Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary in Medieval English Devotional Prose

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DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY
IN MEDIEVAL ENGLISH
DEVOTIONAL PROSE

BY
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Religious aspects of medieval English literature have proved popular among students writing on literary and historical topics. A glance through recent volumes of Year's Work in English Studies shows the popularity of Mariology as a subject among students of English literature. The unpublished doctoral dissertation by A.E. Montgomery on Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary in English Life and Literature before 1300 shows very well per defectus the need for sympathetic investigation of topics of this nature. As even George Bernard Shaw observes, when commenting on Protestant misunderstandings of the Middle Ages, factual knowledge is not enough; one must understand the environment to understand the times. H.W. Patch also concedes that, "for a really adequate understanding of much medieval literature we are in need of more scholars who are intimately familiar with the thoughts of Catholicism."

1 A.E. Montgomery, Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary in English Life and Literature before 1300, unpublished doctoral dissertation, Northwestern University, 1937.
The Mariology of medieval English lyrics, as well as parts of the prose, have been the subject of two recent doctoral dissertations. Rev. Charles R. Mulrooney investigated the devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary in Middle English lyrics, while Evangeline G. Weir searched the homilies and works of religious instruction for source material relating to Middle English plays of the Blessed Virgin. Although Miss Weir investigated some of the materials with which this thesis is concerned, she had a different purpose and used a different approach.

Father Mulrooney analyzed each of the selected poems, and then grouped them as they bore on a particular phase of the cultus of Our Lady. He summarized the testimony of the poets on each of these phases of Marian devotion or doctrine and presented significant selections to illustrate it. Although the present thesis is concerned with selected prose pieces, the method of analyzing and grouping used by Father Mulrooney is worth following.

Miss Weir surveyed the homilies and other works of religious instruction dealing with the Blessed Virgin to discover the extent and nature of devotion to her which these exhibit. She then

considered the role of the Blessed Virgin in the Medieval English drama in relation to the vernacular homilies and other works of religious instruction. Although her thesis included some prose sources, she left untouched most of the purely devotional pieces with which the present thesis will deal.

Thus, an important section of the prose has thus far been left without investigation as far as Mariology is concerned. This section of the prose is important from the viewpoint of both the continuity of our literature and its religious content. R.W. Chambers has proved the indispensability of Medieval English devotional prose in his lengthy and scholarly essay "The Continuity of English Prose." Upon investigating the works which bear the chief weight of this continuity between 1300 and 1500, we find that they contain a devotion to the Blessed Virgin which has never been treated.

The pillars in the bridge of continuity, according to R.W. Chambers, are: The Ancren Riwle, the works of Richard Rolle of Hampole, Walter Hilton, and Juliana of Norwich, The Cloud of Unknowing, and The Book of Margery Kempe. In addition to these we must include the name of William Caxton. Whether Caxton deserves a place in the strict continuity of English prose is a question open to debate—a debate which may be overlooked here.

Regardless of how he should be rated as a stylist, his services as a printer are not to be denied. Furthermore, Caxton offers us a synthesis of medieval devotion to Our Lady through his editing of numerous works, especially Jacobus de Varagine's seven volumes entitled The Golden Legend, and The Knight of the Tower. Thus it seems safe to say that omitting William Caxton would be a mistake here.

Another group of devotional prose selections has been added in order to present a thoroughly representative assemblage, and because these works, like those already mentioned, have thus far never been investigated for their Marian contents. The merits of each of these selections is included below. Their titles are:

The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesu Christ by Nicholas Love,
The Myroure of Oure Ladye, Middle English Sermons edited by W.O. Ross, and the two anonymous titles Speculum Sacerdotale and Jacob's Well.

The Ancren Riwle, written, as far as existing evidence can prove, by Bishop Richard Poore, occupies a vital position in the history of English prose. It became one of the thirteenth century classics, and "enjoyed a prodigious popularity in medieval England for at least three hundred years." The revised edition was written about 1230. The purpose of the writer was to give, in answer to a request, a rule of life for women who desired to

7 Ibid., xcvit.
spend a secluded life in anchorholds usually found near medieval churches.

Richard Rolle of Hampole, called by Chambers "the second great figure of Middle English prose," enjoyed a supreme place in the history of English prose due to his date, his style, and his popularity. Although his place in histories of English literature was formerly due to a lengthy verse treatise which he did not write, he nevertheless became one of the most widely read in England of all English writers. Rolle died in 1349, having written prolifically in Latin and English verse and prose.

Walter Hilton, canon of the Augustinian house of Thurgarton, and Wycliff's contemporary, died on March 24, 1396, the vigil of the Annunciation. His popularity as a devotional writer was apparently second only to that of Rolle. Among his prose works we have Eight Chapters Necessary for Men That Give Themselves to Perfection, A Devout Treatise of Discerning of Spirits, and the frequently quoted Scale of Perfection.

Although Juliana of Norwich and Margery Kempe cannot on their own merits be considered main pillars in the continuity of English prose, they nevertheless represent a class of writers which is comparatively unknown to us because their works have

8 Ibid., ci.
9 Ibid., cvii. Here he is accepting "Miss Deanesley's verdict... See Modern Language Review, XV, 355."
disappeared by mere attrition, "read to destruction." Much of the prose of these two writers is exceedingly beautiful and abounds in references to the Blessed Virgin. By putting together pieces of information offered us in *Revelations of Divine Love* and by the scribe who copied the earliest manuscript, we learn that Juliana of Norwich was an anchoress who lived in a cell attached to the Church of St. Julian at Norwich. The revelations were shown to her on May 8, 1373. Margery Kempe of Lynn was also an anchoress. Hers is the second biography known to have been written in the English tongue, its lone predecessor being a life of Wulfstan of Worcester, an English bishop. Her life is most interesting reading. For, though she was an anchoress, she did make several pilgrimages, the narration of which throws important light on life in the Middle Ages. She died about 1438, but her book belongs closer to the end of the preceding century.

A center of controversy in her own day, Margery Kempe of Lynn may again become the topic of debate among students of mysticism, if we may judge from the renewed interest in her life which has within the past twenty years brought forth a modern edition of her *Book*.

Late in the fourteenth century appeared a work entitled *The Cloud of Unknowing* which, for its importance in the continuity

10 Ibid., cxvii.
of English prose, merits a place beside Richard Rolle and Walter Hilton. It is sometimes ascribed to Hilton, but it is more often attributed to an unknown contemporary of his. Its popularity led to its translation into Latin by a fifteenth century Carthusian. And in the sixteenth century it was still being studied among the English exiles.

The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesu Christ was written while its author, Nicholas Love, was prior of Mount Grace Charterhouse from 1410-1421. This Carthusian presented his book to Archbishop Arundel as a contribution toward that prelate's campaign against the Lollards and their teaching. Dom Nicholas tells us that his intention is simply to draw out the life of Christ "more plain, in certain parts, than is expressed in the gospel of the four evangelists" for those "that be of simple understanding." The Mirror became a favorite book of instruction and devotion, so that it was printed no fewer than four times in pre-reformation days. Even as recently as 1908 there were at least twenty-three manuscripts in existence.12

Among the many books which owe their preservation in print to William Caxton, two in particular claim our attention here; namely, The Knight of the Tower and The Golden Legend.

The Knight of the Tower is the popular title of a book by a

certain Richard of La Tour-Landry who, being interested in the virtuous conduct of his daughters, compiled this book for their instruction. His sons also had a separate book for their benefit, but this one does not seem to have come down to us. The former book claims insertion in our list for two reasons. First, it was published by William Caxton who was "essentially a practical man, on the look-out for books likely to please." This is an argument in favor of its popularity, and popularity is being emphasized in regard to each book on this list because it is an indication of what the literate medieval men and women were reading—and presumably following. The second reason for including this book is that it contains three chapters which are devoted exclusively to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Caxton's edition of Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda Aurea* was his most important translation, and had the largest circulation of all his publications. From the fact that there are over five hundred manuscript copies of the book in existence and that within the first hundred years of printing it appeared in more than one hundred and fifty editions and translations, it is obvious that the *Legend* was in extremely wide demand. Moreover, Emile Male counts it among "the ten books from which we could

15 Legouais and Cazamian, 200.
form an adequate idea of medieval thought and knowledge."16

In our list of medieval prose works of religious instruction, The Golden Legend marks a point of transition. In the first place, the titles which precede the Legend belong to works which depend only slightly or not at all upon the use of legendary materials and exempla. On the other hand, the works named hereafter are either collections of legends and exempla (like The Golden Legend), or else they show an extensive use of these materials.

The next title on our list is Middle English Sermons, a group of fifty-one sermons which were edited from the British Museum Manuscript Royal 18B, xxiii by Woodburn O. Ross.17 These sermons represent a considerable number of authors, and were to serve as models for medieval preachers. They were not originally written for this collection, nor were all of them actually delivered. The purpose was to provide materials for other preachers. At the same time, Ross considers the fact that they are in the vernacular as good evidence that they were designed for lay audiences.18

Another book which furnished the parish priest with in-

18 Ibid., xix.
structions in matters of church observance and legend in the vernacular was the Speculum Sacerdotale. Made up mostly of legenda, vitae, and exempla, it belongs to the fifteenth century, but no information is available as to its authorship.

In Jacob's Well "the exemplum appears to have reached its maximum employment in the religious treatise." Although we have no clues as to its authorship, it is dated about 1440. Part I was edited for the Early English Text Society in 1900 by Dr. Arthur Brandeis, but only the table of contents of Part II has come down to us. The only exclusively Marian passage in Part II is Chapter 91 entitled De Salutacione Angelica. Part I, on the other hand, has enough Marian material to make it worth considering.

Before closing, it will be necessary to point out the medieval attitude toward these legends and exempla. No slight difficulty arose during the Renaissance over this very matter. It was under the two-fold influence of the Renaissance and Protestantism that the vogue and influence of the legends passed away. The Reformers who went about destroying the statues of

the saints also burnt the manuscripts which told their glorious stories. It is possible that they performed this work of destruction less out of wanton malice than out of indignation at their being expected to believe the far-fetched contents of the legend and exempla. These stories must be read in the same frame of mind which the medievalists brought to them, or they will amuse at least bewilderment and possibly scorn.

"Legend" does not mean myth or fable; in the Middle Ages it meant selectio or reading from the life or office of the saint whose feast was being celebrated. When these readings were collected, as was the custom in medieval churches and monasteries, the resulting volume was called a legendarium. The Golden Legend in particular was compiled as a layman's "Lives of the Saints."23

The origin of these stories was popular; the author was the masses. This is explained by the Bollandist, Pere Delehaye, who points out, according to Ryan and Ripperger:

that the curious thing about legends...is that behind the ultimate author who puts them down in writing, there is a hidden 'author', anonymous and manifold, whose memory stretches back through generations: this author is the masses, the people themselves.24

The scholars of the Renaissance and the other destroyers of

23 Ryan and Ripperger, viii.
24 Ibid, x.
the legends seemed to overlook this as well as the purpose of these stories. The purpose was less to make known to the people what the saints had been, than to show the people what they should be in order to be saints. Certainly they were idealizing. Certainly they were not writing history. But they never intended to write history. What they did intend was to present the ideal of the Gospel in the most concrete form possible to an audience much more capable of understanding a graphic narrative than of grasping an abstract ethical disquisition. O'Neill synopsizes the difficulty when he refers to Chapter 9 of Aristotle's Poetics where the distinction is clearly made between the poet and the historian.

