

The Gospel narratives of the Nativity and the alleged influence of heathen ideas.¹

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Have the Gospel narratives of the nativity, in their canonical form, been influenced by Pagan conceptions? No apology is needed for asking once more and endeavouring to answer this question in view of the critical controversy that has recently invaded not only our scholastic, but also popular theological literature. The questions in debate have, of course, long ceased to be of merely academic interest, and involve issues of grave practical importance to Christians generally. With the theological question involved, however, it is not the purpose of the present paper to deal directly. The writer's aim is to discuss, in as objective a manner as he can, the alleged influence of pagan ideas on the nativity-narratives of the First and Third Gospels.

According to the latest exponents of one branch of the critical school there is not the faintest shadow of doubt as to what the true answer to our question is. What the Christian Church has always regarded as the central fact of the narratives in question—the Virgin-Birth—is without hesitation assigned in these quarters to a purely pagan origin. Thus, according to Usener, "for the whole birth- and childhood-story of Mt (Matthew) in its every detail it is possible to trace a pagan sub-stratum. It must have arisen in Gentile-Christian circles, probably in those of the province of Asia, and then was to some extent legitimated by its narrator in accordance with the tendency manifested throughout the whole of the First Gospel by citation of prophetic 'words' in its support."² With this conclusion, also, Schmiedel agrees. According to him, "the origin of the idea of a virgin-birth is to be sought in Gentile-Christian circles."³

¹ A paper read before the *Society of Historical Theology*, Oxford, Nov. 26th 1903.

² *Art. Nativity Enc. Bib.* col. 3352.

³ *Art. Mary, op. cit.* col. 2964.

Soltau's estimate, though more guarded, is also in substantial agreement with the foregoing: "May we not suppose", he says, "that the *Virgin-Birth* of Jesus had a similar [heathen] origin [to that of the episodes of the Angels' Song of Praise, Lc II, 8 f, and of the magi]?"¹

In view of the pronouncedly Jewish-Christian character of the Nativity-narratives of the Gospels such conclusions at first sight certainly seem to savour of paradox. How can such an essentially *pagan* idea have found entrance into *Jewish-Christian* circles? In order to elucidate this question it will be necessary to discuss the character of the narratives afresh. If their Palestinian or semi-Palestinian origin can be sustained the hypothesis of direct pagan influence must be ruled out, as Soltau² indeed admits. For the purposes of this discussion it will be convenient to deal with the narrative of the First Gospel first, since it is here, according to Usener, that pagan influence is pronounced throughout. Moreover it will readily be conceded that Mt's³ account, whatever be its origin, is almost (if not wholly) independent of that of Lc.⁴

A. The narrative of Matthew (Mt).

I.

The Jewish character of Matthew I and II.

The first impression produced by the perusal of Mt's narrative is, undoubtedly, that we have here a genuine product of the Jewish spirit. In spirit as well as in letter and substance it reflects the characteristic features of Jewish habits of thought and expression. How strong this impression is—and how well founded—may be gathered from the remarks of so unprejudiced an observer as Prof. S. Schechter. "The impression", he says, "conveyed to the Rabbinic Student by the perusal of the New Testament is in many parts like that gained by reading an

¹ *The Birth of Jesus Christ* (Engl. Transl., A. & C. Black, 1903) p. 41.

² *op. cit.* p. 34 note.

³ In the following pages Mt is employed to designate the compiler who embodied the first two chapters in the canonical form of the First Gospel. Similarly Lc = the compiler of the Third Gospel in its present form.

⁴ This is well brought out by the writer of the articles on *The Virgin Birth* (Mr. T. ALLEN HOBEN) which appeared in the *American Journal of Theology*, Vol. VI (July and October 1902); cf. esp. pp. 473 ff. The same writer also shows very clearly that the nativity-narratives of Mt and Lc cannot be deductions from the Gospel of James (*Prot-evangelium Jacobi*). "The Gospel of James", he concludes, "seems rather to be the fanciful working out of the canonical stories" (*ib.* p. 478).

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old Rabbinic homily. On the very threshold of the New Testament he is confronted by a genealogical table,¹ a feature not uncommon in the later Rabbinical versions of the Old Testament, which are rather fond of providing Biblical heroes with long pedigrees. They are not always accurate, but have as a rule some edifying purpose in view In the second chapter of Matthew the Rabbinic student meets with many features known to him from the Rabbinic narratives about the birth of Abraham; the story of the magi in particular impresses him as a homiletical illustration of Numb. XXIV, 17: 'There shall come a Star out of Jacob', which Star the interpretation of the Synagoge referred to the Star of the Messiah."²

It is not necessary at this point to insist further on the admittedly Jewish character of the genealogy in the First Gospel. But it is worth recalling here that the representation of the relations between Joseph and Mary in Matt I is in strict accordance with Jewish law, according to which a betrothed woman "occupied the same status as a wife", and the child bestowed upon her, if recognised by the father "must" (to use Dalman's words) have been regarded as bestowed by God upon the house of Joseph."³

Another point that is important in this connexion is the explanation of the name Jesus in Vs. 21 ('He shall be called *Jesus* because he shall *save*' &c.). This involves a play upon words which points to a Hebrew original (יֵשׁוּעַ, יְשׁוּעָה), at any rate for this particular verse. Without affirming a Hebrew original for the nativity-narrative of Mt as it stands (which is a highly precarious hypothesis) this indication at least serves to suggest that the compiler was writing for readers who were not wholly unacquainted with Hebrew, and who, at any rate, could appreciate the significance of the connexion between *yēshū'a* (*Jesus*) and *yōshū'a* (*shall save*); that is, I take it, he was writing for Hellenistic Jews who were not out of touch with Palestine, and to whom the Hebrew Bible would be not altogether unfamiliar.⁴

But what seems to me to be an even more decisive indication of

¹ Cf. *Moreh Neboche* HAZZEMAN p. 45, הערות.

² *Some Rabbinic Parallels to the New Testament* (Jewish Quarterly Review, XII, pp. 418 ff.).

