

**SAINT MARY
THE VIRGIN**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649217557

Saint Mary the Virgin by René-Marie De La Broise

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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RENÉ-MARIE DE LA BROISE

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The Saints

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BY

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LONDON

DUCKWORTH & CO., 3 HENRIETTA STREET, W.C.

DUBLIN: M. H. GILL & SON

1906

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

IT is not possible to write the life of the Blessed Virgin in the same way that one would write the lives of saints of later times. For these, there are usually available some contemporary memoirs possessing a certain authority, and the carefully collected records which form the evidences for their canonisation. From these sources, few in number and perfectly reliable, their biographies may be readily compiled; and in the case of a popular work it is a sufficient guarantee of trustworthiness if these sources are briefly indicated at the outset.

But in the case of the mother of Jesus, the documents which must be taken into account are both more numerous and more difficult to use properly. For the facts themselves, it is necessary, if one wishes to add anything to the gospel narrative, to gather from early christian literature, evidences of diverse value and not seldom of doubtful value, from which may be adduced, occasionally facts, but more frequently merely conjectures and probabilities. On the other hand, concerning the saintliness of the Virgin Mary and her part in the mystery of our salvation, the exegesis of the Old and New Testaments, theological teaching, and even asceticism,

afford instruction of the highest value, and often furnish facts which are sufficiently guaranteed. To demonstrate how these various documents should be made use of, and to show in what way they have been used, it will be desirable to touch upon some questions of method in this introduction, and also to append numerous notes and references to the text.

I have already attempted an essay on the lines of this introduction,¹ and some day I may perhaps entirely re-write this work in a more critical and exhaustive manner. In the meantime, the limitations imposed by the scope of the series in which this volume appears, though demanding some sacrifices on the part of the author, possess great advantages for a wide circle of readers, in presenting a volume which is short and easy to read. If these advantages help to make the most lovable character of the Virgin Mary better known to a larger number, they will more than compensate for the disadvantages.

There are, as it were, three aspects of the subject, and these three ought to be treated simultaneously and interdependently, because, taken together, they present the true aspect of the character and personality of the Blessed Virgin.

Firstly, there is the historical account of the events of her life. For this, the Gospels, and they alone, afford information supported by the historical authority of contemporary narrative and by the still

¹ *Comment écrire la vie de la Sainte Vierge*, in the *Études* of May 5 and 20, 1898.

higher authority of divinely inspired writings. Besides these, there are the other books of Holy Scripture; and for the events and facts which these do not mention, we have the accounts handed down by the Fathers and early church historians, and the local traditions preserved in the countries in which Mary lived. It is also necessary to take into account the apocryphal gospels, and all that singular literature comprised under the name of Apocrypha, which is so much studied at the present day. Further, one may consult with discrimination the personal revelations of certain saints or of persons who have died in the odour of sanctity. But these various sources will supply us with much less information than it seemed possible to hope for. And, for reasons which would require long and complex analysis, the evidences which are derived from them are not important if taken one by one; even by grouping them we do not always find, but often far otherwise, a tradition uniformly and consistently followed; and upon several questions they present only uncertainty and irreconcilable contradictions. However, to bring out that which may be taken as absolutely certain, that is to say the gospel narrative; to accept some points which the testimony of numerous and weighty authorities renders almost certainties; to choose among divergent opinions and traditions those which seem to be best founded; to take, in certain cases, in default of trustworthy documents, a careful estimate of probabilities, such as what has been thought by those who, according to Catholic tradition, have been best acquainted with Our Lady and have