

APOSTOLATE STUDIES

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“ . . . a series of articles designed to increase our understanding of the effectiveness of the apostolate under Cornelia.” This statement in the last issue of SOURCE (p.11) introduced the two papers on the schools for the poor in Preston and on girls’ education in England; in them we aimed to evoke something of the social conditions amidst which our apostolate was exercised. Future papers will explore other contexts and two of them will try to give a close-up of what actually went on educationally in one school, St. Leonards, chosen because its records during most of Cornelia’s life time there (thirty-one years) are very full, and in them we can glimpse her at work shaping part of our apostolate. In this present paper we shall be asking ourselves what preparation she had for her task. Since such a question is both wide and deep, and since some of the ground has so far been researched very slightly if at all, this paper necessarily only sketches in the field, gives an orientation to a problem. But it does not suggest what has no support; it draws attention to articles printed elsewhere which have already dug some ground; and more importantly perhaps, it shows up the gaps in our knowledge and raises questions.

As an apostolic congregation we draw conviction and drive from the knowledge that from the very beginning and always, SHCJ life has been a response to the kingdom’s needs for the day; and if we are to recognize how closely Cornelia responded to these vital needs and how well she sensed the quality of her age (how else could our apostolate have been effective?), then before we proceed with this series, or with this paper in the series, there are factors in the contemporary situation (lying behind the two pictures already given of the education of girls and of the poor) which we need briefly to call to mind.

In the first place, there was no section of the catholic population at that time not in dire need of educational provision.

The *Rambler* makes this clear:

[These are] . . . the real deficiencies of the Church in this country. We have first a population of from one to two millions, consisting of a small number of the aristocracy and gentry, a small number of the professional and middle classes, a sprinkling of petty shopkeepers, and a gigantic mass of the extreme poor. For the education and spiritual guidance and support of this immense body, we have less than eight hundred priests, including the religious orders Our education, clerical and secular, is universally felt and generally admitted to be still in its infancy, and to present most formidable obstacles in the way of a

satisfactory reformation. We have scarcely the shadow of any Catholic organisation of our entire body . . .¹

At a meeting of catholics in London on April 4, 1848, Bishop Wiseman said that in London alone there were 15,000 catholic children with *no* means of education.² A Catholic Poor School Committee appeal in the *Rambler* of the same year pointed out that somehow "competent persons must be thoroughly prepared to teach."³ In a letter to Cornelia in Derby in 1846 the Bishop speaks of the middle classes till then having been "almost neglected" (D 10:25); Cornelia's sisters therefore would not be limited to providing education for any one social group. So great was the need and so slight the professional and financial provision in the country, for non-catholics and catholics alike, that education at whatever level might often more aptly have been described as social work. To be "in" on education was to be pioneering for society. It was a way to help human beings to be more human. Readers who are interested might turn to the "March of Teaching and March of Perfection"⁴ by Sr. Mary Eleanor Slater, for a clear picture of this situation.

A second factor in Cornelia's situation was the background of profound distrust against which any catholic undertaking had to work. This is not the place to consider the roots of this distrust or the rights and wrongs on either side, but in 1846 it was a social fact. The Catholic Emancipation Bill had been passed in 1829, but it would take much longer than seventeen years for catholics to be able to emerge with any confidence from their catacombs, or for their fellow patriots to be able to regard them with complacency. The words "Rome", "Jesuit", "nunnery" were still as red rags to John Bull. To the ordinary Englishman they all spelt deception in some form. An issue of the *British Quarterly* for instance carried a brief review of *The Female Jesuit* which said: ". . . we have no doubt that many protestant families in England are subject to a Jesuit spy system."⁵ The Church Schoolmasters' Association felt itself able to say of Cardinal Wiseman's London lectures, ". . . we doubt if there were a score out of the hundreds who crowded to hear the cardinal who really could and did believe him to be honest in his opinions."⁶ Examples could be multiplied. The point is not that here was prejudice at work, but rather that in such an atmosphere of deep distrust, whether or no it was justifiable, communication was difficult, often not even sought, and we would expect to find catholic social groups half enclosed upon themselves. This was likely to be even more true of the female element in Victorian times, and of women who were nuns, markedly so. An active religious congregation, however, which has education at the centre of its apostolate, dare not let the world recede, and a foundress had to be the kind of person who could keep open life-lines, who was "aware."

With this much knowledge of the English scene in mind helping us to understand a little of what she had to face, we can make a beginning on the question: What qualified Cornelia Connelly for such a work for the Church? *How did God form her for it?* Ultimately this is mystery that cannot be laid bare, but by looking at the human we learn about the divine; and if we consider Cornelia's life before she was sent to England, there were in it elements which seem particularly to have prepared her to found a religious society such as ours. I propose to consider some of these particular elements under four headings: Upbringing and Education; Marriage; Experiences in Rome; the Work of Education. Under each of these we can see that God laid in her path opportunities which could enrich her for a special future (the full extent of that enrichment further research will have to tease out). In a final brief section I hope we may glimpse God forming her through the *cost* of *response*; because it was this which gradually directed all that life was making of her towards God alone and the building of his kingdom.

