

CHAPTER VI.

RITUALISTIC SISTERHOODS.

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I HAVE nothing whatever to say against any good work which Ritualistic Sisterhoods may undertake, nor would I treat the Sisters themselves otherwise than with personal respect. But in writing about Ritualistic Sisterhoods I remember that I have to deal with a system which at the Reformation was entirely ejected, root and branch, out of the Reformed Church of England, and, as most loyal Churchmen believe, for very good reasons. The so-called "Religious Life" in Ritualistic Sisterhoods is an exact reproduction of that system which the Church of

England abolished in the sixteenth century. The spread of this Conventual system in the Church of England is witnessed with serious and reasonable alarm by many of the wisest of Churchmen and Churchwomen. There are at the present time, within the Church of England, a greater number of Sisters of Mercy than were in this country before the suppression of Monasteries and Convents by Henry VIII. The wealth possessed by Ritualistic Convents is, I have no doubt, far greater than that possessed by the Roman Catholic Convents of England in the early part of the sixteenth century. These institutions are not legally recognized by the Church of England, but efforts are constantly being put forth to obtain for them that legal sanction which they possessed in this country before the Reformation. In view of these efforts I have thought it desirable to devote a chapter of this book to Ritualistic Sisterhoods. It is most appropriate that this should be so, since every Ritualistic Sisterhood is as truly a *secret* Society as is the Society of the Holy Cross, or the Order of Corporate Reunion. What passes within Convent walls is a secret known only to the initiated, or to outsiders by means of revelations made by Sisters who have forsaken the so-called "Religious Life." The secret Statutes, regulating not only the lives of the inmates, but also the disposal of their property, are quite unknown to the general public.

The rules of the first of these Tractarian Sisterhoods were copied from Roman models. The thought of establishing such institutions came into the minds of the Tractarian leaders several years before the first was founded. As early as February 21st, 1840, Dr. Newman wrote to his friend Bowden:—"Pusey is at present eager about setting up Sisters of Mercy."¹

At this period Dr. Hook, Vicar of Leeds, was anxious to establish a Sisterhood in that town, but on the sly.

¹ *Life of Dr. Pusey*, Vol. II., p. 155.

Writing to Dr. Pusey from the Vicarage, Leeds, June 9th, 1840, he remarked:—

“ I perfectly agree with you in thinking it to be most important to have a class of persons acting under us, and answering to the Sisters of Charity in some foreign Churches. But there will be great difficulties in the way. Although we shall obtain the co-operation of the really pious of all classes ultimately, there will be much opposition from those ‘ Evangelical ’ ladies who at present control the visiting societies. . . . What I should like to have done is this: for you to train an elderly matron, full of zeal and discretion, and thoroughly imbued with right principles, and for her to come here and take lodgings with two or three other females. *Let their object be known to none but myself, and I would speak of them merely as well-disposed persons willing to assist my Curates and myself, as other persons do, in visiting the sick.*”²

In the following year Dr. Pusey spent two months in Ireland for the special purpose of studying the Roman Catholic Sisterhoods.³ The Irish Romanists very naturally gave him a hearty welcome. Writing to Newman, August 9th, 1841, Pusey remarked:—“ The Roman Catholics have been so civil I have not known what to make of it. I have had to fight off being introduced to the one and the other, and they shake hands so cordially, and are so glad to see one! *e.g.*, a Roman Catholic Bishop of British Guiana.”⁴ He saw also the Roman Catholic Archbishop Murray, of Dublin. Some of Pusey’s friends were greatly distressed at the rumours which were flying about as to the object of this mysterious journey to Ireland, and one of them, the Rev. E. Churton, wrote to him about it, in evident alarm. Three years after the commencement of the first Sisterhood, Dr. Pusey wrote to his friend Mr. A. J. Beresford Hope, describing the plan upon which it was founded. “ We naturally,” he wrote, “ went by experience. Lord John Manners procured us the rules of the Sisters of Charity at Birmingham. I had

² *Life of Dr. Pusey*, Vol. III., p. 7.

³ *Ibid.*, Vol. II., p. 243.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 246.

some rules by me, used by different bodies in England and on the Continent."⁵

The system which Dr. Pusey thus imported into the English Church was not only Popish, but also Pagan in its origin. Nuns and Monks existed long before Christianity, and they still exist to-day amongst those who do not worship the true God. Mr. Hislop, in his learned work entitled the *Two Babylons*, tells us that, in connection with the ancient Babylonish religion—

"There were Monks and Nuns in abundance. In Thibet and Japan, where the Chaldean system was early introduced, Monasteries are still to be found, and with the same disastrous results to morals as in Papal Europe. In Scandinavia, the priestesses of Frøya . . . who were bound to perpetual virginity, were just an order of Nuns. In Athens there were Virgins maintained at the public expense, who were strictly bound to single life. In Pagan Rome, the Vestal Virgins . . . occupied a similar position. Even in Peru, during the reign of the Incas, the same system prevailed, and showed so remarkable an analogy, as to indicate that the Vestals of Rome, the Nuns of the Papacy, and the Holy Virgins of Peru, must have sprung from a common origin."⁶

It seems that as early as June 5th, 1841, a young lady, named Miss Marian Hughes, who subsequently became the Mother Superior of one of Dr. Pusey's Convents at Oxford, took "a vow of celibacy," under the guidance of Dr. Pusey himself.⁷ Newman celebrated the Holy Communion on this occasion, in St. Mary's Church, Oxford. Shortly after this event Miss Hughes went abroad. The biographer of Dr. Pusey informs us that she went in company with the Rev. C. and Mrs. Seager—

"In order to study, as far as might be possible, the 'Religious' Life among women in France. At Bayeux they made the acquaintance of the Bishop, and of the Abbé Thomine, Canon of the Cathedral and Archdeacon of Caen. M. Thomine was the Director of fifteen Convents, and he allowed Miss Hughes to go as a visitor to the Hotel

⁵ *Ibid.*, Vol. III., p. 22.

⁶ Hislop's *Two Babylons*, p. 223. Seventh edition.

⁷ *Life of Dr. Pusey*, Vol. III., p. 10.

Dieu in Bayeux, which was served by a community of White Augustines or Ursulines. She was received with great cordiality, and was allowed to ask as many questions as she liked. She found the Nuns as fervent and simple-hearted as could be wished: perfect harmony reigned between the different grades of Sisters, and the hospital and schools under their management were admirably conducted. The Rule of this House had not been published; but Miss Hughes was allowed by M. Thomine to learn much of it. She afterwards visited the Convent of the Visitation at Caen, which was, of course, under the published Rule of St. Francis de Sales. Pusey was much interested in these details, and in such information as Mr. Seager could collect about the conditions under which temporary vows were allowed in the French Church. In the regulations of the first English Community of Sisters, it is not difficult to trace the influence of the information thus conveyed. Indeed, the Rule first adopted was largely taken from that of St. Francis de Sales, though it was modified after a few years of practical experience.”⁸

Of course, visits to Popish Convents such as that made by Miss Hughes and her Puseyite companions, were kept as secret as possible. It would never have done to have taken the public into the confidence of men and women about to revive that Conventual system which Englishmen everywhere hated and dreaded. Already, it will be observed, the taking of Conventual Vows was contemplated by the leaders of the new Movement, and Miss Hughes had actually taken one of those Vows, that of celibacy. From that day to this the authorities of the Convents founded by Dr. Pusey have never given to the public any idea of the actual terms of the Vows taken by their Sisters. They form a part of the secret work of the Ritualists, which sadly needs Government Inspection, as much in the interests of the Sisters themselves, as of that of their relatives and friends. Fortunately, however, a lady of high personal character, who was for several years one of Dr. Pusey's Sisters in a Convent, of which the late Miss Sellon was the Mother Superior, in the year 1863 gave the public the benefit of her painful experience, in a

⁸ *Life of Dr. Pusey*, Vol. III., pp. 10, 11.

volume entitled *Sisterhoods in the Church of England*, and with it the rules which regulate two out of the three Vows taken by these Sisters. The following is an extract from the "Rule of Holy Obedience":—

"Ye shall ever address the Spiritual Mother with honour and respect; avoid speaking of her among yourselves; cherish and obey her with holy love, without any murmur or sign of hesitation or repugnance, but simply, cordially, and promptly obey with cheerfulness, and banish from your mind any question as to the wisdom of the command given you. If ye fail in this, ye have failed to resist a temptation of the Evil One."⁹

There is nothing in the "Blind Obedience" of a Jesuit worse than this "Rule of Holy Obedience." In the hands of a wicked Mother Superior it might at any time lead to the commission by a Sister of the foulest crimes. If the Mother Superior gives a command to commit a crime, the Sister must obey, banishing from her mind "any question as to the wisdom of the command given" her! In later years Dr. Pusey required a similar blind obedience to be given by the Sisters of Mercy to their Father Confessors. In his *Manual for Confessors*, published in 1878, he gives the following directions to Sisters of Mercy:—

"I would have great respect paid in Confession to your Confessor, for—(to say nothing of the honour due to the priesthood)—we ought to look upon them as Angels sent by God to reconcile us to His Divine goodness; and also as His lieutenants upon earth, and therefore we owe them all reverence, even though they may at times betray that they are human, and have human infirmities, and perhaps ask curious questions which are not part of the Confession, such as your name, what penances or virtues you practise, what are your temptations, &c. I would have you answer, although you are not obliged to do so."¹⁰

We may indeed pity the unfortunate Sister who has to

⁹ *Sisterhoods in the Church of England*, by Margaret Goodman, pp. 79, 80. London: Smith Elder, 1863. It were much to be desired that a new edition of this valuable book should be published. It is now out of print.