The historian and the poet are distinguished chiefly by this— that the one relates what has been, the other what might be...Poetry is chiefly conversant with general truth; history with particular. 25

In this matter the compilers and narrators of the legenda and exempla were poets, not historians, and that by intention. Had this been understood near the end of the sixteenth century, there would have been less sneering at the medievalists.

The exempla shared this fate with the legenda, for they also were narrations, usually short, used to illustrate or confirm a general statement. Frequently these narrations were drawn verbatim from the legendaries. However, up to the time of

the Renaissance they enjoyed unmeasured popularity. Speaking of the exempla in the fourteenth century, Welter says:

...il elargira encore son rôle et sera encore plus fortement représenté dans ses éléments constitutifs par l'absorption de sources nouvelles. Dans le sermon il occupera une place toute particulière et en fera, pour ainsi dire, partie intégrante. Dans les traités de dévotion, de morale et d'enseignement, il sera ajouté en manière d'illustration ou de complément explicatif à l'exposé doctrinal ou didactique. 26

Mosher adds to this manifold purpose of the exempla three other aims: to arouse fear in the sinful or to stimulate zeal, to revive languid listeners, evoke interest or laughter, or to eke out a scant sermon by "farsing" it with tales. 27

That completes the list of works to be treated. The references in these works to the Blessed Virgin will be examined and grouped under the three general headings which appear in the Table of Contents. Then an analysis will be made to discover the attitude of these characteristic medieval English prose writers toward the Blessed Virgin.


CHAPTER II
THE HAIL MARY AND OTHER PRAYERS
TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN

The Hail Mary is the most familiar of all the prayers used by the Universal Church in honor of our Blessed Lady. The growth of this prayer from a simple greeting, ending with the words: "Blessed art thou among women," to its fuller form as we know it today is recorded by Rev. Herbert Thurston, S.J.\(^1\) Until 1568 the Hail Mary in its form of simple greeting was the only one found in the liturgy. Because it was used as a form of greeting, it had long been customary to accompany the words with some external gesture of homage, a genuflection, or at least an inclination of the head. Kneeling at the Ave Maria came to be enjoined in several religious orders. This was true at the time of the Ancren Riwle, the beginning of the thirteenth century, for we find Bishop Poore instructing the sisters either to genuflect or incline profoundly (according to the ecclesiastical season) at the recitation of both the Gloria Patri and the Ave Maria in the office.

...At this word "Venite Adoremus," and at the Ave Maria, and wheresoever you hear Mary's name named, ...if it is a workday, fall to the earth, if it is a holiday, bow somewhat downward.  

It is also true that the Hail Mary occurred in almost every part of the Little Office or Cursus of the Blessed Virgin. In this way, owing to the fatigue of these repeated prostrations and genuflections, the recitation of a number of Hail Marys was often regarded as a penitential exercise. Bishop Poore suggests that the confessor "impose some small thing upon thee, as a Psalm, or two Paternosters, ten or twelve Ave Marys," for trivial faults. The physical penance of saying ten or twelve Hail Marys is not brought out by comparison with the recitation of a psalm or two Paters as well as with the penance mentioned immediately after the Hail Marys, namely, "He may add flagellations too, if he think fit."

Besides the daily recitation of the Little Office, the Ancren Riwle outlines a daily order which begins with the recitation of five Aves before Our Lady's image soon after rising in the morning.

Ross' edition of sermons gives us the medieval text of the

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3 Ibid., 261-2.
4 Ibid., 15.
Hail Mary which everyone over seven years of age had to know along with the Our Father and the Creed. "And their friends be in great peril if they teach them not...."5

This Ave Maria is in the first chapter of Luke, and is this in English to your understanding: "Hail, Mary, full of grace: our Lord is with thee. Blessed be thou among all women; and blessed be the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Amen."6

Commenting immediately afterwards, the preacher says that this prayer should be used as a greeting to Our Lady that she might ask "her Son Christ Jesus to have mercy on thee that thou might at Domes-day come to that joy that ever shall last."

The part of the Hail Mary which follows the Holy Name was beginning to take form at this time, but it was not gaining universal acceptance. This can be seen from the Myroure, for after giving a text of the prayer identical with that quoted above, the author speaks in favor of the shorter form.

Some saye at the begynnyng of this Salutation Ave benigne Jesu. and some saye after. Maria, mater def. wyth other addycyons at the end also....But in the seruyce of the chyrche. I trowe yt be moste sewer. and moste medefull to obey to the comon vse of saynge. as the chyrche hathe set. without all suche addycyons.7

The words "full of grace" had a peculiar attraction for

5 Ross, 12.
6 Ibid.
many writers who commented on the Hail Mary. One example is taken from Ross' collection of sermons. These words of the prayer are taken by the commentator to mean that Mary possessed the completeness of every natural and supernatural virtue. She is "Comely, loving, virtuous, utterly without fault." The reason behind this title, says Ross, lies in the fact that Mary purchased our salvation with the only coin acceptable in buying back sinful mankind, namely, grace: "therefore, Mary was hailed 'full of grace'." Another reason, however, is offered by Juliana of Norwich. She attributes Mary's plenitude of grace to the fact that "her humility overpasseth all creatures." The author of The Cloud of Unknowing does not argue at all. He simply takes it for granted, referring to "Oure Ladye St. Mary that was full of all grace in keeping of time."

A very popular comparison concludes the commentary in Ross' Sermons. Wherever Mary is mentioned as co-Redemptrix, it seems almost inevitable that we find the comparison between Eve and Mary. Whereas Eve caused man to lose paradise, Mary restored him. "Thus mankind, destroyed by a woman, was saved by a woman." St. Luke is credited by another commentator with the

8 Ross, 332.
9 Ibid., 330-1.
12 Ross, 332, 336.
the explanation that the word "Ave" spelled backwards is "Eva", and as Eve's talking with the fiend was the beginning of our perdition, so Our Lady's talking with the Angel Gabriel when he greeted her with this Ave was the beginning of our redemption.13

The Hail Mary was not only looked upon primarily as a greeting among medieval Christians, but the hypocrisy with which "today men hail one another" is to be avoided. The greeting of the Blessed Virgin should be wholehearted.14

Though not all nuns could read, they did know the Hail Mary. This is the supposition upon which Bishop Poore bases his advice in the Ancren Riwle: "If she cannot read her hours in a book, let her say them with Pater Nosters and Ave Marias;..."15 Or perhaps there is another reason why she cannot recite Matins. Then let her substitute thirty Paters, Aves, and Gloria Patris.16

Walter Hilton and Richard Rolle, both writing to lay people on the subject of meditation, make the same suggestion in very much the same wording. Walter Hilton: "When overcome by dryness during meditation, I hold it most secure unto thee for to say thy Pater Noster, or thine Ave, or else Matins..."17 And Rolle:

13 Blunt, 74.
14 Ross, 333-4.
15 Poore, 321.
16 Ibid., 37.
In meditation, if you find your heart dull and dark, "...I hald it...most sekyre un-to the for to say thi pater noster and thine Ave Maria..."\textsuperscript{18} It will be noted that Ave Maria is capitalized while Pater Noster is not. It is to be doubted that any signification can be attached to this, because inconsistencies, not only in capitalization but also in punctuation and spelling, are to be found within single paragraphs of this edition.

Another Marian aid to meditation is found in the Ancren Riwele where Bishop Poore advises the nuns to form a mental picture of Our Lady with her maidens and all the army of angels.\textsuperscript{19} He later advises them to recite the Hail Mary during time of temptation.\textsuperscript{20}

Abundant illustration that this was salutary advice for every class of people is offered by various examples from sundry legends. For instance, in Ross' collection of sermons we read that there was once a particularly sinful prostitute going to the town fair. On the way she passed a church where she met the curate. He promised to support her if she would reform, but she refused. His next tactic was to hire her to say five Aves before the image of the Blessed Virgin in the church. After she had said them, the image asked the Holy Child in its arms to forgive

\textsuperscript{19} Poore, 70.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 218.
the woman. The Child agreed, provided that the woman would repent. She hurried to the curate, made her confession, and immediately died of anguish for her sins. "And her soul was borne to heaven." 21

Further results of reciting the Hail Mary, or even parts of it, are noted in The Golden Legend and Speculum Sacerdotale. In both these sources we are told of a certain noble knight who entered the monastery of Citeaux. Having no education, he was put to study. Alas, "he could nothing learn in long time that he was there save these two words: Ave Maria." After his death and burial, there grew from his grave a fleur-de-lis which had Ave Maria written on each leaf in gold letters. 22

Again these two works collaborate to bring us the tale of another knight, a robber, whose lone virtue was that he daily recited "the salutacion Ave Maria." A holy man once commanded this knight "in virtue of Jesus Christ our Lord that thou say to us who thou art, and for what cause thou art come hither." Though the knight's mouth and tongue moved in answer, the voice was that of another. This voice confessed that he was no man but a devil:

...For my master hath sent me hither to the end that I should take heed night and day

21 Ross, 160-2.
that if this knight ceased to say the salutation, Ave Maria, I then should strangle him with mine own hand and bring him to hell because of the evil life he hath led and leadeth.

But because the knight had never failed to say this daily prayer, the devil could not have him. Upon hearing this, the knight confessed his sins, and the devil was cast out of him by the holy man. 23

Sermons were sometimes opened with the recitation by preacher and people together of a prayer for the success of the sermon. For instance, in Ross' collection we read: "That I maye preach well and that you may reform, I praye you all for charite, iche of you with a good herte, seyeth a Pater Noster and an Ave." 24

A request for prayers appears at the end of the same sermon, along with a reminder of the indulgence attached.

All who have heard this sermon and repent and pray the Pater Noster sincerely five times, and name Jesus' name at the end of the Ave, diverse popes have granted them ccc daies to pardon... 25

Similarly, the closing paragraph of the Ancren Riwle begs a prayer for the scribe as well as for the author.

As often as ye read anything in this book, greet the Lady with an Ave Mary for him who

23 Ellis, III, 102; also Weatherly, 46.
24 Ross, 47.
25 Ibid., 59.
made this rule, and for him who wrote it, and took pains about it. Moderate enough I am, who ask so little.26

A strange thing to the respectable English eye is the occurrence of the name of Mary used as an exclamation much after the fashion of the French "Mon Dieu!" "Holy Mary," "Saint Mary," and "Saint Mary have mercy" are all to be found used by no less a person than Bishop Poore in the pages of the Ancren Riwle.27

Besides the Hail Mary, there were, of course, many other prayers to the Blessed Virgin. Our Lord Himself encouraged these, as we find in The Book of Margery Kempe. The narration is by Margery herself where she records that she began her meditation without having decided on a fixed topic. So, she began by asking Our Lord: "Jesus, of what shall I think?"

