

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

of catholic saints are to be brought up and to take their degrees. Thus the Gentile West has loved to accumulate traditions about the Flight into Egypt, the Sojourn there, and the Return.

If there is not peace in sequestered Nazareth, where shall we find it? Can the eye of jealous power, quickened by the acute discernment of selfish fear, find out the Holy Child amid the many children of that retired village? The evil one will see to that, we may be sure. Peace is not the inheritance either of Jesus or Mary. It is true that he is the Prince of Peace, but not of such peace as earth dreams of. Mary has but lately reached her home. Her heart is broken. She needs rest. It shall come to her in the time of rest, but otherwise than might have been expected. In the dead of night the Lord appeared in sleep to Joseph, the keeper of heaven's best treasures on earth, and bade him rise, and take the Child and His Mother, and fly into Egypt. The three kings had gone back to the east without letting Herod know whether they had found the newborn king, and who He was. Herod had bidden them return to him; but Scripture does not tell us that they had promised to do so; or if they had, the commandment of God, which came to them in a dream, superseded the promise they had made. Tyranny was not, however, to be so balked, and, lest it should miss its aim, involved all Bethlehem in blood by the massacre of the Innocents. Oh, Mary! see what a stern sister thou hast been to those poor mothers of Bethlehem, who saw thee on Christmas Eve wandering homeless through their streets, they perhaps fondling their little ones at their doors!

What a concourse of wailing sounds rose to heaven from that narrow hilltop, while the gutters of the steep streets ran down with blood! It was the law of the Incarnation, the law that was round the gentle Jesus, which was beginning to work. Dearest Lord! His great love of us had already broken His Mother's heart. It was now desolating the happy hearths of Bethlehem, and staining its inhospitable doorposts with blood. And all to keep Himself for Calvary, where He was to shed with a thousandfold more cruel suffering His Precious Blood for us!

The night was dark and tranquil over the little town of Nazareth, when Joseph went forth. No commandment of God ever found such promptitude in highest saint or readiest angel as this one had found in Mary. She heard Joseph's words, and she smiled on him in silence as he spoke. There was no perturbation, no hurry, although there was all a mother's fear. She took up her treasure, as He slept, and went forth with Joseph into the cold starlight; for poverty has few preparations to make. She was leaving home again. Terror and hardship, the wilderness and heathendom, were before her; and she confronted all with the calm anguish of an already broken heart. Here and there the night-wind stirred in the leafless fig-trees, making their bare branches nod against the bright sky, and now and then a watch-dog bayed, not because it heard them, but from the mere nocturnal restlessness of animals. But as Jesus had come like God, so He went like God, unnoticed and unmissed. No one is ever less missed on earth than He on whom it all depends.

The path they took was not the one which human prudence would have pointed out to them. They returned upon the Jerusalem road they had so lately trodden. But, avoiding the Holy City, they passed near Bethlehem, as if His neighborhood should give a blessing to those unconscious Babes that were still nestling warmly in their mothers' arms. Thus they fell into the road which leads into the wilderness, and, Joseph going before, like the shadow of the Eternal Father, they crossed the frontier of the promised land far on until they were lost to the eye, like specks on the desert sand. Two creatures had carried the Creator into the wilderness, and were taking care of Him there amid the stony sands of the unwatered gullies. Sunrise and sunset, the glittering noon and the purple midnight, the round moon and the colored haze, came to them in the desert for many a day. Still they travelled on. They had cold to bear by night, and a sun from which there was no escape by day. They had scanty food, and frequent thirst. They knew whom they were carrying, and looked not for miracles to lighten the load they bore.

