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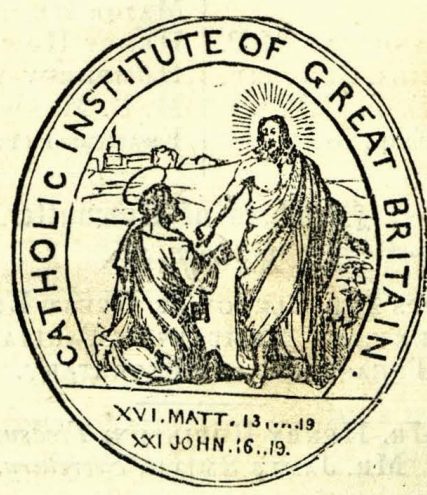
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NUNS

AND

MONASTIC INSTITUTES.

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# N U N S

AND

## MONASTIC INSTITUTES.

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A COMMUNITY of Nuns, is an Association of Catholic Women, who, having no relish for the pleasures of the world, nor feeling themselves inclined to perform the duties of a married state; and actuated by motives of religion, freely, of their own accord, and after the most mature deliberation, and a long trial, engage themselves by solemn vows, to practise the Evangelical Counsels, under the obedience of one common Superior of their own choice, and according to certain rules and constitutions which they have adopted: some devoting themselves to the education of youth; others to the care of the sick in hospitals; and some few to a life of retirement and prayer. If the liberty of conscience of which we boast, as one of the most valuable consequences of our wise constitution, is not to be confined to books, certainly Catholics have a right of *exercising, without molestation, that mode of religion which they think best.* And if, according to the principles of their religion, it is an acceptable thing before God, to tend to perfection by the practice of the evangelical counsels—surely a small number of their daughters have an incontrovertible right to tend to that perfection. And if they imagine that they will correspond better to their holy vocation, by living in retirement with companions of their own sex, than by remaining amidst the busy scenes of the world, why should such a liberty be denied them? Is there any law divine or human compelling women to marry? Is there any obligation of conscience to live in the town

rather than in the country? Is there more virtue in idling away our time in visits, balls, frequenting the theatre, &c. &c. than in living in the company of pious friends, who have the same inclinations, and make their happiness consist in the discharge of the useful occupations and religious duties which they have voluntarily imposed upon themselves? But as this concise, though sufficient defence of our nuns would not satisfy those who know them only from the falsehoods and satires of the day, let us enter into details respecting them.

The nuns who devote themselves to the education of youth, do it from the purest and noblest motives,—from motives of religion. They think themselves answerable to God, for the negligences which might endanger either the health or the morals of the children entrusted to their care. They receive them from the parents as a sacred deposit, which they ought to preserve, not only sound and unblemished, but which it is their strict duty to return one day improved in every virtue, and in every branch of liberal education. The mistresses who preside at the different exercises, are ladies who are themselves adorned with all the accomplishments to which they are to form their pupils, and who discharge their laborious office with that zeal and activity with which we always perform the occupations of our liking and our own choice. They watch over the natural propensities and rising passions of their pupils, with the solicitude of a pious and tender mother; who, by a long experience, has acquired the rare talent of conducting every one of her children according to their particular disposition; and who seeks for no other reward of her troubles and labours, than the temporal and spiritual good of the object of her affection, and the consciousness of having done her duty. Another advantage of education in a convent is, that if a mistress is obliged to interrupt her functions from sickness or any other cause, there is always another ready at hand, and equally qualified, to supply her place. Moreover, the children, seeing in their mistresses, persons their equals and sometimes greatly their superiors in birth, &c. are grateful for the marks of affection and interest which they receive from them; and beholding them always invested with a sacred character, they pay attention to their lessons, open their young hearts to them with freedom and confidence, and listen to their admonitions with docility and a sort of religious respect.

You are sometimes told of a danger of our daughters being seduced by the example of the nuns to embrace a state of perpetual continency, and thus expose us to be deprived of a number of eminent citizens and venerable matrons, who might have been the pride of the country. It is enough to reply, that the number of unmarried women in these realms is almost incredible. It is a fact, attested by the return made to Parliament in the year 1811, that at that epoch the number of females in England, Wales, and Scotland, amounted to 6,262,716, and that only 2,544,215 were married; and, consequently, that there remained unmarried 3,718,501—of all ages, from one year to a hundred years old. Now, if out of that number we take off all children and girls to the age of twenty, and reckon that altogether these form the two-thirds of unmarried women, which is beyond the standard of proportion

established in the bills of mortality, we shall have 1,239,833 unmarried females, from the age of twenty and above. *One million two hundred and thirty-nine thousand women* living in celibacy, either from choice or from necessity; and yet not a word from the pulpit, or in the senate, to stop the progress of a celibacy which might appear to threaten our towns and villages with the danger of being turned into dreary solitudes! Notwithstanding the immense deficiency of men, which must be the necessary consequence of such an extension of celibacy, our armies have never been in want of able commanders—our fleets of gallant admirals—our legislature of profound statesmen—or our courts of justice of upright and wise magistrates; and yet we are told that the whole population of the three kingdoms is in danger of being exhausted; should a few Catholic females (*not one in a hundred thousand of our unmarried women*), from motives of religion, embrace a state of perpetual chastity, and live in retirement!

Let us remark moreover, that in Catholic countries, the esteem or contempt of religious chastity has been always a sure and infallible criterion of the morals of the people. As long as virtue was predominant in a Catholic nation, religious celibacy was highly esteemed, and many were found to embrace it: on the contrary, in proportion as depravity gained ground, religious celibacy fell by degrees into disrepute, and there were few disposed to embrace it; whilst, at the same time, the number of persons unmarried increased, and the sacred obligations of matrimony became every day less and less respected. The cause of this seeming paradox is nevertheless obvious. According to the principles of the Catholic religion, perpetual chastity is looked upon as one of the evangelical counsels, and as a state of perfection. Therefore, as long as the morals of the people are virtuous, and religion is respected, there will be many tending to that state of perfection; and the contrary will happen when morals degenerate and irreligion prevails. To be convinced of the truth of this observation, we have only to read with due attention the history of the reigns of Louis XIII and XIV of France, and compare it with that of their two immediate successors. The licentiousness of manners, and the ignorance and neglect of the duties of religion, occasioned by the civil wars, having been repressed during the happy and energetic government of Henry IV, it is astonishing to see the number of religious houses which were either reformed or founded; and the age of Louis XIV is no less remarkable for the multitude of persons distinguished by their rank, fortune, and talents, who embraced a state of perpetual continency, than for the number of its brave warriors, able statesmen, eloquent orators, great poets, eminent artists, and men of genius in every branch of literature and science. But under the government of the profligate and impious regent, Philip of Orleans, irreligion and immorality having infected almost all ranks of society, religious establishments were visibly decaying, and a vicious and criminal celibacy became fashionable. Religious continency has not been, nor ever can be, the cause of the depopulation of a country.

Again, if we examine the accounts which have been published of late years, concerning the population of the different kingdoms and states of Europe, we shall find, that everything being taken into consideration, viz. climate, fertility of the soil, extent of commerce, and the nature and

form of the government, the Catholic states are as well peopled as the Protestant. The population of Italy, notwithstanding the number of the clergy and the religious, is greater now than it was under the Romans. This is attested by St. Ambrose, who affirmed that it was so in his time, and by a passage from the works of Pliny the naturalist, who declared that if it were not for the kind of prisons, in which the slaves were shut up, a part of Italy would have been a desert. Whilst Sweden was a Catholic country it was more populous than it has been since the Reformation. The Catholic states of Germany contain as many inhabitants as the Protestant, according to the respective extent of territory. The same may be said of the Swiss cantons; nay, that of Soleure (a Catholic canton) is more peopled proportionably than any other. The Catholic Netherlands, before the shutting up of the Scheldt, and the rising of Amsterdam, the rich republics of Italy in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, particularly Venice and Genoa, were not destitute of inhabitants, nor less prosperous than England and Holland. Prussia is not more populous than the three former ecclesiastical electorates; nor Bavaria, Sweden, and Denmark than Lombardy.

Robertson himself says, that at the time of the Reformation, *Germany abounded in inhabitants*. (Hist. of Charles V, vol. iii.) However, in all these countries, religious celibacy was not only tolerated, but even honoured and greatly encouraged, and convents of both sexes were very numerous. No. It is not religious celibacy which can be detrimental to population, nor injurious to the prosperity of the state. It is the celibacy proceeding from luxury, egotism, licentiousness, and excessive love of independency. It is the celibacy of the poor, who from want of assured means of subsistence, to bring up their numerous families, decline contracting legitimate connexions, and abandon themselves to all sorts of profligacy and crimes. In short, it is the forced celibacy, necessarily resulting from our almost uninterrupted destructive wars, which, especially for these twenty-two years past, have swept away the flower of the youth all over Europe, not by hundreds and thousands only, but by hundred thousands and millions.

If chastity be an honourable virtue in itself, does it lose that character only when a young person resolves to preserve her innocence pure and undefiled for ever, in order to have it always in her power to offer to God the homage of a chaste and undivided heart, and to devote herself with more liberty to the service of the sick and of the poor, or to the education of youth?

Marriage is a holy state instituted by God; and in the order of providence and of nature, the general and ordinary state of those who live in the world. Those, therefore, who from motives of religion, and in a Christian and holy manner engage in this state, do well and are to be praised. And the Catholic Church is so far from prohibiting and dishonouring it, as some misinformed Protestant writers affirm, that she ranks matrimony among the sacraments of the new law, requiring the same dispositions of the parties who enter into it, as in those who approach the Lord's table. She judges so awfully and mysteriously of this solemn contract, as absolutely to prohibit persons who have engaged in it from ever

violating it, on any pretext whatever, during the lifetime of their partners ; thus strictly conforming her doctrine to the injunction of our Saviour : "What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder." Matt. (xix. 6.) Nevertheless, those who for the sake of practising a more perfect degree of virtue, and by a divine call, prefer a state of perpetual virginity, embrace that which is more perfect and excellent. Dr. Wells, a learned Protestant, (Paraph. on St. Matt.) confesses that Jesus Christ declares voluntary chastity, *for the kingdom of heaven's sake, to be an excellency, and an excellent state of life.* We do not see among the Jews instances of women making a vow of perpetual virginity ; but the continency of widows after the death of their husbands is mentioned with praise. Judith is honoured for having lived in retirement, fasting and mortification, during her widowhood. The high-priest and the ancients of the people call her "a holy woman, and one fearing God," (viii. 29.) "Thou hast done manfully and thy heart has been strengthened because thou hast loved chastity, and after thy husband thou hast not known any other : therefore, also, the hand of the Lord has strengthened thee, and therefore thou shalt be blessed for ever," (xv. 11.)

It is true that we read in the book of Genesis, these words addressed to our first parents by Almighty God, *Increase and multiply* ; yet they do not imply a strict command, at least to be literally obeyed at all times, through all the succession of ages, and to the end of the world ; but it is a blessing upon the progenitors of mankind, and a promise that their posterity should increase and multiply, and fill up the whole earth. An evident proof of the truth of this observation is, that the sister of Moses always remained a virgin, and certainly this great lawgiver and friend of God would not have suffered it with impunity, if she had been guilty of infringing one of the commandments of the Almighty. Some Protestant commentators have pretended that virginity was a disgrace among the Jews. Several examples show that it was not so. Elias, Elizeus, and Jeremiah, never were married. Among the Essenians, a sect much respected for their strict obedience to the Mosaic law, several men and women lived in perpetual continency ; therefore these interpreters have confounded virginity with sterility. Sterility was looked upon as a disgrace, and as a sort of malediction from God ; because in the promise of the law, (Deut. vii. 14) it was said that neither man, nor woman, nor the beasts of the fields, should be sterile.

But virginity is properly the fruit of the gospel. It is not a precept, it is only a council ; it is, perhaps, that which shone with the greatest splendour in the Church, and produced the most eminent virtues. In his admirable sermon upon the Mount, our Saviour says, "Blessed are the clean of heart, because they shall see God." And his disciples having said to him, when he was teaching them the indissolubility of matrimony, "If the case of a man with his wife be so, it is not good to marry ;" he answered them, "All men do not receive this word, but they to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who were born so from their mother's womb, and there are eunuchs who were made so by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake ; he that can receive it let him receive it." It is also the manifest

doctrine of St. Paul:—"Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ." (1 Cor. xi. 1.) "I say to the unmarried and to the widows; it is good for them if they continue as I. He that giveth his virgin in marriage doeth well, and he that giveth her not doeth better." (1 Cor. vii. 38.) The blessed mother of our Lord always remained a virgin. St. John the Baptist, whom our Saviour declared to be the greatest of those who were born of a woman, was a virgin, St. Joseph was a virgin, St. John the Evangelist was a virgin; and, according to the opinion of the primitive fathers, the predilection of Jesus Christ for him, proceeded from his love of chastity, and because he was a virgin when he became one of his disciples, and remained always a virgin till his death. This great apostle, in his *Apocalypse*, says that spotless virgins are the companions of the Lamb, and enjoy the singular privilege of following him wherever he goes. The tradition of the Catholic Church on this point is unanimous. Among the Romans, Greeks, and barbarians, who had embraced Christianity, many holy virgins preferred torments and death in its most frightful form, to the violation of their integrity, which they had bound themselves by vow to preserve without defilement in mind and body; and since the destruction of the Roman Empire in the west, and the invasion of its provinces by the barbarians of the north, virginity has continued to be held in the greatest esteem and veneration. And wherever Christianity has penetrated, in Germany, Poland, Sweden, Denmark, Hungary, Bohemia, Russia, England, Scotland, and Ireland, in the old as well as in the new continent, under the burning sun of Asia and Africa, as in the cold regions of the north, and in the mild climates of France and Italy, virginity has been honoured and practised by thousands during many centuries. Even among the sects separated from the Catholic Church for these 1400 years, Nestorians, Jacobites, &c. &c. virginity has been and is still considered as a state of perfection, and religiously kept by both sexes.

