

magnified from behind the present cloud. Thus in our relations with God, sorrow makes us feel our own unworthiness more deeply, so that the contemplation of past mercies fills us with an humble astonishment, whose only voice is wondering praise and the thanksgiving of happy tears. This is that glorifying of God in the fires, which is one of the magnificences of tried souls. As we crush the aromatic leaves of the cypress and the bay to extract their fragrance from them, so God presses our hearts till they bleed, that they may worship Him with the perfume of their gratitude, and draw Him closer to themselves with the new delight and love with which they inspire His compassion and His tenderness. Who can doubt that, as Mary sank deeper down and deeper in those amazing gulfs of her dolours, her Magnificat became evermore louder, and deeper, and quicker, and more full of adoring significance in the enraptured ear of God?

Last of all, the magnitude of her faith, in the dark hour of that seventh dolor, did of itself worship the Holy Trinity most incomparably. This is another of the many resemblances which there are between the seventh dolor and the third, the immensity and the repose of faith in unutterable darkness, faith without the light of faith, the sense of faith, the enjoyment of faith, without the ever-present self-reward as well as self-conviction which faith ordinarily brings with it. Here also is the same spirit of contradiction to unregenerate nature. We believe God the more readily, the more firmly, the more lovingly, just the more incredible He vouchsafes to make Himself to us. He never seems more good than when we ourselves have

the least cause to think Him good, never more just than when He looks as if He were positively unjust. Faith is a gift which grows under demand, and becomes the more inexhaustible when its waters are let loose. It is in itself a worship of the truth of God, and in this perhaps resides the secret of its apparently unaccountable acceptableness with Him. Hence the more clearly we see this eternal truth in the midst of blinding darkness, so much the more firmly do we adhere to it in spite of seeming evidence to the contrary, and so much the less are we moved by difficulties; or, rather, the less we apprehend them *as* difficulties, so much the more worship does our faith contain. Though he slay me, yet will I trust in Him, were the grand words of Job. Hence too it follows that calmness enhances faith. It is a testimony to its reality, and an evidence of its empire. Tranquil faith is sweetest worship, because it seems to say that all is at peace because God is concerned. There is no need of agitation, or of trouble, or of any manner of inquietness; God is His own guarantee: all must be right and best and most beautiful, because it is from Him. His word is dearer to us than knowledge, easier to read than proof, and nestles deeper in our hearts than a conviction. Yet never was faith exercised under such circumstances as by Mary in this dolor, never was faith greater, nor ever faith more tranquil. The faith of the whole of the little scattered Church was in her; and there is not more faith to-day in the whole of the huge world-wide Church Militant than was in her single heart that night.

All this gives us but a faint idea of the inward

beauty of our Blessed Lady in the endurance of this seventh dolor. Unknown graces were accompanied by unknown dispositions. The heights which she had reached are inaccessible to our mystical theology. God only can tell how beautiful she was within, and into what new unions with Himself she had by this last sorrow been permitted to enter. It is enough for us to know that, next to the Body of Jesus, her immaculate heart was the most wonderful thing on earth that night.

The seventh dolor contains also many lessons for ourselves, which are quite within the scope of those who are endeavoring to serve God in an ordinary way, while at the same time, like all the other sorrows of our Blessed Mother, it calls us to serve Him with a higher, more detached, and more disinterested love than we have ever done before. We learn from the promptitude with which she left the tomb to do her work, and to fulfil in her cheerless desolation the will of God, how we ourselves should put duty before all other considerations, and, in comparison with it, estimate as nothing the highest spiritual consolations. Now, as if Providence arranged it so on purpose, duty seems often to lead from the sensible enjoyment of Jesus. Even in common domestic life the unselfishness of daily charity will lead us to sacrifice what looks like a religious advantage, to forfeit what it is hard not to persuade ourselves is a spiritual improvement, for an agreeableness which others do not particularly value, and which appears to be only a growth of acquired politeness or of natural kindness, and not at all an obedience to a supernatural bidding of

