

SAINT JOSEPH



ST. JOSEPH
HIS LIFE AND CHARACTER



SAINT JOSEPH:

His Life and Character.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF THE 'PILGRIM.'



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INTRQDUCTION.

THE writer of a life is expected to describe the actions and also the outward appearance of the person, with a life-like reproduction of form and feature : he must describe the mould in which the moral and intellectual being is cast; that mould which is called 'the character,' and which is the impression stamped on each individual by its Creator. And the soul itself, that inner life and being which no human faculties approach, must be indicated by its action on the complex being whom it informs. If any one should take up this book with such expectations, let him close it at once ; for none may do this when a saint is the object of our contemplation, and especially St. Joseph : for we may, indeed, try to describe the natural character of any other saint, together with the supernatural ennobling of that character, according to the actions which by God's permission disclose to us their progress towards that particular perfection which adorns each with such a varied sanctity, that the Church cries out in wonder at each miracle of grace, ' Non est inventus similis illi.' But excepting our Lady, St. Joseph stands nearest to the Incarnate Word, who was the model and perfection

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of the regenerate human race, and whose likeness is reflected in all saints, but especially in those who approached Him most nearly—first in our Blessed Lady, and then in St. Joseph—so that all individual character is, as it were, absorbed in the brightness of their sanctity. Other saints were to encourage us by their own victories over their imperfections, and each reproduced one or more of the attributes of our Lord's sanctity; so that the varieties of their character were permitted to be handed down to us as our models. This could hardly be so with Mary and Joseph, who lived in the visible presence of our Lord, and were both reflections of the whole beauty of the original; and it was unnecessary, and almost impossible, that any natural character should remain.

We are told that the pencil of St. Luke portrayed the human likeness of our Lord, and his pictures of our Lady, though blackened by time into obscurity, have still a miraculous power. But no record tells us what St. Joseph was; only tradition has led the painters of the mystic school to represent him as a venerable old man, with flowing beard and hair, and with a countenance of unruffled calmness and heavenly peace. And as by gazing on light we become light, so Gerson says that his features resembled those of the Son of David, Jesus of Nazareth. How then, we may ask again, is it possible to write a life of St. Joseph? All that the Holy Scriptures tell us is, that the holy house of Nazareth contained three persons: our Blessed Lord,

is the First-born of the new creation, and the model of those who will inherit His kingdom ; and our Lady, the model of a spotless virgin, wife, and mother, the Mater Creatoris ; and St. Joseph, to whom the Eternal Father delegated the office of directing the Holy Family. He was to govern silently, for such is the government of the world by Him of whom it is said by Isaiah (xv. 15), ‘ Verily Thou art a hidden God ; ’ or as those to whom is now intrusted the direction of souls, who look to St. Joseph as their guide through the intricacies of the spiritual life. And as at the first he was the guide and guardian of Christ, so now always those who seek Christ by an interior life are led naturally to look towards him for the same assistance. For Joseph, who was the guide and guardian of God’s family at first, continues to guide and guard that family ever since.

The office of St. Joseph is now, as then, to be the guardian of all who are the children of God ; to watch, as St. Paul did in after-days, ‘ till Christ was formed ’ in the hearts of his converts. For he must be formed in the heart of each who would live like him, and all must be united with the Father and the Son in one Spirit as in one Body ; and St. Joseph is the guardian of all who are the members of Christ, for what God begins never ends. He does not form an office or an instrument, and then throw it aside. His plans are eternal, and He goes on perfecting each till it finds its final consummation in eternity.

Those who have advanced far in the interior life say that they have found St. Joseph their patron as well as their model, and that their knowledge of him has increased with their own progress in imitating his virtues. They have therefore learnt what he thought and felt by their own experience. This would, however, seem to make it impossible that we should by any acquisition of external knowledge attain to the sight of him as he was represented to them in characters traced out by the Holy Spirit on their hearts. They have, however, left us landmarks of their spiritual journeyings across the desert, and they have dug wells for us by the way, where we may rest and listen to some of the wonders they discovered on their road to the heights of contemplation. The danger is lest they should substitute their own views for the pure and everlasting idea conveyed by revelation, or should dare to mingle their own thoughts and feelings with those of him whose life was mystical, and the model of all those who lead an interior life.

What, then, is this life of St. Joseph? It contains not his perfections, but the thoughts which arise in ignorant and unlearned minds while he is the object of their contemplation. If there is truth in them, it is the reflection of heavenly light; if there is error, it is the stains or obscurity of the minds on which it falls. All generations of men behold the light of the sun, but each sees it with his own eyes, and realises it with his own faculties, and expresses it in his own way. The

variations are in the individual ; the light is one and the same. And so in meditating on spiritual things, the faculties which are the medium of the divine intercourse partake of the individual imperfections ; and even saintly persons describe heavenly truths not as they are, but as they see them : they cannot give the object, but only their own view of it. Therefore it is not the object of this Life of St. Joseph to give any one especial view of the saint who holds so high a place in the early history of our Lord. It is rather to lead others to meditate for themselves on the mysteries of which he was the guardian. The Life would never have been written except in deference to the wishes of a devoted follower of St. Joseph, and it is by his desire that these pages are placed before those who have the same devotion to the saint. Let, then, the writer be forgotten, as is meet ; while the reader contemplates for himself the heavenly objects, and is led by the aid of grace to behold and understand what no one can teach another.

Sancte Joseph, ora pro nobis.

CHAPTER I.

THE PATRIARCH TYPE OF THE SAINT.

Cui nomen erat Joseph. *Matt.* i. 27.

Tu eris super domum meam. *Gen.* xli. 40.

Et vocavit nomen Joseph, dicens, Addat mihi Dominus filium alterum. *Gen.* xxx. 24.

A FEW lines contain all that is said about St. Joseph in the Holy Scriptures. His name is said by St. Bernard to explain his office and character, according to the custom of all those connected with the great design of God, and it signified a steward or augmentor.

Matt. i. 16 : Jacob begat Joseph, the husband of Mary.

Matt. i. 18 : His Mother Mary was espoused to Joseph.

Matt. i. 19 : Joseph, being a just man, was minded to put her away privily: but the angel of the Lord appeared to him in his sleep, saying : Joseph son of David, fear not to take unto thee thine espoused wife. And Joseph did as the angel had bidden him. And he called His name Jesus.

Luke ii. 4 : Joseph went up from Nazareth to Beth-

lehem with Mary. And the shepherds found Mary and Joseph and the Baby.

Matt. ii. 13 : An angel of the Lord appeared in sleep to Joseph, saying : Arise, and take the young Child and His Mother, and fly into Egypt.

Luke ii. 19 : An angel appeared in sleep to Joseph in Egypt, saying : Take the young Child and His Mother, and go into the land of Israel, and dwell in a city called Nazareth.'—Jesus, as was supposed to be the son of Joseph.

And this incidental notice is all that we are told of the hidden life and death of him who was the husband of Mary and the foster-father of her Son. And yet these few words contain the whole history and life of St. Joseph; for the words of inspiration are full and perfect, and we, by the help of God, may increase in our understanding of them. There were but a few words spoken to the Blessed Virgin about her Son, and we are told that she pondered them in her heart. And so, by pondering the few words spoken about St. Joseph, we may realise an idea of the saint to whom was intrusted the government of the Holy Family. The words of Scripture alone contain a depth of meaning which fills every faculty of our souls. We know that we are compounded of body, mind, and soul or spirit, and that our souls have three powers, the will, the memory, and the understanding. And the Fathers of the Church teach us that there are also three senses in the Holy Scriptures, the historical, typical, and mystical,

each within each, and all contained in words whose entire import we have no faculties to comprehend.

The mystical sense of Holy Scripture deals with that interior action of the soul of which the senses take no cognisance, and tends to the union of the soul with God ; the allegorical sense is closely united with it, and the Psalms of David are full of both these senses. 'These multifarious spiritual meanings have been explained incidentally by St. Bernard, and we learn that, besides the literal meaning, they have throughout an application to our Lord, and to the Church ; and all that relates to the Head is carried out in the members, so there is a special application to each soul, being, so to say, a microscopic universe, and each regenerate soul is in a mystical sense the theatre of this reproduction of God's great work, the Incarnation and Passion. Christ comes to each of us, that we may, if we will permit Him, live in and suffer in each of us once more.'

One method of attaining this mystical sense is by analysis so minute, that each inspired word is by a sort of spiritual chemistry penetrated and subdivided, so that each of its component parts, and even its essential spirit, is discovered and extracted by a heavenly chemistry, in which the saintly adept, St. Bernard, found in the two words of the Canticles, 'Trahe me,' the materials for twenty-seven sermons ; and other saints, by intense contemplation of a single sentence or word have extracted its deep and various meanings, like the spiritual bees of St. Francis, who dive into the

very heart of the flower and suck its honey. To ordinary persons the same teaching is given in various ways. There is an outer and an inner world. The Holy Scriptures contain both, and our Lord is the fulness of both in Holy Communion. All must pass through the outer world ; the saints only enter that which is within. Yet both are one ; this world of God is one. Man has an outer and an inner life. Christ comes to both, Holy Scripture teaches both. All understand the first of its three senses ; the intellectual receive the second, and the spiritual the third.

The Church, as a mother, teaches all her children, and as the type is the simplest and most intelligible to all, she has appointed the Homilies of St. Bernard on the patriarch Joseph to be read on the festival of the saint, thus placing before us the patriarch as the type and likeness of the saint.

Yet we shall find that more has been revealed to us about St. Joseph than appears at first sight. The whole volume of the Holy Scriptures is one. From the first chapter of Genesis to the last of the Apocalypse the same mystery of redemption is revealed : at first veiled in a few prophetic words, on which hung the faith of the patriarchal Church ; then illustrated as to children by types, both in persons and actions.

It is the typical sense which is placed before the early Church in the Old Testament ; and it has been always found that the easiest way to convey truth is to veil it under the form of an allegory or a type. The

whole of the sacred history has this double sense, and the long course of Divine Providence is placed before us in a history, which, though it really happened, was, as St. Paul says, an allegory as well as an example.

The early Church had also before its people the example of the patriarchs, each of whom resembled more or less the Son of God in His humanity, and were endowed with graces and offices which foreshadowed the coming Saviour, from Abel and Melchisedek to Joshua and David ; and they were also types of the great saints who followed Christ in so far as they resemble Him. So that though the history of Joseph has a special likeness to that of our Lord, yet it has many points of resemblance to that of St. Joseph, who was moulded on the type of the Son of Man, and who shared personally in His sufferings. And if we fully realise this unity of divine teaching, we shall be prepared to learn the intention of the Church in placing before us the history of Joseph the son of Jacob, to illustrate that of Joseph the husband of Mary.

‘Tu eris super domum meam.’ *Gen. xliv. 40.*

Among all those who were raised up to be in their degree the prototypes of our Lord, there is none who bears plainer marks of this typical foreshadowing than the patriarch Joseph, and the circumstances of his life ought to be familiar to all. He was the first-born of Rachel, and given to her prayers. He was the most obscure and meek, yet the most beloved of Jacob’s

sons. He was no warrior nor hunter, but a shepherd, the guardian of his sheep ; innocent, yet fearless in reprobating sin, and, like all who would lead an interior life, committing himself to the direction of his father and of his God, without impatience or distrust. God revealed to him in a dream his future greatness—that his father and his mother should bow down to him ; and he was led to this dignity by a way which seemed that of destruction. His brothers envied him and sold him into Egypt ; he was slandered for his virtue and thrown into prison ; he foretold the deliverance of one who afterwards forgot him. It was his interpretation of heavenly visions which led Pharaoh to honour him, and then his brethren did homage to him. His faith and his fidelity ; his uprightness, unshaken by temptation, or by disgrace, by fear or prosperity, by delay or distance,—all this is a life-like representation of St. Joseph. He was made the master of Pharaoh's house, and ruler of his people ; he was to hold in it even 'the place of God.' His commands were to be obeyed ; he was to be the guardian of the corn which was to feed the family in his charge. All who sought for bread must receive it at his hands ; he was to preserve his brethren during the time of famine and distress ; and Pharaoh said to the people, as God might say to those who seek the Bread of life, 'Ite ad Josephum.' Perhaps it is St. Bernard who says Joseph was chosen by the Almighty to be the prince of his brethren, the stay of the nation, the father of his people. He placed on his

finger the ring from his own hand—the ring of office and the ring of espousals ; he placed him in the second chariot, for the first was filled by another yet greater.

With this clue to assist us, let us turn to the lessons of the feast (Mar. 19). The little chapter is, ‘Thou shalt put glory and great honour upon him. He is beloved by God, and his memory is in benediction. He made him holy in his faith and gentleness,’ and chose him from among mankind. And Pharaoh set him over all the land of Egypt, because he could find no man wise nor equal to him, and said : God inspired all thou sayest, and thou shalt command my house and people.’ And the response is: ‘When the land of Egypt was hungry, the people clamoured to the king for food; and he answered them: Go to Joseph, and do whatever he bids you.’ At Terce the responses are: ‘He set him as lord over his house, and as prince over his possessions. Great is his glory in thy salvation. Thou shalt place glory and great honour upon him. He opened the storehouses, and sold corn to the Egyptians.’ The little chapter at None is Wisd. x. 10 : ‘Wisdom conducted the just, when he fled from his brother’s wrath, through the right ways, and showed him the kingdom of God, and gave him the knowledge of the holy things, and made him honourable in his labours.’ She showed him the kingdom of God, and gave him the knowledge of the holy *scientiam sanctorum*. The last antiphon at the Magnificat is : ‘Behold the faithful and prudent servant, whom the Lord shall set over His family.’

Both the patriarch and the saint were like that good and faithful man whom the Lord set over his family. Both received in dreams the knowledge of mysteries, and both were not only conscious of the mystery of salvation, but fellow-workers in it with God. The patriarch laid up corn not only for himself but for all the people ; and the saint received into his safe keeping the living Bread which came down from heaven, both for himself and for the whole world. It was for your salvation, says the patriarch who bore so many resemblances to our Lord Himself, that God sent me before you into Egypt. Come unto me, and I will give you the good things of Egypt, and ye shall eat the marrow of the land. The patriarch gave food to his brethren and to the Egyptians, and the saint had the same office as regards the Jews and Gentiles ; for he was the protector of Mary the Mother of our Lord, and the supporter of His human nature, and sole fellow-worker with God in this His great design for the salvation of mankind. Of both it may be said, 'The just shall spring forth as a lily, and blossom in the house of the Lord for ever.' It was true in a degree of both, but was fulfilled only in Him of whom both the saint and the patriarch were antetypes.

And thus it is, though it does not at first appear so, that the patriarch, who from a captive became in rank next to Pharaoh, who was above him only on the throne, who was worshipped by his brethren in life, and borne by them in pomp to the cave of Macpelah, should

bear any resemblance to the saint, who is mentioned not in a history of himself, but only in that of one far greater than himself, the Virgin Mary. It is said that she was espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David ; and it is said afterwards, but as it were incidentally, that he was just. We know from the events of our Lord's life, that though Joseph was of royal descent, yet he was a carpenter or smith in the town of Nazareth among the mountains of Galilee. He left Nazareth for Bethlehem at the command of Augustus Cæsar, and fled from Herod when he sought to destroy the Christ, and dwelt as an exile in Egypt. We are told that Joseph, the guardian of Jesus and Mary, was perplexed as to his own duty, and perplexed how to provide for his sacred charge. He had to fly into Egypt, and return by stealth. He suffered the loss of the Saviour intrusted to his care, and did not live to see the fulfilment of His mission. His life was spent at Nazareth as the chaste spouse of Mary and the foster-father of Christ. This difference arises from his belonging to a new dispensation, to a kingdom which is not of this world. Instead of becoming great like the patriarch, whose descendants returned to Canaan with all the miracles of God, the saint returned as it were by stealth, for fear of Archelaus, and dwelt in Nazareth, whose very name was a term of reproach. His death is not even mentioned, nor his name alluded to after our Lord went back with him to Nazareth. He died, like Abraham, in faith, not having received the promise.

CHAPTER II.

THE GENEALOGY.

'Jacob genuit Joseph, Joseph de domo David.' *Matt. i. 16;*
Luke i. 27.

THE sacred genealogy is not a mere list of names, like an ordinary pedigree. The pride of descent is in itself an idle vanity, for the virtues of our ancestors are not transferable to their descendants; and yet in a merely human view of mankind there is an aristocracy of nature, and an advantage in being well-born; and there is something in a race which survives the changes of time and place, so that succeeding generations inherit the noble nature and refinement of their ancestors. Sacred history shows that there is an aristocracy in the spiritual world, and tells us also that St. Joseph was descended from a chosen family. When Adam fell, God promised that a Saviour should be born of the woman, and this general promise was soon made more definite. He chose the family of Seth, and then that of Abraham to be not only the depositaries of His revelations, and to be as it were the priesthood of mankind, but the race from which the Saviour should be born, and which should be the channel of His com-

munications, and the figure of that new and peculiar people, to whom it is said : 'Dedit eis potestatem filios Dei fieri, qui non ex sanguinibus, neque ex voluntate carnis, neque ex voluntate viri; sed ex Deo nati sunt.' But lest this chosen people should presume, they were told by Moses : 'The Lord gave thee not this excellent land for thy justices, for thou art a very stiff-necked people' (Deut. ix. 6).

'Unxit eum in medio fratribus ejus.' 1 *Reg.* xvi. 13.

