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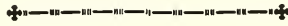
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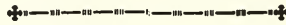


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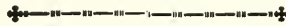
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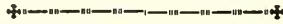
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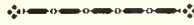


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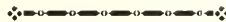
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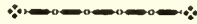
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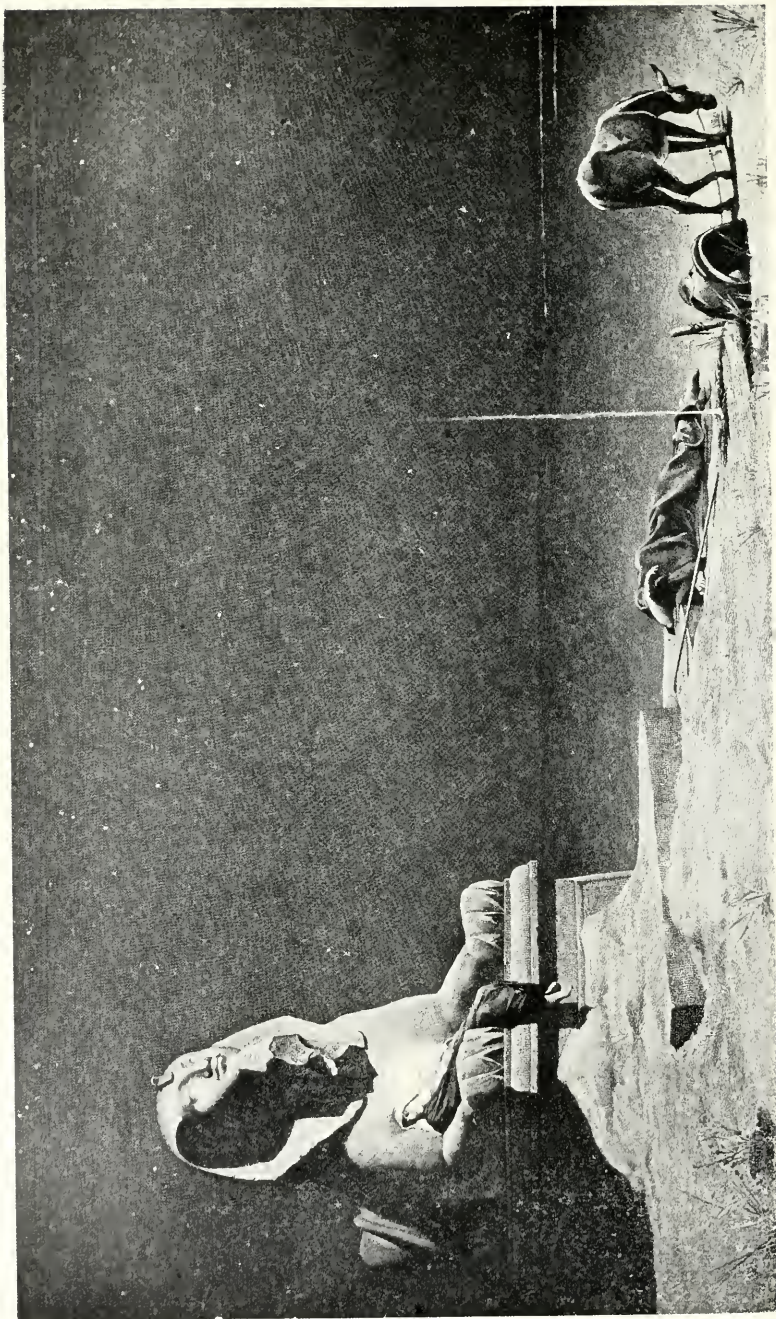
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JESUS AND HIS FAMILY

BY ROBERT P. RICHARDSON

JESUS ben Joseph was born, most probably, in Nazareth, a Galilean village, whose identity with the place now described by that name is somewhat doubtful. The biblical story of his birth in a manger at Bethlehem has all the marks of a fable invented to make a so-called prophecy come true. None the less the orthodox adhere to this tale, and they give equal credence to the date, December 25, conventionally assigned to the Nativity. Yet it is obviously very suspicious that the celebration of the anniversary of Christ's birth should coincide with a celebrated pagan feast, that of the *dies natalis solis invicti*. This festival of the winter solstice, consecrated by the pagans to the victory of the sun; to the defeat of darkness by light as evinced by the length of the day beginning to increase, followed on the joyous seven-day "Saturnalia" which was marked by the kindly custom of bestowing gifts upon relatives and friends, in particular of giving dolls to children, and thence can be traced a linear line of descent to our so-called "Christmas gifts" and "Christmas holidays." And an impartial inquirer, bearing in mind that some of the early Christians dated the Nativity at the vernal equinox in March, will be constrained to think that the chance of Christmas day being the true anniversary of the birth of Christ is precisely one in three hundred and sixty five.

