

THE SON OF THE HIGHEST

“BELIEF in the virgin birth of Christ, though admittedly an article of faith in each of the three orthodox creeds of Christendom, should not be demanded of the individual disciple to-day. It sets too humble a value upon the intelligence of the thinking man. In any case, there is nothing of any essential doctrinal and theological significance associated with this antiquated tenet, which quite manifestly is rooted in the soil of the mythology and lore of some more primitive religion. Whether this earlier cultus is pagan or Jewish in character is a matter of classical debate amongst the authorities, some taking their stand rigidly on this side and others contending no less confidently on that. However, despite these clear-cut divergences in the study of origins, all are united inasmuch as they discern the New Testament birth narratives to be the untrustworthy product of an eclectic syncretism of the old with the new. Quite apart, too, from the archaeological and theological perplexities which are stirred into existence by the concept of a virgin birth, there are difficulties in the realm of physiology that are without parallel and altogether incapable of resolution. As human civilisation advances and as the knowledge of things and their interpretation expands and reaches clearer heights, so in the interests of the progress of mankind towards that which is ultimate we must be prepared, courageously even if regretfully, to jettison those dogmas and beliefs which are plainly the illusions of a threadbare past.”

I

And thus, in preparing the way for a thoroughly rationalised and earthbound religion, up-to-date theology has sent Christ's virgin birth to the wall. Of course, the two firing squads, the one diagnosing a pagan and the other a Jewish origin, discharging their bluster from opposite corners, wipe each other out. Both are positioned on the quicksands of error, and he who thinks to reach port by way of the narrow waters which separate between them finds himself either in the clammy clutch

of the monstrous Scylla or in the dark and vertiginous whirlpool of Charybdis.

Let us admit quite frankly that between the myths of heathendom and the Biblical account of the virgin birth there are points of similarity and contact. One cannot honestly close one's eyes to this fact. The idea of a virgin conceiving and bringing forth a Deliverer who was to bless all mankind is by no means peculiar to the Christian era and religion. It is found in existence centuries before the birth of Jesus. The expectation was, for instance, one of great antiquity amongst the Buddhists of Tibet and China and was a prevalent thought in the pagan theogonies of India, Egypt, Greece, and Asia Minor. Indeed, if we take the whole seething farrago of paganism, we find that the idea of the miraculous birth of a Saviour from a human mother and a divine father, no matter how obscured and diversified it may be, is an ingredient common to the religions of ancient times. A maiden is mysteriously visited by God in the form of light or fire, conception in the womb follows, and in due course a wonderful Son is born. It is well known that the Dionysiac or Bacchic rites of Greece were borrowed from the opposite shores of the Aegean, and the Greek version of the birth of Dionysus, the Saviour-God, as given by Euripides, is an interesting example of the above belief:

*ἦκω Διὸς παῖς τήνδε Θηβαίων χθόνα,
Διόνυσος, ὃν τίττει ποθ' ἡ Κάδμου κόρη,
Σεμέλη, λοχευθεῖσ' ἀστραπηφόρῳ πυρί.*

"I, son of Zeus (i.e., son of God), am come to this Theban land, I Dionysus, whom Semele, the maiden daughter of Cadmus, brought forth, impregnated by lightning-borne fire" (Bacchae 1-3).

As it stands, this citation from the religious drama of Athens looks specious enough. It is set down here as a sample of the *idea* of an extraordinary birth which was at any rate present in the old pagan theologies. But as one reads the more detailed accounts of these and similar stories in the writings of many ancient authors one is repelled by the coarse anthropomorphic carnality and licentiousness that are invariably connected with every case, and one must be careful not to allow

