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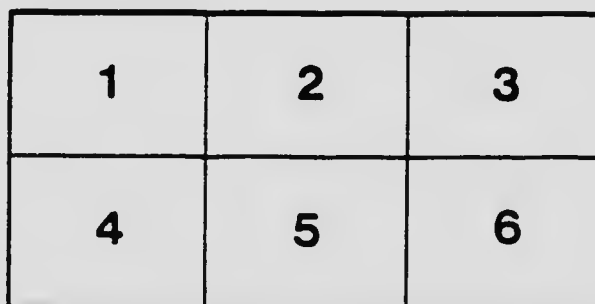
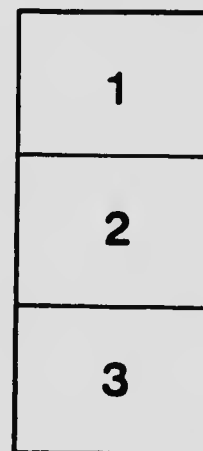
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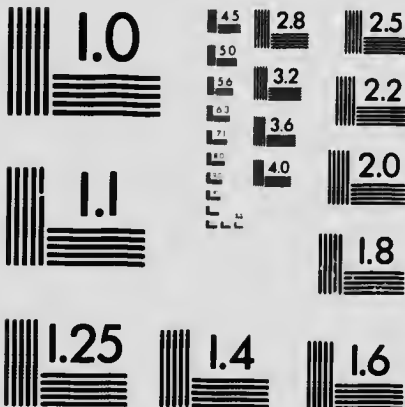
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(DAME MAURUS).

**THE
ESCAPED NUN**

THE STORY OF HER LIFE

**BY
MARGARET MARY MOULT
(DAME MAURUS)**

NEW ILLUSTRATED EDITION

**CASSELL AND COMPANY, LTD.
London, New York, Toronto and Melbourne
1911**

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PREFACE TO NEW EDITION

Two years ago to-day—February 15th, 1909—I escaped from East Bergholt Abbey, to resume a life of freedom in the world. It might be asked now, after the lapse of two years, with what feelings do I regard the grave step of leaving the Abbey and breaking the lifelong vows I had taken. I can only answer that what I did then I in no wise regret—save that I ought to have ended it sooner, instead of enduring for seven years a life upon which I cannot look back even now without shuddering. Could I go back again to that February day, two years ago, my action would be precisely the same, and oh! how I wish with all my heart that the many other unhappy nuns, wherever situated, could have the fortunate opportunity that I had, and the courage, to escape.

PREFACE

But I have had to pay the penalty. I have been mobbed and hounded, slandered and vilified. To-day I am happily married, and my one desire is to live at peace. I have never wished to give offence to believers in the Catholic faith, only to point out the iniquity of a state of things contrary to true religion, and contrary to the best interests of the Church.

All the same, in spite of persecution, slander and abuse, the facts as I have given them in this little book have never been refuted. This is a simple, honest narrative of what actually exists, and what I have actually experienced.

I leave this record in the hands of all just and fair-minded people—both Catholic and Protestant—with the hope that what I have suffered and endured will pave the way to the abolition of the system of vows and all it entails.

MARGARET PAGE.

February 15, 1911.

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THE ESCAPED NUN

CHAPTER I

EARLY DAYS

I was born in Manchester. My father is an Englishman, my mother, Irish, though educated in New Orleans. All on my mother's side are Catholics, whilst my father's people are Protestants. As my mother would not marry my father whilst a "heretic" he was "converted" to the Catholic faith shortly before the wedding although I do not think he cared for the religion. He certainly did not practise it.

The first school that I distinctly remember being sent to was a convent school in Salford, near Manchester. The nuns belonged to the Congregation of the Faithful Companions of Jesus. The cor-

THE ESCAPED NUN

vent was a fine building, standing in its own grounds, not far from Peel Park. I did not like the school. The scholars were always watching and telling tales about each other. There was a great deal of "accepting of persons," not for any personal merit or behaviour, but on account of the position which their parents held.

I remember on one occasion the Superior, a nun held in great awe by the pupils, announced that a raffle for a gold watch would take place. The tickets were sold at ten shillings each. All the pupils were pressed very much to buy a ticket. I forgot to ask mother for several days for the money, and each morning I had a scolding from the Superior for not bringing it, though the raffle was supposed to be entirely voluntary. When each pupil had brought the ten shillings, the day of the raffle was fixed, and, as had been openly hinted among the pupils, the watch fell to the richest girl.

EARLY DAYS

Another conventual mode of obtaining money from the pupils was the holding of bazaars. I went to one of them. The tickets of admission cost one shilling. The articles all seemed very expensive. There was one large table filled with pretty objects. A notice hung over them, stating that everything on the counter was sixpence each. In order to purchase from this stall it was necessary to lead a nun, who had to shut her eyes, up to the table. The first thing her hand touched one had to take. We told the nun beforehand what we wanted, but somehow she never seemed to touch the particular object of our desire, until we had paid three or four different sixpences!

The convent was too far from home to return for lunch, so that I, as well as many others, remained at the school. This was a source of income to the nuns, for the prices of the simplest

THE ESCAPED NUN

things were high. Child as I was I could not help noticing how the nuns sought to make money.

They were not backward in punishing. Many a slap have I had on my hands and arms with a thick round ruler for such offences as turning my head in the class, or not knowing my lessons. A favourite method of punishment was putting children in dark cupboards for an hour at a time. I did not stay at this school more than two terms. I did not like either nuns or pupils.

After leaving this convent I went for the next few years to Catholic schools kept by secular teachers. I spent some time in Ireland, where I went to school with the Presentation nuns in Cashel.

When I was about nine years of age our home in Manchester was broken up, and we had much family trouble. My mother supported her four children for a long time by the sale of her jewellery.

EARLY DAYS

When all the money had come to an end she determined to ask the advice and assistance of the priest in charge of the church we attended in Manchester. In her prosperous days my mother had been one of this priest's chief benefactors. Her name generally headed every subscription list, whether for the rebuilding of the church when it had fallen in, or for a font, or any of the various items that the "poor" priests were always wanting.

To this priest my mother went in her trouble. One bitterly cold night she called on him. The housekeeper told her to wait until his reverence had finished dining. Presently he came into the reception room. He was a tall, well-fed, handsome Irishman, evidently well pleased with his surroundings as he then found them. Mother was astonished at the coldness of his greeting. Had he forgotten her? Did he not remember that she was the

THE ESCAPED NUN

woman he had led by the hand through the different rooms at the bazaar of the year before?

Timidly she asked him if he knew her.

"Oh, yes," replied the priest.

My mother asked him if he had heard of her trouble.

"I have, indeed; it's a great pity, a great pity," he responded.

"Then," asked my mother, "what am I to do with my four little children? I have no means of gaining a livelihood."

"I can suggest nothing but the union," was his comforting reply.

My mother could not find words to answer this cruel speech, but, rising up, she made her way to the door, and staggered into the blinding rain.

He never came near her, nor helped her in any way. Sorely did we need the many handsome sums she had bestowed on him.

EARLY DAYS

This priest had to be suspended for drunkenness long before he died.

Shortly after, my mother took me to the States; there I went to school with Franciscan nuns. When we returned to Manchester I went to a Catholic lay school. A year later we went to live at St. Margaret's-on-Thames, and there I went to a Protestant school, the first I had ever attended. The teachers never sought to interfere with my religion in any way. I was spared all that controversy with which Catholics overwhelm any Protestant unfortunate enough to come in contact with them.

My next school, in Faling, was also a Protestant one. I liked the school and my teacher.

Thirteen months after this we removed to Kilburn, and there I went to school with Dominican nuns. I had only been with them a short time when my health became very bad, and one of the nuns

THE ESCAPED NUN

asked my mother to allow me to go as a boarder to their convent at Bognor. Mother thought only of my health, so she agreed to their proposal. A friend of ours, a Catholic, tried to persuade mother from letting me go, saying: "They are sure to make a nun of her." I went to Bognor, however. I liked the place well enough, though some of the sisters were not very agreeable. I could not help noticing in particular the animosity existing between two of them. I felt very shocked when I first saw the unkind behaviour shown to one, a Belgian, by an English sister. This was the first time I realised how different nuns are when you really know them from what they appear to be to the outside world.

I stayed nearly two years at this convent, but, the climate of Bognor proving too relaxing, the nuns prevailed upon me to go to a house of theirs at Beccles, in Suffolk. It was in January, 1901, that I

EARLY DAYS

went to St. Catherine's Convent. They had another lady boarder there, and we became great friends. The conventual atmosphere was not as calm as outsiders imagine; but on the whole I spent a happy time there. There was a good deal of pettiness in the convent. The Superior incurred the dislike of some of the members, because she neglected to attend the community exercises of devotion in order to do parish work for the priest in charge of the mission. The Superior in her turn was always at loggerheads with a certain little nun who, having a scrupulous conscience, felt it her duty to keep the Superior-General well informed with news of the Beccles house.

CHAPTER II

I DESIRE TO BECOME A NUN

I CANNOT say when I first made up my mind to become a nun. Having been brought up a Catholic, I had naturally thought of the life of the convent as being the most holy life possible. I remember the time when I was the tiniest child shutting myself up and saying prayers, hoping one day I should be a nun. Perhaps it was during my two years' stay at Bognor that I thought most of the possibilities of my having a "vocation."

True, there were many things I had noticed in my contact with nuns that had not gained my respect, but still the beauty and holiness of the life of a nun had great attractions for me. I felt,

I DESIRE TO BECOME A NUN

however, that if I became a nun it must be of an enclosed order. The little imperfections I had noticed about the nuns I had come in contact with I accounted for because they mixed so much with the world. I thought that enclosed nuns, withdrawn from the temptations of the world, and living a life of contemplation and holiness, would be far superior to those I had known.

Before leaving Bognor the idea was established in my mind that if the way were opened I would become a nun. It was in this frame of mind that I went to Beccles.

After about a year I spoke of my desire to become a nun to my confessor, to whom I confessed once a week. I told him I would like to be a Dominican, as I knew the nuns of that order best, only it must be in an enclosed house of that order. He made no reply to this, but drawing from his pocket a small book, he read out a list

THE ESCAPED NUN

of Benedictine convents in England. This priest was a Benedictine monk, so I suppose he thought he would be wanting in zeal for his order unless he tried to secure me for it. He wrote to several convents for me.

I visited Stanbrook Abbey, in Worcester, at the invitation of the Abbess, Lady Cecilia Heywood. It is a beautiful place, and the church is a perfect gem. The nuns pride themselves on the celebration of the liturgical services of the Church, and on their observance of the Benedictine rule.

I spent a few days here, and would have been delighted to stay. The Abbess, however, would not receive me without a dowry of £5,000, so I had to give up the idea of entering.

From Stanbrook I went to Colwich, in Staffordshire, taking with me a letter of introduction to the Prioress, Mother Magdalene, I think her name was, of St.

I DESIRE TO BECOME A NUN

Benedict's Priory. I was given a cordial welcome by the novice-mistress, Mother Gertrude. She was a gentle little nun, with the holiest face I have ever seen. I did not like the Prioress at all. She had a most autocratic and haughty manner, which ill accorded with the formula, "Our dear Mother," which the nuns were obliged to use when speaking to or of her. I did not like this because I thought it would be the occasion for so much hypocrisy. To make matters worse, they had as chaplain a most eccentric priest. I cannot recall his name. There was no love lost between the Prioress and her chaplain. The priest interfered with her business, and would not permit the nuns to go to Holy Communion except when he thought fit. This manner of acting he continued even after the Pope's Bull on "Daily Holy Communion for the faithful in general." The Prioress asked the Bishop of the diocese (I am stating these things on the authority

THE ESCAPED NUN

of one who was a postulant there) to remove the priest. He refused to do so, as the chaplain had an impediment in his speech which prevented him from preaching. I suppose his Lordship thought the priest was good enough for nuns!

I met this man at dinner the same evening that I arrived. For some time he absolutely ignored me, then suddenly he blurted out: "How many inhabitants has Beccles?" From this question I guessed he had spoken to the Prioress about me. I replied that I did not know the number of people in Beccles. Then he went on to say how extremely ignorant I must be, if, after living eighteen months in a place, I had no idea of the population.

After another long pause he asked: "When did bad Queen Elizabeth ascend the throne?" Question after question followed, until I really began to think that the priest was not quite right in his mind.

I DESIRE TO BECOME A NUN

It was a most unpleasant evening, and when he suddenly told me to "get off to bed" I felt greatly relieved, though not a little indignant at such a dismissal. I felt certain I should never like St. Benedict's Priory.

The following day I left for London, where I stayed a short time with some Protestant friends. These good people were very upset at the thought of my entering a nunnery. They did all in their power by conversation and books to prevent me from carrying out my purpose, but I left in a few days for Beccles, quite unmoved in my resolution.

Arriving at Beccles, I lost no time in calling upon my confessor, Father Meinrad. I told him of my disappointment in not being able to enter the Stanbrook community, and of my experiences at Colwich. He did not like to listen when I spoke of the peculiar chaplain they had. I told Father Meinrad I knew I should hate

THE ESCAPED NUN

Colwich, whereupon he said he would write telling the Prioress I had decided not to enter there. She answered by a curt letter, telling Father Meinrad that further communication with me would be unnecessary.

I next asked my confessor to write to East Bergholt for me. This he declined to do, as he had quarrelled with the Abbess. The Reverend Mother of the Beccles convent, where I lived, wrote for me. Lady Lescher, the then Abbess, replied at once, asking me to visit her.

Accordingly I set out for East Bergholt, and stayed two days in the hospice or guest-house of the Abbey. I liked the Abbess, who was very kind to me. She told me she would let me know in the course of a day or two whether they could receive me. When I returned to Beccles I told Father Meinrad that I liked the Abbess, but not the Abbey as much as Stanbrook. Nevertheless, beggars can-

I DESIRE TO BECOME A NUN

not be choosers, and when the letter came acquainting me with their willingness to give me a trial I was very glad to accept it. Several other letters came from the Abbess telling me that I must be very docile and obedient, also desiring me to enter as soon as possible, for delays were dangerous.

The day fixed for my entrance was March 21. The weeks from November until after my visit to Bergholt had been filled with anxiety; now all was sunshine. I longed for the day to come, and felt dreadfully impatient at the inevitable delay caused in procuring the articles of clothing necessary for a postulant.

CHAPTER III

ENTERING EAST BERGHOLT

THE twenty-first of March came at last—the great day on which I was to leave the world, and enter the convent. How eagerly I had looked forward to it, and how bright were my anticipations! It is true I had had one or two misgivings about my perseverance, but I put them away as soon as they came. It was the dark side of my dream-picture, and I resolved not to look at it. I felt ready for any sacrifice; I thought, once I set foot upon the threshold of so holy a place, my inclinations, faults, yea, my lower nature itself, would depart from me.

I remember that the morning was fine and bright, but bitterly cold. I went to Mass and Holy Communion in the Beccles

ENTERING EAST BERGHOLT

Minster, as Father Meinrad called his new church. After my thanksgiving I went to my Spiritual Father in the Sacristy, and knelt to receive his blessing. I had breakfast at the convent, bade all good-bye, and started out for East Bergholt.

The train journey was marked by only one incident, but that a curious one, to which I have often looked back with mixed feelings.

Several stations down the line from Beccles, a gentleman, clad in a heavy fur-trimmed overcoat, entered my compartment, where I sat alone. He began to read a paper as soon as the train started.

After what seemed to me like five minutes I chanced to look across at him, when, to my great confusion, I found he was not reading, but looking at me over the top of his paper. I instantly turned away. Presently he asked if I had seen the morning's paper. I replied in the negative,

THE ESCAPED NUN

and he passed it to me. When I returned it I found the same coal-black eyes fixed upon me, which made me feel somewhat uncomfortable. He astonished me by asking: "Why do you not get married instead of going there?" I could not speak through sheer astonishment. I had certainly never seen the man in my life. I had not told him my destination, nor the object of my journey. As I did not reply, he remarked: "I am afraid I have offended you by intruding on your private affairs." I stumbled out something about it not mattering. I had not the courage to ask how he knew my intention. Several other things he said, trying to turn me from my purpose.

When the train reached Manningtree, and I had to alight, he gave me his hand, saying: "I wish I had prevailed with you to act on my advice."

I answered that my mind was quite made up.

ENTERING EAST BERGHOLT

"No," responded the gentleman, looking at me in such a strange fashion; "it is made up for a time only; after that you will change—yes, you will change!"

The signal was given by the guard, and the train moved out of the station, leaving me looking at the man at the carriage window with a curious feeling at my heart that did not bring particular joy. How often in that convent did I think of him with deepest regrets for not having followed his advice!

I drove to the Abbey in a hired carriage. It is five miles from the station. As I drew nearer I heard the bells ringing for the Vespers.

I was received by Lady Lescher after the service was over, and, after greetings, I related to her the story of my strange railway companion. She declared it was the devil who had assumed human form for the purpose of tempting me. She told me many extraordinary stories of

THE ESCAPED NUN

how would-be aspirants to the religious life had been tempted, and even deterred from carrying out their holy purpose, through diabolical apparitions.

The Abbess told me I must remain in the hospice for a few days, and there make a spiritual triduum, that is, a retreat of three days.

In the course of the afternoon Dame Catherine, my future novice-mistress, came to see me. On first seeing her I disliked her. Her peremptory manner jarred upon me. I was not accustomed to being told when to go to the church, when to go for a walk, what to eat, and when.

The few days were spent in the church, guest-parlour, and my own room.

The church for the seculars is separated from that of the nuns, the former merely commanding a view of the altar and part of the sanctuary. I could not even see the nuns, as a thick curtain was drawn over the iron grille, which is always kept

ENTERING EAST BERGHOLT

locked. There is a second higher and larger grille, very ornamental, separating the nuns' choir from the sanctuary.

I was very much impressed by the chant and recitation of the divine office. It sounded so solemn I fancied angels must be singing with the nuns. It was not till some time after that I discovered the majority of the singers were simply getting through it, without heart and, in some cases, without understanding.

It is of course well known that the Benedictine order has always been famous for learning. I suppose, therefore, that East Bergholt was the exception to the rule. None of the older nuns understood Latin. They were just able to make out the Ordo, or manner of celebrating the Liturgy. I dare say they likewise knew that *Deus* meant God, *pater* father, and *filius* son. Their pronounciation was very faulty. Lady Lescher, on becoming Abbess, had been so disgusted that she

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insisted on each new member learning the language thoroughly. All those who had entered young consequently knew Latin; indeed, many knew Greek quite well. But zealous as Lady Lescher certainly was, she could not teach the language of the Church to people who had reached the age of forty or fifty. Therefore, not one-half of the whole choir understood Latin perfectly. Moreover, the lay sisters, who numbered twenty-one, were absolutely ignorant of the tongue in which every prayer and petition to God was addressed. However, no such thoughts as these occurred to me at the time. I was impressed with the beauty of the music, and the novelty of the surroundings. Beyond that my high hopes held me up, and I looked forward to the peace of God that should so soon come to me.

The guest-parlours are but scantily furnished, and separated by iron grilles from that portion reserved to the nuns. Here

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all visitors are received, whether they be parents or mere acquaintances. The iron-work of the grille is so close that in one case not so much as a finger can be passed between the bars, and in the other case not the entire hand. I remember the agony of tears when my mother first visited me and she could not even kiss me.

After the expiration of the appointed time the ceremony of my reception into the convent took place.

In the afternoon an out sister led me to the enclosure door, at which I knelt down and knocked. It was opened by the Lady Abbess, who was accompanied by the mistress of novices, two chantresses, and several of the seniors, or, as they are called in the convent, the "ancients."

The Abbess asked me what I demanded. I answered that I wished to try my vocation in their holy order. She bade me rise up. The chantresses then intoned the 113th

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Psalm—"In exitu Israel de Egypto." The little party of nuns led the way up the cloisters and entered the church. Here we knelt in private prayer. Afterwards the procession left the church and moved towards the chapter house. At our entrance all the nuns rose from their stalls. I was left in the middle with the novice-mistress, the nuns being in a line on either side. One of the religious left her place, and, going into the centre, read the 58th chapter from the Rule of St. Benedict—"De disciplina suscipiendorum fratrum" (the Manner of Receiving Brothers to Religion).

In it St. Benedict says that: "An easy entrance is not to be granted to one who cometh newly to religious life, but that as the Apostle says: Prove the spirit to see that it be of God (1 John iv.). A senior is to be deputed to watch over the novice to see if he truly seeketh God, and is ready for obedience and opprobrium. All the hardship and austerity by

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which we go to God is to be laid before him. The things which he possesseth must either be given to the poor, or by a solemn gift handed over to the monastery, reserving nothing to himself, because from that day he must know that he hath not power even over his own body."

The novice-mistress then motioned me to remove my shoe and stocking, whereupon the Abbess left her stall, and, coming down to where I sat, took a towel and girded herself with it. Her chaplain brought a cushion and placed it for the Abbess to kneel upon. She was then presented with a basin of warm water, with which she washed my foot, drying it with the towel, and afterwards kissing it. I replaced my stocking and shoe. My mistress led me to the Abbess' stall, and left me kneeling before her. She gave me a short spiritual exhortation, and told me my name henceforth was to be Maurus. after St. Benedict's best-beloved disciple.

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Then she gave me the kiss of peace, as, likewise, did all the nuns.

I was then taken to my cell, and had to take off all my secular clothing and put on my postulant dress. When properly attired, I was led to the noviceship and introduced to the novices, my future companions.

I may mention here that postulants, novices, and juniors of the noviceship are strictly forbidden to hold any communication whatever with the professed nuns. The latter meet the noviceship party only in the choir and refectory, and even here their places are separated.

CHAPTER IV

DAILY ROUTINE

I HAVE given an account of my reception at East Bergholt, and something of the hopes and fears with which I started out on the monastic life. Perhaps it will be as well at this point, before describing the successive steps that were necessary before I became a fully-professed nun, that I should detail the daily life in the convent, and then describe some of my companions there.

The day's routine is as follows: All rise at 5 a.m. winter and summer. At 5.30 all go to the church for Laudes. This is followed by half-an-hour of meditation. At 6.30 Prime commences. When the office is finished the community forms a procession to the chapter house for the

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singing of the Martyrology, Holy Rule, etc.

There are always three separate peals of bells for the divine office. The first, which lasts about five minutes, is to prepare the nuns for the holy occupation on which they are about to enter. At the second ringing all repair to the cloister wearing their cowls; and at the third peal the religious slowly move, two deep, towards the church. When they reach the centre of the choir they genuflect to the Blessed Sacrament; rising, they bow first to each other and then make a profound inclination to the Lady Abbess before they enter their respective stalls. A profound inclination is made in the following manner: One stands facing the Abbess, slowly bending the head and shoulders, at the same time touching the knees with the finger tips. Tierce is now said or sung according to the degree of solemnity marked out for the feast. Mass follows directly,

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and, after the thanksgiving for Holy Communion, Sext is said.

When this office has been celebrated all leave the church and go to the refectory for breakfast, or, on fasting days, a collation. The meal is always eaten standing. The food for this consists of: On Sundays and feast days, bread and butter with a mug of tea; but on fast days of the Church and Rule, two ounces of dry bread and a mug of coffee.

I cannot help comparing this diet to the beef-steak given for breakfast at Edith O'Gorman's convent, as that lady testifies in her book.

At 8.45 a.m. a hand-bell summons all to their various occupations according to the appointment of the Abbess, such as bookbinding, the varied work, heavy as well as light, peculiar to a printing office, church embroidery, painting, illuminating, making habits and all the other articles of clothing worn by the community.

