

MAGNA MATER.

*Lost on the lonely hills the lamb bleats for its mother,
Startled with frustrate hope by reed and shadow
and rock;
And wailing across the world humanity's desolate
flock
Cries—if perchance it be She—upon many an alien
other,
Maya and Ishtar and Isis. . . .
These die with the centuries' death.
Thou Israel, Son
Of the Eternal One,
Cease from thy wanderings: lo, Mary of Nazareth!*

C. C. MARTINDALE.

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INTRODUCTION

THE Apostles' Creed declares that Jesus Christ was conceived by the Holy Ghost, and born of the Virgin Mary. Hence the cult of Our Lady is an integral part of the scheme of the Incarnation. What precisely that cult consists in, its doctrinal and devotional significance which is thereto assigned, is for the Church, the Guardian of Christ's Revelation, to determine. Then, when the Church has determined it, the work of the theologian and apologist begins. He has to explain and justify the word of the Church to men, and this in regard to the particular time and spirit of the age.

In the last century the chief objections to the devotion paid to Our Lady arose out of the doctrine of private judgment. Each and every non-Catholic held himself free to interpret Holy Scripture for

himself, and, according to his own opinion and inclination, to determine exactly what amount of reverence was due to the Mother of Christ. Hence the general idea obtained that she was merely a good woman, much the same as other women, and worthy of a similar respect, but nothing approaching any spiritual veneration.

The present twentieth century, however, witnesses a very different and more subtly-dangerous orientation of non-Catholic thought. Mere private judgment, or more truly personal fancy, is discredited. It is now the fashion, by the aid of the so-called science of comparative religions, to endeavour to prove that the cult of Our Lady is but one amongst a number of Madonna cults, and that the Catholic practice is but a survival of the pagan custom. For instance,* Professor Flinders Petrie says that our cult of Mary has been borrowed from the temple rites of Egypt, and is nothing but the cult of Isis taken over and given another name. Herr Bebel,

* "Religion of Ancient Egypt," pp. 44, 92.

too, the German Socialist, has given widespread currency to this idea in his notorious pamphlet: "Christentum und Sozialismus."

In none of these attacks, however, is any attempt made to give the Catholic doctrine in detail. That would disclose too vast a divergence. A few general similarities are chosen, such, for instance, as that Mary was a woman, and Isis was a woman, and both were religiously honoured by their devotees. The Isis cult is described in language which is usually used to describe the cult of Mary, and, behold, the two are made identical; and since Isis (who never existed at all) came before Mary, the Catholic cult must have been obviously an adaptation of the pagan. "Far more truly might we say that our practice of eating bread is *taken over* from the Egyptian practice of eating *ta*, since bread is only *ta* under another name."

Our apologetic, therefore, will consist chiefly in the clear and positive exposition of the Catholic doctrine. When that is once grasped, and when its rich spiritual value is appreciated, then will

the pagan ritual and cult pale into insignificance.

First, however, we must say a word about the highest and the purest of the pagan cults, for if they fall so far short of the Christian ideal, so much the worse for the others.

THE CULT OF MARY

I

So-called Pagan Madonnas

FIRST of these comes MĀYA, the mother of the Buddha Sakyamuni. The question of the dates of the Buddhist scriptures makes it impossible to say with certainty what was the nature of this cult in the beginning. The traditions are contradictory. The earlier ones did not hold Māyā to be a virgin, whilst the later ones did. Further, according to the Eastern idea, all birth is merely rebirth. The case, then, is one of reincarnation. A superior being such as a Buddha could choose his future parents. Hence Māyā *dreams* that her son enters her side of his own accord in the form of a white elephant with six tusks. When, however, the tradition did begin to insist on Māyā's virginity, it did away

with the Buddha's rebirth. The Buddha himself was obliged to remain in heaven, and to send a phantom of himself to pretend to be born of Māyā.

Next, there is DEVAKI, the virgin-mother of Krishna. Of this cult it must be noticed that the Hindi books which contain its earliest records were composed several hundred years later than the Christian Gospels.* Moreover, in these same Hindi scriptures it is written that Devaki had borne seven children to her husband Vasudeva before Krishna was conceived.

Then there is the Asiatic goddess ASHTART, identifiable with Ishtar, Astarte, Cybele, and Rhea. She was the goddess of life and vegetation, the great earth-mother and mother of the gods. It is said that in pagan and Christian art her representation and that of Our Lady are similar in form.

The most important of all these cults, however, is that of the Egyptian goddess Isis. She was sister and wife of Osiris, and mother of Horus. Set, the brother of Osiris, was said to have dethroned

* Tisdall, "Mythic Christs," p. 27.

him and torn him to pieces, and to have scattered his fragments over the face of the earth. Isis resolved to search for the remains, and to allow herself no rest until she found them. Horus was born after his father's death. Eventually he dethroned Set. The conjugal fidelity and maternal tenderness of Isis, together with the justice of Osiris and the filial piety of Horus, were all factors which appealed to the human heart, and consequently gave the story a certain permanence.

The cult which grew up around the legend undeniably rose to a high level, and its devotees undoubtedly practised a severe asceticism. Indeed, no other form of pagan worship was ever noted for such spiritual fruitfulness. Owing, however, to the mythical and unhistorical character of the goddess, this pure devotion could not last for any length of time. It passed away with amazing swiftness, degenerating into licentious superstition. A noticeable and *vital* point of divergence between this and the Christian story is that Horus was not virgin born.

The similarities, then, which exist

between the Christian Mother of God and the so-called pagan madonnas are only such as would arise from the fact that both pagans and Christians all the world over are human beings, looking out on life with human eyes, and expressing themselves in human language. If the pagans wanted a fruitful family or a fruitful harvest, what more natural than that they should represent their goddess in the form of motherhood, as the patroness of fecundity? As for similar statues, surely the idea of motherhood everywhere suggests the same natural images.

