

the highly qualified persons who pronounced it sincere. Nor must we forget that the separation of Pierce and Cornelia was not unprecedented.²

We have already noted that Cornelia recognized God's will in this judgment and made her response--"if God asks this sacrifice I am ready to give it to Him, and with all my heart"--but the surrender was not easy: "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?" (Gompertz, p. 36)

In her response we see Cornelia witnessing to an heroic love of God above all things, but also an heroic love for and fidelity to her husband, "the sublimest form of love between married people; the supernatural love that seeks above all else, always, and in everything, the greater spiritual love of the beloved one."³

Later, when Cornelia was asked to make another heroic response of love and fidelity to God as regards her own religious vocation, she again responded with steadfast love to the grace of God. Cornelia knew that Pierce had valid orders. She herself was bound by her vow of chastity and her religious vows of poverty and obedience. She could not, without serious sin, yield to his demands that she return to him. She willed not to be "an obstacle to his return to God and his priestly obligations."

We know that Cornelia "by accepting the mysterious ways of God and uniting her love to His, did not abandon and forget her husband and children; she loved them more and more because her love was constantly guided by the love of God, to whom she entrusted them in an heroic way."⁴

Must we not affirm that the keynote of Mother Connelly's life was love, a love that "knoweth no measure, feareth no labour, maketh sweet all that is bitter, findeth rest in God alone"? Can we come to any conclusion other than that she was a witness to heroic love and fidelity?

² Cf. the separation of Sir John and Lady Warner in the 17th century, and that of Virgil Horace Barber and his wife in the 19th century.

³ Paul Molinari, S.J., "Cornelia Connelly: an Appreciation," Cornelia Connelly Guild Bulletin, No. 6.

⁴ Ibid.

DERBY: THE CRADLE OF THE SOCIETY--Part I

Mary Andrew Armour, SHCJ

The Derby to Which Cornelia Came

In the year 1777 Boswell wrote: "I felt a pleasure in walking about Derby There is an immediate sensation of novelty; and one speculates on the way in which life is passed in it."¹

I, too, felt a pleasure in walking about Derby two hundred years after Boswell, though not for the same reason. Externally it is a normal busy town, its streets crowded with shoppers, cars and buses, very much like hundreds of other English boroughs whose growth the Industrial Revolution spurred. But there is a difference. The past is still present in the streets of Derby. Crossing over the Bridge Gate to the town, one can see the spires of six churches which were mentioned by their current names in the Domesday Book (1086). Two are dedicated to Saxon saints, St. Werburgh and St. Alkmund; the others to St. Peter, St. Michael, All Saints and St. Mary. Five of them, rebuilt in different centuries, still stand on the same sites. The ancient site of St. Mary's is unknown; the present Catholic church was built in 1838 with Augustus Welby Pugin as architect. In a newly built up area of modern flats and houses there is a road that is still called Nuns Street. Here the Benedictine convent of St. Mary in the Meadows was founded by the abbot of Darley in 1160. When Cornelia came to Derby in 1846 she would also have seen street names like Nuns' Green, Nuns' Bridge, and Nuns' Mill.

The original Saxon town was called Northworthig, but the Danes levelled much of it and rebuilt and renamed it Deoraby.² In 1377 the population recorded for the poll tax was 1076 adults. When Boswell walked its streets four hundred years later the figure was only 8563. But by 1846 it had shot up to 37,431 as a result of industrialization.

In medieval times Derby's chief industries were wine, which was imported for the nobles and for the monks of the various religious houses; lead, which was used as a means of exchange; and

¹ George Birkbeck Hill, ed., Boswell's Life of Johnson (New York: Harper, 1891), III, 185.

