

seems! How like a mother! And are not all mothers priests? For, rightly considered, all maternities are priesthoods. Ah, Mary! thy maternity was such a priesthood as the world had never seen before!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SEVENTH DOLOR.

THE BURIAL OF JESUS.

THE shades of evening fall fast and silently round that Mother, sitting at the foot of the Cross with the covered Head of her dead Son upon her lap. The very earth is weary with the weight of that eventful day. The animals were fatigued after the panic of the eclipse, whose darkness they had mistaken for the night, so that the beasts slunk to their lairs, the birds to their roosts, and the lizards went to rest in the crevices of the rocks. Men themselves were outworn with sin and the impetuous activity of their own evil passions, while the scattered few who composed the Church were weary with shame, and fear, and sorrow, and the agitation of accumulated thoughts. The well-known sounds of night begin to succeed to the sharper and more frequent noises of the day. There is a divine light in the heart of Mary, more golden than that last lingering rim of departed sunset, that sun which seemed so glad to set after the burden of such a day, and she is resting on it for a moment, before she girds up her whole nature to meet her seventh sorrow and her last.

It was a strange station for a Mother to choose for her repose, just at the foot of the cruel tree on which her Son had died, and which was yet bedewed with

His Precious Blood. Yet it is also just the very spot where, with Mary-like instinct, the mourners of eighteen centuries have come to rest, and have found peace there, when there was no peace, at least for them, in any other corner of the earth. It is a place of spells, since Jesus hung there and since Mary sat there. Here tears have been dried which it had seemed would never cease to flow. Here hearts have consented to live which a while ago were fain to die. Here the widow has found another and a heavenly Husband. The mother has had her lost children restored to her. The orphans have gone there in the dark, and, when they were done sobbing, they found the arms of their new Mother Mary round them. Here thousands of hearts have discovered how good a thing it was to have been broken; for through the rent of their own hearts they saw God. When Mary sat on that hill-top, and enthroned the Dead Christ upon her knee, she left an inexhaustible legacy of blessings behind her to all generations, with the condition of residence on the top of Calvary attached to their enjoyment.

It was not therefore for herself, but for us, that she sat there, and rested for a moment. But the time has now come, and she signifies with calm self-collection to the disciples round to form the procession to the tomb. There was Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, John and Magdalen, the devout women who had come up to the Cross, some of the trusted servants of Joseph and Nicodemus, and to these was now added the converted centurion, who at the moment of our Lord's death had confessed that He was the Son of God. Perhaps also some of the apostles and other disciples

may by this time, as some of the saints have conjectured, have been gathered to the Cross. It seemed sad to break up so fair a scene of beautiful sorrow; but it was time to fulfil the Scripture. With calm heroism, yet not without the direst martyrdom, Mary gave up the treasure which lay across her lap. Who had any right to touch Him but herself? Ah, Mother! thou knowest we have all of us got those rights now. He has become the property of the world, the inheritance of sinners, and thou thyself too art the universal Mother. What the poor old heathen called the earth, that art thou to us, and much more also. But she had borne Him into Egypt. Should she not bear Him also to the tomb? No, Mother! God hath given thee strength by miracle, that thou mightest suffer; but He will not give thee strength to do that which will be a consolation to thy woe! There is that other Joseph, haunting thee with his sweet look of reverence and love through these last two mysteries of thy sorrow. He and Nicodemus will bear the burden, while John and Magdalen will go along with thee.

The rude world intruded not upon the silence of that wonderful procession. The multitude had long since flowed back, like an ebb tide, from that sacred hill. The earthquake had sobered many hearts which diabolical possession had maddened in the morning. The crowded city had enough to think of for itself. For there had been processions also in the streets of Jerusalem, strange processions, such as made men seek their homes, and close their doors, and speak low, and think of God. A shadow was over all hearts. The dead had walked. The earthquake had burst the

