

excesses of acute suffering to be endured, for the whole operation goes on in the very quick of our nature.

In Mary this deifying operation was complete. This was owing to her immense graces, and also to the perpetual nearness of Jesus. The prophecy of St. Simeon, though it did not lay bare to her for the first time, brought formally before her for her acceptance, manifold dispositions of God regarding Jesus, herself, and us sinners. As she had been formally called upon to give her consent to the Incarnation, so now she was definitely called upon to enter into these dispositions of God and make them her own, to appropriate them to herself by a heroic sanctity. We have already seen that these dispositions were by no means such as the mother's heart would naturally have desired. They involved terrible sacrifices. They raised her to heights where mere humanity could hardly respire. They plunged her in oceans of supernatural sorrow. Indeed in the sorrow of this first dolor there is something which we might almost venture to call unnatural, because, not only of the relation in which it placed the Mother to the Son, but also of the free will of the Mother in the matter. Into these dispositions, and with the most perfect intelligence of them which a creature could have, she entered heroically. A ship could not sail into harbor with more calm dignity or more irresistible grace, than she glided out of nature, earth, and self, into the deep bosom of her Heavenly Father.

The third disposition we shall notice is her generosity in the acceptance of this dolor. With us,

generosity in spiritual things is often to be measured by the degree of struggle and reluctance through which the virtue forced its way. But it was not so with our Blessed Lady. It was with her supernatural generosity as it is with our natural generosity. Its gracefulness was in the absence of effort. It was born without the pains of birth, out of the abundance of her heart. It leaped forth spontaneously. It waited to make no calculations. It fought no battle. What had it to fight with in a nature so subjected to grace in its inmost recesses, as hers was? From the greatness of her grace what was supernatural came as obviously to her as what is natural comes to us: and it is in this instantaneous, almost unconscious alacrity, that the attractiveness of generosity consists in us. Suffering and reluctance are two different ideas. She suffered intensely; but there was no rebellion in her lower nature. There was no conflict in her will. There could have been, but there was not. It was inconsistent with the grandeur of her union with God. What took place in our Lord in the garden of Gethsemane had no parallel in His Mother. She had no chalice of sin to drink, no chalice of the Father's anger; but a cup of simple bitterness which Jesus Himself was forever holding to her lips. Could she have struggled against Him ever so little? Could the slightest ripple pass over her conformity to His will, when He Himself was her cup-bearer? In the Agony in the Garden we have to suppose our Lord's Divine Nature mysteriously cloistered off, so far as regarded many of its principal effects, from the human nature to which it was united. Nay, more than this,

we have to suppose a miraculous desertion of the lower part of His human nature even by the higher human faculties, in order to arrive at that stupendous conflict in His all-holy Soul, that momentary and apparent, yet intensely mysterious, insurgency of His lower will against His higher. But surely this is a specialty to Him. It is part of the world's salvation. It is a sublimity in Him of which she is not capable, without being lowered. It has to do with sin and with the angry justice of the Father. It was the revolt of His purity against the loathsomeness of the manifold iniquity in which He was to clothe Himself. It was the culminating-point of the magnificence of His sacrifice. In Mary it would simply be the transient failure of her consummate holiness, without the necessity or the dignity of redemption. We cannot therefore admit it for one moment. It would have broken her tranquility. It would have loosened the compactness of her perfect nature. It would have exaggerated the womanly element in the exalted Mother of God. It would have brought her down to a lower level. It would have made her more like one of the saints. For one moment her will was visible in the mystery of the Annunciation, and then it sank down into the deep will of God, and was never seen again. Far out at sea, in the wide calm a wave will rise up from the heaving plain of waters, crest itself with silver, catch the light, and fall back again all noiselessly into the huge deep, and leave no traces, no wake, behind. So was it with our lady's will. God called it up in the Annunciation. It shone for the moment, and withdrew itself again into His, and was

seen no more. She who often saw God, she who was so united with Him as never saint or angel was, she who had more grace than all the world beside, she who was more glorious than the blessed in their glory, who have no will apart from the will of God,—could it be otherwise with her? No! the generosity of our Blessed Mother was in the spontaneous alacrity and untroubled calm of her conformity to the sweet will of God. She, who had given without struggle all that God had asked of her in the Incarnation, gave also without struggle all that followed from that first consent.

