

body else hopes, but she hopes. Hope holds her heart together, but only just holds it. But a change comes over the face of her child. It seems to be sinking. She would almost recall her sacrifice; but she does not. She is God's daughter, as well as her child's mother. She sees it sink back, and its eyes close, and its little weight indents the pillow somewhat deeper. Is it death? In the mother's heart it was; and hope went, and the world gave way under her feet, and it was not the floor of earth that held her up, but the arm of her heavenly Father. But to the child it is not death. It is sleep. It is hope. A few days, and weak, silent, very white, the child is lying in her lap, smiling feebly into her eyes; it could speak, but it is not allowed. The silence of that smile is such music to the mother's heart. But does she love her child as she did before? Oh, no! it is a new love. She is twice its mother now, because her heavenly Father has given it to her twice. Some of us have been children twice over to our mothers, and Mary has now to be twice a mother to us, for the earthly one is gone. Poor earthly mother! What art thou compared with Mary? What is thy child compared with Jesus? We then have no experience by which to reach the new love of that Blessed Mother for the Son, whom the Eternal Father had now given twice unto her. We have put up our little ladders, the comparisons of our sweetest loves, but we cannot mount to the top. Truly, if Mary had many crosses in this dolor, she also came out of it with many crowns, and a new way of loving Jesus was the best of all.

Such were the peculiarities of the Three Days' Loss. May our dearest Mother pardon our attempt to fathom the depths of that sorrow, which our Lord Himself has pronounced to be unfathomable! She promised that they who "elucidate her shall possess eternal life." The loving endeavor will not therefore be altogether without reward. But we must turn now from the peculiarities of the mystery to the dispositions in which she suffered. The grand disposition, which lasted throughout the dolor, was a mixture of yearning with detachment, which it is not possible for us to understand. It could only happen once in creation, and to one creature, the elected Mother of God. She yearned for Jesus, because she was His Mother. She yearned for His sensible presence, for His visible beauty. She yearned for them the more intensely, because her thoughts were not habituated to separate the Eternal from the Child. Why should she stay her devotion, or unsimplify her worship, by disuniting in thought what God had united, and united by such rivets as those of the Hypostatic Union? But while she yearned with such ardor, she did so with perfect conformity to the will of God. She practised the hard virtue of detachment in the most heroic degree ever known; and she was detached broken-heartedly, not coldly. But for God Himself, for the Divine Nature of Jesus, she yearned without any detachment whatever. Detachment is from creatures, and detachment from the created gifts of God is a higher virtue still. But detachment from God is a horror, belonging only to impenitence and hell. Next to Mary and Joseph, perhaps also we should name the Baptist, St.

Peter probably loved our Blessed Lord more than any other creature, even the burning seraphim, and next to him St. John, the disciple whom Jesus loved. But there was something in the love of the apostles, deep, ardent, glorious as it was, which was not altogether perfect. Some dross of earth adhered to it. It was "expedient that He should go away." It was necessary for their complete sanctification that His dear sensible presence should be subtracted from them. Now the operations of grace cleanse away imperfections, not merely by expelling them from the soul, but by filling up their room with some great gift or peculiar presence of God. This gift which they leave, and by which they effect a cleansing of the soul, is quite separable from the cleansing operation; even though, as a matter of fact, they always go together in the saints. Our Lady had nothing to cleanse. She had no merely natural tenderness for Jesus, which was not already absorbed in the supernatural, and canonized by it. Nothing earthly, nothing unworthy, clung to her love of Him. But the subtraction of His sensible presence might give her the same gift it gave the apostles, without the cleansing virtue which she did not need; and it might give it to her in an eminent degree above their gift because in proportion to her eminence. Thus, as in the third dolor she had found a new love of Jesus, the grace of it might be to raise her whole love of our Lord immensely higher, more nearly equal to His worth, to which at best it must remain infinitely unequal. But so it is with many of our Lady's graces. They strike across the trackless desert of the infinite. They can never reach the other

side; for it has none. Yet somehow they gain a nearer vicinity to God.

