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CONVENT EXPERIENCES.

BY

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PUBLISHED BY THOMAS SCOTT,
11 THE TERRACE, FARQUHAR ROAD, UPPER NORWOOD,
LONDON, S.E.

1875.

Price Ninepence.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY C. W. REYNELL, LITTLE PULTENEY STREET,
HAYMARKET.

INTRODUCTION.

MANY have written upon the Convent Question. Fanatical No-Popery champions, who have never seen the interior of a Convent, have had the effrontery to expatiate with all the assurance of eye-witnesses upon manners and customs most of which would have been unintelligible to them even had they been permitted to scrutinise them. Blinded by Protestant prejudice, their faith concerning Convents is literally "the evidence of things *not seen*." Such witnesses have written to little purpose.

Others, supposed to be runaway Nuns, who at once went over to the enemy and became bright stars in the Evangelical firmament, have also handled the Convent Question. They have made "awful disclosures," quite worthy of a place in the annals of secular crime; but their statements want filling in, for neither in the world nor in the Convent are "awful crimes" the order of the day, and those supposed runaway Nuns should tell us what went on between whiles, that we might the better understand the causes which led to such "awful" results.

To supply what is wanting, to tell the whole truth, is the object of the following pamphlet. It is written by one who, though she left the Convent and the Roman Church, can nevertheless look back with pleasure upon Convent days and Convent friends, and who, strange to say, has not hitherto seen any Anglican minister reproducing so faithfully the Jesus of the Gospels as do many of the much-despised Roman Catholic priests she formerly knew and whom she still holds in affectionate remembrance.

CONVENT EXPERIENCES.

SOME years ago I had a strong desire to enter a Convent. I expressed my wish to my confessor—an uncommonly clever old man—but he at once opposed it. The secular clergy are by no means favourable to Convents, and would far rather their penitents remained in “the world,” where their good works might shine before *men* and have a far wider influence.

My Confessor’s opposition was of no avail, and some time after we discussed the subject once more. He made a sensible suggestion, upon which I acted. He advised me to pass a few days in a suburban Convent, just to see what sort of an impression the mode of life would make upon me, and he promised to write to the Superior urging her to withhold nothing from me, but to tell me with all frankness what was required by the Rules of the Order.

I followed this advice, and went for a short time into a Convent of some note. The result was most unsatisfactory. Everything was far too comfortable, too elegant, and too well-appointed for one passing through such an ascetic phase as myself; moreover, I was at a loss to understand by what mental process the feather beds, merino habit, and inviting food could be made to square with Holy Poverty. In vain was I told by the Novice-mistress that not a Nun in the community dare call a pin her own, that the pronoun “my” was abolished and “our” substituted, and that Holy Poverty was rigidly observed.

I was too obtuse to understand her view of the matter. I was full of fervour, I wanted to *feel* the

poverty I professed, and it seemed to me that, as long as I had undisturbed enjoyment of other people's property, I should experience nothing of the sort, whichever pronoun I might use, so that with *my* views a vow of poverty taken in such an attractive residence would have been a mockery. I took my leave, but have since heard from one who for some years was in a Convent of that Order that the "interior mortification" to which the Nuns were subjected was excessive; their affections were systematically crushed, starved, and finally extinguished, until the joyous, warm-hearted Novice subsided into a mere automaton, afraid and ashamed of enjoying anything!

I communicated all my impressions about that Convent to my old Confessor, fully anticipating a reprimand for venturing thus to censure my betters. To my surprise, he seemed rather glad I had been disappointed; said he had formed similar opinions himself, and once more suggested that I should abandon all idea of entering a Convent. But I had made up my mind to be a Nun, and into a Convent I was determined to go, in spite of my first failure. Some months later, I joined an Order in which my expectations seemed likely to be realised, and where Holy Poverty, with a few startling and amusing exceptions, was keenly felt and daily practised by a fervent community of about a hundred souls, all aiming at serving their God perfectly by imitating as closely as possible the Jesus of the Gospels and the Saints of the Church, and by endeavouring with all their might and main to execute everything, no matter how trifling, "after the pattern which was shewed them on the Mount."

They were aiming at serving *their God*—mark the words—their God, that is, the Convent-God, whose requirements we must of necessity consider ere we coarsely censure those who fulfil them. This necessity has not been felt by those who have handled the

Convent Question; instead of laying the axe to the root of the tree, they have contented themselves with attacking the fruit, which they have failed to destroy, for the Monk and the Nun "have triumphed gloriously," and most of the monastic Orders are flourishing in the British Isles, where they will continue to prosper until the cause—the dread cause of effects so direful—shall cease to exist. The wolf must be slain—not the poor sheep he has molested; the dog must be shot—not the poor baby he has bitten; the poisoner must be locked up, not the poor victims he has infected. Those so anxious for the destruction of Convents and Monasteries of course imagine that the monastic spirit would be annihilated by their fall; but they are unaware that the Convent-God is extensively worshipped outside the Convent walls, and with similar results. Vows are taken and religiously observed in "the world," while, to my certain knowledge, bodily penances in the shape of disciplines, hair-shirts, prickly armlets, &c., which in many severe Orders, including even La Trappe, are *absolutely forbidden*, are practised by many educated Catholics in the quiet home circle—and mark—not at the instigation of an ascetic director, but often in opposition to his wishes, and of their own free will.

Confessors and Superiors of Convents are, taken collectively, grossly calumniated.

Inmates of Convents, and frequenters of confessionals are prompted from *within*, not goaded from *without*, to offer up their bodies "a living sacrifice" on the altar of their God, whose requirements we shall easily ascertain by inquiring what it is which urges so many intelligent, high-minded, enthusiastic persons of both sexes to embrace the religious life—for those who imagine that none but abject, half-witted, ill-favoured plebeians, people the cloister, are vastly mistaken.

Most of those who enter Convents voluntarily—

neither driven thither by adverse circumstances nor unduly influenced by some exciting revival which Catholics call a "Mission," are animated by motives which will bear the closest scrutiny.

They have a firm conviction that they are doing exactly what God requires of them, and not one whit more. If, indeed, they are mistaken, then it is truly lamentable that so much generous self-sacrifice and genuine purity of intention should be misapplied; and that youth, beauty, physical strength, mental ability and innocent enjoyment should be daily sacrificed to appease a well-nigh implacable Deity who has rarely been intentionally offended by one of His victims, and who, by some unaccountable inconsistency, is called the God of Love, seems not only horrible but incredible. The Aztecs would have called Him Tezcatlepoca, in whose honour a fine young man was yearly sacrificed, by having his palpitating heart torn from his heaving breast—but the Convent-God is more exacting, for Tezcatlepoca's victims did no prior penance—on the contrary, they passed the previous year in the enjoyment of everything this world affords, and their end, though cruel, was instantaneous, soothed moreover by the certainty of eternal bliss in Paradise—but Convent victims pass the whole "time of their sojourning here in fear," striving to make their "calling and election sure," by working out their salvation "in fear and trembling," knowing that, "unless their righteousness exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees they shall in nowise enter into the kingdom of Heaven." *They* die as St. Paul died—"daily." They believe as *he* believed, that "God is a consuming fire."

They bring their bodies "into subjection" as *he* did.

