

The Gospel Commentary of Epiphanius.

By F. C. Conybeare, Oxford.

The following text is taken from an Armenian codex preserved in the library of San Lazaro in Venice, written on paper in double columns in a small cursive hand on 322 pages in the year of the Armenians 1198=1750. The codex is entitled within as follows: "The book called of the blessed Epiphanius archbishop of Constantia in Cyprus. Homilies on the original text (?) of Genesis and on the gospel preachings according to Luke." The Armenian version is in the classical idiom of the fifth century, and is at least as old as Moses of Khoren who cites it in his history. Parts of it, e. g. the History of Joseph, are found in the twelfth century codex Paris. Anc. Fonds Arm. 44, of the Bibliothèque nationale. The frequent appeals to Jewish tradition and Jewish Rabbis as his source encourage us to suppose that the author of this work was really Epiphanius, although Armenian scribes have certainly interpolated it here and there. In the following pages I merely translate a few excerpts.

Fred. C. Conybeare.

On Genesis and Luke.

(The creation of man.)

(F. 25) . . . God the word took clay from mount Sion, called accordingly Sion the mother, and water from the brimming spring which ran down by the ravine of Gesameni, the Kedron, which king Hezekiah and the prophet and others afterwards laid waste, for they were often straitened by inroads of the gentiles, and they permitted a little (*scil.* of the water) to pass out which is now called Selowam, and is translated 'Sent' (*or* Apostle). But he also took fire from the effulgent sun's rays, and air from the holy-gleaming space which is near unto heaven's firmament, and with holy wind he mingled <it> of one weight, as also the elements in one measure. But it is also said to be one name, and is

named of wind and air. So with his divine hands he framed man, out of the five materials; and then out of his own godhead by afflation he endowed him with life, equipping and fashioning him with five senses, in essence like to God through grace, as indeed spake he that is the Lord of glory, Let us make etc.

(F. 28.) And God said, It is not good for the man to be alone. And he forthwith laid a trance on him, at the spot where he was himself to sleep upon the cross for three hours. In like manner also the first father slept for three hours. And he took from the ribs on his right side the innermost (*or* lowest) one, which is the smallest of all; and he filled in beneath it flesh, and made it into a perfect woman, with divine and hidden mystery, just as today our body is formed by remaining in a mother's womb . . .

Now in three hours the Lord wrought this. And it was about the ninth hour of Friday And he took Eva by the right hand, and led her to Adam, and with his divine right hand he laid Eva's in the right hand of Adam (*ms. Moses*), as the priests of holy church have learned to do And again the Lord rested on the place of the holy cross, and made Adam rest on his right hand, and Eva on the right of Adam. And he raised his divine right hand and blessed them, and made Adam known unto Eva; and he melted with compassion for her, inspired thereto by divine passionless love, as today Christ for his bride the church. And he said, This now is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called Life, for she hath been taken out of her husband. And he rose up and set them facing the east on his right hand, and opened the firmament of heaven unto them, laying his divine right hand on the head of Adam. And he again blessed him, bestowing on him the grade of priesthood and the dignity of kingship, and furthermore the spirit of prophecy. And God became their shelter and defence.

On Melchisedec.

(F. 56) Arphaksath begat Melchi father of Sedek, and Melchi begat Sedek. And when Sedek was 30 years of age, Sem besought for him of his fathers that they would allow him to follow him of his own will wherever he should go. And with secret intention by night they two took, as if loosing the yokes of asses, the precious relics of Adam and of

Eva. And they came to the land of Palestine which being interpreted is the place of the arena (*asparis*) of battle and war.

And there they found amidst leafy trees, high unto Qapara, a cave dug naturally by the creator and by no man. For there was no man in this land, before the ark was brought thitherwards. And there in the cave they placed the relics of Eva, and with prayer committed them to God. But they took the relics of Adam, and went up into mount Sion, out of which were fashioned the first father and first mother. And Sedek said, Unto where Sem? And the name of the place was called Jerusalem until this day. And thence under God's guidance they came to the place of Salvation called Golgotha, because there they laid the skull of Adam. And the place was high up . . . and they prayed and entrusted the relics to God.