The answer she received was: "Daughter, think of My Mother, for she is the cause of all the grace that thou hast."28

Returning to the Ancren Riwle, we find six pages of orations and versicles which form something of a Little Office. The first oration pleads for freedom from sin in this life and the enjoyment of heaven in the next. This is followed by the Hail Mary and the Magnificat. The next oration asks: "That I may in heaven

26 Poore, 326.
27 Ibid., 168, 247, 255, 273.
28 Kempe, 11.
behold thy joyful countenance." The next three prayers recall to mind Mary's joy at the Resurrection, the Ascension, and her own Coronation, and beg the grace of companionship with her in heaven. Then there is a prayer of rejoicing for the favors Mary has received from God, and the final prayer begs her compassion on the sinful who pray to her. 29

Richard Rolle stops in his Meditations on the Passion to commiserate Our Lord and Our Lady as they met on the Via Crucis. He notes that the love between Our Lord and His Mother was so burning that the greatest sorrow of all was each one's grief over the sufferings of the other. Then he speaks to Our Lady alone in the most touching language to be found in all the Marian passages we are investigating here. Because it is too long to be quoted fully here, the complete prayer will be found in Appendix I. But because of its tender sympathy, vivid phrasing, and childlike, wholesouled point of view, it cannot be omitted any more than it can be described adequately. It was for passages like this that St. Bernard came to be called the Mellifluous Doctor.

A much less poetic passage is found in The Myroure of Oure Ladye. Fire, air, water and earth are listed by the author as the four elements. He reminds his readers that there was a time...
when these creatures had not yet been made, but that even then God had them in mind. The earth would be good and fruitful, the water peaceful, the fire such that its flame and heat would reach up to the dwelling place of God Himself. Finally, he manages to reach the comparison with Mary.

O Mary virgyn moste pure. and moste fruytefull mother thow arte thys same thynge... For so and suche were thowe in the syghte of god endesly er thow were made; and afterwarde of the forsayde pure and clene elementes. thow haddest the matter of thy blyssed body... And suche were thow unmade before god, before thy makynge; as thow haddest deserued to be afterwarde... And therfore thow were moche more excellente endesly in the syght of god to hys moste ioye; aboue al creatures that were to be made.30

Commenting on the hymn In Throno, which was said in the Little Office on Mondays, The Myroure explains that four verses of this hymn praise Our Lady for seven things. First, she has a seat in heaven above all creatures. Second, she is herself the seat of God most pleasant to Him. Third, the angels of heaven praise her. Fourth, God willed to dwell in her womb for a time. Fifth, she dwells in God endlessly. Sixth, all heaven is glad of her presence. And seventh, all that are ill have the hope of comfort from her.31

The recitation of the Little Office was not reserved to

30 Blunt, 105-6.
31 Ibid., 184.
priests and religious. Laymen, too, made it a regular practice. One nobleman, for instance, who had a great love for the Blessed Virgin "took in marriage a much fair damsel." After the nuptial Mass he remembered that he had not yet recited the Little Office. So, what may seem whimsical to us, he sent his bride and friends home while he remained in the church. 32

Prayer took the form of a letter from earth-bound vassal to heavenly Queen, as we read in the Life of St. Ignatius of Antioch.

Unto Mary the Virgin, that bore Jesu Christ in her body, I, humble Ignatius, her servant, send greeting, I, that am yet a novice in the faith and disciple to Jesu Christ and to John thy dear friend, desire to have of thee some comfort and consolation of some good enseignement and teaching. For of Jesus thy Son I have heard say many marvels, of which I am enjoyed to hear only of thee, which hast been always in his company. Thou knowest well the secret desires of him, thou hast been plainly informed, and they that be yet young in the faith with me trust much to be endoctrined of thee, and informed in their creance and belief: Lady, God salute thee. 33

Our Lady appeared to Ignatius in answer to his prayer, and confirmed all that St. John the Evangelist had written of her Son. She further exhorted him to be strong in his faith, steadfast in his good works.

One medieval preacher tells the story of Moses and the

32 Ellis, II, 128.
33 Ibid., III, 17.
burning bush, from which he draws a comparison with Mary's motherhood and virginity. Before closing his sermon, he addresses the Mother of God in these words:

Blessed Ladi, we knowe be feythe and conscyeveth well that the bushe the which Moyses see brennyng betokens the, modur and maiden, enflamed with the speciall grace of the Holy-gost in conscyevyng and bryngynge forthe oure cheff souerane Lord, God and man, thi virginite alvey abidyng afore his burthe, in is burthe, and aftur is burthe. 34

Following this, the preacher warns that no man should attempt to solve this mystery of the virgin-birth by taxing his reason over it; we must merely accept the miracle as true.

Another short prayer is recorded for us in the legendary life of St. Katherine. At the time the story begins, Katherine has not yet been baptized, but she has chosen Our Lord as her spouse. In her prayer she appeals to Mary.

O most blessed Lady; blessed be ye among all women; I remember how I chose that Lord which then was full far from my knowledge, but now blessed Lady, by his mighty mercy and your special grace he hath opened the eyes of my blind conscience and ignorance, so that now I see the clear way of truth, and humbly beseech you most blessed Lady, that I may have him whom my heart loveth and desireth above all things, without whom I may not live. 35

Our Lady's answer notes the absence of one requirement: Katherine has not been baptized. Then Adrian, Mary's own

34 Ross, 221.
35 Ellis, VII, 13.
messenger, baptizes Katherine and the Blessed Virgin leads her to her Son.

This spirit of prayer to Our Lady in every necessity did not lack the approval of St. Elizabeth of Hungary, for even as a small child she exhorted her playmates to pray to the Blessed Virgin. For herself, she chose the Blessed Mother of God as her patroness. 36

If we may consider good works as a form of prayer in its widest sense, we should not overlook several pious practices to which the medieval layman was urged.

The *Golden Legend* urges readers to imitate the practice of St. Francis who fasted on days which commemorated the sorrows of Mary. 37 And an abbot whose troubles were fast mounting is praised for putting the whole monastery on a three-day fast during which the monks "shylde with prayers and wepyngis ask help of the blissid lady Marie, modur of God." 38

Margery Kempe seems to be following an accepted practice when she makes an offering before an image of Our Lady before boarding ship. 39

Almsgiving, either in honor of Mary or in front of one of

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36 Ryan and Ripperger, 675.
37 Ellis, V, 230.
38 Weatherly, 150.
39 Kempe, 50.
her churches, was also a praiseworthy practice, as we find in the life of St. Alexis and again of St. Elizabeth. The latter, however, did not stop with almsgiving. She also refused to wear jewelry on the feast of the Purification. Instead, she wore old clothes, went to the church, and offered a candle to Our Lady.

Another holy woman who was devoted to the Virgin Mary had a marvelous vision in which she attended Mass. As a remembrance, she kept a candle which had been used in the service. This candle became a venerated relic of great potency in healing the sick.

So far in this investigation, we have seen the numerous places in which the medieval writers spread devotion to the Blessed Virgin among their readers. As a means to this they explained, directed, exhorted, and pointed to good examples. We have seen some of the results of their work. The Hail Mary is recited among them primarily as a greeting, with none of the hypocrisy attached to some worldly greetings. It was accompanied with bows, genuflections, and prostrations, so that the recital of this prayer a number of times becomes an edifying form of voluntary penance. We saw the nuns reciting their Ave at the

40 Ellis, VI, 206.
41 Ibid.,
42 Ibid.
43 Weatherly, 24-29.
very beginning of the day as a prayer of greeting, of praise, and of petition for mercy. Everyone who had attained the age of reason had to know it, and everyone did know it—even those who could not read. The medieval text of the Hail Mary, shorter than our present formula, was the subject of frequent comment, especially the words "full of grace," where the comparison between Eve and Mary was popular. Whenever the soul seemed dry, the body tired, and all else seemed useless at the time of meditation it was contemplation of the five senses on the Hail Mary that was suggested as a remedy. The effectiveness of this prayer in time of temptation was seen in many examples, and faithfulness in the daily recitation of the Ave was not without its reward. Preachers began and ended their sermons by reciting it with their listeners and reminding them of the three-hundred day indulgence attached to it. As an exclamation, the name of Mary carried no hint of disrespect, but rather implied confident familiarity.

Other prayers there were, too—prayers which did not depend on a formula but rather on loving trust in the powers of the Blessed Virgin. Their admirable beauty and spontaneity did not go unrewarded, as we shall see further in the following chapter. Our Lady's servants seem never to tire of seeking comparisons, even far-fetched ones, to express their praise of her matchless virtues. Sometimes, they lead us to suspect that they are willing to entertain almost any idea, as long as it takes them, somehow or other, to the thought of Mary.
The daily recitation of the Little Office, by laymen as well as by religious, fasting, almsgiving, and burning holy candles were offered as proofs that their prayers were more than mere words.
CHAPTER III
MARY'S INTERCESSORY POWERS

To call the Blessed Virgin a most powerful intercessor in heaven does not detract from the mediatorship of Christ. For Our Lord intercedes for man with His Father as the Royal High Priest, while Our Lady pleads his cause with Christ as His loving mother. This intercession differs both as to nature and as to power. On the other hand, "the intercession of the Blessed Virgin is naturally more powerful than that of the other saints, for while they are friends of God, she is His Mother."¹

The literature which tells us of the medieval Englishman's faith in Mary's intercessory powers is a mixture of history and legend. The point for us to remember is that even the legendary reports which narrated miraculous answers to prayer had the historical effect of teaching (even if by exaggeration) and encouraging a boundless trust in the Blessed Virgin.

With that understanding, we may proceed to the opening pages of The Golden Legend, where we read of the woman who was

depressed at the prospect of missing Mass on Our Lady's feast, due to the absence of her chaplain. Nevertheless, she went to the chapel to make her devotions. "Anon she fell asleep, in which she had a vision." Our Lord, St. Laurence, and St. Vincent offered solemn Mass, and a chior of angels and virgins sang the Mass. "Whereof she much marvelled, and thanked Our Lord and the glorious Virgin Mary devoutly which had suffered her that day not to be without Mass."²

There was a knight, also, whose love for the Mass was rewarded by Our Lady. He was on his way to a tourney when he stopped on the way to hear Mass. Several Masses followed one another, but he would not leave until all were finished. The result was that he missed the tourney. Yet those who returned from the contest congratulated him on his victories. He attributed this to a miracle on Our Lady's part, so he entered a monastery dedicated to her, and there spent the rest of his life in her service.³

Whether the knight thought that Mary herself took his place or sent someone else disguised as the knight is not recorded. In another story, however, Our Lady did hold the office of a nun. Beatrice was her name, and she is described as fair in body, fairer in soul, meek, mild, benign, and obedient to God, to holy

² Ellis, III, 25.
³ Ibid., V, 105.
Church, to her abbess, and lowly to all her sisters, devout in prayers and in her office of sexton. In spite of all this, she fell. She ran off with a clerk, but not before kneeling at the shrine of Our Lady and praying: "Lady, this temptacyoun may I no lengere wythstondyn. Haue here the keyis of myn offyce." Lay­ing her keys on the pedestal, she went her way with the clerk. After a time he deserted her, and it was fifteen years before she made her way back to the convent gate. There she asked the porter whether she had ever heard of a Beatrice.