They "count all things but dung," just as *he* did.

They doubt whether, after all, they shall not be "castaways," just as *he* did.

They are "counted fools and the off-scouring of all things" just as he was, and they realise with all the intensity of an over-wrought nervous system how fearful a thing it is "to fall into the hands of the living God." They may be great fools for their pains, but what about St. Paul? He preached poverty, chastity, and obedience. He beat his body, fasted, gloried in suffering, despised the world, had visions, took a vow, and is universally looked up to as the fairest flower of the new faith; but let anybody "go and do likewise," especially in an edifice called a Monastery, and he will be universally looked upon as an absurd fanatic or a hypocritical fool.

Call the Convent-God a ghastly myth, the morbid creation of a disordered imagination if you will, but what about the Pauline-God? Did St. Paul worship the reformed God of modern Christianity? did he know aught of the easy-going, virginity-despising, match-making God of the period? or had he formed an erroneous conception of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ? The great apostle himself thought he had "the Spirit of God," and therefore he spoke out boldly, and besought the Corinthians to be "imitators of him as he was of Christ;" taught the Galatians that those that were of Christ had "crucified the world with its affections and covetousness;" cautioned the Philippians against "minding earthly things;" and told Timothy to be satisfied with the mere necessities of life, "food and raiment." Now suppose that valiant soldier of the cross were to visit Christendom in order to claim his own, his imitators, where in "the world" would he find them? He might, indeed, hear his words in many a mouth and see his epistles on many a book-shelf, but he never said "read my epistles;" the burden of his song was, "mortify your members which are on the earth." Where are his followers, those who, like himself, bear in their bodies "the marks of the Lord

Jesus," and in their daily acts of mortification and self-denial fill up, as he tried to do, "that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ." I could introduce him to many (fanatical fools?) whose motives are as pure as his own, whose faith, hope, and charity would bear a favourable comparison with his own, and whose every action would stand the test of his closest cross-examination; people who, like himself, are not "conformed to this world," but have died to it long ago just as he did. St. Paul's followers are by no means so numerous as St. Paul's readers—he is read by the wise men but imitated by the fools. Fools are generally in the majority, but the fools of the New Testament are few and far between, and they are generally to be found living in buildings where, like the early Christians, they can have all things "in common." To some such edifice I should conduct St. Paul, and I should explain to him that a new God—a reformed God is worshipped nowadays—a God who cares far more about Bible *reading* than Bible *practice*, and being better adapted to the requirements of the age, naturally carries all before him; that *his* old God is quite out of date, only worshipped by fanatical men and hysterical women, who are very little interested in Bible *reading*, but very much interested in Bible *practices*, and who have retired into private life in or out of a Monastery, as the case may be; not at all because they are sullen, cross-grained creatures without natural affection, but simply because their God is so fearfully "jealous" and exacting, that nothing short of absolute self-sacrifice will satisfy him; moreover, that they have an odd, unpopular notion that "the friendship of the world is enmity with God," and as it would never do to quarrel with him, they find it expedient to avoid it altogether.

However, perhaps St. Paul's views may have undergone a change, perhaps *he* has a new God now, in

which case he might be quite at home in modern society, and be warmly welcomed in Rotten Row; but should he still adore the God for whom he so lovingly laid down his life in days gone by, in what corner of Christendom would he find a genial resting-place?

It has now been made sufficiently clear what the requirements of the Convent-God are, and what a very striking resemblance they bear to those of the Pauline deity. Surely those *ought* not to be ridiculed whose works are in accordance with their faith. The poor benighted Papist, and the coarse, vulgar Methodist missionary, really believe that the hero of the Gospels was God, that he really meant us to follow his example, and that if we refuse to renounce *all* we have we cannot be his disciples.

Adult skeletons and babies' bones, of which no satisfactory account can be given, have been, and, perhaps, will be, found both in and out of Convents; licentious passions may run riot in the cloister as they do in the camp, and the religious habit may conceal a faithless Nun as a ball-dress may a faithless wife. It is not of Convent *vices*, but of Convent virtues I wish to speak—the *virtues*, not the *vices*, drove me away! Besides, Sister Lucy has already laid so many "awful disclosures" before the public that it is, fortunately, unnecessary to add to the number.

Monks and Nuns do not even lay claim to impeccability, and the members of the *Reformed* Church should set the poor Papists a better example before they dare to meddle with the mote in their brother's eye.

A bag of bones certainly proves that a sin has been committed, but nothing more. When a member of the Reformed Church, in the full blaze of Gospel light, fulfils *his* vow by beating his wife to a jelly, are we thence to conclude that matrimony is a snare, and Protestantism a sham?

The Reformed Church should set a reformed example, and show the Bible-*doers* how much better the Bible *readers* are.

It is quite true that Catholics care very little about reading the Bible, but it is not at all true that (as far as this country is concerned) they are *forbidden* to read it. A Catholic Bible only costs half-a-crown, and a Testament tenpence.

One of my confessors insisted upon my reading a chapter daily, another seemed to know the entire book by heart—he had a text at hand for every emergency—always assumed that I was acquainted with it, and was quite a living Concordance; another (a Monk) was an ardent admirer of St. Paul's Epistles, from which he was constantly quoting. St. Paul would have loved that good old Monk because, like himself, he was a *doer* of the Word. However, it is quite true that very few Catholics like the Bible much, and still fewer consider it any part of their duty to read it. I was quite an exception. I was always fond of the New Testament. I took it with me into the Convent, and continue to appreciate much of it, but reading it would never make *me* a Protestant.

From my infancy I have associated almost exclusively with Protestants, and have had the pleasantest experience of them. I am still intimate with many, and excellent companions they are. I find them straight-forward, kind-hearted, and agreeable people, far superior intellectually to Catholics, and therefore much more interesting, but I am bound to say, after due deliberation, that they are not one whit like Christ—that, according to all appearances, they do not even *wish* to be like him, and that so far from looking *up* to, they generally look *down* upon those who *are* like him. I know they *do* read the Gospels very often, but should never suppose they had ever heard of the Sermon on the Mount or of its "meek and lowly" author. Protestants are assuredly the *readers* of the Word and the *hearers* of the Word, but most certainly not the *doers* of the Word. Whether that is matter for regret is another thing—

it is, however, a curious view of Christianity of which Protestants have got hold—one likely to prove untenable before long, and one by no means calculated to impress the Catholics favourably. “We go by the Bible,” said a Protestant to me one day; he would have been nearer the mark had he said; “We give the Bible the go-by!”

Protestants cannot bear to be reminded that Christ extolled the celibate and even the eunuch, whom *they* consider so unutterably despicable—they wish he had said: “Let every one seek the conjugal state betimes, for in heaven they both marry and are given in marriage.” They cannot endure any allusion to the abject poverty Christ both practised and commended—they wish *he* had said: “Seek ye first worldly wealth and its advantages, for what shall it profit a man to save his soul and lose his money.” Over and over again have I asked my Protestant friends what they suppose Christ *did* mean by those passages in the Gospels the poor Papists so lamentably misapprehend, and all I can get from them is, “O you know, he could not have meant *that*”—but what they think he *did* mean, I have never ascertained. My own impression is that they are thoroughly ashamed of Christ. If I am mistaken, if they really admire *him*, then they ought to be thoroughly ashamed of *themselves*, for their affected reverence for Christ’s *words* is only to be equalled by their supreme contempt for his meaning.