Upbringing and Education

Cornelia came from Philadelphia. She had been born, in 1809, into a well-to-do episcopalian family who could take advantage of all which that highly cultured, humanitarian and religious city could offer. For the sake mostly of those English readers who will know little of its traditions and may not have read "Poor Little American Me"⁷ perhaps others will be patient while we go into this somewhat. Philadelphia was her context in her most formative years. It helped to make her what she was as much as Lancashire makes the Lancashire lass and the culture of the West the Californian. The student of Philadelphia history will quickly be able to suggest ways in which this picture must be deepened, but for immediate purposes we are relying on a guide book which seems especially suitable because it was published in Philadelphia in 1824 when Cornelia was fifteen years old. It sets out to be exhaustive and its value is its great accumulation of fact:

. . . how much has been done [it says] in Philadelphia for the advancement of science and the arts, for the diminution of the miseries and augmentation of the comforts of human life, and for the general improvement and advancement of moral character . . .⁸

The book then proceeds through some two hundred detailed pages to describe with delightful and proper pride the life of its city. What emerges very strongly is an impression of a society solid and settled, yet still full of creative thrust, of cultural and intellectual life. Commercially; the guide has to admit, perhaps the prospects of the city are changing; she has no

longer the advantages for external trade which others have, but still her internal industry is the certain source of great wealth. We can fit Cornelia into this. Her father, as a merchant, belonged among the men on whose pursuit of commerce the city's prosperity stood; her husband's father on the other hand was a well-known and comfortably-off cabinet maker (of which the little book tells us the city had two hundred and eleven);⁹ Henry Connelly, with his beautiful furniture à la Sheraton, represents not commerce but the best of its cultural and elegant consequences.

Elegance and society however are not the main concern of our guide. He prefers to speak of the city's "sedate and literary character";¹⁰ of the "love of solid usefulness" with which the Society of Friends has impressed its citizens;¹¹ of the "more sober and scientific amusements" to which its inhabitants incline (this in explaining why there are only five theatres).¹² And his claims are substantiated by detailed accounts of institutions in which we see not only how the city traditions had started but also how they are still living and proliferating. It is not simply that Philadelphia could be proud of having established, for instance, the country's first hospital with its medical school, its library, its lying-in-ward and its special department for paupers and lunatics,¹³ but that this tradition of philanthropy still flourishes. We are told of the Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons whose first labour had been to achieve the reformation of the Pennsylvania penal code, and its 1824 president, we discover, is Bishop White¹⁴ who later would officiate at Cornelia's marriage. We are told of the Abolition Society which continued its humane interest in the negro population by running free schools for them;¹⁵ of the churches, "exceedingly numerous . . . the protection of the land being extended to all sects alike"; (there were eighty-three places of worship of which nine were episcopalian and four of these had been built in the early nineteenth century);¹⁶ we are given lists of asylums, funds, orphanages, benevolent societies of recent foundation, some since Cornelia's birth and often organised by well-to-do ladies. Did Cornelia's family concern itself with this kind of active charity? We do not know. Certainly Pierce's did, as Sr. Caritas McCarthy has shown in an article published in 1961.¹⁷

The life of the city stands revealed not only in its religious and philanthropic works but in its continued intellectual and cultural interests. Three pages of public lecture courses given in a year, mostly scientific but not exclusively, illustrate this.¹⁸ As far back as 1743 the American Philosophical Society had originated in Philadelphia, our guide tells us, for the cultivation of the exact sciences. As lately as 1815, he goes on, a new branch had developed for the encouragement of work in history, moral science and general literature. The City Library (of which he is very proud, devoting two whole sides to it) had sprung from the joint effort of Benjamin Franklin and his friends to establish a lending system in 1731. Now, he claims, it is

. . . probably the most considerable library of useful books in America. Twice in each year are received from London all the new English works of value, and every American production of merit is regularly procured. . . . Persons who desire to see or peruse books at the library are permitted to do so free of charge.¹⁹

It had a special annex for ancient and classical works, "principally in the Greek and Latin languages," and he lists sixteen other institutions which had libraries attached to them, most of which were accessible to any interested public. Amongst these were America's first Academy of Fine Arts founded only four years before Cornelia's birth (where there were "some very valuable works presented by Napoleon"), and a new Academy of Natural Sciences established during her childhood in 1817 which already by 1824, the guide says, had five thousand scientific volumes in its library.²⁰ Of special interest to us, because we know that Cornelia's three brothers were members, is what the guide has to say about the Athenaeum which had been instituted in 1814. Here is the description:

While the City Library enables the public to procure books at small expense for perusal at home, the Athenaeum furnishes a place of useful and agreeable resort, where valuable books of reference in every department of literature and science, the periodical journals of Europe and America, maps, plates, etc., may always be found and consulted.²¹

The city had its university, too, the guide goes on, the University of Pennsylvania.²² It had finally been established in 1791, an amalgam of two older academic institutions. It had departments of law; arts (mathematics, philosophy and languages); from the latter Cornelia's husband graduated with his master's degree; medicine (we know from another source that the medical school of Philadelphia as early as 1765 had allowed one of its professors to offer what in England we might call an extra-mural course of lectures on midwifery to *women*);²³ and natural science, (natural philosophy, chemistry, mineralogy, comparative anatomy, zoology, botany), "established but a few years" says the guide. It is interesting to realize that the corresponding department in each of the leading universities in England would not be set up for another quarter of a century, i.e., at Cambridge in 1851 and at Oxford in 1853.