We read in the *Acts of the Apostles*, (xxi.) that Philip the Deacon had four virgin-daughters. "Among us," says St. Justin (*Apol. i. No. 16*) "there is a great number of people of both sexes, sixty and seventy years old, who being from their infancy instructed in the doctrine of Jesus Christ, persevere in chastity; and I engage myself to show several of this description in every condition of life." Moreover, this father assures us, that the faithful were prompted to live in a state of continency, from these words of our Saviour already mentioned: "There are eunuchs, &c. who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake." "If we marry," says he, "it is only to have children; and if we avoid matrimony, we keep a perpetual continency." Now such Christians who, in the days of St. Justin, were sixty and seventy years old, and had been brought up from their infancy in the doctrine of Christianity, must have been taught by the apostles themselves, or their immediate successors. Athanasius, who wrote in the same century, expresses himself in like manner: (*Leg. Pro. Christ.*): "A great number of men and women there are among us who live in celibacy, from a hope of being more intimately united to God. Our custom is to remain such as we were born, or to marry but once." And Hermes, the friend of St. Paul, says, in his little treatise, *The Shepherd* (No. 4); "He who marries again, commits no

sin: but if he does not, he acquires great honour with the Lord. Live in chastity and decency, and you will live for God." St. Epiphanius and St. Ambrose affirm besides, that St. Clement, one of the immediate successors of St. Peter, highly commended virginity at the end of his second epistle. Tertullian cries out, "How many voluntary eunuchs! How many virgins of both sexes!" St. Ambrose mentions virgins consecrated to God, by receiving a veil from the hands of the bishop at mass. Some vowed their virginity without receiving the consecrated veil, but wore black or grey modest garments, as a mark of their state. St. Chrysostom speaks nearly in the same manner. The strictest nuns were those called in Syria *daughters of the covenant*; which name included the deaconesses and other canonical maidens, who not only made vows of virginity, but also in many places were appointed to sing hymns and canticles in the church, as we read in the Syriac life of St. Ephrem. All those classes of holy virgins lived in private houses, before monasteries were founded; but never in the same houses with men, as St. Cyprian testifies. In these first ages of Christianity, some of the virgins consecrated to God, lived with their parents, or two or three together by themselves. They never went out, but to church, where they had a place separated, by boards, from that of the rest of the women. There can be no doubt that they had consecrated themselves to God, by vows of chastity: for St. Cyprian says, that if one of them should fall, she would be *incestuous* and an *adulteress*, not to a husband, but to Christ. Tertullian calls them *sacrilegious* who throw aside a habit consecrated to God. And St. Austin positively affirms, that those who withdraw from the monastery, act contrary to their vow, and contract guilt by not fulfilling it. They employed in manual labour all the time which they did not dedicate to prayer, singing hymns, and spiritual canticles. They also practised fasting and other mortifications. St. Ambrose mentions a society of twenty virgins living together at Bologna: he says that they worked not only to gain a subsistence, but that they might also have wherewithal to bestow in charity. He describes, as follows, the ceremonies of the solemn profession of a virgin. She presented herself, says he, at the foot of the altar, where she made her profession before the people; the bishop preached to her, gave her the veil which distinguished her from the other virgins; invited, by a prayer, Jesus Christ to come on the day of these spiritual nuptials, to receive his handmaid, who consecrated herself to him by a public profession, after having long before dedicated herself to him in spirit and in heart.

In the first three centuries of the Church, the Christians enjoyed but short intervals of peace, and were frequently under the necessity of hiding themselves in caves and subterraneous places, called catacombs, to celebrate, with some degree of safety, their holy mysteries. But when peace was restored to the Church, in the beginning of the fourth century, convents of women were founded all over the extent of the Roman empire, where the Christian faith was established. St. Athanasius relates, in the life of St. Anthony, that this holy man placed his sister in a house of virgins; and that a long time after, he paid her a visit, when she was very old, and superior or mistress of many virgins. St. Pachomius seeing his sister desirous to embrace a religious state, built for her a nunnery on the

other side of the Nile, which was soon filled with holy virgins. There were also pious women, who either lived with their relations or in communities, observed continency, and followed some particular rules and religious customs, without taking any irrevocable engagement, and who, consequently, could return to the world whenever they pleased; as we have seen in our days the daughters of St. Vincent of Paula, and many other societies and congregations of pious women, in France, Flanders, Italy, and other Catholic countries.

After such authorities as these, who shall assert that perpetual chastity is an impracticable virtue; and that it is absurd and immoral to attempt it?

The poverty of which nuns make profession does not consist in actual want of the necessaries of life, but in a voluntary privation of its superfluities. They give up their right of disposing of what they bring with them on their entering the convent; but it is to be deposited in the hands of their superior, to be joined to the common stock, and employed for the general use and advantage of the community, there being no distinction of the members who compose it, whether they were rich or poor at the time of their admission: so that the nun who had a large fortune, has not a greater allowance, enjoys no greater comforts, than her companion who had no portion at all; everything is distributed according to the actual wants of the religious, and not according to their former situation in the world. In short, their poverty is an exact imitation of that poverty, or rather community of goods, practised by the first Christians, at Jerusalem; who, though very numerous, as it is related in the *Acts of the Apostles*, "Had but one heart and one soul; neither did any one say that aught of the things which he possessed was his own, but all things were common to all; neither was any one among them that wanted; for as many as were owners of lands or houses, sold them and brought the price of the things which they sold, and laid it down before the feet of the apostles, and distribution was made to every man according as he had need."— (iv. 32, 34, 35.)

These institutes never were a burden to the state which protected them. Possessing but little, they were always content with little. Rich by their sobriety and abstemiousness, joined to their labour, which Divine Providence constantly blessed, they astonished the world by their abundant charities; Almighty God renewing, as it were, the miracle of the multiplied loaves, in order to satisfy their tender solicitude, and eagerness to relieve the poor, the widows and the orphans. The writer of these reflections was an eye-witness of it. He lived for several years in the country, near the habitation of a community of these exiled nuns. They were far from being rich, as was obvious from the state of the house which they occupied, and its scanty furniture. Nevertheless, with their little income and the produce of their garden and four or five cows, they found the means never to refuse any of the numberless poor who came to the convent to beg some assistance. They received them all with unwearied patience, heard with sympathy their long tales of woe, shed tears of compassion on their distress and misery, addressed them with soothing and consolatory words, which revived their drooping spirits, and with a simplicity which greatly enhanced their merit, and shared cheerfully with

them the homely fare of the community. Thus exemplifying, in the whole tenor of their conduct, this advice of the wise man: "Bow down cheerfully thy ear to the poor, and pay what thou owest, and answer him peaceable words with mildness."

Our hospitals and asylums are supported with a liberality and munificence, perhaps not equalled in any country. The buildings are spacious and airy; the accommodations for the sick wisely ordained, the food wholesome and abundant; the remedies of the best quality; the physicians and surgeons of eminent skill; the directors men of merit, and servants of an unimpeachable character. But tender solicitude, ingenious inventions to give ease and relief to the sick, visible sympathy with their sufferings, unremitting attention to watch over all the accidental changes of their disease, to save them unnecessary pain, and procure them the least momentary comfort, religious zeal to alleviate by all possible means the agonies of death, and by seasonable and affectionate exhortations prepare their souls to appear before the Sovereign Judge: all these little helps, both spiritual and corporal, which religion alone can suggest to the feelings and compassionate heart of a pious woman, and in which religion alone can give her courage to persevere with unwearied patience and alacrity: all this is wanting in our charitable establishments, and the largest subscriptions, the conveniences of the buildings, and the highest salaries given to servants will never be able to supply the deficiency. A Protestant author, speaking of hospitals in Catholic countries, says, "Whatever objection might be made to the Catholic religion, certain it is, that on this head, it has at all times had a great and beneficial influence. The arguments of philanthropists would perhaps have never effected that which religious sentiments have done for suffering humanity."—*Bath Chronicle, December 13th, 1808.*

Let us consider the motives and inducements which have led such numbers into the monastic state. What must be their delights who from a pious inclination embrace it! No sooner has a young woman, with such a determination, stepped out of the world, than it seems to her that she breathes in a purer atmosphere; delivered from the yoke under which she groaned, she no longer walks, but runs in the way of the commandments of God: her heart burns with devotion, swells with hope, and triumphs in the consciousness of being for ever united to Him, who has chosen her among a thousand, and whom she loves above all things. Under an habitual sense of the divine presence, she keeps up a perpetual cheerfulness of temper, and enjoys at every moment the satisfaction of thinking herself in company with her dearest and best of friends. The time never lies heavy upon her; it is impossible for her to be alone; her thoughts are the most busied and delightfully occupied at such hours, when those of other people are the most inactive. Solitude is the hallowed ground which religion has chosen in every age for her own: there falls the tear of contrition,—there rises towards heaven the sigh of the penitent and grateful heart,—there melts the soul with all the tenderness of piety, and pours itself forth with all its fears, its desires, its apprehensions, and its hopes, before the great supporter of its existence, and the amiable Saviour who has loved it the first, redeemed it, and destined for it an endless

felicity, in the full possession of himself. "Hope," says the author of the *Spectator*, "Hope in the recluse makes his austerities comfortable, while the luxurious man gains nothing but uneasiness from his enjoyments. He who resigns the world has no temptation to envy, hatred, malice, anger, but is in constant possession of a serene mind: he who follows the pleasures of it, which are in their very nature disappointing, is in constant search of care, solicitude, remorse, and confusion."—*Spectator*, vol. iv. p. 128. However, it was not by laying before the eyes of the pious novice the rich fruits of the land of promise, and representing to her its hills and dales flowing with milk and honey, that she was persuaded to enter it without fear. Of all the mortifications, austerities, and self-denials of a conventual life, she was informed without reserve, and she was obliged to practise them all, in order to assure herself and the community, that her desire to be a nun did not proceed from a momentary fit of devotion, but was the result of a solid and tried vocation. In some communities a trial of two years, of eighteen months in others, and in no one of less than one whole year, is required of the persons who present themselves to enter into a religious life; and the rule is so strict in that regard, that a few hours wanting to complete the year of the noviciate are sufficient to render the vows null and invalid. During this trial of a whole year, there is certainly full time for the overflowing of fervour and devotion to abate,—for the first impression of grief to be worn off,—for the heated imagination to cool, and reason to speak the sober language of prudence and discretion. During a whole year, the duties which at a distance might not have been duly considered,—the yoke which might have appeared sweet, and the burden light, are then appreciated and felt, such as they are in reality, and not merely by speculative reflections, but by daily practice. The inclinations and secret propensities of the postulant are rigorously scrutinized, both by her superiors and by her own companions, and her dispositions continually put to the test. All the mortifications, self-denials, austerities, corporal or spiritual, which are either of obligation or counsel, she must practise during a whole year, in order to know whether her health and courage are equal to them; her rule and constitutions are repeatedly read to her; she receives from her ecclesiastical and local superiors the most impressive admonitions of the indispensable necessity of sounding her heart in the silence of the passions, and of considering at the foot of the altar the high importance and irrevocability of her intended sacrifice. Before the six months of her noviciate are elapsed, the postulant is obliged herself to ask the community as a favour, to be admitted to the habit, and before it can be granted her, the superior is bound by the rule, to assemble and consult the chief members of the community. Every one is at full liberty to speak her mind for or against the postulant; nay it is an obligation of conscience in them to do it with impartiality and the most disinterested motives; however, for fear of their opinion being influenced by that of their superior, they give it by secret votes. If the novice be admitted, the whole community is assembled, the petition is laid before them, suitable prayers are addressed to the Holy Ghost, to implore his light and assistance in the decision which is to take place, and her admission or dismissal is decided by the majority

of the *secret* votes of all the nuns who compose the convent. Towards the end of the year the same measures and precautions are resorted to, before her profession. Therefore, is it not evident that her admission has absolutely depended on her perseverance in asking it as a singular favour; and on the judgment of the majority of the nuns that she was deserving and well qualified to become a member of their society? However, this is not all. Before the final engagement is contracted, the bishop of the diocese comes himself, or sends a venerable priest to represent him. The novice is taken out of the enclosure, and introduced to the bishop in the out parlour, to be examined by him *privately*, on the motives of her vocation; and after being admonished to speak freely her mind, and declare her real sentiments, as in the presence of the Almighty, the questions and answers are put down in writing by the bishop's secretary, and signed by both, and by the novice herself.

After an examination performed with such solemnity, and so positive a declaration from the novice, if she perseveres in her resolution to be professed,—even supposing that her first step might have been rather unreflected,—have we not reason to be persuaded, that the last is the result of a free choice and mature deliberation? On the contrary, if, notwithstanding all these precautions, to know, whether any undue influence and human considerations have not been used to determine her resolution, she engages herself against her will and inclination, is it not true that she has been the chief contriver of her own ruin? If she puts on fetters which it will never be in her power to break off, has she not been the first to forge and rivet them? If she be an involuntary victim led to the altar in order to be sacrificed to the avarice or ambition of her unnatural parents, has she not been herself the sacrificing priest? For it is morally impossible that a bishop, and a whole community, violating coolly and with one accord, the most sacred duties of nature and religion, would enter into a foul conspiracy to force the inclinations of an innocent young person, and devote her to be miserable for the remainder of her life, and perhaps throughout all eternity.

It is sometimes said that a young person inclined to embrace a religious state, would do much better to remain in the world, than to hide in a convent virtuous qualities, with which she was adorned by divine Providence in order to edify her neighbour by her good example. It shows but a superficial knowledge of the nature of man, to pretend that every individual of our species is equally fit to fulfil the different duties of society, and that in order to appreciate with justice what sort of good a man could have done, we must not only consider what others may have done in the same circumstances, but of what he is capable himself; therefore, in order to judge without fear of mistake, whether a young lady would have done better to live in the world than in a community, the first thing to examine is, whether she was fit for the world, and could be happy in the world; for general experience teaches, that in order to render ourselves useful members of the commonwealth, we must be placed in a situation conformable to our inclinations, and adapted to our natural or acquired talents. Some are destined to shine in a high station; others to walk unknown in the obscure paths of an humble life. Some are called to

dedicate their whole time and labours to the service and edification of their neighbour; others to hide themselves in retirement, only occupied with the government of their souls, the regulation of their passions, and practices of piety,—every one according to the particular gift which he has received from the supreme Giver of all good gifts. If it be reckoned as selfishness in a young person to leave the world, because she does not find her happiness in it, and because, knowing her own weakness, she is persuaded that her virtue would be exposed to dangers which it would be very hard for her to resist, it must be owned, that it is a selfishness grounded upon the precept of our Divine Saviour himself, when he says, “What is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, and cast away himself?” (Luke ix. 25.)

