

have lost the meaning of the Incarnation. The Gospels are beautiful history to them, and little else. But the Exodus is far more romantic, more stirring, more glorious, and so is the conquest of Canaan, and the reign of David, and the lofty patriotism of the Prophets. Hence, the enthusiasm which Catholics feel for the Gospel incidents heretics feel in the Old Testament history. But with the former it is more than enthusiasm. It is the life of their religion, the breath of their sanctity, the endless Presence and Vision of their Beloved. So by assiduous meditation, by sorrowing love or by rejoicing love, must we wear our way into the mysteries of Jesus, assimilating them to ourselves, living in them, feeling with them, until their mere character of history has added to itself the reality of a worship, and His Heart, as it were, beats in ours, as another, better, and supernatural life.

A further lesson, which this dolor teaches us, is that suffering, when it is God's will, is better than external spiritual advantages. The Blessed Veronica of Binasco, an Augustinianess, was permitted in spirit to accompany Jesus and Mary in their Flight into Egypt, and, when it was over, our Lord said to her, "My daughter, thou hast seen through what fatigues we have reached this country. Learn, from this, that no one receives graces except he suffers." This we can better understand; but when suffering is pitted against the means of grace, when its presence involves the loss of our external spiritual advantages, it might have seemed otherwise. To submit joyously to suffering under these circumstances involves some-

thing more than ordinary submission. To believe that, because it is our Lord's will, suffering is therefore better for us than even the continuation of those advantages, requires a large exercise of faith. The question of being religious is the question of our eternal salvation. Experience has amply disclosed to us how much depends on regularity in our spiritual exercises. A day for God, what else is it but the legitimate conclusion from a morning with God? Many a man leans his whole life on his daily mass, and it bears him well through to the end. Is there a more helpless being on earth than the soul, long used to frequent communion, and then suddenly and for a length of time deprived of it? Besides, how many people do we see who are the better for suffering? Does it not harden many? Guillore says sickness unsanctifies more than it sanctifies. This is a hard saying. Let us make abatements from it. There is enough truth left to make us exceedingly melancholy. Cardinal de Berulle, speaking of interior sufferings and trials of spirit, said he had known many eminent souls in them, and he had only seen one who had not retrograded under their influence. He was not a man who exaggerated. And yet, in spite of all these terrible sayings and experiences, we are to welcome suffering from God as better than hours of prayer, or the daily sacrifices, or heavenly sacraments. We may look back wistfully upon those things, but not unconformedly. It is a hard lesson to learn. Who does not remember the first time he had to learn it? How disquieting it seemed! Common things looked unintelligible. Conscience had to rearrange itself on a

great number of questions. Never was more spiritual direction wanted than now, when least of it was to be had. Say our suffering was illness. How much did pain dispense us from, and what pain was great enough to dispense us from any thing? There were more trials, more demands upon us, because of our suffering, and apparently less means of grace to keep up the interior supply. A great many things which had seemed fair and strong in health were now tried in us, stretched and let go again, and proved in a variety of ways. Not a few of them broke down altogether. It was a hard time. Sorrows always rush upon a sorrowful man, like cowardly beasts who dare not attack their prey till it is wounded. So we had more to bear then, when we had less strength to bear it. It was a vexatious lesson, learned in dread and insecurity, fruitful of annoyance and tears. But for the time it was learned; and, if the remembrance now is all blotted and blurred by the tiresome venial sins which disfigure it all over, nevertheless self-distrust was deepened; we got nearer to God; we had grown in the inner man; we were more real, because we were more interior; and we were conscious of additional power, because grace was more at home in us.

Our Lady's conduct in this dolor teaches us the additional lesson that we must aim most at compassion for others, when we are suffering most ourselves. This is the way to gain the peculiar graces of suffering. Grace and nature are almost always at cross-purposes. Because Moses had the hastiest of tempers, he became the meekest of men. So sorrow naturally shuts us up in ourselves, and concentrates us upon