grace. It is hard at all times to persuade ourselves that there is no spiritual advantage to be compared to the giving up of our own will, and that petty mortifications, which concern our own private ways, and the use of our time, and habits even of devotion, are, so long as they are painful to us, among the highest methods of sanctification. It is necessary to add, *so long as they are painful to us*, for, unlike other mortifications, when they cease to be painful they cease to be mortifications, and become symptoms of the world having got the better of us, and then unfortunately there is no discretion left us but the apparently selfish rudeness of those who have real cause to be afraid about their souls. If the ordinary civilities of society may often claim our time and attention at the seeming sacrifice of spiritual sweetness and communion with our Lord, much more imperative is the jurisdiction which charity may lawfully exercise over us in this respect. Unfortunately spirituality tends to be selfish. Our nature is so bad that good things acquire evil propensities from their union with us, and it is the best things which have the worst propensities. So even the love of our Blessed Lord, when discretion does not guide it, may interfere with our love of others, and so come at last to be an untrue love of Him. Untrue, because merely sentimental; for there is no divine love which is not at the same time self-denying. To have to give up our own ways to those of others, to have our times of prayer at hours which we dislike, to accommodate our habits of piety to the habits of others, is certainly a delicate and perilous process, one needing great discretion, safe discretion,

and an abiding fear of worldiness. Nevertheless, it is often a most needful means of sanctification, especially to those whose duties, health, or position do not allow them to lead mortified and penitential lives. The use of time, whether we consider the annoying weariness of punctuality and the supernatural captivity of regular hours, or whether we look at the unwelcome interruptions and somewhat excessive demands upon it made by the inconsiderateness and importunity of others, is a most copious source of vigorous and bracing mortification for those who are trying to love God purely amid the inevitable follies and multifarious distractions of the world. It is the especial mortification of priests. But, if manners and charity may lawfully draw us from the sensible enjoyment of Jesus, it would be simply unlawful to deny the claims of duty to compel such an act of self-denial. Yet it is a point in which pious people, especially beginners, almost invariably fail. There are few households or neighborhoods in which the spiritual life has got an unjustly bad name, where the mischief has not been caused by the indiscretion of an ill-regulated piety in this respect, and, while it is to be hoped that we look upon such households or neighborhoods with an entirely unsympathetic coldness, it is not the less sad that the evil should be there, because it is not the less true that our Blessed Lord is the sufferer. Beginners cannot easily persuade themselves that Jesus can be more really anywhere than in the sensible enjoyments of intercourse with Him. The more advanced souls know well that Jesus unfelt is a greater grace than Jesus felt, in a multitude of instances; yet even with

them practice falls below knowledge, because nature rebels to the very last against whatever limits the prerogatives of sense.

If Mary sought for no consolation in the house of John, but abandoned herself there to her desolation till Easter morning, does it not seem as if there was some kind of justification for those who cherish their grief and brood over it? We must distinguish. Grief in divine things so far differs from grief arising from earthly losses and bereavements, that we have no right to put it away from ourselves or to seek consolation, until the impulses of grace bid us do so. The suffering of divine sorrow is so different a thing from that of common sorrow, that there is no danger of sentimentality, or effeminacy, or selfishness arising from it. The endurance of divine sorrow is not the indulgence of it, but the continuation of a crucifixion; whereas the endurance of common sorrow soon ceases to be sorrow, and becomes an indulgence, an elegant and interesting self-importance, and a dissipating softness of luxurious melancholy. Thus sorrow for sin, sadness because of the sins of others, grief because of the vicissitudes of the Church, grief because of our Lord's Passion, or sorrowing sympathy with our Lady's dolours, are not so much events of human sadness which befall us as direct operations of grace, and therefore aiming at different ends and working by other laws. Such griefs should be cherished, their remembrances kindled, and their shadows be, perhaps, with some slight degree of violence, retained, when they seem as if they were departing. All this is unlawful with ordinary sorrows. Yet even in the case of divine

sorrows it is to be remembered that any grace which is out of the jurisdiction of discretion is a phenomenon utterly unknown to the highest theology of the saints.

