

Quartet in Heaven

Four Portraits of Saintly Women

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Woods

FOREWORD

THESE studies in sanctity do not profess to make any special contribution to the life histories of their subjects. St. Catherine of Genoa has been dealt with exhaustively by Baron Friedrich von Hügel in his great work *The Mystical Element of Religion*, Cornelia Connelly's life has been fully written by a religious of her order, while on St. Rose of Lima the hagiographers have worked for centuries, and a new book on St. Thérèse of Lisieux must appear almost every month.

My object is psychological rather than biographical. I want to see these four women as human beings before I attempt to examine them as saints. The tendency of religious biographers has so often been to enlarge on the spiritual side of their subjects, while smoothing away or even rubbing out the marks of our common humanity, that the supernatural has been deprived of its sacramental base in the natural, and appears in consequence tenuous and uninspiring. Jacob Boehme asks: "How can I, being in nature, attain the supersensual ground without forsaking nature?" I believe that the saints have found the answer to this question, but that the hagiographers have in many instances deprived their answer of half its meaning.

In some ways my quartet is more like a *pas de quatre*, for there is among them a constant movement and change of partners. Two of them, St. Catherine of Genoa and St. Rose of Lima, belong to history, while St. Thérèse of Lisieux and Cornelia Connelly belong to modern times. A fresh combination is that of Cornelia Connelly and St. Rose of Lima, who both spring from the New World, from North and South America re-

Foreword

spectively, while St. Catherine and St. Thérèse were born and bred in Europe. St. Catherine combines with Cornelia Connelly in the married state, while St. Thérèse and St. Rose are both unmarried, though only the first is a nun. Finally all return to their original partners, for St. Catherine and St. Rose are saints in the grand manner, complete with visions, ecstasies, miracles and almost inhuman penances, while Cornelia Connelly unites with St. Thérèse in the more ordinary ways of prayer and work and suffering.

The word saint, of course, has different meanings on different levels. On one, which is the sense in which St. Paul uses it in his correspondence with the young churches, it belongs to all the baptized—"the Saints who are in Corinth"—in Ephesus, in Philippi. On another level it is applied to those whose goodness is impressively above the average, but on the highest level and in the technical and formal sense, it depends on the rite of canonization. Cornelia Connelly is the only member of my quartet who has not been canonized, and if I should use the noun and its attendant adjective in connection with her, I wish to make it clear that I use them in the second sense only and that I accept unreservedly the judgment of the Apostolic See, which alone has the authority to pronounce to whom belongs the character and title of saint.

Cornelia Connelly

Cornelia Connelly

1

It is a cold January morning in the Florence of 1880. A thin, sharp wind blows down from the mountains through the brown and yellow streets, and the congregation of the American Episcopal Church shudders and huddles down into its furs as it comes out of the steam-heated warmth. It is not a large congregation, for the cold and lovely churches of the city are a temptation even to those of another religion. Only a faithful few, either staunch Protestants, or nostalgic exiles or invalids who require steam heat, attend eleven o'clock matins at the American Church.

"Sure, it does one good to hear an American voice in the pulpit," says one of them to her friend. "How long has Mr. Connelly been here?"

"Some twenty years or more, I reckon. Mom used to know him way back in '61. But he doesn't look as if he'd go on much longer now. He's getting old."

"How old is he?"

"I couldn't tell you for sure, Remira, but he's getting on for eighty."

"Does he live alone?"

"Oh, no. His daughter Adeline lives with him. You saw

Quartet in Heaven

her at the organ—at least you saw her hat. She looks after him and sees to all the church chores.”

“Is she the only one?”

“I’m not sure. I believe there’s a son over in the States. But Adeline’s the only one in Florence. I like her. Folks say she sometimes goes to one of those Italian popish churches when her father isn’t around, but I can’t blame her for that, considering all things.”

“What things?”

The friend buttons her collar more firmly against the wind as she begins really to talk.

“Would it surprise you, Remira, to hear that her mother was a Roman Catholic nun?”

It certainly has surprised Remira.

“My! You don’t say! How could that have happened? How very, very strange!”

“It sure is a strange story, and you’ll think it stranger still when I tell you that for more than ten years Mr. Connelly was a popish priest.”

Remira stops in her tracks.

“Lord a’mercy! Then how—”

“I’ll tell you how it all happened. You can’t live as long as I have lived in Florence without hearing the story. But let’s step out. This wind is searching me.”

2

When the beautiful Miss Cornelia Peacock married the Rev. Pierce Connelly, her eldest sister, Mrs. Montgomery, was seriously displeased. She had been her guardian ever since the death of their parents, and had brought her up specially with

Cornelia Connelly

a view to making a good marriage. The Peacocks were one of the oldest families in Philadelphia, proud of their Yorkshire descent and occupying an important position in the city; while Cornelia herself was a lovely girl, with a skin like magnolia blossom, lively dark eyes and a shining weight of jet-black hair. She was gifted too, and her sister had developed her gifts by engaging some of the best professors in town as her instructors. She could accompany her own fine voice on the guitar, she could draw and paint, speak French—in fact she had all the right female accomplishments, based on a firm grounding of more useful subjects.

She had money, too—not an enormous amount, but enough to give her beauty and talent a fitting dowery. It was dreadful to see her throwing herself away like this on a mere clergyman of no particular family, only a vaguely Irish origin. It is true that the Peacocks had always been Episcopalians, as suited their English descent, and if a bishop had asked for Cornelia . . . There was no good telling her that Pierce Connelly would one day be a bishop, because she was quite sure that he would not.

It was her sister Mrs. Duval who was always saying that Pierce Connelly would make his mark. The young man had evidently “got round” her, for she liked him very much indeed. He might not be all they could have hoped for Cornelia, but he was a perfectly delightful man, charming and intelligent, and so gifted that he was bound to rise in his profession. His family, too, though nobodies in Philadelphia, had both property and influence in the South.

While the sisters argued, Cornelia quietly took the matter into her own hands. Besides her creamy skin and her dark eyes, she had a peculiarly firm, well-shaped mouth—a little too

Quartet in Heaven

large, perhaps, for the simpering fashions of the day, but beautifully drawn, expressive and determined. When Mrs. Montgomery scolded her about Pierce her eyelids might droop, but her mouth remained firmly set, and as soon as she was twenty-one and legally her own mistress she married Pierce Connelly.

The marriage took place from Mrs. Duval's house, on the first of December, 1831, and soon after it the young couple moved south to Natchez in Mississippi, where a living had been found for Pierce by his relations. They were an attractive pair, and must have surprised many in those surroundings where the middle-aged and stuffy are more commonly found. The new Rector was young, ambitious and enthusiastic, with unusual powers of attraction; while as for the Rector's wife, she might have been described in the same words as Tom Bertram describes Mary Crawford in *Mansfield Park*—"a sweet, pretty, elegant, lively girl."

She did much better, however, than Mary Crawford would have done as a clergyman's wife. She had always been a good churchwoman, and though her duties at that time (two years before the Oxford Movement) could have been scarcely burdensome, she was scrupulous in fulfilling them, as well as in caring for her home and concerning herself with the local works of mercy. Pierce soon made himself popular, both by his eloquence in the pulpit and his good influence in the parish, and he and Cornelia made the Rectory a pleasant place, where one could hear good music and join (if one was able) in good conversation. Altogether the Connelys were a great success. Their circle in Natchez was mainly that of the well-to-do planters outside the town and such of its citizens as prospered on the wealth of the plantations. Those were the days of slave labor,

Cornelia Connelly

and the whole district was prosperous, with the easy, leisured, cultured prosperity of the South before the Civil War.

It was not, however, such a predominantly Episcopalian society as that which they had left. The states of Louisiana and Mississippi had only recently been taken over from France, and Catholicism flourished to an extent which was something quite new in the Connelly experience. In Philadelphia they had had no contact with it whatever—indeed, it was not till they came to Natchez that Cornelia had even seen the outside of a convent. But now they were to meet and speak to Catholics, who though not their parishioners were their neighbors. They were not bigoted, nor did they shun all discussion of their religious differences. Cornelia in particular was interested in the strange unknown life that, while she pursued her own cheerful, ordered, prosperous way, was going on within those convent walls.

Four years passed, and the Connelys had a son and daughter, Mercer and Adeline. Pierce was spoken of as a rising man in his profession, sure of early preferment, and Cornelia was loved for her lightness and goodness of heart. Life seemed to have fulfilled all the happy promises of their wedding day.

But now there appeared in Pierce a growing restlessness. He was successful, he was popular, yet he seemed uneasy. His life as Rector of Natchez no longer satisfied him, and after a time he confided to his devoted, anxious wife that he had begun to have doubts as to his position in the Protestant Episcopal Church. Those new contacts with Catholicism had unsettled him. He had heard the call of a higher truth, of Truth itself, from that Catholic and Roman Church of which five years ago he had known little but the name. Now that he knew

Quartet in Heaven

more, his conviction was growing that it was all that it claimed to be, the infallible interpreter of the Mind of God. In which case . . .

It must have been a perfect moment when his Cornelia, whom he had feared might be stricken by this blow at the central order of her life, told him that his doubt and unsettlement had been hers also, that unknown to each other they had been walking the same lanes of thought, and reached the same journey's end.

3

Here I am making certain presumptions. I am presuming that the Connelys did not discuss their changing attitude toward Catholicism until it had crystallized into a definite purpose, and I am presuming that Pierce was the first to put that purpose into words. I have no facts to go upon, only probabilities. I think it probable that during the incubation stage of their doubts, each would have been afraid of upsetting the other. In those days conversions to Rome—especially in clerical circles—were even more rare and more disruptive than they are now. Cornelia especially would have held in check the attraction she felt stealing over her, knowing that her yielding to it would mean the breaking up of her husband's life. In those early stages, before the full truth appeared, she would even have regarded it as a temptation, and it was not till she knew her own joy when he told her his mind that she realized how far she had traveled without him. As for Pierce being the first to speak, I base that assumption on the continuous pattern of their lives, which consistently shows him always taking the first step, to be followed by Cornelia, who then goes far ahead of him.

Cornelia Connelly

This was what happened now. After more discussion, some reading and much prayer, their choice was made. They both decided to join the Church of Rome, renouncing the religion in which they had been brought up and which in the providence of God had brought them together. It meant many sacrifices—the sacrifice of their home, of their friends, and, for Pierce, of a good position and a promising future. But one sacrifice was spared them. They were well enough off to have no financial anxieties. Unlike many who were to follow him in later years, Pierce Connelly in surrendering his living did not surrender his livelihood. Indeed, by this time he had sufficient private means to be able to plan a visit to Rome, where he decided their reception should take place.

This idea, though it delayed the event for some months, appealed to his sense of fitness, to say nothing of his sense of drama and possibly of his own importance. It would be much better than being received in some small-town church where the priest spoke Latin with an American accent. He pictured a big occasion, a great day, on which he and his Cornelia should be reconciled to their holy mother the Church in the very center of her life and heart.

But his Cornelia, with a keener sense of the supernatural, could not endure the delay. She longed for the Sacraments and hated the thought of having to wait for them till she was in Rome. It did not seem to her to matter where one was received into the Church that is everywhere. The only important consideration was when. As she found her husband determined on this Roman plan, she boldly suggested that she should be received without him while they were waiting for their ship at New Orleans, and it is significant that, adoring her as he

Quartet in Heaven

did and united as they had been in the adventure until now, he still chose to wait for his big occasion, being only the witness of hers. She was received into the Catholic Church by Bishop Blanc of New Orleans, and made her First Communion in the Cathedral.