Old tradition said that one night they rested in a robber's cave. They were received there with rough but kind hospitality by the wife of the captain of the band. Perhaps it was her sorrow that made her kind; for it is often so with women. Her sorrow was a great one. She had a fair child, the life of her soul, the one gentle, spotless thing amid all the lawlessness and savage life around. Alas! it was too fair to look at; for it was white with leprosy. But she loved it the more, and pressed it the more fondly to her

bosom, as mothers are wont to do. It was more than ever her life and light now, because of its misfortune. Mary and Jesus, the robber's wife and the leprous child, together in the cave at nightfall! how fitting a place for the Redeemer! How sweet a type of the Church which He has founded! Mary asked for water, that she might wash our Blessed Lord, and the robber's wife brought it to her, and Jesus was washed therein. Kindness, when it opens the heart, opens the eyes of the mind likewise. The robber's wife perceived something remarkable about her guests. Whether it was that there was a light round the head of Jesus, or that the Holy Spirit spoke in the tones of Mary, or that the mere vicinity of so much holiness strangely affected her, we know not: but, in much love and with some sort of faith, the mother's heart divined;—earth knows that maternal divination well. She took away the water Mary had used in washing Jesus, and washed her little leprous Dimas in it, and straightway his flesh became rosy and beautiful as mother's eye could long to see it. Long years passed. The child outgrew its mother's arms. It did feats of boyish daring on the sands of the wilderness. At last Dimas was old enough to join the band; and though it seems he had to the last somewhat of his mother's heart about him, he led a life of violence and crime, and at length Jerusalem saw him brought within her gates a captive. When he hung upon the cross, burning with fever, parched with agony, he was bad enough to speak words of scorn to the harmless Sufferer by his side. The Sufferer was silent, and Dimas looked at Him. He saw something heavenly,

something unlike a criminal, about Him, such perhaps as his mother had seen in the cave three-and-thirty years ago. It was the Child in the water of whose bath his leprosy had been healed. Poor Dimas! thou hast a worse leprosy now, that will need blood instead of water! Faith was swift in its work. Perhaps his heart was like his mother's, and faith a half-natural growth in it. He takes in the scene of the Crucifixion, the taunts, the outrages, the blasphemies, the silence, the prayer for their pardon, the wishful look cast upon himself by the dying Jesus. It is enough. Then and there he must profess his faith; for the Mother's prayers are rising from beneath, and the sinner is being enveloped in a very cloud of mercy. Lord! remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom! See how quickly he had outrun even some of the apostles. He was fastened to the cross to die, and he knew it was no earthly kingdom in which he could be remembered. This day shalt thou be with Me in paradise! Paradise for thy cave's hospitality, poor young robber! And Jesus died, and the spear opened His heart, and the red stream sprang like a fresh fountain over the limbs of the dying robber, and though his mother from the cave was not there, his new Mother was beneath the cross, and she sent him after her Firstborn into paradise, the first of that countless family of sons who through that dear Blood should enter into glory.

Ages ago the Jewish people, after their deliverance from Egypt, had wandered over that desert. Its gray sands, its ruddy rocks, its stonestrewn plains, its regions of scant verdure, its sea-coast, and its wells of

pastoral renown, had been the scenes of such wonders as the world had not beheld before. Never had the Creator interfered so visibly, or for so long a time together, in favor of His creatures. The whole camp, with its cloud and fire, its cruciform march, with Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasses, bearing the relics of Joseph, its moving church beautified with the spoils of Egypt, was a standing miracle. In Sinai God had thundered from the heights, pouring through that wandering Hebrew people over the whole world the glorious light and transcending faith of the Unity of God, a doctrine that came to the world most fitly from the austere grandeur of a wilderness. There had those commandments of heavenly morality been given, under which we are living at the present day, and which shall be men's rule of life until the doom, the Judge's rule in fixing the doom of each. In our Christian childhood we have wandered with the Jews over that silent wilderness, learning the fear of God. In their pilgrimage we have seen a type of our own. In their vicissitudes we seemed almost to take part ourselves. The very names of the wells and halting-places sound like old songs in our ears, songs so early learned that they can never be forgotten. Here now was the very Creator Himself, in the reality of human childhood, wandering over that historic wilderness, reversing the Exodus, going to make Egypt His home, driven out of the delectable land of the old Canaanites by the very people whom He had led thither by a pillar of light, whose battles He had fought, whose victories He had gained, and whose tribes He had established, each in its characteristic and suitable allotment. There

was Mary with her Magnificat, instead of Miriam and her glorious seaside song; and another Joseph, greater and dearer far than that saintly patriarch of old, who had saved the lives of men by husbanding the bread of Egypt, whereas this new Joseph was to guard in the same Egypt the living Bread of everlasting life. And that very wilderness both the Josephs had crossed.