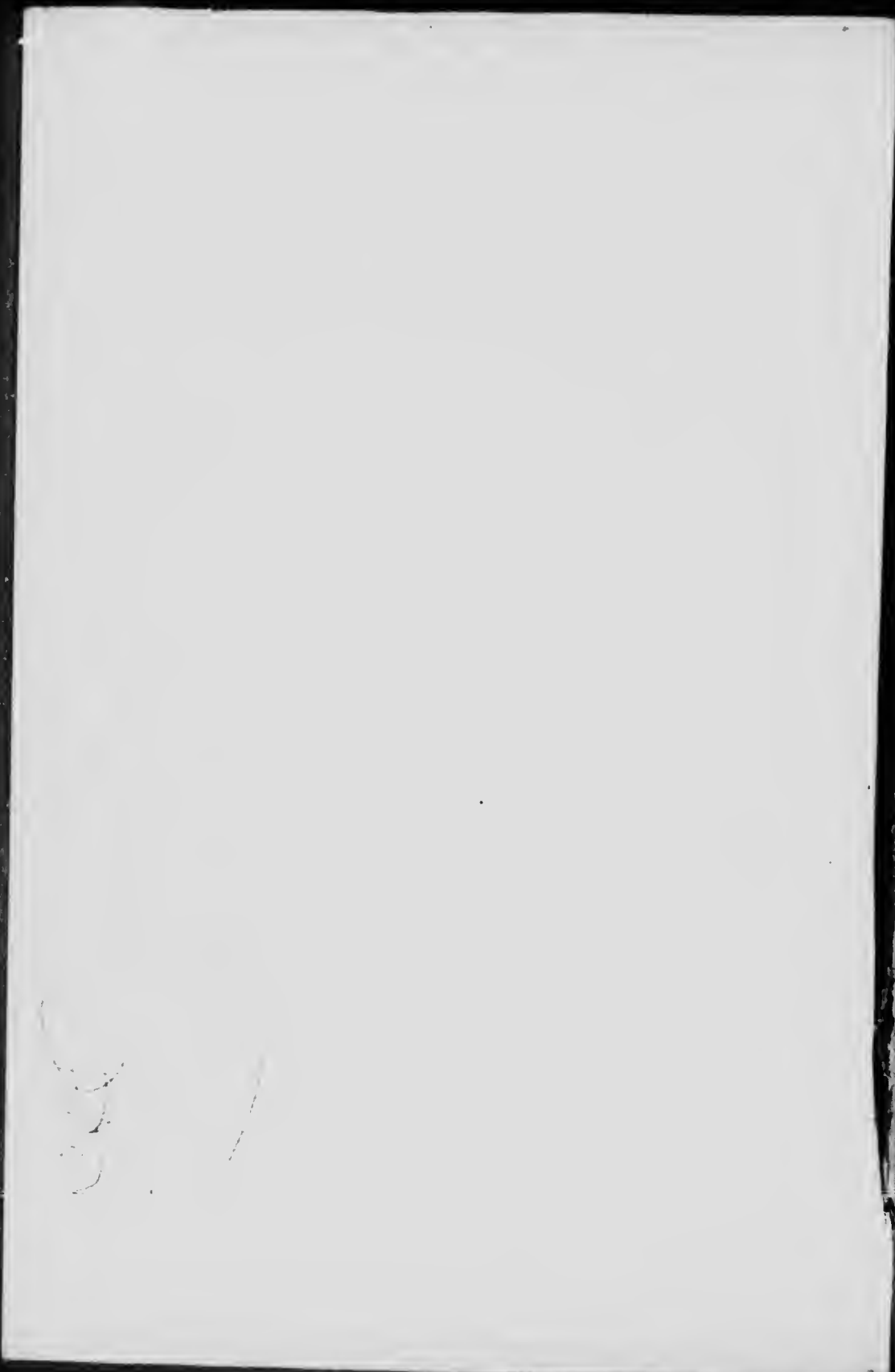
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The nuns employed in church embroidery and illuminating gained much money for the Abbey. They had great demand for their work from private individuals and shops. The church-workers were not to be envied; they had a hard time. Even when they were full of work the Abbess would still take as many orders as came. Every order was always wanted in a great hurry, so the Abbess obliged the nuns to stay at their work all the time left to them from the church services. They sat up till two or three in the morning, working the most delicate embroidery by the light of a small paraffin lamp. Those who were too weary to sit up had to rise some hours before five to get on with the work. I have seen Dame Lucy, who was a splendid embroiderer, looking as if she would collapse, the pain in her head being so bad. Moreover, their eyes were affected. A magnifying glass was necessary to examine some of their work. Dames



From a photograph by the Pictorial Agency.

EAST BERGHOLT ABBEY.



DAILY ROUTINE

Columba, Reparata, and Assumpta, all had to get spectacles to save their sight during the time I was there.

One of these workers, Dame Ida, suffered a great many inconveniences on account of getting no exercise, having to sit bending over an embroidery frame all the day.

The nuns do much towards keeping the interior of the convent in a good condition, such as painting, varnishing, whitewashing, paper-hanging, glazing and carpentering. The cooking, scrubbing, washing, and ironing were undertaken by lay sisters.

To return to the subject of the daily routine. The bell rings for dinner at 11.30 a.m. All go to the church, and at a signal from the Abbess form in procession for the refectory, and the 129th Psalm, "De profundis," is intoned in the cloister. When all have reached the refectory, grace is sung, which being finished, the nuns take their seats on benches at

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long tables arranged on either side of the room. The Abbess's table is placed under the large crucifix at the top. In the centre is the pulpit. Strict silence must always be observed in the refectory. One nun and two lay sisters are appointed weekly to serve the community during meals. The food is brought in between two plates for each one. Meat, of the cheapest kind, is given at dinner on certain days, according to the season, but the greater part of the diet is composed of salt and dried fish.

After my appointment as dispenser not one atom of meat in any form ever passed my lips. It was more than I could do to eat it after seeing the huge coarse lumps of meat that were bought for the community. The smells in the kitchen were simply too awful for words. Why does not our Government give to nuns the same privilege that they give to inmates of asylums, workhouses, and

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orphanages, where there is inspection? I used to pity poor Sister Berchmans, whose delicate constitution was sorely tried by her work as aid to Sister Mildred, the cook. I have often seen my poor little friend standing over the great crocks employed to hold the stock, scooping up the thick layers of fat from the top of the liquid. The smell that issued from it was so vile that Sister Berchmans could scarcely bear it. Yet the liquid was always boiled up for soup, and the fat used for making pastry! Even to pass through the kitchen whilst the skimming was being done was more than I could trust myself to do, though I am by no means delicately constituted. Fortunately the odours in the refectory when the soup was carried in were strong enough to warn the nuns what they might expect!

It was worse with the pastry. One could not know if the dripping was bad until the pastry had been tasted. If

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it was too vile to eat, the only thing that remained was to kneel in the middle of the refectory, holding the plate out that all might see the fault committed against poverty, and the immortification of the religious.

The present Abbess, Lady Hildegarde, bought a refrigerator, but as she would only supply the ice once a week instead of twice it did not keep the meat in a fit condition. I have seen meat absolutely green on the top and covered with fly-blows and maggots. The Abbess herself once brought back the meat sent up for her supper. (She ate meat as often as she felt disposed, not as allowed by the Rule). On the meat were white maggots. She was in a great rage, but I confess I was not too sorry for her. I merely thought that God had mortified her for a change instead of her mortifying us!

As I have said before, I pitied Sister Berchmans from my heart. She was tried,

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not only by her distasteful duties as second in the kitchen, but also by the fact that the cook was a terribly dirty Irishwoman. When she had cooked the dinner, this woman, Sister Mildred, instead of cleaning the larder and refrigerator with hot water and soda, would merely run round them with a dirty, greasy, dishcloth. She would retire to her cell, leaving the supper cook to enter on her duties.

Once Sister Mildred was dismissed from the kitchen on account of her insolence to me. I took this opportunity to get Sister Berchmans and a novice named Sister Theresa to clean the larder. It was a nasty, dark little hole, quite insufficient for the needs of a great community of nearly sixty, all told. The filth these sisters found in the larder was such as to make them sick. In turning out a tremendous box behind the door they actually found dirty aprons, broken plates, shoes,

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and various articles of dirty clothing belonging to Sister Mildred, which she kept among the food. In a locker they discovered heaps of dirty, damp paper, mouldy pudding-cloths, and pieces of mouldy pie. One bag of odds and ends was alive with vermin! Cobwebs and spiders were there galore. I had everything turned out, and these sisters whitewashed the place. Alas! Sister Mildred soon returned to her duties, and with her the former filthiness.

Returning to the subject of the daily routine of the convent, I may add that one of the nuns is appointed each week to read during dinner and supper. First, a passage is read from the Bible; secondly, a chapter of the Holy Rule; then the Life of a Saint, or "Rodriquez on Christian and Religious Perfection," or some other spiritual treatise. When the repast is finished the Miserere is intoned in the refectory, and the community

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once more form in procession to the church, where thanksgiving is sung.

The nuns leave the church as they entered. They then proceed to the work-room where all sit in their appointed places and do needlework. During this hour they may converse together, but must not hold private conversation or speak on worldly subjects. At 1.15 the bell rings for devotions in the church. Strict silence is now the order, as it was throughout the morning. At 2 p.m. the bell rings for Vespers, which are always sung. At 3 o'clock the nuns work together in silence at whatever the Abbess has appointed. From 4 to 4.30 p.m. is given up to spiritual reading in the cells; 4.30 to 5 p.m. to meditation in the church. On certain days Benediction is given. Otherwise a conference in the chapter house is given by the Abbess or in her absence by the Prioress. Supper, or collation on fast days, is at 6 o'clock all the year round.

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The food at this meal is usually milk-pudding, porridge, pastry, or vegetables.

After supper the community repair to the work-room for three-quarters of an hour. Compline is recited or sung in the church at 7.30. Afterwards the solemn silence of the night begins. Matins commence at 8.30 and occupy one hour to one hour and a half, according to the solemnity of the feast. On Monday nights after Matins, the Stations of the Cross must be made for the holy souls in purgatory, or the time may be spent before the Blessed Sacrament. On Thursday nights the nuns watch before the Blessed Sacrament to gain the indulgence of the Holy Hour.

After the laboriousness and monotony of the day the nuns retire to their cells. Each nun has a separate cell which contains a small straw bed. The religious are not allowed linen or cotton sheets, but a kind of felt material is used for the purpose.

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The nuns sleep clothed with woollen tunic, habit, scapular, girdle, and linen veil.

The unhealthiness of this will readily be seen. Imagine having to wear a thick, coarse, flannel garment, not only day and night in winter, but even in the greatest heats of summer. This tunic grew harder and thicker at each washing. In the summer it was quite soaked with perspiration, and even after one had refreshed oneself as well as the limited supply of water would allow, on this garment had to go, as it was directly against the Rule to sleep without it. Our "felt sheets" were usually washed when a religious celebrated her silver jubilee of twenty-five years' profession. The sheets would then have been used twenty-six years and six months at the least, as they are given new or clean to postulants on entering religious life.

Each cell contains a small table, chair, oratory, crucifix, and a few holy pictures.

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Each nun has a copy of her vows hanging over her oratory. The one read by her at the ceremony of her profession is beautifully written on parchment and illuminated. This is kept for ever in the archives of the Abbey.

The religious possess nothing but what has been permitted to them by the Abbess, neither may they give nor take anything from any nun without the same leave.

Once a year during Lent a Chapter of Poverty is held. Each professed nun and lay sister comes before the Abbess and renounces all she has received for her use, leaving it to the Abbess's discretion whether she shall retain or give it up.

The constitutions also enjoin upon the Abbess that she shall visit the sisters' cells from time to time. If she finds anything therein which she has not given them leave to keep she must take it away. Furthermore, no sister is to keep much in her cell, because, though the things are of

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trivial value, the possession of many things injures the spirit of poverty. It was really very annoying to find that your cell had been turned upside down in your absence by the Superior. One never knew when to expect her. Once Lady Lescher paid a visit to the sacristy to examine the cupboards in the absence of the sacristan and her aid. The Abbess found a great number of vases filled with primroses ready to go on the altar; they were for Easter Sunday, I think. In the sacristy at this time there was as aid a very docile, good nun, who laboured one of the hardest in her efforts to attain perfection. The Abbess never let an opportunity pass without using it to try this nun's patience. She therefore scattered the flowers over the floor, and upset the water. When this poor sister came back before Vespers, thinking she had only to place the vases on the altar, she found the work of a whole morning completely undone.

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Concerning poverty the 33rd Chapter of the Rule enjoins that: "No one shall presume to give or receive anything without the leave of the abbot. Neither shall anyone have as his own anything whatsoever. Neither a book, nor a writing tablet, nor a pen, because they are men whose very bodies and wills it is not lawful to have in their own power. If one be found given to this most wicked vice of propriety [this word is used in the monastic life to signify private possession of goods], he shall be admonished twice. If he do not amend he shall be subjected to correction."

Regarding gifts of any kind, letters, etc., Chapter 54 contains the following instructions: "It is not lawful for a monk to receive from his parents, his friends or from another monk, letters, presents or any gift whatsoever, without the permission of the abbot. Even if his parents shall direct it to him he shall not presume

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to receive it until he has first asked the abbot. It shall be in the abbot's power to give it to whom he pleases. The brother must not be grieved lest an occasion be given to the devil. If the brother presume to do otherwise (than what is here laid down) he shall be subjected to regular discipline."

Baths are not permitted by the Benedictine rule. This practice of dirt speaks for itself. I cannot describe the horror I felt when I discovered that henceforth that simple necessity would be denied. All the washing allowable had to be done at night after Matins, when one was utterly tired out. The water, which, as the saints were propitious, would be hot, had to be carried in a small can from the tank in a room some distance from our dormitory. The business of washing, the cutting of one's hair (which it was necessary to keep closely cropped on account of the great heat caused by the five articles of covering

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always kept on the head), and other necessities, such as the mending of clothes, had to be accomplished within thirty minutes of retiring from the church after Matins. With the last ring of the curfew all lights had to be extinguished, without one had express leave to the contrary. Leave to keep a light is not often granted for more than a quarter of an hour, if it is for one's own benefit. But if leave to keep a light is asked when church work has to be done, then an extension of two or three hours, and even more, is readily given.

Tooth powder and brushes were introduced into the convent by Lady Lescher. The dentist remarked on the state of the nuns' teeth, and our Abbess, being enlightened beyond her monastic time, resolved to supply tooth brushes and powder. A tooth brush is supplied to each nun once a year. Our convent being a strictly enclosed one, the nuns could not go out to have their teeth seen to, and if the

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tooth refused to be extracted by the nun who held the office of infirmarian, then the dentist would be called in.

No one need envy the dentist who attends our convent. When a nun suffered with toothache she informed the infirmarian, who would inscribe her name on a list kept for that purpose. When twenty or thirty nuns had been entered down, the dentist would be sent for. He came about 3 p.m., and would remain until 6.30 p.m. In that time all had to be attended to. I have heard regrets expressed by more dentists than one over the beautiful teeth allowed to decay. The usual complaint of the dentists was that they had not sufficient time to do their work properly, that they had to put the work of three days into three hours. These dentists little knew that many of the nuns had to go about their duties suffering the pangs of toothache for months before they were summoned!

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A young girl is expected to follow the wretched, dreary routine I have described: to pray, and meditate the whole day through; to live a life of absolute loneliness, without so much as a single friend—yet Christ in His mortal life had friends; to exist on the barest necessities of life; and behold, it is a grievous crime, a mortal sin capable of casting the soul headlong into hell, to so much as desire anything beyond.

CHAPTER V

COMPANIONS IN THE NOVICESHIP

IN the noviceship at this time were only two sisters, both professed nuns. They were completing the two years of noviceship training after their profession, as required by the Constitutions. The first was named Dame Margaret Mary Walmesley. This religious had pronounced her vows just four months before I entered. She was a cousin of the Abbess, Lady Lescher, and belonged to a good and wealthy family. She was, I think, about forty. During her postulancy and noviceship the nuns were of the opinion that she had no vocation. The Abbess, however, overruled their objections, giving them clearly to understand that she wished Dame Margaret Mary to have the votes

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in her favour. You see, this postulant had great wealth. Subsequently she was admitted to profession.

From her entrance into the convent she had shown signs of unmistakable eccentricity. The life would not help even the strongest of minds to grow bright. Dame Margaret Mary grew stranger. I have often seen her in the middle of recreation, workroom time, and even in the church itself, suddenly break into hysterics and dash through the door. Her screams could be heard at a distance from her cell. Lady Gertrude Lescher obtained permission from the Bishop of the diocese, Doctor Riddell, for Dame Margaret Mary to go away for a few months to live with her sisters, Misses Monica and Constance Walmesley.

Dame Margaret Mary's money had been secured to the Abbey by her vow of poverty. I should explain that cases of mental complaints are the only ones

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permitted to be treated outside the convent. Nuns who have lost their reason are usually sent to private asylums kept by nuns. When the required permission came from the Bishop, the change in this poor nun was remarkable. She grew so bright and full of child-like excitement. She was absent some time from the Abbey, returning only to find Lady Lescher on her death-bed. Dame Margaret Mary loved the Abbess intensely, and it was for love of her that she agreed to be professed. When Dame Catherine Parker was elected to fill Lady Lescher's place, Dame Margaret Mary lost no time in once more obtaining episcopal leave of absence. She remained away until Lady Parker's death, when her friend, Dame Hildegarde Heggen, was made Abbess in her stead. It seems, as far as I could gather, that Dame Margaret Mary had not come into her entire fortune at the time of her profession. Legally, she was

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mistress of what she inherited after taking her vows, but the Roman Church does not recognize any ownership in one who has professed poverty. It was therefore necessary to get this nun back to the Abbey in order to get at her recently-inherited fortune.

Lady Hildegarde never rested until she had got this dove safe within the ark, away from the wicked world. Then the Abbess turned her money to good account. With it she built a large new wing, and rebuilt the wash-house, brewery and laundry. She also erected a cottage for the men working on the estate, large additions to the hospice and a large house for an oil engine, which worked the artesian well. I think the boring of the well was paid for with other money. Up to this time Dame Margaret Mary had been merely hysterical and morbid. Now she grew worse, even going so far as to quarrel with the Abbess herself, who

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had to pet and put up with her because of the money.

From this time the poor nuns had their share of vexations from "the fanatic," as they called Dame Margaret Mary. She used to take very strong likes and dislikes to particular nuns for no reason at all. Her love for them would last several months, and then suddenly change to dislike as intense as the love itself. She would scribble over her valuable choir books, breviaries, *Horæ diurnæ*, *Vesperale*, and *Psalterium*, etc., then take the books to the Abbess, accusing the person of her particular aversion of the deed. This made great trouble in the "House of God." On one occasion she saturated her diurnal with methyated spirits, and, taking the ruined book to the Abbess, accused Dame Lucy of the deed. When Dame Margaret Mary had left the Abbess's rooms, Dame Lucy was sent for. Of course Dame Lucy denied all knowledge of the mischief, so

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the Abbess commanded her to go to Dame Margaret Mary's cell, and tell her she had not done the injury to her book. The nun did as she was bidden. Scarcely had she arrived at Dame Margaret Mary's cell than that religious flew at her, and seizing her by the throat would, I fear, have strangled her, had not a nun in the next cell, Dame Cecilia by name, hearing the sounds of a great scuffle, rushed out, and dragged Dame Margaret Mary away. She turned on the new-comer and kicked her viciously, but Dame Lucy's screams brought nuns flying from all directions to the spot, and thus further calamity was prevented.

After this poor Dames Lucy and Cecilia lived in terror of their lives. Dame Margaret Mary used to hide in dark corners waiting for them to pass by. She would also keep guard outside her cell door, because she declared the nuns went in and stole her goods. Poor thing, she

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deserved intense pity rather than blame! How could such a life improve one in her condition? Had she remained in the world, what might not travel, friends, interesting studies have done for her? Naturally she was very charitable, and how much real good might she not have done with such ample wealth at her disposal?

My other noviceship companion was Dame Assumpta Vaughan. She was the niece of Cardinal Vaughan, Monsignor John Vaughan, and Fathers Kenelm and Bernard Vaughan. I think Dame Assumpta was born holy, that is, with holiness of a certain kind. It consisted chiefly in telling her beads regularly, getting through as many Paters and Aves as she had breath for, whilst doing her work, scrupulously manifesting every peccadillo to her mistress, and, I am sorry to say, those of other people, myself in particular, as well. According to the monastic weights and

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measures Dame Assumpta was a perfect novice, but to me, full of worldly imperfections, she was just unbearable. If I only chanced to cross my feet (crossing the legs is altogether too horrible to suppose in a convent) she instantly reported me. If I was luckless enough to be caught by her in the noviceship or cloisters a minute or two after the time for retiring into my cell, I knew for a certainty she would report me sooner than I could acknowledge the fault. She would cram her pockets with tiny books of devotion full of the maxims of St. Francis of Sales about forbearance and patience, placing charitable constructions on the actions of others, gentleness and sympathy with those who were going through their first trials in religious life, etc. Whether this nun ever practised all these nice things I know not. I was not a witness of them.

Once we were sent out to do some gardening together. I was quite town-

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bred, whilst she had lived her life, before entering the convent, in Hereford, broken only by a visit to Rome for the supreme bliss of kissing His Holiness's toe. I did not find my work nor my companion congenial. She tried me very much by her remarks about the happiness of monastic life. When I paused for breath in my digging, she would lecture me on the unseemliness of delicacy and niceness in the monastic life, when the monks of old were so diligent. At last she asked me to say some prayers aloud, as the repetition of fifty Aves had made her somewhat tired. I complied with her request and began: "Oh, Lord, deliver me from the zeal of newly-professed nuns!" Needless to say that prayer found its way, if not to the ear of God, undoubtedly to the ever-waiting ear of my novice-mistress, Dame Catherine.

I think I have said enough to show that my companions in the noviceship

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were not quite what is termed kindred spirits.

Later on, when I was a novice, and wearing the white veil, a convert, or as I hear my Protestant friends calling it, a "pervert" to the Church, entered the Abbey. She was nearly forty when she entered, and fairly well off. Up to the time of her reception into the Church she had not followed any religion. Her parents had been members of the Church of England, but she had early dropped all attendance at any church. The only "pious" thing she indulged in was to keep a crucifix, which she had found hanging inside a cupboard, and to this great "act of piety," continued through many years, she gratefully attributed her conversion. It seemed to me that her religion consisted of a most slavish fear of God, or more correctly, of hell. She was firmly convinced that if she stayed at the Abbey, put up with everything that

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exasperated her, and went against every natural inclination, then her crown of glory was a foregone conclusion. I rendered her many services at different times when almost everyone in the convent had been against her profession because she had many bodily ailments. I defended her, proclaimed her good qualities, and, finally, gave up my rank in the community to her, and allowed this convert of a few months to make her vows before me, who had been a Catholic all my life.

The nuns strongly objected to receiving delicate members into the community, because the work fell doubly heavy on those who were stronger. I do not think the nuns would have minded doing the work for invalids, but there was no doubt that a few were very lazy, and feigned indisposition. Dame Walburga made many enemies because of her excessive fear for her body. Monasticism

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does not tend to make its adherents sympathetic when there is a question of fleshly concern for the body.

But I shall have more to say in a later chapter about Dame Walburga, and the reasons which led to her being assigned prior rank to me in our community.

CHAPTER VI

DEPORTMENT AND EMULATION

IT will be easy to see from what I have already written that the monastic life is by no means free from the unworthy motives and desires of the outside world. I had fondly imagined, when entering the cloister, that from henceforth only the holiest and most sacred emotions and desires would possess me. Alas, how different it all proved to be!

It is true that we were "very religious" in our denial of the flesh, but not always from the most worthy motives.

Although the food was neither abundant nor of first quality, and the hours of sleep were very insufficient, yet not one nun would rest until she had brought her flesh to do with less than was allowed.

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We emulated each other in this. I know that from sheer pride I would never stop striking myself with a steel discipline until my neighbour in the next cell had finished. It was my one endeavour to eat less than any at my table. I gave great offence to those nuns whose places in the refectory were nearest my own. I hope all the other nuns were not like me! The spirit which actuated my penances was one of sheer pride "to be seen of men." "Amen, thou hast thy reward." I wish I could believe myself to have been alone in this ostentation.

I was noted in the Abbey for my wonderful custody of eyes. Every nun is strictly admonished to keep her eyes fixed on the ground when walking about, cast down when in church, and never to look anyone in the eyes when speaking to them, as this is accounted against modesty for a consecrated virgin. This the 7th Chapter of the Rule enjoins:

DEPORTMENT AND EMULATION

"If a monk be at work, in the church, in the monastery, in the garden, on a journey in the field, standing or sitting anywhere, let him always incline his head and fix his eyes on the ground, thinking himself guilty for his sins at every hour, and saying with the publican in the gospel: 'Oh, Lord, I a sinner am not worthy to raise my eyes to heaven.' (Luke xviii, 13)."

I had not long been at the Abbey when I noticed that every time I looked across the choir or chapter house I met the eyes of one particular nun. It really looked so undignified for a religious to allow her eyes to go rolling about on every side, turning her head first to one side and then to another at the slightest provocation. In the refectory I also saw some looking underneath their eyelashes to see how much more food their neighbours had than themselves. This so disgusted me that in my pride I resolved to become famous for the control of my eyes. I

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succeeded beyond even my own imagination. I cannot excuse my unworthy motive, but I can honestly say I never even saw the faces of the nuns, nor the stalls across the choir or chapter house or refectory. I kept my eyes fixed on the ground or on my book, and the greatest noise could not make me look up. What agony I went through, before I brought myself to this! For there is a little amusement to be had studying the countenances of others when they are unconscious of it, and in a convent it is a great sacrifice when diversion is so rare.

What hypocrisy convent life may engender! Great attention is given from the very first to monastic deportment. The gait must be slow, the head bent, eyes cast down, chin kept in, hands joined underneath the scapular, and the feet, when not walking, kept close together. No one must walk noisily, or bang doors. All individuality is to be submerged in

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the great sea of uniformity, so that none may know who is who from the walk or attitudes adopted. Self assertion is sternly suppressed.

These are the things aimed at by Superiors, but the nuns themselves are not always as zealous in cultivating conventual deportment. In the guest-house, of course, they are perfection, or when any bishop, priest, or other ecclesiastical dignity enters the enclosure. If no one sees them, some are tempted to run along the cloisters, swing their arms, look about, and go up two stairs at a time.

I resolved to perfect myself in deportment. By nature I am slow, so I did not find much difficulty to walk recollectedly. No one ever saw Dame Maurus hurry. The nuns used to call me "The Duchess," "The Carthusian," and "Brother John; the Angel."

When they saw me at the Divine Office standing erect, and keeping unflinching

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custody over all my senses, kneeling with clasped hands at the time of meditation, or walking about the convent, they have often told me I looked as if I was pondering on the Eternal Truths. It was fortunate for me they could not read my thoughts. My mind was far away from my body. I was going over familiar scenes, thinking of people whom I had known and perhaps loved in the world, envying them their freedom, longing for a sight of dear old London once again, and slowly beginning to give way to bitter regrets for the course I had taken. Had I intimated in the slightest degree my thoughts and longings to any one of them, they would have recoiled from me as from one stricken with leprosy. Therefore, as far as they were concerned, I could think my thoughts, but to acknowledge them would have been criminal. The eleventh commandment : "Thou shalt not be found out" was diligently kept.