At least, they say, it cannot be denied, that a nun shut up in her convent, becomes thereby quite useless to society. To this objection I shall answer, that it cannot be brought against those religious who dedicate themselves to the education of youth, and to the attendance of the sick; and they are by far the greater number. As for those who, judging themselves unqualified for these active and exterior duties of Christian charity, prefer a life of solitude and prayer, supposing that they are of no utility, or to speak more properly, of the same visible utility to the public, (since it must be confessed that this kind of life which they like is not in the least injurious to mankind) why should they be denied the comforts of it? Have they not, as their other fellow-citizens, the liberty, as it has been already proved, of disposing of themselves, and of choosing the situation the best suited to their mental and bodily abilities, and consequently the best calculated to make them happy?

Moreover, is a life of retirement, penance, and prayer, to be branded with idleness and inutility to mankind? What shall we say then of Moses, who instead of putting himself at the head of his people, who were fighting against their enemies, went up to the top of a mountain to pray for the success of their arms? What shall we say of St. John the Baptist, who led for so many years such an austere life, hidden in a desert near the river Jordan? What shall we say of the apostles, who resigned to the deacons the care of the poor, the widows, and the orphans, in order to have more time to pray? What shall we say of that holy widow, Anna the prophetess, who, after having lived only seven years with her husband, and had attained the advanced age of “Four-score and four years, departed not from the temple; by fastings and prayers, serving day and night.” (Luke, ii. 36, 37.) Shall we have the temerity to accuse these holy souls of having idled away their time? Shall we dare suspect their fervent prayers to have been unacceptable to God, and of no profit to themselves or others? What shall we say of Jesus Christ himself, who remained hidden and unknown, working in a poor carpenter’s shop till he was thirty years of age, although at twelve he confounded the doctors of the law by the wisdom of his questions and answers, and although as St. Paul declares, “In him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily”? (Col. xi. 9.) What shall we say of his precept, “We ought always to pray and not to faint;” (Luke xviii. 1) and of his long and frequent prayers during the time of his ministry? Shall we have the sacrilegious audacity

to pretend that we understand better than he, what is pleasing to the Almighty, and useful to man? Oh! no, all that we shall say is, "That wisdom of this world is foolishness with God."

Not so thought the primitive Christians. They considered religion as the main point, and made all temporal concerns give place to it; and this is what the monks and nuns do, who have separated themselves from the world, in order to attend with liberty to the *one thing necessary*; and from hence have been called *religious*, as at first all good Christians were. The primitive Christians prayed often, both in common together, and in private by themselves, coming as near as they could to continual prayer. We read in the letters of St. Ignatius, in the works of Tertullian, of St. Clement of Alexandria, St. Cyprian, Origen, in the apostolical constitutions, St. Ambrose, St. Chrysostom, St. Cyril of Jerusalem, St. Augustin, &c. &c. that the first Christians met to pray in common, as often as possible, being persuaded that the greater number of faithful who are joined together in begging the same favours from God, the more efficacious are their prayers towards obtaining the object of their humble and fervent petitions; according to the declaration of our Saviour: "If two of you shall agree upon earth, concerning anything whatsoever they shall ask, it shall be done for them by my Father who is in heaven; for where there are two or three gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them." St. Ignatius recommended to St. Polycarp, (both disciples of St. John the Evangelist) frequently to assemble the faithful, and exhorts him to see that all be present. The public prayers at which they most frequently assisted were those of the morning and evening, or what is called *lauds* and *vespers*. They were exhorted thus to consecrate the beginning and close of the day, and not to excuse themselves therefrom, on account of their temporal concerns, which are to be considered as only secondary to those which are spiritual. Such as could not be present, as the sick, the imprisoned, or people on a journey, met in private as many as possibly could; and though they were alone, they failed not to pray at their appointed hours. Besides *lauds* and *vespers*, they prayed also at *tierce*, *sext*, and *none*, and in the night. St. Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and St. Cyprian, expressly mention all these prayers. Origen requires that every one should pray at least three times a day: in the morning, at noon, in the evening; and in the night. Generally during the day, which was divided into twelve hours, according to the Roman manner, they prayed every three hours. They even rose to pray at midnight. St. Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Origen, mention this midnight prayer. St. Cyprian recommends it. And this custom of getting up in the night is much praised by all the fathers, as of great use to mortify the body, and to raise the mind to God, at a time the most quiet and free from disturbance. The faithful were exhorted besides to employ the intervals of sleep in meditating on the Psalms, and the Lord's Prayer, &c. In a word, to renew more frequently their attention to the presence of God, they recited some particular prayers before everything they did, according to the precept of St. Paul: "Whatsoever you do in word and work, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ: giving thanks to God and the Father through him." Thus all their husbandry

labours, such as ploughing, sowing their corn, making the harvest, and gathering the fruits of the earth, began and ended with prayer. They prayed when they began to build a house, or to dwell in it; to make a new piece of cloth, and when they put on their clothes; and even in the most ordinary occurrences. We see instances of these prayers in the benedictions still retained in the rituals. The salutation at the beginning of a letter, and on other occasions, was not only an expression of friendship but also a prayer. In performing the least action, they made use of the sign of the cross, as a still shorter formulary of a benediction; they marked it upon their foreheads, and used it almost on all occasions, that is to say, whenever they came in or went out; when they walked, when they sat down, and when they rose up; when they went to bed, and when they dressed themselves, or put on their shoes; when they ate or drank, &c. &c. Now this holy practice of continual prayer, this singing of the psalms, these pious observances and customs, these short prayers before and after meals, walks, work, &c. and frequent signs of the cross, we find ordained in the constitutions and rules of monasteries of monks and nuns, and nearly in the same manner as we have seen the first Christians practising them. St. Anthony, St. Pachomius, St. Benedict, and the other founders of religious orders who followed their example, did not aim at introducing any novelty, or to go beyond the virtue of their fathers. They wished only to preserve the tradition of the strict practice of the gospel, which they found to grow slacker every day. They always proposed to themselves as models those ascetics who had preceded them: such in Egypt (according to what Cassian says) were the disciples of St. Mark the Evangelist, who lived in the neighbourhood of Alexandria, shut up in houses, praying, meditating on the Holy Scriptures, using manual labour, and not taking their food until night. Some, it is true, who tended to the most sublime perfection,—or converted sinners, who wished to purify themselves by repentance, practised all the exercises of penance, in imitation of the prophets and St. John the Baptist; adding to the ordinary frugal and spare diet of the Christians, extraordinary abstinences and fasts, and inuring themselves to the duties of piety, by chastising the body, as St. Paul says of himself, and reducing it to subjection. But the generality of religious of both sexes proposed only to themselves the example of the primitive Church of Jerusalem, and that of the apostles. They sought not to gain admiration by any extraordinary way of life, but to live like true Christians. This is seen in the greater rules of St. Basil, which are no more than an abridgment of the morality of the gospel, which he proposes in general to all. There are only a few things in this rule which regard in particular persons separated from the world. What was peculiar in religious was their renouncing marriage, the possession of temporal goods, and the company of the faithful, even of their relations. In every other respect they were an assembly of good Christians, living by their own labour, observing silence, exercising themselves in combating their vices one after another, to the end that having fought a good fight, as St. Paul says, they might attain that purity of heart which would render them worthy to see God. All their practices were, and still are, grounded upon these principles. Such have been the motives which have

at all times actuated the founders and foundresses of monastic orders, and the good religious who embraced their holy institutes.

As to the food of religious, it is necessary to observe that it was a common thing, not only among the Christians, but even amongst the most rational of the heathens, to live on pulse and fish, and to have reading during their meals. The principle recommended to them was, *not to live for the sake of eating, but to eat for the sake of living*. It is also the principle laid down by St. Clement of Alexandria; who says that a Christian ought to eat no more than is necessary for the support of his health, and for keeping up the degree of strength requisite for his labour. He says, that he ought to renounce all exquisite dishes; the setting out of great entertainments, and whatever requires the art of cookery. The religious, as well as the most perfect Christians, took in a literal sense, and as a general rule, the saying of St. Paul; "It is good not to eat flesh, and not to drink wine. Refraining from wine was chiefly recommended to women and young people; and such as drank it at all, always mixed a great quantity of water with it. If they ate any animal food, they preferred fish or fowl, to the grosser flesh of four-footed beasts, which they esteemed too succulent and nourishing. But they constantly abstained from blood, and strangled meats, according to the decision of the council of the apostles, and which was observed for several ages. Many, therefore, lived only on white meats, fruit and pulse; nay, some there were who thought certain kinds of pulse, such as peas, beans, and lentils, too nourishing for those who wished entirely to subdue their flesh. Hence they reduced the vegetables they made use of, to plain herbs, with bread and water, observing literally this other passage of St. Paul, "He that is weak, let him eat herbs." It is true, this abstemious way of life was not then so extraordinary, as it would appear now; though the luxury of the table had reached to an excessive height, (as may be seen in the Greek and Latin authors of that time, particularly in Atheneus), it was not arrived to that pitch or extravagance it is at present with us. The Egyptians and several other nations still observed their superstitious practices. The abstinence of the Pythagoreans was held in great esteem, as it appears from the instance of Apollonius of Thyana, and from the writings of Porphyry, who lived in the second and third centuries. Horace, as great an epicurean as he was, reckons vegetables and herbs his ordinary food, and promises his friend, whom he invites to supper, nothing more. The Emperor Augustus himself most commonly lived upon brown bread, cheese, figs, dates, raisins, and small fishes. A thousand other similar instances are to be found in ancient history. It was usual to make only one full meal a day, and that in the evening, when they had despatched all their business, and everybody was got home; this was their supper. What they called *prandium*, dinner, was rather a breakfast than a dinner in our language; since it was only a slight refreshment to support them during the day, and several did not even take that. It was reckoned among the excesses of Vitellius, (one of the greatest gluttons of antiquity) that he often took four meals a day, and never less than three. The primitive Christians lived at least like the wisest and best among the heathens, and consequently used a plain diet, and preferred that food which required no dressing at the

fire, to that which did. They made at most only two meals a day; the repast, however simple and plain, was preceded and followed by long prayers, of which we have still a formulary in the prayers of the Catholic Church before and after meals. It was also an usual practice in those times to have reading during meals. Pliny never failed to have it; and Juvenal, inviting one of his friends to sup with him, promises to have Homer and Virgil read. The Christians accordingly had the holy Scriptures read, and grave tunes and spiritual canticles sung, instead of the profane songs and buffooneries, with which the heathens accompanied their entertainments. The first Christians behaved with the same modesty and sobriety in every action of life. They valued only interior greatness and nobility; they esteemed only spiritual riches. They condemned whatever luxury had introduced amidst the prodigious riches of the Roman Empire; such as clothes of too bright a colour, expensive buildings and costly furniture. To give a specimen of their aversion to superfluities, I will here transcribe a description of the furniture which the persecutors found in the room in which St. Domna lived, who was a very rich virgin of Nicomedia, as it is related by contemporary writers: viz. a cross, the *Acts of the Apostles*, two mats on the floor, an earthen lamp, and a small wooden box, in which she kept the blessed Sacrament to communicate herself.

If the primitive Christians took any diversion, it was merely a diversion; that is to say, a relaxation of the mind, a rest from labour, to satisfy the weakness of nature, which would sink, if the body always laboured, and if the mind were perpetually fixed on the same object. But they thought that to seek pleasure merely for pleasure's sake, and for no other end, was certainly acting contrary to the obligation of renouncing ourselves, which is the soul of all Christian virtues. Bodily labour, or moderate exercise, is a relaxation to the mind; mere rest, wholesome food, and comfortable sleep, are sufficient to recruit the body. Sedentary games are never necessary; this we see by the example of the poor and the common people, who continually labour. Let us now observe how many women there are who gain their livelihood by working at their needle; their time is wholly employed in this occupation; they seldom stir out during the week, except on Sundays; these persons however look more cheerful, and enjoy better health than our fine ladies, who seem to be in continual motion, and who are incessantly changing places,—from a visit to the theatre to a ball, from the town to the country, from the country to the sea-coast, &c. &c. It is the rich, and such as have no employment, who seek after diversions to kill time, and diminish the irksomeness of their idle lives. The primitive Christians therefore avoided all public shows; those of the theatre, the amphitheatre, and the circus, because these diversions fomented the passions. Moreover they blamed the great expense and idleness encouraged by them; the meeting of both sexes who were there assembled promiscuously together, and disposed to gaze on one another with too much freedom and curiosity. In short, they would admit of nothing unbecoming in their manner of life; nothing vulgar, or unworthy of persons of character; nothing of that silly, useless talk, and that reciprocal commerce of detraction and vanity so common among worldly women;

but condemned by St. Paul, when he says that our discourse ought always to be seasoned with the salt of grace. It was with a view to retrench these disorders that silence was so much recommended.

But however severe this mode of life may appear to us, we must not imagine that it was dismal and melancholy. St. Paul did not require an impossibility, when he exhorts the Christians always to rejoice. If they deprived themselves of those lively and irritating pleasures, which are the general pursuit of mankind, they were at least exempt from the vexations, disappointments, and passions which torment others; since they lived free from all anxiety, disengaged from worldly care, averse to all sordid gain, and to whatever could in the least degree be suspected of injustice; and moreover not subject to the restless desire of amassing riches, and to the ambition of raising themselves above others by power and dignities. As they had neither relish for nor attachment to the vain and transitory pleasures of the world, so they were little affected by the loss or privation of them, and even bore with a constant equanimity of soul and modest courage the calamities inseparable from this life. They enjoyed peace of conscience, and the satisfaction arising from good actions; and, above all, they were constantly supported and animated by the hope of another life, which they looked upon as near at hand, and in which they would be superabundantly recompensed for the short trials they had undergone. "What greater pleasure," says Tertullian, "than to contemn the world, to enjoy true liberty and purity of conscience; to be content with little, and not to fear death? These are the pleasures; these are the shows of the Christians."