Pierce's great day came later, and very much as he had planned it. The Connellys arrived in Rome with introductions to many important people, and when Pierce was reconciled on the Palm Sunday of 1836, he had a no less illustrious sponsor than the Earl of Shrewsbury. The friendship with the Shrewsbury family thus begun was to play an important part in their lives and to continue through good and evil for many years.

The two young people had always moved in good society, but the society of Philadelphia and Natchez was necessarily very different from the society of cosmopolitan Rome. They found themselves for the first time in the midst of an aristocracy, and the change appears to have gone to Pierce's head. He did not cease to be pious and devout, but his letters to his family at home were so full of talk of "great people" and "valuable acquaintances," that in the end his more democratic brothers revolted and openly called him a worldly-minded snob.

His wife reacted very differently to her new surroundings. The differences between husband and wife were now beginning to show. Hitherto in their five years of marriage they had appeared very much alike in character and disposition—a "happy couple," a "united pair." But Catholicism had turned them into individuals, first revealing, then emphasizing important divergencies of outlook and behavior.

Cornelia moved easily in the cosmopolitan society in which she found herself for the first time. The admiration which she

Cornelia Connelly

excited wherever she went was a part of her husband's pride. He comments smugly, "I am sure that her Christian feelings are far too strong for her ever to be carried away either by love of admiration or love for society." How right he was. Her social success could not give her half the delight that she found in the treasures of Rome—the buildings, the paintings, the music. She decided to take advantage of her opportunities and renewed her studies of music and drawing under the best masters of the city. But neither her own talents nor the beauty with which she was surrounded made the real joy of those months. That joy was the ever-flowing, ever-growing joy of her religion. She had not been in the Church a year, but already she was a creature returned to its natural element—"as a duck to water". . . only the well-worn simile can express the perfectly unforced naturalness of her plunge into this new environment. At last, though it seemed as if it had been always, she was living the life for which she had been born.

4

Her happiness being of this nature, she was able to take it with her when they left home and returned to Natchez, though it was a return clouded by bad news and straitened circumstances. There had been some losses in the family fortune, and for a time it looked as if they would be really poor. Moreover, Natchez was full of their former friends, now turned unfriendly by their change of religion.

Cornelia had much to endure and to contend with during the months that followed. Pierce, always easily depressed, began to feel all the anxieties of a man who has lost the job he was trained for and does not know how to find another. He declared

Quartet in Heaven

himself ready to take anything—a clerkship in a bank or a drivership on a plantation, neither of which seems a practical suggestion. It was a much better idea to become a schoolmaster, which he did on being offered the post of professor of English at the College of St. Charles, Grand Coteau, Louisiana.

Both the Connellys must have been greatly relieved to leave Natchez and the shadows of their former life and establish themselves in a new circle which was almost entirely Catholic. They now had three children, for another little son, John Henry, had been born toward the end of their European trip. All the children, of course, were now Catholics, and Cornelia was adding to her delight by teaching them their first steps in religion.

The family's circumstances were henceforth more easy. Pierce had his salary to supplement their income, and Cornelia had been given the post of music mistress at the Sacred Heart Convent which adjoined the College. This was for her a very happy situation, for not only did it give scope and value to her great musical gifts, but it brought her into close contact with an order to which she had been specially devoted ever since her visiting the mother house at the Trinità dei Monti in Rome. There she had made the acquaintance of many of the nuns, and here she became the personal friend of Madame Cutts, the superior, and profited much from the friendship in her spiritual life.

This was growing apace. Though she had been in the Church only two years, she was already treading the higher ways of prayer and sacrifice. Pierce, too, was making progress; indeed, the couple were impressive in their piety, in their happiness and in their love of each other. They must have displayed their religion to the world outside in a most attractive light, for all

Cornelia Connelly

but one of Cornelia's large family became Catholics, and Pierce's brother John was also converted, together with his future wife.

The Connellys lived in a little cottage belonging to the convent, to which they gave the name of Gracemere. Here flourished all the graces of religion and family life. Not content with bringing up her own children in the faith, Cornelia took into her home a little Negro slave girl, whom she converted and then set free. The old South lives again in this act, as it lives in the sunshine and the shade of the garden at Gracemere, where Cornelia sits watching her children at play, her guitar upon her knee.

"When I first became aware," she wrote at this period, "that the religious state was higher than the secular, I secretly rejoiced that my state in life was fixed and that such a sacrifice would never be asked of me."

She was not one of those ungracious souls who look primly and askance at the gifts of God, as if they were not given us to enjoy. She thankfully rejoiced in her lovely home and happy family. Yet her soul could not forget that her life was not the life of the Man of Sorrows, and its deeper knowledge rose suddenly in an act that changed her entire world.

A day came which was to be to her what the day of her conversion had been to St. Catherine of Genoa. Cornelia was never converted, except in the technical, intellectual sense of a change from one religion to another. She had changed her opinions, her allegiance, but her soul was not twice born. All that had happened was the immense improvement of its growth by its transference from an artificial to a natural soil. Nevertheless, a day came which was a turning point in her life. It was a day like any other day of the early Louisiana springtime, and

Quartet in Heaven

as on every other day Cornelia sat in her sunny garden, watching her children at play, her guitar upon her knee. Perhaps she sang there in the garden the old songs of the South, "Shining River," and "Shady Grove," her lovely voice rising among the spring voices of the birds, while the flowers in the spring borders matched the gay, streaming ribbons of her guitar.

It was a moment perfect in its beauty, its happiness, its goodness, and suddenly in the midst of it her soul rose up and cried: "Oh, my God, if this happiness be not for thy glory and the good of my soul—take it from me. I make the sacrifice."

She had done it. She had challenged the divine eagle to swoop on its prey. She had said Amen to her own spoliation. It was a heroic act and its reward was on heroic levels. Twenty-four hours later she sat in her garden. The sunshine and the springtime and the flowers were the same, but instead of the guitar upon her knee lay the agonized body of her youngest child, little John, her special treasure, dying in torment after being pushed by a playful dog into a vat of boiling sugar.

5

When a few days later the little boy was buried with all the joyful, tender rites that the Church keeps for those who die "immaculate in the Way," Cornelia could not know that when she herself came to die he would be the only one of her family whom she could confidently expect to meet again in heaven. She had not realized yet the full effect of her offering. She may even have thought that she had already been fully taken at her word. But she had offered all and she had not yet lost all.

Indeed, at the moment a new hope had dawned in her life. She was expecting another child, perhaps another son, to com-

Cornelia Connelly

fort her and fill the empty place. On the other hand, she was beginning to feel anxious about her husband. There was something on his mind. She did not think it could still be little John's loss, for he did not seem so much unhappy as preoccupied. There was also a change in his manner toward her, and a withdrawal of his confidence.

She observed these things but she did nothing to change them—she did not coax or plague him to tell her what he obviously wished to conceal. She accepted his withdrawal as she had accepted her other sorrow. It was part of the holocaust she had offered. Yet in the heart of her acceptance was an increasing dread. "Oh, my God," she prayed, "trim thy vine, cut it to the quick, but in thy great mercy root it not up yet."

In those words "root it not up" lay perhaps a presage of what was coming, for her whole life was shortly to be torn up by the roots. The spring was over, and the long, stifling summer, but though October had come the air was still warm and heavy in the Deep South. The morning was as hot as any in an English June when Pierce and Cornelia walked home together from Mass on the feast of St. Edward the Confessor. They had been to Holy Communion and Cornelia's thoughts were still in heaven when her husband spoke. Perhaps we may allow our imagination to build up a conversation of which we have no record except her later declaration that if it had not been for God's grace she would have died of sorrow.

"My love," said Pierce, "you may have noticed lately that there's something on my mind."

"I have indeed," said Cornelia, thankful that at last he seemed likely to confide in her.

"I didn't want to tell you anything till my mind was made up.

Quartet in Heaven

I would have hid my preoccupation from you if I could, but I know that because you love me you must have seen it in spite of my efforts. I'm going to ask great things of your love for me, Cornelia."

"You can't ask too much."

He took her hand.

"And of your love of God."

What could Pierce have to ask of her love of God? Her mind must have moved among many conjectures, but she was totally unprepared for what was coming.

"I feel," he said slowly, "—or rather I'm convinced that God is calling me to be a priest."

The full import of his words can hardly have dawned on her at once. We can see her facing him in a sort of bewilderment.

"Oh, Pierce . . . but how . . . ?"

"It can be done," he continued, "if *you* are willing. It is your decision. But it means a great sacrifice from you, my dear. I have gone into the matter and I have found that a married man like myself can be accepted for the priesthood only if his wife before his ordination enters a religious order."

The shock of his words nearly choked her. All she could say was:

"Pierce, the children. . . ."

For a moment he too was silent. Then he said quietly:

"These things take time. It may be some years before I can be ordained, and by then Merty and Ady will be at school. It will merely be a case of providing for their holidays, and I shall be at hand. . . ."

"But there will be . . . What about . . . ?" Had Pierce forgotten the child that was coming?

Cornelia Connelly

He checked—pondered—then said: "If it is God's will that I become a priest, he will provide for *all* our children. There are many things that could happen. My brother and his wife would, I am sure, be eager to help us, or the child might even be taken charge of by the convent you enter—for a while at least. But all this, as I've said, is far ahead in the future, and we must trust in God. If it is his will—"

"If it is his will," said Cornelia with white lips, "—his will be done."

She could say no less, and no more, for she was nearly fainting.

6

The more one thinks of Pierce's announcement, whatever form it actually took, the more one is appalled by the sheer tactlessness (to use no stronger word) of the time he chose to make it. He might at least have waited until Cornelia's child was born. To have compelled her to go through her pregnancy with the knowledge that birth must be followed by separation was a barbarity comparable only to that which, in the bad old days before prison reform, obliged condemned women to see the gallows waiting for them as soon as they had recovered from their lying-in. It is hardly surprising that Elizabeth Fry found these wretched mothers full of a deep resentment. But there was no resentment in Cornelia, though her husband with a few words had turned her deepest joys to sorrows. Her happy home, his tender care, her children's love, were now all so many wounds in her heart. She suffered agony at the thought of the day when she must lose them all and begin a life for which she had never felt any vocation.

It may perhaps be wondered why she submitted so readily,

Quartet in Heaven

why she had not attempted to argue, or said at least: "This is not the time to talk of such things. They must stand over till our child is born." No doubt Pierce would have listened to her, for he loved her deeply, though he was not always very clever in his way of showing it. But we have to remember that first in Cornelia's heart, before her husband, before her children, came the love of God. Undoubtedly she saw God's will in this decision—following as it did so soon after her offering of herself and all she had. She would not have believed that Pierce could have asked of her such a sacrifice—which after all was a sacrifice for him, too—if he had not been quite convinced that God required it of them both. His call to the priesthood was a great honor for him and for her and for their children. For her, too, was the special honor of giving her dearest possession to God. He had asked her for this gift, so she gave it gladly with all her wounded heart.

There were, however, some bad moments when her natural, human feelings would have their way, though she was strong enough to hide them from all save her spiritual advisers.

"Is it necessary," she cried to one of these, "—is it necessary for Pierce to make this sacrifice and sacrifice me? I love my husband; I love my darling children. Why must I give them up?"

