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AVE MARIA

IN the introductory words to two special articles on *Mary the Mother* which he was invited to contribute to *The Catholic Times*,¹ the present writer felt it imperative to point out that 'it would be a grave and lamentable loss if a Catholic's appreciation of our Blessed Lady was no more than the largely sentimental emotion it often appears to be, or even no more than a solid but unpenetrating admiration for her spotless purity of soul and an awed wonder of her virginal Motherhood of God. These are not without their place and value; but it is yet more important to realise that both her immaculate purity and her divine motherhood play an essential part not only in the historic fact of the Incarnation whereby the world was redeemed, but also in the application of the fruits of that Redemption to all men throughout the world and throughout the ages. We need the wisdom of understanding if the full vision of the Motherhood of Mary is not to escape us We cannot properly appreciate the Mother except as inseparably linked with her Son; and there is a sense in which it is true to say that we cannot properly appreciate the Son apart from His Mother. There is no absolute necessity in this; but there is the necessity of God's love, Who chose this way and no other for restoring mankind to His friendship so that only by finding the Child with His Mother can a man find also the wisdom of God which leads to everlasting love. For it is no mere physical necessity which linked these two She is an

¹ September 23rd, 1938.

integral, essential part of the whole divine economy of Redemption as it affects all men and each individual soul until the end of time.'

I make no apology for reproducing these words of mine, not only because of the intrinsic truth and worth of the doctrine they express, but also because they actually epitomize the splendid and successful purpose of another of the 'Friars of Mary' who has, with scholarly research and compelling logic, worthily investigated this important doctrine in the compiling of a recently published volume dealing with Our Lady's place in the plan of Redemption.² The author of this book wisely devotes almost half of it to a consideration of the 'challenge' and significance of Lourdes, 'God's reply to scientific unbelief.'³ To appreciate the true importance of these apparitions of the Immaculate and the meaning of the miracles that have followed them, they must be taken not merely for the historic facts they undoubtedly are, but still more as heavenly signs of a mystical and supernatural reality. At a time when an unbalanced regard for the discoveries of physical science bid fair to oust supernatural religion and belief in God, when the spreading tentacles of materialism threatened to stifle all that was best and spiritual in mankind, God gave men a sign which might be contradicted but could not be disregarded. In the vision of the Immaculate He showed mankind what man might have been and what he could yet become, the glory of one of their own kind in whom sin and the kingdom of this world had no part. Through the instrumentality of an unlettered child and by means of visions and miracles of bodily healing,

² *Our Lady's Place in God's Plan. And other papers on Our Blessed Lady.* By Father Stanislaus M. Hogan, O.P. With a Preface by The Very Rev. Fr. Vincent McNabb, O.P., S.T.M. (Gill, Dublin; 7s. 6d.)

³ All quotations not otherwise specified are from Father Hogan's book.

God called upon the nations to look again upon her who had been and must always be the sacramental sign of His desire that all should share in the intimacy of His Divine Friendship and Life.

There can be no longer any reasonable doubt, even in the least religious minds, of the authenticity either of the apparitions or of the officially recorded miracles of Lourdes. Father Hogan sums up the evidence in a most convincing manner. But he sees clearly, as we all should see, that 'while it is but natural and right to give prominence to the miraculous nature of the Cures at Lourdes, they are not the soul of Lourdes.' They lead men to an appreciation and love for her who was given to them as their Mother; but she claims their appreciation and their love only that she may lead them to her Son and so to their own perfection and sole happiness. 'All through the centuries when Faith waned and Charity grew cold it was the Mother who was chosen by God to bring back to Him a world that had forgotten Him and attempted to do without Him.' But she has done this only by showing them forthwith the Son of God Whom she bore. Thus 'Our Lady of Lourdes brought a sceptical and flippant world to the Grotto where she had shown herself to one of Christ's little ones, and where Cures were wrought which stirred not only the heart but the conscience. Then, as it were, the Mother retired and gave place to the Son.' It is, indeed, noteworthy that the central event during each day of the pilgrimage season at this most favoured shrine of Our Lady is the Procession of the Blessed Sacrament, while the Rosary itself, which was a significant feature of the Apparitions and is the prayer of Lourdes *par excellence*, is just a practical 'epitome of the Gospels' and a resumé of the work of Redemption. In short, then, Lourdes is a striking reminder of the Incarnation and of Our Lady's place therein.