¹⁰ Pusey's *Manual for Confessors*, p. 190.

submit to priestly rule of this infamous kind. If that priest is a bad man, what terrible moral evils he may be guilty of! As we have learnt already (see page 117) three Ritualistic Confessors were mentioned by the late Archdeacon Allen who had fallen into acts of immorality with women who came to them in Confession. Who can wonder at it that reads Dr. Pusey's *Manual for Confessors*, or the *Priest in Absolution*? It will be observed that the Sister is forbidden to show any "hesitation or repugnance" in carrying out the orders of the Mother Superior. Here is an instance of an indignity offered to one of Dr. Pusey's Sisters, by Miss Sellon, the Mother Superior. It is recorded by the late Rev. W. G. Cookeley:—

"One of the Sisters was one day employed in the menial office of lacing Miss Sellon's boots. Whilst she was thus employed with one of the Lady Superior's feet, that dignitary thought fit to bestow her other foot *on the head* of the stooping Sister. Some little disposition to objection and resistance to this disgusting insult being manifested, was immediately checked by the Lady Superior, who remarked that such humiliation *was good* for the Sister."¹¹

The orders of a Father Confessor are, it appears, sometimes equally disgusting. Of one of the inmates of Dr. Pusey's Sisterhood, Mr. Cookeley records that—

"A Sister who had been hasty with her tongue, and had thrown out some unguarded expression, was commanded by the Rev. Mr. Prynne, one of the Confessors to the Institution, *to lie down flat on the floor, and with her tongue to describe the figure of a Cross in the dirt.*"¹²

The Rev. R. M. Benson, who for many years was Superior of the "Cowley Fathers," and Chaplain of several Ritualistic Sisterhoods, wrote an introduction to a little book for the guidance of Sisters of Mercy, entitled:—*The Religious Life Portrayed for the Use of Sisters of Mercy*, and this is what he says to them about their Vow of Obedience:—

¹¹ *A Letter to the Archbishop of Dublin*, by the Rev. W. G. Cookeley, p. 76. London: Ridgway, 1853.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 11.

"A Religious [*i.e.*, a Sister] has made the sacrifice of her will in taking the Vow of Obedience: she is no more her own, but God's; and she must obey her Superiors for God's sake, *yielding herself as wax, to be moulded unresistingly*" (p. 13).

Anyone who submits to a Vow of Obedience like this, "yielding herself as wax to be moulded unresistingly," is more truly a slave to her Superiors than any negro slave is to his master, since slavery of the mind and soul is in her case added to that of the body. Moral slavery is the greatest of all tyrants. Is it right that any free born Englishwoman should be permitted to take a Vow of Obedience of this horrible character? The victims are truly objects of pity. Another lady, who was for a time one of Dr. Pusey's Sisters, commenting on the Rule of Obedience quoted above, very truly remarks:—

"Plainly, this whole Rule of Obedience is simply the *counterfeit* of that entire self-consecration which the Christian, whose soul has been redeemed, owes to his Redeemer. To Him, indeed, and to His holy will revealed in the Scriptures, the Christian owes an unhesitating, unquestioning obedience. If His providential dealings appear mysterious, child-like trust and entire confidence and submission are due from those who know that the Judge of all the earth 'must needs do right,' though His ways are past finding out. . . . But this Rule of Holy Obedience is, in fact, a part of that corrupt and perverted Christianity which, since its first manifestation in the Church, has beguiled ignorantly devout souls—a system which, indeed, 'admits the whole canon of truth, and yet contrives that it should teach only error.' It is part of a carefully devised system for depriving the soul of obedience to God."¹³

We now come to the consideration of the "Rule of Holy Poverty" in Dr. Pusey's Sisterhood. It is as follows:—

"It is not permitted to any Sister to appropriate anything, however small, or under whatever pretext, to herself; since each shall, on the day of her entrance, renounce in favour of the Community, not only the possession, but the use and disposition of *everything* which is hers, or shall be given to her. All this being under the entire regulation of the Superior. Ye shall neither ask for, nor receive anything

¹³ *The Anglican Sister of Mercy*, pp. 62, 63. London: Elliot Stock, 1895.

without permission; and when ye shall have received it, ye shall place it in the hands of the Mother Assistant for the use of the Society." ¹⁴

There is certainly in this "Rule of Holy (?) Poverty" something which looks very much like what City men term "sharp practice." It is a grand scheme for relieving English ladies of their money. "A lady," writes the Rev. W. G. Cookeley, "who joined Dr. Pusey's establishment, as a Sister, carried into the common stock a capital producing, I believe, so large a sum as £1200 *per annum*; when she subsequently left the Society, which she did to join the Church of Rome, she did not possess a penny!" ¹⁵ Here we are face to face with another very serious evil, which sadly needs a remedy at the hands of Parliament. A Sisterhood which retains the property of a Sister who desires to leave its walls, ought to be compelled by law to return her fortune, after deducting a reasonable amount for her support while in the Convent. This "Rule of Holy Poverty" is manifestly unjust on the face of it. A provision should be made, in every case, which shall secure the pecuniary rights of each Sister, and not leave her dependent—should she decide upon leaving the Sisterhood—on the doubtful charity of the authorities. But even if such a provision were made, something more should be done to remove the difficulties which surround a Sister desirous of leaving a Sisterhood. Miss Goodman, writing from the standpoint of one who had practical experience, informs us that—

"The fact that these Conventual establishments are closed against all unwelcome visitation, and that any of the inmates may be secluded from all intercourse and communication with their family and friends, at the will of the Superior, is, if not a breach of the law of England, at least an alarming and dangerous innovation, and in direct opposition to the spirit of civil and religious liberty in this country. Since it is

¹⁴ Goodman's *Sisterhoods in the Church of England*, pp 82, 83.

¹⁵ Cookeley's *Letter to the Archbishop of Dublin*, p. 12. London: Ridgway, 1853.

possible for a young girl to be kept secretly, in strict seclusion, in a Convent professedly connected with the Church of England, not only against her own inclinations, but against the wishes of her parents and friends, and even in despite of their efforts to remove or communicate with her, it is superfluous to add that this fact is one of grave importance, and demands the consideration of the Legislature. The unfortunate inmates of lunatic asylums, private as well as public, are shielded by the law from ill usage and unjustifiable restraint; surely the inmates of Religious Houses, who devote themselves to the good offices of nursing and comforting the sick and afflicted, teaching ignorant adults and training children—or even if solely engaged in prayer and worship—ought not to be left entirely to the tender mercies of high-handed and uncontrolled power, exercised by irresponsible Superiors, whose authority is absolute.”¹⁶

If what Miss Goodman here states be true—and I have discovered no reason for doubting it—it follows that Ritualistic Convents are, in some instances, nothing better than jails for innocent young ladies, and consequently that, like jails, they ought to be under Government Inspection. Nominally, in most if not all of these Convents, the Sisters may be free to leave when they please; but even here *moral* bolts and bars are used which more effectually prevent their escape than any material ones could.

“A Sister,” writes Miss Goodman, “under some circumstances would find it very difficult to leave. Those who enter Sisterhoods abandon family ties; they acquire peculiar habits; are ignorant of the state of things without their Nunnery gates. . . . I have known several Sisters who have spent every penny of their capital; and Dr. Pusey also knows them much better than I do. Without money; without friends; without clothes (Sisters who persist in leaving Miss Sellon’s are sent forth in Sisters’ garb, and they are instructed to send everything back as soon as they can clothe themselves); without an idea which way to look for occupation; what is a Sister to do who leaves a Nunnery? . . . The foregoing is no overdrawn picture of the difficulties: I am speaking from certain facts which came under my own observation.”¹⁷

The Vow or Rule as to Poverty varies in different Convents. The Sisterhood of St. Margaret’s, East Grinstead, is

¹⁶ Goodman’s *Sisterhoods*, pp. vii., viii.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

a very large one, devoted mainly to nursing, but also paying a great deal of attention to the publication of books, and the production of ecclesiastical embroidery. It so happens that I possess a secret book written for the use of this Sisterhood, entitled *The Spirit of the Founder*. It consists of extracts from addresses privately delivered to the Sisters by the Founder of the Sisterhood, the late Rev. Dr. Neale. From this book I take the following extracts relating to the Vows taken by the Sisters:—

“Of the three Vows,” said Dr. Neale, “that every Sister implicitly or explicitly takes—Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience—the two last are perfectly easy to understand. *They bind you to a Sister's life, not certainly here, but certainly somewhere, as long as you live*” (pp. 5, 6).