² Samuel Bagshaw, History, Gazetteer and Directory of Derbyshire (Sheffield, 1846), p. 41.

leather goods, which were bartered for needles and soap with the monks of Darley Abbey and Coventry.³ In the seventeenth century the hosiery trade developed. At first the stocking machines were in people's homes and the noise they made could be heard in nearly every street. Mills prevailed by the early eighteenth century, with machinery turned by children treading a wheel, until water power was introduced and eventually replaced by steam. The first fireproof mill in England was said to have been built in Derby in 1775. Lace, silk and cotton mills gradually appeared, and about 1750 the famous Crown Derby china factory was established in the Nottingham Road near the canal. Here too in the 1830's were erected the large convent and school which were offered to Cornelia Connelly when Dr. Wiseman and Lord Shrewsbury asked her to come and work in the town.

In 1846, a few months before Cornelia and her companions arrived in Derby, the authorities had felt obliged to forbid "Football of the Old Style." This was a rough game played each year in the streets of the town on Shrove Tuesday. There were no rules. The bulk of the younger male population divided into two sides. The aim of one group was to get the ball into the river, and the aim of the other was to prevent this. The fight was known to continue into the water, even when snow and ice covered the ground. "A Frenchman passing through Derby said that if Englishmen called this playing, it would be impossible to say what they would call fighting. Shops were closed and the town presented the aspect of a place suddenly taken by storm."⁴ The origin of the game is unknown but tradition traces it to a conflict with Roman soldiers in 217 A. D. Local authorities in the nineteenth century made various attempts to stop the game, and at Shrovetide in 1846 the Riot Act was read and soldiers entered the town to stop the disorder. Soldiers had to be called in again in 1847, after which the "game" came to an end. Did the nuns in their new convent in Nottingham Road near the Derwent see any of this from their windows? If so, they left no record.

³ See History and Antiquities of Derby, compiled from authentic sources by Robert Simpson (Derby, 1826).

⁴ Stephen Glover, History of the Borough of Derby, intended as a guide to strangers visiting the town (Derby: Mozely, 1843, with later editions including a 4th "corrected to May 1850"), p. 67.

Living conditions in the town were variable. Compared with nearby places such as Leicester and Nottingham, Derby was spoken of as a "most comfortable town." In the early nineteenth century:

Power was given to make various alterations for the widening and straightening of the streets and lanes, and generally to take measures for the better paving, draining, cleansing and lighting of the town, for establishing a regular night watch and for the preventing and removing of nuisances The town of Derby is becoming distinguished among the provincial capitals of the Kingdom for improvements which blend the two characteristics of perfection, elegance and utility. The streets . . . are gradually being divested of obstruction, and, with the approaches to the borough in every direction, have undergone the process which gives smoothness and safety to the carriage ways.⁵

But there were still some very black spots. In Derby's slums there were over 300 closed "courts" with no drainage or water supply and with cess pools formed from the wastes of slaughter houses, tanneries and chemical works. The streets were unsewered and working class houses were small cottages, ill-ventilated and ill-lighted.

Most of the townspeople were employed in the mills. William Hutton, a local historian, "at seven years of age worked in the silk mill from 5 a.m. to 7 p.m. for 1/- a week. As he was too small to reach the machine a pair of pattens was specially made for him which he continued to drag along for a year."⁶ The mill, we are told, was a bear garden where impudence and rudeness were the general characteristics. Mines Acts and Factory Acts were slow in being passed through Parliament. Only in 1842 were women and boys under ten debarred from the mines. In 1847, women and boys under 18 might no longer work for more than ten hours in factories. In Derby as elsewhere the social problems were compounded by the influx of starving Irish, especially during the years 1845-46. There were not only physical and social problems but also serious religious and educational needs--all of which became the daily concern of the new Society of the Holy Child Jesus.

⁵ Glover (1843), p. 8.

⁶ A. W. Davison, Derby: Its Rise and Progress (London: Bemrose, 1906), p. 222.

