

CHAPTER V.

THE FOURTH DOLOR.

MEETING JESUS WITH THE CROSS.

WE have passed into a new world since the last dolor. Bethlehem and Nazareth are left behind. We have bidden farewell to the scenes of the Sacred Infancy, the Boyhood, and the Hidden Life. The Three Years' Ministry has passed. It is twenty-one years since the Three Days' Loss. The Immaculate Heart of Mary has traversed a world of mysteries since then, always in supernatural joy, but always with her lifelong sorrow lying on her soul. Henceforth we remain in Jerusalem, which is the scene of her four last dolours, as it has been also of two or three preceding. We have come to the morning of Good Friday, to her meeting Jesus with the Cross, which is reckoned as her fourth dolor.

But, in order to understand the mystery rightly, we must make a retrospect of the last twenty-one years. Mary is continually changing, though it is only in one direction. Her life is an endless heavenward ascension. She is always increasing in holiness, because she is always increasing in love. She is always increasing in love, because Jesus is always increasing in beauty. Thus each dolor found her at once less prepared and better prepared: less prepared, because she loved Jesus more, and it was in Him that

she suffered; more prepared, because stronger sanctity can carry heavier crosses. We saw before how the augmentations of her love, from the Return from Egypt to her entry into the gates of Jerusalem when they went up to our Lord's twelfth pasch, had increased her capabilities of suffering. So now the marvel of sanctity, whom we left with her recovered Jesus in the house of Nazareth, is very different from that heart which we are now to accompany along the Way of the Cross. This fourth dolor was not in itself equal to the third, but it fell upon greater capabilities of suffering.

The beauty of the earthly paradise which God planted with His own hand, and whither He came at the hour of the evening breeze to converse with His unfallen creatures, was a poor shadow of the loveliness of the Holy House during the eighteen years of the Hidden Life. We cannot guess at all the mysteries which were enacted within that celestial cloister. The words were few, yet in eighteen years they were what we, our human way, should call countless. The very silence even was a fountain of grace. There were tens of thousands of beautiful actions, each one of which had such infinite worth that it might have redeemed the world. During those eighteen years an immeasurable universe was glorifying God all day and night. The beauty of the trackless heavens, swayed by their majestic laws, vast unpeopled orbs with their processes of inanimate matter or their seemingly interminable epochs of irrational life, earth with all its inhabitants, the worshippers of the true God, amid whatever darkness, in all its regions, the chosen flowers

of the bygone generations in Abraham's bosom in the limbus of the fathers, the little children, a multitudinous throng of spirits, in their own receptacle beneath the surface of the earth, the souls worshipping amid the fires of purgatory,—all were swelling as in one concourse of creation the glory of the Most High. The wide creation of angels, above all, peopling the immeasurable capacities of space, sent up to God evermore, the God whom they beheld clearly with the eyes of their intelligence, a worship of the most exquisite perfection. But the entire creation was as nothing to the Holy House of Nazareth. One hour of that life outweighed ages of all the rest, and not only outweighed it on a comparison, but outweighed it by a simple infinity. There was the centre of all creation, spiritual or material, in nearly the most sequestered village of that obscure Galilee. Why should the centre be there? Who does not see that God's centres in all things baffle the calculation of the sciences of men?

There was a sense, too, in which Mary seemed to be the centre of this central point of all creation. For, if Jesus was the centre to Joseph and herself and the countless ranks of wondering and adoring angels round, it appeared as if she was the centre of Jesus, which was higher still. He had come to redeem a whole world, and had allotted Himself but Three-and-Thirty Years for the gigantic work. Twelve had been given to Mary. Some shepherds had knelt before Him, three Eastern kings had kissed His feet, Simeon had held Him in his arms, Anne had blessed Him, some Epytian infidels had wondered at Him, the

townsfolk of Nazareth thought Him no common Child. Otherwise the world knew nothing of Him. He was one among many Galilean children. He had given Himself to Mary. The twelve years ran out, and ended in the strangest mystery of grief. It seemed as if it were a sort of initiation for Mary into some exalted regions of nameless sanctity. From that mystery there starts a period of eighteen years, during which our Blessed Lord appears to devote Himself exclusively to Mary and Joseph. It is as if He were her novice-master, and she in a long novitiate, to be professed on Calvary. It could not be waste of time. It could not be out of proportion with the work of His Public Ministry, or with the suffering of His Passion. It was in harmony with His wisdom, which was infinite. Just as the Three Years' Ministry was the Jews' time, and the Passion our time, the Eighteen Years were Mary's time.