We thus learn that at East Grinstead the Vows are taken *for life*, making it morally impossible for a Sister to withdraw from her profession, so long as she retains a belief in Ritualistic principles as to the so-called “Religious Life.” Dr. Neale seems to have insisted very much upon the alleged wickedness of a Sister ever withdrawing from a Sister's life. “Let me repeat to you,” he said to them on one occasion, “once more, that, henceforth, ever to draw back from a Sister's life *is sacrilege: sacrilege in the highest degree*: inasmuch as the Doctors of the Church have always taught that sacrilege of person is worse than sacrilege of place” (*Ibid.*, p. 89). It seems that in this Sisterhood the Sisters are not required to part with the whole of their property to the Convent on joining it.

“A Sister coming to us,” says Dr. Neale, “and not able to pay any, or all, of the dowry of this House, is then *bound to mention in Confession why not, and to tell the priest how she disposes of her income*” (*Ibid.*, p. 11).

I am afraid that there is in the Confessional a great deal too much interference with the disposal of the property of Sisters. It is open to grave objection that an excitable and enthusiastic young lady should be expected to tell her Father Confessor what she has done with her money. It is no busi-

ness of his, and if he is a bad man he can easily use his opportunities to enrich the Convent at the expense of justice.

"Let us imagine," said Dr. Neale, on another occasion, to his Sisters, "a Sister wishing to join us with a certain income belonging unrestrictedly to herself; when she makes the Vow of Poverty, what does she promise, and what does she not promise? She promises, in the first place, to give up what is called the usufruct of it; that is, neither directly nor indirectly to lay out a farthing of it on herself. She promises to keep nothing in hand, to have, as the usual expression goes, no pocket money, to buy nothing for herself with her own money, either necessary or unnecessary. She does not promise—God forbid—to devote all her income to this House. When I say God forbid, I mean what I say. There have been some griping, grasping Religious Houses which have been satisfied with nothing less, but they have always been regarded the plague spots of Religious Communities" (*Ibid.*, pp. 7, 8).

I wonder whether Dr. Neale had Dr. Pusey's Sisterhood in his mind, when he thus denounced those "griping, grasping Religious Houses" which—as was the case with Dr. Pusey's—requires the Sister to devote *all* her income to the Convent? Dr. Neale understood what he was talking about, and when he terms such Convents "plague spots," it leads us to express a hope that such places may speedily be removed from the Church of England, and thus prevent the spreading of the "plague." At St. Margaret's, East Grinstead, the Sisters may not spend their own money. The Mother Superior kindly spends it for them! I wonder whether Convent authorities ever give a really satisfactory and business-like account to the Sisters of the way their money is spent? Immense sums of money flow into some Convent coffers. Is there ever any auditing of accounts by a *public* auditor? There ought to be, and Parliament should insist upon it. History proves that there have been very wicked Mother Superiors, and very wicked Father Confessors of Convents. The present Ritualistic system makes it *very easy* for the authorities to embezzle the Sisters' money, with but little or no risk of discovery,

should they feel tempted at any time to do so. To plead that all these people are pious and quite above acting dishonestly, is not sufficient to allay doubt and suspicion. It is a plea which is never used with regard to our public religious Societies, as a reason why their accounts should not be publicly audited; and therefore it ought not to be used to shield those secret Societies which exist within Convent walls. The Vow of Poverty is quite unnecessary. Why cannot a private Sister attain to holiness while retaining control over her fortune, and spend her own money as she likes? This Vow keeps her in cruel bondage. And then, after she has thus parted with her whole fortune—in some cases amounting to many thousands of pounds—she is, perhaps, coolly insulted by such advice as the following, given in “Father Benson’s” *Religious Life Portrayed for the Use of Sisters of Mercy* :—

“Accept the food set before you, as though given out of mere charity; and however coarse and uninviting it may be, reflect that you do not deserve even that” (p. 33).

A considerable amount of useful information about Ritualistic Sisterhoods may be read in a Government Blue Book, published in 1870, and containing the *Report from the Select Committee on Conventual and Monastic Institutions*. As an appendix to this *Report*, there are printed the, till then, strictly secret Statutes of two Sisterhoods, viz., that of All Saints’, Margaret Street, and the Clewer Sisterhood. This *Report* is, unfortunately, but very seldom seen, and, like many other Blue Books, is quite unknown to the general public. From it I learn that in the Clewer Sisterhood the Statutes declare that—

“The Sisterhood is formed *without* Vows, for the observance of the Rules of Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience, in which state of life the Sisters offer themselves *perpetually* to God, to live alone for His glory, in the love of Jesus, and to serve Him in the persons of His poor and suffering ones.”¹⁸

¹⁸ *Report*, p. 224.

But, surely, if they promise and offer themselves to God “perpetually” to observe the Rules of Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience, such an offer is, practically, the same thing as a Vow? It would be hard to define the difference. Canon T. T. Carter, who has been Warden of the Clewer Sisterhood from its commencement, has written a treatise to prove, amongst other things, that “the dedication” of a woman to a life of celibacy in a Sisterhood, “whether expressed or implied, or however expressed, was regarded as tantamount to a vow.”¹⁹ The Rev. Dr. Neale, Warden of the East Grinstead Sisterhood, said that “a Vow is tantamount to an Oath.”²⁰ The Rules which regulate the property of the Clewer Sisters, though open to abuse, are not so bad as those which obtain in Dr. Pusey’s Sisterhood. They are as follows:—

“15. Sisters who are able, are expected to contribute each £50 annually to the Community Fund, but this sum may be increased at the desire of any Sister.

“16. The sum to be contributed by each Sister, shall be settled between herself and the Warden and Superior; the arrangement being strictly confidential.

“17. In the event of any Sister desiring to give or bequeath any property to the Community, or any of its Houses, she shall satisfy the Visitor that she has informed the next-of-kin, or the next in degree, if more than one (*or give to the Visitor a sufficient reason for her not having done so*) of her intention, that any objections on their part may be duly considered, and that they may have the opportunity of laying such objections before the Visitor.”²¹

According to these Rules the amount of a Sister’s contribution to the Community Fund is kept a profound secret, known only to the priest who acts as Warden, the Mother Superior, and herself. Even the Council of the Sisterhood are to know nothing at all about it. Those two “old hands” working on a susceptible young lady, could

¹⁹ *Vows and the Religious State*, by the Rev. T. T. Carter, p. 73. London: Masters, 1881.

²⁰ *Spirit of the Founder*, p. 71.

²¹ *Report*, p. 226.

easily, if they pleased—I do not say that they would so act—work the arrangement very much to the advantage of the Community Fund. And then, supposing the Sister subsequently desires to “give”; or, when dying, “bequeath” a part, or the whole, of her property to the Sisterhood, it can be very easily managed under Rule 17, even though that Rule seems at first sight so fair to the next-of-kin. It is very right that she should inform her nearest relations as to what she proposes to do with her property, but, it will be observed, there is an important exception made to this salutary provision. She may “give to the Visitor a sufficient reason for her *not having done so*,” and then, calling in the aid of her Father Confessor, the Warden, and the Mother Superior, the result of their conference will, no doubt, be quite satisfactory to the Convent. But what will her next-of-kin think about it? Even if they are permitted, according to Rule 17, to lay their objections to losing the money (which they might reasonably expect from their relative) before the Visitor, it does not necessarily follow that their protests will be successful. In either case the Convent has an unfair advantage. We know from the history of Romish countries what the threats of a priest can accomplish at a dying bed.

