

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-

like ocean-gardens of vivid, painted weeds, its woods of purple, deep thickets of most golden green, grottoes of fantastic rock with tufted palmlike yellow trees overhanging, and the blue water flowing all round, parklike vistas of glossy, spotted, arborescent herbs, or leagues on leagues of rose-colored forests teeming with strange, beautiful, heretofore unimaginable life. So is it with the sea of sorrows which rolls over the secret depths of the Immaculate Heart of the Mother of God. What we see is amazing, yet it hardly indicates what is below. How then shall we say what her woes are like? Holy men have tried to do so, and they have done it by calling her the co-redemptress of the world, and speaking of her sorrows as they blended with the Precious Blood, and the two made but one sacrifice for the sins of the world. There is a deep truth, and a most substantial one, hidden under these great words, and yet they may easily be understood in a sense in which they would not be true. They are the expressions of an excellent devotion, striving to assist the feebleness of our understandings to a true conception of Mary's grandeurs. They are accuracies, not exaggerations. Yet they need cautious wording and careful explanation. We shall consider them in the ninth chapter; and in the rest of the treatise we shall travel to our end by some other road, not only because we dare not trust ourselves to such a method of procedure, but also because it is against our habits and predilections, and in matters of devotion what does not come natural is not persuasive. We will prefer therefore to approximate to our subject, inevitably falling short,

rather than to overshoot it, making things indistinct by too strong a light, and dissatisfying by a feeling of unreality like a sunset in the hands of an unskilful painter. We shall come at last to the same end, in a manner which is not only most fitted to our own infirmity, but also most calculated to win the confidence of our readers.

The first thing, then, which strikes us about our Lady's dolours is their immensity, not in its literal meaning, but in the sense in which we commonly use it with reference to created things. It is to her sorrows that the Church applies those words of Jeremias,* O all ye that pass by the way, attend, and see if there be any sorrow like to my sorrow. To what shall I compare thee, and to what shall I liken thee, O daughter of Jerusalem? To what shall I equal thee, that I may comfort thee, O virgin daughter of Zion? for great as the sea is thy broken-heartedness: who shall heal thee? Mary's love is spoken of as that which many waters could not quench. In like manner the saints and doctors of the Church have spoken of the greatness of her sorrows. St. Anselm† says, Whatever cruelty was exercised upon the bodies of the martyrs was light, or rather it was as nothing, compared to the cruelty of Mary's passion. St. Bernardine of Siena‡ says that so great was the dolor of the Blessed Virgin that if it was subdivided and parcelled out among all creatures capable of suffering, they would perish instantly. An angel§ revealed to

* Lament., i. and ii.

† De excell. Virg., cap. 5.

‡ Ap Novatum, i. 359. Also Siniscalchi, Preface to his Dolori di Maria, p. xx.

§ In sermone angelico ap Revelat. S. Birgittæ, c. 17.

St. Bridget that if our Lord had not miraculously supported His Mother, it would not have been possible for her to live through her martyrdom. It would be easy to multiply similar passages, both from the revelations of the saints and the writings of the doctors of the Church.

But the immensity of Mary's dolours is especially shown in this, that they exceeded all martyrdom. Not only was there never any martyr, however prolonged and complicated his tortures may have been, who equalled her in suffering; but the united agonies of all the martyrs, variety and intensity all duly allowed for, did not approach to the anguish of her martyrdom. No thoughtful man will ever speak lightly of the mystery of bodily pain. Possibly in that respect his own experience may have shamed him into wisdom. It was in a great measure through bodily pain that the world was redeemed; and is it not mainly by the same process that we ourselves are being sanctified at this hour? It is the unerring justice of God which places on the heads of the martyrs that peculiar crown which belongs to those who, in the heroism of physical endurance, have laid down their lives for Christ. But even in respect of corporeal anguish Mary exceeded the martyrs. Her whole being was drenched with bitterness. The swords in her soul reached to every nerve and fibre in her frame, and we can hardly doubt but that her sinless body, with its exquisite perfections, was delicately framed for suffering beyond all others but that of her Son. Moreover, in the case of the martyrs, they had long looked at their flesh as their enemy and their hinderance on the heavenward

