

ways. Thus God's perfection in Himself, His dealings with His creatures, and the fashion of His redeeming grace, the possibilities of holiness, the inventiveness of divine love, His training of the saints, His guidance of the Church, His inward walk with the souls that seek Him,—all these things are written upon Mary like hieroglyphical inscriptions, easily to be deciphered by the light of faith and the intelligent surmises of devotion. So, by her dolours, He has hung about her a complete revelation of the great mystery of suffering. He has illuminated in her that pregnant doctrine, that suffering is the only true conclusion to be drawn from love, where divine things are concerned. She had no sin of her own for which to suffer. She had no penalty to pay for the fall of Eve. She was not included in the law of sin. She was, in the order of heaven's purposes, foreseen before the decree permitting sin. She also had no world to redeem. All her dear blood, the sweet fountain and well head of the Precious Blood, could not have washed away one venial sin, nor saved the soul of one new-born babe who had no actual sin at all to expiate. She was simply immersed in an unspeakable sea of love, and therefore the deluge of sorrow passed over her soul, and into it, by right, just as the great turbulent rivers run down unquestioned into the sea. Her sufferings close the mouth of complaint forever. With sweet constraint and unanswerable persuasiveness they impose silence on all the suffering children of our heavenly Father. The saints can doubt no longer that suffering is the one grand similitude of Christ. We too in our extreme lowness, whose patience is of so

thin a texture that it was threadbare almost when it was new, learn, not to be silent only, but to bear with gentleness, and even wistfully to think the time may come when we shall actually love, that suffering which seems to be the golden coin in which love repays our love.

SECTION III.

THE FOUNTAINS OF OUR LADY'S DOLORS.

We may now proceed to our third inquiry: What were the fountains of our Lady's dolours? By fountains we do not exactly mean causes, but rather the peculiar sources of feeling in her heart, which gave to her sorrows their distinguishing bitterness. When a mother loses her only son, the loss is of itself bitterness enough; but a character and intensity are given to it by circumstances which awaken particular feelings within her breast. Either he was so beautiful that the loss seems all the more intolerable, or he was so full of moral or intellectual promise, or he was taken so young, or there was something which, humanly speaking, might have been so easily prevented in the actual cause of his death, or there was a special combination of family circumstances which just at that time made his death a greater blow than at any other date it would have been; these, and similar things which might be indefinitely multiplied, are centres of peculiar bitterness round which sorrow gathers, deepening, broadening, magnifying, embittering it, far beyond the measure of the real affliction. Yet all these

things are to the mourner the most stern realities, and by no means imaginary or merely sentimental aggravations. In the case of our Blessed Lady nothing could go beyond the real affliction, because of Him whose sufferings were the cause of hers. On the contrary, human sorrow, even Mary's sorrow, could not equal the real cause of grief. Nevertheless, there were centres also in her heart round which her sorrows gathered more thickly, and ached more cruelly, and throbbed more vehemently than elsewhere. It is these centres which we must now consider, these special fountains of perennial bitterness, premising that of course the perfections of Mary's heart are so far beyond our understanding, that there were doubtless many sources of keen suffering to her which we cannot appreciate, perhaps not even imagine, and that while we traverse the ground which is known to us we must not forget all the regions which lie beyond it still undiscovered, the exploring of which may perhaps be one of the many delightful occupations left for heaven.

The first of these fountains was in the thought that she could not die with Jesus. There is hardly any mother who would not under such circumstances have longed to die. Death is better than life to a broken heart; and where death is not a separation, but an unbroken companionship, only a companionship transferred from the desolate earth to the bosom of our Heavenly Father, to what stricken mother would it not have been a boon beyond all worlds? How incomparably such to Mary! Never was son so much to earthly mother as Jesus was to her; never was any

