

how much more terrible would the outrage be! She still fills the lifeless figure with the life of her own love, and before she has drunk her fill of love by gazing on it, before the red blood has had time to curdle or the limbs to grow cold, it is torn from her, as if it was not hers, by some stern officers,—not the tenderest of their kind, for their office is the rudest, rude even in the wise mercy it fulfils,—and is flung upon the dead-cart, with a heap of other pest-stricken victims, and so borne onward to a dishonorable grave, a promiscuous charnel-house. And fresh grief is so tender, so raw, can so little bear handling! Is it not fearful to think of? Yet it is as nothing to our Lady's agony when the Body of Jesus was outraged by the spear. It is an immeasurably less sorrow in itself, and falls upon a heart which, however sweet and meek and loving, is immeasurably less capable of suffering than Mary's was. But it is an approach to Mary's sorrow, and a shadow of it.

Let us rise higher still. A saint is at the altar, overwhelmed with the dread action which he is performing. His heart is fit to break for love of God, of that Incarnate God who lies before him on the corporal. Wild and sinful men break in upon him, whether in popular tumult or from other cause. He is driven off in his sacred vestments with violence, while he is clinging to the altar as an animal clings to its young when they are being torn from it. He sees the Blessed Sacrament flung upon the ground, the Precious Blood streaming over the altar-steps, and both the Body and the Blood trodden with scorn and blasphemy beneath the feet of the ruffian invaders.

Because he is a saint, the sight would kill him, **did** not God miraculously support him. But the accumulated sorrows of a long life are nothing to this. The vision of that hour has been burned in upon his soul as by a fiery brand. Nothing of it will ever be forgotten. No excesses of penance will be sufficient to satisfy his yearning appetite for reparation. Years after, he will shudder in his prayer, and the tears course swiftly down his cheeks, as he calls to mind the boundless horror of that appalling sin. It is a sort of grief beyond common griefs, a grief in a shrine, of which holy and chosen souls only may participate. Yet what is it to Mary's sorrow when she saw the spear touch the dead side, and the lifelike movement the Body made as the Heart was pierced, and the pulseline throbbing with which the Blood and Water followed the lance as it withdrew? As far as the saint is below Mary in sanctity, so far is his grief inferior to hers. An angel told St. Bridget that so tremendous was the shock to her, that she would have died instantly, but for a miracle. A sword in her own heart would have been a thousand times less dreadful.

It is strange how close to great sins great graces will often lie. Longinus had sinned in ignorance of that which peculiarly aggravated the horror of his act. Nevertheless, it was a cruel action, and the more cruel if he knew that the mother was standing by. Wantonness too was the less excusable in him, upon whom, if tradition speaks truly, the hand of God was laid not lightly. He is said to have been suffering from some disease of the eyes, which threatened total blindness; and it may have been that his imperfect



sight did not allow him to be certain of the death of Jesus, and that on that account he went beyond his commission, and pierced the body with his lance. Some drops of the Blood fell upon his face, and tradition tells that not only was the disease in his eyes instantaneously cured and the full use of his sight restored to him, but also, a still more wonderful miracle, the vision of his soul was made bright and clear, and he at once confessed the Divinity of Him whose Body he had thus dared to insult at the risk of becoming in his own person the murderer of our Blessed Lord. For, if he doubted of His death, he ran no less a risk than that of slaying Him himself. No one will wonder when Mary of Agreda tells them that, as with the penitent thief, so with Longinus, the grace of conversion was the answer to Mary's prayer. The very fact of his having been an instrument to increase her sorrows would give him a special claim upon her prayers.

Another small body of men is now approaching the summit of Calvary, and from their fixed looks it is plain that Jesus is the object of their coming. Is it some fresh outrage, some new sorrow for Mary? It is a new sorrow for Mary, but no fresh outrage. It is Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, together with their servants. Both of them were disciples of our Blessed Lord, but secretly; for they were timid men. Joseph was "a counsellor, a good and just man," who had not "consented to the counsel and doings" of the others, because he "himself looked for the kingdom of God." Nicodemus was a man learned in the Scriptures, the same who had come to Jesus by night for fear of the Jews, and had learned from Him the doc-

