

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

whether we might ever say of anything in God's works that it was merely ornamental. There is something in the idea of mere ornament which seems at variance with the actuality of God, with the magnificence of His simplicity, with His adorable reality. To suppose our Lady's *dolors* to be so much ornamental pathos added to the Incarnation even for the holy end of exciting some additional degrees of love, would involve still further questions regarding the character and perfections of God, His tenderness toward His creatures, and the merciful significance which there is in every pain and sorrow through all creation. It is not easy to see how he who should hold such a view of our Blessed Lady's sorrows could be excused from the highest irreverence, or even from implicit blasphemy. God certainly had a purpose in them. He has a purpose in everything which He ordains. But His purpose in so very marked a feature of the Incarnation as the unutterably woeful destiny of the Mother of God must have been proportioned to the magnitude of the mystery itself, and of that larger mystery of which it is a part. It could not have been a simple pathos. God could not have martyred one of His creatures only to throw a poetical halo round the intense realities of Calvary. Neither could it have been merely a lesson to us. For much of her Compassion is not only inimitable by us, and so beyond our reach, but also incomprehensible to us, and so beyond our understanding. It is true we learn lessons from it, because there is teaching in all that God does. But this is a different thing from God's having no further intention in a mystery than that it

should be a lesson to us. Neither can it have been only for her sanctification, though no doubt this was one great purpose in it. She had become the Mother of God before her *dolors* commenced; and they were a consequence of her divine maternity, not a preparation for it. They did sanctify her. Indeed, they were in an especial sense the sanctification of one who, being sinless, could not be sanctified, as the saints have been, by struggle, evil propensity, or inward temptation. But it is hard to contemplate them at all studiously and believe that their purpose ended here. We crave a deeper and diviner purpose, and one more closely knit to the whole scheme of the Incarnation; and we may be sure that such a one exists, even though it may be beyond our discovery.

If, then, we reject all the views mentioned above, as unreal and unworthy, and clearly at variance with the phenomena to be explained, are we, on the other hand, to suppose that our Lady's Compassion was part of the redemption of the world, that the salvation of souls was merited by it, and that sin was expiated by it? Many writers have used language which seems to imply as much as this. Saints and doctors have united in calling our Blessed Lady co-redemptress of the world. There is no question of the lawfulness of using such language, because there is such overwhelming authority for it. The question is as to its meaning. Is it merely the hyperbole of panegyric, the affectionate exaggeration of devotion, the inevitable language of a true understanding of Mary, which finds common language inadequate to convey the whole truth? Or is it literally true, with an acknowledged and recognized theo-

logical accuracy attached to it? This is a question which has presented itself to most minds in connection with devotion to our Blessed Mother, and there are few questions to which more vague and unsatisfactory answers have been made, than to this. On the one hand, it seems rash to assert of language used both by saints and doctors, that it is only exaggeration and hyperbole, flowery phraseology intended to startle, but without any real meaning hidden beneath it. On the other hand, who can doubt that our most Blessed Lord is the sole Redeemer of the world, His Precious Blood the sole ransom from sin, and that Mary herself, though in a different way, needed redemption as much as we do, and received it in a more copious manner and after a more magnificent kind in the mystery of the Immaculate Conception? Thus, so far as the literal meaning of the word is concerned, it would appear that the term *co-redemptress* is not theologically true, or, at least, does not express the truth it certainly contains with theological accuracy. We are distracted between the desire to magnify our Blessed Mother, the authority of the saints and doctors, and the supremely sovereign requirements of a sound theology. We certainly shrink from asserting that the language of the saints has no meaning, or is inadvisable; and, at the same time, we have no doubt that our Blessed Lady is not the *co-redemptress* of the world in the strict sense of being *redemptress*, in the unshared sense in which our Lord is Redeemer of the world, but she is *co-redemptress* in the accurate sense of that compound word. But these are not times in which it is desirable to use words the real

meaning of which we have not distinctly ascertained. Hence, while it would be sad indeed for any one to attempt to deprive Mary of a title which saints and doctors have conferred upon her,—for we are living in days when the growth of devotion to our Blessed Mother is our surest augury of a better future,—at the same time it is of importance, even in a devotional point of view, for us to know what we mean by a title which certainly conveys a real truth and a truth which could not very easily be otherwise expressed. The following conclusions may perhaps be taken as true, finding truth in the mean, and avoiding both the somewhat violent alternatives of censuring the saints, or of infringing on the prerogatives of our Blessed Lord:—

1. Our Blessed Lord is the sole Redeemer of the world in the true and proper sense of the word, and in this sense no creature whatsoever shares the honor with Him, neither can it be said of Him without impiety that He is *co-redeemer* with Mary.

2. In a secondary dependent sense, and by participation, all the elect co-operate with our Lord in the redemption of the world.

3. In the same sense, but in a degree to which no others approach, our Blessed Lady co-operated with Him in the redemption of the world.

4. Besides this, and independent of her dolors, she co-operated in it in a sense, and after a manner, in which no other creatures did or could.