The fact is, that when the Protestants reformed their Church and their God they ought to have reformed the Bible too, instead of which they are actually making a new translation of the old God’s book! Surely it would be far better for the new God to have a new book, and then much of the wrangling about “letter and spirit” would of necessity cease; it is too bad to take the old God’s book, and by pretending He did not mean what He said,

make it do for the new one! The God of the Gospels and the God of to-day are two totally different deities, and ought most certainly to have two totally different books.

And now let us see how the Bible-*doers* get on far away from all mundane influence in the quiet shade of the cloister.

To no part of my life do I look back with more pleasure and with less regret than to the time I passed in the Convent,—it was a curious and interesting experience. The motives which induced me to take such a step may be briefly summed up in these few words—I believed that Christ said what he meant and meant what he said. I was one of St. Paul's "fools for Christ's sake."

My second Convent was not a pretty place; it was a big, ugly, plain, brick building, standing in a large, unattractive piece of ground which was divided into three gardens and a cemetery.

The interior arrangements were as inconvenient as they were uncomfortable, but whether by accident or design I never heard. I was told that a Nun had planned the Convent; she may have been (and very likely was) *aiming* at discomfort and inconvenience, in which case the result was most satisfactory. I may add just here, that Nuns have a great objection to help from without; they stain, varnish, whitewash, &c., make candles, bind books, frame pictures, &c., *themselves*—often very nicely.

There was no "dim religious light" in that Convent. On the contrary, there was a great glare everywhere always. The boards were scrubbed fabulously white and strewn with fine, white, silvery sand; all the walls were painfully white; the chapel was of very light-coloured stone, the statues and bas-reliefs were quite white, and there was hardly any shade in the garden; nevertheless the "shade of the cloister" existed, but as we were never allowed to walk in the

cloisters (exercise being generally taken in the sun just after dinner) the shade there was of no practical utility. During my whole stay there I felt the absence of colour very much; my eyes suffered from the incessant glare, but I have no reason to believe it affected anybody else. Being far from well on my arrival, it was considered inadvisable to introduce me to my future companions immediately, so for some days I occupied a large private room where I made the acquaintance of the most important person in the Convent—the Novice-mistress.

She might have been forty-five. She had a good, wide brow, handsome eye-brows, and large, expressive, dreamy-looking eyes. Her manner was simple and energetic, and she was without any exception the most warm-hearted and tenderly-affectioned creature I have ever known. Her physical strength was something quite extraordinary; from half-past four in the morning until half-past nine at night she rarely sat down. I never heard her say she felt tired, neither did she ever show the least symptom of fatigue. She had a hearty appetite and an excellent digestion, which, of course were in her favour, but still her bodily strength was remarkable.

My intimacy with the Novice-mistress was, I am sure, of a very exceptional character; it contributed materially to my happiness in the Convent, and was one of the many causes of my leaving it.

After a while I got better, and was told I was to make my first appearance in the Novitiate—the name given to the general sitting-room of the Novices and Postulants. Postulants are the newcomers, the *askers* for the religious habit, the unclothed Novices. They wear the clothes they brought with them out of "the world," which, if at all smart, contrast strangely and unfavourably with the clean, natty attire of the rest. Novices are dressed just like Nuns, barring the veil, which in

their case is white instead of black. I said *just* like Nuns, but there are other trifling differences in the dress which would never strike the ordinary observer. The great object of the Postulants is to receive the religious habit, a ceremony which takes place at "a clothing," and is rarely delayed more than three months. Postulants excluded from any cause from an approaching "clothing" are generally much disappointed; they cannot feel that they have begun their religious life in good earnest until they see themselves in the religious habit; moreover their *own* attire has often become faded and even dirty.

Postulants are allowed plenty of liberty. They generally arrive very much out of health. Previous anxiety of mind; troubles of all sorts; the disapprobation of their parents; the hindrances of every kind which are designedly thrown in their path; the terrible laceration of mind many of them have undergone and continue to undergo for weeks and months, are reasons for treating them with all the indulgence and consideration possible. Postulants are not obliged to observe silence; a Novice is generally allowed to devote herself to all the new-comers, and they may do pretty much as they like, go out when they like, come in when they like, and chat during the hours of silence; but few Postulants require all these concessions, they generally do their best from the first. There is, however, *one* permission of which the majority avail themselves pretty extensively, and that is the permission to *look about them*.

Everything and everybody seem so very queer in the Convent, that were the "mortification of the eyes" insisted on from the first, I am afraid very few would persevere. I was terribly given to staring about; the novelty of the scene in *my* case never seemed to wear off, and though quite up to the others in many respects, I failed signally in the "mortification of the eyes." Eyes were to be "mortified"

because Christ had his eyes habitually fixed on the ground; we know this to be a fact; had it been otherwise the Evangelists would not tell us so frequently that "He lifted up His eyes"; they must previously have been cast down in true cloistral fashion; it was a clear case. With my eyes for awhile under my own control, I entered the Novitiate with the Novice-mistress, at whose appearance the hubbub of voices ceased and the fifty Novices rose; when she was seated they sat down and the noise recommenced. They were at tea; they were having brown bread and butter on brown wooden platters, and were drinking either beer or tea out of brown mugs. They were all between the ages of sixteen and five-and-twenty. The greater number were Lay-sisters, and looked in rude health, as I believe they were; the rest were Choir-novices. It is upon these, the young gentlewomen of the community, that the oppressive weight of Convent life falls so heavily. Many of them come straight from the ease, indolence, and warmth of a luxurious home to the draughty, carpetless, comfortless Convent, where their powers of endurance, both mental and physical, are sadly overtaxed, and where the diet, though well adapted to repair the muscular system, is but ill calculated to restore the nervous tissue upon which such terrible demands are made by the mode of life. Moreover, too many hours are suffered to pass between the meals, and the result is that the Choir-novices soon begin to droop; but I am anticipating. They all looked very well and very happy, and were making a great noise when I first saw them. The noise amazed and scandalised me. I thought, as I believe most people do, that Nuns rarely open their lips, and that a Convent is as silent as the grave; but I soon found out that even in a Convent there was "a time to speak," and the introduction of a Postulant into the Novitiate is always the signal for "speaking."

Convents are unavoidably noisy places, for, as there are neither carpets nor curtains to deaden the sound, nobody can move about silently, especially in Convent shoes, which are clumsy and unyielding. Absolute silence is rarely realised in active Orders, for even when conversation is prohibited vocal prayer is constantly going on, and the wearisome repetition of countless "Hail Marys" during the recital of several Rosaries running, is knagging beyond belief. The "silence" bell was a mockery. Tea—I should rather say supper, for it was the last meal—being over, the Novice-mistress rapped on the table; all stood up, and the 51st Psalm, some prayers, and a hymn to Mary were said in Latin—the latter with startling rapidity. We then went into the garden, where the younger Novices ran about, played at Puss-in-the-Corner, &c., or collected the innumerable snails and caterpillars which swarmed over the cabbages. The other Novices, including recently-professed Nuns who were still in the Novitiate, walked up and down with the Novice-mistress, whose duty it is always to be present during recreation. The evening recreation was a sensible and a *shady* one. It lasted about three-quarters of an hour, and then the bell rang for night prayers, which lasted half-an-hour; and at half-past nine we were generally in our cells. *Cells*—who in "the world" knows what a Nun's cell really is? I thought they were on or under the ground-floor, cold, damp, and dismal, and furnished with a crucifix, a skull, and a *prie-dieu*. Such a cell as that would have delighted me, for those who enter a Convent from conscientious motives are prepared for any amount of discomfort; they go there on purpose to find it. Christ had no toilet-table, no toilet-vinegar, and no toilet-soap; and his followers know they must "take no thought for the body," if they would be worthy members of a head crowned with thorns.

