

skulls that strew the faded herbage of the mount. They have sat down, because the delay was long. Or they have knelt to pray that the cross might pass from them. Foolish souls! that belongs to Gethsemane, not to Calvary. We must not put our beginnings where our end should be. Or the preparations frighten them, the digging of the fosse, the measuring of the breadth from hand to hand, done so carelessly as it seems to be, and yet a matter in which the least carelessness may be infinite torture, the repointing of those blunt nails, and then those cruel unnecessary flourishes of the hammer. Some shrink from stripping in the cold air, and have to be stripped almost by force. Some are terrified by the eclipse, which hides friends' faces and the consolations of creatures. Some cry out and jump up when the cold iron touches the palm of the first hand. Most fail then. Is it not better to go down from Calvary, in the honest confession of our cowardice, than to behave so weakly on the summit of that sacred hill? Oh, no! it is better far to stay. Better a reluctant crucifixion than none at all. Let us stand, if we can; if we cannot, let us be rolled about like logs, as if we had died of fright, and be nailed by force or in unconsciousness. Only let us be crucified; gracefully, if it may be, but ungracefully rather than not at all.

Why do so many fail? Because they are not silent. Endurance depends much on silence. Power escapes with words. It is only by the help of the grace of silence that the saints carry such heavy crosses. A cross for which we have received sympathy is far heavier than it was before, or it may be that the

sympathy has unnerved ourselves, so that the weight seems greater, and the wound in our shoulder sorer. Silence is the proper atmosphere of the cross, and secrecy its native climate. The best crosses are secret ones, and we may be silent under those that are not secret. Indeed, silence creates a sort of secrecy even in public. For at least we can hide how much we suffer, if we cannot hide altogether the fact that we are suffering. We can conceal how often we are almost at the point of sinking beneath our burden. We can keep to ourselves those individual peculiarities of sufferings which are far its sharpest points, and which feed the sympathy of others more than greater things can do. In some way or other human sympathy desecrates the operations of grace. It mingles a debasing element with that which is divine. The Holy Spirit withdraws from its company, because it is "of the earth, earthy." The Comforter gives His best consolations only to the inconsolable of earth. They who seek creatures first must be content with creatures; for they will not find God afterward, let them seek ever so much. They to whom God is not enough by Himself, but must have comforting creatures mixed with Him, will never find out their sad mistake; for to them God will never open those treasures which will show them how different He is from creatures. But all this is hard to nature. Nature never yet breathed freely on the top of Calvary. Men do not take their ease on mountain-heights. They hardly rest there, except to admire the magnificence of the view, because the breathing is so difficult. It is very hard to put away all consolation from ourselves.



Sympathy seems often to be just that which makes our pain endurable. Well, then, let us go down a step lower. Let us not put it away; but do not let us ask it. Let it find us out without our seeking. As the world goes, we shall not greatly peril what is divine in our sorrows by being simply passive about sympathy. But even this passiveness is hard. How should it be anything else but hard, when it is part of our crucifixion? It is Calvary's hardest lesson. Let us take it to ourselves, although we fear it; neither let us be cast down because we fear. Who ever did anything well which he had not first feared to do? What is there upon earth that is worth doing, which is not worth fearing also?

But there is a true consolation—deeply hidden, indeed, yet near at hand—in this putting away of human consolation. It is in the darkness of nature that we realize the vicinity of Jesus. It is in the absence of creatures that we are held up in the sensible embrace of the Creator. Creatures bring obscurity with them, wherever they intrude. They are forever in our way, intercepting graces, hiding God, defrauding us of spiritual consolations, making us languid and irritable. They so fill our senses that the inner senses of our souls are unable to act. We often wish our lives were more divine. But they are, in fact, much more divine than we believe. It is sorrow which reveals this to us. It comes like a shroud around us. By degrees our horizon narrows in, and our great world becomes a little world. Onward still it creeps: first one object disappears, and then another. We are growing less and less distracted. Our inward life is

more awake. Our soul gets strong. Now the line of darkness has touched Jerusalem itself. Even the consolations of the spiritual city have disappeared. The helmets of the Roman soldiers catch the light for a moment above the level of the cloud, as if they were floating away on a dark current. The greenness of the mount grows black. For a moment it blinds us; then, by degrees, the white Figure of Jesus comes out in the dim obscurity. We feel the warm Blood on our hands as we grasp the Cross. It is no apparition: it is life. We are with God, with our Creator, with our Saviour. He is all our own. The withdrawal of creatures has made Him so. But He has not come. He was always there,—always thus within our souls,—only He was overpowered with the false brightness of creatures. He comes out in the dark like the stars. The white moon of noonday does not allure us by its beauty; it enchants us only in the night: so it is the darkness of a spiritual Calvary which covers our souls with the soft shining of our beautiful Saviour.

