

Like the mystery of the Holy Trinity itself, it had seemed to her as that three-fold cord of which Scripture says, with significant moderation, that it is not "easily broken." There was something like a break in it now, and the very thought of such a thing is too terrible for words. What the Word once assumed, that He never put away. The Hypostatic Union could not by possibility be broken. The Body, the Soul, the Blood on the Cross, on the pavement, on men's sandals, and on Mary's garments, all, awaiting the Resurrection, were united to the Person of the Eternal Word, all equally so, though all apart. But the Flesh and Blood were sundered, both worshipful, but both separate. The Blood, precious and divine, was outlying in all directions, in the most unthought-of places, in the most degraded mixtures, in the most complicated, inextricable confusion, as if it was not in its generous, prodigal, world-saving nature to be cooped up in one place, as the Body was, and be inactive in a tomb. Its color should be its voice, and its mute red should preach stirringly wheresoever it might be scattered. But this separation of Flesh and Blood was a fearful invasion of the sanctuary of that heavenly union. Yet more awful far was the sundering of Body and of Soul, that old, dread mystery which God had first invented as a punishment for sin. Here, too, which is more terrible still, it had been done as a punishment, and as a punishment for sin. In the first moments of the Incarnation there had been no succession. The Soul was not an instant before the Body, nor the Body before the Soul, nor either of them an instant without the Divinity. But the Union

which was effected in the womb was broken in the grave, and Mary ministered to both the mysteries. The grief which this appalling separation caused in Mary's heart must have resembled in its pain the disruption which caused it, and it is one of those things which have to stand alone, because God willed that they should be mysteries without mates in His vast creation.

Thus it appears that this seventh dolor was a sort of centre, or a harbor, in which all the various lines of mysteries of the Thirty-Three Years converged. Bethlehem and Calvary, Nazareth and Jerusalem, the Infancy and the Passion, the Boyhood and the Ministry, were all represented here. The possibilities of sorrow were exhausted. Simeon's last sword is sheathed in the Mother's heart. If none can tell the sorrow that she bore, so none can tell the holiness she reached. The frenzy of man's sin and the pressure of divine justice had separated the Body and Soul of Jesus. Both of them combined could do no more; and so the Passion ended. Mary's woes have been mounting, various in their cruelty, inventive in their ruthless tortures, and with her too separation is the last. She is separated from Jesus, from His Soul first of all in the fifth dolor, and from His Body now. Her last separation is from that which she herself gave Him, His Sacred Flesh. Man's sin and the ever-blessed cruelty of divine love have forced the Mother and the Son asunder, though for three-and-thirty years their union had been second to none in creation, save that of the Hypostatic Union. Jesus was without Mary, and Mary was without Jesus, that darkest

of all desolations which the evil one and heresy can imagine in order to rob a poor perishing world of the Precious Blood. Ah, venerable Simeon! thy last sword is indeed sheathed in the Mother's heart. Thou hast departed in peace, according to thy prayer. Thou art gladdening thyself now in the light of Jesus. Yet thy peace beyond the grave is not more glorious than that peace of hers, which for these so many years thy prophecy has turned into inexpressible bitterness!

From these peculiarities of the seventh dolor we may turn now to the dispositions in which our Blessed Mother suffered it. It was the characteristic of our Lady's holiness that it consisted in a perfect correspondence to grace. All holiness is of course simply a correspondence to grace; but with ordinary men, and even with the saints, there is a great deal of failure, of fluctuation, of falling and then rising again, and consequently of imperfect correspondence to grace. Self-will diverts grace from its legitimate channel, and impresses its own character even upon its divine action. Sin also leaves its prints and vestiges even upon our holiness. Temper and disposition too are clearly cognizable in the structure when it is completed. Thus there is something human, something special, something strongly savoring of their natural bent and individual character, in the holiness of the saints. By it we distinguish one saint from another. It is an attraction to our devotion, a stimulus to excite us, a model to copy. This arises from their sanctity not being merely a correspondence to grace, but a result of struggle, of temptations, revolutions, catastrophes, and even ruinous accidents. It is

a divine work, but inextricably mixed up with what is human. It is almost a beauty in our eyes that it should be so. Our Lady's holiness was of quite a different character. It was a simple, unmixed, unthwarted, perfectly accomplished transmutation of grace into holiness, without delay, as the fresh grace came. Hence it is altogether a divine work, sustained by a human will. Sin has left no trace there. There is no vestige of catastrophe, but only the beautiful uniformity of calm and equable law acting with resistless power upon the most glorious theatre in unspeakable pacific majesty. There is no alloy with the pure gold, and, as far as our dim eyes can see, but little individual character. Not that she was without character of her own, and doubtless a very marked one. But it is too near God for us to see it. It is hidden in the vicinity of the intolerable light, as a planet would be if it lay close to the shores of the sun. It is this divine purity of her holiness which, when we reflect maturely upon it, is far more wonderful than its colossal proportions, and distinguishes her with a more nearly infinite distinction from the saints.