Trade was given a fresh impetus by the coming of the railways. In August 1839 the Derby-Birmingham line was opened, and soon the "stupendous and magnificent" Derby railway station was built. In 1840 the first day-excursion train arrived in Derby on Whit-Monday bringing people from Sheffield to see the new arboretum for a return fare of 4/-. A passenger on the first train from Derby to London describes the run:

Everything was in a state of confusion, everybody spoke or commanded . . . improvements had to be made at the last minute with bad and inefficient tools and many would-be passengers were frightened off. Only a few proceeded to Birmingham where they would be taken in tow . . . But we were not quite ready when the Birmingham train came in sight and it whisked along, giving us the go-bye. However another locomotive was procured and we started again on our venture, arriving safely at Euston, a distance of 135 miles, in seven hours, when I inwardly thanked my stars to find myself upon my legs again.⁷

Third class carriages had neither cushions nor lights, but wealthier travellers could have their own carriages attached to the train. "One day Mrs. Mundy entered her coach at Markeaton, drove through the town to the station, had it put on a railway track and rode in it all the way to London. She wrote to say what a good journey and how warm and comfortable it was."⁸

In October 1846 Cornelia Connelly and her three companions made the journey from Birmingham to Derby without any recorded mishaps although it seems to have been too much for Emily Bowles who was unwell when she arrived and had to retire (D 10:34).

At that time there were only two local newspapers in Derby. The Derby Mercury was a weekly founded in 1732. Its accounts of the Jacobite rising of 1745, and of Bonnie Prince Charlie's arrival in Derby and of his hasty retreat from the town made it famous. It was a Conservative paper, concerned more with national than with local news. The Mercury was anti-Irish, anti-Peel, anti-Corn Law Repeal, anti-Catholic, and pro-Established Church. On November 4, 1846, there was a Protestant demonstration in Derby and the paper reported a meeting in the Mechanics Lecture Hall at which the following resolution was drawn up: "This meeting views with alarm the religious efforts and political progress now making by

⁷ Augustus Bozzi Granville, Spas of England (London: Colburn, 1841), quoted in Davison, p. 290.

⁸ Davison, p. 289.

the emissaries of the Church of Rome throughout the United Kingdom." Speakers expressed Christian feelings for individual Roman Catholics but not for the spread of the religion in England. They needed to "unite to stem the torrent of Papacy." Could the arrival of the nuns in October at the convent in Nottingham Road have influenced this outburst? It seems very unlikely. The four nuns were not yet in a religious habit and their arrival had passed unnoticed in the newspapers.

It was only in 1823 that a second newspaper, the Derby and Chesterfield Reporter, was established, more radical and more tolerant towards Catholics. In November 1846 a letter appeared in the Reporter from "a Protestant and a Conservative": "Is it wise, is it discreet, is it just or is it proper that our Roman Catholic brethren should be persecuted by the proceedings of a few bigoted clergymen?" Another letter to the editor from "a Constant Reader" urged fairer treatment for Catholics in the matter of education.

The Reporter printed an account of the laying of the foundation stone of the new Catholic church in Bridge Gate in 1838. A procession from the old chapel to the new site included "about 150 children, each child bearing a small wand about four feet high, formed like a cross, which with several elegant small silk flags gave a most picturesque appearance to this part of the procession." The Honourable and Reverend G. Spencer preached. Augustus Welby Pugin was the architect. "The men employed on the work to the number of 60 sat down to a substantial and ample dinner after the ceremony, and the children of the school, attending the present chapel, celebrated the event by a feast in the evening."

On October 9, 1839, the new church was consecrated. The Reporter continued: "This splendid specimen of gothic architecture was consecrated by Bishop Walsh, assisted by the clergy of Oscott College. The music was by Beethoven. The appearance of the clergy surrounding the altar was extremely gorgeous. The sermon was preached by Bishop Wiseman from Mark 4:31,32--the parable of the mustard seed." The congregation at the evening service at 6 p.m. was addressed by Dr. Walsh on brotherly love between Catholics and Protestants. The Hon. and Revd. G. Spencer announced that in consequence of the Catholic faith having been treated very harshly in the town in public sermons recently delivered, the Very Revd. Dr. Wiseman would lecture on Catholicism on four evenings that week.

