

than chronological questions, just because they are so interesting. Yet I would dwell a little on the synchronisms in the first two verses of this chapter. Suppose a few questions and answers as follows:

Do you remember the last census, when your father had to put all your names and ages on a piece of paper, and a man called and took it away? (My readers will describe the American method, of course.) Here is an account of a census 1884 years ago. (The word "taxed" means "registered;" it occurs also in Heb. 12, 23, "written in heaven.") Who orders a census to be made? The Government. Who was ruler of Judea at this time? Herod: see Luke 1, 5. But who ordered this census? What right had Caesar Augustus to order it? Who was he? (Explain: Roman Empire and tributary kings. So now: Egypt pays tribute to Turkey. Native States in India to Great Britain.) But how could he order it in "all the world?" (Explain: means the Empire. Greek word always used in that sense in New Testament—*oikoumene*, not *kosmos*, as in "God so loved the world.") What had Cyrenius got to do with it? Governor of all Syria at that time, under Augustus: Judea a part of Syria. Which greatest, Cyrenius or Herod? Cyrenius, not in himself, but because represented Emperor, (as British Viceroy of India greater than the Maharajah of Cashmere.)

Now what is the good of all this? Will it not take up time that should be given to higher things? It may, very easily; but if kept in its proper place, it will do a most useful thing—it will show the position of the birth of Christ in general history, and help the realization of that birth as a historical fact. Of course, the fact that Jesus was then born does not of itself prove that he was the Son of God; but it helps us to trust the accuracy of Scripture; we feel we are in the region of true history and not of romance; and if Luke is correct when he refers to the Roman Empire, may we not believe him in the other things too?

But further: with classes capable of appreciating it, I would dwell on the old difficulty of the date of Cyrenius' governorship, and its remarkable solution within the last few years. Teachers who can not only state the fact that Cyrenius was governor twice, but explain the curious chain of indirect evidence by which Zumpt of Berlin has proved it, will give intelligent scholars an illustration of the exact accuracy of Scripture which they will not forget. No "discrepancy" was more triumphantly appealed to formerly by objectors; none has been more completely transformed into Christian evidence. It is worth while for our young people to know how.

2. A description of Bethlehem, or of an Eastern *khan*, may be made a real help to the higher teaching of this lesson. Let me, instead of attempting one myself, copy here a few lines from a book called "Domestic Life in Palestine," by Miss Rogers, sister of a former British Consul at Damascus. The house she describes was not at Bethlehem; but her account is none the less available by way of illustration:

"I found the house consisted of only one very lofty room, about eighteen feet square ... Just within the door, a donkey and a yoke of oxen stood, and I soon perceived that rather more than one-third of the room was set apart for cattle, where the floor, which was on a level with the street, was of earth, and partially strewn with fodder. We were led up two stone steps on to a dais, two feet high, where fragments of old mats and carpets were spread. ... Meantime, our two horses were unsaddled, and lodged in the lower part of the room. ... Three deep troughs or mangers, about three feet by one, were hollowed out of the broad stone coping at the edge of the dais. Mohammed, our groom, filled these troughs with barley, and our tired animals enjoyed their evening meal. ... I imagined Joseph anxiously seeking rest and shelter for Mary after her long journey. ... The raised floor was crowded with strangers, who had, like them, come to be taxed. But Joseph and Mary may have taken refuge from the cold in the lower part of the room. ... I looked at one of the mangers, and felt how natural it was to use it as a cradle for a newly-born infant. Its size, its shape, its soft bed of fodder, its nearness to the warm fire always burning on the dais in midwinter, would immediately suggest the idea to an Eastern mother."

This is a vivid picture. Whether the "inn" at Bethlehem was like that, we cannot say. But this we can say, that the place where Jesus was born, whether a cave, as local tradition says, or anything else, was certainly not better than what Miss Rogers describes. But how will all this help our teaching on the Incarnation? Just by contrast. That was what the Son of God came down to.

But now, how should the great fact of the Incarnation itself be introduced? Put it thus: You all have had a beginning, and that was when you were born. But the birth at Bethlehem was not Christ's beginning. See John 17, 5, where he speaks to the Father about "the glory which I had with thee before the world was." What was he then? Not a man; not an angel; but—see John 1, 1, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." But how do we know this

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