

to her inward eye in multitudes, and that there should be in her as little succession of ideas as comports with the imperfection of a created mind. Thus the past was one present to her; and the future was a second present, and the present was a third present. The greatness of her science was simply converted into an incalculable power of suffering. The clearness of her perceptions was as knives in flesh and soul. There was something dreadful in the immutability of the vision. Moreover there was something infinite in the vision. For custom did not familiarize it to her; on the contrary, it became fresher, its edges grew sharper, it went in deeper. There was a perpetual novelty about its monotonous images. Depths of significance kept opening out in it, like the interlacings and unfoldings of an unwieldy thunder-cloud; and each of these depths pushed the boundaries of her possibility of suffering far further than they were before. Who can think of any alleviation she could have had? Can the imagination suggest any? None! none! The beauty of Jesus, we know, was hourly driving Simeon's sword in. It was a hammer that rose and fell with almost every pulse that beat in His veins. The Light of the world was forever passing in and out of the house; but, strange to say! He cast terrific shadows upon her, her whom He enlightened most of all; and the more she exulted, the more intolerably she suffered. And so her days went by, in the village of Nazareth, and among the bazaars of Heliopolis.

It was occupation enough to her to attend to her sorrows. It was a cruel distraction to have to go through her ordinary actions, and the round of daily

domestic duties. Is it not our experience that almost all distractions are cruel, even when they are kindly meant? We had rather weep than be consoled. We shall come round sooner, if those who love us will only let us muse on our sorrow for a while. But Mary had other sorrows to look to than her own, sorrows that not only caused hers, but absorbed them again, and made them so forgetful as to be hardly conscious of themselves, the sorrows of Jesus. Yet this was no alleviation to her lifelong woe. On the contrary, it was an aggravation. It barbed every one of them afresh with a double bark. Thus each sorrow was double. It echoed in two hearts. And the reverberation made both hearts ache. What she suffered in the heart of Jesus was far worse than what she suffered in her own. And all this mysterious process went on in secrecy and concealment for years and years. She sought no sympathy; she made no lamentation. She was as quiet as heaven when its songs are silent.

A life, with a heart broken almost from the first! This it was to be the Mother of God. This came of her being so bound up with Jesus. A heart-broken life? And what is life? What does the word represent? Oh, such a breadth of diversified experiences, such multitudinous flocks of thoughts, such crowds of complicated actions, such weariful endurance, such tiresome coming round of the four seasons, such a swift slowness of time, every thing so long in coming, and then coming before its time! And to her powers of soul life was so much broader, so much deeper, so much longer, so much more vital! And her life was



a heart-broken life. What is a broken heart? Hearts do not often break. But we can tell what an aching heart is, or a wounded heart. Nay, we have lived on, when our heart got crushed once. It was only a momentary crush. The wheel of life went over it. Then it was over. Yet the surviving it seemed a miracle. But what is a broken heart? And then a life, with a heart broken all the while, almost from the first! O Mary! thou wert the Mother of God, and therefore thou knowest!

But if we look attentively at this first dolor, we shall see that it contains five distinct dolours, five separate wounds in itself. First of all, in the offering she had made to God, she had offered Jesus of her own free will to death. Strange fruit of the greatness of a mother's love! Yet it was out of love that she had made the offering, out of the holiest, purest, most disinterested love of God. For He who was her Son was also God, and He who was God was the victim likewise. But could she have foreseen all that was involved in this? Oh, yes! every thing. Nothing had escaped her. Nothing could be more intelligent, nothing more mature, than the offering she had made. And when long years of oppressive sorrow had come to lay their added weights upon her broken heart, the very thought of retreating would have seemed worse than Calvary; for it would have been an infidelity to Him whom she so lovingly adored. But she had given Him away; she had given Him to death. For nine months she had possessed Him. Never was creature so rich, never creature so supremely blessed. Even then almost her first thought had been to bear