trine of regeneration. Joseph had gone in to Pilate, to whom he probably had access in his capacity as counsellor, and had begged the Body of Jesus, which had been granted to him. He had then, as St. Matthew tells us, got "a clean linen cloth" to wrap it in, and had called on Nicodemus to accompany him to Calvary. Nicodemus, as St. John tells us, brought with him "a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight." They also brought their servants with them to assist. They approached our Blessed Lady with the profoundest reverence and sympathy, told her what they had done, and asked her permission to take the Body down from the Cross. With hearts full of the tenderest devotion to the dolours of the Immaculate Mother, they drew nigh to the Cross, and made their preparations. They fixed the ladder against the Cross. Joseph mounted first, and Nicodemus after him. Mary, with John and Magdalen, remained immediately beneath them. It seemed as if some supernatural grace issued forth from the Adorable Body, and encircled them round, softening and subduing all their thoughts, making their hearts burn with divine love, and hushing them in the deepest and most thrilling adoration. Old times came back upon the Mother's heart, and the remembrance of the other Joseph, who had been so often privileged to handle the limbs and touch the Sacred Flesh of the Incarnate Word. It would have been his office to have taken Jesus down from the Cross. But he was gone to his rest, and one that bore his name supplied his place, and it was both sweet and grievous to Mary that it should be so. One Joseph had given Him his



arms to lie in, the other should give Him his own new monument to rest in ; and both should pass Him from their own arms to those of Mary. It is strange, too, how often the timid are unexpectedly bold. These two disciples, who had been afraid to confess their Master openly when He lived, are now braving publicity when even apostles remain within the shelter of their hiding-place. Happy two! with what sweet familiarities and precious nearness to Himself is not Jesus recompensing their pious service at this hour in heaven!

With gentle hand, tremblingly bold, as if his natural timidity had developed into supernatural reverence, Joseph touches the crown of thorns, and delicately loosens it from the head on which it was fixed, disentangles it from the matted hair, and, without daring to kiss it, passes it to Nicodemus, who reaches it to John, from whom Mary, sinking on her knees, receives it with such devotion as no heart but hers could hold. Every blood-stained spike seemed instinct with life, and went into her heart, tipped as it were with the Blood of her Son, inoculating her more and more deeply with the spirit of His Passion. Who can describe with what reverential touch, while the cold Body was a furnace of heavenly love burning against his heart, Joseph loosened the nails, so as not to crush or mutilate the blessed Hands and Feet which they had pierced? It was so hard a task that we are fain to believe angels helped him in it. Each nail was silently passed down to Mary. They were strange graces, these which were now flowing to her through the hands of her new son ; yet, after all, not so unlike

the gifts which Jesus had Himself been giving her these three-and-thirty years. Never yet had earth seen such a worship of sorrow as that with which the Mother bent over those mute relics, as they came down to her from the Cross, crusted too as they were, perhaps wet, with that Precious Blood, which she adored in its unbroken union with the Person of the Eternal Word. But with what agony was all this worship accompanied, what fresh wounds did not all these instruments of the Passion make in her heart, what old ones did they not reopen!

But a greater grief was yet to come. The Body was detached from the Cross. More and more thickly the angels gathered round, while thrills of love pierced with ecstatic bliss their grand intelligences. Mary is kneeling on the ground. Her fingers are stained with Blood. She stretches the clean linen cloth over her arms and holds them out to receive her Son, her Prodigal come back to her again, and come back thus! And was He not a Prodigal? Had He not wilfully gone out from her quiet home into the wildest and rudest of worlds, leagues and leagues distant from the purity and love of her spotless heart? Had He not spent all His substance on companions, worthless and despicable? Was it not a riotous spending, a riot of some eighteen hours' duration? Had He not been prodigal of His Precious Blood, of His beauty, His innocence, His life, His grace, His very Divinity? And now He was coming back to her thus! Can such a sorrow, such an accumulation of concentrating sorrows, have any name? Can she bear the weight? Which weight? The sorrow or the Body? It mat-



ters not. She can bear them both. From above, the Body is slowly descending. She remembers the midnight-hour when the Holy Ghost overshadowed her at Nazareth. Now it is the Eternal Son who is so strangely overshadowing His kneeling Mother. Joseph trembled under the weight, even while Nicodemus helped him. Perhaps also it was not the weight only which made him tremble. Wonderfully must grace have held him up to do what he did. Now it is low enough for John to touch the sacred Head, and receive it in his arms, that it might not droop in that helpless rigid way; and Magdalen is holding up the Feet. It is her old post. It is her post in heaven now, highest of penitents, most beautiful of pardoned spirits! For one moment Mary prostrates herself in an agony of speechless adoration, and the next instant she has received the Body on her extended arms. The babe of Bethlehem is back again in His Mother's lap. What a meeting! What a restoration! For a while she remains kneeling, while John and Magdalen, Joseph and Nicodemus, and the devout women, adore. Then she passes from the attitude of the priest to the attitude of the mother. She rises from her knees, still bearing the burden as lightly as when she fled with Him into Egypt, and sits down upon the grass, with Jesus extended on her lap.