tombs open, and had awakened their inmates, and, like those impatient prognostics which so often usher in a divine work, there was a resurrection before the time. The old saints of the land, the dead of other generations, had gone about the city, and had been seen of many, with their beautiful threatening faces speaking unutterable silent things. The memory of the day hung like a cold stone around the souls of many. In others it was burning like a hot restless fire, the harbinger of converting grace. Many wept, many more were sad, and all were weary, dulled by a shadow, oppressed by a divine terror. Hell had lighted a volcano in the people during the morning. Now it was burnt out, and human nature could hardly find its place again in many of the hearts from which it had been so awfully displaced. There was therefore no interruption from the city. The city was brooding over itself, like a disconsolate bird over its robbed nest. The very trumpets of Titus were almost in its ears, and might have been heard by prophetic listening. Poor Jerusalem! God has loved thee long, and loved thee with a mysterious fondness; but to-day's disloyalty has filled up thy measure, and thy doom has received its orders, and is now upon its way. From the top of that hill, brown in the dusky twilight, they are carrying to His tomb the Body of thy rejected King!

What awful shapes and shadows, of history, of prophecy, of dim divine decrees, gather like waving banners in the darkness, round that sacred procession! Has creation come to this, that a few faithful creatures are bearing the Dead Creator to a tomb in the

rock, and that a mortal Mother, who numbers less than fifty years, is chief mourner there as the veritable Mother of the Eternal! The songless angels are marshalled round in serried phalanxes. Their science almost makes them afraid, so overwhelming is the mystery. Now they have passed over the grave of Adam, the First Man, in which the Cross had been set up. The Soul of Jesus had already gone to Adam to give him the Beatific Vision. Now his descendants were treading on his grave. His daughter Mary, the second Eve, had been sitting there a while ago with the second Adam on her lap. The bones and skulls of malefactors, luckless tokens of the fall, strewed their path, half bedded in the tufts of faded grass, or lying loose upon the smooth herbage which the goats had cropped. They are descending now into a garden, another Eden, to plant a tree there in the rock, better incomparably than all the trees of that old Paradise, better even than the tree of life, and which should bloom in three days with an inconceivable blooming. It was a garden where the vines grew and the olive-trees dropped fatness. But this tree should give forth wine more gladdening to the heart of man than any which ever bled in the winepress from the vine, were it from the rarest clusters of Engaddi. It should yield oil, as no olive ever yielded it, an oil to heal all wounds, and to be the inexhaustible balsam of the world. There were no flowers on earth like that withered one upon the bier, none to compare with it for beauty or for fragrance, none that should have so vernal a spring as He should have when but another sun was set. So they went onward to the garden, a

whole cloud of divinest mysteries, accomplished types, fulfilled prophecies, historical consummations, resting on them as they went; and over all was poured the soft light of the paschal moon, hanging low in the western heavens, as if it were the light escaped from Mary's heart which was making all the scene so deeply sad, so sadly beautiful!

Slowly they went, and in silence as soft as the foot of midnight itself. If they had sung psalms, the restless city might have heard. But in truth what psalms were there which they could sing? Not even the inspired harp of David could have shed sweet sounds fit for a dirge for such a funeral. No one spoke in all that company. What should they say? What words could have expressed their thoughts? "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." But there are times when the heart is overfull, and then it cannot speak. So was it with that procession. A deeper shadow of sorrow had never fallen upon men, than the gloom which fell on those who now were wending from the top of Calvary to the garden-tomb. There was grief enough to have darkened a whole world in Mary's single heart. Human suffering is not infinite; but it is near upon it, and she had come now to its very uttermost extremity. There was only one sacrifice she could make now, and she was in the very act of making it. She was going to put away from herself and out of her own power, to hide in a rocky tomb and let Roman soldiers come and keep watch over it, that Body which though it was dead was more than life to her. Then, indeed, she would stand upon the highest pinnacle of evangelical poverty, to which

God had promised such mighty things. She would only keep for herself that which she could not part with, and would not have parted with if she could, a broken heart utterly submerged in such waters of bitterness as had never flowed round any living creature heretofore. There never would have been joy on this planet again, if her accumulated woe had been divided into little parcels, and distributed to each child of Adam as he comes into the world. Men look with eyes of admiring wonder at adventurous travellers and the successful explorers of unknown lands. Look now at Mary, as she closes the funeral procession. That woman is a creature of the Most High more exalted than any angel in heaven. The throne that awaits her is one of the marvels of the heavenly court. She is as sinless as the sunbeam, and her empire is over all creation. The Three Persons of the Undivided Trinity will themselves perform her coronation. But she has explored now all the vast realms of pain. She has sounded the depths of every heart-ache man can know. She has traversed vast regions of suffering which none ever traversed before her, and whither none can follow her. She has been with the Incarnate Word in abysses of His Passion which theology has never named, because not even saints have ever imagined their existence. She has exhausted all the possibilities of mortal anguish. Her dolours have out-reached the tall science of the angels. They are known to none but Jesus and herself. At this present moment she is drawing near to the term of that which is so nearly infinite. The mystical border is close at hand. The outside of possible suffering, like the end