But the couching of our spiritual sight is not the only operation which the senses of our soul undergo on Calvary. All souls are hard of hearing with respect to the sounds of the invisible world. The inner ear is opened upon Calvary. The sounds of Jerusalem travel up to us through the darkness, and perhaps the sounds of labor in the gardens near. But they rise up as admonitions rather than as distractions. They come to us softly and indistinctly, and do not jar with the silence of our endurance, or the low whisperings of prayer. Least of all do they muffle the clearness of our Saviour's words when He vouchsafes



to speak. Down below, how the world deafened us by its tumultuous noises, and jaded our spirits with its multiplicity of sounds! We knew that Jesus was at our sides, and yet we could not converse with Him. It was like trying to listen when the loud wheels are rattling harshly along the streets, when listening is no better than an unsuccessful strain, or a perplexed misunderstanding. The mere noise the world makes in its going so amazes us that it hinders our feet upon the road to heaven. It is only on Calvary that earth is subdued enough to make music with heaven; for it is there only that God is heard distinctly, while the low-laying world murmurs like a wind, a sound which is discordant nowhere, because it is rather the accompaniment of a sound than a sound itself.

We see but two things on Calvary, Jesus and Mary; and from each we learn a lesson, one about our own deaths, and one about the deaths of others. Jesus vouchsafes to teach us how to die. If He in His great hour would have His Mother by Him, how shall we dare to die without her? In all things must we imitate Jesus, although it be in a sphere so infinitely below Him. But most of all, it is of importance to us to imitate Him in His death. If it had been well, He would have loved to spare her that terrific scene, though she perhaps would have accounted her absence a cruel mercy. It was there, at that deathbed, that she became our Mother. There is surely not one of us into whose mouth faith does not many times a day put that universal prayer, the prayer of the pope and the peasant, of the doctor and the scholar, of the rich and the poor, of the religious and the secular, that the

Mother of God may assist us in the hour of death. But we must imbed this petition into all our prayers. Let us leave to God, without dictation or even wish, the time, and place, and manner of our death, so only that it be not an unprovided death, and above all things not unprovided with Mary. The hour of death is a thirsty time, and exhausts great graces. Unsuspected chasms open suddenly in the soul, and swallow up past years, old habits, and a thousand other things we can ill spare then. The devil reserves his worst weapons for the last. It is very terrible not to be able to die twice, lest the novelty get the better of us the first time,—and it is a tremendous stake. There are great sacraments for that hour, but not greater than are needed. Watch a dying man! See how absolutions sink swiftly into his dry soul, like summer-rain into the gaping ground. And yet the battle is still coming and going in his eyes. Let us have Mary. Whether she be there visibly or invisibly, whether she speak and work, or work without speaking, let it be an agreement of long standing, a pledge not to be broken, that she shall be present to conduct for us a ceremonial so difficult and yet of such unutterable import. It is worth while to spend a whole life in asking this, if only we gain the object of our petition at the last. What is a good life worth, if it be not crowned by a good death? Yet a good life is the nearest approach in our power to a good death. There have perhaps been comparatively few good deaths which have not come at the end of good lives. And those few, so all the believing world says, have been contrived by Mary. But a good life is the likeliest of



all things to bring her to our bedsides in that hour. A cross-bearing life is forever meeting Mary. At crucifixions she is present as it were officially. If Jesus would not die without her, she will love us all the more if we refuse to do so either. However long the agony has been, however troubled in spirit the poor passing soul, blessed above all the dead are those whose eyes Mary herself has closed!

