

## LEGENDS OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

### COUNCIL OF EPHEBUS

"Sancta Dei Genitrix – Holy Mother of God"

The following is more properly a page from ecclesiastical history than a legend. But we have thought that a rapid sketch of the council held at Ephesus might occupy a most appropriate place in a volume devoted to the relation of the wonders wrought through the intercession of the ever Blessed "Mother of God." The council in confirming this sublime title to the Blessed Virgin, has taught us that we can never conceive too high a notion of the power and majesty of her to whom we fly in our necessities.

In the fifth century, while illustrious doctors were contending against Arianism, and all the other little sects which attacked the of among the defenders of the Church a man of great merit, powerful in speech, rich in learning, and honored for the austerity of his life; he was called Nestorius, and became patriarch of Constantinople. His vanity was excited by the great applause he received. He said in one of his sermons to the young Theodosius: purge the earth of heresies, and I promise you the joys of heaven. It was a bold saying, He combated Arianism but he replaced the zeal of charity with violence; he excited the people against the Arians, whom he drove from their assemblies by force, and whose churches he leveled to the ground. Yet he himself entertained all this time an erroneous doctrine.

He admitted that there were two natures in Christ, which acted in concert. "Jesus Christ," said he, "as man, was born of the Blessed Virgin, suffered and died; but Christ, as God, directed the man Jesus, with whom he was joined by a moral union only."

He first obtained the assistance of weak men to preach this doctrine, which he afterwards asserted himself, in the year 428. The people saw at once that he would deprive them of their grand invocation of Mary, as the "Holy Mother of God," and they rose in a mass against this innovation.

But the inflexible stubbornness of Nestorius would not give way. St. Cyril of Alexandria Wrote in vain to the faithless patriarch, equally fruitless were the supplications of the faithful and the warnings and exhortations of the guardian of the faith, the holy Pope St. Celestine. Nestorius heeded no remonstrance, but persecuted his opponents with great warmth. He was cut off from the communion of the Church, but still persisted in his errors.

The contest became so violent that it was thought necessary to convoke a general council, to condemn the heresy broached by Nestorius. This was done with the concurrence of the Emperor Theodosius the Younger, and it was convoked, doubtless, by special design of Almighty Providence to meet at Ephesus; for the Blessed Mother of our Savior had lived in that town, with the beloved disciple, after the ascension of her divine Son. The tradition of this fact was kept with great fidelity by the Ephesians, who were noted for the warmth of their devotion to our blessed Lady. Delighted were they, then, to learn. that from their city was to proceed the justification of her most sacred character.

On the 7th of June, in the year 431, two hundred and sixty bishops were assembled at Ephesus. Nestorius also arrived with a numerous escort, but was more than ever puffed up with pride and self-conceit. John of Antioch and other prelates being on their way to join the council, it was with some regret (the seventh being the feast Pentecost) put off to the 22d. But these prelates being personal friends of Nestorius, and not wishing to assist at his condemnation, had not arrived when the first session was opened on that day.

The assembled bishops and doctors of the Church walked in procession to the church at Ephesus, dedicated to God under the special patronage of His holy Mother. In this edifice the council was held.

All the townspeople refrained from labor, and in their eagerness to learn the decision of the fathers, surrounded the church, invoking our blessed Lady to direct their proceedings, and to

vindicate her dignity.

Could such an assemblage of worthy pastors of the Church, met in a city devoted to Mary, fail to be unanimous in their decision! Nestorius foresaw that they could not, and he therefore refused to appear. St. Cyril presided over the council as representative of the Sovereign Pontiff, and delivered a discourse at one of the sessions of which the following are some sentences:

“Hail, Mary! treasure of the world!

“Hail, Mary, Mother of God. It is through you that the prophets raise their voices, and that the pastors of the Church celebrate the praises of the Almighty, singing with the angels that sublime canticle, Glory be to God on high, and on earth peace to men of good will.”

“Hail, Mary, Mother Of God through you the Magi offered their presents, guided by a resplendent star.”

“Hail, Mary, Mother of God I through you the glorious college of the apostles was elected by our Redeemer.”

“Hail, Mary, Mother of God! through you St. John leaped in his mother's womb ; the torch fluttered in the presence of the source of light.“

“Hail, Mary, Mother of God ! through you that ineffable grace has descended upon mankind, of which the apostle speaks when he says, it hath appeared to all men.”

" Hail, Mary, Mother of God! From you proceeded the true light, of which the Evangelist said, 'I am the light of the world.'"

" Hail, Mary, Mother of God! from you came forth Him who conquered death and hell."

" Hail, Mary, Mother of God! you gave birth to the Creator and Redeemer of men, our guide to the kingdom of heaven."

"Hail, Mary, Mother of God! by you is every faithful soul saved"

The whole discourse thus contained in each sentence an invocation to Mary, under the title of which it had been attempted to deprive her. The question was decided on the first day; so unanimous were the fathers, that it was not necessary to put it to each one, for they all cried out in chorus, "Sancta Dei Genitrix! Mater divinæ gratiæ! Mater Creatoris! Mater Salvatoris! - Holy Mother of God! Mother of divine grace! Mother of our Creator! Mother of our Redeemer!"

A few friends of Nestorius, indeed, sought to defend him, but in vain; he was condemned. He went into exile, and remained obstinate, proud and unbending, until his death, which took place in Libya, after having a long time wandered from city to city. It is said that his tongue was found, immediately after his death, to have been eaten by worms.

The people of Ephesus, who heard the acclamations before the decision was announced to them, readily conjectured the result, and great was their joy there at. When, at the close of the sermon, the bishops and fathers left the church, they all assembled and reconducted them to their abodes, accompanied by bands of music, bearing torches and laurel branches, and strewing the ground with flowers, through the streets illuminated in honor of the occasion. The women and children prostrated themselves, kissing the robes of the prelates, singing their praises, and extolling our Blessed Lady, in whose honor through out the night the city resounded with cries of " Live, Mary, Mother of God !

Since this time, to the angelic salutation "Hail, Mary full of grace, the Lord is with thee," and the words of St. Elizabeth, at the Visitation, "Blessed art thou amongst women, and Blessed is the fruit thy womb, Jesus," has ever been added the conclusion adopted by the Council of Ephesus : " Holy Mary, MOTHER OF GOD, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death" Amen.

How can it be called in question that the Blessed Virgin is entitled to be called Mother of God, For as Jesus Christ, our Savior, is truly God, so is the Blessed Virgin Mother of God. – Letter of St. Cyril