

When we view her in the holy light shed upon her in the inspired narrative of St. Luke, and contemplate the duties and privileges of her wonderful maternity, we cannot avoid exclaiming: "How near she stood to God!" Never was creature brought into a proximity with the Three Divine Persons like that which was her lot—a proximity, not indeed of nature nor of attributes, but of service and manifold relations. Let us glance at her high honours. Jesus Christ is the "Word made flesh," the Son of God become man;—His two natures, the human and the divine, being united in the Divine Person of the Word. He was conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary; the Holy Ghost, in boundless charity, forming of the pure blood of the virginal heart of Mary, the Most Sacred Body of Him who was to be a victim of sacrifice for man's redemption, and sacramental sustenance for man's spiritual life. Thus Mary becomes the Mother of Our Lord Jesus Christ the Son of God, true God and true man. The Eternal Father with full knowledge of her holiness, and with equal confidence in her powers of management, commits His "Beloved Son" to her keeping. Giving a Redeemer to the world, he wishes Him to reach us by means of the one chosen Mother. Thus is Mary honoured by the Blessed Trinity. She is associated with the Divine Persons, that at the Court of Heaven she may represent the whole human race, that man may communicate by the Mother with her Divine Son, and by Him with His Heavenly Father. Is it not a pride and a joy to us, that our earth should give a Mother to the Son of God, and that the flower of our race should issue in such "Blessed fruit?" And, if in the order of nature we instinctively honour great and illustrious men and women, shall we not, in the order of grace, in which qualities that command admiration vastly surpass those of nature, yield to the higher instincts, and give honour to Her whom God directly invests with more than an angelic dignity? Is there, was there ever, on earth, in the order either of nature or of grace, any being, whether historical or fabled, fit to compete in any kind of excellence with the Mother of the Incarnate God? And do not the hearts of those who love and adore the Son, warm to His Mother? Let me add, must not the devotion paid to her by the Catholic Church, create in every erring but reflective mind, a suspicion, that, where Mary is honoured, there, and there only, exist a due appreciation and the true worship of her Divine Son?

But her relations with God and the sublime office and functions of her Motherhood are not all her praise. Recurring again to St. Luke, we see some of her personal qualities shadowed forth by his inspired pen. Prominent is her love of holy purity, but, with its companion, prudence. The latter virtue more naturally than the former is connected with the present argument; but they must not be separated; for in Mary they were inseparable, the one enhancing the other. It is clearly recorded, then, that the Blessed Virgin's consent

was a condition premised to the Incarnation. Though this mystery had been decreed, and must come to pass, yet God was pleased to give her a voice in its accomplishment. She was, as we have seen, the fourth party concerned in it, and, when it was proposed, her assent was waited for, she was left to become the Mother of God by her own free choice. With prudence she deliberated, with prudence she questioned, and when she had received an explanatory answer from heaven, and the compatibility of the two honourable states of virginity and motherhood had flashed upon her mind in all its light,—then, and not till then, did she accept the high honours and awful responsibilities of her mission. It is therefore to her prudent assent that we owe the last steps taken in the accomplishment of the Incarnation;—it is to her, after God, that we owe the dawning of our Redemption. Standing between the coming Messiah and the expectant human race, she had scarcely uttered her *Fiat*, when the "Word was made flesh, and dwelt amongst us," and His first chosen dwelling place was by her own pure heart. Her consummate prudence, and her fidelity to the vow of perpetual virginity, were ornaments befitting the magnificence of divine mercy which shines in the mystery of the Incarnation.

We have but touched upon her personal holiness: to finish this little sketch of her maternity we must select a few more of the points of brilliancy that shed a halo round her character. We must glance back over her previous life, even to her Immaculate Conception; for in it were laid the foundations of her future greatness. Virtues must cluster around the Incarnate God, and it is the "Angel of the Lord" who informs us that, before his Annunciation, the Blessed Virgin was "full of grace." If, by the testimony of the Angel who was commissioned by God to reveal to her the whole economy of the Incarnation and of her motherhood, she was "full of grace," it is then ascertained by divine authority that she was enriched with every virtue of which a human being is capable;—for grace in its plenitude excludes none. Neither humility on the heights of her greatness, nor charity, nor temperance, nor fortitude, nor, to be short, any Christian virtue was absent. But, moreover, grace in its plenitude before God, and in the measure required by her office and functions as Mother, Nurse and life-companion of God Incarnate, went further. It carried every virtue to its highest perfection. And indeed, the various virtues, in their full number and full perfection, were all needed in her who was to communicate so intimately with the God of holiness. Now, to give this crowning degree of excellence every moment of her life had been employed, even that of her Immaculate Conception. This was a privilege reserved for her, which not only warded off original sin from her soul, and preserved its spotless innocence, but put her in possession of every grace and supernatural gift which our first Mother Eve had forfeited, and many a gift besides. She was destined never to know sin in either of its forms, mortal or