But let us now consider the lessons which this first dolor teaches to ourselves. It was a lifelong unhappiness. Unhappiness is not without mystery even in a fallen world. By rights there should be no unhappiness at all. For is not the whole world full of God everywhere, and can there be unhappiness in the neighborhood of God? How much goodness and kindness is there in every one around us, if we only take a kindly view of them ourselves! Sin is easily forgiven to those who are in earnest. Grace is prodigally bestowed. There is an almost incredible amount of actual enjoyment, and pain and suffering themselves are quickly turned to sanctity. Yet for all this the unhappiness of the world is real. Almost every heart on earth is a sanctuary of secret sorrow. With some the grief is fresh. With others it is old. With immense numbers the unhappiness is literally lifelong, one out of which there is no possible escape except through the single door of death. With some it arises from having chosen an unfit lot in life from

the first. With others it is from the unkindness, misconduct, or misunderstanding of those they love. In some cases men have to suffer for their religion, and its consequences are made by the cruelty of others to last to the end of their days. Not unfrequently it comes from men's characters, or from their sins, or from some consequences of these. Now and then it is the burden of a broken heart, a heart which has been overweighted, and so has snapped, and thus lost its elasticity and the power of throwing off its sorrow. To such suffering time brings no healing. The broken heart lies bleeding in the hand of its Heavenly Father. He will look to it. No one else can. It is astonishing how shallow all human consolation is. The waters glitter so in the sun, we do not see the sandy bottom only just below the surface. We believe it deep, till we have once been to draw water there, and then we learned all about it, for we drew as much sand as water.

Now, what is to be done with this lifelong sorrow? Let our Lady teach us out of the depths of her first dolor. Her sorrows were lifelong. This was the characteristic the first dolor impressed upon them. She suffered without seeking consolation. She suffered without needing to lean on human sympathy. She suffered in silence. She suffered in joy. Let us put this aside, not as inimitable; the time will come when we shall be able to imitate even these things; but let us put it aside as beyond us now. But she had no suffering which was dissociated from the Passion of Jesus. We can make our sorrows in a measure like hers by continually uniting them to the sorrows of our

dearest Lord. If our sorrow comes from sin, of course it cannot be like Mary's sorrow; but it can be just as easily, just as acceptably, united with the passion of our Lord. He will not despise the offerings. The fact of our griefs being a consequence of sin need not even increase the measure of our grieving. Happy they, and true sons, whom our Father punishes in this life! Like Mary, we must be loving, sweet, and patient with those who cause us any unhappiness, and, laying our head with unrestrained and unashamed tears on our Lord's Bosom, let us think quietly of God and heaven. It is not a slight consolation for lifelong mourners to know that our Blessed Lady was a lifelong mourner too. Let us be of good cheer. Let us look our great sorrow in the face, and say to it, "You have made up your mind not to part with me till I go down to the grave: be, then, a second guardian angel to me, be a shadow of God, hindering the heat and glare of the world from drying up the fountains of prayer within my heart." All of us, even if we have not a lifelong sorrow, have a guardian angel of this description. Our sorrows may not be one, but many. They may come on guard, like sentinels, one following the other as each watch of this earthly night is done. Unhappiness is like a secret, subterranean world. We are perpetually walking over it without knowing it, and so seeming unkind and thoughtless one to another when in our hearts we are not really so. What a consolation, then, it is to us to reflect that the lives both of Jesus and Mary were lives of one incessant, secret unhappiness! With confidence, therefore, may we seek the Mother of sorrows,

and ask her to be the Mother of our sorrow. Jesus has a special love for the unhappy. The longest day has its evening, the hardest work its ending, and the sharpest pain its contented and everlasting rest.