of space, is inconceivable. A few more footsteps, and she will have reached that indescribable point of human life. Who would have dreamed of such a possible suffering as the Dead Body of the Living God? There is only one suffering beyond it: it is the parting with that Body, and going back into the world alone in such a solitude as never creature knew before.

But now the garden-tomb is reached, the new tomb of the second Adam. It was hewn in the solid rock, and was new. Joseph had meant it for himself. But no man had ever lain there yet. All things were fitting, and full of all manner of meanings and proprieties. The tomb of this new Joseph was to be to Him what the arms of the other Joseph had often been before, His resting-place a while, when Mary had to part with Him. But in those days there had never been such partings as this was to be. Mary enters the tomb with Joseph. It was his help she chose. Her hands arranged every thing. How gently they lowered His Head into the tomb! As to His arms, perhaps they now allowed her to close them to the Body; or perhaps, if there was room, He rested even in the grave with that wide crucified embrace, ready to receive a whole world of sinners. We are not told. She adjusts and composes the winding-sheet, and puts the feet together, which had been so painfully together those three hours upon the Cross. The instruments of the Passion too she takes, and kisses them, and deposits them in the tomb. There is no unnecessary delay over each action, such as marks the weakness of common grief. All was done in order, as-

siduity, and silence. Then came perhaps the last look. Perhaps she lifted up the cloth to see that the moving of the Body had not discomposed the venerable features. How pale it must have looked by the wan torchlight inside that rocky tomb! The eyes were closed whose single look had converted Peter. The lips were shut that but a while ago uttered those seven marvellous words upon the Cross, the sound of which had not yet died out of her listening ears. Slowly the cloth was replaced; and on her knees she made her last act of adoration of that lifeless Body. Never surely had any anguish so awful, any woe so utterly superhuman, desolated the soul of living creature. There have been many last looks in the world. Many graves have closed on earth, shutting in worlds of hope and love, and imprisoning often more of the survivor's life than death has robbed from the departed. Yet none has ever come nigh this. It stands alone, a grief without a parallel; because she who mourned and He whom she mourned were alike incomparable. Perhaps in none of her dolours was there any single isolated moment that for accumulated and intense woe could be reckoned along with this. She was widowed and orphaned as none else were before. She sank down in depths of widowhood and orphanhood which had never opened to any one else. But what are father and mother and husband and child to an Incarnate God? To be fatherless, motherless, husbandless, and childless, how little a measure of grief do these dismal words represent compared with that for which there is no real word! For a soul to be Christless is simply heathenism and hell. For Mary,

His own Mother, to be Christless, and on the night of such a day,—oh, the sorrow lies out dark before us, like the sea at night, and we know no more!

All who were present at the burial genuflected before the Body, and adored profoundly, and then turned away, as though they were tearing themselves from a strong attraction, and departed in silence. Joseph, as St. Matthew tells us, rolled a great stone to the door of the monument, and then went his way also. Mary, with John and Magdalen, return slowly over the summit of Calvary. She will need repose after the terrific agony of that moment in the tomb. But repose is far away from that broken-hearted Mother yet. Her soul, shattered by that last assault of suffering, has yet to pass through a fearful ordeal before she reaches the house of John in Jerusalem. After that, there is to be no respite to the anguish of her desolation for three days, three scriptural days, from this Friday evening till the dawn of Sunday's sun, the aurora of the Resurrection.