St. Benedict, therefore, ordered nothing that was unusual; nor St. Scholastica, by adapting his rule to persons of her sex, anything that appeared strange or impracticable, concerning fasting, abstinence, manual labour, silence, reading, prayers before and after meals, distribution of time, recreation, &c. &c. The religious were only distinguished from other Christians by a few things, peculiar to persons living quite sequestered from the world. With regard to the diet, St. Benedict, and the other founders of religious orders, have used, on the contrary, great discretion, by adapting their rule to the climate, the country, and to the different constitutions of those for whom it was intended; some exacting a greater austerity, others allowing greater indulgence. We see that St. Benedict permitted his religious two sorts of dressed meat, with a little wine. The hours of meals and sleep which the religious observe, are the same that everybody observed till within the last two centuries. They dined at nine or ten o'clock in the morning, or even sooner, as the labouring people did a few years ago, and they supped at six in the evening. The regulations of the police, with regard to the *curfew* and the time which the people were allowed to work, show that they reckoned the night from eight o'clock in the evening till four in the morning, which is the best rule for taking the exact middle of the night, and to lose as little as possible of the day.

It is a great error to imagine that a nun in her convent leads an inactive life, and that she is always either upon her knees in the chapel, or absorbed in deep contemplation in her cell. This is certainly not the

case; and nuns have been heard to say, that they had more time to pray when they lived in the world than since they had quitted it. The reason is, that in a convent no one is allowed to follow her private devotion and propensity: a nun does not live for herself alone, but for the mutual advantage and comfort of her sisters. Among the members of the same community there is a continual interchange of duties and services, with which every one is obliged to comply: the rule must be equally obeyed by all, whether it calls them to recreate themselves, or commands them to retire to their cells, or to their work. All the hours of the day are distributed with such prudence, that they are never permitted to be taken up too long with the same occupation, which might fatigue the head, or weaken the body: there is a time appointed for reciting the divine office, for mental prayer, reading, manual labour, either in common or in private; for walking or recreation; in short, for everything, according to the different office in the community which each nun has to discharge; so that the religious have not a moment left to uncertainty or idleness; and under the appearance of a dull and tiresome uniformity, there is a constant and pleasing variety, the nuns passing continually from one occupation to another; and thus, though they rise early in the morning, they complain that the day is too short, that the night calls them too soon to take their rest; and they enjoy on their straw bed, or hard mattrass, a sweeter and more refreshing sleep than others do on beds of down. By these wise regulations every excess in prayer, work, &c. &c. is avoided; sufficient time for bodily exercise and for repose is not only granted, but even strictly enjoined; the health is preserved; and with health, evenness of temper, liberty of mind, serenity of conscience, and a constant cheerfulness.

We now come to the question of the vows taken by the inmates of our convents. Their authority is not contemptible. We read in holy writ that Jacob made a vow to offer unto God the tithe of all the things which were to be given to him, and that God was pleased with the offering. (Gen. xxviii. 22; xxxi. 13.) In the books of Numbers (vi.) and Leviticus (xxvii.) there are several laws concerning the different vows which might be made, and the manner of accomplishing them. David, that great prophet, according to God's own heart, made a vow to build a temple to the Lord; and the Lord promised him that his son should accomplish it. (1 Kings vii. 13.) The chiefs among the Israelites bound themselves by a vow, to contribute to the expenses of the building, and they accomplished their *vow*. (1 Chron. xxix. 6.) Samuel, Sampson, and John the Baptist, were consecrated to God by vow; and the obligation of keeping the vows made to God is clearly established, Deut. xxiii. 21, Job xxii. 27, Psalms lxx. 13, Eccles. v. 3, &c. &c. Many even of our Protestant commentators, in their notes on Leviticus and Numbers, acknowledge the sanctity of the vows mentioned in these two books, and the obligation of keeping them. Now, as the God of the Old Testament is no other than the God of the New, and since he vouchsafed to accept the vows of men under the law of nature, and under the Mosaic dispensation, have not Catholics a solid reason to believe that he will equally be pleased with them under the law of grace?

Accordingly, after the apostles in the council of Jerusalem had decided the ceremonies of the Mosaic law to be no longer obligatory, St. Paul made a vow and accomplished it. (Acts of the Apostles, xv., xviii. 18, xxi. 16.) The same apostle, in his first epistle to Timothy, speaking of the young widows, who "having grown wanton in Christ, will marry," says, "that they have damnation, because they have made void their first faith." (1 Tim. v. 11, 12.) And this appears to have been the unanimous opinion of all the holy personages who have distinguished themselves, both by their learning and their virtue, from the time of the apostles down to the Reformation of Luther. We can name St. Ignatius, disciple of St. John the Evangelist (Ep. ad Smyrn. xiii.), Tertullian (De Veland. Virg.), St. Cyprian (Epistle iv.); then the Basils, Ambroses, Hilaries, Gregories, Cyrils, Chrysostoms, Jeromes, Austins, Paulinuses, &c. Even Protestant divines own them to have been warm advocates of religious vows. However, without taking advantage of the authority of the Holy Scriptures, and the practice of the whole Christian world, during fifteen centuries, let us examine the thing with the light of reason alone, and see if an irrevocable engagement be truly destructive of our liberty, and if those who are willing to contract it are to be accused of inexcusable temerity and blindness. Melancholy experience teaches us, that man is born with more propensity to vice than to virtue; therefore to leave him at full liberty to follow, without the least control, the bent of his natural inclinations, would make him most miserable, and render him at the same time the scourge of his fellow-creatures. An evident proof of this truth is, that from the beginning of the world, men have agreed, with one accord, to acknowledge an authority, to submit to laws, to have restraints laid upon their will and actions; in short, to sacrifice a part of their natural independence and liberty, in order to enjoy the security and comforts to be found only in civil society. Nay, even in the present state of things, look around you: who are those who truly taste the sweets of life? Is it the rich man, who finds in his treasures the means to indulge at all times the inconstancy of his desires? Is it the infidel, who having obliterated from his heart the principles of religion and virtue, knows no other morality than the gratification of his unruly passions? Ah! their impatience of contradiction, restlessness of temper, fondness of change, incessant craving after new enjoyments, evidently betray that they are consuming themselves in fruitless attempts, and ineffectual seekings after happiness, which constantly flies away from them at the very moment they flatter themselves they have attained it. If happiness is to be found in this world, the man who enjoys it in its full extent, is certainly the man whose delicacy of conscience does not allow him to transgress in the least the salutary restraints which religion and the laws of his country impose upon him. It is the man, who, by the regular and uniform plan of life which he has voluntarily adopted, has precluded himself, as it were, from the possibility of a change, and thus shut up all the avenues of his heart against the fickleness of vain desires, and the fantastic projects of a heated imagination. In fine, it is the *man, who, according to the Scripture phrase, has borne the yoke from his youth.*

Under our free government, are we not ourselves living in perpetual

restraint? Is not our liberty curtailed and limited by many prohibitions and laws? Are not our soldiers bound by an irrevocable engagement as soon as they are enlisted; by which single act,—almost always done from want, or in a frolic, or in a state of intoxication,—are they not subject to a discipline a thousand times more severe than that of the most rigid religious orders? Are they not, in truth, merely passive instruments in the hands of their commanding officers? Are not their diet, their sleep, their dress, even their motions, under continual restrictions? Willing, or unwilling, are they not doomed to go wherever they are sent, even to the extremities of the world, and to the most unwholesome climates, to fight the battles of their country, with scarcely a distant hope of seeing their friends again in their native land? Is not marriage among us subject to restrictive laws? When contracted as the law directs, is it not indissoluble? And is not the unfortunate young person who has been sacrificed to the avarice and ambition of her unnatural parents, or who has been the melancholy victim of her own blindness, condemned to pass her days beneath the yoke which she can never more shake off? To bring the question nearer home,—by the sole fact of our being born in England, are we not deprived of what appears to be an essential part of liberty; the liberty of disposing ourselves as we think best, and of choosing the climate, and the form of government, which we judge to be the most conducive to our happiness? From this single fact, in which we never concurred in the beginning, nor which we ever subsequently approved of, have we not contracted with our native country an engagement so irrevocable, that it can never be dissolved by any act of our own?

Let us now apply these observations to communities of women. It is true that on the day of her profession, a religious takes an irrevocable engagement; but, had she married, it would have been perfectly the same; the only difference is, that she never makes her vows, but after having acquired a complete knowledge of the whole extent of her future obligations, and of the difficulties she will have to meet with, and after having tried for a considerable time if her health and inclinations are well calculated for a religious life: whilst by marrying, her prospects of happiness rest more upon desires and hopes, than upon experience; as it is impossible for her to be fully acquainted with all the duties and consequences of matrimony, but when it is too late to alter her situation; consequently, whatever may be objected against perpetual vows, can be retorted with stronger force against the indissolubility of marriage. But, as all moral writers agree that the peace of families, the good morals of the people, and the prosperity of the state, depend in great part on the indissolubility and sacredness of matrimonial engagements, have we not a right to conclude, that perpetual vows are also a great ingredient of happiness in a religious life, and perhaps its best security? Supposing that a nun had the liberty to leave her convent, and to come back to it at pleasure, what benefit would she reap from such a liberty? After an abode of a few years in solitude, were she to return to the world, all she knew and loved in it has already disappeared, or is entirely altered for her; for the world is a scene continually changing. If you lose sight of it for ever so short a time, you are sure to see new decorations and new

actors,—she becomes a stranger to its manners and fashions,—destitute of the qualifications requisite to please others, and hard herself to be pleased, obliged to submit to a second education, and to form new habits, in order to gain the affections of new acquaintances and friends, the inconstant religious would be soon disgusted with her new situation, and long after the tranquillity and comforts of her former habitation. Would she obtain the object of her actual desires? It is in vain; her convent is no longer the same as she left it: having once tasted in some degree the noisy and intoxicating pleasures and diversions of a worldly life, she would not have the same relish for the uniform occupations and tranquil enjoyments of a religious life. Having lost the taste of simplicity and candour, she would find the conversation and society of her pious companions dull and insipid; religious observances trifling and tedious, and her own way of life laborious and irksome. Too virtuous to take a part in the criminal diversions of the world, and too worldly still to relish the pure delights of innocence and piety,—half a fashionable lady in her convent, as she was a formal old maid in the world,—an object of compassion and trouble to her religious sisters, and of contempt and raillery to her worldly friends, she would pass, and end, her melancholy days in bewailing the dismal consequences of her inconstancy, or in forming new schemes of changing her present situation for another, which as soon as obtained, would prove equally uncomfortable and burthensome. It appears then certain, that by renouncing the power of disposing of herself, the religious renounces only a power which she could not exercise, but to her detriment and ruin; and which she would not have actually used had she retained it in its full extent. This is not a mere conjecture; it is a truth confirmed by the example of the religious who make their profession in communities in which perpetual vows are not required; it depends upon them to return to the world whenever they please: however, they scarcely ever do it, and they die happy in the house in which they had consecrated to God the first years of their youth. The founders of monastic orders, by imposing on their disciples, rules and practices of perfection, never thought that they could release them from their primary and indispensable duties towards God and their neighbour: those holy and truly wise men were penetrated with the truth of these maxims: “If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. Render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar’s: and to God the things that are God’s. As you would that men should do to you; do you also to them in like manner.” They knew perfectly well, that monastic as well as political obedience derive their strength and support from the same principle, “from Him who reaches from end to end, mightily, and ordereth all things sweetly.” *Wisd.* vii. 1. Monastic and political obedience are two sisters, united together by a perfect agreement of sentiments; and not two rivals always at variance. They both command their respective subjects, “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be, are ordained of God. Whosoever, therefore, resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God.” *Rom.* xiii. 1, 2. Superiors never imagined that by requiring from their religious a vow of obedience, they had power to command them to renounce the lights of their reason, or the dictates of their conscience.

However, such would be the case, if they could ever suppose, that the rule which enjoins obedience to the Superior, is above the natural and divine law which strictly commands allegiance to the lawful sovereign. The vow of obedience does not render the religious a blind instrument in the hands of his Superior, nor deprive him of his natural faculties. No, he ought to make use of them, as other men do, to distinguish between good and evil, right and wrong. He renounces his will, and submits it to that of his Superior, only in this sense, that in the things which, before his profession, he could indifferently either have done or omitted (*salva conscientia*) after it, he engages himself to follow the judgment and discretion of his Superior; acknowledging in him a right to command, and in himself an obligation of obeying; but always with this restriction, within the limits of his rule, and only as far as the natural and divine laws permit; which laws can never be dispensed with on any pretence whatever. Hence, before a religious revolts from his allegiance to his sovereign, he must have already revolted from his faith, and from the rules of his order. The vow of obedience has only for its end the glory of God, the temporal and spiritual advantage of the religious, and the maintenance of peace and good order in the community. The perfection of the vow of obedience consists, not in complying with every order of his Superior, whatever it may be, but in the disposition of the religious (whenever submission is not incompatible with charity,—whenever there is no appearance of sin, or the voice of God condemns the voice of man) to consider in the Superior, who commands, Jesus Christ who is to be obeyed; to obey, not only in things of strict obligation and great importance, but also in matters of indifference; and at the first sign, without reply or reluctance, and even with pleasure and alacrity: such is the doctrine of all Catholic moralists, concerning the vow of obedience.

How then can religious obedience be called a slavery? Slavery is an involuntary yoke. The obedience of the religious is not forced upon him against his will, but the effect of a free choice. Obedience is a burden and yoke only to the Superior. Slavery is the melancholy consequence of birth or of conquest: the obedience of the religious is the result of mature deliberation, and real independence. Slavery is a violent invasion of liberty: the obedience of the religious is a voluntary cession, a gift, a free homage; consequently the noblest act of his liberty. Slavery puts the slave under the dominion, and leaves him at the disposal of a master whom he could not reject: the obedience of a religious subjects him to a Superior of his own choice, and who cannot dispose of him, but according to fixed laws and regulations, which he has himself approved of, and which he respects and loves. Slavery is entirely for the advantage of the master: obedience is entirely for the benefit of the religious: obedience is the delight, comfort, and felicity of the religious: by a generous and unreserved sacrifice of self-will, he is delivered from one of the greatest obstacles to salvation, and exempt from the trouble of choosing for himself. Obedience enhances the value of his good works, and even gives him the merit of all those which he is not allowed to perform. It is the light which guides his steps; the authority which solves his doubts; the help which supports his weakness; the spur which animates him in his undertakings; the motive which en-

courages him in his difficulties; in fine it is his security during his whole life. Slavery is the torment of the slave, and all his desires tend to break off his chains, and to be set at liberty: obedience is the delight of the religious; for he fears nothing more than to see his sacred engagements dissolved, and be rendered again master of his destiny.

