

## CHAPTER VI.

## THE FIFTH DOLOR.

## THE CRUCIFIXION.

THE world is a mystery. Life, time, death, doubt, good and evil, and the uncertainty which hangs about our eternal lot, are all mysteries. They lie burning on the heart at times. But the Crucifix is the meaning of them, the solution of them all. It puts the question, and answers it as well. It is the reading of all riddles, the certainty of all doubts, and the centre of all faiths, the fountain of all hopes, the symbol of all loves. It reveals man to himself, and God to man. It holds a light to time that it may look into eternity and be reassured. It is a sweet sight to look upon in our times of joy; for it makes the joy tender without reproving it, and elevates without straining it. In sorrow there is no sight like it. It draws forth our tears, and makes them fall faster, and so softly that they become sweeter than very smiles. It gives light in the darkness, and the silence of its preaching is always eloquent, and death is life in the face of that grave earnest of eternal life. The Crucifix is always the same, yet ever varying its expression so as to be to us in all our moods just what we most want and it is best for us to have. No wonder saints have hung over their Crucifixes in such trances of contented love.

But Mary is a part of the reality of this symbol. The Mother and the Apostle stand, as it were, through all ages at the foot of the Crucifix, symbols themselves of the great mystery, of the sole true religion, of what God has done for the world which He created. As we cannot think of the Child at Bethlehem without His Mother, so neither will the Gospel let us picture to ourselves the Man on Calvary without His Mother also. Jesus and Mary were always one; but there was a peculiar union between them on Calvary. It is to this union we now come, Mary's fifth dolor, the Crucifixion.

The Way of the Cross was ended, and the summit of the mount has been attained a little before the hour of noon. If tradition speaks truly, it was a memorial place even then, fit to be a world's sanctuary; for it was said to be the site of Adam's grave, the spot where he rested when the mercy of God accepted and closed his nine hundred years of heroic penance. Close by was the city of David, which was rather the city of God, the centre of so much wonderful history, the object of so much pathetic divine love. The scene which was now to be enacted there would uncrown the queenly city; but only to crown, with a far more glorious crown of light, and hope, and truth, and beauty, every city of the world where Christ Crucified should be preached and the Blessed Sacrament should dwell. It was but a little while, an hour perhaps, since the last dolor; so that only four hours have elapsed between the fourth dolor and the consummation of the fifth. Yet in sorrow and in sanctification it is a longer epoch than the eighteen years of

Nazareth. In nothing is it more true, than in our sanctification, that with God a thousand years are but one day. These hours were filled with mysteries so divine, with realities so thrilling, that the lapse of time is hardly an element in the agony of Mary's soul. She comes to the Crucifixion a greater marvel of grace, a greater miracle of suffering, than when an hour ago she had met the cross-laden Jesus at the corner of the street.

They have stripped Him of His vestments, from the shame of which stripping His Human Nature shrank inexpressibly. To His Mother the indignity was a torture in itself, and the unveiled sight of Her Son's Heart the while was a horror and a woe words cannot tell. They have laid Him on the Cross, a harder bed than the Crib of Bethlehem in which He first was laid. He gives Himself into their hands with as much docility as a weary child whom his mother is gently preparing for his rest. It seems, and it really was so, as if it was His own will, rather than theirs, which was being fulfilled. Beautiful in His disfigurement, venerable in His shame, the Everlasting God lay upon the Cross, with His eyes gently fixed on heaven. Never, Mary thought, had He looked more worshipful, more manifestly God, than now when he lay outstretched there, a powerless but willing victim; and she worshipped Him with profoundest adoration. The executioners now lay His right arm and hand out upon the Cross. They apply the rough nail to the palm of His Hand, the Hand out of which the world's graces flow, and the first dull knock of the hammer is heard in the silence. The trembling of excessive pain

passes over His sacred limbs, but does not dislodge the sweet expression from His eyes. Now blow follows blow, and is echoed faintly from somewhere. The Magdalen and John hold their ears; for the sound is unendurable: it is worse than if the iron hammer were falling on their living hearts. Mary hears it all. The hammer is falling upon her living heart; for her love had long since been dead to self, and only lived in Him. She looked upward to heaven. She could not speak. Words would have said nothing. The Father alone understood the offering of that heart, now broken so many times. To her the Nailing was not one action. Each knock was a separate martyrdom. The hammer played upon her heart as the hand of the musician changefully presses the keys of his instrument.

