

SO AS BY FIRE

BY JEAN COONOR

CHAPTER XIII

UNDER THE PALMS

Leigh stood dumb, transfixed for a moment, the blood surging wildly through heart and brain at the vision before him. He had believed her thousand of miles away, this girl whom no denial, no mockery, not even the claim of a royal suitor, could banish from his thoughts and dreams.

"Allston, my dear boy!" Aunt Van's delighted voice aroused him. "I thought you had failed us. I have a lovely crowd with me to-night—Ethel Rose and Janet Howard and Marjorie Rives. And Nellie! Ah, you are astonished to see her, I know. She flashed home upon us like a meteor only last night."

"And then the wonderful grey eyes met his—arch, winsome, compelling, and he made his way somehow to her side.

"Ah, Mr. Leigh—this is our dance, I believe," and he caught at her graceful strategy gladly and led her off into the brilliant whirl. "Just one turn around the room to escape Colonel Dupré and the rest," she laughed up at him. "You hate dancing, I know. There is a little nook behind those palms to which you can take me, and we can quarrel comfortably."

"If such be your pleasure," he answered, as they reached the hedge of feathery green that hid a deep, cushioned window seat.

"Have you not a word of welcome for me!" she asked, as she sat down, as if a little weary, in the shelter of the palms.

"I have no words at all to express my surprise," he began. "And delight, as well, I hope?" she added, mckingly.

"What has brought you home?" he asked, ignoring her light speech. "I thought—" he paused.

"That I was abroad indefinitely," she said.

"No, most definitely and determinedly. So I judged at our last meeting."

"Well, you were mistaken. You are really not infallible, Mr. Leigh. We are home now, definitely and determinedly."

"For how long?" he asked, in a low tense tone.

"Really, that I can not say. I begin to think it things keep up like this I shall like home better than I supposed."

"When are you to be married?" he asked, grimly.

"When am I to be married?" she repeated, with a laugh. "For a man without words it seems to me you are a little catechetical, Mr. Leigh."

"I am—unpardonably so," he answered in a graver tone.

"Not at all—you have the privilege of old acquaintances. Any one who tolerated me during my first months at Roserofte has established a claim on me which nothing can shake. And you were one of my earliest instructors, Mr. Leigh. Don't move, or we are lost. I see a glittering young attaché who is looking for me for the next dance, and I am so tired."

She leaned back on her cushions with a little fluttering sigh, and as the light from an electric bulb fell upon her uplifted face, Leigh noted the shadows under the eyes, the weary lines about the delicate lips.

"Why do you keep this thing up?" he said, almost roughly. "You are not strong enough for it. It is the pace that kills."

"It must kill them," she answered lightly. "I must live in the foam, in the sparkle of things, or not live at all. You are wondering why I came home so suddenly. Grandfather had one of his attacks and it frightened me. I felt that we ought to return at once."

"And the Duke? I beg pardon—in my interest forget—"

"The Duke!" she repeated. "I left the Duke behind with the blue blood of his ten generations aboil. We had a quarrel in the most charming French—there is such *verve*, such vivacity in a French quarrel and the Duke was so dramatic."

"Do you mean you have thrown him over?" Leigh asked, breathlessly.

"Oh, really, no; nothing so vigorous as that, Mr. Leigh," she laughed. "I assure you it was a most graceful adieu."

"Thank God," he said, under his breath. "You didn't care a jot for him, I know."

the generations seemed winding about my neck, and I snatched it and was free. Then even dear Madame Charrette gave me up. I was beyond her understanding, she declared! Never would she take one of these *Americaines incompréhensibles* to her governess' heart again. So we parted, and I went to Italy with the Frascales while grandfather took the baths at *Les Bains Chaudes*. Three wonderful months I spent in Italy, the light tone deepened and softened, and then grandfather joined me and grew worse, as I said, and we are home. Now I have talked myself out, monsieur. It is your turn. What has happened since you left me on the rocks at Biarritz last summer?"

"I have lived, as you see."

"Lived and flourished," she laughed. "Aunt Van tells me wonderful stories of your brilliant success."

