

salem. Of what He has been doing we know somewhat. Scripture tells us the strangest part; the revelations of the saints disclose what we might have divined as likely. He prayed long prayers in the temple. He has gone to the meetings of the doctors and elders; and there He finds how they strive to face the oracles of ancient prophecy, and make out a glorious, warlike, triumphant statesman Messiah, who shall effect a political deliverance for His oppressed people. Here He beholds the grand obstacle to the reception of His doctrine and to the mystery of the Incarnation. This must be removed. Those at least who have ears to hear must be allowed to hear the truth. It is His heavenly Father's work. So He modestly puts Himself forward, as if to ask questions. His sweetness wins all hearts. The gravest doctors hang upon His words. He puts His objections gently, suggests wonderful meanings to deep prophecies, leads them to see that their own view is not tenable, and elicits from them the spiritual truth as if it was the lesson He Himself was receiving, not a new wisdom He was Himself infusing into them. How many hearts did He thus prepare for Himself, of how many apostolic vocations may He not have indirectly laid the foundations then! When Peter converted thousands at a sermon, when he offered a thousand souls to each of the Three Divine Persons, the first time He preached, how much of the work may have been done already by the doctrine which had flowed from questions of the Boy of Nazareth! During these three days, as we learn from some of the saints, our Lord had begged His bread from door to door, so that

He might practise even greater poverty than that which straitened Him at Nazareth. Out of this He had given alms to the poor. He had also visited the rich, performed menial offices for them, spoken kind words to them, and drawn them to God. At night He had slept on the bare ground under the walls of the houses. Earth at least could hardly refuse Him a bed who had called it out of nothing. Thus the Creator of all things, left for the time without His Mother's care, shifted for Himself in His own world as a beggar-boy at the age of twelve. Oh, upon how many shades of life did not our Blessed Master scatter the consecration of His own endurance!

We cannot doubt but that Mary and Joseph, when they entered Jerusalem in the morning, went first to the temple to seek God's blessing on that load of sorrow which weighed them to the ground. Nor were they without hope of finding Jesus there. Throughout the day they threaded the streets of Jerusalem wearily. Mary scanned the passers-by as she had never done before; but Jesus was nowhere to be seen. Everywhere they made inquiries. Some listened patiently but coldly; others peevishly and as if it were a trouble; others again were kind and feeling, but they had no consolation to give. One woman asked her to describe her Boy, and how faithfully did Mary do it! But no! the woman had seen a boy, but no such boy as that. She could never have forgotten such a one, if she had ever had the good luck to see Him. Others too raised hopes, which were as soon to sink again. On the top of Mary's sorrow came now a world of good advice, which made the load no

lighter. Why did she not seek Him here? Why did she not seek Him there? Kind souls! she had sought Him everywhere. She had sought Him as mothers will seek missing children; and many spots are not overlooked in such a search as that. Then some one had given an alms to a boy, who was not unlike the description, and whose loveliness and manner had left an impression behind. But she could say nothing further. However, it was a gleam of light to Mary. There were clearly not two boys in the world who would answer to her description. Then another woman, when she opened her house in the morning, had seen a boy lying on the ground under the eaves. She only saw Him for a moment, but He was fair-haired and beautiful. Another had seen a boy, not unlike the description, breaking a loaf between two beggars in the street; but he had not watched which way He went. He had then been in Jerusalem yesterday, if He was not there to-day. But another had seen Him that morning by the side of a sick person. Here was more light. Mary could be shown where the sick person lived. She saw her and spoke with her. She heard the poor sufferer describe the winning ways of the boy-nurse, His voice, His eyes, His holy words which had brought the tears into her eyes, and the strange presence of God which He had left behind Him in her soul. Mary's heart burned. She drank in every word. It was Jesus. It could be none else. But where had He come from? whither was He gone? The invalid could not say. She knew nothing. He had come and gone. While He was with her, she was so engrossed with Him, she had not

thought of asking Him any questions. And the sun sloped westward and went down, and the shades fell, and the quiet of night came upon busy Jerusalem; but Jesus was not found. It had been a weary day. Neither Mary nor Joseph had broken their fast all day. They were hunger-smitten for the Child. A broken heart wants sleep and food less than others. The night outside was dark, but the night of Mary's soul was darker.