Nothing, of course, could happen until after the birth of the expected child, and no one but the couple's directors knew what was intended. Cornelia maintained her calm and even her gaiety, showing that integrity and stability of character which were among her greatest gifts. Many a woman, one thinks, would have miscarried her child in such a situation, or at least injured its health and vitality with the poison of hidden distress. But little

Cornelia Connelly

Frank was born at his full term, a sturdy, healthy baby, untouched by his mother's suffering.

7

A few months after his birth Cornelia went into retreat at the convent, and here and now for the first time she experienced a sense of vocation. Hitherto all her instincts had been opposed to the religious life. She was a wife and a mother and her vocation was to her home and family. When Pierce had spoken of a change it had seemed to her quite impossible that she should ever, as it were, put her whole nature into reverse.

But she had always believed that the religious life was the higher one, though she had never thought the call would come to her—indeed, she had rejoiced that it could not. Now at last she heard it, and being what she was she gave her whole heart in response.

This is recorded in the notes she made during the retreat. "Examined vocation. Decided. Simplicity—confidence. Oh, my good Jesus, I do give myself all to thee, to suffer and die on the cross, poor as thou wert poor, abandoned as thou wert abandoned."

Yet even now the future was not decided, and the uncertainty must have acted as an irritant on her sorrows. Such a momentous step as the ordination of a husband and father could not be undertaken without much preparation and time for thought. It was not, of course, the first time that a married man had been ordained, and the procedure for such an event was fixed by custom and canon law. But the Connellys' youth—she was only thirty-three and he five years older—put their separation and the disruption of their family into an altogether different class from

Quartet in Heaven

that of those elderly or middle-aged couples who, having fledged their children, decided to give up the rest of their lives to religion.

A year had passed since Pierce's announcement, and outwardly their life was the same. Friends and visitors who saw the same happy, cultured exterior could not know that inside the future had eaten it hollow. To change the metaphor, Gracemere was no longer a home but the platform of a railway station where a couple waits, filling with desultory conversation the time that must elapse before the arrival of the train that is to part them forever.

That train came in some six months later, when little Frank was a year old, and took Pierce away to England and the home of the Shrewsburys while still leaving his ordination a secret and distant adventure. The earl had heard with concern that a man of whom he had always thought most highly had been reduced by financial losses to become a mere usher in a school. He wrote offering to undertake the education at Stonyhurst of Mercer, the eldest boy, and suggesting that the whole family should move to England, where Pierce would find better opportunities for the exercise of his talents than he enjoyed at Grand Coteau. With the kindest hospitality he invited Cornelia and her children to Alton Towers.

It was agreed that the offer should be accepted only in part. Pierce would go to Europe, taking Mercer with him, but Cornelia would stay behind at Grand Coteau with the two younger children. It would be, as it were, a dress rehearsal of their final separation, and a test of Pierce's vocation. He would try to find a temporary post, preferably one that would bring him to Rome, and if it all turned out as he hoped and expected he would then ask for ordination.

Cornelia Connelly

Gracemere was to be given up and Cornelia and the children were to be lodged at the convent—her part of the dress rehearsal. All the family's furniture and possessions were sold by public auction, and when Pierce and his young son sailed for England they left behind them a wife and mother utterly despoiled.

She now regarded herself as virtually a postulant. She lived with Adeline and Frank in a small cottage in the convent grounds, taught in the school, and joined in the community retreat. Her sister, Mary Peacock, converted by her example, was already a novice, and Cornelia had no thought but of herself becoming a Sacred Heart nun at Grand Coteau as soon as the future should be decided.

But this decision was still like a pilgrim's horizon, continuing to recede. Pierce had arrived in England, had settled Mercer at Stonyhurst, spent a few weeks with the Shrewsburys at Alton Towers, and finally accepted the post of traveling companion to a young Englishman (needless to say "of one of the best families"), with whom he was to visit Belgium, Germany, Italy and France.

"What a delightful time," he writes to his brother, "if Nelie were with me! How much rather would I be at home with her and the little ones than anywhere else without them. . . . All the magnificence and greatness I am in the midst of is a poor—very poor—exchange for solitude and holy quiet."

Do we altogether believe him? I am not sure that we do.

8

A letter which Cornelia Connelly might have written to her husband, but did not:

Quartet in Heaven

Convent of the Sacred Heart,
Grand Coteau,
Louisiana.

Feast of St. Aloysius, 1843

My love,

It is now almost a year that you have been gone, and little Frank can hardly remember you, though he prays every night for his dear Papa. We all, the children and I, follow you on your travels, spreading out the map of Europe on our little dining table and underlining in red ink the places you have visited, while we read and reread the descriptions you give in your letters. What a wonderful tour you must be having and how you must be enjoying it! I am glad you find young Mr. Berkeley such an agreeable companion, and of course it must add very much to the pleasures of your trip to meet so many distinguished people. But, my dear love, when are you going to Rome? I had thought you would have been there by now, and as you are so completely in charge of your route, I am at a loss to understand why you are not. When you went away you told me that the main object of your leaving us was to go there as quickly as possible. Yet you write from Fribourg, from Munich, from Milan, from Ancona, yet never mention Rome. I cannot help longing for you to go there, so that our future lives may be settled and the lives of our children. I will not disguise from you that I find this long period of uncertainty most trying to my spirits. I am neither in the world nor out of it, nor know which I shall be a year hence. Nor can I deny an uneasy feeling that your present life spent in luxurious travel and fashionable society is not the best possible preparation for a life of prayer and sacrifice. My dear one, I have given you to God and I want that gift to be as perfect as human nature will allow. I fear lest it become blemished in the course of these delays. I do not presume to dictate to you or even to advise you, but I cannot refrain from asking you to consider whether it would not be possible to expedite your journey to the Holy City, where alone our case can be decided. I am sure Mr. Berkeley would not object, having shown himself so perfectly complying hitherto.

Cornelia Connelly

The children and I are well, thank God! Though little Ady alarmed us all a month ago (when I would not write of it) by coming out in an eruption of her skin which made us fear the measles. She was, of course, taken good care of, but as I was teaching in the school I was unable to nurse her or even to visit her in case I should carry the infection to others. I found this a heavy cross, but I realized that as I must learn to live without my children it was good training for me. That being so, I forebore even to inquire after her. So you see, my dearest, I am doing what little I can to fit myself for this great and wonderful thing that is to change our lives.

I am glad you have such good reports of Mercer. I write to him regularly, for I suppose that I shall always be able to do that. He has sent me some nice letters too. But I wish he did not have these day-dreams. His mind seems always to be wandering among castles in the air! I fear that this may interfere with his studies. He has not told me yet where he is in school.

I must go now and prepare my lessons for tomorrow's classes. God bless you, my beloved, and write to me soon—from Rome.

Ever your devoted wife,
Cornelia Connelly

Actually her diary contains this entry for the feast of St. Aloysius: "Profit by all temptations!!!"

9

At last Pierce Connelly was in Rome. It is hard to conjecture why he took so long to arrive there, because when he finally did so he immediately set about his petition to the ecclesiastical authorities for leave to separate from his wife as a preliminary to ordination. Their answer possibly surprised him. He was told that nothing whatsoever could be done in her absence. She must come to Rome and give her consent in person. Till then he had gone his way, prime mover of the enterprise, doubtless imagin-

Quartet in Heaven

ing that it could go forward and reach its end on his sole impulse. Now for the first time he realized that Cornelia was to have her public say in the matter. It was not enough to inform the authorities that she had freely consented to his wishes from the very first moment of knowing them and was now living a semi-conventual life in anticipation of their fulfilment. She must appear in person and formally express her sanction before anything could be done. The Vatican refused to move without her.

This would mean another delay, which this time would not be Pierce's fault. But once more his behavior becomes a mystery. He wrote to Cornelia, telling her what had happened and what was required and stating that he himself would come over and fetch her. As bear-leader to the most docile (and well provided) of bears, he was able, by suggesting the enlargement of a visit to America, to extend his tour and travel free of cost to Philadelphia where she was to meet him. Cornelia, deeply thankful for this call to action, set her affairs in order and left the convent with her children. But when she arrived in Philadelphia she was astonished to find that they were not to go straight to Rome, but stay where they were for a month and then go as guests of the Shrewsburys to Alton Towers. This was not at all what she had bargained for, nor had she expected to find Pierce plunging happily into social life, accepting invitations for them both, and taking all his former pride in the admiration she excited wherever she went.

She had lived a semiconventual life for over a year and thought she had renounced the world entirely. It was painful to have to make this return and renew the taste of what she hoped she had forgotten. But even Alton Towers did not see the end of it. They left England only for Paris and "half-a-dozen dinner

Cornelia Connelly

parties with the Duchesse de D. and the Princesse de B." It was all unexpected and mysterious.

Some might say that Cornelia's own behavior was as mysterious as her husband's. Why did she put up with all this? She might have challenged him and said: Either we go straight to Rome and arrange for our separation or we return to Grand Coteau and our normal lives. I cannot live indefinitely between two worlds.

The answer lies no doubt in the total offering she had made of herself and her decision to see God's will in her husband's. She was not a mystic. Unlike St. Catherine, her Love did not direct her save through the voices of others. Her confessor and her husband were her guides and she would not challenge their decisions—or lack of decision. Besides, she knew herself too well to trust any choice or decision of her own in this matter. Her human longings were all for a return to the family life she had found so happy, and she dared not speak lest Self should get control of her tongue. There was nothing to be gained by protest but her own comfort, and that she had learned to do without. She was too holy and wise not to have seen had there been any obvious flaw in her husband's sincerity, and in considering his vocation she could not altogether disapprove of these delays, of this half-return to the world they expected to leave, since both the delays and the return should serve to give him a deeper insight into his own heart. She could not object to them merely because they added to her sufferings the torment of hope, though this torment must have increased almost beyond endurance as the Connellys, always with the faithful and obliging Mr. Berkeley, moved from Paris to Orléans, from Orléans, to Avignon, to Genoa, to Leghorn—making their leisurely way to Rome in the days before the railroads. Often during that slow journey

Quartet in Heaven

Cornelia must have had to bear the unbearable hope that the course of events would suggest to Pierce that he had no vocation or indeed that the ecclesiastical authorities might decide that it would be unadvisable to ordain him.

10

At last they were in Rome and dining with princes. In the midst of the usual social round they settled in the Via Ripetta, and little Adeline was sent as a pupil to the Sacred Heart Convent at the Trinità dei Monti. In visiting her there, Cornelia was able to renew her contacts with that other world which she had thought would be her only world by now.

The next delay came from the Church authorities, who made no reply to the couple's petition for separation. This does not seem to have caused any marked distress to Pierce, who at once started making plans for his travels years ahead as the tutor of young Talbot, Shrewsbury's heir. It would, however, be a mistake to attribute his lightheartedness to any relaxation of his desire for the priesthood. Rather, it was due to his conviction that this desire would ultimately be granted. Absolutely sure of himself and of others in their relation to him, he had nothing to consider but how to pass pleasantly and profitably the time of waiting.

Cornelia, on the other hand, found in this ecclesiastical silence a further test of her heroism. It now seemed to her almost likely that the Pope would decline the petition, and all she had given up would be restored to her. In her mind must have lived, even if unacknowledged, the thought of Abraham's remitted sacrifice. It was now four years since that St. Edward's Day when to a call very like the call to Abraham she had answered, "Here am I."

Cornelia Connelly

From that moment her will had never faltered, even in the depths of human grief and loss; and now as the agonies of hope increased there was no change in her. She showed no outward signs of struggle as she went on her quiet, purposeful way. Through complete self-abandonment she had won that rarest gift of complete self-possession. No one could say more fully or more truthfully than she: "Here am I."

