

It is on this optimistic note that I want to conclude. Your spiritual responsibilities above all at the present hour, are crushing; but the grace of God is the grace of God; and at an hour when the Holy Spirit seems to be giving to the Church a renewed youth, how can we doubt but that through you he will infuse into the religious life the sap of a new spring time?

For myself, at least, I believe that with all my heart. May he grant to all to be faithful to their inspiration, and the religious life will know new life and vigour.

THRONE OF WISDOM

BY

JOHN TODD

I. THE WOMAN WHO WAS POOR: SPOUSE AND MOTHER.



S the first, original sin was committed through the sinful mediation of a woman, so it was through a woman's consent and just mediation that we were redeemed from the guilt of this sin. Conceived without the stain of original sin, our Lady was the second Eve. She was the perfect tabernacle of God, simply the mother of Jesus, because she was utterly selfless, because in an old metaphor of the Fathers revived in a recent book, she was like a pipe which waits for the air to blow through it to make music, the Reed of God.

Our Lady was the throne of Wisdom because she can be perfectly described as the Woman who was poor. Here at last was the complete gift of self, the unconditional sacrifice of the creature which God looked for in Adam and Eve, and looked for in vain. So our Lady became infinitely rich, *Sedes Sapientiae*, and entered upon the earthly motherhood with that perfection which she carried on to her eternal motherhood wherein she dispenses to man the same Wisdom whom she mothered in Palestine.

In this article historical facts and theological conceptions are combined in a sacramental way for we are considering the Gospel. In the gospel everything is historical; in the gospel everything is theological. Here is our Lady, living the perfect life; here is our Lady living as the Mother of Grace. Here is our Lady, the perfect spouse of Divine Wisdom; here is our Lady, the Mother of divine Wisdom. Here is the centre of the Marian mystery, unfathomable—in fact two mysteries, incomprehensible apart and

only understood together in the human person of 'Mary'. From the moment of her immaculate conception to her coronation in heaven she was God's beloved, always responding perfectly to every proposal of the divine Lover. Yet this perfection proceeded from the privilege of being the mother of God. For this task she must be perfect. And this privilege was only won for her by the foreseen sacrifice in which she was going to participate, of the son whom she was going to have. The twofold mystery of Mary leads us straight to the mystery of Jesus, crucified.

In truth the mysteries of Mary's two privileges are inseparable. The Church allows us to repeat: *'Beata viscera quae portaverunt aeterni Patris Filium; et beata ubera quae lactaverunt Christum Dominum;*' echoing the 'woman in the multitude', overwhelmed with the wonder of Jesus. It was his evident Wisdom which struck her. Our Lord had been describing how an unclean spirit will return with seven other spirits worse than itself to possess again a man who puts nothing to replace the spirit when it goes out of him:—'till the last state of that man is worse than the first. When he spoke thus, a woman in the multitude said to him aloud, Blessed is the womb that bore thee, the breast which thou hast sucked'. Whilst we may echo this praise of Mary's physical motherhood we may not ignore our Lord's complementary, and in his gentle way corrective reply: 'And he answered, Shall we not say, Blessed are those who hear the word of God, and keep it?' The Church regards this as referring directly to our Lady, though in a way respecting her desire to remain hidden during her life on earth. Here, in our Lord's own words, is crystallised the perfect praise of Mary, spouse and mother, Keeper of the Word, Throne of Wisdom.

God's plan was this from the beginning, according to the words of Genesis, the Protoevangelium (2 v. 18) *'Non est bonum sese hominem solum, faciamus ei adjutorium simile sibi'* and (3 v. 20) *'et vocavit Adam nomen uxoris suae Heva eo quod mater esset cunctorum viventium'*. Here is the divine plan, for woman, of companionship and motherhood; she is to be a help and companion to man and a mother of new lives, his children. This plan finds its perfect type in the Holy Family. Mary is the perfect companion of St Joseph and the perfect mother of Jesus. She is the second Eve, companion and mother, achieving perfection in a human family. God sanctified her and she became a companion to God and the mother of all living, the second Eve in a world of Grace; mother of Grace and companion to all men. And this is the sanctification, the assumption into the kingdom of God of the natural life. 'The Lord is with thee', 'Thou hast found favour in the sight

of God', 'Blessed art thou among women', 'Behold thy mother'. The gospel eternally is. Jesus and Mary are risen and reign in these mysteries, in our souls, till we each become another Throne of Wisdom.