The Cross lies in their path across Calvary. The fatal tree is still discernible in the darkness, for the light of the low moon creeps up over the earth and lights objects from below. But its dimensions look larger and more swollen than before. Mary rests awhile, and falls down upon her knees to adore the blood-stained Cross. She kisses the wood, partly as if it were in sign of reconciliation with it after its cruel yet blessed office of the day, and partly as if it were the most precious object she could touch now that the Body, which had hung on it, was laid in the tomb, and partly also in sign of love and worship of

the Precious Blood. When she rose up, her lips were stained with it. Dreadful seal of love which the Son has printed on His Mother's mouth and cheek, from those lips of His which were "as lilies dropping choice myrrh!" O Mother! "thy cheeks are as the bark of a pomegranate, besides what is hidden within thee!" O Blood-stained mouth, giving voice to that heavenly soul, how much has passed since thou didst sing that wonderful Magnificat! Thy silence now is as eloquent before God as thy song was then!

She turns from the Cross. Below her lies the guilty city, magnified and indistinct in the murky air, with a few restless lights glancing here and there, and the irregular broken sounds of night rising up into the air. There were no words of reproach upon her lips, no look of reproach in her eyes. She took it all in, from the stately temple to the outer gateways of the city. She saw the host of Titus beleaguering its walls, and the mothers that slew their little ones for food. She saw the old predilection of God withdrawing from His ancient Zion, as a golden cloud follows the sunset under the horizon. But she yearned over Jerusalem. Not a week has passed since He whom she had just buried had shed tears of vexed love and lingering fondness over that chosen city of the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. Since then, how had it done penance? Alas! it had crucified Him who wept, Him whom its little ones out of their pure hearts had greeted with Hosannas. Poor Jerusalem! She knew that it was doomed. But there was room in her broken heart for the guilty city as well as for the slaughtered Son. A cloud of beautiful history rests

over its dreary sanctuaries to this day, even in its dishonor; and Mary's entrance into it that night, next to the tears of Jesus, is one of the most pathetic of its memorials. Half buried in its ruins, no city upon earth is so dear to the believer's heart, a city he will assuredly one day see, when he goes to meet His Saviour, whom it slew, come to judge the tribes of men in the valley of Josaphat hard by. Through the same gate, by which she had left the city in the morning, she re-entered it that night. As men count time, some ten hours or so had passed; but in the purposes of God, in the annals of grace, in the chronicles of that broken heart, it was a long secular epoch, longer than the years that had fled since Abraham's day. It was that Friday which we name The Good, partly to veil the bad deed it held, and partly because out of that injustice comes to us an infinity of mercy.

In order to understand the agony which our Blessed Mother had now to suffer, we must take several circumstances into consideration. There was too much of the satiety of bitterness in her soul to allow her to feel sensibly the pain of hunger. She had not done so during the Three Days' Loss. But her long fast told grievously upon her strength. No food had crossed her lips since the evening before. No sleep had visited her eyelids on the Thursday night, and there was little hope of her sleeping now while Jesus lay in the tomb. Moreover, the twenty-four hours had been filled with the most astonishing events, gigantic mysteries following each other in almost indistinguishably rapid succession. Her soul had been on the rack of extremest torture the whole while.

Her mind, serene and capacious as it was, had been stretched and fatigued incessantly by the very comprehension of what was going on around her. Her nature had been shaken to its centre by terror. She was worn out by the bodily fatigue of standing so many hours. The very intensity of her sustained adoration had preyed upon the supplies of her life. That indescribable moment in the tomb had been eclipse and earthquake in her soul both at once. Now, fasting, thirsty, footsore, her eyes tingling with sleeplessness, her limbs aching with fatigue, her mind burning with terrible memories and still more terrible understandings, her heart crushed and desolate within her, a very wreck which the tempests of supernatural woe have been unable to submerge, she enters at the gate of Jerusalem, on another course of the most dire and heart-rending affliction.

She is retracing the morning's pilgrimage, and making the stations of the Cross from last to first, instead of from first to last. Slowly she traversed the intolerable scenes of the morning. Not a gesture had escaped from her retentive memory that evening, just as none had escaped the vigilant anxiety of her eye before. She heard His low soft sighs upon the night-wind. His beautiful disfigured face looked at her through the darkness. Here He fell, and her feet burned and trembled as she stood upon the spot. She knew that she was treading on the pavement stained with His Blood, though the night veiled the ruddy traces from her eyes. There the Cyrenian had taken His Cross. There he had spoken His gentle words, yet words of saddest doom, to the daughters of Jeru-