

there not something cruel in the delay, something perplexing, like the slowness of the Church in converting the heathen? And it was not only all those Egyptian souls which lay on her heart like an oppression in a dream, but there was the glory of God also. One word from Jesus would repair it all; but that word was not spoken. It was not hard for her to bear precisely because it was so strange a will of God. She had too often adored the four thousand Decembers, in which Jesus had not come, not to comprehend the mystery of the delays of God. But it was hard to bear, because of the destiny of that land which swarmed with souls, the multitudes which the Nile mud was feeding and fattening for so insecure an end.

Great things look little by the side of things which are inordinately greater than themselves. So it is with many of the items in Mary's sorrows. Things, each one of which would make a very romance of misfortune in the commoner lots of men, gather in almost imperceptible numbers round those tall griefs of our Blessed Mother which pierce the storm-clouds and go up out of our sight. Yet they must not be forgotten. We must let them accumulate, even as they accumulated in the actual mystery. There are many sufferings in exile, on which we need not dwell here. They are sufferings which make the heart very sick, and a burden which grows heavier as each year that lapses adds its weight to those that have gone before. There is no getting used to exile. It becomes less of a habit daily. The iron is always in the soul. It is always hot, always burning. It makes terrible wounds, whose

lips cannot reach over, and will not heal. Poverty is hard to bear everywhere, but it is hardest of all in a foreign land, where we have no rights, scarcely the right to sympathy. The land bears us because we put our feet on it and tread there. But this is all it does. It bears us as a camel bears its load, because it is more trouble to throw it off than to carry it. It is only because the soil is more merciful than men that a foreign land does not fling the alien and the mendicant impatiently from its corn-bearing fields. There was something also inexpressibly dismal in Mary's utter loneliness amid her own sex. She was far more lonely in the crowds of Heliopolis than the penitent Thais or Mary of Egypt could have been in the savagest sequestration of the voiceless Thebaid. And she, too, so frail, so helpless, so unknown; such a girlish mother, such a delicate flower, that the rude wind ought hardly to blow upon! It is fearful to think of. But God was with her. Yes! but look at Him; less than His young mother, more helpless even than herself. And Joseph; his very meekness was against him, and so old, so infirm, so uncomplaining; what protection was he against the pressure of those wild-faced Egyptians? The prophet wept over the vineyard of Zion, because its hedge was broken down. But what Edens were these that were left unsheltered in Egypt, and so unsheltered!

But we must pass on to greater things. There seems nothing contrary to our Blessed Lady's perfections to suppose that in this dolor the fear which belongs to human nature, and which even our Lord felt in His most holy Soul, was allowed to exercise

sway over her. If such were not the case, we should then have to put her before ourselves as a creature apart, not belonging to the angelic family on the one hand, nor to the human family on the other, but as a glory of God, not singular only, as in her office and her sanctity she truly is, but removed also from the sphere of humanity. We should have to imagine that her gifts did for her what His Divine Nature even did not do for our Lord, that they should make her cease to be woman, while it left Him true Man. She would then be no example to us, and the idea of sorrow in her would be so strange and unsphered a thing, that it would seem fictitious and unreal, a merely symbolical doctrine, or a beautiful allegory of the Incarnation. There can, therefore, be little doubt but that fear was one of the chief sufferings of this Flight into Egypt. There is perhaps hardly a passion which exercises a more tyrannical sway over the soul than fear, or any mental impression more closely connected with physical pain. It comes over us like a spirit from without, leaping upon us from some unsuspected cavern we know not where or how. We cannot prepare for its coming, for we know not when to expect it. We cannot resist it when it comes, for its touch is possession, and its mere advent is already victory. It brings a shadow over skies where there are no clouds, and turns the very sunshine into beams of frost. It breathes through us like a wind, searching everywhere, and chilling our most vital faculties. It goes near to paralyzing our powers of action, so that we are like men who can see and hear without being able either to speak or move. If it were not eminently a

transient passion, ever flowing by the law of its own restlessness, we should lose first of all the freedom of our will, and then the light of our reason. Meanwhile its presence in the soul is accompanied, one while by a disquietude which is worse than suffering, and the continuance of which it seems to us would be incompatible with life, and then another while by a sharpness of anguish which is always on the very point of being literally unendurable. It is not pain, it is torture. How seldom have we ever found the reality of an evil so insufferable as the terrified expectation which preceded it! Earth does not grow a sorrow, human justice has not devised a punishment, of which this is not true.