5. Furthermore, by her dolors, she co-operated in the redemption of the world in a separate and peculiar way, separate and peculiar not only as regards the co-

operation of the elect, but also as regards her own other co-operation, independently of the dolours.

These five propositions seem to place the whole question in a tolerably clear light. It does not appear to be necessary to say any thing about the first. It is of faith that our Blessed Lord alone redeemed the world. The elect co-operate with Him in this work as His members. They have become His members by redeeming grace, that is, by the application to their souls of His sole redemption. By His merits they have acquired the ability of meriting. Their works can satisfy for sin, the sins of others as well as their own, by their union with His. Thus, to use St. Paul's language, by their sanctified sufferings or by their voluntary penances they "fill up in their bodies that which is lacking of the sufferings of Christ, for His Body's sake, which is the Church." Thus by the communion of the saints in their Head, Jesus Christ, the work of redemption is perpetually going on by the accomplishment and application of the redemption effected on the Cross by our Blessed Lord. It is not a figurative and symbolical, but a real and substantial, co-operation of the elect with our Blessed Redeemer. There is a true secondary sense in which the elect merit the salvation of the souls of others, and in which they expiate sin and avert its judgments. But it is by permission, by divine adoption, by participation, and in subordination to the one sole and complete redemption of Jesus Christ. But the holiness of all the saints together does not even approximate to the holiness of Mary. Her merits have a sort of infinity as compared with theirs. Their martyrdoms

and dolours are little more than shadows when placed by the side of hers. Thus in their own sense of co-operation she exceeds them in degree immeasurably, so that her co-operation with our Lord almost throws theirs into the shade. On this account she might be called co-redemptress with a truth, which would be far less applicable to the saints.

But this is not all. She co-operated with our Lord in the redemption of the world in quite a different sense, a sense which can never be more than figuratively true of the saints. Her free consent was necessary to the Incarnation, as necessary as free will is to merit according to the counsels of God. She gave Him the pure blood, out of which the Holy Ghost fashioned His flesh and bone and blood. She bore Him in her womb for nine months, feeding Him with her own substance. Of her was He born, and to her He owed all those maternal offices which, according to common laws, were necessary for the preservation of His inestimable life. She exercised over Him the plenitude of parental jurisdiction. She consented to His Passion; and if she could not in reality have withheld her consent, because it was already involved in her original consent to the Incarnation, nevertheless she did not in fact withhold it, and so He went to Calvary as her free-will offering to the Father. Now, this is co-operation in a different sense from the former, and if we compare it with the co-operation of the saints, their own co-operation, in which Mary herself alone surpassed them all, we shall see that this other peculiar co-operation of hers was indispensable to the redemption of the world as effected on the Cross.

Souls could be saved without the co-operation of the saints. The soul of the penitent thief was saved with no other co-operation than that of Mary, and, if our Blessed Lord had so willed it, could have been saved without even that. But the co-operation of the Divine Maternity was indispensable. Without it our Lord would not have been born when and as he was; He would not have had that Body to suffer in; the whole series of the divine purposes would have been turned aside, and either frustrated, or diverted into another channel. It was through the free will and blissful consent of Mary that they flowed as God would have them flow. Bethlehem, and Nazareth, and Calvary, came out of her consent, a consent which God did in no wise constrain. But not only is the co-operation of the saints not indispensable of itself, but no one saint by himself is indispensable to that co-operation. Another apostle might have fallen, half the martyrs might have sacrificed to idols, the saints in each century might have been a third fewer in number than they were, and yet the co-operation of the saints would not have been destroyed, though its magnificence would have been impaired. Its existence depends on the body, not on the separate individuals. No one saint who can be named, unless perhaps it were in some sense St. Peter, was necessary to the work, so necessary that without him the work could not have been accomplished. But in this co-operation of Mary she herself was indispensable. It depended upon her individually. Without her the work could not have been accomplished. Lastly, it was a co-operation of a totally different kind from that

of the saints. Theirs was but the continuation and application of a sufficient redemption already accomplished, while hers was a condition requisite to the accomplishment of that redemption. One was a mere consequence of an event which the other actually secured, and which only became an event by means of it. Hence it was more real, more present, more intimate, more personal, and with somewhat of the nature of a cause in it, which cannot in any way be predicated of the co-operation of the saints. And all this is true of the co-operation of Mary, without any reference to the dolours at all.

But her dolours were of themselves another co-operation still more peculiar. The Incarnation might have taken place without its sorrowful mysteries. Indeed, if there had been no sin, it would have taken place in glorious and impassible Flesh, and of the same Mother with a different destiny, a destiny of joy as marvellous and inexplicable as was in fact her destiny of sorrow. The joys of Mary are like flashes from some other set of divine decrees, which was not wholly overlaid by the present dispensation. This is their peculiarity. They are tokens of a mystery existing in the mind of God, but which to us is no more than a possible world, or rather a world which our sin would not allow to realize itself. Thus it is impossible to separate the dolours of Mary from her divine Maternity. They follow from it in the way of consequence as necessarily as in the free divine counsels the Incarnation of shame and suffering followed from the necessity of expiating sin. Her sorrows were caused by and inextricably commingled with His sorrows. They came