This choice of God must ever be a mystery. There was no change in the Divine purpose ; though the descendants of Abraham were stained by material sins, and sins of frailty, still they were his children, and still they were members of the visible Church, though the grace of God was ever in earthen vessels. Yet there was grace among some who were not of the race of Israel, as Job. We know the laws which bind the members of the visible Church, but we know not the dispensation of mercy by which Tyre and Sidon may be judged ; we know not the limits of His mercy, nor do we know the measures of grace to those whom Jesus beholds, when, like Nicodemus, they are under the fig-tree.

The genealogy of Christ, the Son of David, is twice given, once by St. Matthew, who traces the descent of Joseph down from Adam ; and then by St. Luke, who traces the line up to Adam from Joseph, whose son, as he says, Jesus was thought to be. The gene-

alogy is that of Joseph and not of Mary, for several reasons. Menechius, in his commentary on the place, says that Mary being an only child, and her pedigree being the same as that of Joseph, he was the legal father, and as the world believed the natural father, of Christ. Besides, it had been prophesied that the Messiah, the Son of David, was to inherit his throne ; and to that succession no female had a right, according to the law of Moses, although she, as well as Joseph, was descended from David. But Jesus, son of the wife of Joseph, was his legal heir, as is observed by the author of *L'Evangile Médité*.

Thus, by the wisdom of God, Christ was thought to be born of man, and suffered because the sins of men were imputed to Him. But by the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin, and the miraculous birth of the Son of God, the promise made to Adam as to the Seed of the woman, and the whole scheme of Man's redemption, prefigured for all ages in types and prophecies, was fulfilled.

After enumerating the ancestors of Joseph, the inspired evangelist reckons up fourteen generations from Abraham to David, and fourteen from David to the carrying away into Babylon, and fourteen generations from the captivity to Christ. And St. Paul writing to the Galatians (iv. 4), says 'Ubi venit plenitudo temporis misit Deus filium suum, factum de muliere.' This fulness of time is to be remarked in the whole sacred history ; and our Lord Himself observed it as a divine

law, when He said to His Blessed Mother that His time was not yet come: and He repeated it to His disciples up to the last supper, when He said, 'Father, the hour *is* come.' There is no mystery which confounds the human reason more entirely than this. God, who alone really exists in Himself, and reveals His name as I AM; who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever; in whom are all things, and with whom a thousand years are as but one day, is the Eternal. All things are present to Him; and with Him, as the poet says, 'One eternal now for ever lasts.'

Yet in the bosom of His eternity He has created time—the past, the present, and the future; and has caused succession in the events which lie through all eternity before Him; and He has appointed 'times and seasons, days and years,' and fixed the hours in which each design of His providence is to be executed, though He preserves the free will of His creatures. We must say with the Psalmist, 'Thy knowledge is become wonderful to me: it is high, and I cannot reach to it' (Ps. cxxxviii. 6). It is enough to study the words of Holy Scripture, and learn what they are intended to teach us.

It is believed that those who were in more immediate connection with our Lord may have received an effusion of grace, in proportion, as it were, to their proximity to Him, and to their correspondence with His grace; and the virtues and actions of the Messiah were shown forth more or less faintly in the progenitors of

the First-born of creation. As time went on, and the types grew clearer and the prophecies plainer, the immediate ancestors of the Son of Man might bear a stronger resemblance to the Divine Child ; but if this were so, their virtues were hidden, like those of Joseph himself ; only the name of his father is recorded, and not that of his mother. Yet never were progenitors so noble before God. There was Abraham, who dwelt a stranger in his own land, to shadow forth Him who left His Father's house to come unto His own, and His own received Him not, so that He had not where to lay His head ; and so of Isaac and Jacob, and of David, the sweet psalmist of Israel. But we are left to conjecture whether the parents of Joseph were as holy as those of our Lady, who have been handed down with such an odour of sanctity that the Church has always honoured them as saints. We only know that their son was just, and we know how many just men have attributed their first correspondence with grace to the teaching of a devout mother and the example of a holy father ; and knowing that the Holy Family was as it were the centre of nobility, we are inclined to reverse the rule, and trace with St. Luke the ancestry of Joseph backwards, from the Son of whom he was the guardian to the first Adam.

The Incarnation of the Son of God was the one great end of all that exists, or ever has existed ; the centre on which all creation hangs ; the model, the idea of all that the infinite wisdom of God has ever

formed. For every beauty, every characteristic, every feature, every quality, every excellence that has been lavished with immeasurable profusion and never-ending variety through the vast realms of spiritual and natural creation, are all as it were but the lines of one vast circle, tending invariably to their centre; and springing again thence to a boundless circumference, of unequal but marvellously beautiful and excellent resemblances.

Thus God has never imprinted upon nature, but above all upon man, the masterpiece of nature, any quality, any character, or, as we should call it, any law, in which He had not in view the sacred humanity of Jesus, the Incarnation of His only-begotten Son. It was this that made the defenders of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin cry out with the triumphant certainty of saints, 'Exurge, Domine, in præceptum quod mandasti; ' Thou who hast commanded children to honour their parents, show how supremely Thou hast honoured Thine. So that we surely see in the sacred bonds with which God has united the members of each family of the human race a faint type, a feeble image of the tie by which the Incarnate Son of God deigned to show that He was truly the Son of Man; and as Gabelus recognised the younger Tobias by his likeness to his father, so we may already recognise the features and the form of the youthful Joseph, and still more the traits of his holy soul, by their likeness to his future foster-Son.

The race of David had many vicissitudes during the schism of Rehoboam and the two captivities. Then came the conquest of the Romans. His royal descendants shared the calamities of his people, and at this time their nobility seems to have been forgotten on earth. But neither the calamities nor the obscurity impeded the course of Providence, nor did the unfavourable circumstances of the time. Joseph was of Nazareth. He was a carpenter ; and his lot, like that of his Lord, was poverty and labour, with the contempt consequent on both. After the glimpse of glory cast upon his birth by faith, his youth, like that of our Lord, was hidden. All is buried again, as if it had never been, in the obscurity of an artisan's workshop. Joseph learned the mystery of penance by the labour, which was the penance of Adam ; all must prepare by penance for redemption. All, whether rich or poor, with the hand or the intellect, must labour. The poor man's body is wearied out when he lies down to rest ; but the harassed mind and aching head of those whose labour falls on the intellect find no repose in sleep. It is only of those who forget God that the prophet says, 'In laboribus hominum non sunt ;' and what is obscurity ? Life consists in accomplishing the will of God, the performance of every duty. And thus he saw and did it at once, for he was a just man ; a man who went straight to his end in everything, that one end being the will of God, the accomplishment of which is the only thing which can glorify Him, because it is the

one moving spring of all existence, and this is to be a man according to God's own heart.

The events of life are overruled by the providence of God. The obscurity into which the family of David was thrown might be the safeguard of Joseph ; his low station preserved him from the evils which infected the Roman empire, that iron age, in which the natural virtues were obscured by diabolical as well as brutal vices ; a reign when there was no mercy to the weak, no hope for the afflicted, and when the devotional instincts of man were perverted by idolatry and witchcraft. As a Hebrew, he associated with his people only ; and though the prophets no longer taught, yet the priests read the Scriptures in the synagogues, and he knew enough to observe the law and to fulfil his duty to God and man.

It is difficult to say how much St. Joseph knew before the angel's revelation. The whole mystery of a spiritual life was not new. God's graces are gradual. The saints tell us that he had known all his life that the duties which are allotted to us are the greatest things we can do for God ; that the spiritual life does not consist in what we do, but the way in which we do it ; and that as the beauty of the king's daughter is within, so grace acts upon the interior motive by which we act ; not on the exterior action, which is guided from moment to moment by the ordinary circumstances of His providence, or sometimes by supernatural directions. It certainly was no new thing to Joseph that

the highest sanctity lay in the faithful performance of the duties of his humble position.

The chosen people of God, both before and after the Nativity, were all hallowed by their calling, all called to be saints ; but God seems to have hidden their rank from those whom He called to special offices until a revelation was necessary for their guidance. Thus David was the least among his brethren until Samuel anointed him to be king ; and we do not know how much St. Joseph knew of his approaching duties, though he was doubtless prepared for them by constant inspirations. The internal communications between God and the soul are secret ; but when action is required, then a special revelation is sent for direction if the providential course of events is not sufficient. It is, then, possible that Joseph did not yet know the mystery of his own future. Perhaps the consciousness would have been dangerous to him if he had known it in the time of helpless childhood, or when he was trained in his youth to labour for his subsistence ; if while in the obscurity of his life at Nazareth he had known that his hands were being trained to minister to the Son of God, and that his eyes were chastened to behold the Immaculate Virgin, who is the Spouse of God ; his ears were tutored to receive the words of eternal wisdom from the lips of Him who is the Wisdom of God ; his life was to be spent among the angels who ministered to the Holy Family ; his tongue was to direct its members and con-

vey to them the messages of heaven ; his mind was to be filled with the contemplation of God Incarnate ; his will was to direct the will of the Almighty, and, as holy writers have expressed it, to represent the authority of the Eternal Truth over the Divine Son ; and his soul was, as St. Francis de Sales says, to be the mirror of the most pure soul of Mary, which was to reflect back the fulness of her grace. The angels must have watched over the birth of their fellow-labourer ; and we may conclude that if kings choose fitting guardians for their sons, God must have made His selection out of the infinite virtue of all possible existence, and chosen one endowed with fitting capability. Let us now see what we actually know of the outward circumstances in which St. Joseph was born.

Though Joseph was of the tribe of Judah, yet he dwelt at Nazareth, in the land of Zabulon, Galilee of the Gentiles ; and every one of these words fulfils a prophecy or foretells what is to come. And Nazareth, then a by-word, is become the resort of pilgrims, who not only visit the place where the holy house stood, but have during all past ages noted every circumstance of the locality. Let us, then, listen to their descriptions of Nazareth. A little village in a secluded valley between green hills, which are pastured by sheep and goats. Behind it is a rocky cliff, still shown as the place from whence the people would have thrown our Lord, and they show the marks of His feet on the rock on which He leaped, 'transiens per medium illorum.'

There stood the house where our Lady was born; and they show the place where she heard the Annunciation. And they show too the place where the house of Joseph stood, and where he worked as a carpenter; but the holy house has been long ago carried by angels to Loretto. The village stands on a brow, and below it extends the long plain of Esdraelon, fertile in corn, and bounded by the mountains of Tabor and Hermon on the east, and those of Samaria on the west. Sandys, who travelled there more than a hundred years ago, ascended Tabor, and says the mountain itself is green and swelling, and on the top is an oval plain, from which the verdant sides slope smoothly down, as Raphael painted it in the scene of the Transfiguration. Looking northwards, 'hill upon hill and mountain upon mountain lead up to the great Hermon, snow-clad through the heats of summer; and to the range of Anti-Libanus. North-east are the dark-blue waters of the lake Tiberias, and Jordan feeding and fed by them. Nearer is the valley where Cana is hid; and on the south-east the plain of Esdraelon, girt in by Carmel, once the abode of Elijah and the sons of the prophets; and by Gilboa, the mountains on which Saul and Jonathan died in battle, and on which David in his grief prayed that rain might never fall. The plain itself was studded with villages of sacred fame: Nain, Sharon, Jezreel where Jezebel slew Naboth for his vineyard, Apheth, and Endor where Saul beheld the ghost of Samuel. The little hill of Hermon—little in com-

parison of the mountain Hermon—rises in the midst ; and the brook Kishon, on whose banks Jael slew Sisera, as it flows to Carmel. Nazareth itself lies concealed among the hills.'

The country where Joseph dwelt must have reminded him, as a Hebrew, of the history of his people. Nazareth stood in the portion of Zabulon and overlooked the rich heritage of Issachar, 'whose lips should be red with wine and his teeth white with milk ;' and the mountains stretching from Carmel to the south, whose rocks were full of wild honey, were once the portion of Manasseh. In very early times Abraham had met Melchisedek at the foot of Tabor, and the patriarch after whom he was named had followed his brethren to Dothan, on the western side of Gennesaret. His royal ancestor David had ruled the Land of Promise from Beersheba in the desert of the south to the foot of the snowy ranges of Hermon ; and all Israel went up to worship at the Temple of Solomon. Then came the schism of Rehoboam, which separated the ten tribes, who dwelt between Dan and Sichem, from Judah and Benjamin ; so that Joseph dwelt among strangers. Nazareth and Cana had been safe in the mountains during the captivity and the successive calamities which fell upon the country, and the Hebrews were again permitted to go up yearly to Jerusalem, though Herod was tetrarch, and now made king by Mark Anthony, a Jew by birth, but more than heathen in his vices. He had rebuilt the ruined temple of Nehemiah, though he also

built heathen temples and amphitheatres, and in the midst of his magnificence he had murdered his own children and his queen Marcasum. Yet still the faithful went up to worship, and the daily sacrifice did not cease, and the priests ministered in their course.

Such was the state of things while Joseph yet laboured as an obscure carpenter at Nazareth.

CHAPTER III.

THE ESPOUSALS.

‘Cum esset desponsata mater ejus Joseph.’ *Matt. i. 18.*

It is said in Scripture, ‘Mary, of whom Jesus was born;’ and St. John Damascene says that as these words convey the greatness of her dignity, so the ineffable title of Joseph is given in the words, he was ‘the husband of Mary.’ It has been already said that we do not know how soon the consciousness of his share in the design of redemption was added to the graces which he possessed under the old dispensation, or whether, as it was said of Mary, ‘her foundations are upon the holy hills,’ so in Joseph the graces of the coming Redeemer already lighted up his soul with supernatural knowledge. It is useful to ourselves to consider Joseph only as he appeared to men, leading an ordinary life among persons of his own class, with only the aid of ordinary grace and conscience and the knowledge of the law of Moses, and to know that he acted up to the measure of the grace bestowed on him; for the Holy Scriptures tell us that he was a ‘just’ man, and in the inspired

language that word contains all virtues. He used the reason and judgment which are given with the conscience to all men, and with the faith of his father Abraham he fulfilled the law of God as it was given by Moses, and in obedience to the law he was espoused to Mary. It is difficult to imagine that some of those whom we see and speak to may be saints in the sight of God ; and it is yet more difficult to consider those whom we only know as saints, as having been men of like passions with ourselves. And yet we are taught by St. Francis to learn from our Lady's visit to St. Elizabeth, the duty of fulfilling the minor charities of society ; and we may in the same way take example from this espousal of St. Joseph to fulfil all righteousness, whether we know or not the results. Thus Joseph acted. Mary was his kinswoman of the same royal descent, a virgin spotless as the spouse of the Canticles and fairer than the daughters of Abraham ; for though her Immaculate Conception might not have been revealed, yet she was by the report of all as holy as she was noble ; untrammelled as he was himself by the false riches and honours of the world. He fulfilled the duty of a just man, and espoused his next of kin without (so far as we are told) any supernatural direction, unless it were that secret voice of God which only the saints hear and understand. What a contrast to the ordinary conduct of men ! There was no clashing of choice with judgment and duty, no doubts and wavering, none of those idle imaginations, those wild and

dangerous desires of the romantic and the unknown, which so often disturb the sacred repose of marriage. She was to be his spouse ; a treasure to be loved and valued, as a just man guards what God has confided to him.

It has been asked, if Joseph had not the same liberty as other Hebrews to marry into another tribe ; and the question is answered by the commentary of Menochius. A woman who was an heiress was bound to marry one of her own family, and Mary was an only child. There were, however, others equally entitled to espouse her ; and though the Evangelists are silent, yet tradition has been busy with the circumstances, and the mediæval painters have embodied the legends. The history of the Blessed Virgin was painted by Giotto in a chapel at Padua, and it was one of his most perfect works. The pictures are said by judges to illustrate the history of the holy persons with a dignified and touching simplicity, and the painter has represented each with graceful beauty and pathos. We know not the authority on which the legend rests, but the painter represents St. Joachim as driven from the temple because he was childless, and all the subsequent events, from the miraculous birth of our Lady when Anna was already aged, to the presentation of our Lady in the Temple, who is represented as a beautiful girl of seven years old, timidly ascending the steps of the Temple, where the high-priest stands ready to consecrate her among the sacred virgins who await their companion.

Giotto in another scene represents the marriageable men of the house of David who sought Mary in marriage entering the Temple, each bringing a rod in his hand at the command of the high-priest, so that he whose rod should blossom might be the husband of Mary. The rod of Joseph bore leaves and flowers, and hence he is represented as holding a lily. In another picture is the blessing of the rods ; and the whole has a supernatural import, and tends to express the belief that all was done by divine inspiration. Other pictures represent the espousals and the bridal procession. The figures of the Blessed Virgin and the other maidens are inexpressibly beautiful. She is represented as about the age of fourteen, dark, but comely, like the Jewish maidens. Travellers say that there is a relic at the Duomo of Perugia which is called 'il sant Anello,' and it is believed to be the ring with which St. Joseph espoused our Lady. It is described as a hoop of opal only, in thickness half an inch. The relic was brought in the ninth century from the Holy Land by a Jew, together with the authentication, and was placed in a shrine of glass and gold made by Rosetti, pupil to Perugino. This is enclosed in a wooden box fastened by fourteen locks, the keys of which are kept by fourteen different people. It is covered by crimson curtains, and drawn up by pulleys to the ceiling of the chapel, and let down once a year for the veneration of the faithful.

It may gratify our natural curiosity to know the

ceremonies of espousals among the Hebrews; but we leave this to the antiquarian, and go on to the next circumstance recorded of Joseph in the Holy Scriptures—the discovery which troubled his peace and perplexed his judgment.

