

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 death-beds 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

griefs. This is the case with the sixth dolor, the Taking down from the Cross. It is the grief of an accomplished sorrow, and in this respect differs at once from the strain of a distressing anticipation, or the active struggle of a present misery actually accomplishing itself. This difference cannot be unknown to us in our own experience. When we are in the act of suffering we are not fully conscious of the efforts we are making. Our whole nature rises to meet what we have to endure. Capabilities of pain, of which we had hitherto no suspicion, disclose themselves. Perhaps also we have a greater amount of supernatural assistance than afterward. But when the pressure is lightened, when the strife is over, then we become conscious of the drain which grief has made upon our strength. The weariness of sorrow, like bodily fatigue, comes when all is over. We stiffen, as it were, and our heart begins to ache more sensibly, in the seeming tranquility which follows the misfortune. The reaction makes itself felt in a peculiar depression, which is almost more hard to bear than actual suffering, not so much because it is intrinsically greater than actual suffering, but because it comes after it, and, being itself the exhaustion of our powers of endurance, it has nothing under it to support it.

It happens also for the most part that, by a merciful cruelty of Providence, our ordinary duties, or even sometimes new duties to which our sorrow has given birth, present themselves before us, and require our energy and attention. But, while this often hinders the reaction of sorrow from going too far, it is also in itself hard to bear. We are seldom in greater want

of grace than in this moment of resuming the duties of our station after an interruption of more than common sorrow. It is like beginning life again at a disadvantage. We have perhaps more to do, when we are less able to do it. We have used up our power of bearing grief, and, just when the rawness of our misery is passing off, new duties come which, either by contrast or by association, open the old wounds afresh, and how are we to endure it? Moreover, excessive grief, even when it lasts but for a short time, seems to have a peculiar power to destroy habits. Things, even hard things, are easy to us, because we are accustomed to them. But after violent sorrow everything appears new and strange. We have lost our old facility. Things have changed places in our minds. Easy things are now hard, because of this very novelty. Yet life is inexorable. It must go on, and under the old laws, like a ruthless machine which cannot feel, and therefore cannot make allowances. Now perhaps is a greater trial of our worth than when we were enduring the blows which misfortune was dealing upon us. This is the account of the sixth dolor; this is the place it occupies in the sorrows of our dearest Mother. Think of the Crucifixion, and all that it involved, and is not the reaction after that likely to be something which it is quite beyond our power adequately to conceive? Immense as is the holiness of her Immaculate Heart, sorrow can still find work to do, and can build the edifice higher, as well as embellish what is built already.

The Soul of Jesus passed into the earth at the foot of the Cross, and descended to the limbus of the

fathers. Mary was still at the foot of Cross. She comprehended in its completeness the vast mystery of the separation of that Body and Soul, the death of the Son of God. The Soul has left her, but she has the Body still. In the next dolor that will go also, and then the Mother will be indeed alone. For the most part it is not God's way to withdraw Himself all at once. He spares the weakness of the soul, and passes from it almost insensibly, after special favors and more intimate union, as the perfume gradually exhales out of a jar where it has been kept. The two thieves are still in their agony close to the dead Body of Jesus. To one of them it is like the soothing presence of the Blessed Sacrament, which we all of us in trouble know so well, because it is unlike any other feeling. To the other there is no consolation now. There is time for him still. Mary still prays, for she never ceases while the fondest hope has any foothold left to which it can cling. The living Jesus is not so far off but He can hear him if he cries. But he has made his choice, and keeps to it. The life that remains in him is every moment desecrating Calvary.

