

earth to be blessed, and David's son should build a temple for the Lord of glory. But when the angel stood before Mary, he was about to utter that, which was not only to mankind the greatest promise that earth ever heard; but was to the Blessed Virgin herself an assurance of an exaltation such as the heart of man never conceived. 'Hail, thou highly favored, the Lord is with thee, blessed art thou among women.' The holy Gabriel recognized in the Virgin, who stood abashed in the presence, one shortly to be advanced above his own seat in the heavens, and with joy and heavenly humility he says, 'Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found favor with God. And behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shall call His name JESU'. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest, and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His Father David, and He shall reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there shall be no end.' b What had this humble handmaid to say to so astounding a declaration? Let us listen to her voice of virgin modesty, and strive to learn from it somewhat of those characteristics that procured for her this title of blessedness. She does not disbelieve Him, nor does she shrink from the promise set before her, but strong in her purity of heart and person, she asked, 'how shall this be, for I know not man?' She plainly intimates that no such alliance was anticipated by her. Nay it is going too far, to suppose, that moved by an unconscious presentiment, that the Lord had chosen her for a habitation to Himself. She had already devoted herself to a life of perpetual virginity. All those passages of scripture, which seem to have an opposite meaning, may, most naturally, be understood in accordance with this idea. It was not long the teaching of the church, and I know not on what authority, or for what sufficient reason men in very late times are found, who strive to raise objection to its reception. But, I say, she is neither unbelieving nor irreverently inquisitive. She proposed the difficulty of her state of life, but when he tells her of the power of the Highest, though she may not understand the mystery, she submits her will to the pure and holy God. 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done unto me according to thy word.' c In the instant of that submission at least, we believe that she was lifted above the condition of sinful flesh. That as the Virgin Mary by bringing into this world the Prince of Life, remedied the death that had been introduced by Eve, so, by obedience and trust she obtained in herself that perfect holiness, which by rebellion and curiosity the other had lost. d Along with the gift of holiness she would obtain the knowledge of the Highest, and then she would understand what she uttered shortly after by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. 'That all generations

henceforth should call her *blessed*.' This she declared, no doubt, from an express assurance and promise of the Holy Ghost. He foreknowing that the church was about to be set up on earth, which was to last through all generations, foreknew also, that in that church, both love and obedience would move her soul to pay that reverence and to utter those praises that in fact, have been heard in the courts of the Christian Temple. And just so far as the reverence has been refused, and those inspired praises sought to be hushed, \* so far has a deliberate attempt been made to prove God a liar, and His words nothing worth.

2. "We may thus have seen, even from so short a rehearsal of the history of the Annunciation, that it is nothing strange, that in our text or elsewhere, the Virgin Mother of God is alluded to by her Divine Son as a pattern of holiness and acceptableness with God. The woman who made the exclamation on which these remarks are built, in waiting on the ministry of the Lord, seems to have been impressed by the Holy Spirit, with a conviction of the divine character of Him she was bearing. And farther reflecting on the ineffable intimacy, as well of nature as of intercourse that must exist between Him, and her whom He should rightly call His mother, exclaimed in sudden ecstacy of astonishment, 'blessed is the womb that bore thee and the paps that thou hast sucked,' and the Blessed Lord assents to her words with a very strong affirmative, rendered usually in scripture by yea verily, † or yea doubtless, ‡ But immediately in the remainder of the sentence He shows that her high exaltation is not the result of caprice, nor of accident, (if I have not been irreverent in the use of such terms when supposed of the events of God's providence,) but that the Virgin Mother obtained it by her surpassing gifts of trust and obedience. Very similar to this is His covert allusion to the life of holy obedience in His Blessed Mother, which we find on the occasion of her coming to Him with some of His kinsmen, when he was surrounded by the crowd. When one told Him of it, it seems to have broken off His discourse but as He was going He says to those around Him, 'my Mother and my brethren are these which hear the will of God, and do it.' At once the interest encouragement to those who would attempt to keep His commandments and the highest enjoy on her who in her holy retirement could thus be alluded to, as perfectly accomplishing such obedience. It is then in filial obedience, that all those gifts and graces centre which procured for her, or rather which fitted her for obtaining the blessedness of being the Mother of God.

3. "The nature of that blessedness is a deep and interesting, perhaps dangerously

\*The Magnificat is left out of the American Episcopal Prayer Book.

†Rom. X. 8.

‡Philip III. 8.