

*Yes, **A** Lord,  
Always Yes*



# *Yes, **A** Lord, Always Yes*

*A Life of Cornelia Connelly*

*1809 - 1879*

*Founder of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus*

*by*

*Elizabeth Mary Strub, shcj*

Casa Cornelia Publications  
San Diego, CA, USA  
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*First published, January 2003*  
*Fourth printing, March 2021*

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# Preface

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SISTER ELIZABETH MARY STRUB'S STORY of Cornelia Connelly, *Yes, Lord, Always Yes* joins the list of Cornelian biographies, but with a difference. It is the first one written with our SHCJ associates particularly in mind. The 1998 General Chapter of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus, recognizing that our associates too are rooted in the charism of Cornelia, asked that: "*The extended Society leadership team . . . commission a simple, illustrated life, in print or video, of Cornelia Connelly in different languages*". When considering this request, we discovered that Elizabeth Mary was already developing a Spanish text, using sections of Cornelia's life for reflection with our SHCJ associates in Santiago, Chile. We were delighted when she accepted to write this version for our English-speaking associates.

At the end of the book there are reflection questions on each of the chapters. These are intended to help the reader deepen understanding and appreciation of Cornelia, this remarkable nineteenth century woman who was called to be wife, mother, and foundress of our Society. Although this book is addressed in the first place to our associates, I am sure that others who read it will find Cornelia a source of inspiration for their lives too.

I acknowledge with gratitude the many people who assisted in the realisation of this short life of Cornelia. I would, however, like to thank most especially, Elizabeth Mary Strub, shcj, who worked through an unusually hot Roman June to complete the book; Rade-gunde Flaxman, shcj, a Cornelian scholar and author of *A Woman Styled Bold* who ably assisted with research; Judith Lancaster, shcj,

for reviewing the text with editorial skill and Wayne Gradon, shcj, for designing an attractive book that many will want to pick up and read. It is their scholarship, determination, and care which brings to our associates and to all of us this new, shorter and reflective version of Cornelia's life.

Geraldine MacCarthy, shcj  
Society Leader

Society of the Holy Child Jesus  
Rome  
15 January 2003

# *Dedication*

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THE STORY OF CORNELIA CONNELLY is the story of many people like you. Although she lived in a different time and place and spent the second half of her life as a religious and founder of a new religious congregation in the Church, Cornelia will reflect something of your own experience as a lay person. Like many of you she knew the joys and sorrows of being spouse and parent. Sometimes she was rich and sometimes poor. She had the same desire you have to place yourself and those you love in the divine care and to belong wholly to God.

You are Cornelia's associates as truly as those of us who are religious. Your state in life is the same as hers in the first half of her life. Ours is like hers in the second half. Our different callings are mutually enriching. From our different perspectives, we bring each other the privileged insights of our different Christian vocations.

You are an associate because something in Cornelia's story attracted you. You recognized an affinity with her and with those whose lives she influenced and you wanted to relate to God as they did. That's how God works. God creates in some people desires and spiritual traits which draw them to others with the same desires and traits. They recognize each other and come together. That's why we now find ourselves associates of Cornelia and of one another. God's Spirit has brought us together.

You caught the essence of Cornelia's spirit, perhaps without knowing the details of her story. This little biography is meant to flesh out her story and heighten your sense of relationship to her by showing you the different circumstances in which, through a multitude of difficulties and challenges, she remained true to God. By recognizing her courage and her spirit of joy in God, you will be able to tap into your own reserves of courage and rejoice more and more in the God of your own lives.

The following pages are gratefully dedicated to you.



*Cornelia, before her marriage*

## *Background*

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CORNELIA AUGUSTA PEACOCK was born in 1809, in the city of Philadelphia. Taking into account that the United States had won independence from England only thirty-three years before, and that Philadelphia was the first capital of the new republic, it is easy to understand why years later an English bishop could have referred to Cornelia with some distaste as “that Yankee”. Indeed, her Yankee traits would get her into serious trouble in “the mother country”.

Cornelia was the darling of a big and well-to-do family. Her father, Ralph Peacock, came from Yorkshire in England where he had led a quiet country life. He immigrated to Philadelphia, participated in civic life as a man of business and merchant, and came to own properties in different parts of the Philadelphia area. He married a widow, Mary Swope Bowen, and fifteen years after his arrival in the city his youngest and seventh child was born, Cornelia.

Mary Swope Bowen Peacock was Cornelia’s mother. For three generations Mary’s family had been involved in the development of the colony and in the struggle for independence. Her first marriage was to an Englishman, a plantation owner in Jamaica, John Bowen. With him she had two children, Cornelia’s half-brother and sister. After Bowen’s death, Mary returned to Philadelphia and married Ralph Peacock, bringing her considerable fortune to the union. Mary was accustomed to a high degree of material comfort and to the society of the civic leaders of Philadelphia.

The Peacock family lived in a good three-storey house in an attractive part of the city. There were strong and lasting bonds of affection among the six Peacock brothers and sisters (a seventh, an eleven-month old girl, had died just before Cornelia's birth). All her life long Cornelia kept in close contact with her siblings and their offspring to the third generation.

We have very little information about Cornelia's childhood. She was almost certainly educated at home as the custom was in families like hers. The family religion was Presbyterian and it planted in Cornelia a strong sense of God's presence and great moral rectitude. She developed from childhood on her love of truth and justice. Remembering her early years, Cornelia would tell how untidy a child she was and what a temper she had. It is easy to imagine her acting impulsively and with the natural generosity of her character. She would not have counted the cost or weighed the consequences.