'My Son, why hast thou treated us so? Think, what anguish of mind thy father and I have endured, searching for thee.' There is Mary indeed, searching for Wisdom, searching for her son. 'But', he asked them, 'what reason had you to search for me? Could you not tell that I must needs be in the place which belongs to my Father?' This was the first public manifestation of Wisdom. His reply is the reply of the Son of the eternal Father, and a reply that presumed and relied upon Mary's 'Ecce ancilla . . .'. He knows that she and St Joseph have suffered anguish of mind. Simeon had promised her that long ago, and she had accepted. Jesus makes no comment. His and Mary's way is a way of sorrows, a way of the cross. It is the will of his Father, to whom he simply refers Mary and St Joseph in his reply. One is reminded of his later words: 'My meat is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish the task he gave me'; or again, 'I do not do anything on my own authority, but speak as my Father has instructed me to speak,' Jesus simply reminds his father and mother of what they already knew, all things are within the providence of God, divine Wisdom disposes all things, 'What reason had you to search for me?'

It was Mary's complete humility and poverty of spirit, and her sympathy with St Joseph which led her to search. The fourth commandment required a son to honour his parents; the parents must deserve and demand this honour. She never doubted God's power; she is not over-anxious. She is our Lady of Sorrows, not of anxieties. The Latin says simply, *dolentes quaerebamus te*, sorrowing we sought thee. In her complete simplicity Mary is the perfect mother, she is nearly heart-broken without Jesus, she must seek her son; she is the perfect spouse, she is nearly heart-broken without Jesus, she cannot but seek him.

Our Lord's reply seems to have been deliberately mysterious. The difficulty of the translation is no mere translator's difficulty. Jesus did not mean himself to be understood except spiritually, supernaturally, through faith, 'nesciebatis quia in his quae Patris mei sunt, oportet me esse?'. 'These words which he spoke to them were beyond their understanding.' It must have been rather bewildering. Yet St Joseph and Mary knew that God *was* his Father. The angel Gabriel had called him the Son of God. The answer reminded them, perhaps for the first time from our Lord's

own lips, of the truth that he was so often to repeat, in one form or another. He was the Son of God.

'But he went down with them on their journey to Nazareth, and lived there in subjection to them, while his mother kept in her heart the memory of all this.' And so gradually the eye of faith and the teaching of the Word changed the text: 'ipsi non intellexerunt verbum' into 'beati qui audiunt verbum Dei et custodiunt illud'.

II. MATER GRATIAE.

The next public appearance of our Lady in the gospel starts with the same sort of mysterious question from our Lord: 'Nay, woman, why dost thou trouble me with that? My time has not yet come'. Immediately we are surprised as we were by 'What reason had you to search for me?'. The question seems almost rude—and the answer obvious. But this is only to those who will not hear the words as mysteries, to those who hearing, may not hear, and seeing, may not see. 'Why dost thou trouble me with that? My time has not yet come.' Again we have the sense of predestination, of complete humility before the will of his Father; of Wisdom overseeing all.

And again events proceed according to the wish of Mary, as when 'he went down with them on their journey to Nazareth, and lived there in subjection to them'. (Then it was certainly 'my time has not yet come'!) At Cana our Lord is again subject to his mother, this time in conceding to her wish for his intervention. He intervened: 'Fill the waterpots with water'. 'Now draw, and give a draught to the master of the feast.' The Miracle was performed. The incarnation was further extended into the natural world; and the world's salvation was prefigured.

What a perfect microcosm of redemption this event is! We are at the banquet after a marriage, naturally the happiest of all human events, sacramentally the image of the union of Christ with his Church. But there is something lacking. Mary asks Jesus to repair it. What is the lack? Wine; the juice of grapes that our Lord is going to change into his Blood in the sacrifice of the Mass, the juice of grapes, fruit of the vine, image of the union of all Christians in the mystical body of Christ. The miraculous change is made at our Lady's request, for she it is who has prompted our Lord and prepared the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you'. This first of our Lord's miracles symbolises his original entry into the world and his perennial re-entry at the words of consecration at Holy Mass. Here also our Lady always presides. The Mother of God is the Mother of Grace.