We have already noticed another of her dispositions, namely, her extreme humility in the temple. Indeed, every moment of the Three Days was drawing forth from her the most astonishing acts of humility. Her tranquility in the midst of that perturbing darkness which came down like deep night upon her soul, and yet perturbed her not, was the effect of her intense humility. The doubt as to whether Jesus had not left her because of her unworthiness was also the offspring of that lowliness which, by thinking exaggerated evil of itself, comes nigh to divine truthfulness. But above all was her humility tried and triumphant in the public assertion of her rights over Jesus, whom she was longing to fall down and worship as the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity, an act which Mary of Agreda tells us she did do as soon as she had got outside the gates of Jerusalem and beyond the sight of men. Her silence, also, when His answer came,—which was in reality no answer to her question, but sounded life reproof, the more strange from the mouth of a Boy of twelve,—was the continuance of the same marvellous humility. All this is like our dearest Mother. All this is what we expect and recognize. The picture grows familiar again. We breathe more freely than when a while ago we were straining up those high hills, which were not meant for such as we are. Mary still astonishes us. There are sweet surprises in her commonest graces, because their beauty is at once so heroic and so gentle. It is far beyond us, but it does not look so. It tempts us

on. It seems attainable. At least it draws us toward itself, and it is the best road for us to be on. How strange it is that finding God always humbles, even while it ravishes, even while it elevates! Humility is the perfume of God. It is the fragrance which He leaves behind, who cannot be humble Himself, because He is God. It is the odor, the stain, the token the Creator leaves upon the creature when He has pressed upon it for a moment. It must be a law of the world of grace, because we find it in Mary, in the saints, and in the faintest, most nearly indistinguishable way in ourselves. Perhaps it is something inseparable from God. We trace the Most High, the Incommunicable, by it in the Old Testament. We trace Jesus by it in the New. The glory of humility is in the Human Nature of our Lord, on which the mysterious pressure of the Divine Nature rested for evermore. It is this inevitable perfume that God leaves behind Him which hinders His altogether hiding His traces from us. It is "the myrrh, and stacte, and cassia from His ivory houses." Mary has found Him now, and she has lain down to rest in the lowliest, most flowery valley of humility, and the fragrance of God has perfumed her garments, her "gilded clothing, surrounded with variety."

Another of our Blessed Lady's dispositions in this dolor was the resignation by which she simplified, as it were, with one endurance such multiform and manifold sorrows as were involved in it. Altogether, there is no disposition of the soul, no gift, no grace, for bearing misfortune, which is at all to be compared with simplicity. It brings along with it singleness of

heart and eye. It is not amazed. It is not precipitate. It does not distract itself with many things. It has a sort of unconscious discretion about it which is very serviceable in times of grief. Self-oblivion is at once the hardest and the most needful lesson which we have to learn in trouble, and simplicity is half-way to it already. Moreover, it strengthens our faith, by keeping our eye with a gentle, hardly constrained fixedness on God. It is in its own nature too self-possessed to be taken unawares by those subtle temptations which assail us in sorrow, and which, under the pretext of prudence, or of greater good, lead us artfully away from God to rest on creatures. Simplicity makes a ring of light round about it, even in darkness, like the moon shining through a mist. If there be not enough light to walk by, there is at least enough to guarantee us against surprises. Such was our dear Mother's simplicity. It had a fearful complication of sorrows to cope with. There was first of all the intense suffering, which is itself a bewildering distraction. It seems to divide our nature into many pieces, and to live and ache in each one of them. Then there was added to this the bodily pain arising from inward grief, and also from fatigue, hunger, and want of rest. To sit down and die would have been easy, had it been right. But she had to work, to think, to plan, to consider, to be stirring; and activity was almost insupportable in such a conjuncture as this. But God chose that very moment to overwhelm her supernaturally with interior trials. She was in darkness. A sudden change seemed to have come over the life of her soul. She was battling, not with