She may have been right in supposing that the papal silence displayed a reluctance to ordain her husband. Pope Gregory XVI had received the Connellys in private audience when they first came to Rome in 1836, and had taken a personal interest in them ever since. He may have hesitated as to the rightness of breaking up so young a family or of ordaining in such exceptional circumstances a man of whose vocation he could not in the nature of things be absolutely certain. Possibly nothing more would have happened if there had not been staying in Rome that winter a very holy American prelate, Bishop Flaget of Bardstown, who had known Pierce and Cornelia for some years and heartily approved of Pierce's aspiration. It is only a surmise that the Bishop intervened on his behalf, but it seems likely that he would have done so and that his better knowledge would induce the Pope to make a favorable decision. Anyhow, delays were ended rather suddenly and on St. Patrick's Day Pierce was able to write to his brother and for the first time make his intentions known.

After giving an account of the matter and explaining the real purpose of his journeys to Europe, with the news that he was to receive Minor Orders almost immediately, he added:

"Nellie at the same time will enter the Convent of the Sacred Heart, where little Ady is, not as a novice but only as a postulant,

Quartet in Heaven

remaining at liberty as long as Frank has need of her. He is to be received with his nurse in a cottage in the garden of the Convent just as he was at Grand Coteau. Cornelia will always pass her nights with him, and he has the most beautiful garden you can imagine to play in, large and high, with a sweet view of all Rome."

This happy disposal of those who were to bear the brunt of his sacrifice is characteristic of Pierce, also the paragraph that follows.

"You know the Prince Borghese has taken charge of Frank's education, and he will be put either here in the College of Nobles at Rome, or with Merty at Stonyhurst in England, as soon as he is old enough. So far, you see, things have been ordered very wonderfully. . . . The children are at once placed as well as little princes could desire, with the interest and protection of great and holy people." Even Frank's nurse gets a splash of gilding—"Nellie has the sweetest little person in the world to take care of Frank, well brought up, never at service before, indeed more of a governess than a nurse. . . . Lady Shrewsbury's sister heard of her for us."

His brothers John and George must have answered this letter as good Christians, for when he next writes to George he thanks him for "the wise and Christian way in which you judge what we have done." George seems also to have written as a good American, for Pierce continues: "You as well as dear John seem disposed to judge rather harshly of the worldly tone of part of the letters I sent you," and after justifying himself at some length finally clinches the matter by pointing out that Our Lord himself took care that his Mother should be of royal blood.

By this time Pierce had received Minor Orders.

On a fine spring day there is no lovelier sight in Rome than the Trinità dei Monti. High above the Spanish Steps the twin towers soar into the breathless dazzle of the sky, while on their flank the convent spreads its great umber façade against dark clouds of ilex in the Borghese Gardens.

On a fine spring day Cornelia Connelly made this beautiful place her prison. She felt it as a prison. For the first time her strong, gay spirit failed. The conflict was over and she had fallen wounded and exhausted on the empty battlefield. "My soul sleeps," she wrote, and she might have added: "My body says, like the starling—'I can't get out.'"

For the first time she experienced the full rigors of convent life—the cold cell, the hard bed, and above all the surrounding, confining walls. The "most beautiful garden you can imagine" and the "sweet view of Rome" were all very well for those who could exchange them at will for the freedom of the streets and the houses of their friends. To Cornelia they were as the exercise yard of a prison and the view between prison bars. Under the weight of sorrow and reaction her health failed, mentally and physically, and she who had always been so brave, so sane, now longed for death and even thought it was near.

In spite of the presence of her little boy and the kindness of the nuns, many of whom she already knew well, she felt utterly alone. The child was too young to be a companion—when he was old enough she would have to send him away—and the nuns' vocation was so utterly different from her own that it was impossible for them to understand half of what she felt and suffered. "Unless," she writes at this period, "the Lord had been my helper, my soul had almost dwelt in hell."

Quartet in Heaven

Pierce had received his Minor Orders in the convent chapel, and it was there a year later that she made the vow of perpetual chastity which must precede his elevation to the priesthood. This followed quickly. On the Sunday after she made her vow he received the subdiaconate and the diaconate a week later. On the third Sunday, July 6, he was ordained priest.

Cornelia had given her gift to God, and for a moment the clouds parted as she saw her gift accepted and ratified. On the day following his ordination, Pierce said his first Mass in the chapel of the Trinità dei Monti. It was also the day of Adeline's First Communion. Kneeling beside her child at the altar and receiving the sacred host from her husband's hand, Cornelia tasted life, not death, and saw the cross she had carried so long bud like Aaron's rod and become a flowering tree among the brooks of Paradise.

It was a moment too big for time, and had soon escaped from it. In its wake the nights and days dragged their slow, hardening length. Cornelia now knew definitely that she was out of place. She found it almost an impossible strain to adapt herself to convent life—at least to the life of this particular convent. The Trinità dei Monti belonged to the same order as Grand Coteau, but this was Italy, not America; if there were no differences of rule there were differences of routine, and of outlook if not of aspiration. She taught in the school, but she had by now sufficient experience as a teacher to have formed her own ideas on the teaching and training of girls. She had an ever-growing conviction that it was not here God meant her to live and work. Yet this Order of the Sacred Heart was the only one she knew. As she was only a postulant she was free to leave it, but where else could she go? Once more uncertainty was added to her trials.

Cornelia Connelly

She felt that God did not wish her to stay where she was, but his remoter purposes for her were hidden.

Then at last Providence moved, and she was shown her way, no longer through her husband's choices but through the Church authorities who had taken his place. Dr. Wiseman, then head of the venerable English College in Rome, had just returned from a visit to England, where he had been deeply impressed by the Church's opportunities in a country which he felt convinced was now on the brink of a great Catholic revival. He realized the important part that education must play in such a movement, and he also realized that, though Catholic boys were already fairly well provided for, very little had been done for the girls. He saw the need for a teaching order on much the same lines as the Order of the Sacred Heart, but with perhaps a more modern outlook and a greater freedom from tradition. It says much for his wisdom and enlightenment that he at once thought of Cornelia Connelly as the best possible leader of such an enterprise.

He had known her since her first days in Rome and thought most highly of her gifts and graces, mental and spiritual. She was thrown away in her present situation, and he suggested to the Pope that here was the very woman they needed in England as the pioneer of Catholic education for girls. Pope Gregory, who also knew her well, received the idea with enthusiasm, and in a personal interview with Cornelia he sketched for her the Church's plan and the part she was to play in it.

His voice must have seemed to her indeed the voice of God, resolving all her perplexities. Now at last she was to be used, set free from her beautiful garden and sweet view to do a work which she felt capable of performing and which she knew was sorely

Quartet in Heaven

needed. For the first time she could see her sacrifice as a prelude to a new life for her as well as for Pierce. Her function was not always to be to stand aside, to get out of his way. She at last had a Way of her own.

12

In a very few weeks she had left the Trinità dei Monti. She could not go to England till certain preparations had been made and suitable accommodation found for her. But so that she might be at once available when all was ready, it was thought best that she should wait in Paris rather than in Rome. So to Paris she went with her children, staying at the Convent of the Assumption. She must have left the Trinità with mixed feelings. There she had experienced at least one blessed moment and many bitter ones. She had known love and kindness but also loneliness and dereliction.

She went but she left behind her a memorial which will always keep her name in the Order of the Sacred Heart even though it was not to be the order of her adoption. There is a story told by the pilgrims who come to visit the shrine of Mater Admirabilis—of which I believe there is a reproduction in every Sacred Heart convent throughout the world. It concerns a fellow postulant who like herself had studied art and was asked to paint a fresco on the wall of one of the corridors. But for some reason the painter's skill failed her and the work was so badly done that the Mother Superior ordered its obliteration. The next morning, however, when with a pail of whitewash the order was to be carried out, the picture had changed. Not only was the painting itself now beyond reproach, but there was about it a new quality of supernatural beauty which thrilled and awed all who

Cornelia Connelly

looked upon it. Such a work must never be destroyed and it was ordered to remain.

So deeply did it now impress all who saw it that it soon became a center of pilgrimage where many graces have been obtained and countless prayers answered. It is known that Cornelia Connelly helped with the painting, though whether it was her paintbrush or her prayers that changed it so wonderfully I do not know. But as a memorial of her at the Trinità dei Monti it is singularly appropriate—*Mater Admirabilis*. . . . The Mother sits in a sunny green field, her workbasket beside her, sewing for the Christ who is to come. On her face is a little secret smile, the smile of a woman who ponders God's secrets in her heart and waits for the Holy Child.

Cornelia Connelly was thirty-six years old when she embarked on the great adventure of her life—the founding of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus. The name had come to her while she was at prayer, and there is something especially touching in that placing of Mary's Child in the center of her life, instead of her own darling children, now given to God. For the years that remained to her (and they were many, for she lived to be seventy years old) she was to have two special devotions—to the Mother of Sorrows and to the Holy Child. Between them they tell the story of her life.

She was happy now. She was called to action, to a work she felt able and eager to do. She was happy about Pierce, too. After some hesitation as to whether he should join the Jesuits, he had gone as chaplain to Lord Shrewsbury at Alton Towers. Cornelia could picture him there, exercising his ministry in surroundings that she herself knew well.

The distribution of Catholicism in England was then very

Quartet in Heaven

different from what it is now. It was then only just beginning to invade the big industrial towns, and for the most part remained still centered in little groups and communities on the estates of the big Catholic landowners. The Shrewsburys, the Norfolks, the Blundells and many others had acted as protectors to their tenants in penal times, and, though those times were over, they still liked to see their estates as centers of Catholic life. Probably all Lord Shrewsbury's employees as well as most of the dwellers in the village were Catholics, and therefore the work of his chaplain would not have differed much from that of a busy parish priest. Cornelia wrote to her brother-in-law from Paris to tell him that Pierce was "deeply engaged in the duties of his ministry, instructing, preaching, hearing confessions, etc., etc." Then she added words that in future years would be painful to read or to remember: "So you see it is not for nothing I have given him to God."

A month or two later Dr. Wiseman called her to England to begin work in his own district. The re-establishment of the Hierarchy was still some years ahead, and the country was divided into missionary districts under a Vicar General. Dr. Wiseman as Bishop of the Midland District arranged for Cornelia and her children to be accommodated at the Convent of the Sisters of Mercy in Birmingham.

It was not till she arrived in England that she realized that she herself was to be the foundress of the new congregation. She had always imagined that the work would be organized by someone with more experience than she had of the religious life and that she herself would occupy an auxiliary and subordinate position. But now she found that she, though not yet even a novice, was to do and be everything, and her spirits may well

Cornelia Connelly

have quailed. The lot of a nun in Protestant England less than twenty years after Catholic Emancipation was not in any circumstances a happy one, and Cornelia's own especial circumstances—a nun with two small children and a mysterious priest husband, an American accent and no money—certainly would not make the situation easier.

However, she set about it all with her wonted drive and courage, and the community already had four members by the time it moved at Dr. Wiseman's direction to Derby. The date of the move must have appeared significant to Cornelia, for it was St. Edward's Day. As she sat with her three companions in the roofless third-class carriage that jogged them mercilessly along one of the earliest railways, she must have thought of that same morning six years ago when in the far-off sunshine of Louisiana she had first seen the terrifying shadow of the life she was leading today.

