

salem, whose women's hearts had melted in them at the cruelty of which He was the victim. There He had impressed His adorable lineaments on the cloth which Veronica had brought Him. There was the corner of the street where Mary herself had met Him. It seems ages ago. Those eyes were on her still. That look was in her soul, burning with a fire of love whose heat was torture to the weakness of mortality. There was the guard-room where He was crowned, and there the pillar of the scourging. She knew what lay around the foot of it; from her mind's eye, at least, the darkness could not veil it. There were the steps of Pilate's judgment-hall, where He had been shown with derisive pity to the raging people. The silent air seemed still to ring with their cries of Barabbas. Verily His Blood was on them and on their children now. It was an awful pilgrimage, and her heart bled within her as she made it. It is always a great trial to love to revisit scenes of deep sorrow. Even when time has closed the wound, it is a bitter pain to bear, bitter although our love may drive us to seek it of ourselves. Eyes weep then that have not wept for years. Strong men sob as if they were weak women, and are rightly not ashamed of it. Hearts are broken afresh which patient, dutiful endurance had pieced together as well as might be. Fountains of bitterness from underneath, long closed and almost unsuspected now, break up, and flow, and inundate the soul with gall. All this, too, takes place when use has blunted the edge of grief, so that it cannot cut as deeply or as ferily as it did before. But what is this compared with Mary's backward way of the Cross, the second

she had made that day? The peculiar horror of the mysteries, the incomparable sharpness of the anguish, the crushed and broken heart of the sufferer, her intense bodily fatigue and fainting lassitude, and the rawness of the recent Passion, bear her sorrow far beyond the limits of all comparison.

In such unutterable woeful plight it was that the streets of Jerusalem beheld their unknown queen that night wending her weary way to the house of John. This was the home she had received in exchange for the House of Nazareth. John is her son now instead of Jesus. He is the man and she the woman. But he must lean on her, not she on him. He who last night pillowed his tired head on the Sacred Heart of Jesus must now, in spirit at least, find his repose upon the Immaculate Heart of the sorrowing Mother. The door closed upon her. She was now at home. Home! surely the word was mockery. It was less of a home to her than the chance cave is to the wounded wild beast. How could she have a home except where Jesus was? Bethlehem had been a home, and distant, foreign Heliopolis, and sequestered Nazareth, and the open hilltop of Calvary, and the inside of the garden-tomb. They were homes, because Jesus made a home for her wherever He was. It was when she left the tomb that her true homelessness began. The first step from that sad second Eden was the beginning of her exile. And John's house, too,—had it no dreadful associations which would weight heavily and haunt darkly a broken heart? Who does not know how, in the extremity of sorrow, the eye and the mind busy themselves, not in despite of us, but to our complete

unconsciousness, with all the minutest details of the place in which we are? The furniture, the position in which it stands, the pictures on the wall, the pattern of the carpet, the exact folds of the curtains, the lines across the ceiling, the mouldings of the cornice, little things that are crooked and awry or out of place, are all indelibly transferred to our souls, never to be forgotten, and each detail, each outline, can hereafter become a well of dark associations, replenishing forever the fountains of our tears. So was it with Mary. In that room, with her spirit at Gethsemane, she had spent the three hours of the agony; and the look of the room brought it all back to her, living, and real, and unbearable. From that room she had gone forth with John and Magdalen to try to gain admittance to the house of the high-priest. To that room she had returned when Jesus was thrown into the dungeon for the night. In that room she had spent such a vigil as no other mother could have spent without forfeiting either her reason or her life. And now she had come back to it again the most bereaved, the most desolate among all the countless creatures of our heavenly Father, and all this because she was nearest to Him, and His best-beloved.

There, with the silent companionship of John and Magdalen deepening the utter solitude, she abode for more than four-and-twenty hours. Her grief meanwhile remained preternaturally at its height, because it was beyond the reach of use and time and calm. None could assuage it but God; and His time was not come yet. In fact, it rather grew than otherwise. Like all divine works, its dimensions were in such ex-

quisite proportion that it looked less than it really was. Its vastness, which was hidden from the eye, manifested itself to experience. The storm also grew and thickened in her soul without flash or sound; yet a true and fearful storm it was, lightening invisibly in the very centre of her fixed tranquility, and imprisoning storm, but painful and desolate exceedingly. It kept up the swiftness, energy, and vitality of her sorrow, that it might penetrate the more piercingly into every part of her nature. It settled down into the depths of her soul, filling up every void, commuting to itself, absorbing and transforming, all other things which it found there. So that her faith became an agony, her love an agony, and even her hope an agony. Every faculty of her mind was on the rack. Her reason was deep suffering. Her imagination brought with its exercise acutest pain. Her memory thronged into the avenues of every one of her senses, filling them up with fire and bitterness and terror. Her will, weighted with all these mysterious dolors, hung suspended as on a sort of rack, in the most agonizing tension, yet calm and brave, uttering no cry, letting no sign of torture pass on its features, but peaceably and passively abiding all for God. It is not impossible also that the outward divine abandonment in which she was might have its fearful inward counterpart, as was the case during the Three Days' Loss, of which this seventh dolor is in many ways itself the counterpart. It was a complete possession of sorrow, a miraculous transfiguration of a human life, grander and broader than other human lives, into a living impersonation of unutterable grief.