There is an amusing—and frightening—childhood anecdote that gives us a glimpse of the “bold woman” Cornelia would become. She and her older sister Mary were walking in a field where some bullocks were grazing. Seven-year-old Cornelia provoked one of them to the point that it began to chase her. Terrified, Cornelia started running away from him. She barely escaped by taking refuge in a nearby barn. Meanwhile, Mary, eleven years old, reacted just as rapidly. She distracted the bullock by opening and closing her red parasol. Furious and scared, the bullock backed into a gully and fell over. Sad to say, the bullock died instantly. History does not relate who paid.

Only two years after the bullock episode, the two little girls lost their father and their lives changed abruptly. Ralph Peacock, not a good businessman, left many debts and the Peacocks had to economize. In the midst of deep human and material loss, the young Peacocks pulled together and stayed united around Mary Peacock. They managed to keep alive the same warm climate of affection as before. Another death saddened the family, Cornelia's oldest brother Dodsworth; and there was a wedding: Cornelia's oldest sister Adeline with a very wealthy man, Lewis Duval. Cornelia's half-sister, Isabella

Bowen Montgomery, had been married since the year Cornelia was born.

Cornelia shared the interests and fun of her beloved brothers and sisters, especially painting and family games. She lived protected and cherished in the bosom of her close family until the age of fourteen. Being the youngest, Cornelia could benefit from the natural gifts of her elders and learn from each one. Her psychological balance and emotional maturity are very likely the products of the happy and secure family circle that surrounded her to adolescence.



*Adeline Peacock Duval*

In this way Cornelia reached her fourteenth year. It is the year Mary, her mother, died of a long drawn-out illness and Cornelia became an orphan. All that she had known and loved up to this point suddenly disappeared. Her brothers and sisters scattered, the family house was sold, and each one went to a separate place. Cornelia was taken in by her half-sister, Isabella Montgomery. There, with her and in her most impressionable adolescent years, Cornelia began a new life.

*See reflection questions on page 159*

## *At the Montgomery's*

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THE ATMOSPHERE IN CORNELIA'S NEW HOME was very different. There were no other children in the family and Cornelia found herself alone in a more sophisticated setting. The Montgomerys were rather formal and not used to having young people around. And although Isabella Montgomery was Cornelia's half-sister, she had married and left the house before Cornelia could remember her. In the matter of religion, Isabella was Presbyterian, but Austin, her husband, attended the Episcopalian church, the typical church of the upper classes.

Although her sedate surroundings and disciplined regime could be confining, Cornelia was able to take advantage of all the privileges enjoyed by a young lady in Philadelphia society. The Montgomerys were very good to her and generous to a fault. They provided excellent teachers, access to concerts, museums and libraries in this "Athens" of the new nation and they surrounded her with a refined social circle. Under the Montgomery roof Cornelia could develop her interest in art, music, drama, and languages. It was typical of her not to lose time feeling sorry for herself. Early on she learned the art of obeying reality and confidently making the best of the way things were.

Cornelia spent eight years as the adopted daughter of Isabella and Austin Montgomery. Certainly she would have met and come to know the Reverend James Montgomery, Austin's brother. He was rector of the new St. Stephen's church in a beautiful part of town.



Already Cornelia's sister Adeline had become a member of his church. Probably Cornelia too began to attend St. Stephen's. It is there that she was baptized just before her marriage.

James Montgomery is a very attractive figure. He ministered in the branch of his Church closest to Roman Catholicism in cult and in doctrine. His eloquence as a preacher and his reputation for holiness assured a growing congregation of followers. Was Cornelia one of them? If the answer were yes, it is the holiness of her half-brother by marriage, the Reverend James, which would have attracted Cornelia.

Perhaps it is through him that Cornelia came to know a young Episcopalian minister named Pierce Connelly. Tradition says that she sang in his church. Pierce had earned his Master's degree in law at the University of Pennsylvania in 1824 and immediately began studies for the ministry. He was ordained in 1828 and took up a post as assistant in a church near Philadelphia. His evident sincerity and fervor as a churchman and his intelligence and good looks assured him a circle of feminine admirers. Cornelia, now a young woman of twenty-two and of great beauty, was the ideal partner for this young Episcopalian minister. They fell in love, a love that knew no obstacles, and planned to marry.

We don't know exactly why Isabella Montgomery disapproved of the relationship between Cornelia and Pierce. Was it snobbery or simple dislike of Pierce? It is true that, compared with the Montgomerys' income, Pierce's was small. It was mistakenly thought that his father was a simple carpenter rather than the fine cabinet-maker he in fact was. Or did Isabella recognize in Pierce a tendency to instability and exaggerated ambition? Whatever the reason, Isabella refused to allow Cornelia to marry Pierce from under her roof.

We can imagine the situation—Isabella and Cornelia painfully confronting one another, Austin defending the young man through loyalty to his brother James, minister in the same communion as Pierce, and Cornelia with the strength of her great love clearing a way through the dilemma.

*See reflection questions on page 160*

## *The Minister Takes a Wife*

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IT IS THE EVENING OF DECEMBER 1, 1831. The gracious house of Cornelia's sister Adeline is decorated for a wedding. The guests are gathered in the upstairs parlor—Cornelia's and Pierce's brothers and sisters, his mother, the Duval family, and friends. The Montgomerys? The Reverend James, yes; Isabella and Austin, probably not.

Bishop White, the one who had prepared Pierce for ordination, now has the pleasure of presiding at his marriage to Cornelia. In the presence of God and their families and friends, Pierce and Cornelia interchange vows of faithful love until death. From now and forever they are joined in the holy state of matrimony.