The little party arrived at Derby (one of them very sick after the journey) to find a vast convent almost without furniture. Kind helpers had prepared for their arrival by cooking a leg of mutton with some carrots and potatoes, but had unfortunately omitted to provide any knives, forks or plates. Nor was there any altar in the convent chapel. Cornelia's first act was to borrow cutlery and crockery, so that she and her companions could eat their dinner, her next to borrow an altar, tabernacle, ciborium and candlesticks, so that they could hear Mass and have the Blessed Sacrament with them in their new home.

Though they were so few in number and the convent did not contain even the necessities of life, she introduced at once a normal conventual rule and started the Society's work of education by teaching in the parish school. It was not, however, till

Quartet in Heaven

December that Bishop Wiseman gave the religious habit to her and to two other members of the community, so as she put it, they were "all novices together." A year later she was formally professed and installed as Mother Superior of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus.

She was now Mother Connelly, mother of a new family, and a family almost as much dependent on her motherly care as her own children had been. For the members of her community were all very young girls, some only in their teens, some recent converts, all quite inexperienced in the ways of the religious life. No doubt they helped satisfy maternal instincts that were otherwise cruelly frustrated. For her own children were no longer with her. Pierce had taken them away.

It is hard to think why he should have done so, for the arrangements for their welfare that had been made at his ordination were working quite satisfactorily. One can only imagine that he was moving in response to the first stirrings of that jealousy of his wife's new position which was later on to become such a disruptive force. He may have compensated himself for the loss of his authority over her by exercising it where it still remained in its full strength. His reasons no doubt were a puzzle even to Cornelia, but his actions were unmistakable. Quite arbitrarily and suddenly he decided that Adeline and Frank should go away to school. Adeline was nearly fourteen and already had some experience of school life, but her mother no doubt had hoped that she would finish her education under her own eye in one of the schools of the Society. As for Frank, he was still only a baby, not yet six years old, and it seemed barbarous to send him away. The Church authorities entirely approved of his staying

Cornelia Connelly

with his mother till he was eight, and to have him snatched away from her like this was enough to break her heart.

There was, however, nothing that she could do about it. Pierce was still the children's legal guardian and had absolute control. She could only face the situation as she had faced every adverse situation in her life hitherto, with courage and the complete acceptance of God's will. She even wrote cheerfully to Mercer about "the nice school at Hampstead where I had put our darling little Frank. . . . Mrs. Nicholson says he has only cried once since I left him."

Mercer was allowed to visit her during the school holidays, but lately he, too, had become an anxiety and for an even more painful reason. He was turning out badly, showing himself both lazy and deceitful. His schoolwork and his conduct left much to be desired. No doubt his peculiar family circumstances were having the same effect on him as they would have had on most children, and he escaped from them into dreams in which he compensated himself for having a home life so unlike that of other boys by performing deeds of incredible valor. He attempted the same readjustment in the conscious field by continually begging for money and other things that he thought likely to increase his popularity and prestige. But it was a situation that no Victorian mother, however wise and holy, could be expected to understand. Disappointed and bewildered, she asks him: "What do you want with an eyeglass?"

13

But more distressing and alarming than Mercer's behavior must by now have become the behavior of Mercer's father. In any attempt to understand Pierce Connelly at this time, two

Quartet in Heaven

facts must be taken into consideration. The first was the death of Pope Gregory toward the end of 1846, the second was the conception and growth of an almost pathological jealousy of Bishop Wiseman.

The late Pope had been a sincere friend and admirer of the Connellys, and Pierce no doubt had hoped great things from his favor. His successor, Pius IX, was not interested, nor had Lord Shrewsbury, on whom Pierce had relied for his advancement, much influence in the new Papal Court. We do not know to what heights Pierce's ambition had soared, but it was probably not far short of a cardinal's hat. Now he saw nothing ahead but monotonous years of work as a country priest. His chaplaincy at Alton had done very well as a steppingstone to higher things, but as an end in itself he found it stultifying and frustrating.

At the same time his wife seemed to be, in commercial language, on to a good thing, and one uses commercial language all the more readily because Pierce's attitude toward the Church has often suggested the attitude of a keen businessman toward a promising enterprise. Apart from his infatuation with high Catholic society, he had always laid great stress on the need for recommending Catholicism to the people at large, and he often wrote of it to his brothers as he might have written of some big business corporation in need of all the succors of publicity and popularity. "Nothing will contribute more to make Catholics popular and do more good than the establishment of Colleges and Convents. . . . Our newspapers and tracts and books, too, it ought to be the business of every Catholic to encourage and disseminate. . . . If every practical Catholic would deny himself to the amount of one tenth of his income for the sake of works

Cornelia Connelly

of piety and charity, our Church would double itself in five years from its increased means and its increased respect."

At first he seems to have taken in his wife's new venture the same sort of pride that he used to take in her social success. He writes proudly and happily to his brother about the great work to which she has been called, and does not seem to have been blind to the place of his own ordination in the designs of Providence for the conversion of England. But this commendable attitude soon changed, the change being no doubt due to the second factor in Pierce's deterioration, his jealousy of Dr. Wiseman.

To understand this one must remember that for fifteen years he had dominated his wife to the extent of being absolute master of her fate. She had seen in his wishes the will of God, and in consequence he seems to have done exactly what he liked with her in everything. She had accepted his decisions and also his indecisions, his procrastinations and his sudden acts. But in the end his power had destroyed itself, for its final act had placed her outside his control. Of him, her husband, Pierce Connelly, she was now completely independent. He had no power over her in her new life or in connection with the Society she had founded. It is possible that he had not sufficiently considered this result of his actions. In itself it would have been bad enough. But not only was Cornelia independent of him, she had become dependent on another man.

Very soon after her coming to England Dr. Wiseman begins to appear in a sinister light. In the first place Pierce held him responsible for her not having started her new congregation in America, which he declared had been her own wish. "You ought to know," he wrote to his brother, "it was no doing of Cornelia's

Quartet in Heaven

coming to England." The Bishop had then compelled her to take possession of the convent in Derby "much against her will and even her judgment." Almost immediately after her removal there Pierce set to work to do what he imagined would loosen his rival's hold upon his wife. (It helps toward the understanding of his extraordinary behavior if we use the language of conjugal jealousy.)

Two of his steps were contradictory. At first he demanded of Dr. Wiseman that she should take her final religious vows without waiting till she had accomplished a year in the novitiate. No doubt he imagined that as a full-fledged religious she would be more independent of her bishop than as a novice. When this move naturally failed he made one in the opposite direction and demanded that she should not take any final vows at all, protesting that if she did so he might be considered responsible for the debts of her community.

Both these attempts at interference failed, but in a third he was entirely and devastatingly successful. Without first consulting either Cornelia or Dr. Wiseman, he wrote to a friend in Rome, Dr. Samuele Asperti, and invited him to come to England as chaplain to the new congregation. This was a gratuitous piece of meddling. Cornelia had always been on the best terms with the Derby priests in whose parish she worked, while the spiritual direction of the community was in the capable hands of the Jesuits. She knew nothing of Dr. Asperti save that he was her husband's friend, and it is at first sight surprising that she should have submitted to this unwarranted intrusion in her affairs. But on reflection one realizes that she was no more accustomed than Pierce to the new state of things. She had

Cornelia Connelly

always let him rule her and could not yet break herself of the habit.

Here one cannot help pausing to compare her with that other saintly wife, Caterina Fiesca Adorna. How would she have reacted if her Giuliano had interfered with her work in the hospital? One can be pretty sure that he would not have been allowed to do so. The medieval wife would have listened to his advice and accepted his co-operation, but with any high-handed acts of interference (had he been disposed to make them) he would have had no success at all. Yet Catherine had not a stronger mind or will than Cornelia. If one thing is proved and certain it is the latter's strength and independence of character. One can only see here a lingering of the Victorian wife who for so long had regarded submission as a religious duty, anticipating the poet's: "He for God only, she for God in him." She had not yet discovered that there was very little of God in the later decisions of Pierce Connelly.

14

It was not till Dr. Asperti had actually arrived and was in residence that she realized all the trouble her obedience had brought on herself and her congregation. The doctor was a fiery Italian, impetuous and bigoted, with characteristically Mediterranean ideas on such subjects as religious communities, Catholic parishes and the conversion of England. He made trouble not only in the Society but in the parish, and soon Cornelia's happy, orderly little world was in process of eruption.

To make matters worse, at about this time her friend and protector Dr. Wiseman was removed from the Midlands to the London District. Not only was she left without his counsel at a

Quartet in Heaven

crisis of her affairs, but he was no longer able to guarantee the Society's finances, with the result that she soon found herself seriously in debt. The community now had nearly twenty members, all busily at work. Besides the parish school there was a new school for "young ladies" and a Sunday class for two hundred mill girls. Cornelia had assumed a load of work and responsibility, and it now looked as if it was going to be too much for her. In desperation she appealed to the new Bishop of the Midland district, Dr. Ullathorne.

The Bishop did the best he could. He made the convent a canonical visitation and expressed his unqualified approval of the Society and its work. But he considered its temporal difficulties too serious to be overcome under present conditions, and advised Mother Connelly to leave her expensive and unwieldy quarters in Derby and find something smaller and cheaper to run. In fact, he advised her to accept an offer which Dr. Wiseman himself had made a short while earlier, when it had occurred to her good friend that her troubles might be a call to move elsewhere. He had therefore written to tell her of "a place prepared, or nearly so, for your reception, where you will be not merely welcomed, but hailed with joy."

The young Sisters of the community were not pleased at the thought of moving. It seemed like an acknowledgment of failure and the undoing of their work. But Cornelia accepted it as she accepted all that came to her through the voice of her superiors, as the will of God. She said to her nuns: "We are Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus. What must we expect but opposition, persecution and flight into Egypt?"

Egypt in this case was Hastings, or rather the new suburb of St. Leonards which Decimus Burton had designed a mile

Cornelia Connelly

westward of the town. Here pale Regency frontages and colonnades gleamed on the seafront or against the trees of a public garden which he had fashionably embellished with a maze. It was a resort of elegance, shrugging away from the picturesque old fishing and bathing town on the other side of the hill. This hill was a sort of *cordon sanitaire* between fashion and mere popularity. From White Rock where it met the sea, it rose a couple of hundred feet to what had long been known as Spitalman's Down. The name was all that remained of a hospital which Isabella de Cham had built there long ago, and was already in process of changing, as the inhabitants both of Hastings and St. Leonards began to speak of the Catholic Ground.

For the Down was now the property of a Catholic priest, who had inclosed the land and erected several buildings. There was also a chapel, a garden and other grounds, extending to over fourteen acres and completely surrounded by a stone wall. No other houses were in sight, and the whole commanded a beautiful, uninterrupted view of the sea. It would be an ideal spot for any convent, but especially for one associated with a school. Hastings and St. Leonards were noted for their healthy climate, and the place being already in Catholic hands the transfer could be easily arranged.

Now the reader must meet the Reverend Mr. Jones, the real old-time Catholic priest, survival of pre-emancipation days, with his silver-topped cane and his buckled shoes. At that period secular priests were never addressed as Father (a later custom introduced from Ireland), but he always scrupulously addressed all nuns as Dame. He was a rich man who had laid out his riches for the good of the Church, his ambition being for his establishment to become a center of religious education. Unfortunately

Quartet in Heaven

his temper was rather uncertain, and former institutions that had settled at All Souls (as the property was called after the dedication of the chapel) had not stayed there long. Dr. Wiseman must have had a real faith in Mother Connelly's wise and peaceable nature when he recommended her to go there.

