

THE
VIRGIN-
BIRTH

by

A
BIBLIO-
PHILE



Division SCC

Section #12,712

THE VIRGIN-BIRTH

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ONE OF THE PRINCIPAL
FOUNDATIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

An Account of some of the Various
Ways in which it was explained, defended,
and devoutly expounded by Doctors of
Theology and Doctors of Medicine at
different periods of the Church's History.

Collected together and presented to

The Twentieth Century

BY

A BIBLIOPHILE

PRIVATELY PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR
AND HIS FRIENDS

1905

I DEDICATE THIS BOOK
TO ALL
PRIESTS OF THE
ROMAN, GREEK, AND ANGLICAN CHURCHES
AND
TO ALL LEARNED MINISTERS OF SUCH
NONCONFORMING BODIES
WHO BELIEVE
IN THE
DIVINITY AND DEITY OF CHRIST

I N T R O D U C T I O N

I do not pretend to enter into any controversy in the following pages, and there will be no reference to any Manifesto of the Clergy, or of others, and no discussion on the Higher Criticism, for by this time the public must begin to be heartily tired of such matters.

It is my purpose to state clearly, from duly authorised books, and from the words and writings of learned and orthodox men, and of saintly and most reverential women, how this Wondrous Work of the Virgin-Birth was begun, continued and finished. Some of the statements and opinions may seem strange and almost shocking to modern ears, and therefore it must be always remembered that they have in every case proceeded from orthodox men and women, thoroughly devoid of prurience, and full of faith and reverence.

If any be offended in this twentieth century, these last facts should exculpate both the writers and myself.

I at once proceed *in medias res*, beginning in a natural order with the Incarnation.

My own opinion of the collections in this book is that they are striking instances of Religious Psychology, and, in addition to that, show the remarkable and thoroughgoing faith that the 'Church of our Fathers' had in the Virgin-Birth.

Last of all, I beg to say I have gathered together my collections with the delight of a Bibliophile, and without any religious bias that I am aware of.

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THE VIRGIN BIRTH

CHAPTER I

THE INCARNATION

THE Doctrine of the Incarnation is, in whatever way we regard it, one of the most tremendous mysteries ever unfolded to mortal men, and it is only reasonable to suppose that when the teachers and expounders of the Church endeavoured to bring it home to the hearts and consciences of their hearers, they would be likely enough to use arguments of a most varied nature, ranging from the sublime and logical down to the magical and ridiculous. The former are known well enough, for they are reflected in the religious literature of each succeeding age, and are preserved for general use in the common text-books of the subjects dealt with. It is not my intention to deal with these so much as with those theological curios which seldom appear in manuals or compendiums and are often quite unknown to that omnivorous individual the 'general reader.' Some may seem the veriest nonsense, others may seem grossly irreverent, and others may make us wonder what purpose they can possibly have served when first delivered to the faithful. But they help to carry us back to times

when religious belief was a *reality*, and not a convention of society or an organised hypocrisy as seems sometimes to be the case nowadays. Moreover they exhibit a curious side of intense religious conviction, and give us a good idea of the food that is sometimes offered to, and received by, the hungry devotee.

The Incarnation does not supply so much of this peculiar food as does the actual physical birth which resulted from it. This is what we might expect. The overshadowing of the Holy Ghost could hardly supply so many curious items, or so many pious opinions, as the miraculous Birth from a Virgin Mother.

It is a general inference that the Conception took place at the exact moment when the Virgin said : ‘ Behold the handmaid of the Lord ; *be it unto me according to thy word.*’ In the words of the Vulgate she said *Fiat Mihi*, and the great event then took place at once. The first tremendous *Fiat* was at the creation of the world ; *Fiat Lux*, said the omnipotent God then, and there was light ; at the appointed time afterwards there came the Redemption, and with it the second *Fiat*, and He who said of Himself that He was *Lux Mundi*, the Light of the World, at this *Fiat* of a humble Virgin, condescended to our low estate, and took our nature upon Him in the womb of that second Eve, who was thus to repair the error of the first Eve, according to the counsel and foreknowledge of God.

To many minds there is a consistent and sweet

reasonableness about the Divine Plan of Redemption which so strongly appeals to them, that it almost disarms criticism and sometimes repels it effectually and completely. This is well known as the precious theological quality called 'simple faith,' and such parallels as the two 'Fiats' and the two Eves have done much to strengthen and satisfy such Faith. But when it is asked *how* the Conception took effect and what were the physical accessories (and the thoughtful or inquisitive mind is prone to such inquiries), then it is that physicians and theologians try to satisfy the demand, and we have whole cabinets of 'curios' ready to our hand, if we can only get the books which contain them. Many such books are what the French dealers term *introuvables*, and it is just because I have in some cases discovered these 'undiscoverables,' that I have reason for presenting my book to the lovers of rare literature.

On the threshold of the subject it must be remembered that I am chiefly concerned here with the way in which the subject of the Virgin Birth has been stated and illustrated *within* the Church of Christ during the nineteen centuries of her existence, and with the importance which has always been attached to the primary article of the Christian Faith. There has been absolutely no controversy within the Church, as far as I have been able to discover, as to whether this great point of doctrine could be dispensed with or not. It has been held universally, and this fact makes it all the more startling that a divine holding

the high position of the Dean of Ripon should seem to say, in the twentieth century of the Church's existence, that it can be put aside or dispensed with. I do not suppose for a moment that the numerous and varied elucidations and pious opinions hereafter to be adduced will all commend themselves to readers of the present age, but they will, at least, show plainly enough that the Faith and Authority of the Church were positively unanimous in the belief of this radical Christian Fact. The many remarkable comments, the many naïve suggestions, the many mystical opinions, and the many astounding revelations to some male and more female saints, which I here present, in many instances for the first time, to English readers, all tend to emphasise this fact. The substratum or foundation is always fixed in God's Word and nowhere else, and this, at least, should commend the subject somewhat to the Evangelical Churches who take their stand on the same 'impregnable rock.' Moreover, the discussion or elucidation of the Virgin Birth cannot be to any faithful Christian a mere argument *de lanâ caprinâ*, or even an imaginative description of Cloud-cuckoo-town. From their earliest days they have been acquainted with those well known words 'conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary,' and if, beyond their mere recital, they take little or no interest in them, it must be a sign of ill omen to the Faith they profess.

And, last of all, the varied theological extracts which I have dug out from many a dusty and

forgotten volume will be, I hope, interesting as 'human documents.' Strange and repulsive as some may be, still they all will help to throw some light on the vagaries of the human intellect, and some will also help to disclose the somewhat peculiar attributes of the *anima naturaliter Christiana*. Thanks to the admirable *Gifford Lectures* of Dr. James, the twentieth century is beginning to understand that there is a psychology which will apply to 'Conversion' and probably other religious mysteries as well. But, first of all, examples must be collected and human documents compared.

THE ANNUNCIATION AND INCARNATION

There has never been any doubt of this in the Church. Gabriel was the *nuncius* and the day was the 25th March. It has been almost universally held that the day of the week was a Friday, and many of the highest authorities, such as Athanasius, Augustine and others, connect it with the creation of Adam, which they hold as having also occurred on a Friday and on the 25th March. This adamic addition will not, I am sure, commend itself to the historical conscience of the twentieth century, and will perhaps tend to weaken the original statement. But such additions or illustrations should not be taken too seriously. They do not really form part of the faith of the Church. Many more such statements of an equally unacceptable character,

according to modern views, will be presently adduced in this collection, and it is best to say at once that they are only, as a rule, pious opinions which may be held or not just as the earnest and devout believer thinks best.

As to where the body of the infant Jesus was derived there was hardly any variety of opinion within the orthodox church. Every Christian tongue confessed that it was of *the substance* of Mary, his Virgin Mother. But in what manner and whence was the substance produced? Here was the difficulty which caused such a crop of pious opinions, all of them most reverently put forth or humbly suggested with a view to the Praise and Glory of God, the confirming of the Faith and the discomfiting of the unbeliever.

This I believe to be a truer statement of the case than the opposite statement of unbelievers, that most of these and similar statements were deliberately fabricated by the authorities of the Church with a view to deceive the public and further their own interests. The words fraud and deceit do not, by any means, truly represent the success of the Church in its cause or its intention—although, I admit, they sometimes contributed their share.

My first witness will be a physician high up in his profession. I begin with the doctors of medicine rather than with the doctors of theology, for in the subject we have to consider they certainly ought to be more at home both by their training and experi-

ence. His folio was printed by high authority in Spain in the year 1576, which two facts tell us something of his surroundings. He explains the Conception thus :

In the Conception of our Lord Jesus Christ the Virgin Mary supplied the material substance and the feminine part, and the Omnipotent Father, by the operation of the Holy Ghost, supplied the masculine part or quality (both being naturally necessary), and so the Virgin conceived and bore her own son and the Son of God.

But whether the Virgin Mary supplied the same material substance in this particular instance, as other women generally supply, is a doubtful question.¹

The fact is, there was another medical difficulty here which rendered the explicit declaration and arguments of St. Thomas Aquinas of small effect. St. Thomas held (3 pt. quest. 31, art. 5) that the Blessed Virgin supplied the same material in forming the body of Christ in the act of generation, as other women supply to the formation of children. But what is it that other women do supply? Doctors disagree. The great Galen says it is *semen*, the great Aristotle says it is *sanguis*.

However, the difficulty is not so great as it

¹ 'In conceptione domini nostri Jesu Christi, Maria Virgo præstitit materiam et sexum fœmineum : pater vero omnipotens, spiritus sancti operatione, masculositatem (alioqui ex naturâ necessarium) supplevit : et ideo Virgo concepit, et peperit filium suum atque Dei.

'An vero Maria virgo, eandem speciei materiam præbuerit ad generationem Christi, quam aliæ præstant mulieres ad generationem prolis, dubium est.'

appears, for *semen* is, after all, only *sanguis uterius coctus*¹ *atque elaboratus adeo, ut aptus fiat generationi*. Consequently the general opinion both of theologians and physicians was that the embryonic body of Christ was formed from the purest blood of the Virgin. There was in her case no ejaculation either of *sanguis* or *semen*, but the Holy Ghost made a collection of either one or the other and brought it secretly into the Virgin's womb without any lustful pleasure or sensual delight on Mary's part, and without any rupture of her virginity whether physical or mental.

Could not He who had secretly, while Adam slept, drawn Eve without the slightest feeling of pain from Adam's side—could not He, in like manner, draw from the Virgin's body the necessary material and collect it in her womb without the slightest feeling of lustful pleasure, especially when His eternal purpose was that the second Eve should bring forth the second Adam, and restore the Fallen Race.

Such is the triumphant argument of the chief physician to the Duke de Medina Sidonia, one of the highest grandees of Spain, and his folio printed by the King's printer and at the Duke's expense, represented the best contemporary opinion on the subject about the year 1576.² But the above is

¹ 'Thrice-decocted blood' Marlowe calls it.

² The modern triumphant argument of the Doctor of Divinity of 1902 is of a rather different description. It deals less with concrete instances and more with abstract and metaphysical considerations. Here it is: 'If the final cause of all mechanism is spirit, of all law is

only the first difference between the Virgin Birth and the ordinary one. There are several others.

The second great difference is that Mary the Mother of our Lord was a Virgin, before she conceived, a Virgin during the act of conception and birth, and a Virgin after the Birth as well.

This is discussed and proved medically in great detail. We shall return to it at the proper place.

A third difference between the Conception of Jesus in the Virgin's womb and the ordinary conception of the human baby was this: The ordinary infant or embryo is organised in its bodily parts little by little and gradually, and if the embryo is to turn out a boy, it has to wait forty days before the *animatio* takes place, *i.e.* before the *anima* or soul is implanted or added—if a girl, in that case eighty days before the soul comes. This was the accepted doctrine generally held by the learned. But this rule was broken through at the Virgin's conception, and the Duke's physician very tersely explains what happened in Mary's case. He says: *Dominus vero Jesus, statim ac Virgo consensum præstitit, spiritus sancti operatione fuit conceptus, integre conformatus*

freedom, there can be no unreason in supposing that God might without any contradiction of the laws of this creation, but as a result of His perfect knowledge of those laws, produce an unusual effect for an adequate spiritual end. And when we reflect on all that Christianity has done and is still doing for the human race, it is impossible to deny that its introduction to the world was an adequate spiritual end.' (Dr. Illingworth, *Reason and Revelation*, 1902).

