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THE FOOT OF THE CROSS.

CHAPTER I.

THE MARTYRDOM OF MARY.

THE beauty of Jesus is inexhaustible. Like the Vision of God in heaven, it is ever diversified, yet always the same, always cherished as an old and familiar joy, yet ever surprising and refreshing the spirit as being, in truth, perpetually new. He is beautiful always, beautiful everywhere, in the disfigurement of the Passion as well as in the splendor of the Resurrection, amid the horrors of the Scourging as well as amid the indescribable attractions of Bethlehem. But above all things our Blessed Lord is beautiful in His Mother. If we love Him we must love her. We must know her in order to know Him. As there is no true devotion to His Sacred Humanity, which is not mindful of His Divinity, so there is no adequate love of the Son, which disjoins Him from His Mother, and lays her aside as a mere instrument, whom God chose as He might choose an inanimate thing, without regard to its sanctity or moral fitness. Now it is our daily task to love Jesus more and more. Year follows year; the old course of feasts comes round; the well-

known divisions of the Christian year overtake us, make their impression upon us, and go their way. How we have multiplied Christmases, and Holy Weeks, and Whitsuntides, and there has been something or other in each of them which makes them lie like dates in our mind! We have spent some of them in one place, and some in another, some under one set of circumstances, and some under another. Some of them, all thanks to God! have been distinguished by remarkable openings of heart in our interior life, such as to change or to intensify our devotion, and materially influence our secret relations with God. The foundations of many buildings, which did not rise above ground till long afterward, have been laid almost unconsciously in those times. Yet whatever may have been the changes which these feasts have brought or seen, they have always found us busy at one and the same work, trying to love Jesus more and more: and through all these changes, and in all this perseverance at our one work, unerring experience has told us that we never advance more rapidly in love of the Son than when we travel by the Mother, and that what we have built most solidly in Jesus has been built with Mary. There is no time lost in seeking Him, if we go at once to Mary; for He is always there, always at home. The darkness in His mysteries becomes light when we hold it to her light, which is His light as well. She is the short road to Him. She has the "grand entry" to Him. She is His Esther, and speedy and full are the answers to the petitions which her hand presents.

But Mary is a world, which we cannot take in all at

one glance. We must devote ourselves to particular mysteries. We must set aside certain regions of this world of grace, and concentrate ourselves upon them. We must survey them and map them accurately, before we pass on to other regions, and then we shall learn much, which a general view would have omitted to notice, and store our souls with spiritual riches, riches both of knowledge and of love, which will draw us evermore into communion with our dearest Lord. As God's blessed will still persists in keeping us alive, and for His own gracious purposes detaining us amid all this cold weariness and these dejecting possibilities of sin, let us at least determine to occupy ourselves with nothing but God; for we have long since learned that there is truly no other occupation which is worth our while. He has a thousand Edens still, even in the bleak expanse of this salt steppe of a world, where we may work, to the sound of running waters, not without colloquies with Him in the cool time of the day; and we may wander from Eden to Eden, either as the weakness or the strength of our love impels us. For the present let us shut ourselves up in the garden of Mary's sorrows. It is one of God's choicest Edens, and we cannot work there otherwise than under the shadow of His presence, nor without the love of Jesus taking a marvellous possession of our souls. For love of Jesus is in the very viewless air of the place, in the smell of the upturned soil, in the fragrance of the flowers, in the rustling of the leaves, in the songs of the birds, in the shining of the sun, in the quiet tunes of the waterfalls as they dash down its rocky places. There for a while, for our Lord's love, we will enclose

ourselves as in a cloistered place, and let the world, in which we are of no great importance, and which is even of less importance to us than we are to it, miss us for a season from our post.

The law of the Incarnation is a law of suffering. Our Blessed Lord was the man of sorrows, and by suffering He redeemed the world. His Passion was not a mystery detached from the rest of His life, but only the fitting and congruous end of it. Calvary was not unlike Bethlehem and Nazareth. It exceeded them in degree; it did not differ from them in kind. The whole of the Three-and-Thirty Years was spent in consistent suffering, though it was of various kinds, and not of uniform intensity. This same law of suffering, which belongs to Jesus, touches all who come nigh Him, and in proportion to their holiness, envelops them, and claims them wholly for itself. The Holy Innocents were, in the counsels of God, simply our Lord's contemporaries, but that is similitude enough to plunge them in a sea of suffering, and for His sake their fresh lives must bleed away in their distracted mother's arms, to be followed by eternal crowns and palms: a happy merchandise, a huge fortune swiftly made, and then so marvellously secured! The same law wound itself round each of the apostles, upon whom the indescribably blessed choice of the Incarnate Word had fallen. It was a cross to Peter and his brother, a sword to Paul, hard stones to James, the flaying-knife to Bartholomew, and the boiling oil and the long years of wearisome delay to John. But, in whatever shape it came outwardly, inwardly it was always suffering. It went with them into all lands.