But, as a matter of fact, the early representations of the Christian Madonna have not been proved to be either Egyptian or Asiatic in their origin. Even if they were, it would prove nothing, for we Catholics could transform and transcend the use of pagan symbols just in the same way as we have transformed the use of pagan temples. It is not enough to show similarity between the two faiths; there must also be shown the connection.

On the other hand, when the divergencies are observed, then will the con-

nection be seen only in external accidents. The inward essence, beauty, and spiritual significance and power of the Christian cult will be found to be sublimely unique. There was, indeed, an intrinsic fitness in God choosing to be born of a Virgin-Mother. He was coming to bring a new life into the world, therefore what more fitting than that He should do it by making us sons of God? And if we were to be made sons of God, what more fitting way than by adoption through brotherhood with Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God? And if the Only Begotten Son were to come on earth, what more fitting way than by birth from a Virgin-Mother? That saved the stupendous dignity of the Eternal Father, since it dispensed with a human father. It saved, too, the stupendous dignity of the Word, since the Word was made Flesh solely for the purpose of the spiritual rebirth of men; thus it was fitting that the Incarnation should be the exemplar of their rebirth—that is, “not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”

II

Divine Motherhood

WHEN we speak of the Divine Motherhood, we do not mean that the mother herself was Divine ; we mean that the Child that was born of her was Divine. Mary, in co-operation with the Holy Spirit, gave to Christ His human nature. She did not give to Him His Divine nature ; that existed from all eternity. The Child that was born of her was one Person with two natures. Mary was the mother of that one Person, and since that Person was God, it follows logically that Mary was the Mother of God. Mary has clothed the Logos with flesh, and therefore is the Mother of God. This was the function of Mary's motherhood—*to provide a body which should be the tangible incarnation of God.* Thus we may look upon Christ as a deified man, or as an incarnate God. Whichever way

we take it, the implication is that Mary is the Mother of God.

The term itself is not found in Scripture, but the idea is. "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and His name shall be called Emmanuel."* Emmanuel means "God with us." "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee. And therefore also the Holy which shall be born of thee, shall be called the Son of God.† "Whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"‡

It is the office of the Church to interpret Scripture, and to give definitions to Scriptural expressions. In pursuance of this duty the Church has defined that Mary is the Mother of God.

This term was in use as early as the second half of the second century. The Emperor Constantine, speaking to the Bishops at the Council of Nice (325), called Mary "the Virgin-Mother of God." The formal definition, however, was occasioned in the fifth century,

* Isa. vii. 14.

† Luke i. 35.

‡ Luke i. 43. See also Rom. i. 2, and Gal. iv. 4.

through the heresy of Nestorius, Nestorius denied that the two natures of Christ were united in one Person. He declared that the human nature of Our Lord had a distinct subsistence or personality. There was only a sort of moral union between God and the Man Christ. Christ, he said, was but a mere human man containing God within Himself, and the Incarnation was nothing more than “an indwelling of the Logos in the man Jesus.” Consequently, God had not really been made man, and Christ was not really God, but only bore God in His human Person. Thus in Christ there were two distinct personalities—one, the Logos ; the other, Jesus. So there were also two sonships—one, begotten of God the Father ; the other, born of Mary. There was needed but one formula to emphasize all these propositions—namely, Mary was not the Mother of God, but only the mother of the man called Christ.

The controversy became so acute that the Third General Council of Ephesus (431) was summoned to settle the matter. The Council defined “that Christ consists



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fore, is not a mere piece of rhetoric, the imagination of an Eastern mind. It is an actual scientific statement of a plain, sober fact, and its main purpose is to keep alive in our hearts and minds the truth that Christ, although Divine, never ceased to be human; and although human, never ceased to be Divine.

Consider, next, how this truth exalts Mary. She produces a fruit which is absolutely the most perfect that can ever be produced. The highest ministry which any other creature can give to God is a ministry of knowledge and love. But Mary gives to Him a new nature; hence her motherhood is the highest ministry to which a creature can be raised.

Here, then, is the great and all-sufficient reason for the honour which we give to Our Blessed Lady. We are most careful not to compromise the Divine attributes by giving her a Divine praise. Having made this reservation, there is no praise which is too great for her. Protestants wonder that we can speak of her as Mother of Life, Mother of Mercy, Mother of Salvation.

These fall far short of that title which has been sanctioned by the centuries of the Church's prayer and belief: "Mary, the Mother of God."

The most serious objection which a person unaccustomed to Catholic devotion might make would be this: Even granting that the title as understood by theologians be right, has it not the tendency to lead poor and ignorant people to attribute divinity to Mary? The answer is that it might be if the people were not properly instructed. One of the chief functions of the Church is to preach the Word of God. She is equally alive to over-beliefs as to under-beliefs. Superstitious books are put on the Index just the same as heretical books.

The Immaculate Conception

THE Divine Motherhood is the reason of all the privileges and special honours which are given to Mary. The eternal decree by which God decided to become incarnate, and to make Mary His mother, required as congruous accompaniment that mother's sinlessness, perpetual virginity, and excellence in virtue.

Amongst the privileges of Mary, the first in order of time is her Immaculate Conception. Much confusion at the present day prevails with regard to this. Some people mistake it for the Virgin Birth of Christ. Thus, when the Rev. R. J. Campbell, in formulating his "New Theology," denied the Virgin Birth of Christ, the *Daily Telegraph* said that he, by this assertion, had repudiated the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. Other people think that it means Mary

was born without a human father. Professor Haeckel, indeed, in his "Riddle of the Universe," tried to make it cover both the Virgin Birth of Mary and the Virgin Birth of Christ. Haeckel says* : "The dogma of the Immaculate Conception seems, perhaps, to be less audacious and significant than the encyclical and the dogma of the infallibility of the Pope. Yet not only the Roman hierarchy, but even some of the orthodox Protestants (the Evangelical Alliance of Germany, for instance) attach great importance to this thesis. What is known as the 'immaculate oath'—that is, the confirmation of faith by an oath taken on the Immaculate Conception of Mary—is still regarded by millions of Christians as a sacred obligation. Many believers take the dogma in a twofold application : they think that the mother of Mary was impregnated by the Holy Ghost as well as Mary herself."

