



The Virgin and the Doves.

(See frontispiece)



It was in Egypt during the exile of the Holy Family. The Blessed Virgin was seated under a palm-tree, near a fountain, at the entrance to Memphis, weaving a seamless tunic for her little Son.

Jesus, who had only attained his fourth year at Christmas, was playing, quite close to her, with children of his own age; his fair skin and pretty golden ringlets enhanced, by contrast with the swarthinness of those dusky denizens of African soil, and, making a picture lovely enough to gladden any mother's heart.

The little Egyptians were amusing themselves making birds out of potter's earth. Birds of all kinds and appearances: sparrows, doves, ravens, storkes—stiff ungainly looking things, it is true, but of which, nevertheless, they were inordinately proud, and ranged round the fountain while defying the Child Jesus to do as much.

He answered, in His usual gentle way, by taking the clay and fashioning two little doves. They were so pretty and graceful, with such dainty bills, slender feet, and perfectly natural looking feathers that his playmates cried out admiration. Even Mary herself could not help saying:

— What a pity they are not alive!

— Mother, replied the Child, be it done according to your word!

He then breathed on his doves of clay. Suddenly their greyish tint whitened, whitened even as the astonished onlookers watched: one would have said into feathers of