a milder and briefer statement such as that quoted above to warp one's judgment. Always the Deliverer is the offspring of the god who, attracted solely by the fleshly beauty and womanhood of the maiden, by subtlety and stratagem obtains intercourse with her and thus satisfies the burnings of his lust. Generally, the god has his own wife in heaven, and thus the act further amounts to one of adultery and incurs the bitter jealousy and spite of his proper spouse. When heathenism has such lecherous and lawless gods it is small wonder that the people who cultivate their worship are themselves besotted with a like immorality and degradation. In this respect at least the pagan tales are as far removed as they well may be from the chasteness and propriety which are the hallmark of the Gospel narratives. Indeed, taken all in all, the dissimilarities are considerably more impressive than any of the apparent points of affinity. Yet, however that may be, and in spite of the contrasts which are so prominent to the eyes of the honest observer, running through all there is a substratum of sameness which cannot be ignored. The *idea* is there of the intervention of a supreme Being in the regular flow of history, resulting in the miraculous birth of a Saviour who is at the same time both the divine son of God and the child of a human mother. In many instances the thought of the virginity of the mother is obscured or even entirely lost in the grossness and carnality of the myths; but in those accounts which are more temperate it is certainly there, wrapped up in the mysteriousness of the event. Thus we perceive the *idea* of the necessity for a God-man as Redeemer, one who by nature of his unique origin is constituted a proper Mediator between man and his Maker. It needed little reflection even for the barbarian to descry that a true Deliverer could never be looked for along the normal line of human posterity. The corruptness of mankind in general and the lamentable failings of even the noblest and best of men convinced him of this. And so the *idea* of the supernormal appearance of a God-man who, inseparably linked both to heaven and earth, would restore the lost glory of man, not only was acceptable to his mind, but also became the logical expectation of his heart.

II

But while this *idea* was unquestionably present in the mind of man, it was by no means the self-effected product of his own intellect. Right at the back of it all there lurked the germ of a great truth that had originally been revealed to man by the true God Himself, so soon, alas, to be darkened and distorted by the repulsive accretions which were the outcome of man's own libidinous and idolatrous corruption. Modern archaeological research is proving ever more convincingly that every branch of heathendom was originally a mutinous and heretical break-away from the one true religion revealed in the beginning by the one true God. Religion did not take its commencement from the fears and apprehensions of some hypothetical ape-man as, awed by the inscrutable forces of nature, he cringed at the back of his cave. Our Western monotheism is not the grand achievement of an age-long evolution from the primitiveness of some conjectural polytheistic animism. All must be traced back to Almighty God who in the beginning created man in His own image and revealed Himself as the one true God, than whom there is none other either in heaven or in earth.

The early chapters of Genesis provide the key to all the rest of Scripture and the foundation for the right interpretation of the whole subsequent history of mankind. He who discountenances these can only stumble along sightlessly in the track of error and misapprehension and will never get a perspective of man in his true relationships. It is always the primary work of Satan to deny or disparage the truth and to reverse the divinely appointed order of things, and once he has successfully planted the seeds of distrust and independence in the heart of man he can safely leave him to bring about his own confusion and in the folly of his pride to accomplish his own destruction. Understanding this, one is not surprised to find the early chapters of the Bible so ruthlessly impugned and discredited, nor to hear the wisdom of man proclaiming on all hands that man has gloriously risen from the humility of a rude primevalism, in direct contrariety to the Biblical teaching that he has shamefully fallen from the high privilege of an original state of blessedness.

The protevangelium of Gen. iii. 15 disclosed to our proto-genitors the first mysterious adumbration of the gracious birth of One who was to deliver them from the awful curse which their sin had brought upon the world. To the serpent the Lord God said: "I will put enmity between thee and *the woman*, and between thy seed and *her seed*; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise *his* heel." In connection with our argument two things in this verse are of especial significance. Firstly, *the woman* and *her seed* are discriminately and exclusively referred to. Why not the seed of the man as well as of the woman, were it not that the Lord God purposed to intervene in some supernatural manner in the normal succession of events? Secondly, the allusion to *his* heel indicated that it was a *man-child* who was destined to be their Saviour. Now, this merciful forepromise kindled the flames of hope and faith in the breasts of Adam and Eve, but in the dull perversity of their hearts they looked for a Deliverer along the natural line of human propagation. The birth of her firstborn, a son, caused Eve to call his name Cain—"Acquisition"—and to exclaim, "I have gotten a man from the Lord!" Very soon, however, she must have been disillusioned as she perceived the wicked nature of her child, and accordingly she named her second son Abel—"Vanity". She had learnt the vital lesson that deliverance, although in some hidden way it was bound up with her own seed, was yet from above and not from man. Cain was a murderer, cursed and driven out by God; righteous Abel was slain; and temporarily the line was severed. Yet Eve had sufficient faith to believe that with the appearance of her third son had been restored the broken continuity which ultimately in God's good time was to lead up to the miraculous birth of the expected Saviour; for she called him Seth—"Compensation" or "Appointment": "God," she said, "hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel, whom Cain slew." And as the human race steadily expanded and multiplied, as it became split up into tribes and peoples and nations, as they toiled and struggled and journeyed, so this grand hope was handed down from generation to generation, twisted and debased though it was by the crudities of the idolatry and polytheism into which they so wantonly lapsed.