son so good and beautiful and dear a son, never any so much a son. The rights of both father and mother centred in the one heart of the Virgin Mother; so that He was twice her Son, double her Son. Who can tell the attractions of His Sacred Humanity, or how the love of Him took root in that deep maternal heart? Then He was God beside, and for three-and-thirty years had been living in obedience to her, in a union of love so transporting that it would have taken her life a thousand times if He had not hindered it, and that, not by tempering the sweet vehemence of love, but by strengthening her heart with His omnipotence. He was going. His sun was sinking in a red sea of blood, among the wildest clouds of shame. She could never forget. Calvary would be in her heart to the last. It would be one of those remembrances which time could never soften, one of those horrors which grow more horrible in the distance, when we can take them in and not be confused by the presence of their excess. But even if it were not so, Jesus would be gone, and why should she live? What was there to live for? The sunshine was put out. It was more of an end than the end of the world could be. It was a darkness inconceivable, nay, it might appear a downright impossibility: for how was the world to go on without Jesus? With the closing of His eyes, it might appear as if all benediction were withdrawn from the earth, and a cold freezing shade come over all its brightness. When His sweet accents were heard no more, surely all nature would keep an unbroken silence, unless those awful cries of the maddened people were to go on multiplying and reverberating

through all space forever. The earth was to have Peter; Mary was to have John. One was to be the apostle of the world, the other the apostle of the Mother. But Jesus was to go.

But it is not only why should she live, but how could she live? Was there a possibility of living without Jesus? None, dearest Mother, except by the help of His omnipotence! Oh, how wonderful must have been her love to accept His will on Calvary, His will that they should part, His will that she should linger on through fifteen mortal years of unfathomable martyrdom! She asked once for water to be turned into wine, and He said His time was not yet come; nevertheless at her will the miracle was wrought, without her asking twice. She could hardly have forgotten that on Calvary. These fifteen years were His will, but what if she for a moment shows her will that it should not be so? will the Mother have to plead long with the dying Son? A word, a look, were possibly enough. How is it that she is still? Is it that she loves Him better now than at Cana of Galilee? And it is a higher love to stay and do His will, than to go with Him and enjoy His beauty. Is she holier now than she was then? For holiness, as it rises, loses more and more its individual will in the will of God. Both are doubtless true, and both facts are in no slight measure owing to her dolours. But is it not rather perhaps that she, like her Son, has gone down into the depths of suffering, and has become as it were enchanted with it, and as He thirsts for more suffering, in divinest discontent even with the excesses of Calvary, so she too thirsts to suffer more, and He gives

to her, what His Father grants not to Himself, another passion of a hundred and eighty waxing and waning moons? It must be remembered also that there was a peculiar grief to our Lady in not dying with Jesus, which we cannot appreciate, but only contemplate far off. Union with Jesus was so habitual to her, and union of so close and vital a nature, that it had become her life; and now, in the most important act of all, she was not to be united with Him. She was to differ when she most longed to resemble Him. Nay, it was a want of union which was to involve actual separation. Who can estimate what this absence of union was to her? Yet her love had this prerogative, to suffer longer than our Lord, and to outlive Him by well-nigh half His life in suffering. Deep down in very deep sanctity indeed we find, that never scarcely was she more intimately united with Him than when she let Him go without her.

Another fountain, which yielded additional bitterness to Mary's sorrows, was the knowledge that her dolours increased the sufferings of Jesus, nay, that they were actually among the worst agonies He had to endure. There was not one pain which she would not have given worlds to alleviate. There was not one fresh indignity offered to Him, which did not pierce her soul, and make her bleed inwardly. As blows and blasphemies, insults, derision, and rude handlings were multiplied, it seemed at each new violence as if she could bear no more, as if the sea of sorrow needed but another drop to break in upon the fountains of her life and wash them away in one terrific inundation. And yet she had to feel that the sight of her

broken heart, ever before Him, was more dreadful to our Blessed Lord than the scourging, the crowning, the spitting, or the buffeting. She was made as it were executioner in chief of her own beloved Son. The more tenderly she loved Him, the more fondly she clung to Him, the more willingly she bore her griefs, so much the deeper the iron of them entered into the Soul of Jesus. She knew all this; and yet her grief was not beneath her own control. Her very holiness increased it a thousandfold. It was in vain she strove to repress it. The very effort was anguish, and no calmness of face, no firmness of attitude, no tearlessness of eye, could have hidden from Jesus the secret abysses of her immaculate heart. Who shall tell the torture of all this to her unselfish devotion? Oh, the seeming cruelty of that exceeding great love which had actually insisted on her being an integral and prominent part of His bitter Passion! How well He knew the plenitude of grace that was in her! How thoroughly He trusted the immensity of her holiness! Life had not been without joys to Him, not even without earthly joys. His Mother had been a whole world of sweetness to the Man of sorrows; and now, in His love of God, in His love of her, in His love of us, He turns all those sweet waters to an ocean of saltiest bitterness for Himself, and keeps slaking His thirst from it incessantly all through the various mysteries of His tremendous Passion. He knew her love so well, and calculated its fortitude so truly, that He hesitated not to lay upon her a cross so nearly the weight of His own. But what all this was, in spite of the eager conformity of her willing heart, what in-

tensity of misery, what unparalleled kind of woe it brought along with it, it is beyond our power to say. It is very deep sea close to shore, where Mary's dolours are concerned.