Such was the mystery of the seventh dolor, or rather

of those few outskirts of it which escape from the secrecy of Mary's heart and come within the range of our limited vision. If it has been hard to tell the story, it will be harder still to specify the peculiarities. The greatest peculiarity of this dolor consisted in its being the last. Very much is implied in this. No one can have failed to perceive that our Lady's dolours are a divine system, a world governed by laws of which we have but a very partial intelligence. We have already classified them on different principles, and have seemed to gain light by doing so. Nevertheless our view of them is by no means complete. Perhaps it never can be. We feel, as if by instinct or divination, that there is a unity in them which we have been unable to grasp, and that they are one in the same way that the Passion is one, though the method is beyond our view. There are lights now and then, strong lights, in dark places. But they only prove to us that we do not see the whole. Like a landscape by moonlight, all is mottled and visionary, shadows and objects confused together, heights and distances falsified, a view which is seen through an inadequate medium. All is real and recognizable, but it is with a visionary reality. Her sorrows were beyond all doubt a very special divine work. The Church does not leave us in any uncertainty as to that question. Now, the end of a divine work must be worthy of its beginnings, and in keeping with them, as it were a crown of grandeur to them. Thus the seventh dolor, whatever may be the peculiar kind of sorrow which it brought along with it, must have been an adequate and congruous consummation of the

rest. We have seen what they were; what then must this have been!

From this it follows, further, that the sorrow of the seventh dolor was a sorrow without a name, a grief which cannot be classed as belonging to the family of any other known grief. It is a class of its own. If we give it a name, it would be an arbitrary one, because we have no similitudes or analogies to guide us in imposing the name. The numerous resemblances which we can trace between the seventh and the third dolor are enough to satisfy us that this last sorrow must have been one of colossal stature. We cannot tell what suffering is like when the heart has got beyond life's possibility of suffering, and the victim is kept alive by power external to himself, not power which mitigates the pain or elevates the capability of endurance by alleviating and consoling, but sheer power of miracle. We have seen this even in her earlier sorrows. Now, here, in like manner, we cannot tell what grief is when it has outrun all the actual experience of the griefs of men, and attained the solitary term beyond which grief cannot go. All possibilities are finite; the possibilities of grief therefore among the rest. He only is truly infinite who is not a possibility, but an Eternal Simple Act. But what can we know of the uttermost territories of possible sorrow? Only as a mysterious place where the Mother of God has been, and where she was when she knelt to make her last adoration of the Body in the tomb. We call it the seventh dolor, and we can call it nothing else. So far as our intelligence goes, her third dolor was her greatest. But her seventh dolor

is beyond our intelligence, both in kind and in degree, and therefore was her greatest in another sense. The circumstances which formed the material of the sorrow were without parallel on earth. They have happened only once, and the unassisted science of the wisest angel would never have dreamed that such things could have happened at all in the bosom of God's creation, rife as it is with unexpected wonders. Mary's heart also was an instrument unparalleled on earth, now that the Sacred Heart was cold and motionless in the tomb. Even when it lived and beat, its union with the Divine Person took it out of the parallel. Mary's state at the close of this vast system of dolor, through which she had revolved, was also quite without parallel, both in respect of holiness, of powers of suffering, and of the miraculous holding together of her shattered life. Thus every thing about this dolor is without parallel. We can but shadow forth in our spirits some nameless immensity of grief, and say it was the seventh which our Mother bore.

Another peculiarity of this dolor, and immediately connected with what has been said, consisted in its being beyond the reach of consolation. It was this which kept its bitter and tempestuous waves unnaturally poised in the air during those four-and-twenty hours in the house of John. It could not be assuaged. It had no power of itself to ebb. It was beyond the laws of grief's common tides. It had nothing to do with creatures, and therefore creatures could not minister consolation to it. The cruelty of men and the rage of devils reached to the death upon the Cross.