A single grace from God is a marvellous thing. Theologians have said that one communion is enough to make a saint. Even in the very commonest graces experience sometimes enables us to discover the most manifold capabilities, the most incredible power of duration, the most extraordinary empire over the soul. It seems occasionally as if a single grace was sometimes a fountain of spiritual miracles within us, or had power enough of itself to turn the helm of our whole lives, and to contain all heaven and the width

of eternity within its own compass. A saint perhaps corresponds to a thousandth part of His grace, we to much less. So far is our meanness, even when it strives, from matching the free magnificence of God. But a grace corresponded to instantly brings another grace, and that another, and so on through an endless series rising in number, in multitude, in beauty, and in efficacy. Thus the irresistible swiftness of the process of sanctification dawns upon us almost as a thing to fear. The possibilities of sanctity cannot be thought of without trembling. The holiness of creatures dazzles us, while the holiness of the Creator seems ever removing and removing further off from us, at the very time it is drawing us onward toward itself in breathless adoration. But our imperfect correspondence frustrates the work. We tie up the liberality of God. We squander, corrupt, dilute His grace, even when we use it, and we delay as if we wished to let it stand and evaporate and lose its peculiar celestial freshness before we take heart to use it. Thus, if we may reverently say it, God with His grace in men's souls is like a man whose thoughts are eloquent and beautiful, but who has not the gift of speech, and cannot utter them, or only in a stammering way which both hides and spoils them. He has not free scope with us. He can but produce a very inferior work at best, because His materials are willfully incapable of a better. Grace was never so gloriously unbound as it was in Mary's soul, except in the Human Soul of Jesus, which is out of all comparison. In her heart it expatiated as if it were in heaven, and developed itself in all its unhindered magnificence.

She corresponded to every grace to the very uttermost. Her graces were gigantic, immeasurable, even when compared with the graces of the apostles; and yet she corresponded perfectly to their vastness. Thus every moment of life was bringing down fresh inundations of grace, which were foliage, flower, and fruit almost the moment they had touched the virgin soil of her immaculate heart. Days went on adding themselves to days, and years to years; and like some fabulous machinery, with overwhelming force and with invisible speed, the process of correspondence and sanctification went on, multiplying itself in one short hour beyond the figures of all human sums. Her life moved too amid tall mysteries, each of which was a universe of sanctification in itself. The march of her soul was among immaculate Conceptions, adorable Incarnations, Hidden Lives of God, Passions of the Impassible, Defeats of the Omnipotent, Birth and Growth and Death of the Immutable and Eternal, the Government of a God, mysterious prodigies of Dolor, Descents of the Holy Ghost, Queenships of Apostles, and the like. What oceans of grace might not such a life of supernatural heroism absorb, and convert into a holiness which, soberly speaking, is unimaginable by angel or by saint! No wonder we always speak so unworthily of Mary. It is one of those sad human infirmities from which we never can escape; for all language is so inexpressibly unworthy of her, that the most glowing praise and the coldest commonplace sink down into one level from such a distance as the inaccessible mountains of her holiness. Love alone can feel its way far on toward her; and happy

is he whose love for her is ever growing. He is enjoying in time one of the choicest blisses of eternity.

This view of Mary's holiness, that it is a purely divine work, because it is simply God's own grace realized, and realized to the utmost, by correspondence, not only gives us the true height of her sanctity, and shows that its world-wide dimensions are not magnified by any mists of affectionate exaggeration, and that all that ever has been said of her by Bernard, Bernardine, and the rest, is far below the level of her tremendous grandeur, but it also explains to us the difficulty we have in getting any clear conceptions of her interior dispositions. In the first place, we are obliged to use the same words to express correspondence to different graces. We speak of her conformity to the will of God, or her generosity, or her fortitude, or her union, when the change of circumstances and the varying refinements of grace have caused the words really to mean different things at different times. We have not keenness or subtlety of spiritual discernment to distinguish between these niceties of grace, these shadings of heavenly beauty. Yet we know them to be so real, that one shade of one of Mary's graces would produce a different kind of saint from another shade of the same grace; and we know them also to be so great and powerful, that each single shade of any one of her graces could fill with color and splendor the souls of a multitude of saints, or the spirits of a hierarchy of angels. But there is such a thing as an eloquent stammering, when we are discoursing on the things of God; and we must speak, even though what we say is far below what we

mean, and what we mean is but a wavering likeness of the reality which we see blindly in the burning fires of the majesty of God.