Crucifixion is a slow death, and includes many sorts of pain. Among these is to be reckoned the breaking of the legs of the sufferers, either to add to the torture already inflicted, now that its duration has become wearisome and without interest to the ministers of vindictive justice, or, by a sort of fierce mercy, to hasten its termination. The executioners, therefore, approach the top of Calvary thus to consummate the punishment of the three whom they had crucified, armed with a strong hammer or heavy bar of iron, of

such weight as speedily to fracture the limbs when they are struck. It was a fearful sound for Mary to hear; the dull crashing of the flesh and bone, and the agonizing cries of the miserable sufferers, one of them, too, the son of her second motherhood, the firstborn of her prayers. But the words will not tell the anguish with which she saw them approach the Body of Jesus. Earth held nothing one-half so sacred. Dead as it was, it was joined to the Divinity, and therefore was entitled to the fullest honors of divine worship. One rude touch of it were an appalling sacrilege; but to crush the limbs, to break the bones, was a profaneness too horrible even for thought to dwell upon. The thought was an intense grief to her religion. But her love, was not it also concerned? It is true, life was gone; but was the lifeless Form less an object of her love than when beautiful life had filled it? Let the hearts of those who have mourned their dead reply. Never does love pour itself out in more soft sadness over eyes bright with life than over those that are closed in death. To the eye of love the pale face has become doubly beautiful. The graces of old years have passed upon it. The intensity of its unmeaning quiet has a charm of its own. The compressed lips speak with a dumb eloquence which belongs to them. The cold body has to satisfy two claims of love,—its own claim, and the soul's; and it satisfies them well. We will call it "*him*," not "*it*," because to fond love it is so really the person, the self, whom we are loving. So mothers have wept over sons, from whose caresses the dignity of great manhood has separated them for years; but now the

old times have come back, and the familiarities of childhood, with more than its passive helplessness have come back, and perhaps the old childish look as well, and grief feeds itself sweetly out of the marble beauty of its dead. Who does not know this? But if we common mourners, whose grief is so soon distracted, can feel all this with such intensity, what must have been the unspeakable love of Mary for the Body of her Son,—her Son, who was God as well! She spoke not. Her voice broke not the silence, mingled not with the moans of the dying thieves; but the silence of her prayer was loud in heaven. The rude men saw that Jesus was dead, and desisted from their purpose. "These things were done, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, You shall not break a bone of Him."

But there was another Scripture also to be fulfilled "They shall look on Him whom they pierced." Mary's prayer shall cause the first Scripture to be fulfilled, but not that any sorrow may spare the Mother's Heart. It shall accomplish the word of God: but it shall not spare the sacrilege. Truly this second Scripture shall be one of Simeon's swords. Whether it were from doubt of our Lord's being really dead, or whether it were in the mere wantonness of authority little used to give account of itself in such times and places, one of the soldiers drew near, and drove his spear into our Lord's right side, across His Body, and through His Sacred Heart, and immediately there issued forth from the sacrilegious wound both Blood and Water, some of which, it is said, sprang upon the limbs of the penitent thief as if it were an outward

baptism or a visible absolution where inward grace had already accomplished its heavenly work. It were long to tell of how much pathetic love this wound in our Saviour's Heart was the figure and the symbol. It has been the sweet contemplation of countless saints. The spear has opened a home, a refuge, a hermitage, in that Wounded Heart in which souls in all ages, in these latter days especially, have nestled in all their sorrows and trials, have renewed themselves in the weariness of their exile, and have hidden themselves from the strife of tongues and from an evil world. It is the very glory of devotion to the Precious Blood that this wound of the Sacred Heart proves that our dearest Lord shed every drop of His Blood for us. To us, therefore, for these and many other reasons, the piercing of His Heart is one of our greatest spiritual consolations. But we have to regard it here as one of Mary's chiefest sorrows.