Him over the hill-country of Juda to Elizabeth and John. All the while she had been longing to see His Face, and behold the light in His eyes, to hear the tone of His infantine voice, to throw her arms around Him and press Him, her treasure, the world's treasure, the Father's treasure, to her bosom. She was His human Mother, and her heart was human, exquisitely human. She woke from her ecstasy, and He was lying on her robe upon the ground on Christmas night, stretching out His little hands to her, as if her arms were His home, as they were. She had only had Him forty days. Her maternal love had not begun to satisfy itself, though it had been feeding all the while on His perfections. Nay, it was further from being satisfied than when she first saw Him. Forty days, not a thousand hours; and now she was giving Him away, giving Him to death, and the sword of Simeon had gone deep into her heart to show her what a gulf henceforth lay between herself and Him. She could have no more quiet possession of Him. She could not forbid His Passion. He belonged to sinners. He belonged to the anger of His Father. He was a victim, whom she was to guard until the hour of sacrifice was come. What an office for a mother to hold! This is what came of being the Mother of God.

But, if she had thus made Him over to the cruelty of His divine office, she could the less bear the contradictions of others to His honor, His happiness, or His doctrine. Simeon had spoken of contradictions. What! would not the whole world be at His feet? Even if He was to die, because by the divine ordinance without shedding of blood there is no remission



of sin, surely till then men will hang upon His lips, will follow Him wherever He goes, to feed on His celestial words. Sinners will everywhere be converted. The days of the saints will come back again to the chosen people and the promised land. And when He has died upon the Cross, the whole world will hasten to confess His royalty, and will throng into the Church which He has founded. No! it was not to be so. She knew it was not to be so. But what was there to contradict about Him? He was beauty, He was truth, He was love, He was gentleness itself. Who could be rude to Him? Who could contradict truth, eternal truth? But she saw how it was all to be. He showed it to her in Himself, when He unveiled to her the secrets of His soul. There was not a dark look ever cast on His venerable face, there was not a cold word, or a wilful misunderstanding, or a petulant retort, or an unbecoming liberty, or an irreverent taunt, or a dire imprecation, or a chilling blasphemy, from that hour to the day of doom, which did not go into her heart with excruciating distress. The howling cries of those multitudes at Jerusalem, ravening for His Blood, echoed day and night within her maternal heart. This then was to be the first-fruits of that magnificent oblation, in order to make which grace had to raise her almost to heights, certainly to neighborhoods, divine! Men would not appreciate her offering. They would not understand it. They would scout it, mock it, contradict it, be cruel to it. No one yet has ever understood it, either in heaven or earth, save the Eternal Father to whom she made it. He alone knew the worth of what she gave,

the worth of Jesus, of the Incarnate Word. Do we know it? Impossible; for, if we did, our lives would not be what they are. There is a knowledge which brings practice along with it: it is the knowledge by which sanctity knows, not the mere knowledge of the understanding.

Alas! poor Mother! Her heart is all wounds, one opening into another, lifelong wounds, which, like the stigmata of the Saints, bleed, but never ulcerate. At least those who contradict Him shall learn at last to see the greatness of their error. They shall come back to Him like wanderers. They shall one day become themselves triumphs of His redeeming grace. Out of Him flow grace, and sweetness, and attraction, and healing. His beauty, confessed at last, shall wind itself around them as a spell. Thus the grief of all this contradiction may be endurable. But, no! the sword of Simeon, like the sword of the Cherubim that guards the entrance of the earthly paradise, "flames and turns every way." *Positus in ruinam multorum*, set for the fall of many, their utter fall, their ruin, their irreparable ruin! Is Jesus to lose forever some of His own creatures? Nay, is He to drive them from Himself by the very brightness of His light, by the very heavenliness of His beauty? Are there to be souls for whom it would have been better had He never come? Oh, cruel thought, cruellest of all! For the more Mary mused upon the Passion, and the longer she had it all before her eyes, all the more avariciously she coveted souls, the more she hungered and thirsted after the harvest of the Passion, and became the Mother of sinners because she was the Mother of