And Sem began to speak to Sedek and said: My son and my hope in the God of my fathers, thus hath it been commanded me by the Lord as we have done. And now again I speak by his command: that thou remain here and minister unto our holy father and mother, who were planned and made by divine holy hands of the creator, who for their sake made all creatures. . . And thou wilt receive as thou deservest from the most High anointing of priesthood and honour of kingship, being long-lived, as it were eternal, from generation to generation, until the Lord, the son of creation (*or* creatures) shall truly copy Thee. Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec, and the Lord is on thy right hand.

. . . And without sweat or labour thou shalt be fed by holy angels waiting on thee. Old age and sickness shall not come upon thee, but thou shalt remain, alive, glorious of God and through men praising and glorifying the creator, of our father Adam. But near the end of the world, in the days when shall be born of a holy virgin the maker himself of Adam, upon the relics of Eva, — in that very watch of Salvation shalt thou be gathered unto thy fathers, the angels of God passing on thy holy spirit sweetly and not with bitterness. And do thou my son lay up in thy mind all I have told thee.

But he stood before him bowing his head, and listened, and shed tears, and tried to stifle his tears, but could not. But the father Sem said to him, Why thus bitterly weepest thou, my son? I know that for lack of fathers and home and brethren thou doest so. And he said: Yea, but I will do the commands of my creator sevenfold more than of father and mother. And Sem blessed him with God's blessing, and they

raised him up and set him before the relics of Adam, and they adored and kissed the holy spot and the relics, and with great bulwarks they surrounded it . . . And Sem kissed him and embraced him, and with tears bedewed the godlike countenance of the young Sedek, for in it imaged forth was seen Christ the son of God. And he blessed him 'Gods peace be with thee always, my son'. And he said: 'Amen.'

[Ibidem p.66 of the Same. Called Rest (?).] Now in the reign of Antipatros of Ascalon whom Augustus, Cæsar of Rome, made king of Judæa, Zacharias was chief priest, son of Berek. There was a certain ruler faithful of the race and house of David named Joachim, and his wife of the tribe of Judah, and both were barren. And they entreated the Lord with much sollicitude and tearful prayers, and the Lord heard their prayers, and gave them a child a daughter. And they took her, the elect one as she was a gift from God's hand, and with all their family and intimacy they gave thanks to the Lord God of Israel, and reared her with great care and in the law of God according to the Lord's command. And when she was three years old, they carry her before the Lord, into the holy temple with gifts and offerings; and the high priests blessed her, and the aged Simeon did the same. And in her fifth year . . .¹ And after that Joachim died, father of Mary the holy virgin, and was gathered to his fathers. And when the holy virgin was eleven, again they carried her with great offerings into the Lord's house, and she was blessed alike by priests and chief priests; and they returned thence home, glorifying the God of Israel. And when her mother Anna died, the holy virgin was left an orphan without father or mother, having God for father, and the Lord was with her. "My father and mother left me, but my Lord received me". And Elisabeth took and carried her to her home, kept and nourished her, and ministered <to her> as to a temple of God. For Elizabeth was sister of her mother Anna. And since the virgin was vowed to God, Elizabeth and all her household took and led her with offerings to the holy temple as the law required. And the holy virgin was of eleven years and remained in the service of the Lord God of Israel in the midst of the temple from morn till eve, with prayers and also tears praying to the Lord for the peace and salvation of all the world, of Jews and gentiles. That this day and for ever she might ask the pardon of all the world, especially of faithful Christians. And she remained in the service of the temple of God for three years

¹ The phrase is not finished in the MS.

joining an angelic life with her spotless soul, with the allholy trinity God,¹ whom she reconciled with all creatures. And she was herself fed by the holy angels. There were also other virgins vowed to the house of God; for ever since they heard the words of God spoken through Esaiiah the Prophet, Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a child, they began and kept guard and outpost thus; but there was none like to the holy virgin Mary. And her father was a son of David, and her mother of the house of David and of the daughters of Levi. And it was because of the kings and priests being providentially mingled with each other that they were allied in blood to one another. Wherefore the virgin Mary had the grace of priesthood and honour of kingship, but also she was much adorned by the spirit of the fear of God.