I am so sorry I cannot tell the reader where my cell was; it was either in Nazareth or in Bethlehem, but I do not know which. I was always a very bad hand at finding my way about, and that Convent was, as I said before, of intricate construction and I never learnt my way about it. Each room and each staircase had a curious name; there was the Sacred Heart, the Five Wounds, Nazareth, Bethlehem, the Holy Angels, the Holy Innocents, Mount Zion, Saint Agnes, Saint Ursula, &c. Other Novices could take messages to the Sacred Heart and be back directly; but *I* was soon found to be an unprofitable servant and was rarely required to run errands. On the first floor was a large room without a fire-place, divided by unpainted wooden partitions into perhaps thirty tiny compartments all open at the top, called "cells" and one of them was mine, or rather *ours* as they always say in Convents!

I confess I was much disappointed with it—it was neither damp nor dismal—it was excessively dry and painfully light. Disposed as I was to see the religious element everywhere and to take a devotional view of everything, I could not help thinking how very much like a bathing-machine my cell was—had it been quite straight the resemblance would have been still more striking. The bed was fixed into the side like a berth on board ship, a small cupboard was opposite the door, on which stood a small jug and basin, pegs were in the partition just like those in a bathing-machine, and a bathing-machine looking-glass was fastened to the wall. There was one chair for which there was hardly room, and a wee bit of carpet in front of the bed. Whenever I go to the sea-side and take a dip in the ocean, I am always vividly reminded of my old Convent cell. I was favoured some time ago with a private view of Holloway Gaol, and have no hesitation in saying that the prisoners' cells in that interesting building are incom-

parably more comfortable, more roomy, more private, and more genteel than those occupied by ladies and gentlemen in Convents and Monasteries; moreover, prison cells are well warmed and well ventilated, but our cells were cold and shamefully ill-ventilated. Considering the defective ventilation and general neglect of sanitary laws, it is astonishing that the health of the community was not much worse. Some of the dormitories in my Convent were just as badly-ventilated and over-crowded as were many of the Metropolitan Workhouse Wards a few years ago. Ignorance of, and contempt for, the body, combined with an excessive reverence for the precepts of their God are the causes which in Convents produce such lamentable results; but as members of the Reformed Church are neither ignorant nor fanatical, to what influences are we to impute *their* shortcomings?

In every cell there was a crucifix and in most a crown of thorns—however, in mine there was only a crucifix. The recollection of that crucifix brings to my mind a silly taunt often flung at Catholics by those who ought to know better. On Sunday, after a late breakfast,—for the God of the day is not exacting,—Protestants frequently pay Popery the compliment of going to High Mass at the Pro-Cathedral or St. George's. They hear fine music, they see pretty flowers, they smell sweet incense, and they go home saying, "What a sensuous worship it is," but it never occurs to them that out of a hundred Catholics not more than five ever hear High Mass at all. The High Mass is for the select few, but the Low Mass is for the multitude. Long before the Protestant has left his bed, hundreds and thousands of Catholics have been to a Mass where there is no music, no incense, and no sermon; where there are no flowers, no candles, and no attractions. At seven and eight o'clock the Protestant may see at the Italian Church, Hatton Garden, what he will certainly

never see in his *own* place of worship—the *poor* at their devotions—unaided by anything to gratify their senses, and frequently too far from the altar to catch the low voice of the solitary priest or to see the two candles which announce that a Mass is going on. We never once had High Mass at the Convent, neither could any of us see the altar from our position in the choir. But I must return to that crucifix. It consisted of a cross stained black (paint was forbidden), on which was pasted a gaudy paper figure of Christ. It did not elevate my soul to God, it did not recall His crucified Son to my mind,—it was a grotesquely ludicrous object, and it always reminded me of Punch. Once, in an indignant mood, I turned it with its face to the wall, but the Novice-mistress turned it back again, telling me that if I could not put up with an ugly crucifix I was no true child of the Cross; but the good soul tried to find me a less objectionable one,—in vain, they were all alike; indeed, everything that met the eye was as tasteless as it could be, for Jesus had been satisfied with the mere necessities of life, and the disciple ought not to be “above his Master.”

The extinguishing of the lamp, accompanied by the exclamation, “May Jesus Christ be praised,” announced that everybody was in bed. At half-past four a great bell rang, and somebody thumped loudly at each cell door, saying “Arise thou that sleepest, and Christ shall give thee light.” At five, we were all in the Chapel for morning prayers, followed by Prime, Tierce, Sext and None of the Divine Office, commonly called Little Hours. Most of the active Orders use the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin, which is usually printed with the English translation, but *we* said the long office from the Roman Breviary—the same which all the priests say all over the world, and of which not one word was translated. Reciting it in a slow monotone, took over two hours

daily, and I think I may venture to assert that the two hours so spent were felt by the majority as a very heavy penance; but as I shall have to return to this subject we will leave it now.

The Angelus bell rang at the end of None, and we all returned to our cells to make our beds, &c.; but the *et cetera* was no joke, especially to those Nuns who slept in the Five Wounds, for they had to carry the water in which they had washed, as well as their empty jug (which rarely had a handle or a spout) down three flights of steep stairs and across a very uneven yard to the pump where they had to wait their turn among the others. Sometimes the bell rang for "Meditation" before the poor girls got back to the Five Wounds with the fresh water. However, most of the Novices slept nearer the pump, and had time for a few minutes Spiritual Reading before we were all summoned into the Chapel again. I should like a medical man to have seen us "meditating." It was then half-past six, and we all (having been standing since half-past four), knelt until a quarter to eight. The mental prayer or meditation lasted till seven, and then came Mass and Holy Communion. Then we breakfasted upon brown bread, butter, and coffee without sugar. There was never the remotest difference in the routine of the Convent during the early morning hours, and before proceeding further, it is necessary to examine that routine very closely. We had supped soon after seven upon brown bread and butter, and the very weakest tea without sugar, and we had passed the evening on our feet and on our knees. At half-past four we were on our legs again—from five to six we were kneeling or standing in the Chapel (there is not much sitting during Office), then came the pilgrimage to the pump, followed by an hour and a quarter's kneeling, bolt upright on a hard deal stool, the hands closely joined (not *clasped* which is less irksome), not a sound could be heard

from the old priest at the altar, and not a thing could be seen, save the back of a Novice in front of you, for we were arranged in rows one behind the other. The quality of the bread and butter served at supper was excellent, and the quantity unlimited, but many of the Choir-novices could eat but very little of such simple food. Insufficient air, sleep, and exercise, combined with almost uninterrupted brain-work, do not tend to promote appetite; the nervous system was habitually over-wrought; the Choir-novices were in a constant state of tension, and the diet, even had they been able to enjoy it, was ill-adapted to repair the waste going on in the delicate machine upon which such terrible demands were made. The Choir-novices are the chief victims of the conventual system, for the Lay-sisters, from whom mere muscular labour is required, have ordinarily excellent appetites, and the diet seems to suit them, moreover to *them* the transition from the world to the cloister is frequently a change for the better.