³ *The Words of Jesus* (Eng. transl.) p. 320.

⁴ It is noticeable that the play upon words referred to above can only be elucidated by a Hebrew—not an Aramaic—original. The present writer believes that Mt I, 20a and 21 was originally current in a (poetical) Hebrew form among the primitive Jewish Christian Community of Palestine (see below). The idea of a messianic redemption from sin is characteristically Jewish-Christian (cf. Lc I, 77, with Plummer's note, *Internat. Crit. Comm.*).

the influence of Palestine in this narrative is the elaborate explanation and justification of the name 'Nazarene' (ch. II, 22, 23), as applied to Our Lord. "In this way the compiler turns the edge of the reproach levelled at the Christian Messiah in the characteristically Palestinian-Jewish designation of Jesus as 'The Nazarene' (ישוע הנצרי)."

I conclude, then, that the whole narrative embodied in the first two chapters of the First Gospel is thoroughly Jewish in form and general conception, and that while Hellenistic colouring is unmistakably present in the story, it shows decisive indications of the influence of Palestine, and is, in fact, addressed to a circle of Hellenistic Jews who were under Palestinian influence.² A word must now be said about the integrity of the narrative, and its historical character and significance.

II.

The nativity-narrative an integral part of the First Gospel.

Does the nativity-narrative (Mt I—II) form an integral part of the First Gospel as it left the compiler's hands? or must it be regarded as a later addition? According to some scholars the answer to this question must be a decided negative. Thus Ad. Merx,³ after discussing the genealogy and arguing for the originality of the reading of the Sinaitic Syriac Palimpsest in I, 16 (*Joseph begat Jesus, who is called the Christ*) concludes that the following narrative I, 18—II, 23 formed no part of the original Matthew, which began the history at III, 1 at the point where the narrative of the Second Gospel commences; the only difference between the two Evangels being that the original form of the First Gospel had prefixed to it the Birth-Register embodied in Mt I, 1—17. To the present writer this conclusion seems to be wholly irreconcilable with the *data* afforded by the genealogy itself.

¹ See on this point further below p. 90.

² Mr. Arthur Wright (*Synopsis of the Gospels* p. XXXII) also concludes that the First Gospel "assumed its present form in a community of Greek-speaking Jews", and suggests that its home was Alexandria. But if this were so we should expect the summary of the Decalogue cited in Mt XIX, 18 to exhibit the order (a) adultery, (b) murder, (c) theft, which though not peculiar to Egypt (cf. e. g. James II, 11) was, at least, the characteristic Egyptian sequence (Philo, Clement of Alexandria, The recently discovered Nash Papyrus of the Decalogue in Hebrew &c.). The conditions seem to be satisfied best by supposing some part of Syria (? the neighbourhood of Antioch) to be its place of origin (cf. IV, 24 where Palestine is actually called 'Syria'. Different designations are employed in the other Gospels).

³ *Das Evangelium Matthaeus nach der syr. . . . Palimpsestübers.* &c. (Berlin, 1902) Cf. esp. p. 15.

The remarkable additions in vv. 3, 5, and 6b of the names of certain women are clearly out of place in a formal genealogy of *Joseph*, unless they are dictated by some apologetic purpose. They are doubtless intended, as Mr. Willoughby C. Allen has pointed out,¹ "to prepare the mind of his [the evangelist's] readers for the following narrative as in some sort foreshadowing the overruling of circumstances by the Divine Providence in the case of the Virgin Mary."

From the genealogy itself it may, therefore, be inferred (whatever be the true text of I, 16) that the subsequent narrative is its proper sequel; and from the special didactic character of the genealogy (which fundamentally dominates its structure and so entirely accords with the distinctive peculiarities of the Gospel as a whole) it may safely be inferred that both the birth-register and its sequel are the work of the compiler of the First Gospel.²

III.

The character and historical significance of Mt's nativity-narrative.

What, then, is the character and historical significance of Mt's narration (Mt I and II)? To the present writer it seems to exhibit in a degree that can hardly be paralleled elsewhere in the New Testament the characteristic features of Jewish Midrash or Haggādā.³

It sets forth certain facts and beliefs in a fanciful and imaginative setting specially calculated to appeal to Jews. The justification for this procedure lies in the peculiar character and idiosyncrasy of the readers to whom it is addressed. The same tendency can be seen at work all through the First Gospel, and even elsewhere in the New Testament—e. g. in St. Paul⁴ though in a far less pronounced form. The task that confronts the critical student is to disentangle the facts and beliefs—the fundamental ground-factors on which the narration is built—from their decorative embroidery.

What then are these fundamental *data*?

¹ *Expository Times* XI, 136.

² These points have been well brought out at length by W. C. Allen in his article on *The Genealogy in S. Matthew* (*Expository Times* XI, p. 135 f.) already referred to.

³ On the subject of midrashic elements in Biblical Literature see the remarks of Prof. S. R. Driver in his commentary on *Daniel* (*Cambridge Bible*) p. LXXI f. (esp. p. LXXII) and cf. K. Budde, *The Religion of Israel to the Exile* (New York 1899) p. 2 f.

⁴ For instances see e. g. F. W. Farrar, *The Life and Work of St. Paul*, Excursus IV (*St. Paul a Hagadist*).

(a) *The Genealogy* (I, 1-17).

The artificial and midrashic character of the genealogy is obvious and admitted. It is dominated by a didactic purpose. This is clearly shown in its structure (3×14 generations), in the insertion of τὸν βασιλέα in vs. 6 (τὸν Δαυεὶδ τὸν βασιλέα), which, to borrow Mr. Allen's words "seems clearly to show that the compiler wished to emphasise the acquisition of royal power in David, its loss at the captivity, its recovery in the Messiah. It is hardly necessary to prove (he goes on to say) that elsewhere in the Gospel the Kingship of Christ is brought into relief"¹: and also in the additions of the names of certain women, already referred to.

The explanation of the three fourteens put forward long ago by Gfrörer² seems to the present writer to be quite possible. He suggests that it is based upon the numerical value of the Hebrew letters which make up the name David (ד = 4, ו = 6, ד = 4), the threefold repetition being due to the fact that the name is made up of three letters.

