

CHAPTER IV.

THE THIRD DOLOR.

THE THREE DAYS' LOSS.

THE Mother without the Child! This is indeed a change to pass upon our Lady's sorrows. Bethlehem had its sorrows, and Nazareth had still more, and on Calvary the tide rose highest. But in all these places the Mother was with her Child. There was light, therefore, even in the darkness. In this third dolor, the Three Days' Loss, it was not so. When we wish to depict our Blessed Mother with reference to her own graces, such as the Immaculate Conception, we paint her without her Child, looking heavenward, as if to show that she was a creature upon whom heaven was falling in fast showers of grace from the Creator. When we wish to see her as she stands to us, as the Mother through whose hands the Son pleases to make His graces pass, we represent her also without her Child, her eyes cast downward toward the earth, and her hands dropping light and freshness on the world. But there are two childless pictures of her in Scripture, which have nothing to do with either of these. The one is her third dolor, when in sorrowful amazement she is searching Jerusalem to discover Jesus; and the other is her seventh dolor, when she is returning at nightfall from the garden-tomb to the great city, leaving her buried Love behind in His chamber

of the rock. Thus are the likenesses of the Passion more and more mingling with the Infancy. They mingle especially in this third dolor, which, both on the side of Jesus and of Mary, is one of the greatest mysteries of the Three-and-Thirty Years. We, however, are merely concerned with it as it regards Mary's sorrow.

The quiet life of Nazareth was only interrupted by the duties of religion, which brought back fresh blessings to the Holy House and augmented its tranquillity. According to the law, the Jews were obliged to go up to Jerusalem to worship God, three times in a year, unless they were legitimately hindered. The first time was at the Pasch, or feast of unleavened bread, instituted in remembrance of the Exodus from Egypt, and corresponding to our Easter. This was the greatest of them all. The second time was the feast of weeks, which was Pentecost or our Whitsuntide. The third was the feast of tabernacles, the feast of lightheartedness and gratitude, to be observed when "they had gathered in the fruits of the barn-floor and the wine-press." To all these feasts Joseph went up yearly. The women were not bound by this law; and some contemplatives have said that, while Joseph went up to Jerusalem three times a year, Mary went up with Jesus once a year, at the Pasch, or feast of unleavened bread. Five years had now passed since the return from Egypt, and Jesus was twelve years old. In that year, as the Gospel narrative tells us, He went up to Jerusalem at the Pasch, with Mary and Joseph, and, according to the tradition, He went on foot. In the minds of all three

there could be but one thought. It is probable that St. Joseph knew of the mysteries of the Passion, as well as our Blessed Lady; and Jane Mary of the Cross tells us that it was revealed to her, that, before he died, he was allowed to feel all the pains of the Passion in such measure as was fitting, just as we read of other saints, some of whom have been permitted to participate in some one mystery of it, and some of them to go through all. Thus, as His last Pasch was always before our Lord, so was it never forgotten either by Mary or by Joseph. It would be especially and vividly before them as they went up yearly to Jerusalem. As they journeyed upon their way, over the hills or through the glens, upon the wide road that lay like a thread over the green uplands, Calvary with its three Crosses rose ever against the sky as the real goal to which they were tending. But all things were not always clear to our Lady. As our Lord at seasons veiled the operations of His Sacred Heart from her sight, so sometimes the future was not present to her, nor the whole mystery of the present understood. She hung upon Jesus for every thing; and it was her joy that every thing was His, and nothing was her own. For what is the creature but the emptiness which the Creator fills? So, according to His will, our Blessed Mother little deemed that, while His Calvary was still years off, hers was close at hand.

How her love for Jesus grew in that journey to Jerusalem! The thought of His bitter Passion in her heart united itself with the sight of the Boy of twelve before her outward eyes, and love rose in a flood.

Each moment He seemed to her so infinitely more precious than He had done the moment before, that she thought she was only just beginning to love Him rightly, and yet the next moment distanced that love also. She knew well, she had known it all along, that she never could love Him as He deserved to be loved. A thousand Marys, which seems to our minds like something more than all possible creations, could not have loved Him worthily. There was something also in the Creator being a Boy which was more than the Creator being a child. The speechlessness, the helplessness, of infancy, the visible palpable contradiction between that state and His eternal perfections, stamped it more completely as a mystery. The Human Nature was tranquil, was passive, and the Divine Nature hidden under it. The actions which were seen were the mere mechanical actions of human life. They were its spontaneous vegetation. The operations of the perfect reason, perfect with all its ungrowing and unutterable perfections from the first moment of Conception, were invisible. It was plain it was a mystery, and somehow things are less mysterious when they openly announce themselves as mysteries. But in the Boyhood there was more of the human will apparent. There were perhaps disclosures of a particular human character. The mind gave a cognizable expression to the countenance. There was a gait in walking, a way of using the hands, and many other things which make boyhood more definite, more individual, than childhood. By a mother's heart none of these things are either unnoticed or unvalued. They are the ailments of maternal