CHAPTER VII

LENT

I ENTERED on my religious life in Lent, and my seven years' stay there was to me like one long Lent.

The last three days of Holy Week are marked by the celebration of Tenebræ. This is simply the name given (it signifies darkness) to the Matins and Laudes of the Divine Office of the Thursday, Friday, and Saturday before Easter. The office has a very penitential character. The 50th Psalm, Miserere, is said in a very low tone, every one kneeling after each of the canonical hours. The first nocturn lessons are sung from the Book of Jeremiah. They are usually called The Lamentations. The tone of the singing is very plaintive; one could imagine one was

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listening to the Prophet wailing over faithless Jerusalem.

A remarkable feature of this office is the extinguishing of the lights in the church after the Benedictus Antiphon has been said. When the Miserere is finished, a noise is made by striking books against the stalls: this is to represent the confusion of the world at the death of Christ.

I shall ever remember Good Friday in the convent. I have said, and I have also heard others say, that if three Good Fridays came in one year we should go mad. Not one word was spoken throughout the entire day, except the words uttered for the *Laus perennis*. Silence cards were hung over every public door, and down the cloisters and corridors. Two ounces of dry bread and black coffee were given at breakfast. Plain boiled fish and semolina pudding, boiled in water, portioned on the same plate, formed the midday meal. At collation

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in the evening rice, boiled in water, and bread were distributed. The whole did not exceed eight ounces.

The Stations of the Cross were made three times during the day. In the Way of the Cross, or Via Dolorosa, as it is sometimes called, there are fourteen representations of the different events which took place in the journey of Christ to Calvary, the first being His condemnation by Pilate, and the last the entombment. Before each of these fourteen stations one has to kneel and recite as many Pater-nosters and Ave Marias as individual fervour suggests.

At the crucifix which ends the Stations, the arms of the devout follower of these scenes of the Passion are usually extended (as Christ's arms on the Cross), and five Our Fathers and Hail Marys are recited. Then the ground is kissed.

Our nuns very often performed these stations on their knees altogether. That

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is, instead of walking from one station to another, they would crawl on their knees. This they did to add to the penance.

The greater part of Good Friday was spent in the church. In the evening, after the Procession of the Relic of the True Cross, a long reading was given in the church from Father Gallwey's "Watches of the Passion."

Before retiring for the night each nun had to take the discipline whilst reciting the 50th Psalm. The number of strokes I gave myself during this time was between four hundred and fifty and five hundred. The disciplines in use in our convent were made of steel. They are like a cat-o'-nine-tails. At the end of each tail are pointed pieces of steel. These are also inserted at intervals in each tail.

To the great relief of all Good Friday had come to an end.

Easter Saturday morning was also a

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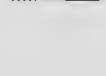
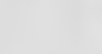
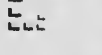
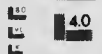
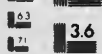
strict fast, with much praying. Easter Sunday was a day of exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, and for the most part spent in church.

I had many shocks during Lent. The number of public penances was very much increased. Not a single day passed but in the refectory several nuns could be seen doing penance. Eating their dinner or collation on the floor, begging little pieces of bread from each nun in the refectory, kissing the feet of the nuns, kissing the ground, standing with a finger on the lips in the middle of the room. kneeling with the arms extended high, prostrated on the floor, kneeling at the door when the nuns passed out, begging pardon for their offences and prostrating on the floor when the Abbess passed; all these and other penances I saw gone through each day. It used to make me go hot and cold to sit and watch them. The sickening, dull, heavy thud of the discipline as it



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struck against the backbone, could be heard almost every night in each cell.

Every day in Lent was one of severest fasting. The nuns added much to their customary penitential practices. Long vigils were kept at night after Matins, extra prayers were said, more frequent visits to the cemetery—a private one in the Abbey grounds—were made. All kinds of privations were added. Planks of wood and pieces of knotted rope were placed in the beds to sleep on. Steel-spiked bands for the arms, etc., were worn more frequently. Hair cloth was also used next the skin. I hope sincerely these exercises were undertaken solely for giving glory to God (I have since learnt the erroneousness of these doctrines); but I have strong doubts about this, as in accordance with the Rule each nun was obliged to draw up a list of the penitential exercises she intended to perform, and take it to the Abbess for her inspection. I know I very

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often wrote down many more than I really wanted to do, because I was afraid of the Abbess's displeasure if I did not undertake enough.

Concerning the observance of Lent, St. Benedict lays down the following in the 69th Chapter of his Rule: "The life of a monk should at all times resemble a continual Lent. In the days of Lent we advise all to keep themselves with all purity of life to wipe away the negligences of other times. This the monks shall worthily do by giving themselves up to prayers with tears, reading, compunction of heart, abstinence from meat and drink, from sleep, and from talking. All are to acquaint the Abbot with what they do, and do it at his command; for what is done without the consent of the Spiritual Father shall be put down to vainglory and merit no reward."

Early in the Paschal time we had a Retreat preached by Father Wilfred

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Lescher, O.P. He was the cousin of our Abbess, Lady Lescher. I was too young in the religious life to understand much about the different ascetic exercises he proposed to the nuns. The course of instructions lasted nine days. The strictest silence is kept during the Retreat, so that recreation is not permitted.

On the last day the professed choir nuns and lay sisters renewed their vows. This ceremony was made as imposing as possible. The word renew or renovation must not be understood to mean that the vows are taken for a certain time, at the expiration of which they are not binding. In the Benedictine Order solemn perpetual vows are taken once, at the end of the twelve months of noviceship. This renewal ceremony takes place after each Retreat, and is done to stir up fervour in the soul, and to obtain pardon for the unfaithful keeping of the obligations entailed by the vows.

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The choir and sanctuary were decorated, and after the High Mass the ceremony began. A handsome silver-bound Evangelium (Gospel-book) was opened at the passage "Behold we have left all things and have followed Thee" (Matt. xix.). The formula of the vows was placed upon it. Each sister read it separately. Various parts of the profession ceremony were sung through. Thus the Retreat was brought to a close.

I watched those around me, wondering what effect the Retreat was likely to produce. I was impressed by the extra scrupulosity of the nuns as a whole. I often asked myself was it impossible to be holy and sensible at the same time? I dared not ask the most necessary questions of anyone. On all sides I saw faces much longer than usual, and fingers would be placed upon the lips instead of the desired answer to a question. Of course, the sermon on Purgatory

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and Hell was to be thanked for this alteration.

By degrees the fear of these places grew less, or rather the terrible words of the preacher grew dim. Within three months every one had relapsed into her former condition. The same breaking of rules when the danger of being found out was small; the same backbiting, the same criticism of Superiors, the same grumbling about their food. I have seen many Retreats, but always with the same results.

CHAPTER VIII

FROM POSTULANT TO NOVICE

As a postulant my time was spent in cleaning the noviceship rooms, lamps, and in gardening; whilst for studies, Latin rubrics of the church, the Bible and church history were imposed upon me. A postulant must be ready for all kinds of manual labour.

My chief troubles at this time were the difficulties I met with in trying to get on with my mistress and noviceship sisters. There seemed no heart in any of them. They were mere machines, devoted to the most strict carrying out of the noviceship regulations. They were like Pharisees, very exact in looking after the rue, mint, and cumin, but the weightier matters of charity they left alone.

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My mistress early gave me a character for disobedience, and even when I misunderstood the order given, she never gave me the benefit of the doubt. I was not brimming over with happiness even as a postulant. I nevertheless buoyed myself up with the hope that, when I grew more accustomed to religious life, I should be much happier. Therefore I looked forward to receiving the habit.

I remember the awful feeling I experienced when I heard for the first time the sound of the discipline. After Matins, when the nuns had been in their cells a few minutes, I heard proceeding from the cell next to mine dull, heavy, regular blows. At first I thought she was beating the dust out of her mattress. Then I remembered that such a thing would never be attempted or allowed in the solemn silence of the night. I listened attentively, and I distinctly heard the rattle of chains. This recalled to my mind

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what I had read in the lives of saints about the flagellation. I thought I should faint, and I half decided to ask them to let me go away the next morning. At Laudes of the following day I looked curiously at the nun, and I was greatly comforted to find that she did not look as though she had nearly killed herself. I therefore determined to stay.

Without any or very little religious spirit, but with a great deal of British hatred of giving in, I said to myself "What man has done man may do." I made a mistake, I know. One who knew me well, Dame Mary Lane-Fox, often told me that I did things from sheer pride; I tried to be a stoic, so she said, rather than a humble truster in Christ.

I waited patiently, with a good deal of curiosity, for my mistress to bring me that dreaded steel discipline. It did not come all the time I was a postulant. I then learnt that they never give peni-

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tential articles to postulants. I consider this very unfair. I think one ought to be given to do at the very beginning all that is required by the Rule. Otherwise how can a postulant know if she can observe what she binds herself to perform? Naturally, people do not like to draw back when they have gone so far as to receive the habit, and have parted with their hair.

As I have said, during this period of my religious life I had the care of cleaning the noviceship and attending to the fire, lamps, etc. Once during workroom time, when all in the noviceship were seated round the table, I noticed that the lamp kept flickering, also that there was scarcely any oil in it. Oh! how I prayed to God, and called upon all the saints to intercede for me, that the oil might last until the time for breaking-up came. I knew what to expect if it didn't. No excuse was ever taken for any fault;

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in fact, if one did excuse oneself or state anything that might serve to palliate the fault, one would get a heavier penance. Later on I found it was more diplomatic to keep my lips tightly closed.

My novice-mistress, who also held the office of Prioress, was not present. The second mistress, Dame Winifrede, was in charge. She noticed the lamp, and with a very severe countenance ordered me to get some oil; while every one in the noviceship stared at me as if to rebuke me for my awful crime. Of course Dame Winifrede told the mistress, Dame Catherine. I was sent for, and ordered to go on my knees. She told me that such negligence could not be tolerated in an Order whose founder, St. Benedict, had said that his disciples must fly forgetfulness on all occasions.

From all she said one would have thought that I had committed a most grievous fault. Unfortunately, my coun-

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tenance did not show that she had convinced me of my crime. She went on to state that it was her duty to impress me; therefore I must prostrate on the floor in the middle of the refectory at dinner the next day. This I did. I thought I had heard the last of "the oil"; but not so. Dame Winifrede came to me, and, with that sanctimonious air that used to irritate me almost beyond endurance, said: "My dear child, I hope you have been to your dear Mother and told her how sorry you are for your fault." I replied that I had told her that the day before, and, surely, after prostrating in the refectory and publicly stating it before all the community in the chapter house, that was enough. However, it was not, according to their principles. I went again to Dame Catherine and said I was sorry, etc., but I am afraid I did not speak very truthfully. I was sorry for myself that I had to undergo such treat-

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ment for such a trifle. It made me very bitter, and the only benefit I derived was that henceforth I tried to be more diplomatic. Perhaps they thought they were teaching me the humility of Christ.

Another time Dame Winifrede told me to knit a stocking. I began to do so. I showed it to her each day, and she seemed satisfied. One particular day, when I had been working at the stocking for about four weeks, Dame Winifrede told me the knitting must be done looser. This I tried to do. After a while she came over to me to look at the stocking. To my astonishment she went to Dame Catherine in the next room, and after a conversation of seven minutes or so, back she came and told me I was wanted.

I went to Dame Catherine, who seemed very displeased. "You have been obstinate and disobedient to Dame Winifrede. She told you to do your knitting looser, and you have not done so." This

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was absolutely unjust. I had done my best to do it as she wanted. I knew it would be of no use to say this, so I knelt down and said nothing. Then my mistress dragged the needles out and threw them on the floor, unwinding all the knitting, and, throwing the unravelled wool on the boards, said: "This, my dear child, will teach you that obedience is the queen of virtues for a nun." Then she left the room. I had not been told to get off my knees, so I had to remain about half an hour until Dame Winifrede came in. She smiled at me, and I asked her permission to rise. She began to tell me not to lose my reward by interior grumbling, but to offer it all to our Divine Lord.

I did not feel inclined for such spirituality, and I must add the great ideals I had of nuns were beginning to shake on their pedestals. I tried to put these thoughts from me, feeling sure they were

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temptations of the devil. I noticed that among those in the noviceship very little love existed ; in fact—I may as well speak plainly—they merely tolerated each other. I was later to discover that it was far worse among the “community,” that is, among the professed nuns.

About this time I made the acquaintance of one who was to be my faithful little friend throughout, I mean Sister Berchmans. She was a lay novice. We were put to serve the community at dinner and supper, and the following week it would be our duty to wash the dishes in the scullery. From the first I think we loved each other. I little dreamt then that she would ever help me in my escape, and that her face would be the last in the Abbey I looked upon. When we were washing the plates we began to talk in a whisper, and amuse ourselves by repeating lines from songs which we had heard in the world. Of

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course, spies were on the watch—they always were—and we were reported to Dame Catherine. She regarded it as a most serious offence, and said I must acknowledge it publicly at chapter when next I was called up. I was also commanded to kneel down and recite the Miserere with my arms extended. Lastly, I was strictly forbidden to speak to Sister Berchmans.

CHAPTER IX

BECOMING A NOVICE

AFTER the expiration of my postulancy, the council, which is composed of the Abbess, Prioress, and three nuns elected by the community, received me for my clothing. On December 12th, 1902, I was clothed in the Benedictine habit, and the white veil of a novice.

The church was decorated and the high altar adorned with flowers and candles. After Vespers, the ceremony began. I wore a white satin dress, orange blossoms, and a white tulle veil. My prie-dieu was placed in the middle of the choir near the iron grille. The celebrant being seated on the faldstool, the grille was opened. The Prioress and novice-mistress led me to the opening where I knelt before

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the priest. After the customary questions had been asked, the Veni Creator was sung. My wreath and veil were taken off, and my hair unloosened.

The master of ceremonies presented a pair of scissors, a salver, and a napkin to the celebrant, and having spread the napkin across his knees, he cut off my hair, letting it fall into the cloth. My dress was taken off, and the habit, a heavy, black serge garment, put on. Each article was blessed by the priest with a special prayer. The girdle, a strong, black leather belt, was given next, and was passed twice round my waist, leaving a piece hanging down on one side. Then the scapular was put on. This is composed of two pieces of cloth hanging from the shoulders, back and front, to the hem of the habit. On my head was placed, first, a linen coif; next, a linen fillet was tied across my forehead. My neck, chin, and sides of my face were

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covered with a linen wimple. On the top of these was placed a veil of white linen, and over this again a larger flowing one, also of white linen. This latter is the distinctive mark of the novice. Lastly, a large, lighted, wax candle, decorated with white satin ribbon and flowers, was placed in my hand. I was led back to my prie-dieu, and the priest sprinkled me with holy water, and the benediction of the Blessed Sacrament was given. Afterwards the community left the church processionally, and lined the cloister on each side. I was led to the Abbess by the novice-mistress, and kneeling, received the kiss of peace, first from her, and likewise from all the sisters; which ended the clothing ceremony.

When the postulant is clothed in the monastic habit all her own clothes must be given up. Underclothing, as well as outside apparel, must be surrendered in strict conformity to the regulations. It

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takes a long time to grow accustomed to these new clothes. Anyone with a sensitive skin must undergo sheer torments from the coarse flannel garment which is worn next the skin. The stockings also are a great trial when one has never worn aught save cashmere or very fine woollen ones.

The postulant has much to endure in the beginning from the many wraps worn on the head. The linen band worn across the forehead caused me to have very bad headaches for months. If I had a slight headache in the morning the tight band would be sure to increase it. For weeks one is quite deaf or exasperated by every sound being intensified through having the ears covered by the sides of the linen wimple, and underneath that by the folds of a coif. The result of this is that many suffer with earache and deafness who were never troubled with such things before. I had much trouble myself all through my

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religious life with deafness and singing in the ears. I was continually obtaining the ear-syringe from the infirmarian. Neither before wearing these wraps nor since I have left them off have I needed the syringe. Dame Catherine and Dame Angela had to have an ear specialist. He told Dame Catherine that she need not come to him again. She must leave off the wraps and let her ears be quite uncovered, or else make holes through the coverings. It was absolutely necessary, he said, to let the air get at the ears. Of course, no notice was paid to his admonitions.

The pattern of the clothes, so tradition maintains, was bequeathed by St. Scholastica, (A.D. 480-543), and no one would be so wicked as to even attempt to alter them. The Superiors would inform you that it was a mark of great softness and love of the flesh to wish to differ from the monks of old. Hygiene

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is scarcely born in monastic houses, sanitary arrangements are in their infancy.

Soon after my clothing I was sent to work in the printing office. The printing press was an old-fashioned one, worked by hand. Each sheet had to be fastened in by pins at the corners; these pins were for ever getting broken or falling out, and then the printing would be crooked on the paper. It required infinite pains to turn out decent work.

The head of the printing room was an old nun who suffered with bad bilious attacks. This nun, Dame Magdalene, could not lift the heavy formes, and she very seldom worked the press. The continual rolling in of the machine and pulling of the lever made her giddy. She could not wash the type or ink slab. I had to do all these things, and she sometimes set the type, but always did the scolding. To wash the type and slab, boiling water and lye were used. I had to put my

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hands into this in spite of the fact that since I had entered the convent they were covered with eczema. This lye, which is very strong, used to cut my hands badly and cause the eczema to go into big sores. One of the nuns, named Dame Candida, said that if I did not do something to a great cut on one of the joints, she thought my finger would drop off. The washing of the formes was done about two or three times a week, according to the amount of printing going on. The Abbess, novice-mistress, and head of the printing office all knew what it cost me to use this lye in the water. Not one of them ever gave me a word of sympathy; I was merely told to keep gloves on my hands when in public places. I told my novice-mistress that the woollen gloves I was commanded to wear made my hands terribly hot, and irritated them greatly. She answered: "Oh, nonsense, child; don't be so soft

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about your flesh; endure your sufferings and unite them with those of our Lord. Do you expect to win salvation for souls if you are a delicate member of a thorn-crowned head?" In spite of this cruel speech she knew that when my hands grew hot at night I was often obliged to get out of bed and keep them in cold water because the irritation was so bad.

When Doctor Carey was called in, when I hurt my back with the bookbinding machine, he noticed my hands and asked if I was being treated for them. He said I needed plenty of good food and sleep, as it was brought on by nerves and poverty of the blood. Needless to say I got neither extra food nor sleep. Since I have left the Abbey all trace of this eczema has gradually disappeared, thus bearing out the doctor's statement that I wanted better food and more sleep.

During my postulancy and novitiate,

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I had spiritual instruction privately for an hour three days in each week. The one thing Dame Catherine harped upon was "Obedience, obedience." How I grew to detest the very name! Once she told me I should never be professed until I learnt to tremble at her words. To use a familiar term, we never got on together. I really disliked her, and I am certain she had no love for me. She often told me I had no feelings, no heart, etc. ; yet all the time I was terribly lonely, and longing for a little human sympathy. I often went into the cemetery, and when no one was about I used to cry as if my heart would break. Try as I would, the life brought me no happiness. It seemed such an insupportable burden. I accused myself of being the cause ; perhaps I did not strive enough to serve God ; perhaps I was too negligent in my meditations, or not sufficiently faithful in keeping my thoughts fixed on God at all times.

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I remember my first birthday in the convent—I was eighteen. Oh, how horrid that day seemed! I told my mistress that it was my birthday, but all I got was a very stiff greeting and an hour's exhortation, at the end of which I was told to go to the church and renew my baptismal vows and ask forgiveness for all the actual sin I had committed during my life.

I think my novitiate was the most miserable part of my religious life. At each step I was made to examine my conscience, and give an account to my mistress on each first Sunday of the month, of my interior life during the past four weeks. I candidly acknowledge that I used to live in dread of those "Retreat Sundays." On these Sundays we made our first meditation as usual. After Mass I had to present myself to Dame Catherine and give her an exact account of how I spent my time during



From a photograph by the Pictorial Agency.

EAST BERGHOLT ABBEY : FROM THE GROUNDS.

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the half-hour, my subject of meditation, my points, my resolutions, even my prayers I had to tell, or more exactly, invent, for her benefit. Then I had to show her my little book, in which she insisted that I should note down the faults I had been guilty of during the month and the resolutions for the coming month. All my delinquencies were brought up once again, and I generally left her with a feeling of absolute despair. Even my love for God seemed to grow less. How could I love One who was so exacting?

Once I went to the Abbess, Lady Gertrude Lescher, and told her that I had no vocation, and was not happy. She was very kind to me, but told me the way of perfection was difficult in the beginning, and that I must be comforted and expect the Lord; that I must do manfully and be resolved not to let the devil wrest from me the crown our Lord was preparing for me. I left her a

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little comforted, but the thing that helped me most was the thought my Lady had dwelt upon, that, by the utter sacrifice of my life, I might win from God the salvation of the souls I loved. Indeed, the life was one of utter sacrifice. Many ascetical writers compare good religious to holocausts.

My greatest trouble at this time was my novice-mistress. She grew harder and more exacting. I am convinced she only meant to do her duty. Still the Spirit of Christ did not seem to fill her with sweetness. One of my trials for many years was the long fast of the morning. As I have said before, we rose at 5 a.m., and did not get anything to eat until 8 a.m. These three hours were spent in the church, and I cannot describe the agony I used to go through each morning from faintness. I could scarcely keep on my feet. I used to sway to and fro, and kneeling for me during medita-

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tion was an absolute impossibility. Yet if I dared to sit down I would have Dame Catherine coming down the church to ask me why I didn't kneel, or to tell me not to make sitting down an excuse for sleep.

If anyone has had to go through many months on insufficient sleep they will know what that means. My mistress on one occasion actually told me I must wait till I did faint, and not be so unmortified as to sit down to meditate. I may add here that she herself always sat, and once, feeling very faint, I stole quietly up to her stall to ask permission to leave the church. I had to pull her habit gently to wake her up, she not having heard me call her several times.

CHAPTER X

A NEW ABBESS

LIFE in a convent of necessity has few excitements. Perhaps one of the greatest events in the life of the nun is a change of Abbess.

Lady Lescher, after having governed the Abbey, *fortiter suaviterque*, for eighteen years, died on May 18, 1904. Dame Catherine Parker, my novice-mistress, was elected Abbess in her place. This was far from good news for me.

The voting for the election of an Abbess takes place in the church in the presence of the Bishop of the diocese. The grille is opened and the Bishop appoints two scrutineers to collect the votes. The professed choir nuns alone have active and passive voice in the election of an

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Abbess. Before the day fixed for balloting each nun receives a list of names of those eligible for the dignity. The Abbess of our convent must be forty years of age, eight years professed, and she must have two-thirds of the votes in her favour.

Lady Catherine appointed Dame Placid Pycke novice-mistress in her place, but kept much of the noviceship affairs in her own hands, so that she was virtually mistress still. Many of the disagreeable things that Dame Placid imposed upon me were done at the direction of the Abbess-elect. Dame Placid was a Belgian, and although of a kindly nature, was always at loggerheads with the two English novices then under her charge. The third novice, like Dame Placid herself, was a foreigner, having been born at Lisbon. This novice, Dame Ida, was a great pet of the mistress, and this alone caused much jealousy and dissatisfaction.

Dame Ida and Mère Madeleine came

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to the Abbey in 1904. They were French Benedictines from the Abbey of Val Sainte, at Nîmes. This Abbey was closed by the French Government, the nuns separating, some going to convents in Spain, and some coming to England. We received the two mentioned above; St. Scholastica's Priory, at Teignmouth, received one, and St. Benedict's Priory, at Colwich, in Staffordshire, received one or two.

At the Nîmes convent I heard the rule had been suffered to get very relaxed. The Abbess was old, and a great invalid and the nuns were split up into factions. Jealousy and backbiting reigned supreme.

A great deal of needlework was done at this convent by the nuns and the orphans. Besides the day school, there was an orphanage also.

The priests seemed to have much power over the nuns, and, according to Dame Ida, they had to give up much time to seeing

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nuns in the parlour and hearing all the tales they had to tell against the particular offender of the moment. Dame Ida told me that when the Government officials came to take an inventory of the monastic goods, she hid, by order of the Prioress, silver chalices, ciboriums, and a monstrance, etc., underneath a large alb, which she was embroidering. When the men came into the room, she did not rise, and they did not disturb her. She also said that the monasteries and convents used to warn each other before the officials came, so that the nuns sent away all they possibly could to the houses of friendly neighbours ; thus when the men came to Nîmes they only found broken-down chairs, tables, and other things of small value.

I am reminded, in relating this, of the conduct of many priests in France who, to trick the valuers of the Government, would cram the tabernacle with valuable articles, because the officials would not

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open that on account of the Blessed Sacrament being reserved therein. Therefore, not only was the host adored by the congregation on bended knees, but the storage came in for a share also!

I think one of the greatest curses that can fall on an enclosed house is to have different nationalities in it. In our house there were English, Irish, Scotch, Germans, French, and a Belgian. The inhabitants were always at war. If an English sister was offended by another English member of the community bitterness and bad feeling ran high enough; it was ten times worse if the culprit was Irish, but indescribable if a foreigner. Moreover, if you chanced to offend one of the French nuns, then all the other French members would take her part. It was worse still if you got into the black books of the German contingent, for the Abbess herself was a German. The French made mischief in the noviceship, and among

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the professed nuns, whilst the Germans set the lay sisters up in arms against themselves and the Abbess, Lady Heggen. This Abbess allowed "her Germans," as we called them, many privileges, and used to praise them up before the other lay sisters, whom she called the lazy English. There used to be real peace between the lay sisters until the Germans came. Then misunderstandings arose quickly on account of the mutual ignorance of the languages. The Germans, who always had access to the Abbess, would go with their side of the story first, and the others would not be listened to.