The bride is twenty-two years old. She is exceptionally beautiful, slight of build and slender. The features of her face are delicately chiseled, her brow wide and clear, her nose well defined. Her dark eyes are full of fire and her smile is sweet. Her dark wavy hair is arranged so as to crown her beauty on this bridal day. So did a contemporary describe her.

The groom is twenty-seven. He is tall and thin, some say handsome, with a high forehead and narrow chin. He has the air of an important person—intense, serious and sensitive.

How did this wedding come to be? Apparently Cornelia found the solution to her dilemma. She went to visit her sister Adeline Duval and in her house she fulfilled her promise to Pierce. It was not a case of deception on her part, but a strong determination to

let no obstacle stand in the way of her love. Marrying at home rather than in a church was the custom of the day. It drew attention to the fact that the domestic church was as sacred as a cathedral. It was certainly the intention of Cornelia and Pierce to make it so.

Less than a year earlier, Cornelia had been baptized in the Episcopal Church. There is no record of a former baptism in the Presbyterian communion so perhaps this was her definitive baptism. She took it very seriously because she told someone that from that time on she renewed her baptismal promises every day of her life. Thus she joined the Church of Austin and James Montgomery, of Adeline and of Pierce. Probably it was Pierce who helped her to understand and embrace the elements of her new faith. For her part, Cornelia was ready to take on an almost sacramental role in accompanying her husband in his ministry wherever it might take him. In this sense, as a minister's wife, Cornelia already had a vocation to service prompted by love.

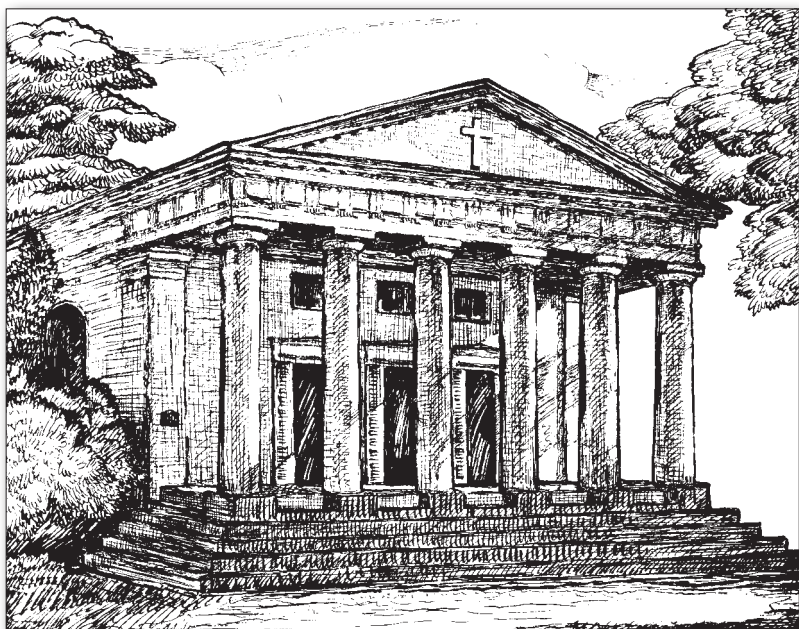
Several days after the wedding, Pierce received the long-desired call to the rectorship of his own church. But the church, Holy Trinity, was a long way off in Natchez, Mississippi. Like the disciples Jesus sent out two by two, Cornelia and Pierce said good bye to familiar places, letting go of all they held of close family ties, and went forth to evangelize an almost virgin territory. At four in the morning they took their places in a coach bound for Pittsburgh. It was an adventure into an unknown future of limitless possibilities.

It took six days on the road and five nights in roadside inns to cover the distance between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh in a coach with opensides and no springs. The December winds whipped around them as they crossed rivers, plains and mountains. In Pittsburgh they took to the water and eventually joined the great Mississippi which brought them to the riverside town of Natchez. It was a trip of a thousand seven hundred miles and took fifteen days. The newlyweds began life together in a new world and a new culture.

## Natchez

Natchez is situated on the eastern bank of the Mississippi in the state of the same name. It grew into a commercial center from which agricultural products, especially cotton, began their voyage north or south to New Orleans from where they reached the rest of the world. The town was surrounded by great plantations where thousands of slaves worked the land. Many of the rich planters had homes in Natchez. Picture the home of Scarlet O'Hara in *Gone with the Wind* and you will see what the elegant part of town looked like.

Along the shady streets of the town one could find every kind of person. Mixed in with plantation owners on horseback or in carriages were commercial travelers, adventurers, vagabonds and simple townsfolk ... and everywhere, blacks. The Natchez aristocracy was cultured, refined and mostly Protestant. Pierce's church, Holy Trinity, was the only Episcopal church in Natchez, so naturally it was the church of choice of the wealthy landowners.



*Holy Trinity Episcopal Church, Natchez*



*White Cottage, Natchez*

One of Pierce's faithful was Dr Newton Mercer, owner of Laurel Hill, an extensive plantation outside the town. He was the most distinguished gentleman of the area and an exemplary Christian. Pierce's brother, Henry Connelly, was a friend of his and it is probably Dr Mercer who proposed Pierce as rector of Holy Trinity when the post became vacant. Mercer sponsored the young couple when they arrived in Natchez and a deep friendship grew between the two families. The Connellys were frequent guests at Laurel Hill and Dr. Mercer was probably instrumental in acquiring appropriate housing for them in the town.

The Connellys moved into this more permanent home about a year after their arrival. It was a miniature *Tara*, gleaming white with a columned porch and attractive proportions, and the Connellys called it White Cottage. There on December 17, 1832, Cornelia bore her first child, a boy named Mercer after Dr Mercer who stood as godfather to him. There are no records to tell if the birth was easy or difficult. Given Cornelia's slight build and delicate constitution,

it could not have been easy but she had the joy of being accompanied by her beloved sister Mary (of the red parasol), who came from Philadelphia to be with her. Mary stayed as a permanent guest in the Connelly household and became part of the family.