Since there are so many resemblances between the seventh dolor and the third, it is not surprising that they should in some respect teach the same lessons. We learn from this last sorrow that there is no darkness like the darkness of a world without Jesus, such as Mary's world was on that fearful night. It is darker than the darkness of Calvary; for that is a darkness which cheers, refreshes, and inspires. Jesus is there. He is the very heart of that darkness. He is felt more plainly than if He were seen. He is heard more distinctly because all is so dark about Him, and other sounds are hushed by the gloom. It is like being in the cloud with God, as tried souls often are. It is truly a darkness, and brings with it the pain of darkness; yet there is hardly a loving soul on earth to whom such darkness would not be more welcome far than light. But the darkness of the absence of Jesus is, as it were, a participation in the most grievous pain of hell. If it is by our own fault, then it is the greatest of sorrows. If it is a trial from God, then it is the greatest of sufferings. In either case we must not let the light of the world tempt us out of the darkness. In such a gloom it is indeed dreadful to abide; but the consequences of leaving it by our own self-will are more dreadful still. It is not safe there to think of creatures. We must think of God only. It is the sanctuary of "God Alone," the motto of the saints and of the saintly. We must deal only with the super-

natural, and leave Him who brought us there, whether for chastisement or fervor, to take us out when it shall be His will. Meanwhile we should unite ourselves to the dispositions in which Mary endured her seventh dolor, and this will bring us into closer union with God.

One more lesson still she teaches. She did her work in the world, as it were, with all her heart; and yet her heart was not there, but in the tomb with Jesus. This is the grand work which sorrow does for all of us. It entombs us in the will of God. It buries our love, together with our sorrow, in the Blessed Sacrament. Sorrow is, as it were, the missionary of the Divine will. It is the prince of the apostles. The Church is built upon it. The gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Our Lord is with it always to the end. It is sorrow that digs the grave of self, and blesses it, and burns incense in it, and buries self therein, and fills it up, and makes the flowers grow upon the tomb. The great secret of holiness is never to have our hearts in our own breasts, but living and beating in the Heart of Jesus; and this can rarely be accomplished except through the operation of sanctified sorrow. Happy, therefore, is he who has a sorrow at all hours to sanctify!

We have now brought our Blessed Mother to the threshold of those mysterious fifteen years which followed her dolours and the Ascension of our Lord. She began with fifteen years without Him, and so in like manner she ended with fifteen years without Him. Only as in the first fifteen years the image of the Messiah was engraven upon her heart, and the shadow

of His coming lay over all her growths in holiness, so in the last fifteen years he dwelt bodily within her in the unconsumed Blessed Sacrament, from Communion to Communion, and was the living fountain of all those nameless and unimaginable growths in holiness which, during that time, went on within her soul. The destiny of the Mother of God was a destiny of unutterable sorrow, exhausting at once the possibilities of woe and the capabilities of the creature. This might be expected, since it was by sorrow, shame, and the Passion that the Incarnate God came to save the world. The dolours of our Blessed Lady, therefore, are inseparable from her divine Maternity. They are not accidents of her life, one way out of many ways in which God might have chosen to sanctify her. They were inevitable to her as Mother of God, of God who took flesh to suffer and to die. Thus, rightly considered, Mary's dolours are Mary's self. Her first fifteen years, commencing with the Immaculate Conception, were a preparation for her dolours. Her last fifteen years, commencing with the descent of the Holy Ghost, were the maturity of her dolours. During them her sea of sorrow settled till it became a clear, profound, translucent depth of unmingled love, whose last act of taking the tranquil plenitude of possession of its glorious victim was the dislodging of her soul from her body, by the most marvellous and beautiful death which creature could ever die. Such an edifice of sorrow as the Divine Motherhood was to bring along with it could not rest on foundations less broad and deep than the immeasurable graces of her first fifteen years. What, then, must have been the