Here, then, we have the very fountain-head back to which is to be traced the idea, universally found in the religions of

mankind, of the miraculous birth of a Saviour whose mother is a mortal woman and whose paternity is to be assigned to God. And the water at the source is crystal pure, for it is of divine origin. But the Adversary has seen to it that from the living stream of the main channel numberless branches have been diverted, soon to be blocked off and left to stagnate and putrefy, befouled by the stercorous imaginations of man's heart. And yet scholars of the present day dare to point to these vile cesspools of paganism as the spring and source of the pure and sacred account of the birth of Jesus of Nazareth which is so simply recorded by the Evangelists! It is inconceivable! It is blasphemy of the grossest order! It is a shameless attempt to arraign and condemn the most holy truth before the bar of error and unseemliness!

If in the degraded realms of heathendom the idea of a supernatural birth played an important part in religious thought, even though it was a repulsively cheapened caricature of the original truth, how much more should the expectation of a miraculous intervention have been prominent in the mind of the Jew! To him, indeed, had been entrusted the very oracles of God. If there was one thing that should have been ineffaceably stamped upon his understanding through the possession and perusal of the Scriptures, it was that Almighty God would not send the promised blessing through the line of natural generation. The Messiah was to be the seed of the woman, but without reference to any human fatherhood. He saw how the shadow of imperfection and death darkened the birth of every child that was born into the world. This was so even in the case of those few individuals who could look back to a somewhat unusual and extraordinary origin. The bent and wrinkled Sarah laughed at the suggestion that she should be the mother of a son, for she was long past the age of child-bearing; but God quickened the deadness of her womb and brought to pass that which had seemed impossible. The barren wife of Manoaah was given power to conceive the mighty Samson; and the prayer of Hannah, Elkanah's childless spouse, was granted by the birth of godly Samuel. But each of these men was born under the curse, and not one was perfect before God. What, then, was the Jew to look for? How was the Messiah to come? He could not expect that by a special act of creation God would provide the perfect Deliverer, for the Almighty had

ceased from all His creative works. The power of God was manifested in the circumstances attending the births of Isaac, Samson, and Samuel in order that the Jew might learn to have implicit faith in God as One who was able to accomplish that which was humanly speaking impossible. He who could quicken a dead and barren womb (cf. Luke i. 36, 37) was also able to cause even a virgin who had not known man to conceive and bring forth a Son who would at the same time be the seed of the woman and the Son of the Highest. The intelligent and enlightened Jew might logically have conjectured that the promised Messiah would be born of a virgin by the power of God; but the cancerous growth of Pharisaism occluded the light of divine truth and clogged his vision with a materialism and arrogance from the baneful effects of which he suffers to the present day.

III

If we now leave paganism and Judaism on one side and turn our gaze upon Christianity itself, we shall find that the virgin birth is an essential and indispensable factor in the Biblical doctrine of the Person of Christ, and in consequence is incorporated in each of the three great creeds of our Faith.

The virgin birth is the great corrective against all those heretical ideas which strike at the root of the full theanthropic Personality of our Lord. No reasonable and observant man will deny the universality of sin. Nobody born after the ordinary manner of human generation has ever, amongst the countless millions that have walked this earth, succeeded in living a sinless and inerrant life; indeed, it is the clear teaching of the Bible that *all* men at every stage of existence, from birth right up to the moment of death, are sinful and unable spontaneously to live a life which is pleasing before a holy God. Now, every record of and testimony to the earthly existence of Jesus Christ goes to prove with the conclusiveness of unanimity that He lived a life which was absolutely perfect, entirely free from sin of any order, and in every respect well-pleasing to God. In view of the catholicity of sin, how are we to account for this if Christ was the normal offspring of a human father as well as of a human mother? Only on the assumption, perfectly legitimate as far as it goes, that God, in virtue of His omnipotence, by a special intervention interrupted in this case the