itself, while grace forces us to become more considerate because we are suffering, and to go out of ourselves, and to pour out upon others, as a libation before God, all that tenderness and pity which nature would make us lavish upon ourselves. There is something in diverting ourselves from ourselves when we are in grief, which has a peculiar effect of enlarging the heart, and swelling the dimensions of the whole character, and something also so particularly pleasing to God, that, when it is done from a supernatural motive and in imitation of our Lord, He seems to recompense it instantly by the most magnificent graces. To sit by the bedside of a poor invalid, when we are ourselves inwardly prostrated by illness, and our pulses are throbbing, and our head beats all over, and through pain our words a little wander, as if we were inattentive,—or again to listen by the hour to the little complaints of a heart ill at ease, while we ourselves are secretly groaning under a still heavier load,—or to throw out joy and light by tone, by look, by manner, by smile, over a circle dependent upon us, when uneasy cares are secretly gnawing at our hearts, and comfortless expectations, and perturbing foresights, and suspicions are haunting us like ghosts,—these are the grand ventures in the commerce of grace. These bring the galleons from the heavenly Indies safe into port with untold wealth and foreign rarities. One hour of such work as that is often worth a month of prayer; and who does not know the enormous value of a month of prayer? Moreover, it is the want of this forcible unselfishness which makes sorrow generally so much less sanctifying than Christian principles would lead us to

expect. We almost look upon suffering as a sort of dispensation from charity. We deem it to be a time when we may lawfully love ourselves. By the very touch of affliction God draws us, as we suppose, for a while out of the calls upon our brotherly affection which surround us on every side. We are to receive now, rather than to give. But in reality there is no time when we may lawfully love ourselves; for, as St. Paul says, "Christ pleased not Himself." If there be a moment in which it might be lawful to feel no love for others, it would be the act of dying, because in that moment all our love is due to God. Self has no place anywhere in love. When love touches self, it either becomes a duty, or is an unworthiness. It is true also that sorrow draws us into solitude, but not an uncharitable, selfish solitude. It guides us gently away from the world as a theatre of worldliness, but not from the world as a field of mutual and self-sacrificing love. When the saints keep their sorrows secret, it is no doubt mainly because love is fond of secrets, which none but its object and itself shall know, and divine love is the shyest, the most secret-loving, of all loves. The saints fear lest God should not prize what others know, because of His dear jealousy, and lest the sympathy of others should take off that heavenly bloom which a sorrow keeps only so long as it is untold. But, besides this, we may be sure that unselfishness was another reason for their secrecy. They would not spread sorrow in the world. There was too much of it already. They would not swell the contagion. If suffering was harder to bear untold than told, were they not ambitious to love suf-

fering? Anyhow, if they could help it, their particular griefs should never unwreath a single smile from any face on earth. The tired pedestrian sighs when he sees a steep and rugged hill to climb, and he is already fit to faint from weariness: so is it with the poor mourner, bent beneath his burden, when he is shown Jesus and Mary in their woes, and is told that as they sorrowed, so must he. But how else can it be? Our sorrow must be measured by our sympathy with others. Our active, cheerful, quiet, unobtrusive ministries to others must be the invariable index of the keenness of our martyrdom.

We learn also from the Flight into Egypt that we must not question the ways of God, either in our own sufferings, or in the griefs of those we love. God might have spared Mary in many ways. Almost every circumstance of this dolor seems unnecessarily aggravated. Even without miracle how many alleviations might have been contrived. But, beyond that, would it have surprised us if Omnipotence had stepped in to work miracles in such a case as this? There is something not uncommon about religious people which it is very difficult to define, but which looks like irreverence. Of course, it is not so. But persons who have habits of prayer, and do not with sufficient exactness and recollection extend those habits into the actions of the rest of the day, and so saturate them with the spirit of prayer, unintentionally acquire a sort of familiarity with God which is not altogether respectful to Him. They think that if they pray more to God than others they must necessarily know more of God than others. This, however, is by no means the