We again find a lack of appreciation of patent fact in the clerical chronology which fixed the year of Christ's birth. This, all competent authorities admit, could not possibly have taken place at the beginning of the "Christian era." For according to Holy Scripture Jesus was born in the reign of "Herod the king," and this monarch died in the year 4 B. C. On the other hand, if the date of the birth of Jesus be fixed by that first fiscal census of the

Jewish lands made under the Emperor Augustus by Quirinus (*Luke*, ii, 1-2) then the year must be one coming after the deposition of Archelaus, Herod's son, whose reign covered the period from 4 B. C. to 6 A. D. And as regards Sir William M. Ramsay's recent attempt to reconcile the inconsistencies in the biblical Nativity chronology, Kirsopp Lake well remarks (in his notes to *Eusebius*) that there is "evidence for a former governorship of Quirinius but none for a census under Herod." Evidently the sacred authors had very vague notions of chronology, and probably the passage that comes nearest giving us a clue to the true date of Christ's birth is the statement in *Luke* that in the fifteenth year of the reign of the Emperor Tiberius (i. e. in 29 A. D.) Jesus was "about" thirty years of age.

As regards the ancestry of Jesus we again find a lack of harmony among the sacred authorities. Two quite different genealogies are given, both tracing descent from David to Joseph, the husband of Jesus's mother. *Luke* (iii. 23-38) tells us that Jesus "began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli, which was the son of Matthai" this pedigree running up to David and thence to Adam. An unprejudiced reader, realizing there could be no *raison d'être* for the genealogy unless Jesus really was the son of Joseph, could only infer that the parenthetical "as was supposed" was the interpolation of some redactor and not a part of the original passage. The genealogy given by *Matthew* (i. 1-16) is quite incompatible with the pedigree recorded by Luke but has this much in common with it that both authors are obviously taking pains to show that Jesus was descended from David and are satisfied that their purpose has been fulfilled when the Davidic descent of Joseph has been demonstrated; in other words they hold that Joseph was the physical father of Jesus. The *Gospel of Matthew*, as the Church has handed it down to us, traces the ancestry of Jesus from Abraham down to David and thence to Joseph, making the latter however the son, not of Matthai, but of Jacob, and then describing Joseph merely as "the husband of Mary of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ." Here too any reader free from the trammels of a Christian education would suspect that a clerical redaction had been tampering with the text, and this suspicion was made a certainty in 1892 by the discovery of the Sinaitic-Syriac manuscript of the Gospels in which *Matthew* i, 16 reads "Jacob begat Joseph, Joseph to whom

was betrothed Mary the Virgin, begat Jesus who is called the Christ." Moreover Paul, with his reference to Jesus as born of the seed of David "according to the flesh," indicates that he has no knowledge of any miraculous conception of the Saviour.

The impartial inquirer will thus hold that Jesus was in every physical sense undoubtedly the son of Joseph by Mary, and in the absence of any evidence to the contrary will regard him as the legitimate offspring of a perfectly respectable marriage. The miraculous conception of which the Gospels tell cannot be deemed an admissible alternative even should we admit the possibility of such a thing. Not only does it fail to harmonize with the genealogies but it likewise cannot be reconciled with other parts of the scripture story. For instance, it is impossible to believe that though Joseph and Mary knew the child of the latter was the son of God, they "understood not the saying which he spoke unto them" when, finding him in the Temple among the doctors, in reply to Mary's reproach, "thy father and I sought thee sorrowing," he said. "How is it that ye sought me?" Wist ye not that I must be about my father's business?" Inconsistency between two alleged facts, while justifying the rejection of one of them, does not obligate us to accept either. And we may well reject also this tale of a twelve-year old boy engaging in discussion with the learned doctors of the Law. It was probably suggested by the vainglorious boast of Josephus: "When I was a child and about fourteen years of age, I was commended by all for the love I had for learning, on which account the high-priests and principle men of the city came to me frequently together in order to know my opinion about the accurate understanding of points of the Law." (*Life*, §2). The pious historians naturally felt that their prophet could not possibly, as a boy, have been behind the uninspired and profane Josephus and fabricated a story which they felt expressed what must have been the truth about the cleverness of the youthful Jesus. And to show how far the latter surpassed the former they fixed the age at which Jesus was depicted as exhibiting his wisdom two years below that at which Josephus says he distinguished himself.

