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THE VIRGIN BIRTH IN THE SECOND CENTURY.

At the close of the second century, the virgin birth was a firmly established part of the creed of the Catholic Christian Church. What was the origin of that belief? This question can be answered only after an examination of the birth narratives which are included in our first and third Gospels. But an examination of extra-canonical sources is also not without value. At the time of Irenaeus, belief in the virgin birth was firmly established. Can a gradual establishment of that belief be traced in the history of the second century, or was the belief firmly fixed from the very beginning? The present article will attempt to give some answer to this question, and thus lay the necessary foundation for answering the further and more important question: is the belief in the virgin birth based upon fact, or did it originate in some other way?

Of course, no one denies that the belief in the virgin birth arose long before Irenaeus. The most that could by any possibility be held is that the doctrine did not attain the full assent of the Church until his time. Even such a view, however, can be dismissed very quickly.

In the first place, the virgin birth has a place in the so-called Apostles' Creed.¹ The form of that creed which is now in use was produced in Gaul in the fifth or sixth cen-

¹ The following discussion of the Apostles' Creed is not based upon independent investigation. All that has been attempted is to point out the bearing which the commonly accepted conclusions in this field have upon the question of the virgin birth. See especially Harnack, *Vetus-*

tury, but this Gallican form is based upon an old Roman baptismal confession, from which it differs for the most part only in minor details. The virgin birth appears as clearly in the older form of the creed as in the later Gallican form.² The Roman confession, which was written originally in Greek, must be dated at least as early as 200 A. D., because it is the ancestor not only of our Gallican creed but also of the many various creeds used in different parts of the Western Church.³ The use of the creed by Tertullian (North Africa) and Irenaeus (Asia Minor and Gaul), coupled with the absence in the creed of polemic against Gnosticism and Marcion, pushes the date back at least to about 150 A. D.⁴ At about 150 A. D., therefore, the virgin birth was part of the creed of the Roman church; belief in it was solemnly confessed by every convert before baptism.⁵ The importance of this fact should not be underestimated. For, in the first place, it is obvious that no new and strange doctrines can be incorporated in such a creed. Belief in the virgin birth must have been universal in the Roman church

tissimum Ecclesiae Romanae Symbolum e scriptis virorum Christianorum qui primo et altero p. Chr. n. Saeculo vixerunt illustratum, in Gebhardt, Harnack, Zahn, *Patrum Apostolicorum Opera*, Fasc. i. Part. ii, pp. 115-142, *Das apostolische Glaubensbekenntniss*, 26te Aufl., 1892, Art. "Apostolisches Symbolum", in Herzog, *Realencyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, 3te Aufl., 1896, Zahn, *Das apostolische Symbolum*, 2te Aufl., 1893, Kattenbusch, *Das apostolische Symbolum*, 2 Bde., 1894-1900, Swete, *The Apostles' Creed*, 1902, McGiffert, *The Apostles' Creed*, 1902.

² The older form has simply "born of the Holy Ghost and the Virgin Mary" (γεννηθέντα ἐκ πνεύματος ἁγίου καὶ Μαρίας τῆς παρθένου) instead of "conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary".

³ See Harnack, Article cited in Herzog, *op. cit.*, pp. 745 ff.

⁴ So Harnack. McGiffert differs at this point decisively from the common view. He detects an anti-Marcionitic purpose in the creed, and places the date between 150 and 175; but he is hardly correct in these contentions, though he has pointed out weaknesses in some of the external evidence adduced for an early date.

⁵ Whether the creed at first contained the words ἐκ πνεύματος ἁγίου καὶ after γεννηθέντα or read simply γεννηθέντα ἐκ (διὰ) Μαρίας τῆς παρθένου is an interesting question, but of minor importance for the present discussion. McGiffert, *op. cit.*, pp. 92 f., favors the latter alternative. But cf. Kattenbusch, *op. cit.*, ii. pp. 619 f.

and must have been required of every candidate for baptism long before it was given stereotyped expression in a definite baptismal confession. In the second place, the central position of the Roman church makes it probable that what was regarded as essential Christian belief at Rome was also the belief of the Church at large. Any considerable dissent from the doctrine of the virgin birth in any part of the Church would probably have prevented its insertion in the Roman confession. Finally, the character of the creed itself doubles the weight of the considerations just adduced. The old Roman creed is evidently not polemic in character.⁶ If it were, it might well contain doctrines which had only recently been firmly established in Rome and were still opposed in other parts of the Church. Such a polemic purpose could hardly fail to appear clearly, if it were really influential in the formation of the creed. An anti-docetic purpose, for example, would naturally appear in the insertion of a "truly"⁷ in connection with the summary of the earthly life of Jesus. As a matter of fact, the creed evidently contains what needed to be emphasized not against heretics but against the non-Christian world. Furthermore, it is a model of brevity. The only facts about Jesus which find a place in this earliest creed of the Church are the virgin birth, the death, the resurrection, the ascension, the session at the right hand of God, and the future judgment. Evidently such an enumeration was intended as the absolute minimum of Christian belief. The virgin birth might well have been accepted by a large portion of the Church without finding a place in such a creed. Its presence there shows that it was regarded as one of the essentials like the death and resurrection.

The middle of the second century is not the earliest but almost the latest date which has been suggested by recent

⁶ Harnack, *Das apostolische Glaubensbekenntniss*, p. 18: "Es ist aus der missionirenden und katechetischen Funktion der Kirche hervorgegangen und war ursprünglich lediglich Taufsymbol." The protest of McGiffert against this view has been noted above, footnote 4.

⁷ After the manner of Ignatius, *Smyrn.* i.

scholars for the origin of the old Roman creed. Striking parallels with the creed can be detected clearly in writers whose activity lies wholly or partly in the former half of the second century—especially in Justin Martyr and in Ignatius. If such parallels are to be interpreted as indicating dependence upon the Roman creed, then the creed must have been produced as early as 100 A. D.⁸ Moreover, the simplicity of form and especially the brevity of the creed speak strongly for a high antiquity. The creed is commended by what it omits as much as by what it contains. Could a compiler of 150 A. D. have resisted the temptation of guarding the faith against heresy?⁹

Of course, no attempt can here be made to settle this question of date. But if the creed was produced so late as 150 A. D. in Rome, it is by no means the only or the earliest second-century witness to the virgin birth.¹⁰

Clement of Alexandria should first be mentioned, for although his witness is no older than that of Irenaeus it comes from a very different part of the Church. He could not be included among the witnesses to the Roman symbol, for his use of that symbol cannot be demonstrated, but his belief in the virgin birth is undoubted. Indeed, he shows that the simple story of the virgin birth had already had time to be elaborated considerably beyond its original form.¹¹

⁸ The positive arguments which Harnack, *Antwort auf die Streitschrift D. Cremers: "Zum Kampf um das Apostolikum"*, 1892, in *Hefte zur "Christlichen Welt"*, Nr. 3, adduces against a date earlier than 140 A. D. are probably no more decisive than the positive arguments in favor of the early date.

⁹ Such internal evidence weighs very strongly with Kattenbusch, who fixes the date at $\pm$ 100 A. D. (*op. cit.*, ii. p. 328). Zahn, *op. cit.*, p. 47, supposes that the baptismal confession attained essentially the form which it has in the old Roman symbol at some time between 70 and 120.

¹⁰ For the second-century testimonies to the virgin birth, see especially Gore, *Dissertations on Subjects Connected with the Incarnation*, pp. 41ff., also Swete, *op. cit.*, pp. 42ff. Cf. Hoben, *The Virgin Birth*, in *American Journal of Theology*, vi., 1902, pp. 481 ff.

¹¹ Strom., vii. 16, 93. Cf. Bauer, *Das Leben Jesu im Zeitalter der neutestamentlichen Apokryphen*, 1909, p. 68, Anm. 2.

Justin Martyr regards the virgin birth as of fundamental importance and defends it at length against Jewish and heathen objections. If he knew the Apostles' Creed, his insistence upon the virgin birth requires no comment. But even if he did not know the creed in its Trinitarian form, he bears testimony to the existence of a Christological summary in which the virgin birth had a place.¹² The virgin birth comes naturally into his mind when he thinks of the fundamental facts of the life of Christ. In one passage, the virgin birth appears pretty clearly as part of a regular formula of exorcism.¹³ As indicating the common belief of the Church, a formula of exorcism is perhaps only less valuable than a baptismal confession. The details which it contains are mentioned not because of any particular relevancy under the circumstances, but merely as essential elements of the Christian conception of Christ. They are necessary to define His "name".¹⁴

Aristides, whose apology¹⁵ may perhaps be dated about

¹² See passages in Harnack, in the dissertation cited from Gebhardt, Harnack, Zahn, *Patrum Apostolicorum Opera*, pp. 128ff.

¹³ *Dial.* 85: Κατὰ γὰρ τοῦ ὀνόματος αὐτοῦ τούτου τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ πρωτοτόκου πάσης κτίσεως, καὶ διὰ παρθένου γεννηθέντος καὶ παθητοῦ γενομένου ἀνθρώπου, καὶ σταυρωθέντος ἐπὶ Ποντίου Πιλάτου ὑπὸ τοῦ λαοῦ ἡμῶν καὶ ἀποθανόντος, καὶ ἀναστάντος ἐκ νεκρῶν καὶ ἀναβάντος εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν, πᾶν δαιμόνιον ἐξορκιζόμενον νικᾷται καὶ ὑποτάσσεται. Cf. Otto's note, who cites Origen, *contr. Cels.* i. 6: οὐ γὰρ κατακληθήσονται ἰσχύειν δοκοῦσιν, ἀλλὰ τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ μετὰ τῆς ἐπαγγελίας τῶν περὶ αὐτὸν ἱστοριῶν. The passage in Justin is such an ἐπαγγελία τῶν περὶ αὐτὸν ἱστοριῶν.

¹⁴ The argument of Hillmann, in *Jahrbücher für protestantische Theologie*, 1891, pp. 255 f., that Justin must be regarded as a pioneer in the support of the virgin birth because he regards as Christians those who deny the doctrine depends upon a false reading in *dial.* 48. In reality, Justin does not say that the opponents of the virgin birth are Christians. See below, pp. 548f., and cf. PRINCETON THEOLOGICAL REVIEW, ii., 1905, p. 645.

¹⁵ The *Apology*, except for a fragment, was unknown until 1889, when a Syriac translation was discovered by J. Rendel Harris. Soon after, J. Armitage Robinson discovered that a Greek text had been preserved within the romance of *Barlaam and Josaphat*. For the reconstruction of the *Apology* and comprehensive discussions of Aristides, see especially Harris and Robinson, in *Texts and Studies*, i. 1, 1893,

140 A. D.,¹⁶ regarded the virgin birth as one of the fundamental facts of Christianity.¹⁷ Harris supposes that the virgin birth in all probability formed part of the *symbolum fidei* as Aristides knew it.¹⁸ At any rate, the virgin birth is given a place by Aristides in a very brief Christological summary. It appears clearly as one of the absolutely essential facts,

Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, who was martyred not later than 117 A. D., mentions the virgin birth clearly in several passages.¹⁹ It is perfectly evident from these passages that Ignatius regarded the virgin birth as one of the essential facts about Christ. It is one of the "mysteries to be shouted aloud", one of the mysteries which were prepared by God in silence but have now been proclaimed to the ages by the wondrous star in the heavens. Or rather, Ignatius does not say merely that the *virgin birth* is one of the three mysteries—in such a form of expression the whole emphasis might conceivably be laid upon the fact of the birth rather than upon the manner of it—he says distinctly that the *virginity of Mary* is one of the mysteries. The important fact is not

Seeberg, in Zahn's *Forschungen zur Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons*, v. Teil, pp. 159ff., Geffcken *Zwei griech. Apologeten*, 1907, pp. 1-96.

¹⁶ So Seeberg. The date cannot be fixed with certainty, but the work bears marks of antiquity.

¹⁷ See Harris and Robinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 29, 32, 36, 100, and p. 3 of the appended Syriac text, Seeberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 331f. The virgin birth is found in all three recensions—Armenian, Syriac and Greek. Without doubt it had a place in the original text.

¹⁸ *Op. cit.*, pp. 23ff.