one evil, but with many, not with an evil which she knew where to find or how to confront, but with uncertainties, surmises, suspicions, torturing suspense, unaccustomed nescience, and a baffling darkness which met her thoughts whenever they went forth, and turned them back again. All this was on her at one and the same time. Yet, throughout, her will was calmer than a summer lake. It lay in the lap of God's will as the lake lies in the bosom of its green valley. It never stirred. Not a first movement, not an indeliberate breath from self, rippled ever so indistinctly the silver level of the waters. This came of her simplicity. It wrought many wonders in her Three-and-Sixty Years. But, except at the moment of the Incarnation, it never wrought a wonder like to the loving stillness of her heart during the Three Days' Loss. It looked,—of course it could be but a look,—as if the loss of the Son had made her sink down more deeply in the Bosom of the Father.

Although this dolor for the most part keeps up among the high hills, which do not belong to us, it is nevertheless so full of lessons for ourselves, that it is difficult to select from them. It teaches us, first of all, that the loss of Jesus, however brief, is the greatest of all evils. It was this which was almost unbearable even to our Lady, and Jesus is not more needful to us than to her, because to all creatures He is absolutely needful; only to us He is a more pressing necessity, because of our weakness and our sin. The greatness of Mary's sorrow is to us a visible measure of the magnitude of the evil. Yet alas! how little we feel it! How happy can men be, who yet have lost

Jesus, often unconscious almost of their loss, more often indifferent to it when they know it! We should have thought the loss of Jesus was in itself so fearful an evil, that nothing could have aggravated it; and yet our want of perception of the greatness of our loss is a token of still deeper misery. It is sad indeed when the voice of the world is more musical in our ears than the voice of our Lord. It is just the very wretchedness, the very hatefulness of the world, that it has no Jesus. He does not belong to it. He refused to pray for it. He pronounced its friendship to be on our part a simple declaration of war upon Himself. It makes our hearts sink to look out upon the world, and to know that it has no part in Him. It is like gazing upon a cheerless and disconsolate view of barren moors or dreary swamp. No sunshine can gild it. It is dismal on the brightest day. Nay, it is ugliest when the sun shines upon it. So it is with the world, because it has no Jesus. So does it become with us in proportion as we are friends with the world, or even at peace with the world. He and it are incompatible. Are we not afraid? Pleasure, gayety, fashion, expense,—dare we, even in our thoughts, put these things into the Heart of Jesus? Would He smile when worldly things were said? Would He wish to please people round Him, who are taking no pains whatever to please His Father? Would he seek to be popular in society, to stand well with those who have not at heart the only one interest which He has at His, to keep out of sight His principles, not simply through silence and reserve, but lest they should ruffle others and interfere with that smoothness of social

intercourse which takes the place of charity? Alas! sin is bad; excess of pleasure is bad; giving God the second place is bad; worshipping the rich is bad; hardening our Christian feelings to become accustomed to worldly frivolities and very slightly uncharitable conversation is bad. But these at least are evils which wear no masks. We know what we are about. We give up Jesus with the full understanding of the sacrifice we are making. We are taking our side, choosing our lot, and we know it. But wishing to please!—this is the danger to a spiritual person. Total separation from Christ is already implied in the very idea. What is it we wish to please? The world, which is the enemy of Jesus. Whom do we wish to please? Those who are not caring to please God, and in whom Jesus takes no pleasure. Wherein do we wish to please? In things, conversations, and pursuits, which have no reference to God, no savor of Christ, no tendency toward religion. When do we wish to please? At times when we are doing least for Christ, when prayer and faith and hope and love and abiding sorrow for sin would be the most unseasonable. Where do we wish to please? In haunts where there is less evidence of God than elsewhere, where every circumstance, every appurtenance, flashes the world's image back upon us as from a lustre. Yet we see no evil. We want smoothness, polish, inoffensiveness, discreet keeping back of God. He said that He and Mammon would not dwell together. But to some extent we will force Him so to dwell. He shall at least keep the peace with the world, and learn to revolve alongside of it in His own sphere,