Christianity ought, one would think, be greatly relieved at the obliteration of the old orthodox picture of the procreation of Christ. Yet even today denial that Jesus was of divine paternity in a physi-

cal sense is greeted by the more orthodox churchmen with a shriek of horror. To the unprejudiced mind this seems passing strange, for you cannot be deemed to be honoring the Deity by depicting him as ruthlessly stepping between a humble carpenter and his fiancée and becoming the father of the latter's child. If there be such a thing as blasphemy it is assuredly blasphemy of the most atrocious description to attribute to God the amorous exploits of a Casanova which is what the orthodox story really amounts to. And if the blasphemer incurs the perils of hell-fire, then those persons who boast they believe the Bible "from cover to cover" might well be asked how they can possibly hope to escape the damnation of hell.

While they avowedly accept the unsavory miraculous conception story so strangely cherished by the Church, orthodox Christians have, as a matter of fact, a strong subconscious disbelief of the possibility of a miraculous conception, as is evinced by the reception they give to any poor girl who announces that she has conceived a child by a miracle. Without deeming it necessary to make any investigation they invariably treat her with scorn and contempt. One rather interesting case of this kind was reported in the eighteenth century by Dr. Watson, the biographer of Lord George Gordon, who was noted as one of the leaders in the religious bigotry of the day. "One evening" says Dr. Watson "a young lady from Oxford St. waited upon his lordship and requested the favor of a private audience . . . She assumed a solemn air, and with a hollow tone of voice, said that six months ago she had conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, without any communication with man, which had rendered her very miserable and unhappy, till the night before when the angel Gabriel had appeared to her, and exhorted her to be of good cheer. He announced that the end of the world was at hand, as might be seen by the fulfilment of the ancient prophecies, and revealed many things hidden in the womb of time, particularly respecting France, Rome and Great Britain. He assured her that the consummation of all things was at hand, and added that the child she was about to bring forth was destined to announce the glad tidings of universal redemption, and commanded her to go quickly to Lord George, and follow his advice; upon which he vanished in an instant. As Lord George seemed to avoid entering into particulars" continues Dr. Watson "I was induced to

reason with her on the impropriety of her conduct. She soon convinced me she was in the way in which women wish to be and I was not a little surprised at the abilities which she displayed in supporting her story. Upon my endeavoring to demonstrate the impossibility of her narrative, she quickly shifted her ground, and observed that the whole history of revelation was equally mysterious, and that to question the possibility of one miracle was to undermine the whole. We saw the force of the argument without being convinced; and this immaculate virgin retired, pitying our want of faith."

The reasoning of the young woman was obviously perfectly sound, and if the Christians who claim they believe in the miraculous conception of Jesus had really in their hearts belief in that to which they give lip service they would listen sympathetically to all such announcements and take an attitude of hope, not one of suspicion. It is not too much to say that the orthodox by their attitude towards Mary, cast a foul aspersion on the chastity of a woman who, in default of evidence to the contrary, we "infidels" hold to have been a virtuous maiden, a faithful wife and a devoted mother. In fact the subconscious orthodox thought and the thought of narrow minded medieval Jews coincide here. The latter, in the Toldoth Sepher Jeshu, elaborated a tale that Jesus was the illegitimate son of a Roman soldier, Pandera, by his light of love, Miriam or Mary. They describe Mary as a hairdresser, that profession evidently then being in as ill repute as manicuring is in these days, and they tell with bated breath that she even committed the further sin of conceiving Jesus at one of those periods at which the "Law" ordered women to keep apart from men.