The Virgin Birth would certainly come within the bounds of this forcible argument as 'an unusual effect for an adequate spiritual end.'

et animatus, et qui ab æterno Deus erat, in momento factus est homo nulla organizatione quadragenaria præmissa. This is the third difference, and although I cannot attain unto the confidence and lucidity of the above Latin, I will give it thus :

‘Our Lord Jesus, at the very instant in which the Virgin yielded her consent, was, by the work of the Holy Ghost, conceived, perfectly formed and animated; and He who from everlasting is God, is made Man in a moment of time, without gradual embryonic development and without waiting forty days for animation.’

But are these forty days to be deducted from the period of gestation or not? That is a ‘curio,’ a theological gem of purest ray serene, and it takes a whole folio page to view it in all its different facets. Here the Duke’s chief physician is too abstruse for me. I will not reproduce arguments and inferences which I cannot follow. However, the conclusion is plain and straightforward enough; it is this—Mary bore our Lord in the womb 275 days or nine months and five days over, in fact from 25th March to 25th December.

But our learned author has somewhat yet to add, perhaps more astounding than the rest. Besides our Lord’s Conception, complete organisation and animation, all instantaneous, there were other things also produced in the Virgin’s Womb: ‘Verum etiam tres tunicæ, amnios, farciminosa et chorion, et vena atque arteria umbilicalis, et quæ ab his nascuntur

venæ et arteriæ, cum venis atque arteriis beatissimæ Virginis copulatæ, a Deo patre, spiritus sancti operatione sunt productæ. Nam persimilis factus est nobis, et sicut nos per venas atque arterias plures, ab umbilicalibus enatas, nectimur matri, et nutrimentum ceu per radios quosdam trahimus, ita et Dominus Jesus, per eadem vasa fuit ligatus, cum vasis uteri beatissimæ Virginis, a quibus nutrimentum accepit. Et sicut ex nutritione nostra, necessarius excrementorum proventus fuit, et tunicas natura paravit quibus colligerentur et asservarentur in partum, ita dominus noster hæc excrementa non fastidivit, sed sudore intra amnium contento, et urina in tunica farciminosa acervata, ejus corpus alluebatur.

With regard to what eventually became of these *tunicæ*, he holds that at the Virgin Birth they were expelled from the womb with the Infant Jesus, for, as he justly remarks, what reason is there to believe that they should be left in the womb, or that God should annihilate them there?

He also, while on this point, gives his opinion pretty fully in favour of some blood following the birth as well as the tunics or secundines. But to hold that the Virgin absolutely lost any of her blood was undoubtedly treading on dangerous ground, and so he adds this reservation: 'unless the Church determines otherwise,' and ends by professing his obedience in all things to her doctrine.

He holds, indeed, that there was an *abundant* flow

of blood (*uberior purgatio*) after the Virgin Birth, and adds: 'Paulo enim minus necessaria, ac naturalis est fœminis hæc purgatio, quam mictio, et alvi exoneratio: quæ nemo verebitur in beatissima virgine, nec in domino nostro Jesu statuere.'

He quotes the opinion of Cardinal Cajetan, who thought that the angels either helped to do the more unseemly work, *omnia excrementosa emundantes*, or else Mary, instructed by them, did the whole work herself. The first opinion was rather preferred by the Cardinal, for the reason that it would have a better effect upon Joseph, who, seeing the delivery of the Virgin effected in such a marvellously quick manner (*tam cito, tam expedite cernens ventrem evacuatum*), would certainly think that what was born of her was of the Holy Ghost, and would be led to adore the Incarnate Deity.

Another medical man of great experience, viz., the physician of Philip iv., King of Spain, has also written an extraordinary quarto of more than three hundred pages. It was published more than sixty years later than the other book just quoted, and, like it, is very scarce indeed. Neither book has been suppressed or put on the Index as far as I know, and it is hard to account for their extreme rarity, except it be that old medical books are treated as waste paper sooner than others.

This author has not so much to say on the Conception as on the embryonic body of Jesus while lying in the womb of the Blessed Virgin for more

than nine months. In his first chapter of his book he considers four questions relating to this period of the Saviour's life.

1. Did the narrow confines of the dark place where Jesus spent his first nine months weary him, or indeed trouble him in any way?

The answer is strongly in the negative, and for these reasons, which are expanded into four or five pages in the original Latin. Our Lord was perfectly happy in Mary's womb, and as the Church says of Him: 'Thou didst not abhor the Virgin's Womb.' His surroundings neither wearied nor disgusted Him, for He was from the very first instant of His conception endowed with perfect knowledge, and He therefore knew what everything was that He saw around Him. For though the secundines and the bladder (*vesica urinaria*) and other unpleasant intestines were near, and the place itself very dark, and moreover His sustenance was the blood taken up by the umbilical vein, still He knew it was a natural place for a baby, and therefore, concludes our learned physician, Jesus would desire to be there, rather than be afraid or have any horror of His surroundings.

So far for this first question—we shall have to return to it again, for many other writers have dwelt upon our Lord's love for His first dwelling-place, at far greater length and with more comments than this King's Doctor.

The second question was like unto the first :

2. An Jesus uteri sanctissimi Matris suæ horrorem habuerit? That is: Did Jesus abhor the Virgin's womb?

Of course the answer is No, and the reasons are similar to those given above.

3. Was the first movement of the embryonic heart of Jesus a *dilatatio* or a *compressio*.

Answer: a *dilatatio*. (In seven pp. of argument).¹

4. An temperamentum Sanctissimi corpusculi fuerit ætatis infantilis, an vero alterius ætatis perfecti hominis?

Answer: It varied as the Lord grew according to his successive periods of life.

Before we leave this expert Doctor altogether, I will mention one more question now, although it carries us on so far forward, even to the stable and Bethlehem *after* the Birth. He debates whether the newly born Babe was affected by the cold and squalidness of his manger bed.

The Doctor says: Yes, He was. For Jesus all His

¹ This was long before the Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus took such a prominent place in the liturgical services and spiritual worship of the Church. Some pious inquirers of later times went even beyond our Physician in his deep research, and tried to settle the question whether the movement of systole and diastole continued in the glorified Body in Heaven. M. Grégoire, the learned and independent Bishop of Blois, calls these Christian mystics *Cordicoles*, and has a long chapter upon them in his *Histoire des Sectes religieuses*, vol. ii., pp. 244-292, ed. 1828.

life was subject to outside influences, to heat and cold, and such like ; but, as was the case with Adam and Eve before the Fall, and with the Blessed Virgin His mother as well, He had no internal complaints or diseases, because His natural constitution was perfect.

He was of a sanguine habit of body, more than most men, but that was from the substance and pure blood of His mother, and also so ordered of Divine Love that He might shed more blood for us. He suffered real pain when circumcised. He had small teeth of a feminine character, and the flesh of His gums being from the substance of his mother, He was more likely to be tender and delicate and suffer more pain from his teeth than other men.

In his chapter *De Dentitione Christi*, the question of Christ's teeth and gums are much more fully discussed than I have been able to discover elsewhere.

Briefly it amounts to this :

The material of which teeth are composed was in Christ a substance less dense and coarse than in other men, because the blood and the milk of the Virgin, which were the proximate and remoter causes of the substance respectively, were, in the case of the Virgin, free from such excrementitious matter as generally serves to harden the teeth. Therefore Christ's teeth were peculiarly sensitive, and the pain at teething would be greater than usual, and our author draws the general inference, as mentioned above, that the Saviour's teeth were small and closely set together (*parvi et densi*).

I here take my leave of the Court Physician of Philip IV. of Spain, and cannot follow him in his many medical opinions on the adult life of Christ, his Passion, Death, and especially whether he would have reached old age, if not crucified. His book apparently is extremely difficult to meet with, and I have sought for it for some time, with a view to place it on my shelves. For that reason I do not introduce this author personally or by his name, for I, as doubtless is the case with all bibliophiles, much prefer to have a book on my own shelves, than in the possible locked-up cabinets of others. I am neither a Biblioclast nor a Bibliotaph, and my books are *mihi et amicis*, but after a long and persistent hunt after a wily fox, no true sportsman would think it fair that some one else who was not in the running should 'from information received' take a short cut, across country, claim and carry off the brush, without so much as a 'by your leave.'

Having thus finished with the medical evidence of these important and orthodox personages, so far as it has to do directly or collaterally with our subject, we must come back to the tremendous fact of the Incarnation and Conception and the circumstances attending it. And before proceeding further, I would quote a remark of Dr. Armitage Robinson, the present Dean of Westminster, who, after the scandal that arose in the Church through the Dean of Ripon's apparent repudiation of the Virgin Birth, at once prepared some lectures on the Incarnation. He

delivered these on successive Saturday afternoons in Westminster Abbey. In his second lecture he declared that there was 'nothing inherently inconceivable in the union of God and man. He thought we had a right to ask whether a miracle was useless or not, but if it should be found to serve a worthy purpose, then 'we should be prepared to weigh the historical evidence with a mind undisturbed by any desire to get rid of the miraculous element. If miracle was ever in place, as witness to the invention of a new power, challenging attention and manifesting the finger of God, was not the coming of the Son of God in human flesh a fit occasion for miracle?' He added: 'This way of looking at the miracle did not, of course, prove that it actually took place, but it set the mind free to consider without bias the historical evidence which supported the miracle.'

These certainly seem to me to be sensible remarks. And of the witnesses, historians and believers are, generally speaking, worthy, God-fearing, and good-living people, who again and again would stake their lives and fortunes on the truth of what they were told, and had, as a rule, no worldly self-interest to serve, and no axe of their own to grind, except in the later corrupt Papal courts and hierarchies. Well, then, may we not take it that there was some real historical substratum for their beliefs, and that the Christian religion, or the Christian mythology, as some prefer to call it, was something considerably

more than a mere windbag of delusions blown out by imposture and fraud. That seems to be one argument of the Dean of Westminster against the Dean of Ripon, put as fairly as I can. I do not discuss it, for this book is not intended to be controversial, but exhibitory. But I commend the orthodox Dean's view to my readers when going through the details of the Virgin Conception and the Virgin Birth.

Do not let us begin by a strong bias against such histories, or even by a bias against the Archangel Gabriel—especially in these days of telepathy and wireless telegraphy, and thought-transference, and Mrs. Piper's communications from the unknown world of departed spirits, and the remarkable waifs and strays that rise at times from our subliminal consciousness. I say in the face of all these up-to-date facts, we should be careful not to begin our inquiry into the origins of Christianity by a strong bias against Gabriel or against the contents of the very documents which have supported and sustained the faith from the beginning until now—the twentieth century of its hold upon the best spirits of humanity. And finally, to speak personally here, as an exhibitor of theological curios and literary rarities: Do not take a bias against them as being *nugæ, tricæ*, rubbish, but keep an open mind. They are human documents; and if sometimes we feel inclined to smile at, or perhaps ridicule, the *sancta simplicitas* in some cases so apparent, we should remember that this is a virtue so rare in these advanced days of

poultry-yard morals, that we ought to greet any little touch of holy simple-mindedness with delight and reverence rather than by jeers or inextinguishable laughter.

Let then *sancta simplicitas* show us a few more of her thoughts and private meditations connected with the Virgin Birth.

Cartagena (Hom. 12 *de Annunc.*) tells us of a famous Dominican whose teaching from the pulpit was that four streams of blood flowed during the conception in the form of a cross from the throbbing and dilated heart of the Virgin, and distilled themselves into the natural place of conception. Then, by the operation of the Holy Ghost, there proceeded from these the small embryonic, but perfectly formed, human body of Christ.