‘*Noli timere.*’

The Gospel appointed by the Church for the Mass of the Festival of St. Joseph is Matt. i. 18-25. The evangelist breaks off the genealogy by the history of the miraculous birth of Christ. It was in doubt and sorrow that the mighty revelation was received by Joseph. It was complete, and every word told him of things which kings and prophets had in vain desired to see. ‘*Joseph, fili David, noli timere . . . quod enim in ea natum est de Spiritu sancto est. Pariet filium: et vocabis nomen ejus Jesum.*’ It was the first time the Holy Name had been spoken on earth.

The history is that of a trial the most severe which could happen to a just man, and yet the whole tone of the passages selected is that of triumphant joy: ‘*Justus ut palma florebit; sicut cedrus Libani multiplicabitur; plantatus in domo Domini in atris domus Dei nostri.*’

The lesson is the praises of Moses applied to him (Eccl. xlvi. 1-8): ‘*Dilectus Deo et hominibus;*’ and the gradual is, ‘*Prævenisti eum in benedictionibus dulcedinis . . . vitam petiit a te, et tribuisti ei longitudinem dierum in sæculum sæculi.*’

Thus the Church looks on trial and sorrow even

as the pains spoken of by our Lord, which will not afterwards be remembered for the greatness of the joy.

It is in the trials which befell St. Joseph that we feel the great difficulty in writing about his life. It is indeed so great, that it appears at times insurmountable; so that the pen drops from the hand in discouragement. We do not know how far St. Joseph was raised by grace above human imperfection, nor do we know the extent of supernatural knowledge that he possessed. We know that his position as guardian of our Lord brought him so near to Him and to the Blessed Virgin, that all which is characteristic in other saints is obscured by excess of light. We know not therefore how much or what he suffered in the tribulations which have raised him to such glory. Other saints suffered from temptations, as St. Paul, who describes himself to the Corinthians (1 ii. 3) as being with them in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. The angel too bade Joseph fear not to take Mary his spouse; and Mary afterwards said that Joseph and herself had sought Him sorrowing. It seems as if knowledge was withheld, that faith might earn its reward; and St. Paul explains at length the imperfections of this present state: 'We know in part, and we prophesy in part' (1 Cor. xiii. 9). Let us therefore consider the trial in itself, and in the way it would be received by ordinary good men.

'Joseph vir ejus, cum esset justus, voluit occulte dimittere eam.' *Matt. i. 18.*

It is a necessary truth that all who belong to Christ must suffer tribulation ; for His kingdom is not of this world, and He came not to give earthly peace, but to destroy it, while He gave instead His own peace, and that not as the world giveth. He came to destroy His first creation, and to make all things new. If there is anything in human life more free than others from the consequences of the Fall, it is the virtuous peace of the young and innocent ; yet this must be exchanged for something better. Joseph had an office and a part to bear in the great work of repairing the unutterable evil of sin by suffering, and it was in his office as guardian of his betrothed that his first trial came. The uniformity of his life was broken by a doubt, which would in any one less just awaken the passions of love and jealousy ; and St. Francis de Sales (Conf. 50) quotes the words of the spouse in the Canticles : 'Love is strong as death, and jealousy is hard as hell.' He was placed in a dilemma more harassing than the imagination of man could invent. He knew the law as given by God to Moses, and in his meditations he had learnt to love it above all that was dearest to him, above all that was dearer to him than his life. He was accustomed to shrink from no sacrifice which it imposed, nor to omit any duty which it prescribed ; and now he was placed in circumstances trying beyond all which can be conceived, he only deliberated that he might discover the

path of duty. The letter of the law was death, and he who was suffering the loss of all he held most dear must be her accuser; and, as St. Bernard says, another overwhelming thought came to increase his perplexity beyond measure. Was not this the Virgin foretold by the prophets who was to bring forth the Messias, and could he dare to remain in her company? How could he approach so great a mystery? As St. Elizabeth said, 'What am I, that the Mother of my Lord should come to me?' or St. Peter, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.' Had he mistaken the will of God, and rashly and blindly entered a state for which he was so unfit? If Elizabeth feared to receive the Mother of our Lord, how could he receive under his roof the God of glory?

The conduct of Joseph, even if he were spared the agonies of ignorance as to the spiritual nature of his trial, is a model for all who are tried by doubts and perplexities. In an instant of time his prospects of earthly happiness were destroyed, and he awoke from his dream of prosperity to action. Yet he deliberated, for he felt the responsibility of action; and 'he thought of these things,' he deliberated, till he could obtain a right decision. She whom he loved above all things except God depended on him, as it seemed, for her life and reputation. The whole future hung on one action. Should he fulfil the law in its severity, without regard to circumstances or persons? was a question which would have perplexed the wisdom of Solomon. He

deliberated, but without perturbation. His judgment was clear, his conscience upright, his gentleness and innocence were unconscious of a stain. He was calm, and none but those who are at rest can estimate the importance of action. The raising a hand or turning an eye has an object, an intention, and a result. No human mind can count its cost, or bear the calculation of its consequences. Some, have said that a sound once uttered goes on for ever ; some, that all which was ever done exists for ever ; and all know that each event is one link in a chain which stretches through the past and future to eternity.

The state of Joseph is a model to all who desire to live godly. They are in a dilemma—not only suffering, but sin besets them, and they fear to do wrong, yet know not what is right: then, like the storm-tossed mariners when human skill fails, they cry unto God in their distress, ‘and straight they are at the harbour where they would be.’ And so it was with Joseph: human reason and judgment had done their utmost, and he resigned himself to God. He must have done so, for he slept. With a pure intention and an upright heart he was faithful to God and to the law, and was at rest. It was a mystical sleep, and God sent an angel to dispel his ignorance and doubt. ‘Fear not,’ was the blessed message of peace, dispelling the only real fear, that of displeasing God. God restores light and joy to his soul in the midst of external difficulties. So God by His grace gives peace in the

very centre of the soul of His servants when temptation and anguish overwhelm them ; and it is in this sleep of the faculties, this abandonment to God, that the angel of God was sent to direct St. Joseph.

When the angel of the Lord first spoke to Joseph, he called him son of David ; and this word implied the fulfilment of the prophecy. All men were waiting, like Simeon, for the salvation of Israel; all women, like Anna, hoped to behold Him ; but Joseph had an hereditary interest in the promise, for he was of the royal house of David, whose inheritance was that promise which rejoiced the heart of Abraham when he desired to see the day of Christ; and he saw it, and was glad. But we are not told that Joseph understood from these words that the time for the fulfilment was come, that the prophecies were all fulfilled, and the moment on which the past and future hung was this in which he was called by the angel 'son of David.'

'Exsurgens Joseph a somno fecit sicut præcepit ei angelus Domini.' Joseph had slept the sleep of faith. If he had been perturbed by human passions or counsels, perhaps the angel would not have been sent to him ; perhaps he might not have been able to receive the revelation. But what a light to burst upon the dazzled vision of a mortal man ! The secret hidden since the world began is revealed to him, the secret of the Incarnation. He was to be the guardian, not only of the Mother of God, but of the Son of God ; and this most sacred and most secret mystery, says St. Bernard,

was to be committed to his keeping. He was to conceal it under the veil of marriage, not only from the world, but, according to St. Jerome, from the devil. Perhaps he knew the mystery of the Immaculate Conception, and the wonderful consequences which result from it: the perfection of the sacrifice as being pure from sin, the perfect propitiation for sin. That holy doctrine, which the lips fear to utter, and the heart receives in awe and silence; that article of the faith which the Church held in silence till it was pronounced in these last days by the Pope, whose prophetic motto is, 'Crux ac cruce,' Joseph must have known; for Isaiah had said that Christ should be born of a Virgin, of whom it had been said in the Canticles that her purity should be like a sealed fountain. He knew, and it was said of him, 'Depositum custodit,' he kept his trust. He must conceal these mysteries from all but the Blessed Virgin, and for life. He might wonder with her, but he was silent, and concealed what St. Thomas called 'miraculum miraculorum'; and the secret was to be kept till the hour was come, and he did not live to see that hour. Was ever patience so heroic? It is hard to conceal the smallest favour, or grace, or gift, or virtue; the very saints have been tempted to lose their consolations by revealing them; but who ever like Joseph understood the mysteries of God? His was more than faith; it was knowledge. We know in part; but he even while on earth knew more. He knew, and spoke not, though all who saw him scorned him as

the carpenter of Nazareth, who knew not even letters. Nay, Holy Scripture names him not, except in the history of others greater than himself. Perhaps he did not even know himself the greatness of his glory.

We scarcely venture to think what must have been the reflections of Joseph on what had passed. We read of saints, and even of ordinary persons, who in a moment of grace have seen before them the whole mystery of Christian faith. But what had he beheld ! and with so much grace, what mysteries could he comprehend, of which other souls are unconscious ! He, whose office transcended that of the angels, could rise above them to a height inferior only to that attained by the Mother of God. He knew that mystery of redemption, revealed to Adam when contrition had opened the gate to pardon ; that mystery which Abraham believed, and won by faith its promise ; that mystery which Moses and the people saw prefigured in the desert. He knew more than the prophets ; what they saw under a veil, he saw revealed. The Redeemer is come, He is beneath his roof ; He will soon call him father. The Virgin, who has conceived Him, calls Joseph by the name of husband. He possesses that which the Fathers speak of, that mystical date dropped by the divine dove in the sealed garden : the palm which sprang from it was his property by all laws, both human and divine. What must have been his first interview with Mary after this great revelation ! with what loving awe must he have beheld her, and what

adoration must he have offered to the Word made flesh ! There is a veil on these wonderful moments, but God loves to see His servants try to raise it. And then the months of contemplation before the Nativity the joy of what the prophet calls 'the prisoner of hope' ! With what ecstasy must Joseph have pursued his labours, conscious that his God was near ! With what raptures must he have communicated with Him ; and when he slept, it was in the thought that the Incarnate Lord was there. When Mary spoke, the words broke the silence of unceasing prayer, and shed light and fervour into Joseph's soul, and he could contemplate always her who has been described as 'clothed with the sun.' He could contemplate what the saints only can speak of, though it is allowed to each, according to their capacity, to gaze and feed on it—that mystery of mercy, the Incarnation, which was accomplished for each individual. A saint said, when told of any new wonder of God's mercy, 'Nothing can surprise me ; one only thing is wonderful, the Incarnation.'

We are told that Mary, after she had received the Annunciation, went with haste to visit Elizabeth ; but we know not whether Joseph was present at the salutation ; whether he guarded her in the hill country of Judea ; or whether he remained in desolation and solitude such as none ever had, for none ever had received such consolation. Mary and Elizabeth, Zachariah and Joseph, were the only souls belonging to the new dispensation ; yet the Scriptures are silent.

CHAPTER IV.

ST. JOSEPH AT BETHLEHEM.

‘Ascendit Joseph a Galilæa in civitatem David, quæ vocatur Bethlehem, ut profiteretur cum Maria.’ *Luc. ii. 4.*

THERE is hardly a greater trial of faith than that of a Catholic, redolent of graces, and exulting in the grace of the Sacraments, who is called by his position to mingle in the common affairs of life. It is so hard to remember that his position, whatever it may be, is the only one in all the universe of God which is fitted for his salvation, and for the duties of which alone he is responsible ; his attention is so apt to be diverted from this, and his judgment is so apt to decide according to another standard than that of God. And thus St. Joseph had just been intrusted with the greatest of mysteries and the greatest of offices. There was no alteration in his outward life ; he was a carpenter and the husband of Mary, and the decrees of Cæsar obliged them by the laws of the conqueror to go up to their native town for a registration appointed by the imperial command. But Joseph knew that Almighty God suffers the course of things to proceed by ordinary rules, and that in

obeying lawful authority he not only accomplished his own salvation, but concurred in the designs of God concerning His divine Son ; those designs round which all the laws of creation hang, and to which they tend. Instead of attempting to fathom the depth of the mysteries intrusted to him, and the way in which they were to be accomplished, he committed his imperfect faculties and all that they could teach him to the guidance of that simple intuitive faith which is the gift of God. He did not say, like Naaman, 'I thought he would come out and recover the leper ;' he acted without expecting fresh revelations, according to the habitual practice of his several virtues. Thus his obedience led him to receive as a manifestation of the will of God the command of Augustus that all the world should be taxed. The Romans were heathens as well as conquerors ; they were the enemies of God's chosen people, and of the land of promise. Their emperor was, in vice and infidelity, the last of all the heathen who seemed likely to carry out the designs of God ; yet Joseph, who had heard the will of God from the mouth of an angel, obeyed the orders of this foreigner and stranger, and went up to Bethlehem with Mary his espoused wife. Spiritual writers tell us that we should listen for a divine command or message in all that surrounds us—in the breeze and the silent sunshine, in the voices of the birds and beasts, and in all that is done or said, however casual it may seem. Who knows but the unconscious child may bear a message, as in the

election of St. Ambrose ? nay, the voices of anger and scorn and cruelty, the threat and the command, may teach us, if we will hear their lesson. And so Joseph, who had been ready to obey the law of God when it seemed to require the most painful of sacrifices, was as prompt to obey when the painful command was given through a heathen emperor. He knew that the powers that are, are ordained of God ; and though he had grieved like his countrymen at the encroachments of the Romans, and that at the time when the sceptre was to depart from Shiloh, yet he had so accustomed himself to look upon his civil duties as a part of his duty towards God, that he hesitated not a moment to depart for Bethlehem, a journey of more than twenty leagues, though the condition of Mary, and the winter, which even in that delicious climate is inclement, might seem to exempt him from obeying so oppressive an edict. It seemed, says Bossuet, as if the Nativity took place at Bethlehem because the emperor commanded that their names should be enrolled there. But Cæsar unconsciously executed the commands of God, by attesting in the public records of the empire, that Christ was born in Bethlehem, the birthplace of his ancestor David.

There are no traditions of this first journey, though it must have been a painful one ; for our Blessed Lady was too young and delicate to bear the long wintry way, when there were storms of wind and rain, when the vines were gathered, and the olives shaken from

the tawny trees. They must have sorrowed as they passed Samaria, which rises above the wooded hills with a circlet of towers and palaces, surmounted by that unhallowed temple which led away from Jerusalem ten tribes to worship after their own way upon Mount Gerizzim. They might speak of their ancestor David as they passed the mountains of Gilboa; and as they passed the defiles in the lofty mountains of Ephraim, they might speak of Jacob and Joseph at Shichem, the city of refuge, and of Shiloh, where the ark first rested before it was placed in the temple of Solomon; of Samuel and Saul in Gilgal, and of Elijah at Bethel. They passed Rama, where the voice of mourning was so soon afterwards to be heard; and passed through the valleys and the lofty forests till they saw the naked mountains of Benjamin, with their deep clefts; for though the portions once given to the tribes had passed into other hands, and the boundaries had been removed by successive revolutions and conquests, still the memory of David's city remained amid the wreck, and Joseph and Mary took the road to Bethlehem, the abode of their great ancestor. They saw the glorious city of Jerusalem like a diadem on the mountains, the theatre of mysteries and miracles; they passed below the Tower of David on Mount Sion, and saw afar off the sepulchres of the kings and the grotto of Jeremiah. But they turned not aside from the road to Bethlehem; that road since trodden by so many pilgrims, who describe the little town as seated on the utmost ridge of

a hill, in a happy soil, and with a most delicate prospect over green valleys and sloping vineyards. They could see afar off, as they travelled slowly and wearily, the gardens of Solomon, in which he took such delight, and where he planted trees of all kinds and made ponds of water (Eccl. ii. 5, 6), and which he describes (Canticles iv. 12) as the mystical garden enclosed, a fountain sealed up, the type of the Blessed Virgin herself. Unnoticed in the crowd, they ascended the long steep street of Bethlehem, where the scattered families of the tribe were now collected by the same imperious edict. The city of David could give them neither rest nor shelter; and the unconscious multitudes passed by, while they, the models of all who lead an interior life, were silently walking with God.

They were rejected from the inn at Bethlehem; we read of no others who suffered this humiliation. They were of royal descent, yet poor, and this excites the scorn of the multitude. Much more would they meet with insult from the Roman official, who despised their nation as conquered and as impious—for the religion of the Jews was the only one not tolerated at Rome. Their names and birth must have been registered with indifference; others of the same race might be rich, might even excite the jealousy of Herod—for on another occasion all those of the house of David were massacred by the emperor—but these were beneath his notice. Yet these few words of registration were great in the eyes of God and His angels; what an era did they

mark in the world's history ! If the registration of a royal name is great among men ; if the names of saints are glorious as they occur day after day in the Roman calendar ; what must be that name of Mary, inscribed in the Roman office as about to be the Mother of God, and Joseph having the office of registering her name !

Joseph and Mary, rejected from human habitations, sought the cave still visited by pilgrims ; but the poor shelter of the ox and ass has been adorned with the wealth of St. Helena, and is enclosed in a church of marble. There saints and pilgrims have worshipped ever since, and there St. Jerome dwelt, that he might receive its holy inspirations while translating the Scriptures. We know all this ; but Joseph had to lead Mary into the neglected cave, the dark image of those human hearts where He still is born and received by men duller and more ignorant than brute beasts. And there in silence and obscurity, while all the pomp and bustle of the world went on outside, Joseph was the sole human witness to the Nativity of our Lord.