road. They had punished it, mortified it, cruelly kept it under, until they had come to regard it with a kind of holy hatred. Hers was sinless. It was the marvellous mine, the purest, sublimest matter that the world knew, out of which our Lord's Sacred Flesh and Precious Blood had been obtained, and she could know nothing of that exulting revenge with which heroic sanctity triumphs in the sufferings of the flesh. But what is the grand support of the martyrs in their tortures? It is that their minds are full of light and radiance. It is that their inward eye is bent on Jesus, by whose beauty and glory they are fortified. It is this which puts out the fires, or makes them pleasant as the flapping of the warm wind in spring. It is this which makes the scourges fall so soft and smooth, and causes the lash to cheer like wine. It is this which makes the sharpness of the steel so dull to the divided flesh and wounded fibres. What is within them is stronger than that which is without them. It is not that their agonies are not real, but that they are tempered, counteracted, almost metamorphosed, by the succors which their soul supplies, from the influx of grace and love wherewith their generous Master is at that moment filling them to overflowing. But where is Mary to look, with her soul's eye, for consolation? Nay, her soul's eye must look where her body's eye is fixed already. It is bent on Jesus; and it is that very sight which is her torture. She sees His Human Nature; and she is the mother, the mother beyond all other mothers, loving as never mother loved before, as all mothers together could not love, if they might compact their myriad loves into

one intensest nameless act. He is her Son, and such a Son, and in so marvellous a way her Son. He is her treasure and her all. What a fund of mystery—keen, quick, deadly, unequalled—was there in that sight! And yet there was far more than that. There was His Divine Nature.

We talk of mothers making idols of their sons; that is, worshipping them, turning them from creatures into creators, regarding them as truly their last end and true beatitude, so giving their hearts to them as they have no right to give them to any one but God. This Mary could not do, and yet in another sense might well do. For Jesus could be no idol, and yet must of necessity be worshipped as the Eternal God. None saw this as Mary did. No angel worshipped Him with such sublimely abject adoration as she did. No saint, not even the dear Magdalen, ever hung over His feet with such mortal yearning, with such human fondness. Yes! He is God,—she saw that through the darkness of the eclipse. But then the blood,—the spittings, the earth-stains, the unseemly scars, the livid, many-colored bruises,—what did all that mean on a Person only and eternally divine? It is vain to think of giving a name to such misery as then flooded her soul. Jesus, the joy of the martyrs, is the executioner of His mother. Twice over, to say the least, if not a third time also, did He crucify her; once by His Human Nature, once by His Divine, if indeed Body and Soul did not make two crucifixions from the Human Nature only. No martyrdom was ever like to this. No given number of martyrdoms approach to a comparison with it. It is a sum of sorrow which material units, ever so many

added together, ever so often multiplied, do not go to form. It is a question of kind as well as of degree; and hers was a kind of sorrow which has only certain affinities to any other kinds of sorrow, and is simply without a name, except the name which the simple children of the Church call it by, the Dolours of Mary.

Her dolours may also be called immense, because of the proportions which they bore to other things in her; for even immensity must have proportions in its way. If she was to sorrow perfectly,—if after Jesus, and because of Jesus, she was to have a pre-eminence of sorrow,—then her sorrows must be proportioned to her greatness. But she was the Mother of God! Who will take the altitude of that greatness? St. Thomas tried to do so, and said that omnipotence itself could not contrive a greater greatness. It had done its utmost, though it has no utmost, when it had imagined and effected the dignity of the Divine Motherhood. What are we to a saint, or a saint to the highest angel, or the highest angel to Mary? Perhaps we are nearer—it is to be suspected that we are much nearer—to Michael or Raphael, than they are to Mary; yet it is weary even for a strong mind to think how far off we are from those tremendous intelligences and uncomprehended sanctities. Yet a sorrow proportioned to our capacities, and even indulgently measured to our grace, can be something so terrific that it makes us dizzy to think of what God might will about us. And then, what can those spirits bear, and yet perish not, who have left the world wrongly, and fallen out of time when there was no root of eternity within them?