About the giving of the holy virgin into the temple of the high priest. So then when she was fourteen years old, the chief priest Zachariah began to think, and as he was struck dumb, he communicated in his own handwriting with the aged Simeon and with the chief priests and elders concerning the holy virgin Mariam, to give her into the keeping of a trusty man until the completion of her fifteenth year. For the Hebrews had a law handed down in the tradition of the elders, to give the bride into the house of the bridegroom, or for receiving the bridegroom into the house of the bride. And this according to the possibilities² of the households they did, in order that by seeing each other for one year they might salute and please one another; but in case they were not pleasing, the contract might be rescinded.

They took the same course for the virgin in whom God dwelled, and mustered all the presbytery³ of the children of Israel from the twelve tribes, those whose lives they knew by testing; and in the name of the Lord God of Israel they cast lots. And it fell to the lot of the spotless and faithful man Joseph, who was also of the house and race of David, and he was honored by God with priestly dignity. And he had a wife Marim, sister of Anna mother of the virgin Mariam, out of whom he had begotten four sons and three daughters. And the virgin Mariam fell to the lot of guardianship of the Lord⁴ by behest of the Lord. And he took and received her as if from the hands of God, and led her into his house. And there were with her Simeon and Joseph his

¹ Grammar lacks.² or capacities.³ or senate.⁴ ? Joseph.

sons, and Solome his daughter; and they walked in joy glorifying God. And Marim,¹ the wife of Joseph, when she beheld the daughter of her sister Anna, exulted and rejoiced, and said: If Anna my sister should today come to us from the dead. And she threw her arms around her and out of her unmeasured love shed tears and wept. And the damsel remained with unspeakable lowliness and joy and gentleness and waiting on all was their servant. But they all waited on her, as if out of fear and reverence for God. And Marem (*sic*) the wife of Joseph was near to bringing forth Jacob the less, and the virgin Mariam had been in the house of Joseph about eight days, when his wife bore Jacob, whom also they call the less; wherefore also at his conception Joseph and his wife had made a vow to God, not again to come together. For thus they spake: Seven (children) have we born, like Anna, after barrenness, and let this suffice us. So they left one another alone, and gave themselves up to the Lord God.

But we have heard from some that they said that Marem the wife of Joseph was also dead; but it was not so ascertained by us. However this (and) many things hard to understand we accurately learned from doctors of the Jews and ancient chroniclers, and them we have exhibited and set forth truly and surely; so that no one may waver here and there, and utter any thing harmful, and injure his soul.

So then as we have related about the God-taught and gentle virgin Mariam, how with unspeakable lowliness she waited on her mother's sister, and on the sucking child, Jacob the less; and she was touched to pity in her divine holy love for them. But also she neglected not, while so doing, the appointed and usual prayers to God at noon and eventide. For when she entered the house of Joseph, the first thing she asked for of her mother's sister was that she might have a place of prayer of her own apart from all. And she had a garden deeper than the apartment belonging to her; and this garden was shut in by a wall all round without and within, being near to a spring, whence entered within the wall water by a canal² to irrigate the flowers and trees of the garden; for the garden and flower plot were protected by doors and bolts, so that one entering in could shut them fast; but no one from elsewhere could enter in there, except the person within should open the doors. And Joseph had made it so because of his house and

¹ *Maremay* in the Armenian, the genitive of Marim or Mariam equally.

² *kayamir*?

his daughters. Marem sister of her mother Anna had appointed this place of prayer and repose for the holy and blessed virgin. And she regularly went in at dawn and eve to pray to the Lord God of Israel, entreating for peace and atonement of his creatures, yea and also for salvation of souls. But also she continually looked toward the lofty throne that passes understanding and comprehension, in divine vision, in holy and sober meditation, and outloud <she repeated> the prophetic words: *Have fear*, with supplication and tearful prayers, with arms outspread to heaven and gazing over against the temple of God. And again she would prostrate herself in the godlike image upon the ground, and say: My Lord and God, in whom wilt thou be pleased, who knowest all? As thou indeed hast said: I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy on, and will pity whom I will pity. So then have mercy and pity, and arise Lord in thy repose. Because it is time for thee to arise, for thy law is set at naught. So now awake in thy invincible might, and come to make us alive.

This and the like words to God, of the prophets, about the coming of the Word into the world, she had learned through the holy spirit; and she had them also written down, and knew it all, and in these (words) she sent up her prayers to God at dawn and eve.