I have anticipated, somewhat, in speaking of these Germans, who did not enter the Abbey until Lady Heggen, who succeeded Lady Parker, became Abbess.

In the noviceship things were, on the whole, worse. Dame Placid Pycke was always depreciating the English, and Dame Walburga and I could not stand

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that. Even our faults were put down to the expense of the nation. It was really galling to know that when we had done wrong the mistress would be closeted in Dame Ida's cell discussing our characters and doings with her. Once I told the novice-mistress that proper pride would prevent me from fawning on my Superiors in the way I saw some doing (meaning Dame Ida). She was horrified, and said that only John Bull and the devil talked of proper pride, but with God and Catholic nations proper pride was excluded from Heaven. She never wearied of bringing this up to me, and she threatened me with a severe penance if I ever said it again.

In the recreation she and Dame Ida spent half the time talking in French, whilst Dame Walburga and I had to keep silence; or else they would amuse themselves saying spiteful things against the English.

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If I chanced to say anything about the King, or show any enthusiasm over anything national, they would laugh me to scorn. Several times Dame Placid has given me long sermons on my knees, telling me that unless I gave up this reprehensible national pride, and had no king but the King of kings, I would make no progress in sanctification. She would also remark when I complained of a fever, "You suppose that you are a young Englishman, do you? You wish to be a practical patriot? It may be English, but it is not good!" or she would say, "I like to see you go with the bulk of your countrymen."

I will here state one instance of the treatment which I received at the hands of our Abbess, Lady Catherine. When I first entered the Abbey, Dame Winifrede had taught me that when I obtained permission to write a letter to my mother, I was to put my letter in an envelope,

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placing the lappet of the envelope inside before putting it into the box for the Abbess to read ; this I always did. Lady Catherine, however, thought fit to alter this. One day she sent for me to her room and told me to leave the lappet outside the envelope, as it was more convenient. Many months afterwards I asked and obtained permission to write another letter. From force of habit, after writing my letter, I placed the lappet inside, and only remembered the new order when the letter was already in the box. The Abbess sent for me (as I expected), and would not accept my excuse of forgetfulness. She accused me flatly of disobedience, and said I did it intentionally. For this trifling offence she ordered me to come every day for eight consecutive days to beg her pardon on my knees. On the eighth day, after going through my expression of sorrow, and after the usual lecture, she told me as it was now the

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eight day I need not come again. I rose from my knees and unfortunately happened to smile, which the Abbess said was sarcastic; so, for this offence, she being extremely displeased, I had to go through the same ordeal for another eight days, to beg her pardon for my "sarcastic" smile.

Another of her favourite modes of trying me was to make me go into the cemetery to scrub the crosses over the graves, and when for about two-and-a-half hours I had laboured at one which was all covered with moss and green slime, she told me to do it over again, which of course I had to do. All this I put up with for the love of God, thinking it would be a grievous sin to leave the life which I had entered upon.

Dame Catherine Parker, though elected to succeed Lady Lescher in May, 1904, was not blessed and installed until the following September. During this time

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she could not call a council or clothe postulants, or profess novices. Lady Lescher's illness had been a lingering one, and my canonical period of novitiate had come to an end some months before she died. I could not be professed on account of her illness. Thus I hoped that when the next Abbess had been elected and blessed I should be admitted to my vows.

With the election of the Abbess came the news that Bishop Riddell would not hold the ceremony of her Benediction until after the hot weather. I had been looking forward to my own profession, which was to follow next, and it was with great disappointment that I heard of the Bishop's refusal to bless the Abbess-elect. I wrote to a friend, a Mother Mary Albert, a Dominican at Beccles, expressing my indignation that a man and a bishop to boot, could not put up with a little heat. She gave the letter to the priest in charge of the parish,

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named Father Meinrad, and he sent it to the Bishop.

When Doctor Riddell came in September to perform the Benediction of the Abbess the first question he asked was: "Who is that novice called Sister Maurus Moul? She has written a disgraceful letter about me, and as a penance she must not be admitted to her profession for six months." He was not accustomed to being found fault with, and everyone who knew him marvelled that I was let off so easily.

The Bishop told the Abbess that she was to try me to the utmost during these six months. The next day, September 7, she sent for me, and made known the Bishop's command. I was very upset. I had completely forgotten having written about him at all. The Abbess was very displeased, because the letter reflected on her, and from that day until the day before her operation, November 21, she

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never spoke a kind word to me, nor did me a kind act. During this time only God knows how much I had to endure from her. Even if I passed her in the cloister I was sure to get a penance, because the length of my habit or my manner of walking did not suit her. If these passed muster then I got a penance because my manner was irreverent in kneeling down and kissing her ring. This we had to do when meeting the Abbess. A profound obeisance had also to be made on approaching or retiring from her.

No one will ever know how many hours of the night I have spent in crying; even in my sleep I have cried, for on waking I have felt the tears running down my face. In spite of all this I never allowed myself to dwell long on the thoughts that continually came to me, that I had made a mistake about my vocation, and that the joys of life were at an end for me.

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In the month of June my mother came to see me. When she saw me, she said: "You don't look happy; are you really happy?" I answered: "Oh, I am happy enough," and then I changed the conversation. She constantly recurred to it, telling me I seemed so serious, begging me to come away with her, and crying very bitterly. When I told her that the Bishop had postponed my profession for six months she really rejoiced.

The Abbess-elect had ordered me to tell my mother that the Bishop had put my profession off, and to tell her if she asked the reason, that it was because I was too young. All this I did, and my mother never knew the true facts of the case until I left the Abbey.

I have already said that the Abbess was under obedience to the Bishop to try me in every way. The greatest trial was yet to come. I have spoken in another chapter about the convert sister we had

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in the noviceship, named Walburga. I had been in the convent a year, and was already wearing the habit when she entered. She had not been nine months in the Church when she came to us. She was a lady of independent means, and therefore regarded with favour by the novice-mistress from the very beginning. Sister Walburga was never given any hard work to do. She was always the delicate lady. I had the fire to light, the grate to black-lead, the floors to scrub and wax, and every other laborious task, besides working in the printing office. She was not even asked to have regular studies; Latin itself was excused. She whiled away the time in studying books on doctrine, and reading over the office of the day from the translation of the breviary by the Marquess of Bute.

She was clothed in the habit on the Feast of St. Agnes, January 21, 1904. All through her noviceship she had the

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same leniency shown her, except when Dame Placid became the novice-mistress. Sister Walburga told Lady Catherine all the news of the noviceship, so Dame Placid, to be revenged on her, used to set Dame Ida to report her doings.

Things went on like this until November, 1904, when Lady Catherine had an operation performed for cancer. She never recovered fully, but was wheeled about in an invalid chair for a few months.

Early in the new year the Abbess conceived the idea of hastening Sister Walburga's profession. She sent for the mistress, and made known to her her intention. Dame Placid resisted as much as she could, but the Lady Abbess clung to it with greater force, and lost no time in calling together her council.

Dame Placid had the disagreeable task of informing me of the proposal to put

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Sister Walburga before me in profession. I really could not believe it. I had endured so much, but the thought of having to give up my rank never occurred to me. The mistress went among the nuns stirring them up against consenting to the arrangement. There was a great deal of talking behind the doors and in corners, but when the council was called, the Abbess got her way, as she also did when the votes of the community were taken.

The profession was fixed for the following month of February. When Dame Placid told me that Sister Walburga was to have my place and be professed before me, a veritable storm of anger struggled within me. I was told in the noviceship, and Dame Ida was there. The mistress asked me if I minded. I knew she only wanted angry words to carry them on a future occasion to the Abbess. Summoning all my stoicism, I merely answered :

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"Not in the least, Mother," and resumed my needlework.

As soon as I could I went to my cell, and then the pent-up feelings broke forth.

When I went to the choir with the others, I knew that many eyes would be curiously watching me, but they only saw my usual stony face, and the report went about that Sister Maurus didn't care, so I got no sympathy.

I avoided speaking to anyone on the subject. Many came to me with honeyed words, trying to get me to talk about the matter, saying that the Abbess was unjust, that it was done through spite, etc. Yet I knew that if I said anything tangible their feet would scarcely carry them to the Abbess's room quickly enough to tell her what I had said. Oh, what a cloak of hypocrisy is the religious life! How insincere does it make its adherents! In my own home I had said just what

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came into my mind, I had never distrusted anyone. Yet here, in "the House of God," I was continually deceiving others, both by word and deed, and I was not the only one who learnt deception in the convent.

The night before the profession I had wept all my tears, so that I could look on the ceremony of the following day unmoved. Once, at the bestowal of the ring, I felt a great lump in my throat, but I regained my composure instantly, chancing to see a pair of eyes watching me intently.

For many and many a month bitterness rose in my heart hourly, reminded as I was at every step that I had lost my rank, which even the Rule insists that the monks should have. In the choir, refectory, chapter house, and elsewhere, from force of habit I would take my stand in front of Sister Walburga, and then remember that I had lost my rightful place;

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so, begging the pardon of Sister Walburga for my forgetfulness, I would take the lower one. Sister Walburga came to me one day before her profession, telling me she would have begged the Lady Abbess not to profess her before me, but she knew she had better secure her rank before the Abbess died, as both the Prioress, Dame Hildegarde, and the novice-mistress, were her mortal enemies.

On the eve of the profession the Abbess sent for me, and on my knees before her chair, bade me harbour no resentment against Dame Walburga, for I deserved all that had happened to me for my negligences and faults in religious life.

I would not let the Abbess know how much it cost me, and she sent me away, irritated that I had not confided my disappointment to her.

February passed away leaving Dame Walburga very satisfied with herself, and

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smiling smugly from the copious folds of her new cowl. My six months of penance came to an end on March 8, a suitable day, for it was Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent (1905).

CHAPTER XI

SPIRITUAL STRUGGLES AND DISAPPOINTMENTS

AFTER Dame Walburga's profession a great change came over me. I grew more reserved and hardened to disappointments and vexations. I began to feel that I did not want to be professed at East Bergholt. I had tried so very hard to be spiritual, and my one desire was to attain a high degree of contemplation. I read the lives of the great contemplative saints with avidity. They did me harm, though I did not know it at the time. First they discouraged me; how could I ever attain such heights? Then they filled me with illusions. All these saints had marvellous visions. I never had one. I determined to leave nothing undone to

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advance in perfection. With the first sound of the bells I would jump out of bed and, prostrating myself, kiss the floor of my cell, offering to God the entire day with its unknown burden of sorrow, sacrifice, and humiliation. Then dressing hurriedly, and shivering with cold in the winter, I would devote what time remained of the half-hour to kneeling before my crucifix asking for strength to keep guard over all my senses, my thoughts, my desires.

During Laudes, I would, in spite of extreme faintness, strive to recite the office with the greatest possible fervour; sitting upright, holding my *Diurnæ* in both hands, expending all my strength in loud and clear pronunciation.

A greater trial awaited me at meditation. Oh, the terrible struggles against overpowering sleep! My eyes grew heavier the more I tried to keep them open. Then, when I yielded, bitter self-reproach was

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- my portion for that day. I have often slept away all my thanksgiving time after Holy Communion. To make reparation for this offence to the majesty of God I would impose some penance on myself, such as only eating a slight piece of bread at breakfast or going without the greater part of my dinner.

Whatever time I could get between breakfast and the ringing for manual labour, I spent in church on my knees before the Tabernacle. I often worked myself up to such a pitch of fervour as to make myself believe that the Tabernacle door opened, and I saw our Lord Himself. Once during one of these visits to the church I fixed my eyes on the picture of Saint Benedict in the stained glass window so long that I really fancied I saw his eyes move. I looked more intently, hoping very anxiously that it really was so, but, alas! on closer inspection I was forced by the little common sense remaining to

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me to ascribe the motion of his eyes to the leaves of the tree outside the window blown by the soft wind of a summer afternoon.

Every Friday night for some time before I left the Abbey I had permission to return to church. I crept down from my cell after the curfew and, remaining on my knees in the dark church, lit only by the sanctuary lamp, I recited the entire Office of the Dead, and then said a Rosary, Miserere, and many a De Profundis. Here I stayed until I was so terrified that I could scarcely move, imagining every noise was made by the devil, and that every shadow must be his. I was eventually obliged to summon up all my courage to quit the church lest the devil should appear bodily. It was such a horrible kind of fascination. I think I should have driven myself mad had I gone on much longer practising such absurdities.

I read in the life of St. Jane Frances

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de Chantal, that that holy woman cut the sacred name of Jesus on her breast with a penknife. I was filled with emulation. That night after retiring to my cell I determined to do the same thing. I prayed for about an hour, then took a sharp knife, and bared my breast. I trembled so much that I could not steady my hand. It would have been so much easier if someone else had done it for me. I reproached myself for such cowardice, and took up the knife once more. I made an incision to form the letter J, but the most awful feelings came over me when I saw the blood flowing. I had just sufficient strength to stagger to my bed, and then I fainted. I never attempted to finish my work.

In reading the lives of St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi and St. Clare, I was struck by their wonderful love of holy poverty. I resolved to imitate them as far as my Benedictine Rule permitted. I have walked round and round my little cell

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day after day, examining my few possessions, seeking to dispense with some one of them. It grew to be a perfect mania with me. I would give up to my mistress books of devotion, my statue of the Blessed Virgin, my holy pictures. For many days I was tormented because I had a note-book to which I was very much attached; I thought Saint Mary Magdalene would never have kept this. Sometimes I quite made up my mind to give it up, but on looking at it my resolution vanished. I gave it up in the end, on reading a story of a monk, who, having two rosaries in his possession at death, was cast into hell for breaking his vow of poverty.

I had often manifested to my mistress my scruples concerning what I kept in my cell. She came one day to inspect them, as I was making my life unbearable. In my cell she found two flannel bags which had escaped my notice. She was

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very displeased with me, telling me I would lose my soul if I continued endeavouring to pass as a model of a poor religious whilst hiding superfluities in my cell. Of course she told Dame Ida, and you can imagine my resentment when my mistress would throw out hints at recreation, about some one who wanted to pass as "Brother John, the Angel," but all the time took good care their dear flesh wanted nothing. This was often said, and I had to bear the sarcasm and the laughter. Yet I had gone to my mistress as the Rule enjoins in Chapter 46, to reveal to her what anxiety my attachment to certain temporalities caused me, hoping for advice from her; for the Rule says: "If any hidden sin lurketh in the soul, let the monk make it known unto his Abbot or to the seniors in the spiritual life, who know how to cure their own wounds, and not disclose or publish those of others."

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I never manifested anything to my Abbess or novice-mistresses that I had not afterwards reason to regret having done. I think it was Father Joseph McCabe who said that in his convent, after the friars had heard the confessions on Saturday evenings, they would repair to the community room, and relate for the benefit of each other what they had been told in the confessionals. Yet every Catholic knows what agonies have to be endured outside confessionals, whilst waiting one's turn to make known some delicate matter of conscience which one would never even dream of divulging to either father or mother, husband or wife.

The atmosphere of the noviceship was not conducive to contemplation, and I began to sigh for a more recollected house. About this time I read the life of St. Hugh of Lincoln, and every book I could get relating to the Carthusians.

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Oh, how I longed to be one of them, how I wished I could enter a house of Carthusian nuns! It was with bitter disappointment I learnt that no house existed for women. Every day of my life I besought St. Bruno to put it into the heart of some holy woman to found one. I had St. Bruno's and St. Hugh's pictures in my cell, and everything I came across relating to the Carthusians I treasured up.

My most valued possession was a little picture of our Lady with the prayer, "Salve Regina," printed on it. Dame Dolores Lane-Fox gave it to me; it had been made at St. Hugh's Charterhouse at Parkminster, by Dom John Baptist Petre. When I told my mistress of my love for the Carthusian Order she was very displeased, and forbade me ever to speak about them again.

CHAPTER XII

A PROFESSED NUN

AT the beginning of Easter, Lady Catherine Parker spoke to me about my profession. I told her I did not think I had a vocation for the Benedictine Order, and did not want to be professed in it. She was very displeased, and told me that the devil had put such thoughts into my head because I did not keep my mind faithfully on God outside the time of actual prayer. She therefore sent for the Abbot of St. Augustine's Monastery at Ramsgate. Abbot Bergh was a Benedictine, and a great friend of the house. I was sent into the confessional to see him. I told him of all my doubts, and that I longed for a stricter and more recollected house.

He laughed at me when I spoke of the

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spite and jealousy, and the backbiting going on in the noviceship between mistress and novices, saying: "That's nothing; you'll find that and worse in other convents." He then abruptly dismissed me, saying I had every sign of a vocation for the Order and the house.

After that Lady Catherine fixed the day for me to make my petition to the Chapter.

On the day the community of professed choir nuns and novices assembled in the chapter house. On my knees in the middle of the room I read my petition, begging to be admitted into the sisterhood. On the next day the Chapter of Deliberation was held. To this the professed of the choir alone are admitted. The Abbess calls upon each nun individually, beginning with the youngest professed, to state whatever she has to say for and against the candidate under consideration.

After this the Chapter of Election is

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held. Each nun receives two small ivory balls, one black and one white. If she wishes to vote for the reception of the novice she places the white ball in the cup; if against her admittance, the black one is dropped in. The Abbess has a double voice in all elections. The candidate must have at least half the votes in her favour. When the balls have been counted the novice is called in and the result of the election made known to her. It has never been known in our convent to blackball, that is reject, a novice. The Abbess makes it too plain beforehand that she wishes the novice to be received. If the Abbess does not want the candidate she is sent away long before her canonical period of probation is up. If a candidate is young and strong, or should she be ever so old and delicate, providing she is rich, then she is quite certain to have a good vocation.

When the Chapter of Deliberation was

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held for the German novices, under Lady Hildegarde Heggen, several of the nuns began to state objections to their reception. They had scarcely begun when the Abbess, angrily glaring at them, commanded them to sit down.

These chapters of voting are a perfect farce. Everyone knows beforehand exactly how they will end. The Abbess is too much feared by the nuns for them to dare to vote against her desires. When a chapter was held for the election of a councillor many of the nuns, desirous of ingratiating themselves into the good books of the Abbess, actually went to her before the election and asked on whom she would like them to bestow their votes. Our mistress told me to go to the Abbess (I was then professed), and ask her whom she considered suitable for the office of councillor. I objected to this, saying the elections ought not to be controlled by the Abbess. My mistress

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answered: "My dear child, take my advice, and go to the Abbess; you need not vote as she tells you. Only if you do not ask her advice, she will have a grudge against you, and isn't it better to be a little tactful and keep in with her?" This was by no means the first time I had had such advice given me by my spiritual directress.

But to return to my own election. The votes were in my favour, and the Abbess fixed May 9 for my profession. She also arranged to have a retreat preached by Rev. Father Procter, O.P., from Haverstock Hill Priory. I was to make my vows during it. Every one in the convent congratulated me that my long waiting had come to an end at last.

The days spent in retreat passed away very quickly. I had much to do besides the extra hours given up to prayer. I had the Antiphons and Plain Chant to learn for the profession; my vows to

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write on parchment—it is the custom to have them beautifully illuminated—and the ceremonies to learn.

Three days before the retreat closed I was professed. Canon Rodgers, of Ipswich was the celebrant. Father Procter preached the sermon. The ceremony must take place during the Mass. After the Alleluia (or Tract in Septuagesima), the deacon sings the Antiphon "*Prudentes virgines aptate vestras lampades: ecce sponsus venit, exite obviam ei.*" (Prudent virgins light your lamps; behold the Spouse cometh, go ye forth to meet him.) After this the novice, leaving her prie-dieu takes the lighted candle and kneels at the grille, which has been opened previously.

The celebrant, who is sitting on the faldstool at the grille, now questions her in the form prescribed by canon law. He asks the novice if she will henceforth prefer the love of Christ to earthly love;

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if she will promise to keep perpetual virginity; will she persevere in the holy order which she has entered?

After the questions have been answered, the novice, standing in the middle of the choir, reads the formula of her vows. In this document she promises before God and the saints whose relics are in the church to keep *obedientia, stabilitas et conversio morum secundum regulam Sancti Patris Benedicti*. She promises obedience to the Bishop in whose diocese the convent is situated, to the Abbess, and her lawful successors. Modern usage calls these vows poverty, chastity, and obedience.

When the vows are read the novice puts her signature to them and then shows the document to the celebrant, all in the sanctuary, to the Lady Abbess, and to each member of the community individually.

The formula is then laid on the altar

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until Mass is finished. Two chantresses begin to sing the Litanies of the Saints, during which the newly-professed nun lies prostrate on the floor of the choir—covered with a black pall in some congregations—to show that henceforth she is dead to the world. It is during this ceremony that the cuculla, or cowl, the badge of the monastic order, is given. It is worn by the professed choir nuns only.

At the Preface the nun chants the Antiphon, "Ancilla Christi sum" ("I am the handmaid of Christ," etc.), which being finished, her head is covered with the large black veil. The ring is given next. It is a plain gold wedding ring worn on the third finger of the right hand.

In placing the ring on the finger, the celebrant, or prelate, if a bishop performs the ceremony, says:—"I espouse thee to Jesus Christ, therefore take the ring of faith, the seal of the Holy Ghost, so that thou be called the Spouse of God,"

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etc. A wreath of flowers is placed on the head to remind the newly professed nun that if she faithfully keeps the vow of chastity she may expect to receive an everlasting crown of virginity in Heaven. Holy Communion is received by her during the Mass.

If the novice professed be a choir nun, the celebrant presents her with a Breviary at the end of the Mass, saying: "Receive this book, and begin to recite the Canonical Hours."

A retreat of nine days is always made before a profession. When the ceremony is over there begins what is called the "bridal silence." This is a solemn silence lasting for three days, during which time not one single syllable is to be uttered. The newly professed is not permitted even to join the others in the recitation of the Divine Office. She must still remain in the noviceship for two years more, under the novice-mistress just as before.

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After the momentary excitement was over I came back to the ordinary routine. I felt very good for about three months, but after that I must confess the monotony began to try me, and the next thing to look forward to was the entrance into the Community.

CHAPTER XIII

A GERMAN ABBESS

AT the end of July Lady Catherine Parker died of cancer. She had survived her painful operation just eight months. She was a very gifted woman, a splendid organist, church embroiderer, and a no mean writer. She entered the convent when about twenty years of age. She held the post of novice-mistress for eighteen years. Naturally hard to herself, she was inflexible to others. She never showed the slightest sympathy for small aches and pains; never made allowance for the upbringing of early years. She was the avowed enemy of daintiness, and of carefulness for one's body. She was very stern to those of her subjects whom she considered gave too much time to arranging

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their cells; even cleanliness of person and care of one's clothes were not infrequently censured by her. I have had many severe scoldings and penances for spending too much time, according to her opinion, in washing during the heat of the summer. I have seen her ridiculing a novice whom she observed walking only in the shade of the garden during the mid-day heat. For a religious to be particular about food was little short of a mortal sin in her eyes. Yet on one occasion when I served her in the refectory she sent me with her portion of mutton to the kitchen to demand of the dispenser, Dame Agnes, the reason for giving her such "fat, black stuff." Moreover she always had tea carried to her cell before the vigils of the night began. As Abbess every whim of her appetite was gratified.

Even Lady Lescher was not without reproach in this respect. The daintiest of dishes were carried to her rooms. For

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weeks she has had quails sent for her consumption when the price was at a half-crown each. When I became dispenser I found in a cupboard in the store-room quite a dozen boxes which once contained *pâté de foie gras*. I do not know whether the numerous bottles of champagne were presented to, or bought by, her. I only saw Lady Lescher taking her food in the refectory twice, once on an Easter Sunday, and the second time on the anniversary of her benediction, November 8. On these occasions she was present at dinner.

Immediately on becoming Abbess, Lady Parker gave up appearing at breakfast and supper, coming to dinner only when she wished to make certain that the nuns' portions of food were not too large.

Lady Lescher certainly lived in a lordly style, but at the same time she was goodness itself in this respect to the nuns. Each morning at nine she

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would visit kitchen and vegetable house to make sure that what the community was to have should be good and plentiful.

Lady Catherine's first act was to preach a long sermon in the chapter house on the poverty of the Abbey (an old story), and the immortification of the nuns in general. The next move was to so diminish the quantity of food that the appeasing of one's hunger was a matter of no little difficulty. Even the pieces of dry bread were not suffered to remain in peace. On two occasions when the procession of nuns entered the refectory for dinner we have seen her Ladyship going round cutting one portion into halves to distribute them to two. After this was done she would march out of the refectory in a most majestic manner to her own apartments, there to partake of her own repast. The abbatial conscience was blissfully forgetful of the constitutions which declared

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(Chapter 56) that the Abbess should partake of the same diet as the community. It was really remarkable that Lady Catherine should have been permitted by God to govern the convent as Abbess only one year. Out of that time she was prostrate on a bed of grievous illness for many months, so that the affairs of the Abbey were completely out of her hands. Every one knew how she had desired the highest honour in the convent. For thirty-six years she had had to bow a most imperious will to her Superiors, and when the height of her ambition was attained, she was compelled to resign it to another through ill-health. Even her haughtiness was thoroughly humbled before her death by having to submit to a most humiliating disease. Her coffin was hurried to its final resting-place, her apartments and all belonging to her were thoroughly disinfected. *Sic Deus disposuit omnia.*

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Lady Catherine had made Dame Hildegarde Heggen Prioress. At the death of an Abbess the affairs of the convent are in the hands of the Prioress, whose duty it is to inform the Bishop of her Superior's death. During the thirty days which must elapse before an election can be held the Prioress suffered keenest anxiety regarding the successor to the abbatial dignity. As days went on she was less guarded, and finally everyone knew how she longed to wear the slippers of the deceased woman.