Their strength is laden now in their hopeless home, yet not overladen; and who thinks of their burden without forthwith hiding his thoughts in God, lest something should happen to him, he knows not what? Yet Mary's soul was as immortal, as indestructible, as their spirits, and stronger far; and her body was miraculously supported by the same omnipotence which confers an imperishable resurrection. Nay, it was perhaps the same blessed Sacrament unconsumed within her, and in all of us the seed of a glorious resurrection, which was the miracle that kept her standing and alive at the foot of the bleeding Cross. What then must that sorrow have been which was proportioned to her greatness, to the greatness of the Mother of God, to her vast strength to bear, to her manifold capability of suffering? If we pause and think, we shall see how little our thinking comes to.

But her dolours must have been proportioned also to her sanctity. The trials of the saints have always an analogy with their holiness, and match it in degree as well as adapt themselves to it in its kind. If Mary's sorrow was the work of God, and was to do work for Him,—if it was meritorious, if it closely resembled our Lord's, if it hung to His, subordinately, yet inseparably, if it was populous with supernatural actions, if it multiplied her graces,—then must it have been suitable to the excellences of her soul, and proportioned to her sanctity. But that arithmetic of Mary's merits has long been a bewildering question; bewildering, not because a shadow of doubt hangs over, but for the want of ciphers to write it down in—of factors whereby to work the gigantic multiplication. The holiness of

the Mother of God was not absolutely illimitable; and this is the lowest thing which can be said about it. If then we cast the most cursory glance over the number of her graces, their kinds, and their degrees, if starting at the Immaculate Conception we make a sort of reckoning up to the Incarnation, using angels' figures because men's have failed us long ago; and then if we think, however briefly, of the way in which at the moment of the incarnation our figures fell over into the infinite, or something very like it; and then if we contemplate, stupidly and wildly as we must do, the velocity of indefinable grace during three-and-thirty years, all thickly strewn with infinite mysteries, we may form some idea, not of the amount of sanctity ready to bear its proportionate amount of sorrow at the foot of the Cross, but of the impossibility of our forming any clear idea of such a sanctity at all. So that we go away with a most overwhelming impression, but it is an impression like a faith, of the enormous weight of suffering which such a sanctity required, in order to engross it, to match it, to accelerate it, to complete it, to crown it, and to augment it by another infinity.

Neither can we doubt that her sorrows were proportioned to her enlightenment. Knowledge always puts an edge on grief. Sensibility gives it additional acuteness. For the most part, when we suffer we hardly know half our actual misfortune, because we hardly understand more than half of it. Neither are we generally in full possession of ourselves. Some part of us is deadened and dulled by the blow which has been dealt us, and all that portion of our soul is a ref-

uge to us from the sensitiveness and vigilance of the rest. A child weeps when his mother dies; but alas! how many a long year it takes to teach both boy and man what a mother's loss really means! Now, our Lady's whole being was flooded with light. Not only did a reason and intelligence of the most consummate perfection illuminate every faculty, and secure the utmost excellence in the exercise of it, but she lived within herself in a very atmosphere of supernatural air and light. In her dolors this light was a torture to her. We may well suppose that no one, except our Blessed Lord Himself, ever fully understood the Passion, or grasped all its horrors in their terrible and repulsive completeness. Yet Mary's knowledge of it is the only one which came at all near to His, and simply because of the excess of heavenly light which shone unsettingly upon her sinless soul. We have but narrow ideas of the light which God can pour into the spacious intelligences of the angels, much less into the vast amplitude and serene capacity of His Blessed Mother. Hence it is that we find the theology of the Beatific Vision so singularly difficult. What blindness is to the blind, and deafness to the deaf, that is ignorance to us. We cannot comprehend its opposite. We make guesses, and draw the most erroneous pictures. Our way lies through darkness, and the twilight is the utmost our weak sight can bear. Light is painful to us, and puzzles us, and troubles our thoughts, and makes us precipitate. Even with the saints, sudden light let in upon them acts as with us, and partially blinds them, until they learn how to suffer the keen ecstatic operations of grace. It brings to

mind what a devout writer on the Passion has said of our Lord, following probably some revelation, that after he had been violently struck by the gauntleted hand of the soldier His eyes were so affected that He could not bear the light, so that the sunshine caused exquisite suffering, and He went about through the streets from shame to shame, from violence to violence, like one dazed, and that can only imperfectly see his way. Ignorance is so completely our atmosphere, that we can conceive less of an excess of spiritual light, an intellectual effulgence, than of any thing else. So here again the extent of our Lady's sorrows escapes us, as we have no means of measuring the supernatural enlightenment to which they were proportioned, or which perhaps rendered them co-extensive with itself.