Now, we have to imagine the operation of this passion among the indescribable sensibilities of our Lady's soul, and at the same time in the midst of her incomparable holiness. There is ever the union with God unbroken; there is ever the tranquility which comes of that union undisturbed. The sanctuary is assailed, but it is not desecrated. Fear dwells within the precincts, but the cloister is not forced. She knew full well that Calvary was to come, and she knew how far off it was. Hence, she could have no doubt that her Child was not now to perish by the hand of Herod. Yet fear, without obscuring her mental vision, might destroy her feeling of security. For thoughts in fear may be just and judicious in themselves, but they dwell alone; they are barren; they have no conclusions. Is not that just what the book of Wisdom says of fears,* that it is "nothing else but a yielding up of

* Cap. xvii.

the succors from thought, and, while there is less expectation from within, the greater doth it count the ignorance of that cause which bringeth the torment"? Besides, our Lord may have veiled His Heart from her then. True, He was not to die; but what other abysses of misery might not be yawning invisibly at her very feet? There are many things short of death which are worse than death. Possible sufferings are inexhaustible, even within the limited lot of man. She might be separated from Him. Herod might give Him to another to nurse, under his own eye. What Egyptian darkness would be like that? The eclipse on Calvary would be comfort and sunshine in the face of such a woful separation as that. Her foresight did not cover every thing with its wide field of vision, or, if it did, she might not be sure that it did. There might be depths which she had to come upon unawares, like the Three Days' Loss. Might she not be coming on some now?

What were the extremities to which a sanctity like hers could suffer panic? Would she start at the forms of robbers, as they distantly scoured the wilderness? When the uneasy night wind awoke suddenly in the muttering palm-tops, or in the tresses of the pensile acacia, like indistinguishable human whispers, was she afraid? Did the dark eyes of the Egyptians frighten her when their gaze was fixed inquiringly upon the Child? Did fear spur her footsteps, deceive her eyesight, play cruelly with her suspicious hearing? Did she every now and then clasp her babe with a more tremulous firmness, and inwardly vow she would never part with Him without laying down her life?

Did the ears of her informed spirit ring with the lamentations of Bethlehem's mothers, or the heart-rending trebles of the little ones fly after her on the winds of the desert? Thou knowest, Mother! We must not dare to say. But who can doubt that fear inflicted upon her the most awful sufferings, making both the wilderness and Egypt a Gethsemane of years? Truly it was the shadow of an Egyptian darkness that fell upon her; and although with her we cannot take to the letter what Scripture says of that old Egyptian darkness, yet there is much in it which will help us to that vague and indefinable view of what our Lady suffered, which alone it is desirable or reverent to take. "During that night, in which nothing could be done, and which came upon them from the lowest and deepest hell, they were sometimes molested with the fear of monsters; sometimes fainted away, their soul failing them, for a sudden and unlooked-for fear was come down upon them. Moreover, if any of them had fallen down, he was kept shut up in prison without irons. For if any one were a husbandman, or a shepherd, or a laborer in the field, and was suddenly overtaken, he endured a necessity from which he could not fly. For they were all bound together with one chain of darkness. Whether it were a whistling wind, or the melodious voices of birds among the spreading branches of trees, or a fall of water running down with violence, or the mighty noise of stones tumbling down, or the running that could not be seen of beasts playing together, or the roaring voice of wild beasts, or a rebounding echo from the highest mountains,—these things made them

to swoon for fear. For the whole world was enlightened with a clear light, and none were hindered in their labors: but over them was spread a heavy night, an image of that darkness which was to come upon them. But they were to themselves more grievous than the darkness."*

But the most grievous part of this dolor remains to be told, and there is no one who can tell it as it should be told. We should understand it, if we had a revelation of Mary's heart; but even then we could not translate it into words. It was a mixture of sharpest pain, wounded feeling, distress so great as to seem unexpected, horror that yearned to disbelieve what it saw, a cruel crushing together of all the loves of her immaculate heart. It arose from the vision of men's hatred of Jesus, made visible in this dolor. Beautiful Child! wonderfully sheathing the keen grandeurs of Godhead in that scabbard of true infant's flesh! Was there ever any thing so winning, ever any thing so hateless, as that blessed Child? Why should men turn against Him thus? Why should the eyes of kings pierce the shrouds of His innocuous obscurity, like wild lynxes, and why thirst for the little shallow stream of His blood, as if He were a tempting prey for savage natures? Harmless, helpless, silent, pleading, beautiful! and men drive Him from their haunts as if He were a monster, heartless, tyrannical, blood-stained, with all the repulsion of great iniquity and dark secret crime about Him! And she knew how beautiful He was, and therefore how unutterable was the sacrilege of that cruel exile, of that murderous

* *Wisd.*, cap. xvii. 18-20.

pursuit, which only ended in exile, because God would not let it go further, and balked ferocity of its victim. She knew too that He was God, the Creator come among His creatures; and although He has not interfered with them yet, has not even spoken to them, but has only looked at them with His sweet Face, they are tormented with restlessness, feel Him a burden, though she who carried Him all over the desert can testify that He is lighter than a feather, or at least seems so to her maternal love, and finally make Him fly before them even before He can walk. This was the welcome God has been waiting for, now these four thousand years! Merciful heavens! is not Divine Love a thing simply incredible?