This guide book was obviously written by someone who knew the city well, probably an inhabitant anxious to exhibit its glories. Six years earlier such a guide would have been useful to Miss Fanny Wright, a visitor to Philadelphia whose letters were published in 1821.²⁴ She was a Scottish writer with a sharp eye, an appreciative mind and an expressive pen. She was struck by the sheer beauty of the city, its neatness and cleanliness, its brick houses with their white doors and slabs of white doorstep (regularly

washed every day), the trees down the straight streets (a little too straight, she wonders?), and generally "an air of cheerfulness and elegance . . . quite unknown to the black and crowded cities of Europe."²⁵ Did Cornelia think something of the kind when she arrived with her little band of first SHCJ in the drab corner, industrial Derby? God had brought her very far, from the brightness of her youth to the greyness of an unknown way, here; yet Sr. Aloysia still remembered thirty-three years later that

. . . there was never seen a cloud of sadness [sic] the generosity of her heart was marked on her countenance so that it was noticed by all around . . . (D 10:33)

Fanny Wright commented on other things more important for us than the beauty of Philadelphia. One was the freedom of social relationships between the youth of both sexes:

. . . They dance, sing, walk and 'run in sleighs' together, by sunshine and moonshine, without the occurrence of even the apprehension of any impropriety.²⁶

This Cornelia would not find in England. A second point is perhaps more significant:

. . . I must remark that in no particular is the liberal philosophy of the Americans more honourably evinced than in the place which is accorded to women. The prejudice still to be found in Europe . . . which would confine the female library to romances, poetry and belle-lettres, and female conversation to the last new publication, new bonnet and *pas seul*, are entirely unknown here. The women are assuming their place as thinking beings, not in despite of the men, but chiefly in consequence of their enlarged views and exertions as fathers and legislators.²⁷

One may suppose this a little sweeping and enthusiastic. The writer was, after all, only a visitor to the land, and moreover a woman responding perhaps with relief to an attitude to her sex by no means as yet common in the United Kingdom; but we note that she says "women are assuming" not "have assumed", and there is evidence to support her opinion. As early as 1787 Benjamin Rush gave an address at the first commencement ceremony of the newly established Young Ladies Academy in the city. In it he said it was incumbent upon the nation "to make ornamental accomplishments yield to principles and knowledge in the education of our women."²⁸ He believed American women had greater responsibilities than their English opposites: they had to be capable of assisting as "stewards and guardians of their husbands' property," able to educate their children intelligently, and not least "to instruct their sons in the principles of

liberty and government." He therefore advocates a serious and substantial education for them in the sciences, history, English literature and moral philosophy, as well as the usual domestic economy and the three R's.²⁹ Rush was speaking well before Cornelia's time, but an examination of the appendices provided by Woody showing the contents of girls' schools' curricula in the first half of the nineteenth century shows that this kind of approach was becoming more and more general;³⁰ several women's colleges had been founded in the States before Cornelia left in 1843;³¹ and the Rev. J. Fraser, reporting for the Schools Inquiry Commission for England in 1866 has this to say of the education of girls in America:

. . . the course of training prescribed for both male and female minds is almost step by step the same. . . I recognise [the endowments of American women] and appreciate their force of character, their intellectual vigour, their capacity for affairs, their high spirit, their courage, their patriotism. The Americans may be right in judging, as de Toqueville says they do judge, that "the mind of a woman is as capable as the mind of a man to discover naked truth, and her heart as firm to follow it." And so they have made their mental training, indeed the whole school culture, of boys and girls the same. . . Nor does the female mind appear unequal to bear the burden thus put upon it. Some of the best mathematical teachers are women; some of the best mathematical students are girls. Young ladies read Virgil and Cicero, Xenophon and Homer as well (in every sense) as young gentlemen. . . In no department of study which they pursued together did they not seem to me, as compared with their male competitors, fully competent to hold their own.³²

Of Cornelia's own schooling we unfortunately know little. Her name has not yet been discovered in any of the known records of old schools in Philadelphia, so presumably she had tuition at home, perhaps from her mother: we know this was a custom: Fanny Wright, for example, refers to a lady of high gifts in Philadelphia society who devoted her mornings exclusively to the education of her family. Or perhaps she studied with her brothers or with their tutors: later in life she once referred to how her brother Ralph used to help her rig her canvasses for painting. (CC 1:60) It seems that after the death of her mother, when she was fourteen years old and had gone to live with her married half-sister, Mrs. Montgomery, the latter provided tutors for her education and prepared her for her place in society; modern languages, music and dancing were inevitably part of her program, but this *per se* might mean little. Bishop Rosati wrote of her in 1836:

. . . Mme Connoly [sic] femme de beaucoup d'esprit cultivé par une éducation soignée . . . (D Appendix: 9)

Mother Maria Joseph Buckle, her earliest biographer and herself an educated woman who had known Cornelia over the whole period of her life as a religious, said:

... her reasoning powers had been cultivated by education and she had studied logic as well as rhetoric ... Arithmetic and mathematics were some of her favourite studies ... (D 63:77)

Supposedly a share of the cultural life of Philadelphia was part of her education, as has already been suggested.³³ We know she went to the theatre with her sisters; we wonder whether she attended public lectures. For instance, much later in life, according to an oral tradition in England, Pugin was to praise her architectural judgement. If this is true, where did she get it? Was Strickland (the architect responsible for so much in Philadelphia at that date) a friend of the family? He designed their brother-in-law's new gothic church of St. Stephen where Cornelia attended for eight years and where she was baptized at the age of twenty-one, and he gave a series of public lectures on architecture.³⁴ Did she attend? Did her brothers bring home ideas? take her out? They went rowing together,³⁵ so why not to lectures and exhibitions?

