

as to produce a change which in any case but hers we should call a revolution. This is surely what theologians mean, when they speak of her first sanctification, her second sanctification, her third sanctification, and so on. They do not mean to deny that she was always meriting and thus always growing in grace; but that the Immaculate Conception, the Incarnation, the Descent of the Holy Ghost, or her Death, were, so to speak, creative epochs in her sanctification, which did not follow the laws of common growth. We would regard the interior darkness of the Three Days' Loss as an epoch of this description.

But how does this bear upon her not understanding the words of Jesus? We must mount for a while to the highest regions of mystical theology. There is a science so high that it confines upon ignorance. It is where the human borders on the divine. It is at an unspeakable height, only not unapproachable because some few saints, and the seraphim, have reached it. Our Lady perhaps reached a higher height. There are limits to the possibilities of creatures. Our Lady reached the uttermost of those limits, and looked out on the Divine Abyss which lay beyond. There the darkness is excess of light, and the science ignorance, not only because language has no vessels to hold its definitions, thought no moulds to contain its ideas, but also because the eyes of the soul are closed and God is reached. What the spirit sees is, that it does not know, that it cannot know, that it is submerged, that its light is a marvellous indistinct distinctness, that knowledge has lost itself in love, and love is living hiddenly in fruition. The same words will

convey different ideas to different minds. If we say the moon goes round the earth, the countryman understands us, but the scientific man understands it differently, because he understands it more widely. An angel might understand it differently still. So the words which our Blessed Lord spake in the temple were not understood by the doctors, because they did not know who His father was, or what was his business, or why His father should not seek Him because He had stayed away to do His father's work. St. Joseph did not understand them, because, though he doubtless knew that Jesus spoke of His Eternal Father, and of the redemption of the world which was His Father's business, he did not know what part of that work Jesus meant, nor why it was a reason He should have left them without notice. Mary did not understand them, because each word rose to her from some unimaginable abyss of divine wisdom, carrying the work of the Incarnation far into the everlasting counsels of the Divine Mind, immensely enlarging her range of view, yet without giving her any distinct images, drawing her more closely within the folds of the Divine Wisdom, till she almost touched what she saw, and so ceased to see, and elevating her to that uttermost point of knowledge where a divine ignorance is the consummation of the creature's science. It was the very words themselves which hindered her understanding, because they carried her into a region where understanding has died out into something better, in consequence of the vicinity of God. It was the preceding darkness which had carried up the life of her soul to the point where this divine

ignorance was possible. Such, with all submission, is the conjecture we would venture to make in explanation of this difficulty. Our Blessed Mother knows how much ignorance and foolishness it may contain; but she will not disdain a guess, whose motive is love and whose end is her greater honor.

There is another peculiarity of this dolor, which is in perfect keeping with the mysterious features of it already mentioned. The first dolor was inflicted on her by Simeon, and the second by Joseph, this one by Jesus Himself, without any intervention of creatures at all. It is very important to remember this in meditating on the third dolor. From one point of view this made it easier to bear, but from another point of view it was harder. There was more to reconcile her to the endurance, while there was also more to suffer in the pain itself. What God condescends to do Himself is not only better done than the creature can do it, but it is done very differently. It is not only more efficacious in producing its results, but its results are of another kind, and bear a different impress on them. Even His words, when He speaks them to the soul Himself, are substantial, and creative, and effect what they utter, and effect it by the simple utterance. Thus there is something extremely awful in the immediate action of the Creator on the creature's soul. It is a divine touch, pressing on us without any medium, not even sheathing itself in the very flesh belonging to the soul it touches; it is a keen, spiritual operation, like no other. Hence the direct action of God on the souls of the saints is ineffably more sanctifying than the persecutions of creatures,