Other Christians, drawing their pious thoughts from St. Jerome, held the opinion that directly after conception Jesus composed his minute embryonic body into the form of the cross, his first thought being, Behold, I come to do thy will, O God, and to die on the cross for mankind. It is on this account that Epiphanius calls the most pure womb of the Virgin *uterus cherubicus et cruciformis*.¹

Another knot to be untied if possible by faithful meditation was this :

Why did the Blessed Virgin marry when she had made a vow of virginity. This would perplex many a female saint naturally. The answer given in a

¹ N. Alberti, *Comentarii sagro-storici*, Ven., 1717, p. 60.

book of much interest for its curious contents¹ is, because she knew Joseph would not hurt her chastity. That had been understood between them ; and, moreover, he was too old.

This reason might be satisfactory, although rather tame, as reasons went then. But there was another reason which was much preferred and far more general, and that was, that the espousals and marriage to Joseph formed part of a deep-laid plot to deceive the Devil, and one that perfectly succeeded.

It was in this way : the Devil, who, as the Scotch Puritans used to say, is an old scholar of well-nigh six thousand years' experience, and can quote Scripture well enough if necessary, was naturally well acquainted with the great oracle of Isaiah, ' Behold a Virgin shall conceive and bear a son,' etc. When therefore the time for the expected Messiah was at hand, the great enemy of mankind began to look about him and observe all the unmarried Virgins with the view of doing his worst to prevent the fulfilment of prophecy. Mary's espousals quite threw him off the scent, and, moreover, when the Child was being carried in womb he naturally thought Joseph was the father, and was terribly undeceived when he heard the angels' Christmas song and the other testimonies to Christ's Divinity. This was a favourite popular belief, and the great St.

¹ *Les Saintes Curiositez*, par Mr. Pierre Clément, Chanoine Régulier. Langres, 1651, ff. 9, pp. 370.

Ambrose threw his protecting aegis over it, as the footnote shows.¹

One objection that has been raised to this pious opinion is, that if the Devil heard the angels singing near Bethlehem, surely he would have also heard or seen Gabriel coming down with his message to Mary at Nazareth. No, was the triumphant answer of the faithful Christian mystics. No, said they, the Devil knew his Bible and was watching Bethlehem: *And thou, Bethlehem Ephrata, etc.* He no more expected than did the learned Rabbis that the Messiah should come out of Galilee, or that any good thing could come out of Nazareth.

But speaking of Gabriel, the question arises, how long was he with the Virgin in the *Santa Casa*. There has been much division of opinion on this. Many think he was with the Virgin nine hours, that he came at six P.M. and left at three A.M., which on the 25th March would be about the time of dawn. This view is somewhat corroborated by the evening *Angelus* and the early morning bell of the Church, but it is thought by others that nine hours was too long a time to stay, and there would be a difficulty with some minds as to whether the conception took place before midnight or after, and this would alter the day of the month according to modern views. Also, it was held not to be at all likely that Gabriel

¹ Non mediocris quoque causa est ut virginitas Mariæ falleret principem mundi, qui eam desponsatam viro cerneret, partum non potuit habere suspectum.—St. Ambrosius in *Cap. 1 Lucae*.

would be nine hours in obtaining the consenting words of the Virgin, and it was also held that he would not stay a moment *after* the Conception.

These last few questions have been chiefly for theologians rather than physicians, but room must be found for one more medical view of the Conception, and that a modern one, before we leave the subject.

There was published in 1854 at Paris the following rare treatise in English on the Virgin Birth, which is so scarce, that I know of no copy at the British Museum or any Public Library of this country.

Its title is :—

Illustrations | on the | Incarnation and Immaculate Conception | of the | Virgin Mary | and the | miraculous and mysterious birth | of our | Saviour Jesus Christ | by | Dr. Edmund Skiers, M.D. | of the Faculty of Paris, London, and Edinburgh; | author of a treatise on the Croup, a sketch of Stomacal affections, &c., &c., pp. 16 in 8vo. Paris, 1854.

This peculiar little book dwells mainly on the author's theory concerning foetal kysts.

A foetal kyst (he says) is an abscess borne by the individual, and independently of the will of the bearer; it is an abscess containing an embryo or foetus in it. This foetal kyst might happen to be borne by either a male or a female; it may be hidden internally in the body, or it appears externally as a tumour, or it may appear externally as a

monstrosity, with the limbs of a foetus hanging to it, attached to the body of the person born so, and without any envelope but the continuous skin.

These foetal graftings from a double conception are consistent with Nature, though they are very startling in fairs, museums, and exhibitions.

He next applies his theory to the Birth of Mary and Christ as follows:—

He assumes a double Conception to have occurred in the maternal uterus of Anne, our Lord's grandmother. This double embryonic Conception he distinguishes as M. (Mary) and C. (Christ).

Anne gives birth to M. a foetus which contains in its body, through adhesion during gestation, a tumour having within it the foetal kyst (C.). Now this vital and tenacious germ egg (C.) might have adhered to and been embedded in the cavity of a muscle endowed with a mucous membranous lining of a very vascular character, and why may not this muscular cavity happen sometimes to be the uterus cavity of (M)?

These two germ eggs (M. C.) had each of course its own separate and proper protecting amniotic membrane. . . . From their intimate congruity the one (M.) might at last entirely envelope (C.) by its own quicker development. In such case (M.) might check the growth of (C.) but would not destroy its vitality because (C.) would find a *nidus* of a similar tissue to its own, and would live on (though checked) and be there incarnated eventually in the intestinal or uterine

formation of the embryo germ (M.). The author admits that his theory is beyond actual demonstration, but will not admit that it is beyond credence, for it is most possible and can be illustrated by what we see in other somewhat similar marvels of nature, subject to the creative will of God. (He might here have referred to cases of *Parthenogenesis* known to science.) And, he adds, if we question this, we question and deny that Power which pervades all things.

Dr. Skiers further holds that just such another wonderful uterine graft might again occur and astonish the world—another birth from a virginal uterine conception *sine concubitu*. But it would not be a Christ or Messiah birth, for that was predicted by prophets and ordained from the beginning by God.

Moreover, should another Virgin conception occur without connection, the offspring might be a female instead of a male.¹ Or it might turn out an imperfect creature or a monstrosity. If this should happen to a Jewess, our author observes that it would indeed be a blow to the Jews who are still looking for a promised Messiah.

Dr. Skiers mentions as an admitted fact that foetal kysts have been noticed in the bodies of male infants who have been burthened with them even to the age of manhood.²

¹ This occurred with John Wroe's infant Shiloh, but the affair was hushed up.

² In many of the books on monsters and strange freaks of nature, which were read with such avidity in the sixteenth and seventeenth

But no idea of an immaculate conception or birth is possible here, there being no uterine nidus in such cases.

The treatise ends in a semi-religious strain, and the author hopes that his theory will put an end to the doubts and dissensions of the various divisions of Christians which have caused so much misery in the world.

Strange to say he quite omits to mention anywhere his view of the Holy Ghost's work in Christ's conception ; in fact he does not seem so much as to have heard ' whether there be any Holy Ghost.'

However, there is another theory of the Virgin Birth, said to be by a French Curé, which gives proper and due prominence to the Holy Ghost, and as it is also comparatively recent and somewhat scientific too, it may well come in here by way of contrast.

This book of two hundred and sixty-one pages, printed at Amsterdam in 1742, and entitled *Dissertations Physico-théologiques*, takes its stand altogether on the assumed scientific fact that all children come originally from the eggs in their mother's ovary. The book is occupied in establishing the following propositions :—

1. Les femmes ont dans leurs entrailles des œufs qui donnent naissance aux enfans.

centuries, I have seen pictures of a grown-up man who carried in front of him attached to his stomach the lower portion and legs of another foetal body which thus adhered to him through life. He was, I think, almost as well known then as the Siamese twins were in recent times, and he also lived to an advanced age.

2. Les œufs des femmes contiennent chacun en raccourci le corps du fœtus.
3. L'usage de l'homme dans la conception est de fournir un esprit extrêmement subtil qui remue le germe de l'œuf.
4. Le Seigneur Jésus a pris naissance, selon la chair, dans un œuf de la Vierge Marie.

After these preliminary propositions, the principal thesis is brought forward and defended. This thesis is to the effect that the Holy Ghost detached an egg from Mary's ovary, put it in a suitable position in her womb (une situation convenable) and then brooded over it, even as the Spirit of God brooded (original Hebrew) over the face of the primeval waters before the creation of the world.

The Curé defends his propositions against objectors who might say that it was unbecoming of Jesus Christ the Son of God to be included in and born from an egg smaller than a pea. To such his answer is the well-known text, Phil. ii. 8, 9, where St. Paul expounds the doctrine of Christ's *kenosis* (ἐαυτὸν ἐκένωσε). And he asks triumphantly, 'Is it not a ridiculous thing to try and make out that God could not by his Holy Spirit detach the egg and let it develop into a child, when every one knows that Joseph could have done it easily *if he had been young enough?*'

But although this French Curé and his book excited considerable ridicule from the worldly-wise,

I think his idea of the operation of the Holy Ghost was extremely scriptural. It was an idea that would, I believe, have commended itself strongly to Milton. If the Holy Spirit of God brooded over (*incubabat*) and overshadowed the waters at the beginning of the world when the earth was lying, as it were, in the womb of a watery chaos, would it not seem congruous to Divine Action that He should do something similar when the very Fount and Beginning of a New and Redeemed World was lying, as it were, in the womb of Humanity?

The Holy Spirit of God at the creation

‘With mighty wings outspread,
Dove-like, sat brooding on the vast abyss
And made it pregnant . . .
And vital virtue infused and vital warmth
Throughout the fluid mass.
The earth was formed but in the womb as yet
Of waters, embryo, immature involved.’

Such was the old Hebrew way of imagining how the productive energy of God’s Spirit would bring the world out of chaos. If that was God’s way at the beginning of the Old Testament, may not we expect Him to do something similar at the beginning of the New?

The overshadowing or brooding of the Holy Ghost over the egg in the womb of the chosen Virgin answers our expectations and joins both Old and New Testaments in fit connection of similar operations.

SOME PROTESTANT 'EXHIBITS' ON THE VIRGIN BIRTH

These are far less numerous, and since it is the very genius of Lutherans, Calvinists, and the Evangelical Churches generally, to reject traditions, fables vainly invented, revelations of saints and ecstasies, and in fact all unwarranted additions to the original Word of God, we naturally find the Protestant theories and treatises less curious, and far less extravagant in detail.

However, there is one Protestant book on my shelves which is a theological curio of considerable interest and of the utmost rarity. It is not to be found in the British Museum or the Bodleian, and I have searched in vain for it in many large libraries abroad. Græsse, the great bibliographer, mentions it as 'the burnt book' in his *Universal Literary History*, and, strange to say, places it in the section *Erotica*, but he gives no particulars, and does not seem to have seen it (cf. *lib. cit.* vol. ii. p. 743).

I will, therefore, with the excusable pride of a possessor, give some account of its contents.

The title-page is as follows:—

I.N.I. | Dissertatio Theologica | de | Sanctificatione | seminis | Mariæ Virginis | in actu conceptionis | Christi | sine redemptionis pretio. | Contra | antiquum scholasticorum nonnullorum | Præservationis in Lumbis | Adami | figmentum, rursus autem a quibusdam | renovatum, | veritatis, in asserenda humanæ Christi naturæ | ἀναμαρτησία, amore conscripta | a | Samuele Schrœero Præposito & | Superintendente Clœdensi. |

Lipsiæ, | apud Joannem Fredericum Braunium | 1709. |
iv. + 63 pp. in 4to. (closely printed).

The author begins by giving a reason for treating a question which he admits is *curiosa magis quam ad salutem necessaria*. As a Lutheran overseer or bishop he had noticed that the faith of many of his clergy and laity had been somewhat weakened by the labyrinthine fancies on the subject of the Virgin Birth. He therefore thought it a useful work to brush aside and refute some of the foolish ideas current, and by stating the scriptural and orthodox view, to help in this manner the weaker brethren.