Perhaps the best indications we have that her schooling was good (apart from the evidence of her own later work) comes through her sisters. When Addie Duval found herself faced with the necessity of earning her living, she wrote to Ralph:

... you may remember all my qualifications in all the ordinary branches of an English education ... (D 6:215)

and with something of the courage and competence we would expect of an American woman educated in the spirit which Fanny Wright and Benjamin Rush and the Rev. Fraser describe, felt confident on this basis to face running a school. Possibly this is a more reliable proof of the quality of their education than it would have been in England at that time where too many women with no competence whatever did this as a last resort.³⁶ Addie's claim is supported by what was said, after death, of the other sister too when she entered the Order of the Sacred Heart:

... d'une famille distinguée mais protestante. Elle était dotée d'une intelligence remarquable et de beaucoup d'aptitude pour acquérir des talents et les sciences qui font l'ornement d'une jeune personne de sa condition. *Elle avait reçu une éducation complète* ... (italics mine: D 64:23, 24)

We are left then with the likelihood that God had placed Cornelia in an American family able to give her whatever education was conceived then as best; and that a cultured liberty of spirit together with an assumption of the high capacity of woman was probably part of what he graced her with.

Marriage

... be advised by your dear good partner—he is your earthly guide—be of one heart and soul—and love each other, if possible, more than ever—for you both possess all the requisites for an earthly paradise. (D 2:70)

Cornelia's sister Addie wrote this to her in November of 1835, just before husband and wife, newly converted to catholicism, were to depart for Rome; and after they had arrived Cornelia wrote back:

... Dearest Addie I thank you a thousand times for all your kind feelings towards my dear husband but how much more you would love him did you know him better if you did but know him as I do. (CC 1:48)

These early family letters reveal a loving relationship between Pierce and Cornelia which meant necessarily that he was one of the greatest influences in her life.

... he is one of the best of men and they are and always have been about the happiest couple that ever breathed. (D 2:53)

her sister Mary wrote; and Cornelia herself, trying so hard to win Addie's full approval of Pierce in this crisis, says:

... When you understand his character better you will know him to be all that is estimable and far far above what your sister ever deserved or looked for in her husband. It is not for me to praise him—but daily do I thank God for having blessed me in such a husband and our dear children such a father. (D 2:60)

We can also perhaps see in these letters what it was especially that, at this juncture, made him so much to her, i.e. the sincerity of his adherence to what seemed his duty to God, however hard. Mary writes of this to Addie (who knew him less well, perhaps, because she had not been able to visit Natchez since the marriage):

... all the most intelligent and first men here publicly make known how much of his late, noble and disinterested course has elevated him in their estimation ... (D 2:52, 53)

and later in the same letter speaks for herself:

... if his duty to God required him to give it up, he would do it without its costing him a moment's pang, he is so perfectly submissive ... (D 2:55)

It is this nobility of action in the man who loved her which seems to have meant so much to Cornelia; he “meddled with controversy” for a noble reason:

... to find out the truth—the blessed truth—and as one who professes to teach nothing but the truth he is bound to cease preaching the moment he doubts. (D 2:57)

She is sure that

... whatever he believes to be his duty by God’s help he will do without a reference to his temporal interests one way or another ... (*ibid.*)

She is *proud* of him because

... The course which he has taken honestly and openly before God and man at the expense of his worldly interests cannot but be respected by all who are blessed with strict principles of honesty. (*ibid.*)

So we glimpse here nobility and generosity in the young Cornelia being called out of her and strengthened because she sees them in the man whom God has given her as her husband. She is being carried by love for him, and beyond that by a vision shared with him. Something of the vision is made explicit, for in the same letter she mentions briefly but vividly as if it were a thought often present, the Church preaching Christ crucified whose faithful followers suffer martyrdom. So under God she is already, in heart and understanding but all unconsciously, moving towards a time when it would be apt to ask of her, as she does here with such pride, of Pierce: “Was it to his own honour and glory that Pierce vowed to devote his life or was it to the Church of Christ?” (D 2:58) We with hindsight, and asking ourselves the question “How did God form her for his work?” can see the great agony of heart she would one day have to endure when this man turned away after all from the vision they shared. She would then herself be called to practise the lesson Pierce had taught her of the cost of adhering to God alone.

The concern for Cornelia’s welfare revealed by the letters between the brothers and sisters at the conversion crisis suggest an affectionate and united family; and this directs our minds back to that earlier crisis when the youngest and loved sister had announced her intention of marrying Pierce. Addie had espoused Cornelia’s cause and taken her into her very wealthy home, but Isabella had opposed it and one wonders just why. Judging from the sharpness of some of Pierce’s later remarks about the exclusiveness of Philadelphia society,³⁷ for which presumably Cornelia was being prepared, one suspects that it was partly social ambition; but

one cannot be sure. The article already referred to, by Sr. Caritas, which describes Pierce’s background, examines this question in particular. At the time of the marriage, December 1831, he was only a curate, but he had education, private means and a future. In church circles he was well thought of, Bishop White officiated at the wedding, and when the young couple soon departed for Natchez he was to be rector of Trinity Church, and he and Cornelia would be at the centre of the episcopalian mission there.