Now, the Immaculate Conception of Mary is something quite distinct from either the conception or the birth of Christ. Nor does it mean that Mary

* McCabe's translation, p. 334.

had no human father. It means simply that Mary, from the first moment of her existence, was by the grace of God free from the taint of original sin. The important and authentic statement of the dogma is that contained in the Bull "Ineffabilis Deus." This is the decree by which Pope Pius IX., on December 8, 1854, defined the doctrine. After certain preamble recounting the revelation and development of the truth, the decree speaks thus :

"To the honour of the holy and undivided Trinity, to the glory and adornment of the Virgin-Mother of God, to the exaltation of the Catholic faith, and the increase of the Catholic religion, by the authority of Our Lord Jesus Christ, by that of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, and by our own authority, we declare, pronounce, and define that the doctrine, which holds that the most Blessed Virgin Mary in the first instant of her conception, was by a singular grace and privilege of Almighty God, through the foreseen merits of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of mankind, preserved free from all stain of original sin,

has been revealed by God, and that therefore it must be firmly and constantly believed by all the faithful.”

It must be noticed at the outset that the subject of the definition is the Blessed Virgin herself. It is not her mother ; nor yet is it her Divine Son. The definition concerns “the first instant of her conception.” It means, moreover, the beginning of Mary as a complete and distinct person. A person is a being composed of body and soul. A body is not a person until the soul has been infused into it. Therefore, the Immaculate Conception of Mary took place in that moment when body and soul first came together.

There have been, however, differences of physiological and philosophical opinion as to the precise stage at which the human foetus is fitted to receive a soul. There are two opinions. The first supposition is that of Aristotle, which is followed by St. Thomas Aquinas, and which places the time at seventy or ninety days after impregnation. The second is a more modern one, and is followed, I think, by most

Catholic theologians, which places the time at the very moment of impregnation.

The existence of these physiological opinions has created the need for subsequent and certain theological distinctions. The act by which the parents form their offspring (that act of bringing together, organizing, and disposing the complementary substances) is called active conception. The effect of this active generation is called passive conception. The one is conception, regarded as the operation of the parents ; the other is conception, regarded as the subjective formation of the offspring. Passive conception is again distinguished. As long as the body is so undeveloped as to be unfitted to receive the soul, the conception is called inchoate. When, however, the soul actually takes possession of its mortal dwelling-place, then the conception is called adequate. Now, evidently it is not active conception with which the definition is concerned, for the definition has to do with Mary, and not with her parents. Neither is it the passive inchoate conception ; for in this



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the infusion of a soul into her body—the conception was immaculate.

By means of these important distinctions, we are able to explain various passages in the Fathers and Doctors of the Church which at first sight seem to contradict the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. Generally speaking, what they denied was that active or inchoate conception could be immaculate. If it can be shown that any of them—as is said of St. Thomas Aquinas, for instance—denied that passive adequate conception could be immaculate, then the only inference is that they were fallible men.

The next point to be noted is that the Immaculate Conception was bestowed “by a singular grace and privilege of Almighty God.” This phrase looks two ways. First, it points the distinction between the sinlessness of Christ and the sinlessness of Mary. The sinlessness of Christ was His in His own right, simply because He was God. He could not possibly have inherited the stain of original sin, though He had chosen to be born with a human father.

Mary had no such right. Since she was a child of Adam, she ought in the ordinary course of things to have inherited Adam's sin and its consequences. Secondly, it points to the distinction between Mary's relation to the Fall of Adam, and that of the rest of the human race. Mary died in Adam even as all others. She was included in the death-sentence passed upon Adam and the whole race. She incurred the debt, as we say, remotely but not proximately, which means, in short, that original sin would have descended upon her had she not been preserved "by a singular grace and privilege of Almighty God." Thus when St. Paul says: "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into this world, and by sin death; and so death passed upon all men, in whom all have sinned,"* the interpretation is that all had sinned except those who had been specially exempted. It is as when the king said to Esther: "This law is not made for thee, but for all others."

Nor does the exception of Mary prejudice the universality of the law;

* Rom. v. 12.

for it is of the very nature of a privilege that the law from which exemption is granted is universal. An exception implies a law and confirms it. Therefore it was that when the Council of Trent defined the universality of original sin, it declared expressly that it had no intention of including the Immaculate Virgin Mary. Bossuet sums up this doctrine in a rich passage for the Feast of the Conception of the Holy Virgin. Addressing Christ, he says : “Thou art innocent by nature, Mary only by grace ; Thou by excellence, she only by privilege ; Thou as Redeemer, she as the first of those whom Thy precious blood has purified.”*

Further, the decree states that this special privilege was accorded “through the foreseen merits of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of mankind.” At first sight it might seem that since Mary inherited no original sin, she therefore needed no redemption, whereas Christ died for all mankind. This clause, however, assures us that Mary did need redemption.

* “Sermon pour la Fête de la Conception de la Sainte Vierge.”

There is redemption by reparation, and there is redemption by preservation. As Christ redeemed the rest of mankind from sin after it had been contracted, so He redeemed His Mother from the necessity of contracting it. Sometimes the Fathers speak of Mary as “purified” (*purgata*), “cleansed” (*mundata*), and “sanctified” (*sanctificata*), by Christ. Their meaning is not that her soul was first stained and sinful and afterwards cleansed and made holy, but that through Christ she was preserved from all sin and uncleanness.

Herein lies one of the most beautiful spiritual values of the Immaculate Conception. It shows us Christ’s absolute power over sin. His redemption of the rest of mankind shows primarily His power to undo sin. His redemption of Mary shows primarily His power to prevent sin, and thus gives to Christians a strong motive of having recourse to Him as a help against sin in the future.