By this means the genealogy was invested with the character of a sort of numeral acrostic on the name David (דוד). However artificial such a procedure may seem to us it is thoroughly Jewish, and could easily be illustrated in other ways. Thus a Rabbinical dictum runs: *The Book of Chronicles* (which it should be remembered was the source and fount for genealogical lists *par excellence*) *was only given for the sake of being interpreted*, or, as we might render the term (לדרש) *for Midrashic purposes*, i. e. for the moral and edifying lessons that may be deduced therefrom.³ It is worth noting also that its ascending structure (*Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob &c.*) is exactly similar to that of the little genealogy of David that closes the Book of Ruth, which may also have been appended for apologetic purposes.

The fundamental fact which underlies the genealogy of the First Gospel, and to which it bears witness, is the Davidic descent of the family of Joseph to which Jesus belonged. Its artificial form merely serves to disguise a genuine family tradition, which may have been embodied in a real birth-register. May it not be a sort of midrashic commentary, in genealogical terms, on the real genealogy which is more correctly preserved in the Third Gospel?

¹ *op. cit. ibid.*

² *Die heilige Sage* II, p. 9 note. So by gematria the 'number of the Beast' 666 (Rev. XIII, 18) = ג'ו'ן קס"ו i. e. *Nero Caesar*. See the commentaries *ad loc.*

³ לא נתנו דברי הימים אלא לדרש *Lev. Rabb.* I, 1.

To the present writer it also seems probable that in making the remarkable additions of the names of the women in vv. 3, 5 and 6b the compiler intended to anticipate (or meet) Jewish calumnies regarding Jesus' birth, which were afterwards amplified in so nauseous a fashion in later Jewish Literature, and which find their explanation in a distortion of the Christian version of the Virgin-Birth. The compiler implicitly and by anticipation rebuts this reproach by throwing it back upon the Royal House of Judah.¹

(b) *The Birth-Narrative (I, 18—25).*

In the narrative that follows (I, 18—25) we are confronted by similar phenomena—the underlying fact accompanied by explanation. The fact assumed and explicitly stated is the Virgin-Birth, which is supported (in the compiler's characteristic manner) by a citation from Scripture, viz. the LXX version of Isaiah VII, 14.

Now it is generally agreed that the narrative cannot have been suggested by the citation. It is certainly remarkable that Is VII, 14 is the only passage in the LXX (with one exception, viz. Gen XXIV, 43) where the Hebrew word נַעֲמָנָה, which means a young woman of marriageable age, is rendered παρθένος. In the overwhelming majority of instances παρθένος corresponds to its proper Hebrew equivalent נַתְנִיזָה. Moreover, of any Messianic application among the Jews of these words concerning the Virgin's Son there is not elsewhere, we are assured on the high authority of Prof. Dalman, even a "trace".² Consequently we are justified in the conclusion that the narrative was not suggested by the citation, but the citation by the assumed fact of the narrative. Another point brought out and emphasized in the quotation is the significance of the term Immanuel. Jesus is represented as realising in Himself the prophetic word about Immanuel, not because He bore Immanuel's name, but be-

¹ Mr. A. Wright (*Synopsis* 2 XLII) accounts for the relatively late attestation of the doctrines of the Virgin-Birth by supposing it "to have been kept back until conflict with heresy brought it forward".

² *The Words of Jesus* (Eng. Transl.) p. 270. In fact it may be suspected that the present form of the LXX text of the passage is due to Christian influence, which may have made itself felt before Mt composed his narrative. Certainly παρθένος in such a connexion can scarcely be accidental (contrast Gen XXIV, 43 in this respect). Badham's attempt (Academy, June 8th 1895) to show that the belief that the Messiah was to be born of a virgin was current among Palestinian and Alexandrian Jews rests upon highly precarious and uncertain evidence (mostly quotations from Martini and others from midrashic texts which cannot be verified. In some cases they look like Christian interpolations).

cause in His Person the full significance of the name 'God with us had become a fact. The name, according to M. Halévy, is interpreted not metaphorically, but literally as meaning that God had appeared among men in the Person of Jesus; in other words that Jesus is God incarnate. This representation is also re-inforced by the explanation of the personal name Jesus as meaning one who saves His people from their sins, a function reserved in the Old Testament for God alone, which could be exercised by no merely human being.

The narrative of Mt, therefore, though it moves, to use M. Halévy's words, "dans une atmosphère phariséenne"¹ must on this view be regarded as dominated by an advanced Christology.

I believe I am right, however, in saying that this view is not widely shared by Christian critical scholars. Thus the writer of the article on 'the Virgin Birth' in the *American Journal of Theology* already referred to (for July 1902) explains the meaning of the birth-story in Matthew as follows: "Matthew's thought seems to be", he says, "that the wonder-working Spirit of God, exclusive of human agency, caused Mary to conceive; that, by reason of this fact, she was innocent of any wrong such as that the suspicion of which had troubled Joseph; and that at the same time such a birth, being in accord with the Immanuel prophecy, marked the child to be born as the Messiah, the Saviour of his people, as the one spoken of in Isaiah, chaps. 7 and 8, to be the deliverer of his nation in the impending war. Thus the application of the prophetic and symbolic expression "Immanuel" was not for the purpose of designating the nature of child, but rather his work, which was to be national and messianic. The result of the nation's sins was always the withdrawal of God; but the Messiah would lead them in righteousness and save them from that abandoning by God which was at the same time the result of their sins and the cause of their impotence and subjection. The term "Immanuel", then, is the prophetic and symbolic designation for Saviour."²

According to this view the compiler's main concern is to explain something which was obviously regarded as a fact within the Christian circles to which he belonged, but which was a source of reproach to the Jewish circles outside for whom he mainly wrote. Such a birth as that described, he contends, actually fulfils the prophetic word about Messiah's birth. Beyond this he does not go. In other words his

¹ *Études évangéliques* (premier fascicule) p. 163.