It is of the four years between marriage and conversion that we need to know so much more. It is not only that Cornelia then had the maturing experience of being wife and mother, but that the context of thought—a context vibrant with polemic—was a shaping force, and much of this would make its impact on the wife through her husband. What was the christianity that they both knew, first in Philadelphia, then in Natchez?³⁸ Bishop Rosati’s account of Pierce’s initial contact with the French scientist Nicollet gives some hint of this (D Appendix: 7). By what movements were they pressed, from books, people, pulpits, pamphlets? What channelled Cornelia’s spirit so deeply towards God? The collection of Pierce’s papers found at Oscott still awaits close study and much of them is understandable only in the light of his setting. His Commonplace Book in particular should then reveal something of the man. It appears to cover the early years of their married life, though dating of individual entries is intermittent and unchronological. It is a conglomeration of lengthy quotations and personal comments, the expression of an informed and aspiring mind (we remember that Mary spoke of his “great intelligence and vast information” [D 2:53]). He quotes in French a good deal, sometimes in Italian, Greek and Latin. His thoughts range widely and powerfully through philosophy, religion, literature, politics. He is alert to significant movements both at home and abroad, especially in Britain; for instance, he takes *Blackwood’s* and the *Edinburgh Review* and he records his views on Lord Brougham’s popular education policy. One entry, undated, has a special interest for us; on a page headed “Woman” and subtitled “Duties of a Wife”, we have without comment a long passage written over as if it were a thoughtful translation. In it is the following:

[She will] ... teach them [his children] to appreciate the richer gratifications of a pure and accomplished mind in contemplating the sublime and beautiful and useful in nature and literature and human character ... her mind will be accomplished, for she is the companion of her husband and the instructress of her children ...³⁹

Was this what Pierce had found in Cornelia?

Experiences in Rome

Cornelia arrived in Rome with Pierce and her two children in 1836, and remained there for the larger part of two years. She was twenty-seven. With what opportunities did God make her ready for his work in this period? I would like to pick out three.

In the first place, Rome was her first experience of living in a catholic community. During a long stay with "the kind attention of many friends" to help her, she took it all in with a mixture of perceptive criticism and openness of heart which only intelligent maturity allows. We may find her saying to her husband with deep readiness of spirit, "give it all to the Church . . . am I not one of its children without a wish that is not connected with it?" (CC 1:6A) but she also writes to her brother, "we are neither of us blind to the many abuses." (CC 1:65) She was, when she arrived in Rome, very newly-committed to the Church and her letters glow with the consolation of a spiritual honeymoon:

. . . Oh my sisters what is all that this world can give or take away compared to the joy of feeling in the true way. [sic] (CC 1:63)

We can assume that at such a juncture in her life she was peculiarly open to grace, more than usually delicate-minded in her perceptions, seeing all things anew. She marvelled at the beauty and significance of Rome; (CC 1:61) the splendour of the company she kept made her laugh; (CC 1:63) but underneath this lay the longing for a heart full of love and charity, and

. . . I try and hope to obtain these graces through the means the Almighty has given me the light to see and the humility to make use of. (CC 1:48)

In this humble deep-seeing state of mind she was enabled to absorb catholic tradition and practice, which one day she would have to pass on and fill with significance for sisters and children.

In the second place, the letters of introduction (D 2:64) which the Connellys brought to Rome took them into the highest society. Cornelia was able to maintain her place there, presumably because she was already a woman of culture, education and elegance. She recognised those among whom she moved as in some sort her equals, for she wrote to her sister Mary:

. . . We find no difference between the polished society of Philadelphia & the society of the English Nobility except that they carry more humility in their politeness. (CC 1:67)

Apparently she slipped easily into place among them. She became, for instance, a personal friend of Princess Borghese, the Princess of Sulmona,

and the Borghese family, and actually spent part of a summer with her children at their Frascati Villa. She was thus enabled to learn much from a society new to her, more international, and springing from a very different culture. We can see her among friends at an intimate dinner party or on more fleeting occasions at some immense reception. Sister Mary Ursula's articles in *The Pylon* gave an idea of what these were like,⁴⁰ and a glance at the list of personages from whom the Connellys received invitations is useful. Cards, notes, letters, are all collected in her scrap book,⁴¹ and it prompts the question at once: Into what currents of interest was Cornelia swept? For what did these men stand in the stirrings of the day? A close study of the scrap book might tell us much. Lord Clifford had theories about education (CC 1:67). What else did she hear that might help to form her judgement? The experience of Roman society must have widened her understanding of how men other than those of her own land might live and think; it would have helped an already generous temperament to be broad, tolerant; above all it would have deepened her perceptions of men's ambitions whether noble or ignoble, of their worldliness or holiness. Was this not useful formation for someone who was herself one day to be responsible for forming young minds and initiating young people into life?

Finally, it was perhaps the impression she made in Rome on this visit that initiated the idea later that she should found a congregation in England. She and her husband were taken up by Lord Shrewsbury, who was the leader of the English-speaking circle in Roman society and whose home at Alton Towers was a centre of catholic revival. Included in this circle both in Rome during the Connellys' first visit 1836-37, and in England at the time of Cornelia's summons to Rome again in 1843, was Nicholas Wiseman. We are almost certain that the Connellys and Wiseman met: they moved in the same circles, and in the scrapbook in Rome there is preserved one of his visiting cards. The extent to which he helped her in her educational efforts also suggests a personal and appreciative acquaintance rather than only the formal relationship of bishop and subject: he drew up a prospectus, made suggestions about curriculum (which Cornelia contrived to ignore), opened bazaars, introduced prospecting parents, allowed the school to use his plays; she on her side in spite of disagreements, e.g., over whether or not nuns should have a proper library, evidently appreciated his ideas and saw to it that, for instance, his essays on English literature and his London public lectures were used in school.