"I have had several big cases and the good luck to win them," he answered. "But success, I would not give my record that name. There are more interesting happenings in your own family, I think."

"Milly's pretty romance with her young doctor, you mean? I confess it rather took my breath."

"Why?" he asked, bluntly.

"Aunt Marian is sighing over it, I assure you. She says Milly should do better."

"Impossible," was the quick reply. "No finer, nobler fellow than Jack Vance walks the earth."

"Still there are other things to be considered for a Randall," and there seemed an odd, mocking ring in the silvery tone. "I think you once told me a family story to that effect, Mr. Leigh. Something about a girl named Rachael Varney, whose young heart and hopes were crushed under the Randall pride in some dim, archaic past. It was my first lesson on sociology and I have always remembered it."

"If you mean that Vance can boast no family tree—" Leigh began.

"None, Aunt Marian declares mournfully, the gray eyes were dancing mirthfully as they met his gaze. "Not even a beanstalk, Mr. Leigh."

"A fig for family trees," was the impatient answer. "The love that would stop such trifles isn't worth the winning."

"That was not the lesson you taught me two years ago, Mr. Leigh."

"It is my lesson to-night," he answered, "but you are past my teaching now."

"Not at all," she said. "I find this new viewpoint of yours most interesting. Let me understand it. You say that love, true love—"

"Is the law," he answered, with passionate earnestness, as all the mingled influences of the past day, Vance's quiet words of love, Dafty's humble story, the laughing, mocking beauty of the girl—before him, into fiery speech. "The supreme law, overruling pride, prejudice, poverty, all petty distinctions of rank, name and place. It should lift its own, if need be, from the deepest mine, hold to its own, heedless of the world's scorn or plaudits through life and beyond death."

"There was a moment's silence, broken only by the plaintive strains of the German waltz music. Then the gray eyes that had been lifted to the speaker in laughing defiance shadowed, softened, and fell beneath Leigh's gaze."

"Would this lesson be beyond your learning?" he asked, his voice trembling despite himself.

She lifted her eyes again, and for a moment their gaze was clear, steady, searching, a glance from soul to soul.

"No," she answered, "for I am a woman. But I think," and she bubbled once more with light and laughter, "I think, like dear Madame Charrette with her English grammar, you are teaching what I would be quite impossible for you to learn, Mr. Leigh. And now I can hide away no longer. I have missed two partners already I am sure, and you are not doing your *devoir* to Aunt Van's pretty buds at all. Come, we must appear again."

And in a moment more she was standing, gay and gracious, under the electric light, the center of every eye, eager partners pressing around her, and the "lesson" of the evening seemingly forgotten.

"I did not expect to have Nellie with me," explained Aunt Van, as during a pause in his duties her nephew found himself at the chapter's side. "She joined us at the last minute. Colonel Dupré, who came over in the steamer with her, sent her an invitation by special messenger this morning. Really, it is scarcely fair to my other girls to have such a belle with me. The men have no eyes for any one else when she is near. If you could overhear them raving over her *beauté du diable*, as old Monsieur Pierfonds calls it."

"Confound his French insolence," said Leigh, fiercely.

"Nonsense, my dear boy—he meant only sincere flattery, I assure you. And there is an evil charm about her, you must agree. Then she has had such wonderful advantages this last two years. Louise Charrette, whom I recommended to the Judge for her governess and traveling companion is incomparable. Nellie shows the training of *la vieille Parisienne* at every turn."

"Was she a good woman?" asked the young man, bluntly.

"Louise Charrette good! My dear Allston, what a question! She is quite a devotee. But there she seems to have failed. Nellie is still out of the Church."

"So I understand."

"It seems very sad and strange," continued the old lady, "but as her grandfather says, these things can not be forced, and even in this stubborn resistance he can see no fault. He simply idolizes her. She goes to church regularly with him; attends lectures, sermons, even missions, at his request. And she was in the very heart of things, of course, at the Frascales. I understand. The old Cardinal, their uncle, was most interested in her. But all in vain. She either can not or will not believe. Perhaps this rumored marriage with the Duc de Lausanne will change her. You met him, I think, last summer, Allston."

