

there is little or no evidence of unction being in general use. Tertullian indeed records that the Emperor Severus had been cured by a Christian by "means of oil," and in gratitude had kept the healer in his palace until the day of his death (*Ad Scap.* 4); but on the other hand, Irenæus only mentions unction as a practice among heretics in his day (*Ad Haer.* i. 21, 5). It seems probable that, as regards the first ages of the Church, anointing with oil was confined to the Judaistic section over which St. James presided. In the words of the Lambeth Encyclical of last year, "There is no clear proof of the use of unction for the sick in the Church until the fourth century." In view of these facts, then, it seems that if the Church to-day seeks for a symbolic act to accompany "the prayer of faith" she would be more closely following the apostolic and primitive use in adopting not unction, but the laying on of hands. While, then, we must emphasise the truth that the healing power sought comes directly from our Heavenly Father, yet in not a few cases I believe the hand may be laid with deliberate intent on the sick, as a means of helping both him who prays and him for whom he prays to realise the definiteness of the spiritual act in which they are engaged when pleading with God for the gift of health.

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*"SHOULD THE MAGNIFICAT BE ASCRIBED TO  
ELISABETH?"*

It has always been known to textual critics that there is a remarkable variant in St. Luke i. 46, according to which the Magnificat is ascribed to Elisabeth instead of to the Virgin Mary. It is discussed in Westcott and Hort's *Notes on Select Readings*, and has been the subject of various articles in Germany and France, but it has not until

latterly attracted much attention in England. The point is not even mentioned in Plummer's *Commentary on St. Luke*, nor does there seem to be any reference to it in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*; certainly there is no article on the subject. It is, however, discussed shortly by Schmiedel in the *Encyclopædia Biblica* (*s.v.* Mary), and at more length by Bishop Wordsworth and Dr. Burkitt in Dr. Burn's *Niceta of Remesiana* (1905). But probably not a few have had their attention first drawn to the point by a passing remark in Harnack's *Lukas der Arzt* (p. 72, cf. p. 140), and the whole question is treated fully by Loisy in *Les Évangiles Synoptiques* (Intro., p. 265, and Com. i. pp. 302 ff.). The most comprehensive discussion in English would seem to be an exhaustive article by Dr. A. E. Burn in the second volume of the *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels* (*s.v.* Magnificat).

It may then be of use to put together the facts and the arguments on both sides. Did St. Luke attribute the Magnificat to Mary or Elisabeth? The question is of importance from its bearing on the validity of the generally received critical text of the New Testament, and it also has a sentimental side which will not be ignored by those who are in the habit of using the hymn in public worship.

I. *The Evidence for the Reading.* In the introduction to the Magnificat in St. Luke i. 46 all our MSS., Greek and Latin, read *καὶ εἶπεν Μαριάμ* ("and Mary said"), except three Old Latin MSS. (*a*, *b*, and *l*<sup>1</sup>), which have *Elisabeth*. These three form, according to Burkitt, "a typical European group"; i.e., they tend to be found in agreement, and their combined evidence should be regarded as single rather than three-fold. All other Versions have the ordinary reading, as have the Fathers, except Irenaeus, Origen, and Niceta. Some doubt, however, attaches to the evidence of the first

<sup>1</sup> Sometimes quoted as *rhe*.

two. In the passage in question from Irenaeus (*Haer.* iv. 7, 1) *Elisabeth* is read by two MSS., while a third has *Maria*, and in iii. 10, 2 Irenaeus unquestionably attributes the Magnificat to Mary; hence Burn and Loisy agree that in the former passage the reading *Elisabeth* is probably due to his translator or to a copyist. The reference in Origen is by way of a note on the reading,<sup>1</sup> and critics are divided as to whether it is to be attributed to him or to his translator Jerome; but in either case it is important additional evidence of the existence of the reading *Elisabeth* in St. Luke. With regard to Niceta there is no doubt. Twice over he speaks of Elisabeth as the author of the Magnificat, and in one case adds the epithet “*diu sterilis*.” He lived at the close of the fourth century, and in his quotations represents generally the Latin Bible just before Jerome’s revision, using a type of text “not very much unlike *b*” (one of the MSS. which has the variant), and therefore “does not add very much to the weight of evidence for the ascription to Elisabeth, except in so far as he shows that the tradition was more widespread and persistent at the end of the fourth century than we might otherwise have supposed.”<sup>2</sup> It is noticeable too that as a liturgiologist (he is supposed to have been the author of the *Te Deum*) he saw nothing incongruous in attributing the hymn to Elisabeth.