love, just when the incipient independence of boyhood is a trial after the sweet dependences of infancy. But we must remember what all these things were in Jesus, in order to estimate fairly what they were to our Lady. Who can doubt that there was a spiritual beauty shining in all He did, a celestial gracefulness breathing over every thing, which would take captive every hour by new surprises the Mother's heart? But, above all, these things brought out wonderfully the Divine Nature. It seems a contradiction to say so; but, if we reflect, we must see that the more the human will was manifested, the more development, the more action, there was about the lower nature, the more also by virtue of the Hypostatic Union must the glory of the Divine Person have disclosed itself. When the mystery lay still, in the hush of childhood, it was worshipped as in a sanctuary; but when it moved, and spoke, and worked, and willed, in the countless daily acts and movements of life, it came forth as it were from its sanctuary, and exhibited itself to men. It flashed out of His eyes; it spoke from His lips; its music escaped through His tone; it betrayed itself in His walk; it made His fingers drop "with the choicest myrrh;" His whole outward life was light and fragrance, as His childhood passed away, and the day of His boyhood broke, and the shadows retired. All day long He was acting, and His actions had on them the stamp, or the scent, of the human will of a Divine Person, and therefore they flowed "like the fountain of gardens, the well of living waters, which run with a strong stream from Libanus." Would it be wonderful, then, if Mary

reached the gates of Jerusalem in that twelfth year, less able than ever to do without Jesus, feeling that it was more and more impossible that her heart should live away from His?

They reached Jerusalem before the beginning of the seven days of unleavened bread; and during that time they made their devotions in the temple, visited the poor and the sick, and performed the other customary works of mercy. It would be impossible to reckon up the supernatural wonders which arose before the throne of the Most Holy Trinity from those earthly Three during the week of unleavened bread. Who would venture to compare any saint with St. Joseph? In what amazing union with God, in what flames of heroic love, in what Mary-like depths of self-abasement, did not that shadow of the Eternal Father dwell, ever honoring by the shadow that he cast that stupendous majesty and awful adorable Person whose representative he was! Generations of Hebrew saints had ascended those temple-steps, and had made sweeter offerings of prayer and praise than all the aromatical spices that for centuries had been burned before Him. Yet what was their collective worship to one of Mary's prayers, to one of her hymns of praise, to one recital of her Magnificat? But when Mary and Joseph knelt together in the temple, all created sanctity, such as had shone in angels and saints, was left behind, outstripped, and gone out of sight. Many a good old man in those times would think of David's days, and of the tide of worship that flowed and never ebbed in his glorious Psalms, and he would almost weep to think how degenerate were

modern times compared with those, and modern worshippers by the side of those grand prophets and singers of ancient Israel. They little dreamed of the incomparable glory of those hearts of Joseph and Mary. But how the mystery deepens when between Joseph and Mary kneels down the Everlasting God, He with the unspeakable Name, now just twelve years old, human years counted by circling seasons and the filling and emptying of moons! Would the songs go on in heaven when the Incarnate Word prayed on earth? Would not all the angels fold their wings around them, timorously hushed, while the prayer of the Coequal God rose up before the Throne, casting far away into invisible shades the poor permissions of creature's worship? And Mary and Joseph ceased to pray to the Throne in heaven, or to the presence behind the Veil, but in prostrate ecstasy they adored the Eternal who was between them, and confessed in mute thanksgiving the dread Divinity of the Boy whose words were almost stealing their souls out of their earthly tabernacles. Was ever temple consecrated with such a consecration? Was it not strange that earth should go on rolling through space the same as ever, and the sun rise and shine and say nothing, and the moon get up behind the hills, and silver the whole landscape, and float down again to the opposite horizon, without so much as a smile of consciousness? Was it not more strange that Jerusalem went about its work, and did not instinctively feel that something had happened to it more wonderful than David's triumphs or the dazzling court of Solomon? A Son of David, "greater than Solomon," older than the

day of Abraham, was among the crowds, one who could destroy the temple and build it up again in three days, a Boy of twelve, fair to look upon, but to Jerusalem only as one of many boys whom many mothers had brought to the feast within its ancient walls and in its historic sanctuary.