So then on the sixth of april according to calendarial art, and according to the lunar numbering of the Jews on the tenth of the moon, the day on which they shut up the lamb hidden with divine mystery, whence also by supernal command these two met on one and the same day, on the sixth of April, and the tenth of the moon, and the image of the day is Kyriake, the lamb was shut up in the spotless womb of the holy virgin, he who took away and takes in perpetual sacrifice away the sins of the world. For the holy virgin Mariam¹ was at prayers in her garden of which above we spake. And she had with her skeins, scarlet and purple for making the veil of the temple; that when her prayers were ended, she might work and weave, and then she went out to draw water in a vessel for her needs; and shutting the door of the garden tightly from within she secured it, as aforetime was her custom, lest anyone should enter and hinder her prayers. And at dawn she began to pray to the God of Israel with tears and entreaties, and besought on her knees till the third hour of the Great Sunday. And as she thus prayed she exulted because she saw full opposite the Lord God of

¹ Spelled *Mrim*.

Israel who was in very truth. And as she prayed she fell on her face, fainting and in a swoon, as is written: My heart and my body swooned, God of my heart, my portion art thou, God eternally. And this prayer for our salvation she made with entreaty.

And she rose up and extended her holy arms cross-wise and said:

Lord God, who sittest upon the many-eyed cherubs and in songs of praise art exalted with never silent voices by all the choir of watchers who cease not from acclaiming thee holy, unto glory and praise of thy dread holy name. Harken now unto thy handmaid, an orphan without father or mother, for thou art father of the childless. So hear my prayer and remember the word of thy servant; my father David. Thus and the like from the holy prophecy of her father she recalled, not forgetful of the nature of God; for she had also learned the 150th psalm; and this and similar divine matters the holy virgin knew. For she knew all in spirit and in letter . . .

(The annunciation is then related in a conventional manner. Towards fixing its date Epiphanius recurs to the incident which befel Zachariah in the temple) . . .

(F. 74) Zachariah remained until the completion of the two feasts, twelve days, and it was on Tisri 22, on the fifth day of the week <that he fell dumb>, and on the Friday (*urbathi*) he went home and came in to his wife Elisabeth and she conceived at eventide of Urbath the lightgiving torch which was to precede the sun of righteousness. So that from that day until Nisan, the 6th of April there are 5^{7/2} months, a point set forth by the holy archangel when he said 'In the sixth month'. But it was also the 5500th year from the first man to the day on which the holy virgin received the annunciation from the holy Watcher of God. Consequently in the sixth age, do proclaim all teachers of Christ's church. Likewise the five and a half months were called six by the holy angel. The ages were also set down to be 5^{7/2}. And why was it proper so to be? Because on the sixth day God made Adam and builded Eva out of him. Therefore is all this marvellous mystery designed 'as it is. . . .

It befell at the third hour, and the image[†] of the day was Kuriakê; but as some say the fourth of the week, though our conviction is otherwise, and why? Because on the Kuriakê God said, Let there be light, and on the same day of Kuriakê the increate light God the word chose to become created light from the virgin . . .

† i. e. name.

(F. 84) And on the very day of the great Kuriakê at the third hour all creatures were saved, and freed from servitude of the enemy. Furthermore all the heavenly hosts received the fragrance of life, which once at the creation from Adam they had received. Likewise on the great and marvellous divine annunciation feast

(F. 85) Of the same. On the visit of the virgin to her kinswoman Elisabeth. Gospel according to Lc 1, 39.

Mariam arose in those days etc.

Why does the Evangelist so immediately relate her visit? For after the salutation of the archangel, when she became a tenement of God, she remained that day entire, filled with exultation and joy; and perceived herself through the same spirit to be purified from all necessities, and from the bodily affections, renewed¹ in some new way to the honour and glory of God the son. For hers was a miraculous and untranslatable matter which the beginningless word began to effect. Therefore on the third day the virgin desired to confirm still more surely the archangel's words, unto the sure and real faith of herself and of all who looked for the salvation of Israel. And she said in a sober and gentle voice to Marim the wife of Joseph, the sister of her mother Anna. My lady and mother, supplicate for mysake the Lord Joseph, that I may go to Jerusalem before you. For the feast of Zatik was near at hand, after a few days, and all Israel was to meet there. But the virgin was in haste, because of God's matter, a holy and hidden mystery. And she yielded to the prayers of the holy virgin and spake to Joseph, who listened and at once bade his two sons Simon and Jesse and his daughter Solome be ready to go with her. And they with promptitude went before, and the virgin came in haste on the second day at the ninth hour, and the image of the day was the third of the week. And the holy virgin entered God's temple and worshipped before the Lord God of Israel, with voice of thanksgiving; and those with her. And they went forth and came giving salutation from house to house. Because the city of Juda lies to the west of Jerusalem, and is in a mountain district, what today is named St. John, because the holy forerunner John was therein. And having entered the city of Juda they came to the house of Zachariah. . . .