¹⁹ *Eph.* xviii.2 - xix. 1: 'Ο γὰρ θεὸς ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς ὁ Χριστὸς ἐκνοφορήθη ὑπὸ Μαρίας κατ'οἰκονομίαν θεοῦ ἐκ σπέρματος μὲν Δαβὶδ, πνεύματος δὲ ἁγίου ὃς ἐγεννήθη καὶ ἐβαπτίσθη, ἵνα τῷ πάθει τὸ ὕδωρ καθαρίσῃ. Καὶ ἔλαθεν τὸν ἄρχοντα τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου ἢ παρθενία Μαρίας καὶ ὁ τοκετὸς αὐτῆς, ὁμοίως καὶ ὁ θάνατος τοῦ κυρίου· τρία μυστήρια κραυγῆς, ἅτινα ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ θεοῦ ἐπράχθη, *Smyrn.* i. 1, 2: πεπληροφορημένους εἰς τὸν κύριον ἡμῶν ἀληθῶς ὄντα ἐκ γένους Δαβὶδ κατὰ σάρκα, υἱὸν θεοῦ κατὰ θέλημα καὶ δύναμιν, γεγεννημένον ἀληθῶς ἐκ παρθένου, βεβαπτισμένον ὑπὸ Ἰωάννου, ἵνα πληρωθῇ πᾶσα δικαιοσύνη ὑπ' αὐτοῦ, ἀληθῶς ἐπὶ Ποντίου Πιλάτου καὶ Ἡρώδου τετραρρχοῦ καθηλωμένον ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἐν σαρκί. . . . In *Eph.* vii. 2 καὶ ἐκ Μαρίας καὶ ἐκ θεοῦ and *Eph.* xx. 2 τῷ νύφ' ἀνθρώπου καὶ νύφ' θεοῦ, Ignatius probably has the virgin birth definitely in mind.

merely that Jesus was born, but also that Mary was a virgin. In one passage, the virgin birth forms part of such a summary of the chief facts about Christ as has already been detected in Justin.²⁰ Harnack is therefore justified in saying: "Ignatius has freely reproduced a 'kerugma' of Christ which seems, in essentials, to be of a fairly definite historical character and which contained, *inter alia*, the Virgin Birth, Pontius Pilate and the ἀπέθανεν."²¹

The full importance of the testimony which Ignatius bears to the virgin birth can be appreciated only when the general purpose of his epistles is borne in mind.²² Ignatius is argu-

²⁰ *Smyrn. i.* In this passage, Zahn reads θεου after δυναμιν and γεγενημενον instead of γεγεννημενον, and omitting the comma before γεγενημενον joins it closely with υἱὸν θεοῦ. Lightfoot's text and punctuation, which have here been followed in the citation above, preserve the parallelisms between ἀληθῶς ὄντα ἐκ γένους Δαβὶδ κατὰ σάρκα and υἱὸν θεοῦ κατὰ θέλημα καὶ δύναμιν and between γεγεννημένον and the following participles. These parallels seem certainly to be intended. Ignatius first mentions the twofold nature of Christ ("of the seed of David" and "Son of God"), and then enumerates the leading individual facts in His earthly life, namely birth, baptism and crucifixion (the resurrection does not here appear in the same form, because Ignatius turns aside to mention the blessed results of that true passion which the docetists were unwilling to admit). Zahn's defence of his view of the passage is not convincing.

²¹ Harnack, Article cited from Herzog, *op. cit.*, English Translation (*The Apostles' Creed*), pp. 59f. The reasoning by which Hillmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 253f., eliminates the testimony to the virgin birth from the Ignatian epistles hardly requires refutation. Hillmann argues that since the author traces the Davidic descent of Jesus through Joseph therefore he could not have accepted the virgin birth. But in the first place, it is not certain that Ignatius traces the Davidic descent through Joseph rather than through Mary (see Bauer, *op. cit.*, p. 15), and in the second place, even if he does, he may rightly or wrongly have united the virgin birth with that view. Like others in the early Church (for example the authors or compilers or interpolaters of Matthew and Luke), he may have supposed the two things to be in harmony. As a matter of fact, Ignatius plainly expresses his belief in the virgin birth. It is another question how he harmonized it with his belief in the Davidic descent. Hillmann supposes that γεγεννημένον ἀληθῶς ἐκ παρθένου in *Smyrn. i.* is an interpolation; the famous passage, *Eph. xix. 1*, he does not even mention. Cf. PRINCETON THEOLOGICAL REVIEW, iii., 1905, pp. 645f.

²² For the argument which follows, see Swete, *op. cit.*, pp. 45 f.

ing against docetists; to refute them it was not necessary to prove the virgin birth of Christ, but only to prove His real birth. "Born of a woman" would have been sufficient, indeed it might seem to be a more emphatic contradiction of docetism than "born of a virgin". Yet in *Smyrn.* i. 1, it is the latter phrase which Ignatius uses; the phrase seems to slip naturally from his pen.²³ He does not appear to be under the slightest necessity of defending it; apparently the opponents themselves accepted the virgin birth as over against an ordinary birth, but regarded it, like every other event in the life of Christ, as a mere semblance. Ignatius clearly gives the impression that in his day the virgin birth was far beyond the reach of controversy, both in Antioch and in Asia Minor. Other errors had to be combatted; but not the error that made Jesus by ordinary generation the son of Joseph. The testimony of Ignatius, therefore, is unequivocal. At 110 A. D., belief in the virgin birth was no new thing. It had its roots already deep in the life of the Church. It must have arisen very considerably before the close of the first century.

The other apostolic fathers do not mention the virgin birth, but in view of the clear testimony of Ignatius, their silence is meaningless.²⁴ It is preposterous to expect the doctrine to be mentioned inevitably in every epistle and every moral treatise. How often is it mentioned to-day in the sermons and in the devotional writings even of those who insist most strongly upon it? The early Christian writers were not conscious that posterity would be dependent upon a few brief writings of theirs for its entire knowledge of the second-century Church. They were not concerned, therefore, to give a complete summary of their views about Jesus, but addressed themselves to special needs.²⁵ Ignatius

²³ Of course, at other times he speaks simply of the birth without mentioning the peculiar manner of it. See *Magn.* xi, *Trall.* ix. 1.

²⁴ To call it "a uniform and notable silence" (Hoben, *op. cit.*, p. 481) is misleading. The passages where Hoben supposes the virgin birth would have been mentioned if it had been accepted are not convincing.

²⁵ Hillmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 250ff., argues that in 1 *Clem.* xxxii. 1 Jesus

mentioned the virgin birth only because the reality of Jesus' earthly life had been assailed. Against the docetic errorists, it was necessary to insist upon the birth of Jesus. But insistence upon the birth of Jesus meant insistence upon a virgin birth. Ignatius and his opponents were apparently not aware that any other kind of birth had ever been attributed to Jesus in the Church. The virgin birth of Christ, says Ignatius, is one of the great mysteries. And he insists upon the greatness of the mystery in order that his readers may see how important it is to hold, against the docetists, that the mystery is a real thing and no mere semblance. The more marvelous the birth of Christ, the more important it becomes to vindicate its reality. Justin mentioned the virgin birth because, in the first place, his plan was more comprehensive than that of the apostolic fathers. He was attempting a defence of Christianity as a whole, and therefore could not ignore such an essential element in Christian belief as the virgin birth of the Lord. In the second place, the virgin birth required special defence, because it was the object of special attack. But the attack came from men outside the Church. The virgin birth was attacked by outsiders just because it was known as one of the characteristic Christian beliefs. The silence which early Christian writers preserve about the virgin birth when they are writing against schis-

is represented as belonging to the tribe of Levi, and that therefore, since there is no tradition that Joseph was a Levite, the Levitic descent of Jesus must have been traced through Mary. In that case, he continues, the Davidic descent, which of course could not be given up, must have been traced through Joseph. Therefore Joseph must have been regarded as the father of Jesus, and the author did not believe in the virgin birth. But, as has been noticed above (footnote 21), Davidic descent through Joseph was (to say the least) not always regarded in the early Church as contradicting the virgin birth, and in the second place, it is highly improbable that Clement in the passage cited really meant to imply that Jesus was descended from Levi (see Bauer, *op. cit.*, pp. 11ff.). As to Hillmann's argument from the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (*op. cit.*, pp. 25ff.), it is perhaps sufficient again to refer to Bauer, *loc. cit.* "Geistige Abstammung von Levi und Juda hat keineswegs die leibliche von beiden Geschlechtern zur Voraussetzung" (Bauer, *op. cit.*, p. 13).

matics and heretics, and Justin's elaborate defence of it against unbelievers, are alike indications of the firm position which it held in the faith of the Church.²⁶

The preceding investigation has shown that a firm and well-formulated belief in the virgin birth extended back at least to the beginning of the second century. How did that belief originate? It may have originated in a fact, or it may have originated in some other way. Toward the answer to this question some progress has already been made. For, the older the belief in the virgin birth, the more likely it is to be based upon fact. Myths and legends require time for development. Something has therefore been gained by the proof that the virgin birth was a firmly established part of Christian belief within a few years after the death of the last surviving eye-witnesses of the life of Jesus.

The question arises, however, whether the testimony to the virgin birth is unanimous, even from the beginning of the second century on. May it not be balanced by counter testimony to an ordinary human birth? Obviously the investigator must institute a careful search for positive denials of the virgin birth in the early period of the Christian Church.

Such denials are not hard to find, and they may be divided into two classes; (1) denials of the virgin birth by opponents of Christianity, and (2) denials by professing Christians.

Under the former head,²⁷ the denials of the virgin birth by *pagan* opponents of Christianity can hardly be expected to be of much historical value. It is hardly likely that after Christianity had claimed the serious attention of the Graeco-Roman world, the opponents would be able or willing to institute scientific investigations in Palestine with regard to the birth of Jesus. Such a method of attack would be contrary to all that is known of the religious controversies of antiquity. It is a little different, however, with regard to

²⁶ Swete, *op. cit.*, pp. 46, 47, has rightly called attention to the testimony borne to the virgin birth in the second century even by heretics. Cf. Bauer, *op. cit.*, pp. 37ff. Those heretics who denied the virgin birth will be discussed below, pp. 541ff.

²⁷ See Bauer, *op. cit.*, pp. 458ff.

those denials of the virgin birth which proceeded from the *Jews*. From the very beginning, the Jews were in close contact with Jesus and with His followers, and the relation was for the most part one of active opposition. If the real facts of the birth of Jesus were concealed by the Christians, it is altogether conceivable that the Jewish opponents could have handed down the true story. The Jewish view of the birth of Jesus must, therefore, be examined with some care.

The earliest source for investigating the Jewish objections to the virgin birth is Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho*. But the Jew, Trypho, is not represented as offering any concrete facts in opposition to the Christian story. The inconsistency of the virgin birth with the common Jewish Messianic hopes is emphasized,²⁸ exception is taken to the Septuagint rendering in Is. vii. 14,²⁹ the discrediting similarity of the virgin birth to heathen myths such as that of the birth of Perseus from Danaë³⁰ is noticed, positive evidence against the virgin birth of the Messiah is produced from the Old Testament.³¹ But there is no alternative Jewish story of the actual circumstances of the birth of the man Jesus.³²

Origen's treatise against Celsus supplies what is lacking in Justin. The Jew whose anti-Christian polemic Celsus is repeating does not content himself with ordinary objections to the virgin birth or mere ridicule of it,³³ but seeks to substitute for it an account of the true course of events, which

²⁸ *Dial.* 49 (268A).

²⁹ The objection is to the rendering παρθένος instead of νεάνις. *Dial.* 67 (291A). Cf. *dial.* 43 (262C).

³⁰ *Dial.* 67 (291B).

³¹ *Dial.* 68 (293C,D).

³² It has been suggested that there is an allusion to such a story (which would resemble the one that will presently be examined) in *dial.* 23 (241B). There Justin calls Jesus τὸν κατὰ τὴν βουλήν τοῦ θεοῦ δίχα ἁμαρτίας διὰ τῆς ἀπὸ γένους τοῦ Ἀβραὰμ παρθένου γεννηθέντα υἱὸν θεοῦ Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν. If δίχα ἁμαρτίας is to be read, there may perhaps be an allusion to a story of a birth of Jesus out of wedlock, but such an interpretation is very uncertain. Cf. Otto's note, and Bauer, *op. cit.*, pp. 458f., who cites also Zahn, *Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons*, ii. p. 778.

³³ *Contr. Cels.* i. 39 (ed. Delarue, p. 356).

Jesus Himself is said to have concealed by the miraculous story. Jesus was really the fruit of an adulterous union of Mary with a certain soldier whose name was Pantheras, and on account of her adultery His mother had been cast out of her home by her husband, the carpenter.³⁴ Similar stories appear in the Talmud (but with wide divergences so far as names and circumstances are concerned), and reach their culmination in the mediaeval Tōl'dōth Jēshū. The same slander is also perhaps alluded to by Tertullian.^{34a} The Jewish polemic used by Celsus can hardly be put much later than the middle of the second century, and although the parts of the Talmud where the stories about Jesus occur are late, they certainly are based upon earlier tradition. Furthermore, traces of this kind of Jewish polemic against the virgin birth have been discovered by some scholars in the Protevangelium of James³⁵ and even in the canonical Gospel of Matthew.³⁶ But however early the story of the adultery of Mary may be, it is now universally agreed that far from representing any independent tradition it is based merely upon the Christian story of the virgin birth.³⁷ Hence the early Jewish slander

³⁴ *Contr. Cels.* i. 28 (p. 346), i. 32 (pp. 349, 350).

^{34a} *De spect.* 30, "fabri aut quaestuariae filius", cited by Bauer, *op. cit.*, p. 458.

³⁵ A. Meyer, in Hennecke, *Handbuch zu den neutestamentlichen Apokryphen*, pp. 99f. There seems to be no necessity for supposing, as Meyer does, that the Protevangelium is directed also against a Jewish Christian belief in the birth of Jesus from Joseph and Mary.

³⁶ For example by Zahn, and by A. Meyer, *op. cit.*, p. 49. For an exposition and criticism of the view of Zahn, see PRINCETON THEOLOGICAL REVIEW, iii., 1905, pp. 65off.

³⁷ The story of the illegitimate birth of Jesus was at least not excluded by Bahrđt, *Briefe über die Bibel im Volkston*, 1782, i. pp. 130ff., and was expanded into an elaborate narrative by Venturini, with detailed rationalizing not only of the canonical narratives but also of the Protevangelium of James (Venturini, *Natürliche Geschichte des grossen Propheten von Nazareth*, 2te Aufl., 1806). According to Venturini, the true father of Jesus was connected with the Essenes; and afterwards Jesus Himself became an Essene. Venturini's romance was the source of the anonymous work, *Historische Enthüllungen über die wirklichen Ereignisse der Geburt und Jugend Jesu* (of which the second edition appeared at Braunschweig in 1849), which purported to

is simply one testimony more, and that not an unimportant one, to the general belief of early Christianity in the virgin birth, and to the absence of any positive historical tradition that could contradict it.³⁸

Accordingly, the denials of the virgin birth by opponents of Christianity have absolutely no weight as against the historicity of the event. The opponents presuppose the Christian doctrine, and have no historical tradition of their own to substitute for it. The mere fact of their opposition is of no importance whatever, for it is only what was to be expected. Unless they were to become Christians, they could hardly accept the virgin birth of Jesus Christ.