The parishioners of Holy Trinity church grew very fond of their minister and his young wife. Many from the nearby plantations opened their homes to Pierce and Cornelia. White Cottage became a place where people of many walks of life were welcomed. Cornelia's charm and spiritual quality, Pierce's zeal as a minister, and the sincere desire of both to create a truly Christian environment for their visitors, drew people to them. Like Dr Mercer and all the local gentry, the Connellys had slaves for the house and children, on a much-reduced scale. Cornelia cared for them like a mother, instructing them in their faith and treating their ills.

Pierce's ministry was difficult, tiring, and at times discouraging. Slaves, vast plantations, great distances between Natchez and the boundaries of the parish, long rides in suffocating heat—these were realities for which nothing had prepared Pierce. Except for Cornelia, he was very alone in his ministry. There was no other Episcopalian minister anywhere near. His bishop, burdened with an enormous territory, visited him officially only once in three years. His congregation was totally white; the blacks preferred a more evangelical style. In spite of the fact that it comprised merchants, plantation owners, and professionals, it was depressingly small. Only fourteen people took communion regularly when Pierce arrived in 1832. With a huge effort, he managed to bring the number up to fifty-six by 1835. It was not a very plentiful harvest.

Without doubt Pierce labored very zealously for the Reign of God. His bishop, James Otey, took note of this on his one visit. Pierce preached with eloquence and conviction, he administered the sacraments and celebrated the Eucharist with devotion, and he taught the pure doctrine of his Church. In a word, he was a model minister but he was known to sink at times into depression, and Cornelia would have to console him and lift his spirits.

*See reflection questions on page 160*

*We must go to God by our intentions. cc*

## *More About Pierce*

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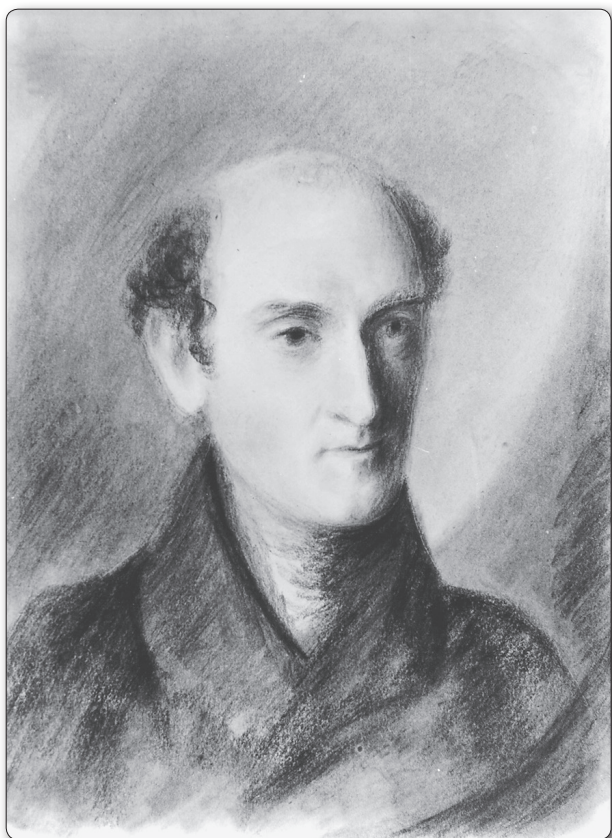
PIERCE CONNELLY IS A COMPLEX CHARACTER. He is full of contradictions. The oldest among four brothers, he seems not to have been much liked by them. His father was a renowned cabinet-maker whose works graced some of the most distinguished homes in Philadelphia and are found today in great museums. Pierce chose to follow a different profession and went into the ministry. This, of course, brought very little income into the family.

The relationship with his mother, Elizabeth Pierce Connelly, was strained and awkward. We do not know what happened between them, but an estrangement occurred. And on Pierce's side there were feelings of rejection by his mother and of failure.

In spite of his relatively empty pockets, Pierce had much in his lineage of which to be proud. His father Henry and his uncle, Colonel John Connelly, were philanthropists and played a part in civic life. John served in the Revolutionary War against England and was at different times a senator and a deputy in the government of Pennsylvania. Isabella Montgomery's rejection of Pierce could possibly have stemmed from their different family loyalties in the not very distant war with England.

In Pierce's heart of hearts, there was something that told him he was destined for great things. He was a firm believer in, and spoke beautifully, about humility, but he craved a place in the sun among men of renown. His need to be recognized can perhaps be traced





*Pierce Connelly in 1836*



to the fact that his mother seemed to prefer his brothers to him. He was unable to tolerate rejection and anonymity.

Many people in the church where Pierce began his ministry opposed his appointment there. And just before his marriage, his postulation as rector of an important church in Boston was turned down. These were humiliating reverses which he managed to overcome. But as the humble minister of a small flock on the frontier of the nation, he experienced frustration and even depression. There was a moment in these years when he harbored the hope of being named bishop, but it came to nothing.

In his disappointed state, Pierce became aware of a rabid anti-Catholic movement that was reaching his own part of the world. It arose among the more charismatic evangelicals and propagated itself like wildfire among other Protestant sects in the East. These different sects joined forces against the growing presence and strength of the body of Catholic immigrants and their Romish and therefore alien Church. They spread vicious lies about the Pope, priests and religious and warned of an imminent invasion of Papal troops. This "Nativist Movement" fed the xenophobic fear of a wave of poor Catholics from Europe come to take away jobs and create foreign ghettos. It broke into physical violence against convents and churches.