The portere seyde, "I knowe here wel for a blyssed womman, sché is yet here in here offyse, moste meke, mylde, obedyente, of alle here systerys." This Beatrix seyde it was nought so, for sche was out of this hows xv yere afore... Beatrix, knowyng that it was nought so, turning fro here hows, purposyd for to go on beggyng, wepyng and sorwynge. our lady mette wyth here, and seyde: "Beatrix, in thy lyknesse and in thy clothyng I haue don thin offyse, syth thou kest to me the keyis of thin offyse, because thou were meke, mylde, and obedyent..." Oure Lady brought here to here celle, and toke here agen here keyis, and vanyst away fro here. Beatrix, wythoute schamynd of here susterys, was schreuyn priuely, and dede penaunce, and kepyd mekenes, myldeness, and benygnyte, and obedyens, in-to here ende.4

During the reign of St. Gregory the Pope, a plague struck. Against its ravages, St. Gregory "ordained a procession, in the which he did do bear an image of our Lady, which, as is said, S. Luke the Evangelist made, which was a good painter, he had

4 Brandeis, 271-2; also Weatherly, 188-9.
carved it and painted after the likeness of the glorious Virgin Mary. And anon the mortality ceased...."5 Practically the same story was told of the famine and pestilence which swept the whole earth when Justinian ("formerly a good emperor") adopted a heresy and outlawed the pope. The sickness stopped when a procession with an image of Mary was organized.6

Then there was Mary of Egypt, a sinner. When she went to Jerusalem to visit the holy places, she could not enter the church to venerate the holy cross, for some invisible power kept thrusting her back. Knowing the reason for this, she wept for her sins before a statue of the Blessed Virgin and begged for forgiveness and the strength to live chastely. "When I had thus prayed, and to our blessed Lady thus faithfully promised, I went again to the doors of the church, and without any impediment I entered into the church."7 The rest of her life she spent in the desert doing penance.

St. Leo the Pope one day sang Mass in the church of St. Mary Major, "and much people by order were communed and houseled, and a matron, a certain woman, kissed his hand, whereof he was tempted vehemently in his flesh."8 Being a man of severe penance, he secretly cut off his hand. But the people began to

5 Ellis, III, 64.
6 Weatherly, 24.
7 Ellis, III, 107.
8 Ibid., IV, 10-11.
murmur because he did not appear at public functions.

Then Leo turned him unto the Blessed Virgin, our Lady, and committed himself wholly to her providence. Then she anon appeared to him and restored to him his hand and reformed it with her holy hands, commanding that he should go forth and offer sacrifice to her son.9

As something of a postscript to the story, we are reminded that St. Leo is the Pope who called the Council of Chalcedon at which he decreed that the Virgin Mary should be called the Mother of God.

John of Damascus also had his hand restored by the Blessed Virgin. This prior and holy man came to be captured by Saracens who put him to teaching the great lord's son. So successful was he that he gained this lord's affection. The son became jealous, so he wrote a treasonous letter in John's hand and dropped it where the emperor would find it. As a result, John was condemned for conspiracy. Thus his right hand was cut off and fixed to the wall in his old convent in front of an image of Our Lady.

Johun kom home to his hous a-forn that ymage of oure Lady, and unwryed his wounde, and schewyd out his arme to the ymage and seyde. "Lo, lady, is this the mede for my good dede that I have done to thi worshipe?" Johyn wente thens to bedde, and to hym kom oure lady... Oure lady seyde, "My chyld, be glad for this sorwe and schame schal turne the to

9 Ibid.
heys worship and ioye." Oure lady, in his syghte, fecchyd his hand, and sett it agen on his arme, and blyssed it, and wente here wey.\textsuperscript{10}

As soon as the miracle became known, the lord asked John's pardon, and the pupil was put to death.

Sometimes Mary brought companions in these visions, and then one of these would perform the actual miracle, as in the legend about St. Hyppolitus. Standing near a place where lightning struck, a certain Peter lost a leg. Then he crawled to a church of Our Lady, hid his leg in a hole of the church, and prayed Our Lady with tears for his deliverance. "And on a night the Blessed Virgin with S. Hyppolitus" appeared to Peter in a vision and restored the leg.\textsuperscript{11}

A simple priest was hailed before the ecclesiastical court for saying no other Mass but Our Lady's. St. Thomas of Canterbury therefore forbade him to celebrate any Mass at all.

Wherefore this priest was full sorry, and prayed humbly to our blessed Lady that he might be restored again to say his mass. And then our Blessed Lady appeared to this priest, and bade him go to St. Thomas, and bid him by the token that the lady whom thou servest hath sewed his shirt of hair with red silk, which he shall find there as he laid it, that he give thee leave to sing mass and assoil thee of his suspending and thine inhibiting, and restore thee again to thy service. And when St. Thomas heard this he

\textsuperscript{10} Brandeis, 277-79.
\textsuperscript{11} Ellis, IV, 232.
was greatly abashed, and went and found like as the priest had said, and then assailed him to say mass as he did before, commanding him to keep this thing secret as long as he lived.12

Our next series of legends is of the type which probably made the Renaissance scholars and the Protestant reformers gnash their teeth and tear their hair. Nevertheless, if we keep in mind what was said at the beginning about the medieval attitude toward these legends,13 we shall not be disturbed by their evident theological contrariness. Rather we shall share the viewpoint of the medievalists that a pious hyperbole is just that and not an occasion of smoke and thunder.

In the first story a monk who had led a sinful life was surprised by a sudden death. At his judgment the personified vices and virtues fought for his soul. Of course the virtues, being outnumbered, were losing the battle, when the Blessed Virgin and St. Peter intervened. Finally, it was decided that the monk should return to life and do penance.14

A variant of this tale concerns the monk who was lax but devoted to Mary. After he had drowned, she earned him a return to life in order that he might confess. This he did and finished his life doing good works.15

12 Ibid., IV, 58; V, 108.
13 Vide supra, 9-12.
14 Ellis, IV, 163.
15 Ibid., 248.
The details change slightly again, and we read of the riotous-living clerk who had a vision of his judgment at which the Blessed Virgin interceded for him. No sooner did he awaken than he left for a monastery to serve Our Lady in good works.\textsuperscript{16}

Further, a clerk of evil life whose only virtue appears to have been his devotion to the Blessed Virgin, died and was buried outside the churchyard. The Blessed Virgin reproved the Archbishop of Rome for allowing this, so at her suggestion the grave was opened and a lily was found growing from the dead clerk's mouth.\textsuperscript{17}

More likely to succeed in edifying the medieval reader was the story told on the feast of St. Dominic.

There was a monk, before the establishment of this order, which was ravished in spirit and saw the Blessed Virgin our Lady S. Mary kneeling with her hands joined, praying her son for the human lineage. And he oft withstood her request, and at last he said to her that so busily required him: Mother, what may I do more for them?

At this point, Jesus recounts some of the means of salvation He has already given the world, and then continues:

\ldots but because it appertaineth not to me to withsay thy request, I shall give to them my preachers, by whom they may be enlumined and made clean\ldots And another saw a like vision that same time when the twelve abbots of the order of Citeaux were sent to Toulouse against

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., V, 109.
\textsuperscript{17} Weatherly, 46-8.
Our Lady interceded more than just once for her son Dominic, as he himself saw in a vision when he was at Rome for the confirmation of his order by the pope. He beheld Our Lord holding three spears in his hand, brandishing them against the world. When the Blessed Virgin ran hastily to Him, asking what He was going to do, He answered that He was going to destroy the world for its vices. Then she fell down at His feet and said:

Dear son, have pity, and tarry thy justice by thy mercy... I have a true servant and a noble fighter against the vices, which shall run over all and vanquish the world, and subdue them under thy signory, and I shall give to them another servant into his help that shall fight as he doth. And to Our Lady her son said: I am appeased and receive thy prayer, but I would see whom thou wouldst send in so great an office. And then she presented to him S. Dominic, and Jesu Christ said: Truly this is a good and noble fighter, and shall do diligently as thou hast said. And then she showed to him and offered to him S. Francis, and he praised him as he did the first.

When it came to recruiting men for the Order, Our Lady was again on hand. When Reynold, a most promising prospective Dominican, was suddenly taken with a deadly illness, St. Dominic "prayed heartily to our Blessed Lady the Virgin, to whom he had committed the whole order." Our Lady appeared to Reynold,

18 Ellis, IV, 178-9.
19 Ibid.
anointed him and cured him. "And S. Dominic, being in prayer, saw all this in a vision." And Reynold lived to preach many a sermon in Bologna and Paris. 20

To the medieval mind, Our Lady seemed ever willing to protect the reputation of all women, good or bad. Her protection against wagging tongues seems almost like a brusque: "Mind your own business!" In the instance of a good woman, "Cunegonde, the wife of Henry the emperor, (who) was forced to the trial by fire in defense of her reputation, a voice said, "The Virgin Mary hath delivered thee, virgin." And she went without any hurt upon the burning ashes." 21

Even the Roman lady who committed the double sin of incest and murder was protected by Our Lady. This woman, though she repented, prayed and did penance, could not bring herself to confess. Then a fiend in a clerk's disguise accused her of the incest and murder before the emperor and the people. When she was sent for, and the emperor had informed her of the clerk's accusation, she asked for time to consider her plight. She went to confession, performed her penance and appeared again before the emperor. This time the fiend did not recognize her, "for she was kept safe by the Holy Virgin."

20 Ibid., 184.
21 Ibid., 219.
Thanne seyde the kyng to the fiend in the clerkys lyknesse: "lo, thou clerk, here is the womman that thou hast accusyd. say now of here what thou canst say!" The fiend seyde: "It is nought this womman that I have accusyd; this womman is holy, and marie kepith here."