² *op. cit.* p. 479.

governing purpose is not theological or speculative but apologetic and practical.

(c) *The Episodes in ch. II.*

The form of the narrative embodied in chapter II exhibits much the same characteristics as the preceding. Its midrashic character is evident throughout, and it is governed by an apologetic purpose. But the underlying facts and beliefs do not lie so obviously on the surface. Throughout, the evangelistic writer, according to Zahn¹, is drawing an elaborate parallel between Israel's national history and the personal history of the Christian Messiah. Just as the genealogy is designed to show that the birth of the Messianic King forms the climax of Israel's history, so here, especially in the Episode of the flight into and return from Egypt, the writer intends Israel to draw a parallel between the history of its own national youth and the episodes of the early years of Jesus. The fatherly relationship that had been metaphorically ascribed to Jahve as regards Israel (e. g. in Deut. XXXII. 18: 'Of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that gave thee birth')² is, the Evangelist implies, fulfilled in a real and literal sense in Jesus, who though belonging to the family of David, and therefore David's Son, was the Son of God without the intervention of a human father by the power of the Holy Spirit. Consequently the citation from Hosea XI. 1 ('Out of Egypt have I called my son'), which in its original context can have only a national reference, is, from the Evangelist's standpoint, a perfectly consistent proceeding. The use of Scriptural citations, throughout, is indeed remarkable. The writer regards the prophetic words as charged with a wealth of hitherto unexhausted meaning, which in the light of Jesus' life-history have acquired a new or widely extended significance. He constantly introduces such citations with the striking formula ἵνα πληρωθῆ κ. τ. λ. and when this is modified (as e. g. in Mt II. 17 τότε ἐπληρώθη) the alteration is probably intentional.

The narratives, then, have a basis in fact, or what is assumed to be or regarded as fact. But in form they have often been assimilated to earlier models and display unmistakable midrashic features. Thus the form in which the episode of the return from Egypt is narrated in

¹ *Das Evangelium des Matthäus*, p. 103f.

² Contrast: Is LXIII, 16.

VV. 20 and 21 is clearly modelled upon the LXX of Exodus IV. 19, 20 (the return of Moses from Midian to Egypt).

And this, perhaps, affords the true key for interpreting the apologetic significance of the rest of the narrative. The Evangelist intends to suggest a likeness between the divinely guided career of Moses, the instrument of Israel's redemption from Egypt, and the Messianic Redeemer who saves His people from their sins—the type, of course, being far transcended by the antitype.

Thus the story of the magi, with its astrological features, has a very striking parallel in the midrash Rabbā to Exodus in the section which deals with the birth of Moses. In the passage in question we are told that "Pharaoh's astrologers perceived that the mother of the future redeemer of Israel [i. e. Moses] was with child, and that this redeemer was destined to suffer punishment through water. Not knowing whether the redeemer was to be an Israelite or an Egyptian, and being desirous to prevent the redemption of Israel, Pharaoh ordered that all children born henceforth should be drowned."¹

To the present writer this midrashic story seems to have exercised an obvious influence on the form of Mt's narrative, the underlying motive of which is to shew that the prophecy of Deut XVIII, 15 was fulfilled in the birth of Jesus in whom the narrator saw a second and greater Moses. Prof. Schechter, indeed, following Wünsche,² has suggested that the episode of the star is a "homiletical illustration of Numb XXIV, 17 ('There shall come forth a star out of Jacob'), which the Targumim refer to the star of the Messiah."³ But there the star is identified *with* the Messiah; and moreover in Mt's narrative there is no direct citation of the Numbers passage, as we should expect if that was an influential factor in the representation. Another influential idea that may be detected at work in the narrative is the desire to suggest the homage of the Gentile world (cf. Is LX, 3f., 6; Ps LXVIII, 29; LXXII, 10), as well as

¹ *The Jewish Encyclopaedia*, Vol. II, p. 242. The passage can be seen translated at length in Wünsche *Der Midrasch Schemot Rabba* p. 10. It may, of course, be objected that the Midrash is a comparatively late compilation (8th to 12th cent. a. D.); but it embodies much earlier material. Thus the story referred to above is alluded to in *T. B. Sanhedrin* 101^b, and in its main features was known to Josephus (*Ant.* II, 9, 2). It was no doubt, therefore, current in the time when Mt composed his narrative.

² *Neue Beiträge zur Erläuterung der Evangelien* p. 12.

³ *Targ. Onk. When a king shall arise out of Jacob and the Messiah be anointed from Israel etc. Targ. of Jerus: A king is to arise from the House of Jacob, And a Redeemer and Ruler from the House of Israel etc.*

the essential divergence between the spiritual kingship of the Messiah and the earthly kingship of secular rulers (such as Herod), who are instinctively hostile to the new force that has entered upon the stage of humanity.

What are the facts and ideas that underlie the narrative as a whole?

(1) that Jesus was born at Bethlehem—a fact which is independently attested by Luke and John (VII, 14).

(2) It is not improbable that the episode of the flight into Egypt may have a basis in fact in some incident of Jesus' early life; for the following reasons:

(a) it is in accordance with Mt's method to frame his narratives on a basis of what he regarded as fact;

(b) because the story is confirmed indirectly by the obviously independent tradition, which is preserved (with very early attestation) in the Talmud,¹ that Jesus brought magical powers from Egypt with which he later worked many miracles. This may very possibly have owed its origin to a distorted version of an oral tradition which may go back to the early Jewish-Christian Community of Palestine: And

(3) the last section of the chapter (VV. 19—23) implies that the Evangelist belonged to a Christian Community whose members bore the common designation of *Nazarene* (the characteristically oriental name for Christian). This part of the narrative also attests the fact (which appears in the Lucan account) that Jesus, while born at Bethlehem, was brought up at Nazareth. It is worth noting, also, that the significance of the allusion to the dictum of the prophets "He shall be called a Nazarene" can only be elucidated by reference to the Hebrew messianic terms *neḥzer* (נֶחֶזֶר), *ḥemal* (חֵמַל), and *nazir* (נָזִיר). In the LXX equivalents the indispensable assonance is lost.²

¹ T. B. *Abōdā Zārā* 16^b, 17^a; Midrash to Eccles. I, 8. The story is given on the authority of R. Elieser ben Hyrkanos (c. 80—120 a. D.).