But the week of unleavened bread came to a close. Multitudes, as usual, had thronged the Holy City, like a modern Roman Easter. Every tribe had sent its worshippers. They had come who dwelt in the southernmost villages of Simeon, or in the lot of Reuben beyond the mountains of Abarim, or from Manasses beyond the river, or from the shores of Aser, or from where Lebanon looks down on Naphthali. According to custom, the multitudes were told off in separate throngs, leaving Jerusalem at different times, the men together and the women together. They left in the afternoon, the men by one gate, the women by another, to reunite at the halting-place of the first night. By this means confusion was avoided. The city was emptied without scenes which would hardly be appropriate to so solemn a season and would be especially undesirable after the religious occupations of the past week. The roads, also, would not be crowded all at once, but that huge multitude would thaw quietly away in order and tranquility. Thus it was that Mary and Joseph were separated during the first day's journey, which was in reality but the journey of an afternoon. An opportunity was also thus presented to our Blessed Lord to separate from them unperceived. So when the women to whose caravan Mary belonged were mustered at their proper gate, Jesus

was not there. But children might go either with the father or the mother. He was, therefore, doubtless with Joseph. Mary missed Him; but it was sweet to think how He was all the while filling Joseph's heart with tides of joy and love. She must learn to be unselfish with Him betimes; for the day would come when He would be taken from her. Alas! it was come, another day that she had not suspected, and He was gone. She went upon her journey; and, as the revelations of the saints tell us, what, indeed, God's ordinary ways would lead us to expect, the Holy Ghost flooded her soul with unusual sweetness, the common preliminary to unusual trial. Her thoughts were gently diverted from the absence of Jesus. She was absorbed in God, and trod the ground, and kept the path, and answered questions only mechanically. Her soul was being annealed again in the furnace of divine love, to enable her to pass through the ordeal that was coming.

The shades of evening had fallen on the earth before the two bands of men and women met at the accustomed halting-place. Joseph was waiting for Mary, but Jesus was not with him. Mary's heart sank within her before she spoke. Joseph knew nothing. His unworthiness would have felt surprise if Jesus had accompanied Him rather than His Mother. He had supposed He was with Mary, and had not been disquieted. The bustle of the halt, the cries of the crowd, the preparations for the evening meal, the unloading and watering of the beasts of burden, all died out of their ears. They were suddenly alone, alone amidst the multitude, more lonely than two hearts had

ever been since the sun set on Adam and Eve, flushing the mountains of paradise, which to them were as cloisters they might cross no more. Joseph was crushed to the very earth. The light went out in Mary's soul, and a more terrific spiritual desolation followed than any of the saints have ever known. What could it mean? Jesus was gone. It was a harder idea for her to realize than the mystery of the Incarnation had been. If the rolling universe had stopped, it would have been less of a surprise. If the trumpets of doom had blown, her heart would not have quailed as now. They would ask among their kinsfolk and acquaintance if He was with them; as many of them loved the Boy exceedingly, with yearnings of heart which they who felt them could not comprehend. They would ask, but Mary knew it would be all in vain. She knew Him too well not to be certain that if He had been in the company He would long since have joined her. No such ordinary occurrence would have been allowed to break the union between her heart and His. She felt that the depth of her misery was not going to be so shallow as this. An abyss had opened, and a cold wind was rushing out of it which froze every sanctuary within her soul: They made their search. It was only to receive one negative after another, varied by the different amounts of sympathy which accompanied each. Their inquiry ended, and deep night had come. The sun had set on one side of the globe and had risen on the other, but the thousands of leagues of darkness did not hide, nor the thousands of leagues of light reveal, two hearts in such consummate misery as Joseph's and her own.

There were many sorrows on earth that night, but there were none like hers. There have been many nights since then, with their beautiful raven darkness braided with stars, and many incredible sorrows, with nothing like a star set in their dismal blackness; but there have been no sorrows like hers. The stars would not have shone if they had had hearts within them. The darkness should have wept blood instead of dew to be in keeping with the forlorn anguish of that memorable night. When all Egypt rang suddenly at midnight with the terrible wail for the first-born, and the troubled river hurried away from the intolerable sickening sounds of human woe, the countless cries that wove themselves into one amazing voice, as if the great earth itself had spoken in pain, from the Cataracts to the Delta, were not freighted with such a load of misery as lay that hour on Mary's single heart.