When the Connellys first visited Rome, Monsignor Wiseman was rector of the English College. He appeared to his students as

. . . never idle for a moment. Even recreation he made subservient to a useful purpose. On each Thursday (the weekly holiday) it was his habit to take us all to one of the catacombs, or churches, or antiquities, or picture galleries, or the museums, or the studios of artists.⁴²

At the same time Cornelia was discovering Rome:

... seeing it wont do [she wrote to her sister Mary], it must be studied, and it will take at least a year to study it with any kind of advantage. (CC 1:61)

The student goes on:

... in proof of Wiseman's versatility I may mention that he often acted as our organist. Indeed he had a critical appreciation of music as well as the other fine arts. It was he too who painted the scenes for the first play which we acted in 1837.⁴³

At this time Cornelia was taking private lessons in painting and music and having her voice trained, and a time was going to come when she too would be painting the scenes for a school's first play. Brian Fothergill also reminds us of Wiseman's belief in the educational value of Christian art. It was as important to him, Fothergill says,

... as understanding Christian philosophy or theology; indeed they all held together as threads which formed the cord of Christian civilisation ...⁴⁴

and he quotes Wiseman as saying at a later date:

... We have never failed to embrace any opportunity that presented itself of pointing out the beauties and artistic elements of the Catholic ceremonial, as well as the poetry of our ritual, and forms of prayer, all eminently conducive to the creation of religious art ...⁴⁵

This too was something which Cornelia insisted on in her schools; and one of the books in regular use was Rio's *Christian Art*, the importance of which was discussed in a very long article in the second issue of the *Dublin Review*, a quarterly of Wiseman's creation.

We cannot conclude from these facts that had Cornelia never met Wiseman she would never have developed these interests or used them as she did; but one can conclude, supposing—as is likely—that they did meet, that they may have recognised each other's quality; and when the proposal was made that she should come to England, she may well have felt that her ideas and attitudes would meet with approval. Wiseman on his side, as Fothergill says, "had a splendid vision of the future of Catholicism in England, and to make a reality of this he had to create a new atmosphere among the clergy."⁴⁶ They had appeared to him as narrow-minded, lacking as a consequence of conditions of work in England in anything approaching an awareness of the intellectual needs of the day. They and their flocks had for many years survived as a socially deprived minority,

quite unable now that they had freedom to better themselves without better education, and suspicious of the enthusiasm, the independence, the determination to take part in the nation's cultural life of the growing body of converts who were springing from the Oxford Movement. Leaders were needed who could unite both sides and who would promote a new and liberal atmosphere. Cornelia could do this, Wiseman perhaps hoped, through religious communities which would meet the needs of education and of converts. A convert herself but unprejudiced by the English scene, cultured, Roman in outlook, she was as Fr. J. Walsh S. J. argues in his very valuable article "Why an American Foundress?", "admirably suited to be the female counterpart of Newman and Faber."⁴⁷

We may tentatively conclude that in these months of joy in Rome, as Cornelia's stability in God grew deeper, her natural gifts also flowered; and nine years later in spite of plans already half made that she should go to America, Wiseman perhaps remembered his *first* impressions and was glad to welcome her, on Shrewsbury's inspiration as Fr. Walsh shows, to England instead.

The Work of Education

We now ask ourselves, if God was inviting this woman to found a congregation whose central apostolate was to be education, what professional opportunities did he put in her way? One did not train to teach in those days; this was a want of the age which Cornelia herself recognised and set about meeting. The commissioners reporting on the state of girls' education in England said that the principals of schools generally had no qualifications whatsoever beyond deportment, gentility, and a "certain pedantic precision of speech."⁴⁸ Was Cornelia better fitted than this? Did she, apart from her own education, know anything about schooling?

During the year which she told her brother she spent in "reflecting over the wants of the age and the means of spiritual Mercy to be exercised" (CC 1:70), she was staying in a convent where there was a school, the Trinità dei Monti in Rome, and inevitably her mind must have turned back to that other Sacred Heart school in which she had really worked at Grand Coteau. What had these schools taught her? The program of studies of the Society of the Sacred Heart was drawn up, we are told by Janet Erskine Stuart,

... to enable those who go through it to judge wisely of people and things, to distinguish between the 'precious and the vile' in questions of literature, art, taste, conduct and manners; and the studies which conduced most effectually to this end were considered relatively the most important ...⁴⁹

This is reminiscent of Pierce's expectations of a wife, referred to earlier in this article, and Cornelia would have been at home where such an attempt was made. We do not know a great deal of how much she was involved in either establishment. At the Trinità between April 1844 and April 1846, first as a postulant and then as a guest, she gave lessons but it is not recorded of what kind or how often. Of Grand Coteau however, we know rather more, though still not enough to be able with sureness to construct more than an extremely general picture. The school had a hundred pupils.⁵⁰ It probably offered the "useful and ornamental" education advertised by its sister convent at St. Louis in 1834.⁵¹ Between June 1838 and July 1843 Cornelia gave music lessons: piano, singing, guitar, twenty-three a week:

... Mr Connelly and Lady are finally settled ... he as a Professor of 1st English class, and she, as a *Professor* of Musick in the Convent ... Mme Con. Has as many lessons as she can afford giving, 23 ... a acquis une voix supérieure pendant son voyage d'Europe ... (D 4:13)

She seems to have been treated as a full member of staff because the journal records her presence at "cachets" (a custom which like the badge system she later incorporated into her own schools). She will therefore have had opportunity to sense atmosphere, note how it was created, be aware of organisation, and through conversation with the nuns she will have become acquainted with their educational aims and ideals. It is not very likely that she would have been shown their *Plan of Studies*, but she will have observed what we can now read about, that the methodology of the early Sacred Heart schools was very enlightened for the period: e.g., the use of visual aids, the careful planning of work, the principle of uniting the useful with the agreeable, of instructing whilst amusing,⁵² all of which Cornelia was later to insist on. It is interesting to realise that whereas long sections of the SHCJ Rule and some parts of the *Book of Studies* are taken directly from the Jesuits, there is (apparently) no verbatim transference from the RSCJ Rule or their *Plan of Studies*; yet the influence was there, and Cornelia's working contact with this fervent educational order at the height of its missionary zeal in Louisiana was her professional formation, a preparation much superior to that of the great majority of her secular contemporaries in England.