without encroaching, without jarring. Dreadful! Is there not hell already in the mere attempt? Yet how little men suspect it! It is like something noxious getting into the air, and not at first affecting the lungs. But the lights burn dim, then one by one they go out, and we are left in the darkness, unable to escape, because lethargy and suffocation have already begun within ourselves. In other words, high principles gently lower themselves, or are kept for state occasions, such as Lent, or a priest's company. Then we begin to be keenly alive to the annoyance which comes to us from the conversation of uncompromising Christians, and we pronounce them indiscreet, and by that ceremony they are disposed of to our great comfort, and we praise them more than ever, because by that reserve we have got rid of what fidgeted us in them, and we lull to rest the remaining uneasiness of conscience by this greater promptitude of a praise which we have first made valueless by counterweighting it. Then it dawns upon us that it is a duty to keep well with the world even for God's sake. Then keeping well edges on to being friends with the world. Then there begin to be symptoms of two distinct lives going to be lived by us; but we do not see these symptoms ourselves. Then uncomfortable feelings rise in us, taking away our relish for certain persons, certain things, certain books, certain conversations. We rouse ourselves, and take a view, an intellectual view of the rightness of being smooth, and not offending, and getting on well with the world. The view comforts us, and we are all right again. Then God's blessings, His spiritual blessings, very gradually and almost im-

perceptibly, begin to evaporate from us, from ourselves, our children, our homes, our hearts, and every thing round us. But the sun of prosperity shines so clearly that we do not see the mist of the evaporation rising up from the earth and withdrawing itself into heaven. Perhaps we shall never awake to the truth again. Trying to please is a slumberous thing. So we drift on, never suspecting how far the current is carrying us away from God. We may die without knowing it. We shall know it after that, the instant afterward.

Thus we may lose Jesus in three ways. We may abruptly break from Him by sin. We may quietly and gracefully withdraw from Him, confessing the attractions of the world to be greater than His. We may retire from Him slowly and by imperceptible degrees, always with our face toward Him, as we withdraw from royalty, and all because He is not a fixed principle with us, and the desire to please is so. But if we have lost Him in any one of these three ways,—sin, worldliness, and the love of pleasing,—and He rouses us by His grace, what are we to do? This third dolor teaches us. It must be a dolor to us. We must search for Him whom we have lost. He may not allow us to find Him all at once. He probably will not. But we must put off every thing else, in order to prosecute our search. Other things must be subordinate to it. They must wait, or they must give way. But we must not be precipitate in our search. We must not run; we must walk. We shall miss Him if we run. We must not do violent things, not even to ourselves, although we richly deserve them.

It is not a time for taking up new penances. The loss of Jesus is penance enough, now that we have found it out. We must be gentle, and sorrow will give us gentleness. Hence, our search must be also a sorrowful one, as Mary's was. We must seek Jesus with tears,—with tears, but not with cries,—with a broken heart, but a quiet heart also. We must seek Him, also, in the right place,—in Jerusalem, in the temple; that is, in the Church, and in sacraments, and in prayer. He is never among our kinsfolk; He never hides in the blameless softness of a kind home. This is a hard saying; but this dolor says it. All these are the conditions of a successful search. It was so Mary sought Him; it was so she found Him. We must be of good cheer. Every thing has its remedy. Even worldliness is curable, and it is by far the nearest to incurable of any of our diseases. If our whole life has been but a desire to please, if every thought, word, action, look, and omission has got that poison at the bottom of it, we must not be cast down. To change the habit is too difficult. We will change the object. It shall be Jesus instead of the world. Who ever knew people more thoroughly all for God than some who were once notably all for the world? nay, it would seem the more notably for the world, the more thoroughly for Him.