At first sight, however, it may not seem quite so easy to account for the other class of denials of the virgin birth—denials, namely, on the part of professing Christians. What except true historical tradition could lead any Christian to

be taken from an ancient manuscript! In recent years also, the biologist Haeckel has given credence to the Pandera story (*Welträthsel*, English Translation, pp. 375ff.), but of course has not been followed by any historical student. Cf. the refutations of Haeckel by Loofs, in *Christliche Welt*, 1899, columns 1069f., and Hilgenfeld, in *Zeitschrift für wissenschaftliche Theologie*, 1900, pp. 265f.

³⁸ Cf. Origen, *Contr. Cels.* i. 32 (p. 350): Καὶ ἴδωμεν εἰ μὴ τυφλῶς οἱ μυθοποιήσαντες τὴν μοιχείαν τῆς παρθένου καὶ τοῦ Πανθήρα καὶ τὸν τέκτονα ἐξωσάμενον αὐτὴν ταῦτα πάντα ἀνέπλασαν ἐπὶ καθαιρέσει τῆς παραδόξου ἀπὸ ἀγίου πνεύματος συλλήψεως· ἐδύναντο γὰρ ἄλλως ψευδοποιῆσαι διὰ τὸ σφόδρα παράδοξον τὴν ἱστορίαν καὶ μὴ ὥσπερ εἰ ἀκουσίως συγκαταθέσθαι ὅτι οὐκ ἀπὸ συνήθων ἀνθρώποις γάμων ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐγεννήθη. It is true, there are some indications that the Jews, when they denied the virgin birth, did not always substitute for it the story which has just been described, but perhaps sometimes represented Jesus as simply the son of Joseph. But of the evidence which Bauer, *op. cit.*, p. 458, cites for the latter representation, the only passage that is of early date is Tertullian, *de spect.* 30 (quoted above, p. 34a), where Bauer supposes that the two alternative methods of attack are placed side by side. The allusion there is very indefinite. It is quite possible that Tertullian is simply referring to the unbelief of Jesus' contemporaries (Mt. xiii. 55), as he is in the sentences that immediately follow. At any rate, if the Jews in the second century ever did maintain against the Christians that Jesus was physically the son of Joseph, there is not the slightest indication that they had any traditional basis for their contention independent of the canonical Gospels. Mt. xiii. 55 οὐχ οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ τοῦ τέκτονος υἱός; was obviously the starting-point.

deny the miraculous conception of his Lord, provided he had once become acquainted with it? It becomes evident at once that Christian denials of the virgin birth demand very careful attention.³⁹

When the virgin birth was denied, two possibilities were left open. If Jesus was not born of a virgin, he may either have been begotten by Joseph or else he may never have been born at all. Those who held the latter view⁴⁰ are of little importance for the present investigation, for their denial of the virgin birth evidently proceeded not from historical tradition, but from philosophical theory. To them, any birth, even a birth from a virgin, seemed to bring Christ into too intimate relation to the world.⁴¹ If the virgin birth is mythical, then Marcion's denial is not a refutation of the myth, but a further development of it.⁴²

Carpocrates and Cerinthus regarded Jesus as the son of Joseph and Mary. They differ from Marcion, therefore, in that what they substitute for the virgin birth is possible and of itself probable. Hence their denial of the virgin birth, while it may be the product of philosophical speculation, may also prove to be derived from historical tradition. The question cannot be quite so easily decided as in the case of Marcion.

Carpocrates⁴³ was a Gnostic thinker of the first half of the second century. The world he held to have been created by angels far inferior to the supreme Father. Jesus, he sup-

³⁹ The invaluable work of Bauer, which has already been cited a number of times, has been used very freely both for the discussion immediately following and in other parts of the present article. Bauer has collected the materials for investigation with unparalleled fulness.

⁴⁰ For example, Marcion. See Bauer, *op. cit.*, pp. 34ff.

⁴¹ See the vigorous passage in Tertullian, *de carne Christi* (Oehler ii. pp. 425, 426).

⁴² If, as was formerly supposed by many scholars, Marcion's gospel, which contained no account of the birth of Jesus, represented the original form of the Gospel of Luke, of which our third Gospel is an expansion, then Marcion could not be dismissed so readily. But that hypothesis has now been generally abandoned.

⁴³ See, for example, G. Krüger, Article "Karpokrates", in Herzog, *op. cit.*

posed, differed from other men only in greater strength of soul, which enabled Him to remember what He had seen in the presence of the supreme God. God sent a power upon Him, in order that He might escape from the creators of the world. Every soul which will imitate Jesus may accomplish as much as He. In order to escape further incarnations, men should strive to have experience of all kinds of actions. All morality consists in faith and love, everything else is good or bad only in human opinion, not in reality. It will be seen at once how very slight is the connection of such a system with Christianity. It is not surprising that followers of Carpocrates at Rome placed representations of Jesus by the side of those of Pythagoras, Plato and Aristotle very much after the manner of the later pagan emperor.⁴⁴

Obviously, the author of such a system would not require any historical evidence to induce him to deny the virgin birth, even if that were a universally accepted doctrine among the Christians of his day. For it was essential to his system that Jesus should start on an equality with other men, except for a greater freedom of soul. Only so could imitation of Jesus on the part of other men insure a success equal to His. If Jesus were born of a virgin, then a fundamental difference of nature, as well as of character, between Him and other men would have to be assumed; and His followers could have no assurance that it was not that different nature, unattainable to others, which procured Him His victory over the powers of the world. Of course, it may be held that Carpocrates was correct in regarding Christianity as simply imitation of Jesus. But even then the whole character of his system, which is suffused with ideas of pagan philosophy, is hopelessly opposed to the view that such a correct interpretation of Christianity was anything more than a lucky speculation. He is a bold historian who would trace the line of true primitive Christian tradition through Carpocrates rather than through Ignatius or Justin. At any rate, Carpocrates cannot be regarded as a Christian, except in a very

⁴⁴ Irenaeus, *haer.* i. 25 (Stieren).

broad sense. His followers were only following out the teachings of their master, when they claimed to be equal to Jesus or even stronger than He.⁴⁵ Carpocrates' denial of the virgin birth is perhaps not so very much more significant than that of Celsus.

Cerinthus is discussed by Irenaeus⁴⁶ immediately after Carpocrates. That his life must have fallen in a very early period is indicated by the familiar tradition of his encounter with the Apostle John in the bath-house at Ephesus. Like Carpocrates, he was a Gnostic, and like Carpocrates he regarded Jesus as the son of Joseph and Mary. But he supposed that after the baptism the Christ descended upon the man Jesus and enabled Him to proclaim the unknown Father and perform miracles, only to leave Him again before the passion. It is widely held by modern scholars that the view which dated the Messiahship and divine sonship of Jesus from the coming of the Spirit at the baptism represented an intermediate stage between the historical, purely humanitarian view of Jesus and the fully developed doctrine of the virgin birth, which extended the divine sonship back to the very beginning of Jesus' human life. If such was the development, Cerinthus may seem to be a witness to that intermediate view which had not yet relinquished the purely human birth of Jesus.⁴⁷

Another explanation, however, will account equally well for the absence of the virgin birth in the teaching of Cerinthus. It has just been observed that Cerinthus supposed the Christ to have departed from Jesus before the passion. Will it be supposed that such a view is more primitive than the one which held the Christ to have suffered on the cross in order that He might be raised up in glory? Is it not more likely that the teaching of Cerinthus on this point was due

⁴⁵ Irenaeus, *haer.* i. 25, 2.

⁴⁶ *Haer.* i. 26.

⁴⁷ Cf. Usener, *Religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen*, i.² pp. 122ff. Usener places the Christology of Cerinthus between that of Carpocrates and the later doctrine of the Church as it appears in the virgin birth.

simply to a fear of bringing the Christ into too close relationship to the world and to sin? If so, then the same docetic interest will account for Cerinthus' rejection of the virgin birth, even supposing that to have been generally recognized in the Church of his day. Upon docetic principles, it was impossible for the Christ to be born at all, even from a virgin. Therefore, He must have been united with Jesus only subsequently. But if the man Jesus had no relation to the Christ until His baptism, then there was no reason why He should be supposed to have been born of a virgin. Indeed, there was a positive reason to the contrary. For birth from a virgin was felt to involve divine sonship. Hence, if Cerinthus had accepted the virgin birth he would have been required to accept such a real incarnation of the Son of God as his exemption of the Christ from the passion shows him to have been most of all anxious to avoid. The virgin birth, therefore, was thoroughly abhorrent to the principles of Cerinthus, and his denial of it may well have been due to philosophical prepossession rather than to historical tradition.⁴⁸

It may be objected that Cerinthus accepted the bodily resurrection of the man Jesus, even though he represented the Christ as having already departed from Jesus before the passion. Why should he have had any greater philosophical objection to the virgin birth of Jesus than he had to His resurrection? In reply, it should frankly be admitted, in the first place, that no matter how firmly established the belief in the virgin birth may have been in the time of Cerinthus, it was neither then nor at any other period of the Church regarded as quite equal in importance to the resurrection. A thinker who accepts the resurrection of Jesus without the virgin birth accepts more of Christianity and more of the canonical Gospel tradition than one who accepts the virgin birth without the resurrection; and it seems to have been the effort of many of the Gnostics to accept just

⁴⁸ Irenaeus, *loc. cit.*, says that Cerinthus denied the virgin birth because it seemed to him to be impossible ("impossibile enim hoc ei visum est"). Does this mean that the objections of Cerinthus were philosophical rather than historical?

as much of Christianity as they conveniently could. In the second place, it is not true that the virgin birth was no more inconsistent than the resurrection with the dualistic principles of Cerinthus. For the virgin birth, at least to a man of Greek training, if not to a Jew, involves divine sonship far more obviously than does the resurrection. Mat. i. 18-25 or Lk. i. 35 might well seem to Cerinthus to represent the supreme God as no more separate from the world than Zeus or the other divinities of Greek mythology; and if that representation were correct, then the whole dualistic system of Cerinthus fell to the ground.⁴⁹

The denials of the virgin birth that have thus far been discussed⁵⁰ are alike in that they each proceeded from a single individual. This circumstance has facilitated the psychological exhibition of the motives for such denials. The system of Marcion, for example, is a fairly definite thing, and it can easily be shown that the virgin birth was inconsistent with it. The case is widely different, however, with the class of denials of the virgin birth which must next

⁴⁹ It is no decisive objection to this argument that the Ophites of Irenaeus (*haer.* i. 30, 13), though they held that the Christ descended upon Jesus at the baptism and departed from Him before the crucifixion, accepted the virgin birth (see Usener, *op. cit.*, pp. 137ff.). For the compulsion exerted upon Gnostic sects by the tradition of the virgin birth might well have been less effective in one case than in another. Usener himself says (*op. cit.*, p. 138): "Man sieht wie die jungfräuliche geburt, nachdem sie in das schriftliche evangelium aufgenommen war, anerkennung heischte und selbst die widerstrebensten lehrgebäude des doketismus dazu zwang sich mit ihr auseinanderzusetzen, und wie die versuche der ausgleichung erst mühsam und ungeschickt, dann gewandter ausfallen." The only question is whether the contradiction did not arise on account of Gnostic innovations rather than (as Usener thinks) on account of innovations in the Gospel narratives.

⁵⁰ It is perfectly possible that other Gnostics besides the disciples of Carpocrates and Cerinthus denied the virgin birth. See Bauer, *op. cit.*, pp. 31f. With regard to the Gnostic Justin, the matter is perhaps not quite so clear as is sometimes assumed. It is not quite certain that Justin regarded Jesus as begotten by Joseph, though he speaks of Him (Hippol. *Philos.* v. 26, ed. Dunck. et Schneid., p. 226) as son of Joseph and Mary. At any rate, other Gnostics who denied the virgin birth are fully as unlikely as Carpocrates and Cerinthus to have been influenced in their denial by historical tradition.

be examined; for the authors of these denials can be grouped under no more specific heading than "Jewish Christians" or at the best "Ebionites".

At about the middle of the second century, Justin Martyr writes as follows:⁵¹ "And Trypho said, 'About these things also we have heard your opinion. So resume the discussion where you left it, and finish. For what you say seems to me to be paradoxical and incapable of proof; for when you say that this Christ preëxisted as God from eternity and then condescended to become man and be born, and that He is not a man proceeding from men, it seems to me that you are saying something that is not only paradoxical but also foolish.' And I said to this, 'I know that the statement seems to be paradoxical, and especially so to those of your race, who have never wished either to understand or to do the things of God, but rather the things of your teachers, as God Himself cries. Nevertheless, Trypho', I said, 'this person remains the Christ of God, even if I am not able to prove that He preëxisted as Son of the Maker of all things, and as God, and that He has been born as a man through the virgin. But if it is shown absolutely that this is the Christ of God, whoever He be, then even if I do not prove that He preëxisted, and condescended, in accordance with the Father's will, to be born as a man of like passions with us and with a fleshly nature, it is just to say merely that I have been deceived in this, but not to deny that this is the Christ, even if He is seen to have been born as a man from men and is proved to have become Christ by election. For indeed, my friends, there are some', I said, 'of your own race who confess that He is Christ but maintain that He was born a man from men; with whom I do not agree, nor would the majority of those who have come to the same way of thinking as I, since we have been commanded by Christ Himself to obey not human teachings but the things

⁵¹ *Dial.* 48. For the translation, some assistance has been received from Reith, in the *Ante-Nicene Christian Library*.

that were proclaimed through the blessed prophets and taught through Him.' "

At the beginning of the last sentence of the passage just quoted, the manuscripts have always until recently been held to read "of our race" instead of "of your race".⁵² Justin has accordingly been represented as saying: "Certain men of our race (that is, of the Christian Church) confess Jesus to be Christ even though they deny His virgin birth." Hence it has been argued that since Justin extends Christian fellowship to those who denied the virgin birth, it is evident that at the time of Justin the virgin birth had not yet become firmly established as an essential part of Christian belief. Other scholars, quite correctly, were unable to satisfy themselves with what in Justin would be an absolutely unparalleled designation of the Christians as "men of our race", and hence preferred, by a simple emendation of the text, to substitute "your race" for "our race".⁵³ "Your race" is in the *Dialogue* a common designation of the Jews and occurs in this immediate context. Never was an emendation more imperatively demanded. But fortunately it is quite unnecessary to marshal the arguments in defence of it. For the simple fact is that the primary manuscript of the *Dialogue*, which is in the Bibliothèque Nationale at Paris,⁵⁴ does not read, as has always been assumed, "our race" but "your race". The far-reaching conclusions which have sometimes been based on the former reading, and the ingenious arguments in support of the latter, could alike have been avoided if one of the editors or other disputants had taken the trouble to examine the manuscript for himself.⁵⁵

⁵² ἀπο τοῦ ἡμετέρου γένους instead of ἀπο τοῦ ὑμετέρου γένους.