During this time Dame Hildegarde was quite affable. The unfortunate nuns were beguiled into electing her, though they soon had reason to regret it.

Bishop Riddell was present at the election, which took place on September 6, 1905. The votes were distributed between Dame Hildegarde, the Prioress, Dame Mechtilde Smith, the Sub-Prioress, and Dame Frances Roskell, the First Dean. At the

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first two scrutinies no one obtained a sufficiency. The elect must have a two-thirds' majority. In the third scrutiny Dame Hildegarde scraped through by just three votes over the required number. She was quite overcome, and gave vent to floods of tears.

The lay sisters, who are not present at an election, were quite dismayed when they heard the result. They, every one, rose in rebellion, declaring it a terrible disgrace and calamity that a good old English community could not find one of themselves to govern it, but must have a foreigner at the head. The fact was they were bitterly disappointed that their mistress, Dame Mechtilde was not elected. Lady Hildegarde knew this, so her first act when in power was, to dismiss poor Dame Mechtilde from her office as head of the lay sisters, and put in her place one absolutely incapable of the charge. This was the

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beginning of much trouble for the lay sisters.

Lady Hildegarde was blessed and installed on September 9, 1905. The procuratrix at this time was Dame Candida Bosworth. She had held this responsible office for many years, being trained by Lady Lescher, and the former occupant of the office, Dame Alphonsa Kendle. Dame Candida was about thirty years of age when Lady Lescher died. This Abbess knew how great a treasure her procuratrix was; she accordingly trusted Dame Candida absolutely. Lady Parker followed in Lady Lescher's footsteps in this respect. When Lady Heggen became Superior she revolutionized everything. She had respect for neither tradition nor the memory of former Abbesses. One of the many things she altered was the way the procuratrix's books were kept. She actually presumed to teach Dame Candida—who had a man's capabilities for business—some German

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method, which after all could not but bring the same results in the end. This was the beginning of a series of quarrels between them.

Dame Candida remonstrated with the Abbess on her reckless expenditure of money, on what most of us considered unnecessary alterations.

At this time the entire community was in a state of great dissatisfaction concerning the food. The Abbess really curtailed the quantity and quality to such an extent that even the most pacific and mortified of the nuns rebelled. All the malcontents went to Dame Candida, who was, under the Abbess, head of the temporals of the convent. This nun was of a most generous, motherly disposition; in fact, a second Lady Lescher to the nuns, as far as her power permitted her to be.

Dame Candida heard all the tales and grumblings for some time, and deliberated

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on the best course to pursue. Although there were many nuns far older than she, none of them had her character or British strength of purpose. They preferred to talk their grievances in twos behind doors and in recesses, but when the affair was taken to the proper authority they one and all backed out.

The procuratrix bearded the Abbess, a veritable lion, in her den on the subject. I saw Dame Candida leaving the abbatial apartments after the interview. I have no words to describe her looks. She was very good looking, tall, and very slender, intensely pale, and with quite a Grecian cast of features. When in repose she would have passed for a statue. When I saw her on this occasion she looked anything but statuesque.

The Abbess would not be reasonable, therefore the procuratrix thought it her duty to inform the Bishop of the diocese, which she did by letter. Soon after this

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the Bishop made his episcopal visitation. According to the decrees of the Council of Trent the Bishop is to visit the convents under his jurisdiction once each year. Bishop Riddell, however, had not made a visitation of our Abbey for eighteen years.

During the visitation the Abbess, with two or three senior nuns, accompanies the Bishop through the enclosure. She takes him through the infirmary, community room, dormitories, etc.; wherever she thinks fit, every place having been put shipshape prior to his entrance.

After this each nun in the order of profession sees the Bishop alone in the guest-room, not with a grille between. His Lordship sits in the part on the enclosure side where the nuns sit when seeing friends. Anyone is at liberty to tell the Bishop of any abuse which may exist. He asks questions about the right keeping of the enclosure, the food, etc.

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Dame Candida informed the Bishop of the abuses which had crept in regarding the food, spending of money, and alterations. I was told afterwards by one who was in the confidence of the Abbess that the Bishop asked her Ladyship to buy English meat instead of foreign mutton at 4½d. per pound. This she never did.

Secondly, the Abbess—who never came to Matins—made a rule that each nun was in future to hold her breviary. We had never done this. Every other Abbess allowed us to leave the books opened on the frontal of the stalls. The books are a tremendous weight, and have large type, so that we could easily read from them from our seats. Moreover, the office of Confessor Pontifex or Non Pontifex occurs almost nightly in the Ordo of our Abbey, and nearly every nun could say it from memory. The psalms, responses, versicles, antiphons, hymn and

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first nocturn lessons common, I could have said in my dreams. The nuns must have complained to the Bishop of this innovation. It is not a small matter to sit upright with nothing to lean the back against—leaning back is never permitted on any occasion—and hold heavy books when you are collapsing for want of sleep.

The nun whom I have spoken of as being the confidante of the Abbess told me she was really furious about this.

When the Bishop had left the house, the Abbess was a real dragon. She came oftener to choir for a few days following, to see if anyone dared lay the books on the frontal. We had even to hold them open for Compline, which is the same all the year round. It was quite a tradition in the Abbey that Compline was to be said in the church without books or lights.

Thus resulted the episcopal visitation.

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I hope, when the day comes for Government inspection, the Inspector will see that the Abbess carries out the directions given to her.

Now Dame Candida reaped what she had sown. One of the injunctions of our constitutions is that a chapter of faults is to be held in the chapter house on the Monday and Friday of each week. At this chapter the sisters are called up by the Abbess into the middle of the room where they accuse themselves publicly of their faults, and receive a penance. At the first chapter held after the Bishop left, Dame Candida was called up. When she had accused herself of her faults, the Abbess began telling her of those which — in her estimation — she had omitted. She spoke to Dame Candida in a way that might have been expected of a much less educated woman. I cannot recall her words now, but I do know that they simply sent a cold shiver over

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me. I raised my head and then looked round.

I saw Dame Candida prostrate at the Abbess's feet, the Abbess purple with rage, pouring out volumes of very bad English, and most of the nuns staring at one another, expressing by their looks the disgust they felt. Yet they were too cowardly to stand by their champion!

Poor Dame Candida, what must she have felt! She had been so respected and loved by Lady Lescher and the community. She was of a very proud and sensitive nature, and I really wept to see her lying at that vulgar woman's feet, hearing her being called liar, fool, agitator, and other such expressions. The Abbess said that Dame Candida had not apologized up to the holding of the chapter, therefore she was to take her dinner and supper on her knees off the floor in the refectory every day until she felt inclined to apologize. Lastly, she was dismissed from her

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office of procuratrix, and one more docile—perhaps I ought to have said one who would bow the knee to Baal—put in her place.

From this you can see that it does not pay one to oppose the Abbess even on a question of principle.

CHAPTER XIV

SICKNESS AND DEATH

THE life of a conventual establishment is one of sufficient harshness to try those of the strongest constitution, and it is not to be wondered at that many are unable to stand its rigours, and fall ill. Sometimes they recover—sometimes they die.

In the case of an illness of an Abbess, the Bishop will accord her leave of absence if the doctor decides a change is necessary, her life being looked upon as needful to the community. To nuns, however, who are suffering from anything save lunacy, the maxim, "One comes to religion to learn, not how to live, but how to die," is plentifully administered.

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Aches and pains of a minor sort were plentiful, though despised by those in authority. The autocratic system under which we lived would naturally tend to increase these. For example, the Abbess would insist on throwing open the windows of the workroom whatever the weather. All these windows were at the bottom of the room—her seat was at the top. Lady Hildegarde has had these windows open in February and March, and in consequence, the draughts were so bad that Dame Candida could not move her neck, and suffered terribly with rheumatism in her shoulders. Dame Lucy and myself were distracted with neuralgia in the head, and Dame Assumpta had severe toothache.

Dame Candida went to the Abbess, and told her of the windows, but she only laughed, and refused to have them closed; so we had to go on suffering.

At this time I worked in the book-

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binding department. The apparatus was old-fashioned and very heavy; in fact, an old nun told me that when the nuns bought it they did not know what they were getting, and she added: "It is only fit for a man to work." All the same, I had to do it until I complained to my mistress of severe pains in my back. Dame Placid told the Abbess, but she only laughed, and said: "Oh, it is nothing, only lumbago! Tell her to walk quickly in the garden, and next week I will make her serve in the refectory—that will give her some running about." However, before the next week came they were obliged to call the doctor in.

Doctor Carey, the Roman Catholic doctor who regularly attended the nuns, told the Abbess in my presence that I must have suffered a great deal.

I had to remain in bed for some weeks. When I did leave it, it was many a long month before I could bend my back

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the least bit without enduring excruciating pain. I had to be excused from making the profound inclinations in the choir, and it was all that I could do to rise from my stall at each Gloria Patri.

Dame Editha Roskell was infirmarian when I was ill. She was a gentle, kind little nun, who used to literally shake in the presence of Lady Hildegarde. Except when the doctor visited me the first time the Abbess never came near me. Dame Placid told me that when she was ill, Dame Hildegarde, who was then infirmarian, used to visit her as little as possible. When she did enter her cell she kept her handkerchief to her nose and mouth, and would not so much as shake the pillow!

Nature is strong, and often pulls through, but sometimes the illness is fatal.

There was one nun, a Dame Winifred Wood, who had been educated by the Ursulines at Upton, whose life could easily

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have been saved had they sent her to a consumptive sanatorium. Instead, I suppose it was the will of a merciful God, that she should be left to die. She was a Yorkshire woman of a very large build, and gave one the idea of having a strong constitution. She told me that two neglected colds caused the symptoms of consumption to appear.

She was subjected for months to the most hard-hearted treatment at the hands of Dame Hildegarde, who then held the post of infirmarian. She was cut off from the little society which is allowed in convents, and compelled to wander about the garden alone. I do not forget that Dame Dolores — Miss Mary Lane-Fox — pleaded with Lady Lescher that poor Dame Winifred might be allowed to join the novices at their recreation, as she was banished from that of the nuns, on account of expectoration. Lady Lescher granted the leave on the understanding

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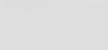
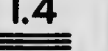
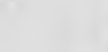
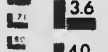
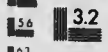
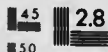
that she retired when Dame Hildegarde, who had care of the recreation in the noviceship, appeared. The infirmarian seldom came to the recreation as she preferred a siesta.

Even Lady Lescher, who was most kind to Dame Winifred, could not be induced to reprimand the German infirmarian. I shall ever remember the affectionate gratitude of Dame Winifred to Dame Dolores. I used to see the poor nun creeping about, dying on her feet, a living image of patience and profound humility. Never a complaint escaped her, she glossed over the glaring unkindness of her infirmarian, which would have disgraced any woman, and, in a nun, was altogether unpardonable. I do not believe she would even allow herself to think about the treatment she received; to her sensitive conscience it would have seemed like a grievous sin. No, she put into strict practice the precept of the Rule: "That a monk be content



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with all that is vile, and the leavings or cast-offs of everything."

Lady Lescher was undoubtedly kind to her—she has been known to leave her dinner to see what they had sent to Dame Winifred. The Abbess did what she could to instil into the infirmarian a little more of that Christlike spirit which such a sublime occupation demanded. We all knew, and I am certain that Lady Lescher knew likewise, that it was impossible for Dame Hildegarde to feel for anyone except herself. If she had the slightest ache the whole house knew of it. Any remedy that money could buy was obtained for her. The cellar belonging to the infirmary was filled with her German mineral waters, and the cupboards with her pills and Sprüdel salts.

Dear Dame Winifred's end came in March, 1904. No one regretted it for her sake, and surely if humble long-suffering and forgiveness of injuries merit a

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place in Heaven, then that soul deserved a very high one.

Dame Winifred was in her thirty-third year when she died. She had been in the convent about twelve years. For months before the end she had suffered terribly with dropsy. She was buried in the Abbey cemetery in the garden, as all the members are.

Her mother and father were notified of her death, and an account sent to them of her holy end. I do not suppose they told the parents that no one knew exactly when she died. The attendants were elsewhere, and one of them, Dame Walburga, coming to her bedside, found her dead.

CHAPTER XV

RECEIVED INTO THE "COMMUNITY"

ON May 9, 1907, I left the noviceship, and was received among the fully-fledged choir nuns, and given the title of "Dame" by the Abbess, Lady Hildegarde. I felt there was now nothing to look forward to but death. I was not long among the professed nuns in the workroom—this room is to them what the noviceship is to the novices—when I discovered that there was far more jealousy, uncharitableness, backbiting, tale-telling, than had existed in the noviceship. Certainly there was good reason for keeping the novices and younger nuns apart from the "community," as we generally styled the dames. I struggled on now without the assistance of anyone. The Abbess did not care to

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spend much time, to use her own words, "talking about souls."

At this time I was aid to the dispenser, my work consisting in helping Dame Reparata to portion the food for the nuns, making jams, pickles, and in summer, picking the fruit. There was plenty to do, but I did not mind the work, as I had not the responsibility of the office.

Now that I was free of the noviceship I lived as much like a Carthusian hermit as my Rule allowed. I tried to keep myself free of all the party feelings that ran so high among the professed nuns. All the time I had left from the store-room I spent in my cell reading, praying, and studying. I only mixed with the community during recreation, and it was quite enough.

These recreations were a perfect misery. In the summer we had to walk round the garden the greater part of the time. The

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Abbess, Lady Hildegarde, introduced this. She objected to sitting with us in the workroom, lest she contracted any disease. Some of the nuns were consumptive, and our Abbess lived in terror of microbes. When we went into the garden we had to walk in groups, according to our ranks. The seniors with the Abbess, the middle rank among themselves, and the juniors last. The whole time the Abbess was scolding someone. Either one of a set was seen with another not of her own rank, or two were seen walking together. This latter was a very serious offence, as it was a fruitful source of treason. I have seen our Abbess pick up her skirts and race down the garden after two nuns who accidentally had become separated from their party.

In Lent of the year 1908 our change of offices took place. Once each year, according to the arrangement of the Abbess, there takes place a chapter at which each

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nun, beginning with the Prioress, lays down her office in compliance with the decrees of the constitutions. The Abbess has it in her power to appoint new officials or retain the old ones. She has supreme power given her by the Rule. In Chapter 65 it states "The government of the monastery shall depend on the will of the Abbot." In some orders the members choose their officials by vote. In the Benedictine order the Abbess appoints all from the Prioress down.

It was at this chapter that I was appointed dispenser. The previous dispenser, Dame Reparata Swarbrock, held the office for a little over a year. She was the sister of Dame Cecilia, and niece of the Prioress, Dame Frances. Tales were taken to the Abbess that the dispenser took choice bits to the Prioress' cell, and that she and her sister used to go to the store-room after Matins, and eat things. Also, that they had been seen running

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up the corridors to their cells with jugs of tea and things to eat, up the sleeves of their cowls. The sleeves of these garments are very wide and long, reaching past the knees. Then again the dispenser used to agree with Dame Cecilia, who was procuratrix, to come to the second table for her dinner in order that she might give her a better portion. I have seen her carrying to the refectory a huge plateful of mutton or of some other special stuff which was not given to the nuns. Of course there are always eyes about, and others saw what I saw. I think what really decided the Abbess to remove Dame Reparata was the fact that on every similar occasion when she came in to make similar arrangements she found the dispenser eating. It is strictly against the Rule to eat between meals.

It was a great blow to Dames Cecilia and Reparata when I was appointed, for they would have to exist on the regu-

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lation amount like the rest of the community.

I had a hard time as dispenser. I was responsible for the kitchen, dairy, bakery, vegetables, orchard, ordering the provisions. I had also to supply the food for guests and priests, as well as the catering and portioning for the community and men on the farm.

I have said before that meat was seldom given, and then only in the smallest quantities. It was all foreign, and only given at dinner. The amount this and the preceding Abbess allowed for one meal was two small legs of mutton. This had to be portioned to about sixty persons. It permitted only the smallest and thinnest slice to be given to each. The Abbess had always to have the thickest and juiciest piece. Very often she has come to the kitchen and stormed at me about her portion. The nuns had to eat the common diet or leave it, and

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go without if it did not agree with them ; but nothing was sent to the Abbess that she did not like.

Although it was precisely stated in our constitution that the Abbess should take the same diet as the nuns, she never did. I had always to see that her portion was very tempting, and on the days when the nuns had to sit down to a bloater or herring, she would have her dinner, which would consist of a mutton chop or some fowl, in her own apartments. When the nuns had milk pudding, made without a single egg, the Abbess would dine on custard pudding, and always insisted on having stewed fruit with it. — All the Abbesses took beef-tea or very good soup at 10 a.m., and also some little delicacy with wine at 4 p.m. The community had nothing between their meals.

Our breakfasts on Sundays and feasts would be bread-and-butter ; but the Abbess, whether on fast or feast, would

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always have a new-laid egg and whatever fruit was in season, etc.

During the time I held the office of dispenser guests were never wanting at the Abbey. No sooner had one party left than another came to stay three or four days. These guests had to be supplied with dinner, etc., yet the Abbess would not buy one ounce of meat extra.

On one occasion, having only a very small quantity of meat, I went to her to ask her to buy some in the village. She would not do so, but was exceedingly cross that the meat had been eaten. I reminded her of the visitors, but she would not accept that as a reason, remarking "It is nonsense that five could make all that difference; where there are sixty to feed, anyone knows five more cannot be much." This would have been true had the guests simply had ordinary portions like the nuns. The joint was sent

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in to them first, and then used for the nuns afterwards.

On other occasions I have had the door slammed in my face and been told, "It is nothing to do with me; do the best you can!"—on a few scraps of meat!

The nuns have told me after dinner that all they got was a lump of fat, a piece of gristle, and a bone. They bore this sort of thing for months, when many began to feel run down. Several of them seemed to waste away before one's eyes. They went to Dame Cecilia, the procuratrix. She keenly felt the want of meat; therefore she sympathized with them. Often she has bought me a leg of mutton or a shoulder without the knowledge of the Abbess, trusting to luck to pay for it. Without her I do not know what I should have done. After weeks of buying meat like this the Abbess found it out. There was a terrible scene, and I was

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strictly forbidden to speak to Dame Cecilia about the meat.

When the Abbess went to Droitwich Dame Cecilia bought us all we wanted, and the change in the nuns was truly gratifying to see. There was one visitor in the camp, who wrote informing the Abbess that more meat was given at dinner, and she by letter forbade Dame Cecilia to buy extra. The procuratrix took no notice, and the good supply went on until the Abbess came back.

The worry of all this was really dreadful. The office would have been hard enough under better circumstances, but with an Abbess such as we had it was awful.

I went to her, and asked her on my knees to remove me from the responsibility. I told her I could not attend to my soul at all. When I went to the church to meditate or say the office, I was always distracted with thoughts of the meat, or what I could give the nuns

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for dinner on the following day. I assured her it was not the work, but the worry. She would not listen to me.

I went on for several months more during the summer, on my feet in the heat of the kitchen, which was small and almost filled by the huge range. I had to stand for hours over the fire stirring great pans full of jam, and dressed in those heavy woollen clothes. In the middle of it I have had to fly to the church for some one of the numerous services. I did not expect to be excused from this, and I did not ask. No one knows how heavy the fruit season is unless they have had experience; yet if I came to choir a few minutes late for the meditation, I would find the Abbess waiting for me at the church door, refusing to listen to any reason. I have been so dreadfully hot and tired, that meeting with such harshness has often caused me to pass my half-hour in tears.

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For months the entire choir has been obliged to return to church each day in the one half-hour of free time, to practise saying the word "Spiritui" in the Gloria Patri. The Abbess declared the nuns said "Spiritúi" instead of "Spiritui." So they would have to say that word over and over again with the accent on the "i." I asked to be excused from this, as it broke into my time for the kitchen, but I only got a volley of abuse, and the Mother Prioress was ordered to report if I came late.

The Abbess irritated the nuns very much over this word. She never came to choir without giving them a lecture and a practice afterwards. She also had cards with the word printed in large type put round the choir. These were before us for months, and we did not dare remove them or put books on them, because the Abbess gave big penances for this fault. There was no pleasure in saying the office.

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It was a great burden to have to go seven times in the day and once in the night to say the same "vain repetitions."

My work in the kitchen was heavy enough, as every nun acknowledged, but my heavy burden was rendered just insupportable by the conduct of those lay sisters employed in and about the kitchen. The cook was the greatest trial. She had a most disagreeable temper and would fly into a rage with very little provocation. She made the scullery-maid's life a hell on earth. I never remember giving Sister Mildred an order that I was not overwhelmed with angry words or reproaches. Could I have cooked what was required without asking her, I would gladly have done so.

Another trial that I had to endure from Sister Mildred was her constant spying on me. I have several times found her listening at the door of my office, to which she had crept noiselessly. She was

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the greatest mischief-maker I ever met. Whilst assuring me to my face of her affection, she would calumniate me behind my back.

The religious spirit among the lay sisters seemed to be deteriorating. Being uneducated, they were harder to deal with.

These lay sisters used to fight and quarrel with each other in a way that would put decent servants in the world to shame. In spite of all this, they insisted on regarding themselves as martyrs and proficients in the religious life.

When the Papal Bull concerning daily Holy Communion was first promulgated, I remember that whilst many of the nuns would not approach the Holy Table daily, the sisters went in a body without scruple. I never received daily. It seemed to me that great struggles after perfection were necessary before one ought to communicate daily.

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Changes soon came. The Abbess had dismissed the gardener from the kitchen-garden and put in his place her three Germans, who were to work miracles there. They dug the whole place up, and planted heaps of things which were never seen again.

Dame Lucy Cain was placed in charge. She was an exquisite embroiderer, but knew nothing of gardening. The Abbess's great idea was to give us heaps of greens and salads to eat, and so save the meat bill. Accordingly she instructed Dame Lucy to plant rows of lettuce, German corn salad (I think they called it), and kohl-rabi, which looked like turnips. I had the pleasure of sending into the refectory twice a day three basins of salad, which came out very nearly the same as they went in. The kohl-rabi no one would eat; there were rows in the kitchen each time it was cooked.

After dinner her Ladyship would come

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in, and the cook, her aid, and myself could be seen lying prostrate in the sand of the floor whilst the Abbess called us fools, idiots, and such like, because it was not cooked to her taste.

On the anniversary of her Benediction, September 9, I asked her if I might give the nuns a nice supper in honour of the event. I thought it was a good excuse to get them something decent to eat. She said I might do so, and then told me the following, which might be nice for Germans, but I am afraid English palates did not appreciate it: "You must tell de German seesters to bring you in lots and lots of de corn-leaf salad. Den do you get some beetroets and potatoes and boil dem, and den cut dem up all in de salad, and get a leetle vinegar and oil and sauce made with flour and mix dem all up very weil togedder. Oh, dey will like it, I know." She rubbed her hands, s...king all over with delight. "Give dem lots

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of it on dishes, and dey can have two sardines each," were her last remarks.

I went to the kitchen and made known the result of my request. Everyone was disgusted. The nuns were expecting a better supper than usual, and you can imagine their disappointment on beholding what one described as "a mess which the hungriest pig in the land wouldn't eat." The dishes came out as they went in, and the nuns regaled themselves with the two sardines.

Dame Lucy was not head of the kitchen-garden long. She complained that the Germans were disobedient and always fighting among themselves. The Abbess would not listen to anything against her Germans. Each morning Dame Lucy said that the Abbess used to visit them at their work and talk by the hour to them in German. She herself was always getting into hot water.

Dame Lucy came to me one morning

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to say she had heaps of lettuce going to seed, and would I take a big basketful and boil them down to serve as spinach, as the Lady Abbess said they were not to be wasted. I agreed to do so. That afternoon a load came in.

The next morning, the Abbess, poking about as usual, saw the lettuces and asked me what I was going to do with them. I told her what Dame Lucy had said. Here was her opportunity, and she took it. When the community was assembled in the hall designated St. Paul's, she called: "Dame Lucy and Dame Maurus, come to me." Everyone bristled up, expecting something.

We walked up to her Ladyship, and she commanded me to tell her what Dame Lucy had said. I did so. Then she turned on Dame Lucy and spoke to her in language which no woman ought to use to another. She told her several times she was a liar, and that this was only another sample of her lies. The Abbess

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declared Dame Lucy had no orders to pick the lettuces. All this time Dame Lucy was lying prostrate on the floor at her feet. I looked on, and I could not keep the tears back. I did think it sad to see the Abbess bending over her prostrate form, purple with rage, and stamping her feet. Here was this nun humbling herself for love of Christ in a way in which no one in the world would be called upon to do, not even to a king; and the Abbess, instead of taking this act in a spiritual way, simply took it as a tyrant would from a slave.