'Impleti sunt dies.' *Luc. i.*

The great event of Joseph's life was the birth of Jesus. How entirely was he lost in contemplation as the moment approached, and while he sought through Bethlehem for a retreat to receive the Lord of the universe ! How did he grieve at seeing that He came unto His own, and His own received Him not ! He understood something of the agony which that Divine Heart

began to suffer at the sight of the ingratitude of man, and His own unrequited love. But he could say, like Jesus, ' Father, not my will, but Thine be done.' They were driven from Bethlehem, and wandered till they found shelter in a cave; and then, while grief and joy were mingled in inconceivable harmony, he began to prepare for the Nativity. He cleanses the manger; he touches with care the crib which is to be the object of veneration to all future ages, and which, cased in silver, yet is priceless in comparison with the gold and jewels which surround it. He lays in it a little straw, to form the bed of the King of Angels. He arranges a resting-place for the Queen of Heaven. He had perhaps a scanty fare to offer her; he was worn out with the fatigues of that harassing day; but there are moments when the soul is so lost in the things of God, that it is unconscious of what nature suffers; and thus must it have been with the one witness of the Nativity. He must have been prepared by many and great graces to understand as no others could understand the mystery of mysteries.

That very night he was to see Him whom Abraham and all the prophets had seen under a veil in the distant future, and he was to take into his arms Him whom the heavens cannot contain. But the words we use when we speak of the contemplations of St. Joseph are but as the babbling of an infant; yet if they make us think more of that mystery, and more of St. Joseph's greatness, they will not have been said in vain.

The night advanced, and at midnight Mary brought forth her first-born Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger. No other words but those of Holy Scripture can relate this great event. Joseph adores the Eternal Wisdom veiled in the silence of an infant, to confound the pride of human intellect; the Omnipotent bound in swaddling clothes, to shame the independence of man's presumptuous will; the King of Heaven reposing on a little straw, to teach the luxurious world the emptiness of its possessions.

What secrets does Joseph discover in all this? How did he read that lesson of truth—the vanity of all that men seek after, the greatness of what they despise? How amiable are poverty, contempt, and pain to his enlightened eyes! how willingly does he embrace the lot which links him to his Lord! He prizes his despised condition above the kingdoms of the world, and would not change it with the most glorious of sovereigns. He turns to the Holy Child, he thinks of the love which brought Him down from His throne of glory, and he is lost in the contemplation of God's love for sinful and ungrateful man. And that Divine Infant will call him father, and he may even now take into his arms his God. What a thrill must have passed over his whole being, when he pressed to his bosom his Divine Saviour! and yet we also, the lowliest of the Church's children, may conceive it partly, since we too receive within our very hearts that same God in the moment of Communion. But what a difference! Why have we

not Joseph's heart, Joseph's sanctity, Joseph's love ? Why can we not worship our Creator like him, with all the capacity of our being, with all the grace which God would give us if we would not refuse it ? How ardently must Joseph have offered himself to the service of his Creator, and dedicated his whole life, his every action, his labours, his anxieties, and sufferings ! And we in our measure can do the same : we are more unworthy, nay, there is sin and malice ; but we can give all we have, and Joseph could give no more. Joseph must have understood that the new-born King was the sole redemption of mankind, and that it was God who had made him 'coadjutor in the work of redemption,' as St. Bernard says, and 'who willed that he should be present at the birth of Christ, that he might bear witness to the testimony of the angels, and that of the shepherds and the Magi.'

And now that the days were fulfilled, the carpenter of Nazareth, the husband of Mary, beheld the fulfilment of the whole chain of prophecy from Adam to holy Simeon. His faith wavered not, though the second Adam was born, not a perfect man like the first Adam, but a child, with all the weakness and wants of infancy. Such must be the birth of all His followers, as little children : 'Except a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.' 'Behold, I make all things new.' This was our Lord's teaching ; but the Jews understood it not ; they sought Him while He was in the midst of them ; but Joseph beheld

His birth in faith. We know not to what extent the immensity of redemption was revealed to him; perhaps his human nature might then have sunk, like that of the Apostles before the Comforter was sent. Now we know that God had made a new creation, a second Adam, more excellent than the first, and the Father of a more excellent race; 'for as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive.' We, born of this spiritual parentage, know little of its dignity. Perhaps he knew it all, and he was silent. The inspired writers tell us not what he knew and felt. O blessed saint! safe in the presence of God, and so full of faith that he required not knowledge. If his faith had failed, it must have been recorded; but the silence of Holy Scripture proves that he filled his high office—the guardian of Mary, the reputed father of Christ. But Joseph did understand the mystery; his soul was supernaturally strengthened by extraordinary graces, and could bear a light which no other could have borne and lived; and if Moses, who spent forty days in the mountain conversing with God, shone so resplendent that none could bear to look at him, what must have been the light that inundated the soul of Joseph when he paid his first act of adoration to the Incarnate God!

Bossuet makes some reflections on the sign given to the shepherds that they would find the Child lying in a manger. This was what Isaias had said: 'Unto us a Child is born and a Son given (Is. ix. 6). God the mighty, Father of the world to come, the Prince of

peace.' Perhaps Joseph understood the mystery of poverty—that He sought not the riches of this world, but the treasure in heaven, and that the manger was a fit cradle for Him who came to His own, and His own received Him not; a fit cradle for Him who said, 'The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head' (Matt. viii. 20). Men were unworthy, and He made His abode with the ox and ass. The manger was the throne of His poverty, and there all the angels of God worshipped him; and doubtless His Mother and His adopted father adored Him, as his brethren and parents worshipped the patriarch Joseph. But Joseph was poor, and he, if any man, could realise the dignity of His poverty. All religious aim at detachment and abstinence; but who can say with Jesus, ' The prince of this world has nothing in me'? Who does not feel the bondage which chains us to the earth, the pride of the eyes, if not the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life? Our Lord, through His whole preaching, had taught that His kingdom is not of this world; yet one of the last questions asked by His apostles was about the time when the kingdom would be restored to Judah. Yet He was born a king; and so those who are His people must be born of water and of the Holy Spirit, in the bosom of their Immaculate Mother the Church. Nicodemus did not understand this mystery; nor could Joseph from the study of the Jewish Scriptures. What he knew and what he understood was from above, and

we are not told the time nor the extent of his inspirations. We are only told that he acted when his office required.

‘Et pastores erant vigilantes.’ *Luc.* ii. 8.

It was not enough that the birth of the Incarnate God should be known to two holy souls ; the good tidings must be told to ‘men of good-will ;’ and it was to shepherds that the angels first announced the coming of the Great Shepherd. These shepherds were keeping watch over their flocks by night, they were keeping by turns the night-watches on the mountains above Bethlehem ; and pilgrims still see the place where they lived, and the grassy hills where their flocks were pastured. They watched against the midnight thieves and prowling wolves, in that silence in which it is always awful to be alone, while all the world is at rest ; and in the face of the heavens perhaps the aurora or some mysterious meteor lit up the darkness, or the lightning which seems to open the very depths of the firmament. No one has been benighted on the open mountains without feeling that he stands in the presence of God. They watched as those who in the spiritual life wait and hope for heavenly things. So Habacuc watched till the Lord answered ; so the Psalmist desired more than those who watch for morning ; so must all watch, for we know not the hour of the Lord’s coming. So do those watch who know not when the thief may come to rob them of their treasure ; and thus the shepherds

watched, faithful in small things, and ready to receive greater things. They were not sunk in sleep, nor satisfied with riches ; they kept their senses in subjection, and their minds were open to knowledge ; and they beheld a light, a light unmistakable, shining from one end of the heaven to the other, a heavenly light ; and they heard angels jubilant, adoring God, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good-will.' They heard from one glorious angel the 'Evangelium,' the message sent to men, 'To you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord of all.' They were to know Him by the swaddling clothes and the manger. They found Mary and Joseph and the Babe, and departed in the fulness of their joy. Joseph then was there, and they must have told him the whole. What must he have thought of this stupendous confirmation of his faith ! He had beheld the mysterious event, and as a man he must have beheld it with that half consciousness in which we witness what we know, but cannot comprehend. But these were shepherds, poor men, more uneducated than himself, who had heard and seen the things of heaven. They were gone back, satisfied with having once seen their Saviour. Joseph was to abide with Christ and dwell in His house for ever ; he was to see His face and hear His words, to be, as it were, in continual communion with Him ; and while all wondered, and Mary kept all these words, pondering them in her heart, Joseph must have meditated in silence while he beheld

her, as Correggio has represented her, in adoration of her God. 'Adoravit quem genuit' is the motto of that beautiful picture, in which he has delineated her inspired features and joined hands, while she kneels before her Child, thus embodying by his art the mixture of human with divine love. Joseph saw all this, though none has recorded it. The shepherds had come in rejoicing to have found their Saviour, and soon after the Magi adored him with royal homage; but none spoke or wrote of Joseph. 'Sicut jumentum in conspectu tuo.' Only his name is mentioned as being present, and as hearing the word spoken by the shepherds concerning the Child. All that heard it wondered, and he among the rest.

CHAPTER V.

ST. JOSEPH AT THE CIRCUMCISION AND PURIFICATION.

'Cum natus esset Jesus in Bethlehem Iuda.' *Matt. ii. 1.*

ST. JOSEPH now learnt the greatest of earthly mysteries — the excellence of poverty ; that virtue which St. Francis of Assisi called his bride. Even heathens had suspected there is something great in poverty, and saw that it was greater to want nothing than to possess everything. But it was revealed to St. Joseph that men judge by false standards, and he learnt the greatness of what appears little, and the nothingness of what appears great to man. The eternal Son of God, the Saviour promised for four thousand years, could not be honoured or elevated by what the world thinks great. Nay, riches and power would have lessened the greatness of Him who created all things. His eyes, enlightened supernaturally, would see that His obscurity and humiliation did in fact enhance the splendour of the divine perfections ; and that earthly glory would have been like a dark spot between us and His ineffable glory.

And when the veil of prejudice was removed, how

would St. Joseph appreciate the beauty of holy innocence and natural affection !

The Holy Family was, in the infancy of our Lord, of a heavenly perfection. How the painters delight to represent Him lying in His Mother's arms, in the fulness of infantine beauty, while the halo of glory surrounds His head like an impalpable crown, and the maternal love of the Blessed Virgin is poured forth from her inmost heart with the milk of her bosom, and His infant hands are extended to caress His Mother ! And as He grew older, they represent Him in the arms of the venerable Joseph, whose calm features are enlightened with the joy of pressing to his heart the Holy Child. Yet Joseph must obey the law of Moses.

'Et postquam consummati sunt dies octo, ut circumcidetur puer.'

The ceremony of circumcision was generally performed by the parent in his own house ; wherefore the painters who represent the ceremony as taking place in the Temple follow a popular error. The ceremony, or rather sacrament, as we all know, was a mystical token of sin and reparation of a chosen people and of a coming Redeemer. But it was a badge of sin, and as such Joseph knew that the Holy Child was exempt from it, and from the law which enjoined it on sinners. Yet he fulfilled the law to the letter. He, the head of the family, was bound to perform the rite, and to shed the blood of the spotless Infant. He

had witnessed the adoration of the shepherds; yet faith and obedience enabled him to perform the duty of a father, by subjecting the Son of God to the humiliation of the sons of men, and to treat Him as a sinner requiring penance. ‘He was to be reckoned among the malefactors.’

If the humility of John the Baptist was exercised afterwards in baptising Him to whom he ought himself to have come for baptism, what must the humility of St. Joseph have suffered at inflicting this painful mark of sin! We often think of Mary weeping over the first drops of blood shed by her Son; but no one speaks of Joseph’s sorrow in performing with his own hands this cruel, this unnecessary action. The circumcision of St. John the Baptist was in the midst of his kinsfolk; but that of Jesus was as a houseless, homeless exile, done in obscurity and sadness.

Circumcision was a great shadow of the mystery of Penance; for sin can only be expiated by suffering, and suffering can only have merit through the Blood of Christ. Without shedding of blood there is no remission. This truth was revealed after the fall of Adam by the institution of sacrifice, and the knowledge of it was perpetuated among the chosen people by an elaborate ceremonial; so that those who fulfilled the law not only partook of the benefit, but understood this great doctrine, according to the grace given to them. The doctrine of Penance seems to have belonged to the Christian Revelation; and Joseph, in poverty and

mental sufferings, was the minister of the new dispensation. But now his office was to fulfil the old law; yet while he did so we may see in him the type of the priests of the new law, who offer day by day the one Sacrifice from the rising of the sun to the going down thereof (Mal. i. 11).

It was the wonderful office of St. Joseph to shed the first blood of the Redeemer of the world. It was his hand that first poured upon the earth that precious Blood which was to wash away its stains. Mary, as afterwards on Calvary, offered the victim, for He was her own; but Joseph's hand was the instrument of this blood-shedding. The hands of executioners were the instruments of the dreadful wrath of God, wreaked in its utmost vengeance and to the very dregs on Him who had become sin for us; but Joseph was the instrument of mercy. Sin must indeed be expiated, and the innocent victim must begin early to pay the penalty, and bear the confusion and shame of that dreadful stain which He took upon Himself; but the ceremony was a covenant of mercy, a proof that God would accept an atonement; and He who came to fulfil the law in all its rigour intended to institute a gentler remedy for the sin of Adam through the blood which He now sheds, and it is Joseph's hand which pours it out. His hand is first dipped in that fountain in which the priests of God's Church dip their hands to pour forgiveness on the heads of Adam's sinful children, bearing the burden handed down to them from him, and

still more on those who in the Sacrament of Penance are freed from the heavy load of their own actual guilt. The heart of Joseph must have been pierced with grief at the pain which he inflicted on the weeping Infant ; but being as he was enlightened supernaturally on the end for which Jesus came upon the earth, he rejoices with the joy of that infant heart in seeing the work of redemption begun, and the name of Jesus, as he gives it to the Child, fills him with an inexpressible sweetness. Thus sorrow and joy are still to go hand in hand through Joseph's chequered life ; for love produces joy, but it is nourished by suffering.

He restores Jesus bathed in His blood into the hands of His Mother, and thus pierces her heart with the first sword of grief ; and Joseph shrank not from his task, though it was full of anguish. He must concur with his Virgin Spouse in the work of redemption, and must say with her, 'Fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum.' He foresees the future sufferings which await the new-born Saviour and His holy Mother, and he shares them as a part of his high vocation ; he offers himself generously to all that is reserved for him, loving that most high will in all things and above all things. But shall no one in this cold and ungrateful world share in the adoration of those drops of precious Blood ? Must it drop unheeded on the ground, while the world unthinkingly rushes by, and will soon trample unconsciously on the hallowed spot ? Joseph and Mary alone supply for the ungrateful world ; and

what must have been the intensity of their adoration ! and what the grief of the Holy Child, to think that Joseph and Mary share His sufferings, and begin already that work of reparation which is continued by all holy souls to the end of time !

‘Vocatum est nomen ejus Jesus, quod vocatum est ab angelo priusquam in utero conciperetur’ (Luc. ii. 21); ‘Et vocabunt nomen ejus Emmanuel; quod est interpretatum, nobiscum Deus’ (Matt. i. 23); and St. Matthew says (i. 25), ‘Vocavit nomen ejus Jesum.’ The sense of this latter verse is, that His Mother called Him Jesus ; but it is said before to Joseph, ‘Et vocabis nomen ejus Jesum’ (Matt. i. 21). The angel used the same words to Mary (Luc. i. 31). The name was, then, announced to both, but Joseph had the office of giving it. The name was given on the same day as the circumcision, and that by the father, as appears by Zacharias naming his son John: the name was in fact given with the consent of both parents, for it had been revealed by an angel to both. Volumes have been written on that Holy Name, at which all creatures in heaven and earth must bow. Joseph knew its dignity and the extent of its import ; he knew, for the angel had told him that He should save His people from their sins. It was the first time that name was spoken by human lips ; it was spoken in the presence of Mary, while he held the Holy Child in his arms ; and that holy name must have echoed through the three realms of heaven and earth and hell, but we are not told what were its

consequences to those who heard it. Let us consider it one moment. 'Emmanuel,' God with us. God within us, reconciling unto God, so that we are one with Him. God with us, purifying us from sin, that we may sin no more. God with us, that we may live where there is no sin, for in His presence there can be no sin; and these, as Bossuet says from St. Augustine, are the three steps to the salvation promised by the Name of Jesus.

'Et postquam consummata sunt dies purgationis ejus secundum legem Moysi, tulerunt eum in Jerusalem, ut sisterent eum Domino.'

The obedience of Joseph as well as Mary to the law was perfect. The Holy Child needed not circumcision, nor the Immaculate Virgin purification. Mary, in her humility, rejoiced in this concealment of her glory; and the Redeemer came that He might be despised and counted among transgressors. Joseph was in a different position. He felt as the disciples felt, as Mary herself felt, at seeing the Holy One suffer. It was an heroic obedience in that just man to fulfil the law of Moses, by taking his virgin spouse to the Temple, that she might offer the sacrifice appointed for the sinful daughters of Eve. All that he had been taught by supernatural revelations seemed to exempt him, nay to forbid his subjecting the only two sinless beings in the world to these humiliating badges of sin. But he was born under the law, and he fulfilled it, leaving the rest to God. He was the 'vir fidelis, multum laudabitur, et qui custos est Domini sui glorificabitur.'