transmission of original sin and ensured that any harmful or undesirable characters present in the genetical make-up inherited from his parents should be replaced by others beneficial in nature and conducive to sinless living. Thus the man Jesus might have been preserved without blemish or transgression by the power of God. But there are two chief objections to this view. Firstly, the appearance of a perfect individual in this manner, despite the human parentage, would have amounted to a new creative act on the part of God; whereas God had long since ceased from the work of creation. Secondly, such a one could never be constituted the Saviour of mankind, for under no circumstances could he have mediated between God and man, inasmuch as he would have no self-originated merit of his own to plead. His indefection would simply issue from his being kept by the power of God, and would in no way be due to his own efficiency. *All* his sinlessness would be indispensable to his own justification, so that nothing would remain over and above—not even enough for the offering of a gentle push towards restoration to the least sinful of individuals. There would be only just enough righteousness for his own salvation, and nothing over.

But, further than this, had Christ been born in consequence of the marital union of man and woman, He could not properly have been God. It is argued by some that His humanity was exalted and glorified by the process of deification, whatever that may be. Such an idea of apotheosis, so prevalent, for example, in the theologies of the Greeks and Romans, is earthly in its origin and is hopelessly and illogically materialistic in conception. Proud and rebellious man would like nothing better than to be as God. Well might he be reminded what it means to be God. GOD is the great I AM, without beginning and without end, the inscrutable ALL IN ALL, the omnipotent CREATOR and PRESERVER of an infinitude of universes, the unapproachable RULER of eternity. It is rank folly to imagine that a person who has had his commencement within the despicable confines of time and space could under any conditions become God, the everlasting Being, without origin, body, parts, or passions. Such an occurrence would finally abolish the essential nature of God. The very imagination is an incongruous enormity.

“The truth is not that, being man, He afterwards became

God; but that, being God, He afterwards became man," says Athanasius (Con. Ar. 1.39—*οὐκ ἄρα ἄνθρωπος ὦν, ὑστερον γέγονε θεός· ἀλλὰ θεός ὦν, ὑστερον γέγονεν ἄνθρωπος*). Those who designate Christ a person of entirely human origin, and at best a deified man, entertain unworthy humanistic and anthropocentric conceptions similar to the crude delusions which are so characteristic of the religions of heathendom. On these premisses the fundamental distinction in the Godhead between the Father and the Son can have no real existence, and one has perforce to adopt the interpretations advanced by the Unitarian sect, and repudiated by Scripture. For if there was a time (*i.e.* prior to His birth) when the Son did not exist, there must also have been a time, coterminous with the above, when God did not exist as Father; and, this being the case, at some *time* a change must have taken place in the Godhead—which is preposterous: for the natural and substantial Being of God is far above the dimensional meagreness of the finite and is in no way subject to the undignified limitations of time. With Him there is "no variableness nor shadow of turning"; He is *the same* from everlasting to everlasting. Else He would not be God.

"If indeed," writes Augustine (Civ. Dei, 9. 15), "all men are unavoidably miserable for the very reason that they are mortal (*omnes homines, quamdiu mortales sunt, etiam miseri sint necesse est*), a mediator must be sought who not only is man but also God, in order that the blessed mortality of this mediator may lead men out of mortal misery into blessed immortality." This mediator between God and man is the man Christ Jesus, whose divinity renders Him always equal to God, and whose humanity has made Him similar to us (*divinitate, qua Patri est semper aequalis, et humanitate, qua nobis factus est similis*. Ib. 9. 17). Calvin speaks with no less emphasis on this matter. "It deeply concerned us," he says, "that he who was to be our Mediator should be very God and very man. . . . The case was certainly desperate, if the Godhead did not descend to us, it being impossible for us to ascend. . . . The work to be performed by the Mediator was of no common description: being to restore us to the divine favour, so as to make us, instead of sons of men, sons of God; instead of heirs of hell, heirs of a heavenly kingdom. Who could do this unless the Son of God should also become the Son of Man, and so receive what

is ours as to transfer to us what is His, making that which is His by nature to become ours by grace? . . . Moreover, it was especially necessary for this cause that He who was to be our Redeemer should be truly God and man. It was His to swallow up death; who but Life could do so? It was His to conquer sin: who could do so save Righteousness itself? It was His to put to flight the powers of the air and the world: who could do so but the mighty Power superior to both? But who possesses life and righteousness, and the dominion and government of heaven, but God alone? Therefore God, in His infinite mercy, having determined to redeem us, became Himself our Redeemer in the person of His only-begotten Son" (Inst. 12. 1, 2).