Next, the definition tells us precisely what the Immaculate Conception was—namely, that Mary “was preserved free from all stain of original sin.” It says

not a word about any miraculous interference with the natural order of procreation such as is asserted by Haeckel. It says not a word about either the Conception or the Birth of Christ. It means simply and solely that the habitual sin of Adam, which sin descended as a blight on all his offspring, did not touch Mary. There are to this doctrine certain sequels which follow by theological inference. Thus, for instance, the state of being free from original sin implies the state of being free from concupiscence. But as this is not expressly stated in the definition, it is said to be only proximate to faith ; it is not *de fide*, but it is *fidei proximum*. The one, and only one, thing which is defined is that Mary, through the infusion of a special grace and by the foreseen redeeming merits of Christ, was preserved from original sin.*

* Perhaps it may be well to notice, though not strictly relevant, that the Catholic doctrine of Original Sin differs from the Protestant doctrine. Original sin in the Catholic sense is something negative, a mere absence of certain supernatural gifts with which our first parents were endowed, and which were lost. Whereas in the Protestant sense it means a sort of disease, a radical corrup-

Lastly, the decree says that the truth was revealed by God. The fitness and antecedent probability of such a truth is evident from the relation of Mary to the Incarnation. God from all eternity foresaw that man would sin ; and also from all eternity decreed that man should be redeemed by a Saviour born of a virgin. It was fitting therefore that He should adorn her with graces becoming her office. It is impossible to conceive any grace more beautifully fitting for the reception of God's Holy One than the grace of perfect sinlessness.

As to the question of Scriptural evidence, it must be remembered that one of the fundamental doctrines of the Catholic Church is that she does not depend on the Bible and the Bible only for the evidence of the revelation given by God. She claims that she is the keeper and

tion of pure nature, an active poison infecting the soul and disorganizing its powers. This is repudiated by Catholic theology. Original sin is but the deprivation of that supernatural unmerited grace which Adam and Eve had on their first formation—deprivation and the consequences of deprivation.

guardian of a living tradition, and that of the truths handed down some may or may not be witnessed to by Scripture. Thus a Catholic, although he is bound to believe in the Immaculate Conception, and believe that it was revealed by God, yet is not bound to believe that there is cogent historical proof of such revelation, apart from the Church's teaching and decision. He accepts it as part of a living tradition.

This is not the place to give a whole treatise on the constitution and claims of the Church. But taking such a treatise as a preamble, the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception follows conclusively from the definition of 1854. Apart from such a treatise, however, it may be urged that although Scripture does not speak of the dogma in set terms, yet there are passages from which it may be inferred. In the Bull of definition is quoted the speech of God to the serpent after the Fall: "I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed."* Taking the seed of the woman to be Christ, it

* Gen. iii. 15.



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critical controversy, and merely quote the texts in order to indicate and accentuate the Church's mind as to the actual nature of the dogma. Let the same be said, too, of the testimony of the Fathers.

In considering the patristic evidence, it must not be forgotten that the dogma has undergone a process of development. As Newman said in a letter to Pusey on the occasion of the "Eirenicon": "Though I hold a process of development in Apostolic truth as time goes on, such development does not supersede the Fathers, but explains and completes them. And, in particular, as regards our teaching concerning the Blessed Virgin, with the Fathers I am content. .

Here, let me say, as on other points, the Fathers are enough for me. I do not wish to say more than they suggest to me, and will not say less."* Indeed, it would be unscientific to restrict the evidence of the Fathers to such passages as speak expressly of the Immaculate Conception. If the Fathers declare in any way that Mary was completely free

* "Difficulties of Anglicans," vol. ii., p. 24.

from all stain of sin, then this must be taken to include freedom from original sin. It is something similar to the case of those devout Catholics of the present day, who, not having arrived at the age to know what the word “conception” means, are able to make a perfect act of faith in the truth of the Immaculate Conception — understanding thereby Mary’s perfect sinlessness from the beginning of her existence.

Now, there are two characteristics which mark the evidence of the Fathers —namely, the perfect unqualified purity of Mary, and her comparison with the first woman, Eve. The words of St. Anselm have a special importance in this connection, since they give the general teaching of tradition together with the reasons for Mary’s singular privilege, and are quoted at the beginning of the Bull of definition : “It was fitting that Mary should shine with a purity than which none greater can be conceived except in God ; for she is the Virgin to whom God the Father ordained to give His only Son—generated from His heart, equal to Himself, and beloved

by Him as another self—so that He should be the one and self-same Son of God the Father and of the Virgin. She it is whom the Son chose to be His Mother substantially, and of whom the Holy Ghost willed and effected that He, from Whom He Himself proceeds, should be conceived and born.”*

The comparison of Mary with Eve dates from the earliest times. Thus, St. Irenæus (A.D. 120-200) writes: “As by a virgin the human race had been bound to death, by a virgin it is saved, the balance being preserved—a virgin’s disobedience by a virgin’s obedience.”† Again, Tertullian (A.D. 160-240) says: “Eve had believed the serpent; Mary believed Gabriel. The fault which the one committed by believing, the other by believing has blotted out.”‡ Once more, St. Cyril of Jerusalem (A.D. 315-386) says: “Since through Eve, a virgin, came death, it behoved that through a virgin, or rather from a virgin, should life appear, that, as the serpent had

* “De Conc. Virg.,” c. xviii.

† “Adv. Hær.,” v. 19.

‡ “De Carn. Christi,” p. 17.

deceived the one, so to the other Gabriel might bring good things.”* By the time of St. Jerome (A.D. 331-420) the comparison had passed into a proverb: “Death by Eve, life by Mary.”† So also St. Augustine (A.D. 354-430): “By a woman death, by a woman life.”‡

Of course, in all these passages there is an explicit point of resemblance in the virginity of Eve and the virginity of Mary, but the prominent point of contrast is in the relationship of each to sin. As Eve was the cause of death and sin, so Mary was the cause of life and the enemy of sin. Mary, moreover, is represented as taking an active and intelligent part in the undoing of sin by her perfect obedience. Original sin is not explicitly mentioned with regard to her, because amongst the Ante-Nicene Fathers generally the question of original sin had not come into prominence. But from the eloquent way in which they speak of Mary’s complete enmity with sin, they are held to include in, or rather

* “Cat.,” xii. 15.

