

# The Immaculate Conception.

## A Historical Sketch of the Controversy.

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THE twenty-first day of June, A. D. 431, was a memorable day in the ancient city of Ephesus. Upwards of one hundred and ninety-eight bishops had assembled in the Cathedral-church of St. Mary in solemn council, and, as the Acts of the Council expressly say, St. Cyril of Alexandria presided as the Legate of the Sovereign Pontiff. The main purpose for which the Fathers gathered was to examine into the errors disseminated by Nestorius in the East, and to condemn his particular teaching concerning the maternity of the Blessed Virgin to whom he denied the title *Theotokos*,—the title of Mother of God. Ephesus was the capital of Asia Minor, and a populous and opulent place. The gathering of so many prelates and the nature of their deliberations threw the whole city into a state of commotion, for Ephesus, as the See of St. John, the Beloved Disciple and Mary's child, bequeathed to her at the foot of the Cross, was especially devoted to the honor and worship of the Mother of God. Here tradition declared that Mary lived with St. John, and here many held that she died. The Ephesians, probably, had never known how much they loved Mary until this great Council assembled within their walls. Then love and anxiety were pictured in their faces, and, as a modern writer has said, even the children in the streets would have answered, if they had been asked the meaning of this assemblage of Church-dignitaries, that bad men had endeavored to rob

their Blessed Mother of her lawful title, and good men had come to restore it to her. Large crowds gathered around the old Cathedral and lingered the whole day long. They were intensely anxious, for they knew that Nestorius had gained the imperial court over to his side, that the heresiarch and Count Candidian who was to represent the Emperor at the Council refused to enter it until John of Antioch with his quota of votes arrived, and that even in the Council many bishops were disposed to favor Nestorius. The debate must have been long and attended with excitement, for the day wore on, and the shades of night began to close around the expectant crowds, yet no voice had been heard from the church. At length the Fathers of the Council finished their important business; the great gates of the historic basilica were thrown open, and all listened with bated breath while Mary, as every true Catholic believed, was proclaimed the Mother of God. All, men and women, old and young, noble and low-born, gathered around the bishops and acclaimed them with the heartiest cries. They would not leave the prelates, but insisted on accompanying them to their homes with lighted torches. After the Eastern fashion, they burned incense before the city's guests, and later on the whole of Ephesus was ablaze with lights in honor of the solemn declaration that Mary was the Mother of God. Her earthly triumph had been brought about by this life-and-death struggle