It is obvious then that the textual evidence for the new reading is very slight, but it would be wrong to brush it aside at once. There are two considerations to be borne in mind: (a) The type of text associated with the names of Westcott and Hort no longer has the field to itself. Textual critics are giving increasing weight to much of what is known as

<sup>1</sup> *In Luc. hom. vii.*: “*Invenitur beata Maria, sicut in aliquantis exemplaribus reperimus, prophetare. Non enim ignoramus quod secundum alios codices et haec verba Elisabeth vaticinetur. Spiritu itaque sancto tunc repleta est Maria.*”

<sup>2</sup> Burkitt in Burn, *Niceta*, p. cliii.

the " Western " text ; in particular it is held that the Old Latin and Syriac often preserve readings current in the second century, the fact being that the text of the Gospels may well have been for some time in a fluid state. The question is still *sub judice*, and must be left to the experts. Probably most of us feel a prejudice in favour of the Westcott and Hort type, as at least giving us a fixed basis on which to work. And we are at any rate justified in our present state of knowledge in hesitating before we accept a reading which has *no* Greek evidence in its favour. There is, indeed, no case where critics have done so with any unanimity. It is at the same time of great importance to realise that the text of the New Testament cannot by any means be regarded as finally fixed, and that we may be called upon to revise our views on the subject.<sup>1</sup>

(b) In the case before us the nature of the variant forbids our rejecting it at once. It seems to be too widely spread to be ascribed to a slip of the pen,<sup>2</sup> and it is obviously improbable that *Elisabeth* should ever have been substituted for *Mary*, whilst the reverse is possible enough.<sup>3</sup> On the

<sup>1</sup> St. Matthew i. 16 may serve as an example of the type of case in which there is an increasing agreement among critics that no Greek MS. preserves the original reading ; but there the evidence of corruption is far greater than in the case we are considering.

<sup>2</sup> Nestle, however (*Intro. N. T. Crit.*, p. 238) apparently considers the variant to be due to mere carelessness.

<sup>3</sup> We may note that *b* plays a somewhat prominent part in the important readings connected with the Virgin Birth. But, unfortunately, the tendency of its variants is so divided that it is hard to discover any bias on the part of the scribe. On the one hand, we have this variant " Elisabeth," which *might* be due to a desire to depreciate the position of *Mary*. Similarly in St. Mark vi. 3 *b* reads " son of the Carpenter " instead of " Carpenter " (cf. St. Matt. xiii. 53 and St. Luke iv. 22) ; in St. Luke ii. 5 it has " wife " instead of " fiancée," and in St. Matthew i. 16 an apparently intermediate reading with *genuit*, whilst in verses 19, 20 and 24 it does not share the variations of *Syr<sup>Cur</sup>* which emphasise the Virgin Birth. Most striking of all, in St. Luke i. 34 it stands alone in substituting for " How shall this be ? etc.," the words of verse 38, " Behold the handmaid, etc." From these instances one might be tempted to suppose in this MS. some hesitation with regard to the Virgin Birth. But in other cases we have variations

other hand, the evidence for *Mary* is far too strong (including, e.g., Tertullian) and that for *Elisabeth* too weak to allow us to suppose the latter to have been the original reading. The conclusion of the majority of recent critics is that the real reading is *καὶ εἶπεν* ("and she said"), from which the variants were derived by way of gloss. Whilst by no means accepting this view as final, for the reasons stated under (a), we may adopt it as a provisional hypothesis. A further question at once arises. If there was originally no name, which gloss is right? Burn and Wordsworth say "Mary," Burkitt, Harnack, Loisy, Schmiedel, etc., "Elisabeth." The question can only be answered on internal and grammatical considerations.

