

vision of it to be her perpetual companion. But now the hand of sinful man was actually upon her. She was in contact with the violence of which Jesus was to be the victim. Here was the first touch of Calvary: and it chilled her to the heart. In our own limited sphere of endurance, we must surely all have felt that there is an additional difficulty in receiving a cross when it comes to us, not directly from God, but through the hands of our fellow-creatures. But not only is it an additional difficulty: it often seems to be the peculiar difficulty. We fancy, doubtless not unfrequently deceiving ourselves, that we could have borne it patiently and cheerfully if it had come at once from Him. But there is something which dishonors the cross in its transmission through the hands of others. Thus it is a trial, not to our patience only, but also to our humility. There is nothing humbling in having the weight of God's omnipotence simply laid upon us by Himself, with the intervention only of inanimate secondary causes. There is nothing humiliating in the death of a dear child, or the taking away of a beloved sister, or in the breaking up of a household by death, or in the desolation of home by some terrific accident. Humility is not exactly or immediately the virtue which divine catastrophes elicit from the soul. But when God punishes us through the injustice of men, through the base jealousies of others, through the unworthy suspicions of unbelieving friends, through the ingratitude of those we have benefited, or through unrequited love of any sort, then the bravest natures will shrink back and decline the cross if they can. It is true that reason tells them

God is really the fountain of sorrow. It comes from Him, even though it flows through others. But nothing except an unusual humility will make this dictate of reason a practical conviction. Even with inanimate causes there is something of this reluctance in submission to sorrow. If a mother hears of the death of her son, her soul is full of bitterness, yet, if she be a real Christian, full of resignation too. But fuller tidings come. It was a mere accident. The slightest change in the circumstances, and he would have been saved. If it had not happened when it did and where it did, it could not have happened at all. Take away a little inculpable negligence, or imagine the least little common foresight, and her son might this hour have been in her arms in the flush of youth. His death was so exceptional, that circumstances rarely ever combine as they combined then. They seem to have combined, like a fate, on purpose to destroy him. Ah! and is not this veil thin enough for a Christian eye to discern our heavenly Father through it? Does it not give a softening sweetness to the death, that it was brought about with such a manifest gentle purpose? Look at that Christian mother, and see. Her resignation has almost disappeared. Hard faith is all that is left to sustain her in her sorrow. The tears have gushed out afresh. She has broken silence, and grieved out loud. She has wrung her hands, and given up her work, and sits by the wayside weeping. She has told the story so often that it has grown into her mind. Each time she told it the slightest tint of exaggeration entered in, until now the death of her son has become to her own self a painful mystery, an unaccountable injustice,

a blow which will not allow itself to be borne, but is manifestly unendurable. So bitter, so trebly bitter, does the action of creatures render the fountains of our sorrow.

But there is something more than this in our impatience at the intervention of creatures in our misfortunes. It is a deep-lying trust in the justice of God, which is far down in our souls, and the foundation of all that is most manly in our lives. It seems to be our nature to bear blows from Him; nay, there is something comforting in the sense of His nearness to us which the act of punishment discloses. Our whole being believes in the infallibility of His love, and so is quiet even when it is not content. No idea of cruelty hangs round our conception of God, even though we know that he has created hell. But every created face has a look of cruelty in it. There is something in every eye which warns us not to trust it infinitely; greatly, perhaps, we may trust it, but not to the uttermost. It is the feeling of being at the mercy of this cruelty which makes us shrink from sorrows that come as if directly from the hands of creatures. Our sense of security is gone. We do not know how far things will go. Strange to say, it seems as if we knew all when we are in the grasp of the inscrutable God, but that, when creatures have got their hands upon us, there are dreadful things in the background, undiscovered worlds of wrong, subterranean pitfalls, dismal possibilities of injustice, magnified like shadows, and to appearance inexhaustible. There is the same difference between our feelings in misfortunes coming straight from God and misfortunes that

come through men that there is between the feelings of an unpopular criminal hearing the wild yells of the multitude that seek his blood through the thick walls of his prison, which he knows to be impregnable, and his terror when he is exposed to the people in the street, with their fierce eyes glaring on him, and a feeble guard that must give way at the first onset. In the one case he has to confront the considerate tranquility of justice, in the other to face the indefinite barbarity of savages. Even David, whose heart was after God's own heart, felt this deeply. When God gives him his choice of punishments, after he had numbered the people, he answers, I am in a great strait: but it is better that I should fall into the hands of the Lord, for His mercies are many, than into the hands of men. And so he chose the pestilence. Who is there that does not feel that the immutable God is more easy to persuade than the hearts of flesh in our fellow-sinners? He will change His purpose sooner than a man. When God stands between us and the unkind world, we feel secure and grieve quietly, our head leaning on His feet even while we sit desolate upon the ground. But when the merciless world itself is down upon us, no shorn sheep on the wide treeless wold, with the icy north wind sweeping over it, is in more pitiable plight than we. This was what Mary felt. The partition was wearing away. The wall was sinking that had stood between the world's actual rudeness and her broken heart. Her martyrdom grows more grievous as it grows less placid, notwithstanding that the current of her inward tranquility flows unquicken'd still.