An illustration, I do not say of undue influence, but of the way in which Ritualistic Convents benefit largely by the wills of dying Sisters, is thus given by Miss Goodman, in her *Sisterhoods in the Church of England*, p. 16 :—

“The father of H—— [one of Dr. Pusey’s Sisterhood] was a Scotch baronet, and when he died, his property went to his eldest son; but Lady ——, the mother of H——, was an heiress, and a considerable part of her own *large property* was settled on herself for life, to be divided equally afterwards among her daughters and younger sons. When H—— was dying at Bradford [Convent], her mother and sister were sent for; but they were allowed to stay only two days, of which one was Sunday. On the Monday H—— made a will leaving her share of her mother’s property absolutely to Miss Sellon [the Mother Superior], or to the Sisterhood, which is

much the same thing. *The mother expressed a wish that her daughter should do otherwise, but in vain ; so Lady — went away with the pleasant reflection that Miss Sellon, through whom she was sent away from her daughter's death bed, will inherit as a daughter from her.*"

In the Sisterhood of All Saints', Margaret Street, it is provided by the Statutes, that no Sister leaving the Sisterhood, even if "dismissed," shall have any right to any portion of the money or property which she has given to it, whether as a dowry or otherwise. The rule, which is very stringent, is as follows :—

" 18. No Sister, *whether dismissed or not*, or whether remaining or not, or her heirs, executors, or administrators, shall have or be entitled, either in her lifetime or after her decease, to, or shall have power to claim, either at law or in equity, any estate, right, title, interest, property, or share whatsoever in or to the real estate or chattels real, houses, leasehold or copyhold estates, stocks, funds, and monies, or in or to the household furniture, books, linen, china, and other chattels personal, and effects belonging to or held in trust for or used for the purposes of the said Society, or any of them, or any part or parts thereof, anything herein contained to the contrary thereof in anywise notwithstanding."²³

It is evidently quite possible that a Sister may, whether intentionally or otherwise, be "dismissed" contrary to strict justice, yet, according to this rule she is, even in such a case, barred from any claim for compensation on the property of the Sisterhood, which, of course, includes what she has given to it. Such a rule is open to grave abuse. By Rule 22 the first Mother Superior, Miss H. B. Byron, is excepted from the operations of Rule 18, to this extent, that, should the Sisterhood be dissolved in her lifetime "the houses and property of the said Society in Margaret Street, Cavendish Square, shall be reconveyed to and vested in the said Harriet Brownlow Byron, her executors, administrators, and assigns." It is evident that Miss Byron looked after her own interest very well. It would have been well had the authorities shown an equal regard for the interests of the

²³ *Report*, p. 215.

other Sisters. By this same Rule 22, it is provided that the "whole of the property and effects" of the Sisterhood shall, in the event of its being dissolved, "be disposed of to such charitable purposes in connection with the Church of England" as the trustees may select, the unfortunate Sisters being in no way provided for by the Statutes, though they have probably contributed the greater portion of the Sisterhood property out of their own private fortunes. On July 21st, 1870, Mr. W. Ford, the Honorary Solicitor of this Sisterhood, was examined before the Select Committee of the House of Commons on Conventual and Monastic Institutions. He was questioned by the Committee on this subject, as follows:—

"3768. They [the Sisters] have not precluded themselves by these Statutes or regulations from taking property by trustees?—No; they may receive property in their own names or in the names of trustees; when the Sisters go away or die they or their representatives shall not be considered to have any right to a share of the property of the Community.

"3769. *Though they may contribute some, they are not to take any away?*—It is not put so in express words, but that is the legitimate inference I think."²³

In the course of his evidence Mr. Ford stated that at All Saints', Margaret Street, the Sisters take no Vow of Poverty, and may continue to hold any personal property of their own, which they may not have handed over to the Sisterhood. The Statutes are signed by all the Sisters, who promise to observe them "God being our helper." Mr. Ford was asked by the Committee, if this was not equivalent to an oath: but he denied that it was, though he admitted that "a great many persons of tender conscience might feel" that, in thus invoking the name of God as a witness to their promise, "they were entering into a solemn obligation, and that if they failed in it, they would feel it some sort of a burden on their conscience."²⁴ Mr. E. E.

²³ *Report*, p. 173.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

Freeman, Solicitor of the Clewer Sisterhood, also gave evidence before the Select Committee, and stated that in that institution a similar, but verbal declaration of consent to the Statutes was made by each Sister, ending with the words, "God being our helper."²⁵ From this gentleman's evidence we further learn that the rules as to the possession of private property are more severe at Clewer than at All Saints', Margaret Street, as the following questions and answers show :—

"4097. Do I rightly understand that they [Clewer Sisters] give up nothing on entering the Community?—They give up nothing on entering; they make arrangements for the disposing of their property, and they do not deal with their money after entering the Institution."

"4100. But is it the arrangement, or one of the rules, that they shall not hold any property for their own benefit?—Yes."

"4103. But it is understood that they shall not employ any moneys or properties that they may receive for their own purposes, after they have joined?—Yes."²⁶

What the rules are as to the Vows of Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience, which obtain in the numerous other Sisterhoods within the Church of England I have been unable to ascertain.²⁷ They are kept as great secrets, known only to the initiated. Could not the Charity Commissioners make inquiries on this subject? The Rules of the Sisterhoods which I have come across, may, of course, have been altered since those were issued which I have quoted, but I have no reason to hope that, if altered, they have been altered for the better.

This subject of Conventual Vows demands the serious attention of loyal Churchmen everywhere, and especially of our Bishops, whose influence is, in some instances at least,

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

²⁷ From a letter published in the *Life of Archbishop Tait*, Vol. I., p. 456. I learn that in the "Sisterhood of the Holy Cross," which works in connection with the St. George's Mission at St. Peter's, London Docks, "Perpetual Vows" are taken by the Sisters. By the way, is there any connection between this "Sisterhood of the Holy Cross," and the secret "Society of the Holy Cross," both of which work in the same parish?

considerable over the Sisterhoods in their dioceses. In the opinion of many of the most learned Divines of the Church of England these Vows are most dangerous, and wholly without Scriptural authority. A case is mentioned in the *Life of Archbishop Tait*, in which a clergyman of the Church of England administered a Vow of perpetual Celibacy to a young lady who was only *eighteen* years of age! No wonder that the Archbishop termed the taking of such a vow "a *sinful act*."²⁸ It is very common nowadays to see very young Sisters of Mercy walking in our streets. How many of them have taken Perpetual Vows? It would be easy to fill several pages with extracts from the writings of English Divines in proof of their opposition to Conventual Vows, and certainly it is quite reasonable to ask the question, Why cannot we have Sisterhoods without any Vows, direct or indirect? Is it not possible to be kind to the sick and poor, and to educate the young without them? The history of many Deaconesses' Homes, conducted on Protestant principles, is an ample answer to the question. No sensible person objects to Christian women banding themselves together for Christian work; on the contrary, they ought to be encouraged in their good resolutions to the utmost. But, surely, he is not to be considered an enemy of Christian charity who faithfully points out the dangers and evils which invariably follow the taking of Vows of Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience? The late Bishop Samuel Wilberforce was ever a great friend to women's work in the Church, yet he, old-fashioned High Churchman though he was, felt bound to raise a warning cry on this grave subject. Writing on April 14th, 1850, to a clergyman who had submitted to him the rules of a proposed Sisterhood, he remarked:—

"I object, then, absolutely, as un-Christian *and savouring of the worst evils of Rome*, to the *Vows* involved in such a context in the statement as, 'She is for ever consecrated to the service of her

²⁸ *Life of Archbishop Tait*, Vol. I., p. 466.

heavenly Spouse.' I object to the expression itself as *unwarranted by God's Word and savouring of one of the most carnal perversions of the Church of Rome*. . . . I add my solemn warning that such tampering with the language, acts, and temper of the Church of Rome in young women of our communion must tend to betray them into infidelity to their mother Church, and to perversion to the Papal schismatical and corrupt communion."²⁹

At the Oxford Church Congress, in 1862, Bishop S. Wilberforce delivered a stirring speech on the subject of Vows, strongly condemning them, whether taken for life, or for a shorter period, and this although he was quite in favour of Sisterhoods, when free from this and other Romanizing peculiarities. He said:—

"I think so far we are agreed—but if it were to be imagined from the silence of any that those who were silent went on to approve, in the first place, of Vows of Celibacy being made *for life*; or, secondly, of the taking Vows of Celibacy *for a fixed time* by those who give themselves to that life, I believe it would be an entire mistake of the meeting. I am bound to say this, in order that there may be no mistake of one holding the office God has given me, that I should not have felt at liberty to take any part in the engagements of any Sisterhood of which such Vows formed a part³⁰—because, firstly, *I see no warrant for them in the Word of God*—and it would seem to me that to encourage persons to make Vows, for which there is no distinct promise given that they should be able to keep them, would be *entangling them in a yoke of danger*; secondly, because it seems to me that our Church has certainly discouraged such Vows. . . . I feel, therefore, that I may venture to say that, instead of the Perpetual Vows representing the higher, it is the admission of a lower standard. . . . I believe that the abuses of that life have come, first from the promises of *perpetuity*; and, secondly, from the abuse connected with the admission of persons having *property*, and being *led to give that property up, in a moment of excitement, to this purpose*. . . . One single word on the use of the term 'Religious.' I confess

²⁹ *Life of Bishop Wilberforce*, Vol. III., pp. 330, 331.