Such is the lesson which Jesus teaches us about our own deaths. We learn one from Mary about the deaths of others. It is, that devotion for those in their last agony is a Mary-like devotion, and most acceptable to her Immaculate Heart. There is not a moment of day or night in which that dread pomp of dying is not going on. There are persons like ourselves, or better than ourselves, and whose friends have with reason loved them more than ever ours have loved us, who are now straitened in their agony, and whose eternal sight of God is trembling anxiously in the balance. Can any appeal to our charity be more piteously eloquent than this? When we think of all that Mary has done for each of those souls, those who are ceaselessly, momentarily fixing their eternity in death, when we call to mind the long train of graces which she has brought to every one of them, and consequently the yearning of her maternal heart for their final perseverance and everlasting salvation, we may form some idea of the gratefulness of this devotion to her. The deathbed is one of her peculiar spheres. She seems to exercise quite a particular jurisdiction over it. It is there that she so visibly co-operates with Jesus in the redemption of mankind. But she

seeks for us to co-operate with her also. She would fain draw our hearts with hers, our prayers to hers. Is she not the one Mother of us all? Are not the dying our brothers and our sisters in the sweet motherhood of Mary? The family is concerned. We must not coldly absent ourselves. We must assist in spirit at every death that is died the whole world over, deaths of heretics and heathens as well as Christians. For they, too, are our brothers and sisters; they have souls; they have eternities at stake; Mary has an interest in them. And their eternity is in more than double danger. How much more must they need prayers, who have no sacraments! How much darker must their closing scene be, where the full light of faith shines not! How much more earnest must be the prayers, when not ordinary grace, but a miracle of grace, must be impetrated for them! Alas! they will have none of our other gifts; at least, and affectionately in their own despite, they shall have our prayers. We must remember also that we too have to die. We shall one day lie in the same strait, and need unspeakably the same charitable prayers. The measure which we mete to others shall be measured to us again. This is the divine rule of retribution. Nothing will prepare a smoother deathbed for ourselves than a lifelong daily devotion to those who are daily dying. Mary assisted her Son to die in many mysterious ways. By His will, and in the satisfaction of her own maternal love, she has now assisted at the deathbeds of many millions. She has great experience by this time, if we might so speak, and is wonderfully skilled in the science of the last hour. By



prayerful thoughts, by pious practices, by frequent ejaculations, by the usages the Church has indulged, let us win a bright and gentle end for ourselves, by following Mary everywhere to the deathbeds she attends.

Such are the lessons we learn from the fifth dolor. The Crucifixion can never be rightly understood without Mary, because without her it is not truthfully represented. What a picture it is, the High Mass of the world's redemption, offered by Jesus to the Eternal Father, while the countless angels are the audience and the spectators! When the Host is elevated, the whole frame of inanimate nature trembles with terror and adoration, and earth darkens itself, which is to be a rubric it is to observe in the presence of Jesus for all ages. But what is Mary's part? Her Immaculate Heart is the living Altar-stone on which the Sacrifice is offered; it is the Server, the beatings of whose broken heart are the responses of the liturgy; it is the Thurible, in which the world's faith, the world's hope, the world's love, the world's worship, are being burnt like incense before the slain Lamb that taketh away the sins of the world; and, finally, the same Immaculate Heart is the Choir, the more than angelic Choir, of that tremendous Mass; for did not the silence of her beautiful sufferings sing unutterable, voiceless songs into the ravished ear of the Bleeding Host?

## CHAPTER VII.

## THE SIXTH DOLOR.

## THE TAKING DOWN FROM THE CROSS.

THE darkness of the eclipse had passed away, and the true shades of evening were beginning to fall. The Cross stood bare on Calvary against the light which the setting sun had left behind it in the west. The spectacle of the day was over, and the multitudes of the city were all gone, and the current of their thoughts diverted elsewhere. A few persons moved about on the top of the mount, who had been concerned with the taking down of Jesus from the Cross, or were bringing spices from the city to embalm Him. Mary sat at the foot of the Cross, with the dead Body of her Son lying across her lap. Is Bethlehem come back to thee, my Mother, and the days of the beautiful Childhood?

There are many varieties of human sorrow. It is difficult to compare them one with another; because each has its peculiarity, and each peculiarity has an eminence of suffering belonging to it, in which no other sorrow shares. Thus it may easily happen that a sorrow which in itself looks less than another may in reality be greater, because of the time at which it comes, or the circumstances under which it occurs, or the position which it occupies in a series of other