He vanished away as a cloud of smoke, and the lady was saved.22

Another time a woman was making her way through the night to a sinful meeting when she fell into a well that was twenty fadom depe, and in her fallyng cried helpe on oure lady; and whenne she come to the water, she fonde it harde undernethe her fete, and a uoys come to her saieng, "thou hast in the worship of oure lady, kept thin flesshe clene in her fast, and therfore now thou shalt be saued of this peril." And so, on the morw, folke come to feche and wynde up water at that well, and thei herde and saw her therinne, and thanne thei drowe her up, hauynge moche meruaile how she might be saued; and she saide it was for loue of her fast the Friday and the Saterday. And thus, as ye haue herde, God and oure lady saued her.23

In at least two places we read of the good woman whose devotion to Mary saved her from a snare into which her husband had fallen. This husband was a knight who fell into poverty because he was in the habit of giving expensive gifts. To escape shame, he fled to the desert where he met the devil disguised as another

22 Brandeis, 66-7.
knight. Said the devil: "If thou wilt a little obey me, thou shalt abound in glory and riches more than thou wert tofore."

As soon as the knight had received the riches from the devil, the devil demanded in return that the knight bring his wife to him. So the knight went home, took his wife, and was leading her to the desert. But on the way, she stopped at a church to commend herself to the Blessed Virgin. While in the church she fell asleep, and the Blessed Virgin took her place, unknown to the knight. When they arrived in the desert, the devil's disguise fell away and he fled back to hell. The man returned to his wife, and "they threw away all the riches of the devil, and dwelled alway in the louings of our Lady." 24

The devil took another direct and sound beating at the hands of Our Lady when the vicar-general of a certain diocese sold his soul to the devil. At one time the vicar could have been bishop, but he refused. Then the man who did get the bishopric dismissed the vicar, whereupon he denied God and Mary, and contracted with the devil to get his position back. When he had succeeded in being restored, he repented "and ran with great devotion unto the Virgin Mary." She rebuked him and made him promise to confess. He made his confession and died three days later. 25

24 Ellis, IV, 249; also Weatherly, 189.
25 Ellis, V, 110.
A totally different type of necessity was cared for by Mary in the story of the Jewish child who communicated.

It happened in the city of Bourges, about the year of our Lord 527, that when the Christian men were communed and housed on an Easter day, a child of a Jew went to the altar with the other children, and received our Lord's body with the others.

When the father discovered this, he threw the boy into a blazing furnace. But Our Lady preserved him from harm, and the townspeople threw the father into the furnace. 26

The mother of St. Rock had long been childless, and had often prayed for a son, but it was not until she petitioned Our Blessed Lady very especially that her prayers were answered. This same St. Rock whose life had begun at the intercession of Mary, also ended his life in her care.

Then at the last, when S. Rock knew by the will of God that he should finish his mortal life, he called to him the keeper of the prison, and prayed him that he would go to his lord, and to exhort him in the name of God and of the glorious Virgin Mary, that he would send to him a priest, of whom ere he died he would be confessed, which thing was anon done. 27

Mothers, it seems, could be very bold with Our Lady without exhausting her patience, at least if we may judge from the following incident. It happened that a lady whose son had been

26 Ibid., IV, 252.
27 Ibid., V, 1, 10.
imprisoned went to the church of the Blessed Virgin and took from the arms of the Lady statue the carved image of Jesus, saying that she would hold it as hostage until Mary effected the release of her son. The Blessed Virgin appeared that night to the son, opening the prison gate for him. Whereupon the mother returned the image of the infant to the arms of the statue. 28

We read in the life of St. Clare that her religious life began in the church of Our Lady of Portiuncula, for it was before Our Lady's altar there that she had her hair cut off before entering the abbey of nuns. 29

And in special it is read that, when the hour of death approached, she, which long time had lost her speech, began to speak and say: Go out surely, thou hast a good safeconduct. And when one of her sisters, being there present, heard that, she demanded her to whom she spoke. And she answered: To my soul, whom I see abashed to depart from my body, for he ought not to doubt, for I see the holy Virgin Mary which abideth for me. And this said, our Blessed Lady entered into the chamber where S. Clare lay. And she was crowned with a crown right clear shining, that the obscurity of the night was changed into the clearness of mid-day. And she brought with her a right great multitude of other virgins all nobly crowned, among whom there was one that bare a rich mantle, to whom she said: Give hither the mantle. And when she had sweetly embraced her she clad her with the mantle. 30

28 Ibid., 106.
29 Ibid., VI, 162-3.
30 Ibid., 167, 186.
The Blessed Virgin also came to St. Aldegonde on her deathbed to lead her into heaven.

S. Wautrud saw in a vision, five days before the death of the holy Aldegonde her sister, the blessed Virgin Mary, both S. Peter and S. Paul, princes of the apostles, accompanied with many saints and a great legion of angels, which led her sister Aldegonde into paradise. 31

Christians in groups were not forgotten by Mary, as we learn from the account of her leading a host of angels to protect Constantinople from the attack of a Saracen king. Even the king was converted. 32 And when Julian was cruelly persecuting an abbey of monks, he did not foresee the powerful intervention of the Virgin. After the monks had prayed and fasted for three days in expectation of martyrdom,

...upon a nycht as the abbot lay in his prayers, hym thought he sawe that oure lady opened the dore of the chirche and yede to the graue of a knyght namyd Quiriacus, the which was dede and i-beried a-fore by the space of vii dayes. And sche bad this knyght rise and arme hym and a-venge hure of Julyan. And then he rose and armyd hym with his armour that was honged in the chirch toke his owen hors in the stable and lept upon hym and then he yede his way. And al this the abbot sawe in his sweuene. And in the morowe folowyng the abbot told alle that he hadde seen to his monkus, the whiche openyd his graue, and there was no body, ne armour in the chirche, ne hors in the stable. and in the thridde day as Julyan was fightyng with his enmyes, he was slayn of the for-saide knyght Quiriacus. And in the nyght

31 Ibid., VII, 221.
32 Weatherly, 46.
folowyng the abbot sawe howe the knyght come to his graue ageyn and put ageyn bothe the armour and the hors.33

From these examples, it might be concluded that Our Lady could not be stern with her clients. Yet we find her reproofs very strong. Certainly aware of this was the young man who inherited an estate, and at the urging of his friends, married. Our Lady reminded him of his devotion to her, and accused him of deserting her. As a result he left his new wife to enter the service of the church.34

Not quite as stern, but equally effective was her treatment of a certain Cistercian monk. This monk was a physician, and neglected his monastic duties in favor of his medicines. So on a solemn feast of Our Lady he was at Matins when the Blessed Virgin entered the choir and gave a "spoonful of her medicine" to everyone of his brethren, but not to him. The monk repented and reformed, and after a year he was permitted to partake of Our Lady's medicine.35

We turn now to The Book of Margery Kempe, which is not to be classified among the legends. It is autobiographical. Here we find the Blessed Virgin playing quite a different role from the one we saw in the legends. She herself appears less

33 Ibid., 150; also Ross, 316.  
34 Weatherly, 202.  
35 Brandeis, 290-1.
frequently as the central figure. However, we get an accurate idea of her intercessory powers from the way she is referred to in the conversations between Our Lord and Margery. These references, though sometimes very brief, are always revealing.

Early in the Book Margery is in need of assurance that Our Lord loves her. In reply, Our Lord swears by His Mother that He loves Margery with all His heart. He even turns to the Blessed Virgin with the request that she herself tell "My daughter of the greatness of the love I have unto her."

Immediately afterwards, the Queen of Mercy, God's Mother, dallied to the soul of this creature, saying:

'My dearworthy daughter, I bring thee sure tidings, as witness my sweet Son Jesus, with all the angels and all the saints in Heaven who love thee full highly. Daughter, I am thy Mother, thy Lady and thy Mistress, to teach thee in all wise how thou shalt please God best.'

She taught this creature and informed her so wonderfully, that she was abashed to say it or tell it to any—the matters were so high and so holy—save only to the ancho­rite who was her principal confessor...36

Soon after this, Margery was bewailing her sins, and Our Lord comforted her by promising to be present with His Blessed Mother at Margery's deathbed.37

Like many mystics she was having trouble finding a suitable...
confessor, but when she prayed one William Weaver in the name of Our Lady to help her, he agreed.\textsuperscript{38} One time when she was in Rome on a pilgrimage she wanted to confess to a priest who understood no English. So she asked him through an interpreter to ask Our Lady and the saints to pray that he might have the grace to understand her.

Thus they prayed thirteen days. And after thirteen days the priest came again to her to prove the effect of their prayers, and then he understood what she said in English to him, and she understood what he said. And yet he understood not English that other men spoke; though they spoke the same words that she spoke...\textsuperscript{39}

In obedience to Our Lord's command, she gave away all her money in alms. Then in a vision she saw Our Lady begging meat for her, and she recalled the promise Our Lord had made to her shortly before to the effect that He would ask His Mother to beg for her.\textsuperscript{40}

Moreover, Our Lady absolved Margery from the vow which she had made (and kept for many years) to fast one day a week in her honor.

Our Lady, appearing to her soul, bade her go to her confessor and say that she would have her discharged of her vow, so that she should be mighty to bear her ghostly labors, for without bodily strength, they might not be

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 54.  
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 71.  
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 80.
endured...

Furthermore, Our Lady said to her:—

'Daughter, thou art weak enough from weeping and crying, for both make thee weak and feeble enough. And I can thank thee more for eating thy meat for my love, than for fasting, that thou mayest endure thy perfection of weeping.'

Another time, as she was praying in a chapel of Our Lady, she had another vision in which the Blessed Mother appeared and asked: "Daughter, wilt thou see my Son?"

And anon, forthwith she saw Our Lady hold her Blessed Son in her hand and swathe Him full lightly in (a) white kerchief so that she might well behold how she did it.

Later on, she learned that she had become a grandmother, and since she wished to see her son, daughter-in-law, and their child, she begged this favor of the Blessed Virgin. Our Lady answered by promising that Margery would see them before she died, and then fulfilled the promise much sooner than might be expected from the wording of it.

All these tales, both legendary and biographical, show us something of the idea the Middle Ages had of the power invested by God in the Blessed Virgin over angels and men, good and bad. Was a servant of hers sad because she could not hear Mass on her feast? She would arrange a Mass; her own Son would be the

41 Ibid., 147.
42 Ibid., 191.
43 Ibid., 203.
celebrant. Or was this knight kneeling in her chapel going to miss the tournament? Someone must take his place, since he "hath chosen the better part." And poor Beatrice with all the virtues save one. With patience and help she would have stability too, though it should require fifteen years. Was a plague or persecution raising havoc among her clients? That must stop. Mary of Egypt? She had the makings of another Magdalene.

Lost limbs were restored that her servants might praise her and her Son the more. Perhaps the zeal of some of these children was misdirected, like the devotion of the priest of one Mass. Yet that Mass was in honor of the Blessed Virgin, so be not too harsh.

If a miracle were required to advance her Son's cause, or to prevent virtue from falling, or to tame the spoiled and troublesome child who was, in spite of all, her child, then she would pray her Son for that miracle. And let the devil, under whatever disguise he might assume, beware. For she was that woman who would crush the serpent's head.
CHAPTER IV
MARY'S JOYS AND SORROWS

If the medieval plays of the Blessed Virgin were arranged in the chronological order of the mysteries they commemorate, they would present a fairly complete Life of Our Lady. Passages from the lyric poems of this period might be arranged in the same way. The prose too, tells the story of the main events in Mary's life from her Immaculate Conception and birth to her Coronation as Queen of Heaven.