⁵³ ὑμετέρου instead of ἡμετέρου.

⁵⁴ The only other extant manuscript is regarded as clearly secondary.

⁵⁵ To Harnack belongs the honor of the discovery (*Dogmengeschichte*, i.,⁴ 1909, p. 320). The present writer has also examined the manuscript, and can report that the reading ὑμετέρου is perfectly plain. There could never have been any doubt but that the first letter of the word is υ and not η. The whole trouble was apparently caused by a simple careless blunder of the first publisher, Stephanus, which has been copied by all subsequent editors.

Accordingly, Justin does not say that those who denied the virgin birth were Christians; and indeed it has already been shown on the contrary that he regarded the virgin birth as one of the absolutely fundamental things which the Christian apologist must defend. What he does say is that the Jew is illogical in rejecting the Messiahship of Jesus simply because he felt obliged to reject the virgin birth. If the Jew could be induced to see that he was wrong at least about the Messiahship, then he might finally be convinced of his error about the virgin birth as well. Compared with full Christianity, and in itself, that mere recognition of the Messiahship of Jesus probably seemed to Justin entirely inadequate, but compared with the hostility of the Jews, and regarded simply and solely as a stepping-stone to higher things, it might serve Justin's immediate purpose.

The information to be derived from the passage is, therefore, simply that at the time of Justin there were certain men of Jewish descent who though they accepted Jesus as the Messiah regarded Him as merely human and born in the ordinary human way.⁵⁶ Certainly Justin does not say that *all* Jewish Christians denied the virgin birth.⁵⁷ Indeed Justin's indefinite form of expression may seem to suggest exactly the opposite.⁵⁸ In the passage just preceding (Chapter 47), Justin has been discussing the Jewish Christians at some length, and has divided them into two classes, according to their position with regard to the necessity of Gentile Christian observance of the Mosaic law. Here, however, he refers to these believers in the Messiahship of Jesus as though they were entirely independent of the

⁵⁶ ἄνθρωπον ἐξ ἀνθρώπων γενόμενον.

⁵⁷ Bauer, *op. cit.*, p. 33, is entirely unwarranted in saying that the only Jewish Christians whom Justin knows were Jewish Christians who were not convinced of the virgin birth.

⁵⁸ Cf. Zahn, *op. cit.*, ii. p. 671, Anm. 2: "Dann (if *νυμετερον* be read) aber erfordert der Satz den Gegensatz, dass es auch solche Juden, d.h. hier Judenchristen gibt, welche Christum keineswegs für einen aus Menschen erzeugten Menschen halten." But it may be doubted whether the contrast implied in the word *τινες* itself is not simply with all other Jews rather than with all other Jewish Christians.

Jewish Christians whom he has just been discussing. If he had meant that all of those Jewish Christians, of both parties, rejected the virgin birth, surely he would have used some other expression than "certain men of your race". The reader has rather the impression that these "certain men" of Chapter 48 are comparatively few in number, and were left entirely out of account in the general division of Jewish Christianity which was set up in Chapter 47. Apparently Justin has to inform the Jews about those among their own number who denied the virgin birth and yet accepted the Messiahship of Jesus. The Jews had apparently jumped at the conclusion that in attacking the virgin birth they were attacking Christianity itself. This passage, therefore, far from indicating that Justin knew no Jewish Christians except those who denied the virgin birth,⁵⁹ proves rather that in the time of Justin the Jewish Christian opponents of the virgin birth were so insignificant as to be ignored even by their own countrymen. The Jews regarded belief in the virgin birth as characteristic of Christianity.

These rejecters of the virgin birth could hardly be included in that milder group of Jewish Christians whom Justin recognized as Christian brothers. For, in the first place, as has been emphasized above,⁶⁰ Justin regarded the virgin birth as one of the fundamental facts about Christ. In the second place, it should be observed that these "certain men" of Chapter 48 denied not only the virgin birth but also the divinity of Christ and apparently the preëxistence. Whatever might be thought of those who rejected the virgin birth, it is hardly likely that those who denied altogether the higher nature of Christ could ever be received by Justin into Christian fellowship.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Bauer, *loc. cit.*

⁶⁰ P. 533.

⁶¹ But *cf.* Hilgenfeld, *Judenthum und Judenchristenthum*, 1888, p. 39. In concluding the discussion of Justin, it may be remarked that the real difficulty in *dial.* 48 lies in the last sentence, where the οὐδ' ἂν πλείστοι ταῦτά μοι δοξάσαντες εἶποιεν is very obscure. Conybeare, at any rate, is very rash when he interprets the passage as implying that

Accordingly, the indications are that at the time of Justin some of the Jewish Christians⁶² accepted the virgin birth while others did not. Such a divided condition of Jewish Christianity appears, at any rate, clearly in the writings of Origen, in the former half of the third century.

In Origen's allegorical exegesis of the healing of the blind man (or the two blind men) at Jericho,⁶³ the blind beggar represents Jewish Christianity in its spiritual poverty. Jewish Christians show their poverty by the low view which they hold of the person of Christ; like the beggar they address Jesus as "son of David" instead of by some higher title. They either suppose Him to have been born of Joseph and Mary, or else, admitting His birth from Mary and the divine Spirit, they deny His divinity.⁶⁴ The Gentile Christians rebuke the Jewish Christians for their low view of the person of Christ, as the crowd rebuked the beggar for his cry of "Son of David". The beggar, however, cried out all the more, and Jesus honored his real though inadequate faith by commanding him to be brought near. Then the beggar bethought himself of a higher title than "Son of David" and said "Rabbouni". Not till then did the Saviour grant the restoration of sight. That lower view of the person of Christ is, therefore, according to Origen insufficient; but it may serve as a stepping-stone to a more adequate faith.⁶⁵

In this passage, apparently the only Jewish Christianity which Origen has in view is one which could be regarded by the crowds of Gentile Christians who were following after Jesus as an "Israelitish remnant sitting by the way".

"the majority of Christians were more open to historical considerations and less ready than Justin to sacrifice them to a *priori* prophetic constructions" (*Myth, Magic, and Morals*, 1909, pp. 180f.).

⁶² It is convenient to use the term "Christian" in a broad sense to include all professing Christians.

⁶³ *In evangelium Matth.*, Tom. xvi. 10ff. (Lommatsch iv. pp. 32ff.).

⁶⁴ ὅτε μὲν ἐκ Μαρίας καὶ τοῦ Ἰωσήφ οἰομένων αὐτὸν εἶναι, ὅτε δὲ ἐκ Μαρίας μὲν μόνῃς καὶ τοῦ θείου πνεύματος, οὐ μὴν καὶ μετὰ τῆς περὶ αὐτοῦ θεολογίας.

⁶⁵ Cf. above, p. 549.

Yet even among men who held such a low, humanitarian view of the person of Christ, there were not wanting some who accepted the virgin birth,

In the fifth book of Origen's treatise against Celsus,⁶⁶ Origen answers the charge of Celsus that the Christians do not differ from the Jews as follows: "Suppose there *are* some who receive Jesus and on this ground boast that they are Christians, and yet wish to live according to the Jews' law like the mass of the Jews (and these are the two fold sect of Ebionites, who either acknowledge with us that Jesus was born of a virgin, or deny this, and maintain that he was begotten like other human beings⁶⁷)—what does this fact establish against those of the Church, whom Celsus has designated 'those of the multitude'?"⁶⁸ The name "Ebionites"⁶⁹ which is here applied to these heretical Jewish Christians, was alluded to in the passage just cited from the *Commentary on Matthew*. The incidental use of the phrase, "the twofold Ebionites",⁷⁰ seems to show that the division between those Ebionites who denied the virgin birth and those who accepted it was no mere unimportant or fluctuat-

⁶⁶ *Contr. Cels.* v. 61.

⁶⁷ The translation of this parenthesis is that of Crombie, in the *Ante-Nicene Christian Library*.

⁶⁸ ἀπὸ τοῦ πλῆθους. The translation of this phrase has been taken from Crombie, *loc. cit.*

⁶⁹ Origen, *de princip.* iv. 22, derives the name from the Hebrew עֲבִיּוֹן "poor", and interprets it of the spiritual poverty of the sect. Perhaps it was originally a name used among the Jews for Christians in general, or else it may have been applied in a good sense by the Ebionites themselves. Tertullian and others supposed that Ebion was the name of the founder of the sect, but this hypothesis, despite the vigorous defence of it by Hilgenfeld (*cf.* also Dalman, *Worte Jesu*, English Translation, pp. 52f., footnote 3), has now been generally abandoned.

⁷⁰ οἱ διττοὶ Ἐβιωναῖοι. *Cf. contr. Cels.* v. 65 Ἐβιωναῖοι ἀμφότεροι.

⁷¹ Harnack is therefore venturing on doubtful ground when he says (*op. cit.*, i. 4 p. 323: "[Es giebt]—von synkretistischen (gnostischen) Judenchristen abgesehen—nur eine mannigfach schattirte Gruppe von Judenchristen, die sich selbst sowohl Nazaräer als Ebioniten von Anfang an genannt hat." *Cf.* Harnack, *Chronologie*, ii. p. 633, Anm. 1, Zahn, *op. cit.*, ii. p. 664, Anm. 2, McGiffert, *The Church History of Eusebius*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, on iii. 27, note 1.

ing one.⁷¹ The same division appears in Eusebius.⁷² In Epiphanius and Jerome, the terminology (at least) differs, for by these writers those who accepted the virgin birth are called Nazarenes⁷³, while the name Ebionites is reserved for those who denied the virgin birth.⁷⁴ Epiphanius' terminology has been followed by some scholars (for example by Zahn), "Nazarenes" being used for the more orthodox and milder class of Ebionites, "Ebionites" for the less orthodox. Whatever terminology be adopted, at least so much is fairly plain—from the time of Origen to the time of Epiphanius, there were two parties among the schismatic Jewish Christians, one of which denied the virgin birth, while the other accepted it.⁷⁵ It is true that Irenaeus and following him Hippolytus mention only Ebionites who reject the virgin birth; but their failure to mention the other division of Jewish Christians does not prove that it did not exist at the time when they wrote. For, in the first place, the less pronouncedly heretical character of those Jewish Christians who accepted the virgin birth might well cause them to be omitted from a catalogue of heresies;⁷⁶ and in the second place, Irenaeus and Hippolytus, since they lived in the West, can hardly be expected to give minute information about Jewish Christianity.

⁷² *Hist. eccl.* iii. 27.

⁷³ This term, Epiphanius says (*haer.* xxix. 1), was originally applied to Christians in general.

⁷⁴ When Jerome says that the Nazarenes accepted the virgin birth, he is apparently contrasting them with the Ebionites. Apparently he does not say in so many words that the Ebionites denied it.

⁷⁵ It should be noticed that Origen regards both classes of Ebionites as standing outside the limits of the Catholic Church: he blames Celsus for confusing these errorists with "the men of the Church" (τοῖς ἀπὸ τῆς ἐκκλησίας).

⁷⁶ Eusebius, *hist. eccl.* vi. 17, characterizes the Ebionites in general as those who deny the virgin birth, although in *hist. eccl.* iii. 27 he has mentioned Ebionites who accept it. Cf. also Origen, *hom. in Luc.* xvii (Lomm. v. p. 148), with the passages mentioned above, where Origen clearly divides the Ebionites into two classes according as they accepted or rejected the virgin birth. Cf. McGiffert on Eusebius, *hist. eccl.* iii. 27, note 15, where the passage, *hom. in Luc.* xvii, is mentioned.

Which of these two classes of Jewish Christians seems better fitted to preserve the correct tradition about the birth of Jesus? . Unfortunately, the first detailed information, at least about the more orthodox group, dates only from the latter half of the fourth century. It will be convenient to start from that point and work backwards.

In the latter half of the fourth century, the Ebionites, or less orthodox class of Jewish Christians, who denied the virgin birth, are described in some detail by Epiphanius. His account^{76a} is far from clear, and must be used with great caution. Despite his faults, however, Epiphanius has evidently preserved valuable information about the Ebionites which without him would have been lost.

According to Epiphanius, Ebion started from the sect of the Nazarenes, and began his special teaching after the destruction of Jerusalem, east of the Jordan, where the Nazarenes also had their seat. The Ebionites followed the Jewish law, and in washings even went beyond the Jews. In general, the Ebionites are divided into factions. Elxai^{76b} introduced confusion. The Ebionites regard the sexual relation as impure,⁷⁷ and therefore do not partake of animal food.⁷⁸ Jesus they hold to have been begotten of a human father;⁷⁹ the Christ came down upon Him in the form of a dove. The Christ was not begotten by God the Father, but was created like one of the archangels, though greater than

^{76a} *Haer.* xxx.

