









**Female Scripture Biography:  
Including an Essay on What Christianity Has Done for  
Women.**

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"It is a necessary charity to the (female) sex to acquaint them with their own value, to animate them to some higher thoughts of themselves, not to yield their suffrage to those injurious estimates the world hath made of them, and from a supposed incapacity of noble things, to neglect the pursuit of them, from which God and nature have no more precluded the feminine than the masculine part of mankind."

The Ladies' Calling, Pref.



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Essay



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### Vol. II

### The Virgin Mary.

#### Chapter I.

### Section I.

Congratulation of the Angel Gabriel--Advantages of the Christian Dispensation--Eve and Mary compared--State of Mary's Family at the Incarnation--she receives an angelic Visit--his Promise to her of a Son, and Prediction of his future Greatness--Mary goes to Elizabeth--their Meeting--Mary's holy Enthusiasm and remarkable Language--Joseph informed of the miraculous Conception by an Angel--general Remarks.

"HAIL, THOU THAT ART HIGHLY FAVOURED, THE LORD IS WITH THEE! BLESSED ART THOU AMONG WOMEN!"

Such was the congratulatory language in which the commissioned angel addressed the virgin of Nazareth, when about to announce the intention of Heaven, that she should become the mother of Jesus; and such the strain which we cannot help feeling disposed to adopt, while recording her illustrious name, and contemplating this wonderful transaction.

On Mary devolved the blessing which the most pious of women had for a long succession of ages so eagerly desired, and which had often created such an impatience for the birth of children, in some of whom they indulged the sublime hope of seeing the promised Messiah. In her offspring was accomplished the long series of prophecy which commenced even at the moment when the justice of God pronounced a sentence of condemnation upon rebellious man; and which, like a bright track extending through the moral night, and shining amidst the typical shadows of the Mosaic dispensation,

fixed the attention of patriarchs, and prophets, and saints, for four thousand years:--and upon this otherwise obscure and insignificant female beamed the first ray of that evangelical morning which rose upon the world with such blissful radiance, and is increasing to the "perfect day."

Infidels may contemplate the manifestation with unholy ridicule or vain indifference; but we will neither consent to renounce the evidence afforded to the historic fact, nor cease to celebrate the mysterious miracle. We will unite with the impassioned angel, at least in the sentiment and spirit of his address; and join the high praises of the midnight anthem, sung by descending spirits in the fields of Bethlehem: "GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST, AND ON EARTH PEACE, GOOD WILL TOWARDS MEN!"

In the course of Scripture history, we are now advanced to that period which the apostle emphatically denominates "the last days," in which "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners, spake in time past, unto the fathers by the prophets," speaks to us "by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds." Let us hear his voice, admit his claims, and bow to his dictates. As truth arises upon us with greater splendour, we shall find that character is formed to greater maturity under the immediate influence of "the ministration of righteousness" which "exceeds in glory." By the unparalleled transactions of this age we shall see the whole energy of the human mind drawn forth, and furnished with ample scope for exercise; all the faculties become ennobled and purified; and the female sex especially, from the days of Elizabeth and Mary to the close of the sacred record, becomes marked with a holy singularity. By the starlight of the former dispensation, we have discovered many women of superior excellence, availing themselves of all the means they enjoyed, and presenting a pre-eminence of character proportioned to their comparatively few advantages and imperfect revelation; but amidst the splendours of the "Sun of Righteousness" we shall witness, in the females who adorned this new era, a greater elevation of mind and advancement in knowledge.

Still it must be recollected, that the day only dawned, the shadows were not at first entirely dispersed; and although the favoured

inhabitants of Judea and its vicinity saw the age of Christ, not like Abraham, "afar off," but in its commencing glory, their prejudices and prepossessions did but slowly melt away. Some degree of dimness remained upon the moral sight; and we are called to observe, not so much the accuracy of their conceptions as the fervour of their love.

The two most extraordinary women that ever appeared in this world were unquestionably EVE, "the mother of all living," and MARY, "the mother of Jesus Christ." They occupied respectively the highest stations and the most critical points of time that ever fell to the lot of mortals; and they exhibit an instructive contrast. EVE lived at the beginning, and MARY at the "fulness of time."--EVE saw the glories of the new made world after creative Wisdom had pronounced it all "very good," and before sin had tarnished its beauty and disarranged its harmonies.--MARY beheld it rising from the ruins of the fall, at the moment of its renovation and in the dawn of its happiest day.--EVE was placed in the most glorious and conspicuous situation, and fell into a state of meanness and degradation.--MARY was of obscure origin and lowly station, but was raised, by a signal appointment of Providence, to the highest eminence.--EVE was accessory to the ruin of man--MARY instrumental in the birth of him who came as the Restorer and Saviour of mankind--EVE beheld the fatal curse first take effect, in overcasting the heavens with clouds, in withering the blossoms of paradise, envenoming the spirit of the animal creation, disordering the human frame, and ultimately destroying it, and introducing all the nameless diversities of wo which fill up the tragedy of human life.--MARY witnessed the beginning of that long series of blessings which divine love has for ages dispensed to man "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus," and which will eventually replenish the cup of existence with unmingled sweetness and perfect joy.--EVE witnessed, with a trembling consciousness of guilt, the awful descent of those mighty "cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life," and which were placed "at the east end of the garden of Eden." MARY, with feelings of ecstatic rapture, beheld the angel Gabriel standing before her, with the smiles of heaven upon his countenance, heard his