³⁰ In his diary for November 30th, 1860, the Bishop records that during a visit he had that day made to the Clewer Sisterhood, he "would not consent to altering rule about *no Vows*." (*Life of Bishop Wilberforce*, Vol. III., p. 332.) It is evident from this that the authorities wished to introduce Vows. Have they been introduced since then?

that I have the very deepest objection in any way whatever to applying the word 'Religious' to such a life. I think it was adopted at a time when the standard of lay piety was very low, and at all events, as no good seems to me to be got by the use of a word ambiguous at least in its meaning, and which seems to imply that God can be better served in the unmarried Sisterhood than in the blessed and holy state of matrimony, I think it is a pity that it should be used."³¹

Archbishop Tait, a Broad Churchman who, like Bishop Wilberforce, had no objection to Sisterhoods, if they could be kept free from Romish corruptions and abuses, was equally stern in his denunciation of Vows. Writing to a gentleman, on December 27th, 1865, who had asked for his opinion on the subject, Dr. Tait, who was then Bishop of London, replied:—

"There is no warrant for supposing that I in any way approve of Sisterhoods in which Perpetual Vows are administered. I have on more than one occasion stated publicly my belief that all Vows or oaths administered under the circumstances you describe, not being sanctioned by the Legislature, and being taken by persons not authorized to receive them, are of the nature of illegal oaths. It is a grave question whether a clergyman of the Church of England, administering such an oath, does not make himself amenable to prosecution before the magistrates."³²

A London Sisterhood, whose name is not given, applied to Dr. Tait to licence a certain clergyman as their Chaplain. His lordship replied, expressing his willingness to do so, provided only "that habitual Confession shall not be urged upon the Sisters or any inmates of the House"; and, secondly, "that no Vows whatsoever shall be administered or sanctioned by the Chaplain." These very reasonable and moderate conditions were, however, rejected by the Chaplain. He would subject himself to no such conditions, and consequently the Bishop very properly refused to licence

³¹ *Life of Bishop Wilberforce*, Vol. III., pp. 332, 333.

³² *Life of Archbishop Tait*, Vol. I., p. 457.

him. The Bishop wrote to the Mother Superior of the Sisterhood, giving his reasons for his refusal to license the Chaplain :—

“It is felt,” he wrote, “that such Vows are not warranted by anything in the teaching of our Church, and are rash, as binding the conscience not to follow the leadings of God’s providence in case of a change of circumstances. If, notwithstanding this, any ladies choose to bind themselves by Vows, I do not see what can be done to prevent their acting in a way unwarranted by the Church, and rash, from a mistaken notion that real devotion of life to Christ’s service is strengthened by this attempt to forecast the events of our changeful life which God retains in His own keeping. The Church of Rome, in sanctioning such Vows, sanctions also a power of dispensing with them; but the claim to such dispensing power is rightly repudiated by us—so that a Vow for life may be an *entanglement of the conscience*, when God plainly, in our changing relations, prescribes for us a change of duty. The only Vows which the Church of England sanctions are such as the Formularies recognize as based on the teaching of God’s Word; and for these the law of the land provides by giving its additional sanction to the Formularies.”³³

The Bishop’s exhortations were in vain. The Mother Superior wrote to him, in the name of all her Sisters, to say that they would rather go without a licensed Chaplain than have one on the condition laid down by his lordship.³⁴

There is another subject connected with Ritualistic Sisterhoods, which needs to be mentioned here. There are now, scattered throughout the country, several Ritualistic Convents of *Enclosed Nuns*, who are supposed to never leave the Convent walls. Miss Goodman mentions that, in her time, there was an order of Enclosed Nuns in Dr. Pusey’s Sisterhoods. “The Sisters at Plymouth,” she states, “do not speak of themselves under the title of ‘Nuns’; they are Sisters of Mercy; but those of the community belonging to the Order of the ‘Sacred Heart’ are termed ‘Nuns’ by the Sisters of Mercy, and the place of their habitation a ‘Nunnery.’ As I have before observed, the ‘Order of the

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 461.

³⁴ See the Mother Superior’s Letter, *ibid.*, p. 462.

Sacred Heart,' or, as it is often termed, the 'Order of the Love of Jesus,' is *strictly* 'Enclosed,' and their time is supposed to be spent in almost perpetual prayer, for the living or the dead, according as their prayers are solicited."³⁵

Miss Goodman further mentions that the rules of this Enclosed Order of the Sacred Heart are modelled after those of the Poor Clares in the Church of Rome, but that in the former Order the discipline is, in some respects, more cruel than in the Church of Rome.

"The relatives of a Poor Clare," writes Miss Goodman, "can speak with her through a 'grille'; the relatives of an Anglican are to think of the Sister as in the grave, and it is esteemed a falling away from the rule for a recluse to desire even to see one so near and dear to her as a mother. An aged lady has for years been trying every means to obtain, as she says, 'only one word' from a beloved daughter at Miss Sellon's, but without success: she has written most imploringly to Miss Sellon, and has begged the interference of the Bishop of Exeter, who declares himself powerless in the matter; yet there is nothing to forbid the meeting except the rule of the Order to which the daughter has devoted herself."³⁶

Another Order of Enclosed Nuns existed for several years at Feltham, Middlesex, from whence it was removed to Twickenham; and, later on, to West Malling, Kent. Its Home is known as the "Convent of S. Mary and S. Scholastica." I have no idea how many Nuns reside within its walls. Originally this Nunnery was under the control of the Rev. J. L. Lyne, who calls himself "Father Ignatius," after Ignatius Loyola, founder of the Jesuit Order. A schism took place in its ranks, and the Feltham Nuns seceded from the control of "Father Ignatius." That gentleman, however, keeps on another Nunnery of his own at Llanthony, where he has also a Monastery. In 1879 this Convent was in Slapton, Devonshire, where, in company with two others, I had an interview with "Ignatius" himself, who told me that his Nuns "never see the face of man"—his own face,

³⁵ Goodman's *Sisterhoods in the Church of England*, p. 125. ³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

I presume, excepted. "Sister Mary Agnes, O.S.B.," who was for seventeen years one of the Nuns under "Father Ignatius," states that the "Discipline," or cat o' nine tails, was used by the Nuns in the Convent,³⁷ and this is confirmed by the *Monastic Times*, June 24th, 1884, a periodical issued by "Ignatius" himself. Sometimes this "Discipline" was inflicted by the "Mother Superior" against the will of the unfortunate Nun, an instance of which is given above (p. 40).

That horrible, but perfectly true story, the accuracy of which has not been publicly denied by "Ignatius," reads like a chapter of Convent life taken from the Dark Ages. I wish I could think it were an isolated case; but when I remember that one in the position of the late Dr. Pusey, as recently as 1878, recommended, as I have already stated, this self-same "Discipline," as a penance for Sisters of Mercy, I cannot help feeling anxious about the fate of the unhappy creatures subject to it. In his well-known *Manual for Confessors*, Dr. Pusey recommends Ritualistic Father Confessors to prescribe for Sisters of Mercy, as a penance, and "For mortifications, *the Discipline for about a quarter of an hour a day*" (p. 243). There is something truly horrible in such a penance. A "quarter of an hour a day" of whipping on the bare back, amounts to *ninety-one hours of whipping every year!* What an outcry there would be raised all over England if it were discovered that the humblest woman in East London were subject to such torture as this, even though it were inflicted by herself! Is it not evident that the inherent evils of Convent life are growing up rapidly in what used at one time to be termed the *Reformed Church of England*? This "Discipline"—which is sometimes made of spiked steel instead of whiplcord—is in itself quite enough to make a Convent an abode of misery and woe, rather than a paradise on earth which some of the friends of the so-called "Religious Life" assert it to be. Would to

³⁷ *Nunnery Life in the Church of England*, by Sister Mary Agnes, O.S.B., p. 97.

God that the history of the inmates of Ritualistic Convents could be written for the benefit of the public! A cry of horror would, I have no doubt, then be heard throughout the length and breadth of the land. A few ladies only of those who have left Ritualistic Sisterhoods have published their bitter experiences for the good of the public. The principal of these are Miss Cusack, who, after leaving Dr. Pusey's Sisterhood, became a Roman Catholic, and was known as "The Nun of Kenmare," and who has now become a Protestant; Miss Margaret Goodman, who has written two books on the subject, viz., her *Experiences of an English Sister of Mercy*, and *Sisterhoods in the Church of England*; Miss Wale, who wrote the *Anglican Sister of Mercy*, giving her experience of Dr. Pusey's Sisterhoods; and "Sister Mary Agnes," who wrote *Nunnery Life in the Church of England*, being her experience of life in Father Ignatius's Nunnery. All these writers agree as to the misery of the so-called "Religious Life" in Anglican Convents.

Miss Cusack was one of the earliest of those who joined Dr. Pusey's Sisterhood, of which she remained a member for about five years. She joined the branch of the Sisterhood which then existed at Osnaburgh Street, London, and of which a Miss Langston was at that time Superior. One of the ladies in this Convent was known as Sister Jane. This lady, Miss Cusack states—

"Let drop many little hints as to the state of affairs [in the Sisterhood], with which she was far from being satisfied, but above all she warned me against Miss Sellon, and not without cause. Her description of the Plymouth Sisterhood was that it was 'a hell upon earth,' and later, I knew, from personal experience, that she was not far astray."³⁸

A very curious story is told by Miss Cusack as to the way in which Dr. Pusey heard the Confessions of the Sisters. It implies that he systematically broke the "Seal of Confession." Miss Sellon, she states—

³⁸ *Story of My Life*, by N. F. Cusack, p. 65.