† Ep. xxii. 21, *ad Eustoch.*

‡ “Opp. Serm.,” 232.

not to exclude from their meaning original sin.

Towards the end of the fourth century, however, the doctrine becomes more explicit. Perhaps the most important declaration is that found in the "Carmina Nisibena" of St. Ephrem (A.D. 379), who speaks thus: "Truly it is Thou and Thy Mother only who are fair altogether; for in Thee there is no stain, and in Thy Mother no spot. But my sons (*i.e.*, the members of the Church of Edessa) are far from resembling this twofold fairness"* Again, he says: "Two were made simple, innocent, perfectly like each other, Mary and Eve, but afterwards one became the cause of our death, the other of life."† Thus, St. Ephrem gives the traditional meaning of "Mary, the second Eve," in the fourth century. It is just that time when the doctrine of Original Sin assumes a prominent place in theology, and St. Ephrem at once concludes that the tradition of Mary being the second Eve implies her exemption from all sin. The testimony is important, since it

* Hymn 27, strophe 8. † Opp., ii. 327.

disposes of the supposition that the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception did not come into existence until the Middle Ages

What did come into existence in the Middle Ages was the famous controversy concerning this doctrine. The Feast of the Conception of Our Lady was kept in the East as far back as the fifth century. It was not introduced into the West until early in the twelfth century. Indeed, St. Anselm, the Archbishop of Canterbury, is said to have been the first Western bishop to celebrate it. As the feast became more and more popular, opposition arose. St. Bernard was the one who made the great protest against it, and this on the grounds that the feast was a novelty, and that he did not believe the doctrine which was involved in the feast. Possibly or probably he had confused the ideas of *active* and *passive* conception. However, the opposition spread, and became so violent as to oppose the doctrine in any form. Among the opponents are numbered St. Bernard, St. Peter Damian, Peter Lombard,

Alexander of Hales, blessed Albert the Great, and St. Thomas Aquinas. Their chief argument was that if Mary did not incur the stain of original sin, then she could not have been saved by Christ, the Saviour of all men. It would seem as if the dogma were about to perish.

But a school of theologians, however much power it may seem to possess for the passing moment, does not constitute the Catholic Church. Eight years after the death of St. Bonaventure and St. Thomas, there was born in a Northumberland village a child who was destined to make short work of the accumulated opposition. This was the Franciscan theologian, Duns Scotus. He began very gently, and at first only "would wish" to believe that Mary was Immaculate, and he grew in age and subtlety—he was the *Doctor Subtilis*—he declared boldly that the Immaculate Conception was Mary's unalienable privilege. So great an impetus did he give to the movement in Mary's favour that gradually the Dominican authorities gave way, and the Scottish view prevailed.



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plain, literal, and grammatical sense of the word “immaculate” is neither “fatherless” nor “miraculous,” nor “begotten of the Holy Ghost.” It is simply and only “stainless.”

IV

Perpetual Virginity

THE question here is not precisely as to whether Mary was a virgin when she brought forth our Redeemer. That is a fundamental article of the Christian Faith. We go farther than that. We say that Mary's virginity was assuredly perpetual. This was defined by the Fifth General Council (canon ii.), and by the Council held in the Lateran under Martin I. (canon iii.) This only refers to the perpetual virginity of Mary's flesh. But more, in the Catholic consciousness, this virginity is extended to her mind and feelings. Jesus Christ was her only begotten Son. She had no other child but Him. She had no inclination or desire for any child but Him. She was virgin before, during, and after the birth of Christ. She was virgin, not only with regard to the integrity of the flesh, but also with regard to the

purity of her mind and feelings. Mary was never called other than the Mother of Jesus, and on the Cross Christ recommended her to the care of St. John, because there were no other children to take His place.

As in the case of the Immaculate Conception, so also in the case of the perpetual virginity, its innate fitness is gathered from the dignity of the Divine motherhood. As Christ drew His Divine nature from the Eternal Father, appearing as the Only Begotten Son most perfect in all things, so it was fitting that He should be also the only begotten of His Mother, her sole and most perfect Offspring. Her Offspring was of such stupendous dignity, so unique in all its aspects, that God reserved Mary for all time for Christ only. The common consent of Christendom is expressed in the prophecy of Ezechiel · “This gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall pass through it, because the Lord, the God of Israel, hath entered in by it, and it shall be shut.”*

There are, however, a few Scriptural

* Ezek. xliv. 2.

texts which have caused some difficulty in connection with this point. It is not a question of modern criticism, however, for St. Jerome both felt the difficulties and answered them. Thus, in Matt. i. 25, we read: "And he knew her not until she brought forth her first-born Son." We must read the verse together with the preceding one: "And Joseph, rising up from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took unto him his wife." In this context it is evident that the sacred writer merely wished to emphasize the Virgin Birth of Jesus without referring in any way to the life of Mary after the birth of her First-born. The same answer suffices for the difficulty in verse 18: "Now the generation of Christ was in this wise. When, as His Mother was espoused to Joseph, *before they came together*, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost." There is, however, less difficulty in this case, because it is not at all sure that the phrase "before they came together" means anything more than that Joseph received Mary for his wife.

Again, it has been suggested that the title "first-born" implies also second-born, or other children. The suggestion is quite gratuitous. The first-born in every Jewish family was endowed with definite privileges and obligations. He was in a peculiar way dedicated to God, and it is in this sense that Christ is called the First-born.

Lastly, there is the difficulty of the "brothers of Jesus."* In Gal. i. 19 we read: "But other of the Apostles I saw none, saving James the brother of the Lord." "Brothers" in Biblical language means simply relations, or members of the same tribe. And, as a matter of fact, we know that "James the brother of the Lord" was the son of Alphæus. Now, the wife of Alphæus, or Klopas, or Cleophas (all forms of the same Hebrew name), was another Mary, and sister of the Mother of Jesus. So there is direct evidence that the so-called "brothers of Jesus"

* "Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brethren James, and Joseph, and Simon, and Jude? And His sisters, are they not all with us?" (Matt. xiii. 55).

were not the children of His Virgin Mother.