Her Ladyship worked herself up to such a state that I feared she would have a fit. At length she commanded Dame Lucy to eat her dinner off the floor in the refectory, and dismissed her from the kitchen-garden. She put Sister Mary, the youngest of the German novices, in her place. Finally, I was forbidden to speak to Dame Lucy.

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Soon after this I again appealed to the Abbess to remove me from my onerous office. She was very displeased, and told me never to mention it to her again. "You are obliged to work for the community harder than anyone else, because Lady Lescher took you without any money. I have put you in the kitchen," she cried, "because you were poor, and did not bring a dowry." These words never died from my memory.

CHAPTER XVI

UNSETTLEMENT AND DOUBT

I HAD now been at the Abbey about six years, and I had found the life one of continual disappointment. I had entered East Bergholt expecting to find it the abode of peace and holiness, where worldliness and sin were banished, and where all were devoting their lives to the highest and best. Instead of that I found it to be the abode of worldliness, jealousy and meanness. One by one my cherished ideals and beliefs were shattered, and I became the prey of unsettlement and doubt. I had expected hardship and self-sacrifice, and had indeed earned the reputation of a Spartan in the establishment; but it was not the physical ills I suffered that undermined my faith in the calling.

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I would have gone on in suffering and privation, denying the wants of the flesh in order to minister to the good of the soul. My dissatisfaction and unsettlement arose from the fact which was becoming more and more apparent that the life of the convent, with its prayers and fastings, was not making anyone more holy, but that the effect was the very reverse.

The causes that made for my unsettlement were chiefly three: the bad example of those in authority, and especially the Abbess; the pettiness and worldliness that existed among the nuns; and the insincerity of the religious observances.

The first cause I have already touched on in describing Lady Hildegarde. Whilst Lady Lescher was alive, things were different. She was a good, kindly, motherly soul, and we respected her, and tried to do her bidding. If any command seemed hard, one had only to be told "My Lady has wished it," and the order would be

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carried out with cheerful obedience. But we could not respect Lady Hildegarde, and I do not fear contradiction when I state there was not one in the convent who liked her.

According to St. Benedict the life of the Abbot must be a living fulfilment of the Rule, yet our Abbess lived on rules quite different from the nuns.

All the community, including poor old nuns, whose proper place was an arm-chair, rose at 5 a.m., both in winter and in summer. The Abbess came down at 8 a.m. when she felt inclined, or before noon when she did not. We were in the church from 5.30 a.m. until 8 a.m., without breaking our fast—having had no food since 6 o'clock of the evening before—chanting at the top of our voices, except the half-hour of meditation. Our Abbess would have a cup of tea carried to her room before coming to Mass, at which she sometimes appeared. If she

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went to Holy Communion—she would have to be fasting—she would slip out and get her tea before the end of Mass, almost immediately after receiving what she, I suppose, believed to be the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of the Redeemer. She seldom came to Vespers in the afternoon—for which relief the nuns said a fervent *Deo gratias*. She was seldom present at the afternoon prayer; when she came it was only to see that no one was late. To Compline she never under any circumstance came; whilst at Matins she never appeared unless it was for the office of Christmas, Easter, or some principal feast of our Lady or St. Benedict. On these nights she would have the office sung an hour earlier, for her own benefit.

The teachings contained in Chapter 2, "What kind of man the Abbot ought to be," and in Chapter 64 "On the appointment of an Abbot," were quite

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thrown away on our Abbess. In the first-named chapter the Patriarch of Monks tells the Abbot he must remember to make himself worthy of his name, and of the place of Christ, which he holds in the monastery. He is to teach nought but what is commanded by the Lord—God forbid that he should do otherwise. His commands must be sprinkled with the leaven of divine justice in the minds of the disciples. “The Abbot must point out by his own example whatsoever things are to be avoided by his disciples, lest after preaching to others he himself become a castaway.” “Before all things the Abbot must not lightly value the souls committed to his care and have more solicitude for fleeting earthly things, but he must always remember to whom he is to give an account of the souls he has received.” If these golden counsels were always followed, how different would have been the history of monastic houses

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in the past! In Chapter 64 the Rule goes on to say that "it behoves the Abbot to be learned in the Divine Law, that he may know how to bring forth old things and new (Matthew xiii., 52). He must be chaste, sober, and always prefer mercy to justice, that he himself may obtain mercy. He is to hate vice, and love the brethren. In correcting he must not be too severe, lest too eagerly scouring off the rust the vessel itself be broken. The bruised reed must not be crushed. He must always remember his own frailty. He must not be quarrelsome nor anxious, nor excessive, nor headstrong, neither must he be jealous, nor over suspicious, because he will never be at rest."

I think anyone can see how truly apostolic are St. Benedict's teachings; unfortunately the spring has been poisoned at its very source. St. Benedict says "the Abbot is to teach his disciples by his own deeds." If we had followed our

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Abbess, where would the church services have been? He also says "he must not place too much importance on the things of the world." Yet the very reason she used to give for not appearing in church was, that the business of the Abbey occupied her time. As for not being suspicious, she made life unbearable. If she saw two people speaking, she would not rest until she had found out what they were talking about.

Of her selfishness, cruelty, and despotism, I have given many instances in other chapters. With such a one at the head of the establishment, what wonder that grave faults and abuses should exist among the members?

Lady Hildegarde still governs the Abbey. Our Abbesses are elected for life, unless through old age, or ill-health they wish to lay down the burden of government. She is not likely to quit her comfortable position.

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I have mentioned as the second cause of my unsettlement, the pettiness and meanness of the nuns themselves. In the constitution it says that the convent should resemble a family. This it certainly did not. It was split up into little parties, the grievances of one of the number being the grievances of all the rest.

There were too many relations at East Bergholt for spiritual relationship to be possible. The Prioress, Dame Frances Roskell, had three nieces and a cousin; Dames Cecilia had a sister and two cousins; Dame Assumpta had two cousins; Dames Agnes and Gertrude Murray were sisters; Dame Dolores had an aunt and one cousin. And so it went on. Among the lay sisters there were also relations. In some convents they will not take relations, for they are a source of perpetual trouble. These relations were for ever speaking together in corners. Mother Prioress used to tell everyone's business to her nieces,

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and they in turn used to spread it among their own circle. Dame Cecilia was spiteful to me when the Abbess dismissed her sister, Dame Reparata, from the storeroom and made me dispenser in her place. I am sure I did not want the place, as after events proved.

Thus it went on. Nothing could be imagined less spiritual than our Abbey. I have not found such narrow-mindedness, such uncharitableness or jealousy among women in the world. If one nun was appointed to sing by herself in the church, black looks would be given her for a week after by the disappointed ones. I have seen nuns banging doors in each other's faces for spite. If one spoke to another at recreation, and that one had some grievance, real or imagined, against the speaker, she would jump round in her seat and not answer. The very elements of politeness were scrupulously set aside.

When a candidate presents herself for

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the religious life she receives much instruction on the absolute necessity of despising the things of the world: its pleasures, riches, and manners of thinking. In spite of so much teaching it is simply amazing to behold the miserable attachments to petty objects that reign supreme. I was surprised on entering the noviceship to find how much boasting there was about one's family, riches, whom one knew when in the world, where one travelled, etc. Not in the noviceship alone was this to be found, where it would be excusable in persons coming newly to religion, it existed among the dames in a greater degree. One nun boasted of her estates, though I was told by one who knew her, that her people were butchers. From the way one nun spoke of her father, I fancied he must be very near the Prime Minister, whereas he was just something on the Local Board of Bootle, near Liverpool. Another was very fond of relating

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anecdotes of her aunt, the Duchess of ——, or her cousin, the Countess of ——. I think she was related to all the nobility in the land!

Human nature, judging from what I saw at East Bergholt, seemed utterly unable to accomplish all the precepts contained in conventualism. A common fault of the novices was the mean little criticisms of the clothes, and other belongings of the postulants. This is very unedifying. When one leaves parents, home, and everything dear in the world, expecting to find the nuns little short of angelic; prepared to make any and every sacrifice; and to obey blindly as commanded by the Rule, neither discussing the wisdom of Superiors nor their motives, my readers will readily imagine what a blow it is to a fervent postulant to find herself sneered at for her obedience, and to see a glaringly worldly spirit under a

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religious habit. The nuns speak of worldliness, worldly ways, worldly spirits, etc., to describe the faults of any within the walls, yet I must state once more that, in the world, I never met the worldliness of these nuns.

Regarding that most contemptible of all littlenesses—selfishness about food—there is plenty to say. Standing in the refectory it was really sad to see nuns picking up first one piece of bread and butter, then putting it down to take another that looked nicer, or had more butter on it. The same disgusting tricks could be seen when dishes of food were handed round. The nuns who had grown grey—shall I say in the service of God, or of Rome?—could be seen taking not the first that came, but the largest or best piece.

Perhaps the most painful side of the unsettlement in my mind was that, through the insincerity of the worship,

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I began to lose faith in the institutions of the Church—ordinances which had been most sacred to me from childhood. I have described how, before entering as a postulant, I had heard the nuns singing in the choir, and thought they must be angels. Too soon I found it to be unmeaning repetition. My own perseverance in the prayers and ritual brought me no satisfaction of soul. I have often knelt before the Tabernacle and tried my utmost to realize the supernatural presence abiding there. I can fully say I have never realized it. The most I have ever done was to repeat over and over again: the Church teaches this doctrine, the doctors of the Church confirm it, therefore it must be true.

One of the things that shocked me was the behaviour of the nuns in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament.

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Kneeling in my stall in bitterness of heart and dryness of spirit, I have seen those devotees of the Host running in and out of church making their genuflections in a manner in which they would not have dared to make them to any earthly monarch. Yet they said "The King of kings, and Lord of lords" was there! I did not disbelieve the doctrine of the Real Presence; their actions merely set me thinking.

I have also witnessed the greatest irreverence coming from the priest at the altar. Once during the consecration at Mass, when the priest held the Host up for those present to adore, the altar-boy, being inattentive, neglected to ring the bell. The priest turned round, holding what he said was the Body of Christ, and called to the server in the angriest of tones: "Hi, there, ring that bell, do you hear: what are you up to?"

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On another occasion at the beginning of the Preface, the boy failed to answer the "Sursum corda" with the words "Habemus ad Dominum." The priest turned round, and glaring at the offender, gabbled the required words in the most irreverent manner possible.

This same priest, I may add, was most objectionable in giving Holy Communion to the nuns. He was very short-sighted, and no matter how the sacristan placed the candles on the communion board, it never suited him. More than once he has interrupted the words: "Corpus Domini nostri Jesu Christi custodiat animam tuam ad vitam æternam. Amen" ("May the body of our Lord Jesus Christ keep thy soul to life everlasting. Amen"), which he has to say to each one receiving the Host, to call out to the nun to whom he was giving it: "I say; will you open your mouth and put out your tongue?" This request

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was not whispered in a reverent voice, it was said in tones expressing great irritation.

Such things as these set one thinking for themselves; Catholics are too apt to use the brains of the popes and priests instead of their own.

In the writings of Catholic authors it is not unusual to find recorded instances of a far more serious nature relating to the gross carelessness and irreverence of Catholic priests. It is related of Madame Cecilia, the Abbess of Solesmes, that on one occasion, on going into a church, she would not genuflect to the high altar, declaring the Host reserved therein had become mouldy. The priest in charge was sent for, and it was found even as she had said.

A friend of mine told me that once, paying a visit to a chapel in Norwich, she saw that the sanctuary lamp had gone out for want of oil. The altar was covered with a thick dust. The rest of the place

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showed signs of the greatest neglect. Thus do Roman Catholic priests testify to their belief in the Real Presence.

Is it to be wondered at that I became more and more unsettled? At first I tried to put away my discontentment, but scarcely an hour passed in which I did not find myself regretting the life I had chosen, and vaguely longing to get back to the world.

As time went on, I gave up struggling against my thoughts, and instead of making my life miserable by vain attempts to pass hour after hour saying Aves and ejaculating prayers, I used to build all sorts of castles in the air for hours at a time. I turned away from the thoughts of the present evils, which through so many days had been mine, to think about that good old past, my life before I entered. I dreamt beautiful dreams of what might have been, and tried to forget that I lived at the Abbey.

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Gradually the desire to escape became more and more impressed on my mind. During all the years I had been miserable, but I had not thought seriously of giving up. Now I felt I must. My mother had not visited me for three years, and I did so long for her. I thought if she came I would tell her how miserable I was; and get her advice. How often have I laid awake at night crying for her when the others have been sleeping.

But it was not to be that I should see her, and when, about six months after I had first made my resolve, the crisis came, I had to act on my own initiative.

CHAPTER XVII

OTHER UNHAPPY SOULS

AT this time a lay sister, named Sister Majella Jordan, was appointed by the Abbess to work during the morning in the kitchen-garden, and in the afternoon to cook what was required for the supper at 6 p.m.

In the world this sister had been a tailoress in Liverpool. She was very delicate, and coughed terribly. She looked like a living skeleton. She had been suffering for some time before Lady Lescher died. In fact, extreme unction had been administered to her. Lady Lescher took great care of her, and she recovered.

When Lady Heggen became Abbess, Sister Majella's health broke down, and

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she coughed and spat up great quantities of blood. She complained that the work in the infirmary was too heavy for her. The Abbess said she couldn't have people idle about the house, so she sent this sister to work in the garden.

Here, for hours, in the cold and heat, this sister had to stand digging or weeding. At 3 p.m. she had to come to me to get the orders for the supper. The perspiration would be streaming off her, and her heavy woollen clothes would be wet through. She could scarcely stand on her feet, and she had yet to be in the kitchen until 7 p.m. at the earliest.

She used to cry a great deal and confide in me. I liked her, and would also give her my confidence. For months I made her have my portion of meat, which I never tasted. I have given her fresh eggs and biscuits, and even brandy and wine. I kept these in the store-room for flavouring the sauces sent into the guests. I think

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I kept her alive with what I gave her to nourish her.

I have often made her come in when no one was about and given her good soup or arrowroot. When I first did this I had many scruples, because I was disposing of goods that did not belong to me. I sometimes resolved not to go on with it, but at the sight of this poor sister's face my resolutions vanished. Therefore I told God that I only did it to relieve her sufferings, and I hoped He would accept it in this spirit.

We were both very miserable, but she was always able to say heaps of prayers and talk about the Holy Will of God. I told her that I was very unhappy, and my heart simply sank within me when I thought I should have to live all my life shut up here. I went on to say that I might put up with it if I were about sixty instead of twenty-four, but I was afraid I should go mad long before I died.

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She tried to comfort me by telling me the Abbess might die soon, or I might be taken out of the kitchen.

In the November of 1908 the Abbess, who had been suffering with arthritis, obtained episcopal permission to go to Droitwich for the brine baths. The day she left I asked Sister Berchmans Merry if she would have liked to have gone with the Abbess. "Oh, yes," she replied, "I would; for if I once put my foot on a London station I would slip away and go to my mother, and neither the Abbess nor the Abbey would see me again."

Like myself, this little sister longed to return to the world and be with her mother.

When her mother was ill and had to be attended by strangers, poor Sister Berchmans was nearly distracted with grief. Once she told me she would give anything on earth to be away from East Bergholt, but she would not leave now she had taken her vows, for she feared the respon-

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sibility of such a step. She was the same age as myself, and had been in the Abbey since she was twelve. At seventeen years of age she became a postulant, then a novice, and finally she was professed five months after me.

When she admitted her discontentment I also told her of my own. I candidly confessed to her that I meant to take the first opportunity that presented itself and make a dash for freedom. I asked her to consider whether she felt capable of standing the deadly monotony and hardship of the life for the rest of her mortal days. She, after several days' reflection, only said she could not bring herself to leave after having taken her vows. From that day I never tried to persuade her. It would have been very serious for me had I worked upon her feelings to quit the Abbey, and then when she was out, to discover that her conscience reproached her for the step she had taken.

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Although she would not leave, she encouraged me in my determination.

A month passed away, and I hoped that my mother would come to see me at Christmas.

The Abbess returned for the feast. She was terribly irritable, and it was clear her pains had not left her. Her worries had been augmented by one of the nuns, Dame Gertrude Murray. This nun was an invalid accustomed to the kindest of treatment from Lady Lescher. When Lady Hildegarde came into power she cut off one by one Dame Gertrude's little extras, and made her live the common life and do some work. She evidently got this on her mind to such a degree that her nerves became unstrung. She would not eat the common diet, but shut herself up in her cell, which overlooked the sanctuary and choir. She grew morbid and nervous from reading the lives of saints and being over-anxious about her spiritual welfare.

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When she knew Lady Abbess was going away she insisted on seeing the doctor. Up to this the Abbess and the nuns had treated her complaints lightly; no one believed she was ill. However, the doctor said change of air was necessary, and it was hinted about the convent that Dame Gertrude's brain ran the risk of being affected. She was taken to Droitwich, and although only there a month the change in her appearance was wonderful. Plenty of good food and sleep and long walks in the country had made a different being of her.

Dame Dolores Lane-Fox and Dame Angela Kelly stood in the greatest need of the like treatment. They seemed to grow thinner before one's eyes. Dame Angela was not happy in her religious life. She was very fond of me, and told me on several occasions how she regretted having entered. "I simply dare not sit down and think about it," she said, "for I

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am certain I would try to find an open door."

Even Dame Dolores, who was a model of a fervent religious, told me when I was a novice that had she known what she was in for she would never have come. Hers was a big sacrifice to make, and she made it generously.

Dame Etheldreda Walmesley, her aunt, entered when about forty-two years of age. She was a Weld-Blundell before her marriage, and had been married twenty years. Her husband died of blood-poisoning after an illness of only three days. Soon after his death she entered our convent, bringing great wealth with her. She built the beautiful chapel of the Holy Souls in the Cathedral at Westminster. She was a good religious, and very kind to me. She knew that I was very unsettled, and tried her utmost to help me. One day she acknowledged to me that she could not have borne the life

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at twenty years of age. "You see," she added, "when my husband died, the world had no further attraction for me."

Dame Cecilia Swarbreck, the procuratrix, often hinted to me that she was not happy. She sought to relieve her mind by indulging in all the active work of the procuratrix's office.

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CHAPTER XVIII

PLANNING TO ESCAPE

I HAD plenty of work in the kitchen during Christmastide. Many of the nuns' friends and relations send presents to them at this time. Some get sweets and cakes, tinned meats, etc. Dame Lucy's father used to send £5 for the nuns' table. In Lady Lescher's time the nuns had the money spent on them, but this Abbess kept it all. Dame Lucy told her father when he came to see her not to send it again because the nuns got none of it.

All the things came to my store-room. As soon as they arrived I had to inform her Ladyship. She would come down, look at them, and carry off all the best things to eat in her own room. The

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nuns to whom they were sent never got any.

When Dame Agnes' sister came, she asked her to send some chocolate for two invalid nuns in the infirmary. Dame Agnes was infirmarian in Dame Editha's place. The chocolates came, and I told Dame Agnes. She went to the Abbess and asked if she could take them for her sick. The Abbess told her to leave them alone, that the chocolates belonged to her, and she was not going to have this propriety. Dame Agnes told me the result of her visit. I promised her I would do my best to get them. When the Abbess came down she asked where the chocolates were. I replied in the cupboard.

"My Lady, shall I take them to the infirmary, because there is a label on them with the words 'For the Sick'?"

"You will do nothing of the kind," responded the Abbess. "Dame Agnes has

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been asking for them already, and I cannot have this proprietorship in the Abbey. You do bring them to my room. I do know what I will do with them."

I thought "Yes; so do I." That was the end of the chocolates.

Madame Boursot, a friend of the Abbey, sent a large gorgonzola cheese on Christmas Eve. The following Sunday I gave small pieces of it to the nuns for supper. On the Monday morning at 11 o'clock Dame Cecilia came to tell me that the Abbess wanted me. When I entered her apartments she was standing, and at once began: "How dare you give my cheese away without my leave; how dare you, I say?"

I at once knelt down and answered: "I am exceedingly sorry, my Lady; had I known I needed your permission I would have obtained it before touching the cheese."

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"Oh, oh," she cried, "you do just as you like in the kitchen; you walk about as if you owned the place; now prostrate at once." After some time spent in storming at me she told me: "Now get up, and go."

I got up from the floor, and went out. Half an hour later I had to go to her again to get her permission for some sick sisters to have meat. When I entered after her "Deo gratias," I asked to whom might I give meat. She cried "Go away, do not speak to me; you know quite well who are to have meat."

"My Lady, I am very sorry to trouble you," I said; "but I do not know."

"Then find out," screamed the Abbess.

As I did not move she simply stamped on the ground, and ran across the room. I got so frightened that I went out as fast as I could, and the Abbess actually ran after me half-way down the corridor.

PLANNING TO ESCAPE

On the Tuesday she came to the store-room and found fault with me about the salad. I was just doing it when she entered.

"Oh, I do not like you to do the salad," she began. "Can you not get somebody else to do it?" I asked whom I could get, and she said: "Oh, I do not know; but I do not like you to put your hands near it."

"Then," I asked, "why do you not put someone else in the office, if my hands do not suit you?"

"Prostrate at once, you impudent creature," she cried; "and you do penance in the refectory for this." One always got the worst of it if there was a quarrel with the Abbess.

On Wednesday and Thursday she came again, finding fault all the time that she and her pets were taking away big bags of rice, sugar, tea, and coffee, the cakes and biscuits sent to the nuns,

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and jams and jellies, to send on before to Droitwich, whither she was going on the following Monday.

On Friday she came again, asking for the key of the apple-house. Presently she came back, and began storming at me because she found some of the thousands of apples going bad.

“Shame on you, shame on you; is this how you keep your vow of poverty? Is this your gratitude to Lady Lescher, who took you out of charity. You, who ought to work harder than anyone else?”

She went on like this for quite a quarter of an hour. I did not answer one word. The efforts I made to control myself no words of mine can describe. When she turned to go a dreadful impulse to rush at her and seize her by the throat came upon me. How I controlled myself I do not know; thank God I did! It left me feeling so weak that I thought I was going to faint, and one of the aids

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to my office coming into the store-room at that moment exclaimed: "Oh, how white you look, Dame Maurus!"

She came nearer to me. "Oh, don't speak to me, leave me alone, please," I entreated, and then I just broke down and could say no more.

I related what took place to Sister Berchmans. "Sister, I will never forgive her for that cruel speech, and I shall not oblige her to keep me much longer." I think I worked hard enough for the little food and shelter the Abbey provided!

On the Saturday she came again, this time about giving too much fruit to the chaplain of the convent. I had been ordered to give him four biscuits, a small piece of cheese, and one banana with his dinner. I gave him two bananas, and she must have watched or been told that I gave more than the one. The priest of our Abbey had two shoulders of mutton

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allowed him each week. The first shoulder was cooked fresh on Saturday, and he had to eat it cold until Monday. The second was served hot on Tuesday, and he ate that cold until Thursday. He was given one egg each morning for his breakfast, and two each night for his supper, and this regime never altered.

On Sunday the Abbess came to give me her last scolding. She could find nothing to say except that her dinner was sent in cold, and then gave a résumé of all the week. On Monday morning she left for Droitwich.

January passed away, and my mother did not come. I had asked permission to write to my mother in the Christmas week, and the Abbess had accorded it. I wrote my letter, and put it in the box. But the gorgonzola cheese upset her Ladyship, and on the Tuesday she came into the kitchen with my letter, which I had written about a week before. "Do you call

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this a letter written by a nun?" she demanded. "I cannot allow such a thing to leave the house." Whereupon she threw it on the ground, and went away.

I picked the letter up and read and re-read it carefully. I could see nothing irreligious in it. I decided to wait until she had gone to Droitwich, and then ask the Prioress to allow me to write.

In the middle of the week following, I went to Mother Prioress and told her about the letter.

"Do you see anything wrong in my letter?" I asked.

"Oh, no," replied the Prioress; "but my Lady said you put crosses in the corner for kisses, and that was not right for a nun." Then Mother Prioress told me that the Abbess's last words to her before she left the house were that she was not to allow Dame Maurus to write any letters.

I told Sister Berchmans this, and to-

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gether we planned to ask the gardener to post me a letter to my mother. I wrote a very short one, without address or signature. As far as I can remember it ran as follows: "Come before Lent if possible, and bring an extra five shillings with you."

I waited until he came, and asked him to post it. He agreed to post not only that but a hundred others if I wanted it. He, knew what an old vixen the Abbess was, and he had often before advised me to run away. He used to come to the store-room to empty the great bags of sugar, which came in six hundredweights at a time. He moreover brought all the goods up from the station to my office, so I had many opportunities for seeing him. He was very dissatisfied with the Abbey in general, and with the Abbess in particular, since Lady Lescher's death. He said he was looking out for a better place.

CHAPTER XIX

BETRAYED

DURING this time Sister Berchmans and I took every opportunity of having a talk. She begged me to tell our plans to Sister Theresa Jordan, Sister Majella's sister, who was a great friend of hers, and also liked me. At first I objected, then I agreed to do so.

We called her in, and had a council of war, with the door shut, as I thought. After we had talked some time, something—I do not know what—induced me to look over my shoulder in the direction of the door. To my horror I found it just slightly ajar, and the bottom of a habit and a foot in the opening! I got up and flew to the door. There stood Sister Mildred, with her obsequious airs!

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"Oh, Dame Maurus, I was just going to knock," she said.

"What do you want?" I demanded.

"I only wondered if you were going to your dinner to-day."

"Presently," I replied, shutting the door abruptly.