Yet Holy Scripture leaves us to consider these things with the aid of the Holy Spirit; and, as Jeremiah said, we perish only because we will not consider. Joseph was present at the presentation; that great moment, foretold by the prophets, when the Lord visited His Temple. And why did He visit it? and what is a temple? A place of worship and a place of sacrifice; for there is no worship without a sacrifice. He went there to offer and to be the sacrifice. And He is offered by the priest of God, whoever he may be, so that he is a priest; for the office of the priest only is to represent Him who Himself offers the sacrifice. And it is Jesus who offers the sacrifice of Himself to His eternal Father. It is His holy Mother, the type of the Church, who brings Him in her hands, and gives Him to the priest to be offered to God; and Joseph is present, for the Gospel says, 'they' bring Him. He unites in that great sacrifice; he concurs in it. Do we not see all this in our own churches?—where the priest, perhaps we know not whom, but one who has the sacerdotal dignity, offers a sacrifice to the eternal Father; and Jesus Himself offers the sacrifice in the person of the priest, and gives Himself as that sacrifice; and Mary's hands have brought Him, for it is through Mary that the Church has received the gift of that precious Body and Blood which nourishes us; nay, it is her very blood which runs through the veins of Jesus, and her flesh which He has taken, in order that in our very nature He may communicate Himself to us. And as Joseph is

the model of priests in the circumcision, so the faithful may humbly look upon themselves as uniting with Joseph in the great sacrifice ; they concur in the sacrifice of Jesus, and why have they not the interior dispositions of Joseph ? The sacrifice is the same, the victim is the same, He to whom it is offered is the same—the God of infinite majesty. Let us not forget Joseph, and all he must have felt in performing a ceremony which seemed injurious to Mary's divine maternity. But he knows the value of obedience, that it gives every action a priceless value ; and also he knows well that the sanctity which is veiled by humility from the eyes of men is far more precious in the sight of God. Here too sorrow mingles with joy ; while he sees the Saviour of the world adored by Simeon and Anna, he hears that He will be set for a sign to be contradicted, and that a sword of sorrow will pierce the Mother's soul.

There is one other circumstance of the mystery in which Joseph is deeply concerned : it is that the priests redeemed the Child. The father and the Mother concurred, but it was especially the father, as the head of the house, he who would provide the means ; and thus the Child becomes his again by another right. He is restored to him by the law as one redeemed, and the Scripture itself seems to forget that he is not the natural father, so truly does he possess all the paternal rights.

'Tulerunt eum in Jerusalem, ut sisterent eum Domino.'
Luc. ii. 22.

The knowledge of this journey increases by time.

From the first ages of Christianity pilgrims have gathered up the traditions which were received from those who saw the holy Joseph and the beautiful Virgin ; she bearing the Holy Child, and he directing her steps along the road from Bethlehem to Jerusalem. It was a journey of two hours through the vale of Rephaim, where their ancestor David had routed the Philistines. On a hill above Bethlehem they still show the house of the patriarch Joseph, and near it, in the village, the abode of the shepherds, and the mountains where they fed their sheep. They passed the cistern of David—that water for which he thirsted in battle, and spilt without drinking, because it was the price of blood. Not far off, in Rama, where the sound of weeping was so soon to be heard, is the sepulchre of Rachel, where she rested in death after her weary pilgrimage ; and the well of Jacob, the house which still bears his name. They passed the places named after the prophet Elias, the prophet Habacuc ; they passed the cistern where soon afterwards the Magi would water their camels ; and the loving tradition of the place points out the turpentine-tree, where the Mother of God rested as she carried her Son.

They entered Jerusalem by the fountain of Bathsheba and the tower of David. The road was full of the past and of the future, and they must have entered the city with something of the sorrow of Jesus when He wept over it. It had been elected by God for His especial dwelling, and it was, as it appears to travellers,



'like a diadem crowning the mountains.' It was founded by Melchisedec, the type of the priesthood of our Lord, and David won it from the Jebusites and adorned it with buildings, and quitted Hebron to make it the seat of his kingdom. There Solomon built his Temple, which was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, and it lay waste for seventy years. Nehemiah built up its walls in fifty-two days, building with one hand, and fighting with the other; all deeply mystical and prophetic, for it was this Temple which was hallowed by the presence of our Lord, and which He said Himself was a symbol of His mystical body.

Yet the Holy City was now made by Herod to emulate Rome in heathen splendour. He had built a palace of marble, shining with gold, near the Tower of David, and his theatre and amphitheatre rose high over the city. But it was on the Temple that the eyes of Joseph were bent. He led his family by the fountain of Siloe, and past another fountain which is now named after the Blessed Virgin. The place where they presented the Holy Child is now marked by a church, but it is turned into a mosque. The circumstances of the presentation are described by Butler. The Blessed Virgin waited for the priest at the gate of the temple, and made her offerings of thanksgiving and expiation, and presented her Divine Son by the hands of the priest to His eternal Father. She redeemed Him with the five shekels as the law appointed, and received Him back as a trust till His Father should demand Him for

the accomplishment of man's redemption. In all this there is no mention of Joseph; it is as if he was not present. The prophecies were addressed to Mary, only the blessing of Simeon was given to both; and it is said that after they had performed all according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth, according to St. Luke. But St. Matthew gives the history of the Magi, and the Massacre of the Innocents, and the Flight into Egypt, which appears to have taken place at Bethlehem soon after the Presentation.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT.

‘Surge, et accipe Puerum et Matrem ejus, et fuge in Egyptum.’

Of the four Evangelists, St. Matthew alone relates the Adoration of the Magi and its consequence, the Flight into Egypt.

The visit of the three kings, as they are called by tradition, Gaspar, Melchior, and Balthasar, is full of import, but it belongs to the history of Joseph only so far as he witnessed it. Yet we may consider what he must have thought when he saw their camels coming up the steep street of Bethlehem, bearing the treasures of the East, and when he saw their Ethiop slaves bringing in their offerings of homage and adoration, as an old poet says :

‘Myrrh, incense, gold, as to man, God, and king.’

And what must have been his feelings when he saw the venerable kings or sages in all their gorgeous apparel doing homage to the Holy Child in His Mother’s arms ! He is always represented as standing behind them, while the Star sheds a supernatural light through

the open roof of the poor dwelling. He must have heard from the attendants the wonderful story of their following the miraculous star for many days and through many countries, till it led them to Jerusalem ; and how, when they inquired of the great and learned in Jerusalem, they lost the light ; and how, when they set out again according to the directions of the holy Scriptures which foretold the Christ, they again saw and followed it. Perhaps they told Him themselves in the exultation of their joy, how they had spent their nights in watching the cloudless sky of Arabia, and worn away their days in fruitless calculations ; and how their long labours were repaid by the silent answer to their desires, the sign of a star in the sky which they had studied by astronomy ; and how their long journey and anxious doubts were repaid by finding the expected Messiah, through that hard-earned knowledge, which the shepherds, without toil or delay, had gained from the voices of angels. The Magi might repeat the prophecy of Balaam, the ancient prophet of their country, 'Orietur stella ex Jacob,' and Joseph might see that they fulfilled the prophecy in Psalm lxxi. 10, 'Reges Arabum et Saba dona adducent,' and that of Isaiah lx. 6, 'Omnes de Saba venient, aurum et thus deferentes.'

It seems as if the adoration of the Magi, paid as it was with the honour given by the world to a king, and with all the pomp and circumstance of earthly homage, aroused the enmity of the evil world. It conveyed a deep spiritual mystery, and its outward glory brought

down the usual persecutions of wicked angels and men upon the defenceless Holy Family. It was the usual reaction of human events from the throne to the hovel. The bare suspicion of the mystery was enough to rouse the terrors of earth and hell. While Joseph was at peace in the obscurity of Bethlehem, the court of Herod was in arms, and the mandate had gone forth from the king to slay all the infants in Bethlehem. The star which had guided the Magi to Christ was misused by the king to direct him in his crime, and his knowledge of the holy Scriptures only added to his guilt. So blind was his fury, that according to a heathen writer, says Bossuet, one of Herod's own children perished in the massacre; and yet the only child he sought was the only one which escaped. The Holy Family were far away before those cries of sorrow were heard around the tomb of Rachel, which had been prophesied of old, and which were yet remembered when St. Matthew wrote.

While this danger was imminent Joseph slept, and his sleep was mystical. Three times in sleep he received the commands of God by the mouth of an angel. The powers of his mind were suspended, his senses conveyed no intimation of the coming changes, and his thoughts were not occupied with designs. When man does nothing, God acts. Man does but interfere with and impede His work. 'Stand still, and see the salvation of God,' was the command given to the Israelites on the shore of the Red Sea; and thus it was when an

angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in sleep, and said, 'Arise, and take the Child and His Mother, and fly into Egypt, and be there until I shall tell thee. For it will come to pass that Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him.'

It has been said that these words formally conferred on Joseph the paternal office which he fulfilled towards the Son of God. St. Alfonso from St. John Damascene, tells us that God gave to him the love and vigilance as well as the authority of a father; and Bossuet explains thus, what he calls the beautiful theology of Psalm xxx. 15.: 'God does not form the heart like the other parts of the body. It is in His hands as soft clay, which He moulds and fashions like the potter. He gives to some a heart softened by love, and when He withdraws love the heart is hard. When He sends the Holy Spirit the heart becomes that of a child. While Saul kept his father's flocks his heart was changed to that of a king, and the heart of the rebellious people was moved to obey him.' Joseph had the heart of a father because he filled the paternal office, as Jesus had the heart of a son. Jesus was as an orphan, says Bossuet, and it seemed as if He could already have said, 'Deus meus, quid dereliquisti Me?' Joseph guarded His infancy, and was a father to Him when His Father in heaven gave over to him His own office. How much more real a paternity is this than the natural love which we share with the animals for their offspring! They have watchfulness, care, tender-

ness, self-sacrifice, even to the loss of life ; God gives them this natural love. The supernatural love is a greater gift.

Bossuet says, when Joseph received his office he received also a father's heart. He had the affections of a father as well as a husband. Men adopt sons ; but Christ adopted a father, and this journey to Bethlehem was the first act of Joseph's ministry.

Who can say to what an intense degree his heart had been made capable of appreciating Him who was to be his foster-son ? Perhaps he foresaw the future sufferings of the stable and the crib, and the flight into Egypt. He felt as a father would have done ; for holiness does not weaken, but refines and deepens, the feelings with which God has endued our nature and implanted in us, perhaps with a view to this First-born of creation ; for as the mother's heart is formed on the type of Mary's heart, so the affections of a father's heart are types of what Joseph was to be to Jesus. He felt these affections as no father or husband ever felt, yet he obeyed the will of God as it was manifested through ordinary means ; and like Mary in after-years at the foot of the Cross, he was ready to sacrifice those very feelings to the great work of the reparation of God's honour, and the redemption of the world.

The angel now bade Joseph take the child and His Mother, and guard Him in Egypt till he was told to bring him back. As God gave him a spiritual paternity, so He gave the heart of a son to Jesus. He clung to

Joseph for aid and for protection. He followed him henceforth and obeyed him. Till now Joseph had not known tribulation; he had been perplexed and harassed, but there had been no danger, no mortal fear. Not that Joseph feared as men do, for as a saint he feared only to offend God. His trials began when first he came in contact with Christ, and this one differed in degree rather than in kind. His fear was not like that of ordinary men, with weak faith and misplaced hope and misguided love. He sees indeed the difficulties and sufferings that await him. He bears Christ with him, and that will increase the danger though it consoles him in his hasty flight. He must rise instantly, without time for preparation, with perfect detachment from all he has, and perfect abandonment of all to come. He must dwell in a foreign and a hostile land. He must act and labour and suffer, and he must see the Divine Infant and His Blessed Mother suffer also. But he had Christ with him; he could not have the anxiety of doubt, or repugnance, or disbelief. He adored the designs of God over the Redeemer of the world. He concurred in them, though he did not understand them. He could not fear the rage of Herod, for what was it to the Son of the Most High, and to those who dwell under the shadow of His wings? but he grieved to see Him rejected by His own nation and driven among the heathen—to see Him who came to lay down His life for His people persecuted by them as a usurper. Joseph felt all the humiliation of his

flight, and not the least of this was that he should be the instrument—that God should appear to men as in need of his weak instrumentality to secure Him from the threatened danger, and that this might lead even those who knew them to doubt that He was the Messiah, whose divinity was becoming more and more deeply veiled. Then again, what a model of obedience was God pleased to give the world! for it is the only virtue the Son of Man could at first practise. The command too was not given by the Eternal Father to His Son, but through an angel to Joseph—an angel who was indeed high in the heavenly court, yet inferior to our Lady; and was not Mary, that most exalted of pure creatures, the fittest to receive and obey the message? No; Joseph, the lowest in dignity of all that Holy Family, was to communicate His command, and the others were to obey.

St. Francis in his Conferences of Sales, says in his own sweet way: Could not our Lord Himself have whispered in the ear of His good father St. Joseph, 'Let us go into Egypt; we shall stay there so long.' But He would not speak before His time was come. Could not He have inspired it into the heart of His Mother or His father better than to leave it to the charge of an angel? No; for Gabriel had charge of the Annunciation and of the Holy Family, and our Lord chose to be governed by him. And why does the angel speak to Joseph instead of to our Lady? and why is she not offended?

They all know we must take the messages of God from those whom He appoints.

And might not St. Joseph, if he had been less perfect in obedience, have hesitated at the command itself? It might have seemed unreasonable that God should have to fly before man. And again, must he have no time to prepare, no means of providing for their long abode in a strange land, nor even know how long he is to remain there? No; the command is peremptory and without explanation; the obedience is simple and without a reflection or reply.

It is so common with us all to be placed in circumstances when we must act in blind obedience, that we may take a merely natural view of the angel's command. St. Joseph must have felt that the honour of beholding the adoration of the shepherds and the Magi was too great for him, and now he might feel the dangers and difficulties were also too great. How could he take the Immaculate Virgin and the Hope of Israel into a heathen land? Simeon had foretold troubles, and they were come. He shrinks not to accept them willingly. Some saints have earned their cross by detachment: they have left their families and died a voluntary death to all that makes life dear, that they might receive a hundredfold here, and hereafter life eternal (Mark x. 30). Joseph, like the beloved disciple, bore the keener pangs of anxiety for the treasure intrusted to his charge: he shared the fatigues, the shame, the privations of the Holy Family; the crown of thorns

already pierced his head, and the nails his hands and feet ; his eyes were blinded with tears, and his heart was faint within him through divine love. None could allay his thirst or give him ease upon the cross, for it was that of Christ.

Joseph had been in glory. He had wondered that he should be the guardian of a mystery, the father of a king. He had to recover by flight his appointed state, his hidden life, and a new phase of the work of God opened before his eyes. The warning of Simeon had awakened the first thought that persecution is the lot of all who belong to Christ ; but the same truth is spoken now by an angel.

The flight of Joseph, like everything else, is typical. We pass through the world urged on by outward things ; but if we take the Child and His Mother with us, we are safe. We are sometimes kings, and sometimes beggars ; in Canaan, and then in Egypt ; in prosperity or sorrow ; in pleasant places with joyous friends, and then alone, dark, dull, and confined ; it is a different surrounding, but the person is the same. All change outside, like the scenes of a theatre. To go forward is the law of creation. Move onwards, pass through these things, is the necessity of time. To Egypt now in fear, then to Canaan in uncertainty ; but all is right at last, for the will of God is done.

The command of the angel showed precipitation and fear. The Son of God came in infirmity and subjected Himself to the troubles of human life ; and He must

hide in Egypt. Rise, fly, was the command ; as if terror had possessed heaven before the message spread it on the earth. And Joseph rose from sleep to obey. Others might have asked how they should go as pilgrims on a long and dangerous journey to Egypt, where they had no relations or friends ; a strange and barbarous nation, and a country whence his ancestors had been rescued by such repeated miracles. Well might Egypt be the type of the world, as Canaan is the type of heaven ; and ordinary men know that the escape of the people of God from Egypt does but faintly shadow out the difficulties of each soul which is rescued from a perishing world, as St. Arsenius was from the imperial court by the words, Fly, be silent, and be calm. Joseph must have seen another difficulty in the command. How could the Messiah leave His people, of whom He said afterwards : I am not sent but to the house of Israel ? How could the Son of David leave Canaan for Egypt ? How leave Bethlehem and Jerusalem, now in full expectation of their Saviour ? How carry the Hope of Israel from the Temple of God to the abode of devils ? But Joseph reasoned not, nor gave a thought to the disappointment of his own hopes, nor to the change from adoring worshippers to negligent or scornful heathens. He must give up all that God Himself had given, and abide in 'terra deserta et invia et arenis ;' a land where the heat of the desert, and the barren and pathless sand and thirsty solitude, figure but too plainly the spiritual journey of the soul in her

time of desolation. Yet it is said of the Spouse of Christ (Cant. iii. 5), 'Who is this that cometh up from the desert, flowing with delights, leaning upon her Beloved ?' And again (Hosea ii. 14), 'I will allure her and lead her into the wilderness, and I will speak to her heart; and she shall sing there according to the days of her youth, and according to the days of her coming up out of the land of Egypt.'