She went down to St. Leonards to inspect the premises and had scarcely set foot on the Catholic Ground before her heart was filled with a mysterious sensation of familiarity combined with new experience which she recognized as the memory of a dream. She had already visited this place and it was with a sense of home-coming that she wandered through the buildings and over the grounds with their wide, amazing view of the sea. The last of her fears and hesitations were removed, for she clearly saw God's hand in this. She felt that here indeed was the spot chosen by heaven for her work to go forward in a new strength, and before she went to bed that night she wrote to her community, bidding them thank God for having found them such a lovely and suitable home. Fortunately no dream had told her all that she would suffer there or what would be in her heart as she looked out at that wide, amazing sea.

15

Throughout almost the whole of her stay in Derby, Pierce Connelly had been making trouble. His desire to interfere with his wife's congregation had become almost a mania—no doubt because he hoped that by dominating it he could regain some of his lost dominion over herself. When he found that even the appointment of Dr. Asperti was not going to help him—for the chaplain, though a disruptive force, was too conscientious a priest to lend himself to such schemes—he had suddenly left Alton and

Cornelia Connelly

gone to Italy, crowning the rashness of his act by taking his children with him.

Without a word to their mother he had removed them from their several schools, giving as his reason that the ecclesiastical authorities were plotting to kidnap them. One might almost see here the first symptoms of delusional insanity, and it is certain that Pierce's words and conduct from now onwards show an increasing lack of mental control. Hitherto he had not been in the habit of acting rashly or without realism. He had carefully weighed and pondered, indeed procrastinated, the various steps he had taken. But now he rushed wildly into a maze of follies. He suddenly appeared in Rome, assaulting the College of Propaganda with the preposterous demand that the Society of the Holy Child should be exempt from episcopal visitation. His next move was to proclaim himself the Society's founder and demand the approval of a rule which he himself had drawn up. Here once again he had gone too far, for Propaganda naturally wrote for confirmation to Bishop Wiseman (then still in the Midland District) inclosing a copy of the imposed rule. The result was an emphatic statement that Mr. Connelly had no authority whatsoever to act in the matter.

Cornelia was in dire distress. She suspected (as indeed he himself confirmed later) that he had taken away her children expressly to have a bargaining hold over her. They were the hostages of her Society, and one hardly knows whether to admire most the clear self-knowledge or the devoted heroism with which she took steps against her own heart. In order to make sure that her love of her children should not betray her love of God she made the following vow: "In union with my crucified Lord and by his most Precious Blood: in adoration,

Quartet in Heaven

satisfaction, thanksgiving and petition, I, Cornelia, vow to have no future intercourse with my children and their father, beyond what is for the greater glory of God, and is his manifest will made known to me through my director."

She did, however, all she could to calm her husband's frenzy by writing to his and her faithful friend Lord Shrewsbury, beseeching his intervention. After telling him that Pierce's visit to Rome "has been only time and money thrown away," and that she would herself write to Propaganda to decline any changes in the rule of her Society, she begs: "Will you, then, my dear Lord, explain all this to him in your own gentle, holy way, and induce him to turn his heart all to his flock for the love of God."

She had given him as a gift to God and she had purchased that gift with everything in life that she held most dear. It now looked as if her gift might be spoiled, made worthless, leaving her with the payment only. It is easy to imagine what the Enemy of her soul would make of this, how he would urge her to cut her losses and keep at least her children. Her vow must have been to her then like a rock in a stormy sea, to which she clung, but against which also she was dashed and bruised so that the whole of her, heart, mind and soul, seemed to be bleeding.

It must be remembered, too, that this storm broke in the midst of the troubles and anxieties that preceded her move from Derby. If she could ever escape from thoughts of her husband and children, it would be into thoughts of the strife caused by Dr. Asperti or of the debts with which she had been burdened by Dr. Wiseman's departure. Only the strongest soul could have survived such a battering.

Then less than a month after her letter to Lord Shrewsbury,

Cornelia Connelly

her husband came back from Rome to renew his persecution in person. The removal to another part of England of the man his mind had dressed up as his rival and enemy did not cause the improvement that might have been hoped. Indeed, it led to fresh trouble, for when Pierce applied (through his confessor—he scorned to act in person) for facilities for an interview with his wife, the delay caused by Dr. Wiseman's absence was so great that he determined to act without episcopal consent. He suddenly arrived at the convent and demanded to see Cornelia. She, supported by Dr. Asperti, refused. Pierce insisted. She still refused. He refused to leave the convent until he had seen her, but she would not leave her cell. For six hours he raged in the parlor, sending demands and messages by scared lay Sisters. When at last he realized that he could not break down his wife's determination, he went off, vowing vengeance on the convent, on Dr. Asperti, and above all on the man he considered the villain of it all, Bishop Wiseman.

It is easy to imagine his reaction to the news that Cornelia was going to follow the Bishop into his new district and set up her convent under his protection. Before she herself had actually left Derby (though several of the nuns had already gone), he wrote to Dr. Ullathorne, demanding his intervention. The letter, though it still shows an outer dressing of piety (leaning like so much of Pierce's piety toward smugness), contains some curious phrases for a priest to have written. After an unctuous beginning: "It has pleased Almighty God, more than once, as it appears to me, to call me to hard trials," he goes on to write of "principles which unlike dogmas or matters of discipline are too clear for anyone to doubt about." After that it is not perhaps surprising of him to proclaim: "I am a man, a husband and a

Quartet in Heaven

father before I am a Priest." He then proceeds to announce the real purpose of his letter. "I hear she is about to leave your Lordship's jurisdiction and come again under that of Dr. Wiseman. My object in writing is to beg your Lordship to prevent this if possible." Then comes his threat: "If the laws of justice and honour cannot at once be enforced by the authorities of the Church, I am determined to apply to those of the country."

Poor Cornelia entered her beautiful new convent only to be served with a writ to appear before the Court of Arches to answer her husband's suit for the restitution of conjugal rights.

16

It would be a cynical understatement to call it a bad start. The scandal was nation-wide and the evil which it threatened appeared world-wide. The mere local failure of Cornelia's new school, or even of her Society itself, was a minor catastrophe compared with the damage likely to be done to the Catholic cause in England and even abroad. Anti-Catholic feeling had been growing in the country ever since the beginning of the Oxford Movement, and it would now swell on a richer diet than it had known for years. Here was a man robbed by the Papists of his wife, whom they had shut up in a convent, refusing to let him even see her. That they had not done the same with his children was due only to the smart countermove by which he had snatched them out of their clutches. The fact that he himself was a priest may have fogged the situation a little for some, but for the majority it only set out the magnitude of the outrage which had driven him to take such a step against the Church in which he ministered. In legal circles dry jokes were cracked on this unique event in the history of the English

Cornelia Connelly

law—a Roman Catholic priest suing a Roman Catholic nun for restitution of conjugal rights before the Protestant Court of Arches.

Until the Divorce Act of 1857, matrimonial cases could be heard only in the ecclesiastical courts (except for those demanding the rare divorce *a vinculo matrimonii* for which an Act of Parliament was required). So in summoning Cornelia before the Court of Arches Pierce was taking the only course open to a husband who wished to get back a runaway wife. The Court, presided over by the Dean of Arches, the chief law officer of the Archbishop of Canterbury, was an exclusively Anglican tribunal. It could not be expected to understand the situation, and its decision was almost a foregone conclusion for Cornelia, who saw in her husband's action the betrayal not only of herself and her Society but of his own priesthood.

There was a rumor that he had publicly apostatized, and though this could not be confirmed it is obvious that every consideration both of Catholic loyalty and personal religion had been swept away by the madness of pride and jealousy. Cornelia wept for her children who now might fall into Protestant hands. If Pierce had hoped by his action to detach her from Dr. Wiseman, he had only once again defeated his own ends. For these terrible events had made her rely more and more on her kind friend and protector, who stood loyally at her side from the moment when in answer to her news that she had received her husband's citation, he wrote, "Fear nothing . . . you will be fully instructed what to do. No personal appearance will be required of you. I will look after everything for you. I never turn my back on one whom God has given into my care."

As for Pierce, he too must have felt confident of the Court's

Quartet in Heaven

decision in his favor—so confident that he wrote to Dr. Winter, his successor in the chaplaincy at Alton, suggesting that he should escort Cornelia from St. Leonards to Albury Park in Surrey, where friends of his had offered to receive her, and thus spare him the necessity of resorting to compulsion for the enforcement of the Court's decree. "The lawyer's letter in my hands says: 'She may now be compelled by force to return . . . any agreement between you and her, or between either of you and any third person notwithstanding.' They must now therefore know that force can be used and most surely it shall be used."

The case of *Connelly v. Connelly* came before the Court of Arches in May, and as had been generally expected, judgment was given for the plaintiff. Cornelia's counsel at once gave notice of appeal, thus delaying any possible enforcement of the Court's decree by its officials. But though no legal compulsion could yet be used, Pierce's earlier threats carried the possibility that he would intervene illegally. His manner both of talking and writing suggested that he was prepared to learn at least one lesson from the ecclesiastical authorities and kidnap his wife. There was a rumor that he had hired a yacht and intended with the help of friends to raid the Convent of the Holy Child and forcibly remove the Mother Superior.

Cornelia's friends urged her to leave the country, but she steadfastly refused, though she thanked them gratefully for their advice and offers of protection. "A flight like this," she wrote to Lady Shrewsbury, "would be an acknowledgement of some cause for flight, which would be contrary to the truth. We have nothing to fear. God and truth are on our side."

A flight would also mean abandoning her young Society, too young to be left without a mother—not only on account of

Cornelia Connelly

its own tender age (barely three years founded, only six months at St. Leonards), but on account of the age of its members, few of whom were over twenty. It was with that same pity for the youth of her new family that Cornelia decided to keep the news of her tragedy from all save one or two of the oldest. This was, of course, easier to do in a convent than it would have been in an ordinary household. Nevertheless, it required not only constant vigilance but a firm control of her own demeanor, so that nothing could be suspected from any appearances of strain or sorrow. She for whom gaiety had always been a note of life must continue to be gay, to smile as though the Enemy of her soul had not snatched her gift out of God's hands and thrown it in the mud. She must busy herself with the small domestic concerns of the community, give practical help to her inexperienced cook, decide how far a pair of shoes had exceeded the requirements of religious poverty. She must sympathize with the small griefs and cares of her postulants and novices as if there were no other griefs or cares.

These young things must not notice that she never went alone either to the parlor or the garden, and of course they did not know that in her cell a disguise hung ready to put on if the worst should happen and she should have to flee. One day it looked as if that moment was near.

"Look, Mother, at that pretty yacht out at sea. I wonder where it comes from and where it's going. It wasn't here yesterday."

Her calm, wise eyes gaze quietly over the edges of the garden to where, below, the channel spreads like a shining floor round a white ship at anchor. The sudden leap of her heart has already become a prayer as she answers, smiling:

"Yes, it's a lovely sight. I often thank God for our view of the sea."

Quartet in Heaven

17

For days that must have seemed like weeks that yacht lay at anchor off Hastings. Then one morning Cornelia looked out and it was gone. The channel lay an innocent, empty stretch of water blinked with sunshine. The yacht had disappeared and nothing had happened. Pierce had made no attempt to carry off his wife. Perhaps his nerve had failed him, or his opportunity; more likely his decreasing funds had disposed him to wait for the almost certain decision of the Privy Council, which would give his schemes the backing of the law.