^{76b} The Elkesaites have generally been regarded as Gnostic Jewish Christians. But according to Brandt, *Elchasaï*, 1912, the sect was at first not Christian at all, but simply Jewish (Elxai, Brandt believes, was a real individual, who in the reign of Trajan produced, at least in substance, the book that bears his name). If the older view be held, it is not quite impossible that the virgin birth was taught in the Elxai book (Hippol., *Philos.*, ix. 14, x. 29).

⁷⁷ Yet Epiphanius also says that the Ebionites permit a plurality of marriages. The latter practice, he says (*haer.* xxx. 2), was a later development.

⁷⁸ ἐμψύχων.

⁷⁹ ἐκ σπέρματος ἀνδρός. Bauer, *op. cit.*, p. 31, is apparently mistaken when he says that Epiphanius represents the Ebionites as divided on the question of the birth of Jesus.

they. Christ came to abolish sacrifices. The Ebionites repudiate the work of Paul, and reject some of the Old Testament prophets.

The Ebionites use exclusively a single gospel, which Epiphanius describes as a mutilated Matthew. They themselves call it the Hebrew Gospel, or the Gospel according to the Hebrews. One of the fragments which Epiphanius has preserved refers to the apostles in the first person; the apostles are therefore perhaps represented as the authors of the book. Hence the gospel might well be called the Gospel of the Twelve Apostles, and has therefore often been identified with the work which is mentioned under this title by Origen.⁸⁰ The same fragment explains how the gospel came to be called a Gospel of Matthew, for Matthew is singled out by Jesus for direct address.⁸¹ He could be regarded, therefore, as the representative of the other apostles in the composition of the book.⁸²

The fragments which have been preserved by Epiphanius are amply sufficient to indicate the character of the gospel. It is a worthless Greek compilation based on our canonical Gospels.⁸³ It contained no account of the birth and infancy

⁸⁰ See Zahn, *op. cit.*, ii. pp. 728ff. Schmidtke, *Neue Fragmente und Untersuchungen zu den jüdenchristlichen Evangelien*, in *Texte und Untersuchungen*, 37 Band Heft 1, 1911, pp. 170ff., protests vigorously against the identification.

⁸¹ καὶ σὲ τὸν Ματθαῖον.

⁸² See Zahn, *loc. cit.*

⁸³ That it is dependent on our Greek Gospels and was itself originally written in Greek is proved by the substitution of ἐγκρίς "cake" (in a description of the μέλι ἄγριον on the basis of Num. xi. 8) for ἀκρίς "locust" in the account of the food of John the Baptist. The change is due to the vegetarian principles of the author (see Zahn, *op. cit.*, ii. p. 733), which also led him to change Lk. xxii. 15 Ἐπιθυμία ἐπεθύμησα τοῦτο τὸ πάσχα φαγεῖν μεθ' ὑμῶν into Μὴ ἐπιθυμία ἐπεθύμησα κρέας τοῦτο τὸ πάσχα φαγεῖν μεθ' ὑμῶν; . The Ebionite opposition to sacrifices appears in the gospel in the supposed saying of Jesus, Ἥλθον καταλῦσαι τὰς θυσίας, καὶ ἔαν μὴ παύσησθε τοῦ θύειν, οὐ παύσεται ἀφ' ὑμῶν ἡ ὀργή. Schmidtke, *op. cit.*, pp. 193f., supposes that this citation was constructed by Epiphanius out of materials provided by the Clementine *Journeys of Peter* and that therefore it does not properly

of Jesus, but incidentally displays dependence upon the first chapter of Luke, and perhaps also upon the second chapter of Matthew.⁸⁴ In the account of the baptism, the three forms of the voice from heaven which were current in the second century are simply placed side by side.⁸⁵ ✕

From the confused and contradictory statements of Epiphanius, at least so much would seem to be clear—that the Ebionites as he describes them were not simply Pharisaic Jews who accepted Jesus as the Messiah, but were strongly affected by Gnostic ideas. Their rejection of parts of the Old Testament, their views about sacrifice, and their interpretation of the event at the baptism would seem to place the matter beyond doubt.⁸⁶

Hence the question arises whether the sect which is described by Epiphanius is not entirely distinct from all of the Ebionites mentioned by Jerome and by the earlier writers, Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Origen and Eusebius. The Ebionites of Jerome are not charged with any peculiarly Gnostic doc-

belong among the fragments of the gospel of the Ebionites. Cf. below, p. 576 and footnote 145.

⁸⁴ It is said of John the Baptist, ὃς ἐλέγετο εἶναι ἐκ γένους Ἀαρὼν τοῦ ἱερέως, παῖς Ζαχαρίου καὶ Ἑλισάβετ. Perhaps the historical error at the beginning of the gospel, Ἐγένετο ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις Ἡρώδου τοῦ βασιλέως τῆς Ἰουδαίας ἦλθεν Ἰωάννης βαπτίζων arose from a thoughtless repetition of the ἐν ἡμέραις Ἡρώδου τοῦ βασιλέως of Mt. ii. 1. Since the author of this gospel omitted the first two chapters of Matthew, the ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ἐκείναις with which Matthew introduces his account of John the Baptist became meaningless, and the author simply turned back to Mt. ii. 1 for an explanation of ἐκείναις without stopping to think that Mt. ii. 1 refers to a much earlier time. See Nicholson, *The Gospel according to the Hebrews*, 1879, p. 15.

⁸⁵ Καὶ φωνὴ ἐγένετο ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ λέγουσα, "σὺ μου εἶ ὁ υἱὸς ὁ ἀγαπητός, ἐν σοὶ ἠυδόκησα" (approximately Westcott and Hort's text in Mark and Luke), καὶ πάλιν "ἐγὼ σήμερον γεγέννηκά σε" (Western text in Luke). Καὶ εὐθὺς περιέλαμψε τὸν τόπον φῶς μέγα. ὃν ἰδὼν (φησὶν) ὁ Ἰωάννης λέγει αὐτῷ· "σὺ τίς εἶ, κύριε;" καὶ πάλιν φωνὴ ἐξ οὐρανοῦ πρὸς αὐτόν· "οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱὸς μου ὁ ἀγαπητός, ἐφ' ὃν ἠυδόκησα" (approximately Westcott and Hort's text in Matthew).

⁸⁶ Schmidtke, *op. cit.*, pp. 175-242, attributes the apparent Gnostic character of the Ebionites of Epiphanius simply to the undue use which Epiphanius made of the Clementine *Journeys of Peter* as a source for information about the sect. See below, p. 576.

trines; apparently they differ from the Nazarenes merely by a stricter Judaism and a lower view of the person of Christ. The same may be said of the more unorthodox of Eusebius' two classes; and both classes of Origen's Ebionites seem to be blamed for a grovelling, inadequate opinion about Jesus rather than for unlawful speculations. In Irenaeus and Hippolytus, the matter is perhaps not quite so clear. In the first place, if Irenaeus' assertion that the opinion of the Ebionites about the Lord was similar to those of Cerinthus and Carpocrates is to be taken strictly, it involves the Ebionites in speculations that transcend Pharisaic Judaism. Philastrius, in reproducing the lost *Syntagma* of Hippolytus, brings the Ebionites into even closer relation with Cerinthus.⁸⁷ But it should be noticed that Irenaeus mentions Carpocrates as well as Cerinthus in this connection, although the views of the two men about the person of Christ were very considerably different. Therefore, when it is said that the Ebionites held similar views to those of Cerinthus and Carpocrates, the similarity must be interpreted rather broadly. In the second place, however, Irenaeus says of the Ebionites: "Quae autem sunt prophetica, curiosius exponere nituntur." If, as has been suggested,^{87a} this means that the Ebionites sought to determine what things are prophetic, then a marked parallel has been discovered between these Ebionites and the Gnostic Ebionites of Epiphanius, who exercised criticism on the Old Testament. And perhaps the failure of Origen, Eusebius and Jerome to mention the Gnostic doctrines of the Ebionites does not prove that those doctrines did not exist.

This evidence for the Gnostic character of the Ebionites mentioned by the earlier writers is far from amounting to anything like positive proof. The common view that the

⁸⁷ Philastrius, c. ix (in the *Vienna Corpus*, vol. xxxviii. p. 20): "Ebion discipulus eius Cerinthis, in multis ei similiter errans saluatorem nostrum hominem de Joseph natum carnaliter aestimabat, nihilque divinitatis in eo fuisse docebat," etc.

^{87a} See Schliemann, *Die Clementinen*, 1844, pp. 494ff. Cf. Schmidtke, *op. cit.*, pp. 226f.

Gnostic Ebionites of Epiphanius are to be distinguished from the Pharisaic Ebionites of Irenaeus remains, to say the least, perfectly possible. But the other view, which would attribute to the Ebionites of Irenaeus at least the germs of the peculiar doctrines described by Epiphanius, is also possible. It should be remembered that the extant descriptions of the Ebionites from the period before Epiphanius are very scanty, and that some of them come from men who had little opportunity for observation. To an outsider, the insistence of the Ebionites upon forms and ceremonies in general might be more noticeable than the exact difference of their ceremonies from those of the ordinary Jews; and their humanitarian views about Jesus might be more noticeable than their peculiar speculations about the Christ. Thus it is not quite impossible that all the Ebionites who denied the virgin birth were adherents of the Gnostic sect described by Epiphanius. The Elxai book was probably produced at an early time; so that Gnostic Ebionism, even if based from the beginning upon that book,⁸⁸ may have originated before the time of Justin Martyr.⁸⁹

The Nazarenes, of the time of Epiphanius and Jerome, must next be considered. The account of them given by Epiphanius is evidently not based upon personal observation; but Jerome, during his residence in the East, may well

⁸⁸ If Ebionism, though at first independent of Elxai, accepted the Elxai book later on, that fact would seem to indicate some original affinity for its contents; so that even pre-Elkesaite Ebionism would perhaps not be altogether unlike the Ebionites of Epiphanius. The whole question is, however, very obscure.

⁸⁹ Cf. the combination of an insistence upon Jewish observances with docetism in the errorists of the Ignatian epistles. See *Magn.* viii, with Lightfoot's note. This elimination of all non-Gnostic Jewish Christianity that denied the virgin birth is apparently favored by Zahn, *Das apostolische Glaubensbekenntniss*, p. 56. In opposition, see Harnack, *Chronologie*, i. p. 633, Anm. 1. For the view of Schmidtke, see below pp. 574ff. Whether Symmachus, who translated the Old Testament into Greek (perhaps about 200 A. D.) was an Ebionite, is apparently not altogether certain. Schmidtke, *op. cit.*, p. 236, Anm. 2, regards him simply as a Jew. Harnack, *Dogmengeschichte* i.⁴ pp. 322, Anm. 2, 327, Anm. 1, assigns him to the Gnostic branch of the Ebionites.

have come into close contact with them,⁹⁰ and therefore the scattered remarks about them in his writings deserve careful notice.

According to Jerome, the Nazarenes, who are scattered throughout all the synagogues of the East,⁹¹ continue the observance of the Jewish law,⁹² they try to be both Jews and Christians and therefore fail of being either, they seek to put new wine into old bottles.⁹³ Yet they are to be estimated higher than the Ebionites, who merely pretend to be Christians.⁹⁴ Whereas the Ebionites repudiate Paul as being a transgressor of the law,⁹⁵ the Nazarenes regard the preaching of Paul as a manifestation of the light that lightened the Gentiles (Is. ix).⁹⁶ And they recognize the divine sonship and virgin birth of Jesus.⁹⁷

The Nazarenes used only one gospel, which was written in Aramaic.⁹⁸ A copy was preserved in the library at Caesarea, and Jerome was also permitted by the Nazarenes at Beroea in Syria to copy the gospel. Indeed, he even says that he made a Greek and a Latin translation of it. Despite the knowledge of its contents which he claims to possess and the frequent mention of it in his writings, his various designations of the gospel have given a great deal of trouble. At times, he calls it the Gospel according to the Hebrews or the gospel which is called that according to the Hebrews; at other times, he speaks of it as though it were the Aramaic original of the Gospel of Matthew. Once he designates it

⁹⁰ Schmidtke, *op. cit.*, pp. 246ff., however, denies with very considerable show of reason that Jerome had ever come into contact with the Nazarenes at all.

⁹¹ In criticism of this statement, see Schmidtke, *op. cit.*, pp. 249ff.

⁹² Ed. Vall., iv. 122.

⁹³ i. 747, v. 161.

⁹⁴ i. 746.

⁹⁵ vii. 75.

⁹⁶ iv. 130.

⁹⁷ i. 747.

⁹⁸ "Chaldaico quidem syroque sermone, sed Hebraicis literis" (ii. 782). For the materials for studying the Gospel according to the Hebrews, the present article is dependent especially upon Zahn, *Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons*, ii. pp. 642-723.

as the gospel which is called by many⁹⁹ the authentic Gospel of Matthew. The fullest single designation of the gospel is the following:¹⁰⁰ "In evangelio iuxta Hebraeos, quod chaldaico quidem syroque sermone, sed hebraicis literis scriptum est, quo utuntur usque hodie Nazareni, secundum apostolos sive, ut plerique autumant iuxta Matthaeum, quod et in Caesariensi habetur bibliotheca." The following is a possible explanation of this vacillation in Jerome's manner of speaking of the gospel.¹⁰¹ Jerome had found an Aramaic gospel in use among the Nazarenes, which in part was parallel to our Greek Matthew. According to an early and wide-spread tradition, Matthew had written his Gospel originally in Aramaic ("Hebrew"). It was therefore natural at first sight to suppose that the Nazarene gospel was nothing less than the Aramaic Gospel of Matthew. Yet, as a matter of fact, there were wide differences between that Nazarene gospel and our Matthew; so that if that gospel were the original Matthew, then our Matthew must be anything but a faithful translation. Jerome did not venture to draw this conclusion. Yet he could not bear to relinquish the appearance of being the only man in the Church who had in his hands the genuine Aramaic Matthew; and indeed in many cases the Greek Matthew could really be admirably interpreted by regarding the corresponding passages in the Nazarene gospel as the original. Accordingly, where our Matthew and the Nazarene gospel are parallel, Jerome treats the Nazarene gospel as the original Aramaic Matthew; where the two gospels differ decisively, he calls the Nazarene gospel by some other name, such as "Gospel according to the
✓ Hebrews".