In the darkness—alone, silent—Mary and Joseph were treading the road again to the Holy City. Their feet were sore and weary. What matter? Their hearts were sorer and more weary. The darkness in Mary's spirit was deeper than the darkness on the hills. Even if the paschal moon were not shining they would see the white glimmer of the road; but no road out of this sorrow glimmered in her heart. Had it all been, not a dream certainly, but a transitory thing? Was she to see Jesus no more? Had He withdrawn His wonted illumination from her heart forever,—forever veiled now that beautiful Heart of His, where, for the last twelve years, the curtains had been looped up, and she had seen all its mysteries, read all its secrets, lived

almost perpetually in its life? Was she unworthy of Him? She knew she was. Had He, therefore, left her? It was not like Him. But she did not see things as before, and it might be so. Had He gone back to His Father, leaving unredeemed the world which did not want Him? No! that was impossible. He had not paid the price of her Immaculate Conception yet. Tyrants seldom slumber. Had Archelaus watched his opportunity, and seized Him? Herod might have left his son that charge as a legacy of statecraft. Had she perhaps mistaken the date of Calvary, and was it to come now? Was the Boy hanging on a cross that moment, in the darkness, on some mount outside the gates? Oh, the bewildering agony of this unusual darkness! She has seen all the Passion before in her spirit. How did it go? Was she not there? She cannot remember. She can recover nothing. Within, there is nothing but darkness, covering every thing. Is He actually dead without her, His Blood shed, and she not there? Agony! Has He gone to death, purposely without telling her, out of kindness? Oh, no! so cruel a kindness would have been contrary to the union of their hearts. But this, this very separation, without a word, and then this interior darkness, in which He has wrapped her soul, how do these comport with that union of their hearts? Ah! then there is not certainty to go upon, except the certainty that He is God. This very sorrow shows her that she is not to argue from what has gone before. The past, it seems, did not necessarily prophesy the future. Not to understand it, that is such suffering. Sudden darkness after excessive light is like a blow. Her soul wants

to see. But it is hooded. A baffling blindness has come on. She has nothing left her now, but that which never was dislodged from the depths of her soul, the gift of peace. Oh, how the waters of bitterness rose silently out of the endless caverns of that peace, the subterranean bitterness which—who does not know that has once felt it!—leaves its taste for life!

Perhaps He had gone into the wilderness to join that marvel of eremitical sanctity, the boy John, the son of Zacharias, hereafter to be called the Baptist. He was making his novitiate of years, in that tender age, among the wild beasts, lonely, hunger-smitten, the prey of heat and cold, of wind and wet, preparing for his mission, which was to forerun the preaching of Jesus. Has her Boy gone to join him, gone to share in that novitiate? She would have known it was not so if she could have seen as usual. But it was the misery of her inward darkness that she no longer seemed to understand Jesus. It was the only light she wanted. All the world beside might have been dark to her, and she could have borne the burden lightly. But not to understand Jesus was a variety of martyrdom she had never dreamed of. Yet do not most mothers taste it somewhat as their children, now in new trials and unproved spheres, and so needing most the old unity with the mother's heart, outgrow their childlike confidence, and live down in their own hearts, and have mysteries written on their brows? There are hearts to whom this is sharp. But they are far off from the woe of Mary when the Boy of Nazareth first began to look unlike

the Babe of Bethlehem. Perhaps He had gone to Bethlehem, on a visit to His own sanctuary. But could He have any work there, connected with the redemption of the world? And if He had only gone because He loved to go, was that like Him? Mary was perplexed. A while since she would have answered, No! with the utmost confidence. Now she was not so sure; and even her humility made her less sure than her darkness by itself would have done. All this was so unlike Him! He might do any thing now. Whatever He did would of course, be holy. But He might do any thing, so far as her understanding Him went. But if He had gone only out of devout pleasure, His pleasure would have been so much greater if they had been with Him. Besides that, would He have gone for pleasure without telling them, when He knew how awful the pain of missing Him would be to them? Mary could not be sure He would not; for why did He do what He had done? Why give this pain at all? Has He emancipated Himself? But He is only twelve! Again: if He had done so, would he not have spoken? She cannot tell. She can tell nothing. She knows nothing. Only He is God. Her bruised heart must kneel and bleed, and bleed and kneel. She is crucified in the darkness, as He will one day be. He has abandoned her, as His Father will, one day, abandon Him. Go on, weary, forlorn, forsaken Mother! the daybreak is catching the towers of Zion: thither drag this inexplicable load of grief, thou wonderful daughter of the Most High!

Meanwhile where is our Blessed Lord? In Jeru-