There is something in the thought of our Blessed Lord's dead Body which overshadows the mind, and bends the soul down in profoundest reverence. It hung there upon the Cross, in the light of the March afternoon, white, with seams of dark blood all over it, and disfigured with almost countless wounds. There was no object on earth so sacred as itself. It was worshipful with the divinest worship. Throngs of invisible angels were adoring all round. Yet, while it was adorable, it was helpless also. It was as if the Blessed Sacrament had been left upon a mountain-top over which there was a thoroughfare for men. This object of divine worship was the property of the rulers, who had just consummated the unutterable sin

of the Crucifixion. Practically speaking, it was in the power of base executioners to do what they would with it, certain that no ignominy which they could work upon it would be reproved. There was something very dreadful in a thing which was so sacred being left in such insecurity, in such vicinity of evil, to such probability of appalling outrage. The Mother was there, her heart full of worship, but helpless as the Body itself. Were she to plead, her pleading would but suggest sacrilege. It would but stimulate the ruffian nature of those with whom she had to deal. But there it hung upon the Cross,—anybody's right, anybody's property, rather than hers, out of whose sweet blood the Holy Ghost had made it. Two wretched criminals were writhing in their last agonies on either side. The city was keeping feast below, and preparing to commence its Sabbath-rest. That Victim-Body had begun its Sabbath already. Its pain had ceased, and it was resting. The executioners are returning. The Roman soldiers ride up and down the mount. The relics of the execution must be cleared away before the Sabbath begins. That Body does not belong to the Cross. It belongs to an unimaginable supernal throne, at the Right Hand of the Eternal Father. No one is here who knows it but the silent Mother; and she is silent, because she has no right to speak, and because her speaking would do harm. Oh, how often in the world does God frighten us by this seeming abandonment of Himself and of all He holds most dear! And it appears as if it were the very strength of our love which made our faith so

weak. We fear most timorously for that which we love most tenderly.

The love of God brings many new instincts into the heart. Heavenly and noble as they are, they bear no resemblance to what men would call the finer and more heroic developments of character. A spiritual discernment is necessary to their right appreciation. They are so unlike the growths of earth, that they must expect to meet on earth with only suspicion, misunderstanding, and dislike. It is not easy to defend them from a controversial point of view; for our controversy is obliged to begin by begging the question, or else it would be unable so much as to state its case. The axioms of the world pass current in the world, the axioms of the gospel do not. Hence the world has its own way. It talks us down. It tries us before tribunals where our condemnation is secured beforehand. It appeals to principles which are fundamental with most men but are heresies with us. Hence its audience takes part with it against us. We are foreigners, and must pay the penalty of being so. If we are misunderstood, we had no right to reckon on any thing else, being, as we are, out of our own country. We are made to be laughed at. We shall be understood in heaven. Woe to those easy-going Christians whom the world can understand, and will tolerate, because it sees they have a mind to compromise!

The love of souls is one of these instincts which the love of Jesus brings into our hearts. To the world it is proselytism, the mere wish to add to a faction, one of the selfish developments of party spirit. One

while the stain of lax morality is affixed to it, another while the reproach of pharisaic strictness! For what the world seems to suspect least of all in religion is consistency. But the love of souls, however apostolic, is always subordinate to love of Jesus. We love souls because of Jesus, not Jesus because of souls. Thus there are times and places when we pass from this instinct of divine love to another, from the love of souls to the hatred of heresy. This last is peculiarly offensive to the world. So especially opposed is it to the spirit of the world, that, even in good, believing hearts, every remnant of worldliness rises in arms against this hatred of heresy, embittering the very gentlest of characters, and spoiling many a glorious work of grace. Many a convert, in whose soul God would have done grand things, goes to his grave a spiritual failure, because he would not hate heresy. The heart which feels the slightest suspicion against the hatred of heresy is not yet converted. God is far from reigning over it yet with an undivided sovereignty. The paths of higher sanctity are absolutely barred against it. In the judgment of the world, and of worldly Christians, this hatred of heresy is exaggerated, bitter, contrary to moderation, indiscreet, unreasonable, aiming at too much, bigoted, intolerant, narrow, stupid, and immoral. What can we say to defend it? Nothing which they can understand. We had, therefore, better hold our peace. If we understand God, and He understands us, it is not so very hard to go through life suspected, misunderstood, and unpopular. The mild self-opinionatedness of the gentle, undiscerning good will also take the world's