grandeur of the graces which came upon that edifice when it was completed, and were its domes, and towers, and pinnacles? We have often wondered what could be done to Mary, in the way of sanctification, at the descent of the Holy Ghost. What was left to do? In what direction was she to grow? The mere fact of the delaying of the Assumption meant something; and what could it have meant but increase of holiness and multiplication of grace? If she was kept on earth to nurse the Infant Church, as she had nursed the Infant Saviour, to be herself a living Bethlehem, with the Blessed Sacrament forever in her, and her queenship of the apostles and external ministry of Bethlehem to the childhood of the Church, still, untold and incalculable augmentations of grace and merit are implied in the very office, as well as in the fact that it was God's Mother who fulfilled the office. It was her dolours which opened out in her soul fresh abysses for eager grace to fill. It was the dolours which rendered her capable of that other new creation of grace in the descent of the Holy Ghost. His graces are absolutely inexhaustible: her capacities of grace are practically inexhaustible, to our limited comprehension. The grace which prepared her for the Divine Maternity prepared her also for her singular and lifelong martyrdom. Her martyrdom prepared her for those ineffable augmentations of grace and merit which were compressed into her last fifteen years. Thus her dolours are, as it were, the centre of her holiness. They reveal Mary to us as she was in herself more than any other of her mysteries. Indeed, they are hardly to be called mysteries; they are more than that: they are

her life, her self, her maternity. They enable us to understand her holiness. They help us to see that what theologians say of the momentary accumulation of her merits is not so incredible as it often seems to those who have not loved and meditated their way into Mary's greatness. There is nothing about Mary which unites in itself so much of Mary's part in the Incarnation, of her own peculiar personal holiness, and of her similitude to God, as the system of her dolors. They are at once the plainest and the completest as well as the most tender and pathetic revelation of the Mother of God. As her first fifteen years were secret, so were her last fifteen; but over the marvellous processes of grace which fill them both lies the shadow of her dolors, the shadow of a coming time in the one case, the shadow of a lofty mountainous past in the other. He who would learn Mary must enter into her broken heart to do so. It is the "dolorous Mother" who illuminates the Immaculate Conception on the one side and the fair pomp of the Assumption on the other.

Look once more at the great Mother, as she leaves the garden of the sepulture. Eve going forth from Eden was not more sorrow-laden, and bore with her into the unpeopled earth a heart less broken and less desolate. That woe-worn woman is the strength of the Church, the queen of the apostles, the true mother of all that outspread world, over which the blue mantle of darkness is falling fast and silently. Sleep on, tired world! sleep on, beneath the paschal moon and the stars that are brightening as it sets; thy mother's heart watches and wakes for thee!

CHAPTER IX.

THE COMPASSION OF MARY.

AT first we stood on the shore of Mary's sorrows and gazed upon them as one vast ocean. We then sounded, one after another, the seven abysses of that ocean, which the Church selected and presented to us. Now we look at her dolors again as one, but pouring their waters through the strait of Calvary into the mightier ocean of the Precious Blood. This peculiar point of view is called the Compassion of Mary, the right understanding of which involves several grave theological questions, and yet is most necessary to make our devotion to the dolors real and profound. There are, in fact, seven questions for us to consider: the divine purpose of her Compassion, its nature and characteristics, what it actually effected, the relation in which it stands to our own compassion with her, a comparison of the Passion with Mary's Compassion, the seeming excess of the Compassion over the Passion, and, lastly, the measures and dimensions of her Compassion.

SECTION I.

THE DIVINE PURPOSE OF MARY'S COMPASSION.

First of all, then, we have to consider the divine purpose of her Compassion. It is very questionable