IV

The Deity of Jesus Christ is unmistakably set forth in the writings of the New Testament, implicitly on every page, and explicitly by many unequivocal statements. And He who is very God must of necessity be eternally existent, having neither beginning nor end in time, from everlasting to everlasting the great and immanent I AM. Accordingly, the sacred Book speaks most plainly of the pre-existent Christ and of His ceaseless continuance on and on into infinite perpetuity. He is "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever" (Heb. xiii. 8); distinct from other men, "without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days nor end of life" (Ib. vii. 3: *ἀπάτωρ, ἀμήτωρ, ἀγενεαλόγητος, μήτε ἀρχὴν ἡμερῶν μήτε ζωῆς τέλος ἔχων*); "whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting" (Micah v. 2); "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. xiii. 8). "In the beginning," writes the disciple whom Jesus loved, "was the Word, and the Word was with God. . . . The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made" (John i. 1-3). There is, moreover, the verbal testimony of our Lord Himself: "I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father" (Ib. xvi. 28): "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I AM" (Ib. viii. 58); "O Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine own self with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was" (Ib. xvii. 5); "I am the first and the last,

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and the Living One; and I became (ἐγενόμην) dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore" (Rev. i. 17, 18). This same Jesus St. Paul declares to be "the image of the invisible God, begotten before all creation (πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως—*v.* Shedd, Dogm. Th. i. 325; also Alford and Lightfoot *in loco*); for by Him were all things created, in the heavens and upon the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist" (Col. i. 15-17). None of this can possibly be true of any mere man, howsoever good, nor even of any individual for whom the reward of deification, vainly imagined, is claimed.

Are we not justified, too, in detecting a latent allusion to the miraculous incarnation of the Second Person of the Godhead in St. Paul's phrase, *γενόμενον ἐκ γυναικός* (Gal. iv. 4)? Alford and Lightfoot do not concur with such an interpretation and quite rightly insist that the emphasis is upon the humanity of our Lord. There is something to be said, however, for Calvin's view that here St. Paul "wished to distinguish Christ from the rest of mankind: because He was made from the seed of His mother, and not from the carnal intercourse (*κοίτη*) of husband and wife". Surely we have here a retrospective glance at that mysterious prophecy in Gen. iii. 15 concerning the seed of the woman, clearly fulfilled, as Paul saw, in the virgin birth of Christ. Elsewhere when this idiom occurs, the verb used is always *γεννητός* (*v.* Job xiv. 1; xv. 14; LXX: *γεννητὸς γυναικός*; and Matt. xi. 11: *γεννητοῖς γυναικῶν*). Now, *γεννάω* is the usual word meaning to "beget", and, in the passive, to "be born". But in this instance, and also in Rom. i. 3, Paul employs the verb *γίνομαι*, properly meaning to "become", in direct contrast to his regular custom;—even in this same chapter he uses *γεννάω* three times in speaking of the birth of Ishmael and Isaac (Gal. iv. 23, 24, 29). This is no *lapsus calami* on the part of the Apostle. It is a cryptic reference to the pre-existent Christ: He who, though eternally God, *became* man that He might effectually mediate between us and God. "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ," he writes in another place, "how that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich . . . Who being in the form of God, counted it not a thing to be grasped at to be on an equality with God,

but emptied Himself, assuming the form of a bond-slave, *becoming* in the likeness of men (*ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος*)" (2 Cor. viii. 9; Phil. ii. 6, 7). The Holy Spirit testifies to the same truth by the words of St. John, who states that "the Word *became* (*ἐγένετο*) flesh, and dwelt among us" (John. i. 14).

