

AVE MARIA, GRACIA PLENA

The following extract is taken from Walter Hilton's paraphrase of the homily on *Ave Maria* in the *Stimulus Amoris*. It has been shortened considerably and the English modernised from *Bodleian MS.* 480.—C.K.

MY lord Jesus Christ to thee I yield thanks inwardly that thou deignest for us wretches to take our kind in a maiden's womb and of her to be nourished, thou that keepest all things and governest. And that thou vouchsafest for to lighten with thy grace me that am unworthy life for to know, and wit that thou hast a Mother and that I may and dare greet her with an *Ave*.¹

We shall come to the presence of her in our heart and with heart and mouth greet her and say *Ave Maria*. Such hearty and devout beseechers she loveth and nourisheth and comforteth as her own Son. Certes if I loved her entirely in mine heart and spoke all the good of her that I could and followed after her living stiffly in all my work, soothly I durst then more sikerly with witness of conscience call her my mother and say *Ave Maria*.

The angel greeting bringeth to our mind how God's Son became man for us, became our brother, our flesh, our bone, and our blood. Where should we find more matter of gladness, where was more spread abroad the unspeakable richness of God's charity. For in the first time of this angel greeting heaven and earth were coupled together, and creature of God and man in a maiden's womb.

And when she is heartily hailed and greeted, the sweet fruit that she bare lighteth on the heart of the greeter. Blessed is that fruit that refresheth a man's soul and filleth full of fatness of grace. *Ave Maria*.

Ah Lady Mary, whereto lovest thou us so much? What profit were it to thee though we loved thy Son and thee more than I know? I know not why! except that love hath never done, nor never can say how! Art thou not rich enough in worship in heaven with thy Son? Whereto then art thou so busy for to purchase earthen vessels, the wretched hearts of men. Take us then to thee thou hunter of souls and suffer us a while, and always, to rest within the bosom of thy pity. Thou hast so maskeld² and snarled us with thy good turns, and so homely borne up on us tokens of love! Now then brethren and sisters, run we all together in peace and

¹ It is interesting to note that the literary device of the repeated *Ave* is entirely due to the genius of Walter Hilton. There is no indication of it in the Latin.
² enmeshed.

charity and yet oft greet we this worshipful lady with an *Ave*.

What heart is there that will not some while melt into tears of love, when he thinketh how Mary our sister, a poor maiden, was for our sake advanced to the highest worship that ever had creature. or ever shall have, that is to be God's Mother. Certes there is nothing as to herself that her list better for to hear than to bring to her mind with love and reverence that she is God's Mother, for otherwise would she not³ be known nor greeted nor loved. Then thinketh me that it is good to us for to bear her often on hand and greet her with an *Ave Maria, mater Dei*.

Ah! this is a wonderful *Ave* and a mighty, that putteth away fiends to flight and maketh sinners for to sorrow for their sins. Through virtue of this fruit all creatures are relieved, men are ransomed, angels are reapparalled, the high Father of heaven is accorded and made one with mankind. This is a worthy *Ave* for it cleareth our understanding and maketh our mind stable and raiseth up our hearts to heaven and softeneth our breast and maketh our throat easy and our tongue ready for to speak and greet this worshipful lady with an *Ave*.

Ave Maria. Love maketh me hardy, and therefore I name her name and say to her homely. Hail Mary, Star of the Sea. This star standeth ay still unstirrabl, it is leader and guide to mariners for to bring the ship to good haven. Right so Lady! to us that are gathered together in bitterness of this world, as a shipful of men in the midst of the sea, ful far cast out from the haven of hele, all about set with mirkness of uncunning, all to-shaken with storms and waves of sundry temptations, often in point to perish and be drowned through hideous head of temptation, thou Lady art to us not only as a Star but as a beam of great light; thou art to us ready help, siker refuge, sweet fellowship, mighty comfort and haven of hele! Thou makest our mirkness to shine with a little presence of thy light, and turnest oft our night of woe into day of mirth, thou makest storms for to stint. Since thou are star of the sea I covet ay whiles I live to be in the sea. Rise up ye tribulations on each a side against me, press in ye bale and bitterness, though I dread I shall not dread overmuch for the star of the sea overshineth my head, and whilst I behold her with her Son in her arms I may not perish, our ship may not go to wreck, for thou art not only lode star but thou art the ship bearing us, the anchor fastening us, the oar righting us, sail overshining us! thou art the ship that bringeth us to the haven of endless hele, where we shall greet thee with ay lasting *Ave* in the bliss of heaven. Amen.

³ i.e., She would not wish to be known.