In a sermon on "The Conception of Our Blessed Lady," which begins with a commentary on the words "Mary, thou hast found grace at the Lord," we are told that she found grace in three manners. The third of these three manners concerns the Immaculate Conception: "This glorious virgin was, in the womb of her mother sanctified more plainly and more specially than ever was any creature." Then St. Augustine is quoted in confirmation of this, and it is narrated of St. Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury and "pastor of England," that he sent a letter to his bishops on the miracles in England, France and elsewhere which confirm belief in the Immaculate Conception. One of these miracles, which is related again in the Speculum Sacerdotale, tells
us that William the Conqueror sent Abbot Helsinus on a diplomatic errand to the Danes. On the way back, a storm arose which began to wreck the ship. Then "an honourable person in the habit of a bishop" appeared to the abbot and promised to save the ship if the abbot would swear to "hallow the feast of the Conception of Our Lady, and of her creation, well and solemnly, and go and preach it." The abbot agreed, asking on what day the feast should be celebrated. He was told that the eighth day of December was the day to be set aside, and the Office for the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin should be recited completely, except that wherever the word "nativity" occurred the word "conception" was to be substituted. When the abbot promised, the tempest ceased.

For the feast of the Nativity of Our Lady, The Golden Legend describes the ancestry of Mary at great length, finally reaching the point of telling us that Mary was born of Joachim and Anna in answer to their prayers. Her birth was prophesied to Joachim by an angel.  

Margery Kempe was contemplating this event one day, and

Then, anon, she saw Saint Anne, great with child, and she prayed Saint Anne that she might be her maiden, and her servant. And anon, Our Lady was born, and then she arranged to take the child to herself and keep it till it was twelve years of age, with

1 Ellis, II, 124-7; also Weatherly, 250-1.
2 Ellis, V, 96.
good meat and drink, with fair white clothing and white kerchiefs.³

The **Golden Legend** adds that "Master John Beleth" received a revelation as to the date of the Nativity of Mary, and that the feast was established, but that no octave was kept until the time of Pope Celestine. It was during the conclave which elected him that the cardinals were making poor headway with the election until they vowed to keep the octave of Our Lady's Nativity if she would help them.

And they then by one accord chose Celestine, and were delivered, and accomplished then their vow by Innocent, for Celestine lived but a little time, and therefore it might not be accomplished by him.⁴

Mary's dedication in the temple is supposed to have taken place when she was three years old.⁵ There in God's service, she prayed until terce, from terce to none she worked, "and from none she ceased not to pray, till that the angel came and gave her to meat."⁶

Then at the age of fourteen, when the virgins commonly returned to their homes, Mary refused. This made the bishop (sic!) angry. So he and the people prayed for light.

Anon came a voice out of the oracle and said

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³ Kempe, ll.
⁴ Ellis, V, 103-4.
⁵ Ibid., 96-98.
⁶ Ibid.
that, all they that were of the house of David that were convenable to be married and had no wife, that each of them should bring a rod to the altar, and his rod that flourished, and, after the saying of Isaiah, the Holy Ghost sit in the form of a dove on it, he should be the man that should be desponsate and married to the Virgin Mary. 7

Joseph, described here as an old man, was chosen. The Knight of the Tower also refers to Joseph as old when he tells his daughters that God wedded Mary to Joseph so that she might have a guide and protector, and that He told Joseph that she was with child by the Holy Ghost. "And thanne this olde Joseph had gret ioye," and thanked God. 8 He also tells his daughters that Mary was obedient to her husband as an example to every young lady and every good woman, and emphasizes the wisdom of Mary's asking the angel how she might have a child, since she knew not man.

...Wherby is gret ensaumple unto you all women, that whanne there is said or reported ani thinge unto you, that neither ye ansuere ne consent till ye be assured what may befall unto you in the ende, worship or blame, as by this glorious mayde Marie ye have ensaumple. 9

The complete story of the Annunciation is told in the Speculum Sacerdotale by paraphrasing St. Luke. 10 The Golden Legend does not describe the story, but launches into a compara-

7 Ibid., 102.
8 Wright, 148.
9 Ibid., 149.
10 Weatherly, 39.
son between Eve's causing our damnation by her disobedience and Mary's beginning our redemption by her obedience. Then the moral is presented on the fact that the angel found Mary "alone, enclosed in her chamber," as befitted a maiden consecrated to God. It is also noted that Mary referred to herself as "handmaid" and not "lady."11

Why did God wait so many years after Adam's sin to save man? We find the answer in Ross' collection of sermons: "Because He could find no instrument suitable to His purpose until Mary was born, just as bees cannot make honey unless flowers are blooming."12

This meekness of Mary is extolled by another preacher as well as by the Knight of the Tower.

Since we be called Christian men, let us do as Christ teaches us and evermore be gentle and lowly. For by meekness, as clerks say, Our Lady St. Mary deserved more to bear Our Lord Jesus than by any other virtue...13

...Ye may see how God is plesed with deuote praiers and of humble creatoures, for, of trouthe, the sone of the fader of heuene descended from aboue into the glorious urgin Marie as moche for her humilite as for the chastite; for, all-be-it that she was pure, chaste, and clene, withoute ani synne, so was she the most meke and humble of all creatoures, as it shewithe whan she conceyued oure Saueoure Thesus, by the annunciacion

11 Ellis, V, 97-100.
13 Ibid., 20.
angelyk, where as she said her self 'Teche, lo, me, the humble chaumbrere of God. his will and plesaunce be fulfelled in me.'

At the words **Natus ex Maria Virgine** in the Creed, Bishop Poore's anchoresses were to prostrate on workdays and bow on holidays. These same words are the occasion of a defense of Mary's perpetual virginity, for

...We saye. **Natus ex maria virgine**, Borne of the vyrgyn marye. Not onely borne of mary. wherin we knowledge her perpetuall vyrgynyte. not hurte by hys byrthe. no more then by hys conception. but as she conceyued vyrgyn wythoute synne. so she bare chylde vyrgyn wythoute payne.

The Myroure returns to the theme of Mary's meekness and obedience at the Annunciation. She is compared to a lantern holding three flames of love. The first flame shone forth when she promised her maidenhood to God. The second flame appeared when "she bare downe her selfe bysely in all thynges with un-thynckeable mekeness." The third flame was "her obedience in all wyse praysable." And these three together lighted up in her at the Incarnation.

A vaguely similar figure of speech is found in Ross' collection of sermons. When the Babylonians led away many of the

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14 Wright, 110.
15 Poore, 16.
16 Blunt, 316.
17 Ibid., 213.
Israelites as prisoners, those who were left asked a priest when they would be free. He showed them three roses, each bearing a letter signifying a woman, and said that they would be free when those flowers became one. The comparison is made thus: the prisoners represent mankind; the Babylonians, God; and the flow­ers, Mary.  

A lesson for the nuns of the anchorholds is drawn by Bishop Poore when he exhorts them to "imitate our lady, and not the cackling Eve" in avoiding conversations.  

The Knight of the Tower also has a lesson for his daughters which he takes from the Visitation. Our Lady's courtesy and good nature, shown in visiting Elizabeth, should prompt us to love and visit our kindred.  

According to Margery Kempe, St. Joseph went with Mary to visit Elizabeth. Margery is relating the scene as it appeared to her in her contemplation.

Then went she (Margery) forth with Our Lady and with Joseph bearing with her a pottle of wine and honey, and spices thereto. Then went they forth to Elizabeth, Saint John Baptist's mother, and when they met together, each worshipped the other, and so they dwelt together, with grace and gladness twelve weeks. And Saint John was born, and Our Lady took him up from the earth with all manner of

18 Ross, 318.
19 Poore, 52.
20 Wright, 149.
reverence, and gave him to his mother, saying of him that he should be a holy man, and blessed him.21

She went with Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem also, where she helped them find lodging, begged food and bedding for them, and wept over the Infant at the thought of "the sharp death He would suffer for sinful men."22

This foreshadowing of the Passion is brought out again in the Myroure of Oure Ladye. Knowing what had been prophesied about her Son, Mary "sorowed greatly as often as she behelde tho partys of his body wherein he shulde suffer specyals paynes. So moche, that had she not hys often comforts," she might not have lived long enough to witness the Passion.23

The whole Gospel story is paraphrased in The Golden Legend, and then the story of Sancta Maria Rotunda is told.

At which nativity our Lord showed many marvels. For because that the world was in so great peace, the Romans had done made a temple which was named the Temple of Peace, in which they counselled with Apollo to know how long it should stand and endure. Apollo answered to them that, it should stand as long till a maid had brought forth and borne a child. And therefore they did do write on the portal of the Temple: "Lo! this is the temple of peace that ever shall endure." For they supposed well that a maid might never bear ne bring forth a child. This

21 Kempe, 11-12.
22 Ibid.
23 Blunt, 244.
temple that same time that our Lady was delivered and our Lord born, overthrew and fell all down. Of which christian men afterwarde made in the same place a church of our Lady which is called Sancta Maria Rotunda, that is to say, the Church of Saint Mary the Round. 24

Here it is written of the Magi that the star which appeared to them "had the form of a right fair child which had a cross in his forehead."

The reflection in the Speculum Sacerdotale that Christ was born to restore peace between man and God, man and angels, and man and man, leads back to the comment which we have seen before, namely, that as all the world was lost because of a woman, so redemption was won through a woman. 25

To Juliana of Norwich, Jesus is "the fruit of the Maiden's womb," and Mary is our mother through being the Mother of Christ. 26 Further, the Ancren Riwle refers to Jesus as "the Virgin's child, the Son of God," 27 and prayed: "Thou who didst condescend to be born of a virgin, have mercy on us." 28

The Circumcision, we are told, was necessary in order to prove that Christ had truly taken His flesh of the Virgin Mary. Sufficient proof it was, too, "for a body phantastic shall shed

24 Ellis, I, 26 ff.
25 Weatherly, 5.
26 Juliana of Norwich, 29, 69.
27 Poore, xxiv.
28 Ibid., 13.
And of the flesh of the circumcision of Jesus Christ, it is said that the angel brought it to Charlemagne, and he bare it to Aix-la-Chapelle, and set it there honorably in the church of our Lady... Also it is said that it is in the church of our Lady at Antwerp.

The adoration of the Magi is mentioned in passing in almost all the accounts of the Nativity which paraphrase the Gospels. The Golden Legend, however, gives St. Bernard's reasons as to why the Magi brought these specific gifts. The second of these reasons refers to Mary: "For they offered to Mary, the mother of the child, gold for to relieve her poverty, incense against the stench of the stable and evil air, myrrh for to comfort the tender members of the child and to put away vermin."