The history of this question is one of the most remarkable examples of how the collective Catholic consciousness has selected a truth for defence, even though the surface-value of Scripture might seem to be against it. The doctrine was first seriously attacked between the years 380 and 390 by an Illyrian bishop named Bonosus, the apostate monk Jovinian, and the layman Helvidius. Their defect was due certainly to moral rather than intellectual considerations. The high purity and chastity implied and secured by perpetual virginity was not held in honour by them. A tremendous storm of indignation throughout Christendom arose against them. They were completely extinguished.

Similarly the voice of tradition has given us the true interpretation of Luke i. 34. When Gabriel announced to Mary that she should conceive and bear a Son, she answered : "How shall this be done, because I know not man ?" The words must have referred to the future, because if they referred merely

to the past there was no point in them. Imagine them spoken by a maiden of to-day, betrothed, yet not married ! The Christian consciousness interprets them to mean : “ How can I have a child, since I have resolved (or vowed) to remain for ever a virgin ? ”



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declined. Mary, however, accepted the favour in the fulness of her heart. "Behold the handmaid of the Lord ; be it done to me according to Thy word." Through her voice, through her will, the human race welcomed the coming of God as one of its own members. By her moral consent therefore, as well as by providing God with a body, Mary acted on behalf of the race in bringing the one Mediator into the world.

Moreover, this co-operation of Mary tended to produce the richest fruits in the Incarnation. It was necessary for our salvation that God should become Man, but that was not enough. Our co-operation also was needed. And ours is helped by Mary's. It was needful, for instance, not only that the Son of God should become the Son of Man, but that also we should believe that fact as the most vital article of our faith ; that we should draw near to Him, confident in His power ; that a love of infinite value should be put forth to counteract an offence of infinite dishonour ; that a complete victory should

be won over the enemy of the race. Mary's co-operation, in fine, made the realization of this practicable and possible.

First, the Divine motherhood proves to us the truth of the twofold nature of Christ in the single personality. Mary as a mother proves that Christ was Man. Mary as a virgin proves that Christ was God. Mary as mother and virgin at the same time proves that Christ was God and Man at the same time. Thus does the co-operation of Mary help our faith.

Also our hope and confidence. The infinite God is offended, and we are afraid. But then we have a Mediator in His Son. That Son, however, is our Brother. We know it through Mary, for we know that through Mary He is partaker of our flesh, and of all our human weakness except our sin. It is Mary who has given us this Brother. It is Mary from whom He took that sinless weakness which gives us such hope and consolation. Being thus instrumental in bringing home to us the humanity of Jesus yet without in any

way obscuring His Godhead, we deem it fitting to ask Mary to be with us in our prayers to Christ. If in life and action she gives us confidence and enlightenment as regards the Incarnate God, it is not likely to be otherwise with regard to prayer to the Incarnate God.

Next, there was needed a love of infinite value to counteract the offence of infinite dishonour. Such a love could be expressed in many ways. The most fitting way, however, was through a sacrifice of flesh and blood. Jesus offered His Flesh and Blood long before the sacrifice on Calvary, and at Mary's hands. She "carried Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord."

And lastly, if such a sacrifice was able to counteract an offence of infinite dishonour, it was also able to overcome the power of Satan, which was not infinite. Thus the parallel of contrast between Mary and Eve is made complete. Eve was instrumental in bringing universal ruin to the race; Mary was instrumental in bringing universal reparation. Most appropriately, then, in this subordinate sense of co-operation and not of opera-

tion, is Mary called the reparatrix and mediatrix.

Then Mary co-operated by her shining example. She is called the mirror of justice because of the clear way in which she reflects the qualities of Incarnate Goodness. But most especially was she divinely destined to be the exemplar of her own sex. It was the mission of Christianity to raise man by raising woman. So Christianity chose Mary as the exemplar of a mother, a wife, a virgin, and a widow. It is her example which gives the form and tone to the many religious Orders where the vow of chastity is kept, the triumph of grace over nature.

Secondly, she co-operated by her intercession. The Communion of Saints, the bond of spiritual union and intercourse, is fostered by mutual intercession. And since Mary is the first of the saints, she will at least have primary part in the intercession. Indeed, we have the explicit record in Holy Scripture that when the Church was founded it was in mutual intercession with Mary. Before Christ ascended into heaven He fore-

told the descent of the Holy Spirit. For ten days, therefore, the Apostles “persevered with one mind in prayer with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brethren.” That way of spiritual communion with Mary, thus begun in Apostolic times, has continued throughout the whole history of the Church. It was not one which should cease with the death of the saints, but, rather, one which should be intensified. And so it has been intensified and developed and made more complex. It would be absurd to pray *for* the saints. But they can pray for us, and we can ask their prayers. This principle of co-operative mediation is sanctioned in the Apocalypse in the ministry of the angels. One “came and stood before the altar, having a golden censer,” “and there was given to him much incense that he should offer the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which is before the throne of God.” Then, too, we are told that grace comes to us from “Him that is, and was, and is to come, and from the seven spirits which are before His throne.” Thus there are mediators

not only in the offering of our prayers, but also in the bestowal of God's graces.

In all religious development, whether doctrinal or devotional, the selective principle is holiness. We have seen that there is a Divine sanction for subordinate mediation under Christ. The power and the energy of mediation will be decided by holiness. As on earth it is the prayer of the just man that availeth much, so in heaven it is the prayer of the most just that availeth most. Our Lady's singular holiness therefore marks her out as the chief intercessor of the heavenly court. Our Lord gives us one instance of an intercessor or mediator, other than Himself, beyond the grave. It is the story of Dives, Lazarus, and Abraham. The rich man in hell saw Abraham afar off and cried: "Father Abraham, have mercy on me; and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water to cool my tongue: for I am tormented in this flame." That was only a Hebrew parable, and a Hebrew mode of speech. The point, however, is that the idea behind it—namely, that of intercession or mediation

by the dead, by those who have passed to the life of glory—was approved and taught by Our Lord Himself. And if this is so with Abraham, much more is it true of Mary. Abraham was “the friend of God,” whereas Mary was “the Mother of God.”