Would it not be a hopeless task to make any calculations for the sake of approaching to that sum of love which these years produced in Mary's heart? The spiritual beauty of the Human Soul of Jesus, the contagion of His heavenly example, the attraction of all His actions, the efficacy of His superhuman words, the sight of His unveiled Heart, the visions granted from time to time of His Divine Nature and of the Person of the Word, were all so many fountains of substantial grace flowing at all hours into Mary's soul. Without special assistance she could not have lived in such vicinity to Him. She could not have survived such a superangelic process of sanctification. Her life could not have lived with her love. If there was

any thing like a respite, if we may so speak, in the eagle-flight of her soul, ever on and on, and upward and upward, it was when she saw Jesus hanging His love on Joseph, and arraying with new and incomparable graces that soul which already in its grandeur surpassed all the saints. Eighteen years with God, knowing Him to be God, eighteen years of hearing, seeing, touching, being touched by, and governing, the Creator of the universe! Is it possible for languish to unveil the mysteries of such an epoch? Which is the most imitable of God's attributes by us His creatures? Strange to say, it is His holiness. So our Lord Himself declares. We are to be perfect as God is perfect. The product, then, of all these eighteen years in Mary's soul was sanctity, and, if sanctity, therefore love. But by what means, in what ways, by the infusion of what gifts, at what rate of speed, by what accelerated flights, what mortal can so much as dream but they themselves, Mary and Joseph, on whose souls God lay thus as it were upon a resting-place? If love belonged only to angels and to men, we should have to give it some other name when it reached the height it did in Mary. But God Himself is love. So we have an infinity to move about in, and can call Mary's sanctity by the name of love, without fear of uncrowning it of any of its highest elevations. But if our Blessed Mother could ill part with Jesus at the gate of Jerusalem eighteen years ago, how will this new universe of ten thousand different kinds of love of Him, which she holds in her heart, allow her to part with Him now? This is the one sense in which each dolor outstrips its predecessor,

that it has more love to torture, and therefore more power of inflicting pain. So much power it has, that omnipotence must stand by to hold the life in that dear heart, which is dearer to Him than all the world beside.

The Eighteen Years come to an end, and the Three Years' Ministry begins. It is not clear to what extent our Blessed Lady was with Jesus during His Public Ministry. Most probably she was never long separated from Him. But Scripture affords us no decisive testimony on the point, and contemplative saints have differed upon the subject. It seems most likely it was not an actual separation from Him. If she was allowed to follow Him through His Passion, we can hardly suppose she was ever far removed from Him during His ministry. He began His miracles at her intercession at Cana in Galilee, and when, on one occasion in the Gospel, she comes to seek Him, as it were, with a Mother's rights, the tone of the narrative would lead us to suppose that, on the one hand, she was not continually with Him, and on the other that, although it was no common thing her joining Him at times, she did so on occasions. Under any circumstances, whether in spirit or through the revelations of the angels, or by some human channel, we cannot but suppose that she was aware of all His sayings and doings during those three years. The words of her Son can hardly be the common and accessible property of all of us and not have been her portion also and a means of her further sanctification.

To Mary the Three Years' Ministry was like a new revelation of Jesus. She saw Him from many points

of view from which she had never seen Him before. Every variety in Him, however apparently trivial, could not be really trivial, and was full of wonder, full of beauty, full of grace. It was fresh food for love. It rung changes on the love which it drew from the Mother's heart. In the Infancy she had seen Him, as it were, in still life, giving out heavenly mysteries, as the fountain throbs out water, with a seeming passiveness, though not unconsciously. In the Boyhood, the wonders of His activity had developed themselves. Her heart was taken captive afresh by His gracefulness. But He was with those He knew, to whom He trusted Himself, whom He loved unspeakably. He was at once the subject and the superior in the Holy House. But His Ministry was almost a greater change upon His Hidden Life than His Hidden Life had been upon His childhood. He had now to act out in the world, to be God, yet not to seem singular, to adapt Himself to numberless new positions, to address Himself to various classes of hearers. At one while He was gently maturing the vocations of His apostles, at another He was swaying multitudes, at another soothing sorrow, at another rebuking sin. Now He was unfolding the Scriptures, and unrolling the hidden folds of His deep parables to the chosen few; now He was quietly and with easy wisdom eluding the snares of His enemies, who had endeavored to entangle Him in His talk. Every day brought its changes, its attitudes, its positions, its varieties. Every side of His Human Nature was brought out. Endless graces were elicited. It was like three years of heavenly music, rising and falling, changing and interweaving,

hushing and raising, winding and unwinding its beautiful sounds for evermore. It was an indescribable combination of sweetness and power, of wisdom and simplicity, of accommodation and sanctity, of human and divine. There was not, there could not be, a trait, a tone, a gesture, a look, in the behavior of the Incarnate Creator, which was not in itself at once a revelation to Mary, and, in a lower degree, to the angels also, and at the same time an unfathomable depth which His own eye alone could sound. It was more beautiful than the Infancy; it was more wonderful than the Hidden Life. Its effect upon Mary must have been astonishing.