or the pain of austerities, or the pressure of God's own external providence. It has also the same characteristic which belongs to the highest class of miracles, in being instantaneous in its effects. When, therefore, the intention of God's immediate action is to cause suffering, it must attain its end in a manner which we tremble to think of. It is fearful to contemplate a created thing which has been called out of nothingness by omnipotence for no other end than to inflict torture. Such is the fire of hell, and the mysterious action of that fire on disembodied souls both in hell and purgatory. Who can think of it without shuddering? No beneficent office does it fill. There are no indirect results into which its being wanders, and, as it were, rests. It was created to torture. It is no element turned to another end. It has an end. It keeps to it. Through eternity it will never flag. Multiply, deepen, broaden, condense the mass it has to act upon, and it is ready to work upon that mass, undiverted, unstretched, unweakened. It knows what it has to do, and it does it with terrific truth, with unblamable success. Yet this fire is but a secondary cause. What must the touch of God Himself be, a touch too, which is lovingly bent on inflicting pain? Oh, there were many martyrdoms in one in the Three Days' Loss! We are not worthy to tell or to conceive them. Let creatures stand aside, or rather let them lie prostrate near, while God does what He wills with His Mother's soul. Yet creation has something to do with it; for the natural Mother was crucified in her own heart by the Son whom she had borne. Both His Natures had fastened on her to make her suffer.

The fairness of His Face, the light in His Eyes, the attractions of His Human Heart, racked her with anguish as she thought upon her loss; while, as God, He was visiting her with those appalling interior trials which we have seen formed the chief part of the third dolor. It is useless to talk of seas of suffering here; infinites would better express our inability to speak of them at all.

When Mary grows into her right place in our minds, there are many things which have a different meaning in her from what they would have in one of the saints. The idea of Mary which the Gospels, as interpreted by catholic theology, convey to our minds, is not merely an intellectual view. Although it is in one sense a theological conclusion, yet it is something much more than that. It is a product of faith and of love, worn in by habits of prayer. Thus, over and above the knowledge of the Gospel mysteries, there is in the soul of the pious believer an appreciation, an apprehension, an instinctive, almost intuitive, realization of Jesus and Mary, which has its own certainties, its own associations, its own perceptions, its own analogies. It is true that the individual mind gives some color and consistence to these things: yet when, in the popularity of various writings, in the spirits of devotions, in the contemplations of the saints, and in other ways, such ideas attain a kind of universality, they become the sense of the faithful, and express the true catholic idea. The cultivation of right instincts about our Blessed Lord and His Mother is obviously a matter of great importance, because of its necessary connection with sanctity, and of the influence which it exer-

cises over our worship of the Blessed Sacrament, over various other devotions, and over the spirit in which we observe the great feasts of the Church. Now, when we have a clear and consistent idea of Mary in our minds, certain things we hear or read will startle us and strike us as unlikely. If they do not rest upon the authority of the faith, but are simply the view of some preacher, or the teaching of a book, or the contemplation of some single saint, we put them away as unsuitable, because we have more confidence, and rightly, in that view of our Lady which has become part of our spiritual life, than in the preacher, the book, or the single saint. We do not condemn them, perhaps do not even like to differ from them, we simply put them away. But if what startles us comes to us on the authority of the Church, then either we must reform the idea in our minds, or we must expect to find some deep and unusual significance in that which surprises us. Now, there are one or two such things in this third dolor; and these must be enumerated among its peculiarities.

First of all, it strikes us as unlike our Blessed Lady that she should have allowed her sorrow to wring from her any outward demonstrations of grief. She not only showed her sorrow in her outward deportment, but she told Jesus that Joseph and herself had sought Him sorrowing. She told it Him almost reproachfully. Now the saints have borne the greatest sorrows in complete, heroic, and supernatural silence. It has always been their characteristic to do so. They have wished none but God to know their sorrows. Was our Lady inferior to any of the saints in this gift of silence? On the con-

trary, her silence was one of the most remarkable of her graces. Tradition says that the three hardly ever spoke in the Holy House at Nazareth. The sweet, heavenly colloquies which we should have pictured to ourselves as a main part of the life of the Holy Family are in our own imagination. They did not exist. A deeper silence than that of a Carmelite desert reigned there, or a Carthusian house where the Alpine winds moan in the corridors and shake the casements, and all else is silent as the tomb. The words of Jesus were very few. That was the reason Mary laid them up in her heart, because, like treasures, they were rare as well as precious. When we reflect we shall see it could hardly be otherwise. God is very silent. So far as Mary is concerned the Gospel narrative fully bears out the tradition. It is amazing how few words of hers are recorded there. Moving or still, she appears there like a beautiful statue, whose beauty is its only language. So striking is this, that some contemplatives have supposed that in her humility she commanded the Evangelists to suppress every thing about her which was not absolutely necessary to the doctrine about our Blessed Lord. St. John, who was most with her, says next to nothing about her; and St. Mark does not mention her but once, and then indirectly only. We can have no doubt that no saint ever practised silence as she did. Her silence to St. Joseph is a wonderful proof of this. But how should she be otherwise than silent? A creature, who had lived so long with the Creator, would not speak much. Her heart would be full. Her soul would be hushed. She had been with Him for twelve long years,—long years so far as the formation