She had also the advantage of discussion with her husband. Reason suggests this, and hints in the records lend support. As an educated and apostolic man himself, Pierce acknowledges the importance of education and writes to his friend Hübner that "it is all we can look to for any good here." (D 4:50) He was a success in his work with his pupils (though he

found it not demanding enough as that same discontented letter to Hübner shows), and on one occasion at least his class spent the day *en fête* at the Cottage; (D 4:47) and later when he had left Grand Coteau and was writing back to Cornelia from Georgetown he takes the trouble to tell her about the arrangement of dormitories and study room in the convent school of the Visitation. (D 4:175) It seems not unreasonable to suppose that the shared involvement of both husband and wife in teaching was also part of Cornelia's formation for her work.

We have assumed all through this article that it was an apostolate of education for which God was preparing Cornelia. Nor is this in doubt. Yet given that Cornelia's earliest statement about the Society refers to spiritual works of mercy and especially to the needs of converts but does not mention education directly, should we ask ourselves: What in 1846 did she believe God was asking her to establish? She was thirty-seven years old. Her life had lead her to this moment. What did she discern of his will?

Three statements taken in conjunction with each other will help us. The earliest is her brother Ralph's letter, written September 12, 1846. It assumes the apostolate of education in the reference to Derby, but lays its general emphasis on works of spiritual mercy, and these are to be exercised in a very open context:

1. ... After remaining then for nearly a year longer and reflecting over the wants of the day and the means of spiritual Mercy to be exercised my Revd Father Director decided upon my coming to England. Since coming I have united myself with a very distinguished writer of the day Miss Emily Bowles to put our work in operation. The great and good Dr. Wiseman ... has entered warmly into our designs and we have nearly concluded upon accepting the beautiful building at Derby ... the immense number of converts in England offered so large a field for Spiritual Mercy that it seems in the designs of God to begin here ... I will ... send you the heads of our rules which will please you I am sure since we enter so into the active duties of the world and will not be cloistered. (CC 1:69, 70)

The extract from the *Tablet* (October 31, 1846), part of the Society's earliest advertising, defines the apostolate more closely, puts education first but embeds it in other wants of the age:

2. [The Society] ... has for its object the practice of works of Spiritual Mercy exclusively—especially the education of children, giving catechetical and other instruction under the direction of the parish clergy, and what is a striking feature, receiving a boarder at the discretion of the Mother Superior, and, under a light rule, ladies desirous of temporary retirement, or of preparing for the Holy Sacraments, converts etc. (D 10:27)

A note in the archives of Propaganda (given here in translation from the Italian) is not dated, but must have been written before December 1848 when the SHCJ left Derby. It shows more clearly what were the designs into which Wiseman had entered so warmly:

3. At Derby there is a house . . . [which] has as its aim
 1. The education of girls of the middle class, who live with the community, and there are already a good number from various parts of the Kingdom
 2. The training of mistresses to teach in Catholic Schools
 3. The reception of protestants who in preparation for their entry into the Church wish to make a retreat; and also for those who have been expelled from their families (D 10:64)

In August(?) of 1847 Wiseman had written to the Holy Father:

. . . With regard to the women the plan conceived in Rome was for a congregation which should receive converts and which should be adapted to their needs (D 10:73. Trans.)

But he had not conceived of this as in any way excluding education because on September 28, 1846 he had written to the Jesuit provincial saying that the community *about* to be established at Derby was “for the purpose of educating the poor and middle classes, and training school-mistresses.” (D 10:14)

So here are three windows, opened very early in our existence through which we may peer into Cornelia’s mind. Her letter to Ralph, written with uninhibited fervour before her vision could be tempered by what was actually possible or allowed, suggests in the last sentence quoted that she saw for the Society’s apostolate a degree of closeness to the world which was not then usual. Was there an association in her mind between this need and work for converts? As a convert herself the work would appeal; as one at God’s disposal she would be ready to sacrifice going to America; but was her agreement strengthened by the realisation that the variety of contact this provided was appropriate to a teaching congregation? It is not too far-fetched to suggest that she may have been groping towards a concept of SHCJ communities which practised a variety of works of spiritual mercy, and these by their existence in our midst would help to sustain the vitality of the central work of education. It is fact that the true educator is always involved in what lies beyond the school, and what can be said of the individual might also be said of a community; and we noted earlier in this article that a foundress of this kind of congregation had to be able to keep open lines of communication with the world. Such an understanding of the apostolate might arise in the mind of one accustomed to listening to

God in very varied circumstances; would she not wish to put her Society into a position where it too could hear his Spirit through many channels?

Early in this paper it was suggested that . . . “we might glimpse God forming Cornelia through the *cost* of *response*; . . . which gradually directed all that life was making of her towards God alone and the building of his kingdom.”