Whether it was after three full days, during which Mary was left as it were entombed in this hideous darkness, or whether it was on the third morning, so it was that Mary and Joseph went up to the temple to lay their sorrows again before the Lord. They went in by the eastern gate. Now, close to this gate there was a spacious room, a sort of Academy, in which the interpreters of the law sat, and answered questions, and resolved doubts, and moderated in disputations. St. Paul speaks of this place in his defence before Felix, when he says that he was not found disputing in the temple. It was there also, at Gamaliel's feet, that the great Apostle of the Gentiles learned the traditions of the law. By the opening into this academy Joseph and Mary had to pass. It was not a likely place for them to enter. But the Mother's ear has caught a sound, in which it was impossible that she should be mistaken. It is the voice of Jesus. They enter. The doctors are looking on Him with a mixture of awe and pleasure. There has never been such a doctor in that Academy before. Joseph and Mary also wondered. She had never heard quite that tone of voice before. She had never seen that light in His

eye before. Her soul worshipped in His presence. But she had rights over that Boy, who was astonishing the wise elders of the nation. She would fain have knelt before Him, but she knew that was not the place, nor the time. But she came forward, and said to Him, Son, why hast Thou done so to us? Behold, Thy father and I have sought Thee, sorrowing. He could see that, without her saying it. He could see the ravages which grief had made in her countenance. He could hear it in her voice weak and trembling. He could see it in the feebleness which was letting the flush of joy almost overpower her. But He had no need so to see and hear it. He had never been away from her. He had been lying in her heart the whole while. He had been meting out to her just those supplies both of physical strength and of heavenly grace, which were needed to enable her to endure. His own heart had been crucified with hers. But the mystery was not over. He said to them, How is it that you sought Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business? He has taken out Simeon's sword, and thrust in His own. Why had Mary sought Him? Oh, think of Bethlehem, the wilderness, Egypt, and Nazareth! Why had she sought Him? Poor Mother! could she have done otherwise than seek Him? How could she have lived without Him? There were a thousand reasons why she should have sought Him. Does He deny her rights? Is He about to take them from her, and just, too, in the joy of finding Him? Rights! They were His own gift. He could take them back if He pleased. But His Flesh, His blood, His beating Heart, were not these in

some sense hers? No! rather hers were His. But the right to love Him, can even the Creator take that away from the creature? No! that right is inalienable. Creation must be uncreated before that right can be forfeited. If He is going to part with her now at that very eastern gate of the temple, which was a type of herself, nevertheless she will love Him as before, and not only as before, but a thousand times more. That look, that tone, when He was among the doctors,—they have gone deep into her soul. To her, they were absolute revelations of God.

Is the darkness gone? Far from it! For the moment He has thickened it by His words. "They understood not the word that He had spoken unto them." But He is not going to leave her. He has been about His heavenly Father's business in Jerusalem. Now, the same business takes Him back to Nazareth. And He, so much more lovely; and she, so much more holy; and Joseph, nigher to God than ever, and more like the shadow of the Eternal Father since the late eclipse, went back upon their way to Nazareth, where, for eighteen unbroken years,—with the annual visits to Jerusalem,—Mary shall enjoy His sanctifying presence; and by His toil in the shop it shall appear that His heavenly Father's and His earthly father's business were but one. Those broad eighteen years: to Mary it was like seeing the beautiful, free ocean after climbing the dark mountains. "And He went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them; and His Mother kept all these words in her heart."

In describing the mystery of this third dolor, much

has been already said of its peculiarities. Nevertheless, we must now dwell upon its characteristics at greater length. In the first place, it was the greatest of all her dolors. This arose partly from its involving a separation from Jesus, and partly from a union of other circumstances to be considered presently. We read in the life of the Blessed Benvenuta of Bojano, a Dominicaness, that, while she was suffering from the illness which for many years would not allow her to lie down, but forced her to remain sitting in a chair, she began to contemplate the grief of our Lady during the Three Days' Loss. She desired to participate in that affliction, inasmuch as she had herself been accustomed to sorrow all her life, and had sought for it, and desired ill-health, and fled from every joy. She prayed earnestly, therefore, both to our Lord and His Mother, to grant her the grace to feel in herself our Lady's sorrow. And, behold! a holy and venerable Lady appeared to her, with a beautiful and graceful Child, who began to walk about the room, keeping close to His Mother. His aspect and conversation inspired her with sublime happiness. But when she sought to touch Him he withdrew from her, and both He and His Mother suddenly disappeared. On this a vehement sorrow took possession of her soul, which continually increased, and afflicted her so deeply that she found no consolation in any thing, and it appeared as if her soul and body would be torn assunder. She was compelled, therefore, to call on our Lady to help her; for she could no longer endure it. At the end of Three Days, our Lady appeared to her, with her Son in her arms, and said, You asked for a taste of

