

The day was over, at last. Then, in the silence of the night, followed by one or two whom he could trust, he entered the church. In loving reverence, with no word spoken, as men handle the lifeless forms of saints and martyrs as — may I say it? — Joseph and Nicodemus handled the dead Body of our Lord, they took down the Blessed Rood, with its attendant figures of the Mother and St. John, from the screen; the stations of the cross, the crucifixes over “altar” and pulpit, all, in short, that the bishop, speaking by the mouth of his lay-chancellor, had ordered them to remove, as “objects to which superstitious reverence was likely to be paid”. True, the bishop had not personally ordered their removal, but he was bound by the acts of his chancellor, responsible for them to the Church — and to the State. To such a condition of slavery had “Catholic” bishops and clergy fallen in the “English branch of the Universal Church.”

The sad task ended, and the “sacred images” — “idols” their “fellow-Catholics” called them — housed, for the present, at least, in the rectory, “Father” Butler retired to his room, not to sleep, but to pray and make reparation for the insults offered to His Lord “in the Blessed Sacrament” — for that, too, must no longer be “reserved” as heretofore — to Himself, His Mother and the saints by reason of the removal of their images from God’s house at the bidding of “an impious and tyrannical State.” Truly, there was need of penance and of reparation.

There was greater need than he knew, as yet. The “gospellers,” thinking it just possible that their “zeal for Protestant truth” might be foiled in this instance also — as had proved to be the case — had provided themselves with a yet more powerful weapon for use against “Romanizing idolaters.” A “consecrated host” had been “secured” — not reverently consumed — by the “apostate priest,” and, two days later, at a “Protestant rally” in Middlehampton, exhibited, held up to ridicule, and finally