Pierce naturally leaned toward the wing of his Church closest to the Catholic Church in doctrine and practice. In spite of the pressure of opinion among the Protestants of Natchez, Pierce resisted the frenzy of anti-Catholicism which attacked his fundamental beliefs and made him cast a more attentive look toward the Catholic Church.

At the same time, Pierce met in the home of Henri Chotard, a friend and distinguished French explorer and scientist, Chevalier Josef Nicolas Nicollet, a fervent Catholic. The title itself would have turned Pierce's head. The two became friends and spent hours together exchanging religious and philosophical ideas. When Nicollet was off exploring in the West, Pierce wrote to him lamenting the absence of real authority in Church and state and fearing the political influence of the uneducated masses. The letters reveal his felt need

for a leader of divine right in both religious and civil society. So it was natural for Pierce to find in the Catholic Church, the Church of his friend, a possible answer to his questionings. The fact that Nicollet was a French aristocrat added weight to his influence over Pierce's thinking.

Three years after his arrival in Natchez, and while Cornelia was expecting their second child, Pierce's doubts deepened about the legitimacy of the Episcopal Church and his ministry in it. He had probably confided his doubts to his bishop. He certainly did to Nicollet. A Church that attacked another Church with so much violence and hatred could not be the true Church.

In August 1835, Pierce wrote a letter of resignation to Bishop Otey. He explained that he had lost faith in the divine authority of the Episcopal Church and that he needed time to study at leisure the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church. In the following month he told his congregation of his decision and took his leave of them amidst lamentations and tears, because he was held in high esteem for his learning and piety. His parishioners even gave him a gold cup as a farewell gift. At this point Pierce thought that he could simply transfer his ministerial vocation to a Catholic setting, and in this day and age he could have.

There is no doubt that Pierce acted sincerely, but the disappointment of his ambitions and the moral and physical demands of his ministry may have contributed to his decision. From his point of view, it was a heroic decision, an act of supreme integrity. He was losing his source of income, scandalizing his family and friends, and casting his wife and children upon the future undefended.

*See reflection questions on page 161*

*... to find out the truth, the blessed truth. cc*

## *Several Months in Suspense*

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DURING THE WHOLE TIME OF PIERCE'S DISCERNMENT, Cornelia was aware of his questionings and uncertainties. At first she had not realized he would take so dramatic a step as to resign his rectorship, but she kept pace with his investigations believing that a wife should follow her husband in matters of faith.

Cornelia too knew Nicollet and welcomed him as a guest in her home. Pierce shared with her the drift of his conversations with Nicollet, but she read independently and little by little came to her own convictions about the Catholic Church. When the moment came for Pierce to resign, she was ready to face the consequences and pay the price not just because it was her husband's decision. She too was a truth-seeker and would sell all to find it. Truth was a prime value which would necessarily override all practical and material considerations. This is what Cornelia told her sister Adeline who was shocked by what Pierce had done.

Neither Pierce's family nor Cornelia's could understand his position. For them as for Bishop Otey, Pierce was afflicted with a sort of madness. In both families, there had been a strong strain of anti-Catholicism. In other quarters there was great rejoicing. When Nicolett found out about Pierce's resignation, he celebrated and made immediate contact with Bishop Rosati of St. Louis to announce the great news.

After resigning from his parish, Pierce went directly to St Louis to consult with the bishop and learned that he could not be a Catholic

priest while his wife was alive, except in the very rare case that the couple agree to separate. When Cornelia later heard this news it was with great relief and she shared it in a letter to her sister Adeline. Separation even for the short time that Pierce was in St. Louis was a trial to Cornelia. She wrote to him saying how much she missed him, filling out the letter with all the homey details of everyday life. And she wanted Pierce to know that in spite of her fears she trusted his judgment entirely.

A whole way of life was in the balance. Mercer was a toddler and Ady just a baby. Mary Peacock was still in the family, but inevitably great changes were on the horizon. The Connelys could not comfortably remain at White Cottage or in Natchez and Cornelia was already dreaming up ways to spread the faith they would soon adopt. To the horror of family members on both sides, the Connelys announced that they would travel to Rome, the very heart of the Church, to examine it and its doctrines close up. Only then would they take a definitive step.

Without delay the Connelys disposed of their house and belongings. They had no idea when or if they would return. Once more they let the Mississippi current take them down river. In New Orleans they would await the first sailing available for Europe. Their Protestant friends in Natchez, puzzled and saddened by their decision but still faithful, pledged themselves to see to their financial interests and keep them well informed. The Connelys would not see Natchez again for almost two years.

*See reflection questions on page 162*



*Joseph Rosati, CM, 1st Bishop of  
St Louis, Missouri. 1789-1843*

*The invitation comes from God  
and to Him you must give your answer. cc*

## *From New Orleans to Rome*

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WHEN THEY ARRIVED IN NEW ORLEANS, the Connellys—Pierce, Cornelia, Mercer (Merty), Adeline (Ady), with Phoebe the nurse—settled in to await the ship that would take them to Marseilles and Rome. For the first time they found themselves in a city that was almost entirely Catholic.

Bishop Rosati had invited them to a very exceptional liturgical event, the consecration in the New Orleans cathedral of the new bishop of New Orleans, Msgr. Anthony Blanc. Present for the occasion in full vestments were all the bishops of the surrounding territories. It was Cornelia's first Mass and her first contact with the Catholic Church in a high and festive moment. Cornelia found it both inspiring and impressive, especially the sermon which touched a spiritual chord very personally. Pierce was given the vision of a full and magnificent priesthood bound with ties of obedience to one central authority, the Pope in Rome. This taste of ecclesiastical splendor must have sharpened his desire to be part of it all as a Catholic priest.