Of course we three were in consternation. Sometimes we said, "Oh, she must have heard, the door was open," and again, "Oh, no, she couldn't, we spoke so quietly," and so on until we were sick.

Sister Mildred went straightaway to Sister Majella to acquaint her that there was a mystery in the store-room because Dame Maurus, Sister Berchmans, and Sister Theresa, were always whispering together in corners. "For your sister's sake you ought to find it out," pursued this oily hypocrite, who was the first to run down Sister Majella, and call her a lazy drone.

Sister Majella was sick in bed at the time, and consequently in no state to be

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worried. I used to visit her several times a week to take her oranges, etc. One day after seeing Sister Mildred, Sister Majella sent for her sister and said: "Now, Sister Theresa, I know what this mystery is about: Dame Maurus is going to leave you, and you are helping her; the Holy Ghost has told me so."

Sister Theresa could not deny it, but she remained silent.

"If," went on her sister, "you do not tell Father Taggart all you know about it, I will tell the whole community before the night is out."

Sisters Berchmans and Theresa met me after Vespers, saying: "Oh, Dame Maurus, a dreadful thing has happened." They then told me the story.

We deliberated on the best course to pursue. At last I said: "Go and ask Sister Majella if she will see me for a few minutes."

This she refused to do.

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"Then," said I, "I will not let you have the unpleasantness to do; it is all my fault, so I will go first and tell Father Taggart, and you can go afterwards." This was on Saturday, February 13, 1909.

This priest was a Redemptorist from Bishop's Eton, and was appointed extraordinary confessor to our convent by Bishop Riddell, of Northampton, our ecclesiastical superior. He preached the Retreat of 1907. His sermon on hell was really dreadful; I wish I could write it down. He painted in true Redemptorist style all the terrors of the infernal regions. He related how Brother Giles, the disciple of St. Francis of Assisi, had a vision of hell fire.

"Oh, Father," cried the holy man on regaining his senses, "I did not see a single religious in hell."

"No," replied the saint; "you did not go down deep enough; the souls of

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bad monks and nuns are in the lowest part of hell, where they are pickled and salted in fire."

Then Father Taggart went on to tell us why these religious were in hell. For small faults continued, for being inattentive at their prayers, for being wasteful, for letting their thoughts wander outside their convents. These led on to greater sins, and they lost their souls.

During his discourse I asked myself "Who can be saved? God seems to delight in casting his creatures into hell." It was really awful and at the end when we knelt down to pray, the ground and everything reeled from me, and then I fainted.

They carried me out and took me into the chapter house. Dame Editha was the infirmarian, and she told me afterwards that she thought I was dead, for I was so long before I came to.

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To this priest, therefore, I went on that memorable Saturday. Three times before, with several months between, I had told him, as previously I had told another priest, that I found the life intolerable, and try as I would it brought me no happiness. Each time he had scolded me, and told me to beg our dear Jesus's pardon, and renew my vows, and not be so unfaithful. He said God would bless me if I tried. He quoted the words of the founder of his order, St. Alphonsus Liguori: "If anyone enters a convent, and after profession seeks an excuse to quit it by alleging that they have no vocation, let them know that if they persevere faithfully God will bestow a vocation on them."* There is certainly no getting out of it, St. Alphonsus's maxim is like the fork of Cardinal Morton.

Each time I had tried to follow Father

*The quotation is something after this style. I have not given the exact words.

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Taggart's advice, but without any lasting result. Therefore, when I had made my confession on this particular Saturday, I told him I was very unhappy, and could not stand the life much longer.

"Oh, my dear child," he cried in horror, "in God's name what has put such thoughts into your head?"

Then he went on to say that he could not give me absolution until he had seen me in the guest-parlour. He told me to ask Mother Prioress to let me go to him.

Before I left the box I told him about Sister Majella and the two sisters. He was not pleased at all, and commanded me to tell Sister Majella to mind her own business, and that the Holy Ghost did not interfere in other people's affairs.

Then Sisters Berchmans and Theresa went to him. He soon dismissed them and said it was nothing to do with them. He sent a message to Sister Majella by Sister Theresa that she was to let the matter

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rest, and not presume to say we were in mortal sin and ought not to have gone to Holy Communion. The Pope had stated what dispositions were necessary for daily communion, and he had also forbidden discussions on the subject. So, unless she wanted to be excommunicated *ipso facto*, she had better abstain from theology. Her sister told her all this, and she declared herself satisfied.

I went to the parlour to see the priest. He was in a terrible state. He blamed the present Abbess for the spirit existing in the Abbey. He begged me to put out of my head such wicked thoughts. He spoke very seriously on the dangers to one's soul which existed in the world.

"You will never save your soul, I feel sure," he cried. "I am not a prophet, but of that I am certain."

He said he would write to the Bishop and say that we needed a visitation very badly

BETRAYED

He worked on me to such an extent that I promised him I would give up this wicked idea of leaving, and try all over again.

After this I went again to him in the confessional, where he gave me absolution and a blessing.

I came away from the church and found Sister Berchmans and Sister Theresa; I told them what transpired during the interview.

"Well," I said, "I have promised him to stay, but I do not expect happiness; I shall beg of God to let me die soon, or I shall go mad." Then we kissed each other, and resolved to commence again. We decided never to speak to each other, as our frequent conversations were giving scandal to our numerous "weak brethren."

CHAPTER XX

THE ESCAPE

ON the Sunday morning I made fervent resolutions at Mass and Communion. Sister Majella had promised to let the matter drop, but she did not keep her word. All my kindness to her appeared to be forgotten. On Sunday she told Dame Editha and Dame Agnes about me, and it so upset them that they were unable to go to the choir. Then it spread to a few more, who, in passing me on the stairs, drew their habits around them lest they touched mine. One would not enter the store-room "because," she declared, "the ceiling will fall on me."

On Sunday afternoon Sister Berchmans came to me, looking very pale and upset.

THE ESCAPE.

"Oh, Dame Maurus," she said, "one of the lay sisters says Sister Majella has told her that you have given letters to Henry to post, and you intend leaving the Abbey!"

I was aghast.

"Oh, what can I do?" I cried. "It will get to the Prioress next, if she does not know already; then the Lady Abbess will return, and what will she do to me?"

"Oh," said Sister Berchmans, "your character has gone; they'll never give you another chance. Already they are asking why is Henry always going to the store-room, and they suspect something. If I were you," she continued, "I should see Henry about the trains, and leave to-night!"

We were in a frightful state of nerves.

Accordingly we waited until 5 p.m. for Henry, and Sister Berchmans called him to the store-room.

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We told him what had happened. Sister Berchmans asked him if he would find out a train and take me to the station. He declared nothing could be done on Sunday night, and asked me to wait until the following evening.

We let him out, and just as I was about to re-enter I beheld Dame Ida in the doorway! I knew by her manner that she had heard all. We neither of us spoke, but her face was very red. Later on I saw her in earnest conversation with Dame Placid, and then I guessed she was telling her.

I need not say that neither poor Sister Berchmans nor I slept that night. I was hebdomadarian for the week, and how I got through I do not know. Once only did I forget my duty. I said "Oremus," and then lost my head, and could not remember to go on with the collect.

On Monday morning Father Taggart

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left at 8.30, and I called Sister Berchmans to help me make sandwiches for him. She looked pale and worried. We neither of us ate any breakfast. The morning passed on, and I felt very nervous, and almost by a superhuman effort did I manage to appear outwardly the same. My heart would jump at every knock at the store-room door.

Before dinner Sisters Theresa and Berchmans came again, and their looks were enough to convince me that something fresh was known. I staggered to a chair. They told me that it was reported that Henry and I had been overheard arranging about a train for me to run away.

"Oh, Dame Maurus, it's all up," they cried; "everything has leaked out, and spies are everywhere."

The bell rang for dinner, and in this state of mind we had to go to the kitchen.

Several times during the portioning I thought I was going to faint. Sister

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Berchmans was livid. Even as I write now in my own little room I am trembling all over. It is wonderful how much one can go through and not lose one's reason. We had not broken our fast, yet our dinner remained untouched.

At two o'clock we went to Vespers. Directly after Vespers I was on my way to the store-room, when I saw Sisters Berchmans and Theresa beckoning to me. I was about to follow when Dame Cecilia came up and told me Mother Prioress was in her (the procuratrix's) office, and desired to speak to me. I followed, and found Mother Prioress in an agitated condition, crying.

"Oh, Dame Maurus," she said, "is it true you have arranged to leave the Abbey with Henry to-night?"

I nearly collapsed. I could not tell an untruth, so I replied, "Mother Prioress, you had better ask Henry if he knows of such a plot."

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"Oh, I thought you would not do such a wicked thing."

I felt very guilty, but did not reply.

Poor Mother Prioress was soon satisfied, but Dame Cecilia was really dreadful. She questioned me very closely, and I had a hard time to avoid telling lies. You can imagine my terror when, at the close of the interview, Dame Cecilia announced her intention of seeing Henry after she had interrogated Sisters Berchmans and Theresa. I was dismissed, and the two sisters were sent for.

I went to the bakehouse, and waited for them. They came back like lunatics. It seems that Sister Majella was there, and accused them of being my accomplices. They could deny nothing of what she stated. How it all leaked out is a mystery. The very walls seemed to have ears.

Sister Theresa told me that when they went away Dame Cecilia started off to

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find Henry. When I heard this I was much upset. I did not imagine she would ask Henry, out of respect for a nun.

I jumped up, declaring I must find Henry first, to warn him. I went through the laundry from the store-room on to the apple-house, and to the brewery. I did not venture past here, as we were not permitted farther. From the brewery door I could just see the farm buildings.

I waited a few minutes, and to my great relief Henry appeared. I beckoned to him; he placed the milk-pails on the ground, and was just starting off in my direction when a boy ran up and spoke to him. Henry hesitated, and finally set off in the direction of the hospice. I next called the boy, and asked where had Henry gone.

"Dame Cecilia sent me for him," was the reply.

I returned to the two waiting and

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anxious sisters, and told them of her to
failure.

"There is no time to be lost now; your one chance is to go to-night, otherwise the Abbess will return, and you are lost," said Sister Berchmans; and we thought the same.

Then I asked her what she wanted me for when she beckoned to me after Vespers.

"Oh," she replied. "During Vespers, Sister Frances came to the bakehouse and asked me whether I had heard the dreadful thing?"

"What, about Dame Cecilia?" I asked.

"No, about Dame Maurus; that she has been asking Heary to help her to leave the Abbey to-night?"

"How do you know that?" I asked Sister Frances.

"Mother Prioress and Dame Cecilia came to the hospice after Vespers asking did

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we know anything about it. She said that Sister Majella told her.'

." 'Don't believe it until Dame Maurus tells you herself; everyone is so ready to believe bad of everyone else here,' was my diplomatic reply."

Then Sister Berchmans went on to tell me the latest news about Dame Cecilia and the gardener. It appears that Sister Berchmans went to Henry after Sister Frances, the out sister, had gone, and asked him if he would get a carriage and take me to the station. He objected to this, saying that he would be seen. Then she asked him to walk down behind the carriage. He refused to do this also. Finally he had courage enough to state plainly that he did not like the risk of it.

When I heard this I blamed Sister Berchmans for having stooped to entreat him.

"Oh," she retorted, "he went half the way willingly, he must go the rest

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against his will," but I forbade her to speak to him again, saying: "I will go without his help."

All this conversation took place in the bakehouse. Sister Berchmans's duty was to bake the bread. We were speaking in whispers, faint with terror, now laughing, and again in tears.

Further speech was interrupted by a knock at the store-room door, which was opposite the bakehouse. I fled behind a big screen which hid the ovens. The other two went on with the kneading. Presently the nun who knocked at my door, getting no answer, came to the bakehouse, and opened the door.

"Do you know where Flame Maurus is?" she asked.

"I really could not tell, Mother Sub-Prioress," Sister Berchmans replied.

After she had gone I emerged from behind the screen. "God forgive me for my lies," were my friend's first words.

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"Oh, Dame Maurus, she is after you now, and what she won't think of asking you will not be worth asking."

"I had better get out of here," I replied. "She will go to my cell, and then if I am not there she will tell Mother Prioress."

I went to the store-room and had not been there long when Mother Sub-Prioress returned. She had a great reputation for sanctity among the Superiors, but was cordially detested by the nuns for being a spy. Nothing was too trivial for her to run off to the Abbess with. I so dreaded her questioning that I thought my only chance with her lay in pretending terrible agitation. This I did, and paced up and down the room, begging her not to question me further, for I should go mad. This was true enough, for I was in a fearful state, knowing that Henry had been questioned.

When Mother Sub-Prioress could get

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nothing out of me she told me to go to my cell and stay there.

Alas! I had to do this. My cell was at the farthest end of the Abbey, and at a great distance from the kitchen.

I nearly screamed from the intensity of my suspense. Would the next command be for me to remain there for the rest of the evening, and another nun be sent in my place to the kitchen? Oh, how I prayed this might not happen, for I should be lost.

When I went to my cell it was about twenty minutes after five. I began to collect my few belongings which I had brought to the Abbey, and my Latin books and breviaries, which my father had given to me. These I put together, but the books made the parcel so heavy that I half decided not to take them.

I had scarcely hidden them underneath my bedclothes when Mother Sub-Prioress came again. She gave me a long lecture,

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which I had to listen to attentively, in spite of my agitation. I thought she would never go.

In desperation I said at last, "Please, Mother Sub - Prioress, will you excuse me; the quarter to six has just struck, and my duties in the kitchen require me."

"Never mind them, my dear child, I will ask Mother Prioress to send someone else to do them for you, and you can stay here and be quiet."

"Oh, my God!" I cried in my heart. "This is just what I did not want."

Desperation overcame prudence, and I fell on my knees before her entreating her to let me go to the kitchen, for I said "My own thoughts, and being alone, drive me mad!"

She looked at me with strong suspicion in her black eyes. But thank God she yielded.

We left the cell together, she to go to

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the refectory, as the bell was ringing for supper, and I to go to the kitchen.

Sister Berchmans was lifting the pan of porridge on to the table. She looked very agitated. Her face was very flushed, and she seemed on the verge of hysterics.

"Oh, do be calm," I whispered, whilst putting on my apron; "don't look like that or everyone will know something is wrong."

I portioned the porridge. Dame Ida, my aid, was next to me, putting the enamel covers on the plates. Sister Martha, the German, stood next placing the plates on the trays, and then carrying them to the turn where Sister Theresa stood waiting to take them to the refectory. Sister Berchmans cooked the suppers because Sister Majella was too ill.

When I had finished the portioning I slipped away from the kitchen and went by roundabout passages to my cell to get the parcel, to which I was too greatly attached

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to leave behind. This I bestowed in a house where boxes were packed and unpacked.

I returned to the kitchen, trying hard to look very commonplace, but I felt Dame Ida's eyes fixed on me.

A few moments later I went into the pantry, pretending to look for something. From there I called to Sister Berchmans if she knew where Sister Mildred had put the beef-extract. Of course she came, and I whispered to her to go to the noviceship and steal me a cloak. Our postulants wore cloaks in choir just like those worn by nurses. We, the professed nuns, wore big cowls. This garment would have seriously impeded my progress, so I left it behind, yet I wanted something to cover me and hide the white of my dress. Therefore we had agreed earlier to get a cloak.

As soon as she could Sister Berchmans made her way to the noviceship, return-

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ing with the cloak rolled up tightly under her apron.

I went into the store-room, and Dame Ida followed.

Then I went into the kitchen again and asked Sister Berchmans to keep Dame Ida talking, whilst I took off my apron and put on the cloak.

I had just got into it when I heard someone in the kitchen asking for Dame Maurus. I tore the cloak off and seized my apron. I had scarcely tied it on when Sister Frances came in asking for a loaf; I knew quite well she didn't want one. She only came out of curiosity to eye me. I gave it to her in silence.

When she had gone I made another attempt to put the cloak on. I called Sister Berchmans to me, and we both went into the yard outside my office.

"Oh, sister," I cried, "supposing the gate has been bolted, or supposing Dame Cecilia is there watching it."

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"Make the attempt," was the answer. "If you are here another night I shall go mad; I really cannot stand this anxiety," and she certainly looked it.

By this time we had reached the gate at the end of the yard. This led into the farm; the farmhouses could be seen in the distance.

"Come with me to the outer gate," I entreated.

"I dare not; if anyone were watching from the windows"—there were many cells, overlooking that part of the grounds leading to the farm buildings—"they would see my white veil."

The nuns who had made their vows wore black veils, but the lay sisters always wore white.

This objection was reasonable enough, so I had to content myself. She stood at the yard gate, and I went forward a few steps, carrying my parcels. I returned to her, all my courage seemed to have melted.

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“ Oh, sister,” I cried, “ if only we were going together.”

“ I cannot ; oh, I cannot,” she answered, and then burst into tears.

I stood still, and she, realizing the danger of delay, pushed me from her, crying “ Oh, go ; do go ! ”

Thus we parted, without a single word of farewell, and without any words of gratitude on my part. Oh, how I regret this ! If only I could see her, my dear, faithful friend, how I would thank her for having helped me to my present happiness, clouded only by the thought of her being detained there !

I walked along towards the outer gate. The light which issued from the cottage where Henry and the others lived, showed me the way.

I saw Henry coming from the cow-house and entering the cottage. I do not know whether he saw me.

At length I reached the great gate.

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I hesitated for a few moments to leave the friendly shelter of the bushes. If anyone was watching the gate and saw me I should be lost. At last I went to the gate and raised the bolt; it was unfastened, and the gate swung open.

Without waiting to shut the gate, I ran through and found myself outside the Abbey, the first time since I had entered it, seven years before. I had escaped.

CHAPTER XXI

PURSUIT

OF course my difficulties had only just commenced. I looked round in bewilderment, for the road branched into three directions. I was not at all sure which turning to take for Manningtree. Finally I took that which lay to the right of the Abbey.

I had not gone many yards when I passed a man smoking a cigar. He looked very like Mr. Wheeler, the steward. Just as we passed I saw him start, and then look round, only to continue his journey. I suppose he must have thought I looked like a nun, but as a nun was the very last person he expected to see there, he must have thought himself mistaken.

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I went on walking, or, rather, half running. For the first mile I seemed to travel on wings, but after that I had to stop very often and put my parcels down. It was very dark and cold, with a high wind. A little later it began raining heavily. People passed me on the road, and I should not have known whether they were men or women had not they said, as is usual with country people, "Good night."

After I had walked a very long way for one who was quite unused to walking or exercise, I inquired of a passer-by, taking care to cover up as much of the white of my dress as I could, "Am I very far from Manningtree Station?"

"No, ma'am, only about three miles and a-half," was the consoling answer, which made my heart sink.

I went on again. The road was very bad, uneven and muddy. The leather slippers without heels, and without straps,

PURSUIT

were constantly sticking in the mud, and they grew heavier with the lumps adhering to them. Some persons on bicycles passed; these bicycles had very powerful lamps, so to avoid being seen I hid in the hedges.

The night was so dark that I could not see the road I walked on. All the five miles of distance had not a single lamp to light the way. Several times I fell headlong into the ditches, my parcels rolling some way off. My habit was covered with mud, and my hands also. Once I nearly fell into some water, a pond or small river; I do not know which it was, because I could not see it. I followed an incline of the road, and just stopped when I heard the water flowing.

I retraced my footsteps, and after walking for some little distance I came to where the road again divides. Here I took the wrong one. I had walked some



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THE ESCAPED NUN

way when the mud became so bad that it rendered walking impossible. "This cannot be the main road," I thought, "for no carts could go along this."

I went back again, and waited until a man came along, and I asked him the way to the station. He was accompanied by a girl. I walked in the direction he had indicated, and they followed. Again the road divided, one part running high up, and the other lower down. Of course, I took the wrong one; but fortunately the man ran after me and showed me the right one. This time he must have seen that I was a nun, for the light streamed out of a house standing near.

I went on again, and presently came upon a few shops standing on one side of the road. Several men were outside one, so I had to wait in a hedge until they had dispersed. I waited a long time, and when I passed by the shops, the men with the exception of two had gone.



From a Photograph by the Victorial Agency.

ON THE WAY TO MANNINGTREE.

PURSUIT

I refrained from asking the direction at any of the houses I passed, because I was afraid it would make a scandal for the Abbey.

I had not gone very far on my way when I heard the sounds of a horse galloping in the distance. It came nearer and nearer. I hid among the bushes by the wayside, and the vehicle passed. I kept my back to the road, so I did not notice who was in the carriage.

When it had passed I once more continued my journey, and soon had the extreme satisfaction of seeing the lights of Manningtree Station in the near distance. I was very weary, and parched with thirst, although it was so cold.

A little farther on I came to an inn, having a lamp swinging outside. Scarcely had I reached this place and was standing underneath the lamp when I saw the carriage returning. One glance showed me it was a waggonette, and before I had

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time to see who was the driver, and who the occupants, a voice called: "Why, there's Dame Maurus."

I looked, and saw Henry driving, and Sisters Philippa and Justina, two of the out sisters, or portresses of the hospice. These sisters are not bound to enclosure, and can go out on messages when commanded by the Abbess. They are not vowed, but make a simple promise of obedience to the Abbess.

Sister Justina had seen me first, and Henry immediately sprang down. I began to run, but I had no strength. It was all spent.

I dropped my parcels in the road, and tried again to run. I had only taken a few steps when Henry caught me, and held me in his arms.

I entreated him to let me go, which he did. I managed to get to the palings on the opposite side of the road, when Sisters Philippa and Justina came up.

PURSUIT .

At once they began pulling me, one trying to release my fingers from the fence, and the other, bending down, put her arms round my knees, and tried her utmost to get me off my feet. I had the strength of despair. They called to Henry to help them, but he merely looked on.

I began to cry, but never released my hold on the fence. They pulled desperately, and I began to scream "Help! Help! Oh, help me!"

I never thought my cries would be heard, for I had no strength to shout loud.

Sister Philippa told me to stop screaming and making a scandal.

"As long as you pull me," I answered. "I shall scream. You are making the scandal, not I. If you let me go, no one will notice me, but if you pull me and I scream, they will know I am running away, and that you are trying to take me back against my will."

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She did not answer, but pulled at me with renewed force.

I screamed and cried at the same time.

"Oh, help me! Help me!" and then some porters, one having a lantern, came from the station towards me.

"Here are some men," I observed, "now leave me alone," which they did.

The porters stood just a little way off gazing at us. It was raining heavily, so I suggested that we should stand underneath a wooden roof outside the station. The two sisters and I walked first, Henry following, leading the horse.

When we reached the covering the sisters began urging me to return, making use of every argument they could think of to persuade me.

"What will you think of this night's work when you are on your death-bed?" said one.



From a photograph by the Industrial Agency.

THE FENCE FROM WHICH THE TWO SISTERS ENDEAVOR TO DRAG ME.

PURSUIT

"What will you do when you stand before the judgment seat of God?" inquired another.

"For the sake of Lady Lescher, who professed you, return."

"You are damning your soul," they went on.

I told them not to bother about it. They would not be held responsible. Then Sister Philippa asked me to come back and clear Henry. I said Henry could clear himself without my assistance. He had just posted one letter for me, and that was all there was to clear.

"If there was nothing more than that, why did you want to warn Henry before Dame Cecilia saw him?" Even that was known! For some reason unknown to me when Henry went to Dame Cecilia, she had said "What I wanted you for, will do again," so that Henry up to then had not been questioned.

I asked Sister Philippa how she knew

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I had wanted to see Henry that afternoon.

"You were seen beckoning to him," she replied.

Then Sister Justina said if she stayed until midnight persuading me she would do so.

"Sister Justina, you can stay for ever; you know the character I have at the Abbey; my mind is made up, and nothing on earth will alter it."

"Then come back for to-night, and we will give you clothes and money, and you can go in the morning."

They really must have thought me an innocent to believe such a thing.

"You are in no position to promise me anything; if I returned, Mother Prioress would say that she must not be held responsible for your promises."

At this point the station-master came up. After looking at us for a little while he asked: "Can I help you, ladies?"

PURSUIT

"This young lady," Sister Philippa answered, pointing to me, "wishes to go to London to-night." Then she hesitated to say more.

Some one asked "What time is there a train?"

"There is none until the mail-train at twenty minutes past one in the morning."

"Now, you'll have to come back," a chorus of voices cried; "it is now only about half-past eight."

"I will not return," was my answer.

"Where will you wait for all those hours?" asked Sister Philippa.

"I will stay in the waiting-room."

"They will not let you."

"Then I will stay in the road."

Turning to the wondering station-master, Sister Philippa told him I had no money.

"My mother can pay at the other end," I interposed.

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"Excuse me, miss," broke in Mr. Swann, the station-master, "but in a case like this, I shall have to telephone, and it is too late now."

"Then I can send a telegram to my mother if someone will lend me six-pence."

"No, you cannot, the office shuts at eight; so you had better return for to-night," the station-master advised.

"I will never go back," I replied, looking steadily at him.

Then we stood looking at each other in silence, and I think the real state of affairs must have dawned on Mr. Swann. He broke the silence by saying to Sister Philippa: "If you will make it quite clear to the Lady Abbess, in what spirit I assist this young lady, merely to avoid scandal for the Abbey, I will lend her the money to go to her friends in London."

Seeing that further persuasion was use-

PURSUIT

less, Sister Philippa thanked him. We went to the waiting-room; I urged them to return to the Abbey. I went to Henry outside—he was actually weeping—and bade him good-bye. I said I was sorry to have been the cause of this trouble to him.