that sorrow which I suffered in the loss of Jesus; and it is but a taste which you have had. But do not ask such things again, because your weakness could not live under such an agony of grief!* The seventh dolor, the Burial of Jesus, alone approaches to this third dolor in severity. But for many reasons it was much less severe. Both of them involved separation from Jesus; but in the case of the Burial she knew that He could suffer no more. She understood the mystery. She triumphed in the accomplishment of the great work of the world's redemption. She could count the hours to the moment of the Resurrection. In this third dolor she had lost Jesus, and she knew not why, nor where He was, nor what He might be suffering. She was plunged into a dense spiritual darkness, and God seemed altogether to have abandoned her. Hence, the torture of her heart never rose to a more intolerable height than during these Three Days, not even amidst the horrors of the Passion.

The loss of Jesus would have been, under any circumstances, a most fearful sorrow; and one which it is impossible for us, with our little grace and less love, to appreciate at all adequately. We must have Mary's heart to feel Mary's grief. But the peculiar circumstance of the Three Days' Loss, which rendered the loss of Jesus so dreadful, was the darkness in which her soul was cast as into a pit. She, who heretofore had been all light, was now all darkness. She did not know what God was doing with her. She had to act, and could not understand the circumstances under which she was acting. It was not only the contrast

*Marchese, Diario, Ottobre 30.

with the past which made the present so hard to bear. The night that had come down upon her was in itself intolerable anguish. She had ever leaned on Jesus. She never knew till now how much she had leaned upon Him. And He had withdrawn Himself. She did not see into the future ; the past was all blurred together, and gave no light ; the present was full of perplexity, accompanied by intense anguish of heart and bitterness of spirit. Sister Mary of Agreda says that the very angels withheld their colloquies from her, lest they should give her light about the loss of Jesus. There can, of course, be no doubt that this darkness of Mary was a divine operation. We must look for parallels to it in those indescribable interior trials which some of the greatest saints have passed through, always remembering, that if they were sent to the saints as cleansings of the spirit, to her Immaculate Heart this trial could only be, as it were, another marvellous sanctification superadded to those which had gone before. For in her spirit there was nothing to cleanse. The work, the parallel to which in the saints took long years to do, might be accomplished in our Lady's soul in three days, not only because of her perfections which would enable grace to work more rapidly and without the shadow of an obstacle, but also because the divine operations in the soul seem scarcely to need the lapse of time. Who does not know how in dreams, in accidents, in moments of great suffering, time appears almost miraculously compressed? Long years of previous life pass in distinct, orderly, and cognizable array before the soul, which seems intelligently to comment on each of them ; and

yet the whole process has occupied only the space of a lightning-flash. In the same way, we have apparitions of souls from purgatory, complaining of the long years in which their friends have left them in the flames without mass or suffrage, when the sun of the day on which they died is not yet set. We are taught to believe that the particular judgment, which awaits us at the end of life, will occupy but a moment of time. Again : one action will sometimes appear to do the work of years, even in respect of the formation of habits. This is especially the case with heroic actions, such as Abraham's sacrifice. The same thing may occur in the profession of a religious. There may be something akin to it in the special grace of the different sacraments. Are there any of us who do not remember experiencing some marvellously swift processes of grace, which seemed hardly to require succession of time, so instantaneous were they, and yet a veritable procession and sequence of different steps? So in the perfect soul of Mary, already elevated by grace and union to so sublime a height, this divine darkness of three days may have wrought the most astonishing effects, which we cannot describe, seeing that her height, even before that, was far above out of our sight. This darkness is a peculiarity of the third dolor in which no other of our Blessed Lady's sufferings shares in the slightest degree.

It is not possible for us to say with any certainty when this darkness ceased. But we should be inclined not to refer to it the fact that Mary did not understand the words of Jesus in the academy of the temple. This we should regard as rather a separate