After the ceremony Pierce was invited to dinner with the whole assembled hierarchy. His personal contact with these churchmen was very gratifying. They received him as a prodigal son, as a man of courage who had sold all to find the pearl of great price. He was the center of attention, an object of admiration. The conquest of this possible convert and Protestant minister gave the bishops great

hope amidst all the polemics against Catholics. Little did they realize that their real trophy would be Cornelia, and soon.

For ten days the Connellys waited for news of a ship sailing for Europe. Meanwhile, some of the bishops gave him letters of introduction to important persons in Rome—ecclesiastics and aristocratic lay people. He was also preparing for publication in the Catholic press the text of his farewell sermon in Natchez.

Cornelia, deeply moved by the religious experience of the episcopal consecration and solemn Mass, began a series of instructions in the Catholic faith with Bishop Rosati who was still in New Orleans. He and newly consecrated Bishop Blanc found her especially well prepared to be received into the Catholic Church. Now fully convinced and ready, Cornelia could not in conscience delay her reception. Nor did she want to face a long and hazardous sea voyage without the blessing of being in what she called “the true way”. Pierce gave full approval to his wife but was not personally able to commit himself yet. He would await his arrival in Rome and the resolution of all doubt. He was also anxious to hear what prospects he had for the Catholic priesthood before taking a final step.

We know that on December 8, in the presence of Pierce, Cornelia renounced her former faith and embraced the new. From the hands of Bishop Blanc, she received her First Communion in the cathedral. So great was her emotion at receiving her Lord sacramentally that the bishop later commented on the abundance of tears shed for sheer joy. If her marriage was a declaration of independence from her family, her conversion proclaimed the supremacy of conscience over conformity with her husband’s stance. This religious act of independence marked a subtle but permanent shift of balance between the two spouses.

Two days later the Connellys boarded the sailing ship Edwin accompanied by the new French nurse, Annette. Imagine the circumstances: the whole family, including a little boy and a baby, crammed into a single cabin without facilities for laundry or space to stretch out—for two months. After bouts of terrible seasickness they finally reached Marseilles. Cornelia wrote her sister Adeline

of a possible quarantine: "Oh terrible!" she wrote. "Can't we in any way escape five days more in that little cabin?" "Oh *bien*," she answered herself. "We must make up our minds to endure it cheerfully." Those words could easily sum up Cornelia's whole life.

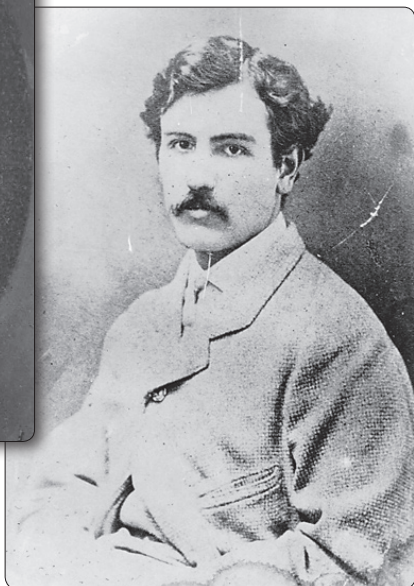
*See reflection questions  
on page 162*



*Adeline Connelly aged thirty-six*



*Mercer (Merty) Connelly,  
aged nine*



*Frank Connelly when he was about  
twenty-one.*

*Let us take God's view. What does God think of this?  
How shall I view this in eternity?* cc

## *Journey to the Center*

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CORNELIA AND THE CHILDREN, all with bad colds, stayed in Marseilles for three weeks recovering and resting from their exhausting journey. It was their first look at the “Old World” and everything they saw enchanted them. From Marseilles they again took ship to Civitavecchia, and made the final stage of their trip to Rome by coach. What emotion they felt as the dome of St Peter’s arose on the horizon! Under this cupola they would find space enough for their souls.

They arrived in the eternal city in February 1836, six months after Pierce’s resignation from Holy Trinity church. It was an especially cold and rainy winter in Rome, but neither cold nor rain dampened their enthusiastic spirits. They settled into a spacious set of rooms in a small hotel in the Via Santa Croce, a portentous place to live, whose significance they must have pondered. They were also in the center of the city and near many of the people they would soon know. After their hard journey, the comfort was more than welcome. Cornelia was amazed by how inexpensive their nice apartment was. They were even able to rent a piano for twenty cents a day.

Pierce, provided with a number of letters of introduction from Bishop Rosati, began to make his round of visits—Cardinal Fransoni, Prefect of Propaganda Fide, the office concerned with the Church in the United States, and Cardinal Odescalchi, the Pope’s vicar. Through them the Connellys met the outstanding families of



Rome. Here as in New Orleans, Pierce found himself surrounded by admirers. Certainly his fame as a potential convert from the new and largely Protestant world contributed to his popularity. But Cornelia too drew admiring looks. She was beautiful in a classical way, young and charming. She and Pierce made a most attractive pair, he with his intelligence and learning, Cornelia with her delightful manners. Their obvious sincerity and fervor also drew people to them.

Soon this interesting American couple began receiving visits and invitations from all sides. They found themselves moving in very elevated circles. Cornelia met a number of converts like herself, women whose destinies would parallel her own. All this instant notoriety fed Pierce's ego. Cornelia's widening circle of friends served more to heighten her admiration. She was moved by the goodness and even humility of some of the most aristocratic of her acquaintances.

One of these was Msgr von Reisach who was to become Cornelia's confessor. He had already spoken to the Pope, Gregory XVI, about Pierce Connelly, and from that moment the Pope took a paternal interest in the whole family. In those days before the reigning Pope retired to the Vatican, he moved about his own city freely with little ceremony, and the Connelys met him several times in his palace.