In the fifth dolor, therefore, they found their term. Human agency could not reach the seventh dolor. It struggled feebly and faintly, or at least comparatively so, in the sixth; it reflected itself, depicted itself, there; it failed and died out before the seventh, and fell short of that moment at the tomb. Like the third dolor, its affliction was altogether divine. We may guess the proportions of a sorrow coming express from God, and from Him to a creature such as Mary, when compared with the sorrows men or devils can inflict. But here, again, we do not know what it is to be beyond the reach of human consolations. Men tell us, with the usual flattery of comfort or the monitory commonplaces of edification, that our griefs are beyond human consolation. But it is not really so. Time consoles us inevitably, even though it may do its work tardily. Kindness consoles us, even while it irritates us. Life consoles us by the very importunity of its distractions. But Mary was further removed even than this. She was beyond the consolations, not only of common grace, but of that prodigious grace which she herself brought down from the top of Calvary. What is a creature like who is beyond the consolations both of nature and of an unparalleled grace, and whom God Himself can alone console by immediate union with Himself?

We think of those who lie on the bleak confines of creation, in eternal exile from their Father. Oh, woe is their unutterable and yet ineradicable life! Yet there the mighty cloud of an unanswerable justice casts something softening and tolerable over their endless solitude of pain, by the very fact that it renders

it even to their blackened spirits so confessedly reasonable. But Mary was beyond consolation, even when she was meriting more divine sweetnesses than all the angels and the saints together. So that she is not to be paralleled for woe of that kind, even with the lost. Moreover, if we may so dare to speak, love is in some sense a more energetic agent than justice. Thus there is a sense in which an inconsolable desolation prepared by eternal love to inflict suffering must be a more penetrative and overwhelming thing than an inconsolable desolation prepared by eternal justice for the punishment of sin. Nay, the Blood of Jesus somewhat quells the fierceness of the flames of hell; whereas it was that very Blood which was kindling the flames in Mary's soul and heating the furnace of her heart sevenfold hotter than it was before. So that even the desolation of the lost may not compare itself in its excess with that mystical inconsolable affliction which was God's last trial of His Mother's heart. Even He, so seemed it, had no more proofs whereby unutterable sanctity might be established.

But there are some lesser peculiarities, lying on the outside of this seventh dolor, which we must not omit to notice. We saw that the loneliness of the sixth dolor had not yet reached the point of desolation, because Mary still had the companionship of the Body. It became desolation when the great stone was rolled to the door of the monument and she went forth from the garden of His sepulture. This has been a well-known moment in the grief of all of us. All was not over when death was over. We spoke of the lifeless frame in the masculine or feminine, as if the body was

the real self of the one we loved. The house was not forlorn,—at least, not utterly forlorn,—though it was darkened and silent. The dead furnished it, peopled it with one exclusive growing life, and filled it with a mysterious attraction. It made home more home. It was now a consecrated home. It had but been a common home before. Oh, there was such manifold companionship in the dead! Its white face was so eloquent. It did not tell of pain just passed, and the gnawing of hungry disease, and the blight of pestilence. But it spoke of old times, of simple childish years. It was a very resurrection of bygone looks, of almost forgotten expressions, of innocent youthful pleasantness of countenance, blooming above death like the snowdrops above the hoar-frost. The compressed lips smiled at us. The closed eyes looked at us, without opening. The blue-veined hands were full of meaning. It was a dark hour when the coffin closed, but the spell was not gone yet. The moment of desolation did not come when the blue spires of incense upcurled themselves out of the damp grave, and the clods rattled on the coffin-lid, and the hollow sound was like a frightening echo of eternity. But it came when the mourner set his first step again on the threshold of his door, having left the partner of his life, or the child of his hopes, or the mother of his boyhood, behind him in the grave. Then the house was empty indeed, and his heart was empty too, and desolate. If we substitute Mary for ourselves, and Jesus for the love we lost, and make allowance for those wide disparities, like grief was Mary's when she turned away from the garden-tomb. This it is within

our compass to understand, and there are dark days in our own past to testify to its reality.

