

In speaking of the peculiarities of this dolor, we have already seen how horror at the sight and sound of sin was united in our Lady's soul with the most inexpressible tenderness for sinners. But in our meditations we must remember to assign it its proper place among her dispositions. It has only been for the convenience of meditation that we have, throughout, treated separately two things which in reality are never disunited, the peculiarities of each dolor, and our Lady's dispositions under it. They both grow on the same stalk, and are often the same blossoms with different names.

There was yet another disposition of our Blessed Mother in this dolor, which was an effect of her eminent sanctity. In the breadth of the sorrow which lay heavily upon her, filled in, as we might have supposed it would have been, with a multitude of figures, she saw nothing in the point of her soul but God only. In that light, all secondary causes vanished. They were submerged in her single view of the First Cause. There was no Pilate, no Herod, no Annas, no Caiaphas; but only God, with His irresistibly sweet will streaming out of Him, and filling up every nook and corner where else perhaps some human agency might have been visible. If the secondary causes were there at all, they were far in the background, with the soft golden haze of God's merciful intentions upon them, or else behind the mist which His light and heat always raise when they beat full upon the earth. It is this grand singleness of vision after which the saints are perpetually striving, and to which they hardly attain, even amid the many wonders of

their holiness, at the end of a long life of ascetic straining and supernatural trial. It was a grace which Mary started with, and had always exercised; and, in this fourth dolor, it underwent an especial trial, because the sorrow had so much more of an external life, and was produced by such a far greater crowd of outward agents and circumstances than any of her others had been. If all exercises of all virtues were heroic in her, there were many times in which they went beyond heroic, and were godlike. So now, in this single vision of God only, there was a shadow of His blessed and eternal occupation with Himself, which belongs to Him who can have no end but His own adorable Self. What wonder so much sweetness, so much gentleness, so much patience, so much conformity, so much tender love of sinners, so much inexplicable outpouring of love upon Jesus, came from a grace which had its root so deep down and so high up in the mountain of God Himself!

This fourth dolor gives us also many lessons for ourselves. All the dolours have led us through strange realities; for it is the way of sorrow, above all other things in human life, even more than love, to make the things which lie around it peculiarly solid. But in this dolor our realities grow more real. They gain a new reality from being integral parts of that last tremendous drama in which the salvation of the world was accomplished at an incalculable cost of pain, and shame, and agony. The three fountains of the Sacred Humanity were drawn dry by the exactions of most merciful justice for the sins of men. In His Body the abyss of pain was emptied, in His Mind all the possi-



bilities of shame, in His Soul the depths of intellectual and moral agony. We have seen Mary's sufferings almost pass into His, and His revert to her. Have we no participation in this reality? Yes! one, out of which the hot springs of devotion ought to be flowing always. We ourselves were part of our Mother's dolors, because we were an actual part of our Saviour's Passion. Thus they cease to be mere matters of history to us. They are not simple devotions, which attract us because they are so touching. They are not only a beautiful scriptural pathos, enhancing at every turn the lovely mysteries of the Incarnation, and clothing with fresh interest that which already kindles our faith and fascinates our love. We ourselves are part of them. We made ourselves felt in them. We were agents then, not simply spectators now. There is guilt attaching to us; and the sorrow which comes of guilt and shame is another thing from that which comes of gratuitous pity or affectionate compassion. It tells differently on our intercourse with our Blessed Mother. It changes our position. It makes our devotion part of our penance, instead of a free sentiment of our own religious choice or pious fancy. There are some devotions into which taste may lead us while we worship; but this is one in which justice is concerned, and into which duties flow. Forgiven love knows what it has to do. The dear Magdalen stands up forever in the Church to tell us that we must love much to whom much has been forgiven. We were cruel to our Mother; and, when we had wounded her, and the weapon was yet in our hands, she pressed us to her bosom. Unmelted, we wreaked

wrong after wrong upon her, and she paid us back love—fresh love, always love—for every unkindly wrong. Seven times we went into her heart to hurt her. Seven times we took part in her chief mysteries of grief. Seven times we turned against her, when she was loving us as never mother loved before. But seventy-times seven would not nearly express the sum of graces which she has obtained for our barren and thankless souls. Ah! if we have been realities to her in those days of her dolors, is it not the least we can do to let her dolors now be realities to us?