So much for the manner in which this dolor came to her. But St. Joseph's share in it is by no means exhausted there. He is a new ingredient throughout all the years over which this sorrow extends. He was old, and his years had need of rest. He dwelt forever in an atmosphere of calmness, which seemed to suit his graces best, and in which they developed freely, like the magnificent foliage we read of in almost windless islands. His life had been a life of outward tranquility as well as inward. Haste, precipitation, and unsettlement were foreign to him. He combined virginal meekness with the most fervent love. He was simple like Jacob, meditative like Isaac, living a deep life of faith, far beneath the surface of the soul's storms, like Abraham. He was like,—at least the thought comes natural,—like the gentle gifted Adam, full of soft sanctities and placid familiarity with God, before he fell. He seemed rather a flower to blossom somewhere just outside the earth, or to be caught up and planted inside that old hidden Eden of man's innocence. Oh, how Mary's heart was poured out in love and admiration upon this trophy of God's sweetest, gentlest graces! But she was to drag him out into the storm. She was to throw him into life's rude, rough, swift, jostling, inconsiderate crowd, and see his meek spirit bruised, wounded, and outworn with the struggle. At his age how unbecoming the cold and heat, the wind and wet, of that houseless wilderness! How his eye shrank from the wild fiery faces of the Arabs and the dark expression of those keen Egyptians, and how strangely his voice sounded as it mixed with theirs! Mary felt in her heart every one of these

things, and many more, many worse, of which we know nothing, but may surmise much. It was only the sight of Jesus, only the thought of the Child's peril, which enabled her to bear it. And then, like a transplanted flower in a new climate, Joseph gave out such new light, such fresh fragrance, such altered blossoms, such different fruits. His soul was more beautiful than ever, and with the brightness of its beauty grew the intensity of Mary's love, and, with that love, each trial, each grief, each incommodity of his winning old age, was a keener sorrow and a deeper grief than it was before.

But she was positively encircled with objects of sorrow. From Joseph she looked to Jesus. Her nearness to Him became a supernatural habit full of consequences to her soul. It brought with it swift growths of sanctity. It adorned her with extraordinary perfections. It was a perpetual process of what the hard style of mystical theology calls deific transformation. We can form no just idea of what it was. But there are moments when we get a transient glimpse in our own souls of what the habitual nearness of the Blessed Sacrament has done for us. We perceive that it has not only done something to each virtue and grace God may have given us, but that it has changed us, that it has done a work in our nature, that it has impregnated us with feelings and instincts which are not of this world, and that it has called up or created new faculties to which we cannot give a name or define their functions. The way in which a priest says office, or the strange swiftness of his mass, is a puzzle to those who are outside the Church.

They are quite unable to understand the reality of the view of God which a Catholic gets from the Blessed Sacrament, and how that to him slowness, and manner, and effect, whether they be to tell on others or admonish self, are, in fact, a simple forgetfulness of God, and the manifest *unfrightedness* of a creature who has for the moment forgotten Him, and His terrible nearness on the altar. From this experience we may obtain an indistinct conception of what the nearness of Jesus had done in Mary. How much more sensitive, therefore, did she become about His sufferings! The change which His presence wrought in herself would be daily adding new susceptibilities to her sorrow. She saw trials to Him in little things, which yesterday, perhaps, she had scarcely discerned. For if her love grew, her discernment must have grown also; in divine things light and love are coequal and inseparable. Just as in our small measure our tenderness and perception about the offended majesty of God grow with our advance in holiness and our more refined sensibilities of conscience, so in an astonishing degree Mary's capabilities of wounded feeling about Jesus were daily being augmented.

