

Anno Domini.

BY CHAS. C. MILLARD.

Our Christian friends often cite the letters A. D., which are commonly affixed to dates, as establishing and commemorating the fact that Jesus was born at the beginning of our era. The following, taken from a religious paper, shows that our time is not reckoned from that event; and that A. D. 1 is an arbitrary point of time, and not a memorial of any great event, either real or supposed, in the world's history:

"Our year is supposed to be reckoned from the birth of Christ, and is called Anno Domini. The learned monk, Dyonsius, singularly enough, made a mistake of four years, which causes Christ to be chronicled in history as having been born four years before [after] his actual birth. The Christian era, by this mistake, began when Christ was four years old. Why should this blunder be perpetuated?"

The writer then argues for the correction of the error. (The "after," which I have inserted above, must be read instead of "before," in order to avoid contradicting the statement in the following sentence and the remainder of the article):

As Dyonsius Exiguus seems likely to be condemned unheard, because he has been a long time dead, I will volunteer to plead for him, "Not guilty." The learned monk believed that the gospel, "according to St. Matthew," and the gospel, "according to St. Luke," was each a part of "the inspired word of God"; and that each was "equally inspired and inerrant." He also knew that the date of the birth of Jesus, as given by the writer of Matthew's gospel, is "in the days of Herod the king," and that two years later this king was still reigning; hence, "the birth" must have been at least two years before the death of "Herod," king of Judea.

He was also obliged to notice that Luke, the only other New Testament writer who gives a date for "the birth," gives a different date, namely, when a decree went out "from Cesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed"; and at the time of the first taxing under this decree, "when Cyrenius (as Quirinius) was governor of Syria." Josephus, a careful and contemporary historian, gives the date of the first taxing as in the year 6 or 7 of our era, which corresponds to the time when Quirinius began to be governor of Syria, according to known and Hebrew history. (See Encyclopaedia Britannica, vol. 13, pp. 426 and 427, art. Israel).

Then this last date is, at least, eight years later than the first, and the Jesus, who was born in the reign of Herod, was eight years old, or upwards, when the Jesus of

whom Luke writes was born. This may seem strange, but we should remember that "all things are possible with God."

With these facts before him, what was a devout monk to do? The "inerrant word," according to Matthew, was just as strong as the "inerrant word," according to Luke, and a date had to be fixed; the authorities demanded it. He decided the question in the only way in which it was possible to give equal credit to each gospel. He fixed the date of "the birth" just half way between the dates as given by each, or to express it in a common way, he "split the difference." And so it remains unto this day. Dyonsius made no mistake, the mistake lies elsewhere.

This is one of the vexatious problems of "holy writ," which, like the celebrated ghost, will not "down." Dr. W. M. Ramsay of Aberdeen university has written a book and had it published recently, in which he endeavors to prove that "Christ was born in Bethlehem at the time stated in the gospel, according to St. Matthew." Dr. Ramsay admits the foregoing facts, and also that "at this point apologists for Luke have thrown up their hands"; but he proceeds to make history as follows: "Quirinius was twice governor of Syria, and his first term was contemporary with the last years of Herod's reign." That he is leading the rear guard of a forlorn hope is shown by the new evidence he brings forward to sustain his assertion. He tells us that three eminent men have discovered, in Egypt, that under Nero, A. D. 61-62 and later, a Roman census was taken every fourteen years; and he assumes that this periodic taking extends backward to the time of Herod, and that the first one when the decree went forth was passed in silence by Josephus. The conclusion is a non sequitur, it does not follow the facts.

A few plain, undisputed facts, verified by the authority quoted above, will finish the argument. After a long reign, Herod died B. C. 4. After King Herod, Archelaus was king of Judea, Idomea, etc., until A. D. 6, when he was removed by the emperor of Rome.

Judea was then annexed to Syria, and Quirinius, governor of Syria, was also governor of Judea; after this, for a long time, Judea was governed by procurators, who "were subject to the Imperial Legate of Syria."

Until A. D. 6, it mattered not to Judea nor to a Judean writer who was governor of Syria, for Archelaus, as well as Herod, held the title of king and was subject only to the emperor. But while Judea and Syria were under the same governor (Quirinius), the first taxing was made under the decree of Cesar Augustus. Luke says it was the

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