Every morning of life we begin anew. We go forth from our doors to encounter a new day on its passage to eternity. It has much to say to us, and we to it; and it carries its tale to God at sunset, and its word is believed, and its message remembered till the doom. Would it not be an unproductive day in which we did not meet our Lord? For is not that the very meaning of our lives? If the day is meant for the sun to shine, it is but half a day, or rather it is night, if only the material sun shall shine, and the Sun of justice also rise not on us with health upon His wings. We go out to meet Jesus in every action of the day; but we require this fourth dolor to admonish us that we must rarely expect to meet Him except with a Cross, and that a new one. When we are in sorrow, He Himself "draws near and goes with" us, as He did with the disciples on the road to Emmaus. That is the privilege of sorrow. It is an attraction to our dearest Lord which He can seldom resist. Provided we seek not other comfort, He is sure to draw near and comfort us Himself. Oh, if unwary souls did but



know the graces which they miss by telling their griefs and letting their fellow-creatures console them, how saints would multiply in the Church of God! We read the lives of holy persons, and wonder how ever they can have attained to such a pitch of union with God, little suspecting all the while that we have had sorrow enough to carry us further still than that, only we would not wait for Jesus; and, if we will not let Him have the first word, He may perchance send His angels to fulfil our consolation, but He will not come Himself. But when we take the initiative, when we ourselves go out to meet Him, and we do so by our promises in prayer, by our open profession of piety, by our ecclesiastical vocation, by our religious profession, by the works of mercy to which we have now by usage committed ourselves, then it is always with the Cross that we encounter Him. Why, then, are we so amazed when crosses come? When it has happened thus so often, do we not see that it is a law, a law of the kingdom of grace, and that not to perceive it is to lose half its blessing, by missing the promptitude of obedience? We lay ourselves in the arms of our heavenly Father, knowing not what is to come, only that much is to come, more than without Him we could by possibility bear; let us lie still now that we are there, and not be surprised into retracting the offerings we once have made. What cross we shall meet to-day we know not: sometimes we cannot guess. But we know that if we meet Jesus we shall meet a cross, and evening will find us with the burden on our backs. Only let us remember this invariable peculiarity of these divine encounters, and then, if we

are reverently wary in making promises, we shall also be reverently firm in keeping our resolutions.

Some men meet Him, and turn away. Some see Him far off, and turn down another road. Some come close up, and leap down the precipice at the side, as if He were a destroying angel blocking up the way. Some pass by, pretending they do not know Him. He has been walking cross-laden in thousands of earth's roads to-day; but He has had a few honest greetings. Faith and love have made some men too timid to pass Him or avoid Him, but they have expostulated with Him about the cross, and have wept out loud when He persisted. Some follow in the sullenness of servile obedience, and drag their cross, and it jolts upon the stones, and hurts them all the more, and they fall, but their falls are not in union with those three of His upon the old Way of the Cross. Few kneel down with the alacrity of a glad surprise, and kiss His feet, and take the cross off His back, and shoulder it almost playfully, and walk by His side, singing psalms with Him, and smiling when they totter beneath the load. But oh! the beauty of that day's sunset to such as these! They "constrain Him, saying, Stay with us, because it is toward evening and the day is now far spent. And He goes in with them." This is what we should do. Can we do it? No! but we can try, and then He will do it in us. But He *meets* us with the Cross. This implies much. It implies that we must turn back from our own road, and that all the way we went till we met Him was but waste of strength and fruitless travelling. We can only carry our crosses



one way, and that is heavenward. They keep our faces in that direction. They push us up hill; down hill they would prostrate us, and fall heavily upon us, and kill us. All the faces of cross-carriers are turned one way. The end, which is meant to go into the earth, points to the earth: the cross of the cross looks over our shoulders into heaven, and rights itself there, however unsteady we may be, like the needle always trembling in reverent fidelity toward the Pole. So let us not miss our opportunity, but take up our cross at once, and turn round and follow Him; for so only shall we fall into the Procession of the Predestinate.