With minutest fondness she smooths His hair. She does not wash the Blood from off His Body. It is too precious; and soon He will want it all, as well as that which is on men's shoes, and the payment of Jerusalem, and the olive-roots of Gethsemane. But she closes every wound, every mark of the lash, every

puncture of the thorns, with a mixture of myrrh and aloes, which Nicodemus has brought. There was not a feature of His blessed Countenance, not a mark upon His Sacred Flesh, which was not at once a sorrow to her, and a very volume of profoundest meditations. Her soul went through the Passions upon His Body, as men trace their travels on a map. The very quietness of her occupation, the very concentration of her undistracted thoughts seemed to enable her to go deeper and deeper down into His sufferings, and to compassionate them with a more interior bitterness than before. In none of the earlier stages of her sorrow had there been more demand upon her to control the common gestures and outbursts of grief, than when she sat in the light of that spring evening with her Son's dead Body on her lap, smoothing, anointing, and composing the countless prints of shame and suffering which had been worn so deeply into it. In vain for her were the birds trilling their even-song, the weight of the eclipse being taken off their blithe little hearts. In vain for her were the perfumes of the tender fig-leaves rising up in the cool air, and the buds bursting greenly, and the tender shoots full of vernal beauty. Her grief was past nature's soothing. For her Flower had been cruelly gathered, and lay withered there upon her knee.

She performed her task as an act of religion, with grave assiduity, not delaying over it to satisfy the grief of which her heart was full. The dead Body seemed as obedient to her as ever the Babe had been in Bethlehem, obedient in all things but one. She told St. Bridget that the extended arms could not be



closed, and laid by His side, or crossed upon His breast. We ought rather to say they *would* not, than they *could* not, be closed. He will not relinquish those outstretched arms, which seem to invite the whole world into the utmost width of their embrace. There was room for all within them, a harbor large enough for all creation. If the lifting up of His Hands upon the Cross was an "evening sacrifice" to the Eternal Father, the outstretching of them was as it were a sacramental sign to men that none were excluded from His invitation and His welcome. He would carry with Him to the tomb the form and figure of one crucified; and Mary understood why the arms were rigid, and forbore the gentle violence she was about to use. He must be swathed in the winding-sheet in that shape as well as may be, preaching large, wide, welcoming love even to the end. Mary must now take her last look of that dead Face. Mothers live lives in their last looks. Who shall tell what Mary's was like? Who would have been surprised if the eyes of the Dead had opened, and His lips parted, under the kindling and the quickening of that look? With heroic effort she has bound the napkin around His Head, and has folded the winding-sheet over the sweet Face. And now there is darkness indeed around her. The very dead Body had been a light and a support. She has put out the light herself. Her own hands have quenched the lamp, and she stands facing the thick night. Oh, brave woman! Hours of ecstatic contemplation over that silent-speaking Countenance would have passed like moments. But it was a time for religion, not for

the indulgence of her tenderness; and she pierced her own heart through and through with the same hand with which she hid His Face. But, O Mary! thou seest that Face now, and art drinking thy fill of its beauty, and thou wilt do so for evermore, and never be satisfied, even when always satisfied, happy, blessed Mother!

When we pass from the narrative of the sixth dolor to treat of its peculiarities, we are struck at the outset by a characteristic which runs all through it. It surrounds us perpetually with images of the Sacred Infancy and of the Blessed Sacrament. The Passion seems to sink out of view, as if it were a foundation only; the superstructure is carved all over with symbols of Bethlehem and the Altar. There is scarcely an action or attitude of Mary in all the dolor, which does not bring to mind at once either the old days of the Mother and the Child, or the coming days of the Priest and the Host. When she kneels to receive the Body, and remains kneeling with it in her arms for the others to adore, when she ministers to it and with tender reverence manipulates it, when care and responsibility for the Lord's Body is the anxiety of her heart, and her grief comes from the fear of sacrilege, we cannot avoid having the Blessed Sacrament continually before us. Her outward demeanor appears as if it were the model from which the Church had drawn its rubrics for mass, benediction, or procession. Her inward temper seems the ideal of those interior dispositions which should belong to all good priests in virtue of their being custodians of the Blessed Sacrament. In its measure, the same prophetic forth-