What Cornelia had slowly to acquire, it would seem, was a complete unpossessiveness, a loving selflessness which conversely was a Godwardness, a single unifying faith that Christ spoke in all circumstances and was drawing her forward through them to act with him solely for the kingdom. She had to be—always—intent to listen and to do, i.e., in the full meaning of the word, *obedient*. Obedience would express her loving relationship with God. Her life had been endowed with great gifts and opportunities and we have been considering these as part of what made her ready for his work. But they could not in themselves and alone make her ready. In the shadow of the procession of gifts which gave her security, there arose another procession which summoned her to put her reliance in God alone. It is possible to view the years before she founded the Society as a continual exodus, a long succession of experiences or events into which God invited her, to which she responded, and out of which he then called her, allowing all the things of this world on which she relied to crumble from her one by one—her childhood home when her mother died; her trust in a sister’s understanding when she had to leave to marry Pierce; the joy of life with her children when they died; the security of approval and well established relationships when she and Pierce went from the episcopalian church; the deep bonds of married love when her husband became a priest; the shelter of religious life at the Trinità when she realised that neither was this what God needed; and at the last moment, the joy of returning to America. At each loss she leapt forward to him a little nearer. In her own language:

. . . Our fidelity in corresponding to one grace disposes us to receive others, and God delights in bestowing his talents upon those who make them produce fruit (CC 54:37);

and we know from her spiritual notebooks how perseveringly she practised “fidelity, fidelity, fidelity.” (CC 21:11) Here was the cost of loving response. This was what was formative. As with deeper and deeper obedience she listened to God and gave, a rising tide of faith in him possessed her and carried her forward with unflinching confidence, conformed to Christ. She knew that in herself and in her Society (it was God’s will, not hers, she said) Christ was continuing his mission:

. . . we shall *think* for the love of God *and speak* for him *and act* for him (CC 8:98)

I think that the thirty-seven formative years had brought her, it would appear, to the joyful faith that this was so, and it enabled her to be what she wished children and sisters to be

...untiring in desires that all of His creatures may enjoy the same ineffable good that you enjoy, for this is true love and charity. (CC 7:14)

FOOTNOTES

1. *The Rambler*, vol. 2, Preface, p. iv.
2. *Op. cit.* 1848 No. XVI.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *The Catholic Educational Review* (USA), April 1962, vol. IX, no. 4 "March of Teaching and March of Perfection" pp. 220-2.
5. *British Quarterly Review*, No. XV, May 1851, p. 586.
6. *The School and the Teacher*, September 1854, p. 160.
7. *Rosemont Alumnae Journal*, June 1964, "Poor Little American Me" by M. M. Caritas.
8. *Philadelphia in 1824*, 1824, p. 10.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 37.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 93.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 196.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 60.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 71.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 72.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
17. *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia* Vol. LXXII, Nos. 3, 4, 1961. "Cornelia and Pierce Connelly: New Perspectives on their Early Lives" by M. M. Caritas.
18. *Op. cit.* pp. 122-125.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 94.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 116.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 95.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 116.
23. *Women's Education in the United States* by Thomas Woody, 1929, Vol. 1, pp. 227-8. The full advertisement for the course is given. Female pupils were to be taught privately.
24. *Views of Society and Manners in America in a Series of Letters, 1818, 1819, 1820*, by an Englishwoman (Miss Frances Wright), N. York, 1921. (It has since been established that she was Scottish).
25. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 312.
28. Woody, *op. cit.*, p. 303.
29. *A Century of Higher Education for Women*, by M. Newcomer, 1959, p. 9.
30. Woody, *op. cit.*, p. 303.
31. Newcomer, *op. cit.*, p. 12.
32. *Schools Inquiry Commission* "The Common Schools System of USA and Canada," by the Rev. J. Fraser, 1866, p. 192.
33. *Op. cit.*
34. *Guide, op. cit.*, p. 124.
35. *Life of Cornelia Connelly*, 1922, p. 3.
36. *Schools Inquiry Commission* quoted in SOURCE, Winter, 1971, p. 36.
37. Reference in D 4:48. Original MS in Birmingham Archdiocesan Archives.
38. A beginning has been made on this subject by Sr. Caritas in two articles in *The Pylon*, vol. XXVII, no. 2, Autumn 1965, "Introducing the Reverend James Montgomery"; and vol. XXIX, no. 3, "The Connellys in the Church of the Mississippi Valley."
39. Photostat copy of Commonplace Book in Mayfield Archives. p. 29, Author of passage not legible.
40. *The Pylon*, vol. XXIII, nos. 1 and 2, Spring 1961, "The Connellys' First Visit to Rome", continued in Summer, 1961, by L. S. Muir (i.e., Sister Mary Ursula Blake). Cf. also "Cornelia Connelly's Second Stay in Rome", *The Pylon*, vol. XXIX, no. 3, 1968.
41. Original in the SHCJ Roman Archives.
42. *Nicholas Wiseman*, by Brian Fothergill, 1963, p. 83.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 82.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 83.
45. *Ibid.*, quoted from *Essays on Various Subjects*, p. 413.
46. *Ibid.*
47. *The Pylon*, vol. XXIII, no. 3, Winter, 1961-62: "Why an American Foundress for England in 1846?" by James Walsh, SJ.
48. See SOURCE, Winter, 1971, pp. 35-36.
49. *The Society of the Sacred Heart*, by Janet Erskine Stuart, 1914, p. 82.
50. *Education with a Tradition* by M. O'Leary, 1936, p. 200.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 201.
52. *Ibid.*, pp. 121-35. These pages describe in some detail the early practice in schools of the Society of the Sacred Heart.