But this dolor tells us more still. It teaches us that long rest is the ground in front of great crosses. Unusual crosses follow unusual quiet. The greater the peace now, the greater the cross presently. This is one of those lessons which every one knows and no one remembers. Out of three-and-thirty years, twenty-one ran out between the last dolor and the Passion. How often does the same thing happen to ourselves! Partly it is that God gives us a breathing-time that we may make the most of our past graces, and so gain new strength and collect ourselves for higher achievements. Partly it is that the past graces, in which lie prophecies and preparations of grace yet to come, require time to develop themselves and become established in the soul. Partly also the cross comes at the end of these quiet times in order to consolidate their graces, to acquire a permanent possession of them for the soul, and to crown them with the cross, which is the only reward on this side the grave. A grace un-

compressed, unfixed, unmatured by sorrow seems hardly yet our own, but a transitory thing which may or may not be realized. At best it is but income and not capital. The refinement of sorrow is the last process of grace. After that it becomes glory by the mere keeping. He who forgets that the cross is coming wastes his quiet. He misses the ends for which the calm was sent him, and renders himself less able to bear the cross when it comes than he would have been if he had prepared for it. It is in these long seasons of quiet that most of those serious mistakes in the spiritual life are made which have consequences almost irreparable. Sometimes we think we have attained the level of our intended grace, and therefore we persist in keeping upon it in spite of inspirations to higher things, resisting these as if they were temptations to evil, not attractions to good. We may thus mar the whole scheme of our sanctification. Sometimes we imagine our tranquility to arise from dulness, weariness, and want of fervor. We overlook the operations of grace which are going on in our souls beneath the surface of the apparent calm, and extricate ourselves by a fatal effort from the groove in which we were intended to run, and adopt a spiritual life after a type and fashion of our own. It is less unsafe to be without spiritual direction in times of growth, and trouble, and change, than in these long seasons of comparatively untempted peace. There could be no lukewarmness, no self-trust, no falling back, no idle loitering, if only we remembered that the seeming quiet was merely the hush before the coming of a greater cross. It would then be to



us at once a period of rest in God, and yet of ardent, tremulous, active preparation for a new and different manifestation of Him, which we know will break upon us like a storm, and be a serious trial of our worth.

This dolor also prepares us for another trial, which is by no means infrequent in the experience of the cross. We never seem to need our Blessed Lord's consoling presence and kind words more than when He has just loaded us with another cross. Nature groans under the burden, and becomes faint. If at the same moment our supernatural life becomes a cross to us also, how shall we bear it? Yet there are few of us who have not experienced this collision of an outward with an inward cross. We meet Jesus. He gives us our new cross without a word, even, so it seems, without a blessing. Often the expression of His Face says nothing. We are like servants with a master. We have simply to do His will, without any further directions than a sign. No confidence is imparted to us. No cheerful words of encouragement are uttered. There is no token that He is pleased or displeased with us, no token that we are doing Him a service in accepting this new cross, no token that He is other than indifferent whether we carry it or not. We have simply the material obedience to perform. He could not treat us otherwise if we were mere machines. Then, when this cold dry ceremony of imposing the new cross upon us is performed, sometimes He walks by our sides without looking at us or speaking a single word, as if we were slaves carrying His burden for Him and beneath His notice. Either He is occupied with His own thoughts, or He considers