We can now understand the meaning of that text : “For there is one God, and one Mediator of God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.”* On the face of it, it would seem to render all Our Lady’s help superfluous. There is one Mediator of God and men, therefore there can be no need of a mediatrix. But if the text were thus taken in its superficial sense it would prove too much. It would prove that there was not only no need of Our Lady, but also no need of any of the other subordinate helps of religion. For all religion is a means of uniting us to Christ, a mediator between Christ and us. The Bible would be superfluous, Baptism would be superfluous. The preacher would be superfluous. Prayer for each other would be superfluous. For under that supposition nothing

* 1 Tim. ii. 5.



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He is the sufficient Mediator, and there is no absolute necessity for the intercession of Our Lady. He is the only Mediator of infinite worth. The mediation of Mary, however, does not obtain for us the possibility of salvation, but supposes it. It helps, moreover, to make the possibility an actuality. Mary's mediation, indeed, derives all its power from that of Christ. The intercession of Mary, then, is not absolutely necessary, but only of the highest utility.

The Assumption

BY the Assumption is understood the passing of Our Lady, both body and soul, into heaven. It is not an article of faith, but it is so universally accepted by the Christian Church that it cannot be denied without rashness. There is indeed reason to believe that if the Vatican Council had continued its sittings it would have defined the doctrine. Much evidence was collected for this purpose, both historical and theological. It must be admitted at once that the historical evidence for the Assumption is almost worthless. The proof is mainly theological.

The belief in Mary's Assumption has been so universal and intense that the suggestion has been made that she never died. It was argued that since death was the punishment of sin, and Mary had no sin, therefore Mary did not die.

This supposition, however, must be rejected. Mary's privileges depend upon her Divine Motherhood. Her Son suffered death for our sins. Mary must not be supposed to have privileges above her Son. There must be no doubt about her human nature, so that there shall be no doubt about her Son's human nature.

It was, therefore, most fitting that Mary should undergo death. She died because Jesus died. Her sinlessness, however, although not a sufficient reason for exemption from death, was a sufficient reason for exemption from death by disease, or from corruption after death. Since the Middle Ages pious belief has ascribed her death to love. The ardent desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ would be a prayer to God to release her soul from the bondage of the flesh. Her virginal integrity during life was a reason why her body should remain incorrupt in death, and should be honoured with a speedy resurrection. This, at least, is an opinion of the Fathers. She who had been conceived without sin, who had borne her God,

who through life had been free from the slightest taint of concupiscence, who had been closely associated with Christ in the conflict with sin, was most appropriately honoured with this triumph over sin—a complete resurrection and glorification of her body and her soul.

These theological considerations underlie that development of Catholic devotion which is signalized by the Feast of the Assumption. The feast was celebrated all over both East and West as early as the sixth century. No one knows, however, why it came to be celebrated on August 15. It is also spoken of as the Sleeping, the Pause, the Departure, the Removal, the Transit, and the Reception. None of these titles give any indication of the special assumption of Mary's body, but neither do they exclude it. It is significant, too, that the Early Church, while most assiduous in collecting relics of the saints, possessed none of Our Lady.

An implication of the mystery of the Assumption is the Crowning of Our Lady in heaven. By the Crowning we mean that she received that exceedingly

high degree of glory which corresponded to her high degree of grace when on earth. Crowning is a universal and effective symbol of the last adornment and finish of any good work. It was fitting then that God, Who had from eternity chosen Mary to be His Mother, and had prepared her expressly for that office with an immaculate conception, a sinless life, a perpetual virginity, and a supereminent purity, should complete His good work by crowning it with a high degree of glory, the highest of any creature under Christ. We render our devotion to this truth when we meditate on the Crowning of Our Blessed Lady.

Perhaps the first devotional value of the Assumption is to reveal to us the connection between sin and corruption of the flesh, and between virtue and the integrity of the flesh. It is one of the laws of the spirit-life that if the soul is kept free from sin the effects of grace are felt in the body. The will which is enlightened by revelation and energized by grace is strong for the observance of the laws of nature. The physical laws of nature are just as much reflections of

the Divine Mind as the moral laws of nature. If they are disobeyed a punishment upon the physical organism follows. Thus there is an inner organic connection between the spiritual life and the life of the body. The effect of sin is seen in disease, death and bodily corruption. The effect of virtue is seen in bodily resurrection, and bodily glorification.

Mary, being ever free from sin, was ever free from disease and bodily corruption. She died only in order to be like Jesus, but also, like Jesus, her flesh did not see corruption. The soul that had known no sin drew the body after it, so that both might share the life of glorification.

The law also works conversely. As the sin of the spirit is followed by a retribution in the flesh, so also an indulgence of the flesh involves the enslavement of the spirit. The flesh, in fact, lusteth against the spirit. This law, which was such a stern reality and personal experience in so great a saint as St. Paul, had no place in Our Lady, even as it had no place in Our Lord. Jesus, being absolute substantial holiness,

could not possibly have any temptations of the flesh. He had temptations of the world and of the devil, but not the slightest shadow of a rebellion of the passions. So also was it with Our Lady. Her Divine Motherhood, her immaculate conception, her perpetual virginity, all required that she should be free from this conflict of the passions. Also, it was not merely a negative freedom, due to a nerveless body. It was a positive, ardent freedom due to the presence of the ardent spiritualized love in her soul. Her bodily assumption is the fruit of this. It is a free gift of God certainly, but it is bestowed as the fitting complement of that intense love which could nullify so completely all possible rebellious tendencies of the flesh.

