

SCIENCE AND CHRISTIANITY

To return to the particular question of the impregnation of the Virgin Mary by the Holy Ghost, we are referred to the gospels for testimony to the fact. The only two evangelists who speak of it, Matthew and Luke, relate in harmony that the Jewish maiden Mary was betrothed to the carpenter Joseph, but became pregnant without his co-operation, and, indeed, "by the Holy Ghost." As we have already related, the four canonical gospels which are regarded as the only genuine ones by the Christian Church, and adopted as the foundation of faith, were deliberately chosen from a much larger number of gospels, the details of which contradict each other sometimes just as freely as the assertions of the four. The fathers of the Church enumerate from forty to fifty of these spurious or apocryphal gospels; some of them are written both in Greek and Latin—for instance, the gospel of James, of Thomas, of Nicodemus, and so forth. The details which these apocryphal gospels give of the life of Christ, especially with regard to his birth and childhood, have just as much (or, on the whole, just as little) claim to historical validity as the four canonical gospels.

Now we find in one of these documents an historical statement, confirmed, moreover, in the *Sepher Toldoth Jeschua*, which probably furnishes the simple and natural solution of the "world-riddle" of the supernatural conception and birth of Christ. The author curtly gives us in one sentence the remarkable statement which contains this solution: "Josephus Pandera, the Roman officer of a Calabrian legion which was in Judæa, seduced Miriam of Bethlehem, and was the father of Jesus." Other details given about Miriam (the Hebrew name for Mary) are far from being to the credit of the "Queen of Heaven."