view and condemn us; for there is a meek-looking positiveness about timid goodness which is far from God, and the instincts of whose charity is more toward those who are less for God, while its timidity is daring enough for a harsh judgment. There are conversions where three-quarters of the heart stop outside the Church and only a quarter enters, and heresy can only be hated by an undivided heart. But if it is hard, it has to be borne. A man can hardly have the full use of his senses who is bent on proving to the world, God's enemy, that a thorough-going catholic hatred of heresy is a right frame of mind. We might as well force a blind man to judge on a question of color. Divine love inspheres us in a different circle of life, motive, and principle, which is not only not that of the world, but in direct enmity with it. From a worldly point of view, the craters in the moon are more explicable things than we Christians with our supernatural instincts. From the hatred of heresy we get to another of these instincts, the horror of sacrilege. The distress caused by profane words seems to the world but an exaggerated sentimentality. The penitential spirit of reparation which pervades the whole Church is, on its view, either a superstition or an unreality. The perfect misery which an unhallowed touch of the Blessed Sacrament causes to the servants of God provokes either the world's anger or its derision. Men consider it either altogether absurd in itself, or at any rate out of all proportion; and, if otherwise they have proofs of our common sense, they are inclined to put down our unhappiness to sheer hypocrisy. The very fact that they do not believe as we

believe removes us still further beyond the reach even of their charitable comprehension. If they do not believe in the very existence of our sacred things, how shall they judge the excesses of a soul to which those sacred things are far dearer than itself?

Now, it is important to bear all this in mind while we are considering the sixth dolor. Mary's heart was furnished, as never heart of saint was yet, with these three instincts regarding souls, heresy, and sacrilege. They were in her heart three grand abysses of grace, out of which arose perpetually new capabilities of suffering. Ordinarily speaking, the Passion tires us. It is a fatiguing devotion. It is necessarily so because of the strain of soul which it causes, as well by its horrors as by the profound adoration which it is every moment eliciting. So when our Lord dies a feeling of repose comes over us. For a moment we are tempted to think that our Lady's dolours ought to have ended there, and that the sixth dolor and the seventh are almost of our own creation, and that we tax our imagination in order to fill up the picture with the requisite dark shading of sorrow. But this is only one of the ways in which devotion to the dolours heightens and deepens our devotion to the Passion. It is not our imagination that we tax, but our spiritual discernment. In these two last dolours we are led into greater refinements of woe, into the more abstruse delicacies of grief, because we have got to deal with a soul rendered even more wonderful than it was before by the elevations of the sorrows which have gone before. Thus, the piercing of our Lord with the spear was to our Blessed Lady by far the most awful sacrilege

which it was then in man's power to perpetrate upon the earth. To break violently into the Holy of Holies in the temple, and pollute its dread sanctity with all manner of heathen defilement, would have been as nothing compared to the outrage on the adorable Body of God. It is in vain that we try to lift ourselves to a true appreciation of this horror in Mary's heart. Our love of God is wanting in keenness, our perceptions of divine things in fineness. We cannot do more than make approaches, and they are terrible enough.

We have spoken already of mothers watching the deathbeds of their sons. It is the form of human woe which comes most naturally to us when we are with Mary upon Calvary. When the long struggle is at last over, and the breaking heart has acknowledged at least a kind of relief in the fact that the object of her love has no more to suffer, when that same heart has taken quiet possession of the beautiful dead form before it, as if it were a sanctuary, almost a refuge from grief itself, would not the least roughness, the least inconsiderateness, the most trivial dishonor to the dead body, be a new and fearful sorrow to the mother? Is there a mother on earth who could bear to see with her own eyes even the kindly hand of science, which she has herself invoked, endeavoring to discover in what recess it was that the mysterious ailment lodged itself which has now made her childless? Would it not be as if she saw a hallowed object desecrated before her eyes? In the dire necessities of the pestilence, with its swift burial and rough ministers and horrible dead cart and quicklime-pit,