case. Prayer is not the *whole* of spirituality, neither is it *in itself* the most solid part of devotion. It wants ulterior processes to make it solid. There are some good men in whom prayer is really the least solid part of their spirituality. There are exercises more interior than prayer, in which the soul learns more of God, and learns it faster. Not that these things can exist without prayer, or will survive its discontinuance. Only they are not prayer. Then these men, whose almost exclusive spiritual practice is prayer, put themselves upon intimate terms with God, and, especially if their prayer is the prayer of sentiment, acquire a habit of thinking of God and themselves, not of God alone,—of God in them, rather than of God in Himself. The results of this betray themselves in times of sorrow, and particularly of interior trials. The submission of such men is not instantaneous. They would fain talk to God about it, and, if they cannot persuade Him, at least let Him persuade them. To this extent He must flatter them. They will accept the cross directly God and they conjointly agree to put it on self; but not if it is His act, done without consulting them. Or at least they will satisfy nature, by dignifiedly complaining to God of what He has done, and insisting somewhat freely and untimorously on the additional graces by which He is to compensate them for this new burden. In fact, they question the ways of God, and so lose the childlike spirit of sanctity. Men may not *assail* God, even with the impetuosity of their prayers: their business is to adore. Otherwise, the gracefulness of submission is gone. The right to more intimate union with God is for-

feited. The waters of grace in their soul become shallow, and their spirit of prayer thin, peevish, vexed, and wailing. All this is because, in their prayer, they have had the habit of being something before God, instead of being nothing. It is melancholy to see how apt spiritual persons are to be impertinent to God. Perhaps the fewness of the saints is attributable to this.

But there is comfort even here. God knows our weakness. We think no one can enter into it as we do. But He knows it infinitely better. He practises the most incredible forbearance toward us. He makes the most unimaginable allowances. Woe unto us if we should venture to make excuses for ourselves, if it were but the thousandth part of the excuses He makes for us! But we have yet another lesson to learn. We spend the most of our lives in the Holy Land, in quietness and at home. Either we are in the Holy City, with the courts of the temple conveniently at hand, or in the unworldly sequestration of Nazareth, or by the blue water flapping on the shore of the calm Gennesareth. But sometimes we have to go down into Egypt to buy the wholesome corn of tribulation, the best sustenance of our souls. Sometimes we have to fly thither from before the face of men or the machinations of the devils. Now, the lesson is that, whatever and wherever we are, we always have Jesus with us. No time is inconvenient for Him, no place unlikely. There is no darkness but He is the light, no light but its best light is He. Alas that a truth so sweet to be remembered should so easily be forgotten! Yet who does not forget it? Who is not always for-

getting it? Could Mary forget Him when she bore Him in her arms? Why should we? Why distract ourselves from such a companion? How be so near Him, yet so seldom advert to Him? There are many heavy weights which the thought of Him would make lighter. There is a self-willed liberty, which displeases self and leaves dejection after it, which would be sweetly taken captive if His arms were felt twining round our necks. There are chills in the heart, which we should not feel if He were nestling warmly against it. There is a loneliness which beckons temptation to come and people its wilderness, which the company of Jesus would turn into blameless talk, and song, and gladness. It is easy to leave Jesus, if we let Him run by our side over the sands, and forget His presence; but if we carry Him in our arms, as love and Mary do, it requires much evil courage to lay our Burden down upon the sand and wilfully walk away. He is ever with us; and He is with us ever as a Child: partly that the burden may be lighter, partly that love may come more easily, partly because His littleness better suits our own. There is but one true symbol of the Christian soul. We must never paint it otherwise before our mind's eye. In the dark and in the bright, by dear Jordan or by dark Nile, it is truly, and forever, a Madonna and Child.

Such is the second dolor, the Flight into Egypt. Who has not been devoted to it from his childhood upward? With how many early pious imaginings has it not been interwoven! It has been a type of life to us. It was a poetry with prayer in it,—a prayer whose reality was enhanced by its poetry. Ah! it

wakes old years, and old tears as well; for it seems to wake those who have long been dead. Childish memories,—early beginnings of which God has taken care,—flowers, that have borne fruits in grace,—a divine love, sometimes obscured but never lost, and distinct steps taken in the knowledge of Jesus,—all these things, with the soft light of an unremorseful childhood over them, come sweetly out of this beautiful mystery of Jesus and Mary. Times come back when it looks, in the distance, as if He and we had been but one then, and His Mother and our own blend indistinctly into one shape, and speak with one kind of voice. And there is the sunset in the wilderness, the great orb flashing on the rim of the desert-horizon, its light reflected in Joseph's eyes; and then there is Jesus sleeping on His Mother's lap, and the round moon above, and the glittering well, and the whispering palm, and night breathing heavily over the yellow sands. But the dead do not come back again. There were figures in the picture once which are missing now. The years rob us as they pass. One by one, men and things are missing. God alone is never missing.