He then repudiates the early opinions of the Marcionites and others who held that Christ was not really born of Mary's substance, but came from heaven and passed through her as water passes through a tube or canal. He refuses to be drawn into any controversies with Papists concerning the Immaculateness of Mary, and determines to confine himself chiefly to a discussion of two hypotheses which were often mentioned among the learned and unlearned in his time.

They are both connected with that particular matter or substance taken from the Virgin Mary, out of which the human nature of Christ was formed. In the original Latin used by Schroeerius the word for this is *massa*, and the two hypotheses considered are:—

1. God by His infinite Power and Wisdom preserved the *massa*, or substance, of the Virgin from which Christ's human nature was formed, perfectly pure from all taint of sin.

It had been thus preserved, from the beginning, in Adam's loins and in the successive loins of the Patriarchs right down to the Virgin Mary.

2. This *massa* from which Christ's human nature was formed, was really tainted by sin as coming from the Virgin, who was, like all the rest of the human race, born in sin, and needed redemption. But it was sanctified and freed from all taint of sin by God.

Neither of these statements commends itself to our Lutheran Bishop, and especially does he condemn, confute, and occasionally ridicule the first hypothesis. I have never been a student of Lutheran theology, and must confess my surprise at the very large number of Lutheran theologians who are here quoted in connection with this subtle, curious and scholastic point of divinity; as I have already said, they are far less numerous and less extravagant than the Roman Catholic disputants on similar questions, but nevertheless their number is amazing. I suppose their custom of producing compendiums of systematic theology forced them to consider the subject. I will spare my readers both their names and their verbal subtleties. As for their names, I hope they 'are written in heaven,' but most assuredly they are not often written in England, or even in America, although the German element is rather strong in some parts of the United States. Perhaps my rare

and remarkable 'curio' of Samuel Schroeer is lying unnoticed among the books of some American farm-houses, handed down from father to son right away from the time of its first Lutheran colonist and possessor. There is much more chance of finding a copy in America than in England, I should say.

We will dismiss then from consideration the various Lutheran divines quoted by Schroeerius and confine ourselves to his own statements simply.

He begins by giving his version of the orthodox Lutheran views. Coming from a man in his official position, it is stamped with some authority. Here it is: The Holy Ghost formed the true human nature of Christ from the blood of the Virgin Mary, and the Logos took this nature to himself. (*λόγος* *assumpsit*). When the Holy Ghost by His particular work and influence elicited the prolific semen from the purest blood of the Virgin, He gave to the Virgin the power of conceiving a child without the generative seed of a man—a power quite beyond the order or rule of Nature.

As the earth, in the beginning, brought forth the green herb by the word of God alone, without the driving of the plough in the furrow, or the sowing of the seed in the soil, so the Virgin, most perfect of women and most pure, conceived without any friction or any sexual union with a husband, Him who was the Tender Plant of Grace (*Germen Gratiae*) and by the efficacy of the Holy Ghost brought Him forth into the world.

Next we have a severe attack on the first theory

just stated, that Christ as to His human nature was in the loins of David, of Abraham, and originally of Adam, and this was preserved perfectly pure from sin by God through all the generations of the genealogy.

Schrœerius seems to dislike this theory more than any others then in vogue, and his feelings seem still more intensified against it when he tells us that those who favour the theory of Adam's loins have lately embraced effusively (*exosculati sunt*) the results of certain recent experiments of anatomists and physicians regarding the ovary in the female sex. The fact is, they thought that Eve's ovary would be a splendid adjunct to Adam's loins, and, between the two, or by means of the two, they thought the old theory (hypothesis I.) could be made to hold the field against all comers. This our author will not allow at any price. He had heard one of these ovary theorists assert the following :

'In Eva formaliter actu et seminaliter stamina omnium hominum fuisse, ne unico quidem excepto.'

The last four words raise his ire, and he asks indignantly : How could this wonderful anatomist know that the ovarian origins of all men were there without exception ?

Why, he must have been far sharper than his famous knife. How could he know the whole and exact number of the human race, and that not a single one was left out. How could he know that Christ was not excepted ?

How did he know Christ's particular embryonic

egg? What if it had really been the egg of Judas or Pilate? (Quid si Judæ aut Pilati fuisset?) Why, he adds derisively, the next thing these people will say is, that we do not come from the loins of our father but from the ovary of our mother alone, for some of these learned physicians speak of a generative seminal fluid like the white of an egg which is found in certain arteries and veins of the womb—*vasa spermatica*, so they call them. Our Protestant Bishop will not condescend to discuss such an absurdity, as he calls it. He simply gives it a categorical denial and says: ‘It is absolutely false to say that the semen of the Virgin Mary was present in her *vasa spermatica* before the action of the Holy Ghost began.’ As a matter of fact, according to the learned Bishop’s theory, the Virgin’s semen was at that time non-existent. ‘It was,’ he says, ‘neither in the loins of Adam, nor in the ovary of the Virgin, nor *a fortiore* in the ovary of our first mother Eve, but the Holy Ghost by his creative virtue pro-created that semen from Mary’s blood.’¹

Schrœerius is less successful in meeting the difficulty of the Scriptural statement, that Jesus took upon him the seed of Abraham, and therefore inferentially was in the loins of Adam, just as all men are said to have sinned in Adam. He escapes by a quibble and snatches a ridiculous victory. His opponents said: ‘All the human race came from the

¹ ‘Sed spiritus sanctus virtute creatrice ex sanguine Mariæ semen illud procreavit.’

loins of Adam, therefore the human nature or human part of Christ must also have come from the loins of Adam.' The answer of our logical bishop is: 'I deny your first proposition. Remember Eve, she was one of the human race, but she was never in the loins of Adam as the rest were.' The next object of attack is the theory of the *preservation* of the pure seed in the loins of Adam, and through the loins of all the succeeding Patriarchs right down to the Blessed Virgin. Here Schroërius scores an easy victory. He declares there is not a word or tittle in Scripture about the preservation of any holy substance or semen, either inside Adam or inside his descendants; and if such a 'holy seed' did come down genealogically to the Virgin Mary, then it was a man's seed (*semen virile*, i.e. of Adam and the Patriarchs), but Christ was to come from the seed of the woman.

There are many more arguments adduced against both the hypotheses originally mentioned, and at page 55 we have the carefully prepared statement of the author himself on the Virgin Birth; he holds that: 'The Holy Ghost by a special and wonderful working far beyond any natural law, by a powerful generative influence (*efficaciâ sementivâ*) made the blood of the Virgin Mary fit for the appointed result. There was no generative act, for in that case the Holy Ghost would have been the true father, which is absurd, but there was a new creation, a new and unheard of work on earth, full of the mystery of God (*cf.* Jerem. xxxi. 22), for from the blood of the

Virgin a 'holy thing' was formed, a perfect body with a soul derived from the Virgin's soul, and a body consubstantial with our own human body, but without that taint of sin which prevailed still in the rest of the blood and substance of the Virgin. This pure and holy substance or body, free from all sin, then received the hypostatical union and remained shut up for nine months, gradually increasing till the time of birth. From the beginning to the end of this marvellous work of the Holy Ghost, there was no need for *λύτρον* or redemption from sin in this sanctified blood or semen of the Virgin. But apart from this separated *Massa*, the Virgin was under sin, and required the ransom of Redeeming Blood, even as the rest of the human race.

Here, in the last clause, we have the stern Protestant who will not have any Deification of Mary, or any acceptance of her sinless birth. Strange to say, though very many curious points are raised about the Conception, nothing is even hinted at with regard to any carnal pleasure that Mary might have received from the *φρόνημα σαρκός* which apparently she inherited.

Here the Roman Catholics express themselves very explicitly, and make both the conceptions (viz. of Mary and her Mother Anna) perfectly free from sensual pleasure. Indeed, we hear that Joachim and Anna when they heard that their continued prayers for offspring had been accepted, and had betaken themselves in thankful piety to the work of genera-

tion, it was with this accompanying marvel—*semen in morem sudoris posuerunt*.

And this, as most commentators hold, would have been the constant habit of body with both Adam and Eve and their descendants, if there had been no Fall.¹ So calm a way of getting rid of one of the most intense passions and secretions of the natural man might indeed commend itself to such a spiritually minded and mystical theologian as was Robert Gaguin, that very early defender of the Immaculate Conception, but physicians, with their greater practical experience, have always been on the side of the coarser view. For instance, the Spanish Grandee's physician, whose views on the Incarnation we have already heard, is very unspiritual and coarse when he treats of Mary's own birth. He will have it that Joachim and Anna were her parents in a perfectly natural way, *i.e. ex masculi accessu carnali pudendorum attritu delicioso, et seminum in utero effusione*. There is no ambiguity here, and he holds that Sarah, Elizabeth and Anna were under exactly the same conditions, and their sterility as a result of age was overcome in the same way. The resulting embryo had first sensibility, afterwards movement, and last of all *maximo præunte dolore*. Maria, Isaac, and John the Baptist are extruded from the womb. The age of the mothers would account for the *maximus dolor*. However we shall find both physicians and

¹ Cf. Roberti Gaguini de Virginis Conceptione . . . oratio. (Paris, 1498.)

theologians generally agreeing that the Virgin-Birth was perfectly free from *dolor* of any kind, and the Virgin Conception equally free from any *atritus deliciosus* or the slightest carnal pleasure.

But physicians and Protestants of all denominations, and even English Churchmen if not too 'High,' dwell far less on the sinful carnal pleasure of the generative act than is the case with Roman Catholic theologians of the priestly order. Is not this because these last are professed and compulsory celibates?

I shall not quote any more early Protestants on the Virgin Birth, for there is a great sameness in their allusion to it, and not one of them is so full or so interesting as the Lutheran we have just heard. They all have a tendency to depreciate the Blessed Virgin, just as all Roman Catholics try to exalt her. But by way of contrast I will give the utterances of an esteemed twentieth century Free Churchman, the Rev. Alex. Whyte, D.D., who at Christmastide 1902, addressed his brethren at Edinburgh on the subject of 'That Holy Thing,' Luke i. 35; and as this expression of Scripture is cognate to that sanctified *massa* or substance of the Virgin Mother on which Schroërius has just been so learnedly discoursing, the contrast may have interest. He began by saying: 'That holy thing! We could not fail to be arrested and indeed startled with this so singular and unexpected expression. For when we take time to think of it, this is never applied to any other child in all

the world but Mary's child . . . But how did Christ, being the Son of God, become man? Christ became man by taking to Himself a true body, and a reasonable soul, being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and born of her, yet without sin. Now it was that true body and that reasonable soul, taken together, which constituted that holy thing of which the angel here speaks in such salutation, and in such congratulation to the mother of our Lord. . . . Never before nor since, had any mother but Mary such a holy thing laid in her lap. Never had any other mother such a holy child running around her knee. For Mary's first-born Son never caused his happy mother neither (*sic*) a single sigh nor a single tear. Mary never needed to teach her first-born Son to sing this sad psalm of ours :

“ When deep within our swelling hearts
The thoughts of pride and anger rise ;
When bitter words are on our tongues,
And tears of passion in our eyes.”

‘ Joseph and Mary had often to teach all that sad psalm of ours to James and to Joses and to Simon and to Judas and all their sisters, but never to their eldest brother.’ And so on through a long homiletical discourse, in which is shown how St. Paul, and all other Christians, are terribly handicapped and hindered by what they have inherited from their mothers. ‘ Had Paul's mother brought forth another such holy thing as Mary brought forth ; had the Holy Ghost prepared another such body and soul for Paul as he

prepared for Paul's Master—what a holy and happy life Paul would have lived!