benedictions, and held "communion sweet" with the holy messenger. Wretched, wretched Eve! Happy, happy MARY!

The Jews have been always celebrated for their care in preserving their genealogies: in consequence of which it providentially happened, that the evangelists were able from their own authenticated records, to verify the ancient predictions of the birth of Jesus Christ. Two of the inspired historians have given a statement of his ancestry; the one tracing it from Abraham, and the other ascending to Adam; the one pursuing the line of Joseph, his reputed father, the other the line of Mary, his real mother; both concurring in the most decisive evidence of his being the Son of David and of Abraham, and the true Messiah of the prophets. [1]

Although in her distant ancestry Mary may justly be considered as of an illustrious descent, yet at the period of the incarnation, this family was in a very reduced state: the genealogical tree of David was cut down to its very roots, when the ancient prediction was accomplished respecting that great Personage who is represented "as a slender twig shooting out from the trunk of an old tree, cut down, lopped to the very root, and decayed; which tender plant, so weak in appearance, should nevertheless become fruitful and prosper."

"But there shall spring forth from the trunk of Jesse,  
And a cion from his roots shall become fruitful.  
And the spirit of JEHOVAH shall rest upon him:  
The spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
The spirit of counsel and strength,  
The spirit of knowledge, and the fear of JEHOVAH." [2]

But vain is the "boast of heraldry." It can avail nothing to elevate an insignificant character to eminence, or screen a guilty one from contempt. The evangelists have not recorded the lineage of Joseph and of Mary for the purpose of emblazoning their names, but solely to authenticate the prophetic declarations respecting Christ, to be connected with whom is real honour and solid glory. Of past generations, how many names, great in human estimation, have descend-

ed into oblivion, while those only will obtain an imperishable memorial, who are "written in the Lamb's book of life."

It must ever be deemed a noble distinction to have stood related to Christ "according to the flesh;" more so than to have been the sons and daughters of the mighty princes of mankind: but to have been his MOTHER was the sole honour of one happy female; still, however, less happy on this account, than because of the genuine humility with which she adorned her lowly sphere, and the lively faith with which she recognized the character of her Son.

In reference to the genealogical tables of Matthew and Luke, it has been admirably remarked, "We observe among these ancestors of Christ, some that were *heathens*; and others that, on different accounts, were of *infamous character*: and perhaps it might be the design of Providence that we should learn from it, or at least should on reading it take occasion to reflect, that persons of all nations, and even the *chief of sinners* amongst them, are encouraged to trust in him as their Saviour. To him, therefore, let us look even from the ends of the earth; yea, from the depths of guilt and distress; and the consequence will be happy beyond all expression or conception." [3]

In the apostolic epistle to the Hebrews, it is intimated as a fact, of pleasing notoriety, in the history of the church of God, that angels are "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation." When appointed by the great Supreme to this service, they usually adopted a human form and appearance, probably for the purpose of securing that degree of familiarity which the nature of their communications required, and which a more splendid manifestation would have precluded; in the scriptural accounts, however, of these remarkable visits to eminent saints in early ages, whether they appeared in numbers, as to Abraham, or individually, as on other occasions, no distinct mention is made of their names or order. But to impress a character of majesty and dignity upon the message, and upon all the circumstances of the divine communication to Mary, when an angel is commissioned to announce that she was selected by the wonderful providence of God as the mother of the Messiah, the name of the celestial messenger is recorded by the evangelist in a marked and solemn manner. It was the angel GABRIEL [4] one, as we may infer, of the highest order [4] of those intelli-

gences that "circle the throne rejoicing;" and the same glorious spirit who so many ages before had been sent to Daniel, to specify, in a prophetic enigma, the time of "MESSIAH THE PRINCE," which he now came to announce as having actually arrived.