What, now, was the relation between Jesus and his kinsfolk? The fourth gospel represents the family as, on one occasion at least, mingling with the disciples, for we are told that "after this he went down to Capernaum, he and his mother and his brothers and his disciples." (*John*, ii, 13). And Mary is depicted as confidently turning to her son at the Cana feast in the expectation that he would miraculously furnish more wine for the thirsty wedding guests (*John*, ii, 1-11). We are told however that the brothers of Jesus had no faith in his pretensions; "For neither did his brothers believe in him" (*John*, viii, 6). Jesus is reported to have resented this attitude, for when he reached his home town in the course of

his missionary tour, his mother and brothers came to the house where he was preaching and sent in word to him. The message was delivered in the words: "Behold thy mother and brothers without seek for thee." And we are asked to believe that the Prophet of Nazareth actually repudiated mother as well as brothers, replying dramatically "Who is my mother and my brethren?" and then, "stretched forth his hands towards his disciples, and said "Behold, my mother and my brethren!" (*Matthew*, xii, 46-50) *John* too would have us believe that when at the wedding feast at Cana the wine gave out and Mary said to her son: "They have no more wine!" Jesus boorishly replied to his mother: "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" (II, 1-11). And *Mark* actually asserts that when Jesus healed the sick and cast out unclean spirits his family concluded he must be crazy and sought to put him under restraint: "And when his family heard of it they went out to lay hold of him, for they said he is out of his mind." (iii, 21). A somewhat different translation is given this passage in the King James and in the Revised Version, "his friends" being substituted for "his family" and the euphemism "beside himself" being used for "out of his mind." But certainly any person so beside himself that he has to have others lay hold of him and keep him under restraint is mentally deranged, for the time being at least. And it is admitted by scholars that the only possible rendition of the original Greek of the first phrase in question is "his family" or "the people of his household." John Wyclif showed himself to be more honest than later translators since he frankly rendered it "his kinsmen."

To appreciate the assertions of the canonical writers at their full value we must remember that nineteen hundred years ago the miraculous healing and the "casting out of devils" were regarded as quite the proper thing for a holy man. The thought of ascribing madness to a person who alleged he performed such wonders would be the last thing that would enter the heads of his fellow citizens. If not a holy man the miracle monger might be an impostor or an emissary of the devil, but he would scarcely be deemed a madman. Moreover, as all liberal biblical scholars admit, the breach between Judaism and Christianity only came about gradually, and in the beginning of his career, at least, Jesus could not have aroused the animosity of the Jewish people as a whole but only that of certain interpreters of the Law from whose dicta he

dissented. And hence if we were to conjecture *a priori* what effect the reports of the feats performed by Jesus would have been likely to have had upon his family, we would naturally suppose that his brothers and sisters would boast of their relationship to the new prophet, and that his mother would feel that her fondest hopes had come true. It is as difficult to imagine Mary looking upon her son as a lunatic as it would be to suppose that a pious Methodist woman of today would call her son crazy because he embarked on a successful career as an evangelist.

Orthodox churchmen are, it would appear, quite willing to believe that Jesus was a boor and an undutiful son; at least they prefer this view to the belief that the "inspired" scripture-writers might have been lying about the matter. We infidels, on the contrary, have no particular tenderness for ecclesiastical historians, and would be loath to believe that Jesus was as black as they paint him. And without letting our feelings sway us one way or the other we shall find reasons which might well have impelled the gospel writers to deviate from the truth as regards the relations which subsisted between Jesus and his family.

Let us investigate further into what the four canonical gospels tell us about the family of Jesus. His father, Joseph, was apparently dead when Jesus began his ministry, at least this is the natural explanation of there being no longer any reference to him at or beyond this time. Jesus had four brothers and several sisters, the names of the four sons of Mary being given in *Mark*, vi, 3, and *Matthew*, xiii, 55, where it is reported that when Jesus returned to Nazareth the town's folk said: "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us? The Greek wording here would indicate that there were at least three sisters, but Epiphanius tells us there were only two, named Mary and Salome. Catholics, it should be noted, deny that these brothers and sisters were children of Mary whose perpetual virginity is insisted on by the Church, but all Protestant scholars agree that as these brothers and sisters are always mentioned in conjunction with the mother of Jesus it is hardly possible to assume that they were cousins or other kinsmen. Now none of the brothers of Jesus are in any of the lists of the twelve apostles. In the canonical lists of the twelve there is a Simon, but this is he who was renamed Cephas, the ex-disciple