We must, however,—so also this dolor teaches us,—be on our guard against a temptation which is likely to assail us in our search. We soon lose the feeling of guilt in the feeling of beginning to be good again. It is part of the shallowness of our nature. We shall not have gone far on our road in search of Jesus be-

fore we shall be drawn to attribute the loss of Him, not so much to our own fault as to some mysterious supernatural trial which God is sending us, and the coming of which is itself an index of our goodness. We feel our hearts sorrowfully burning after our Lord. They cannot surely be the same hearts which we thought but a while ago were living contentedly without Him. The change of feeling has not been sudden or marked, therefore it cannot be new. So we argue. Alas! the truth is, our own changeableness is so great that it is incredible even to ourselves, except at the moment of the turn, when we see it with our eyes. Let us not take any grand views of supernatural chastisements. They are rare, and they are not for such as we are. Simply we have sinned, and we are being punished for it. It is our punishment to have to search for Him, who once dwelt with us, and only left us reluctantly. Let us be sure that every thing about us is very commonplace. We have lost Jesus, not in a mystical darkness of soul, but in the weakness of a worldly heart; we shall find Him, not in a vision or in any masterful interior operation of grace, but in the resumption of our old prayers, in the frequentation of the old sacraments. It is here the Evil One deludes many. They look out for a more striking appearance of our Lord than they had before. So they come up to Him, do not know Him, and go past Him. It is not often men turn back upon a search. But if these souls do not do so, cannot every one see that they have a wilderness before them, in which they may die, but which they will assuredly never cross? Mary might have thought her loss of

Jesus a supernatural trial, and she would have thought truly. But she thought it was her own fault, and so she reached a far higher truthfulness.

It is true, there is a loss of Jesus which is not altogether our fault, which is half trial, as well as half punishment. It is not so much a loss of Him as a veiling of His Face. We only think we have lost Him because we do not see Him. This happens to us again and again in our spiritual life; and, if we watch attentively, we shall be sure to detect the action of some law in these disappearances. We shall come to know the circumstances under which they happen, which regulate their duration, and which accompany His re-appearance. For He does nothing, except in order, weight, and measure,—more so, if it were possible, in the world of souls than in the world of matter. God has His own way with each one of us, and it is of consequence we should know His way with ourselves. But, with all, His way is a system. It has its laws and its periods, and is just as regular in its deflections, and as punctual in its catastrophes, as it is in its peace, its sequence, its uniformity. There is, perhaps, no infallible way of knowing when this disappearance of Jesus is our own fault. Perhaps it is always, in some measure, our own fault. If it were only a trial, it would cease to be a very efficacious one, were we sure it was but a trial, and no fault of ours. Even then we must not be passive,—even then we must sorrow,—even then we must search. We must not wait for Him to come back to us; we must go and find out where He is. But, till we find Him, do not let us seek for consolation either from our guides or from

ourselves, least of all from the sympathy of creatures or the comforts of earth: He is our only true consolation. It would be the saddest of things if we were consoled by any thing but the finding of Him! All this the third dolor teaches us; for it mirrors on its surface, without being disturbed by the deep things under it, all the relations of the soul with its Saviour and its Lord.

There is something almost selfish in the feelings which we turn away from the deathbed when the grim work is over. There is a sense of calm and of repose, which, for the moment, seems as if it were an enjoyment of our own. But it is not so, or not more so than to our nature is unavoidable. It was anguish to see one we loved suffer so terribly; to watch him struggling with the dark enemy, and to be unable to assist him except by prayers we were too distracted to pray, only that the mourner's unselfish will is itself prayer with God. So much hung upon the struggle; such interests were on the balance; we were sick to think of them, but sicker still to see them,—now uppermost, and now undermost,—in that tremendous hour. Now all is over; as far as we can see, well over, happily over, eternally right. His body is harmless; his soul is accepted. There is nothing to annoy our love of him, because there is nothing to afflict and harass him. It is a beautiful change to him, a soothing change to us. Our hearts are full to overflowing with that expansion which belongs to true repose. Such is our feeling, as we watch Jesus and Mary, on the threshold of the house of Nazareth, together again, the two hearts like one, on the shore of

that broad and tranquil sea of eighteen years, during which they shall separate no more. Mary's heart is still broken. It must be broken always. But it beats inside another Heart, which will not leave her again for years and years; and there is a quiet, pensive, evening brightness about her sorrow, most unlike the darkness, and the wandering, and the weariness of the Three Days' Loss. She has got Jesus back again. It is peace to us as well as to her. Truly she is to be envied now for her joys even amidst the number of her sorrows.