Joseph knew the Scriptures, and he knew their mystical sense; he knew that the glory of the world is the desert of the soul, and that the earthly deserts he had to pass were rich in heavenly graces. That very night, says Gerson, he arose and collected his poor tools, that he might work for his family; and he set out on a journey of 400 miles by unknown roads, and then over pathless sands, to foreign cities, inhabited by heathens, where the servant of God is more lonely still; a stranger dependent on charity; day by day exposed to the heat of the summer and the cold of the winter, and to the attacks of wild beasts and robbers. Mary takes the Child in her arms, and gathers up their mean garments and utensils; and they go forth as pilgrims. Painters represent the Holy Family, perhaps from some tradition, Mary riding on an ass, and carrying the Holy Child; Joseph walking beside her, leading the ass and carrying his tools. And there is a legend, that in crossing the desert they were attacked by robbers, and that their captain, moved by the ineffable graces of Mary, yielded to the inspirations of pity, and let them pass in

safety ; and that that captain was afterwards the penitent thief rewarded for this one good deed by the grace of conversion, and a good death. But who can imagine the anxieties felt by the guardian of that Holy Family ; the hurry and confusion of a journey at night, and in secret, and in danger from the soldiers of Herod ; the uncertainty of getting food and shelter ; the unspeakable responsibility of directing the flight without a guide or guard ? All rested on Joseph. One only of these cares might harass and oppress a man who has with him a treasure ; but what of Mary, the tender, the spotless, the beautiful Virgin ; the Child, whose birth and office were known only to himself and to Mary ? He must protect the Ruler of heaven and earth ; he must beg for the support of Him in whose hands are all created things. Yet his faith failed not, nor his patience. His fortitude bore him up through a long series of monotonous days, which brought neither help nor comfort. There seemed to be no voice, nor any that regarded. His was the courage of endurance in obscurity, neglect, and delay. His whole life in Egypt was to be hidden to man, and to himself, and to the sensible intercourse with God ; but the Christ and His Mother were with him, and it sufficed his faith to know that he was told 'to take the Child and His Mother, and fly into Egypt, and be there till I tell thee.' Though the holy Scriptures are silent, and St. Matthew only says, that at the command of the angel Joseph arose, and took the Child and His Mother by

night, and retired into Egypt, and was there till the death of Herod ; yet a single glance at the map will show us what that journey was. The mountains of the Amalekites almost separate Judæa from the wilderness of Paran. A narrow plain extends from Gaza along the coast of the Mediterranean, and joins the sandy deserts which extend over the peninsula on the north of the Red Sea ; so that the Holy Family, flying by night and defenceless, must have crossed the wilderness of Sheir and that of Paran, before they could reach Goshen ; a journey difficult even to caravans. We are not told whether Joseph took the route inland by Hebron, where it is said that Adam was created, and where Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were buried in the cave of Macpelah ; or whether they went by Beersheba, where Hagar and Ishmael nearly perished by thirst in the wilderness of Sheir ; or whether they went by Jerusalem and the castle of Emmaus to Gaza, once a rich and stately city, where Samson had carried the gates on his shoulders, and pulled down the idol temple on the Philistines ; but Alexander had taken the city, and it lay in ruins, on the edge of a desert, where nothing grows but a few palm-trees. The camels do not cross it in less than six days ; and how did St. Joseph pass it without the help of angels ? We are only told that Joseph guided the Holy Family to Egypt, and we know that the troubles and dangers of the journey disappeared like the pillars of sand which rise so often on the horizon of those deserts, and seem to

thicken and approach so as to overwhelm the traveller, but which melt away in the wind, like dreams at daylight.

It is thought that the Holy Family went to the city of Pelusium, at the mouth of the westernmost channel of the Nile, where in the ninth century Bernard, a Saxon monk, saw a church dedicated to our Lady.

Pelusium was then no doubt divided, like the rest of the great cities of Egypt, between the gross idolaters who worshipped the serpent and the crocodile, and the sceptical philosophers of the Alexandrian schools. There were, besides, the depraved and worldly, and shameless immorality was publicly allowed. The cities were all governed by Roman officers, for the country had been conquered by them not many years before, and the obelisk of Cleopatra was still standing, and bore the name of that queen, so celebrated not long before for luxury and beauty.

But there were other recollections which lead us back to the great chain of type and prophecy which runs through the history and teaching of the Old Testament; for St. Matthew applies to this passage the words of Hosea, 'Out of Egypt have I called my Son;' and again, 'Israel is my son, and I have loved him.' Before the Advent all revelation was full of types, and Rohrbacher says, from Bossuet (*Elévations*), that this refers literally to the departure of the people of Israel, but figuratively to the Son of God, of whom they were the figure. Egypt during the famine was their refuge,

and became their prison, and God delivered them from their prison to place them in the land of Canaan. Egypt was also to be the refuge of Christ, and God would in time take Him out of it. The patriarch Joseph and the Saint were driven from the land of Promise by the sins of those who dwelt in it, to Egypt, the type of the Gentile world ; and in after-times the sin of the Jews themselves, which led St. Paul (Acts xiii. 16) to say, 'Lo, we turn to the Gentiles.' It seems as if this world were a mere shadow of greater things, and we ourselves are as in a dream, doing or else hindering the work of God, and our thoughts go back like those of Joseph to the great patriarch who was sent down from Canaan to preserve life, to be the saviour of the Egyptians as well as of his brethren. Joseph must have remembered how he called down his family to enjoy the temporal prosperity of Egypt, as our Lord calls us to follow Him, that we may have peace. 'Venite ad me, et ego dabo vobis omnia bona *Egypti*, et comedetis medullam terræ.' The patriarch, and now the saint, placed his family in the land of Goshen, where stood Rameses, between the Nile and the Red Sea. The city had been built like Pithom by the Israelites, and both were store cities to Pharaoh ; and here the miracles were afterwards done by the rod of Moses in the field of Zoan or Tanis, the most ancient and the royal city of the Pharaohs, on the next branch of the Nile beyond Pelusium. Joseph the patriarch was not forgotten. The Pyramids he had built at Noph, or Memphis, are standing to this day

near the present Cairo ; and they now show, in the castle of Cairo, the ruins of Joseph's well, with thirty large pillars of Theban stone, and railings painted with gold and azure, and Pharaoh's hall, and a room called after the steward of Joseph. They show Joseph's prison also, and Joseph's granaries. And they show too in old Cairo, in the church of St. Barnabas, a dark chapel, which was once the house where the Holy Family dwelt ; but others say they dwelt in a village two miles from Cairo, where they inhabited a square room with a paved floor and a well. They show also a tree which they say was growing there at that time ; so that Goshen was the abode of the second as well as of the first Joseph.

The memory of Joseph the patriarch had not checked the idolatry of the Egyptians ; and Joseph and Mary, and even Christ, must have beheld them worshipping the crocodile and the ibis. But there was a prophecy that the statues of Egypt should be shaken ; and Bossuet says that it was now fulfilled, and that the idols were shaken at the presence of Christ, and that the devils who were worshipped in Egypt trembled because the time of their expulsion drew near. But it is impossible to imagine the solitude of the Holy Family in Egypt. Hebrews among idolaters and philosophers, with none of their own kinsfolk and nation, strangers among foreigners ; they must have concealed their ineffable purity and their dignity in the sight of God, while they carried on their trade and earned their living among

their neighbours. It is said that Joseph made ploughs and yokes, and that our Lord carried the work to those who employed Joseph, and that He laboured with Joseph's tools while preparing to cultivate the hard and barren heart, and place His easy yoke on the children of men. They dwelt unknown, and degraded, and unobserved ; but in less than one hundred years St. Mark was Bishop of Alexandria, and the Church of Egypt was soon afterwards glorious in the Fathers of the Desert. Even then the Holy Family was a light shining in darkness, and St. Francis de Sales says that St. Joseph exercised the heroic virtues of virginity, humility, constancy, and courage.

In that Holy Family he beheld as it were the seeds sown of that religious life which was afterwards established in the Church, to bring before the eyes of the world those counsels of perfection which can be followed only by those who withdraw from worldly sympathies. St. Joseph may be regarded as the finished type on which it was to be formed. Mary and Jesus Himself loved that same simple hidden but intensely heavenly life. But St. Joseph being, as it were, nearer to our weakness, serves as a faithful mirror in which we gaze at the resplendent beauties of the divine life. Exteriorly his is a life of unceasing, humble, painful labour, not with a view of amassing riches, nor of gratifying sensuality, but purely to satisfy with scanty measure the bare necessities of nature, and with the remainder to relieve the poor. But this labour is accom-

panied with unceasing prayer ; and while his hands are busy, his heart is fixed on his God, and the intervals of labour are given to contemplation. His nights are often passed in prayer, which he learns from his divine foster-son. What must have been that prayer offered up in company with Jesus and Mary, not as now in spirit, but in corporeal presence ! How did he grudge the little time snatched from it for the repose of his wearied body ! and when the rising sun recalled him to his daily labours, did he not, like St. Anthony, find that its bright rays came too soon to recall him to earth. Have we not here a faithful image of the life which so many thousands afterwards were to lead in those same deserts ? and can our dull minds, material as they are, dare to think that the abode of seven years in Egypt was time lost ? It had been foreshadowed by seven years of plenty and seven years of famine. It was a precious seed-time, which was to produce an abundant harvest, not only peopling earth with living angels, those Fathers of the Desert, of whom it might be said that there were giants in those days, but with a spiritual progeny, which was to overflow the whole earth, and enrich the Church with the beautiful varieties of a life of perfection, which are to adorn her to the end of time. Has not Jesus, though yet a helpless Child, already begun the great work for which He quitted Heaven, namely, the sanctification and so the salvation of men ? and as in all His works He proceeds with a holy deliberation, first preparing the ground, and

watering the soil, and forming the model on which the future plantation will be trained. We have seen Joseph a model of other states and duties, but here he is especially the model of religious and of those interior souls who, though outwardly in the world, seek inwardly that solitude of heart in which God dwells alone.

CHAPTER VII.

ST. JOSEPH'S RETURN TO NAZARETH.

'Defuncto autem Herode, ecce angelus Domini apparuit in somnis Joseph in Agypto ; decens : Surge, et accipe puerum et matrem ejus, et vade in terram Israel : defuncti sunt enim enim qui quærebant animam pueri.'

ALL things have an end. The sojourn in Egypt was over ; for Herod was dead. In Egypt, as in Nazareth and Bethlehem, the Angel of God waited on Joseph. God directed him from heaven when supernatural aid was necessary, and in one place as well as another. So it is now, although no angel is sent, as to Joseph in his sleep ; for the Holy Spirit is poured out on all flesh, and each has light enough to guide him on his road to the heavenly Canaan. The Israelites had been led out of Egypt in defiance of the strength of Pharaoh ; the Holy Family, under a new dispensation, left it in silence and obscurity. But the journey was difficult ; the Holy Child was too old to be carried in the arms of His parents, and too young to walk far. St. Bonaventure says He suffered cold, and hunger, and weariness. How often did He lie down exhausted on

the road ! And yet Joseph must be the guide and director of this painful journey. He bore the responsibility, he struggled with the difficulties ; he heard on the road that Archelaus reigned instead of Herod. Perhaps he heard then, for the first time, of the Massacre of the Innocents, and the amount of danger from which the Holy Child had been delivered. It is only said that he feared to go into Judaea ; and being again warned in his sleep by an angel, he turned aside to the region of Galilee, and dwelt in Nazareth, and so fulfilled another prophecy : 'He shall be called a Nazarene.'

How very little can we judge, by what we know, of what will best accomplish the designs of God ! It seemed so fitting that He who had been promised for so many ages to the tribe of Judah should dwell among them ; that He who was to restore the kingdom to Israel should dwell among the few who had remained faithful to their king and their Temple, and dwelt near Jerusalem, which was and is the city of the people of God ; for there is a spiritual Jerusalem, of which that of David was a type. But Joseph was commanded by an angel ; so that no doubt remained as to the will of God, to return to Nazareth, the land of Zabulon and the land of Napthali, Galilee of the Gentiles ; for Isaiah says the people who dwelt in darkness have seen a great light, and on those who dwelt in darkness and in the shadow of death, on them has the light shined. Behold the mystery of the Gentiles being admitted

with the Jews into the new covenant! It had been prophesied, but the Hebrews understood it not, and the restoration of the kingdom to Judah remained a difficulty with the Apostles themselves, just before our Lord's ascension and after it, until Peter baptised the centurion.

After all that had happened of glory and persecution, of mystery and revelation, Joseph must return to ordinary life, to his trade, carried on in his native town among his kinsfolk and neighbours, who were ignorant and profoundly unsuspicious that there was anything remarkable in the Holy Family. 'Is not this the carpenter?' they said afterwards; 'filius Mariæ, frater Jacobi, et Joseph, et Judæ, et Simonis? Nonne et sorores ejus hic nobiscum sunt?' (Marc. vi. 3.)

It was quite true; but there were greater things than these—so great that we must receive the Evangelist's few words on the subject of meditation, and learn from the Saints their import.

'Puer autem crescebat'—for, as St. Augustine says, God did not do all by miracle lest 'dum omnia mirabiliter fecit, delecet quod misericorditer fecit.' Therefore Joseph had to guard the feeble steps of the Holy Child, and aided Mary in teaching all that belonged to Him as man. He who had given the first lesson of humility by keeping silence when an Infant in the manger, now by degrees utters from His lips the words which will give glory to God on high, and on earth peace to men of good will. Let us not fear to watch with

Joseph His mysterious weakness ; it is the mystery of the two natures of our Lord, which is so great that it has separated from the Church many who dared to question it. Rather let us glory in the perfection of His weakness, for it is the greatest, perhaps, of all the miracles in the Redemption ; so that a saint might well say there is only one thing wonderful—the Incarnation.

‘Puer crescebat’—so thoroughly did the childhood of our Blessed Lord resemble that of other children, that the Jews remarked no difference. The paternal care of Joseph must also have resembled that of fathers, for it is God who has poured into the hearts of all fathers such a wise and watchful care, such a brave and tender love, such unwearied efforts to make their sons men as perfect as themselves. If we add to this natural gift of paternal instinct all the amount of what Joseph had received by grace and by inspiration, we shall approach, though we cannot fathom, the depth, height, and extent of love, the awe and increasing wonder, and the joy, beyond even his own knowledge, which filled the heart of Joseph as he saw the Son of Man increase in all that belonged to Him as man. How wonderful is the concealment of the mystery ! Not one among his brothers, the sons of the sister of Mary, believed that He was the Christ. ‘Neque enim fratres ejus credebant in eo’ (John vii. 5). Not even the suspicious Pharisees and scoffing Sadducees thought that He had Another, and not Joseph, for His Father; and

they brought it afterwards as an evidence against His being Messiah.

We know what is the training of a Christian child to whom the grace of God has been given by baptism ; we know what it is to cherish the supernatural virtues of meekness and humility, obedience and charity ; we know what it is to join the little hands in prayer, and teach the lips to utter holy words, and guide the steps to the altar of God ; and we know that this is education. Not the fierce struggle with passions which ought to have been met when they first troubled the baptismal grace of childhood ; not the stimulus to intellectual labours, and the painful excitement of emulation for ‘the battle of the world ;’ but to stand by while the guileless experience of childhood is gained ; while the eyes still turn for direction to the parent, and the hands loosen their grasp of the beloved toy in slumber ; to stand by while the deep thought is not spoken by the lisping tongue, but lies deep in the intelligent eyes, and while the child yet beholds the world without prejudice and without desire. If earthly parents thus watch over their children with a sense of their own unfitness to guide these movements of baptismal grace, with what awe, mingled with admiration, must the Holy Child have been adored by Joseph and Mary—he the perfection of a father, and she full of grace !

'Remansit puer Jesus in Jerusalem, et non cognoverunt parentes ejus.'

In considering the great mystery of the loss of Christ, the same difficulty again presents itself. As to Joseph, we do not know how much he was inspired and how much was natural, and the safest course seems to take only the external actions and the persons, and to judge of what was interior by what passes in the minds of other saints and holy persons, according to their own testimony and example, leaving in the hands of God the secrets of His inspiration.

The infancy of our Lord had been afflicted by poverty and persecution, but the peace of the Holy Family had never been disturbed, for nothing external could interrupt the exercise of all that was good, in the natural and supernatural gifts bestowed on Joseph and on Mary; and no human calculation may attain their amount, when they were received by both with an entire correspondence; for Mary was full of grace, and Joseph was just; and, as has been said, in the holy Scriptures the word 'just,' according to St. Alphonso, signifies all perfection. And yet this peace must be broken—the sword must not only pierce the heart of Mary but of Joseph. Our Lord said He came to give peace, but not as the world gives peace, with persecutions. The way of the Cross is the only way to heaven. Sorrow here, and joy hereafter. There must be sorrow even at Nazareth; the pure gold must be re-

fined in the fire, and the myrrh crushed that it may give out its perfume. The treasure cannot be guarded without anxiety ; not the anxiety of faithless men, but the anxiety of those who fear to lose the gift of God.

Yet one trial seemed improbable ; the very one allotted to them seemed the most unlikely—that they should lose sight of Him who was their All, and that He should escape from them. Such innocence and retirement, guarded by poverty, seemed secure from such a calamity, which would seem to belong rather to those who are agitated by strange adventures and living in perils. Yet it occurred to Joseph in the course of his duties ; and among these it was the performance of the duty of going up every year to worship at Jerusalem, which was enjoined by the law on every male. He took the Child Jesus with him when He was twelve years old. ‘Ibant parentes ejus per omnes annos in Jerusalem in die solemnii Paschæ,’ and also, as the commentary says, on the two other feasts on which all males were obliged by the law of Moses to pay their vows in the Temple. ‘Et cum factus esset annorum duodecim, ascendentibus illis Jerusalem, secundum consuetudinem diei festi. Remansit puer Jesus in Jerusalem, et non cogeraverunt parentes ejus.’