The Gospel according to the Hebrews is cited by Clement of Alexandria, Origen and Eusebius, all of whom had first-hand acquaintance with its contents. It was also used by

⁹⁹ "plerisque" (vii. 77).

¹⁰⁰ ii. 782.

¹⁰¹ See Harnack, *op. cit.*, i. pp. 634f.; and cf. Zahn, *op. cit.*, ii. pp. 684f., Ropes, *Sprüche Jesu*, in *Texte und Untersuchungen*, 14 Band Heft 2, pp. 84f.

Hegesippus and perhaps by Ignatius. By Origen it is evidently distinguished from the Gospel of the Twelve Apostles, which has been discussed above. The latter Origen reckons among the apocryphal gospels—it is one of the “attempts” to which Luke alludes in his prologue; whereas the Gospel according to the Hebrews is apparently treated by Origen with respect,¹⁰² though not as equal in authority to the four canonical Gospels. Formerly, it was supposed that a connection of some kind existed between the two Jewish Christian gospels—for instance, that the Ebionite gospel was a later recension of the Nazarene gospel, or that the two were different recensions of a common ancestor—but the investigations of Zahn, Handmann and Harnack have caused the two to be regarded as entirely separate works.

The external evidence makes it highly probable that the Gospel according to the Hebrews was written not later than the beginning of the second century; Harnack favors a first-century date.¹⁰³ With regard to the relation of the work to the canonical Gospels, widely different views have been held. Baur supposed that the Gospel according to the Hebrews was the starting-point for the whole development of the Gospel history; others have held it to be based upon our Greek Gospels; others have held intermediate views of various kinds. Zahn supposes that it was developed from the original Aramaic Matthew, but except from the purely linguistic point of view reproduces the original far less faithfully than our Greek Matthew. Harnack would regard it as independent of the Greek Matthew, partly more original, partly less original. Handmann identifies it with the *Logia*, one of the two common sources of our Matthew and Luke. The problems of the gospel cannot here be solved. But at least so much is clear—despite some things that look like fantastic elaborations of the Gospel history,¹⁰⁴ the Gospel according

¹⁰² Cf. however Schmidtke, *op. cit.*, pp. 154ff.

¹⁰³ Harnack, *op. cit.*, i. pp. 635ff., is probably right in his contention (against Zahn) that a Greek translation of the gospel existed long before Jerome, though Jerome did not see it.

¹⁰⁴ The primitive character of the remarkable fragment (the fourth

to the Hebrews contains tradition at least of great antiquity, and is the most interesting of the non-canonical gospels of which any considerable fragments have been preserved. It cannot, therefore, be a matter of complete indifference whether or not this gospel contained an account of the virgin birth; and this question must therefore now be discussed.

In the first place, the designation of the gospel as the Gospel of Matthew by Jerome and Epiphanius is better explained if it contained something corresponding to Mt. i-ii. The omission of two chapters at the beginning would have far more effect in producing the impression of a different work than very much greater divergences in the middle. If the gospel began with the baptism, like Mark, why should the report of it which came to Epiphanius have connected it so specifically with Matthew, and represented it furthermore as a "very complete"¹⁰⁵ Matthew? It is true that Epiphanius himself did not understand wherein the completeness consisted—he is doubtful whether the gospel contained the genealogy and does not know whether the readers of the gospel accepted the virgin birth—but this very lack of understanding shows that Epiphanius did not invent the designation "very complete". It was part of the indefinite report which was his only source of knowledge about the gospel. In order to explain Jerome's half-conviction that the gospel was nothing less than the Aramaic Matthew, the presence of a beginning corresponding to Mt. i-ii is even more imperatively required.

This requirement would perhaps be partially satisfied if the gospel, though omitting all mention of the virgin birth, contained the genealogy of Mt. i.¹⁰⁶ This hypothesis, how-

in Zahn's list), preserved both by Origen and by Jerome, Ἀρτι ἔλαβέ με (i. e. Jesus) ἡ μήτηρ μου, τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα, ἐν μιᾷ τῶν τριχῶν μου καὶ ἀπὴννεγκέ με εἰς τὸ ὄρος τὸ μέγα Θαβώρ, has never been successfully defended.

¹⁰⁵ πληρέστατον.

¹⁰⁶ This view has been held by Hilgenfeld, in *Zeitschrift für wissenschaftliche Theologie*, 1863, p. 353, *Evangelium sec. Hebraeos*, pp. 15ff., Handmann, *Das Hebräer-Evangelium*, in *Texte und Untersuchungen*, 5 Band Heft 3, 1888, pp. 123, 138. Aside from the considerations just

ever, is certainly incorrect. For if the gospel contained the genealogy without alluding to the virgin birth, then the genealogy must have ended with some such sentence as "Joseph begat Jesus". But if the gospel contained such a sentence as that without correction or explanation, it certainly could not have been treated with favor by Origen, Eusebius and Jerome, every one of whom had independent and first-hand knowledge of its contents.¹⁰⁷ Even if Hilgenfeld were correct in supposing that those Jewish Christian readers of the gospel who accepted the virgin birth could explain "Joseph begat Jesus" in harmony with the virgin birth,¹⁰⁸ certainly Origen and Eusebius (who had accepted the fourfold Gospel canon and were in no way prejudiced in favor of the Gospel according to the Hebrews) and the many Catholic Christians to whose opinion they seem to bear testimony could not and would not have done so. At the time of Eusebius, no Catholic Christian would have placed a gospel which closed the genealogy with "Joseph begat Jesus" in any other category than in that of the decidedly spurious books. It is absolutely certain, therefore, that if the Gospel according to the Hebrews contained no mention of the virgin birth it also contained no genealogy. But if it contained no genealogy, it must have had a very different appearance at

mentioned in the text, the presence of the genealogy in the Gospel according to the Hebrews is thought to be favored by the statement of Epiphanius (*haer.* xxx. 3, 14) that Cerinthus and Carpocrates used the genealogy of Matthew to prove that Jesus was the son of Joseph and Mary. But there is no real reason whatever for supposing that Cerinthus and Carpocrates used the Gospel according to the Hebrews. There is some evidence from Irenaeus (iii. 11, 7) that Cerinthus adopted the Gospel of Mark. See Bauer, *op. cit.*, pp. 33f., Zahn, *op. cit.*, ii. pp. 730f., Anm. 1, and especially Schmidtké, *op. cit.*, pp. 209ff.

¹⁰⁷ See Zahn, *op. cit.*, ii. p. 686.

¹⁰⁸ Hilgenfeld, *Evangelium sec. Hebraeos*, p. 19: "qui partum virginis concedebant Matth. hebr. I, 16 ad arbitrium interpretati videntur esse." For a Jew it was perfectly possible to understand the word "begat" in a putative rather than physical sense. "If the Genealogy had ended with the uncompromising statement 'and Joseph begat Jesus' it would not prove that the Evangelist believed that Joseph had been the natural father of Jesus" (Burkitt, *Evangelion da-Mepharreshe*, ii. p. 261). Similarly Allen, in *Internat. Crit. Com.*, on Mt. i. 16.

the very beginning from the Gospel of Matthew, and could hardly have been brought into such close connection with that Gospel by Epiphanius and Jerome.¹⁰⁹

In the second place, the character of the readers of the gospel is not unfavorable to the supposition that it contained an account of the virgin birth. Jerome found it in use among the Nazarenes, who accepted the virgin birth.¹¹⁰ Apparently Epiphanius did not find it in use among the Ebionites, who denied the virgin birth; they used the very different gospel of which Epiphanius has preserved fragments. Eusebius¹¹¹ assigns the Gospel according to the Hebrews to the less unorthodox Ebionites, who accepted the virgin birth. In fact, there is no clear evidence that this gospel was ever used by men who held Jesus to have been the son of Joseph and Mary. Irenaeus,¹¹² it is true, says that the Ebionites, who denied the virgin birth, used only the Gospel according to Matthew, but there is no real reason for identifying this supposed Matthew with the Gospel according to the Hebrews. The only possible way of arriving at that identification is by a process of elimination. The only two specifically Jewish Christian gospels that are known—at any rate the only two that are known ever to have been called by the name of Matthew—are the Gospel according to the Hebrews and the gospel of the Ebionites as described by Epiphanius. Therefore, since the gospel used by the Ebionites of Irenaeus cannot possibly have been the gospel of the Ebionites of Epiphanius, it must have been the Gospel according to the Hebrews. But is it so certain that the gospel in question was not the gospel of the Ebionites of Epiphanius? If the considerations adduced above¹¹³ have any weight

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Zahn, *op. cit.*, ii. p. 686.

¹¹⁰ In one passage (vii. 77) he speaks of it as the gospel which the Nazarenes and Ebionites use, but here he is probably inaccurate. Cf. Schmidtke, *op. cit.*, p. 167. Jerome seems never to have come into close relations with the Ebionites.

¹¹¹ By the most probable interpretation of *hist. eccl.* iii. 27. See, however, for a criticism of this passage, Schmidtke, *op. cit.*, pp. 143ff.

¹¹² i. 26, 2.

¹¹³ Pp. 556ff.

whatever, then the purely Pharisaic and non-Gnostic character of these Ebionites of Irenaeus is not so certain as is usually assumed; and if their teaching contained the germs of the Gnostic doctrines professed by the Ebionites of Epiphanius, then they may already have possessed that same Ebionite gospel.¹¹⁴ But even if the identification with the gospel of the Ebionites be abandoned, the identification with the Gospel according to the Hebrews does not necessarily follow. For the Ebionites mentioned by Irenaeus may have used some gospel which has been lost; or they may have adapted the canonical Matthew to their peculiar doctrines in some such way as Marcion adapted Luke. The statement of Irenaeus remains puzzling. But manifestly he is guilty of error or incompleteness of one kind or another, for the Ebionites could not have received the Gospel of Matthew as we know it (and as Irenaeus knew it); and inferences drawn from such an erroneous statement cannot be allowed to nullify clearer evidence.¹¹⁵

In the third place, there is some positive evidence that the Gospel according to the Hebrews as known to Jerome did contain a narrative corresponding to the second chapter of Matthew.¹¹⁶

In the commentary on Matthew, Jerome says:¹¹⁷ "Librarium hic error est. Putamus enim ab Evangelista primum

¹¹⁴ Schmidtke, who denies the Gnostic character of the users of the Ebionite gospel, believes that that gospel is the one referred to by Irenaeus (*op. cit.*, p. 225). But *cf.* Harnack, *op. cit.*, ii. pp. 628, 630f.

¹¹⁵ What gospel was used by the Jewish Christian opponents of the virgin birth mentioned by Justin Martyr and by Origen? It would be over-bold to answer that it was the Gospel according to the Hebrews, simply because no other definite answer can be given. In view of the scantiness of the sources, no definite answer can reasonably be expected.

¹¹⁶ For the following argument, see Nicholson, *op. cit.*, pp. 31ff., and especially Zahn, *op. cit.*, ii. pp. 652f. (Anm.), 687f. (Anm.). For the opposite view, see Hilgenfeld, *loc. cit.*, Ropes, *op. cit.*, pp. 86ff., Harnack, *op. cit.*, i. pp. 643f., Anm. 2, Handmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 119ff. Schmidtke, *op. cit.*, pp. 276ff., though he supposes that Jerome's Aramaic gospel contained Mt. i-ii, regards as valueless the positive proofs now to be adduced.

¹¹⁷ vii. 14. With regard to Ἰουδαίως Mt. ii. 5.

editum, sicut in ipso Hebraico legimus 'Iudae' non 'Iudaeae'. Quae est enim aliarum gentium Bethlehem, ut ad distinctionem eius hic Iudaeae poneretur? Iudae autem idcirco scribitur, quia est alia Bethlehem in Galilaea. Lege librum Jesu filii Naue. Denique et in ipso testimonio, quod de Michaeae prophetia sumptum est, ita habetur, 'et tu Bethlehem, terra Juda'." Here the most natural interpretation makes "ipso Hebraico" refer¹¹⁸ to Jerome's Hebrew Matthew, that is, the Gospel according to the Hebrews. If "ipsum Hebraicum" had been mentioned in the comment on the citation Mt. ii. 6, then it might well have referred to the original Hebrew of the Old Testament passage from which the citation is taken; but Mt. ii. 5 is not a citation, and in connection with it "ipsum Hebraicum" means most naturally the original "Hebrew" (Aramaic) of the Greek Gospel. The passage, therefore, seems to show that the Gospel according to the Hebrews contained Mt. ii. 5. It must be admitted, however, that the interpretation which refers "ipso Hebraico" to the Hebrew Old Testament is not impossible. According to that interpretation, Jerome would mean: "Not only does 'Iudae' stand in the original Old Testament passage upon which the scribes based their answer, but also when it comes to the actual citation of the passage even our Greek Gospel in its present form has 'Iudae'. Therefore 'Iudae' must have stood in the original text of the Gospel even in verse 5."^{118a} An objection to this view is afforded by the circumstance that the description of the Old Testament passage, "quod de Michaeae prophetia sumptum est," comes only in the comment on the citation. If "ipso Hebraico" referred to the Micah passage, the description would naturally have been given in connection with that phrase.