II. *Grammatical Considerations.* (a) It is said that *καὶ εἶπεν* standing alone must refer to Elisabeth as the last speaker. This is more than doubtful. Mary is the prominent figure, and usage is not decisive as to whether the phrase may or may not be used when the speaker changes. Wordsworth<sup>1</sup> finds it in accordance with Hebraic and Septuagint idiom to omit the name of the fresh speaker in such a case. Probably most readers reading the paragraph as a whole will feel that it is impossible to pronounce decisively for either speaker on these grounds.

(b) If the introduction is inconclusive, can we gain a clearer light from the subscription? The Magnificat is followed by the words, "And Mary abode with her about three months and returned to her house." *Primâ facie* these words undoubtedly suggest that Elizabeth and not

with an exactly opposite tendency. In St. Luke ii. 33, 41 it substitutes "Joseph" for "father" or "parent," and in particular in St. John i. 13 it is the only MS. which has preserved the reading "qui . . . natus est," a reading which, *pace* Loisy (*Quint. Ev.*, p. 180), seems to imply the miraculous conception. The phenomena, then, are too contradictory to allow of our ascribing any uniform bias to the MS. in question.

<sup>1</sup> In Burn's *Niceta*, p. clvi.

Mary has been the speaker in the preceding verses, and yet this conclusion is by no means certain, the repetition of Mary's name after so many verses being entirely natural and serving to mark the whole section as a "Mary section." We can, however, go further than this. It has not been sufficiently emphasised that the verse looks forward at least as much as back; it connects with v. 57, "Now Elisabeth's full time came that she should be delivered," and this has decided the form of the preceding sentence. It would have been awkward to say, "ἔμεινεν δὲ σὺν Ἐλισάβετ . . ." ("she remained with E.") τῇ δὲ Ἐλισάβετ ἐπλήσθη ("and E.'s full time came"), while ἐπλήσθη δὲ αὐτῇ would have been ambiguous. Taking the verses together, the "Mary" at the beginning of the first marks the close of the "Mary section," and is answered by the "Elisabeth" at the beginning of the second, marking the commencement of an "Elisabeth section." The verses have, in fact, received the best literary form possible and contain nothing incompatible with the ascription of the Magnificat to the Virgin. At the same time the fact that the grammar is superficially in favour of "Elisabeth" may have been the cause, as Westcott and Hort suggest, of the substitution of her name for Mary's in v. 46.

III. *Internal Evidence.* (a) It is quite obvious that a main source of the Magnificat was Hannah's song in 1 Samuel ii., and it is equally obvious that whatever the real origin of that song (it is not as a whole appropriate to Hannah's situation, and has been supposed to be the song of a warrior), St. Luke, Mary, or Elisabeth, would all believe it to be her's without question. The resemblance between the two has furnished a strong argument in favour of the ascription of the Christian hymn to Elisabeth. Hannah's song of praise is inspired by the fact that Jehovah has removed from her the reproach of childlessness; the parallel is with

the situation of Elisabeth, not with that of Mary. True, but no critic seems to have pointed out that *the only words in Hannah's song which are really appropriate to Elisabeth are entirely unrepresented in the Magnificat*. These are v. 5b, "Yea, the barren hath borne seven, and she that hath many children languisheth." Surely these words, even if not literally applicable, must have found an echo in the Magnificat, if it had been by Elisabeth, the more so as the first half of this very verse is fully represented ("They that were full have hired out themselves for bread; and they that were hungry have ceased"). The omission is almost inexplicable if the Magnificat is attributed to Elisabeth, whilst it is perfectly natural under the ordinary view; the words were quite inappropriate in Mary's mouth.