of habits is concerned, though they had passed to her like a saint's ecstasy, full of painful love. She had born Him in her arms. She had watched Him sleep. She had given Him food. She had looked into His eyes. He had perpetually unveiled His Heart to her. Thus she had learned His ways. All manner of divine similitudes had been transferred to her soul. We know how silent God is. Between the Creator and the creature, in such relations as He and Mary were in to each other, silence would be more of a language than words. What could words do? What could they say? They could not carry the weight of the Mother's thoughts, much less the Son's. It must have been an effort to speak, a condescension, a coming down from the mountain, on her part as well as His. And why come down? St. Joseph did not need it. He, too, dwelt high up among those mountains of silence, too high for any voice to reach, almost too high for earth's faintest echoes to sound there. He did not need teaching as the multitude did, from the green mound, or on the plain, or by the shore of the inland sea. Even in the days of His Ministry, which was the "time to speak," as the Hidden Life was the "time to keep silence," our Lord was very silent. How remarkably this is hinted at the close of St. John's Gospel, the disciple of the Sacred Heart! The text itself sounds as if it would be less of an exaggeration if it spoke of words instead of works. "But there are also many other things which Jesus did; which, if they were written every one, the world itself, I think, would not be able to contain the books that should be written." Was he speaking of the

Thirty-Three Years? or was he ending his Gospel, as he had begun it, with the eternal doings of the Word?

But is it not then all the more surprising that our Lady should have indulged in this outward, almost reproachful demonstration of her grief? It is indeed most mysterious. We know, from the book of Job, in what boldness of complaint, in what seeming petulance of familiarity and love, God allows His creatures. He seems even to take a pleasure, and to find a worship, in the truthful utterance which comes up from the very depths of the nature He Himself has fashioned. This is the mourner's consolation, when he thinks of God. But nothing of all this will apply to Mary. Was it a heroic act of humility, by which she expressed Joseph's sorrow, and coupled herself with him? It may have been. It would be like her. But there is such an intense truthfulness in the Gospel words that we do not like to relax the strictness of their meaning by such interpretations as this, unless compelled by obvious necessity. We have but few of her words. We would rather those few should have meanings in them about herself. Was it meant to convey to us the exquisite suffering of this dolor without implying any need or satisfaction of her own in making the complaint? The Gospel sometimes does so; and once, when our Lord prayed and a Voice came from heaven, He said to His disciples that it was for their sakes that He had prayed His Father to glorify Him. But this interpretation labors under the same difficulty as the last. There was indeed humility in our Lady's words. But it was in coupling the great

but far inferior sorrow of Joseph with her own. The words do indeed reveal to us the severity of her affliction, but it is by their own truthfulness, and in their literal acceptance. It was the excess of her anguish which wrung from her, not in the excitement of a sudden revulsion of feeling, but with all tranquility and unbroken self-possession, those marvellous words. Neither was there any imperfection in this. The idea of imperfection only comes in with the idea of disproportion. We complain because of our weakness. Our sorrow is out of proportion with our strength, and so without shadow of blame we utter a complaint, and our complaint is a faultless imperfection. The saints suffer and do not complain, because their inward strength is proportioned to their sorrow, and their silence is a perfection. But there is a step beyond this. Speech, in the creature's extremity, is its necessary resort to the Creator. Complaint to creatures is complaint; but complaint to God is adoration. The sorrows of the saints have never been coextensive with the possibilities of their natures. We presume Mary's suffering in this dolor to have been so. It went not only beyond the power, but beyond the right, of silence. It drove her nature to its outermost limit of endurance, magnificent and worshipful as that nature was. It exacted of her that which was proportioned to it, the ultimate resort of the creature, the perfect unbosoming of itself to the Creator. Our Lord's perfection in His Human Nature culminated in a word. His silence was indeed a most adorable perfection; but it was a higher height, when He broke out into that cry, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken

me?" Then it was that His Passion had reached to the whole breadth of His Humanity, and had covered it. Thus it was that our dearest Mother had her Passion at the end of the Infancy; and her Compassion, together with His Passion, at the end of the Ministry. The darkness of this third dolor was the Gethsemane; the loss of Jesus was the crucifixion of her soul; her complaint was her cry upon the Cross, just when the torment of the Cross was ending. It was with her now as it was to be with Him hereafter.

There is yet another thing which strikes us as unlike our Lady in this third dolor. It is her venturing to question our Blessed Lord as to the reasons of His conduct. In the midst of her love of Jesus, the thought always uppermost in her mind, the memory that never went to sleep, the faith which was her life, the fact which was her worship, was His Divinity. Indeed, the greatness of her love arose from this very thing. It seems most probable that our Lord had actually shown her His Divine Nature. But at all events she saw it always by faith. It was the prominent thing which she saw in Him incessantly. Hence it would seem impossible for her to question Him. Her humility and her intelligence would alike forbid it. She had asked a question for one moment, just before consenting to the Incarnation. But it was of an angel, not of God; and, moreover, those days were passed. How is it then that she thus seems to call upon Him, and in public also, to explain and justify Himself for what He had done? In all the Gospels her words are without any parallel. They stand out by themselves, inviting notice, and yet full of mys-

tery. Her spirit was not troubled by the interior darkness of her soul. It never had been troubled by it. Trouble is not the word. Besides, the darkness had gone at the first sight of Jesus. It was not in the flush of joy, which at that instant was crowding in at all the inlets of her soul, that she spoke, not knowing what she said, like Peter upon Tabor when he talked of building three tabernacles. Neither joy nor sorrow ever made the balance of her tranquility even to quiver. There was never any conflict in her. Struggle would have desecrated her Immaculate Heart. It was not exactly that she wanted to know. Her science was so vast, that it was absolutely without desire of increase, so far at least as it was merely science, and not the beatifying accompaniment of an ever-augmenting love. Her science was such as was befitting her altitude as the Mother of God. She knew, not only all that was due to her, not only all that was convenient for her, but all which could perfect her perfections within the limits of a creature. Every thing in her had its limits. Every thing was vast, but it was also limited. Her beauty was in her limitations. She remained a creature. Hence her science was perfect, having nothing imperfect about it but the inevitable imperfection of whatsoever is created. God only is illimitable, God only omniscient, God only perfect with absolute, independent, intrinsical perfection. Why then did she question Jesus thus? We must reverently venture upon a conjecture. It was by an impulse of the Holy Spirit, by an attraction from Jesus Himself, by a will of His which she read in His Sacred Heart. She had just been raised to a fresh

height of sanctity. She had been drawn closer to God. The time of boldness follows great graces, just as the time of great graces follows great trials. Heavenliness of mind takes the form of an adoring familiarity, when it is in actual contact with God. We see this in the saints. But what will the corresponding phenomenon be in the sanctity of Mary? Jesus invited her to claim Him, to assert her rights over Him, to exercise her authority upon Him. And all this publicly before the doctors. Thus would He make solemn proclamation of her being His Mother, and do her honor before all, while they who heard little knew the import of that royal proclamation. Just as it required vast grace in St. Joseph to enable His humility to govern and command His God, so now did it require immense grace in Mary thus to assert her rights over Jesus. But she did it in the same calm simplicity with which she had consented to the Incarnation; and that moment she stood once more on another mountain, higher than that which a moment since had been the pedestal of her wonderful grace. The glory of obedience, the triumph of humility, the magnificence of worship, all these were in the bold question of the Blessed Mother.