“Made one strict rule for her own protection, which was never broken. No Sister was allowed to go to Confession unless she was in the house, and she always remained in the room next to the one which Dr. Pusey occupied when he heard the Sisters' Confessions. When he had heard one Sister he always went into her room before he heard the Confession of another Sister; hence I think we were not unreasonable in concluding that he told Miss Sellon—if not in words, at least by implication—what had passed. And this was religion!”³⁹

It may be well to remark here, that Miss Cusack is not the only person who has brought such a charge as this against Dr. Pusey. The late well-known and highly esteemed Rev. Mark Pattison, Rector of Lincoln College, Oxford, wrote as follows:—

“I once, and only once, got so low by fostering a morbid state of conscience as to go to Confession to Dr. Pusey. Years after it came to my knowledge that Pusey had told a fact about myself, which he had got from me on that occasion, to a friend of his, who employed it to annoy me.”⁴⁰

The Confessional, when in the hand of a bad-tempered Confessor, must be often the means of making the life of the poor Sisters burthensome. Certainly what Miss Cusack relates about Dr. Pusey has a very suspicious appearance, indirectly corroborated as it is by Mr. Mark Pattison's revelation.

Miss Cusack mentions the case of a clergyman and his wife who were foolish enough “to give up their baby girl to Miss Sellon to train her for a Convent life.”

“Alas,” she writes, “for their utter ignorance of the person to whom they had given their treasure. I pitied the poor babe from my heart. It was treated shamefully; and I believe some years later the parents found out their mistake, and reclaimed their child. But the poor little thing was for years at the mercy of a woman who knew no mercy, and at the caprice of one who never considered the feelings or the welfare of anyone except herself.”⁴¹

It is possibly to the case here mentioned that Miss Margaret Goodman refers, in her *Sisterhoods in the Church*

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

⁴⁰ Mark Pattison's *Memoirs*, p. 189.

⁴¹ Cusack's *Story of My Life*, p. 77.

of England. Miss Goodman wrote from a bitter experience of Miss Sellon's Sisterhood, of which for several years she was a member. This child, if she were the one referred to by Miss Cusack, was named Lucy, and it appears that there were several other "child novices" in the branch Convent at Bradford, Wilts :—

"One day," writes Miss Goodman, "the little novices, attended by the lady who had charge of them, were spending their hour of silence in the grounds at Bradford. During this time the children were not only required to refrain from speaking or crowing, but they were expected to remain perfectly still. Little Lucy had a great fear of wasps: indeed, she was altogether rather a timid little one; so, as one of these insects wheeled nearer and nearer, the child shrank back. 'Sit still, Lucy,' was the admonition she received. Poor Lucy obeyed, but watched the wasp in agony; at length it almost touched her face, and then she pleaded, 'Please, may I move just a very little bit; I am so frightened.'" ⁴²

No wonder that poor little Lucy's mother, when she was only eight years old, came and took her away from the Convent. "It was found," Miss Goodman informs us, "that her mind had been overwrought, and, at the direction of the medical attendant, who feared a disease of the brain, all tasks were suspended for more than a year" (p. 132). I think my readers will consider that, under such treatment as is described above, the wonder is that Convent training did not drive the poor sensitive little child mad. Miss Cusack's estimate of Miss Sellon is shared by Miss Goodman, though the latter, by way of apology, pleads that it was her office which spoiled the woman in Miss Sellon. Both these ladies were Sisters at the same time. Miss Goodman quotes a letter which she once received, which she states confirms her own opinion of the Mother Superior.

"Those under Miss Sellon suffered from want of the commonest care. Anything that affected her own comfort or that of — was ordered immediately—other things were forgotten. It was a fault even to do anything for a sick person without the 'Mother's' orders ;

⁴² Goodman's *Sisterhoods in the Church of England*, p. 135.

and she, late at night, late in the morning, unpunctual at all times, would forget to give any. At the same time, it was always thought right to do anything for her, with or without orders; and so, sharing none of the hardships of others, she was unaware what they were." ⁴³

Miss Goodman boldly brings charges of "cruelty" against the authorities of this Sisterhood, and supports her charges by evidence which has never been refuted. She mentions, amongst other cases, that of a Sister, whose sufferings at the hands of Miss Sellon appear to have facilitated her death.

"The Sister of whom I am now writing took a cold which, being neglected, proved fatal, from being constantly obliged to remain many hours with damp feet. She had asked for new boots some *months* previously, but her request had been overlooked, I suppose; while, to add to her necessity, she was Portress at the House in Osnaburg Street, and in taking her messages to the Superior, she had to cross an exposed courtyard, during a wet and cold season. If the poor Sister's death had been occasioned by a cold caught while in the execution of some act of mercy, we might not so much have deplored it, but it seems extremely sad that *a valuable life should have been sacrificed to an absurd rule.* Her work as Portress must have taken her frequently into the presence of her Superiors, therefore it is strange that the need of shoes was not observed. . . I must distinctly affirm, that her death ought not to have been unexpected, and could only have been so to those who were wholly absorbed in other matters—that is, in administering to the slightest wish and whim of the Lady Superior. The contrast is more evident in this case, because the Sister was one of those who came and went to the several Houses in the train of the 'Mother'; and thus, while all was confusion in the anxiety and confusion of so great an arrival, SHE CRAWLED ABOUT UNNOTICED AND UNPITIED." ⁴⁴

A story like this is enough to make a Briton's blood boil with righteous indignation. Where was the womanly kindness of the women who ruled this Convent, to allow a poor creature thus to die "unnoticed and unpitied," and all for the want of a pair of shoes! And does not the thought that there may be scores of other tenderly-reared ladies at present in these Ritualistic Convents, suffering similar

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 19, 20.

cruelties, and "crawling about unnoticed and unpitied," make us justly anxious that *these* Convents, as well as those of the Church of Rome, should be open to Government inspection? The objections commonly brought against such inspection are of the feeblest kind, and might just as reasonably be brought against the existing Government inspection of factories. The sensible way to argue is that, if factories need inspection, how much more do Ritualistic Convents? And if the Government inspection of factories in recent years has—as everybody admits—remedied many and grave abuses, why should not a similar reformation of abuses be expected as the natural result of Government inspection of Convents?

Honour and attention were paid to this young lady when too late to do her any good. "If a splendid funeral," remarks Miss Goodman, "could atone for any want of care in her lifetime, poor Sister Fridswida's would certainly have gone a long way. The coffin was very beautiful, and the pall was a gorgeous mass of white and gold" (p. 23).

While the comfort of poor Sister Fridswida was thus shamelessly neglected, that of Miss Sellon (the Lady Superior) and Dr. Pusey (the Father Confessor of the Convent), were very carefully attended to.

"Most elaborate was the care bestowed in preparing the suite of rooms [in the Convent] in which Miss Sellon and Dr. Pusey lived. I may mention that some *hundreds of pounds* were spent in making ready their apartments, which formed a suite of rooms in the tower of the Abbey. I do not mean in furniture only, but in carrying hot-water pipes into every room and passage, in addition to the open grates; in opening walls for extra doors, &c. A long spiral flight of stone steps was covered with wood, on which was nailed rich carpeting; and whenever the Lady Superior ascended or descended, these pieces of carpeted wood were fitted on to each step, and taken up again when she had ceased to walk upon them."⁴⁶

Certain ladies held office in the Convent, who were known as "Eldresses." These, like Miss Sellon, appear to have

⁴⁶ Goodman's *Sisterhoods in the Church of England*, p. 37.

had their share of the good things of this life, not enjoyed by the ordinary Sisters :—

“Two young Novices having occasion to go into the kitchen late one evening, saw on the dresser a large dish of cold soup prepared for next day’s dinner. One said, ‘How good it looks!’ and drawing near, they observed suet dumplings floating in it. They declared they must taste the dumplings; but they took a morsel more, and a morsel more, until they had made most alarming inroads, and went to bed trembling, lest a searching inquiry should be made the next morning. Will there be ‘an hour’ for stealing the dumpling? It was at the time, just before we went to bed, that *we were apt to feel most ravenously hungry; and, in winter, terribly cold also, and altogether woe-begone.*

“Though opposed to the rules, the Chapel was at one time often without a fire, and we left it for bed after two hours of almost incessant repeating aloud of Psalms and other prayers, nearly all of which were said standing. On leaving one night, myself and the Novices were met, as we passed down the corridor to our respective cells, by a droll girl, a kind of servant in the house, and who from having lived amongst the Irish, before being taken by the Sisters, had acquired many of their expressions. She invited us to ‘Come and see true *“Holy Poverty,”’ as practised by the governing powers in the Abbey: Eldresses as they were termed. ‘Sure,’ said Martha, ‘if its cold and hungry ye are, come here, and its Holy Poverty I’ll show ye.’ She tripped on before, and threw open the door of an Eldress’s cell, saying, ‘Sure, and arn’t this Holy Poverty?’ We stood peering over each other’s shoulders round the open door, perfectly fascinated. After an interval of years, every object in that little cell is clearly before me; so strong was the impression which, *from contrast with our own state,* it made upon me. The cell of the Eldress contained a blazing fire, a heaped-up feather bed, instead of a healthy hard mattress, and on her table stood a bountiful plate of cold meat, and a small horn of wine.”⁴⁶*