"Yes," was the brief answer.

"It will be a most brilliant *parti* even for her, I understand," said this good matchmaker with interest.

"Really, of that I am no judge," was the dry answer. "He struck me as a rather empty figure head of a fast-vanishing past."

Something in the words, in the tone, was a sudden, startling revelation to Aunt Van. But she was too wise, too wary, to give sign.

"They are all at Marian's house in Baltimore for the present," she went on. "Gilbert felt his father should be under the care of a specialist—for a while at least. But the Judge insists that no anxiety about him should mar the pleasure of Nellie's home-coming. Marian is to give a reception in her honor next week."

And the good dame chattered on in seeming unconsciousness of the light that had flashed upon her. And, where were her keen wits, that she had not seen from the first? The fete at Van Arsdale Manor, the trip to Europe last summer, the feverish devotion to his profession, the sudden deadening of all youthful enthusiasm since his return. Her boy, her poor, dear boy she saw it all!

It was close to another day before the good lady's duties as chaperon were over, and in the old-fashioned Southern hotel which she favored, her pretty charges, after various wise provisions for their comfort and beauty, were comfortably settled for sleep until the next forenoon. Aunt Van never allowed her girls the pace that kills. But in the wide airy room that Mildred and Nellie shared together, a log fire was blazing cheery welcome when they entered, and both girls had found the evening too exciting in many respects to induce sleep. Slipping into a silken kimono, Nellie flung half a dozen pillows on the hearth rug, and nestling there in the cheery warmth and glow, watched the quieter, graver movements of her room-mate with a curious gleam in her eyes.

"It's too late for the Rosary to-night," she said, as Milly twined the amethyst beads around her wrist.

"Come, it's all settled, I see it in your face. You and Dr. Vance had it out there among the azaleas to-night. Tell me all about it, Milly. You have promised to marry him."

Milly sank into the low chair before the hearth and the firelight showed the new radiance on her sweet, womanly face.

"Yes," she answered, simply. "I have promised him. It will be a disappointment to mamma, I know—but I love him, Nellie."

"What a solemn finality you put in the word," was the half-mocking reply. "Did you ever love before, Milly?"

"Never!" the sweet voice seemed to thrill with its earnest denial. "I have had girlish fancies, of course, but never anything like this—so strong, so deep, so compelling. Nellie. There seems but one place in the world for me and that is at his side, one life for me and that is a share in his, one name for me—his wife. I have no doubt, no fear. The one shadow that loomed between us is removed. He believes, he hopes now, even as I do."

"Since when?" was the startled query.

"For more than a year," Milly answered. "But he did not tell me until to-night under the azaleas. He was almost afraid, he said, that I would doubt his motives—the earnestness, the purity of his faith. As if I could—as if I could!

Though, as he said, it was a few words of mine that made me think that, that stole like a faint light into his darkness. And then with that little light glimmering before him, he met Father Lane, the missionary. I don't suppose you remember him, Nellie. He preached for us once or twice at St. Barnabas."

"Yes, I remember him," was the low answer.

"There was a terrible fever epidemic in Jack's town that year, and he and Father Lane met constantly at sick-beds, death beds, in the slums, the hospitals. Wherever there was direct need, they stood together, Jack fighting for the body and Father Lane for the soul. And such brave fighting as it was. Jack said he sometimes gave in under the strain but Father Lane never."

"The fever raged in the very lowest part of the city, among criminals, outcasts, negroes—the dregs of the place. But there was no spot too foul or dangerous for Father Lane to enter, no creature too vile, too abandoned, for his message of hope and love. And in the burning light of this charity, Jack saw the Truth and followed it. He is silent about it usually, for it seems too holy, too wonderful an experience for casual speech, but he was received into the Church by Father Lane six months ago. Oh, Nellie, you can not understand how happy this has made me, you can not understand."

"No," was the low, dreamy answer, as with her hands clasped over her head Nellie looked into the leaping

fire. "No, I suppose I can not understand."

"But some day you will," Mildred went on, softly, "some day the Light will shine for you, dear, as it did for Jack. We are all praying for it—Sister Celestia and all."