It should be mentioned also as a peculiarity of this dolor, that it was one of the chief sufferings of our Blessed Lord. Perhaps more than the chief. In the seventeenth century there was a nun of the order of the Visitation at Turin, who lived in a state of the most unusual union with our Blessed Lord. Her name was Jeanne-Bénigne Gojos. She had a special devotion to the Sacred Humanity, and the peculiar

form of her spirituality was the offering up of all her actions to the Eternal Father in union with those of Jesus. It had been revealed to her that this was the particular devotion of Mary and Joseph on earth, an "amorous invention," (so she called it,) by which they themselves had gained enormous graces. In passing over in her mind the various mysteries of our Lord's Thirty-Three Years, she felt herself supernaturally attracted to unite her soul with Him in the mystery of the Three Days' Loss. This became her interior occupation, until at last it pleased our Lord to reveal to her some of the secrets of His Sacred Heart about it. He told her that it had cost Him more suffering than all the other pains of His life. For then in His Mother's grief, caused by the separation, He beheld all that grief included, which was to be her martyrdom on Calvary, and that as there her body and soul would have been sundered by an agony of grief unless He had kept them together by His omnipotence, so during the Three Days' Loss His almighty love had kept both Mary and Joseph united to Him, and that the cruelty of the pain was so great that without this secret assistance they could neither of them have survived. He added moreover that their sorrow was simply incomprehensible, and that none could understand it but Himself.* Let us meditate on this, without daring to add to it.

The heights of mystical theology, into which this dolor has led us, must not, however, make us omit some other considerations, which come more nearly to our own level. There is no need to seek for a climax

* Vie, p. 453.

in divine things. Little things are not dwarfed by the side of great ones, when the presence of God is seen in both. We may therefore remark this peculiarity of the Three Days' Loss. If we may say so, it enabled Mary better to understand the wretchedness of those who are in sin. She was to be the mother of mercy and the refuge of sinners. She was to love them as never mother loved faultless child. She was to be a sanctuary so fortified by love, that hardly omnipotence itself should tear from it the victims due to justice. It was not then enough for her to have a marvellous vision of sin. She must know how they felt who unhappily had sinned. But how was this to be? What had sin to do with her? It had at once to make her childless, and to give her multitudes of children. Its shadow had fallen from the first upon the joy of her heart, the living joy outside her that moved about the house of Nazareth, and the joy within her which was her life. Otherwise, within her, sin had nothing to do. It never passed there. The decree in which it was foreseen did not concern her. She was decreed before. She can see the malice of sin well enough, when she looks on Jesus, and knows that it will slay Him. But how is she to divine the feelings of poor sinners, and still keep her own soul inviolate? It is by means of this third dolor. Sin is the loss of Jesus. She knows now the misery of that. Sin is the loss of Jesus when we have once possessed Him. She knows that also; for there was the sting. The uncertainty to which she was a prey, while the supernatural darkness rested on her soul, and which made her doubt if her own unworthiness had repelled Jesus from her,

gave her an approach at least to the dismay of one who has forfeited grace, and lost our Lord by his own fault. At least it enabled her to know the *kind* of pain. But to lose Jesus after having once possessed Him, and not to feel the loss, nay, to be positively indifferent to it, to acknowledge it, and yet not care for it,—this, after what she had felt, most piteously disclosed to her the worst unhappiness, the direst need of the luckless sinner! Henceforth, if she measures sin by Calvary, she will measure her love of sinners by the dolor of the Three Days' Loss; and have we not said already that it was the greatest of them all?

But there was still another peculiarity in this dolor. It did what beforehand could never have been expected. It brought forth in Mary's heart a new love of Jesus, the love of what we have lost and mourned, and then got back again. Affection has no greater consecration than this. It is a flower which grows very commonly on human sorrows, but it is surpassingly beautiful in all its varieties. Mothers have bent over the beds of their dying children, as though their hearts would burst. They would not stay God's hand, even if they could. Their will is with His. But their hearts! Oh, this very conformity of their will sends all the sorrow rushing to the heart. The flower withers. They see it withering before their eyes hour by hour. Human skill has certified now to the absence of hope. It should have said rather to the absence of trust in itself. It is useless to speak of no hope to a mother. It is a language she does not understand. The bitterness of death is in her soul; but she hopes. She has made her sacrifice to God; but still she hopes. No-