The lectures were delivered, and on October 17 a report was printed in the same paper: "The audiences were very large, augmented no doubt by the virulent notice which has been taken of the erection of the new church and the abuse of Catholicity, from the

several pulpits of the Establishment. The most effectual way," continued the paper, "to bring a sect into notoriety is to abuse it soundly. If no public curiosity existed previously, this will be sure to produce it. Catholics ought to be much obliged to their advertisers." The 1843 edition of Stephen Glover's History of Derby counted fifteen non-conformist chapels, eight Church of England churches and one Roman Catholic church in the town.

Describing coronation day (1838) the Reporter commented on the decline of drunkenness in Derby. The occasion passed "with as little inebriation as we ever witnessed anywhere during a general holiday." This time the landlord of the Cross and Keys in the Market Place evidently did not need to send home his customers in a wheelbarrow.⁹ Brewing was an important industry and ale remained the national beverage. "Tea was still beyond the reach of the masses and was used sparingly even by the gentry. In the advertisements of ladies' seminaries it was mentioned as an attraction, but the men regarded it as 'cat-lap' and preferred something stronger."¹⁰ As the nineteenth century progressed tea-drinking became more common. Temperance or tee-total societies, as they were called, marched through the town at their annual gatherings and boasted of the number of reformed drunkards who handed round the tea cups at the table.¹¹

Why Derby?

Why did Mother Connelly go to Derby to start her work in England? There were many reasons why Derby in the Midlands was an obvious choice. Pierce and Cornelia had both stayed in the Midlands at Spetchley Park, the home of the Berkeley family, in 1843 and from there they had visited Alton Towers, Lord Shrewsbury's home; contacts with both families had been kept up in Rome and in England. Dr. Wiseman had been made Coadjutor Bishop of the Central District in 1840, and there was a great deal of discussion going on between him and the Earl, as they were anxious to provide education for girls of the middle classes in England as well as for the young factory workers in the industrial towns. There is no doubt that pressure was brought on Cornelia in the Sacred Heart convent in Rome where she was seeking to know God's will for the future.

⁹ Bagshaw, p. 196.

¹⁰ Davison, pp. 130-131.

¹¹ Davison, p. 182.

In April 1846 Pierce wrote to his brother John from Rome:

Father Grassi, Nelie's Director had very nearly sent her to America--but Lord Shrewsbury so strongly argued in favour of England that she is now on her way there, where she will probably enter into religion but it will be with the hope of connecting England and America together in a new Congregation (D 5:115).

In another letter to the same brother he wrote:

Doctor Wiseman has, much against her will and even her judgment, made her take possession of a large and beautiful convent--St. Mary's at Derby She wanted to begin in a more humble and quiet way (D 5:158).

In August Cornelia wrote to John Henry Newman to tell him that she and Emily Bowles were going to see the convent at Derby. She says:

Miss Bowles and myself thought it better we should go to Derby as Dr. Wiseman had wished we should do so and we had requested the command in the Spirit of obedience However it is very doubtful whether we should accept the Convent or rather be more retired & nearer the Jesuit Fathers (D 10:7).

This question of being near the Jesuits was a very important issue in Cornelia's mind. According to Dr. Wiseman, writing to Father Lythgoe, the Jesuit provincial, September 28, 1846:

One advantage proposed in selecting Derby as the first place for founding such a Convent was the nearness of Mt. St. Mary's from which it was hoped that some priest could be spared for some hours a week to hear the Confessions, etc. of the religious . . . the fate of the Establishment seems almost to rest upon this concession (D 10:14).