How wonderful must have been the thoughts of Jesus and Mary as they wandered over those scenes of God's past mercies, past judgments, past grandeurs! We may reverently follow them in our meditations, but it would be hardly reverent to write our guesses down. It was a journey of hardship and fatigue. At last they reached the shores of the Red Sea, and saw the waters that lay between Egypt and themselves. We can hardly conceive that they did not as it were reconsecrate by their presence the exact scene of the Exodus, wherever it was. Thence it would be most likely that they would follow the coast, and round the gulf by Suez, and so pass on to Heliopolis, now truly, for some years to come, to be the City of the Sun. Tradition speaks of trees that bowed down their leafy heads, inclining their branchless steams, to shade with their fanlike plumes the Mother and the Child. It speaks also of the uncouth images of the heathen gods which tumbled, like Dagon, from their pedestals, when the True God went by. There, on the banks of that old river where Moses wrought his miracles, amid crowds of benighted idolaters, and in all the straitnesses of poverty, the Hebrew strangers dwell, for seven years, for five years, or for two years and a half, as different authorities maintain. Joseph pursued his

trade of carpenter, and Mary doubtless contributed to the support of the modest household, while Jesus unfolded His infantine beauties day after day, more delicate and lovely a thousand times in His human loveliness than the fairest snowy lotus that was ever cradled on the bosom of the Nile.

During those years that Egyptian city was the centre of the world. The garden of Eden was as nothing to it in beauty or in gifts. Thither were the angels gathered in multitudes to wonder and adore. Thither, though men knew it not, went all the world's prayers, its sighs, its secret expectations. Thither also went the voices of pain and sorrow in Heliopolis itself, into God's ear, and that a human ear, in the next street or in the selfsame house. Supernatural actions of consummate sanctity, and of infinite value, were pouring forth day and night from the Human Soul of Jesus in more abundant volume than the Nile-flood at its highest, meriting graces which should carry fertility over the whole wilderness of a fallen world. Beautiful also was the heart of Mary during those years. Her holiness was rising perpetually, her union with God, the closeness of which was already far beyond what any technical term in mystical theology can express, grew closer and closer; so that the Mother seemed to be well-nigh identified with the Son, in spite of that whole infinity which always lay between them, as between the Creator and the creature. Her sorrows grew as well. There was still the lifelong sorrow of the first dolor at her heart; and to this were superadded the many new sorrows which this second dolor, this Flight into Egypt, had of necessity brought with it. Did

dark Egypt know of the great light which was shining on the banks of its famous river? Did the priests, in spite of themselves, offer sacrifice to the sun with less faith, now that *He* was close at hand, smelling the sacrificial odors, and in hearing of the wild worship, who invented the sun, called it out of nothing, gifted it with all its occult influences, set it up as a hearth at which the golden ether should kindle itself into heat and light, and made it the centre of such vast outlying regions of life and such magnificent far-stretching phenomena, right away beyond still undiscovered planets, and all out of His own unimaginable wisdom? Did no misgivings come across the more thoughtful in the multitude, when they joined in the undignified rites of their debasing animal-worship, now that the Eternal had assumed a created nature, and was to be seen and heard in their land? Some truth, some sweet gracious trouble in many souls, must surely have stolen like an infection from the nearness of Jesus and Mary. For are they ever near, and some benediction does not follow? But all these things, all the secrets of this Egyptian life, are hidden in divine concealment.