The Choir-novices sometimes fainted on their return to their cells after Little Hours—one with whom I had many conversations *frequently* fainted before breakfast—*she* languished for want of sleep. There was plenty of time to sleep provided you fell asleep at a quarter to ten, as the Lay-sisters were sure to do after working in the garden all day, but an over-taxed *brain* refuses to sleep at the word of command, and many of the Choir-novices could not compose themselves till after midnight. It was seldom known that anybody had fainted, for, from motives of piety, the Novices suffered in silence like their Master; moreover, they were afraid of being sent back into the world as too delicate for the cloister, so that not until they broke down altogether was their enfeebled state of health adequately realised. I was now among the Bible *doers*, who literally took “no thought for the body,” and who fasted with a happy heart and a

cheerful countenance, "as to the Lord and not to men." Any Novice taken ill in the chapel was afterwards permitted to sit during meditation. Just in front of me knelt an unusually tall girl, who had permission to sit, and one day I asked her how it was that she never availed herself of that permission. She replied, "because I should fall asleep immediately." The Novice-mistress had something to lean against, and often went to sleep; had *we* had something to lean against *we* should often have gone to sleep! That tall-girl (I forget nearly all their names) drooped very soon after her arrival for want of more animal food; her lips and the inside of her eyelids became quite white. Had she earlier made her requirements known she would have had some meat for breakfast, but, like them all, she dreaded being sent away as too feeble to observe the rule, so kept gradually losing her strength until her languishing appearance excited attention. She had been educated in the Convent-school, and, like many of the pupils, she returned to live and to die among the companions of her childhood. I am quite certain that all the girls in that large Novitiate were *voluntary* victims, that not the slightest attempt was made to induce them to remain, and that they dreaded nothing so much as the possibility of rejection. One pretty, lively Novice was expelled during my stay for disobedience, and on the morning fixed for her departure, she positively refused to leave her bed, and had to be dressed and ejected by main force.

And now let us go to breakfast. Some of us were quite tired by breakfast-time, and there was but little rest to be had during meals, for we sat upon forms or stools, which afforded no support to the poor back. We had brown bread and butter on brown wooden platters, and about a pint of very fair coffee, nice and hot, but without sugar. We were allowed to talk during breakfast, and not one of the meals was hurried

over. The quantity of coffee was, I believe, unlimited ; as often as a mug was pushed into the middle of the table somebody got up and put coffee into it.

Then came the washing-up, a duty which generally devolved upon the new-comers. Two large tubs of very hot water were brought in by a Lay-sister, the mugs were washed by one Postulant, rinsed by another, and wiped by a third. We were cautioned never to catch hold of anything by its handle. Handles were looked upon solely as excrescences intended for ornament, and were therefore to be avoided, especially during the washing-up. The water-jug in my cell was the only one I ever saw which had a handle *and* a spout ; they had all fallen victims to circumstances at the pump before my arrival, but the dinner-mugs, being entrusted to the Choir-postulants, were most of them intact. Even now I rarely meddle with handles, to the extreme amusement of my acquaintances. After the washing-up came the dread "marking" of the Breviary, ready for Matins, and Lauds, which were said daily at six o'clock in the evening.

Common sense and human nature are frequently outraged in Convents ; but, unfortunately for those who are so clamorous for their demolition, it can be shown that most Convent-practices, so far from being in opposition to the "Word," are in strict accordance with it.

Supernatural motives and *uncommon* actions distinguish alike the Prophet of Mount Carmel, the Baptist in the Desert, and the Bernard in the Cloister.

Fervent old David praised God "seven times a-day," and seven times a-day does the Church call upon her children to do the same—so far so good. But David knew the meaning of every word he said, whereas a very small proportion of those whose misfortune it is to "say Office"—under pain, mind, of "*mortal sin*"—understand one word of it.

To the majority of the over-worked secular priests

of London the obligatory "Divine Office" is a very serious infliction. Some of them have told me so; *one*, indeed, with amazing frankness, said that the Church had done wisely to make prayer compulsory, for otherwise he for *one* should never pray at all! However, priests may say Office just when they like—all at once or piece-meal—out loud or in a whisper—fast or slow according to—I was going to say *devotion*—but I had better say *time*. An hour suffices for most priests to say the ordinary Office of the day with sufficient distinctness to satisfy their consciences, and as they occasionally understand some of it, things might be worse. In the Convent matters *are* worse, considerably worse—for *there* it is very unusual for anybody to understand any of it. I was quite an exception, for having formerly given some attention to Italian and having long been familiar with the Psalms and New Testament in Latin, I could soon find my way about the Breviary far better than I ever could about the building, but I was the *only* Novice who understood anything more than the Doxology. Every morning a Nun came to teach the Novices to "mark the book," and at the end of twelve months many of them were still unable to find their places, and even the old Nuns themselves were often at fault when the "Commemorations" were numerous. I believe that "Office" was cordially hated by most of the community, and that among the many uncongenial occupations of the day not one was so thoroughly distasteful to the majority as that unintelligible and most fatiguing Office. It was said—that is the longest part of it—at six o'clock in a loud, distinct monotone, and it occupied nearly an hour. Many of the poor girls had been using their lungs the whole afternoon in the various Schools of the Order, and were quite tired out. I myself have frequently had to stop from sheer exhaustion long before it was over; it was a most oppressive and irrational

affair. Once I asked the Novice-mistress if she really thought God could possibly be pleased with such an offering. Her answer conveyed volumes. She replied, "Never allude to the subject, for I cannot bear to dwell upon it; I always offer up my intention before it begins, and that is all I *can* do." She, and many of them, could say large portions by heart, but nobody could translate a line. I thought it very sad. On Sunday the Office for the Dead was said in addition, so that the poor lungs got but little rest even on the Day of Rest.

I have said before that Postulants had plenty of liberty, so after the marking of the Breviary, I could do much as I liked until twelve, when I had to prepare the table for dinner. Being generally very tired after so much standing, I was glad to have a long rest in the garden, where I was frequently joined by the Novice-mistress, with whom I had many very interesting conversations, but it was only very gradually that I began to see how fatal even to the interests of the poor soul are the results of taking "no thought for the body." Bible-readers are indisputably "wiser in their generation" than Bible-doers, and if they could only persuade fervent Christians that the *hearers* of the word are more acceptable to God than the *doers* of it, the Monasteries would soon be vacated; but at present the poor fools really think that they must suffer with their Master here if they would reign with him hereafter.