When permission had been obtained, Cornelia wrote to Merty: "The Revd. Fr. Lythgoe S.J. has promised me a weekly Director from Spink-hill which puts us quite at rest about our souls" (D 10:23). The Earl of Shrewsbury had also approached the Jesuit provincial: "I am confident," he wrote, "there is no one so capable of carrying out an Institute of this description as good Mrs. Connelly, so I beg of you not to discourage her by throwing unnecessary obstacles in her way" (D 10:12).

The Convent

In December 1846 the Catholic Herald (USA) printed an account by Pierce Connelly of the new congregation and the warm support given to it by Bishop Wiseman, who

sees in it a remarkable providence of God, and has, contrary to all that Sister Cornelia intended and desired, given them a very grand establishment, the chapel of which is not yet finished in Derby. He says it is just what he was longing for-- and that while in Rome the spiritual building was preparing, here the material one was, the Lord only knowing that one was for the other (D 5:153-154).

The money for this material building had been raised by the parish priest, Mr. Sing, but there was still a large debt, and money for this and for furnishings and the upkeep of the house had to be found. The bishop wrote to Cornelia assuring her:

I have no hesitation in saying at once, that I will take the whole Convent with its liabilities on myself, and trust to Divine Providence for the means of meeting all In the name of God and of our Blessed Lady let us begin at once courageously, and put our trust on High (D 10:11).

He really meant at once. The letter dated Sunday, Sept. 6, 1846, concludes: "On Tuesday, Her Nativity the foundation stone of the work may be laid."

A day or two before this letter was written, Dr. Wiseman and Mr. Sing had called to see Cornelia at the Mercy convent in Handsworth, Birmingham, where she and Emily Bowles were staying. Cornelia was away, probably at Spetchley Park where Merty was spending his holiday, and the visitors were received by Emily, who was "aghast" as she was "dreadfully weak." But, she says, the Bishop was "radiant with smiles." He told her about the financial situation in Derby and said that he had "taken the whole upon himself." He told her to write to Mother Connelly to say "that he and Mr. Sing would be glad if we could begin as soon as possible."¹²

¹² In 1861, when Wiseman's feelings towards Mother Connelly had hardened over the St. Leonards dispute, he wrote to Bishop Ullathorne: "The Rev. T. Sing, having built a Convent at Derby, placed in it the Community formed by Mrs. Connelly [sic], under the title of "The Holy Child" ~~head~~ [sic] in which I took a great interest, but in founding which I had had no part, nor in establishing it"--a statement difficult to reconcile with his earlier letters (D 15:36).

Emily "felt quite odd to think that everything was done--really before one could look round. But I never saw the Bishop take up a thing so warmly--he was quite full of happiness--& as Miss Edmunds said afterwards--he smiled on me as St. Francis might have smiled upon St. J F de Chantal, wh made me laugh heartily--I am now quite tired--so please excuse my stupidity." In a postscript Emily adds, "Tell me about the dress," indicating that they were already discussing the habit (D 10:9-10).

The new convent to which Cornelia came with her three companions in October 1846 is described in the books and letters of the period as a "beautiful," "elegant," "spacious" building. We know it was first dedicated to St. Vincent de Paul; "the name was formed in the bricks while being erected" (D 10:138). In none of the printed accounts of the time are Holy Child nuns mentioned, but one gazetteer notes: "A convent for the sisters of charity and commodious school rooms adjoining, are now building in the Nottingham Road."¹³

Glover's History of Derby gives a particularly full description of the convent from its

striking frontage extending upwards of 300 feet in length. It is of course in the Gothic style, the chief entrance being protected by a perforated wall of remarkable character and beauty. The interior has been planned with far greater regard to usefulness than effect, the rooms being more numerous than vast in size; but while simplicity reigns within, the careful attention to arrangement, to lighting and ventilation, in a word the height and form of the rooms and fitness of every part for the purposes intended, testify beyond all doubt that the health and comfort and convenience of the inmates have been most thought of by the architect, Mr. Joseph Hansom of Preston. . . . The building . . . comprises large poor schools and master's or chaplain's residence, forming the extremity of the wing on the right; next comes the vestry and a chapel, 50 feet in length and possessing some beautiful stained glass, and already prepared for a good deal of future decoration. The cells or rooms of the nuns surround the gallery of the chapel, while the library, reception and chapter rooms and other apartments occupy the centre. Between this part of the fabric and the extreme