It overshadowed them in all vicissitudes. It walked with them along the Roman roads, as if it was their guardian angel; it strode by the side of their uneasy galleys on the stormy waters of the Mediterranean. They were apostles. They must be like their Lord. They must enter into the cloud, and the darkness of the eclipse must fall upon them on the top of some Calvary or other, from Rome to Bactria, from Spain to Hindostan. The same law has environed the martyrs of all ages. Their passions have been living shadows of the great Passion, and the blood they shed mingled its kindred stream with the Precious Blood of their Redeemer, the King of Martyrs. So with the saints. Whether they have been bishops or doctors, virgins or matrons, seculars or religious, unusual love and unusual grace have always reached them in the shape of unusual trial and unusual suffering. They too must be drawn into the cloud, and they will come out of it with their faces shining, because they have seen, and seen closely, the Face of the Crucified. It is so in its measure with all the elect. They must stand at least within the fringes of the dark cloud, or it must overshadow them in transit, perhaps more than once, in order to secure the salvation of their souls by giving them at least an adequate likeness to their Lord. What, then, must we think of His Mother, who came nighest to Him of all?

It can plainly be no wonder, if she shall suffer more than any one but Himself. The immensity of her sorrows will neither be a distress nor a surprise to us, but rather the obvious conclusion from all we know of the grand mystery of the Incarnation. The amount

of her sufferings will be the index of the magnificence of His love for her. The depth of her pains will come the nearest of all things to fathom the abyss of her love for Him. Her far-rolling sea of sorrow will measure the grandeur of her holiness. The loftiness of her divine Maternity will raise her dolors close up to His gracious Passion. Her sinlessness will almost seem to enclose it within the same life-giving law of expiation. Her union with Him will render her Compassion inseparable from His Passion, even while for a thousand reasons it is so manifestly distinguishable from it. The Woman clothed with the Sun will be wrapped round and round with the bright darkness of that same terrible destiny, which He vouchsafed first to appoint and then to accept as the great law of His Incarnation. We must be prepared to find Mary's dolors beyond the reach of our imagination, above the possibility of our description. We can only gaze upon them with such instruments as faith and love supply, and note the beauty and the strangeness of many phenomena which we can only imperfectly comprehend. Especially can we thus increase our devotion to the Passion, many unknown regions of which are momentarily lighted up for us by the contact of her dolors, just as in the occultation of Jupiter, the luminous, tearlike planet, as it touches the dark portion of the moon, scatters a momentary line of light along the unseen edge, like a revelation, and then by its disappearance proves the reality of that which we cannot see.

But, before we ask St. John the Evangelist to hold us by the hand, and go down with us into the depths

of that broken heart, which he, the saint of the Sacred Heart, knew better than others, we must take a general view of our Blessed Lady's dolors, just as we familiarize ourselves with the general outlines of the geography of a country before we endeavor to master its details. There are seven points, on which it is necessary for us to have some information, before we can study with advantage the separate mysteries of her surpassing sorrow. We must know, as far at least as lies in our power, the immensity of her dolors, why God permitted them, what were the fountains of them, and what their characteristics, how it was that she could rejoice in them, in what way the Church puts them before us, and what should be the spirit of our devotion to them. These are questions which need answering; and the answers to them, however imperfect, will serve as a sort of introduction to the subject.

SECTION I.

THE IMMENSITY OF OUR LADY'S DOLORS.

When we think how we can best describe our Lady's dolors, it gradually dawns upon us that they are in fact indescribable. We see but the outside show of them, and there are no adequate figures by which even that can be represented. He who looks over the wide Atlantic sees a waste of waters with a white horizon on every side; but that waste of waters tells nothing either of the multitudinous manifold life which it contains within its bosom, nor of the fairy-