Then I returned to the sisters, and they took their departure after once more going through the horrors of what awaited me in the next world. I had been told so often that I should certainly go to hell, that it really began to get monotonous.

“If hell is worse than the hell I have left,” I answered, “I shall be surprised.”

Life in a convent is a hell on earth. It was beyond my powers to live my life according to the many rules and regulations. If I did not, but lived carelessly, then according to many Catholic writers, the deepest part of hell would await me. So my conscience made life

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unbearable. I therefore resolved that if hell awaited me in any case, I preferred to go back into the world and live a little more like the millions there, and risk what waited me after death.

Since I have left the convent I begin more clearly to see that many of the "mortal sins" of the Romish Church are merely offences against the Pope's laws. I have lived as a Catholic all my life, and especially during my seven years' residence at East Bergholt. It never brought me any happiness, peace or comfort. On the contrary, it made life itself an intolerable burden, hampered as it was by so many restrictions and austerities, which Christ Himself never mentioned in the Gospels.

When they had gone, Mr. Swann came to me, and we spoke together for some time. He had a good fire made up, and ordered me some refreshments, the first I had eaten that day. Sister Berch-



From a photograph by the Pictorial Agency.

THE PLATFORM, MANNINGTREE STATION.

PURSUIT

mans, I am sure, went to bed supperless.

He said he had given orders to the inspector to keep an eye on me, and see I was not disturbed by more visitors. "You are on the company's property," he said, "and your liberty must be respected." He also said he would see the waiting-room door was locked.

He left me to myself, and after that weary journey of five miles along a dark muddy road, the waiting-room seemed palatial. I was thoroughly wet through and very cold, so I was grateful for the big fire.

The hours seemed to pass away very slowly, but I was unable to sleep, for I still expected to see some of the nuns again.

At last, to my great relief, the inspector came to tell me the train was due. He put me into the compartment nearest the guard, and told him about me. I

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was the only passenger. I thanked the inspector for his kindness, and was soon speeding away. It was with the utmost satisfaction that I leaned back in the carriage, knowing myself to be each moment going farther away from East Bergholt.

CHAPTER XXII

REACHING HOME

I THINK it was about half-past four when I reached Liverpool Street. The platform was crowded with postmen, milkmen, and milk cans. There were a few soldiers on the platform. On alighting from the carriage I looked about for the way out. I was bewildered by the bustle going on around me. I tried to pass along unobserved, but I did not succeed.

The people looking on must have noticed my perplexity, for a man came up and asked me was I expecting anyone to meet me? I answered in the negative.

We stood looking at each other; at last he said: "Where do you want to go?"

"I want to go to St. Paul's Road,

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Camden Town, but I do not know how," I answered.

"Shall I get a cab for you, for there is no other way of going at this hour of the morning?"

I thanked him, and he went up a street, which I was afterwards told was Gracechurch Street, to get a hansom.

I was driven to Camden Town. The streets were deserted except for a water-cart and street-sweepers' carts. I thought my driver had miraculous powers, for the way he drove up one street and then another in all sorts of directions, seemed to me quite marvellous. He even drove up to No. 71, St. Paul's Road, without hesitation, although he could not see the numbers.

We had no little difficulty in waking the occupants of the house. After I had rung and knocked many times, the cab-driver came and tried. He would not leave me until the door was opened, he said.

At length we heard footsteps, and after



From a photograph by the Pictorial Agency.

NO. 71, ST. PAUL'S ROAD, CAMDEN TOWN, LONDON. N.W.

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bolts had been withdrawn and locks unfastened a man appeared. He looked as if he were only half awake.

He stood gazing at the strange apparition on the steps. His hair was standing very erect on his head; I do not know whether this disarrangement was caused by fright or was merely the result of his slumbers.

I asked if Mrs. Moulton lived there.

"No," he answered.

I looked at him in astonishment.

"She has always given me this address to write to; did she not live here?"

"She used to live here," he replied in a not very brisk tone.

After a pause, in which I looked first at him and then at the cab-driver in mute despair, the owner of the house was inspired to say "Mrs. Moulton's son, Jack, lives here."

A weight of anxiety lifted at these words. Turning to the cabman I said: "It is all right, thank you," but not

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until he saw me enter the house would he go.

I had not long to wait before my brother appeared.

"Oh, Jack, what is the matter, you look so white; are you ill?" I cried, forgetting that he had been aroused from his sleep by Mr. Martin saying, "Get up, Jack, your sister is here."

"Who, Maud? What does she want?" he asked crossly.

"No, not Maud; but the nun," Mr. Martin replied. This my brother told me afterwards. I had not seen him for nearly nine years.

I told him I had left the Abbey without permission. With the characteristic bluntness of a boy he answered, "You were a fool ever to have gone!"

Mrs. Martin came to us, and gave me some breakfast, and then one after another her sons appeared.

As soon as she could, she and my brother

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went for mother. I cannot describe our meeting. For the first time for many years I felt myself in my mother's arms.

"Are you sorry I have left the Abbey, mother?" I anxiously asked.

"Sorry, my darling? I thank God you had the sense to leave it," was her reply, her eyes filling with tears.

In the afternoon, after brushing the mud off my clothes, mother and I started off to St. Margaret's-on-Thames, to the home of Mr. George Clement Price, who has been a lifelong friend of my family.

When asked by my mother if she could take me to his house to stay with two of his daughters, he replied: "Yes; and she may stay for ever if she likes."

We arrived at Cliftonville, their house, about six in the evening.

CHAPTER XXIII

ECCLESIASTICAL SUPERIORS

THE following day I had the unpleasant task of writing to my ecclesiastical Superior, the Right Reverend Doctor Keating, Bishop of Northampton. In my letter I told him that I had escaped from the Abbey, and begged him to help me to get a dispensation from my vows from the Pope. I also wrote to Father Taggart, C.Ss.R., our extraordinary confessor.

The Bishop's reply came the following day. This and all the other letters which I received from Doctor Keating I destroyed at the time. I would not let them pass from my possession. I had no idea of ever writing my experiences; indeed, the proposal would at that time have horrified

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me, and therefore I did not keep the letters. The Bishop gave me leave of absence whilst my case was "under consideration," as he wrote. I was afraid he meant by this to persuade me to return. I took care to let him understand I would not return under any consideration.

Father Taggart's letter was duly received. He gave me the impression of being intensely disgusted with me. He strongly advised me to go to see the Bishop, and even enclosed a postal order for the purpose. I returned it to him, refusing to undertake the journey.

His Lordship was anxious that I should go abroad, and he said he could arrange for me to go with a Catholic family. I thanked him for his kindness, but refused to leave England.

In another letter he asked me to come to Northampton to see him. I replied I had no money, and was without clothes; also I could not go unless I had a wig,

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for my hair was closely cropped. He sent me a ten-pound note in the next letter, telling me to accept it as a gift or a loan. I replied, thanking him, and saying that I accepted it as a loan. This I shall return when I can get the opportunity.

I escaped from the Abbey on Monday, February 15, 1909. On the following Monday, my mother, going shopping in Camden Town, was startled by hearing newspaper boys shouting out "Escape of a nun." Sandwich-men were walking about with placards announcing the same thing. She bought a copy of the *Star* and discovered that I was the nun in question.

I was very upset to see the account in the paper. Through the week I had felt so glad that few people had seen me leave the Abbey, and I thought there would be no unpleasantness for the convent.

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The next morning my mother wrote begging me to believe that she had nothing to do with the publication. We afterwards learnt that the news had come from Manningtree.

That same day the Bishop wrote commanding me to write a denial of the exaggerated statements contained in the paper. I read the account through very carefully, and with the exception of the number of nuns—the paper said one hundred—and my personal appearance, there was nothing untrue. I wrote in this strain to the Bishop, and took no further steps in the matter.

Meanwhile we were besieged by reporters of the daily papers. They went to 71, St. Paul's Road, and they also found my mother. Mother entreated me to grant an interview. I refused all, for the Bishop had forbidden me to see them. The reporters even found me at Cliftonville, though I had never left the house.

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One came with my mother, but he had to return to London without seeing me. All that I could be persuaded to do was to write the following, which appeared in *Lloyd's News* :

"I do not regret having left the convent, for the monotony would have driven me mad. I am sorry for having caused my ecclesiastical Superiors so much trouble in leaving in the manner in which I did."

Mother gave them a photograph which I had given her. It was a snapshot, taken on the occasion of the golden jubilee of the profession of our Abbess. She had belonged to an active order of nuns in Germany, called "The Sisters of Christian Love." It was fifty years since taking her vows in this congregation. She had not been twenty-five years professed in our Abbey.

The weeks passed by without seeing me any nearer to being definitely settled. I had various proposals set before me,

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even for appearing on the music halls, all of which I of course refused. Still I could not subsist on the air, and the Catholics, clergy or laity, did not come forward to help me.

About this time my mother saw in the papers the account of the Protestant Alliance giving a Bible, Foxe's "Book of Martyrs," and a gold watch to the station-master at Manningtree, and to each of the porters. She wrote to Mr. T. H. Sloan, M.P., thanking him for this. She was glad the men were rewarded, although too poor to reward them herself.

Mr. Sloan answered this letter by requesting an interview at the Protestant Alliance Offices, 430, Strand. She went, and saw Mr. Sloan, who is treasurer, and Mr. Henry Fowler, the secretary. These gentlemen asked her to obtain from me my consent to see them. Mother begged me not to refuse this, and, compelled by poverty, I consented. They accordingly

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came to St. Margaret's, and Mr. Sloan took the documentary evidence which he wanted regarding his bill for the inspection of conventual and monastic institutions. From this time the Protestant Alliance have been good friends to us. What we should have done without them I do not know.

The week before Easter Sunday I left St. Margaret's, and came to London, staying, at the expense of the Alliance, first at Guilford Street, and next at the Buckingham Hotel in the Strand.

The Bishop wrote on the Saturday before I left Cliftonville, telling me that Mr. Sloan, the leader of the Orange Party in the House of Commons, intended bringing in a Bill for the Inspection of Convents on the following Thursday. He therefore ordered me to present myself before His Grace the Archbishop of Westminster, and to do whatever he commanded me. I wondered if he knew that I had furnished

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Mr. Sloan with the details he required and I decided I had better not answer this letter at all.

The Bishop wrote an indignant letter demanding an explanation of my conduct. I replied that I wanted my dispensation from Rome and nothing more.

A few days before I appeared at the Queen's Hall the dispensation arrived. The conditions of the form were that I should present myself to a priest, confess to him, communicate and perform the penance he imposed on me daily, for the rest of my life. This dispensation would permit me to marry once, should I wish to do so. But a second dispensation would be required for a second marriage.

I did not feel inclined to go through all this red-tape. Neither did I intend doing any more penance. I had done heaps in the past seven years.

I therefore wrote to the Bishop that I did not intend taking further steps in

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the matter of the dispensation. In a previous letter he demanded why I had not acknowledged the receipt of the release of my vows. He reminded me that if I did not fulfil the conditions my dispensation would not be valid. I suppose I am not really dispensed, but that does not weigh for much with me now. I have heard nothing more from his Lordship since.

From the hotel in the Strand we went for a holiday to Westcliff. Letters from unknown persons followed us even here. I think hundreds were sent to St. Paul's Road. They did not reach me.

In the end Mrs. Martin refused to take them in. One came to the hotel just a day after we left. The writer, a gentleman, asked me to make an appointment for 3 o'clock on a certain day which he named in the letter. Someone from the Protestant Alliance went to see what was wanted of me, but the gentleman was not

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seen or heard of again. I have had various invitations by letter to the houses of the writers, but of course I have never accepted.

Here is a specimen of an anonymous letter which I received at Westcliff:—

“MADAME,—I have heard with much sorrow of the great scandal that you are giving to all Catholics, and especially to the convent, where you were received and cared for some years, and where, under cover of darkness, you sneaked out like Judas when he betrayed his Lord and Master, and Judas went out in the night. Also you walked out with the religious habit on, to desecrate it, and which was not your property. After having enticed the poor gardener to break rules and disgrace himself, you are a coward and a shameless creature. Where is your religious modesty! To sit on a platform and receive a bouquet from blasphemers

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and scoundrels, also to give them flowers from it, you are worse than the poor prostitutes on the streets!

“How could you listen to the blasphemy against the Blessed Sacrament of that God you have received so often! Remember you have to meet Him. God does not pay on a Saturday. *Iddio non paga il Sabato*. He is slow but sure. I wonder He does not strike you down and cast your vile soul into hell; that is too good for you. You are receiving money which is got by fraud and lies against the True Church of God. How dare you lie down in your bed with such awful sins on your soul! You are degraded in the eyes of all decent people, also your shameless mother, and that foul-mouthed woman, Edith O'Gorman. The good Mother Abbess is very ill through your bad conduct, you were not fit to walk on the doorstep of that Holy Place, you viper from hell. Remember hell is paved with the skulls of bad

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monks and nuns, yours will be added to it. Do not dare to enter a Catholic Church lest the thunderbolts of Heaven fall upon you, you degraded wretch!

“I hope when you are at the point of death, that a thousand demons will rise up to tear you body and soul into hell for all eternity, and that the money you have received will burn your vile carcass with every torture of Hell. In Hell there is no release, the pendulum swings with two words, ever and never. You may call on Messrs. Sloan, Fowler, and Hyslop, the last was the wretch who volunteered to seize the Host. I hope they will help you! What company! What a difference from those pure souls in the convent. Why did they ever receive you in their midst, coming from such a bad family. You have the tainted blood in your veins of the murderers of Jesus Christ. You are doing the same. The Blessed Virgin will turn

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her face from you unless you repent before it is too late. Give it all up. Better to starve in this world than lose your soul.—NEMESIS.”

The post date of this letter was May 14, 1909.



From a photograph by the Pictorial Agency.

AT HOME.

CHAPTER XXIV

AM PRESSED TO RETURN

FROM time to time pressure was brought to bear upon me by the Catholics, and this culminated in an adventure whilst we were at Westcliff.

On May 10, 1909, two gentlemen called to see me. They were a Mr. Lane and a Mr. Colbourne. They said they wanted to help me, and that money could be raised for us. They were followed on May 13 by a Miss Baker. She talked for a long time very seriously, and said many things against the Protestants and the Alliance. She said that if I went with them I should lose my refinement, and then gradually get hardened, and then lose my morality, and then go into the gutter. She also pressed me to go

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to St. Mary's Abbey, at Stanbrook, but I replied that I would never think of going back to any convent.

Miss Baker came again the next day, and saw my mother. On the Wednesday she again called, and continued to press me. She said if I kept with the Alliance I should lose my soul and be dragged down lower. At last I yielded to her persuasion so far as going with her and my mother to London.

When we got to London, Miss Baker took us by the Tube to Brompton and straight into the Brompton Oratory for the service of Benediction. My mother objected to going in, and a discussion took place on the steps of the Oratory, but at last she got us in, and after Benediction she took us to her own house, where she introduced us to one or two afternoon callers and her niece, Miss Ross. Early in the evening she took us to the Davies Hotel, where she

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left us. She took our room in the name of Miss Baker.

On Thursday, which was Ascension Day, when Miss Baker came, she brought Mrs. Moore, the wife of Count Moore, with her, and was determined about our going to Mass. On leaving us after Mass she said she would call in the evening for me to go to see a gentleman who was interested in us. In the evening she came and took me to her house with my mother, and asked me to see a gentleman in a room by myself. She introduced him to me, and I found he was a Jesuit Father. When alone, he wanted me to go on my knees and make a confession, and I said I could not as I was too much upset. He repeatedly said to me, "Do not be afraid to tell me, for you know I am a priest." He then began to question me in detail as to what I had been doing since I left the Abbey, and I told him. I still refused to make a confession, and he gave me

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his blessing, and I went out and rejoined my mother.

The next morning, Friday, Miss Baker came to see me with a paper in a long envelope, but, seeing I was ill, said my mother had better go across to her house and see a gentleman about it. Afterwards Miss Baker's niece called to see me, and talked a long time about my wickedness to the Catholic religion, and that she was surprised at my having gone into the company of such heretics. I was in bed all day on Friday, and on Friday night and on Saturday morning I was very hysterical, owing to the constant worrying to which I had been subjected. Miss Baker came to see me again on Friday evening.

On Saturday, the 22nd, Miss Baker called to see me again, and remained with me about an hour and a-half, during which time she pressed me very hard. It had been understood that we should

AM PRESSED TO RETURN

leave for Southampton the previous night by the mail train, to catch the boat for New York, but I felt quite unable to go, and I understood my mother arranged to postpone our leaving until the following Wednesday. This Saturday morning Miss Baker suggested that we should go and live next door to a house of The Good Shepherds, instead of staying at that hotel until Wednesday; or, if we preferred, we could go down to her house at Ash; and for a long time she talked to me on the subject of monasticism. When the interview ended, my mother came to me and told me that Mr. Henry Fowler and Mr. Alfred Fowler were waiting downstairs. I had an interview with them, and told them of the course of continued pressure of religious matters to which I was being subjected, and how unhappy I felt. They offered to take my mother and myself away at once if I pleased, and I consented to go with my mother. We

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accordingly placed ourselves under the protection of the Protestant Alliance.

After lunching at the First Avenue Hotel, Holborn, Mr. Fowler and his brother, my mother and I, left the City for Forest Gate, the home of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Fowler. We stayed with them for a fortnight. Every possible kindness was shown to us; in fact we could not have been the recipients of greater kindness had we been personally related to them. Mr. Fowler insisted on my getting medical advice and treatment from his own doctor, as I was very run down.

CHAPTER XXV

VISITING OLD SCENES

FOR some time past it had been rumoured by Catholics, throughout Manningtree, East Bergholt, Dedham, and the surrounding villages, that I had returned to the convent, and from information in the possession of the Protestant Alliance the convent authorities were informed that I had returned to Romanism, and was going back to the Abbey.

On Thursday, June 17, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Fowler, Mr. W. Carnes, Councillor T. W. Cook, mother and I, left London for Manningtree. On arriving at the station a large gathering met us and congratulated me on my escape. I thanked Mr. Swann and the porters for their kind help on that occasion.

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Our party then visited Manningtree; where we were welcomed by the villagers. Various friends of the Alliance were visited on the journey, and arrangements made for luncheon at the hotel.

The fact having gained publicity that I was in Manningtree, a great crowd gathered, evincing their pleasure by most enthusiastic cheering. We came at length to East Bergholt village, and passed the Abbey. We could see the high fence—regarding which some contradictory statements have been made by Mr. A. C. White in the *Universe*, a Roman Catholic paper—which was clearly visible on our standing on the carriage seats, so that we could see over the outside brick wall of ten feet high.

The hospice door chanced to open for the exit of a visitor, and I saw two of the out sisters, one of whom I recognised as Sister Justina, who had endeavoured to restrain me from leaving Manningtree

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Station on the night of my escape. After this recognition she retired with a scowl upon her face.

We returned after driving through Dedham, to Manningtree, and had a most gratifying send-off.

Mr. Swann told me of the gardener's dismissal. He had worked for the community for twenty years, since a boy of twelve. It seems that the Bishop visited the Abbey shortly after my escape, and Henry was sent off to Canada.

About the beginning of July we were invited by the Rev. J. H. Marshall, of Swanley, Kent, to spend a few weeks at his delightful place. Here I began to write this book—which many had been urging me to do—in the study of the reverend gentleman. Everything they could do to make us happy they certainly did with a cheerful heart and a good will, so that we were very loath to leave them. Mr. Marshall is greatly loved by his people,

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and his daughter is of great assistance to him in his work.

I attended his church on the two Sundays we were there. I thought the service truly apostolic. I could picture that upper room at Jerusalem having the like ritual, if ritual it can be called, where all is so beautifully simple. I could not help comparing this service with the celebration of Mass at Brompton Oratory, where one is continually disturbed by late comers, perpetually having to change your seat, listening to singing of a third-rate opera stamp, and scarcely able to discern the celebrant at the altar. I was greatly shocked at the irreverent conduct of some of the congregation, especially women. They gave me the impression of being present solely to criticise the dress and manners of others there, and to see exactly who was singing in the choir, rather than worshipping God.

From Kent mother and I went to Stroud Green, where we stayed with Mr.

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Arthur Colville Evans and his wife, at their home in Ferme Park. I cannot speak sufficiently of the courtesy and kindness shown us by this gentleman and his charming wife. Whilst at Ferme Park I had the privilege of hearing the Rev. Charles Brown preaching to his congregation.

Here, also, I for the first time addressed a public audience. The occasion was the holding of a garden party at "Brendon," the Highgate home of Mr. and Mrs. Clement Williams. Mr. T. H. Sloan, M.P., spoke, and the Rev. Charles Brown took the chair.

I felt dreadfully nervous before beginning, and even up to the moment of speaking I had not the least idea of what I should say. Encouraged by the kind looks and manners of the audience, I got through my ordeal, to my heart-felt satisfaction.

I have since spoken at several drawing-room meetings, and have in each case

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received most sympathetic attention from my hearers, who have been interested and enthusiastic regarding conventual inspection.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank each and every one of those ladies and gentlemen who have been such staunch friends in a period of anxiety and trouble. *Ad multos annos* to them all.

I must also thank my readers who have followed this record of my experiences to its close. My story is unusual, not, alas, because those experiences are out of the ordinary, but because I, of so few, have escaped to narrate them. God only knows how many poor souls there are at this moment shut away from the outside world behind the walls of conventual establishments, suffering untold agonies and longing for the freedom that will never come. Drawn there by the most sacred aspirations of the human soul, when too young to know themselves or the

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world, I say, God only knows how many of them have suffered the disillusionment, the anguish, the bitter grief that I passed through. The working men in the factory, the women and the children who earn their daily bread, these are all cared for and safeguarded by legislation and factory inspection. But there is no one to see that the poor nun—much more defenceless than these—is ensured the ordinary conditions of decent living. I say that we ought to have got past conventual inspection long ago. It is a perfect disgrace to *the* Protestant country of Europe to tolerate what even some Catholic countries will not allow.

If what I have written opens the eyes of the people of England to the need for conventual inspection, what I have gone through will not have been in vain.

AN AFTER-WORD

BY THE EDITOR OF "THE QUIVER"

THE reader has now had an opportunity of forming his own judgment upon Miss Moulton's remarkable story. Whatever his creed, he will find in it material for much reflection. I regard it as essentially a human document—the story of a soul's struggle towards the light. Whatever it may prove, it is undoubtedly of living interest. There is nothing so truly pathetic as the striving of an earnest soul after the highest and the noblest, and the realisation that what one has striven for has been a delusion and a hollow mockery. Miss Moulton does not attempt an academic indictment of the system of monastic vows—she tells the story of her experiences simply and graphically, with just the ingenuous touch of a woman who has suffered and is sore at her treatment.



From a photograph by the Pictorial Agency.

MY HUSBAND AND I AT HOME.

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"The Escaped Nun," since its appearance in 1909, has had an extraordinary sale. The book has met with a mixed reception—sympathy with the sufferer and indignation at her treatment from ordinary people; abuse, persecution, vituperation from Roman Catholics.

The non-partisan reader may meanwhile ask himself: is this an exceptional experience? Was Miss Moulton the victim of unfortunate circumstances or temperament, which made her convent life the very reverse of the ideal which it should have been? Or is this the logical outcome of a system which secludes from the world the very people who might work out its salvation? This story of petty slander, tyranny, backbiting, and jealousy—is it the accident of good things gone wrong, or only what one might expect if you put the absolute power of body and soul into the hands of one woman, however good, without appeal, without inspection, without let or hindrance from public opinion? Is the state of an

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“enclosed” the highest, purest form of Christian life, or is it sacrificial fervour run to waste—religious selfishness?

I have been able to have several quiet talks with the author of this book, and there can be no doubt that she is a woman of considerable charm and personality. Finally I was privileged to visit her at her quiet country retreat. I should state at once that she is now happily married, and to one who is able to give her that peace and seclusion she needs.

Several hours I spent with Mrs. Page (as she now is) and her husband in their home not far from a popular seaside resort. Her husband is a man of culture—an artist, who, prior to an unfortunate accident a few years ago, which deprived him of the sight of one eye, frequently exhibited in the Royal Academy.

The Protestant reader would doubtless like to conclude that Mrs. Page has become a zealous Protestant, a regular church attendant, and an enthusiastic church worker. May I say that I was not in the



From a photograph by the Pictorial Agency.

IN THE GROUNDS OF MY HOUSE.

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least surprised to find that she was none of these? Why should we Protestants desire to make petty sectarian capital out of such a sad story as that "The Escaped Nun" reveals? I should not have been in the least surprised if I had found that Mrs. Page's bitter experiences of Romanism had produced a total reaction against all forms of religion. That is what is happening to-day in hundreds of thousands of cases in France and other countries. No, from the intimate talk I had, I know that Mrs. Page has her own religion; she is endeavouring to get back to the fundamentals of the faith. We spoke of the witness of the Bible, the quite simple facts of the life of Jesus Christ—of how He quarrelled with the religious professors of His day, of how He preached simple faith and kindly deeds. Mrs. Page prefers to leave dogmatism to the dogmatic, and what she asks for is just peace. It is a pathetic spectacle—that of a woman who has been crushed in the iron machine of ecclesiasticism. Is it to be wondered at

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that what she requires is not the disputations of the doctors, but the ministration of kindly nature—the rest of soul and the occupation of mind and body that will let her forget the sadness and disillusionment of her experiences, and enable her to build up a living, vital, working faith?

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