The existence of Nunneries in the Church of England, the inmates of which are supposed never to leave their walls, makes it all the more important that I should call public attention to the fact that *private* burial grounds now exist within some Ritualistic Convents. I have heard of several such places, the existence of which is, as far as possible,

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 105-107.

kept a profound secret from the outside world. One such *private* burial ground certainly exists within Ascot Priory, one of Dr. Pusey's Sisterhoods, within the premises of which Dr. Pusey died. Miss Goodman says that Ascot Priory is the head-quarters of the "Order of the Sacred Heart," which I have already mentioned. Several of the Nuns are buried within those walls, though whether their deaths were properly registered or not is more than I can say. Certain it is that the existence of such places is naturally calculated to arouse suspicion. They ought not to be tolerated by the Government, and those already existing ought to be at once closed by authority. It would be well if some Member of Parliament were to question the Government on this subject, and make an effort to secure a return of all such *secret* burial places, whether connected with Ritualistic or Roman Catholic Sisterhoods.

The very existence of such burial grounds within Convent walls would, at any time, facilitate the commission of crime. In Roman Catholic Convents, it is well known, illegitimate infants, and even the Sisters themselves, have been murdered, and secretly buried. Human nature is the same all the world over, temptation and opportunity are all that are needed to rouse certain natures to deeds of evil, and though we have heard of no such foul deed as murder in Ritualistic Convents, it is just as well that nothing shall be tolerated which is calculated to arouse suspicion and help on iniquity. Depend upon it, once the people of England realize that such secret burial-places do exist, their just indignation will not be removed until they are closed for ever. It is better and wiser far to prevent evil and crime, than to cure them after they have been committed.

Ritualistic Sisterhoods mainly exist for the propagation of what ordinary and loyal churchmen term advanced Romanizing practices and doctrines. In the chapels attached to several of these institutions advanced Ritualism is secretly practised which the world at large knows nothing

about. It is nothing uncommon now for the Reserved Sacrament to be kept in the chapels, and even "Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament" is not unknown. The Rev. Owen C. H. King, a Ritualistic clergyman was, before his ordination, frequently present at the services of the St. Margaret's, East Grinstead, Sisterhood, in the chapel attached to their Convent in Queen Square, London, and at which the Rev. Dr. Littledale officiated. When Mr. King became a Roman Catholic he published a pamphlet, entitled, *The Character of Dr. Littledale as a Controversialist*, in which he described the secret services at which he was present. The pamphlet was published during Dr. Littledale's lifetime, and I have never heard that he publicly, or otherwise, denied the facts mentioned by Mr. King in the following statement, nor yet have the Sisters themselves done so:—

"Not many years ago, while preparing for the ministry of the Church of England, I was engaged in voluntary lay work in connection with St. Alban's, Holborn. During this time . . . I was on many occasions present at certain services performed in the chapel connected with the branch of the East Grinstead Anglican Sisters, established in Queen Square, London. Dr. Littledale is the Chaplain of this institution, and Dr. Littledale (the author of '*Plain Reasons against Joining the Church of Rome*') several times was the officiant. Now as an 'Anti-Roman' controversialist, he has written against the following:—

"1. The doctrine of 'Concomitance,' *i.e.*, that Christ is present whole and entire under either species in the Blessed Sacrament—from which it follows that the Blessed Sacrament cannot be reserved in one kind only.

"2. The 'modern Roman Rite' of Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

"3. The use of the Latin tongue in Church Services.

"4. The use of images of the Blessed Virgin and the Saints.

"But as Chaplain to the East Grinstead Sisters, Dr. Littledale adopts all these customs. Everyone of these things is practised by him, and I am prepared, if called upon, to prove my assertion by the production of such evidence as it will be impossible to resist. Once I attended a 'Mass' at Queen Square, which, to my utter astonishment, was said in Latin from the Roman Missal, and although Dr. Littledale

was not the officiating minister on that occasion, still the demeanour of the assembled Sisters showed that they were witnessing a service to which they were quite accustomed. On the altar, at which this 'Mass' was said, is a Tabernacle, and in this Tabernacle is kept a vessel called a Ciborium, which contains consecrated altar breads—that is to say, the Anglican Sacrament is Reserved in one kind by Dr. Littledale for the purposes of Communion, and for another purpose also, which I will explain presently. People outside the circle no doubt will think this an extraordinary performance for a Church of England clergyman to go through who has penned his name to the Thirty-nine Articles. What, then, is to be thought of one who has been engaged by the S. P. C. K. to write against all these things? But more than this. On Sunday afternoon the 'modern Roman Rite of Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament' is performed at this singular Anglican altar, and Dr. Littledale exposes on the altar a 'consecrated' wafer, in a Monstrance, for the worship of the Sisters, *and the chosen few who are permitted to be present*. The hymns which are used on this occasion are sung in Latin, and in fact the whole performance is an exact imitation of the well-known service of the Roman Catholic Church. After this, one would scarcely be surprised to hear that the chapel is not without *a sacred image*, surrounded with *flowers and candles*. I challenge Dr. Littledale to deny these things; as I said before, I am prepared to prove them all."⁴⁷

The services provided for the clothing of a Novice, and the Installation of a Mother Superior of a Ritualistic Sisterhood, as provided in the Ritualistic *Priest's Prayer Book*, have much of superstition connected with them. This book has had an immense circulation amongst the Romanizing clergy during the past thirty years, and I regret to state that it has been recommended to town curates by the Bishop of Truro (Dr. Gott) as one of those books which he has "found exceptionally valuable" to himself.⁴⁸ The service for "Clothing of a Novice in a Sisterhood" in this *Priest's Prayer Book*, assumes that a "Bishop, or some one in his stead, vested in Albe, Stole, and Cope," shall perform the

⁴⁷ *The Character of Dr. Littledale as a Controversialist*, by Owen C. H. King, pp. 5-7. London: Burns and Oates.

⁴⁸ *The Parish Priest of the Town*, by John Gott, D.D., pp. 214, 216. First edition. London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1837.

ceremony. At one point in the service "the Benediction of the Candle" takes place; after which "the Officiant shall light the Candle, and place it in the hands of the Postulant." Later on it is ordered that "the Novice's Habit shall be blessed," and it is asserted that *this dress* will be to the Postulant "a sure protection, a token of her profession, a beginning of holiness, and a strong defence against all the darts of the enemy." There is certainly no Scriptural or Church of England authority for supposing that the dress of a Sister of Mercy will protect her from the devil, or be to her in any way a "beginning of holiness." The marvel is how Church of England clergymen, in this enlightened nineteenth century, can believe in such superstitions. Yet, after all, it must be admitted that there is no limit to the superstitions and follies which men will believe, when once they have forsaken the Bible as their only Rule of Faith. And what are we to think of the following portion of this service, published in all seriousness?

"The Bishop shall then deliver the Habit to the Postulant, saying—

"Receive this Habit that thou mayest wear it unspotted before the Judgment seat of our Lord Jesus Christ."⁴⁹

Surely, this is an impossible task to give to the poor Postulant? The said "Habit" will, no doubt, be worn out long before she appears "before the Judgment seat." How, then, can she wear it, and in an "unspotted" condition too, on that great occasion? Besides, one may reasonably ask, what authority is there, in earth or heaven, for assuming that anybody will be dressed in the "Habit" of a Ritualistic Sister of Mercy on the great Day of Judgment?

When the time comes for the Postulant to become a fully professed Sister, another religious service is provided for the occasion, termed a "Form for the Profession of a Sister." In this it is directed that the Bishop shall bless the Habit

⁴⁹ *The Priest's Prayer Book*, pp. 302-306. Seventh edition. Eighteenth thousand. London, 1890.

if it be a new one, in the same words as in the case of a Postulant, and, in addition, he "shall bless the Veil and Ring" to be worn by the Sister on the occasion, and also a "garland of flowers."⁵⁰ The *Priest's Prayer Book* also contains a form of religious service for the "Installation of a Mother Superior." The Mother Superior, like a Lord Bishop, must needs have a "Pastoral Staff" of her own, and it is ordered at a certain point in the service—"Then shall the Bishop proceed to bless the Pastoral Staff;" and, accordingly he has the daring to pray to God thus:—"Almighty and Merciful God, Who of Thine unspeakable goodness hearkenest to our supplication, and of Thine abundant loving kindness givest to us the desire to pray, *plenteously pour the might of Thy bless-ing upon this Staff.*" The Bishop must then "bless the Ring of office" to be worn by the Mother Superior, and say:—"Bl-ess, O Lord, and hal-low this Ring, *and send upon it Thy sevenfold Holy Spirit.*"⁵¹ Is there not something very much like blasphemous irreverence in asking that God the Holy Ghost shall be poured out on a gold ring? Things like these are what have made men Infidels in France and elsewhere. Certainly if holiness consists in the possession of material objects blessed by a Bishop, Sisters of Mercy possess holiness to an extraordinary degree. They possess, as we have seen, Holy Candles, Holy Habits, Holy Veils, Holy Rings, Holy Flowers, and even a Holy Pastoral Staff for each Convent. Poor, deluded victims, of a superstitious system! Is there any valid reason why Christian women should not band themselves together—as is the case in many Deaconesses' Homes—without adopting the superstitious customs of Popery and Paganism?