¹³ Bagshaw, p. 56.

left, which is a steward's house and the laundry, washing and drying rooms, is a noble suite of rooms devoted to educational purposes, specially for the training of young persons in the important art of teaching poor children.¹⁴

The "perforated wall of remarkable character and beauty" is still in Derby and forms part of the gates of the teacher training college in the town. Before the convent was pulled down in 1865 parts of it were sold; tradition says that the stained glass windows of the chapel were used in at least one church in the area. One writer who does not praise the building is Mother Maria Joseph Buckle, who visited the convent with her mother in March 1848 in order to make a retreat under Father Clough, S.J. In her reminiscences she writes:

The Convent itself was small and poor, the first home of the Holy Child in England; the little chapel was dark and Gothic--but the decorations, like all those in our convents, was sic pretty and in the Italian taste that Mother Foundress had acquired in Rome (D 78:4).

Mrs. and Miss Buckle had also visited the nearby Catholic church of St. Mary and had met Mr. Thomas Sing, the parish priest. The church

was full for Benediction of Manufacturers and the poor and there was a large school of which the sisters had the charge. The town itself was dirty and full of black chimnies sic but there was an air of work and earnestness about the mission and as my Mother said it looked as if the conversion of England was in prospect (D 78:4).

Perhaps these two ladies were not accustomed to buildings of red and black bricks in the neighborhood of factory chimneys. Perhaps, too, the same thought might have crossed Mother Connelly's mind, although this is at variance with the tradition that when she first saw the convent she exclaimed: "We shall never stay here. This is not Bethlehem" (D 73:158). These words were supposed to have been spoken to the little band that was with her when they arrived in October. But this was surely not Cornelia's first visit to the convent. She had written to Dr. Newman on 31 August to say that she and Emily intended to visit Derby on Wednesday, 2 September, to "see the convent." Perhaps the exclamation was a spontaneous remark to Emily on their arrival; we know the doubts they had about going at all.

¹⁴ 1849 edition, pp. 93 and passim.

Carved above the main entrance of the Derby convent was the Holy Child standing in front of a cross. This familiar motif, though not original with Cornelia, was adopted early in Society history and expresses a wealth of spiritual insight in joining Bethlehem with Calvary. In the Rule which Cornelia presented to Dr. Wiseman for approval in 1850, she included a chapter on the novice mistress from the Visitation Rule. She expanded this chapter however, at one point, to convey clearly in her own words how profound and comprehensive was her devotion to the Holy Child, how intimately linked it was to the vowed life.

As the Society of the Holy Child Jesus is spiritually founded on the virtues of Poverty, Suffering and Obedience which our most Blessed Redeemer came down from heaven to practise in the grotto of Bethlehem and thence through His whole life unto Calvary, so ought all to begin life again with the most sweet, holy, loving Child Jesus, a humbled God . . . that they may finally be united to our crucified Lord.

The first publication in the Society was a translation by Emily Bowles of French Meditations for Whitsuntide, printed in Derby in 1848. Cornelia herself wrote the introduction for "my dear children"--the children of the Derby schools:

You must take for your pattern the Holy Child Jesus . . . you must learn . . . how He looked, how He acted, & how He prayed. May you really so learn of the Holy Child Jesus, my dear children, growing as He grew in stature and grace; and when you grow up, may you . . . love and follow the Man Jesus (D 65:55).

The frontispiece was a picture of the Holy Child Jesus with arms outstretched before a cross (D 63:45). Mother Maria Joseph in giving an account of this little manual notes:

This introduction is the more important as it not only shows Mother Connelly's method with the children, but because she made this little book the text book for Postulants ever afterwards (D 65:55).