the Saviour, the Mother who gave Him away to death when she had possessed Him but forty days in Bethlehem. The countless multitudes of those who were to be saved were the nearest approach to an alleviation of her inconsolable sorrow. But even upon this semblance of a consolation she was not to lean. Oh, it was a fearful thought to think of her beautiful Child, that He was to be in some sense a destroyer. Not altogether a Saviour, but a law of life which was to be a sentence of death to some, nay, to many. Things had become very grave now between God and His world. Jesus would be a touchstone. Men must take their sides now, more definitely, more intelligently. God was weary of their sins, weary of waiting for their return. The very greatness of this last long-prophesied mercy made the rejection of it the more fatal and irretrievable. The salvation of men would now be in some respects more like that of the angels. Their probation was becoming more divine, and therefore more decisive. To reject Jesus was to be lost eternally, and yet the "Rejected of men" was one of the very names which Scripture gave Him. If any thing could have been hard to Mary's faith, it would have been that Jesus was to be the ruin of many souls; and faith's heroic acceptance of this worshipful truth only made the edge of it keener, and the point sharper, to go down into her heart.

It is part of our imperfection that one impression upon our mind dulls another. We cannot attend to many things at once. Even sorrows, when they come thickly, in some measure neutralize each other. Great sorrows absorb us, and then little ones fall upon us,

and we hardly feel them more than the drops of a thunder-shower. We are conscious of them: but the suffering they cause is hardly distinct. But it was not so in our Lady, with the perfections of her unfallen nature. Her self-collection was complete, and embraced every thing. There was no confusion in her mind from want of balance. It received, appreciated, and thoughtfully handed on to her exquisite sensibilities of pain, every slightest aggravation of any one of her multiplied sorrows. So it was now. The curse incurred by her native land, because of the rejection of Jesus, was a distinct and bitter grief. All the glories of its past history, from the Exodus to the Maccabees, rose up before her mind. Her heart swelled over the vicissitudes, now sad, now glorious, of her people. She thought of the Tombs of the saints and prophets scattered among the hills. Her eye traversed the battlefields, where the sword of man had so often avenged the majesty of God. It was the land of promise, very various, very beautiful. It had what no other land had upon it, the golden light of God's mysterious choice. It was the holy East advancing to the water's edge, and confronting that grand West which it was first to convert, and then civilize, and last of all to glorify. It was not a mere feeling of patriotism which stirred within her. That land had been the earthly home of heavenly truth, when the rest of the world lay in the cold shadow of spiritual darkness. It was more like a sanctuary than a region of the earth's geography. There was hardly a mountain which had not seen some miracle, hardly a hollow to which some promise was not attached. The



banks of its river, the shores of its inland sea, were overhung with clouds of sacred poetry. A very network of prophecy lay over the whole land, over all the localities of the separate tribes. Their virtues and their faults had to do with the geography of the regions allotted for their dwelling. The peculiar scenery of the country was the imagery of the Scriptures; and it was soon to be something more, because of the teaching of her Son. Then there was Jerusalem. Even the great God had loved that city, almost as if He were a man, with a human affection. He had cherished it in His heart as fondly and as wistfully as any Hebrew who mused upon it beneath the willows by the waters of Babylon. Jesus Himself wept over it, as if His heart would break, from the top of Olivet. Poor city! fair city! it was the trophy of so many mercies, of so much divine tenderness, of so many victories of divine love. It was the tabernacle of the visible glory of the Most High. The sweet savor of sacrifice rose from it evermore. And now the adorable blood of Jesus was to lay it all desolate, and the Roman fire, and then the ruin of ages, were to lick up almost the vestiges of its holy places! What made Jesus weep, what made Him feel like a mother who would fain shelter her young beneath her wings, must needs have been to Mary the intensest misery. And Simeon's sword had not forgotten even this! Sweet Mother! Thy Son and thyself must ruin Judah, the chosen, the long-endured, the delightful of the world. Fain as thou art to be nothing but the glad channel of God's love to earth, thou must be content to be an instrument of His wrath

as well. Thou, too, Mother of mercy! art not thou thyself, even to this day, set for the fall of many, both in the old Israel and in the new? Sweet is the will of God, even when it is terrible in its counsels over the children of men!