All the loves in her heart were crushed. Jesus was hated. Had men simply avoided Him and got out of His way, it would have been an intolerable sorrow. Had they gone by Him with indifference as if He was no concern of theirs, but just a living man, as their senses told them, who increased by one the population of the world, and was otherwise poor and commonplace, even that would have been acutest grief. For men to ignore, to misapprehend, to depreciate Jesus would have been a lifelong thorn in her heart, which nothing could have extracted. But He was hated. And there He was flitting like a speck over the wilderness out of sight of the people, whom He loved the most of all those He came to save. She loved Him with many loves, because by many rights, and under many titles. She was wounded separately and bitterly in every one of these loves. She was His creature and His mother. She loved Him with the

intensest natural affection as having borne Him. Her love was marvellously grown with His growing beauty and her increasing experience of Him. She loved Him with supernatural love because of His holiness, and her own which was attracted by His. She loved Him as the Saviour and Redeemer of the world. She loved with perfect adoration His Divine Nature, and the Person of the Eternal Word. Beyond this, where could love go? Whither could it reach? But she loved also, and with an enthusiasm which was like a second life to her, the glory of God, His exaltation by His creatures, and the honor of the Divine Majesty. She loved the Most Holy Trinity with all the loves the saints have ever known, with complacency, congratulation, desire, condolence, imitation, esteem. Now Jesus was the very end at which all these glories of God aimed, the very monument on which they were all hung, the very fountain out of which they all came, the very food by which alone they were all to be satisfied, the very price which was equal to their value, the very means, the only means, by which Mary could love them as she desired. There was not one thing about which God is tender, which was not outraged and wounded in this attempt upon the life of Jesus, in this hatred of His Son whom He had sent. And fearfully, like stigmata upon the saints, upon Mary's ardent love passed the many wounds of the Eternal Object of her love.

This was not all. She loved men. Their own wives and mothers never loved them as she did. No missionary ever burned for souls as she burned. She had all their interests at heart, and the interests of

every one of them. She would have died to save the lowest of them, if the limited sacrifice of a mere creature could have merited their salvation. She would have suffered tortures to hinder any of them from a single sin, for their own sake as well as God's. But what need of more words? She was going to give them Jesus. She had made up her mind to it. Nay, virtually she had done it. Oh, how men wounded her now in this love of hers, unrequited, disdained, as it were thrown back upon her! She shuddered at the abysses of darkness, the capabilities of separation from God, which this hatred of Jesus disclosed; and a sort of sacred horror passed upon her, when she perceived in it such a terrible manifestation of the power and malice of the evil spirits. They did not yet know that Jesus was God, but their instincts drew them round His grace and holiness by a sort of attraction which they did not understand, but which nevertheless rendered them furious. And men, men whose nature the Word had assumed, men for whom Jesus was to die, men whose mother she was to be, even the chosen tribes of Israel, were almost possessed by these evil spirits, were following their leading, doing their bidding, without knowing how terrible were the things that they were doing. Oh, can we not conceive how out of the most broken of all broken hearts the Mother of mercy would forestall that sweet omnipotent prayer of her Child, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do?

Now this second dolor, as has been already said, was not a transient mystery. It was not a complete action, done, and over at once. It spread itself over a long

time. It endured for years. For all those years Mary had to suffer all these sorrows. Besides the seven years' sojourn in Egypt, which opened the wound wider in the exiled heart day by day, this dolor was a double dolor. It had an echo for it; for the Return was a sort of echo to the Flight. There was the same weary way to travel, the same fatigues, the same privations, and many of the same dangers. The fear, however, was less, or rather it had sunk into anxiety about the great object, the Child's life; though it had still many lesser objects by the way. There were, however, some aggravating circumstances in the Return, by which it is distinguished from the Flight. The age of Jesus presented a peculiar difficulty to their poverty. He was in His eighth year,—too young to walk, too old and heavy for His Mother's arms. Either it would entail upon them the cost of some beast of burden, which would also materially increase the toils of St. Joseph in the wilderness, or they must have borne their precious Burden by turns, when He had allowed the natural consequences of weariness, or the soreness caused by the burning sand and prickly sand-plants, to work their will upon Him and make it impossible for Him to walk farther. The increased age of St. Joseph was also a feature in the Return which Mary never for a single hour forgot. Labor had bent him, and years—years especially of recent disquietude—had left their furrows on his holy face. He was easily tired; for his strength was soon spent; and Jesus helps less with their cross those that are near Him than those who are farther off. The age of Jesus also brought to Mary, as usual, fresh reasons