This was quite probable ; for in these holy pilgrimages it was customary for the men and women to form separate companies, and to perform pious exercises on the way. Jesus at His tender age might be in either of these companies, and tradition tells us that His pre-

sence brought with it a divine sweetness and joy, and that his kinsfolk and acquaintance, though they knew not what that Presence was, yet were delighted to possess it. All approached with awe the presence of Almighty God in the sanctuary. This Presence was as powerful to attract, yet its sweetness took away fear. But that Presence, dear beyond all to Joseph and Mary, was lost. It is not possible for us to imagine the intensity of pain at the first suspicion of the loss, and the agony when the loss became a certainty. While it was yet possible that He might be found with His kinsfolk the pang was harassing, but it was bearable, and hope often cast out fear by the thought that the Divine Presence is not always sensible, and that the joy of seeing God continually is reserved for heaven. But as Joseph searched, he became more convinced that this was an unwonted absence; and then arose an interior trial, which has occurred to many saints, thus: his humility was alarmed; he knew that he was unworthy of the high office intrusted to him, and he feared that this was a chastisement for some negligence. The consciousness of his high office came on him as it had never done before. He was the director of the Holy Family, and had he displeased the heavenly visitor, or, most terrible of all suspicions, had he offended God Himself, who had chosen him for his office, by an unworthy fulfilment of it? Had he been occupied by his labour, and had he not enough contemplated the Holy Child while he was increasing in wisdom and stature,

and in favour with God and man? Could he have been distracted, or faint-hearted, or impatient, and had the Heavenly Child left him in deserved displeasure? The fear of having offended God is unbearable, and those who love Him are not safe from it; even the Psalmist cried, 'Cleanse Thou me from my secret faults'; and St. Paul, though his conscience did not accuse him, yet knew not whether he was worthy of love or hatred. The humility of Joseph had increased with his sanctity, and though his conscience did not reproach him, yet he was ready to believe that God had found him unfit for his office, and had taken it away for ever. But his fear was without trouble—his bitterness was in peace. That profound submission to God, which is the characteristic of the saints, held the centre of his soul, and though all else was overwhelmed with anguish, he ceased not to abandon himself to God, whose mercy is equal to His justice. 'Though He slay me,' said Job, 'yet will I trust in Him.' His consciousness recurred ever to the dreadful truth. He, the depositor of the most tremendous of secrets, he had lost his sacred charge, the Desire of all nations, the Hope of Israel. Which way could he turn under such a weight of suffering? Who could share or console his grief? Even Mary herself could only grieve with him, but not like him, for his was the grief of responsibility. Never in all the trials of man could there be so great or soul-subduing a sorrow. Mary increased rather than assuaged his grief. He saw her

sorrow ; perhaps he was the cause of it ; and he plunged himself still deeper in annihilation at the thought of his own unworthiness. Still he does not lose courage or sink into despair. St. Francis says true humility is accompanied with generosity ; and he uses every means to recover what he has lost, if it be God's will. He seeks Him sorrowing, with tears which purify his holy soul, and anguish which refines it in the crucible of suffering.

Joseph is the model of souls who lose Jesus, for all lose him at times ; some by mortal sin, and these must weep tears of bitterness till they find Him in the temple at the feet of the priest in the tribunal of penance. And pious souls lose Him in prayer, and they become dry and distracted in reading, and it brings no light nor comfort ; holy Communion does not seem to restore Him.

It is related by Butler that an Abbot of Rievaux, in a sermon on losing the Holy Child, says that His behaviour to His parents is the same which leads Him to withdraw Himself for a time from us, that we may seek Him the more earnestly. Our Lord has many ways of escaping us, as we read in spiritual books. Sometimes He withdraws, not grace itself, but some special graces, or the consciousness of them. He escapes when He wills. His Spirit comes and goes like the wind, and none knows whence it comes nor whither it goes. The sea is motionless till the wind arises, so is the soul helpless without grace. He goes when He

will through the midst of those who would lay hold of Him. He was with them, but He is gone, they know not how ; they are in darkness and trouble, and they know no more. But Joseph teaches them what to do. We must humble ourselves like him ; we must acknowledge that we deserve it ; and this generously, and not in proud despondency.

It is Mary who describes his grief and his exertions. ‘Pater et ego dolentes quærebamus te.’ Such are the heroic souls who are called to follow Christ. Those of less faith and less humility and love would have despaired, or died of grief. If their souls had contemplated themselves, not Him, the self-consciousness must have been fatal. Those who love less grieve for themselves ; but they loved Him only, and grieved only for Him, and He made their grief bearable, for He whom they sought was watching over them, and supported them, though they knew not He was there.

‘Invenerunt eum in Templo.’

It was in the fulfilment of a religious duty that the trial had come ; and it was in the temple that the trial was removed : so it was with St. Iranus, when in his devotion he feared for his salvation, and recovered his peace before an image of our Lady. But who can comprehend the joy of Joseph when he found the Child, and knew that He had not remained behind them in displeasure ? We can only guess it by the joy of those ordinary men who are freed from the

fear of having displeased God. So much were they emboldened by their holy ecstasy, that Mary dared to question Him. 'Fili quid fecesti nobis? Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing.' O, mystery of divine love, that the soul whose life hangs on the breath of God should take upon her, like Abraham, to plead with God, and that He should answer her, 'How is it that ye sought Me?' as He answered the complaint of His disciples, 'It is good for you that I go away.'

Joseph had in one sense suffered more than Mary at the loss of Jesus,—'Iristabatur ab humilitate,'—because he thought himself unworthy of having such a treasure confided to him; and in the same sense his joy must have been far greater, because he had feared.

CHAPTER VIII.

HIDDEN LIFE OF ST. JOSEPH.

'Et mater ejus conservabat omnia verba hæc in corde sue.'

IT is in the heart that mysteries are received and understood ; the lips may speak, and the ear may hear, but the heart alone can understand by time and meditation. But did not Joseph consider ? It is of Mary only that the Scriptures were to speak. He knew from the first that Jesus was the Christ ; but this was far from enough. He had to learn His office and His Father's work, and he was astonished at the consequences of what he believed ; and this is the characteristic of His teaching—at first a new and startling revelation, which, like the seed, grows and brings forth fruit according to the measures and weights of the heavenly balances. For eighteen years that growth went on, and all that time '*Jesus proficiebat sapientia et ætate et gratia apud Deum et homines.*' These words must be meditated by each ; none can realise them for another. We are told that they believed His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten Son of God, full of grace and truth.

Our Lord taught Mary and Joseph, not by words, but by deeds. As Man, He increased in all perfection of mind and body, and His graces found favour with God, and even with man. Joseph beheld His immaculate innocence, His charity, His humility, and above all, His obedience.

‘Nonne hic est faber, filius Mariæ?’ *Mark vi. 3.*

We learn from other passages of the Evangelists several particulars of the life of Christ. He worked in the shop of Joseph; for people said when He began to preach, ‘Is not this the carpenter?’ and in the first ages of the Church there was a tradition of the ploughs which Jesus made. He received no human learning, for when He began to preach in the synagogue of Nazareth—‘Ubi erat nutritus, et intravit secundum consuetudinem suam diei sabbate in synagogam et surrexit legere’—they said, ‘How came this Man by all these things? How could He learn letters? Was not this the Son of Mary, the brother—that is, the cousin-german—of James, and Joseph, and John, and Simeon; and are not His sisters also with us?’ And they were right. Joseph could not teach our Lord His unanswerable reasoning and persuasive preaching; these were the emanations from the divine wisdom which dwelt within that second Adam of our nature.

The prophet foretold that He should be modest and gentle, not letting His voice be heard, not contending, or crying out in the streets, subject to His parents,

meek and humble, and the joy of all who knew Him ; so that St. Ephrem said, ' His companions used to say, " Let us go to Sweetness." ' What must have been the gentleness of Joseph in such an atmosphere of divine love ? for Jesus was in the midst of the Holy Family, illuminating each member as from a sun of light and heat, while He Himself, who is Light, was veiled by His charity.

' Jesus proficiebat sapientia et estate.'

It is said of the Holy Child, after He was brought back from Egypt to Nazareth, *Puer crescebat*; and after His return from the Temple, *Puer proficiebat*. As a child, He was strengthened—' confortebatur'—until the age when His human nature made progress by that correspondence with the Will of God which united His Soul with His divinity. But this is a mystery too deep for contemplation. We only know that the human nature of our Lord was capable of increase as well as of suffering and death ; but in Him was from the first the fulness of grace, and as Bossuet says, ' the increase was not in the possession of grace and of wisdom, but in His manifestation of them ; as the Church manifests the faith intrusted to her at the first by successive declarations of its mysteries, according as mankind required a fuller teaching. His human nature passed through all the stages of life, that He might teach the virtues of all conditions.

It is a great revelation that ' *Puer proficiebat*. '

Jesus, full of divine perfection, improved the human nature He had taken by developing as well as manifesting its faculties. As that sinless body had grown towards the fulness of manly excellence, so had that perfect soul, finer and purer than that of Adam when created in the image of God, attained by degrees its force and its extent. And Joseph must have watched with loving awe that sanctity increasing more and more unto the perfect day, which men learn slowly—‘here a little, and there a little.’

‘*Et gratia apud Deum et homines*,’—‘In favour with God and men.’ *Luc.* ii. 52.

It seems as if the sacred historian gave in these few words a description of the house at Nazareth to be the model of all Christian families. We see the ineffable purity of Mary’s life detached from the world and from all that belongs to it. We see the Holy Child increasing like the souls who were hereafter to be born of Him, of whom the Psalmist said, ‘I will appear before Thy sight in justice: I shall be satisfied when Thy glory shall appear.’ ‘*Et homines*.’ The first stages of grace are lovely even to the natural feelings of man. The charity which unites the soul to God unites it also to all His creatures. The joy of her espousal is fresh; there has been yet no mixture of what belongs to earth, and there are some, even in this rough world, who preserve their baptismal innocence, or at least the sweetness and the perfume of its grace. There is a panoply

around them like the legendary charm which made the champions of the cross invulnerable, and even the shafts of slander touch them not. The Fall has not so entirely destroyed the image in which man was made. There is a natural admiration of what is good, until it interferes with the selfish principles, and the worst and fiercest natures have seldom lost the tenderness with which it is natural to look at a child, or even on an innocent and gentle person, until sin has ranged them among the enemies of God and all that is good. If Jesus found favour among men, what must He have appeared to Joseph? We can only measure great things by small.

The Blessed Virgin was the Tabernacle of the most Holy, and no shadow of sin could touch her or obscure the reflection of His brightness. Joseph was the mysterious cloud which veiled from profane eyes the mystery of the Incarnation. St. Francis says our Lady belonged to him; he was like the male palm-tree, which bears no fruit, yet must overshadow the fruit of the female palm, and she was planted near him like the spouse in the Canticles. 'Sicut palma exultata sum in Cades.' The palm-tree is the type of Judæa, even on the coin of Vespasian, in which a disconsolate woman sits under a palm-tree. The Psalmist (xcii. 12) says the righteous is like the palm-tree planted beside the waters, as they are planted on the banks of Jordan and nourished by its sacred waters, so that Jericho was called the city of palms. The palm was especially the

type of our Lady. Joseph was a saint before his espousal, much more, says St. Alphonso, when he was the spouse of her who was full of grace and whose office is to dispense grace; and St. Francis compares his growth in perfection to the mirror which reflects not the sun itself, but the reflection of the sun on that most pure mirror our Lady, on whom the rays of glory proceeding from the Son of God fell with full radiance and reverberated on St. Joseph.

If a life spent with Mary would sanctify Joseph, what must have been the heavenly influences of the presence of our Lord! Volumes have been written on visits to the Blessed Sacrament; but Joseph beheld Jesus. He spoke to Him and heard His answers. Others may hear His inspirations with the interior ear, but Joseph heard with his bodily ears His answers to his questions. His eyes are, as the Scriptures express it, the light of His countenance, and were turned on Joseph. The whole being of Joseph absorbed into itself the visible and tangible Presence which, when perceived by faith only, has power to raise the saints into ecstasy. How do we behave in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament? and what must have been the life of Joseph while he spoke and moved and laboured, while he ate and drank and slept, in the visible presence of God? Those who attend on kings know the personal influence of a mere earthly sovereign, and what must have been that Presence which found favour with God and man. Yet let us remember that

when the woman cried out in rapture, 'Blessed is the womb that bare Thee,' our Lord replied that those are more blessed who hear the Word of God, and keep it; and that He said to St. Thomas, 'Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed.'

The external actions of St. Joseph were the same before and after the angel's revelations. He had still to labour, and now he must labour for a family; but what a family! It is said by à Lapide that his actions, in contributing to the support of Christ, related to the order of hypostatic union, and were therefore inconceivably superior to any others. If the kingdom of Heaven will be the reward of those who serve Christ in the person of the poor, what will He give to him to whom He can say literally, I was hungry, and you gave Me meat!

'Et erat subditus illis.'

St. Bernard says that Joseph was the 'fidelis servus et prudens quem constituit Dominus sua matris solatium.' Joseph worked at his trade in his own cottage. Mary performed the duties of the house, and aided Joseph. Jesus worked with him, swept the shop, sold the work, and carried the tools. He obeyed His Mother and His father also. What an intercourse between the Mother and Son! She full of grace, the only one, the chosen one of God, and He God Himself. She commanded, and He obeyed. She adored His person while she fulfilled her office, and Joseph filled his;

for he held an office the most tremendous ever trusted to man. But weak and ignorant rulers often command saints. He knew what his office was, and had fortitude to perform it. It would be an error to think that the life of St. Joseph had no trials. If there is one suffering greater than another to those in command, it is to feel inferior to those who obey them. Elizabeth felt shame that the Mother of her Lord should visit her; and St. John cried out, 'Comest Thou to me?' St. Peter refused when Christ would wash his feet. Yet Joseph commanded Jesus! St. Alphonso says, if it was wonderful to see Joshua command the sun to stand still, and the sun obey the voice of a man, what was it for Joseph to command the Son of God? It was revealed to St. Bridget, that when St. Joseph said, Do this or that, He heeded it immediately; and Gerson says that He prepared the meals, and washed the vessels, and carried water from the spring, and washed the house. Overbeck has represented our Lord in one of his pictures as sweeping the chips of wood into the form of a cross.

We do not hear of Joseph pleading his unworthiness to fill his office of command, and our Lady immediately said, 'Ecce ancilla Domine!' St. John the Baptist pleaded, but yielded. This is true humility. Not only the sense of unworthiness, but the confidence in God, are to make us what He wills. Sarah was reproved for laughing, and Ahab for refusing to ask a sign, as though he mistrusted the power of God to use

so vile an instrument as himself. But it is sometimes said of Joseph that he did as he was commanded ; sometimes only the fact is recorded, leaving his acquiescence to be understood. *Subditus illis*; and this may be said of our Lord in the Holy Eucharist. He is with us in the Tabernacle, or He is raised up on the altar. He is exposed, that He may listen to our wants and give us Benediction ; and what is He when He enters within us by Holy Communion ? We almost shrink with St. Peter to think of ourselves when we are made one with Him ; that He is in a manner *subditus* !

And this is the last that is told us of St. Joseph. His life at Nazareth was thenceforth hidden. It was so obscure, that only his poor fellow-villagers knew of his existence ; and this oblivion appears to the worldly not only death, but the silence of the tomb. The heathens thought that a name and the memory of past deeds was a sort of immortality, so that obscurity was to them a burying alive in the midst of living men. And there is in man an ardour for action, which is the life of the natural man ; it is the spring which moves the complicated machinery of mind ; and there is an instinct, strongest in the noblest men, to use their strength in doing or in suffering. And men of weaker minds rush about the world from excitement, without an object, yet they can only be in one place at a time, and movement gives succession, not possession. They see and hear only a certain amount ; they live in plenty,

and consume only the daily bread. Even in spiritual things men misuse their activity ; they seek the Lord at a distance, while they fly from Him in the midst of them and within them.

This hidden life, says Bossuet, is thought death by men, and they dread it ; life, they say, is action, and he who does not act ceases to live. But there is an interior action, though the world knows it not, nor believes that there is action unless the body moves. Bossuet says that the obscurity in which our Lord passed thirty years was in order to destroy the pride of man. He can do nothing. God does all. Thus it is that the hidden life of St. Joseph is opposed to the pride of the world. Men only observe actions ; the hidden life is beyond their reach, like death. He says again, the Cross is not enough even to conquer pride, but the hidden life destroys it. Christ Himself is still hidden in our tabernacles, and our lives are hid with Christ in God. We too are hidden. But when He appears, we shall appear with Him in glory, and know even as we are known.

The love of a hidden life and death will only come by degrees, as souls begin to discover that it is not really an obscure life and an ignoble death. These are views of faith which are learnt more by the study of the contrary than by a bare assertion that a hidden life is amiable. It is not amiable, unless we see that what appears hidden and useless is really glorious, active, and useful ; and when we learn to apply this truth to

life, it is still easier to apply it to death, which is only the door to life, the raising of the veil, the beginning of reality, the attainment of that for which we live. We live for God and for our sanctification ; we die to arrive at God and eternal beatitude. And this led to the distinction of vocations ; to the active and the contemplative life. It is not true that material change alone is action, and that the repose of the body is inaction. St. Gregory from his sick bed ruled the world ; and so the soul, when all the avenues of sense are closed, may rise to heaven, and range in thought through creation. The memory and intellect cannot be bounded by material things.