From the Novice-mistress, I ascertained that many Novices had been obliged to give up their vocation and return into the world in consequence of "bad knees." Constant kneeling upon those hard stools with no support whatever, seriously and permanently injured the knee; water formed beneath the skin; the joint stiffened; became enlarged and painful, and the poor Novice was sent home. A very pretty girl in the cell next to mine had a bad knee while I was

there—it swelled considerably—the other one became painful, and for some weeks she could not put her feet to the ground: however, she got better. Other diseases (peculiar to women) were common in the community; they were indisputably induced by protracted kneeling; but as the sufferers never mentioned their various ailments for fear of being sent away, they were rarely discovered until after the Vows had been taken.

“Let him that readeth understand,” that there are voluntary sufferers *outside* Convent walls who cast their gifts before a much more numerous frequented altar, and who adore a deity who is only to be propitiated by wasps’ waists, exposed chests, distorted feet, and enamelled skin. When I was at school some years ago, a girl of seventeen suddenly fell backwards during tea-time, and was carried away in a fit; the doctor attributed it solely to the camphor she was in the habit of chewing to make her eyes bright. A few months ago I visited regularly, first in the hospital, and afterwards in the workhouse, a poor woman, who died a very lingering death, owing to a diseased bone in her instep. She told me she attributed her then condition to the tight boots she had had the folly to “indulge” in formerly. Magnanimous victims! *they* suffer without any prospect of recompense, whereas, the fools of the cloister are silly enough to believe that their Father who sees “in secret” will hereafter “reward them openly;” they actually think Christ said what he meant, and meant what he said, and they count it all joy to share his bitter chalice. Continual cheerfulness reigned in the Novitiate; I saw only two Novices who seemed discontented, they both left; one with whom I am intimately acquainted begged hard to be re-admitted, but without success; it was the monotony that wearied *her*. Several (I think five), died during my stay. I am sure they died “in sure and certain hope

of a happy resurrection ;” but one and all had a terrible conviction of an intervening Purgatory of a frightful character ; certainly a “strange god” was worshipped there. One young consumptive Postulant sickened immediately after her arrival ; she begged to be “professed” on her death-bed, her request was granted, and she died in the religious habit. I may take this opportunity of saying that Nuns do not look so dead as other corpses, this is mainly owing to their being buried in the same dress they wore in life ; those I saw did not look dead at all. I believe low fever was one of the commonest causes of death. Four young Novices carried the coffins to the cemetery, and the graves were very shallow ; had they been deeper, the coffins would have floated. These deaths all occurred in the “Mother House” of the community, in Holland. Sickly members are generally sent back from “Missions” to die in the Mother House. The mortality was, I believe, high in the Order, so the Nuns thought, but I am no judge. I confine myself to what I know to be facts ; the Choir-novices soon declined in health, and I saw very few elderly Nuns.

At twelve the bell rang for vespers, and at half-past twelve we dined. There was always beef for dinner, preceded by soup, accompanied by vegetables or stewed fruit, and sometimes followed by a pudding. The beef was generally stewed ; if cold, there was always abundance of nice, good, *hot* gravy for the potatoes, but we seldom had cold meat. Strange to say, this sameness of animal food never affected me unpleasantly, neither did I ever hear anyone complain of it or appear weary of it. We each had a clumsy-looking soup plate, in which we received everything we ate. We had large wooden spoons, which were never washed—we *licked* them, wrapped the bowl in paper, and rolled them up in our dinner-napkins with our forks. Sand was handed round after dinner in a

saucer, we dipped our forks in it and rubbed them bright with a piece of paper. A religious book was always read aloud at table, and the mortification of the eyes was especially enjoined during meals; once I availed myself of it to transfer all my meat from my plate to my pocket; it was tainted, and as it was forbidden to leave anything (though a pig was kept), I had no alternative. Lest any No-Popery champion should thence conclude that the meat was invariably unfit for food, I must add that it was generally good and sufficiently well prepared, though always overcooked, to be moderately inviting; he will, however, be pleased to hear that the beer was always detestable.

The reading during dinner was a gross absurdity. Eating was a merely animal process, and consequently disgraceful, so we were enjoined to nourish our souls the while with holy reflections; but as it was just possible that our thoughts during feeding time might take a carnal turn, a spiritual book was read aloud. I was older than the rest, and upon a very different footing with the Novice-mistress, so some months later, when we had become very intimate I ventured to insinuate that very few of the Novices were attending to the reading, and that I sincerely hoped, upon gastronomical grounds, that *nobody* was listening. She seemed amazed at the surmise, for though she admitted that *her* head was far too full of other things, hers being a post of very great responsibility and the Novices numerous, to allow of *her* attention being fixed upon the reading, it had never occurred to her that the thoughts of others might be wandering too. I asked her to put the matter to the test, so one day she called out during dinner, "Sister Eudoxia, what is the reading about?" The poor Novice rose, blushed, and muttered that she didn't know. Several more were appealed to with the same results, and my triumph was complete. Of course, the Novice-mistress, as in duty bound, reproved us

collectively for our supineness concerning our salvation, and reminded us that "the kingdom of God is not meat and drink."

Immediately after dinner we had to say the 51st Psalm out loud, marching the while from the refectory to the chapel, where some prayers were said kneeling; then, after five "Our Fathers" and five "Hail Marys," repeated with extended arms, we proceeded to the garden for the first Recreation; but several of the poor Choir-novices being by that time quite tired out, were obliged to confess their need of repose, and used to pass the Recreation time lying on their straw beds in their cells. I have said there was but little shade in the garden, and walking up and down in the sun just after dinner was not invigorating—we had no sun-shades, and my skin has never recovered its previous hue. The interval between breakfast and dinner had been spent by the Choir-novices in either teaching or studying, and at two o'clock a bell called them all from the garden or the dormitory to the same occupations, which lasted until four. The Novitiate was ill-ventilated, it had no fireplace; the seats had no backs. In summer the Novices might study in the garden, but as they could not write comfortably in the open air they were generally in the Novitiate. The carriage of most of the Nuns was very bad—they stooped sadly, owing, doubtless, to the demands made upon their spines and chests. At four another bell rang—it was the favourite bell "according to the flesh," for it announced a mug of coffee, a piece of bread-and-butter, permission to talk, and a brief respite from lessons. The coffee was indescribably grateful—never were the refreshing effects of that dear little berry more apparent than in that Teaching Order, where the nervous system was always on the stretch.

Close to me sat a clever Novice of twenty-two. She was preparing for an examination and was

learning two foreign languages; I was her English mistress, and a better pupil I never had. Novices *always* do their best "as to the Lord and not to men." I think she sometimes drank a quart of coffee at four o'clock. She told me she never could say a single prayer without distractions; she thought of her studies right through meditation, mass, office, &c., and was wholly absorbed by them. She had a marvellous memory, but, like them all, she was cruelly over-worked and became subject to attacks of hysteria. Ignorance of, and contempt for, the poor body produced these melancholy results. Let it not be supposed that the Superiors of Monastic Orders are in clover while the underlings are doing bitter penance. I have never known and never heard of the Superior of any Convent who had not wretched health; they are generally subject to violent headache, neuralgia, and indigestion. Once I saw a bit of rag peeping out from behind the Novicemistress's ear. I asked what it was. After a little hesitation she said she had very sore ears, and that something was the matter with her head. A little coaxing induced her to let me see it. She took me into her cell—it was close to mine and just like it—she took off her stiffly-starched white cap and tight skull-cap which were under the heavy black veil of the Order. A Nun looks very strange without her head-gear. I should not have known my Novicemistress, she looked more like Jack Sheppard! Her poor head was all over scabs—white scabs—and underneath these scabs a watery discharge was slowly oozing. There was no skin behind her ears, which were very red and quite wet. She used the bits of rag to prevent the two surfaces from coming into contact, for the skull-cap just caught in the tops of the ears and bound them tightly to the head. She had formerly had abundant auburn hair, and soon after it was cut off this disease made its appearance.