The Right Hand is nailed to the Cross. The Left will not reach. Either they have miscalculated in the hole they have drilled to facilitate the passage of the nail, or else the Body has contracted through agony. Fearful was the scene which now ensued, as the saints describe it to us in their revelations. The executioners pulled the left arm with all their force; still it would not reach. They knelt against His ribs, which were distinctly heard to crack, though not to break, beneath the violent pressure, and, dislocating His arm, they succeeded in stretching the Hand to the place. Not more than a gentle sigh could be wrung from Jesus, and the sweet expression in His eyes dwelt there still. But to Mary,—what imagination can reach the horror of that sight, of that sound, to her? Oh, there was more grief in them than has gone to the

making of all the saints that have ever yet been canonized! Again the dull blows of the hammer commence, changing their sounds according as it was flesh and muscle, or the hard wood, through which the nail was driving its cruel way. His legs are stretched out also by violence; one Foot is crossed upon another, those Feet which have so often been sore and weary with journeying after souls; and through the solid mass of shrinking muscles the nail is driven, slowly and with unutterable agony, because of the unsteadiness of the Feet in that position. It is useless to speak of the Mother; it is idle to compassionate her. Our compassion can reach no way, in comparison of the terrible excess of her agony. But God held His creature up, and she lived on.

Now the Cross is lifted off from the ground, with Jesus lying on it, the same sweet expression in His eyes, and is carried near to the hole which they have dug to receive the foot. They then fasten ropes to it, and, edging it to the brink of the hole, they begin to rear it perpendicularly by means of the ropes. When it is raised almost straight up, they work the foot of it gradually over the edge of the cavity until it jumps into its socket with a vehement bound, which dislocates every bone, and nearly tears the Body from the nails. Indeed, some contemplatives mention a rope fastened round His waist with such cruel tightness that it was actually hidden in the flesh, to hinder His Body from detaching itself from the Cross. So one horror outstrips another, searching out with fiery thrills, like the vibrations of an earthquake, all the supernatural capabilities of suffering, which lay like

abysses in the Mother's ruined heart. Let us not compare her woe to any other. It stands by itself. We may look at it and weep over it in love, in love which is suffering as well. But we dare not make any commentary on it. Sorrowful Mother! Blessed be the Most Holy Trinity for the miracles of grace wrought in thee at that tremendous hour!

Earth trembled to its very centre. Inanimate things shuddered as if they had intelligence. The rocks were split around, precipices cloven all along the most distant shores of the Mediterranean, and the mystical veil of the temple rent in twain by the agitation of the earth, as if a hand had done it. At that moment,—so one revelation tells us—there rose up from the temple-courts a long wailing blast of trumpets, to mark the offering of the noonday sacrifice, and they that blew the trumpets knew not how, that day, they rang in heaven as the noonday trumpets never rang before. Darkness began to creep over the earth; for the satellite of earth might well eclipse the material sun, when the earth itself was thus eclipsing the Sun of justice, the Eternal Light of the Father. The animals sought coverts where they might hide. The songs of the birds were hushed in the gardens beneath. Horror came over the souls of men, and the beginnings of grace, like the first uncertain advances of the stealthy dawn, came into many hearts out of that sympathetic darkness. A moment was an age when men were environed by such mysteries as these.

The first hour of the three begins,—the three hours that were such parallels to the three days when she was seeking her lost Boy. In the darkness she has

come close up to the Cross; for others fell away, as the panic simultaneously infected them. There is a faith in the Jews, upon which this fear can readily graft itself. But the executioners are hardened, and the Roman soldiers were not wont to tremble in the darkness. Near to the Cross, by the glimmering light, they are diceing for His garments. The coarse words and rude jests pierced the Mother's heart; for, as we have said before, it belonged to her perfection that her grief absorbed nothing. Every thing told upon her. Every thing made its own wound, and occupied her, as if itself were the sole suffering, the exclusively aggravating circumstance. She saw those garments—those relics, which were beyond all price the world could give—in the hands of miserable sinners, who would sacrilegiously clothe themselves therewith. For thirty years they had grown with our Lord's growth, and had not been worn by use,—renewing that miracle which Moses mentions in Deuteronomy, that, through all the forty years of the desert, the garments of the Jews were not “worn out, neither the shoes of their feet consumed with age.” Now sinners were to wear them, and to carry them into unknown haunts of drunkenness and sin. Yet what was it but a type? The whole of an unclean world was to clothe itself in the beautiful justice of her Son. Sinners were to wear His virtues, to merit by His merits, to satisfy in His satisfactions, and to draw, at will, from the wells of His Precious Blood. As Jacob had been blessed in Esau's clothing, so should all mankind be blessed in the garments of their elder Brother.