We shall never approach to a true view of her if we do not give the Three Years' Ministry its due place in the stupendous process of her sanctification. The epochs of her sanctification were more wonderful than the days of creation, and they are as distinctly marked. The Immaculate Conception, with its fifteen years of growing merits, was the first day. The Incarnation, with the twelve years of the Childhood, occupied the second. The Three Days' Loss, with the eighteen years of the Hidden Life, filled the third. The Three Years' Ministry occupied the fourth. The Passion was the fifth. The Forty Days of the Risen Life, with the descent of the Holy Ghost, engrossed the sixth. Then came the seventh, our Lord's Sabbath, when He had ascended into heaven, and sat down at His Father's Right Hand, leaving the great world of Mary's sanctity to go on for fifteen years, but, as in the case of the material world, not without His ceaseless interference, and watchful providence,

and real presence, yet without His Hands working at it as they did before. Then comes its end, her glorious death, her sweet doom, her blissful resurrection, and His second Advent with His angels to assume her into heaven. We can never estimate the graces of our Blessed Mother if we break up and disjoin these seven days of her spiritual Genesis.

We must therefore consider the Three Years' Ministry as a most peculiar time, during which, under the influence of the adorable changes of Jesus, her love was growing, perhaps as it had never grown before. It seems unreal to talk of new breadth and depth and height, to that which was beyond all, even angelic, measurements long ago. Years since, her love had gone up so near to God, that the strong splendor of His vicinity confused its outlines and proportions to our ineffectual eyes. Nevertheless, we must speak so, hardly knowing what we mean. Mary reached Bethany on the Thursday in Holy Week, loving Jesus with a love which far surpassed the love she had for Him when the eighteen years of the Hidden Life had come to a conclusion. St. Joseph was gone, and although her love of him, ardent as it was, was no diversion from her love of Jesus, but rather a variety of it, and an addition to it, yet in some way, as all changes were with her, his death increased her love of our Blessed Lord. The apostles had come into Joseph's place. She knew all the secret designs of grace which our Lord had upon each of them. She saw His way with them all through, in the variety of their vocations and their gifts and their characters. It was a model to her, who was one day to be the queen of

those apostles. Her love of them also in some way multiplied her love of Jesus. As in her other periods, so in this, every thing which Jesus did was a fresh fountain of love within her heart. His sermons, His parables, His secret teaching, His austerities, His prayers, His tears, His miracles, His journeys, His weariness, His hunger, His thirst, His contradictions, —each one of them was an inexhaustible depth of love. So it was up to the eve of the Passion. All this incalculable augmentation of love was, from our point of view, a correspondingly increased capability of suffering. So the end of the Ministry arrives, and the possibilities of her heart are more wonderful than ever.

We seem to have wandered away from the dolor before us; but it is not really so. The seven dolors are not seven separate mysteries, neither can we understand them if we look at them in that way. They have a unity of their own, and, if we detach them from that unity, we miss their significance. They carry the whole of the Three-and-Thirty Years along with them. Each of them depends for its truth, for its depth, for its intensity, for its peculiar character, on a certain portion of those years, inseparable from it. Jesus grows more beautiful. Grace rises proportionately in Mary's soul. The growth of grace is the growth of love. It reaches a certain point, known to God, fixed by Him, capable of bearing a certain weight, of undergoing a given amount of elevating and sanctifying sorrow; and at that point, as by the operation of a law, one of the dolors comes, takes up the grace and love of the preceding times, of years as in the childhood, of days as in the swift Passion, compresses them

into the most solid and sublime holiness, flies away with the Mother's soul as if it had the strength of all the angels, and places her upon some new height, far away from where she was before. Thus each dolor is a distinct sanctification to her, a renewal, a transfiguration, another degree of divine union. Then the process begins again. Grace and love accumulate once more, with an acceleration and a magnitude in proportion to her new height, until once more, in the counsels of God, they reach the point where another dolor comes to do its magnificent work. Thus also we have two principles of comparison, by which we can contrast the dolours one with another. First of all, they differ in themselves. Each has its peculiar excess, like our Lord's sufferings in the Passion; and so each has its own perfection and its own pre-eminence. They are all equally perfect, but it is with a different and an appropriate perfection. The kind of excess in one may be more afflictive than the kind of excess in another. Thus it is that we call the third dolor the greatest. In this sense they do not rise by degrees, each exceeding its predecessor, and so culminating in a point. But there is a second sense in which they do. Each dolor, as it comes, falls upon greater love, and also upon love that has suffered more, and therefore upon a greater capability of suffering. In this way each is worse than its predecessor; and they go on rising and rising in the terrible power of causing anguish, till the very last, till the Burial of Jesus, till the possibilities of woe seem to be exhausted, till the abysses of sanctifying sorrow contained in the huge world of the Incarnation have been dried up by the absorption