That place and its vital significance is perhaps best realised in a consideration of the free consent invited of

her by the Angel of the Annunciation; for in this, as St. Thomas teaches, she spoke not merely in her own name, but in the name of the whole human race. In this sacramental invitation and answer, God speaks to and hears the whole human race. In the striking words of St. Thomas, there is to be 'a spiritual matrimony between the Son of God and human nature; and therefore in the Annunciation was sought the consent of the Blessed Virgin in the place of the whole of human nature.'⁴

As I ventured to put it in the newspaper article already quoted, 'it is a moment of intense drama. God, desiring the friendship of man with a divine "love-longing" (to use the striking phrase of Juliana the Mystic), sends his heavenly messenger to ask the consent of fallen man in the person of this spotless daughter of Eve. The redemptive restoration of man was to be, according to the decree of God's eternal wisdom, a work of love in which both God and man must share; both the giving and the taking of this divine love-token was to be inspired by love and accomplished by willing sacrifice. And in the moment of stillness between the Archangel's announcement and the Maiden's reply there is a hush, as it were, in the very courts of heaven. Then—"Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Be it done unto me according to thy word." Not only had Mary consented to be the Mother of the Redeemer; she had consented also, in the name of all mankind, to the conditions of that Redemption It is this important element in the partnership of the human with the divine in the work of Redemption that provides the key to the profound mystery of the Mother and the Child.'

Without delaying unduly on the exact theological claim that Our Lady has to the high titles of Mediatrix and Co-redemptrix, Father Hogan penetrates acutely to the authoritative truths for which they stand. 'When Our

⁴ *Summa*, IIIa, xxx, 1.

Blessed Lady became the Mother of God,' he writes, 'she became the Mother of the whole Body of Christ, Mother of both the head and the members, Mother of the mystical as well as of the physical body of Christ.' In other words, her essential part in the Incarnation is paralleled by and signifies her place in the application, to the soul of each individual man, of the fruits of the Redemption it effected. That application depends primarily upon incorporation into the Mystical Body of Christ, which confers upon each member the privilege of sharing actively and effectively in the redemptive act, both for themselves and for others, thus allowing them to fill up 'that which was wanting in the sufferings of Christ.' And this is to be accomplished by them not as individual units, but precisely as integral members of the great organic unity called the Mystical Body of Christ, in which each shares in the power and activity of Christ both by reason of the particular hierarchic grade assigned to each and by the personal effort at conformity with Him in holiness. This dual degree of participation is the measure and cause of participation in His redemptive act. It is clear, therefore, that, under both heads, Our Lady has the supreme place under the Head in the Mystical Body and a supreme right to the title and position of Co-redemptrix which such participation implies. Just as some grace comes to some men through the instrumentality of every worthy member of the Mystical Body, so all grace comes to all men through the instrumentality of the highest and most perfect member of that same Body.

Thus Our Lady is a true Mediatrix—not, as Fr. Hogan acutely notes, precisely between us and God (which is the sole right of the God-man), but between us and Our Lord, and that in a unique way. He quotes St. Thomas in his Commentary on the *Ave Maria*: 'The grace given to Mary was so abundant that it overflowed upon the whole human race. It is a marvellous thing that any saint should receive grace sufficient for the salvation of many souls; but

that anyone should be endowed with grace sufficient for the salvation of all mankind is the most amazing of wonders, yet this is the privilege of Christ and also of the Blessed Virgin.' This privilege in Our Lady is the direct result of her Motherhood, not only of her Motherhood of God, but also of the Motherhood of Men given to her at the supreme moment of Redemption. 'The Plan of Redemption is a unity,' writes Fr. Hogan . . . 'Our Blessed Lady is inseparable from the Mystery of the Incarnation, she is inseparable therefore from the mystery of the Redemption, consequently from the acquisition and distribution of those graces which are necessary for our salvation. She does not and cannot give grace to us; God alone does this. But Our Blessed Lady can intercede for us and obtain from Him the grace we require.' Moreover, this intercession is sacramental in the sure effectiveness of its instrumentality.

This much, above all, Fr. Hogan's book should make clear, namely that devotion to Our Lady is not a thing of sentiment or even of choice. Like the Sacraments, it is a definitely appointed instrument of grace, an essential part of the divine superabundance of means whereby men may come to Him. That this particular means is made so attractive and, if we may say it without the risk of misapprehension, so human, does not render it the less efficacious or the less necessary. 'It is no mere poetic fancy but theological truth which inspired Dante to sing:

'Riguarda omai nella faccia ch'a Cristo
 Più si somiglia, che la sua chiarezza
 Sola ti puo disporre a veder Cristo.'
 (*Paradiso*, xxxii, 85-87).

'Now look upon the face which unto Christ
 Bears most resemblance, for its brightness clear
 Alone can fit thee to behold the Christ.'
 (Dean Plumptre's Translation).'

We agree with Fr. Hogan, in his introductory passage, that 'we cannot speak too much about Our Blessed Lady,'

at any rate provided that it be done worthily, as he has done it. And by 'worthily' we mean with due appreciation of her true importance and essential place in the Divine Plan of Redemption. Many such worthy volumes on Our Lady have appeared in recent years, yet this present one has a value of its own, not lessened but rather increased by the fact that the author has drawn freely from authoritative sources old and new. Indeed, we hope that his abounding and solid devotion to the Mother of God will move him to use his gifts of learning and authorship in the production of a still more scholarly and magisterial work on the same subject, of which this present volume gives a foretaste, but does not yet satisfy the appetite it engenders.

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