¹ or renewing.

(Here the codex leaves nearly 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ columns blank, pp. 86 and 87. The magnificat and visit to Elisabeth are then explained at length) . . .

(F. 95.) Wherefore Simon and Jôse returned after their father and mother and sisters, since they had all together come to the feast of Zatik. But the virgin and Solome remained with Elisabeth about three months . . . Elisabeth beheld with the eye of faith as in a looking glass, the creator of all things coagulated in the virgin's womb in flesh. And therefore she told her, supplicatingly as if imploring, to go forthwith to Nazareth. So the virgin being gentle and lowly listened to her, and spoke to Solome, and they sent word to Joseph at Nazareth. And he sent Simon and Jôse. And they came and brought the virgin holy and their sister to their home, and she saluted them and bowed to the holy priest Zachariah, for he was still dumb. But he rose up and called with a gesture of his hand the holy virgin, and with pure divine love bade her farewell, and blessed her with tears . . . And they went straight to their home, and when they approached Joseph and his wife Marem, he went forth to meet them with every one else, and they entered his house and rejoiced and thanked God. But the virgin would not at once sit down and rest, but went and entered her garden, where she received the tidings from the holy watcher, and fell to praying . . .

Of the same. About the holy baptist.

(F. 106) This also is a mine of wisdom, that the testimony of the archangel (*sc.* to Joseph) be to us an assurance of our faith, and stop the mouths of the impious. For <she possessed> the by nature uncontaminated and unconfused channel (? *αῖμα*) of blood, and was a sister of the just Joseph. For Anna mother of the virgin was daughter of Kleophas, and Joseph was brother of Kleophas. But the watcher called her *wife*, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mariam thy wife etc. . . . See how at once the just man did the bidding of the angel. When he heard he wavered, not for a second vision and a third wife,² but eagerly through his faith in God took unto himself his life.

(F. 107) When the just Joseph awoke from his inspired dream, he called his daughter Solome and Marim his wife, mother of Solome,

² I feel sure neither of the text nor of my interpretation of it.

and burst into tears of unmeasured joy, and related to them his dream. And they came full of joy and glorified the God of Israel. . . . But after that the neighbours and inhabitants of the city of Nazareth saw that the eye of guardianship of Joseph and his household and sons over the virgin was changed, and her holy and spotless pregnancy became visible. Now the priests who dwelled in Nazareth hated the just and blessed priest Joseph. . . . and sent to Jerusalem as messenger Annas who in those days was a scribe and child in years. And he dwelled in Nazareth, but was afterwards chief-priest in Jerusalem. . . . They wrote separately to Zachariah and the aged Simeon and to Alexander the priest who was old in wisdom, but a stripling in years, and they on hearing all this came in haste to the temple and summoned the presbyterate Scribes and Pharisees. . . . They read the letter borne by Annas, and wrote off to Joseph to take Mariam and come in haste. . . . and justify himself in the Lord's house as touching the holy virgin they had betrothed to him, as a deposit and not in wedlock. . . . And Joseph, read their letter and arose in haste, and bade his sons and his daughter Solome and his wife Marem and the holy virgin. . . . and they came straight to certify the truth and the purity of the virgin; and entering the temple they worshipped and prayed. And the virgin had no misgivings, as she was spotless, but went boldly to the raised dais reserved for virgins. . . . (her prayer is given). . . . And Elisabeth received them and took them to her house, which she had in Jerusalem, against her coming to honour the feasts. But the chiefpriest Hyrkanus who was in authority at Jerusalem and the chief priest Zachariah and the aged Simeon and the other scribes and pharisees and elders of Israel met and took counsel. . . . (The ordeal of water). . . . Alexander took living water in an earthen pot and of the tithes of barley meal in a vessel of wood, and he came forward and called Joseph to him, and put on this hands the meal, and he himself had in his hand water, and he bared (F. 110) the head of Joseph and he asked him, Art thou pure and blameless as touching this virgin? (Joseph swears a long oath that he is, writes it on parchment and washes it in the living water). . . . and he took earth, a handfull from the floor of the temple near the altar, holy soil, and cast it in the water; and he took the barley meal from the hand of Joseph and gave the water in the earthen jar to Joseph and placed the barley before the Lord near the altar. And he took a handfull of the barley meal, and laid it on the altar. And he turned to Joseph, and said to him, Drink, and if thou hast sinned before the