If it had been a foregone conclusion that the Court of Arches would decide in his favor, the verdict of the Privy Council seemed doubly assured. But now suddenly the power of evil began to fail, as it so often does on the very edge of triumph, thus reflecting the Enemy's eternal frustration and final impotence. The case could not have been tried at a worse time. The recent restoration of the Hierarchy, combined with Dr. (now Cardinal) Wiseman's somewhat injudicious utterance from the Flaminian Gate, had thrown the country into the grip of the most virulent No-Popery epidemic since the Gordon Riots. The Ecclesiastical Titles Bill (aimed at the new Catholic bishops) was actually before the House of Commons when Mother Connelly's appeal was heard by the Lord of the Privy Council—"the most Protestant Court of what was at the moment the most bigoted country in Europe."

The result was a remarkable instance of the different ways in which God and Satan treat their clients. Incidentally, it must also be regarded as a shining example of the integrity of English law. In spite of the clamor around them, the Lords maintained their judicial impartiality and allowed Cornelia's appeal, re-

Cornelia Connelly

versing the decision of the Court of Arches. The matter was not finally closed—there were still certain steps Pierce could have taken toward a new trial. But fortunately by this time he was almost totally without funds and could do no more.

Cornelia was delivered from his persecution, but she was not delivered and never would be from the suffering he had brought into her life. For months, even for years, she had to see him expose himself in frenzied assaults on the Church whose priest her sacrifice had made him. She had to see him rob her children of their faith, and, when at last he withdrew with them to another country, leave behind him the smoke of a scandal which it would take years for her Society to live down.

The decision of the Privy Council seems to have robbed Pierce of his last few remains of sanity and self-control. His plunge into what an Anglican bishop has described as the Protestant underworld suggests the plunge of the Gadarene swine over their cliff. Down into the depths he hurled himself, with howls of rage against the Church which had now become in his distorted mind the representative and enlargement of his hated rival, Cardinal Wiseman.

Only such a supposition accounts for his behavior and utterances, which are almost those of a madman. They are so wild that one would have expected them to defeat their own ends and cause only incredulity in those who saw and heard him. But those were the bigoted Protestants of Mid-Victorian England, already frightened half out of their minds by the restoration of the Hierarchy and Cardinal Wiseman's pastoral. Pierce provided these gentry with a veritable armory of defense. One who until he saw the light had been himself a Catholic priest, fully instructed in the laws of his Church and familiar

Quartet in Heaven

with all the secrets of the confessional, had declared in all the finality of print that Dr. Wiseman was now teaching the children of England that the burning of heretics "whenever practicable and expedient" was as binding as Friday abstinence. No doubt he himself had given permission to certain of his penitents to poison their relatives, which he proclaimed, "according to the Church may occasionally be innocent and lawful," even though he had not had cause to order the shooting of his sovereign, which was, however, the sort of thing, he assured his readers, which might happen any day.

His pamphlet *Reason for Abjuring Allegiance to the See of Rome* went into twenty editions. No doubt it would not have had such a sale in modern times, when the enemies of the Church base their attack on very different grounds. The old-fashioned "hissing Protestant" is almost extinct, though echoes of his voice can still sometimes be heard in remote districts. Only a few years ago a Sussex woodcutter was told by his aged father when he announced his intention to join the Church of Rome: "Well, well, my boy, if 'ee will do it I can't stop'ee. But mark my words, lad, *dey'll burn'ee, dey'll burn'ee.*"

Pierce Connelly set the Smithfield fires as smoking in many a nervous Victorian imagination. Then after a time he grew tired of it all and left the country. He took the children with him. By this time the poor things must have grown used to being dragged to and fro between England and Italy. Mercer was nearly grown up, Adeline in her late teens, while Frank was only ten. All three had spent the last few years in an atmosphere with which the home life of a modern divorced couple would compare favorably. Cornelia was heartbroken at their loss, which involved, she knew, the loss of their religion.

Cornelia Connelly

The fact that Pierce was able to apostatize all three may at first seem surprising when we consider how firmly they had been grounded in the Catholic faith and how carefully trained in it during their early years by parents they deeply loved. But we must observe two things. First, that their father was by general report a most persuasive and attractive man. This may hardly appear from his conduct or from such of his correspondence as has been passed on to us, but the evidence is too clear and too consistent to be ignored. "Charming" and even "fascinating" are adjectives which those who knew him personally did not find out of place. He also provided the children with a home which contained at least one resident parent, a luxury they had not enjoyed since the days of Grand Coteau. Life with him must have begun once more to appear normal and respectable—they ceased to bear the stigma of being different from everybody else.

The other consideration is that more than possibly their youthful religion had been tried too high. Children are not unlike Baron Friedrich von Hügel's dog Puck, of whom he used to say that, much as he loved his master, he evidently found it a strain to be always in human company, and sometimes had to run off and be his canine self in the company of other dogs. To what extent the young Connellys were allowed to enjoy the company of "other dogs" is doubtful—it probably was not great. In their home the spiritual atmosphere would have been intense, and Catholic school life at that period was rigid and demanding, as indeed was all school life. (A part of Cornelia's achievement with her new Society was to soften and modernize Victorian ideas on education.) Pierce in his early Catholic days had been exceedingly stiff in his demands on himself and others.

Quartet in Heaven

His letters to his brothers are full of exhortations to abjure "pretty things"—displaying a streak of Puritanism as much out of place as his addiction to the Best People. While even Cornelia sometimes appears in her letters to Mercer at Stonyhurst to ask too much of a young boy who already had so many strains upon him.

It was, of course, a time of stern ideas on conduct and morality, and America before the Civil War was just as "Victorian" as the Queen's own country. Children of the tenderest age have a natural affinity and aptitude for religion, but it is not till they are much older that they begin to have anything in the nature of a moral sense. The grafting of a moral code upon a spiritual attraction is a process requiring great sympathy and delicacy, and one that can easily be mishandled. Above all, the child with his supernatural attraction to heaven and God and the saints must not be allowed to think that these things are only means to an end—an end, moreover, necessarily involved with the convenience and credit of his elders. It is a sad reflection that the faith of the young Connelys may not have been lost only through the disruption of their home and the blandishments of their father, but also through a sort of spiritual and moral suffocation in which the very holiest of those who loved them had a share.

Be that as it may, Cornelia's children were lost to her in this world, both bodily and spiritually. Mercer and Frank both died outside the Church, and though after her father's death Adeline returned to the practice of her religion, that was not till after Cornelia herself had been dead some years.

As for Pierce Connelly, the end of his story is as peculiar as any part of it. If the Gadarene swine had halted their rush "down a steep place into the sea" to browse the scanty pasture of some ledge above the level of the waves, they would have provided a parallel to his last years spent as Minister of the American Church in Florence. One can only guess the considerations that guided him. No doubt they were partly financial, for he had spent nearly all his money on litigation, and his chances of finding employment were very much worse than when he had found himself in a similar position fifteen years earlier. Moreover, the last five of those years had been spent in hurling himself against the Rock of Peter, and he was perhaps feeling exhausted and glad to settle down in a position which might by this time have had a certain amount of nostalgic attraction. One may wonder, perhaps, at the American Church authorities receiving him back after his excursion into Popery. But possibly they thought that he had atoned for his lapse by the thoroughness of his anti-Catholic propaganda.

One wonders more at his settling in the midst of a Catholic city, where a skyline of spires and a clangor of bells would ceaselessly call to his memory past years. In that memory lay buried not only splendors and privileges, not only the love of his wife, but moments of sacred experience and spiritual ecstasy. When he heard, as he must have heard many times of a morning, the three sweet, short strokes of the sacring bell, did he never see Pierce Connelly at the altar, lifting the Sacred Host? Possibly after banging his head so madly against the Rock he had suffered a sort of spiritual concussion and no longer thought of these things. The same state would account in a different way for

Quartet in Heaven

his acceptance of what could be considered only a humble position. He was pastor of a church that had no real footing in the city, no permanent congregation—which ministered only to foreigners in transit and was regarded by the citizens as a mere conventicle. From every point of view it seems a strange ending for a man who had once dreamed of a cardinal's hat.

What was really in his heart during those last years of anticlimax, it is only for the Judge of all to know, and we can only guess that it was the prayers and offered sufferings of his wife that kept him thus precariously on his ledge when he might so easily have fallen the whole way into the abyss. But we may be quite sure that she never ceased to pray for him and that her prayers were powerful with God. In one respect Pierce Connelly stands unique in that interesting category of "saints' husbands." It was he who provided his wife with most of the raw material for her holiness. Every step she took on the way to heaven was on his impulsion, either following or resisting him. But for him, she would never have founded the Society which has spread all over the world and done such an inconceivable amount for Catholic education. Until he confronted her with his desire for the priesthood she had had no thought but of spending and ending her days as his wife and the mother of his children. No doubt Cornelia Connelly would in any event have left behind her a happy and fragrant memory, but it is entirely due to her husband that she has left so very much more. Certainly she had never dreamed of entering a religious order. By the very nature of things that would have been impossible, though there is always that pathetic little note which proclaims her thankfulness that the choice is not and never can be offered her. It is also most unlikely that without Pierce's leadership she would even

Cornelia Connelly

have become a Catholic. I am not suggesting that she would have resisted the truth, but there is always a stage in a conversion, before conviction has been attained, which belongs to attraction only, and Cornelia with her spirit of self-denial and strong sense of duty would almost certainly have resisted an attraction which threatened her husband's peace.

Then when his leadership had been changed to attack, and instead of being her good angel he became her tempter and soul's enemy, it was through him that she trod the higher, more mysterious paths of suffering. She had already suffered through him in the depths of her tenderest human affections, but now she was also to suffer in the highest peak and summit of her soul. For now she had lost the sustaining thought that what she suffered was the Will of God. "I would grind myself to powder," she once had said, "if by that I could accomplish God's Will." But this apostasy, this awful dereliction of a consecrated priest, this loss by her children of the gift of faith could not possibly be according to His Will. It could only be the work of the devil which for some mysterious reason He had allowed. She knew that God cannot will evil, but that He sometimes allows it, when it is capable of being turned into a greater good. There is always a higher card with which to take the devil's trick, and it was for Cornelia to play that card and win with it, instead of the four souls he had taken from her (and who knows but that she won those too), countless young lives trained in faith and holiness for the Greater Glory of God.

At the time when Mother Connelly started her great work of educating the Catholic girls of England, the education of

Quartet in Heaven

women was almost at its lowest ebb in this country. Though the position of governess was still practically the only one open to a woman who had to earn her living, very little was done to raise her mental equipment above that of the average school-boy. Indeed, the governess probably knew less about such subjects as arithmetic, history and literature than her younger brothers. "Accomplishments" were still the chief stock in trade of the schoolroom. To know more was to be "learned," and to be "learned" was to be unattractive to men and undisposable in the marriage market.

Cornelia Connelly had had a better education than was generally given to girls, and she certainly had a much richer and clearer mind than most of her contemporaries. She also had had some experience of teaching at Grand Coteau and at the Trinità dei Monti, which led her to form certain ideas on what was still known as "female education." These ideas are remarkably enlightened and progressive for her times. Such pioneers as Miss Beale and Miss Buss had scarcely begun their work of reform when she produced her *Book of Studies*, in which she had set down the educational aims of her Society.