V

The Roman Catholic conception of the Virgin Mary as immaculate is backed by no warranty from the pages of Holy Scripture. The ridiculous efforts which have been made to bring such a doctrine into line with the teaching of the Bible are all transparently either weak or dishonest, and we do not intend to go into them here. In fact, this belief is directly opposed to the unambiguous statements of the Word of God to the effect that, with the single exception of Christ, *all* are sinful and not one single person is righteous or free from spot (cf. Rom iii. 10-12, 22, 23; viii. 32; Gal. iii. 22; 1 John i. 8; 2 Cor. v. 21; Heb. iv. 15). And so Rome is forced to fall back upon Tradition and the Church as the two authorities which are both ultimate and binding. "There are two arguments," says Alphonsus de' Liguori (*Glories of Mary*, ii. 1), "that conclusively prove this pious belief. The first of these is the universal concurrence of the faithful. . . . The second reason, and which is stronger than the first, that convinces us that Mary was exempt from original sin, is the celebration of her Immaculate Conception commanded by the universal Church." Anyone who will take the trouble to look into the history of this matter will soon find that there is no such thing as a "universal concurrence of the faithful"; on the contrary, the writings of Popes and Fathers contain the most striking divergences and contradictions in connection with this very subject, so much so, that it was not until as recently as 1854 that this dogma was officially decreed by the Pope to be "henceforth and for ever an article of Catholic belief".

If, then, the Virgin Mary was stained in common with all other individuals with sin, both original and actual, how was it that Jesus Christ, "the Lord from heaven", who through her assumed a true, natural, and fleshy humanity, did not receive from her the taint and the guilt of original sin? Of course, to reply in the face of the clear teaching of Scripture

that Christ's mother must, after all, somehow have been immaculate, is but to shift the difficulty one stage further back and to intensify it. And the infallible Word of God which tells us that in Christ was no sin nor guilt nor darkness at all also points to the efficient cause of His perfect spotlessness. This efficient cause was the Holy Spirit of God. Where the Holy Spirit is operating there is life and glory and power and liberty. From the very first moment of conception in the womb of the Virgin Mary the Holy Spirit was at work, and with ceaseless vigilance He remained on duty as God's Holy Child Jesus was gradually formed within His mother. This was the absolute and incontestable guarantee of our Lord's complete freedom from sin of any kind. "Now the birth of Jesus was on this wise: when His mother Mary was espoused to Joseph (before they came together) she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. . . . That which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. . . . 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" (Matt. i. 18, 20; Luke i. 35). This same Spirit was the never failing dynamic in life of our Lord's blemishless impeccability, and in death of His mediatorial obedience (Luke iii. 21, 22; iv. 1; etc.; Heb. ix. 14). The function of the Holy Spirit from that earliest instant when the substance of our Lord's humanity began to be formed until He returned to the Father amid the acclamations of the heavenly hosts was to complete with all holiness and righteousness the Person of the Son of Man. Thereafter He was free, as it were, to come as the Spirit of Christ and to make the ascended, triumphant, and glorified Saviour an ever present reality as Redeemer and Sovereign to the heart of each believing individual (John xvi. 7, etc.).

The incarnate Son of God is the great and perfect Exemplar of the new life in all its stages which is vouchsafed to all the elect according to the grace of God. If we are to know this only true life we must, like the Saviour, be born from above (*ἄνωθεν*), we must be born of the Spirit (John iii. 6, 7). If we are to experience victory in the hour of temptation, if we are to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, we must live by the same Spirit as Christ lived by, and in His power. If at the appointed time we are to rise from the dead and ascend

up with glorified bodies to the place whither He has gone before and where we shall ever be with our peerless Lord, serving and worshipping Him without ceasing in the triumph of eternity, it is only because He first died, the just for the unjust, and was raised with power, and was received up as Victor to the right hand of the Majesty on high, alive and supreme for evermore. Blessed be His incomparable Name who has made it possible for us by His grace to be born, in like manner to Himself, "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John i. 13). Blessed be the all-efficient Holy Spirit who "beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God: and if children then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom. viii. 16 17). "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy hath caused us to be born from above (ἀναγεννήσας ἡμᾶς) unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, unto an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us" (1 Pet. i. 3, 4).

PHILIP E. HUGHES.

*St. John's Church,
Lewisham, London.*