peculiarity of this third dolor, referable to other causes, and an evidence of the hold which this sorrow had taken upon her nature. The darkness may indeed have passed off gradually, beginning with the first sight of Jesus. We would venture, however, to conjecture that it passed away entirely the moment she had found Him, while some of its consequences remained. It may be also that the weakness and weariness which had been hardly felt, because the darkness and the sorrow absorbed all feeling now told upon her, and would even be brought out by this sudden revulsion from grief to joy, just as we read of some of the saints when long ecstasies have passed away. Various reasons have been assigned by theologians for our Lady's not understanding the words of Jesus. Rupert thinks she did understand them, but out of humility acted and looked as if she did not. But this is not satisfactory, from the difficulty of harmonizing it with the direct words of the Gospel. Our own Stapleton attributes it to the excess of her joy at finding Jesus, which so acted upon her mind that she could not understand His words, just as from an opposite cause, namely, the excess of sorrow, the apostles later on could not understand what our Lord said about His own death. But there is hardly a parity between our Blessed Mother and the apostles; and it would be a hard inference to receive, except upon authority, inasmuch as it would represent our Lady's tranquility as shaken, and her self-possessed use of reason for a while perturbed, and perturbed too when He was speaking whose voice could lay the winds and calm the seas. Denys the Carthusian

limits her ignorance. He says she knew that Jesus spoke not of Joseph but of His Eternal Father, that He alluded to the work for which He had come into the world, and that, according to the human nature He had assumed, He must ever be intent upon that one work, but that the circumstances of time, place, and manner had not yet been revealed to her. This supposition, while it is more honorable to our Blessed Lady than that of Stapleton, proceeds upon the notion that the Thirty-Three Years, and the Passion, dawned upon her gradually in successive revelations. We have throughout assumed that she knew all, or almost all, from the beginning, which last hypothesis is more consonant with the visions and revelations of the contemplative saints.

Suarez makes two suggestions. He holds that Mary understood Jesus to speak of His heavenly Father, but that she did not know exactly what the particular things were, relating to the divine science, on account of which He had left Joseph and herself. Or again, she was not quite sure whether our Lord meant to imply that He intended to hasten the time of His manifestation to the world, which otherwise would not be before His thirtieth year. So that, he adds, there was no "privative ignorance" in her, but only the absence of knowledge of some particulars not necessary to the perfection of her science. But, were this the case, we should be more inclined to refer it to the continuance of that divine darkness, with which God had visited her. St. Aelred, with others, insists upon the words being taken by the figure *synecdoche*, and so applying only to St. Joseph,

and not to our Lady, just as the Evangelist says both the thieves blasphemed upon the cross, whereas in reality, according to some commentators, only one did so. Thus, according to St. Aelred, our Lady understood the words, and laid them up in her heart that she might teach them to the apostles afterward. But it may be replied that it is not certain only one of the thieves blasphemed. On the contrary, it is the more common opinion that they both did. Moreover, St. Aelred's interpretation seems to be taking a liberty with the words of the Gospel, which would hardly be warrantable without much more authority from tradition. Others think the words "*they* understood not" apply to the audience in the academy, and not at all to our Lady and St. Joseph. But this does not recommend itself. The sense of the faithful has always found both difficulty and mystery in the passage, which it would not have done if that interpretation had been obvious or natural. Novatus thinks that, by a special permission of God, Mary did not understand at once the words which Jesus had spoken, but that she came to the understanding of them by pondering them in her heart. He finds this interpretation most suitable to the words in the Gospel, and he discovers a parallel to the process in her mind, in the way in which the saints, who have had the gift of prophecy, often foresaw the future, not by direct prophetic light, but by comparing one light with another, and so drawing fresh inferences from the comparison. Yet it does not exactly appear what end is gained by this supposition. No one would deny that our Lady had all the gifts which the saints have had; but why should we

gratuitously suppose that any of the imperfections, which accompanied the exercise of these gifts in the saints, should have adhered to her, beyond those which belonged to her of necessity as a creature?

Let us venture to add another to the number of conjectures which theologians have made upon the subject. It may be supposed that every increase of sanctity in our Blessed Lady was accompanied by a proportionate increase in her science. In a perfect and unfallen nature like hers it is not easy to conceive of the two processes being separate. In the case of one who has sinned, hardness of heart may be removed in degrees quite disproportioned with the removal of darkness of mind. Light and love, though always correlatives, are not such in sinners in the perfect way in which they are so to the innocent. Thus we presume that the mystical darkness, which God sent as a spiritual trial to overspread Mary's soul, gave rise to such heroic acts of love and union, that it raised her to enormous heights of holiness above those lofty mountain-tops on which she had stood before. We presume that there was more difference of a supernatural kind between the Mary who left the temple-gate at the end of the week of unleavened bread and the Mary who entered it the morning she found Jesus, than there ever was between a saint in his saintly youth and the same saint in his far more saintly old age. There could be no revolutions in Mary, because there was nothing to destroy, nothing to overturn. All that could be done was to superadd. But the superadditions might be so immense, or so swiftly accumulated, or so instantaneously conferred,