(b) With regard to the language of the Magnificat itself, the most distinctive verse is v. 48. The opening words ("For He hath regarded the lowliness of His handmaiden"), though true of Elisabeth, *ταπεινώσις* being used of the reproach of childlessness (cf. 1 Sam. i. 11), recall Mary's "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word" (v. 38). It may be true that the second half of the verse ("For behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed"), if divested of the fullness of meaning which Christians have found in it, is, as Loisy maintains, possible in the mouth of Elisabeth<sup>1</sup> (cf. Leah in Gen. xxx. 13). But there is no question that it is far more appropriate to the mother of the Messiah, and is the natural answer to Elisabeth's "Blessed art thou among women" (v. 42) and "Blessed is she that believed" (v. 45).

(c) Passing to the general situation, we are told that the Magnificat regarded as the utterance of Elisabeth is in exact correspondence with the Benedictus as spoken by her husband Zacharias, when he too is filled with the Holy Ghost

<sup>1</sup> *Les Évangiles Synoptiques*, i. p. 305.

(v. 67, cf. v. 41). But in the latter hymn the central thought is the coming of the Messiah of whom the child is the forerunner. If, however, the Magnificat belongs to Elisabeth, it is her own personal happiness and exultation which becomes a main theme and the occasion of the song. The emphasis laid on her own joy in verses 46-49 is quite out of keeping with the subordinate position which she assumes in verses 41-45. There can indeed be no doubt that Mary is intended to be the real centre of the picture; if she is deprived of the Magnificat, she is left on this occasion absolutely silent. Burkitt suggests that the "*Λόγος ἀπὸ συγῆς προελθών* more corresponds to the fitness of things than a burst of premature song."<sup>1</sup> It is not, however, very obvious why the song should be more "premature" as spoken by Mary than by Elisabeth, and the mystic fitness seen in her supposed silence is perhaps a little subtle. It is natural that she should reply to Elisabeth's salutation, and it seems something of a "modernism" to suppose that a first century writer would have seen a profounder significance in her not doing so.

Our conclusion, then, is that we need have little hesitation in believing the ordinary view to be correct. It is by no means certain that the accepted reading is wrong; and even if we assume an original *καὶ εἶπεν*, it will still remain probable that St. Luke intended Mary to be understood as the speaker of the Magnificat.

This last phrase has been deliberate. Nothing that has been said touches the question of the real authorship and ultimate origin of the hymn. We have been dealing with a question of "Lower Criticism." What did the author of the Third Gospel actually write, and what did he mean to be understood by his words? The further and more important question belongs to the "Higher Criticism." Who

<sup>1</sup> *O.C.*, p. cliv.

really wrote the Magnificat ? Is it a free composition of St. Luke himself ? Or is it a Jewish hymn which he found in some source and adapted for his purpose ? Or does it really rest upon words spoken by Mary on this or a later occasion ? The question is part of the wider problem of the nature and origin of the first two chapters of St. Luke, and lies beyond the purpose of the present article. But one remark may be allowed. As has been often pointed out, the character of the Canticles is strongly in favour of their substantial authenticity. On the one hand the vagueness of the language and the lack of definite prediction suggest that they were not deliberately composed at a later date to fit the supposed circumstances ; it would have required but little ingenuity to write something which superficially at least would have been far more appropriate. On the other hand, they do reflect in a marvellous way the general hopes and the temper of the circle from which they claim to have sprung. Dr. Sanday<sup>1</sup> has called attention to “ the extraordinary extent to which these chapters hit the attitude of expectancy which existed before the public appearance of Christ. It is not only expectation, and tense expectation, but expectation that is essentially Jewish in its character.” It is hard to believe that either St. Luke, or any other Christian poet, could have had the dramatic genius, for it required no less, to think himself back so completely into the temper and circumstances of a very peculiar and very brief period of transition, unless he had considerable and authentic materials to guide him. The argument may not be decisive, but it must at least be taken into account in any solution of the problem of these two chapters which is to claim to be final.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Life of Christ in Recent Research*, p. 165.