So the appointed years ran out; and, when Herod was dead, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in sleep, saying, Arise, and take the Child and His Mother, and go into the land of Israel. For they are dead that sought the life of the Child. Joseph arose with the same promptitude as of old. There was no delay. No one at Heliopolis would care to detain them. They were too obscure. They were free to come and go as they pleased. The stars of night were

still standing tremulously like thin shafts of light in the breast of the Nile, when they began their homeward wanderings. Once more they saw the waters of the Red Sea. Once more the weary night-wind of the wilderness sighed round them as they sank to rest upon the sands. Once more the hills and the vineyard-walls of Southern Judah greeted their eyes, the welcome land which God had chosen. But the cross was not to be removed all at once. The temple at Jerusalem was their natural attraction. But Joseph knew the value of that treasure he was set to guard; and, when he heard that Archelaus reigned in the room of his father, he was afraid to go there. In his fear he doubtless sought light in prayer, and again a supernatural warning came to him in his sleep, and he was bidden to retire into the quarters of Galilee. So the long journey was made longer, until at length the old home at Nazareth received the three.

Such was the mystery of the second dolor. It extended over an uncertain length of time, for we must not confine the dolor to the Flight only. Epiphanius thought that our Lord was two years old when He fled, and remained in Egypt two. Nicephorus fixed the duration of the sojourn at three years. Barradius calls it five or six, Ammonius of Alexandria seven. Maldonatus fixes it at not more than seven, nor less than four. Baronius gathers from a variety of considerations that our Lord fled in His first year, and returned in His ninth, thus giving at least seven full years to Egypt: to this Suarez also inclines, though he says that nothing positive can be decided about it. Seven years is also the most commonly accepted time

among the faithful. This dolor presents three different objects of devotion to us: the Flight, with all its fears, its hardships, and fatigues, the Sojourn, with its sense of exile and its companionship with the idolaters, and the Return, with those peculiarities which followed from the increased age and size of Jesus. Some writers dwell on one or other of these in preference to the rest. Pious contemplation may shift from one to another according to its mood. But to comprehend the dolor in its unity, we must consider it as a drama in three acts, the Flight, the Sojourn, and the Return, by which, as we shall see presently, it is made a double dolor.

We may now therefore pass from the narrative of the mystery to a consideration of the peculiarities of this dolor.

The first thing to be noticed is, that as Simeon was the instrument of the first dolor, so Joseph was the instrument of this. There was much in this to the loving heart of Mary. There is a certain appearance of cruelty in sending sorrow through those we love. Shakspeare says that the first bringer of unwelcome news has but a losing office. Thus it was at once a sorrow to Joseph to convey fresh sadness to Mary, and to her to receive it from him. The world has often been glorified by heroic examples of conjugal affection. Many have been recorded in history as notable phenomena, which were too precious for the wisdom and the solace of mankind to be forgotten. In the deeper depths of private life it is a pure fire which is burning evermore. But never did marriage throw its divine sanctions round a conjugal love so pure, so

true, so intense as that which existed between Joseph and Mary. Never was there such oneness, such identity, such living out of self and in each other, as was in them. It was the very perfection of natural love. Next to her natural love for Jesus, earth has never seen such another love as that between Joseph and herself, unless it were also Joseph's love for the Holy Child. But added to this natural love there was so much that was supernatural; and supernatural love is not only deeper, but more tender, than natural love. It brings out the capabilities and depths of the human heart far more than natural affection can do. Joseph was to Mary the shadow of the Eternal Father, the representative of her Heavenly Spouse, the Holy Ghost. In him she saw with awful clearness and most reverential tenderness two Persons of the Most Holy Trinity. When she saw Jesus in his arms, it was a mystery to her too deep for words. Tears only could express it. Then the exceeding sanctity of Joseph was continually before her, and she was privy to operations of grace within his soul, which probably surpassed those of any other saint. For they were the graces of him who was the master of God's household. While then it was an exercise of obedience to him as her appointed master, it was also no slight aggravation of Mary's sorrow, that this time it should come to her through Joseph.

There was a further aggravation in the fact that her suffering seemed to come less directly from God, and more from the wickedness of men, than was the case in the first dolor. There it was prophecy, God's disclosure of the future, and His infusion of a vivid