² It is especially notable that the Targum equivalent of נָזִיר in the Messianic passage Is. XI, 1 is משיחא (Messiah):

ויצא חטר מגוע ישׁ	Heb. 1 ^a
ויפוק מלכא מבגודי דישׁ	Targ. 1 ^a
ונצר משרשיו יפיה	Heb. 1 ^b
ומשיחא מבני בגודי יתרבי	Targ. 1 ^b

B. The Narrative of Luke (Lc).

I.

The general character and integrity of Luke I—II.

It is hardly necessary to shew in detail that the nativity-narrative embodied in the first two chapters of the Third Gospel is Jewish-Christian throughout. The matter has been well summed up by Usener in a single sentence. "In the whole tone and character of the narrative"—(he says) "its leading conceptions, its repeated employment of the Hebrew psalm-form, its familiarity with Jewish and its defective acquaintance with Roman conditions—the hand of a Jewish Christian is, as is now generally recognised, unmistakable."¹ It is refreshing, also, to find Usener defending the substantial integrity of the narrative (apart from the supposed interpolation in I, 34—35).

Thus referring to the attempt that has been made to separate the early history of John (ch. I), and that relating to the birth and early childhood of Jesus (ch. I and II), he says: "To separate the two sections from each other, as has been proposed, is not possible. They are firmly united: Zacharias' song of praise points to the Redeemer, and in the prophetic words of the aged Symeon is repeated the same Hebrew psalm-form as is seen in the hymns of Elizabeth and her husband."

In the case of one small part of the narrative, however, its integrity in the canonical text is (as has been mentioned) denied, viz. in the crucial 34th and 35th verses of the first chapter. These are supposed, by all the representatives of the advanced critical school,² from Harnack downwards, to be an interpolation quite foreign to the context, and out of harmony with the Jewish-Christian character of the narrative as a whole.

Without repeating the familiar arguments for and against this view, which have been well summed up by M. Halévy, who decides strongly in favour of the authenticity of the verses as forming an integral part of the original Jewish-Christian narrative,³ I should like only to add two considerations which seem to me to be decisive against the theory of interpolation.

¹ *Encycl. Bibl.* III, col. 3342 (art. *Nativity*).

² With the distinguished exception of Gunkel; see below p. 99.

³ *op. cit.* pp. 170 ff.

(1) The climax of the passage is reached in v. 35 in the words: *therefore the holy thing which shall be born shall be called Son of God* (υἶος θεοῦ). Now it is certainly significant that Luke's genealogy reaches its climax in similar words (*Adam the Son of God*). The dominant idea of Luke's genealogy lies, it seems to me, in the characteristically Pauline conception that Christ is the second Adam; and that as the first Adam was Son of God by a direct creative act, so also was the second. Thus the genealogy reveals unmistakably the hand of Luke the disciple of Paul, and at the same time guarantees the Lucan character of the alleged interpolation.

But (2) the phraseology of the suspected verses is unmistakably Hebraistic. Thus the phrase Πνεῦμα ἅγιον ἐπελεύσεται ἐπὶ σέ may be illustrated from the LXX. The verb ἐπέρχομαι is often used in connection with πνεῦμα; and the whole expression has a verbal parallel in the LXX of Is XXXII, 15: ἔως ἂν ἐπέλθῃ ἐφ' ὑμᾶς πνεῦμα ἀφ' ὑψηλοῦ. The use of πνεῦμα ἅγιον (without the article) as denoting the power of God (without imputing to the πνεῦμα any personal implication) may be paralleled also from the Psalter of Solomon (see Ryle and James on *Ps. Sol.* XVII, 42). To object (as Schmiedel and Soltau do) that because 'spirit' (רוּחַ) in Hebrew is usually feminine, therefore the Holy Ghost (שְׁפִיחַת רוּחַ) could not be represented in Hebrew-Christian circles as the father of Jesus, is beside the mark. Πνεῦμα ἅγιον here is an impersonal term, and therefore no question of the sex of the πνεῦμα is involved.

In the words that follow (δύναμις ὑψίστου ἐπικιάσει σοι) we have again an echo of Old Testament language, and, in fact, the whole underlying idea, which is that of a theophany, can only be elucidated from the Old Testament. Ἐπικιάζω is the verb used in the LXX of Exod XL, 35 of the cloud which rested on the Tabernacle when it was filled with the 'glory of the Lord'.¹

As Prof. Briggs² has pointed out: "The annunciation represents the conception of Jesus as due to a theophany." And the method adopted for describing this in the suspected verses is suggested by the language of the Old Testament. "The entrance of God into his tabernacle and temple to dwell there in a theophanic cloud would naturally suggest that the entrance of the divine life into the virgin's womb to dwell there would be in the same form of theophanic cloud." The form of repre-

¹ Cf. also the theophanic cloud of the transfiguration narrative (Mt XVII, 5; Mark IX, 7; Luke IV, 34) where the same verb is used.

² *The Messiah of the Gospels*, p. 50.

sentation here given is therefore entirely congruous with the Jewish-Christian character of the narrative as a whole, and the assertion that such a representation could not have emanated from Jewish-Christian circles can only be characterized as arbitrary and baseless dogmatism.

But (3) the theory of interpolation is confronted with a further radical difficulty. It is not enough to remove the suspected verses (vv. 34, 35) to make the narrative congruous with the assumption of a non-miraculous birth. The significant fact still remains that the figure of Joseph is quite subordinated in the Lucan account, while that of Mary is proportionately enhanced in lonely importance. This feature dominates the whole structure of Luke's first two chapters; and in this particular a sharp (and obviously designed) contrast is suggested between the nativity of John the Baptist and that of Jesus. While in the case of the Baptist's birth the annunciation is made to the father (I, 13f.), in that of Jesus it is made to the mother (I, 28): and while the Baptist's birth is represented as the occasion of such profound joy on the part of Zacharias that the latter's dumbness is overcome and he bursts into the strains of the Benedictus (I, 68—79), no such rôle is assigned to Joseph. What reason can be adduced for this deliberate minimising of the part assigned to Joseph—a feature that characterizes the Lucan narrative throughout—except it be that the fundamental fact, dominating and forming the climax of the whole, is the miraculous birth of Jesus of a Virgin-mother?