There are two vocations of God to man, the contemplative and the active, the life of Mary or of Martha. Thus, says Bossuet, there was one vocation to Joseph and one to the Apostles ; they were a light to reveal, and Joseph was a veil to conceal, Him who was the Saviour of souls, and her who was the Immaculate Virgin full of grace. Joseph was a hidden saint, and fulfilled his vocation.

Men live in the past and future ; the realisation of the present ought to be the perfection of sanctity. Even the philosopher said, 'Age quod ages,' and no one can calculate the value of the least action done by Joseph, as he did it, and for whom ; and when we are told that one action of our Blessed Lady exceeded in perfection those of all the angels and saints, we may consider the hidden life of Joseph as entirely beyond

our comprehension. He knew the mystery of Christ, he knew of Mary, and he told nothing of them, nor of himself. Joseph was the veil which hid the mystery of the Immaculate Conception and of the Incarnation : his was greatness without fame, happiness without display, glory without praise. 'Gloria mea testimonium conscientiae' (1 Cor.). When the Lord sought for Himself a man according to His own heart (1 Kings xiii. 14), and Samuel chose a king among the sons of Jesse, David was unknown even in his own family. The prophet passed by the strong, the comely, and the brave, and chose the gentle shepherd of Israel. Such was Joseph, the son of David. He was called to fill the highest office ever intrusted to man ; not to be the leader of God's chosen people, but that of guardian or steward of the mysteries of God ; and his graces were simplicity and detachment, and love of hidden life. The virtues which men esteem are those which are active and relate to man, and they neither seek nor understand the hidden virtues, where all that passes is between man and God ; and yet in them the chief good is found. Joseph bore no office in the sight of men, but he was 'glorious in the secret devotion to God, all hidden in the privacy of his conscience.' Joseph was just, and justice or righteousness is between man and God alone—God and man **ALONE**—and none can judge of it but God : it is a mystery profaned by revealing it to any who know not its secret. Our Lord bade us shut the door when we pray, that our prayer may be

in secret; and the Psalmist prayed that he might abide under the shadow of His wings.

And this was Joseph's life, without event or change even to the last; a living death as regards the world, but life in the sight of God. He lived with Christ and Mary; he worked, he moved, he spoke all day and every day in His sight; his one thought was of Him. We are often told that sanctity consists not in doing great things, but in doing little things perfectly. We know that each action must have a right intention, and be faithfully performed for the love of God and man, and that its sole merit consists in this obedience. Men value actions by another standard, that of their utility. This leaves out every other qualification but that of interest. The victories of a conqueror, or the politics of a statesman, are as nothing in the sight of God if they are deficient in obedience; and the most ordinary acts of Joseph surpassed them all. It was no routine of trifles when he rose up to work, to eat with his family, to converse with them, and rest with them; for who were the persons? Christ and Mary. He was familiar with the presence of Jesus; he comes and goes, he hears and knows the mind of Jesus. All this is the material form of all spiritual life, and these things are not trifles.

Many, like the rich man, ask 'what they shall do to inherit eternal life; but all are not told like him to sell their possessions. Joseph attained the height of sanctity in the most ordinary external circumstances.

St. John Baptist was at that very time living in the desert. Born as he was, according to promise, not to nature, cleansed from sin in his mother's womb by the visit of Mary to Elizabeth, he was inspired, when he was seven years old, to leave his father's house and remain in the desert mountains of Judea, eating the honey which the wild bees lay up in the rocks, and dwelling in a cave on the side of a mountain under a wood of locust trees, whose fruit was his food, though the olives grew in the valley below, and the vines grew on the surrounding hills. He drank of the spring which flows from the rocks, and travellers yet see the ledge of stone on which he slept. There he dwelt alone in the sight of God and angels till he was inspired to leave the woody valley and the lofty mountain for the wilderness of Jordan, not near the palm-trees and the balsam of Jericho, but a sandy plain, where only willows and barren tamarisks shade the sacred waters. There, girt with a camel's skin, dwelt the first of ascetics and of hermits. He preached repentance, and all Jerusalem came out to hear him. It was like the preaching of Jonah at Ninive ; and our Lord afterwards said of him that 'there was none greater than him among those born of women.'

It was at that very time that Joseph was leading a secular life in the greatest obscurity as a carpenter in the remote village of Nazareth. He only left it to make a yearly visit to Jerusalem. He had no work but his trade, and few knew him ; yet he was guided

in this ordinary life by visions of angels, and he filled the duties of his office as a just man.

Bossuet says of our Lord Himself, ‘Look at the Divine Carpenter; He handles the saw and the plane; His tender hands are hardened with rough tools; He does not hold the “pencil of a painter nor the pen of a writer;” He works with His hands the will of God, and while all Jerusalem came out to hear the preaching of John, He whose shoe he was unworthy to lift was in His workshop in His native town, labouring for the support of His Mother.’ And all this may be said in a degree of Joseph, who not only did this himself, but commanded his Lord to do so also.

CHAPTER IX.

THE HIDDEN DEATH OF ST. JOSEPH.

‘The Son of Mary—the Carpenter.’

JOSEPH is not mentioned here, and from this Bossuet infers that he was already dead, and that Jesus supported His widowed Mother by His labour. Mary was alone at the marriage of Cana, and alone at the Cross, for He left her in the charge of John. Joseph must have died in the arms of Jesus and Mary. Joseph had waited long to see the accomplishment of the mystery confided to his keeping, and he died, like Abraham, without seeing it. Like Moses on Mount Abarim, he saw the promised land afar, but entered not in. We are told that the monks of Citeaux were a living image of the life and death of man. It is said in the life of St. Stephen Harding, that they went forth to labour in the fields, and returned each night, leaving their work unfinished, to lie down and sleep. So did Joseph, and so does the Christian who looks for his reward, not for his success, but his obedience.

As the life of Joseph was hidden, so was his death.

St. Francis says that St. Joseph died like Mary, from the pure love of God ; ‘that intense desire of the soul to behold Him from whom she is an exile on earth ; that desire which is the punishment of those who are separated from Him for ever.’

Our Blessed Lady and a few chosen saints, among whom is St. Joseph, died from love of God ; not only with that love which ‘is stronger than death,’ nor even that love which so overflows the soul that, notwithstanding the agonies of that awful moment, the soul is so strong in the habit of love, that forgetting pain it quits the body in the act of love. But his was a love so intense that weak nature could no longer bear its violence, and the effort of love itself, tending towards its divine object, broke the bonds that confine the soul within the prison of this body, and set it free to plunge itself in the immensity of God. This was Joseph’s death. Yet it had a resemblance to that of other men ; so that they may look to him as an especial patron in the hour when they expect to pass through a space awful from its mysterious obscurity, where they must wait with a longing, which is its greatest torment, before they reach eternal bliss. Joseph knew that the gates of heaven, closed in chastisement of Adam’s sin, were not yet opened ; and that he must suffer long years of suspense before he could behold his Creator ; nay, more ; he must leave Jesus upon earth, and exchange His blessed presence for Abraham’s bosom. But his soul, like that of David, was subject to God, and

we may look on him as our model and patron, not only in his life, but in his death.

At first sight, the death of a saint absorbed in an ecstasy of love scarcely seems a model to us, who can only offer the natural horror of death as a sacrifice and a penance. But though Joseph had attained to a sanctity which might free him from that fear of the justice of God which torments the soul in death, yet he owed his graces to the merits of his Redeemer as much, if not more than the greatest of sinners. He had only corresponded with them, not repaid them ; and he, with all his treasures of sanctity, died, trusting only in the mercies of God and the merits of Christ, saying, like the most imperfect among ourselves,

‘*Misericordias Domine in æternum cantabo.*’

CHAPTER X.

HEROIC VIRTUES OF ST. JOSEPH.

ST. FRANCIS DE SALES, in his Conferences, writes on the virtues of St. Joseph, and this might seem enough. But he beholds him with the eyes of a saint ; as when St. Thomas beheld St. Bonaventure in his cell, writing the life of St. Francis while in ecstasy ; and he, though a saint himself, said, ‘Leave a saint to write the life of a saint.’ Yet others wrote, and with profit, the life of the Seraphic Father ; and we, on whom the ends of the world are really come, may think, and read, and write of St. Joseph as we see him with human eyes, when he was a mere mortal like ourselves. St. Francis says, ‘Some saints are great in charity, and some in austerity, there being as many different sanctities as there are saints ;’ and he illustrates the virginity, humility, and constancy of St. Joseph by the palm-tree ; ‘for the Holy Ghost makes us sing at the feast of a confessor, “The just is like the palm-tree,” which is the emblem of *constancy*, for it neither bends nor breaks. So St. Joseph was bold in danger, and patient

in delay' (p. 307). 'What must have been his *humility*, when he kept that dear Child in his workshop' (p. 301); 'his pure *virginity*, when he guarded that of the Queen of Virgins ; and his *perseverance* against internal weakness, and against outward accidents?' (p. 308.)

The same gifts of the Holy Ghost which descended upon the Apostles, to fill them with powers for their mission, imparted to Joseph gifts in proportion to the transcendent greatness of his office—angelic purity, singular prudence, heroic fortitude, unbounded patience, unshaken constancy, seraphic love of God, and intense affection for his Immaculate Spouse ; virtues becoming him who was appointed to relieve the 'famine in Egypt,' to preserve the Bread which came down from heaven to be the food of man. The dream of the Patriarch was fulfilled in the Saint. The stars adore him, that is, the blessed spirits reverence him, as it was revealed to St. Gertrude ; and what wonder, since the sun and moon bowed down before him ? Jesus, the Sun of justice, and Mary the Immaculate Mother of God, not only honoured, but obeyed him.

The faith of St. Joseph was simple, like his justice. He did not hesitate, says Bossuet, between reason and revelation—he acted in blind obedience. Abraham believed that the barren would bear a son ; and Joseph that a Virgin should conceive, and bear a son. His faith was more tried, and more complete. In his own simplicity and uprightness he believed the word of an

angel ; in all simplicity he received the office of a father. The father's love was impossible by nature, but he had it by grace. His faith failed not when he saw the Christ in the weakness of an infancy which was left to all appearance destitute of help from His Heavenly Father. This was more trying to the faith than when at the crucifixion Mary beheld the human nature of our Lord fail, because He was then visibly supported by the Divine nature ; as when He said, 'Thou wouldest have no power if it were not given thee from above.' And his faith failed not when the Magi were saved from Herod by going another way ; nor when the angel bade him fly by night, and then return, not because of God, but because his enemies were dead. And when he felt with Mary the grief of the three days' loss, his faith failed not in Christ, nor in God the Father, who had sent Him to redeem the world.

The Faith of St. Joseph. Nazareth was perhaps a greater trial to the faith of Joseph than Bethlehem, or Egypt, or Jerusalem. We naturally long for action ; we count the moments of delay and suspense till the passive state becomes a positive agony. How would an ordinary man have borne to see so much evil going on around ; the Jews worldly, the heathens proud and triumphant ; to see the people for whom Christ was born, die without knowing Him ; to see the Son of God as though He were deserted by His Heavenly Father, and given over to a poor carpenter, whose name it was a disgrace to bear ? 'Nonne hic est faber filius ?' Yet he

was patient, and left to the mercy of God the pending souls, the crimes of the heathen, the weary waiting of the Jews. The emperors went on with their wars and conquests ; soldiers, officers, governors, war, peace, all going on with noise and public interest, such as it seemed would never pass away, while the Saviour of all was labouring in the carpenter's shop. And this trial of faith lasted through his life. He died without seeing any fulfilment of God's word. He left all in God's hands. He saw not the end of these things, but he lived and died in faith, in hope, and in love.

The Humility of St. Joseph. If ever there was heroic humility, it was in Joseph. He saw Christ, and was silent. He rejoiced like Abraham to see this day. Prophets and kings had desired to see it ; he saw it, and concealed his joy. He knew it is the glory of God to conceal His word, and the glory of kings to search out his speech (Prov. xxv. 2). Joseph spoke to none but Jesus and Mary. He preferred to be hidden with them rather than to be known to the world. He preferred the portion of those who follow Christ, who are not of the world, though they are in the world. Bossuet says much on the humility of Joseph. Three great charges were intrusted to him : the Virginity of Mary, the Person of Christ, and the Secret of the Incarnation, which St. Bernard calls 'secretissimum et sacratissimum sui cordis arcanum.' Yet he concealed them all, not only in the obscurity of his hidden life, but in the daily intercourse with his countrymen, who despised

him as a carpenter, and thought that 'no good thing could come out of Nazareth.'

The detachment of St. Joseph was perfect. Abraham left his country, St. Joseph left his home. He was detached from interest ; he left his trade, and spent all he had in wandering homeless with Christ, and was persecuted for His sake and because he was with Him, knowing that he was truly rich and abounded, because in Him he possessed everything. He was detached from establishment, knowing that we have none here ; for God has prepared us a city with foundations, and we leave Babylon for Zion. God gives us homes to rest in, but we are pilgrims ; we pass through the desert, and use its pools for water. We honour our parents, yet if we hate them not for Christ's sake, when duty calls us from them, we are not worthy of Him ; and whoever gives up relations for His sake will be doubly rewarded. The simplicity of St. Joseph was the same as his justice. He was upright with men, and also with God. He did not serve two masters. His obedience was simple, trusting, and fearless. If the master of the family had hesitated whether or not he should obey the decree of Augustus, on account of the danger it would be to his guardianship of Mary, what would have been the result ? He went against reason and judgment, against everything but obedience, though the command was given by the mouth of a heathen ; and, again, when they had performed all things according to the law of Moses, they returned to Nazareth.

And this is all that the Scriptures tell us of St. Joseph. Yet St. Ambrose, in his sermon on the third Sunday in Lent, has placed him among the saints whose life is a model for all. He says, 'We read of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and other just men, in order that we may, by imitating their footsteps, follow in the path of innocence laid open by their virtue. In the life of Joseph there are many kinds of virtues, and chiefly conspicuous is that of chastity. From Abraham we learn unflinching truth, from Isaac the simplicity of an honest mind, from Jacob we learn patience in labour. St. Joseph may be to us the mirror of chastity, for which he was loved by his parents above his brethren. The envy excited by this love is the point of his history from which we learn forgiveness of injuries. Joseph would not have been preferred to others if he had loved those only who loved him, and hated his enemies. He is chiefly remarkable for obeying what our Lord taught, though he lived before the gospel, for he loved his enemies, according to the command of our Lord.'

There is one important circumstance to be observed before considering the life of St. Joseph. It is that the knowledge of him and of his office, and the devotion towards him, has gone on increasing. The Holy Scriptures are almost silent about him, except so far as he took a part in the history of our Lord. Nor is his name mentioned in the age which followed that of the Apostles. And there is a natural reason why we should, as time goes on, know more about St. Joseph.

We understand things better when they are past. As those who had seen the Lord did not understand His words till long after, so, when we contemplate the history of Him and His saints, our eyes seem to be opened to understand the Scriptures, like the disciples at Emmaus when our Lord was leaving them. Not long after the apostolic age, the devotion to St. Joseph began to appear, and it has gone on increasing in extent though not in intensity ; for nothing can be said of him now which exceeds the language of the early Saints and Fathers of the Church. Perhaps the veil which appears to hang over St. Joseph in early days is a part of that wisdom which makes the Church suit her form of devotion to the character and requirements of the times, and which caused her to conceal from the multitude the excellences and sublime prerogatives of our Lady, lest they should in their ignorance forget that she was not only the Mother of Jesus, but the Mother of God, or lest their idolatrous habits should lead them to worship a creature of such surpassing excellence. But as time went on a new danger arose, and men in the pride of their intellect forgot that Jesus was not only true God, but true Man. Then the privileges of Mary were brought out in a stronger light, that it might be seen how our human nature can be elevated by a new creation ; and the Church taught her faithful children to dwell on the rank she holds in the great mystery of the Redemption, in that God had chosen a woman to crush the serpent's head ; and that

she was Immaculate, because sin is so hateful to Him, that if the least shadow of it had passed over her, she could not have been His Mother; nor could the propitiation of the Cross have atoned for its malice if the Sacrifice had not been of stainless descent as man, as well as perfect as God. All this was not brought before the minds of men till they could bear it, and till it was necessary to their belief in the doctrine of the Incarnation. The knowledge of St. Joseph's office and power naturally followed. Perhaps St. Jerome was the first, and St. Bernard the next, in explaining the full sense of the Scriptures on the subject of St. Joseph. And when the heresy which raised human reason above grace had carried away three parts of the world into revolt against the authority of the Church, St. Teresa, who was especially raised up to stem the torrent by her prayers, was taught by God the greatness of St. Joseph's power, and the place he holds in the economy of grace. St. Teresa learnt much of him in her own simple way, and tells us how she was led to be the instrument of increasing the devotion to St. Joseph, not only in her Order, but throughout the Church. And she bears witness to the power of his intercession, and to his patronage of those who endeavour like him to lead an interior life with Christ. And there has been a chain of holy writers on the subject. Gerson wrote the life of St. Joseph in twelve poems called *Josephina*; St. Francis de Sales enumerates his several virtues; and we have the panegyrics of Bossuet, and the meditations

of St. Alphonso, on the supernatural virtues of the Saint; while year by year we listen to the teaching of the Church upon his festivals. Let us not say, then, that we know little of St. Joseph; but rather, with full trust in his powerful intercession, end our meditations as we began, with

Sancte Joseph, ora pro nobis.

THE END.

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