that any thing like communicativeness will inflate us, and make us forget ourselves. But sometimes the trial is worse than this. He makes over His load to us, and then, like an unburdened man, walks on lightly with a quicker step than we can follow, laden as we are. We cannot keep up with Him. We do not know if He meant us to try to do so. Perhaps He intended us to fall behind, into our proper place as inferiors. Perhaps He would consider it a liberty if we endeavored to overtake Him. On the other hand, He may think us wanting both in diligence and respect if we lag too far behind. Then he goes out of sight, and has not told us which road to take; and we come to a cross-road, and are in perplexity. Moreover, like a practised superior, He does all this so naturally, and with so much apparent unconcern, that we cannot divine whether it is meant to try us, or whether it is indifference, displeasure, or disdain. It comes at the very moment too when He has given us more work to do, and heavier weights to carry. Thus Mary met Him; the meeting was in silence; He passed on out of sight; they met again on Calvary. There is not a step in this journey which we have not sometimes to take. It is a peculiar trial, for which there is no possible preparation but love. The more we love Jesus, the more confidence shall we feel in His love of us; and while our humility will not be surprised by any show of indifference, when something far worse than that is merited by our vileness, our love will enable us to go on with a quiet suffering cheerfulness, convinced that the love of His Heart and the look of His face are telling different tales.



We must also be prepared to find that one cross leads to another, and little crosses to great ones. For the most part crosses do not come single. They meet each other in our souls, as if it were at a given moment and on some previous understanding. Sometimes, especially after seasons of long tranquility and the apparent inaction of grace, we suddenly pass into a region of crosses, just as the earth traverses a region of shooting stars at certain periods of the year. Then crosses follow each other in rapid succession, now one at a time, now two together, now two or three at once, so that we can hardly stand upright. Sometimes there is a storm of crosses driving right in our faces like vehement slanting hail, pelting so pitilessly that we can hardly make any way at all, or at least we have all the miserable feeling of making none. Sometimes they come upon us from behind, and if we are walking carelessly we stumble and fall; and, alas! who does not know that a fall with a cross on our shoulders, though it seems so much more pardonable, always hurts us far more grievously than a fall without one? It is the cruelest law of the spiritual life.

Some men have one lifelong cross to carry, and other crosses do not appear to be added to it. But even then it is much the same as if there were new crosses; for the burden is not equable. Sometimes the road is rougher; sometimes the day is hotter; sometimes we are ourselves unwell, and timorous, and weak; sometimes also the cross, by a sort of miracle, causelessly so far as we can judge, grows far heavier, and galls us as it never did before, and, the reason be-

ing hidden, the remedy is hidden also. This lifelong cross, even when most equable, and unaccompanied by other crosses, is the hardest of all trials to bear. There is so much mutability in our nature, that even a change of punishment from sharp to sharper is in effect a relaxation. The satisfaction of the change is a greater good to our humanity than the increased severity of the pain is an evil. The dreadful thing to nature is to be tied down to a persevering uniformity. It is in this that the secret heroism of vows resides. Who has not felt relief in illness, when the pain has changed from one limb to another? So is it, and still more, with the sufferings of the soul. He who carries one cross for years, and carries it to his grave, must either be one of God's hidden saints, or must lie in low attainments as near to lukewarmness as is compatible with the salvation of his soul.

But sometimes the one lifelong cross remains always upon our shoulders, only as the abiding foundation of a very edifice of crosses, which God is forever building up, and pulling down, and building up again, upon the old enduring cross, without ever shifting that. There are some souls God seems always to be experimenting upon, and only experimenting, and experimenting to the last; but it is real work. This unites the two sufferings of monotony and change together. All the epochs of life are variously represented by the transitory heaps of crosses, while the abiding cross is the deep undertone of the whole of life. Such men walk the world, not merely as memorials to be wondered at, but as living fountains of devotion to all who see them. They are men of



power; for it is to the secret intercessions of such souls that all spiritual renewals on the earth are owing. Not unfrequently they carry for a while the whole Church upon the top of their cross. They are monuments of God's love; for in them we see in fullest revelation the grand truth, which is true also in its measure of the very lowest of ourselves, that the cross is never only a chastisement, but always a reward as well, and the plentifulness of God's love to each created soul is measured by the abundance of its crosses.