It is another peculiarity of this dolor, which it shares with the sixth, and which we have already alluded to repeatedly, that Mary was surrounded in it by images of the Sacred Infancy. These were a two-fold fountain of sorrow, both in their contrasts and their similitudes. His imprisonment in the tomb was an image to her of the nine months He had spent in her blessed womb. But she had borne Him then herself over the hill-country of Judea, with swiftest exultation, while each thought was a Magnificat within her soul. Joseph of Arimathea reminded her of him who was chosen of all men by the Eternal Father to be the foster-father of Jesus. But he had gone to sleep peaceably, with his head on the bosom of Jesus; while Joseph of Arimathea was just reversing the pleasant sadness of that older mystery. When she laid Jesus in the tomb, and arranged the winding-sheet, she remembered the crib of the manger, wherein she had laid Him at Bethlehem. But between the crib and the tomb there was all the vast interval which lies between the poles of Christian devotion, Christmas and Passion-tide. The two mysteries were so alike, and yet so different! He was more helpless now than ever He was then. What was loveliest obedience then is rigid passiveness now. His silence was voluntary then; so is it now, but with a different kind of will. He had noticed her then; He takes no notice now. When He slept as a Babe, and His eyes were closed, she knew that He was thinking, loving, worshipping, all the while; and His sleep was

in itself a beauty and a charm. But now the Heart was cold and motionless; worshipful, because of its union with the Godhead, but not beating with conscious love of her. They had had one strange union since His death. It was when she had knelt with Him extended on her arms, and they two together had made the figure of one Crucifix, and it was neither altogether Jesus who was crucified, nor altogether Mary, but God's one victim out of two lives. That was a figure with a strong divine light upon it, never to be forgotten, though we should soon sink out of our depth in its theology of love.

Yet the Passion was there as well as the Infancy. They met upon that ground. That marble Body, many-streaked with intertwisted red and livid blue, was no monument of Bethlehem. The whole Passion was elaborately written out upon His limbs; nay, it is gorgeously illuminated on His Hands and Feet and Side this hour in heaven. Those instruments of the Passion, too, those precious relics which are deposited in the tomb, tell not of Bethlehem and Nazareth, but of Jerusalem and Calvary, of the Prætorium and of Golgotha. Others touching, handling, carrying Him rather than herself,—this painful characteristic of the Passion, which had cut so deep into her soul in the fourth dolor, was renewed in the sixth and seventh. It was a sort of token of the presence of the Passion. But tokens were hardly needed, and, if present, were scarcely perceptible in a mystery which breathed the aromatic bitter of the Passion in all its bearings and in each minutest incident. In the Sacred Infancy she had none to lean their weight on her weariness and

weakness ; for she and Joseph both leaned on Jesus, and rest, and peace, and joy are all one abiding thing to those who lean on Him. But she had to carry the Church in her heart at the Passion. When Jesus died, Peter, the Rock, leaned his repentant faith and love on hers. She upheld by her gentle bravery both John and Magdalen. Joseph and Nicodemus would scarcely have had nerve to detach the Body from the Cross if she had not been there to inspire them with her own tender fortitude. Yet this leaning of others made her heart ache. It was a fresh sorrow of itself. It multiplied the number of dear hearts in which she had to suffer, while it was also a strain upon her own. The Passion reached its height in Mary, not when the Soul of Jesus sank through the greensward at the foot of the Cross, but during that final moment at the tomb.

Here also the Three Days' Loss, that mystery which shines apart, finds something like its fellow. The essence of the sorrow is the same in both cases. It is the loss of Jesus. The time which the loss endures is mysteriously the same. There is the same absence of human agency and secondary causes. The occupations of the absent Jesus are not alike in both cases. In the first he was illuminating the doctors of His nation. In the second He was giving beatific light in the limbus of the Fathers, the older doctors of His people. There was a Joseph to sorrow with Mary at the tomb, as there had been a Joseph to sorrow with her in the temple ; and both Josephs were the choice of God Himself. The nature of the suffering was the same in both cases, because it came from a divine

abandonment. Desolation was equally the form of sorrow then and now. She had lost Him both times in the same place, just outside the gates of Jerusalem. There can be little doubt that the Three Days' Loss was a prophetic foreshadowing of the present separation. But there was one notable exception to all these similitudes. The darkness in the seventh dolor arose from the impossibility of consolation. The darkness in the third was a mysterious ordeal of supernatural ignorance. Here she knew every thing. She had watched the Passion to its close with heroic fidelity. She had embalmed Him herself. She had helped to lay Him in the tomb. She knew where He was and how He had been lost, and she knew of the Resurrection that was to come on Easter morning. But as one deep calleth to another in the ways of God, so doubtless, the third dolor calls to the seventh, and the echoes answer to the call. The voices of both agree in telling us that they both have abysses which we cannot sound, and that beyond the deep places, in which we have nearly lost ourselves, there are deeper places still, which we suspect not.

But the seventh dolor has a prerogative of its own. The Hypostatic Union had long been an object of blissful contemplation to Mary, just as it was the work of God into which the delighted science of the angels most desired to look. The union of our Lord's Body with His Soul, and the union of both Body and Soul with His Divine Person as the Eternal Word, the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity, had been to her the type of all unions, the monument of immutability in the mutable works of the Creator.