

EDITORIAL

THE month of May is associated in the minds of Catholics with a special emphasis upon their perennial devotion to our Blessed Lady. This devotion is a highly developed and integral element in the historic tradition of Christendom, common to East and West alike. In the West however it has been, as it has never been in the East, one of the central points of religious controversy, often encountering the most rooted and bitter hostility on the part of our separated brethren. The definition of the Assumption as an article of Catholic faith by our present Holy Father on All Saints Day 1950 brought this largely latent hostility once more into the open.

The protests then made served to show that non-Catholics, however well disposed towards the Faith, find it very difficult not to suspect that Catholic love for our Lady, and the freedom and exuberance of its expression, trench in some way upon the supreme prerogative of her Son in the work of redemption. Every page of the New Testament demonstrates this prerogative to be unique, exclusive and in no way to be usurped by any created being however holy, called to however high a vocation. Catholics are accused therefore of distorting the New Testament gospel and the primitive tradition. Failing to appreciate to the full the true and complete humanity of the Word made Flesh, they have, it is asserted, exalted a human being, God's Mother, to what is equivalent to a place within the incommunicable nature of the Godhead, paying her, in effect, divine honours.

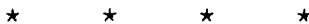
It is in fact true that the exuberant language of love and devotion does at times go beyond theological precision, and may even appear to attribute to Mary grace-giving powers which belong to God alone. But to those within the family of Christ's Mystical Body this language of love is perfectly understood, and even when it sounds excessive can be allowed for and pardoned. For there is in the faithful, whether simple or learned, a firmly based spiritual instinct which prevents them falling a prey to the sin of an idolatry which would attribute to Mary a power that is her Son's and his alone. Catholics do not come near to thinking that our Lady is a kind of goddess; they know only that she is

God's Mother, a human mother who ministered our human nature to the eternal God when he sought it, who was supremely faithful in her motherhood and everything it involved, and therefore supremely holy. They are convinced that her prayers must be universal prayers, powerful above all others because of her humble co-operation in a salvation that was universal. For this reason they venerate her with the highest honour and worship that can be given to one who is yet a creature like themselves.

We Catholics claim that this doctrine concerning our Lady's place in the scheme of redemption is rooted in Scripture because it is rooted in the Scriptural doctrine of the Incarnation of the Word. The very documents that have crowned the long development of Marian teaching with the definition of her Immaculate Conception and Bodily Assumption make this claim unequivocally. The Apostolic Constitution *Munificentissimus Deus* which defined the Assumption says: 'All the arguments and considerations of the Fathers and theologians rest on Sacred Scripture for their ultimate foundation. The Scriptures present the beloved Mother of God as most intimately united with her divine Son, as ever sharing his lot. Hence it seems all but impossible to see her who conceived Christ . . . as separated from him, if not in soul yet in body, after her life on earth was over. . . . Seeing that by preserving her from the corruption of the tomb he could give her such great honour, we must believe that he actually did so. . . . Hence, as Christ's glorious resurrection was an essential part and final sign of the victory over sin and death, in like manner the struggle which the Blessed Virgin endured in common with her Son was to end in the glorification of her virginal body'. The glory of Mary was and is *solely* for the sake of her Son, and apart from him and from his redemptive work she would be nothing.

But not all Protestants share the suspicion and hostility of the majority to Catholic teaching about our Lady. We print below by kind permission of the editor of the *Menevia Record*, the interesting quarterly magazine of the Welsh diocese of that name, in the current number of which it appears, a literal translation of a poem by the well known Baptist preacher and seminary professor, Gwili (1872-1936). Gwili was one of a number of individual Welsh Protestants who have recognised the importance of our Lady because of their fervent faith in the Godhead of her Son. There is hostility to Catholic *doctrines* of our Lady among

Protestants and Anglicans, but it is because these doctrines are not yet understood as Gwili came to understand them.



Hail blessed mother of Jesus: the AVE of heaven and earth be to thee! Let me, after an age of silence, approach thee with my belated praise in thy honour.

There was a day in Wales when the praise of the mother of my Lord was on every true tongue. From every valley arose the incense of worship: on every mountain was remembered the hill where thou didst suffer.

Thou didst hear a thousand anthems of the Muse of the great poets, to thy gentle lips and countenance. How many strings sang thy praise long ago from the banks of Clwyd to the Vale of Neath!

The noble monks, lovable and sweet-songed, gentle protectors of all peaceful learning, for long ages in Wales, placed from dawn to vespers their gift on the altar of the Mother of our God.

Thy purity was in Welsh nuns, who long sought thy shining grace, O Virgin Mother, a thousand times purer than the fine snow on the untrodden hillsides of my country.

Garden herbs and the blessed flowers were a treasure for my country bearing Mary's name. And our consecrated Churches were tranquil under thy patronage, Virgin Mother of the Word.

The sound of thy evening bell as men went homewards made my fathers kneel gently at bedside and doorway. No ship left harbour without begging protection and fortune from the White Star of the Sea.

Now the joyful chant has died away at the doors of many churches, once enchanted places, and there arises no more from the host of altars the sweet scents of gentle prayer to thee.

Forgive us, tender Virgin, if we have learned to pay thee less respect than Heaven would like, because we have loved the Son whom thou didst love so much, afraid lest we honoured thee more than him.

Let us be taught, O blessed Virgin, once again to pay our country's debt of praise to thee, and when Christendom calls thee blessed, let no lip in holy Wales be dumb.