Pierce did not forget his main purpose in coming to Rome. Under instruction from an American Jesuit, Anthony Kohlman, he soon resolved his doubts about miracles. Nor did he delay in consulting Cardinal Odescalchi about possible ordination. He had discovered while talking to Rosati that there were indeed rare cases in recent history which could serve as a precedent. The cardinal wisely advised that it would do more good for him to become an exemplary catholic layman known to have converted. Pierce seemed to have accepted this advice, but only two weeks later, in his petition to be received into the Catholic Church, he also asked permission to be considered for ordination. The ministerial vocation was always his ideal.

At a certain moment either before or after his petition, Pierce spoke personally with the Pope in a private audience. The two men, the young minister aspiring to the priesthood and the Vicar of Christ, understood each other well politically—both were conservatives—



*John Talbot, XVIth Earl of Shrewsbury*

and they enjoyed meeting because the Pope was jovial and had a sense of humor. We also know that Pierce's story evoked tears from Gregory who had a sentimental side.

It is quite possible that the Pope encouraged Pierce in his desire for the Catholic priesthood, and if this were so, he would probably have told his wife. In any event, when Cornelia realized that he hadn't dropped the whole idea, she was distraught. She confided her anguish to a young American priest studying in Rome, John McCloskey (later Cardinal Archbishop of New York). "Is it necessary," she asked, "that Pierce sacrifice himself and me too? I love my husband and my beloved children. Why must I give them up?" This exchange took place even before Pierce had made his abjuration. McCloskey never forgot Cornelia's pleading look.

On Palm Sunday, Pierce renounced his former faith and was received into the Catholic communion. Cornelia's most earnest prayers were answered and her joy

was complete. Once more husband and wife were united in the same faith. The following Thursday, Holy Thursday, both were confirmed in the chapel of the residence of Cardinal Weld, a once married man and widower with children and grandchildren. It was a private ceremony with only the Cardinal's family and the earl of Shrewsbury and his wife present, godparents to both Connellys. Holy Week of 1836 therefore represented a milestone in the Connellys still united spiritual journey.

The question of Pierce's ordination was left suspended in the air as a distant possibility, but one that Cornelia could never forget. Probably Pierce was advised to live his new Catholic faith as fully as possible before again raising the issue. It is also the case that Pierce never gave up his priestly aspirations.

*See reflection questions on page 163*



*John Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury*

*I'm cosmopolitan, the whole world is my country;  
and heaven is my home. cc*

## *The Cosmopolitan Life*

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CORNELIA AND PIERCE STAYED TWO YEARS IN EUROPE, December 1835 to December 1837. Pierce's investments in the South and Cornelia's patrimony facilitated their long sojourn. In fact, living in Europe was more economical at this period than living in America. Besides, Europe offered many advantages that Pierce wanted to exploit.

The Connellys' story and reputation made them showpieces of the Church. They were welcomed everywhere. Pierce reveled in this, but Cornelia had different interests. She found a spiritual director, Msgr von Reisach, and went about developing her interior life. The churches and basilicas of Rome with their seasonal sermons by great preachers to mark the liturgical moment further instructed her and fed her soul. In the company of the young daughter of Lord and Lady Shrewsbury, Gwendaline Borghese, Cornelia went on missions of mercy to the poor of Rome. These visits gave Cornelia firsthand knowledge of the ugly side of Rome. The Papal City was badly administered by the Church and the ill effects were everywhere to be seen.

Cornelia became fascinated by the city itself, so rich in history, art and architecture. She wanted to explore all its corners and educate her children amidst its treasures. She began to study Italian and improve her French. She took music lessons and studied painting

under noted professionals. Artists took note of her classic profile and wanted to paint her.

Pierce, meanwhile, with the fervor of the convert, wrote enthusiastic didactic letters to all and sundry—to Bishop Otey, to his mother, to his friend Dr. Mercer—insisting on the apostolic authority of the Catholic Church. His efforts to convince and instantly convert them fell flat. He did succeed in making them think he had gone crazy. But in Rome, he was a celebrity. His letter of resignation was translated into Italian and published in the United States. His friend and godfather Lord Shrewsbury, with a view to the conversion of his compatriots, invited Pierce to England and offered to introduce him into British society.

The Shrewsburys invited Cornelia and the children to stay in their palazzo while Pierce traveled. He left in April for Paris and England, and very soon Cornelia was receiving lonely letters from him. His emotional dependence on his wife was becoming obvious. Without her he felt rudderless, alone and apprehensive about the future. Cornelia answered his letters bucking him up. This time it is she who would have to support him. “Our faith”, she told him, “is all we need to be secure and happy. And you have a great mission to accomplish for the Church in England. Give it your all”.



*Roman residence of the Shrewsburys on the Corso. Cornelia stayed there with her children for the four months that Pierce was in England (during the Connellys first stay in Rome).*



*Alton Towers*

### *Pierce in England*

In England, sponsored by Lord Shrewsbury, Pierce stayed in the great houses of the Catholic aristocracy (who formed a little circle within the bigger circle of upper class British society). For this reason he had little contact with the atrocious conditions of the urban poor who were exploited as fodder for the industrial revolution.

Pierce's host, John Talbot, 16<sup>th</sup> Earl of Shrewsbury, could trace his lineage far back in English history. In spite of being Catholic, he was an earl, and Pugin, the architect of the Gothic revival, had built for him a county seat of medieval splendor, Alton Towers. His two daughters married into two famous Italian families, the Borgheses and the Dorias, and through his many connections he wove the Connellys into the same circles.