Lord, let this water and thy oath and the soil from the Lord's house be to thee for a curse and for death. And Joseph said, Be it so, be it so, and all said, Amen. And Joseph raised his eyes to God and said . . . and he drank the water, and according to the order of the law they bade him go and ascend the hill of Olives; and he went down and then proceeded to ascend. And all the crowd of the city followed, and many others on the walls looked on. . . . And Joseph returned from the mount of Olives, descended and came resplendent and radiant as light; and a sweet odour exhaled from him and penetrated the Lord's house. He fell on his face and said with joy: At my crying out, thou heardest me, O God, according to my righteousness. And Alexander came forward and took him in his arms and kissed him, and hid his head. So did also the priests and elders and Simeon . . .

(The virgin also drinks the water and triumphs under the ordeal. Then great rejoicings follow, and Elisabeth decks her out and all repair for a feast to Elisabeth's house) . . .

(F. 113) But the virgin Mariam in that hour took the child prophet, and wept for love and kissed his face tenderly and would not be separated from him or go her way. So also Elisabeth took the little Jacob youngest son of Joseph, for he was only about a month old; and they were of the tribe of Levi and Juda, allied with each other according to the law as one in kinship . . . and they returned to their city Nazareth . . . and after two months was the census, and Joseph went up with all his household . . . and when they reached Bethlehem, and the birth hour came for the holy virgin, they hastily entered a cave, for there was no room in the inn. And in the third watch of the night was born the word God man of the holy virgin upon the arms of the first mother Eva, and she was a virgin in conception and in parturition and without pangs . . . and a cloud of light overshadowed the cave, and a sweet fragrance scented all the world, according to the annunciation of Gabriel to the holy virgin.

But until this moment was kept alive Melchisedek by behest of God, and he was at that time on mount Thabor, and his life had been drawn out all those long ages and centuries according to the saying, Thou art a priest for ever in the succession of Melchisedech, and the Lord is on thy right hand. But he was not yet grown old, but like a youth was kept strong by supernal behest, he who is called without father, without mother, like the son of God, motherless in heaven by generation, and fatherless on earth by original birth. Wherefore in that very hour

the angels bore him off and set him down in the cave before the Word made flesh, while the latter still lay on the arms of Eva, and he had in his hands a censer of gold and a censer of silver, and a pure white linen cloth and three loaves of unleavened bread and a precious cup of wine incorrupt, and he worshipped before the Lord son of creation, and kissed the place on which the Lord was born, and then the feet and hands of the Lord in fear and trembling, upon the arms of Eva. And he bestowed on him who laid hands on him and made his the order of priesthood and dignity of kingship, as he had received it from him, and laid before him as offering the bread and wine and the utensils thereof, the flambeau giving light and the censer the perfume burner (?). And he himself stretched out his arms before the word of God the Father, and spake a prayer:

My Lord and son of the Lord, from God the Father and Lord from Lord, give rest to thy servant Sedek, son of thy servant Melchi, on this day, for now have I bestowed on thee thy high heritage on the very day in which I found thee faithful.

Now command thou my flesh to repose in dust, from which I was moulded, and my spirit to return to thee, and ever with the heavenly priesthoods to abide in spirit, and as thy priest for ever for the service of glory.

And he prostrated himself before the new-born king, kissing the earth. And the angels of God invested him with great honour, and carried him¹ . . . near to the tomb of Moses. And handed over his holy spirit tenderly and advanced it near to the throne of glory, a priest of God eternally in presence of God. But his holy body was buried by angels near to the tomb of Moses unknown to any. And Melchisedek was gathered unto his fathers, as a man holy and faithful, and he truly died unto the refuting of the opinion expressed by some concerning him, and the book of the law fixed a place, as they were affrighted beholding the creator and the legislator . . .