This was not altogether such a picture of Jesus and of the consequences of His coming, as a mother's heart would have desired, if nature had been bidden to paint it. The sun should have been without clouds. The shadows that darkened the landscape were too many and too heavy. Around the Infant Jesus what should there be but light and joy, unmingled mercy, unbroken peace, all night and the relics of night passed away and gloriously melted down to gold in the sunrise? He came with the sole intention of love, and lo! the immediate consequence of His coming is contradiction, ending with the everlasting ruin of many souls, and the laying waste of His earthly country, and the dispersion of His chosen people. But the blood of the Holy Innocents would have been a lesson to Mary, if she had needed teaching, of what those are to expect, and in what mysterious dark laws they are involved, who come very near to Jesus. Now, at least if His coming shall not exclusively accumulate praise and worship for the single attribute of the divine clemency, the justice of God shall find its glory therein. All things, at any rate, shall be for the great, the greater, the greatest glory of God. Yes, they shall in truth; but not altogether as might have been expected. The mission of Jesus was an infinite possibility of glory for God. But what was infinite in it rested at the possibility. God was not to



have one tithé of the glory which was due to Him for the sending of His Son. The wills of men should contrive to frustrate it at every turn. To such an extent should their malice succeed, that there should actually be an appearance of failure over the whole scheme of redemption. It should be possible, in time to come, for theologians to speak as if the redemption of Mary in the Immaculate Conception were the grand, almost sufficient, work of redeeming grace. The very sweetness, and humility, and forgivingness of Jesus should act as stumbling-blocks in the way of His Father's glory. Nay, the very things which, because they were so divine, should have fructified most to the glory of God, shall furnish occasions and opportunities for greater outrage against the Divine Majesty than sinners could have had without the Incarnation. Alas! how darkness is gathering round the very cradle of the Child! Christmas is deepening into Passion-tide, with unnatural, unseasonable combination. Poor Mother! here are five wounds in one. Thou hast offered Him to death: His appearance will be the signal for numberless contradictions to start up against Him: He is set for the downright ruin of many: Because of Him the land and the people will be cursed: He will enable men to desecrate God's glory more than all generations have done before. Poor Mother! which way wilt thou look? Jesus Himself has the crown of thorns round His Infant Heart, which will one day be seen upon His brow; and is it less cruel on the heart than on the head? As to sinners, there is to be no such universal salvation of them as might come near to a compensation for all this grief. As to

God, there is far from free course to His glory; much glory, doubtless, but then also unheard-of impiety, the ways and means thereto being furnished by His own exceeding paternal love.

Such were the peculiarities of the first dolor. Not much need be said about her dispositions in it. Partly they have been in great measure anticipated in what has been said, and partly they are, many of them, so far above our comprehension, so indistinguishable in the dazzling brightness of the inward beauty of "the King's daughter," that we know not what to say. A book might be written on Mary's interior beauty; and in these days it greatly needs writing. Meanwhile we will delay a while on three graces which our Lady exercised in a heroic degree in this first dolor. The first was her practical acknowledgment of the sovereignty of God. There can be no doubt that this is the fundamental idea of all worship. There is no making terms with God. The obligations are all on one side. The completeness of our subjection is the perfection of our liberty. God is Master. There can be no questioning of justice or of goodness, where He is concerned. The essence of sanctity lies in the enthusiastic acknowledgment of this sovereignty. Our prerogative is in our responsibility. It is by this that we come to have royal hearts toward God. It is comparatively easy to say this, when the sun shines, and even to fancy that we believe it. But when darkness closes in, and sorrows give us no respite, and the doors of heaven seem barred to prayer, and human injustice makes us its victim, and human unkindness tramples on us when we are fallen, and human love betrays us,



and God's face is turned the other way, then it is hard, with whole-hearted sincerity and royal equanimity, to confess the absolute, irresponsible, majestic sovereignty of God, with no desire to tear the veil from off its mysterious reasons, with no shadow of desire to turn ever so little the other way the Will that seems riding us down so fiercely. We hold all from God. Who does not know that? All good comes from Him. All good must go to Him. His glory is the sole significance of all good. His will is law, and the sole law. All laws that are eternal are only so because He is eternal from whom they flow. They are manifestations of Him, not His obligations. It cannot be otherwise; for the nature of things, as we speak, what is it but the character of God? All this is very clear when the sun shines on it. Happy they whose natures are such that all through life there is a fixed sunbeam on this grand truth of God's sovereignty! But listen to the cries of anguish from Job, which make the rocks of Edom ring again, till the whole world hears. By the side of his magnificent patience whose clamorous submission God has bidden to pass into a proverb of sanctity, place the silent endurance of the Mother of God, her heart quelled, beautified, made glorious, well-nigh beatified, by the exulting sense of God's supreme sovereignty. There can be no magnificence among creatures equal to the perfection of obedience. God-made-man was so enamored of the loveliness of obedience, that He clung to it for thirty years, and left Himself barely three wherein to save the world, and, in order even to do that, only changed the outward form of His obedience. And this old wicked world,

why is it rocking to and fro, and getting weary of itself, but for the want of that spirit of subjection in which alone terrestrial beatitude consists?