Concerning the Purification, the Golden Legend says that Our Lady took Jesus to the temple to offer Him to God and to offer for Him the pair of turtle doves in order to keep the law, and to give us an example of humility and patience. Then there is a paragraph moralizing on the offering of the poor, which comes to the conclusion that our offering should be "one simple will and a good intention" to match the pair of turtle doves. Then Simeon's Nunc Dimittis is paraphrased before we are told that this feast is also called Candlemas in remembrance "of the

29 Ellis, I, 35.
30 Ibid., 40.
31 Ibid., 51.
offering that our Lady offered in the temple as said is, and every each beareth this day a candle of wax burning, which represents our Lord Jesu Christ." A little later Our Lady is praised for her purity and humility.

This feast is called the purification of our Lady, not for that she had need ne ought make her purification, for she was pure and clean without having any tetch of deadly sin ne venial, like as that had, without company of any man, by the virtue of the Holy Ghost, conceived the Son of God, and was delivered without losing of her virginity, so she came with her blessed son at the fortieth day after his nativity for to obey the commandment of the law, after the manner of other women which had need of purification, and also for to show to us the example of humility.

This glorious Lady is queen of heaven and Lady of Angels, nevertheless she is pure and humble among the women like as a poor woman without making any semblant of her great humility ne of the high majesty of her son. 32

When Margery Kempe saw the Purification and Presentation re-enacted in her prayer as she knelt at Mass, she wept so freely that when it came time for her to offer her candle at the altar rail she scarcely had strength enough to walk. 33

Almost nothing is said of the Flight into Egypt by our authors. The only one who makes even a passing remark about it Margery Kempe, who accompanied the Holy Family in a vision and

32 Ibid., III, 19-27.
33 Kempe, 181.
helped Mary find shelter for the night. 34

Mary's actions in connection with the Finding in the Temple are interpreted to teach "widows and mothers conformity to God's will after the loss" of their sons. 35 It also teaches us how to find Jesus:

If thou wil seke earthly ioye, thou wil noght find Christ. For he es noght funden in thair lande that lyves in fleschly lusted. Hys modur when he was willed fra hyr, scho soght hym greand arely and late ymang his kyndred and hirs; bot scho fand hym noght, for al hyr sekyng, til at the laste scho come intil the tempyl, and thare scho fand hym syttand ymang the masters, herand and answerand. Swa behoves the do, if thou wil fynd hym; seke hym inwardly. 36

For the most continuous and detailed account of Our Lady's part in the Passion, we turn to the pages of Margery Kempe. It is true that she does not present the scenes in the order in which they appear here, but when taken from her Book and rearranged to fit the chronological order, they paint a complete picture.

She says first that she "saw in her soul" how Our Lady took leave of her Son, Jesus, on Holy Thursday. To Margery this was both a sorrowful and a joyful parting, and it brought her tears.

34 Ibid., 12.
35 Blunt, 263.
in abundance.\textsuperscript{37} This gift of tears frequently caused her embar-
assment, but Our Lord told her that the gift of tears for His Mother was a grace from Him.

And, therefore, daughter, thank Me highly for this great charity that I work in thy heart, for it is Myself, Almighty God, that maketh thee to weep every day for thine own sins, for the great compassion that I gave thee for My bitter Passion, and for the sorrows that My Mother had here on earth, for the anguish that she suffered, and the tears that she wept.\textsuperscript{38}

Furthermore, Our Lord told her that He wished the sorrows of His Mother to be made known through Margery in order that men and women might have more compassion for the sorrows Mary suffered for Him.\textsuperscript{39}

The sting of inward suffering in the Passion which has already been noted by Richard Rolle\textsuperscript{40} is brought out again in the Ancren Riwle where we are told that the weeping of Mary was one of three spears which smote Christ to the heart.\textsuperscript{41} Of Mary's part, we read:

\begin{quote}
...For so much as she loved him more than all other, her pains passed all others'.
For ever the higher, the mightier, the sweeter that the love be, the more sorrow it is to the lover to see that body in pain that is loved.\textsuperscript{42}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{37} Kempe, 59.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 145.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 167.
\textsuperscript{40} Cf. Appendix I.
\textsuperscript{41} Poore, 83.
\textsuperscript{42} Juliana of Norwich, 49-50.
In the company of the Blessed Virgin, Margery Kempe saw the Agony in the Garden, the sleep of the apostles, the coming of the crowd, and even the betraying kiss of Judas.

And then anon, she saw Judas come and kiss Our Lord, and the Jews laid hands upon him full violently.

Then had Our Lady and she (Margery) much sorrow and great pain to see the Lamb of Innocence so contemptibly hauled and dragged by His own people, that He was specially sent unto.43

Together Mary and Margery witnessed the scourging with "the eyes of their soul" as vividly as if they had been in the dungeon and seen it with the eyes of the body.44 Then they saw Our Lord take up His cross, and they "went by another way to meet with Him." Mary tried to help Him with the cross, but fell down "as if she had been a dead woman."45 Of this meeting on the Via Crucis Bishop Poore writes that as Christ suffered in all His five senses, it was here that He suffered most "in his sight, when he saw the tears of his dear Mother."46

Later Margery went forth in contemplation to Calvary.

And anon, afterwards, she beheld how the cruel Jews laid His Precious Body on the Cross, and then took a long nail, rough and course, and sit it on one hand, and, with great violence and cruelty, they drove it through His hand. His Blissful Mother beholding—and this

43 Kempe, 173.
44 Ibid., 174.
45 Ibid., 175.
46 Poore, 80.
creature—how His Precious Body shrank and drew together with all the sinews and veins in that Precious Body for the pain that It suffered and felt, they sorrowed and mourned and sighed full sore.

And the she thought, in her soul, that she heard Our Lady say to the Jews: "Alas, ye cruel Jews, why fare ye so with my sweet Son, Who never did ye any harm? Ye fill my heart full of sorrow."

And then she thought the Jews spoke again boisterously to Our Lady, and put her away from her Son.47

And when Our Lord had rendered up His Spirit, Margery came to Our Lady saying: "I pray you, Lady, cease from your sorrowing for your Son is dead and out of pain, for me-thinketh ye have sorrowed enough."48 Then Joseph of Arimathea took Our Lord's body from the cross and laid it on a marble slab where the Blessed Virgin washed it. At first she did not want to part with it for burial, but St. John persuaded her that it must be.

Margery's description of Mary after the burial of Jesus is that of a resolutely disconsolate mourner.49 Yet the Myroure tells us that her sorrows were ameliorated by her Divine Son,50 that at the death of Jesus her sorrows began to pass away,51 that though thorns of sorrow pricked her heart, they could not change her will, and that "her stableness brought joy to angels and

47 Kempe, 175-6.
48 Ibid., 177.
49 Ibid., 178.
50 Blunt, 245.
51 Ibid., 251.
Even though she is compared to "a fayre rose that faded in coloure for plente of sorowe in tyme of her sonnes passyon," she enjoyed the foreknowledge of the Resurrection. Finally, in the sermons edited by Ross we read: "Doctors say that all the faith of the Church was in her alone while Christ was in the sepulchre." 

The Golden Legend tells of three apparitions of the risen Christ on the day of His Resurrection, "but they be not had in the text of the gospel." Of course one of the three is to the Blessed Lady.

...He appeared unto his mother Mary, the glorious Virgin, and how be it that the holy Evangelists speak not thereof, the Church of Rome approveth it. For the same day is made station at our Lady the major... And though the Evangelists have not written it, yet they knew well for certain that it is right that first he should enhance and comfort her that had most pain and sorrow for his death.

Margery Kempe gives us the words of Christ's greeting to His Mother: "Salve, Sancta Parens." Then He kissed her sweetly and said:

Dear Mother, My pain is all gone, and now shall I live for evermore. And Mother, so shall your pain and your sorrow be turned into full great joy. Mother, ask what ye will, and I will tell you.

52 Ibid., 243.
53 Ibid., 255-6.
54 Ross, 322.
55 Ellis, I, 95.
And when He had suffered His Mother to ask what she would, and had answered to her questions, then He said: Mother, by your leave, I must go and speak with Mary Magdalene.

Our Lady said: It is well done, for, Son, she had full much sorrow for your absence. And I pray you, be not long from me. 56

We read no more of the Blessed Virgin until the Ascension. The Myroure explains that Mary was allowed to remain on earth to comfort the good and correct the erring. She was mistress of the apostles, comforter of martyrs, teacher of confessors, "the moste clere myroure of vyrgyns," the comforter of widows, a wholesome counsellor of the married, "and moste parfyt strenger of all in the comon ryghte Faythe." 57

The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin seems to have been one of the most popular themes of all. The Myroure, Speculum Sacerdotale, a long sermon in the Ross collection, and four more in The Golden Legend all treat of it at length.

The Myroure says that the body of the Virgin Mother was spared from decay and taken at once into bliss. 58 And further, "god knew that hy moste cleene body shylde no more be turned to pouldre ne rotte, then hys moste holy body, whyche shulde be conceyued and borne of thy maydenly body." 59

56 Kempe, 180.
57 Blunt, 262.
58 Ibid., 271.
59 Ibid., 112.
The ten page sermon from the *Speculum Sacerdotale* can be summarized as follows: Christ, dying on the cross, gave St. John care of His Mother Mary. She soon desired to die and to join her glorious Son. An angel appeared to her announcing her approaching death. Mary prayed for a peaceful death, and the apostles were miraculously brought to her. They themselves were amazed at their translation, spent two days in prayer with Mary, and on the third day she passed to eternal bliss. Christ was with her in her death. Her soul was of such whiteness that nothing can be compared with it. The beautiful body was prepared for burial, the apostles sang psalms as they carried the body to the tomb, with St. John carrying a palm at the head of the procession. On the way, a "prince of the Jews" attempted to stop them, but was miraculously stricken, as were the bystanders. They recovered their health and sight by the aid of Peter and were converted. Jesus met the apostles, took the body of Mary, and her cousin Elizabeth (!) saw the Assumption.60

The sermon preserved for us by Ross is long, wandering, and heavy; although some passages are exceptional and should be noted. Mary is the comeliest of creatures, the most virtuous, very desirous of holiness, and able and anxious to give good gifts. She is the woman of Revelation clothed in the sun, the moon beneath her feet, a crown of twelve stars on her head.

60 Weatherly, 182-191.
"This is Mary, whose Assumption we are celebrating." The heaven in which this sign of Revelation appeared represents the Church; the sun, grace. When the sun has risen it becomes bright. Similarly, grace makes the soul bright. Without the sun the earth is dark; without grace man is helpless. Mary's soul was habitation of the Holy Ghost; her body, that of Christ. Her conduct was always virtuous. Grace was given to others in part, but to Mary completely. Even had others been able to equal her in other respects, she alone was the Mother of God. She had the moon beneath her feet; that is, she overcame the desire for worldly goods, even giving to the poor the gold which the Magi offered, so that at the Purification she had only turtle doves to offer. The crown of twelve stars represents the perfection of virtue, or perhaps the privileges of Mary. On this day Mary ascended into heaven in soul and probably in body. Mary in heaven is gracious and full of compassion. She is now our advocate in heaven. 61

Of the four sermons found in The Golden Legend, the first is the most satisfactory from the standpoint of detail and continuity. Since it forms a better summary than any of the others, we shall treat it in the last place.