We must not imagine, that the constitutions of monastic orders give to Superiors a despotic authority over their religious. No, they cannot govern them according to their caprice, but according to the rules of their community. Superiors themselves are bound by laws which they cannot infringe; they are not surrounded with slaves nor even with subjects, but only with friends and children. The sceptre which they hold, is the sceptre of mildness and benevolence; it is forbidden to the Superiors to rule with harshness, and to the inferiors to obey through servile fear: the names of father or mother which they bear is not only a title of honour; it is a mark of the nature and character of their administration. In short, their empire is an empire which love and confidence have erected, and which is exercised only by confidence and love.

Now, if you shut to Catholic women the entrance of the cloister, you evidently preclude several of them from the avenues to happiness, which consists in a seclusion from the agitations of the world, and which they could not find elsewhere. In order to make us sensible of this truth, we need but take a slight survey of our communities of religious women. Let us suppose each of them to have been composed of thirty members; and that out of this number ten who were without near relations, and as it were strangers in their native country, esteemed themselves happy to have had it in their power to enter, by adoption, into a family, the gentle and pure manners of which were suitable to their own inclinations: ten others, destitute of those natural graces and captivating charms so highly valued in the world, had brought a grateful heart into a society of pious and enlightened souls, among whom the want of these external accomplishments is accounted as nothing, when compensated by virtue; the ten remaining, condemned by the shipwreck of their fortune to a life of penury and indigence, with transport blessed the religious foresight of our ancestors, who had prepared for them an hospitable land, where, from slender means of subsistence, united together, there arose a comfortable sufficiency for all. Now, if you disperse these thirty nuns, and keep them separated from one another in the wide world, you offer violence to their inclinations, destroy their happiness, and devote their existence to the greatest calamities. Are not the calamities which oppress individuals, to be looked upon as the calamities of the political body of which these individuals are members? And is it not the duty of a wise and paternal government to prevent them? "The happiness of a people," says Dr. Paley, "is made up of the happiness of single persons; and the quantity of happiness can only be augmented by increasing the number of the percipients or the pleasure of their perceptions." Vol. ii. p. 346.

It has been also said (for what has not been said against religious orders?) that notwithstanding all the regulations which the most consummate wisdom could establish, to prevent an abuse of power in the Superior, nevertheless, it might be still *possible*, that he should abuse his

authority over a timid and uninformed religious, to make him subservient to the designs of his ambition, or his enmity against the government of his country. That such a thing is *possible* we grant. That it is probable, we boldly deny. But with this objection of *possibility*, there is nothing so sacred, so useful, so necessary upon earth which will be free from suspicion. If the mere *possibility* of an abuse be once admitted as a sufficient cause to reject and abrogate a convention, or destroy an establishment, there is no longer any sort of authority safe, nor any sort of obedience without danger. The defence of the country must not be entrusted to the genius of the most experienced general, because it is *possible* that he will abuse his influence over his soldiers to raise the standard of revolt. Magistrates should not be appointed, to watch over the execution of the laws, and maintain good order; because it is *possible*, that a judge will use the sword of justice, which is put into his hands for the punishment of the guilty, to sacrifice the innocent. Parents must be deprived of the authority which every law, divine and human, gives them over their children, because it is *possible* that they will form and habituate to commission of crimes, the young hearts which they were bound to bring up in the practice of every virtue. Sciences and liberal arts, ought no longer to be tolerated, because they may *possibly* tend to increase the number of corrupted citizens. Nay, religion itself, and all religious worship, must be reprobated, because in the hands of hypocritical and profligate ministers, it is *possible* they may become an instrument of delusion, superstition, and fanaticism.

Let it be acknowledged that, through that infirmity inherent in all human establishments, which tend, after a certain lapse of time, to relaxation and decay, the most fervent convents have now and then wanted reformation. But the irregularities so loudly complained of by the zealous advocates of religious sanctity, and so maliciously exaggerated by partiality or prejudice, though they no longer subsist, were, for the greatest part, mere irregularities,—deviations from the strictness of the rule, too frequent an intercourse with seculars, introduction of a worldly spirit, or adoption of conveniences contrary to a life of mortification and poverty. But these irregularities were never general; they existed only in some few houses, whilst all the others exhibited the most edifying example of all Christian and religious virtues. I will not even deny that sometimes, though very seldom, vices might have crept into convents, and polluted these sacred abodes of innocence and perfection. Indeed, since among the twelve apostles, chosen by Jesus Christ himself, and formed by his example and instructions, there has been a traitor, can we reasonably expect that our convents, which have contained many thousand religious, during the space of fifteen hundred years, should have enjoyed the singular privilege, never to have the inconstancy of a *foolish virgin* to bewail? However, let that be as it may, these defects, nay, even these vices, were only the defects and vices of some few individuals; they had never any influence on the prosperity of the state, or the morals of the people; they were not the *cause*, but the melancholy *consequence* of the general corruption of manners: as in a country infected with the plague, the most healthy and robust constitutions cannot always escape the general contagion.

As for enclosure, such as was sanctioned by the civil laws in Catholic countries, before the French revolution, is it true that it made a convent a place of slavery and woe? A most afflicting scandal has served at least to display a most edifying truth. Out of a feigned compassion for religious women, pretended philosophers had long since published throughout all France, that the day when an option should be offered to these cloistered victims, between their chains and their return to the world, they would *that very day* quit, with eagerness, their deserted solitudes. However, a solemn law loudly proclaimed such an option; and the result of this philosophical experiment, became, to the eternal ignominy of those who had solicited it, a splendid triumph of the fidelity, and an evident proof of the happiness of our virgins. And we may say, if such a comparison be allowed, that the crucible scarcely threw out an imperceptible dross. Those religious virgins, whom their false friends had flattered themselves to stir up, and draw into inconstancy,—those to whom they had endeavoured to palliate the crime of injury and apostasy, in order to smooth the way for their return to the world;—all of them recoiled back with horror, at the prospect which opened before them, and hid themselves with more eagerness than ever in the obscurity of their beloved solitudes, from which, at a later period, it became necessary to tear them away by violence. And after twenty-two years of abode in the world, immediately upon the restoration of the Bourbon kings to France, these pretended victims of religious despotism, sent forth from all quarters of that extensive kingdom the most urgent petitions to the king, to obtain leave to resume the public exercise of their sacred engagements, and shut themselves up again within the walls of a convent. Nay, some, without waiting for that permission, at once put on their religious habits, erected grates to their parlours, and excluded the world from their houses.\*

But if the objections against a religious life be destitute of solid grounds, as it must appear to every impartial reader; in the *form* in which they are dispersed among the public, we shall discover still more of disingenuousness and intrigue. Enmity to a religious life is served up in every shape that is likely to allure, surprise, or beguile the imagination:—in a fable, a tale, a novel, a poem, and “awful disclosures;†” remote and oblique surmises, in books of travels; of philosophy; of natural history; in a word, in any form rather than the right one, that of professed and regular disquisition: and because the coarse buffoonery and broad laugh of the old and rude enemies of the Catholic faith, would offend the taste, perhaps, rather than the virtue of this cultivated age,—a graver irony, and more skilful and delicate banter is substituted in their place. The adversaries of a religious life have gone still farther; they have pursued it with poisoned arrows: obscenity itself has been resorted to by a Gathercole and a Gregg. The innocent customs,—if we are not permitted to call them the holy rules of the religious,—together with all the adjuncts and appendages of their external profession and worship, have been impudently profaned by an unnatural conjunction with impure and lascivious

\* This is a fact of which the writer of these pages was an eye-witness. Among the religious communities which put up grates, he may name the English Austin nuns in Paris.

† Maria Monk's, to wit.

images. The fondness for ridicule is almost universal; and ridicule to many minds is never so irresistible, as when seasoned with obscenity, and employed upon monks and nuns. But in proportion as these noxious principles take hold of the imagination, they infatuate the judgment; for trains of ludicrous and unchaste associations adhering to every mention of a religious life, render the mind indisposed to receive either conviction from evidences, or impressions from its benefits to society; and this effect being exerted upon the sensitive part of our frame, is altogether independent of argument, proof, or reason; is as formidable to a true religion as to a false one; to a well-grounded faith as to a chimerical mythology or fabulous tradition. Every mind which wishes the advancement of truth and knowledge, in all researches which have reference to the happiness and reputation of his fellow-creatures, must abhor this licentiousness, as violating no less the laws of reasoning, than the rights of decency.

Monasteries in England are nearly no more; yet justice is due to an order of men, which was formerly an illustrious part of this nation, and abounded in persons eminent for birth, learning, and piety. The veil which death throws over the ashes of good and great men is sacred; and to cast dirt upon their shrine, is shocking to the most savage barbarian; yet some have made it a point of merit. Bishop Burnet says (and many after him repeat) "that the monks were become lewd and dissolute, when the order was suppressed among us." But the Protestant Henry Wharton,\* in his *Specimen of Errors in Burnet's History of the Reformation*, answers this slander in the following manner, p. 142: "God forbid that any professors of Christianity, much less the greatest pretenders to it, should be guilty of such monstrous wickedness, or that any others should believe it of them, without evident proof. Surely if the monks had been guilty of such things, it could not have escaped the knowledge of their visitors, who searched and divulged all their faults with the utmost industry. Nor would it have been unknown to Bale, brought up among them, or omitted by him in his *English Votaries*, wherein he has set himself to defame the monastic order, and the unmarried clergy, with insatiable malice." It were to be wished, that they who claim greater indulgences, would seriously reflect, that the glaring irregularities of two or three members, bring an undistinguishing censure upon a whole body; make a noise, and alarm the world, as if all flesh had corrupted its way: whereas the sober, modest, and humble worth of a much greater number, who there in private follow the duties of the wise and good, must in the nature of the thing, escape the notice of the world. Notorious disorders, how few soever are concerned, strike the senses of some, and affect the passions of many more; and by their senses and passions the gross of mankind generally judge of things; but it requires a greater degree of reflection, than the bulk of mankind will give themselves the trouble to make, to consider, that great numbers must have spent their time profitably, formed habits of a just way of thinking, and laid in that stock of knowledge and virtue, which they have produced into view in a more public sphere: that those vices, which they complain of, may not be the native growth of the place,

\* Under the name of Anthony Harmer.

but imported from irregular and undisciplined families; from schools,—and from the worst of schools,—the world at large. The same learned divine and historian, in an answer to another charge of Bishop Burnet, importing that the monks, about the end of the eighth century, had possessed themselves of the greatest part of the riches of the nation, shows (page 40) that the monks had not then probably gained the hundredth part, though, afterwards, in the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth centuries, they increased exceedingly in number and possessions. “But after all,” says he, “they will never be found to have possessed above the fifth part of the riches of the nation, and considering they were wont to lease out their lands for easy fines, and small rents, they did not in reality possess the tenth part of the riches of the nation. Then, for that other charge, that the best part of the soil being in such ill hands, it was the interest of the nation to have it put to better uses, it is altogether erroneous. From the beginning to the end, none improved their lands and possessions to better advantages than the monks, by building, cultivating, and all other methods, while they kept them in their hands. Of this Croyland is to this day a manifest instance. And when they leased them out to others, it was the interest of the nation to have such easy tenures continued to a great number of persons. To this it may be added, that they contributed to the public charges of the nation, equally with the other clergy; and the clergy always contributed in proportion with the laity; so that we cannot find to what better uses these possessions have been since put.”

Bishop Tanner, and several other Protestant writers, also observe, that the Church lands, after the Conquest, contributed to all public burdens equally with the laity. Another celebrated Protestant historian, Mr. Mallet, in his *History of the Helvetians*, vol. i. p. 10, expresses his opinion of the services rendered by the religious to society, in the following terms:—“The monks softened, by their instructions, the ferocious manners of the people, and opposed their credit to the despotism of the nobility, who knew no other occupation than war, and grievously oppressed their subjects and inferiors. On this account the government of the monks was preferred to their’s. The people sought them for judges; and it was an usual saying, that it was better to be governed by a bishop’s crosier, than by a monarch’s sceptre. The monks were engaged in useful employments; they cleared and cultivated desert and savage lands; and we find that in many places where those missionaries established themselves, agriculture, next to preaching, was their principal occupation. Was it possible that such men should not be venerated during their lives, and after their deaths?”