Furthermore, in this dolor our Blessed Lady entered perfectly into all the dispositions of God about Jesus, herself, and us. We are often told in spiritual books that we ought to enter into the dispositions of God about us, or conform ourselves to the interior dispositions of Jesus. Since the seventeenth century such language has become universal among spiritual writers, expressing an old truth in a new way, a way adapted to the change which has come over the modern mind. Let us try to affix a definite meaning to this language. Everybody has a certain way of looking at things, especially things which concern himself. He has a point of view peculiar to himself. This is the reason men can so seldom agree perfectly about the commonest things, hardly indeed about matters of fact; and this shows how intimate to a man is this private point of view, how much of himself is implicated in it, how it helps to fix and stereotype his character. Now, this point of view arises from a variety of causes, a man's own disposition, the dispositions of his parents, his early associations, the circumstances and localities of his youth; and, above all, his education. Nearly every family and household have mental peculiarities of their own, which others recognize and appreciate far more distinctly than themselves. The same is true of religious communities, of large cities, and finally of nations themselves. In this peculiarity we shall for the most part find that the weaknesses and unworthinesses of our character intrench themselves. There



is a necessity of littleness in all peculiar spirit, whether it be family spirit, party spirit, community spirit, or national spirit. In the case of the individual there is a necessity of selfishness. It is from our own point of view that we are able to take magnified views of self: it is that which supports our vanity, and make it seem reasonable and true; it is that which is the standard whereby we judge others; it is that out of which all misunderstandings come. It is plain therefore that, in the work of the spiritual life, this stronghold has, if not to be destroyed,—and destruction is a rare work in holiness,—at least to be taken, sacked, and garrisoned afresh. How is this to be done?

Let us turn from ourselves to God. God also has His point of view. In Him it is essentially true. He has His view of the world, of the vicissitudes of the Church, of certain maxims of life, of vocations, of duties, of sins. He intends each of us for a particular work, and gives us the number and the kind of graces requisite to fit us for that work. He gives us light up to a given point and no further, grace in certain quantity and not beyond, and of one sort, not of another. He has dispositions about us, both with reference to our natural characters, and to our supernatural correspondence to His grace. He has certain dispositions with regard to our sanctity. This is the foundation upon which all spiritual direction rests. It is of immense importance to us to know what God's particular dispositions are about ourselves; and these are chiefly discernible in the operations of grace in our souls. But we ourselves cannot see these operations,

nor pass any safe judgment upon them, at least in the long-run, because of the disturbing force of self-love. Hence we put ourselves under the guidance of others, of men who have a particular gift in them because of their priestly character, and whose prayers for light God will answer very specially, in reward of our obedience and in aid of their responsibilities.

When we come to know God's dispositions about us,—and many of them, the most important, we may know at once, because they are general, and follow from His being God, then the next step is to enter into them, that is, to banish from our minds our own corresponding dispositions, and put His in their place. This is not done all at once, but by degrees. Gradually, first in one thing, then in another, we come to take God's views of things. We look at them from His point of view, either forgetful or disdainful of our own. It is His interests, or the supernatural principles He has infused into us, or the disclosures He has made to us of His will, which regulate this point of view, and not our own likings and dislikings, our natural tastes or acquired character. This emancipates us from the littleness of family, from the littleness of community, from the littleness of country, but, above all, from the littleness of self. The work implies nothing less than a complete inward revolution. It makes the new man. It is the similitude of Jesus. It is the mystical death of self. But there are seasons of fearful struggle to go through, before we reach the goal. It is a long, an arduous transformation, with many digressions, many wilful retrograde movements, many dull times of stupefied cowardice. There are