Ch. 18. On Lc 2 etc.

But there was also there (in Bethlehem) the grave of the first mother, who also had heard the solemn and immovable edict, With sorrow shalt thou bear children. But today came the child of a virgin by means of virginal birth to change the curse into a blessing . . .

¹ *Igayi a vox nihili.*

(p. 119.) On the cave of Bethlehem.

Why was Bethlehem called House of Ephrath by the prophet? At the death of Sarah in all the land of Palestine Abraham had not the smallest holding nor a foot of earth But he sought in the region to buy for silver in Hebron a plot, and the cave which had been dug out of the rock for burial of his forefathers. And there he buried Sarah in the cave which is called Repetition. But Abraham himself, Isaac and Jacob and all of them, were buried there to this day. And it is near Bethlehem, which is why it was called after the name Ephron house of Ephratha, and Bethlehem after our translation and rendering is called House of Bread.

But we, longing to know the truth, took the trouble to consult the ancient and earliest chroniclers and doctors of the Jews, asking them why Bethlehem was called the House of Bread. And they told me the following, bestowing the knowledge as a great gift:

What time Jesu led Israel over Jordan and gave them for heritage the land of Canaan and Palestine, there was a youth of the tribe of Judah called Jôse who had taken much spoil, and with it a damsel of the gentiles whom from pity he slew not, but carried her off in holy wedlock to his home. And he talked with her of the faith of Abraham and of the God of Israel and law of Moses. And the damsel heard all and fell on her face and said: I believe in the God of Abraham. And Jôse led her to Jesu, and told him all, and Jesu was pleased and blessed him and also the damsel and bade the priests to act according to the law of Moses." And they gave the virgin who believed to the youth to wed, for he respected her person till he had wedded her, and curbed his desires. And Jôse received her from the hands of the priests and led her to the house of his father and mother. But before long his parents and kinsfolk opposed Jôse and insulted him over the damsel who believed, because she was of gentile race. But he wept and besought his father saying: Lead me where thou wilt and make me a house of a threshing floor,¹ and prepare me bread to eat and settle me there. And let me not be a reproach to thy family And Jôse went down and walked amid the leafy pine trees of Sikim, and found a cave where were laid the relics of Eva, just as it had been naturally dug by the creator; however he knew it not then to be the tomb of the first mother Eva.

And Jôse took a pick, and dug and enlarged it making it cut out

¹ Or perhaps the sense is *House of possessing*.

of the rock, and he made it like a house, and on the right hand side he made a little manger for the use of his animals, that the damsel might have occupation and means of livelihood. And she went in and lived there, and said to her husband: Lo this is for me a house of eating bread and a dwelling place of peace. And the woman's name was Ephrat, and on the score of the woman's living in the cave, a city was built there, and the name was given it by the great Jesu, Bethlehem house of Ephrat, which is why in the ancestral tongue by translation Ephrat is called Fruitbearing. For in the place so named the virgin-born fruit Christ was given us by God To continue—: At that time a man oppressed of the race of Israel having an ox and a very few sheep was dwelling in the cave and working in the fields of Bethlehem. following the sheep for the shepherds who were there, and he himself had exchanged the calf which he had and was working the land. But he had no wife or children. And he was a godfearing man, and what ever he earned by toil and also milk of his flocks he gave to the wayfarers and needy. So he on that miraculous and salutary night, chanced to be come there, and found Joseph and his party, because there was no room in the inn And Joseph advanced to meet him, and they saluted one another enquiring each for the other's welfare And Joseph told him modestly, as one trustworthy, of the circumstances, and he praised the God of Israel; and they both remained outside praying to God, until the ineffable birth appeared in glory for the world's salvation

And they themselves sat down and asked of one another, and Joseph found the man to be of the house of David and a near kinsman of his own, and his name was Isaac. And there were hard by[†] shepherds sleeping in the open who were there on account of the few sheep he had wandering round with them. But he also dwelt in the cave in order to feed his calf. There then he was privileged to witness the miraculous birth. It is also no matter for surprise that this is not recorded in the Gospel, if we look at the truth of facts. There were so many wonderful things not recorded, because there was eager anxiety on the part of the holy evangelists to proclaim Christ God. But let us return to our narrative

[†] Were hard by] The text here is not certain.