In the *De viris illustribus*, the following passage occurs:¹¹⁹ "Matthaeus qui et Levi, ex publicano apostolus, primus in Iudaea, propter eos qui ex circumcisione credider-

¹¹⁸ As in *de vir. ill.*, c. 3.

^{118a} See Schmidtke, *op. cit.*, pp. 276f.

¹¹⁹ *De vir. inl.*, c. 3, ed. Richardson.

unt, *Evangelium* Christi Hebraeis litteris verbisque composuit; quod quis postea in Graecum transtulerit, non satis certum est. Porro ipsum Hebraicum habetur usque hodie in Caesariensi bibliotheca, quam Pamphilus martyr studiosissime confecit. Mihi quoque a Nazaraeis qui in Beroea, urbe Syriae, hoc volumine utuntur, describendi facultas fuit. In quo animadvertendum quod ubicumque evangelista, sive ex persona sua sive ex Domini Salvatoris veteris scripturae testimoniis abutitur, non sequatur Septuaginta translatorum auctoritatem, sed Hebraicum. E quibus illa duo sunt: 'Ex Aegypto vocavi Filium meum', et, 'Quoniam Nazaraeus vocabitur.' " The most natural reference of "in quo" in the middle of this passage is to the "hoc volumine" which immediately precedes. Jerome says that in the original Hebrew Gospel of Matthew he has observed that the Evangelist in his Old Testament citations always follows not the Septuagint but the Hebrew text. Examples of such citations are "Out of Egypt have I called my son,"¹²⁰ and "For he shall be called a Nazarene."¹²¹ Harnack himself admits that if Jerome were an honest and reliable writer, this passage would show that the verses Mt. ii. 15, 23 were contained in the Gospel according to the Hebrews. But, Harnack continues, since Jerome was not an honest and reliable writer, the very ambiguity of the passage suggests that he is trying to appear to have the key to the two puzzling citations in his hand, without definitely committing himself. In the commentary on Is. xi. 1, he does not appeal to the Gospel according to the Hebrews but to "eruditi Hebraeorum" for the information that Mt. ii. 23 comes from that passage. But surely this last argument is without value. As Zahn has pointed out,¹²² if an Aramaic equivalent for Mt. ii. 23 stood in the Gospel according to the Hebrews, it would still require all the learning of those "eruditi Hebraeorum" to show that this was derived from Is. xi. 1. The connection

¹²⁰ Mt. ii. 15.

¹²¹ Mt. ii. 23.

¹²² *Op. cit.*, ii. p. 688.

with Is. xi. 1 might be more plausible on the basis of the Aramaic of Mt. ii. 23 than on the basis of the Greek, but surely it would not be self-evident. Ropes, in a very acute discussion of the passage,¹²³ makes the antecedent of "quo"¹²⁴ not the Hebrew Matthew, but the Gospel of Matthew in general. Under this interpretation, the words from "in quo" on are intended as a second confirmation for the fact of a Hebrew original of Matthew, which was affirmed in the first sentence of the paragraph. Schmidtke interprets "in quo" adverbially.¹²⁵ It may freely be admitted that if it could be shown on other grounds that Mt. ii. 5, 15, 23 did not as a matter of fact stand in the Gospel according to the Hebrews, then both this passage and the remark on Mt. ii. 5 could be interpreted in harmony with that fact. But as it is, the interpreter is under no such compulsion. He is perfectly free to interpret both passages in the most obvious and natural way. And when so interpreted, these passages add something to the probability (already established on the basis of more general considerations) that the Gospel according to the Hebrews contained a chapter corresponding to Mt. ii. That no other and clearer allusions to a narrative of the birth of Jesus in the Gospel according to the Hebrews have been discovered may indicate that those writers who used the gospel found no birth narrative there; but it may also indicate simply that the birth narrative of this gospel was so much like that of the canonical Matthew that references to it would have been superfluous.¹²⁶ It is the absence of such a narrative which would have evoked comment.¹²⁷

¹²³ *Op. cit.*, pp. 88ff.

¹²⁴ In "in quo", middle of the citation.

¹²⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 280: "Bei dieser Gelegenheit, das ist der Sinn, muss die Aufmerksamkeit besonders darauf gerichtet werden, dass der Verfasser des Matth.-Evangeliums nie nach der Septuaginta, sondern stets nach dem hebräischen Text citiert." This interpretation is more natural than that of Ropes.

¹²⁶ See Zahn, *op. cit.*, ii. p. 686.

¹²⁷ Cf. pp. 562ff. above. The suggestion of A. Meyer, in Hennecke, *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen*, p. 15, that Mt. ii may have stood in the Gospel according to the Hebrews without any account of the virgin

Two objections may be urged against the conclusion that the Gospel according to the Hebrews contained a narrative corresponding to Mt. i-ii.

In the first place, a stichometric list of canonical, disputed and apocryphal books attached to the *Chronography* of Nicephorus¹²⁸ makes the Gospel according to the Hebrews, with 2200 stichoi, considerably shorter than the canonical Matthew, with 2500 stichoi.¹²⁹ But the extant fragments of the Gospel according to the Hebrews appear to be longer rather than shorter than the corresponding passages of Matthew. Therefore the difference in length may best be accounted for by the absence of a narrative of the birth in the Gospel according to the Hebrews. The argument is plausible, but should not be allowed to contradict the more definite evidence which has been adduced above. The figure 2200 may be incorrect,¹³⁰ or the greater length of Matthew may be accounted for by omissions in the Gospel according to the Hebrews other than the omission of the birth narrative.¹³¹

In the second place, the extant fragments of the gospel are thought to be contradictory to the virgin birth, which therefore, it is said, was probably not narrated in the same book. So far as the account of the baptism is concerned, the argument has little weight. The words of the Spirit: "Fili mi, in omnibus prophetis expectabam te, ut venires et requiescerem in te. Tu es enim requies mea, tu es filius meus primogenitus, qui regnas in sempiternum", do not necessarily mean that Jesus has not become the Son of the

birth is not impossible. But in view of what has been said above (pp. 562ff.), it is unlikely.

¹²⁸ For introduction and text, see Zahn, *op. cit.*, ii. pp. 295ff.

¹²⁹ Mark 2000 stichoi, John 2300, Luke 2600.

¹³⁰ So Zahn, *op. cit.*, ii. p. 717, who appeals to other ancient errors in the figures of the stichometry.

¹³¹ Long stretches in the central part of Matthew are unrepresented in the extant fragments of the Gospel according to the Hebrews. See Zahn, *loc. cit.* It has been observed above (p. 562) that a great difference in the middle would affect the Matthaean appearance of the gospel less unfavorably than a much smaller difference at the beginning.

Spirit before the baptism. The fragment mentioned above, in which Jesus speaks of the Spirit as "my Mother" deserves somewhat closer attention; for in Mt. i. 18-25 the Spirit takes the place not of the mother but of the father. But the designation of the Spirit as the Mother contradicts not the canonical narratives themselves but a crassly materialistic interpretation of them. The feminine gender of the Semitic word for Spirit,¹³² which has given rise to the "my Mother"¹³³ of the fragment, was in the original Aramaic written or oral sources of Matthew and Luke¹³⁴ simply an additional safeguard of the lofty spiritual meaning of the birth story. "In divinitate nullus est sexus."¹³⁵

The preceding argument, though it does not make the presence of an account of the virgin birth in the Gospel according to the Hebrews altogether certain, at least makes it probable. The importance of this conclusion depends partly upon the antiquity and value that is to be attributed to the gospel itself. If the gospel was written in the first century, as Harnack supposes, then its testimony becomes exceedingly valuable. But even if the dating of Zahn, after 135 A. D., is to be adopted, even then the gospel provides a valuable supplement of other evidence. The special import-

¹³² Hebrew רִיחָ .

¹³³ ἡ μήτηρ μου.

¹³⁴ Cf. PRINCETON THEOLOGICAL REVIEW, x., 1912, pp. 1-38, 212-277.

¹³⁵ Jerome, *comm. in Isaiam* iv. 11 (iv. 485f): "Nemo autem in hac parte scandalizari debet, quod dicatur apud Hebraeos spiritus genere feminino, cum nostra lingua appelletur genere masculino, et Graeco sermone neutro. In divinitate enim nullus est sexus. Et ideo in tribus principalibus linguis, quibus titulus Dominicae scriptus est passionis, tribus generibus appellatur, ut sciamur nullius esse generis quod diversum est." Cf. *epist. ad Damasum de Seraphim et calculo* 17 (i. 60): "...quando de superioribus disputatur, et masculinum aliquid, seu femininum ponitur, non tam sexum significari, quam idioma sonare linguae." Origen, *in Ioh.* (ed. Preuschen iv. p. 67), compares the figurative use of the term "mother" in Jesus' words about him who does the will of God. All three passages are cited by Nicholson, *op. cit.*, pp. 80f. (Nicholson's reference seems to be wrong in the case of the last passage).

ance of the testimony of the Gospel according to the Hebrews to the virgin birth of Christ is that it is a testimony by Jewish Christians. If not only Gentile Christians but also Jewish Christians accepted the virgin birth before the close of the first century, then the legendary or mythical explanation of the origin of the idea becomes very difficult.

It is now time to sum up the results of the preceding discussion concerning the Jewish Christian denials of the virgin birth,

The virgin birth was denied, in the first place, by the Gnostic Ebionites described by Epiphanius; but the character of this sect is such as to raise a very unfavorable presumption with regard to its historical traditions. These Gnostics are as far removed as possible from all that is known of primitive Jewish Christianity. It is therefore exceedingly unlikely that they were united with Jesus or with His first disciples by a tradition which has elsewhere been lost. At any rate, the only gospel which they are known to have used was a worthless compilation, which exhibits the most unscrupulous dogmatic alterations of the canonical material.¹³⁶

The virgin birth was perhaps denied also by certain Pharisaic Ebionites, who, aside from their humanitarian views about Jesus, differed from the Catholic Church merely by a strict insistence upon the Jewish law: though the evidence for the existence of such a sect has been greatly exaggerated both as to quantity and as to quality. At any rate, their denial of the virgin birth is not difficult to explain. They probably belonged to the stricter party of the Jewish Christians, who insisted upon the observance of the law by Gentiles as well as by Jews.¹³⁷ They were more Jews than Christians, and to the orthodox Jew the virgin birth was an abomination.¹³⁸ It seemed out of harmony with his pride in the marriage relation and the begetting of children.

¹³⁶ Cf. Zahn, *Das apostolische Glaubensbekenntniss*, p. 56.

¹³⁷ See below, footnote 142.

¹³⁸ Cf. Weiss, *Leben Jesu*, i⁴, 1902, pp. 210, 214.

It might seem to him to make void God's promise of a prince of David's line. It contradicted the exaggerated transcendentalism of his idea of God, and seemed to make Jehovah no better than Zeus.

These Jewish Christian denials of the virgin birth are more than neutralized by the Jewish Christian affirmation of it.

In the first place, the affirmation can be traced at least as far back as the denial.^{138a} The denial appears for the first time in Justin Martyr, and it appears in such a way as to suggest that at that time it was by no means formidable. In the eyes of the non-Christian Jews, at any rate, it did not loom very large. Until corrected by Justin, the Jews were apparently unaware that the Messiahship of Jesus could be accepted apart from the virgin birth. At the beginning of the second century, Ignatius, when arguing against Judaizers, apparently felt no need of correcting their view of the birth of Jesus. Let it not be said that this is due to indifference on the part of Ignatius, or to the fact that the virgin birth had not yet become firmly established as a doctrine of the Church. Ignatius hardly yields to any later writer in the place he assigns to the virginity of Mary—it is for him one of the three great mysteries whose long-deferred revelation marks a new epoch in the history of the world. It is true, the argument from silence should be used with caution. But the silence of Ignatius about Jewish Christian denial of the virgin birth is at least as significant as Justin's silence¹³⁹ about Jewish Christian acceptance of it.¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, the Gospel according to the Hebrews is probably

^{138a} Even leaving out of account the New Testament evidence.

¹³⁹ It has already been shown that it is only apparent silence.

¹⁴⁰ Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, Part ii, vol. i. pp. 373ff., supposed that the form of error which Ignatius is combatting throughout the epistles is Gnostic Judaism. Harnack, in *Expositor*, 3rd series, vol. iii., 1886, pp. 175ff., supposes that separate heresies—non-Jewish docetism and ordinary Judaizing—are combatted. If Harnack is correct, only a comparatively small portion of the epistles is occupied with Judaistic error, and the argument just stated becomes, perhaps, somewhat weaker.

a direct witness to Jewish Christian belief in the virgin birth, from a time prior to that of Justin.¹⁴¹

In the second place, the character of those Jewish Christians who accepted the virgin birth raises a presumption in favor of their affirmation. Ritschl pointed out the close similarity between the views of the Nazarenes of Jerome and the views of the original apostles. Like the original apostles, the Nazarenes for their own part continued the observance of the Jewish law; but, again like the apostles, they recognized the freedom of the Gentile Christians and approved the work of Paul. The stricter Ebionites, on the contrary, who sought to force the observance of the law upon the Gentile converts^{141a} and regarded Paul as an apostate, were the spiritual successors not of the apostles who had stood nearest to Jesus, but of the Judaizing "false brethren, privily brought in".¹⁴² In general, these Naza-

¹⁴¹ It is not improbable that very early (and probably Jewish Christian) testimonies to the virgin birth are to be found (1) in the *Ascension of Isaiah*, (2) in the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, and (3) in the newly discovered *Odes of Solomon*. The passage in the *Ascension of Isaiah* which narrates the virgin birth is placed by Charles, *The Ascension of Isaiah*, 1900, pp. xxiiff., xxviii, xlivf., 77, at the close of the first century. Cf. however Harnack, *Chronologie*, i. pp. 574ff. For the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, see Warfield, *The Apologetic Value of the Testaments of the XII Patriarchs*, in *Presbyterian Review*, i., 1880, pp. 57-84. Warfield regarded this work as a document of the "Nazarene" Christianity of the early part of the second century. His complaint that the book is unduly neglected by defenders of traditional views is true to-day as well as thirty years ago, and true with regard to the virgin birth as well as with regard to the New Testament canon. Indeed, the reason why the three works just named are not discussed in the present article is not that they do not afford highly important testimony to the virgin birth, but rather that the questions concerning them are so intricate and the diversity of solutions so great, that it would transcend the limits of the present article to attempt anything like a precise estimation of their importance. They would have to be saved for separate discussion.