Usener, indeed, partially perceives this difficulty and therefore supposes not only a certain amount of interpolation, but also of omission to have taken place. "We are", he says, "in a position to infer with certainty from II, 5 that in the original form of the narrative after I, 38 stood the further statement hardly to be dispensed with (even though judged inadmissible by the redactor who interpolated I, 34f.) that Mary was then taken to wife by Joseph, and that she conceived by him."²

But to produce anything approaching a consistent result the present form of the narrative must be subjected to much more drastic treatment. The whole stress and emphasis of the narration must be altered; the prominence assigned to Mary must be got rid of; and a hymn of thanksgiving, corresponding to the Benedictus, ought at least to be assigned to Joseph. In a word the symmetry and substance of the Lucan account must be destroyed; it must be torn to shreds and wholly re-written.

² *Enc. Bibl.* III, col. 3350.

Is it conceivable that the 'original form' of the narrative can have undergone so radical a transformation as is desiderated by Usener's hypothesis and yet have produced the present balanced whole? To the present writer such a conclusion seems irreconcilable with the *data* afforded by a critical study of the account in its entirety. Usener's theory, far from removing difficulties, only serves to raise fresh critical problems. It reduces the Lucan narrative to hopeless confusion, and (in view of its admittedly Jewish-Christian character) involves its genesis in insoluble obscurity.¹

II.

The Origin of the Lucan Narrative.

The Lucan narrative, then, in its integrity may be regarded as Jewish-Christian through and through. It must have emanated from Jewish-Christian circles, and doubtless reflects the piety and worship of the early Palestinian Christian Church.

What account, then, is to be given of the origin of its present Greek canonical form? One commonly held theory is that the Lucan form is a direct translation from an Aramaic document. But as has been pointed out by Lagarde, Resch and Dalman these early chapters "have throughout a colouring distinctly Hebrew, not Aramaic, and not Greek."² Dalman, however, thinks that "the assumption of a Hebrew document as the source for Luke I, II must, at any rate, be held as still unproved; and it might even be maintained", he adds, "that the strongly marked Hebrew style of those chapters is on the whole due not to the use of any primary source, but to Luke himself. For here, as in the beginning of the Acts, in keeping with the marvellous contents of the narrative, Luke has written with greater consistency than usual in biblical style, intending so to do and further powerfully affected by

¹ Soltau, indeed, finds no difficulty in carrying the critical analysis to extreme lengths, and discovers in the Lucan account *strata* of different age and origin. Thus, according to him, Luke II, 1-7 (in an earlier un-edited form) and II, 21^a, 22-40 embodies the oldest form of the original Jewish-Christian legend of Jesus' childhood. Then "this Jewish-Christian Tradition was entirely altered in Luke through the addition of two new elements" of heathen origin; viz. (1) the generation of Jesus through the Holy Spirit (I, 26-56); and (2) the Angels' Song of Praise (II, 8-20). At the same time II, 21^b was interpolated. Cf. *op. cit.*, p. 26f. According to this writer, also, the episode of the Magi in Matt. II is of purely heathen origin, having been suggested by the journey of the Parthian king Tiridates through Asia Minor in 66 a. D. on a journey of homage to Nero. Cf. *op. cit.* p. 40.

² Dalman, *Words of Jesus* (E. T.) p. 39.

the 'liturgic frame of mind' of which Deißmann speaks."¹ It seems to me, however, that Dalman goes too far in excluding altogether the use of Hebrew sources in the composition of the first two chapters of the Third Gospel. My own conclusion, arrived at independently, closely approximates to that of Prof. Briggs, whose words I will venture to quote. Briggs points out that the material of which the Gospel of the Infancy is composed is "in the form of poetry embedded in prose narrative. This poetry is of the same kind as the poetry of the Old Testament. It has the same principles of parallelism and measurement of the lines by the beats of the accent, or by the number of separate words This poetry was translated from Aramaic originals, and was doubtless written when translated by Luke. The Greek translation in some cases destroys the symmetry of the lines of Aramaic poetry, obscures their measurement, and mars their parallelism. It is probable that the prose which encompasses this poetry comes from the authors of the Gospels, the poetry from other and probably several different authors. Therefore we are not to look for an earlier written Gospel of the Infancy of Jesus, but are to think of a number of early Christian poems with reference to that infancy from which the author of our Gospel made a selection These songs, which have been selected for use in the Gospel of Luke, doubtless represent reflection upon these events by Christian poets, who put in the mouths of the angels, the mothers and the fathers, the poems which they composed. But the inspired author of the Gospel vouches for their propriety and for their essential conformity to truth and fact."²

The only point on which I venture to differ from Prof. Briggs is as to the original language of these hymns. It seems to me that this may very well have been not Aramaic but Hebrew. This hypothesis would account for the pronouncedly Hebraistic character of the narratives as a whole. The hymns themselves are obviously modelled on the psalm-poetry of the Old Testament. There is every reason to suppose that a part at least of the sacred poetry of the Old Testament—such as the Red Sea Song (Exod. XV), the special psalms for the days of the week, and a rudimentary form of the collection of psalms which afterwards bore the technical name of the 'Hallel', possibly also the 'Psalms of Degrees'—would be familiar in their Hebrew form to the Aramaic-speaking Jews of Palestine in the time of Christ from their liturgical use

¹ *ibid.*

² *op. cit.* pp. 42 ff.