Then there was the seamless tunic she herself had wrought for Him. The unity of His Church was figured there. She saw them cast lots for it. She marked to whom it had fallen. One of her first loving duties to the Church will be to recover it for the faithful as a relic. Then it was that the history of the Church rose before her. Every schism, which ever should afflict the mystical Body of her Son, was like a new rent in her suffering heart. Every heresy, every quarrel, every unseemly sin against unity, came to her with keenest anguish, there on Calvary, with the living Sacrifice being actually offered, and the unity of His Church being bought with so terrible a price. All this bitterness filled her soul, without distracting her from Jesus for a single moment. As holy pontiffs, with hearts broken by the wrongs and distresses of the Church, have been all engrossed by them, yet never for an instant lost their interior union with Jesus, so much more was it with His Mother now. It was on Calvary she felt all this with an especial feeling, as it is in Lent, and Passiontide, and in devotion to the Passion, that we learn to love the Church with such sensitive loyalty.

Fresh fountains of grief were opened to her in the fixing of the title to the Cross. It had come from Pilate, and a ladder was set up against the Cross, and the title nailed above our Saviour's Head. Every blow of the hammer was unutterable torture to Him, torture which had a fearful echo also in the Mother's heart. Nor was the title itself without power to extend and rouse her suffering. The sight of the Holy Name blazoned there in shame to all the world,—the

Name, which to her was sweeter than any music, more fragrant than any perfume,—this was in itself a sorrow. The name of Nazareth, also, how it brought back the past, surrounding the Cross, in that dim air, with beautiful associations and marvellous contrasts. Everywhere in the Passion Bethlehem and Nazareth were making themselves felt, and seen, and heard, and always eliciting new sorrow from the inexhaustible depths of the Mother's heart. If He was a king, it was a strange throne on which His people had placed Him. Why did they not acknowledge Him to be their king? Why did they wait for a Roman stranger to tell it them as if in scorn? Why did they not let Him rule in their hearts? Ah! poor people! how much happier would it be for themselves, how many sins would be hindered, how many souls saved, how much glory gained for God! King of the Jews! would that it were so! Yet it was really so. But a king rejected, disowned, deposed, put to death! What a load lay upon her heart at that moment! It was the load of self-invoked curses, which was to press to the ground that poor regicide people. She would have borne all her seven dolours over again to abolish that curse, and reinstate them, as of old, in the predilection of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It was too late. They had had their day. They had filled up the measure of their iniquity. It rose to the brim that very morning, and the breaking of Mary's heart was a portion of their iniquity. But at least over her heart Jesus was acknowledged king, and reigned supreme. So was it with the dear Magdalen and the ardent John; and, as she thought of this, she looked

upon them with a very glory of exceeding love. Is it that Jesus breaks the hearts over which He reigns, or that He comes of special choice to reign in broken hearts? But as the sense passed over her of what it was to have Jesus for a king,—of the undisputed reign which by His own grace He exercised over her sinless heart,—of the vastness of that heart, far exceeding by his own bounty the grand empire of the angels or the multitudinous perfections of the saints,—and of the endless reign which He would have in that beautiful "ivory palace" of hers which made Him so glad,—her love burst out afresh upon Him, as if the dikes of ocean had given away, and the continents were being flooded with its waters, and every gush of love was at the same time an exquisite gush of pain.

She had enough of occupation in herself. But sorrow widens great hearts, just as it contracts little ones. She had taken to herself the thieves for sons. She was greedy of children. She felt the value of them then, in the same way in which we know the value of a friend when we are losing him. His dead face looks it into us, and means more than his living expression did. She has wrestled in prayer for those two malefactors, and God has given her to see the work of grace beginning in the heart of one of them. Does this content her? Yes! with that peculiar contentment which comes of answered prayer, that is to say, she became more covetous because of what she had not. She counted that only for a beginning. She pleaded, she insisted. One would have thought such prayer at such a time resistless. It is not Heaven that resists. Graces descend from above like

flights of angels to the heart of the impenitent thief. They fluttered there. They sang for entrance. They waited. They pecked at the heart of flesh. They made it bleed with pain, with terror, with remorse. But it was its own master. It would not open. So near Jesus, and to be lost! It might well be incredible to Mary. Yet so it was. The thief matched his hardness against her sweetness, and prevailed. Mary may not be queen of any heart where Jesus is not already king. But, oh, the unutterable anguish to her of this impenitence! His face so near the Face of Jesus, the sighs of the spotless victim dwelling in his ear as silence dwells in the mountains, the very Breath of the Incarnate God reaching to him, the Precious Blood strewn all around him, like an overflow of waste water, as if there was more than men knew what to do with, and in the midst of all this to be damned, to commute the hot strangling throes of that crucifixion for everlasting fire, to be detached by his own will from the very side of the Crucifix, and the next moment to become a part of hopeless hell! Mary saw his eternity before her as in a vista. She took in at a glance the peculiar horror of his case. There came a sigh out of her heart at the loss of this poor wretched son, which had sorrow enough in it to repair the outraged majesty of God, but not enough to soften the sinner's heart.