In the second place, if Mary's holiness consists in tranquil, adequate, congenial correspondence to grace, it is that correspondence which must give the name and character to her dispositions. But, if the graces are far out of our sight, if their abysses are not registered in our theology, (and who can lay down soundings for the unfathomable?) then must her correspondence also be far out of our sight, and with it those conceivable dispositions which form her interior loveliness and grandeur. We can do no more than hazard guesses, and imagine shadows, which shall stand for those invisible realities. We can but make calculations, and then allow for errors from our knowledge of the superlative excellence of the Mother of God, and then let the sum stand, not as an accuracy, but as a mere help to getting an idea. Each succeeding dolor the difficulty of speaking of her dispositions has been greater; and yet we could not be silent, because her dispositions were the graces of her sorrows in blossom, passing on to the fruit of solid holiness. For Mary was no mere monument of marvels, upon which God had hung external dignities, and endless banners, and figurative emblems, and the external spoils of a redeemed world. The bewildering glory outside—and truly it was bewildering—was as nothing compared to that which was within. Mary was a creature, a woman, a mother, a sufferer; and by stupendous correspondence to them she had made God's gifts her own. They are at this moment not

mere ornaments, or privileges, or decorations, or offices conferred, or prerogatives communicated, or even inalienable jewels; neither are they simple attributes, or perfections referred to her, or glories separable from her, or wonders predicated of her, or merits imputed to her; in heaven they are Mary's own self, her own human, maternal, characteristic, loving, quiet self; a self which is in glory what God made it twice over, in nature and in grace. Oh, it is sweet to think that our Heavenly Father has such a daughter, to be ever at His feet worshipping Him with the little greatness of her love!

Of all the interior dispositions of the saints, that which strikes us as the most magnificent, more magnificent than the spirit of martyrdom, is that of perseverance in a complete sacrifice. Perseverance is in itself the most uncreaturelike of graces. It is as if the immutability of the Creator had dropped like a mantle upon the creature, and became him well. There is something at once more graceful in its movements and more heroic in its demeanor than characterized the beautiful fervor in which the soul irrevocably committed itself to the first generous sacrifice. There is more of heaven in its stateliness, while there is also more of a man's own in the courage of the sustained effort. But the glory of perseverance is greatly increased when it is in a complete sacrifice. There is a completeness and unity about the whole work, which seems to render it an offering worthy of the divine compassion. Strange to say, while many souls fail under the effort while the sacrifice is yet incomplete, there are not a few who dishonor it in its com-

pleteness. Nature gives way and seeks repose, when it has attained the summit that was before it; and it seldom happens on earth that there is not something ignoble and unworthy about repose. Others look back on what they have done almost with cowardly regret; for it is rarely the case that any sacrifice is strictly speaking complete in itself. A man has committed himself by it to something further, something higher. All efforts in the spiritual life, properly speaking, have to be sustained till the end. The difficulty, and therefore the costliness of perseverance, consists in its tension never being relaxed. It is on this account that perseverance is an uncreaturelike grace, a supernatural similitude of God. Others again do not regret the efforts expended or the sacrifices made; but they look at once for their reward. They lower the nobility of what they have done by a want of disinterestedness. We are not offended when little services look for their reward. But great services remind us of God, and do not look so palpably unworthy of Him, and therefore they offend us by the mention of their recompense. So it is, that in one way or other there are few souls, who do not somewhat disfigure and impair their sacrifice, and take the unearthly freshness from it. Thus when we see any one persisting in his complete sacrifice with the same ardor and fortitude and magnanimity and patience, almost gracefully unconscious that he has done or is doing any great thing, not that he does not understand what he has done, but because when all his thoughts are fixed on God there are none left for attention to himself, then do we call it the most magnifi-

cent of all interior dispositions, a shadow of the rest of the unfatigued Creator when His sabbath succeeded to the making of the world. Such was Mary's disposition in this seventh dolor. It was the sabbath of her world of sorrows. But when we think of the sacrifice which she had made, of the completeness with which she had made it, and then of her quiet bravery in that desolate solitude of creatures which was all around her uncompanioned soul, we may conceive how far it is beyond our power to realize the intrinsic majesty of such a disposition, and how much we should lower it, if we strove to compare it with the corresponding disposition in the saints, to which in the paucity of words we are fain to give the self-same name. God rested on Himself in the hollow of uncircumscribed eternity, when His dread sabbath came. Can a creature share in such a sabbath? Yet to what else shall we liken Mary in the repose of her dolours finished?