Another lesson which we learn from this first sorrow of Mary is, that the highest use of God's gifts is to give them back to Him again. Nothing is in reality our own, except our sin. God is jealous of any thing like a proprietary feeling, even in the gifts of nature; but in respect of the gifts of grace this jealousy is increased a thousandfold. We must make Him the depositary of His own gifts, because we do not know how to use them rightly. We must be like children who bid their father keep the little treasures which he himself has given. So with the gifts of God. They are more ours when in His keeping than in our own. Everything which increases our feeling of dependence upon Him is sweet, and safe, and true, and right, and the best thing. Besides which, God is the end for which all things were given. Nothing good is meant to stay with us. It would not keep good. It would spoil. Every creature is a channel, through which things find their way back to God as surely as blood finds its way back to the heart, through endless turnings, and has done its work, not in delaying anywhere,—which would be disease,—but in passing on, and in passing swiftly, kindling and making alive as it went along. Moreover, our humility is always in peril if we detain a gift of God, even if it were for no longer than to look it in the face, and love it, and then think of it with complacency when it is gone. We must refer every thing to God. It is the secret of being holy.

Grace comes, and temptations give way, and great things are done, and love is all in a jubilee, and then self begins to sing an undersong; but we are making such a noise with praising God that we do not hear, and she is wounded, and holds her tongue, and we know nothing of it. Could we not keep up that beautiful noise forever? Oh, yes! for graces are always coming; like the people in the streets, there is no end to them,—sometimes a thinning, never a break. So we could be always praising God, always sending back to Him, when we have humbly kissed them, the gifts and graces He has sent us. Besides which, God and His gifts are two very different things. Sometimes He feigns as if He would overreach us, in order to try our love. He sends us some very heavenly gift, and then watches to see if we will take it for Himself, and rest in it, not as if it were our own, yet not as if it were His, but as if it were Himself. But the soul that loves truly can never fall into this mistake. It no more thinks of lying down on one of God's best gifts to rest itself than we should dream of lying on the green, yielding billows of the sea to sleep. It must reach God, nothing short of God. It keeps giving back His gifts, as if in constant protest that, needful as they are, they are not Himself, and cannot stand in His stead.

Another lesson to be learned is, that in this world sorrow is the recompense of sanctity. It is to the elect on earth what the Beatific Vision is to the saints in heaven. It is God's presence, His manifestation of Himself, His unfailing reward. We must not be amazed, therefore, if new efforts to serve God bring

new sorrows in their train. By the supernatural principles of the spiritual life they ought to do so. If we are able to bear them, these sorrows will come at once. Their delay is only the index of God's estimation of our weakness. Yet we need not fear that they will be disproportioned to our strength. God's blows are not dealt out at random. Our crosses are poised to a nicety by divine wisdom, and then divine love planes them, in order to make them at once smoother and lighter. But we can have no real comfort in devotion if we are without trials. We have no proof that God accepts us, no security against delusion. We know that the stars are in their old places in the sky; but in different states of the atmosphere they seem much farther off than at other times, or again much nearer, like teardrops of light on the very point of falling to the earth. So is it with God. Joy makes Him seem far off, while sorrow brings Him near, almost down into our bosom. When sorrows come, we feel instinctively their connection with the graces which have gone before, just as temptations so often have an odor about them of past victories. They come up one after another, dealing their several blows upon our poor hearts, with such a modest heavenly significancy upon their faces, that it is easy to recognize angels beneath the thin disguise. As we touch them, even while the thrill goes through us, we feel that we are almost handling with our hands our own final perseverance, such solid evidences are they of our adoption, so full of substantial graces in their presence, and leaving such a legacy of blessings when they go. A heart without sorrows is like a world without

a revelation. It has nothing but a twilight of God about it.