Such were the outward, or rather let us call them the official, occupations of Mary during the first hour upon the Cross. Her inmost occupation, and yet outward also, was that which was above her, overshadowing her in the darkness, and felt more vividly even

than if it had been clearly seen,—Jesus hanging upon the Cross! As our guardian angels are ever by our sides, engrossed with a thousand invisible ministries of love, and yet all the while see God, and in that one beatifying sight are utterly immersed, so was it with Mary upon Calvary. While she seemed an attentive witness and listener of the men dividing our Lord's garments among them, and of the nailing of the title to the Cross, or appeared to be occupied with the conversion of the thieves, she did all those things, as the saints do things, in ecstasy, with perfect attention and faultless accuracy, and yet far withdrawn into the presence of God and hidden in His light. A whole hour went by. Jesus was silent. His Blood was on fire with pain. His Body began to depend from the Cross, as if the nails barely held it. The Blood was trickling down the wood all the while. He was growing whiter and whiter. Every moment of that agony was an act of worship fully worthy of God Himself. He was holding ineffable communion with the Father. Mysteries, exceeding all mysteries that had ever been on earth, were going on in His Heart, which was alternately contracted and dilated with agony too awful for humanity to bear without miraculous support. It had divine support; but divine consolation was carefully kept apart. The interior of that Heart was clearly disclosed to the Mother's inward eye, and her heart participated in its sufferings. She, too, needed a miracle to prolong her life, and the miracle was worked. But with the same peculiarity. From her, also, all consolation was kept away. And so one hour passed, and grace had created many worlds of sanc-

tity, as the laden minutes went slowly by, one by one, then slower and slower, like the pulses of a clock at midnight when we are ill, beating sensibly slower to reproach us for our impatient listening.

The second hour began. The darkness deepened, and there were fewer persons round the Cross. No diceing now, no disturbance of nailing the title to the Cross. All was as silent as a sanctuary. Then Jesus spoke. It seemed as if He had been holding secret converse with the Father, and He had come to a point when He could keep silence no longer. It sounded as if He had been pleading for sinners, and the Father had said that the sin of His Crucifixion was too great to be forgiven. To our human ears the word has that significance. It certainly came out of some depth, out of something which had been going on before, either His own thoughts, or the intensity of his pain, or a colloquy with the Father. "Father! forgive them; for they know not what they do!" Beautiful, unending prayer, true of all sins and of all sinners in every time! They know not what they do. No one knows what he does when he sins. It is his very knowledge that the malice of sin is past his comprehension which is a great part of the malice of his sin. Beautiful prayer also, because it discloses the characteristic devotion of our dearest Lord! When He breaks the silence, it is not about His Mother, or the apostles, or a word of comfort to that affectionate forlorn Magdalen, whom He loved so fondly. It is for sinners, for the worst of them, for His personal enemies, for those who crucified Him, for those who had been yelling after Him in the streets, and loading Him

with the uttermost indignities. It is as if at Nazareth He might seem to love His Mother more than all the world beside, but that now on Calvary, when his agony had brought out the deepest realities and the last disclosures of His Sacred Heart, it was found that His chief devotion was to sinners. Was Mary hurt by this appearance? Was it a fresh dolor that He had not thought first of her? Oh, no! Mary had no self on Calvary. It could not have lived there. Had her heart cried out at the same moment with our Lord's, it would have uttered the same prayer, and in like words would have unburdened itself of that of which it was most full. But the word did draw forth new floods of sorrow. The very sound of His voice above her in the obscure eclipse melted her heart within her. The marvel of His uncomplaining silence was more pathetic now that He had spoken. Grief seemed to have reached its limits; but it had not. That word threw down the walls, laid a whole world of possible sorrow open to it, and poured the waters over it in an irresistible flood. The well-remembered tone pierced her like a spear. The very beauty of the word was anguish to her. Is it not often so that deathbed words are harrowing because they are so beautiful, so incomprehensibly full of love? Mary's broken heart enlarged itself, and took in the whole world, and bathed it in tears of love. To her that word was like a creative word. It made the Mother of God Mother of mercy also. Swifter than the passage of light, as that word was uttered, the mercy of Mary had thrown round the globe a mantle of light, beautifying its rough places, and giving lustre in the