After the barbarians had overrun the whole of the Roman Empire of the West, all the learning and piety in Europe which had escaped their ravages, were chiefly confined to the monasteries they had spared, or after their conversion re-established. These had schools to which both laymen and persons intended for the Church resorted. In those schools were brought up the apostles of England, Belgium, Gaul, Germany, and the other countries of Europe towards the north,—St. Austin, Willibrod, Anscarius, Boniface, &c. &c. These holy prelates founded religious communities, which exhibited the eminent virtue and fervour of the primitive

solitaries. Venerable Bede, St. Odo, St. Bernard, St. Thomas of Aquin, St. Bonaventure, St. Anselm, &c. were men who would have done honour to the most enlightened ages. It was in monasteries that the treasures of all sort of antiquities were found; it was in them that several precious works of ancient writers were discovered, which must have perished in the general confusion of barbarous ages, without these asylums where religion still threw out some light. It was there the holy Scriptures were preserved and copied with the greatest care, as were likewise the writings of the fathers, the canons of the Church, the public records, the titles of families, and all other precious manuscripts of sacred and profane literature, which have been so conducive to the revival of letters, and the liberal arts among us. In a word, the purest practice of the gospel was preserved in monasteries, whilst it was more or less corrupted in the world. It was a very important service rendered to religion and learning, carefully to have collected whatever concerned the belief and the manners of the Christians, the revolutions of empires, and the succession of kings, during the space of several centuries: to have transmitted to us the laws and discipline of the Church; the names of the great men who have distinguished themselves either by their talents or their sanctity; to have copied their works and preserved those of ancient authors. And to whom are we indebted for all these precious advantages, but to religious? An Alexander, a Cæsar, a Homer, a Virgil, a Cicero, a Plato, a Demosthenes, a Tacitus, &c. would have remained entirely unknown to us, had it not been for the labours of poor religious, who neither wished for nor claimed the honour of adding their own names to those which they saved from eternal oblivion. It is by the continued researches of these pious solitaries that those precious collections of books were formed and first known in Europe. According to the rule of St. Benedict, each monastery was to be furnished with a library; and the religious houses which were destitute of one, were considered as a camp, destitute of the most necessary means of defence. *Clastrum sine armario, quasi castrum sine armamentario.* "A cloister without a library is like unto a castle without an armoury." And it is indeed from the libraries of monasteries, that those precious manuscripts have been taken, which, since the invention of the art of printing, have enriched us with so many excellent works in every branch of sacred and profane literature. When the art of printing was unknown, the generality of the people and the nobles themselves could neither read nor write; the monks recorded the transactions of their times. In several monasteries, it was a constant practice to choose from among the members of the community the most learned of the religious, who wrote with exactness the most memorable events of each reign. At the death of this religious, the fruit of his researches and observations was laid before the general chapter, and after mature examination they were redacted into a sort of chronicle, which was kept for the instruction of posterity. "Had it not been for the labours of the monks," said Sir John Markham, "the English would be still but children in the history of their own country." What would Usher, Cave, Tillemont, Montfaucon, Mabillon, Fleury, Bingham, Gale, Spelman, and other historians, have done, if from Hugh, a regular canon of St. Victor in the twelfth century, up to Paladius, a monk in the fifth,

monasteries had not supplied them with an uninterrupted succession of witnesses attesting the events of their age. In our own country, Bede, Ingulf, Turgot, William of Malmsbury, Matthew Paris, and Matthew of Westminster, have rendered this service; and many celebrated men in other countries, whom it would be too long to insert, have done the same. The Bulgarians owe their conversion to two monks,—Theodore Cepharas, who had been prisoner in Bulgaria for many years, and Methodius.\*—This great work was accomplished by the following means. Bogoris, King of the Bulgarians, was inclined to the Christian faith by the assiduous and long persuasions of his sister, who had zealously embraced it at Constantinople, having been taken captive very young, and detained a long time in the court of the pious Empress Theodora. This prince had also several conversations with the monk Theodore; but the fear of exciting a revolt among his subjects, who were still strongly attached to their superstitions, prevented him from yielding to the voice of his conscience, till God was pleased to awaken him by a more powerful call. As he was passionately fond of hunting, he desired the Emperor of Constantinople to procure him a picture, which should be a curious hunting-piece. Methodius, according to the custom of many devout monks in that age (845) employed himself in drawing pious pictures, and excelled in that art; he was sent, therefore, to the court of the king, who, having built a palace, was desirous of adorning it with paintings. He gave the good monk an order to draw him some piece, the very sight of which would strike terror into those who beheld it. Methodius thinking nothing more terrifying than the general judgment, represented, in the most lively colours and with exquisite art, that awful scene, with kings, princes, and people, standing promiscuously before the throne of the great Judge, who appeared armed with all the terror of infinite majesty and justice, and attended with angels ready to execute his sentence. Some were placed on the right hand and some on the left. This moving sight, and the punishment of the reprobate, which was represented also in the picture, and still much more the explication of every part of this dreadful scene by Methodius, made the deepest impression on the king's mind, and from that moment he began to fear God more than his subjects, and resolved to be baptised: but though the ceremony had been secretly performed during the night, the news of the king's conversion was soon noised abroad; the Bulgarians, enraged, took up arms and marched in open rebellion towards the palace. Bogoris, animated with a lively faith and undaunted courage, placed himself immediately at the head of his guards, forty-eight only in number, and taking a little cross which he carried on his breast sallied forth from his palace, attacked the rebels, and defeated them in an instant. This victory restored order and submission among the Bulgarians; and a short time after his people imitated his example, and embraced the faith. Methodius was not only a skilful painter; he was also a zealous apostle and an eminent scholar. Assisted by his brother Cyril, he brought about the conversion of the Bulgarians, Moravians, &c. Studowski,

† Of Thessalonica.

in his *Sacra Moraviæ Historia*, styles Cyril and Methodius the apostles of Moravia, Upper Bohemia, Silesia, Lusatia, Croatia, Circassia, &c., and almost all the Sclavonian nations. The two brothers invented the Sclavonian alphabet, translated the Bible from the Greek into the Sclavonic tongue, and likewise the Liturgy, and instituted mass to be said in the same, which was approved of by Pope John VIII, to whom Methodius had repaired to give him an account of his mission among the barbarians; and the version is to this day used in all the Churches which adhere to the Sclavonian rites. This is another instance of the *ignorance* of monks, and of the *prohibition* of the holy Scriptures to Catholics.

In the ages, called with scorn and derision the ages of ignorance and monkery, our illiterate ancestors did not confine their benevolence to those transient acts of generosity, so common and so much extolled in our days, and which, notwithstanding their boasted extent, have always left the poor to be supported by taxes levied upon the public at large. These good and virtuous men, in their enlarged views, provided for the present and future generations: they thought that they should draw down upon themselves and upon their offspring, the blessings of heaven, and merit the gratitude of their country and of posterity, in founding establishments, in which the praises of the Almighty should be sung, and his most holy law preached to the end of time. They imagined that by erecting on their estates, convents of both sexes, which was without the least expense to the state, they should afford (as they actually did, for many centuries) sure and permanent resources to the poor, harbours always open to the distressed, useful and ever-subsisting censors of public licentiousness, and sanctuaries where the humble and pure virtues of the gospel could be cultivated with security and peace. Whether our forefathers, or our contemporaries, have merited most of religion and humanity, let the reader decide! Since the beginning of the last century, London, Bath, Bristol, Liverpool, &c. have been increasing every day in riches, extent, and population. The streets, squares, gardens, and theatres, are beautiful and commodious. As for the places of religious worship, either of the Established Church, or other persuasions, it must strike the eyes of an observer how mean they are. Most of them low and narrow brick buildings, which would not be judged fit for concert-rooms; they are only distinguished from private houses by their despicable construction; erected more from a sordid speculation than from disinterested and noble motives of religion. The only thing thought of is, how many pews are wanted to afford a handsome benefit to the architect, and a sufficient salary to the clergyman who is to attend the divine service on Sundays: but whether their solidity, size, and architecture answer the religious purposes to which they are destined, is not in the least regarded. And, indeed, if the actual inhabitants of London were now as punctual as they were in former times, in coming to church to hear the word of God, all the churches, chapels, and meeting-houses now subsisting, would not be sufficient to contain the tenth part of its population.

Our simple and plain ancestors, in *monkish times*, directed by *narrow-minded* and *bigoted monks*, thought that no expense should be spared to

erect the most majestic temples to the honour of the Almighty. They inhabited uncomfortable houses; but their genius, grandeur, and elevation of thought were displayed in the places of religious worship, with a taste and magnificence which have never been surpassed, and very seldom equalled, in modern times. Westminster Abbey, the Cathedrals of Lincoln, Salisbury, Wells, and York, are still subsisting monuments of this truth, and excite the admiration of lovers of the fine arts. What shall we conclude from this melancholy contrast? That egotism is always sordid, and *truly narrow-minded* in all its undertakings, and that religion being no longer considered by our politicians as the only solid basis of public prosperity, all that concerns religion, its influence, or preservation, is either entirely laid aside, or treated with the utmost indifference.

But it is objected against the monks, that they had lost the spirit of their institute; that men who had made vows of poverty, inhabited palaces. It must be acknowledged that their houses were stately buildings, their churches magnificently adorned, that all which served for divine worship was sumptuous and of the most exquisite workmanship. That the halls, chapter-rooms, and apartments destined for the abbot and guests, were nobly though simply furnished; the libraries abounding with works of the best ancient and modern writers in every language; the courts, cloisters, refectories, spacious and well-adapted to their respective uses; the gardens and orchards, producing all the riches with which a beneficent Providence always repays the labours of industry and perseverance: but those who have assisted at the meals of the lords of these great estates, have found that they were satisfied with a homely fare, most of them living throughout the year on fish and vegetables;\* they drank but the most common wines, in the countries where it is the beverage of the poor, as well as of the rich, and elsewhere, table-beer, or small cider. Our servants would bitterly complain if they had for their breakfast, what was judged sufficient for the dinner, supper, &c. of a monk. Those who have visited the rooms occupied by the inhabitants of these *palaces*, can testify that they were only little cells about ten feet square, without a fire-place, and without any furniture, but a plain bedstead, with a straw bed or mattress, a table, a praying desk, a crucifix, two or three chairs, a few plain engravings, and a book-shelf. The Petaus, Mabillons, Montfaucons, Kirchers, Malbranches, Houbigants, Calmets, Bourdaloues, and, in our days, the Guerangers,—who corresponded with all the learned societies of Europe, who reckoned among their friends and admirers the greatest men of their age, and whose immortal works will be transmitted to the latest posterity, were not better accommodated.

Monasteries in France, the Netherlands, and other countries which fell under the yoke of the French tyrants, have shared the destiny of monasteries in England. These noble and pious establishments, which had been for so many years the asylum of virtue, around which deserts had been changed into rich meadows, fruitful fields, populous hamlets, villages, and towns, are nearly levelled to the ground, their peaceful inhabitants have been driven into the wide world, to drag on a miserable

\* The richest abbeys of Benedictines in France,—St. Denis, St. Germain, St. Ouen, Remigius Fécamp, Caen, Bec, &c.—are instances.

existence in wretchedness and grief: their possessions, which, in great part, were the property of the poor, have passed into other hands, without enriching their unjust purchasers. Nothing remains but here and there some stately ruins, which loudly proclaim the taste, munificence, and piety of their founders, and the rapacious cruelty and vandalism of the present age. This destruction of monasteries was celebrated with complacency by Protestant writers, as the triumph of reason over superstition, and as the forerunner of the downfall of popery; whilst in reality it was only the beginning of that deluge of calamities which laid waste the greater part of Europe. The same principle which justified this destruction, led to the plunder of the property of the secular clergy, nobility, gentry, and all the rich, and paved the way to that military government in France, which, during a space of twenty-two years, occasioned the death of ten millions of men at least. With the riches of the religious, it was said by their enemies, that all the debts of the nation would be paid, and scarcely any taxes in future would be necessary; but a general bankruptcy ensued, and taxes ten times heavier than they were in the most distressed times of the monarchy were imposed. If to this we add what happened under the reigns of Henry VIII, Elizabeth, and James I, we shall have an evident proof that the dissolution of monasteries never was of any service to the states which resorted to that impolitic and unjustifiable measure of intolerance and arbitrary power. It has been maintained by several Protestant authors of reputation, that the legal provision made for the poor by the last parliament of Queen Elizabeth, was rendered necessary by the dissolution of monasteries in the reign of her father. Before this event took place, the wants of the indigent were relieved by the charity of the monks; and Dugdale remarks, that while the convents stood, there was no act for the relief of the poor, so amply were they provided for by those houses; whereas in the next age, there were no less than eleven bills brought into the House of Commons for that purpose. That monasteries afforded relief to the poor, is a position maintained by Smith and Blackstone, the latter of whom attributes to the dissolution of these monasteries, the numerous statutes made in the reign of Henry VIII and his children, for providing for the poor and impotent. From the twenty-second of Henry VIII to the thirty-third of Elizabeth, hardly a parliament met, in which some laws that regarded the poor were not enacted. But if we reckon up (to use the words of a Protestant writer) *the superabundance of men and women who devoted themselves to the welfare of their neighbours*, we shall be forced to acknowledge, that the suppression of convents was of no service to society, but even an irreparable loss.

We will not speak here of the number of celebrated men whom religious orders have produced: scholars, poets, historians, critics, mathematicians, divines, metaphysicians, astronomers, politicians, commentators, moralists, orators, &c., who, by their profound meditations and researches, knowledge of antiquity and learned languages, discoveries and genius, have promoted the progress of literature and the polite arts, established the evidences of Christianity with the greatest perspicuity and strength, and preached the morality of the gospel with an eloquence equal to that

of the most famous orators of Athens and Rome. Neither will we mention the number of colleges governed by religious, as nothing very positive can be ascertained from the testimony of historians; all we know is, that in Spain, the religious of St. Basil had four colleges in each province; that all the different congregations of St. Benedict dedicated themselves to the education of youth, and that the Jesuits had establishments all over Europe, &c. &c. As for women, it is known that they were all brought up by nuns. We will content ourselves with giving an idea of the indefatigable labours of religious of both sexes, in relieving the wants and necessities of suffering humanity; for even this imperfect sketch will be sufficient to remove the prejudices of those who are willing to be undeceived.