But this was not all. There was a change in Him, as well as in her; and it also, like the other, went as another spring to feed the stream of her sorrows. He was not a stationary vision, just as we all know how the Blessed Sacrament is not a stationary presence, but one which lives, acts, grows, puts out attractions, makes manifestations, and is as immutably changeful as the worship of heaven, which never wearies even the vast intelligences of angels. Thus the Holy

Child was constantly giving out fresh light and beauty. He was an inexhaustible treasure of supernatural loveliness. It always seemed as if at once she knew Him so well, and yet was but just beginning to know Him at all. There was a mixture of custom and surprise in her love of Him, which was like no earthly affection. For, while she felt instinctively as if she could prophesy how He would act in giving circumstances, she was quite sure there would be some divine novelty in the action when it came, which would take her unawares. Thus the delight of wonder forever mingled with the delight of habit. Her powers of observation, and the completeness of her intelligence, must also have been quickened by the velocity and expansion of her love. Nothing escaped her. Nothing was without its significance. If there were unfathomable depths, at least she was becoming more and more expert in fathoming them. Jesus was a revelation, and therefore called out science as well as faith. Even to us, to learn our Blessed Lord is a different thing from believing in Him. Such a lesson it is,—with Himself as the professor to teach it, divided into a million sciences, eternity the university to learn it in, where the best of us will never finish the course, never take our degree? Mary was learning it, as even the angels in heaven cannot learn it. So infinite was the worth of the grace our Lord was disclosing, so infinite the value of His manifold daily actions, so infinite the satisfaction of each of His least sufferings, that in this one dolor Mary had what with so many infinities may well be called three eternities in which to learn His loveliness and raise her own love to the mark of her

learning. There was first the wilderness, and then Egypt, and then the wilderness again. And all these accumulated lights, sensibilities, beauties, graces, attractions, increments of love, were but so many fresh edges put on Simeon's sword. The result of each, the result of all, the product of their combination, was simply an immensity of sorrow.

There are two ways of doing battle with grief. One is in the privacy of our own homes, in the secrecy of our suffering hearts, with the undistracted presence of God round about us. But under the most favorable circumstances it is no easy task. The common round of indoor duties is heavy and irksome; and somehow, though if sorrow had chosen its own accidents it would not have made itself more endurable, the cross seems always as if it never fitted, as if there were peculiar aggravations in our own case to justify at least some measure of impatience. But the fight is much harder when we have to go forth to meet the enemy, not only before the faces and among the voices of men in an unsparing publicity, but to receive our sorrow at their hands, and to feel the pressure of their unkindness upon us. In this case it is not that external work is an unwelcome distraction to our sorrow; it is not merely that grief gives us a feeling of right to be dispensed from the actual conflict of work; but our very external work is our sorrow. We go out to sorrow. We pass from the shelter of home on purpose to meet our grief. We do our best to let suffering take us at a disadvantage, and off our guard, amid a multiplicity of things to do, and having to look many ways at once. Neither is this our own

choice. It is simple necessity. Of the two battles with sorrow, this is far the hardest to fight, and the unlikeliest to win. In passing from the first dolor to the second, our Lady's sorrow shifted from the easier battle to the harder one, if battle is a right word to use of such a supreme tranquility as hers. Her new sorrow called for actual outward obedience, not the mere assent of an inward generosity. She had suffered in the sanctuary of her own soul before; now personal toil, external privation, rough work, enter into her sorrow. They who appreciate rightly the shyness of extreme sanctity will have some idea of what this change, in itself, and considered apart from other aggravating circumstances, inflicted upon the delicate nature of our Blessed Mother.

It not unfrequently happens that persons beginning in holiness feel, almost in spite of themselves, a kind of disesteem for the outward observances of religion. They may be too well instructed to fall into any erroneous opinion on the subject; but, for all that, the feeling is upon them, and will show itself for a while in many little ways. Habits of interior piety are comparatively new to them, and, with the fresh feeling of how little outward devotion is worth without the inward, they exaggerate the importance of interior things, and look at them in too exclusive a light. There is something so delicious—there is no other word for it—in the first experiences of communion with our Blessed Lord down in our own hearts, that faith, for want of practice, does not see Him, as it will one day, in the commonest ordinances and most formal ceremonies of the Church. But, as

the soul grows in holiness, a reverse process goes on. Vocal prayer reassumes its proper importance. Sacraments are seen to be interior things. The calendar of the Church leaves a deeper impress on our devotion. Beads, scapulars, indulgences, and confraternities work ascetically in our souls,—a deep work, an interior work. At last, to high sanctity outward things are simply the brimming vases in which Jesus has turned the water into wine, and out of which He is pouring it continually into the soul. To a saint a single rubric has life enough in it to throw him into an ecstasy, or to transform him by a solitary touch into a higher kind of saint than he is now.* To an inexperienced beginner there is nothing perhaps in St. Teresa less intelligible than her devotion to holy water. They can understand her doctrine of the prayer of quiet more readily than her continual reference to holy water, and the great things she says of it. From all this it comes to pass that there was one peculiarity of this dolor of our Lady, into which none can enter fully but a saint, indeed even a saint not fully; for we must remember that it is of Mary we are speaking. This was the deprivation of spiritual advantages in the wilderness and in Egypt. There was no temple, probably no synagogue. There were no sacrifices but such as were abominations and horrors to her soul. There was not the nameless atmosphere of the true religion round about her but on the contrary the repulsive darkness and the depressing associations of the most abandoned misbelief and degrading worship of the inferior animals. To her this was a fearful desolation.