If St. Paul was not free from this law, neither can we expect to be exempt from it. We can, however, turn to the Mystery of Our Lady's Assumption, and learn that, if we cannot have her full glory, we may at least have a share in it. That share will be proportioned to our positive virtues, the active, energetic struggle of the spirit against the flesh.



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be of a kind suitable to such a person. It is a question of the kind of honour which we should give to her.

The Catholic doctrine and practice is that we give to Our Lady an honour which is not Divine—since Divine honour should be paid to God alone—but which is nevertheless higher than that merited by any other creature. We thus distinguish three kinds of honour—*latria*, which we pay to God alone; *hyperdulia*, which we pay to Mary; and *dulia*, which we pay to any other of God's creatures.

The word *latria* in itself means "service," and in its original use could mean the service of either God or man; hence some of the earlier theologians (or, at least, one) have spoken of the worship of God as *latria primaria*, and that of Our Lady as *latria secundaria*. This distinction emphasizes Our Lady's subordinate place, and consequently the subordinate honour due to her. The common usage of the Church, however, keeps the term *latria* as a technical expression to signify the service which should be rendered to God alone.

Dulia means secondary, and is the

word the Church uses to express the relative veneration which Catholics give to the angels and the saints. *Hyperdulia* is an expansion of *dulia*. It denotes the greater veneration which we give to Mary as the highest of all mere creatures, though at the same time it is a worship incomparably lower than that given to either God or to the human nature of Christ.

The devotion to Mary, like all other devotions, has undergone a process of development. It was much less prominent, for instance, in the Early Church than it is in modern times. Nevertheless, it was far, far higher even then than Protestants would have us suppose. The Early Church certainly did not ignore Our Lady's share in the work of the Incarnation, nor undervalue her dignity, as is now done by most Protestants. The title "Mother of God" was a homely and familiar expression.

The faithful living in the Middle Ages or the nineteenth century were not the only ones privileged to have visions of Our Lady. There is a remarkable

instance so early as the third century. It is related by no less a personage than St. Gregory of Nyssa (fourth century) concerning no less a personage than Gregory Thaumaturgus (third century). The story is that Gregory Thaumaturgus, shortly before he was called to the priesthood, received in a vision a Creed from Our Lady at the hands of St. John. Gregory had been absorbed in some theological thesis which the heretics of the day had impugned. "In such thoughts," says Gregory of Nyssa, "he was passing the night when one appeared, as if in human form, aged in appearance, saintly in the fashion of his garments, and very venerable both in grace of countenance and general mien. . . . Following with his eyes his extended hand, he saw another appearance opposite to the former, in shape of a woman but more than human. . . . When his eyes could not bear the apparition, he heard them conversing together on the subject of his doubts; and thereby not only gained a true knowledge of the faith, but learned their names, as they addressed each other by their respective appella-

tions. He is said to have heard the person in woman's shape bid 'John the Evangelist' disclose to the young man the mystery of godliness; he answered that he was ready to comply in this matter with the wish of 'the Mother of the Lord'; and enunciated a formula well - turned and complete, and so vanished."

St. Gregory of Nyssa also relates how a certain Christian woman, having recourse to the protection of St. Mary, obtained the conversion of a heathen who had attempted to practise on her by magical arts, and how both were martyred.

Now, whether we believe these stories or not, whether they are true or whether they are false, they are evidence of a practical devotion to Our Lady in the Early Church.

There is, moreover, a most satisfactory explanation why the devotion was not prominent. There was the danger that the heathen might misunderstand it. Further, the full Godhead of Christ had not been defined, and there was a real danger of confusing the honour due to

Mary with that due to her Son. When once the Council of Ephesus had defined the true position of Mary, then the danger was past. And so we find that the Church was using to Mary the same language in the fifth century as in the twentieth.

This practice of the Early Church has its lesson for us to-day. There undoubtedly is a tendency among some Catholics to use exaggerated language about Our Lady. Things have been said about her which may have been very well in their context in another time and another country. But in England in the twentieth century we have to be careful in using language which, though correct in itself, is easily liable to be misunderstood by our non-Catholic friends. For if the devotion to Mary obscured or belittled, even in the slightest degree, the adoration due to God alone, it would be quite wrong. If anyone knowingly did give Divine honour to Mary he would by that very act cease to be a Catholic ; but, as a matter of fact, it is those religions which have ceased to give relative honour to Mary

which have in time ceased to give supreme honour to God.

The Catholic's supreme devotion to God is protected by the obligation of hearing Mass every Sunday, which sacrifice, as every Catholic child is taught, can be offered to God alone. The adoration which the Catholic pays to Christ, really present in the Blessed Sacrament, keeps this supreme devotion constantly before his mind.

Nevertheless, such is the nature of the human heart ; tendencies to exaggeration will occur, and these must be corrected by the teaching authority of the Church.

There are two points which seem to have given offence in the past. The first is an assertion that somehow the flesh of Mary is received in the Blessed Sacrament. Now, it is quite true that Mary gave to Christ the flesh which He gives to us in the Eucharist ; but when she gave it to Him, it ceased to be hers. Pope Benedict XIV., when he was yet Cardinal Lambertini, exposed this error in the following words · “ This doctrine was held to be erroneous, dangerous,

and scandalous, and the *cultus* was reprobated, which in consequence of it they asserted was to be paid to the most Blessed Virgin in the Sacrament of the Altar."

The second point is the tendency to attribute to Mary a power equal to, or above, that of Christ. Against this tendency the Holy See has spoken authoritatively. In a Decree of the Inquisition of February 28, 1875, addressed to the Bishop of Presimilia, the title "Queen of the Heart of Jesus" was condemned. The offices of the Blessed Virgin and her Son must not be inverted—that is, she must be dependent on Him, not He on her. Hence the Sacred Congregation declared that "it has been ruled by the Sovereign Pontiff, that the images or pictures to be consecrated to the *cultus* in question, must represent the Virgin as carrying the Infant Jesus, not placed before her knees, but in her arms." The same decree further affirms "that although she (the Blessed Virgin) has the greatest influence with her Son, still it cannot be piously affirmed that she exercises command over Him."



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