of John the Baptist, who deserted the latter and enlisted under the banner of the man from Galilee. There was also a Jude, who was however the son of a certain James. Moreover there was a James, son of Zebedee and brother of John, and another James, son of Alphaeus, neither of whom could have been "James, the brother of the Lord" mentioned under that title in the writings of Paul. The four canonical gospels then give us to understand that the brothers of Jesus were in no way connected with his ministry. And *Acts* has only this much to say about them: that after the Ascension, in a house on Mount Olivet, the eleven apostles who remained after the defection of Judas, "went up into the upper chamber" and with one accord continued steadfastly in prayer, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus and his brethren." (i, 13-14).

It is then astounding to learn, on turning to other sources of information, that tradition is unanimous in holding that James, the brother of the Lord, took up the leadership of the Christian flock after the death of Jesus—a succession which, if this brother's previous attitude had been what the canonical gospels would give us to understand, is unparalleled in history and is wholly beyond the bounds of credibility. The heretical *Gospel according to the Hebrews* however puts the past record of James on a different footing. This asserts that James, the brother of the Lord, was one of those present at the Last Supper. Grieving over the prospective death of his brother but hoping for a glorious resurrection, James vowed that after drinking from the cup handed around by Jesus he would not taste food or drink until after the Lord rose from the dead. Consequently James was one of the first to whom the Lord made himself known after the Resurrection. Paul however (*I Cor.* xv, 5-8) puts the order of the appearance of the risen Jesus as first to Cephas, then to "the twelve," next to five hundred brethren, following this to James, then to "all the apostles" and finally to Paul himself. Clement of Alexandria tells us that, after the Ascension, Peter, James and John chose "James the brother of the Lord" to be the head of the disciples of Jesus and that the office of Bishop of Jerusalem was assumed by him. *Acts* gives no inkling of any such election of a head of the Church while telling us at some length (i, 21-26) of the choice of a new apostle, Matthias, to replace Judas. Confirming the story of Clement we have Hegippus who narrates that after the Ascension the charge of the Christian Church

devolved on James, the brother of the Lord, in concert with the apostles. The title of "James the Just" had been applied to him from the beginning, as he was holy from his very birth. According to Josephus (or perhaps to a Christian interpolator of his *Antiquities*) "the brother of Jesus who is called Christ whose name was James" was condemned to be executed by the Sanhedrin at the instigation of the High Priest, Annas, a Sadducee. And James was duly stoned to death, though this had as sequel the removal of Annas from the office of High Priest. Hegissipus however relates that James was stoned by a mob, and finally had his brains dashed out with a club, animosity having been aroused by his advocacy of the doctrine of a future life (denied by the Sadducees but upheld by the Pharisees) and brought to a climax by a public profession of faith in Jesus as the Messiah. After the martyrdom of James it is asserted by tradition, as transmitted by Eusebius, that "those of the apostles and the disciples of our Lord that were yet surviving came together from all parts with those that were related to our Lord according to the flesh" and "all unanimously declared Simeon, the son of Clopas as worthy of the episcopal seat." And this Simeon, "they say was the cousin german of our Saviour, for Hegissipus asserts that Clopas was the brother of Joseph." In the reign of Domitian (A. D. 82 to 96) the followers of Christ in Judea still had at their head (according to Hegissipus) members of the "family of the Lord, namely two "grandchildren of Judas, called the brother of our Lord according to the flesh." At first arrested by Domitian these two men were subsequently released, and "Thus delivered they ruled the churches, both as witnesses and relatives of the Lord. When peace was established they continued living even to the time of Trajan."