1846 was the Golden Jubilee of the foundation of the Society and there were many celebrations. At Mayfield on the 15th of August when all the superiors were meeting, Cardinal Vaughan blessed and distributed a new Society medal representing on one side the Holy Child with arms outstretched against a cross; this medal was then attached to the large rosaries worn by all the nuns until the recent change of habit.

The Habit

The habit, too, was thought out by Mother Connelly in Derby. We have already seen Emily Bowles's interest in it while they were still in Birmingham. Sister Aloysia Walker, one of Cornelia's first three companions, wrote in her account of those early days: "After the first few days she began to form the dress we were all so anxious to see" (D 10:37)--so Emily was not the only one. It "was of Black Coburg cloth & the veils at first were of Barege--coarse twilled Serge was worn for a time, afterwards replaced by French Merino" (D 10:130). In style it was similar to a model of the day reproduced in the Illustrated London News and described as a street dress for a young widow. It would have been quite inconspicuous at the time, compared with the more traditional tunic, scapular and wimple of the older orders. Pierce Connelly's expectation that the dress would look "the least striking possible" (D 5:153) was in fact achieved for a provincial town, whereas in London it was considered in the 1850's imprudent to wear even this religious habit outside the convent.

Mother St. Martin Cutmore's Recollections of Sister Aloysia Walker inform us further:

The Habit was not exactly the same as the one worn [later]. There was a broad hem in the veil containing a piece of buckram [sic], which made a kind of hoop round the face. This was changed about the time that the first set of Sisters came to America, Sister Aloysia being one on the number (D 76:5).

The Apostolate

A few days after Mother Connelly arrived in Derby she received a letter from Dr. Wiseman congratulating her on beginning her work in England. He defined the aim of the new little society which he and Lord Shrewsbury had been so eager to see started:

The field which you have chosen for the exercise of spiritual mercies is indeed vast and almost boundless but it presents the richest soil, and promise of the most abundant return. The middle classes till now almost neglected in England form the mass and staple of our society, are the "higher class" of our great congregations out of the capital, have to provide us with our priesthood, our confraternities and our working religious. To train the future mothers of this class is to sanctify entire families, and sow the seeds of piety in whole congregations; it is to make friends

for the poor of Christ, nurses for the sick and dying, catechists for the little ones, most useful auxiliaries in every good work. And . . . you will be yourselves partaking in the most consoling of duties, the education in Catholic piety of the lambs of Christ's flock, his dear poor children (D 10:25-26).

An article in the Tablet, 31st October, 1846, also noted:

The new convent at Derby . . . has for its object the practice of works of Spiritual Mercy exclusively--especially the education of children, giving of catechetical and other instruction under the direction of the parish clergy and what is a striking feature, receiving as boarders 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. We hope soon to hear more of a congregation that appears peculiarly adapted to the wants of England at the present time It seems to open the door of Religious life to many who from education or retirement are unfitted for the more corporal works of mercy, but who would be glad to devote themselves to God in serving the souls of their fellow creatures (D 10:27).

In July 1846 John Henry Newman, who was staying at Alton Towers, wrote to a Miss Giberne about the founding of

a new congregation, under the sanction of Rome, with the object of instructing girls, principally of the middle and upper classes; of affording a refuge (for a while) for ladies cast off by their families, and of assisting priests in various things. The works will be all spiritual works of mercy, in opposition to corporal The person who begins it, is in the truest and best sense an enthusiastic person,--of education and great influence in her circle--who has been married but not elderly I suppose (D 10:3-4).

Pierce Connelly's letter in the Catholic Herald (USA), 17 December 1846, said: "Their receiving in a separate department, boarders, is a very important feature here in England" (D 5:153).