Furthermore, our sorrow must be our own. We must not expect any one else to understand it. It is one of the conditions of true sorrow that it should be misunderstood. Sorrow is the most individual thing in the whole world. We must not expect, therefore, to meet with sympathy at all adequate to what we are suffering. It will be a great thing if it be suitable, even though it is imperfect. It is a very desolate thing to have leaned on sympathy, and found that it would not bear our weight, with such a burden of sorrow upon our backs. It is very difficult to erect ourselves again. The heart sinks upon itself in dismay. It has used its last remaining strength to reach the place where it would rest itself, and now what is left for it but a faintness which opens all the wounds afresh, and a dismal conviction that the grief is less tolerable than it was before? It is best, therefore, to keep our sorrows as secret as we can. Unfitting sympathy irritates us, and makes us sin. Inadequate sympathy lets the lame limb fall harshly to the ground. The denial of sympathy excites almost a querulous despair. God knows every thing. There are volumes of comfort in that. God means every thing. There is light for every darkness out of that simple truth. Our hearts are full of angels when they are full of sorrows. Let us make them our company, and go on our road, smiling all the day, scattering such sweetness round us as mourners only are allowed to scatter, and God will understand us when we go to Him. Who can comfort like those who also mourn?

We must expect also that it will be in some measure with us as it was with Mary ; our sorrows will be fed even by our joys. God sends us joys before sorrows, to prepare our hearts ; but the joys themselves contain prophecies of the coming sorrows. And what are those sacred fears, those strange presentiments, those vague expectations of approaching evil, by which joys are so often accompanied, but the shadows which they bring along with them ? It is out of the brightness of life that its darkness mostly comes. In all manner of strange ways joys turn to sorrows, sometimes suddenly, sometimes gradually. Sometimes what was expected as joy comes in the shape of sorrow. Sometimes the very enjoyment of the joy turns it into sadness, as if an enchanter's wand had been waved over it. Sometimes it is gladness to the last, but when it goes it leaves grief behind, a grief it was all the while concealing under its cloak, and we never suspected it. So again when a sorrow has become calm, and the freshness of its sting seems worn off by time, by endurance, or by the distraction of our duties, a joy comes to us, makes us smile as it enters our souls, but, when there, goes at once to the fountain of sorrow, wakes up the slumbering waters, digs the source deeper, and shakes the earth around to make the spring flow more abundantly. There are few who have not experienced this kindling and enlivening of grief by the advent of gladness. But, in truth, in a world where we can sin, in a strife where we so often lose sight of God, in a dwelling which is rather an exile than a home, all joys are akin to sorrows, nay, are almost sorrows in holiday attire. Joy is life looking

like what it is not. Sorrow is life with an honest face. It is life looking like what it is. Nevertheless, there is the truest, the heavenliest of all joys in sorrow, because it detaches us from the world, and draws us with such quiet, persuasive, irresistible authority to God. The sunrise of grace within the soul is full of cloud, and doubt, and uncertain presages, even amid the flashings of beautiful light which are painting the troubled sky everywhere. But when the orb has mounted to the top of its noonday tower, all clouds will have melted away into the blue, no one knows how. For to turn joys into sorrows is the sweet, safe task of earth : to turn sorrows into joys is the true work of heaven, and of that height of grace which is heaven on earth already.

There is still another lesson to be learned. We must all enter into this dolor in some way or other in life. The characteristic of Mary's sorrow is that Jesus caused it. But this is not peculiar to her affliction. He will be a cause of blessed sorrow to every one of us. There are very many happy earthly things which we must sacrifice for Him ; or if we have not the heart to do so, He will have the kind cruelty to take them from us. Persecution is a word of many meanings, a thing of countless shapes. It must come infallibly to every one who loves our dearest Lord. It may come through the hard tongues of the worldly, or in the suspicions, and jealousies, and judgments of those we love. In the peace of family love and domestic union it often comes from hands which make it hard to be endured ; and, because of religion, there is keen misery where the casual visitor sees nothing but the