"Oh, no, no, no," was the impassioned cry, and the crouching figure before the fire started up suddenly and falling on her knees buried her head on Mildred's breast.

"Don't don't pray for me—don't let her pray. For it is as she said years ago—the Light for me must be fire, Milly—burning, revenging, consuming fire. Don't pray for it, lest you be heard, lest you be heard."

"Nellie, Nellie, dear Nellie!" cried the other in dismay, as she clasped the sobbing, trembling girl in her soft tender arms, "what a strange, wild way to think, to feel!"

"I know. I am a strange, wild wicked girl, Milly," the speaker lifted her head again and tossed back the loosened red-gold hair from her strained face. "But I am not so wild and strange and wicked that I can not be glad you are happy, Milly—glad, glad! And oh, don't mind any one being disappointed. Don't care whether he is rich or poor or high or low, let the world laugh or frown as it pleases. Love like yours is enough—enough to make heaven on earth, Milly, heaven on earth!"

"And you brought it to me," said Milly, as with tender touch she smoothed back the loosened hair from Nellie's face. "I can never forget that. If it had not been for you, we would never have known each other. It was at your bedside we met. He called us to you, you remember."

"Yes, I remember," the speaker's voice grew cold and dull again. "I remember. But we will both look like witches to-morrow if we sit up here talking any longer. *Die heures de sommeil* Madame Charrette assured me was the first commandment of a pretty woman. Let us to bed and to sleep."

But long after the new betrothed was lost in happy love dreams the gray eyes of her companion stared into the fire-lit shadows about her.

Finally, as if tortured by restlessness, she rose to look at the clock on the mantel. The wide hearth was a bed of embers, blue and sparkle had died—all was clear fiery glow. And as she stood looking at it—the triumphant beauty of the evening—she seemed to feel a scorching breath within her inmost being.

"It will come," she whispered to herself, "it has come—already. My God, my God!" she flung herself upon her knees and buried her face in the cushioned chair before her.

"Oh, if, like Milly's happy lover, I dared, dared follow the Light that is burning within my very soul—if I dared—if I dared!"

TO BE CONTINUED

WHO CAN FORGIVE SINS BUT GOD ONLY

CONFESSION WAS OBSTACLE TO CONVERSION

(A TRUE STORY)

Up in his small lodging room, Jack Morrison sat smoking. As a medical student, he knew that smoking was not good for him, but he knew also that there were worse things than this.

From down the hall voices and laughter sounded; then footsteps approached, while someone called Jack's name. Receiving no answer, the caller, a young man, stood in Jack's doorway.

"Aren't you coming, Jack?" he inquired.

"Where?" The curt question expressed little of Morrison's bitter mood.

"Oh, it's just the religious meeting—revival or something. Don't you remember? Not exactly in our line, but the fellows all promised to go. Everybody's doing it; and it may prove something of a lark," he ended hopefully.

"No I do not care to go, thank you," came the cold response.

"All right; so long," and the young man rejoined his waiting comrades.

For some time the other sat smoking, but the listless expression on his face had given place now to one of utter despair. With bitterest self reproach he was acknowledging to himself that through his own fault he was not making good in this, the last year of his medical studies. He was failing miserably to live up to his past record, and the great things expected of him, especially by his old father, already dreaming of his son's future and brilliant career. Why was he failing, and so utterly? He simply had fallen in with the wrong companions this year, he told himself wearily. The sane, healthy things of life had come to have little attraction for him, and while he realized that he had sunk low, he felt that he could not rise and free himself.

At last Jack put aside his pipe, and leaned his aching head on his hands. He was very lonely; why had he not gone with his friends to the meeting? It was surely an amusement, innocent enough. Ah, yes! too innocent for him. Consequently he did not want it. The whole city to-night was crowding to hear the evangelist, who was considered a good speaker. Why not go with the crowd, even now? This man might have some message of hope for him.

The entrance to Arno Hall was brightly lighted that night, and its doors were thrown hospitably open.

An hour ago a great many people had entered. Now a few stragglers still were entering or leaving.