One of the ladies who came to Derby for a period of temporary retirement and to follow a retreat given by Francis Clough, S.J., from Mount St. Mary's, was Frances Bridges, daughter of an Anglican

clergyman in Kent. She soon entered the Society, receiving the habit in 1849. Frances (Sister Mary Ignatia) Bridges (1812-1889) was the closest to Mother Connelly in age, and was for thirty years her devoted secretary and companion, keeping a diary of events from 1856-1877 (D 61).

Also among the Derby retreatants were Mrs. William Buckle and her daughter Elizabeth (1822-1892) who joined the little community in 1848 and is remembered as Mother Maria Joseph. Her intellectual gifts and classical background helped the Holy Child boarding schools and training college to raise the standard of girls' education. Material she collected for a life of Cornelia Connelly (D 63-67) and her later Recollections (D 78) are rich sources for study of the spirit and history of the early Society.

Another "lady boarder" at Derby was a Miss Hawthornthwaite who had been instructed by Pierce Connelly. Her great grandnephew writes in 1945 (D 6:231-232):

Victoria Constance Hawthornthwaite at one time took a vow to obey Mr Connelly. She went and lived with Mrs Connelly at Derby where she was able to help her in the school as she spoke French and Italian, played the harp and the piano and organ. . . . At Derby she was asked by Mr Connelly to act as a spy on Mrs Connelly. This she would not do for her love for Mrs Connelly. She therefore told Mrs Connelly who agreed that it were better were they to part. Victoria Constance took advice and was told that her vow was not binding and left Derby.

She eventually went to Australia and entered a Benedictine convent near Sydney and became its prioress. Letters to her sister reveal her continued interest in the Connellys:

What sad news you have given me of poor Mr. Connelly. . . . It seems so impossible that he could leave the Holy Church in his sober senses that I can believe he is deranged.

How I should like to know how Cornelia is and what has become of dear Adeline & poor Mr Connelly (D 6:235, 237).

The great grandnephew's final note (D 6:233) mentions a family "tradition that Victoria Constance was in love with Mr Connelly and went into the convent as she could not marry him. Probably only a Prot idea, prots being unable to understand the 'call of religion.'"

(To be continued in the next issue of SOURCE)

SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE CHRISTOLOGY OF CORNELIA CONNELLY

Catherine Quinn, SHCJ

Matthew's account of the all important question posed by Christ: "Who do you say that I am?" is perhaps less starkly challenging than the accounts in Mark and Luke. Jesus knows what is in man and his question draws forth a response characteristic of the person who is challenged. Simon Peter spoke up, the disciple who was spontaneous, dependable, generous and weak. Mt 16, 13-23 gives indications of these personal characteristics of Peter.

Matthew struck an important note in his expanded account. The confession of Peter is interpreted as the foundation of a community of persons who say: You are the Christ. The fruitfulness of the faith confession of any man is significant. The acknowledgement of Jesus Christ once drawn from the heart and mind of an individual becomes the foundation and inspiration for further witness of him, because "God has chosen to need men and women in every age to reveal his love, to extend the reality of the Incarnation" (SHCJ Documents, p. 7).

Rosemary Haughton wrote of Cornelia Connelly in Theology of Experience:¹

Cornelia had a passion for Christ, and therefore a passion for truth, which was stronger than her personal faults and which she managed to pass on to her spiritual daughters.

Cornelia's acknowledgement and confession of Jesus was, like Peter's, in accord with her whole personality. She was a woman capable of great love. Early in their married life, when Pierce was away she wrote to him: "Dear love my more than life . . . my own dear life" (CC 1:1). Cornelia's capacity for loving affection never lessened. It grew into a passion for Christ which was stronger than her personal faults and which hopefully she still manages to pass on to the members of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus. She herself wrote not long before her death: "Let us all pray fervently for each other, not forgetting that we have a community in heaven waiting for us to join them there" (God Alone, p. 43). Her care for the Society can hardly have grown less.

¹ (New York: Newman, 1972), p. 159.