'But as it was, Paul was hampered and hindered and humiliated and driven desperate, by that unholy thing he had inherited from his mother; by that body of death, from the burden and pollution of which he never found a single day's deliverance in his whole life. And, indeed, the whole situation of things with Paul and with us all was such.' His comforting inference is: how happy should all Christians feel to see their surety and substitute, Jesus Christ, finishing His work for us with the holy and strong instrument which the Holy Ghost had prepared for Him.

If these are typical Christian thoughts among the Free Churches of our land—and it seems they are, or otherwise the Editor of the *British Weekly* would hardly have placed them in the most prominent position in his Christmas issue—then, I think, we may say that the Virgin Birth is held in a strong and even catholic manner by that numerous body of Christians, who are so often denominated as our dissenting or non-conforming brethren, although the manner of expressing it and discussing it is very different.

The same remarks hold good for the voice of the Church of England in her pulpits on Christmas Day 1902, when the Virgin Birth was in many cases more specially and critically dealt with by reason of the Dean of Ripon's unexpected remarks. And at

Westminster Abbey a series of lectures on the Virgin Birth delivered by the Dean were concluded with the following forcible remarks :—

‘ If the miracle never took place at all two serious problems confronted us. The first was a problem of literary criticism : how was the belief of the early Church to be explained ? and, more particularly, what of the two narratives, if the thing never happened ? There appeared to be no doctrinal ground for the invention of the story in the earliest times. St. Luke was a follower of St. Paul, but St. Paul never based the Incarnation upon it, indeed, never so much as mentioned it ; and neither St. Matthew nor St. Luke put it to any doctrinal purpose. Again, the whole atmosphere of the Judaism of the time appeared to be unfavourable to the transplantation of heathen myths, such as legends of parthenogenesis. If there was one characteristic of the first Christian days, it was the proclamation of *truth*. The shadows of superstition were scattered, figments were thrust aside on every hand ; “ Children of light,” “ Children of day ”—these were the epithets of new converts. Where were we to find the dark corners in which a fresh crop of superstitions grew ? and even if they did grow in some obscure place, was St. Luke the writer to be imposed upon by them ? If we were absolutely precluded *à priori* from believing in the possibility of the miracle of the Virgin Birth, we should be faced by a literary problem insoluble by any intelligible process.

‘A second problem faced us when we considered the situation from the point of view of the membership in the Christian Church. How could we explain the witness of the Church to the Virgin Birth, given in her earliest and briefest Creed, proclaimed by all her great theologians, reverently cherished by her simplest saints, if after all it was a figment of superstitious imagination. Had she unconsciously repeated a lie at every Baptism since her baptismal creed took shape, that is, at least, from the middle of the second century to the present day?—she with her mission of truth, which dispersed the black night of the heathen religions, driving them off the face of the earth, just because they were false and she was true. The two problems ought to be considered apart, the literary problem being treated just on its own merits; but the one difficulty was reinforced by the other difficulty, and the two together effectually barred the way for most of us. They made it impossible for us to explain the story of the Virgin Birth as a legend of the pious imagination of the first generation after the Crucifixion.’

Perhaps the feeling of English Churchmen on this subject is best expressed in a charge of Archbishop Tait (his final one of 1880):—‘Before the mysterious narrative of His Incarnation we bow in awe-struck silence. How could the Son of God come into the world? No mere human experience can tell you. We know what was believed by His disciples. No other account of the Mystery has ever found credit in the Church, and if you believe in Christ’s Resurrection,

I see not how you can logically hesitate at the Mystery of the Incarnation.'

If this, being twenty years old, be considered as not quite 'up-to-date,' I will also add here the latest view of the most cultured representative of the Church of England in our country, I mean the *Church Quarterly*. This magazine, as recently as January 1903, when dealing with the credibility of St. Luke's Gospel, which, as is well known, has been attacked recently by some advanced members of the school of 'higher criticism,' has a few good remarks on the Virgin Birth :—

'It is quite clear that this [the Virgin Birth] was not an ordinary part of the missionary teaching of the Apostles. If it was taught at all, it would be part of the catechetical instruction, and it is very probable that in the earliest period, knowledge concerning it was not widely diffused. But St. Luke was certainly acquainted with it. No one can doubt that who reads his narrative in the first chapter of his Gospel.

'It is quite true that Professor Schmiedel would omit as interpolations certain verses which conflict with his own opinions, but that is a method of criticism which is quite unscientific; and moreover it is not sufficient for his purpose, for the idea of the Virgin Birth colours the whole narrative, and especially the story of the Annunciation. . . . St. Luke knew and believed in the Virgin Birth, but does not mention it in the Acts; St. Paul may perfectly well have known

and believed in it, although he never mentions it explicitly.'

But as I profess to be a scribe bringing out of my treasures things mainly old and rare, I will end this part by an extract from a scarce book of mine, of about 600 pages, devoted to showing the Mercy and Truth of God when He exiled Adam and Eve from Paradise.¹

The Virgin Birth was strongly corroborated according to this pious Franciscan by the following deduction from God's awful revelation to Abraham when the 'horror of great darkness' fell upon the Patriarch as we read in Genesis xv.

God then said of His people : ' In the fourth generation they shall come hither again.'

But the fourth generation and many many more generations have passed away, and God's word is unfulfilled. What then did God mean by the fourth generation? Oranus sees the meaning thus: It was the fourth *different* generation, not the fourth *ordinary* generation, that was meant. There have been four different kinds of generation in the human family.

1. Adam : without father or mother.
2. Eve : without a mother, but taken from a man.
3. The ordinary human race : with father and mother.

¹ Exilium | Generis Humani | felicissimum | a F. Nicholao Orano, | Leodio, Ord. S. Francisci Regul. Observantia.

Montibus, Apud L. Reorum, 1615.

4. The Man Christ Jesus : without a father, but taken from a woman.

And it is this fourth generation which completes God's scheme and shall fulfil His promise. I may add that the idea of the four kinds of generation is referred to by St. Bernard long before, so that it is only the curious inference and corroboration from Genesis that we owe to this Belgian author.

The effect of the Virgin Conception on the world is finely rendered in Virgilian hexameters by Sannazar in his great poem *De partu Virginis*, which is well known as the acme of modern Latin poetry.

At Venter (mirabile dictu !

Non ignota cano) sine vi, sine labe pudoris,
 Arcano intumuit verbo. Vigor actus ab alto
 Irradians, Vigor omnipotens, Vigor omnia complens
 Descendit, Deus ille, Deus : totosque per artus
 Dat se se, miscetque utero, quae tacta repente
 Viscera contremuere : silet Natura pavetque
 Adtonitae similis : confusaque turbine rerum
 Insolito, occultas conatur quærere causas.
 Sed longe vires alias, majoraque sentit
 Numina ; succutitur tellus : lævumque sereno
 Intonuit cœlo, rerum cui summa potestas,
 Adventum Nati Genitor testatus : ut omnes
 Audirent latè populi, quos maximus ambiat
 Oceanus, Tethysque, et raucisonaque Amphitrite.

Lib. I., vers. 185.

I will conclude this part of the subject by a few summaries from the *Dogmatische Mariologie* of Professor H. Oswald, who lectured to students for the priesthood at Paderborn, and published his work in 1850.

1. *The Incarnation*—Mary's age was twelve to fourteen when she conceived ; fifteen was the greatest possible age. The moment of the Incarnation was when Mary said *Fiat*, and with that word came Redemption, as with God's *Fiat* came Creation. Some have said that Christ was, when first conceived, perfect in all his parts and limbs perfectly developed physically, and that his increase was only mechanical, purely quantitative enlargement. But Professor Oswald cannot accept this. It appears to him rather a caricature. He adopts the development of the embryo from the *punctum saliens* to the Babe of Christmas night ; but the human soul was in the *punctum saliens* complete with all its full faculties, and the Godhead too.

The Virgin's conception was from within rather than from without. It came from her purest blood, which was *not* a *sanguis menstruus*, because she had no original sin, and therefore her blood was purified beyond ordinary woman's. When the Virgin said *Fiat*, this pure blood came ; she had a bodily perception of it, and therefore of the Incarnation, but there was no animal spasm (thierische Ekstase). The Holy Ghost *obumbravit eam*, and so, as Augustine also thinks, cooled any material heat, and became *refrigerium spiritus*, and so her spasm was spiritual.

Certainly the Paderborn theological students receive more information than is given at Cambridge or Oxford.

CHAPTER II

THE PERIOD OF GESTATION

THE first incident recorded in this period is the visit to Elizabeth, and Scripture tells us that Mary 'went unto the hill country with haste, unto a city of Juda, and entered into the house of Zacharias and saluted Elizabeth, and it came to pass that when Elizabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb.' (Luke i. 39, etc.)

It is much debated by learned theologians whether Joseph accompanied Mary on this hurried visit. St. Bernard, St. Bonaventura, St. Isidore and others think he was with Mary, but the greater number and almost all recent authorities hold that Mary went alone. It is generally admitted also that she suffered no inconvenience whatever from the fruit of her womb. The great authority of St. Augustine and others has practically settled this question. His exact words are: *Plena sunt viscera, et nullum novit onus Virginis conscientia. Cum esset gravida, salubri levitate plaudebat, lumen enim quod intra se habebat pondus habere non poterat.* (Serm. xi. de Nativ.).

In fact, as Salmeron remarks (vol. iii. tract x.), the Virgin wished to show by her hasty and laborious

journey uphill, that she was more lifted up by her precious burden than weighed down by it, and that she was rather carried by it than it carried by her.

What really happened when Mary arrived at her destination and saluted her cousin Elizabeth is perhaps best explained in the long and naïve Dedicatory Epistle to the Virgin, which is a kind of Preface to *La Somme des Pechez* of the R. P. F. I. Benedicti, and one of the most singular dedications in the whole of literature. My copy is the first edition, Lyon, 1584.

After thirty-eight pages of his dedication, wherein he addresses the Virgin as to the prophecies concerning her and the fulfilment in the Birth, he goes on thus :

‘ Arrivée que vous fustes en la maison de Zacharie, vous salüastes vostre cousine Elizabeth d’un salut de telle efficace, qu’il remplit et la mere et l’enfant du saint Esprit, tellement que le petit enfanton se tournant vers vous pour faire la reverence à vostre fils, qui n’avait pas encore cinq jours, et trassaillant de joye au ventre maternel il eut alors l’usage de raison : chose inaudite et semble qu’il vouloit dire, *ma mere ouvrez moy la porte et me laissez sortir, . . . à fin que je presche au monde. Ecce Agnus Dei, ecce qui tollit peccata mundi.* On dit qu’il se mit à genoux au ventre de sa mere, et adora Jesus Christ, souhaitant l’embrasser, comme sa mere faisoit la sienne.’

And this is corroborated in the margin by long

Latin references to Avicenna (for a child's face in the womb being always naturally turned to its mother's backbone), to Bernardinus de Bustis (for the kneeling *in utero*), and to Chrysostom (for John's supposed words to his mother).¹

The old Fathers were constantly meditating upon Mary's gestation in their pious writings. *O Uterum Cælo ampliozem* said St. Epiphanius, *qui in te Deum non coarctasti*. They were pleased to imagine the Blessed Virgin hastening to see Elizabeth, and later on travelling with Joseph on foot all the way to Bethlehem, ninety-six miles from Nazareth, with the greatest ease and comfort, almost skimming the ground with her preternatural lightness. Some of the Fathers add that she need not have gone to be taxed, for women were free from it, but that Joseph would not leave her, and she knew also that prophecy should be fulfilled. Some others, more prosaic, piously opine that Joseph bought her an ass for the long journey, and afterwards used the same animal when they fled into Egypt with the young child. But I fear this twentieth century does not indulge in such thoughts as were wont to delight the ages of Faith.

But there is one point about the gestation of the Virgin, which cannot fail sometimes to arrest the attention and occupy the thoughts of modern

¹ I can commend this book of 1532 (!) pages in quarto, as a genuine and racy literary curiosity throughout, especially the first edition (1584); afterwards it was somewhat Bowdlerised.

believers, I mean that which they hear sung or said in church every Sunday: 'When Thou tookest upon thee to deliver man: Thou didst not abhor the Virgin's womb.'