Another disposition of her soul in this dolor was her detachment from all spiritual consolations and the sweetness of divine things. This is a height of love which he who practises it not on earth loses the opportunity of practising forever; for there can be no such love in heaven. We talk so often of the love of suffering, urging it on others and on ourselves, that we almost forget how high and rare a grace it is, and how rash the pursuit of it is to common souls. There are few indeed to whom such a grace is a reality, and fewer still with whom it is at home, or amidst whose other graces it finds a place that fits it. Yet saints, who have loved such suffering as creatures could in-

flict upon them, have shrunk from those processes of suffering which God Himself immediately imposes on the soul. Many, who have willingly parted with the light of the earth, have drawn back trembling from the darkness of heaven, when it threatened to descend upon them, and have averted it by the energy of their prayers. There have been saints, who for the love of God would forego His spiritual sweetnesses and consolations, who yet could not bear to have His blessed Self laid upon them as a dread instrument of mysterious pain. The cloudy solitudes of divine abandonment have been trodden by very few, and they for the most part, when they had entered into the obscurity, let us know how far they had advanced by the cries of anguish which escaped from them, as from wounded eagles, in their torture. Jesus Himself had cried aloud as He sank down into that appalling death. Mary, in this dolor, was allowed to try this perilous descent, and to share still further than she had done beneath the Cross the dereliction of our Blessed Lord. As this came upon Him at the end of His Passion, as the crowning sorrow, just when it was least possible for nature to endure it, so hers came on her at the end of her Compassion, as the crowning dolor, when suffering had left nature but as a wreck amid the abounding waters of divinest grace. The two sorrows, His and hers, ended in the same mysterious divine affliction, whither we cannot reach, but where we know that out of speechless woe there rose unutterable beautiful light from out their souls, which worshipped God with the perfection of created worship, carrying, as on some mighty resistless wave, the offering of hu-

man love far beyond the highest point which the tide of angelical intelligence was ever known to reach.

There are also two growths of heroic sorrow which we must not forget to notice, and which we may assuredly reckon among her dispositions in this dolor, the spirit of intercession and the spirit of thanksgiving. The products of grace are not unfrequently the contradictories of nature, even while they are grafted upon them. It would seem as if the natural result of sorrow were to make us selfish, by forcibly occupying us with ourselves, and concentrating our attention upon our sufferings. Yet we know that the proper grace of sorrow is unselfishness. It is as if the very multitude of things we had to bear made large room in our hearts, and caused a leisurely tranquility there, which enabled us to think of others, and to legislate with the most minute and foreseeing consideration for their comfort. The spirit of intercession is part of the unselfishness which comes from the sanctification of sorrow. Our kindness toward others takes especially a religious and supernatural form, because we are bearing our sorrow in the presence of God, and our whole being is softened by it, and drawn into deeper and more heavenly relations with Him. The spirit of intercession belongs to hearts, which are victims,—victims, voluntary or involuntary, of God's loving justice. Every Christian who is in sorrow is so far forth a living copy of Christ Crucified, and the spirit of expiation is an inevitable element in his grace. Moreover, human agents are generally more or less concerned with our griefs, and, for the most part, not innocently or unintentionally so; and our

thoughts, in being occupied with ourselves, are necessarily occupied with them. Thus Jesus prayed for His murderers upon the Cross. Thus the martyrs prayed for their tormentors. Thus, also, to wrong a saint has generally been the royal road to his choicest prayers. Who can doubt, therefore, and especially in those critical circumstances of the world and out of the very abysses of the mysteries of redeeming grace, that Mary's soul, the more it was overwhelmed with the waters of bitterness, with all the more quiet intensity poured itself out on others? and inasmuch as her prayers were her treasures, treasures that could enrich the world far beyond its own suspicion or belief, it would necessarily be in intercession that the largeness and exuberance of her love found vent, especially when this spirit of intercession was, at the same time, the most efficacious reparation to Jesus for the wrongs He had sustained.

But, while sanctified sorrow melts the heart in kindness toward others, much more does it absolutely liquefy it, to use the favorite word of mystical writers, in kindness toward God; and this, in the same spirit of contradiction to nature, takes the form of thanksgiving. On natural principles, the times of sorrow are the times when we have least to thank God for; but to an enlightened and discerning faith they are the times into which blessings are miraculously compressed, miraculously both for number and for greatness. Yet even here there is something also which is deeply natural. When a friend has wounded us in any way, his change of conduct somehow brings out his love for us in our hearts, and the past is brightly