for loving Him, and ceaseless augmentations of the old love; and all this heightened the pangs she was enduring. Moreover, she and He were now upon the road to Calvary; their faces turned right toward it. Can that thought ever have left her through the whole Return? And on the frontiers of the Holy Land fear met them again, and turned them away from Zion, and sent them back to the seclusion of Nazareth. Scripture says, "There is no peace for the wicked." Alas! when we look at the world we are tempted to cry out that it is rather for the good that there is no peace!

From these peculiarities of the second dolor we may now pass to the dispositions with which our Blessed Lady endured it. Much may be gathered from what has been already said. But there are three points to which our attention should be especially directed. The first is, her unselfish absorption in the sufferings of others. It is as if her heart was put out into the hearts of others, in order to feel, to love, to suffer, to be tortured. As we pass in review the incidents of this dolor, it never comes to us for a moment to think how cold she often was, how hungry, how wind-burnt, how sleepless, how footsore, how harassed in mind, how great her bodily fatigue, as if these were the elements of her own sorrow. They were sufferings which we, her sons, do not forget, and as sufferings they were part of her endurance. But as subjects upon which she dwelt, or which she bewailed, or which she even much adverted to, we should feel that we were dishonoring her if we put them in the reckoning. Her sorrowful sympathies were all abroad. They were lavished on Joseph, or they were centred in Jesus.

They covered the whole majesty of God with their humblest condolence, or they went out like a deluge over the entire earth, bathing all the souls of men in every generation with her mournful pity and efficacious compassion. They were everywhere but in her own miseries. They were for every one except herself. There seemed to be no effort about it. It was her way. It came natural to her, because she behaved with grace as if it really was a nature to her. As the moon reflects the light of the sun without the least trouble to itself, and beautifies the earth without any exertion, so Mary reflects God, and gives light, and shines, without effort, almost unconsciously, as if it was simply her business to be luminous and beautiful, and that there was no wonder in it at all.

Another disposition in this dolor was her keen sensitiveness about the interests of God defrauded by sin. This is the new sense developed in the soul by sanctity; and the more we grow in holiness the more keen does this sense become. The range of its vision is wider, while, at the same time, its perceptions are more accurate and minute. Its ardor increases with the increase of grace, and, by a natural consequence, its powers of making us suffer increase likewise. In the case of very great saints it becomes completely a passion, and, at last, possesses itself of the whole life. There can, however, be hardly a comparison between this sensitiveness, as developed in the highest saints, and the same feeling as it existed in the Mother of God. She was drawn inside a divine ring, and lived a divine life. She had a sort of unity with the Divine Majesty—a spiritual unity—which gave her a right to

share in the concerns of God; a right to be interested only in His interests; a sort of actual participation in the sensibilities of His glory, such as can belong to no other creature whatsoever. She is one of the household, and, therefore, feels differently from one outside, however dear a friend, however near a neighbor. Her prayer is not mere intercession: there is in it a permitted jurisdiction over the Sacred Heart and the Will of God, which renders it a different thing from the intercession of the saints. All the elect work together with Jesus in multiplying the fruit of His Passion; but there is allowed to her an indefinable co-operation in the redemption of the world, to which the co-operation of the saints bears the same relation as their sympathy with our Lord's Passion bears to our Lady's Compassion. If the sufferings of St. Paul in his flesh* "filled up those things that are wanting of the sufferings of Christ for His Body, which is the Church," what must be said of Mary's dolours? These considerations, if they cannot help our spiritual obtuseness to an adequate conception of our Lady's sensitiveness for the glory of God, will at least enable us, when we are astonished at the sublimity of this instinct in the saints, to remember that hers was so much higher as to be out of sight of theirs.

Even to us, down in the deep valleys where the merciful inquisitiveness of grace has found us out, there is something inexpressibly mournful in the way in which God is excluded from His own creation. We are considering now the mystery of the Creator's flight from His creatures. Is there not also something

* Coloss., i. 24.