An old gentleman of benevolent aspect came down the street and paused before the door. A placard above made some announcement, doubtless as to the nature of whatever was transpiring within, but the kindly blue eyes were dim with age. Being just a bit curious, and intensely interested in human affairs, the old gentleman boldly walked in.

There was an inner door which was opened for him by a man stationed near by. "Too bad, you've missed the speaking," he said, "but the Rev. Mr. Horton is still within."

Our elderly friend entered a long, well-filled hall, at the end of which was a raised platform, evidently having been just vacated. A man in clerical garb was passing from group to group in his audience, shaking hands and pausing for an earnest talk with many.

The newcomer was watching the scene with deep interest, when he suddenly dawned on him where he was. He now remembered having heard that a revival was going on in the Protestant churches, but being occupied with other affairs, he soon forgot the matter. Turning to leave rather hastily, he collided with a man back of him, apparently not having been seen. Daniel Stone inadvertently paused, arrested by the look on the man's face. A young face, and proud, with an eager light, an eager hunger that might mean passion, pain, or sin in the dark eyes now fixed on the face of the evangelist with something almost compelling in their gaze.

Perhaps it was that gaze, or merely Stone's movement to leave, that attracted the attention. At any rate, the next moment the Rev. Richard Horton stood beside the two, and Daniel Stone felt his hand warmly clasped. A pleasant greeting sounded in his ears, while with a warm feeling in his heart, he acknowledged that the non-Catholic's sociability was something Catholics might profit by.

"You are a Christian?" the gentleman questioned with a piercing, but kindly, glance at the beaming, serene, aged face of Daniel Stone.

"Certainly! that is, I hope so," the other returned in some confusion.

"Do you care to ask me anything?" the evangelist further inquired.

"Not a single solitary thing," Stone returned with such vehemence that the other smiled.

"You feel perfectly satisfied, then?" That is well," he added, still smiling. Daniel Stone stepped back, not, however, before he had seen a cloud cross the evangelist's countenance, as his eyes met the restless ones of the young man who had waited. Standing at the door, with frank interest, Stone watched their interview. It did not last long, and when the young man turned away, the look of hopelessness on his face told the watchers that Richard Horton, for all his kindly good fellowship, had not known how to help his brother's need.

As the young man approached the door, Stone nodded to him, and they left the hall together. "Well, did he do you any good?" the young man asked when they were outside.

"The other laughed softly. "No," he acknowledged, "but, you see, I wasn't exactly expecting him to. I didn't really need any help, and being a Catholic, I didn't, strictly speaking, have any business there."

"Why not?" Jack challenged. "Other denominations were well represented?"

"Why, Catholics have everything they can possibly need in their own Church. What, therefore, would be the use of galivanting around—unless to share our treasures with them? Indeed, I wish we could," Stone said feelingly.

"Where?" The curt question expressed little of Morrison's bitter mood.

"You forget," the young man returned with a touch of haughtiness in his tone, "there are some things in your Church we would not care to have shared with us."

"That is only because you do not know the truth about them, and the value of them," the old gentleman returned untruffled. "Now, I've just laid a car go by, and there will not be another for ten or fifteen minutes; in the meantime, I am going to tell you just exactly what your need is at this moment—what my Church can give you, the Sacraments of Penance and of the Holy Eucharist."

The other started slightly. "I could never bring myself to kneel to anyone but God," he said vehemently.

"I could never bring myself to kneel to my sins to follow-man. We should tell them only to God in the secret closets of the heart."

"I do believe," Daniel Stone calmly remarked "that you non-Catholics imagine you are ahead of us, mentally and spiritually, with that idea of telling your sins only to God. To my thinking, there is not the slightest merit or satisfaction in that mere telling. Suppose, for instance, standing (you and I) as we are now, you deliberately knocked me down, no resistance being offered by me. Do you think it would be, in any sense, brave, or manly, or satisfactory to me to have you tell me that you had knocked me down? What I would expect though, would be that you'd humble yourself sufficiently to tell the doctor what you had done, and as a reparation that you'd pay the bill. Oh, yes! it is right and proper that we tell the Almighty of our sorrow for sin, but for real humility and mortification give me confession. For, understand, there is something humbling in kneeling down and telling the tale of our sins to a fellow-creature; and never, for a moment, does he who listens or he who kneels forget Whose is the voice that pro-