of the single immaculate heart of the Mother of the Incarnate Word. This is the unity of the dolours; and each dolor really means, not what it looks like by itself, but what it is in the setting and order of the Three-and-Thirty Years.

The Passion may be said to begin on the Thursday in Holy Week in the house of Lazarus at Bethany. Mary, as might have been expected, opened the long avenue of sorrows, great epochs in substance, though brief in time. Jesus had entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday in the modesty of His well-known triumph. He had spent that day teaching in the temple, as well as the following Monday and Tuesday, returning however to Bethany at nights, as no one in Jerusalem had the courage to offer Him hospitality, as the rulers were incensed with Him because of the recent resurrection of Lazarus, and none of those who had cried Hosanna on Sunday had the courage to put themselves forward individually and so draw the resentful notice of the chief priests upon them. The Wednesday He is supposed to have spent in prayer on the Mount of Olives, and to have seen the elect of all ages of the world pass before Him in procession, while He prayed severally for each. Judas meanwhile was arranging his treachery with the rulers. It is supposed also that our Blessed Saviour spent the Wednesday night out of doors praying in the recesses of the hill. On the Thursday morning He went to Bethany to bid His Mother farewell, and to obtain her consent to His Passion, as He had before done to His Incarnation. Not that it was necessary in the first case as it was in the last, but it was fitting and convenient to the per-

fection of His filial obedience. Sister Mary of Agreda in her revelations describes the affecting scene, how Jesus knelt to His Mother, and begged her blessing, how she refused to bless her God, and fell upon her knees and worshipped Him as her Creator, how He persisted, how they both remained upon their knees, and how at last she blessed Him, and He blessed her. Who can doubt but that He also enriched with a special blessing His beloved Magdalen, the first and most favored of all the daughters of Mary? He then went to Jerusalem, whither His Mother followed Him, together with Magdalen, in order that she might receive the Blessed Sacrament. The last Supper, the First Mass, took place that night, our Lord's first unbloody Sacrifice, to be followed on the morrow by that dreadful one of blood.

By a miraculous grace she assists, in spirit, at the Agony in the Garden, sees our Lord's Heart unveiled throughout, and feels in herself, and according to her measure, a corresponding agony. She sees the treachery of Judas consummated, in spite of her intense prayers for that unhappy soul. Then the curtain falls; the vision grows dim; she is left for a while to the anguish of uncertainty. With the brave, gentle Magdalen, she goes forth into the streets. She tries to gain admittance both to the houses of Annas and Caiaphas, but is repulsed, as she was at Bethlehem three-and-thirty years ago. She hears the voice of Jesus; she hears also the blow given to her Beloved. Jesus is put in prison for the night; and St. John comes forth, and leads our Blessed Mother home to the house in which the last Supper had been eaten.

At all the horrors of the morning she is present. She hears the sound of the scourging, and sees Him at the pillar, and the people around Him sprinkled with His Blood. She hears the gentle murmurs, the almost inaudible bleatings, of her spotless Lamb; she hears them, and Omnipotence commands her still to live. In spirit—if not in bodily presence—she has seen the guards of Herod mock the Everlasting. She has beheld the ruffians in the guard-room celebrate the cruel coronation of the Almighty King. She has seen the eyes of the All-Seeing bandaged, and the offscouring of the people daring to bend the knee in derision before Him who is one day to pronounce their endless doom. She has looked up to the steps of Pilate's hall, and has beheld—beautiful in His disfigurement—Him who was a worm and no man, so had they trodden Him under foot, and mangled Him, and turned Him almost out of human shape by their atrocities. She heard Pilate say, "Behold the Man;" and verily there was need that some one should testify that He was man, who, if He had been only Man could never have survived the crushing of the winepress which the threefold pressure—of His Father, of demons, and of men—had inflicted upon Him. Then rose over the crowded piazza that wild yell of blasphemous rejection by His own people, which still rings in our ears, still echoes in history, still dwells even in that calm heaven above, in the Mother's ear who heard it in all the savage frightfulness of its reality. Now the Magdalen leads her home, whither John is to come with news of the sentence when it is passed.

Quietly, almost coldly, we seem to say these things.