These aims include a thorough grounding in English, French, writing, arithmetic, geography, history and grammar. Then, greatly daring, with her older classes, she breaks into the exclusively masculine inclosures of philosophy, astronomy, geology, Latin and Greek, and even architecture and heraldry. At the same time she would not neglect such almost necessary accomplishments in those pre-wireless days as music and singing, and she balanced her curriculum with the usual feminine arts of needlework and embroidery, to which she had added lace-

Cornelia Connelly

making and other activities useful to the Church such as the making up of vestments.

In none of these things would she tolerate the amateurish standards so prevalent in many girls' schools. Everything must be up to the professional mark, and she engaged specialists from London as instructors. On yet another point she showed her enlightened and adventurous spirit. Those were the days when girls still had to wear backboards and walk with weights on their heads in the interests of "deportment." It occurred to Mother Connelly that a girl could hardly learn better how to move, walk, come into a room, etc.—to say nothing of speaking clearly and musically—than by acting a part in a play. The performance of plays therefore became—as it is still—an important part of her curriculum. And this happened at a time when the Reverend Edmund Bertram might still be living at Mansfield Parsonage. Many considered it a dangerous novelty, and some parents were shocked to the pitch of their removing their daughters. But Mother Connelly refused to sacrifice her ideals to prejudice, and in time the opposition to her innovations died away, and her boarding school at St. Leonards became famous throughout the country for providing the very best type of Catholic education.

It was Catholic with a large and a small C. In all knowledge Cornelia aimed at a Christian synthesis. The rule of her Society expressly states that it had "chosen education as a means to gain souls to God." All the teaching was given by women leading dedicated lives, and the subjects were chosen with a view to leading the pupils to "the invisible things of God through the medium of the visible." "*Ut dum visibiliter Deum cognoscimus, per hunc in invisibilium amorem rapiamur . . .*" Thus, through

Quartet in Heaven

the Christmas Preface, she united her Society with the greatest feast of the Holy Child.

It is interesting to notice here that in the religious training of young people in her schools Cornelia appears to have avoided that rather smothering intensity that she sometimes showed in her dealings with her own children. The type of religious education given by her Society shared the enlightenment displayed in other subjects. For instance, in teaching Church history, she insisted that mistakes and scandals should not be left out or glossed over. It was better that the children should hear of these things from teachers who would use them as proofs of the Church's divine origin than, perhaps later on, from those who saw them only as occasions for disillusion and skepticism.

Her schools also, more than other convent schools, allowed the pupils a great deal of freedom and fun. No doubt her fears for her own brood had led to a state of anxiety in which she had overstressed the claims of motherhood—requiring, for instance, that poor Mercer should confess his faults to her as well as to his confessor, and showering reproaches where perhaps encouragement, or even a little teasing, would have done more good. The change is all part of the flowering of her nature as it responded more and more closely to the supernatural. The weakness she had shown in her own family—too uncritical an acceptance of the will of a selfish man, too much anxious concern for her children's welfare—have disappeared now that she is the Mother of that so much larger family, the Society of the Holy Child Jesus.

Mother Connelly did not confine her educational work to "young ladies." She started Poor Schools, as they were then called, in St. Leonards, London (where her nuns had to wear

Cornelia Connelly

the cast-off clothing of the postulants, in order to escape being pelted in the streets), Preston and Blackpool. Public education was at that time in a shocking state. The school-leaving age was ten, and the subjects taught amounted to little more than reading, writing and arithmetic. Corporations such as the National Society did what they could by establishing "Middle Schools" for those children whose parents could afford to keep them at school a year or two longer, and Mother Connelly worked on similar lines, adding to the curriculum grammar and geography, as well as such useful though, in those days, unusual subjects as hygiene and domestic economy.

Her work did not go unappreciated. School inspectors praised her highly. One even declared that her school was "one of the most perfect institutions of its kind in Europe." But much dearer to her soul must have been Cardinal Wiseman's words, spoken twenty years after he had brought her to England expressly to salvage and promote Catholic education—"You have realized the desire of my heart."

She had her struggles and many bitter trials and disappointments besides those caused by her husband. Even before the tumult and scandal of the *Connelly v. Connelly* case had died away, she had begun to have trouble with the Reverend Mr. Jones. This was hardly surprising, as no less than six communities had already failed to live with him, but it was a cruel addition to her other cares to think that once more she and her young nuns would have to move house. Taking her usual refuge in prayer, she started a novena for the whole community. They must all have been a little disconcerted by the form taken (presumably) by the answer, for on the last day of the Novena Mr. Jones died. He died suddenly and unexpectedly, but he died

Quartet in Heaven

peaceably, assuring Cornelia that his will would insure her remaining in her present home, where indeed her Society has carried on its work ever since.

For many years it was the mother house, to be succeeded in that capacity by the convent at Mayfield, Sussex, which she had founded as the result of a school picnic among the ruins of what had once been the palace of the Archbishops of Canterbury. When the development and increase of the Society necessitated a more central seat of government, Mayfield became the English Provincial House and the mother house was transferred to Rome.

At the time of Cornelia's death in 1879, there were convents not only in St. Leonards and Mayfield, but in London, Preston, Blackpool, Sevenoaks, and at Neuilly in France. There were also three schools in her native city of Philadelphia and one at Sharon Hill in the same state. Since her death four more convents have been established in England (at Harrogate, Oxford, Birmingham and Lancaster), three in Eire, one in Switzerland, one in Rome, six in Africa, and no less than twenty-two in the United States. These convents are all power stations of Catholic education, energizing every sort of school—boarding schools, day schools, grammar schools, parochial schools, preparatory schools, training colleges and university hostels. The Society of the Holy Child Jesus has spread over the world an enlightened, progressive, effective system of Christian education—truly a rich harvest to have sprung from the seed of one woman's broken heart.

20

St. Catherine of Genoa "became a saint because she had to"—because without the support and integration of the supernatural her difficult, introverted nature would have collapsed into

Cornelia Connelly

hysteria. But no such psychological necessity can have influenced Cornelia Connelly. In any sort of life she would have found a measure of success and happiness. Her charm and her talents would have made her popular in any society, while her strong affections and domestic tastes predestined her to a happy marriage. By giving herself to God, she lost all these things that she would otherwise have enjoyed. Her religion, far from unifying a broken life, disrupted everything except her own being.

I am not thinking here of the religion she was brought up in and practiced for the first twenty-six years of her life, but of that more exacting, urgent faith which she and her husband adopted soon after their marriage. If either they had failed to hear or failed to respond to its call, she might have passed tranquilly into old age, watching her children grow up and bring her their children. To the end of her life she would have remained her husband's darling. No doubt he would have given her some anxious moments, but at least she would not have seen him broken on the Rock. Or even if he and she had gone so far as to join the Catholic Church together, they might still have kept themselves in the shallows of Catholicism, where so many paddle and splash, and never risked those deep waters in which she had been cruelly buffeted and he had been drowned. Again, a less holy woman—perhaps only a little less—would have refused to sacrifice herself to Pierce's vocation. If she had refused there would have been no Society of the Holy Child Jesus, but also no broken home or broken hearts.

Certainly the impact of the supernatural on Cornelia's mind and character was more in the way of a test and a purge than a deliverance, and the fact that she survived the ordeal without mental injury bears witness not only to the power of super-

Quartet in Heaven

natural grace but to the psychological integrity of the nature that responded to it.

With so strong and self-reliant a personality it is perhaps surprising to find her consistently molding her spiritual life on the will of others. In this she could not be more unlike St. Catherine, who for so long went her lone, eccentric way with no guidance save the inward promptings of her Love. Cornelia from the first made a practice of frequent confession and obedience to a director. She also followed her husband's leadership, even at times when perhaps a little opposition would have been good for him. All the more important decisions of her life were his in their first inspiration. Indeed, her spiritual life is built on her married life; it begins in her compliance as a wife and crowns itself in the holocaust of her home and family.

When Pierce Connelly's authority was removed by his own act, she turned instead to the authority which that same act had put in its place, and to the end of her life she accepted the guidance either of Dr. Wiseman or (when the new diocese was created) of the Bishop of Southwark. Yet it would be a mistake to regard her as a woman easily led, or so derivative in her ideas that she could not act without advice and example. This is proved by the fact that in every case where authority abused its power she showed herself as firm in resistance as she had hitherto been docile in acceptance. Not only did she reject Pierce's usurped authority at a mighty cost, but at least on one occasion she showed herself equally resolute with Dr. Wiseman when he had, as she thought, taken in a local dispute an attitude unjust and injurious to her community. Her obedience was from strength and not from weakness, and may well have been part of a deliberate plan to subdue and transform her own will

Cornelia Connelly

which her clear self-knowledge may have shown her as in danger of becoming headstrong. For her the voice of authority, whether her husband's or that of her ecclesiastical superiors, was not its own but the incarnate logos of a higher Will.

It must be remembered that unlike St. Catherine, she had no Inner Voice to direct her. The threshold of consciousness in that other's so different nature was, as we have seen, abnormally high. Therefore, many mental processes which most of us consciously transact would seem to come from elsewhere, from outside herself and thus appear to be invested with an authority which we can seldom recognize in our conscious thoughts. Had Cornelia had a different mental constitution, with a higher threshold, it is possible that her *Book of Studies* might have been, as it were, dictated by her unconscious mind and come to her with all the mystery and impressiveness of an inner revelation. Had it done so it would have been neither more nor less supernatural than the reasonings of her normal consciousness, inspired by grace. But Cornelia, as far as we know, had no visions, no locutions, no ecstasies. She followed the normal ways of thought and prayer. Like St. Catherine, she was a teacher, but she expounded no private revelation, only the age-old revelation of Universal Truth, which it was her task and privilege to adapt to the needs of modern education. Hers is no "difficult" character to be saved by grace from psychological ruin, but one of the sanest, healthiest specimens of mental integrity that ever responded to spiritual inspirations.

Yet these two women, so unlike each other—these two wives, so different in their attitude both to their husbands and to their own souls—have one point of resemblance that wipes out all their divergencies. They have a meeting place in the Gospel of

Quartet in Heaven

St. Catherine's feast. Cornelia Connelly is not a saint of the Church, but in the Gospel of the Mass of "A Holy Woman not a Martyr" her story as well as Catherine's is told. Both Catherine and Cornelia are the merchant who found that treasure hidden in a field, both are the trader who found the pearl of great cost. Both sold all that they had and bought the treasure and the pearl. The only difference lies in the nature of the personal goods that they sold, and we could argue as to who paid most. But the point is that both paid all. Indeed for the saints there is no lower price.

Born and brought up in Sussex, Sheila Kaye-Smith has never moved very far from the fields and farms she portrayed so memorably in such novels as *Jeanne Godden*, *Rose Deeprose*, and *The Happy Tree*. After her marriage, she lived in London for a time, but she and her husband soon came back to the country they both love, and remodeled an ancient oast house in Northiam, where they now live.



Photo by Roy Hudson, A.R.P.S., England

As a girl, Miss Kaye-Smith heard much about Sussex ways and old days from her father, who was a doctor in Hastings for many years. This early indoctrination caught fire rapidly, for at the age of twenty she published her first book, *The Tramping Methodist*. This was the prelude to a number of novels about the region, that have won her a wide following both in England and the United States.

Miss Kaye-Smith is also a poet. *Saints in Sussex* covers a wide range of subjects, but many are religious in tone, and the mystical element is strong. Now, almost twenty years later, it is not surprising, perhaps, to find her turning to a similar theme in this present study of four holy women.

Her most recent novel, *Mrs. Gailey*, was published in 1951.