It is not to be wondered at that superstition follows the Sisters within the Convent walls. In the secret *Manual of*

⁵⁰ *The Priest's Prayer Book*, pp. 306-311. Seventh edition. Eighteenth thousand. London, 1890.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 311-314.

Prayers According to the Use of Devonport, which is also known to the Sisters as the *Devonport Manual*, many superstitious services are provided for. I should explain that this secret book is for the use of Dr. Pusey's Sisterhood, and is printed at their own private press. In the "Office of the Choir of the Holy Sepulchre" is a hymn in honour of the winding sheet which wrapped our Lord's dead body. The first verse is as follows:—

"The glories of that sacred Winding Sheet
Let every tongue record;
Which from the Cross received with honour meet
The Body of the Lord." ⁵³

In the "Office of the Choir of the Pierced Heart" is a hymn in praise of the spear which pierced our Lord's side, and of the nails which fastened Him to the Cross!

"What tongue, illustrious Spear! can duly sound
Thy praise, in heaven or earth?
Thou who didst open that life-giving Wound,
From whence the Church had birth.

"And equal thanks to you, blest Nails! whereby
Fast to the Sacred Rood,
Was clench'd the sentence dooming us to die,
All blotted out in Blood." ⁵³

On reading this one cannot but feel that it would be just as reasonable to have a hymn in praise of the man who thrust the spear in our Saviour's side; and another in honour of the man who drove the nails into His Body; for they were but instruments for carrying out their master's orders.

I possess also a copy of the first part of the secret *Devonport Manual*, "printed at the Printing Press of the Devonport Society, A.D. 1861." From it I learn that the Sisters wear useless and superstitious Scapulars.

"On putting on the *Scapula*:—

"Lord, protect me under the shadow of Thy Wings." ⁵⁴

⁵³ *Devonport Manual*, Part III., p. 338. There is no date to the edition of this book which I possess.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 332.

⁵⁴ *Devonport Manual*, Part I., p. 4.

What, in the opinion of this Sisterhood, are the virtues of their Scapulars, we are not told, but we can hardly be thought uncharitable if we assume that, in their opinion, they are the same as those derived from the Scapulars worn by Roman Catholics. Scapulars were the product of the Dark Ages, and are, in the Church of Rome, generally supposed to be a protection against fire and drowning, and enable the wearer to pass into heaven soon after they have entered Purgatory. I cannot find in either of the two parts of the *Devonport Manual* in my possession, that the Sisters are ever required to specially pray for their own relatives and friends outside of the Convent. At page 4 of Part I. the Sister is directed to pray thus:—"Bless my dear Mother and my Community," but the Mother is the Mother Superior, and not the Superior Mother at home. It would appear that the Sisters are expected to act as though they had no mothers, relatives or friends outside the Convent; or, as if they were all dead and buried.

"Of what use," asks the *Devonport Manual* of the Sister, "will it be having left the world, if you still dwell on its news, or to have given up your relations if you are taken up or entangled with the wish to receive letters or visits from them?"⁵⁶

In many of the Ritualistic Sisterhoods much of the time of the Sisters is devoted to the care of the sick, and not a few of them act as nurses for the sick and dying. Dr. Pusey said, at the Oxford Church Congress, that "the Sister is the Pioneer of the priest," which amounts to this: wherever the Sister goes, she prepares and makes ready the way, as a pioneer, for the priest to follow her. We may be quite sure that the priest whom the Sister may recommend is, whenever possible, one of the Father Confessor class. In only too many instances the Nursing Sisters act as zealous missionaries of the Ritualistic cause, and use their influence to persuade young ladies—more especially those with large fortunes—to enter Ritualistic Convents.

⁵⁶ *Devonport Manual*, Part I., p. 32.

In the secret book for the use of St. Margaret's, East Grinstead, Sisterhood, the *Spirit of the Founder*, Dr. Neale, their Warden, is reported as having said to them: "You stand, if not in the place of priests, yet in the place of God's ambassadors, to those to whom you are sent."⁶⁷ Nor is their influence in the matter of will-making to be despised. It would be interesting to know how many legacies to Convents, and bequests for the erection of new Romanizing Churches, are the result of the influence of Nursing Sisters of Mercy. Protestant families are never theologically safe with Ritualistic Nursing Sisters in their houses.

The influence of Ritualistic Sisterhoods in destroying a love for Protestantism, and planting a love for more or less of Roman Catholic doctrine in its place, is most of all seen in their educational work, whether it be carried on by means of schools or books. Convent Schools for the upper and middle classes are now very numerous, and constitute a serious danger to the Protestantism of the Church of England. The specially sad thing is that many parents who dislike Ritualism exceedingly, send their daughters to these schools to be educated, merely because they are cheap. The policy is a selfish one, and cannot be justified by those who believe that the welfare of the souls of their children should be, to Christian parents, a first consideration. In elementary schools for the poor also these Sisters are frequently seen as teachers. The "Sisters of the Church," who are known by various *aliases*, such as "The Kilburn Sisterhood," "Church Extension Association," &c., devote themselves largely to the work of education, and are publishers of many works, in which Auricular Confession for young and old is taught, as also the Real Presence, and the Eucharistic Sacrifice. The Sisterhood of St. Margaret's, East Grinstead, publishes the most extremely Romanizing books of any Sisterhood I am acquainted with. One of the worst of these is the *Night Hours of the Church*, in three

⁶⁷ *The Spirit of the Founder*, p. 94.

volumes. In the "Editor's Note" to the second volume it is stated that these *Night Hours* are translated from the "Roman Breviary," and that the work has "been carefully brought into accordance with the Latin original." In this work services are provided for "All Souls' Day," and for the festival of "Corpus Christi," two Roman Catholic holidays which are not found in the Kalendar of the Book of Common Prayer; the first of these being held in support of the doctrine of Purgatory, and the second in honour of Transubstantiation. Throughout these volumes the Intercession of Departed Saints is asked for, and they are invoked by name, especially the Virgin Mary. The following extracts prove the Invocation of the Virgin:—

"Blessed art thou, Virgin Mary, Mother of God, that believedst the Lord: for there hath been a performance of those things which were told thee: behold thou art exalted above the choirs of Angels. Intercede for us to the Lord our God."⁸⁸

"Holy Mary, Virgin Mother of God, intercede for us."⁸⁹

In a "privately printed" volume of *Offices from the Breviary*, dated 1885, for use in St. Saviour's Hospital, Osnaburgh Street, London, N.W., which is under the control of another Sisterhood, is contained a Hymn to the Virgin, the first verse of which is as follows:—

"Those five wounds of Jesus smitten,
Mother! in my heart be written,
Deep as in thine own they be!
Thou, my Saviour's Cross who bearest,
Thou, thy Son's rebuke who sharest,
Let me share them both with thee."⁹⁰

1 On the question of the general work of Ritualistic Sisterhoods, and their objects, I cannot do better than quote here the following wise remarks from *Cautions for the Times*, edited by the late Archbishop Whately:—

"The principal method of decoy, at present, is not so much argument as other kinds of persuasion. Among these, none seem

⁸⁸ *Night Hours of the Church*, Vol. II., p. 175.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

⁹⁰ *Offices from the Breviary*, p. 95.

more popular just now than what are called 'Brotherhoods' and 'Sisterhoods of Mercy'; the real grand object of which appears to be, not so much almsgiving itself, as, under pretence of that, imbuing with Tractite" [now called Ritualistic] "principles those who receive, and those who administer 'the charity.' And it is part of the system not only to make a great parade of their works of charity, but also to represent themselves as the *only* persons who pay any regard to the wants of the poor in those localities where such associations have been at work. Bold and persevering assertions often gain credence with the thoughtless; and thus it has come to be believed by many, in some cases which have lately made much noise in the world, that in such and such districts the poor were left wholly unthought of till these Sisterhoods arose; the truth being the very reverse: *twenty times as much* was being done for the poor, and in a more judicious and efficient way, by persons who were content to go about their labour of love quietly, without blowing a trumpet before them, or wearing any fantastic uniform." ⁶¹

⁶¹ *Cautions for the Times*, p. 344.