shadowing of the worship of the Blessed Sacrament is visible in the actions and gestures of Joseph and Nicodemus, of John and Magdalen. Thus an entirely new set of ideas comes in with this dolor. While it looks as if it were but the complement of the Crucifixion, and divisible from it only by an imaginary line, we find its inward spirit, its examples, allusions, doctrine, and figures, to belong to an entirely different region from that of the Passion. This reveals to us the real distinction there is between this dolor and the two which have preceded it. The mystical connection of the Blessed Sacrament with the Sacred Infancy has been dwelt upon at length elsewhere.\* The Blessed Sacrament is as it were the real perpetuation of His Infancy in memory of His Passion. Thus, in the sixth dolor, it appears as if our Lord had no sooner consummated the work of His Passion than He at once began to shadow forth that state in which it was His sweet will to abide with His Church forever in the Sacrament of the Altar. From that instant, the old images of Bethlehem rose up again, as if they had been kept down by force for a while, and they return more determinately and plainly in the shape of forebodings of the Blessed Sacrament. This is not so much a separate peculiarity of this dolor, as its very soul and significance, running through every feature of it, tincturing Mary's dispositions under it, and giving a special character to the lessons which it conveys to ourselves.

There is a peculiarity of this dolor, which it is impossible for us fully to understand, but which must be

\* Blessed Sacrament, book second.

borne in mind throughout, because it indicates the greatest depth of sorrow which this mystery reached in the soul of our Blessed Mother. It was the withdrawal of the life of Jesus. She herself, perhaps, did not know till now how much it had supported her, nor how many offices it had fulfilled toward her. For three-and-thirty years she had lived upon His life. It had been her atmosphere. There had been a kind of unity of life between them. Her heart had beaten in His Heart. She had seen with His eyes, and had heard with His ears, and had almost spoken with His lips and thought with His thoughts, as she had done when she composed and sang the Magnificat. Mother and son had never before been so fused into each other. Two lives had never seemed so inseparably one life as these two had done. And how shall one of them, and that the weaker and inferior, now stand alone? The sundering of body and soul looks a less effectual separation than the dividing of the life of Mary from the life of Jesus. Perhaps it was on this account, to supply this mysterious want of the Human Life of Jesus, that the species of the Blessed Sacrament remained incorrupt within her during the remainder of her life, from one communion to another. We have sometimes seen mothers and sons approximate to this unity of life, especially when the son has been an only child, and the mother a widow. It has been also in these cases, as with our Lady, that it is the mother's life which is drawn into the son's, not the son's into the mother's. The sight of such a mother and son is one of the most pathetic which earth can show; pathetic, because its roots have al-



ways been, not in the palpable sunshine of overflowing happiness, but in the unwitnessed depth of domestic sorrow. The grandeur of its beauty has been in proportion to the fiery heat of that furnace of agony in which the two lives had been melted into one. But, when we looked, we have trembled to think how the inevitable separation of death would ever be endured. Yet how faint a shadow of Jesus and Mary are these filial and maternal unities on earth!

In order, then, to understand the intolerable suffering which the withdrawal of the life of Jesus caused in the heart of Mary, we must know what His life had been to hers throughout. But this is not within the reach of our comprehension. We can but guess at it, and calculate it, and then be sure that the reality has far outrun our boldest calculations. Yet here, also, the annals of human sorrow help us by comparison. Who has not known instances of that perfection of conjugal love when husband and wife have so lived into each other that the life of one is apparently imbedded in the life of the other? Each has borne the other's cares. Heart has leaned on heart, and they have throbbed together in one pulse. They have used even each other's senses with such an affectionately borrowed use, that we have sometimes been fain to smile at such simplicity and dependency of love. Voice, expression, gesture, gait, manner, and a thousand little nameless ways, have been only the outward disclosure of the intense unity of love within. Long years have formed habits which it would seem downright death to break. The checkered experiences of life, with their dark and bright, their tears and smiles,

their losses and their compensations, have still more effectually moulded those two hearts into one. The two personalities are confused; God alone sees them clear and distinct, each in its own sphere of praise and blame, of merit and demerit, in His account. Death comes. There is not a power in nature but inexorable death which would dare to rend asunder so exquisitely delicate a union. And what has been the consequence? It has become plain that there was almost a physical reality in this oneness of two loving lives. For, now that one is left alone, the stream can hardly flow. It shrinks and runs dry, like a fountain in the summer. It is not self-sufficing. It cannot feed itself. The one spring cannot do the work of the two. The survivor is unable to face life. His mind succumbs distracted under the least burden. It is not merely that one-half of his strength is gone. It is something more than that. He is truly as feeble and faint as a man bleeding to death; but he is incomplete also. He has no front to present to the common tide of daily life, and breast it as it comes. No matter how calmly life may flow, it is too much for him. He droops, and pines, and dies in as many months as physical decay may require; and his death is not so much a death in itself as a part and completion of that other death. The lives were one, the deaths are one also. Who has not seen this? But we do not mourn over it. It is best and completest as it is. Here, also, we have but a partial shadow of the union of Jesus and Mary; yet it helps us to see what an overwhelming sorrow to her sensitive heart must have been the ces-