She told me that others had similar heads. I was horror-struck. I moistened the scabs with warm water and tenderly detached them all; then I saw the thin discharge going on beneath. I often washed her head, but all the scabs returned. Of course the disease had become chronic. Air could not possibly penetrate through the three thick coverings worn on the head, one of which was so stiff that it was like card-board—it took a quarter of an hour to rub the starch into it. Why they ran counter to Bible teaching in regard to cutting off the hair I never knew. It did not seem to answer. Some of the Nuns had setons; the Infirmarian told me so. She said they could not do without them, but I do not know why they were required. I never heard of them in this country, save, indeed, as a thing of the past, but there they were in full force.

At a quarter-past four we were all in the Chapel for the Visit to the Blessed Sacrament; and as it was the only time when we were at liberty to choose our own devotions and say what we liked to God, that brief visit was much appreciated. Moreover, it came just after the coffee, and as it only lasted ten minutes our poor knees had not time to become insupportably painful. I only cared for *mental* prayer, and though I had not the same reason for objecting to "Office" as the others, I very early began to discover that the immense amount of vocal prayer of all sorts appointed by the Rule was calculated to put all real devotion to flight, and that prayer was likely to become a merely mechanical affair. My old Confessor had begged of me to be in no hurry either to censure or to commend what I saw in the Convent, but to wait quietly and study the effect the whole thing made upon me before I came to a conclusion. I followed his advice.

After the Visit most of the poor Novices resumed their studies, and some of them took a sly glance at

their Breviary to see if they had forgotten where to find and how to read the Antiphons, which at six o'clock would have to be distinctly repeated in the Chapel. I have known a Novice lose her appetite for a week at the very thought of having to say the Antiphons in the Choir, and then when the dread moment arrived I have seen her burst into tears and leave the Chapel sobbing. The nerves of a fervent Novice who is striving with all her might to enter in at the narrow gate, are necessarily morbidly sensitive, and the mode of life is enough to undermine the strongest constitution.

I do not recall one Novice who did not droop visibly during my stay. They faded cheerfully, suffered heroically, and "died daily" to all the comforts and luxuries of life with a constancy and a devotion past all praise; but willing as was the "spirit" the poor neglected "flesh" was weak. The very thought of those poor girls saddens me still. The tendencies, the inevitable tendencies, of Convent *virtues* depressed me, and the conviction that they were not one whit exceeding the spirit of the New Testament, which I was just then continually reading, drew my thoughts into a very unexpected channel.

Roman Catholics face boldly all the New Testament difficulties, and most generously do they try to meet them. Protestants, on the contrary, shirk them; they wish Christ had never said "Whosoever forsaketh not *all* that he hath and hateth not all his relations, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." Protestants would rather be imperfect and stick to their money than be perfect on Christ's terms; so would most Catholics. I am not extolling Catholics over Protestants; all I contend for is that good Protestants repudiate those principles which are pre-eminently *Gospel* principles, and that good Romanists cordially embrace them and carry them out to perfection.

Convents and Monasteries are not to blame; if the spirit that animates them be to blame, then let its whereabouts be discovered and let it be stifled forthwith ere more victims wither beneath its influence.

Long before I contemplated a Convent life I was familiar with bodily penances. None were allowed in the cloister. Some of the Novices arrived with a tight iron chain twisted round them; it was at once taken away and never returned.

The reader has now been informed how most days passed in the Convent; from half-past four in the morning until half-past nine at night there was no change in the daily routine, but on Saturdays there was a different programme. Before looking at it I will state that after three months I was clothed, and was a very happy, healthy Novice. I have said before that many of the Novices concealed their ailments, and were frequently very much to blame for their reticence. I spoke out boldly to the Novice-mistress upon matters physical, and had the satisfaction of hearing her inform all her children collectively that they were to *sit* in the Chapel when kneeling affected them unpleasantly. We always addressed her on our knees, an invariable custom in all Convents, for the Superior represents God. This startles Protestants, but it has no peculiar effect upon Catholics, who from childhood upwards are accustomed to listen to their Confessor week after week as if he were God. Nothing could exceed the good understanding there was between the Novice-mistress and her Novices, they all loved her; kneeling did not diminish the affectionate familiarity of our intimacy with her.

On Saturdays many strange things came to light.

We wore knitted black worsted stockings, and on Saturdays we washed them, but no soap was allowed—soap was said to spoil them. On Saturdays we cleaned out our cells in the strangest way. Wet

sand was flung under the bed and we swept it out with a common birch-broom. Fleas were looked for on Saturdays. The Convent was beautifully clean but there were fleas in the straw beds, and, as no sheets were used, it was easy to find the fleas in the twilled flannel coverings which did duty for sheets. Once I caught seventeen fleas in "our" cell! The straw beds were not uncomfortable, but they were dangerous; the straw wasted, the beds became thin, and many of the Nuns suffered from rheumatism, which they assured me was caused by the want of warmth underneath them; the beds should have been refilled more frequently.

On Saturdays we went to Confession. I am quite familiar with the edifying and suggestive revelations current in No-Popery publications. Of course "they speak that they do *know* and testify that they have *seen*." I am going to do likewise. The priests *I* know consider it a misfortune to have anything to do with Convents; they esteem no infliction comparable to the bore of hearing Nuns' confessions; they would far rather hear a regiment of soldiers, who have a catalogue of mortal sins to get rid of, than listen to the monotonous rigmarole of a scrupulous Nun in whose whole lifetime it would be difficult to find half-a-dozen voluntary deviations from the path of rectitude. I know that if *I* were a priest I should avoid Convents. Moreover a Convent priest always plays second fiddle to the Superior and ranks *after* her in the estimation of the Novices. Our old priest rarely said a word to us. We were forbidden to ask him any advice, for then his influence might have clashed with that of the Novice-mistress. We were urged to get over our Confession as quickly as possible in order not to keep the rest waiting, and I am quite sure that very few of us exceeded five minutes. I have been to confession many hundreds of times "in the world," and can say with all sincerity that it is very rare to be ques-

tioned at all in the Confessional. You are expected to make haste and be off, as the secular priest has no time to spare, and his poor, ignorant, half-prepared penitents have the greatest claim upon him. I know but one Catholic priest who likes hearing Confessions; most of them hate it.

While I was a Postulant I had a large piece of soap, but when I was clothed it was taken away, and I was instructed to kneel down and ask for a piece of community soap. I did so, saying "May I for the love of God have a piece of soap;" the usual form of petition. A very hard bit of white soap, not quite an inch square, was put into my extended hand, and I was told that it was against Holy Poverty to use the corner of my towel (certainly with such a bit of granite as that piece of soap, it would have been!) but that I might have a bit of an old stocking. I made my acknowledgments in the accepted form, "Deo gratias," and retired with the soap. The next day was Saturday, and while sitting in the Novitiate wondering where all the others were, a Novice came and told me to go and wash my arms. Quite amazed, I asked why? "Because," replied Sister Adelpine, "the Novice-mistress says so;" she added "we always wash our arms on Saturday afternoons." This I thought a most troublesome and inconvenient arrangement; but it never occurred to me till later that arms were washed on Saturday afternoons *only*! *Legs* were never washed at all!