Never did even an angel before convey so important a message, or descend to this earth with such rapturous sensations. It must ever, indeed, be considered the felicity of an angel, as well as of a man, to do the will of God, whether this obedience involve personal difficulty, or be accompanied with circumstances of peculiar delight. It must have afforded satisfaction to the mighty spirit who was despatched from heaven to eject the first parents of our race from the bowers of Eden, and to stretch his flaming sword across the path of access to the tree of life, as well as to that favoured angel who now hastened to the cottage of the virgin of Nazareth; because each was accomplishing a purpose in which he knew that the divine perfections were pre-eminently displayed; but as, in executing the will of God, the holiest of men must necessarily experience a different kind and degree of satisfaction, according to the nature of the service itself to which they are called; and as we have scriptural evidence that the inhabitants of the invisible world have peculiar sensations when sinners of the fallen race are converted to God; it is not surely an inadmissible sentiment, that, as never spirit was honoured before with such a message, Gabriel must have felt unusual joy upon announcing the incarnation of the Son of God. His very language expresses it. His address is full of pathos and congratulation. It breathes angelic rapture. With it we commenced this subject, and in some measure participating the bliss, we cite it again: "Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee! Blessed art thou among women!"

There is nothing in the narrative to induce us to think that the angel assumed any extraordinary splendour of appearance on this occasion; and judging from the usual mode in which blessed spirits visited the sons of men in former times, as well as from a consideration of the tender age and lowly station of Mary, it is probable that he entered the room where she was, as an ordinary stranger. It is besides stated, that she was troubled at his *saying*, not at his *appearance*.

This salutation excited in the virgin's breast a sensation of astonishment mingled with apprehension. Among the Jews it was not lawful for a man to use any salutation to a woman, not even by a messenger, or her own husband; in addition to which, the panegyric and congratulatory terms in which she was addressed, might well lead her to "cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be."

The benevolent messenger at once relieved her from the embarrassment into which he perceived she had been thrown, by familiarly calling her by name, renewing the solemn assurances of divine favour, and predicting the future glory of that illustrious Son whom she should bear, and whose description, being, like all the Jews, well instructed in the prophetic Scriptures, she would immediately recognize. These were his remarkable words: "Fear not, Mary; for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shall conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shall call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David. And he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever: and of his kingdom there shall be no end."

Her surprise was now raised to the highest pitch; and, incapable of comprehending by what means such a declaration could be fulfilled in her who was at present a virgin, she ventured to inquire of the angel, "How shall this be?" It is worthy of observation, that she did not instantly reject the testimony of her illustrious visiter as manifestly absurd and impossible, but modestly requested an explanation of the mysterious assurance. She was evidently one of those who "waited for salvation" in Israel; and who well knew that it was the province of human reason to submit, with implicit confidence, even to the most inexplicable statements of revelation.

It is true, she could not conjecture by what miraculous conception the angelic prediction would be verified; but she did not hesitate a moment to allow the apparently incongruous facts of his being her son, and yet the Son of the Highest, who should rise to the throne of David, and possess an everlasting kingdom. Her reason was confounded, but her faith triumphed; and though she knew not the *manner*, this was no sufficient evidence with her against the proba-

bility of the declared fact. Upon how many inferior occasions, and under far less mysterious circumstances have we been incredulous, deeming even the plainest declarations improbable, because they were unaccountable; and presuming to introduce some arbitrary alteration into the record of heaven, or some far-fetched comment, rather than humbly bow to supreme authority.

If, however, it were admitted that the question of Mary betrays at least a momentary incredulity, this was soon dispersed by the angel's reply: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee, shall be called the Son of God. And, behold, thy cousin Elizabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible." In the exercise of lively faith and joy she answered, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her."

Let us endeavour to imitate the spirit of Mary. She acknowledged the power of God to accomplish the greatest, and, to her, the most inconceivable designs; and with unaffected simplicity, blended with humble and holy satisfaction, she received the divine word. Thus let us resign ourselves to the will of God, and confide in his most wonderful declarations. It is for mortals to believe, and not to cavil; when Jehovah speaks, to hear and to obey. Let us beware of stumbling at the promises through unbelief; and cherish increasing pleasure in the conviction, that he who sent his Son into the world to be the Saviour of men, will freely bestow upon his redeemed people all the blessings of time, and all the riches of eternity.

It is observable, that on this occasion a young woman, though at first overawed by the heavenly manifestation, at length displayed a faith which shines with peculiar brightness, when brought into comparison with the sentiments of the aged priest Zacharias, when the same angel appeared to him a few months before, to communicate a prediction of far less apparent improbability.

When this venerable man was burning incense on the golden altar before the Lord, and therefore in circumstances peculiarly favourable to the most elevated exercises of faith and devotion, Gabriel appeared to him, and gave him assurance that his frequent