^{141a} For the distinction between the milder and the stricter party of Jewish Christians, see Justin Martyr, *dial.* 47.

¹⁴² Ritschl, *Entstehung der altkatholischen Kirche*,² pp. 152ff. No doubt the evidence will not warrant the definite division of Jewish Christianity into two parties, the milder party accepting the virgin birth and the stricter party denying it (see Nitzsch, *Dogmengeschichte*, pp. 42f.).

renes, living in seclusion in the East and using their own ancient gospel, produce an impression of conservatism and antiquity in marked contrast to the Ebionites of Epiphanius, with their doctrinal innovations and their worthless gospel.

The foregoing discussion of the Nazarenes and Ebionites has followed for the most part the main trend of recent opinion as influenced chiefly by Zahn, Handmann, and Harnack. Despite important differences in detail, a large measure of unanimity had been attained. But in 1911 the whole question was re-opened by the elaborate work of Schmidtke on the Jewish Christian gospels.¹⁴³ One thing is clear—Schmidtke cannot be ignored. His investigation, which is exceedingly thorough and is based partly upon new materials, has resulted in an entirely new reconstruction of the Jewish Christian gospels and of their readers. A critical examination of Schmidtke's arguments is the first duty of subsequent investigation in this field. That duty has not yet been performed, and it will probably not be satisfactorily performed for a number of years. For it will involve nothing less than a thorough reconsideration of all the complicated questions connected with schismatic Jewish Christianity. In the present article, all that can be attempted is (1) a brief exposition of Schmidtke's view, and (2) some

But at any rate there is no evidence that any who held the milder view about the law, from the time of Justin to that of Jerome, denied the virgin birth; though a rather ambiguous passage in Eusebius (*hist. eccl.* iii. 27) seems to mean that those who accepted the virgin birth were of the stricter way of thinking. The passage, when taken in connection with the evidence from Jerome, may indicate merely that not only the milder Jewish Christians but also some of the stricter ones accepted the virgin birth. At any rate, it is natural to expect that the stricter Ebionites in general would deny the virgin birth while the milder party would accept it. For the strict view of the continued validity of the ceremonial law would naturally be joined to a low view of the epoch-making significance of Jesus' coming. On the other hand, to abrogate the law of Moses something more than a human Messiah was required. Which view was historically correct—the view which made Christianity a mere continuation of Judaism, or the view which made the birth of Jesus an entirely new beginning in the religious history of the world?

¹⁴³ Mentioned frequently above.

estimate of its bearing upon the question of the virgin birth.

The results of Schmidtke's investigation may be summarized briefly as follows.

At an early date, the Jewish Christians in Beroea in Syria, who had before simply formed part of the mixed church of that city, drifted apart, owing to the force of circumstances, from the Gentile Christians, and formed a separate community. These Jewish Christians of Beroea came to be designated as Nazarenes. The statement of Jerome that the Nazarenes were spread abroad through the synagogues of the East is entirely valueless. There never were Nazarenes outside of Beroea. The Nazarenes had formed part of the Catholic Church, and even after their separation differed from the Gentile Christians in little more than in their own devotion to Jewish customs. For example, they recognized the work of Paul with enthusiasm, and accepted the doctrine of the virgin birth. At some time after the writing of Ignatius' epistle to the Smyrnaeans, but before 150 A. D., the Nazarenes of Beroea translated the Greek Gospel of Matthew into their own language, the Aramaic. It was not a perfectly literal translation, being rather somewhat like a targum. It displayed incidental acquaintance with Luke and John as well as with Matthew. But it did not differ from Matthew sufficiently to be regarded as a separate book. There is every reason to suppose, for example, that it contained Mt. i-ii. This Aramaic Matthew of Beroea, though it was really a translation of the canonical Greek Matthew, came to be regarded as the original from which the Greek Matthew had been translated, and thus gave rise to the tradition of the "Hebrew" original of Matthew, which is attested by Papias in the middle of the second century and played a large rôle in Irenaeus and subsequent writers. The Nazarene gospel was used by Hegesippus (about 180 A. D.), but was unknown except by hearsay to other writers until Eusebius. Eusebius had not seen the gospel when he wrote the *Church History*, but secured a copy before the appearance of his *Theophany*. He regarded the gospel as the

original of Matthew. His copy was added to the library at Caesarea, where it remained in the time of Jerome. But the author who brought the gospel into prominence was Apollinaris of Laodicea. To him we owe the fragments which have been preserved by Jerome, and also those which have been preserved on the margin of certain Gospel manuscripts which are descended from an edition of the Gospels which may be called the "Zion edition". This Nazarene gospel was never regarded by anyone who was really familiar with its contents as a work distinct from the canonical Matthew, but was regarded as the original from which the canonical Gospel had been translated. It has absolutely nothing to do with the Gospel according to the Hebrews.

The Ebionites mentioned by Irenaeus and later writers were a sect quite distinct from the Nazarenes. They were characterized by a denial of the virgin birth, though the name "Ebionites" was wrongly applied by Origen and Eusebius also to a sect that accepted the virgin birth. When Epiphanius wrote the first draught of his section on the Ebionites, he had no first-hand knowledge of them whatever. His description of the sect is vitiated by a confusion of the Ebionites with the Elkesaites, and by a wholesale employment of the material of the Clementine writings as the source of information about the Ebionites. All that he says about the Gnostic character of the Ebionites is based simply upon these groundless combinations. There never were any Gnostic Ebionites. But what Epiphanius says about the vegetarian principles of the Ebionites is correct. After writing the first draught of his chapter, Epiphanius received first-hand information about contemporary Ebionites on the island of Cyprus, and became acquainted with their gospel. This later and correct information was simply added to the original draught of Epiphanius' work, and the result is the confused account which we have before us. The Ebionite gospel from which Epiphanius gives extracts is to be identified not with the Gospel of the Twelve Apostles,¹⁴⁴ but with

¹⁴⁴ Cf. above, pp. 555f.

the Ebionite gospel which is mentioned by Irenaeus as a Gospel of Matthew and is also mentioned and cited by Origen and others under the title "Gospel according to the Hebrews". The earliest trace of its use is in Hegesippus. To this Gospel according to the Hebrews are to be assigned the fragments in Epiphanius which have usually been assigned to the Gospel of the Twelve Apostles,¹⁴⁵ and also such fragments as the fragment in Origen which mentions the Holy Spirit as Mother of Jesus. This Greek Gospel according to the Hebrews has absolutely nothing to do with the Aramaic Matthew of the Nazarenes. The two were kept quite separate by the early writers. Eusebius says of Hegesippus that he cited from the Gospel according to the Hebrews *and* from the Syriac (Gospel).¹⁴⁶ Here the two are placed clearly side by side. The identification of the Gospel according to the Hebrews with the Aramaic Matthew of the Nazarenes is due altogether to the combined stupidity and deceitfulness of Jerome. Despite what he says about his Greek and Latin translation of the Gospel according to the Hebrews and about his opportunity of transcribing the Nazarene gospel, he was not really familiar with either one. He saw the Aramaic Matthew in the library at Caesarea, but on account of his ignorance of Aramaic was unable to use it to any great extent. His knowledge of the Gospel according to the Hebrews was derived from Origen; his knowledge of the Aramaic Matthew from Apollinaris of Laodicea. Since he was ignorant of both gospels, it was possible for him to confuse them. He interpreted "according to the Hebrews" in the title of the Gospel according to the Hebrews erroneously in a linguistic sense, and so was led to identify this gospel with the Aramaic gospel of the Nazarenes. His designations of the Aramaic gospel and of the Gospel according to the Hebrews vary according to his

¹⁴⁵ Schmidtke removes, however, from the list of these fragments the one which refers to the abrogation of sacrifices. See above, footnote 83.

¹⁴⁶ *Hist. eccl.* iv. 22, 8: ἔκ τε τοῦ καθ' Ἑβραίων εὐαγγελίου καὶ τοῦ Συριακοῦ καὶ ἰδίως ἐκ τῆς Ἑβραϊδος διαλέκτου τινὰ τίθησιν. Cf. however Nestle, *Einführung in das griechische Neue Testament*, 2te Aufl., pp. 77f.

sources of information and according to the exigencies of the occasion. In the *Commentary on Matthew*, for example, he could not well designate a gospel which he referred to only occasionally as the original of Matthew, for if the gospel was the original of Matthew it was absurd for him not to refer to it oftener. He could not refer to it oftener because his knowledge of it was really limited to the citations made by Apollinaris.

Even such a brief summary may suffice to exhibit the revolutionary character of Schmidtke's treatment of the Jewish Christian gospels. The theory cannot here be examined critically. But such examination can be omitted with the better conscience because the importance of Schmidtke's investigation for the question of the historicity of the virgin birth is not so great as might be supposed. If Schmidtke's theory should prove to be correct, the second-century testimony to the virgin birth would not be weakened.

It is true, if Schmidtke is right, the Nazarenes, who accepted the virgin birth, can no longer be regarded as a wide-spread sect, but become a local community at Beroea in Syria. It is true that the more orthodox "Ebionites" whom Origen and Eusebius represent as accepting the virgin birth disappear from the pages of history.¹⁴⁷ It is true that the Nazarene gospel, which contained an account of the virgin birth, can no longer be regarded as embodying independent tradition, but becomes a mere translation of Matthew with some employment of the other canonical Gospels. It is true that the Ebionites of Epiphanius, who denied the virgin birth, are cleared of the charge of unhistorical Gnostic speculations. It is true that the Gospel according to the Hebrews mentioned by Hegesippus and other early writers can no longer be regarded as containing an account of the virgin

¹⁴⁷ Schmidtke, *op. cit.*, p. 241, suggests that the more orthodox of Origen's two classes of "Ebionites" is due simply to a false application of the name "Ebionite" to the Gnostic Jewish Christians, who, according to Schmidtke, accepted the virgin birth. It is the same confusion which Schmidtke sees in the connection which Epiphanius sets up between Elxai and the Ebionites. The suggestion is exceedingly bold.

birth. These features of Schmidtke's theory may appear to weaken the testimony to the virgin birth and enhance the value of the Jewish Christian denials of it. But other features of the theory point just as strongly in the opposite direction. In the first place, though the Nazarenes shrink to the proportions of a local community, their primitive appearance remains. And they accepted the virgin birth. It was the mere chance of their survival as a separate sect which made them peculiar. Other Jewish Christians of similarly primitive character may be held simply to have been merged in the Catholic Church. In the second place, the Nazarene gospel, if it ceases to be a depository of independent tradition, becomes a valuable witness to the early acceptance of the Gospel of Matthew on the part of Jewish Christians. And the Gospel of Matthew contained an account of the virgin birth. In the third place, if the Ebionites, who denied the virgin birth, cease to be Gnostic, they cannot for that reason lay claim to special primitiveness. Their language, for instance, was Greek not Aramaic. Finally, if by Schmidtke's theory the Gospel according to the Hebrews is shown to have contained no account of the virgin birth, it is also shown to be utterly valueless. The only gospel of these Jewish Christians who denied the virgin birth, the only Jewish Christian gospel which did not contain an account of the virgin birth, was a worthless Greek compilation based upon our canonical Gospels, a compilation which displays incidental dependence even upon those infancy sections which it omitted. The use of this gospel by Hegesippus and the mention of it by Irenaeus form simply further testimony to the early authority of the fourfold Gospel canon. And the employment of this gospel, and of this gospel only, by the Ebionites proves how absolutely destitute they were of genuine historical tradition, except such as was embodied in the canonical Gospels. Whatever the cause of their denial of the virgin birth, such denial was not based upon primitive tradition coming down from the time of Jesus. No sect whose sole gospel was the one which Epi-

phanus quotes in his chapter on the Ebionites has the slightest claim to be regarded as standing in any direct and peculiar relation to the primitive Jewish church.

One fact deserves to be kept constantly in mind in the whole discussion. Jewish Christianity was not confined to the schismatic Jewish Christians included in lists of heresies. It has been proved above that even of the heretical Jewish Christians mentioned by Origen and others some accepted the virgin birth. But this whole discussion has left wholly out of account the great numbers of Jewish Christians who simply became merged in the Catholic Church.¹⁴⁸ And everything points to the hypothesis that these, and not the schismatics of whatever opinion, were in possession of the most primitive historical tradition with regard to the life of Jesus.

The results of the foregoing investigation of the second-century testimony to the virgin birth may be summed up in two propositions:—

1. A firm and well-formulated belief in the virgin birth extends back to the early years of the second century.

2. The denials of the virgin birth which appeared after the beginning of the second century were based upon philosophical or dogmatic prepossession more probably than upon genuine historical tradition.

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¹⁴⁸ See Schmidtke, *op. cit.*, pp. 247ff., especially pp. 247f., Anm. 4.