There is one more lesson yet to be learned from this dolor. Jesus and Mary are both going one way: could it be any other way than the road to heaven? Yet the road they were travelling led over Calvary. Hence we infer that no one's face is toward heaven when it is not toward Calvary. In life, whether we know it or not, we are always travelling to a sorrow. At the next turn of the road stands an unforeseen death of some one whom we love, or the breaking up of a circle in which it seems as if our very existence were bound up, or some disgrace which we never reckoned on. We look on to something next summer, and it is a joy to us to think of the good and happy work we then shall do, and there is a bed of sickness lurking in the way, and the summer's sun will only shine upon our useless and querulous convalescence. The long nights of winter are to find us at an occupation which we only regret we have delayed so long, because it is so good, so full of God's glory, so full of our own sanctification. But before the shortest day has come, all life has shifted. Cir-

cumstances are changed. The good would be good no longer, or the means of doing it have slipped from our hands. The loss of the opportunity is an unhappiness to us; the delay by which we lost it is greater still. A good which can be done now can never be done afterward. If it will be good to-morrow, then be sure it is not good to-day. God changes things when He changes times. This is the reason why unpunctual, procrastinating men are never holy, seldom affectionate, always selfish. So life slips by, and we manufacture our own sorrows by the want of promptitude. Devotion only means one thing in theology, and that one thing is promptitude.

Sometimes, however, we do see the sorrow toward which we are travelling. Perhaps this is the most common case of the two. We know that an illness is almost sure to return at a particular season of the year. Or we have an inevitable work to do, and the experience of the past assures us that the suffering, which will come of it, is as inevitable as the work itself. Or we are bending over a sister or a child, in whom insidious consumption is wearily eating its fatal way. A loss we cannot bear to think of is thus continually impending. It may be next spring, or it may be next spring year. Or it may be when the leaf falls this year, or when it falls two years hence. Or a sharp frost may nip the flower this winter, or the bloodvessel may break in sleep to-night. A son perhaps has wound his whole manliness around an aged widowed mother; or a daughter so clings to a failing father, that she has never in her whole life been able to undomesticate herself from the hearth of her child-



hood, and to the last has remained more daughter than wife, more daughter than mother. In both cases the son and the daughter have before them an inevitable sorrow, inevitable if they live themselves, inevitable in the course of nature. It is only a work of time, and of no long time. In the majority of instances these foreseen sorrows are more sanctifying than the unforeseen. Life grows softer under the shadow, heavenlier during the eclipse of earth. It suits better with the common laws of grace, and is a less perilous process than the terrible surprises which make saints, as money is minted, by one desperate blow, one sharp pressure when hot from the fire. Oh, happy are they, did they but know it, who have a visible sorrow always waiting them a little farther on the road! So has the path been garnished of by far the greatest number of the predestinate.

Thus the fourth dolor contains within itself the whole science and mystery of cross-bearing. This is the wisdom we learn from the picture while we gaze on Mary in the streets of the cruel Jerusalem. The eye of her soul sees the fair-haired Boy in the temple, whom she sought more than twenty years ago, while her bodily eye is fixed on the pale and bleeding and earth-stained Man, going with sound of trumpet and the chorus of earth's curses to His doom. And shall we, who gave Him that heavy cross to bear, and kept weighting it after we had given it, as if our cruelty were not satisfied, refuse to bear the sweet grace-giving crosses which He binds on us, so little too as, when we have borne them for a while, we are forced to confess they are? Oh, no! let us do now as Mary

did then,—look at Him who is on the road before us, and see how the beauty of the Sacred Heart sits with meek majesty and attractive love on the woe-worn disfigured Countenance.