Distinguished by different rules and denominations, but all tending to the same end,—the exercise of benevolence and charity,—an immense number of religious of both sexes had divided among themselves the various distresses and sufferings which form the long and melancholy catalogue of woes that afflict the poor, in order to give to each of them a more speedy and effectual assistance. Some took for their department the care of the sick under the most contagious disorders. There are reckoned in Christian Europe about four thousand three hundred cities and towns;\* of these, three thousand two hundred and ninety-four are of sufficient extent and population, to be supposed to have had each an hospital; (a calculation rated much too low, for in Catholic countries there was scarcely a village of any note, without a religious establishment for the sick and the poor) therefore you will have three thousand two hundred and ninety-four hospitals, more than the two-thirds of which were served by religious. Now taking upon an average that each of these hospitals contained a hundred beds, it will be found that about *three hundred and twenty-nine thousand and four hundred* of our fellow-creatures were every day for more than a thousand years attended and relieved in their various diseases, by religious of both sexes. If to this we add the numberless poor who were not in hospitals, and were nevertheless attended, relieved, and assisted with food, raiment, and medicines, by religious associations, during a period of fifteen centuries, the aggregate amount of charities of every description, bestowed upon the distressed and destitute, will be beyond the power of calculation. Other religious dedicated their whole time to the bringing up orphans and foundlings. In every capital and large town, there were asylums and houses of refuge for those unfortunate women, whom want or libertinism had led astray from the paths of innocence. There you would have admired women of unblemished chastity, under the sweet name of “the daughters of the good Shepherd,” devoting themselves to reclaim from vice, and bring back to sentiments of virtue, these melancholy victims, whom the world abandons to infamy and distress, after having first corrupted them by its pernicious maxims and examples. In order to secure their perseverance in their good resolutions, they were taught to work, and a small sum of money was given them to settle in the world. They were not even interdicted the hope of

\* Chiefly according to Guthrie's account.

embracing a religious life. They were informed that, if after imitating Magdalen in her disorders, they took her for a model in their penance, many sins would be forgiven them, and even that they might aspire to the same favours which this great saint received from Him "who came not to call the just, but sinners to repentance." *Luke v. 32.*

On the highest Alps; on the summits of Mounts St. Gothard and St. Bernard; in those dreary regions covered all the year round with perpetual ice and snow, which do not contain a single shed, nor produce a single tree,—where nothing is heard but the roaring of the winds, nothing to be seen but numberless pieces of rock, which are all precipitated from the surrounding peaks, and where you cannot move a step without almost insurmountable difficulties and fathomless precipices,—there the charitable disciples of St. Bernard of Menthon and of St. Francis have established themselves, in order to give assistance to the benighted traveller. Bernard of Menthon was born in the Genevois in 903, and descended from one of the most illustrious houses of Savoy. Having embraced the ecclesiastical state, he employed himself in missions among the unconverted Pagans, who inhabited the mountains, and converted them to Christianity. Having witnessed the hardships and dangers encountered by the French and German pilgrims, in their passage to Rome over the Alps, this benevolent monk founded two monasteries or *hospitia* for their relief on Mount Joux, called from him Great and Little St. Bernard. These were peopled by canons-regular of St. Austin, and Bernard himself became their first provost. He obtained several important privileges from successive popes, and his convent acquired great popularity and large possessions. Bernard died at Novara, at the age of eighty-five, and was canonized. His institution has undergone a variety of vicissitudes, and lost great part of its riches, but it still subsists, and is eminently useful. There are ordinarily between twenty and thirty monks belonging to the convent; eight of whom are usually dispersed among the Alpine parish churches, under their patronage; ten or twelve, whose age and health are able to bear the keen atmosphere of the mountain, constantly reside at the convent: the few others, who can no longer bear it, are permitted to reside with the aged provost of the whole, in a house belonging to the convent, and situated at Martigny below. The monks of the mountain are industriously employed in the prosecution of their private studies, in the instruction of their novices, in the education of some scholars who are sent to board and lodge with them, and in managing the temporal economy of the whole. They have a prior, the deputy of the provost, and governor of the convent in his absence; a sacristan, who takes care of their chapels; a cellarer, serving as purveyor, comptroller of the kitchen, and managing all the exterior concerns of the monastery; a clavender, who keeps the keys, and dispenses the requisite articles to the monks and to the travellers; and an infirmarian, who takes care of the sick, in the apartment appropriated for them. The cellarer keeps twenty horses constantly employed during the summer, in fetching the magazines of flour, bread, cheese, liquors, and dried fruits, for themselves and for their guests, and forage for their milch cows during winter. Their fire-wood, of which they use a great quantity, is brought to them on the backs of mules, from

the distance of twelve miles, and by a steep path, that is passable for six months only during the whole year. Before the winter sets in, they send down their horses for the season to a farm which they have on the northern side of the Rhone. With equal attention they relieve both their own countrymen and foreigners. They make no distinction of state, sex, or religion, and ask no questions concerning the *country or creed of the wretched sufferer*. In winter and spring their solicitude has a larger range of attention and activity. From the first of November, through the winter, to the first of May, a trusty Alpine servant, who, as an Alpine, is denominated a *Maronnier*, and one or two dogs of an extraordinary size accompanying him, are constantly engaged in going to meet travellers a considerable distance down the Vallais. These dogs possess an instinct, and are trained in a manner to render them peculiarly useful in their employment. They point out the road to the guide and to travellers, through fogs, tempests, and snow; they have also the sagacity to discover travellers who, having lost their way, have fallen amidst the drifts of snow, and who are lying there, wearied and exhausted. The monks themselves accompany the guide, and aid him in administering necessary relief. Apprised of the benumbing and stupifying effect of extreme cold, they rouse the sleeping travellers, and exert themselves in a variety of ways to preserve and recover them from approaching and apparent death: and in doing this they expose themselves to great danger. In order to avoid the numbness occasioned by the cold, they carry with them short thick staves, armed at the end with iron, and with these they continually strike their hands and feet. About three miles below the convent, on the road of Hannibal's ascent, they have built a small vaulted room, called the Hospital, which is intended for the casual refreshment of travellers benumbed, and to enable them to reach the convent. The trusty maronnier visits it frequently, in order to meet the traveller; but principally at the approach of night, and on his return leaves bread, cheese, and wine. On extraordinary occasions, when a storm subsides, he sallies forth to this building, with his stock of meat and wine, and assists all whom he finds distressed. The monks themselves are often seen on the tops of their rocks, watching opportunities for the exercise of their humanity. When the snow is deep on the ground they employ themselves in making roads through it, and thus, by timely vigilance, prevent many fatal accidents; but notwithstanding all their charitable efforts, scarcely a winter passes in which some traveller is not brought to the convent with his limbs benumbed and frozen. The traveller is sometimes quite overwhelmed, and sunk into the mass of descending snow. When he is not very deep, the dogs discover him by the scent, and when they fail, the monks engage in the laborious office. They range themselves upon the snow, and sound it with long poles; and thus they have rescued many from imminent danger of being lost. In order to avoid repetition, we shall only add, that the Capuchins who live in the *Hospitium* on Mount St. Gothard perform the same offices of charity, encounter the same difficulties, and are exposed to the same dangers.

From the summit of the Alps, let us pass to the new world; and the miracles of heroic charity which we have admired on Mounts St. Bernard and St. Gothard, we shall behold displayed with equal zeal and danger in

the mines of Mexico and Peru. Peter of Betancourt, a friar of the order of St. Francis, residing at Guatemala, a town and province of South America, was moved with compassion at the distressed situation of the negro slaves, who in their maladies were left destitute of every assistance. By begging alms, having made the acquisition of a small and mean house where he kept formerly a school for the children of the poor whom he educated, he built himself near it a kind of infirmary, which he covered with rushes, in order to give a shelter to and attend the slaves who might be abandoned by their merciless masters. He soon met with a poor negro woman of that description. As she was so infirm as not to be able to walk, he took her on his own shoulders, and, proud of his burden, he carried her with joy to this miserable hovel which he called his hospital; and by the alms which he obtained, he provided for all her wants. She did not survive long, but died blessing the indefatigable care and charity of her benefactor. The rich inhabitants of Guatemala could not resist the example of this humble and charitable friar: they opened their treasures, and, under the management of Peter of Betancourt, the mean house of the poor negro woman was changed into a magnificent hospital. He died young; the love of humanity had consumed his feeling heart. As soon as the report of his death was spread, all the poor and slaves ran to the hospital to see once more their tender benefactor. They kissed his feet, cut pieces from his clothes,—nay, they would have torn his body to pieces to have had some portion of his relics, if they had not been prevented by the military whom the governor was obliged to station round his coffin. One might have imagined that it was a tyrant who was thus protected against the hatred of his people. No; it was only the corpse of a poor friar, which it was necessary to save from the effects of the gratitude and love of the poor and the distressed! Soon after the death of Peter of Betancourt, his order greatly increased, and the whole continent of America was covered with hospitals, served by his disciples, who took the name of Bethlehemites. These religious have hospitals at the bottom of the silver and gold mines, and thus they bury themselves alive in the bowels of the earth, in order to afford spiritual and corporal help to the unfortunate Indians doomed to be deprived of the light of the sun, in order to procure for us those metals which are the occasion of so many crimes. The form of their vow was: “I, brother N——, make a vow of poverty, chastity, and hospitality, and oblige myself to attend the sick who are poor, though they may be *Infidels, and attacked with contagious disorders.*”

It was in South America that a Spanish monk, Bartholomew, of Olmedo, first taught that religion ought not to be preached sword in hand, but by instructions which would enlighten the mind, and by good examples which would gain the heart. A Spanish monk we must therefore reckon among the first defenders of religious liberty, and one of the first and most zealous adversaries of persecution. It is related in the *History of America*, that Fernando Cortes, animated with intemperate zeal, had commanded his soldiers to overturn the altars, and to destroy the idols, in the chief temple Zempoalla. After his victory over the inhabitants of this town, he went to Tlascala, and the people of the country yielded

themselves as vassals to the crown of Castile, and engaged to assist him in all his future operations. Cortes endeavoured to persuade them to embrace the Christian faith; but finding them not ready to yield to his arguments, he had recourse to menaces, and was actually proceeding to violence, when he was restrained by the interposition of Father Bartholomew of Olmedo, chaplain to the expedition. Accordingly he left the Tlascalans in the undisturbed exercise of their own rights, requiring only that they should desist from their horrid practice of offering human victims in sacrifice.—*Robertson's History of America.*

The religious of the orders of the Blessed Trinity, and of our Lady of Mercy, for the redemption of captives, founded by St. John of Matha and St. Peter Nolasco, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, to the three solemn vows common to all religious, added a fourth, namely to give up their substance, and even their liberty, if necessary, for the ransoming of slaves. These charitable religious led a very austere life: among the Trinitarians a third part of the revenue was always set apart for the object of their institution. As soon as they had collected a sufficient sum of money, they set off for Tunis and Algiers. Neither the fatigues of so long a journey, nor the unwholesomeness of the country (almost always infected, more or less, with the plague), nor the ill-treatment they frequently met with from barbarians, who bear an inveterate hatred to the Christian name, nor even the danger of death under its most horrid shape, could deter them from accomplishing with zeal the laborious task imposed upon them by their Superiors; nay, they courted it as a singular favour, and esteemed themselves happy to suffer ignominies and torments, and even to lay down their lives for the deliverance of their fellow-creatures. Truly animated with the spirit of the Gospel, they sought for no other witness of the heroic acts of patience and charity, which they daily performed, but Him who sees in secret, and expected no other reward but from Him alone, and from the consolation of having rescued from the most cruel slavery men with whom they were entirely unacquainted, and whom they were never to see again. For although, during a space of six hundred years, hundreds and hundreds of thousands of slaves have recovered their liberty, and been restored to their friends and native land, through the unabated zeal and courage of the Trinitarians, and the fathers of our Lady of Mercy, the particular name of each of these benefactors of mankind has not been transmitted to posterity. After having accomplished the object of their hard mission, they retired silently to their convents; they hid in the obscurity of their solitude the long train of their charitable deeds, and prepared themselves, by prayer and mortification, to undertake again new journeys for the same purpose with equal fatigue and danger. There were in Catholic Europe before the revolution two hundred and fifty houses of Trinitarians, and several of the fathers of our Lady of Mercy. These two orders subsisted during six centuries, and were constantly engaged in redeeming slaves: accordingly, what an immense number of our fellow-creatures have they not restored to liberty and to the comforts of life!

It was among the Grey Friars that the celebrated Cardinal Ximenes was brought up. He was prime-minister to Ferdinand the Catholic and Isabella. Near three hundred years before the Burkes, the Grenvilles,

the Foxes, and the Wilberforces, employed the power of their eloquence to put a stop to the slave-trade, this great man,--of whom the learned Leibnitz said, that, *if great men could be bought, Spain would not have paid too dear for Ximenes, if she had bought him with the gift of one of her kingdoms*,--this great man had rejected with horror the proposal which had been made to him, to permit and encourage this infamous commerce of human flesh; thinking, as Dr. Robertson observes, that it was the height of injustice to reduce a race of men to slavery, in order to preserve the liberty of another. During the whole time he held the reins of government, he was the constant protector of innocence and merit; he never conceived or promoted any project but for the benefit of humanity. The whole of his immense revenue he spent in relieving the wants of the state, and the distresses of the people. The doors of his palace were always open to the poor: he received them with affability, read their petitions with kindness, and assisted them with generosity. He frequently visited the hospitals and colleges of his diocese: he repaired and adorned them, and delivered the country from usurers and houses of ill-fame. He formed at Toledo, under his own eyes, an establishment for young ladies of the poor nobility, where they were brought up according to their rank, and provided for them a sufficient sum of money to settle them in the world at the end of their education; an establishment which was afterwards imitated by Madame de Maintenon in France, in the royal house of St. Cyr. He founded also the University of Alcala, where he published the Polyglot Bible, so much valued by the learned, and to which he applied himself with great diligence, and had it printed at his own expense.

The different orders of religious spread here and there all over the East, have also an indisputable right to our esteem and gratitude. Animated with that charity which is the soul of all religious institutes, they dedicate themselves to the service of their fellow-creatures, as far as their circumstances permit. In the solitudes of Mount Libanus, and the forests of Abyssinia, as well as at the cataracts of the Nile, on the banks of the Tigris, the shores of the Red Sea, and in the sandy deserts of Egypt, we meet with continual instances of their humanity. The Maronite monk calls every night from the top of his cedars, to his solitary cave, the trembling stranger walking in the dusk of the evening on the brink of the fathomless precipices of Mount Libanus. The Abyssinian monk waits for you at the entrance of his impenetrable forests, to show you the way to his lonely habitation, and save you from the ferocity of the lions and tigers prowling about in search of prey. The Coptic monk watches from the summit of his tower, to discover the traveller wandering in pathless deserts, in order to save him from inevitable death, either from thirst, or from the sword of the Arabian robber. All religious of every order, live a very extraordinary life. To judge of them by their eagerness to shun the society of men, it might appear that they are desirous only of their own happiness, and nevertheless they sacrifice it every day from motives of humanity; for it is proved, that in hospitals where there is a great number of sick, the religious who take care of them, have almost continually a slow fever, which consumes them, and which proceeds from the

infectious atmosphere in which they breathe. On the summits of Mounts St. Bernard and St. Gothard, the air is so keen, that it is reckoned impossible to live there more than ten years. The monks, who have established hospitals in endless darkness in the gold and silver mines of the new continent, shorten also their existence by breathing an air impregnated with metallic vapours. The children of St. Francis, the Jesuits, and Dominicans, who shut themselves up in the galleys of Tunis and Algiers, and in the pestiferous bagnios of Constantinople, to afford the slaves the consolations of religion, devote themselves also to the most speedy martyrdom.