in public worship. We have the analogous practice of the modern Jews to guide us. Though multitudes of the modern Jews possess but the barest acquaintance with Hebrew as a language they are perfectly familiar with, and sing with the utmost zest their popular hymns—such as נִדְּל , the אֵן כְּמִלְהֵינִי , and עוֹלַם אֲדָן —in their Hebrew form. There is also the precedent of the so-called Psalter of Solomon. The remarkable resemblances in phraseology and diction between these ‘psalms’ and the ‘Songs’ in S. Luke (the Magnificat, the Benedictus, the Angelic Hymn, and the Nunc Dimittis) have been pointed out in detail by Ryle and James in their classical edition of the Psalms of Solomon (p. XCIf.). These editors give good reasons for supposing that the Psalms in question were “intended for public or even liturgical use” and argue strongly for a Hebrew original. Exactly the same arguments may be applied to the hymns of the nativity-narratives. I conclude, therefore, that these hymns were composed in classical Hebrew for liturgical use, and were so used in the early Jewish-Christian Community of Palestine: and this conclusion, its seems to me, accords with their primitive Christology, which betrays no knowledge of the Logos doctrine of the Prologue to the Fourth Gospel, for instance.

The selection of the hymns and their setting in the prose narrative with its ‘scenic’ features and schematic and dramatic arrangement betray the hand of the Greek historian, and are doubtless due to S. Luke himself.

The only serious argument I know of that militates against the view here advocated is the objection of Dalman that the expression $\epsilon\pi\epsilon\kappa\epsilon\mu\alpha\tau\omicron$ $\eta\mu\acute{\alpha}\varsigma$ $\acute{\alpha}\nu\alpha\tau\omicron\lambda\eta$ $\acute{\epsilon}\xi$ $\upsilon\psi\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$ (Luke I, 78, in the Song of Zacharias) is “formed entirely after the Greek Bible and quite impossible to reproduce in Hebrew.”¹ It is clear that $\acute{\alpha}\nu\alpha\tau\omicron\lambda\eta$ could only go back to the Hebrew נִמְצָ , the word rendered “Shoot” or ‘Branch’, and applied to the Messiah (Jer XXIII, 5; Zech III, 8; VI, 12). But according to Dalman “the Hebrew נִמְצָ excludes the allusion to the light which follows in v. 79.” Therefore he concludes “it is clear that in Luke, chap. I, an original in Greek lies before us.”²

But I venture to doubt whether an original Hebrew נִמְצָ in such a connexion would be involved in such disabilities. As is well known נִמְצָ (‘Branch’) was a common designation of the Messiah, and is used practically as a proper name: and as Dalman himself points out, it is

¹ *op. cit.* p. 39.

² *op. cit.* p. 224.

actually rendered in the Targum by the term 'Messiah' (משיח Is IV, 3). As such, of course, it could well be made the subject of such a verb as ἐπεκεράτω ('visited'). But the question remains, is such a personal designation of the Messiah incompatible with the metaphor of light that immediately follows ('whereby the מנצ from on high hath visited us to give light to them that sit in darkness'): The meaning of the word in Hebrew is not exactly 'Branch' but 'shoot' or 'offspring' (lit. *what sprouts or springs up*).

Now it is significant that in Syriac both the verb ܩܘܨܘܘܩ, and the noun ܩܘܨܘܩ are constantly used of light and splendour, and associated ideas (e. g. ܩܘܨܘܩ = ἀπαύραμα in Heb I, 3 and is directly applied to Christ).

It seems to me, then, that the Hebrew word מנצ may very well have been used here by Aramaic-speaking Jews in the Aramaic sense of 'shining'. Of this interpretation of the Hebrew term there may also be a trace in the LXX of Is IV, 3, where the expression ויהי צמח ויהי נה (which was understood of the Messiah) is rendered ἐπιλάμψει ὁ Θεός; i. e. the LXX here (as often elsewhere) have interpreted a Hebrew word by an Aramaic parallel. It should be noted also that in the Hebrew of the Midrash¹ the verb מנצ actually occurs with the meaning 'shine', 'grow bright'.

This association of the idea of light with the messianic designation מנצ was, perhaps, facilitated by the conception of the messianic light founded upon Is LX, 1:² while in the New Testament itself we have in Rev XXII, 16 the remarkable identification of Jesus 'the root and offspring of David' with 'the bright, the morning star' (i. e. the Star of the Messiah, Numb XXIV, 17).

I conclude, then, that the original of ἀνατολή ἐξ ὕψους was מנצ מנצ; that this was a well-understood personal designation of the Messiah; that with it was associated the idea of light (possibly the light of the Messianic Star), while together with this idea that of the 'Sprout' or 'offspring' was also included in the conceptual content of the expression;³ and that the phrase מנצ מנצ is a poetical equivalent of *Messiah from Heaven*.

¹ See e. g. *Cant. R.* (to III, 6).

² Cf. Weber, *Jüdische Theologie* (1897), p. 397 f.

³ See the Revelation passage quoted above; and cf. in illustration Justin Martyr, *Apol I*, 32: *Isaiah, another prophet, prophesying the same things by other expressions thus spake, 'There shall rise a star out of Jacob, and a blossom shall ascend from the root of Jesse' &c.* For the application of the idea of the Messianic light to Christ cf. also the fragment of an old Christian hymn quoted in Ephes V, 14 (ἐπιφάσκει σοι ὁ Χριστός).

Zeitschr. f. d. neutest. Wiss. Jahrg. VI. 1905.

C. Relation of the Lucan and Matthean Nativity-narratives.

That the nativity-narratives in the First and Third Gospels are essentially independent has already been indicated. The fundamental facts on which they agree and on which they revolve may very well have been derived from a common source, viz. the early Jewish-Christian community of Palestine. The meagre historical content of Matthew's narrative is explained by the apologetic and polemical purpose that dominates it. He selects and uses only such material as is immediately useful for the practical purpose he has in view, and in view of this it is surely unsafe to argue from his silence that he was unacquainted with other traditional incidents which were treasured in the Palestinian circle. And in fact there is, I believe, one direct point of contact between the two narratives which suggests that Mt was not unacquainted with the Hebrew Hymns and poetical pieces which are so striking a feature of the Lucan account. I refer to the annunciation by an angel to Joseph set forth in Matth. I, 20—21:

*Joseph Son of David fear not to take to thee Mary thy wife;
For that which is begotten within her is of the Holy Spirit.
And she shall bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call His name Jesus;
For it is He that shall save His people from their sins.*

Here we have, it seems to me, an example of synthetic or constructive parallelism of the type of Ps II, 6:

Yet have I set my King upon Zion my holy hill.