This was a subject which saintly men and women used to dwell upon in the ages of Faith far more than we should ever suppose, unless we had their books and writings and oft-repeated expressions to convince us. *Uterus Virginis Paradisus Christi*, was a current saying with many of them.¹

I have many books dealing with this earliest period of our Saviour's Human Life—but perhaps the most singular and the most elaborate on my shelves is the following quarto volume of more than 400 pages:—

Giesù | Bambino | o sieno | ragionamenti per modo di
Meditazioni sopra i | Dolori, ed Allegrezze, et' ebbe il
Cuore di | Giesù Cristo reli' Utero della Madre; | come
altresi sopra le Virtù da Lui esercitate mentre stava ivi
racchiuso: | Composti dal Padre D. Antonio de Torres Pre-
posito Generale della Congregazione de' Pii Operarii.
Napoli, 1731. 4to.

Four hundred and thirty pages connected with the life of Jesus in the Womb, and his joys and sorrows there, is an amazing production for an author, in whatever way it is regarded. How could he possibly expand his subject to such an extent, is the first question that naturally arises. Well, this pious

¹ Rich. a Sancto Laurentio, lib. 12 *de laud. Virg.* For others cf. Marracci, *Polyanthia Mariana*, lib. 14. And it was accepted almost universally that our Lord was most reluctant to quit that blessed womb that bare him.

Head-Provost had a way of writing that was homiletical, mystical, patristical, and scriptural, and these qualities combined are quite equal to four hundred pages on most subjects—but surely a more singular subject would be hard to find. He has after all no new facts to produce, and I will therefore only give one extract as a specimen of his work.¹ He is comparing and commenting on two great facts of our Lord's uterine life.

1. The humiliation of his position.
2. His reluctance to leave it.

Che umiliazione sarebbe questa se Dio la dessè in gastigo? Stare racchiuso nelle viscere d'una Donna senza muoversi, senza operare, ristretto fra più secondine, soggetto a stare fra proprii escrementi, succhiar poco sangue per la vena umbilicale per alimento, un' Uomo di perfetto giudizio? . . . In questo statosi che potè dire il Verbo incarnato rivolto al Padre (Ps. cxix. 107); *Humiliatus sum usquequaque Domine*. Lo chiama Signore per la già assunta Umanità. Ah! e mio Signore e mio Padre; vedere a che mi ha ridotto l'amore, che porto all'uomo per Voi: mi vedo per essi tutto Cinto d'umiliazioni, tutto avvolto fra vili miserie, mi rimiro *usquequaque* annichilato, annichilata la Maestà; in luogo d'amanto reale mi ricoprono vili tuniche: annichilato nella Potenza, senza potermi muovere, annichilato nella Sapienza, ristretto in un' utero senza parlare:

¹ *Giesù Bambino*, pp. 336-7.

annichilato nell' Immensita; mi rimiro ristretto fra poche membrane. *Humiliatus sum, exinanitus sum usquequaque Domine.*'

Having thus brought in the arts of rhetoric in order to present the period of Mary's gestation as one of the greatest indignity and humiliation to the unborn Babe, we are next, by way of contrast, shown the great reluctance of Jesus to leave the Virgin's womb at all. This was a commonplace of theology held by many great Fathers of the Church, and is referred to as early as Tertullian. It was based on these words of the Psalmist, *I was cast upon thee from the womb, thou art my God from my mother's belly* (Ps. xxii. 10). This the Vulgate rendered: *Quoniam tu es qui extraxisti me de ventre*, and it was the word *extraxisti* which showed our Lord's reluctance, for it was held that David was speaking here in the person of Christ, and so the meaning, as expounded by our author in accordance with the general view of the Church, was that Christ was forcibly *dragged* from his mother's womb; the very word *dragged out* (*extrahere*) implies resistance and unwillingness, and such was the attitude of Jesus as Tertullian plainly states: *avulsisti, inquit, ex utero quid avellitur, nisi quod inhaeret, quod infixum, innexum est ei, a quo, ut auferatur, avellitur.*—Tert. *De Carne Christi* (Ps. c. 20.). But the prophetic Psalm is not the only evidence of the great desire of the babe to stay in the womb. There was the prolonged time of gestation. Why *prolonged* except

by reason of the Saviour's reluctance. Damascenus writes (lib. iv. c. 15): 'Novem menses expleverat, ac decimum jam ingressus est, cum in lucem probatus est.' And on this we have the gloss of Cartagena (tom. ii. lib. 5 hom. 14): *Hinc inferre licet adeo Christo infanti placuisse in utero Virginis delitescere*, and this inference was generally received. Several held the belief that Christ was not born till the tenth month after His Animation, to fulfil that text of the Book of Wisdom, *decem mensium tempore coagulatus sum in sanguine*.—Sap. VII.

These meditations and explanations may seem very strange to the present century, but it is, I fear, often forgotten that Jesus in the womb was never looked at in the light of an ordinary *fetus*. Although it was universally believed that he was born of the substance of his mother, it was also universally believed that he was born complete and perfect in his faculties, and that this uterine marvel took place at the moment of conception, and that, therefore, his faculties were perfect during the whole period of gestation. It was in consequence of this that many saintly women, such as the Blessed Catherine of Bologna and St. Bridget and others, had revelations from Christ, speaking of his joys and sorrows during his nine months and more *in utero*. The joys were far above the sorrows—indeed only one great *dolor* is revealed as connected with the gestation, and that is the Friday spasms. They occurred every Friday between the Conception and the Birth, and even in

the womb Jesus suffered by anticipation the pains of Calvary. This was a revelation to B. Catherine of Bologna, and is recorded by Joannes Gregorius à Jesu in his *Calvarium*, lect. 46, and would be allowed as a pious opinion although there is no corroboration for it elsewhere. Pious opinions are hardly supposed to require corroboration by faithful believers.

But the question naturally arises, How can we possibly account for this curious interest taken in the uterine life of Christ? It seems that almost the only answer that can be given is that our forefathers in the Faith *realised* the Incarnation much more than we do in this twentieth century, for they held that Jesus was perfectly formed, animated and able to understand what was happening around him *in utero*, and therefore well suited to be an object of pious reverence and admiration to Christians.

As to the way in which the fully-formed infant Jesus was carried in the dark chamber of Mary's womb during the period of gestation there is some diversity of opinion.

Was Jesus *attached* to his mother in her womb or was he *detached*? that is one question. That is to say, had our Saviour a navel and umbilical cord, or was the second Adam like the first Adam without these (to him) unnecessary adjuncts? The great consensus of authority is in favour of the navel and the attachment, and this view is further corroborated by the existence of portions of the original umbilical

cord right down to modern times. Portions were exhibited with great reverence in churches in France, Rome and elsewhere, and were held to be authentic. But more will be said of the sacred navel and its appendant cord in the next chapter on the Virgin-Birth.

Another subtle view connected with the period of our Lord's gestation was this: Some held the ingenious opinion that Christ did not exist in His mother's womb *extensivè* but only *definitivè*, and therefore it was that His Presence and Substance passed out of His mother's womb in a somewhat similar manner to that in which His Presence and Substance is contained in the consecrated elements of the Eucharistic Sacrifice. This opinion had some notable defenders, and it certainly made the physical virginity of Mary a more easy article of belief. But it was generally rejected as a new and unauthorised opinion, and was held to be in direct opposition to the constant tradition that Joseph had discovered Mary's condition *ex ventris tumore*.

'How could that have occurred,' queried the orthodox theologians, 'if Christ was not present in the womb *extensivè*?'

An venter increbuisset, si inextensus in eo extitisset Christus? That was enough to settle the matter, it was thought; and besides, it was argued, would so many Fathers of the Church and other grave theologians have wasted time in discussing whether Mary suffered any inconvenience during

the gestation, if there was really no inconvenience to suffer and no extra weight to carry.

So, the general opinion being thus strongly supported, it may now virtually be said to be *de fide* that the Infant Christ during gestation received nourishment and increase of size from the substance of His mother by the usual means of the umbilical cord. But we must now come to the actual birth.

THE VIRGIN-BIRTH

Perhaps the fullest account of the Birth of Jesus and the difficulties and controversies arising out of it, may be found in the second volume of I. C. Trombelli's *Mariæ Sanctissimæ Vita ac gesta*, Bononiæ, 1772. This is a standard work, from the Roman Catholic point of view, and can hardly be called rare, and so may be consulted further by those who wish to know the arguments *pro* and *con* as between Papists and Protestants. It is pretty well known that most Roman Catholics hold that Mary the Mother of our Lord was a Virgin (1) *ante partum*, (2) *in partu*, (3) *post partum*; that is to say, the Virgin Mary never lost the signs and tokens of virginity at any period of her life.

This the Protestants deny. They say such assertions are not scriptural, and they assert, or rather asserted during the Reformation period, that when Christ was born into the world He opened His mother's womb, and therefore she had no longer all

the necessary signs of virginity. This subject is not dwelt upon much now in controversy, but in the times of Bucer, Beza, and Peter Martyr, it was a burning subject of discussion. Peter Martyr was described as a man who dared to assert that the Virgin's womb was open after the Birth of Christ, and that He had opened it; and then there were other heretics and Protestants who declared that the Virgin had other children by Joseph after the Virgin-Birth, and thus lost her virginity, and the controversy was very bitter here as well.

As I said before, I have nothing primarily to do with controversies, and do not interpose my own views in the matter, except that I maintain that the great and bitter controversies that have raged round the minor and principal details of the Virgin-Birth all go to show that the root doctrine of the Virgin-Birth was an essential element of Christianity, and practically accepted by all the various contending parties in Christendom.

I know that there have been discussions in the first two numbers of the *Hibbert Journal* about an old reading from some Syriac or other Eastern source, in which it is stated that 'Joseph begat Jesus,' but it seems much more likely that this reading, even if it had been the original one, was merely used to serve the purpose and scheme of the genealogy, and to make Jesus a descendant of David through the legal or betrothed husband of His mother Mary.

But this ancient reading from which some have

tried to infer that Jesus was born of Joseph and Mary in the natural way cannot bear up against the continuous and universal belief of the Church of Christ, for so many centuries, that the Birth of Christ was a supernatural and not a natural birth. The statement that Christianity as a religion is built upon a supernatural basis cannot possibly be contradicted or evaded. Its sanctions, its promises, and its hopes, have been founded from the beginning not on man but on God. In another way of looking at it, Christianity is a Revelation of God's Will and Purpose, such as could hardly have entered into the conceptions of the human mind except by the influence of God's Holy Spirit.

But in any case if we dig down to the foundations of the great Church of Christ on earth, we shall always find there the supernatural, and almost the chief item of that will be found to be the Birth of Jesus from a Virgin Mother. We can hardly throw this item away and at the same time hope that Christianity can in some way remain as firmly fixed on its foundations as ever.

Such a hope can never attain its fulfilment. I have lately been reading the Life of Bishop Westcott of Durham, and was rather struck with an expression of thought which he heard in a sermon, and apparently agreed with. It was this: 'We should not take it for granted that our five senses are sufficient to account for everything in the universe.' All I can say is, that if miracles are to go without excep-

tion or limit, if the Virgin-Birth is to go without reserve of any kind, and the traditional Divine Sonship of Jesus of Nazareth to go with the rest, then in such case we shall certainly require a sixth sense, hitherto latent, whereby we may accept the sanctions, the promises, and the hopes, as they are in Jesus.

The New Testament tells us plainly two great facts about Jesus Christ :

1. He was supernaturally born.
2. He was sinless.

Two of the four evangelists tell us that He was conceived by the Holy Ghost without the intervention of a human father. Another tells us that 'the Word was made Flesh, and dwelt among us'; and this, as we infer, through the operation of the 'Creator Spirit.'

The other New Testament writers do not contradict this; on the contrary, they rather suggest it. Thus St. John speaks of Christ as *ὁ ἄνωθεν ἐρχόμενος* (John iii. 31), and St. Paul calls Him the 'second man from heaven' (1 Cor. xv. 47), thus clearly giving Christ a different *origin* from Adam; for the latter was of the earth, earthy.