The fourth of these sermons expounds the arguments of St.

61 Ross, 244 ff.
Augustine for five pages to the single conclusion that this prerogative "decet." ⁶²

The third sermon paraphrases St. John Damascene who says that Our Lady did not die, but passed from earth to heaven. Then the comparison between Eve and Mary is expounded again, after which the apostles are shown pleading with Mary not to leave them orphans, and they are comforted by her. ⁶³

The second account, Caxton tells the reader, is "taken from a sermon read in many churches." Mary is forewarned of her death by an angel lest she be frightened. This angel also promises her specific joys in heaven, and gives her a palm as protection against the corruption of death. Then Mary assembles the neighbors to bid them farewell. Their sorrow is softened by her words of comfort, but St. John the Evangelist is especially heartbroken. The other apostles are carried in clouds from their separate stations to the doorstep of Mary's home. St. Peter leads the apostles in chanting psalms. During the funeral procession, the Jew who tries to overturn the casket loses the use of his hands. He is cured after he confesses faith in Mary's motherhood of God. Mary is laid in a new tomb in the Valley of Jehosaphat; and after three days Our Lord comes for her.

⁶² Ellis, IV, 267-71.
⁶³ Ibid., 262-7.
Later, one absent apostle demands to see the sepulchre. After an argument, the others consent. They "found not the body, but they found only the vestments, and the sudary." This sermon closes with an interesting claim:

And let no man ween that I have made this of my proper head and engine, but I have set it here which I have by doctrine and study learned of the lesson of them, which by tradition and learning of their foregoers have received it. 64

According to the first of these sermons, all the apostles were dispersed (including St. John), and Mary was living in Jerusalem visiting the holy places. She was seventy-two years old according to one set of figures, "but it is more probable that which is read in another place, that she lived after the ascension of her son twelve years, and so then she was sixty years old." She desired greatly to be with her Son, and an angel appeared who promised that she would die in three days. Then she asked to see the apostles. First John was taken up in a cloud at Ephesus and carried to the doorstep in Jerusalem. Mary warned John that a rumor was being circulated about a plan to defile her body after burial. Then "all the apostles were ravished with clouds from the places where they preached, and were brought tofore the door of the blessed Virgin Mary." Our Lady told them to stop weeping lest the people say: "Lo! there,

64 Ibid., 254-62.
how they dread the death which to others preach the resurrection." Then each apostle preached a sermon. After they were over, Our Lord, with the angels and saints, came "about the third hour" of the night to Mary's bed and sang the exequies. "And then in the morning the soul issued out of the body and fled up in the arms of her son." The body was to be buried in a new tomb, but on the way the procession was stormed by the Jews, and the one who touched the stretcher had his hand paralyzed. After the apostles made him profess faith in the virgin birth, he "was anon all whole perfectly." On the third day after the burial Our Lord came with a great multitude of angels, re-united Our Lady's soul with her body, and she "issued gloriously out of the tomb, and thus was received in the heavenly chamber, and a great company of angels with her."65

The actual ceremony of Mary's Coronation as Queen of Heaven is not to be found among these authors. However, we are favored with a description of her as the already reigning Queen of All Saints.

On a time when the sexton of St. Peter's had by devotion visited all the altars of the church, and had required suffrages of all the saints, at the last he came again to the altar of St. Peter, and there rested a little, and saw there a vision. For he saw the King of Kings in a high throne sit, and all the angels round about him, and the Blessed Virgin of virgins came crowned with

65 Ibid., 234 ff.
a right resplendishing crown, and there fol­
lowed her a great multitude of virgins with­
out number, and continents also. And anon
the King arose against her and made her to
sit on a seat by him. And after came a man
clad with the skin of a camel, and a great
multitude of ancient and honorable fathers
followed him... And an angel which led this
sexton thus in the vision, expounded this
vision to him and said that our Blessed Lady
the Virgin was she that was in the first
company, and he that was clad in the hair of
camels was S. John the Baptist with the pat­
riarchs and prophets...66

The angels, we are told, rejoice that Mary should be even
nearer to God than they, and they praise God for her exalta­
tion.67

Thus we may read a complete life of the Blessed Virgin in
the devotional prose writers of this period, from her Immaculate
Conception to her regency in heaven. We find Mary described in
all the main events of her life on earth, even in those myster­
ies which pertain more specifically to her Son, where we might
expect her to be completely overshadowed. But the medieval de­
votion to her was not satisfied with recognizing her in her own
mysteries; it must seek her out wherever she might be found.

66 Ibid., VI, 107-8.
67 Blunt, 178.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The works which have been reviewed in this thesis were selected because they were judged to be representative of what was being written in prose for both religious and lay readers in the Middle Ages. Moreover, their authors were from a variety of walks of life—a bishop, a printer, a father of a family, men and women mystics, and monks. From the popularity of their works we gather that these authors were being read, and thus we get an indication of what ideas about the Blessed Virgin were being accepted by the masses.

As the various authors and editors presented their works for our inspection, we noted the prominence of the Hail Mary not only as a prayer but even as a greeting. We saw laymen following the example of monks and nuns in reciting the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin, fasting on her vigils, and giving alms in her name. The reward they received in return was Mary’s powerful intercession with her Son. Any manner of miracle might be asked of her with confidence. For as she was God's mother, she was also theirs, their merciful queen, lovable lady, and defense
against the devil. Her name was always on their lips, her virtues forever praised, and the mysteries of her life constantly contemplated. Among them she was a living person, a motivating force, an ennobling inspiration, a familiar contemporary. The men and women who built the shrines and churches of Our Lady, landmarks throughout England, knelt at her altar with the hearts of children beating in their breasts. This strong, complete, undistracted, and whole-souled love of children gathered at their mother's knee was the warmth and light of medieval life.
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APPENDIX I

MEDITATIONS ON THE PASSION

A, Lord, the sorewe that fel to thi herte, 
whan thou on thi modur caste thine eyen. 
Thow saw hyre folewe after among the great 
priests; as a woman out of herself her hands 
she wrung; weeping and sighing her arms she 
cast; the water of here eyes dropped at her 
feet; she fell in dead swoon, after that 
once, for sorrow of the pains that to her 
heart smitten. The sorow that she made and 
the much dolor aggravated manyfold all thine 
other pains, so when she knew that it was 
so, then was her condition worse, and thou 
also for her wept; so was your sorrow, either 
for other, waxing manifold with heaping sor­
rows. The love of your hearts, that over all 
other loves was without make, burning kean, 
made you to burn, either for other, with un­
like sorrow to any other woe; as the love was 
matchless, so the sorrow was peerless: it 
stuck at your hearts as it were death.

A, Lady, mercy, why were you so bold, among 
so many violent foes to follow so ny? How 
was it that timidity of womankind or maiden­
hood shaming neither had thee withdrawn? For 
it was not seemly to thee to follow suche a 
route, so vile and so shameful, so grisyly to 
see. But you neither had no reward to so 
many dreads, nor to ought else that thee 
should let, but as out of thyself for sorrow 
of thy son's passion was all thy heart set. 
Your love was so sharp, either to other, and 
so burning hot, thy sighings were so far­
fetched, the dole of your cheer was deadly 
woe. The love and the sorrow, that stuck in 
thy breast, bereft thee the recking of bodily 
dread and of world's shame and all maner of
lettings, that as out of thyself thy sorrow hath thee made.

A, Lady, for that sorrow that thou suffred of thy son's passion—for that should have been mine own, for I it had deserved, and many worse, I was cause hereof, and he guiltless, as the dear wounds were mine own right—get me, for thy mercy, one of them all, a prick at mine heart of that same pain, a drop of that pity to follow him with. If all that woe is my right, get me of mine own, ne be thou not so wrongful to withholde al. Though al thi woe be dear, art thou not very generous? Parte with the poore, that lytel hath or non. Gyf me of thi sighings, that sighest so sore, that I may sigh with the that began that woe. I aske not, dear Lady, kastelys, ne towrys, ne other worldys wele, the sun, not the moon, ne the bryght sterrys; but woundys of reuthe is al my desyr, peyne and compass-youne of my Lord Jhesu Cryst. Werste and unworthyest of alle mennys haldyng, I have appetyte to peyne, to beseke my Lorde a drope ofhys reed blod to make blody my soule, a drope of that watur to waschyn it with.

A, Lady, for that mercy, that modur art of mercy, socoure of al sorewe, and bote of alle bale, bodur mad of wrecchys and of wooful, herken to this wrecche, and vysit thi chyld. Soue in myn herte, that is hard os ston, a sparcle of compassyoun of that reuthe to souple it with.  

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1 Rolle, English Writings, ed. Allen, 22-4.
APPENDIX II

The following litany is composed of titles conferred upon Our Lady in the selections under discussion. Though most of these titles are repeated frequently by the authors, only one source for each title has been included in the footnotes. Further, the footnotes are all gathered together at the end of the litany, and correspond in number to each line of the litany.

Holy Mary
Holy Mother of God
Mother of Christ
Mother of the Redeemer
5 Mother of Mercy
Mother without a Mate
Sweet Lady, Saint Mary
Mary Most Humble
Mary Full of Grace
10 Mary Full of Meekness
Comeliest of Women
Comfort of Martyrs
Comfort of Widows
Counsellor of the Married
15 Dwelling of the Holy Ghost
Empress of Hell
Example to Good Women
Exemplar of Humility
Gate of Heaven
20 House of God
Lantern of Divine Love
Handmaid of Jesus Christ
Constant and Pious Lady
Lady of Sorrows
25 Lady of All the World
Blessed Maiden Mary
Fair Maiden of Endless Joy
Maiden, Wife, and Mother
Mediatrix of Sinners
30 Mirror of Virgins
Mistress of Apostles
Queen of Mercy
Queen of Heaven
Sovereign of Angels
35 Spouse of the Father
Star of the Sea
Star out of Israel
Perpetual Virgin
Virgin Most Pure
40 Unspotted Virgin
Holy Virgin of Virgins
Rose among Thorns
Teacher of Confessors
Most Worthy Creature of God
45 Worship and Beauty of the Court of Heaven
29 Kempe, 192.
30 Blunt, 262.
31 Ibid.
32 Kempe, 49.
33 Poore, 33.
34 Ibid.
35 Blunt, 92.
36 Poore, 34.
37 Blunt, 198.
38 Ibid., 148.
39 Ibid., 105.
40 Poore, 33.
41 Ibid., 34.
42 Blunt, 241.
43 Ibid., 262.
44 Ibid., 288.
The thesis submitted by Bernard Joseph Mulhern, S.J. has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

Date: Jan. 3, 1949

Signature of Adviser: Rev. F. J. Coughlan, S.J.