* We may instance the conduct of St. Andrew Avellino in Holy Week.

Her height of sanctity did not lead her to dispense with the commonest assistances of grace, but on the contrary to cling to them with a more intelligent appreciation. It did not teach her to stand and walk merely resting or guiding herself by outward ordinances, but rather to lean her whole weight upon them more than ever. She felt less able to dispense with little things, because she was so richly endowed with great things. She had reached to that wide view of saintly minds, and to her it was wider and more distinct, that in spiritual things one grace never supersedes another, never does the work of another, never stands in the stead of another. Less intelligent piety mistakes succeeding for superseding, and so loses in reverence, while it misses what is divine. As the loftiest contemplation works its way back again through the accumulated paraphernalia of meditation almost to the indistinct simplicity of the kneeling child's first prayer, so is it wonderful in all things else to see how the saints in their sublimities are forever returning to the wise littleness and child-like commonplaces of their first beginnings. The puzzles of spirituality are only the symptoms of imperfection. We are fording the river to reach Canaan. The water is shallow when we first begin; it deepens as we advance; but it gets shallow again near to the other side, and shelves quite gently up to the heavenly shore. Hence it was doubtless a keen suffering to Mary to be deprived of the outward ordinances of her religion. Her spirit pined for the courts of the temple, with its crowds of worshippers, for the old feasts as they came round, for the stirring and the

soothing show of the ceremonial of the law, and for the sound of the old Hebrew Scriptures from the reader's desk within the synagogue. The presence of Jesus, instead of being to her in lieu of these things and superseding them, would only make her crave for all those sacred things, which He, long years before He was her Babe, had Himself devised and ordered from out of Sinai. We shall not do justice to this peculiar grief of hers; but we must remember it. We shall not do justice to it, because we have no such acute sensibilities, no such excessive hunger for the things of God, no such visible presence of Jesus to turn that hunger into downright famine.

It happened once to a traveller who had been long among the sights and sounds of Asiatic life, in whose ears the musical wailing of the muezzin's voice from the gallery of the minaret over the nightly city or amid the bustle of the day had almost effaced the remembrance of Christian bells, that from the Black Sea he passed up the Danube and landed nowhere till he reached the frontier of Transylvania. He landed in a straggling village, and heard the bells jangling with a sound of strange familiarity and very barbarous singing; and he saw a cleric, with a Crucifix glittering in the sun, and some rude banners, and girls in white with tapers, and a pleasant rabble of Christian-faced boys, with boughs of hawthorn or some white-flowering tree in their hands; and then a priest, in poorest cope and under humblest canopy, bearing Jesus with him, to bless the village streets on Corpus Christi. And there came a light, and a feeling, and an agitation, and a most keen, most sweet pain in the

traveller's heart, which gave him a surmise far off from the real truth—but still a surmise—of what Mary felt in Egypt. Such to him was the first sight of holy things at the gate of Christendom when he passed out of the influence of the strange imagery of the Mohammedan law. He only saw what he had lost; she realized what she was losing.

But it was not only her own religious feelings which were wounded by the false and loathsome worship round her. She mourned for the souls it was destroying; souls that knew no wiser wisdom, and so their ignorance at least was innocent, but in whom it was deadening the moral sense, vitiating the conscience, making its judgments false, and corrupting its integrity. It was a system of wild enchantment, which held that ancient people as in a net, entangling them in its iniquities so that they could not escape. It was a vast, complete, national organization. They were going down upon the silent sweep of its stream into everlasting darkness as irresistibly as a log goes down the Nile. Oh, how much glorious understanding gleamed out of the dark faces of many of them! What hidden sweetness, what possibilities of gentleness and goodness, almost trembled in the voices of many! And she all the while holding Jesus in her arms on the river-side, the Saviour of the world, the fondest lover of souls, who would have drunk the whole river of souls dry if they would have let Him! Why should He not preach to them at once, He whose mind knew no growth but the knowing, by acquisition, what He knew otherwise before? Why should He not let His light shine on them at once? Was