The clearest and most succinct orthodox account of the Virgin-Birth that I have met with is that of B. Amedeus Lausanensis, who belonged to the Cistercian Order, and lived in the time of Eugenius III. He says in his fourth Homily :

'Sed jam qualiter eum beata virgo peperit, adver-

tamus. Peperit eum salvâ virginitate, quia salvo pudore concepit. Peperit inviolata, quia illibata suscepit. Et quia in delictis non concepit, absque dolore peperit, nullum habens in conceptione contagium, nullum passa in partu dissidium. . . . Maria non solum non doluit, verum etiam in partu virgo fuit. Hæc est illa janua, de qua in Ezechielis volumine legimus, *Porta ista clausa erit Principi, et per eam Princeps egredietur.*

‘Per hanc nimirum Princeps regum terræ Christus egressus est, quam sicut in ingressu non aperuit, sic in egressu non patefecit. *Pertransivit in pace, et semita ejus non apparuit.*

‘Et si miraris clauso utero Mariæ, signataque virginali pudicitia Deum natum; mirare quod clauso, obseratoque aditu sepulchri, ad superos rediit, et clausis januis ad discipulos introivit.’

The last argument for the Virgin-Birth was a very favourite one, and was taken to illustrate the miracle exactly. ‘If you can believe our Lord’s body rose through the tomb, which was so sealed and guarded, you can equally believe, for it is exactly similar, the great miracle of the inviolate Virgin-Birth through the closed *uterus.*’

But difficulties and discussions by no means cease with the admission of Mary’s virginity *in partu.* It was a subject of dispute very early in the Christian Church whether Christ was born into the world *sine ullis sordibus*, or with the usual accessories of child-birth.

Many great theologians, headed by Nazianzen (Orat. 40), hold that nothing foul or bloody accompanied the birth of Christ. *Dei filius*, says Nazianzen, *sine ulla fœditate ex Virgine egressus est; nihil enim fœdum, ubi Deus est.*

But the great majority of orthodox physicians, together with such great names as Tertullian and Jerome, hold that our Lord was born wrapped in the usual membranes (*tegmine membranarum solito convolutus*, says Jerome), and it is further stated by Jerome in a letter *ad Eustochium* that *Jesus cruentus egreditur pannis involvitur, blanditiis delinitur.*

Moreover, St. Bridget tells us she saw the membrane lying near the newly-born babe, wrapped up and very tidy.

This was, of course, in one of her visions or revelations, which are highly esteemed by orthodox theologians. Her words are: *Vidi etiam pellem secundinam jacentem prope eum [Christum scilicet nuper natum] involutam et valdè nitidam.*

At the time of the Reformation Beza, a champion of the Protestant views, made a very unwise and temporising assertion concerning the Virgin-Birth, and between two stools he certainly came to the ground, and did harm to his party on this question. He advanced the singular theory that 'the Virgin's womb was torn asunder at the actual moment or instant of birth, and then at once closed together again in its original perfection; so that though Mary lost her virginity for a very brief moment, she

recovered it perfectly after the birth' (Beza, *Liber de omnipotentia carnis Christi*). A theory of this kind could never stand examination, and the orthodox Romanists at once put forward their uncompromising views with a feeling of triumph. 'No,' said they; 'the uterus of the Blessed Virgin was never *reseratus* or *dilatatus* or *ruptus* or *laxatus* or even *apertus*, either at the birth of Jesus, or at any other time.' And their orthodox descendants hold to that opinion still. Above all do they abominate and detest Calvin and his sectaries, for he and his followers have always declared that the Blessed Virgin brought forth her Son *aperto et laxato utero*.

Catholics would accept anything in reason rather than this. Thus some thought, as Abulensis (*Par.*, cap. 64) tells us, 'that Christ came forth from the mother in the natural way, but the *claustrum virginitatis* was not broken or in any way damaged, because Christ *exiit modum quantitativum, induitque modo indivisibilem, ad eum modum quo existit in Eucharistia*.' While others made the apparent physical impossibility a matter most easily accounted for in this way: Christ's body had the four gifts or qualities of the glorified body, though He did not always manifest them openly; the four qualities were (1) *agilitas*, (2) *claritas*, (3) *impassibilitas*, (4) *subtilitas*.

Now our Saviour when on earth actually showed three of these to his disciples, viz. :—

- (1) When He walked on the sea.

- (2) When He was transformed and His glory shone in His countenance.
- (3) In the species of the Eucharist, is it not reasonable to suppose that he would show the other quality or attribute ?
- (4) When He came into the world and left that nine months' resting-place where He was so pleased to dwell.

I have already shown how many of the Fathers thought that He so loved the habitation of Mary's womb that eventually He was, to use the words of the Psalmist, 'drawn' (*extractus*, only) therefrom.

But the love of Jesus for His pre-natal abode is nowhere, to my knowledge, placed in a stronger light than in that great work the *Theologia Mariana* of Christoph. de Vega, S.J., where this learned Jesuit goes so far as to assert that one great reason for the institution of the great Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was that Christ might again visit the bowels of his Virgin Mother (*virginea viscera*) as often as she received the consecrated elements, which was every day regularly according to the early tradition of the Church. His words are :—

'Ita enim Christo arrisit Virginei uteri hospitium, ut quia natu major jam non licebat iterum Marianum uterum ingredi, modum adinvenit quo sepius virginea viscera inviseret, quoties nempe B. Virgo Panem hunc vivificum assumeret, sumebat autem quotidie. Experimento namque didicerat per novem

mensium curriculum maternorum viscerum puritatem, munditiam et tanti hospitii majestatem, virtutumque omnium apparatus, suppellectilenque mundissimam. Et quamvis, ut dolorem absentiae suae in fidelium animis leniret, Eucharistiam etiam inveniret, ante alios tamen, et propter unam Mariam praecipue hoc sacramentum institutum fuisse, credendum est; ut posset post Christi in caelos ascensum Filii absentiam facilius sustinere, hoc vivifico Pane beatitudinis dilatæ vices subrogante.'—C. de Vega, *Theol. Mariana*, vol. II. p. 219.

But there is an appendage of the actual Virgin-Birth which I have hinted at before, and to which we must now devote a few pages. I mean the Umbilical Cord which attached Jesus to the person of His mother *in utero*, and which was severed when the actual Birth made the separation necessary. As I think I have already said, there have been theologians who have held the view that as the first Adam had no occasion either for a navel or an umbilical cord, and therefore probably was not furnished with either of these when he was formed, so the Second Adam was also probably without these rather degrading reminiscences of our human and fleshly origin.

But this view has always had very few supporters, and the fact that there were two or three umbilical cords or navels of Jesus Christ enshrined in different localities for the homage and admiration of the faithful, went a long way to satisfy the easy

belief of that large class of people who, if they intend to take a pilgrimage for the purpose of adoring a relic or getting some temporal benefit from the visit, would much rather have something quite out of the common, something indeed unique, if possible, rather than the ordinary bones of a known or unknown saint, which were the very commonest kind of relic anywhere. In fact, we may say that the general Christian tradition has always been that Jesus was of the substance of His mother and joined to her in the natural way, but that this did not in any way mar her perfect virginity either *in partu* or *post partum*. The curious history of one of these umbilical cords will show how they looked at these matters in the ages of Faith and later.

THE UMBILICAL CORD AND NAVEL OF JESUS CHRIST.

This remarkable relic had been preserved and venerated for a long period at Châlons-sur-Marne, and was the cause of many pilgrims and devout Catholics visiting the shrine, and indeed brought some profit and fame to the town until the visitation of the Bishop of Châlons in 1707 caused a great change in every way.

Of what happened then, there was fortunately an excellent account printed at Châlons by Edme Serenze at the time (1707).

The little book contains :—

1. Lettre d'un Ecclesiastique de Châlons à un Docteur de Paris ;

2. Procès-verbal de Monsieur de Châlons ;
3. Requête de quelques Paroissiens, . . . pour
la restitution de la Relique,

and some other official documents.

As to the letter, which is a rather amusing one, it seems that a certain doctor in Paris had heard that there was great excitement at Châlons and elsewhere on account of a certain visit that the Bishop of the diocese had made to the Sacred Navel, or Umbilical Cord, which the people of Châlons venerated, so this doctor wrote to some one on the spot and asked what had happened, and to whom the Navel belonged. The letter given is the reply. It begins by an expression of surprise at the doctor's ignorance about such a wonderful Navel and its still more wonderful history ; how the Blessed Virgin carefully preserved it and afterwards gave it as a present to the beloved St. John ; and how, after many adventures, it came eventually to Châlons.

So the letter proceeds to enlighten the doctor's darkness thus : ' You must know then, my dear sir, that there is in our town of Châlons a Parish called *Notre Dame en vaux*, where for several centuries has been preserved a portion of the Holy Navel of our Lord Jesus Christ. "What?" I seem to hear you say, "surely our Blessed Lord never had a navel!" Pray, sir, be patient and do not interrupt, we are not on *that* question now. I know quite well what the old Fathers have said about the pure and wonderful

manner in which our Lord issued from the womb of His mother, and I admit it leads one to suppose that these old Fathers would hardly go into ecstasies, or be over-credulous in the case of such a singular relic as this ; but let us avoid controversy and keep to plain facts. How, then, did this relic come to be here ? Well, the tale is a very curious one, and you shall hear it from the beginning.

‘When Jesus Christ was born that little fleshy ligament that is called the umbilical cord, and which is attached to the child’s navel, was detached in the usual way and the Virgin Mary picked it up, so they say, with great reverence and holy faith, and kept it carefully all her life. I am not sure that she did not always carry it about with her. Anyhow, after the death of her Son it became the source of her consolation, and when she died she gave this precious keepsake to St. John the Evangelist, as to one whose great love for his Master rendered him most worthy of it. St. John, when Bishop of Ephesus, left the relic to his successors in the See, and passing through the hands of several Bishops it at last came into the hands of Charlemagne, who made a present of it to Pope Leo III., and from Rome a portion of the relic was afterwards sent to Châlons, where it is not only venerated but almost adored. It is carried in procession under a daïs, and the benediction is given with the same ceremonies as if the Very Body of our Lord was locally present.

‘If you have any doubt as to what I am telling

you, I can only say that we have had this Navel here from time immemorial ; that ought to be enough for any one ; but if any scruples remain, I would advise you to go to the sign of the “ Three Pigeons ” in the Rue de Marmouzets, and ask for Haymald Robert de Limoge, who has been a licentiate in law, and afterwards was in the service of a Cardinal, and later on a soldier, and now lives at the “ Three Pigeons.” He will tell you how he saw, in the great Treasury for Relics at Rome, certain Letters Apostolical drawn up in the manner of a Pope’s Bull, wherein it was said that a part of the Holy Navel was at Châlons. Now here was a man who in his position as a Cardinal’s servant had great opportunity of handling and examining such documents, so if you doubt after such evidence there is really nothing more to say.

‘ Anyhow, it has been traced for you to Châlons, and we know historically that in 1407 Charles de Poitiers, the Bishop of Châlons, had the Holy Navel placed in a handsome reliquary, and from that time till now it has been the centre of pilgrimages and miracles and adoration. But on the 18th of April this year (1707), Messire Gaston Jean-Baptiste-Louis de Noailles, brother and successor of Monseigneur le Cardinal in the Episcopal See, began a first visitation of his diocese, and in spite of considerable opposition from the officials of the church insisted upon his right to visit and examine the sacred relic, of which the common report was that it had never been touched

or inspected since 1407. So there was brought to the Bishop “un image en ronde bosse de vermeil representant la Ste Vierge tenant Jesus Christ son Fils, au Nombriil duquel est un cercle d’argent avec cette inscription au tour DE UMBILICO DOMINI JESVS-CHRISTI. Le Prelat se met à genoux animé d’une Ste hardiesse, et persuade qu’un Evêque qui a l’honneur de consacrer le Corps de Jesus Christ et de le tenir tout entier entre ses mains, ne doit pas craindre à la vue de son Nombriil.”¹

‘The Bishop then, in the presence of all standing by, took out what was under the crystal. It appeared to be three pieces of red *taffetas* in worn condition and wrapped one in the other. When they were unrolled there were found three small pieces of stone. One piece was *lice comme du gravier*, and of the same colour and hardness. The two other pieces were like *éclats* of some dark yellow stone of a friable nature, and there were also a few very small pieces chipped off of the same quality and colour.

