Different minds may feel differently as to the  
answer to this question. And, seeing that  
much has been said and written on this  
note in no friendly spirit, I submit that  
it is not for any man to charge another,  
who is as firm a believer in the facts  
related in the sacred text as he himself  
can be, with weakening that belief, because  
he feels an honest conviction that it is here  
relating, not a miracle, but a natural appearance. It is, of course, the far *safer*  
way, as far as reputation is concerned, to  
introduce miraculous agency wherever possible: but the present Editor aims at truth,  
not popularity.

Now we learn from astronomical calculations, that a remarkable conjunction of  
the planets of our system took place a  
short time before the birth of our Lord.  
In the year of Rome 747, on the 29th of  
May, there was a conjunction of Jupiter  
and Saturn in the 20th degree of the  
constellation Pisces, close to the first point  
of Aries, which was the part of the  
heavens noted in astrological science as  
that in which the signs denoted the greatest and most noble events. On the 29th of September, in the same year, another  
conjunction of the same planets took place,  
in the 16th of Pisces: and on the  
5th of December, a third, in the 15th  
degree of the same sign. Supposing the  
magi to have seen the *first* of these  
conjunctions, they saw it actually **in the  
East**; for on the 29th of May *it would  
rise* 3½ hours before sunrise. If they then  
took their journey, and arrived at Jerusalem in a little more than *five* months (the  
journey from Babylon took Ezra *four*  
months, see Ezra vii. 9), if they performed  
the route from Jerusalem to Bethlehem in  
the evening, as is implied, the *December  
conjunction*, in 15° of Pisces, would be  
before them *in the direction of Bethlehem*,  
1½ hour east of the meridian at sunset.  
These circumstances would seem to form a  
remarkable coincidence with the history in  
our text. are in no way inconsistent  
with the word **star**, which cannot surely  
(see below) be pressed to its mere literal  
sense of one single star, but understood in  
its wider astrological meaning: nor is this  
explanation of *the star directing them to  
Bethlehem* at all repugnant to the plain  
words of vv. 9, 10, importing its motion  
from S.E. towards S.W., the direction of  
Bethlehem. We may further observe, that  
*no part of the text respecting the star,  
asserts, or even implies, a miracle*; and  
that the very slight apparent inconsistencies with the above explanation are no  
more than the *report of the magi* themselves, and the *general belief of the age*  
would render unavoidable. If this *subservience of the superstitions of astrology  
to the Divine purposes* be objected to, we  
may answer with Wetstein, “We must  
infer therefore that these men came to  
their conclusion from the rules of their  
art: which though beyond all doubt futile,  
vain, and delusive, might yet be sometimes  
permitted to hit on a right result. Hence  
appears the wonderful wisdom of God, who  
used the wickedness of men to bring Joseph  
into Egypt,—who sent the King of Babylon against the Jews by auguries and  
divinations (Ezek. xxi. 21, 22), and in this  
instance directed the magi to Christ by  
astrology.”

It may be remarked that Abarbanel the  
Jew, who knew nothing of *this* conjunction, relates it as a tradition, that no conjunction could be of mightier import than  
that of Jupiter and Saturn, which planets  
were in conjunction A.M. 2365, before  
the birth of Moses, in the sign of Pisces;  
and thence remarks that that sign was  
the most significant one for *the Jews*.  
From this consideration he concludes that  
the conjunction of these planets in that  
sign, in his own time (A.D. 1463), betokened the near approach of the birth of  
the Messiah. And as the Jews did not  
invent astrology, but learnt it from the  
Chaldæans, this idea, that a conjunction  
in Pisces betokened some great event in  
Judæa, must have prevailed among Chaldæan astrologers.

It is fair to notice the influence on the  
position maintained in this note of the  
fact which seems to have been substantiated, that the planets did not, during  
the year B.C. 7, approach each other so as  
to be mistaken by any eye for one star:  
indeed not “within double the apparent  
diameter of the moon.” I submit, that  
even if this were so, the inference in the  
note remains as it was. The *conjunction  
of the two planets*, complete or incomplete, would be that which would bear  
astrological significance, not their looking  
like one star. The two bright planets  
seen in the east,—the two bright planets  
standing over Bethlehem,—these would  
on each occasion have arrested the attention of the magi; and this appearance  
would have been denominated by them **his  
star**.

**in the east**] i.e. either in the  
*Eastern country from which they came,*or in the *Eastern quarter of the heavens.*