Mt is here using and translating from a poetical piece in Hebrew, derived doubtless like the hymns in Luke from the Palestinian Community; and this conclusion is confirmed by the explanation of the name Jesus, which (as already mentioned) can only be elucidated by a play upon words in Hebrew.

The significant omission in Lc's account to ascribe to Joseph any part either in the reception or utterance of the 'songs' is thus, partially at any rate, compensated for in Mt.

D. Have the Narratives been influenced by Heathen Ideas?

If the account here given of the character and genesis of these narratives be even approximately correct what room is left for the operation within them of heathen superstitious ideas? However much Jews at various times may have been influenced by their pagan neighbours, in the sphere of religion, and especially in their conceptions of God,

they¹ are the last persons ever to have been affected by pagan superstitions. Towards such, and towards all the associations of idolatry in all its forms they took small pains to disguise their aversion and contempt, as witness the Maccabean revolt and the conflicts with the Roman Government on the question of worship of the Emperors.

Yet we are asked by Soltau to believe that "the idea of the supernatural descent of Augustus" (embodied in the fable that his mother, while asleep in the temple of Apollo, was visited by the God in the form of a serpent, and later gave birth to Augustus) was "applied . . . to the case of Jesus."² Soltau, indeed, concedes that the belief in the Virgin-Birth of Jesus could not have originated in Palestine; anyhow it could never have taken its rise in Jewish circles:³ and in this view he is supported by Schmiedel and Usener. Consequently he is driven to regard the story of the Virgin-Birth as an "insertion" in the original narrative, of "Hellenistic origin."⁴ The difficulties that beset this theory of "insertion" have already been indicated. How is it that such "insertions" should have taken so characteristic a Jewish form? This, at any rate, must be the work of Jews. Moreover why should such alien elements have crystallized themselves in just the most markedly Jewish parts of the New Testament, while they are passed over in silence elsewhere?

Gunkel, indeed, fully admits the Jewish-Christian character of the whole of the narrative of Lc, and boldly argues that the idea of the Virgin-Birth of the Messiah must have become a christological dogma in Jewish circles before the time of Jesus, in the same way as the Messiah's birth at Bethlehem and of the family of David had become a fixed popular Jewish belief; and that this was transferred to the history of Jesus.⁵ But in support of this statement not a scrap of positive evidence is given.⁶ If such were the case why is the Virgin-birth of Messiah never alluded to in the main body of the Gospels in connexion with the other popular beliefs (such as his birth at Bethlehem and of the family of David) that are mentioned? In fact, so far from its being a popular or even familiar belief among the Jews it may be inferred with practical certainty from Mt's narrative that the story of

¹ i. e., the post-Maccabean Jews of Palestine.

² *op. cit.* p. 49.

³ *op. cit.* p. 47f.

⁴ *op. cit.* p. 49.

⁵ *Zum religionsgeschichtlichen Verständnis des Neuen Testaments* (Göttingen 1903) p. 69.

⁶ An attempt has been made to supply this deficiency by Badham in *the Academy* for June 8th 1895 (cf. above p. 86 note).

the virgin-birth was a stumbling block to Jewish readers which required special apologetic efforts to overcome. The natural and instinctive Jewish attitude towards such a story was represented by a section of the later Ebionites, who, while admitting other claims on behalf of Jesus, refused to believe this.

The conclusion is forced upon us, therefore, that if the story of the virgin-birth is a legend it must have grown up within the Jewish-Christian community of Palestine, and must represent a primitive christological dogma expressing the idea of the perfect moral and spiritual purity of Jesus as Son of God. The Christian consciousness, it might be urged, working on such a passage as "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee" (Ps II, 7), together with the Scriptural promise of the fulness of the Spirit that should rest upon the Messiah (Is XI, 2) may have been led to transfer these ideas to the physical beginnings of Jesus' life.¹ But in the absence of any analogous developments in the Christian consciousness elsewhere this is hard to believe. Why did the christological process assume just this form, and in this (*a priori* most unlikely) quarter? The impulse must have been given from without. But unless the idea came from heathen sources—which to the present writer seems inconceivable in so strictly Jewish a circle—then it must have grown out of a conviction, cherished within a limited Palestinian circle of believers, that the traditional belief among them was based upon facts of which some members of this community had been the original depositories and witnesses.

When subjected to the *criteria* properly applicable to it—and when the evidence is weighed in the light of the considerations advanced above—such a tradition, it seems to the present writer, has high claims to historical credibility. The alternative explanations only serve to raise more difficulties than they profess to solve.

In any case the hypothesis of pagan mythological influence is to be ruled out. Thus, to take one last instance, when Usener² suggests

¹ This is substantially the position taken up by Lobstein in his essay on *The Virgin Birth of Christ* (Williams and Norgate, 1903). Lobstein contends that "the conception of the miraculous birth of Christ is the fruit of religious feeling, the echo of Christian experience, the poetic and popular expression of an affirmation of faith" (p. 96). Lobstein also denies pagan influence and maintains that the conception "has its roots deep down in Israel's religion transformed by the new faith" (p. 75 cf. p. 69 f.). This writer's treatment of the subject, by its critical sobriety and religious feeling, contrasts favourably with Soltau's arbitrary and confused exposition.

² *Enc. Bibl.* III, col. 3352.

that in the formation of the narrative of the flight into and return from Egypt (Mt II, 13f.) "mythological ideas may have had their unconscious influence; it is to Egypt that when attacked by the giant Typhon, the Olympian gods take their flight"—this scholar is, it seems to me in the light of the considerations advanced in the earlier part of this paper, on a completely wrong track; and his failure to put himself at the right standpoint completely vitiates his treatment of the narrative of Mt throughout.

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