‘The surprise was indeed great.

‘On eût beau recourir aux lunettes; les objets

¹ Jour pris, Mr. l’Evêque en Rochet et Camail se transporte à N. Dame avec presque tous les Chanoines de cette Eglise et le Peuple qui voulut l’y suivre; il se fait apporter un image en ronde bosse de vermeil representant la Ste Vierge tenant Jesus Christ son Fils, au Nombriil duquel est un cercle d’argent avec cette inscription au tour DE UMBILICO DOMINI JESVS-CHRISTI. Le Prélat se met à genoux animé d’une Sainte hardiesse, et persuadé qu’un Evêque qui a l’honneur de consacrer le Corps de Jesus Christ et de le tenir tout entier entre ses mains, ne doit pas craindre à la vue de son Nombriil pretendu . . . sa prière finie il ordonne à un orphevre d’approcher, qui sans autre secours que celui de la pointe de son couteau releve le cercle et ôte le cristal.

purent être grossis, mais ils ne changerent pas pour cela de nature, et on reconnut que l'oracle de la rue des marmouzets n'étoit pas infallible.

'On n'en demeura pas là, on fit venir sur le champ le Sr. Chevre qui par sa profession d'Acoucheur et d'Acoucheur habile pouvoit mieux connoître les parties du corps humain et la nature des vaisseaux umbilicaux. Il assura en pleine assemblée que ce ne pouvoit être, ni n'avoit jamais été, un Nombril d'enfant.

'Upon this decision of the doctor, the relic was carefully wrapped up as before and put by the Bishop into *une petite boîte de vermeil*, and taken away by him to make such use of as he thought expedient.'

The rest of the letter is taken up with the account of the excitement that followed in the town when it was heard the Holy Navel had been taken away.

Then follows the *procès-verbal* of the above visit of the Bishop in full, giving the names of all who attended in the Bishop's train. We learn the visit took place at 7 P.M. on the 19th April 1707, and the official account tallies perfectly with the letter from Châlons we have already mentioned, and adds further details of what happened after the Bishop had left the church with the umbilical cord in his possession.

It seems that the Bishop and his satellites went at once to the official residence of Messire André de Harouys, who held the important offices of *Conseiller du Roi en ses Conseils*, *Maître des Requêtes*, and *Intendant des Provinces et frontières de Champagne*.

Here the relic was thoroughly examined again, and having sent for some more people of good standing in the neighbourhood, they all agreed that the reliquary did not contain the Navel of Jesus Christ; that they had examined the contents with a powerful microscope and found nothing but a few pieces of a stony material and some chips of the same character. To this effect they drew up the *procès-verbal*, and all signed it.

The next document given at length is 'A Request of some principal parishioners of Notre Dame, tendered respectfully to Monsieur de Châlons, for the restitution of the Relic.'

This is a very curious document of nearly ten pages, and goes into the earlier history and genuineness of the Umbilical Cord, which the petitioners hold to be quite as sacred and as important as the Holy Coat at Argenteuil, the Holy Sudarium at Turin, the Handkerchief with the impression of the Lord's Face at Laon, and the Nail (*clou*) preserved in the *Trésor de S. Denis*. It is admitted that this precious *nombriil* had been given to the Church of Notre Dame at Châlons when it was dedicated, and that was only one hundred years ago, but its previous history can be traced and authenticated.

The Blessed Virgin, who always considered her Son as a God-Man (*comme un homme Dieu*) from the moment of His Birth, carefully preserved all relics connected with Him. These she eventually gave to St. John the Evangelist, and they were handed down

to the successive Patriarchs who succeeded St. John in his episcopal seat. Afterwards they came into the possession of Charlemagne, to whom they had been presented in gratitude for his help given against the Saracens. Charlemagne gave them to Pope Leo III., and they were by him placed in the world-famous Treasury of the Chapel of St. John Lateran. Afterwards Pope Clement v. divided the Umbilical Cord into three portions; one remained in the great Treasury, and the other two were sent to Constantinople and to the Church of Our Lady at Châlons—this last mainly through the efforts of the Bishop of Châlons, who was a *persona grata* with the Pope, and a Frenchman and fellow-countryman as well. Many proofs are given of these latter circumstances, and mention is also made of the loss of both the prepuce and navel of our Lord in the terrible sack of Rome in 1527.¹

A strong appeal is made to the Bishop, and the stony substance is defended ingeniously as true and genuine. ‘Monseigneur, in all humility we ask, what did you expect to find in the reliquary? Surely not the rosy flesh of an infant. If this relic had not been so carefully guarded under locks and keys for so many centuries, you might have suspected some change or imposture had been effected. But is it not natural to expect a hard substance, and some powder or grains of dust with it? When flesh is

¹ These were, however, recovered in a remarkable way, as fully explained by Cardinal Toletus in his *Commentary on St. Luke*.

embalmed this always happens. For what is used in the process tends to become hard and dry and almost petrified by age, and so the relic was as it should be.' The appeal ends with a list of important signatures of people connected with the town and diocese. There is also a *procès-verbal* setting forth how in the year 1407 the two churchwardens (Marguilliers or Pourvoieurs) of the parish church at Châlons, accompanied by several of the leading parishioners, came to the Bishop of Châlons in the beginning of December and laid before him certain facts relating to *une petite parcelle du Nombriil de Nostre Seigneur Jesus Christ*, which had been possessed and honoured in the parish church beyond the memory of man. It had always been kept in a silver box or reliquary on which was engraven *De Umbilico Domini*, and on the Festival of the Circumcision every year the clergy and people of Châlons and the neighbourhood honoured it with processions and special functions. This deputation then asked the Bishop Charles de Poitier whether he would solemnly transfer the Sacred Navel from its present silver box to a very beautiful image of the Blessed Virgin Mary which a certain Thibault, a wealthy and pious parishioner, had given for that purpose.

The Bishop consented, and there is a long account of the many ceremonies and great enthusiasm at the time of transference. A jeweller opened the box, the contents were reverently exhibited, and placed by the hands of the Bishop within the image of the Virgin.

It seems that pilgrimages were enjoined, and that the special days were the Festivals of the Conception and Circumcision, and that a remission of forty days of any term of penance that had been imposed would be granted to the pilgrims.

Some of the inhabitants of Châlons were much annoyed at what they considered the uncalled for action of their Bishop, and one of them, in the name of the rest, applied to the principal lawyer in the parish for legal advice as to their own rights in this to them important matter. They submitted to him three important points, which they claimed could be decided in their favour :—

1. Was the Bishop's visitation and consequent action valid?
2. The question whether Jesus ever had a navel.
3. Whether that navel, or part of it, was in the legal possession of the Church of Notre Dame at Châlons.

As to the first point (1), the parishioners declared the Bishop's visitation invalid and null on several grounds :—

- (a) He had not observed the formalities required by the Council of Trent—a council of great weight with Catholics in France.
- (b) There was not proper notice given of this visitation.
- (c) The Bishop's *procès-verbal* was not drawn up

at once and on the spot, as it should have been.

- (d) And lastly, the insuperable objection that the Bishop's visitation took place at seven o'clock in the evening, when all the doors of the church were shut except the one adjoining the cloisters. Allowing the power and authority of Bishops, still such an important visitation ought not to take place when the church is practically shut up and no congregation present, and only lighted up by the setting sun. The Bishop, it is true, brought fifteen or sixteen people with him, but they could not, though eye-witnesses, give proper evidence about the appearance of the navel in such a poor light. They also protested against the right of the Bishop to take from their possession a relic of such undoubted authenticity.

As to the second point (2), whether Christ ever had a navel and umbilical cord. The parishioners are very indignant that such a question should be raised for one moment in the face of the positive assertions of the greatest doctors of the Church, and of St. Paul himself, that Jesus Christ was made in all things like unto His brethren. Therefore, He certainly had a navel and its appendant cord. St. Jerome also says that our Lord at His birth *cruentus egreditur*, and Tertullian adds, *quomodo avulsus nisi per nervum umbilicarem*.

The parishioners then forward to their advocate for his consideration the authorities and arguments by which the Bishop and his party tried to do away with the very existence of both navel and umbilical cord in the special case of the Saviour. The Bishop's party had quoted about twenty famous authorities in the Church, all tending to prove that there was nothing either *broken* or *opened* in the Blessed Virgin's body when the Holy Child Jesus was born.

There was also abundant authority quoted to show that our Lord passed through and out of His mother's womb, just as the rays of the sun pass through a pane of glass and come out on the other side without any fracture of the crystal. So it was, they said, in Mary's case, and there was the additional probability that He who, when He was about to leave the world, passed through closed doors to greet His disciples, would also when He entered into the world pass through the closed doors of his nine months' resting-place without fracture or damage.

Mary also was the door or gate that was seen 'shut' by the prophet Ezekiel (ch. xliv., v. 1). This has always been a favourite proof of the Virgin-Birth. 'Then said the Lord unto me, this gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter in by it; because the Lord, the God of Israel, hath entered in by it, therefore it shall be shut.'

All these authorities and references were used to show that our Lord's Birth was really very different to the ordinary birth of mankind, and that although

He increased and was nourished in the womb of His mother of her substance, still it was by no means necessary to infer that He was fed through the navel, or indeed that He had a navel at all. The Bishop's party even went beyond what the arguments for their view required ; for, besides denying the necessity or likelihood of an umbilical cord, they also dispensed with all secundines, tunicae, or ligaments which generally envelop the human foetus. The parishioners, in sending these adverse arguments to their advocate or special pleader, urge him to do his best to lessen their validity and upset them, for that they, his clients, are firm believers in the Holy Navel, and wish by all means to get it back.

As to the third point (3), *their legal possession*, the parishioners are very confident, and give the historical proof at full length for their advocate to use to their best advantage. The proof given does not differ, except in length, from the history of the relic already given.

I must now bring my exhibition of curiosities of theology connected with the Virgin-Birth to a close. I could go on and fill many more pages with the history and traditions connected with what ensued after Mary brought forth her first-born Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes and laid Him in the manger. But I forbear, for all this is not properly part of the History of the Virgin-Birth, which naturally ends at the severance of the umbilical cord, which is the last subject I treat of.

Finally, I must reiterate what I have plainly hinted at before, viz. that I cannot understand how the Christian religion is to continue, with its present sanctions and future promises, of the same validity as before if the Virgin-Birth be deemed a doubtful or unimportant matter, and if the many recent attempts to remove the supernatural from the domain of systematic theology be crowned with complete or even partial success. I think Christianity will remain for some time yet, but that it will gradually, like the Paganism of Imperial Rome, become an organised hypocrisy both for priest and people if the Virgin-Birth and the supernatural elements generally, on which hang the exceeding 'great and precious promises,' be relegated to the limbo of 'fond things vainly invented and founded on no certain warranty of Holy Scripture,' and dismissed from the education of the young and from the pulpits of our churches.

If we reject the Virgin-Birth and accept Joseph as the true father of Jesus of Nazareth, then the Divinity of the Saviour is also rejected, and His words instead of having to us the very sanction of the Eternal, become only the words of a young Jew of Galilean birth who had far-reaching views of a Kingdom of God, and by His teaching and death witnessed a good confession that He loved God and His neighbour also; but who, if His supernatural birth, miracles, resurrection, and ascension are denied, has no superior credentials to many teachers of mankind, both before His era and afterwards.

Printed by T. and A. CONSTABLE, Printers to His Majesty
at the Edinburgh University Press