Water is made wine. What a parable! Water becomes wine; in a similar way at Mass the water of our humanity is lost in the wine of his Blood. Dropping water into the wine in the chalice the priest says: '*Deus qui humanae substantiae dignitatem mirabiliter condidisti, et mirabilis reformasti: da nobis per hujus aquae et vini mysterium, ejus Divinitatis esse consortes, qui humanitatis nostrae fieri dignatus est particeps, Jesus Christus Filius tuus Dominus noster*'. 'O God, who in a marvellous manner didst create and ennoble man's being, and in a manner still more marvellous didst renew it; grant that through the mystical union of this water and wine we may become companions of the Godhead of Jesus Christ, thy Son, our Lord, even as he vouchsafed to share with us our human nature.' At Cana our Lord wonderfully changed water into wine prefiguring his Passion whereby we were to be changed from noble but fallen creatures into companions of the Godhead.

But the miracle was hidden from the eyes of the bride and bridegroom and the guests. Seeing they see not. 'And the master of the feast tasted this water, which had now been turned into wine, he did not know whence it came, only the servants who had drawn the water knew that.' First of all people to know our Lord's first miracle were the servants, drawers of water. Just so also the most despised sort of Jews, shepherds, were the first at the crib: 'and so they went with all haste and found Mary and Joseph there, with the child lying in the manger. On seeing him, they discovered the truth of what had been told them about this child. All those who heard it were full of amazement at the story which the shepherds told them.' So too the servants who drew the water made wine must have told others for 'So, in Cana of Galilee Jesus began his miracles, and made known the glory that was his, so that his disciples learned to believe'.

Cana is a veritable treasure of kindness and delicacy. God shows himself to be supremely interested in our affairs, in fact supremely interested in a Jewish wedding feast—not just the wedding, but the feast, while some might be found who would drink too much of the wine that our Lord provided. All receive gifts here, the bride and bridegroom and other guests receive wine, the servants receive the pleasurable secret knowledge of the miracle, the disciples receive faith, for it was now 'that his disciples learned to believe'. And Mary had mediated in this gift of faith for it was she who had asked for the miracle. Mary had mediated in the gift of faith to those who were to be the first priests of her son's Church.

Our Lord, the central figure, the Word, remains somewhat mysterious, a sign of contradiction. 'Why dost thou trouble me with

that?' 'Fill the waterpots . . .', 'now draw . . .' All that is seen is divine power: 'Jesus began his miracles and made known the glory that was his'. The human foundations were ignored for the moment. The sign and the gift of faith alone are given. Later and gradually during his public life our Lord revealed himself. Wisdom unfolded itself gradually as it unfolds in the history of the Church. As Jesus's own life unfolded he became seemingly more gentle and more human as well as more undoubtedly divine. So in the Church's history in these later days we have the consoling devotion to our Lord's Sacred Heart and we have the manifold apparitions of our Lady.

In the Gospel as our Lord's own gentleness and humanity are seen more clearly our Lady retires. In fact she does not speak again. Cana has revealed her mediating between God and man, distributing the riches of Eternal Wisdom. She is seen as the Mother of Grace. Cana is the summit of the visible historical revelation of Mary's personality, for on that day she openly gave her Son to the world. She is the throne of that wisdom given to the world, Wisdom given to 'little ones' first, to shepherds, to servants and then to all the world. From now on Mary has to learn 'what is in man'. She has to learn the wisdom of sorrow and suffering, of the cross, of crucifixion, of martyrdom, of living death.

A MEDIEVAL BOOK FOR TODAY

BY

KATHERINE CHOLMELEY



URING the 14th century, several books on the interior life were written in England. The most useful of these is, perhaps, the *Scale of Perfection*, composed by Water Hilton, a Canon of the Augustinian Priory of Thurgarton in Nottinghamshire.

It is as fresh in manner as though it had been written yesterday. We feel, while reading it, as though we were learning from some wise spiritual director of our own time. The style is easy, the sentences simple in construction. There is little that we may regard as archaic; the book is as applicable to any century as is the *Imitation*. The guidance along the road of the spiritual life is just that which we would hear today from an experienced confessor, or the skilled conductor of a Retreat. It is eminently practical. Charity and humility are the two virtues on which men should build the structure of the contemplative life. The chief study and