nounces absolution—even the Holy Spirit's own. Christ did not will to remain on earth as a visible Presence, to which men might kneel unashamed, but kneeling might forget all save that Presence. But He stayed with us, veiled in the Holy Eucharist, and He vested His priesthood in men. They are frail, human hands that hold the power of the keys, but they are human hearts and sinful for which that power is given. To me the sacrament of penance expresses Christ's infinite mercy, even as the Holy Eucharist expresses His infinite love."

"The speaker paused, a little ashamed that he had been so carried away as to preach something in the nature of a sermon. But the thoughtful face of the man beside him told him he had made an impression. He continued at length, slowly: "When I was young, I went wild for a bit. I forgot many things. I am an old man now, standing on the brink of the grave, but I look back on that page of my life with sorrow indeed, but without fear, believing that by confession it has been made white—because of the merits of Christ. Humbly, sorrowfully, we kneel to confess our sins, and lo! the act becomes one with the bitter humiliations of the Passion, and the infinitude of the Christ sorrow for sins."

Jack Morrison did not respond at once; but courage and hope had come into his face. Far down the street a car came in sight, then swiftly, yet with grave gentleness, the young man spoke: "Just a few months ago I thought of entering your Church. It was confession that kept me back. Perhaps it was my pride, but I could not quite stand for it. Now your words have shown me my own need, and to-morrow I shall make arrangements to be instructed in the Catholic Faith. Goodnight, and thank you."

There was a fervent handclasp, and he waited to help Daniel Stone on his car: then he stepped back, alone once more. Close to him was the lure of a great, evil city. On the street corner, just opposite, there were flaring lights, and swinging doors, and gay voices; but the young man was oblivious of it all. His glance had swept to the peace of the stars above him. "A stained page made white," he murmured, "and I called it degradation; infinitude, and I dreamed of chains."

He became an exemplary Catholic. —Anna Rose in the Missionary.

THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

(Sermon by the late Very Rev. T. N. Burke, O. P.)

"Thou art all fair, O my beloved, and there is no spot or slightest stain in thee."

These words are found in the Canticles of Solomon, and the holy Catholic Church applies them to the soul and body of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In the Scriptures the king addresses his spouse by these words. The king represents no other than the Almighty God, and surely, if among all the daughters of men, we ask ourselves, and who was the spouse of the Almighty God? We must immediately answer the Virgin Mother, who brought forth the eternal God, made man. Wherever, therefore, the Scriptures and inspired writings of the old law speak words of love, and denote attributes belonging to a spouse, these are directly applicable to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Now, among the many gifts and graces which the prophet beheld in her, and upon which he congratulates her, are these: he tells us that he saw her at the king's right hand in golden garb, surrounded with variety; that everything of beauty and loveliness was upon her; but, in addition to this, he tells us that a vision of such perfect purity, such perfect immaculateness rose before him. It was, that filled with the Holy Ghost and the joy of God, he exclaimed, "Thou art fair, O my beloved, and there is no spot or slightest stain in thee."

Behold, then, dearly beloved, the first great grace that the Virgin of Virgins received at the first moment of her existence. When we reflect upon the relationship which the incarnation of our divine Lord established between the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Almighty God, namely, that she should be the Mother of God, that He, taking His sacred humanity from her, should be united to her so as to be the flesh of her flesh and bone of her bone—that He was to be altogether here, as the child belongs to the mother at birth—and in this new relation of His humanity He was not to suffer the slightest diminution of His own infinite sanctity which belonged to Him as God—and when we reflect upon all this, and see the awful proximity in which a creature is brought to Almighty God in this mystery of man's redemption, the very first thought that strikes the mind is, I know God must have forfeited something of His holiness, or else the creature that He selected for His mother must have been all pure, all holy, and so fit to be the Mother of God—either God must have forfeited some of His holiness coming to one personally a sinner, taking tainted blood, the nature that belonged to us that He took in her, that which was a broken, a disfigured, and deformed nature, tainted with sin, and steeped, if you will, in sin—for what, after all, is the record of man's history but a record of sin—or Mary must have been sinless. But if the Almighty God took that nature from one who bore in her own blood the personal taint of the universal sin, we must conclude that the Almighty God thereby compromised His own infinite holiness—nay, that He did

