

THE STABAT MATER.

BY HENRY KAVANAGH.

(This is one of the seven great Hymns of the Christian Church—composed by an Italian monk, of the Order of St. Francis, in the 13th Century—and revered alike by Catholics and Protestants.)

The Latin will be found in the *Ursuline Manual*, page 759, with a translation at page 615, and both, in the *Key of Heaven*, page 389, and *Catholic Piety*, 437; but these English versions are extremely poor and independent of the text, written by some person who had more piety than poetry in his composition.

There is a metrical version of this Hymn in a modern edition of the *Vade Mecum* which I hear is a great improvement on those referred to.

I have endeavoured to make a literal translation, though in two or three instances, forced by the necessities of rhyme and measure, I have amplified an idea, but still in accordance with the spirit of the Latin stanzas, and as near as possible to the letter. I did not expect to convey the simplicity, sublimity and pathos of the original—but was anxious to do all the justice in my power to a Lyric—which after the “Dies Iræ,” is the greatest and most pathetic Hymn that ever was written—and which, 600 years ago, must have been conceived in a monastic cell, and composed at the foot of the Crucifix.)

“O quam tristis et afflicta,
Fuit illa benedicta
Mater Unigeniti!”

Oppressed with woe, the Mother stood
In tears beside the awful Road,
On which her Son, with blood imbrued,
Midst cruel tortures hung.
In utmost, speechless misery rise
Those moistened, meek and mournful eyes;
Her soul,—in anguish breathing sighs,
The sword of sorrow stung.

What dread affliction was the guest
Of her, above all women blessed;
What sadness filled the Mother's breast
Who bore the Holy One;
And moaning—hopeless of reprieve—
Disconsolate beyond relief,
Beheld in depth of solemn grief
The sufferings of her Son.

What man in sympathy sincere—
Christ's Virgin mother mourning near,
Who would not shed a bitter tear,
Such sacrifice to see.

What human heart though hard as steel,
To which her plight should not appeal;
Who would not Mary's dolours feel
For Jesus' agony.

She saw the Saviour rudely urged,
By rabble bound, by soldiers scourged—
That from the people sin be purged
By His abundant merit;
The One Begotten desolate,
The last pangs of His dying state,
Abandoned to the Jewish hate
As He gave up His spirit.

Sweet Mother, fount of love divine,
Cause those overwhelming woes of thine,
In force and compass to be mine
And make me grieve with thee:
That while I most devoutly mourn,
My heart with love for Christ may burn,
Consumed as ashes in an urn,
That God well pleased may be.

Obtain, Madonna,—this request,
That in my seared and callous breast
The wounds of Christ may be impressed,
That I their worth partake;
Those in His Feet, in Hands and Side,
His thorny Crown with me divide,
The anguish which the Crucified
Has suffered for my sake.

Oh! let my tears with thine be blent—
For the Incarnate Word lament,
And feel the racking pains which rent
His Body from His Soul.
To stand with thee till I expire,
Beside the Cross, is my desire;
As partner in thy sorrows dire
Sincerely to condole.

Most pure and perfect Virgin born,
Whom every grace and gift adorn,
Grant favour to me still forlorn,
That with thee I may weep.
Christ's sacred Passion make me share,
As His companion and coheir,
The death of the Anointed bear,
His wounds in memory keep.

I'd bear their marks, be like Him bruised,
His Cross deep in my heart infused,
Filled with the Precious Blood that oozed
From every wound away.
Then, as devout desires attend,
Inflamed with love, be thou my friend,
O Virgin fair, my cause defend
Upon the Judgment Day.

May I be strengthened by the loss
Of Blood that crimsoned Calvary's moss,
And seek protection by the Cross,
The Grace of God be given,
That Union which the weak inspires;
And grant that with celestial choirs
My soul enjoy—when life expires—
The happiness of Heaven.