

The Three Languages of the Cross.

READING St. John's touching story of the Redeemer's Passion we find, in the description of the closing scene, these words: "And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross. And the writing was, 'Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews.' This title then read many of the Jews; . . . and it was written in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin." (S. John: xix, 19, 20). Now these three tongues are called the "Three Languages of the Cross."

Whatever was Pilate's motive in setting up this inscription over the head of the Messiah, there was truly a certain peculiar fitness in this fact, that through all the agony of the Crucifixion, through the darkness and the convulsions of Nature, through the rending of the Veil of the Temple, these three mute witnesses of God's kingship and almightiness should stand over His head. For they had done, were doing, and were destined to do great things in the accomplishment of His marvellous and merciful designs with man.

In the number three, which Plato calls the "mother and the mistress of all numbers," there is a mystic nature. The most Holy Trinity—sublimest of all wonders—is the perfect type of excellence in three. The Wise Men that followed the Star of Bethlehem of Juda were three; and three are the cardinal virtues, Faith and Hope and Love. Three countries, Greece, Italy, and England, have produced the three great epics. And so it was only in accordance with this plan of the universe—trinity in unity and unity in trinity—that this unique inscription should be written in the three tongues specially set aside by God from all the languages and dialects of the earth.

In the designs of the Omnipotent, who, from the beginning of ages, had willed to have for a long succession of centuries a peculiar people to be the guardians of His laws and the keepers of His commandments, the Hebrew tongue was an instrument by no means insignificant. Language is one of the three great marks of distinction between races; and with the singular and most honourable exception of Ireland, every great nationality that lost its language has become absorbed in some stronger people. And Ireland has remained startlingly distinct from the Sister Island only because her children had a superabundance,