Acts on several occasions, mentions a "James," evidently a person of some importance, but without further designation. After Herod Agrippa had "killed James, the brother of John with the sword" he imprisoned Peter who was released from his confinement by an "angel" (which some commentators would identify with the "death angel" that brought Herod Agrippa's life to a close). Peter proceeded to the house of the mother of John Mark and after relating the story of his deliverance said: "Tell these things unto James and to the brethren" and departed (*Acts*, xii, 17). James is again mentioned, as someone of authority, in *Acts* xv and xxi, in

connection with the controversy as to whether Gentile converts need be circumcised and compelled to keep the Jewish Law, and from Paul's account of the same dispute we can identify this James with James the brother of the Lord. It is well known that *Galatians* gives a view of this transaction quite different from that of *Acts*, and the brilliant work of Ferdinand Christian Baur definitely established that James must have been the acknowledged head of the Judaizing faction in the Christian Church and a zealous advocate of the strict observance of the Jewish Law who only reluctantly agreed not to insist on imposing circumcision and the Law on the Gentile converts of Paul. And not only *Acts* (as Baur contended) but to a certain extent the four canonical gospels as well were "tendency" writings, partisan documents written from a Pauline point of view which endeavored not to set forth the truth but to obscure it whenever so doing would benefit the Pauline party. This fact is perfectly obvious, and those recent opponents of the Tuebingen School who deny that *Acts* is a tendency tale, and base this on the paradoxical assertion that none of Paul's Epistles are authentic, cut a very poor figure indeed in their attempts to refute the arguments of Baur.

We know that the rift between Judaizing and Pauline Christians gradually widened, and that finally the latter became dominant in the "orthodox" Christian Church, the former becoming outcast heretics known as Ebionites. These Ebionites did not become extinct until after the fifth century. The animosity between the orthodox and the heretics was, as usual, very great, and since the heretics took James, the brother of the Lord, as their patron, the orthodox would naturally do all in their power to belittle the importance of this progenitor of heresy. And in this way may be explained the omission of all reference to any part played by James in the ministry of his brother. It was not deemed desirable to attack James directly; he was slighted by being ignored in the gospel histories and only slurred by implication as in the story that the family of Jesus thought that the latter was out of his mind. How far the orthodox would go in their tales may be seen from the passage in the fourth gospel in which we are told that Jesus on the cross, seeing his mother and "the disciple he loved" standing by, said "unto his mother, Woman behold thy son" and then "to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour the disciple took

her into his own home." (*John*, xix, 26-27). It is not credible that Jesus should commit his mother to the care of a mere disciple when she had another son who occupied so prominent a position in the Christian flock as to be selected as Christ's successor, and not merely must we reject this story (as of course all liberal biblical scholars do) but we are constrained to regard it as a malicious fabrication aimed at James.

The attitude of the early Catholic Church—the Church of Paul as distinguished from the Ebionite Church of James—towards Mary is indicated by a passage in *Luke*. (xi, 27-28) where we are told that "a certain woman out of the multitude lifted up her voice" and said to Jesus: "Blessed is the womb that bare thee and the breasts which thou didst suck." This eulogy of one's mother would have been gratifying to a loving son, but *Luke* gives us to understand that it met with a rebuke from Jesus who replied: "Rather blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it." The contrast between this attitude of the early Church and the Mariolatry of modern Catholics is startling. Whether Mary accepted her son Jesus as a prophet or whether she repudiated his claims and really regarded him as out of his mind cannot be positively decided. But assuredly all of his family cannot have held aloof. James, the brother of the Lord, could never have taken over the reins so easily had he not previously had a prominent part in the work. And we may regard it as a certainty that if Mary the mother of the Lord belonged to the Christian flock she was of the Church of James, not of the Church of Paul, and was by no means in the good graces of the Catholics of the early days.

The gospel passage in which it is related that the family of Jesus believed him to be insane and endeavored to put him under restraint is taken by Paul W. Schmiedel (undoubtedly one of the ablest and most brilliant of biblical scholars) as one of the nine "foundation pillars for a truly scientific life of Jesus." These pillars he describes as "such data as from the nature of their contents, on that account, cannot possibly be regarded as inventions." Much as we respect this acute thinker we cannot regard the passage in question in such a light. It may represent the truth or it may not, but there were ample reasons for orthodox prevarication here. For all that is really known to the contrary Jesus may have been on the best of terms with all his family, loving and loved by his

mother and looked up to and revered by his younger brothers and sisters. The attitude towards his mother which the canonical gospels attribute to Jesus would, if founded on truth, be an ineffable blot on his memory. Christians are quite content to accept what they ought (one would think) regard as a vile libel. An infidel on the contrary will refuse to believe that Jesus was an undutiful son merely on the authority of heretic-hating historians.