more than this, that He contradicted His own word, for the word of God is, that nothing defiled, nothing tainted, shall come near to Almighty God. The soul that departs from this world with the slightest taint of sin upon it must pay to the last farthing, and purge itself unto perfect purity before it can catch a glimpse of God in heaven. And if this immaculateness and purity be necessary in order even to behold God, Oh, think of the purity, then, of the immaculateness, that must have been necessary in order not only to behold God, but to take Him into her bosom, to give Him the very human life that He lived, to give Him the very nature that He took, and united to Himself in the unity of His own divine person—to give Him that humanity that He literally made Himself. What infinite purity, what perfect innocence and immaculateness did these involve, unless, indeed, we are willing to conclude that the Almighty God came into personal contact with the sinner and so allowed something not undefiled to come into contact with Him. But here, the mystery which brought so much suffering to much humiliation, so much sadness and sorrow to the eternal Son of God, brought Him no compromise with sin, brought Him no defilement of His own infinite sanctity, not in the least lowering Him from that standard of infinite holiness which is His essence and nature as God. And, therefore, it was necessary that, coming to redeem a sinful race, the individual of that race from whom He took His most sacred humanity, should be perfectly pure and immaculate. More than this, we know that the Almighty God never yet called any creature to any dignity or to any office without bestowing upon that creature graces commensurate with the greatness, the magnificence, and the duties which he imposed upon him. Hence it is that we find when He was about to create the Prophet Jeremiah, when he was about to make him a prophet, to put His divine inspiration into his mind, when He was about to send this man to announce His vengeance to the people, the Scriptures expressly tell us that He sanctified that man in his mother's womb before he was born, and that the infant prophet came into this world without the slightest taint of sin. Hear the words of Scripture: "The word of the Lord came to me, saying, Before I formed thee in thy mother's womb I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee and made thee a prophet unto the nations." So, in like manner, when the Almighty God created a man who was to arrive at the highest dignity of the prophets, namely, not only to proclaim the coming of God, but to point out God amongst men in the person of Jesus Christ, John the Baptist, created for this high and holy purpose, created to be amongst men what Gabriel the archangel was to Mary, namely, the revealer of the divine counsels, God sanctified him in his mother's womb, and John the Baptist was born without sin. If the Almighty God sanctifies a man before his birth, anticipates the sacramental regeneration of circumcision, sanctifies him before the sacrament, as in the case of Jeremiah and John the Baptist, simply because that man was called to the office of proclaiming the Word of God, oh, dearly beloved, surely there must have been some distinctive sanctity, some special grace in reserve for Mary, as much higher than the grace of the prophet or of the provision of the Baptist, as Mary's office transcends theirs. Jeremiah had but to announce the word of God revealed to him. Mary it was who was to bring forth the word of God incarnate in her immaculate womb. John the Baptist was to point Him out and say, "Behold the Lamb of God." Mary was to hold Him in her arms and say to the world, "This Lamb of God, Who is to save all mankind, is my Son." And therefore it is, that an office exceeded that of prophet, preacher, and precursor, as her dignity so far transcended anything that heaven and earth could ever know or imagine in a creature, so the Almighty God reserved her alone amongst all that He created upon this earth, that she should be conceived, as well as born, without sin, that that stream of sin which touched us all, and in its touch defiled us, should never come near and soil the immaculate Mary, that that sin which has mixed itself up in our blood in Adam, and, upon the stream of that blood, found its way into the heart-veins of every child of this earth, could never flow in the immaculate veins that furnished to Jesus Christ the blood in which He washed away the world's sin. Therefore the Almighty God for this took thought and forethought from all eternity. The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His ways, before He made anything from the beginning; that is to say, in the divine and eternal counsels of the Almighty God, Mary arose in all the splendor, in all the immaculate whiten