But is she then to be simply passive? If it is His will that she should be part of His Passion, may she not think that the fondness of her love will really be some alleviation of His pains? She has been too near the Incarnate Word not to comprehend that strange union of intensest pain with intensest joy, which was the normal state of His blessed Soul on earth; and deep down, deeper than the fountains of grief, might not her love be a wellspring of gladness in His heart? The heroic devotedness of the Mother must surely be a most pathetic contentment to the Son. Yet we venture to suppose that it was not so. The analogies of the Passion seem all to point the other way. He shut off from His lower nature the sensible beatitude of the unbroken Vision of God. He stripped Himself by an amazing detachment of all that could have consoled Him. The dereliction of His Father was an abyss into which He purposed to descend. He can hardly have allowed His Mother's love to have been a consolation and support to Him. He can hardly have kept to shine upon Him in His darkness the greatest earthly joy His Sacred Humanity had ever known. It would be out of keeping with the Passion, with that completeness of bleak desolation which He spread around Himself, the vastest, direst wilderness of soul that ever man had known, worse round Him, the sinless Saviour, than was the homeless earth that lay outstretched, with all its haunting shapes and

shadows of terror, before the blood-stained, impenitently remorseful Cain! No! Mary might not think that in that hour her love could soothe His Sacred Heart. But were there no maternal offices which she might fill toward Him? Alas! only such office as the mother of the Maccabees had filled of old. Slowly and incommodiously the blood from the thorns was trickling into His eyes; but she could not reach to wipe away the blood from Him, whose special office it is to wipe away tears from all eyes forever. His lips are parched with thirst, white, bloodless, cracking; but she may not damp them for one moment with her moistened veil, though His blood shall henceforth daily damp the fires of purgatory for a thousand souls. His poor unpillowed head, that beautiful head, to her the most beautiful of created things,—if He leans back the thorns are driven in, if He leans forward His whole body drags from the nails,—may she not hold it in her Motherly hands, and let Him rest so for a little while until He dies? No! neither for Him nor for her is there to be any alleviation. O Mother! rob Him not of one jewel of His perfect Passion; for see how generously He is enlarging for thee every hour the bounds of thy great sea of sorrow! But this is a third fountain of her grief, that she cannot alleviate the Passion of her Son.

It was another fountain of peculiar sorrow to her that she was an eyewitness of the Passion. We learn from the revelations of holy persons that, though she was absent in body, she was present in spirit at the sufferings of Gethsemane, and even followed in her soul with mysterious and supernatural sympathy the

various phases of our Saviour's agony. She was present bodily at the scourging, at the Ecce Homo, along the way of the Cross, and for the whole time on Calvary. It appears most probable that she was not in the houses of Annas and Caiaphas, but that she was at the doors, and heard not only the insults, but even the blows, which were given to Jesus, and that she suffered an especial torture in the separation from Him at those moments. Yet it was a fearful thing for a mother, particularly one of such exquisite sensibilities and profound love as Mary, to have to follow her only child through every step of that bloody drama. It would have been a terrific martyrdom, if she had spent those hours retired in the women's apartments of an Oriental house, hearing the distant cries of the raging multitude, or listening to the mournful intelligence which would be brought her from time to time. Still, she could better have collected herself there to suffer in quietness and peace. Others at least could have spent the time all the more undistractedly in prayer. But it was not so with her. Her Son was God. It was better to be nigh Him. The nigher God the better, always, for all of us; but for God's Mother most of all. Unbroken as was her union with the invisible God at all times and in all places, she would pray better when she saw Jesus. Besides, she had not the helpful distraction which Christian women have in their afflictions. She was not divided between the dear Child who was being taken from her, and the all-holy God who was inflicting this blow upon her. Her grief and her religion did not fall two different ways. The suffering Child