At the foot of the Andes or Cordilleras, between the Oronoko and the Rio de la Plata, there is a vast tract of land inhabited by savages, where the Spaniards had not carried that devastation which generally attended their conquests. It was there that the Jesuits attempted to found a Christian republic, and to procure at least to a few Indians that happiness which the Catholic clergy had, in vain, endeavoured to secure to all the inhabitants of the new continent. In order to succeed in their enterprise, they solicited of the court of Spain the liberty of all the Indians whom they could civilize, and after having met with the greatest opposition from the first planters, they obtained it. Having thus, through their industry and perseverance, triumphed over avarice and wickedness, and meditating one of the noblest designs which ever entered the heart of man, they sailed up the Rio de la Plata in frail canoes. The Paraguay falls into this large river, and gives its name to the country of which we are now speaking. It is a mixture of thick forests; vast plains overflowed during six months in the year; impassable marshes, and mountains upon mountains, infested with tigers, wolves, and snakes of an enormous size. The Indians who were found wandering here and there in these inhospitable deserts, were a stupid, indolent, and ferocious race of men, without the least tincture of civilization or morality, and like the birds of their land, fixed their habitation chiefly in the branches of trees.

The first accounts represent to us the Missionaries making their way through thick forests, travelling through marshy grounds in which sometimes they sunk to the waist, climbing steep rocks, exploring caves and precipices, in imminent risk of meeting with wild beasts and serpents instead of human beings, and carrying with them no other weapons but their breviary under their left arm, and a large cross in their right hand, and without any other provision but an unshaken confidence in God. Several Missionaries died with hunger and excessive fatigue. Some were murdered and devoured by the savages. Father Lezardi was found by one of his companions upon a rock, his body had been pierced with arrows, and was half devoured by birds of prey; his breviary was upon the ground by his side, and open at the office of the dead. When a Missionary found thus the remains of one of his fellow-labourers in this uncultivated vineyard, he hastened to render him the last duties of religion and friendship, and, penetrated with joy at his happy departure, he sung a *Te Deum* on the solitary grave which he had raised to the honour of a martyr. Such moving scenes, renewed, as it were, at every step, struck the savages with amazement. Sometimes they surrounded the

unknown priest who spoke of God, and then looked up to the heavens which he pointed out to them; at other times they ran away from him as from a magician, and were seized with fright and terror; but the religious followed them, stretching forth his arms towards them in the name of Jesus Christ, and inviting them by his silent but pathetic eloquence to come back to him. If he did not succeed in dispelling their fears, he planted a large cross in an open place, and hid himself in the woods: the savages perceiving no man by, came nearer to examine this standard of reconciliation and peace; it seemed as if an irresistible power attached them to the sign of their future salvation. Whilst they were thus motionless, and beholding the cross, the Missionary sallied forth from his ambuscade, and availing himself of their surprise, conjured them to abandon their wretched life, and to enjoy the sweets of society. Whether Almighty God rewarding the faith and confidence of these holy religious, bestowed upon them the gift of tongues, or whether the ardent charity which was burning in their hearts, was so visible in their whole countenance as to make their language to be understood without the help of words, we cannot say; all we know is, that by an heroic perseverance they converted these poor Indians. As soon as the Missionaries had succeeded in dispelling the fear and shyness of some of the savages, and prevailed upon them to abandon their wandering manner of life, and adopt a social one, the conversion and civilization of whole tribes rapidly followed. For, as charity makes itself all to all, the Jesuits had recourse to every means which they thought best calculated to gain the confidence of the Indians. Having observed that they were very fond of music, these charitable religious were continually sailing up and down the Paraguay, singing holy canticles, which the Catechumens repeated with an astonishing exactness, as tame birds (if we may be allowed to use the comparison), sing, to draw into the nets of the fowler the wild inhabitants of the air. The Indians suffered themselves to be drawn into the inviting snare laid for them in order to seduce them from their misery and wretchedness. They were seen coming down from their mountains, running to the banks of the rivers, and even sometimes casting themselves into the waters and swimming after the enchanted vessel from which they heard such melodious accents. They gradually approached the fathers with more confidence, and consented to remain a short time with them, and then returned again to their wilderness.

But the first sensations of humanity,—the sweet and tender feelings which they had experienced, and the peace and joy which shone on the countenance of their former companions, who pressed them to partake of their happiness, did not allow the savages to remain long absent from the missionaries, who on their side were watching every opportunity of renewing an intercourse with them. The single hearing of a canticle was sufficient to bring back the Indians, to listen again to what had occasioned in them such unknown and pleasant emotions. They were accompanied by their wives and children; and considering no longer the Jesuits as enemies, but rather as supernatural beings, they entreated them to repeat to them their melodious tunes. Become now acquainted with their rude language, these holy religious joined instructions to the singing

of canticles, and spoke with such energy and pathetic eloquence of the sweets of social life, and of the awful truths and unspeakable comforts of the Christian religion, that not one of these fortuitous meetings ended without a great many savages desiring to be placed under the guidance of the Missionary.

It would be exceeding the limits of these pages to give a circumstantial account of the conversion and civilization of the savage inhabitants of these vast countries. It will be sufficient for the information of the reader to remark, that in a few years, thirty little republics of Indians were formed. We call them republics on account of their form of government; though, in reality, they were only numerous families, under a chief, who ruled with the authority and tenderness of an affectionate father, and whom the members obeyed with the docility and love of dutiful children. The villages were regular, the streets wide and straight; the houses, one story high, were built with stone, commodious, but without the least superfluity. In the centre of the village stood the church, the building appropriated to the mission, the hospital, the school, and the public granary. The lands were divided among the inhabitants, proportionably to the number of the members of each family, and the wisest precautions were adopted to provide against the possibility of a scarcity.

As soon as the children had attained the age of seven years, they were sent to the village school. The Jesuit who presided, examined with a paternal attention the disposition of each of his pupils; every one was formed according to the particular trade for which he appeared to be naturally qualified. Some became silversmiths, others clockmakers, weavers, blacksmiths, carpenters, tanners, &c. They were also taught music and dancing, and to make all sorts of musical instruments, organs, guitars, harps, violins, &c. &c. Those children who displayed greater talents, were instructed in sciences, painting, architecture, and all the liberal arts, each one according to his particular taste. It is worthy of remark, that the Jesuits themselves had learned all sorts of trades, &c. to become useful in inculcating the first principles to their pupils. The boys who seemed to prefer agriculture, were placed in the class of husbandmen; and those who still appeared to have retained some relish for the wandering life of their parents, were appointed to take care of their immense flocks. Every morning, at the first dawn, the inhabitants of each village were called to the church, to offer their first thoughts to the Supreme Giver of all good gifts, and to implore his blessing upon the labours of the day. In the dusk of the evening, they again assembled in the church, where the night prayers were sung in two parts, and with music.

As the Indians are naturally indolent, and without foresight, a kind of surveyor was appointed, to examine the ploughshares, and other implements of husbandry in each family, and oblige the chief to sow his corn, &c. &c. The slothful and negligent were condemned to till a larger portion of the *common* field, and thus, through a wise administration, the very faults of those harmless men turned to the prosperity of the public. They were married young, in order to avoid the danger of libertinism; and the greatest concord, and union of hearts, subsisted between the married couple. In case of any delinquency, the first fault was punished by a secret admoni-

tion and reprimand from the Missionary; the second by a public penance at the entrance of the church, as was customary among the primitive Christians; and the third by flogging. But during a space of one hundred and fifty years, there is scarcely an instance of an Indian having deserved this last punishment. "*Their faults,*" says their candid historian, "*are children's faults. Indeed they remain so in many respects during their whole life; but they also possess their good qualities.* Although they were inspired with the greatest horror of bloodshed, the frequent incursions of the Portuguese into their territory in order to make slaves, had forced the Jesuits to train these inoffensive Indians to the use of arms. Every man come to a proper age was therefore instructed in the art of war, and they fought with such uncommon bravery, and with so much order, that they forced their enemies to leave them unmolested in their labours, and in the tranquil possession of their independence.

The spirit of ferocity and revenge, the propensity to the most shameful vices, and the love of independence and impatience of control, which characterise the Indian tribes, were henceforth changed into gentleness, patience, chastity, and subordination. We can form an idea of their truly evangelical virtues, by these words of the Bishop of Buenos Ayres to Philip V: "*Sire,*" said he to this prince, "*in these numerous tribes of Indians, naturally prone to every kind of vice, there reigns such an innocence, that I do not think that among them a mortal sin is ever committed.*" With the help of these industrious and docile natives, the Jesuits succeeded in rendering these unwholesome wilds a most delicious country. The forests cleared away, were turned into orchards, groves, and gardens, where the most useful trees and vegetables of the two Continents grew up with the greatest luxuriance and profusion. Deep morasses formerly inundated with stagnant waters, became rich meadows; and barren deserts fruitful fields, covered with abundant harvests. Instead of the hissing of serpents, howling of wolves and other beasts of prey, and the frantic yells of savages torturing the unfortunate victims which they were going to sacrifice to their implacable revenge, and to devour, nothing was heard but the bellowing of milch cows, neighing of horses, bleating of sheep and lambs, and the voice of husbandmen and shepherds making the mountains and valleys resound with canticles of praise and thanksgivings to the true God, or singing in the most melodious tones the charms of a country life, and the sweets of society. Among those Christian savages there were neither quarrels nor lawsuits; nay, the words *mine* and *thine* were unknown, because, as it is remarked with great propriety by their historian, the man who is always ready to dispose of the little which he possesses in favour of those who are in need, has really nothing of his own. Abundantly provided with all the necessaries of life, governed by the same men who had reclaimed them from barbarism and wretchedness, and whom they loved and respected as their fathers; enjoying in the bosom of their families the most delicious sentiments of nature; knowing the great advantages of civil life, without having left the security of their deserts; tasting the charms of society, without having lost the sweets of solitude; these Indians might flatter themselves that they possessed a happiness of which there had never before been an example. Hospitality, friendship, justice, and all the

virtues which honour man, were continually flowing from their pious and loving hearts. Muratori has given, as with one single word, the best notion of this Christian republic, by calling it, *Il Cristianismo Felice*; or, "*Christendom the Blest.*"

In reading this history, it seems almost impossible not to feel an ardent desire to pass the seas, in order to find, far from the revolutions and vices of our corrupted societies, an humble retreat among the cottages of these amiable and inoffensive savages, and a peaceful grave under the palm-trees of their burying-grounds. But, alas! nothing is permanent in this vale of tears. *All this is no more!* The missions of Paraguay are destroyed; the unfortunate savages, civilized with so much fatigue, are left to themselves, and are wandering again in their forests, or perhaps buried alive in the bowels of the earth. The annihilation of the most perfect and happy government which the genius of man ever produced, has been applauded. It was a creation of the Catholic religion; it had been established by religious, and watered with their blood. This was enough to excite the hatred and contempt of our pretended sages! They triumphed in beholding the Indians reduced to a most horrid slavery, and they were at the same time fatiguing Europe with the noise of their philanthropy and love of liberty! But let us turn off our thoughts from this unaccountable infatuation and disgraceful instance of the corruption of man. While we bewail here the unhappy destiny of the virtuous inhabitants of Paraguay, formed by the enlightened piety of their former masters, they are undoubtedly adoring, under their present tyranny, the Almighty hand which has struck them; and by sufferings, borne with Christian resignation and patience, they are meriting a most distinguished place in that republic of Saints, which the persecutions of man cannot reach, nor his calumnies disturb.

Your universities and societies of the learned, have produced a number of men of rare merit and extensive genius,—the Newtons, the Lockes, the Addisons, the Clarkes, the Sherlocks, the Louths, the Lardners, the Kennicots, the Paleys, the Broughams, &c. &c. But, is it not worthy of remark, that these Protestant schools of learning never produced a John of Matha,—a Peter Nolasco,—a Bernard of Menthon,—a Peter of Betancourt,—a Vincent of Paula, and legislators like those of Paraguay? You abound with commentaries, explanations, and dissertations upon the gospels; you have learned and elegant treatises of ethics; your works upon legislation and politics are innumerable: however, is it not surprising it is only in the schools of *ignorance* and *superstition*, as monasteries are called, that these maxims of the gospel ("as you would that men should do to you, do you also to them in like manner," *Luke* vi. 13; "Greater love than this no man hath,—that a man lay down his life for his friends," *John* xv. 13; "In this we have known the charity of God, because he has laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren," *1 John* iii. 16); have been put literally into practice, in their utmost extent and highest perfection, and not only by a few individuals now and then, but by hundreds and thousands, for several centuries, without interruption? In the flourishing times of Pagan

Rome, a crown was conferred on the man who had saved the life of his fellow-citizen : to what rewards, therefore, are not these generous men entitled ? What honours and crowns do they not deserve, who exposed their lives to save that of their fellow-creatures, without distinction of friend or enemy, religion or country ; not only once, by a sudden impulse of humanity, and momentary effort of courage, but daily, with coolness and deliberation ? Protestants as you are, can you refuse to admire the foresight and wisdom of these benefactors of mankind, who had formed disciples, animated with their spirit, who have perpetuated their charity during such a long period of years, and whose establishments, for the relief of suffering humanity, would have subsisted till the end of time, had they not been destroyed, and the provision made for the poor and distressed, plundered by the rapacious impiety of the vilest of mankind ; supported and encouraged in that regard by the prejudices of pretended philosophers and politicians, and by the blindness and ill-understood compassion of philanthropists ? But, alas ! the names of fabulous legislators are in the remembrance and on the lips of all of you who have had a liberal education ; and yet the names of these real benefactors of mankind are to you entirely unknown ! Nay, more, the institutes which formed them to such heroic actions, are branded with the most hateful calumnies, and the heroes themselves represented as fanatics and bad citizens !

THE END.

*Publications issued by the Catholic Institute  
up to May 1840.*

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*I give to the Treasurer for the time being of a Society formed in London in or about the year 1838, called THE CATHOLIC INSTITUTE OF GREAT BRITAIN, the office or establishment of which is now or lately was situate in Soho Square, in the County of Middlesex, the sum of \_\_\_\_\_ pounds, to be raised and paid out of such part of my personal estate as shall not consist of chattels real, and to be applied in promoting the lawful purposes of the said Society, in the manner which the General Committee for the time being of the said Society in London shall from time to time or at any time direct. And I declare that the receipt of such Treasurer shall be a sufficient and effectual discharge for the said legacy or sum of £ \_\_\_\_\_, as well as for all or any accrued interest in respect thereof.*