Whatever struck me as strange I always discussed with the Novice-mistress, not on my knees, but "face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend." From her I learnt that nobody was allowed to wash until she had put her stays on and had covered her neck with a large handkerchief. Soap was to be used for the face on Saturdays only. Arms were to be washed on Saturdays only. Feet were *never* to be washed with soap, and the water was only to rise to the ankle.

She had been eighteen years in the Convent, and her ablutions had never extended further. Coarse flannel chemises were worn next the skin; they were never taken off at night, and were changed only once in three weeks. Recently-clothed Novices, like myself, were allowed to retain their own under-linen for some weeks, or even longer. Woollen chemises were only given to those who seemed likely to remain.

I was thunder-struck when I fully comprehended the washing arrangements, and the Novice-mistress was equally thunder-struck when she fully realised what *my* notions of ablution involved. Only one Postulant had ever presented herself to that large community whose ideas upon soap and water at all resembled mine. She left just before my arrival; and, by a very curious coincidence, I have made her acquaintance and we are very intimate. She is a very intelligent Frenchwoman; and when she found that she could not have her accustomed cold bath, she gave utterance to her sentiments with great freedom, and left before she was elevated to the rank of Novice. I proceeded more cautiously, and reserved my remarks for the ever-willing ear of my friend the Novice-mistress. I found that this woful neglect of personal cleanliness was mainly due to profound ignorance of the requirements of the body; but as I and the French lady were the only two among the hundreds that, in the course of eighteen years, had come under her notice who had expressed the smallest astonishment at the washing arrangements, she was quite justified in considering us peculiarly fanciful in our notions. I could not persuade her that health was at all contingent upon the condition of the skin.

When we discussed insufficient air, food, sleep, clothing, and exercise, she readily embraced my views, because the low tone of health among the Choir-novices was clearly attributable to those causes; but, unfortunately for my argument, no ill effects met the

eye which could be as clearly traced to insufficient ablution. There were seventy young ladies in the celebrated school attached to the Convent; they were from the best families in the country. I was early appointed "Surveillante" in the largest dormitory, and was there while the children dressed and undressed. They used as much soap as they liked, but they washed no more than we did—their feet were washed less frequently, for while we might wash ours every week they were allowed to wash theirs (and no higher than the ankle) only once a fortnight. Surely had they been accustomed to ample ablutions at home, their parents would never have tolerated such disgraceful neglect at school. I never heard one of the children make any remark upon the subject, and they all were in excellent health—so were the numerous Lay-sisters, and yet not one drop of water ever penetrated below the collar-bone or above the ankle. They were all extremely dirty. With but few exceptions all Monks, Nuns, and the children in Convent schools are equally dirty—unblushingly dirty.

The "religious" of the Order of Saint Dominic are obliged by their rule to be clean in their persons—but they are exceptions. I have known ladies from other Orders who have either been Novices or pupils, and they all agree with me that bodily filth is part and parcel of the system pursued in Convents. My remarks made no impression whatever upon the Novice-mistress; she thought me *eccentric*, and being very much attached to me humoured me a little now and then in regard to my skin. I have seen her expressive eyes fill with tears at the thought of the inadequate sleep, food, &c., which caused so many of her Novices to languish; but to the advantages of soap and water she was hopelessly insensible. The Catholic Church teaches her children to hate, despise, and mortify their flesh; the spiritual books tell them

to be ashamed and afraid of their bodies. Luckily most of them give the Church the go-by, but in the Convent they are conscientious and they act out their convictions. Still I am bound to say that in my opinion ignorance rather than fanaticism is at the bottom of Convent filth.

The discovery of a bundle of babies' bones would indisputably have both startled and shocked me, but my impression is that I should have rallied from its effects far more rapidly than I did from the discovery of the daily, monthly, yearly filth of the "Spouses of Jesus." There was an incongruity about it I never could get over; and how it happens that my views on the matter were so very unprecedented mystifies me still.

It was on a Saturday that I was told I was to leave Holland, for that an English teacher was sadly wanted in one of their Mission-Houses in London, and that in a day or two I should return to my own country with my new Superior. They avoided as much as possible sending Novices from the Mother-House, because, as the vows could not be taken elsewhere, their travelling expenses had to be paid back again for the Profession. However, as nobody else would have been equally available just then, I was selected to go to London with the former Novice-mistress, whose new title was Sister Superior. I told my dear, old friend that we should in all probability never meet again. I had already almost made up my mind to leave the Order, and she knew it. The very many confidential conversations I had had with her during nearly a year and a-half, combined with my own observations, had convinced me that to make the religious vows *perpetual* is both silly and cruel. I am quite sure that many of the Nuns regretted having made their vows, and I am equally sure that no power on earth would induce them to break them. I am certain that nothing is hidden from the Novices;

they are frequently in regular harness for two years before they take their vows, and know perfectly well to what mode of life they are binding themselves; but it is a sad mistake to make the vows *perpetual*. After a few years, when the first fervour has worn off, when the health is seriously impaired, and when there is nothing to look forward to but monotony, some of them begin to doubt whether, after all, they have done wisely. One of the Nuns told me she had never ceased regretting the step she had taken, and she was indisputably miserable.

Courtship precedes matrimony and the Novitiate precedes the vows—both frequently turn out failures—the bride and the Novice may make a mistake—one becomes a wretched Nun, the other a miserable wife, and yet neither is to blame. The Novice, however, has ample time to make up her mind; she is animated by the best motives; she feels happy, but still she is honestly shown both sides of the question; she has less excuse than the bride, who sees but *one* side; but she, the Novice, deliberately puts her head into the noose and very rarely withdraws it. The Visitation of Religious Houses by Protestant authorities would be wholly useless. Nuns can get out of durance without their aid if so disposed—but they very rarely *are* so disposed, however miserable they may be. Nuns *can* be released from the two vows of Poverty and Obedience—one was so released by the Bishop; she was an English woman of five-and-thirty, and she left Holland during my stay there. Protestants constantly forget that the inmates of Convents do not *want* to get out, and that if they *were* out they would still pursue the mode of life which they consider in harmony with the precepts of the Gospel, and with the practice of the Early Church. There are Monks and Nuns in “the world” as well as in the Cloister. I know some—some, moreover, who lead a far more ascetic life than would be

allowed in most Cloisters. All the Nuns I knew entered the Convent in order the more closely to imitate Christ. Had "the world" not been so hostile to his interests, they would have remained in it.

They suffer quite as much as the relatives who deplore them, but they see no alternative. Prove to them that they would be more like Christ *without* his poverty, his chastity, and his obedience, and that absolute self-renunciation is no part of his teaching, then and then only will the Monasteries and the Nunneries be vacated; but as long as the New Testament contains the texts upon which their course of action is founded, so long shall we see the much-despised fruits of their voluntary Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience.