edification of mutual love. Who was ever let alone to serve Jesus as he wished? It is idle to expect it. The husband's love rises against it in the wife. The mother will tear her children from the Saviour's arms. The father looks with suspicion on the claims of God, and jealousy of the Creator will make him harsh to a child who has never given him an hour of trouble in life beside, and to whom he never has been harsh before. The brother will forego the manliness of fraternal affection, and bring the bitterness of the world's judgments into the sacred circle of home, if Jesus dares to lay a finger on his sister. Oh, poor, poor world! And it is always the good who are the worst in this respect. Let this be laid to heart and pondered. Outside of us, beside this inevitable persecution, our Lord will bring trials and crosses round us, at once to preserve our grace and to augment it. The more we love Him the thicker they will be. Nay, our love of Him often gets us into trouble we hardly know how. It almost leads us into faults, into imprudences to be repented of. Suddenly, especially when we are fervent, the ground gives way under our feet, and we sink into a pit, and in the retrospect our fall seems inexcusable, and yet how did it all come to pass? How also is it within the soul? Are there not such things as the pains of love? Are they not more common than its joys? Then there is the worse pain of not feeling our love, of seeming to lose our love, of its forever slipping away from us. There are also interior trials, by which self-love is put to a painful death, and a cleansing of our inmost soul by fire which is exceeding agony. Then there are the distresses into

which the love of Jesus entraps us. It persuades us to give up this world, to put out all the lights wherewith earth had made our hearts gay, to break ties, to eschew loves, to commit ourselves to hard, dull lives, and then it leaves us. God hides His countenance from us. All view of the other world is shut off from us. Just as it is at sundown, no sooner has the last rim sunk below the horizon, than, as if evoked by a spell, from river-side, from woody hollow, from pastures where the kine are feeding, from meadows with the haycocks standing, there rises up a cold, white, blinding mist; so is it in the soul: no sooner is God's Face gone, than past sins, ghastly things, break up from the graves in which absolution laid them, and present imperfections, and unknown temptations, and chilling impossibilities of perseverance, all rise up together, and involve the soul in the coldest, gloomiest desolation, through which no star can pierce, and it is much if a sickly whiteness tells us that there is a moon somewhere. Who does not know these things? It is no use shuddering. They are not on us now; but they will come back again, be sure, when their hour arrives. Thus Jesus is in us a cause of sorrow, in us He is a sign to be contradicted, in us is He set for the rise and fall of many.

These are the lessons which the first dolor teaches us, and they are lifelong lessons, as its sorrow was. Let us now go home to Nazareth with Mary. Angels accompany her steps, full of astonishment and reverence at her grief. Perhaps it is their first lesson in the profound science of the Passion. So she went her way through the streets of Zion, and over the hills, and

through the glens by the watercourses, until she came to the green basin of Nazareth, the Mother bearing her Child! And they were all in all to each other. And who shall tell what mute language they spoke, as the Child's Heart beat against the Mother's heart in sorrow and in love? And each was dearer to the other than before, and we also perhaps were dearer to them than an hour ago? for the shadow of Calvary had already fallen, both on the Mother and the Son; and they loved the shadow, and it was we who cast it.

CHAPTER III.

THE SECOND DOLOR.

THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT.

THE Flight into Egypt has always been a fountain of poetry and art in the Church at large, while it has been a source of tears and of rich contemplation to religious souls. It is not only that the mystery is so exceedingly beautiful in itself; but the Gentiles have loved to regard it as, after the Epiphany, the beginning of our Lord's dealings with them. He flies from His own people to take refuge in a heathen land. He consecrates by His presence that very land which had been the great historical enemy of the chosen people, and which was, as it were, the express type of all heathen darkness. Amid those benighted Gentiles He finds a peaceful home, where no persecutions trouble the even tenor of His childish life. The idols fall from their niches as He moves. A power goes out into the rich Nile-valley, nay, overflows it, and runs far into the yellow sands of the desert, sanctifying and setting apart the whole region as a future Church, as a blossoming wilderness, as a barren mystical paradise populous with saints. The fathers of the desert are to pass into a Christian proverb throughout the magnificent West, a phenomenon which men will never be weary of admiring, a living discipline, an enduring academy, in which all future generations