Their multitude is equally beyond our powers of measurement. Every look at Jesus drove the swords deeper into her soul. Every sound of His dear voice, while it lifted her far up on the wings of maternal transport, brought with it its own bitterness, which pierced all the deeper and the keener for the joy that went along with it. Every action of His came to her with a multitude of pains, in which past and future blended in one terrible provision which was always actual to her blessed soul. Every supernatural act which rose up within her heart, and such acts were forever rising there, was a new dolor; for either it taught her something new of Jesus, or it was a response to some fresh love of His, or it was a growth of new love in her, or it drew her into closer union with Him, or it illuminated her mind, or it ravished

her affections, or it intensified her worship; and in all these things the dearer and the more precious our blessed Lord became to her, the more unutterable were the heart-rending woes of the cruel and ignominious Passion. Thus, full as her life was of great events, rapidly succeeding each other, the multitude of her sorrows was being swollen every hour by the mere hidden life of grace in her heart. They came together like the streams of people in a huge city, swelling the crowd from every side, and swaying it to and fro. They were independent of external events, whose necessary sequence, with the time and room they occupy, keeps the intolerable fulness of human life within limits. It was more like a perpetual creation. They created themselves, only it was not out of nothing: it was out of her own exceeding holiness, and still more out of the exceeding beauty of her Son. If the number of her woes is beyond our power of counting, what must their pressure have been, when they concentrated themselves as one weight upon one point of her affections, and then ever and anon distractedly dispersed themselves all over her soul with an amazing universality of suffering, which it is not easy to picture to ourselves? We need not fear for her. She who was as tranquil as though she had been divine, in the moment of the Incarnation, can forfeit her peace for nothing else: but oh, how bitter must her peace have been! *In pace amaritudo mea amarissima!*

There was also another very true sense in which the sorrows of Mary were immense, in that they were beyond the power of human endurance. They went beyond the measure of the natural strength of life. It

is the unanimous verdict of the devout writers on our Blessed Lady, supported by the revelations of the saints, and indeed founded upon those revelations, that she was miraculously kept alive under the pressure of her intolerable sufferings. In this, as in so many other things, she participated in the gifts of our Blessed Lord during His Passion. But this is true of our Lady, not only during the horrors of Calvary, but throughout her whole life. Her prevision of all her sorrows, at least from the moment of St. Simeon's prophecy, was so vivid and real, that, without a peculiar succor from the omnipotence of God, it must have separated her soul and body. She could not have lived under so dense a shadow. She could not have breathed in so thick a darkness. She must have been suffocated in the deep waters in which her soul was continually sinking. It was impossible in so perfect a creature that her reason should be perturbed. It was impossible that peace should ever be dislodged from a heart in such transcendently close union with God. But her beautiful life might have been, nay, would have been, extinguished by excess of sorrow, unless God had worked a perpetual miracle to hinder this effect, just as through her whole life she was always on the point of dying from excess of love, and when His appointed moment came, and He withdrew His extraordinary succor, she did in fact die of simple love. What then must that sorrow have been, which required a standing miracle not to force body and soul asunder; and this, too, in a sinless soul, where remorse could never come, where doubt never harassed the judgment, unless it were once during the Three Days'

Loss, and where perpetual peace reigned amid the quietness and subordination of all the passions?

Our Lady's dolors also went in their reality beyond the measure of most human realities, and this both in reason and sense. In our sorrows there is generally a great deal of exaggeration. We fancy almost as much more as we have really to bear. If our suffering comes from others, we dress it up in circumstances of unkindness, which never had any existence. We impute motives, which never crossed the mind to which we impute them. We throw a strong, unequal and unfair light on little trivial occurrences, which are probably altogether disconnected from the matter. Or if it is some loss we are undergoing, we picture consequences far beyond the sober truth, and bearing about as much proportion to the real inconveniences implied in our loss, as a boy with a lantern bears to the prodigious tall shadows he is all the while unconsciously casting on the opposite wall. The combined weakness and activity of our imaginations envelop our sorrow in a cloud of unreality, which is still further increased by a kind of foolish wilfulness, leading us to refuse comfort, and turn a deaf ear to reason, to give way to culpable indolence and brooding, and to interrupt the continuity of our ordinary duties and responsibilities. Now in all this wilfulness and weakness there is a sort of pleasure, which is a great condescension to endurance. But with our Blessed Lady all was thoroughly true. Her sorrows went up into regions of sublimity, of which we can form only the vaguest conceptions. They went down into profound depths of the soul, which we cannot explore because they have no parallel

