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A table of contents for *The Expository Times* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expository-times_01.php

pdfs are named: [Volume]_[Issue]_[1st page of article].pdf

Mary or Elisabeth?

By J. RENDEL HARRIS, LITT.D., LL.D., D.D., BIRMINGHAM.

Who was it sang the Magnificat? The tradition of the Church, as gathered from the Gospel, is that it is the song of the Blessed Virgin; and it is only in quite recent times that a claim has been made for the authorship of Elisabeth. The grounds for such a change in the name attached to the canticle are (1) Biblical, (2) Patristic. The evidence of the MSS and versions is not unanimous for the reading in Lk 1⁴⁶, 'and Mary said, My soul, etc.' There is good Old Latin evidence from three of the best MSS (codd. *a*, *b*, *l*) that *Elisabet* was read in place of Mary, and it is interesting to note that we can catch the corrector of one of the MSS in question revising his text so as to get rid of a name that was thought objectionable. In the next place we have the evidence of the Latin text of Irenæus to the same effect, nor is there any reason to suppose that the lost Greek text of Irenæus had any other reading than *Elisabet*.¹

The question, then, may be asked whether there are any reasons for affirming one reading against the other. Ought we to say that the judgment of the Church is decisive in the matter, and has given the authorship to Mary, or shall we say that a preference should be accorded to the other reading on the ground of its early circulation and proved deletion in later times? A familiar dilemma. For we cannot presume that the Church is always wrong when it has an overwhelming majority of suffrages on its side, nor, on the other hand, that the struggling minority of insufficient attestations is safely to be disregarded.

It has occurred to me that a ray of light might be let into the Council Chamber from an unexpected quarter.

All students are aware that the songs at the beginning of the Gospel of Luke, as well as their prose setting, are suspected to have a Semitic origin, whether Hebrew or Aramaic, an observation which is capable of reinforcement from various turns of speech, and valuable to the higher critic because it distinguishes the Birth-sections in Luke from the rest of the Gospel. That the supposition is not inept may, perhaps, be allowed from a use to which I put it in the explanation of the obscure

¹ The Oxford editors should have restored it throughout.

sentence in the Song of Simeon, where I proposed to alter ²

A Light for Apocalypse of Gentiles,
And Glory for thy people Israel:

to

A Light for Galilee of the Gentiles,
And Glory for thy people Israel.

Syriac scholars will see the reason for the correction, Galilaia for Galiana, and Old Testament scholars will recall the passage in Isaiah (9¹) that is involved in the change, which itself is familiar to us by its quotation in Mt 4^{15, 16}.

When we turn to the other Canticles, the *Benedictus* and the *Magnificat*, and print them side by side, we can easily see that they are inspired by common thoughts and marked by parallel expressions. If they do not come from the very same mint, it will be a surprise to any one who is familiar with the literary criticism of the Bible. The reader can work it out for himself. I do not need to spend time over a matter so obvious. They are literary compositions, not historical records.

On the assumption, then, of a Semitic origin for the Lucan Canticles, we turn to the Song of Zacharias to see whether there is any personal reference in the text. It is an important question, because it has been suggested in some quarters that the Canticles are merely national hymns, and have no historical connexion with the Gospel. One direction in which we look for an historical link would be the name of Zacharias himself. When he was born, his father gave him a name which means that 'Jahweh has remembered (us),' namely, in the birth of a child; and this meaning would have been carried over to the offspring of Zacharias, if there had not been a miraculous contradiction of the application of the father's name to the son. In any case, the name which the father bore never lost its meaning; he carried the remembrance of God's mercy about with him. When we turn to the *Benedictus*, we find this very thought to be emphasized; God has undertaken

'to perform the mercy promised to our fathers,
and to remember his holy covenant; the oath

² See THE EXPOSITORY TIMES for 1917-18, vol. xxix. p. 58.

which he sware to our father Abraham, etc. etc.'

If we turn this back into Semitic speech, we shall see Zacharias looking at us from the script. We may, if we please, write *Zakar-iah* on the margin in Hebrew letters. That is as it should be, if the canticle is to be something more than a nationalist hymn.

In the next place, when we turn to the *Magnificat*, where we are faced with a similar problem and with the interpretation of language which is certainly parallel to that of the *Benedictus*, we find the singer recounting what God has done for her, and how

He hath holpen
his servant Israel, *In remembrance of his mercy* ;
As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, etc. etc.

The parallelism of this passage with the one previously quoted may lawfully be invoked to

prove that the mercy, promised and performed by God, is the same grace in both cases. That is to say, it is the birth of John and not the birth of Jesus which is the theme of the singer ; and since Mary can hardly be expected to sing *Magnificat* over John, we infer that she is not the singer, but it is perfectly in order that it should be Elisabeth. From which we infer finally that it is the name of Elisabeth which stood originally at the head of the canticle, and should be restored to it. If that leaves Mary songless, we have a reason before us for the subsequent modification of the text. The same conclusion is implied in the statement that 'the Lord had *magnified His mercy* with Elisabeth, which corresponds to the versicle in the Canticle that He that is mighty hath *done great things* for us . . . and *His mercy* is for ever and ever.' If the foregoing criticisms are just, it will supply us with one more vindication of the Western text.

In the Study.

Virginibus Puerisque.

‘信—Faithful.’

BY THE REVEREND ALEXANDER BAXTER, HAWICK.

'Know therefore that the Lord thy God, he is God ; the FAITHFUL God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations.'—Dt 7⁹.

THOSE of you who have read Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* will remember that one of the men in that story is called 'Faithful.' We don't need to ask what kind of man he was because his name tells us. He was 'faithful.' Now if you could read Chinese you could learn what the man who first wrote that queer-looking character I have shown you meant by 'faithful,' because in the character he has really given us a picture of his meaning. Look here : the character is made up of two parts : 1 which is 'a man' (a short form of the original 人). The other part 言 means 'words' (the mouth 口, and I suppose what comes from the mouth 舌). So, you see, we have a picture of A MAN STANDING BY HIS WORDS—the Chinese 'Faithful.'

Now let me tell you a story from China. You all know that China has been greatly troubled by brigands or robbers in recent years, and that one

of their favourite methods of robbing is to steal, or kidnap, people and force from friends of the people captured large sums of money for ransom. A Chinese friend of mine was once captured in this way and carried off to the hills. He was a teacher in a Christian College, and the robbers thought the college would pay a large sum of money for his ransom. It, however, could not do this, and would not. Time passed, but one day some friends of the college discovered a man who was really the leader of the robber band. They told him the college would never pay any ransom money, and asked if he would visit it, see the work that was going on, and talk things over with the missionary in charge. 'We will do you no harm,' they said, 'you need have no fear, for Christians keep their promises.' The robber believed this, and promised to visit the college. The evening before he was due to arrive, a number of Chinese students and young teachers turned up at the house of the missionary. They were quite excited, and said they had come with a plan for getting back the teacher from the robbers. Their plan was next day to capture the robber leader and lock him up till he made arrangements to set free the teacher. When the missionary first reminded them of the promise made not to harm