in ourselves. They were heightened by the unappreciable perfection of her nature, by the exuberant abundance of her grace, by the exceeding beauty of Jesus, and above all by His Divinity. Each of these enhancements of her griefs carries them out of sight of our limited capacities. But to her, in the midst of the most serene self-collection, each was perfectly real, thoroughly comprehended in all its bearings, and heroically embraced with full intelligence of all that was either actual or involved in it. Her physical nature, free from all the ruin of disease, exempt from the disorganization consequent on sin, was full of the keenest vitality, of the most delicate susceptibilities, of the most tender and lively sensitiveness, and endowed with a most fine and amazing capability of suffering. Hence there was nothing, either in reason or sense, to deaden a single blow. Use did not make her sorrows more tolerable. Continuity did not confuse their distinctness. Not one of them was local; they were felt all through, with a swift circulation and a fiery sharpness which exempted no part of her body or soul from its piercing anguish, nor gave so much as a transient dispensation to this or that particular faculty. Tranquil herself with that unutterable tranquility of hers, there was no repose in her sorrows. They never left her. They never slept. They gave her no truce. Day and night was their uproar heard round the walls of the city of her soul. Day and night their flaming shafts fell in showers all over her most sacred shrines. There was not one, a jot of whose malice was lost upon her. She missed none of the bitterness. She knew their full value, and had none of those surprises which

sometimes force us suddenly across great trials we hardly know how. There was no succession in them, because they all stuck in her, like Sebastian's arrows, and their poisoned barbs were all rankling there at once. It is terrific, this reality of Mary's sorrows. It is a feature of them which must not be forgotten when we cease to speak of it, else we shall understand but very imperfectly what has yet to follow. Truly this is an immense reality, such as could not be found anywhere out of Jesus and Mary, another participation in the depths of the Passion.

But these sorrows of hers had some sort of share in the redemption of the world; and this gives them a peculiar immensity of their own. This, however, is a matter to be examined hereafter, and at length. It is sufficient then to say now that by the ordinance of God, Mary was mixed up with the Passion, that her dolours were added to our Lord's sufferings, not without a purpose, but, as is the case with all divine things, with a most real and mysterious purpose, and that as the Mother and the Son can in no wise be separated at any other point in the Thirty-Three Years, least of all can they be separated on Calvary, where God has joined them so markedly, and almost unexpectedly.

Of the diversified romance and artistic beauty of Mary's dolours we need not speak. Such things belong of right to all divine works. Her compassion was part of the great epic of creation, a pathos and a plaintiveness not to be disjoined from the sublimities and terrors and sacred panics of the Passion of the Incarnate Word. But it is not touching poetry of

which we are in search. Rather it is plain piety, and a downright increase of love of Mary, and of devotion to her Son. If there be one department of practical religion from which we could desire that a sentence of perpetual banishment were passed upon mere sentiment and feeling, it would be the department of Mary. Mary is a great reality of God, and sentiment is prone to rob us of our reality by turning substance into fancy, solidity into prettiness, and so overclothing the outside that we almost come to doubt whether there be an inside at all. Let then the exceeding beauty of Mary's martyrdom find us out, if it will, and catch us up into the air, and surprise us into sweet tears, and calm the trouble of our sympathies; but do not let us seek it, or go out of our doctrinal, devotional way for it. Yet if artistic things can in any way increase our genuine love of God, let even them be welcome.

SECTION II.

WHY GOD PERMITTED OUR LADY'S DOLORS.

But may we now ask why God permitted these dolours of Mary? Is it reverent to institute such an inquiry? All things are reverent which are done in love. We do not inquire because we are in doubt, or as if we were calling God to account, or as though we had a right to know; but we inquire in order that we may gain fresh knowledge to mint into fresh love. Perhaps there is no one work of God of which we are capable of knowing all the reasons, or of understand-