In London Pierce stayed in the Shrewsburys' town house until June. He had a magnetic personality to which all doors opened. But the Earl had plans for his protégé that went beyond the purely social. He wanted him to meet Bishop Walsh, ordinary of the District where Alton Towers was located, and Nicholas Wiseman, rector of the English College in Rome, and he introduced him to influential laymen—Augustus Welby Pugin, and Ambrose Phillipps de Lisle,



both converts with many intellectual and social contacts. Shrewsbury believed that Pierce had a leading role to play among Catholics in Protestant England. This would prove true, but in a very different way from what Shrewsbury imagined.

At this time in England, there was a movement among High Church Anglicans centered in Oxford to restore many of the traditions, doctrines and devotions of the pre-reformation Church, which, of course, was Roman Catholic. This Oxford Movement led not a few intellectuals and divines straight to Rome. John Henry Newman, still an Anglican priest, was a key figure in the Movement, actively involved through the written word and sermons, and later, as a Catholic, he would have a role to play in Cornelia's saga. Pierce probably met him too. He knew several other members of the Oxford Movement and would have energetically engaged them in theological debate.

In Oscott, a seminary and college in Birmingham, Pierce mixed with an important gathering of Catholic intellectuals. There he met George Spencer (of the same family as Princess Diana), a young priest, and like Pierce, a convert. Spencer ministered to the poor. He invited Pierce to stay with him and witness another side of Church life. For the first time, Pierce was exposed to a model of priesthood different from what he had met in Rome. The two maintained a friendship for quite some time and Spencer no doubt fanned the embers of Pierce's priestly desires.

Whether it was a wealthy and generous benefactor to Catholic causes like Ambrose Phillipps de Lisle, or an architect like Pugin,



*Nicolas Wiseman, shortly after he became Bishop, at the age of thirty-eight, in 1840.*

all had at heart the conversion of England. They enlisted Pierce into the front lines so that he came to think of England as tied to his destiny.

At last Pierce arrived at Alton Towers, the lordly seat of the Earl of Shrewsbury and his family. This magnificent and extensive property is today a public park, but then it was the center of a whole self-sufficient world, a mini kingdom. Shrewsbury was known for his goodness, towards the poor especially. Pierce knew the full extent of his goodness because the earl offered to educate Merty in an English school, something the Connellys could never have afforded. On the other hand, Shrewsbury no doubt calculated that Merty would be the magnet that would draw the Connellys to a more permanent residence in England. He was completely faithful to his commitment.

At Stonyhurst, the Jesuit college where Merty would become a pupil, Pierce was put on display as the guest of honor. It served to heighten his sense of self-importance, and he returned to Rome more convinced than ever of his bright future as a Catholic luminary.

### *Rome Again and Home*

Pierce went to England in April as the humble beneficiary of the Earl of Shrewsbury. He returned in September like a lion. During his absence, Cornelia had kept a more domestic rhythm taking the children out for walks, visiting churches, and studying painting, music and languages. She saw her spiritual director, Msgr. von Reisch, once a week in the convent of the Sacred Heart at the Trinità dei Monti.

Now that Pierce was back, the Connellys began a new round of visits and social engagements, and a new pregnancy—the future John Henry. Pierce kept an album with all the calling cards and invitations they had received and which later passed through Borghese hands into the Society where it can still be seen. Spiritually significant for Cornelia was the new liturgical cycle of Advent and Christmas lived



intensely at the heart of the Church. Cornelia took the children to visit all the wonderful *presepios* (Bethlehem scenes) in the churches, each trying to outdo the others in intricacy and fascination. In the week after Epiphany, 1836, there was a special event which marked Cornelia for life, a cycle of sermons on the Incarnation. Listening, Cornelia drank in great draughts of theology couched in language that satisfied her soul. Prince Doria, married to Lord Shrewsbury's daughter Mary and friend of both Connellys, sent Cornelia the three volumes of these sermons. Years later they served as the principal source of Cornelia's inspired first chapter of the Rule of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus.

In April, Cornelia was six months pregnant. From America came rumors of a financial panic. For the Connellys it was a signal to begin thinking of the long journey home. Before traveling, they visited the Pope to take their leave. The Pope talked with them in the Vatican library and gave them gifts, but there is no record of what they talked about or if the children were there. One of the cardinals gave Pierce a letter to deliver personally in Vienna to Prince Metternich, the man who had redesigned Europe after Waterloo. It was also their passport into Austrian society.

Five days later, they set out traveling north and stopping to see the treasures of the great art centers of Italy. They crossed the Alps into Austria in a storm and finally reached Vienna at the end of May, where they would await the arrival of Cornelia's baby. Without delay Pierce took the letter to Metternich, and this personage who ruled the destiny of Europe for forty years, received Pierce with great courtesy. They conversed for twenty minutes during which Pierce would not have hesitated to expose his pro-monarchic views. What was in the envelope besides a simple letter of introduction, history does not relate.

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June, Cornelia gave birth to a boy, her second son and third child. He was baptized John Henry in the church of St Augustin. The official record of his baptism can still be seen there. The rest of Pierce's time in Vienna was taken up with invitations from important people. The high point for him was probably

the reception by the dowager empress in the imperial palace of Schönbrunn and his acquaintance there with the emperor's uncle Maximilian. Cornelia was still recovering from childbirth and busy with the new baby. She was happy to stay in their lodgings while Pierce made his social rounds.

But the Connellys' cosmopolitan life was coming to an end. Dr Mercer sent word of bank closings and urged the Connellys to return as soon as possible. The bad news meant a return to a more down to earth way of life and for this Cornelia was more than ready. Pierce wrote that she was "dancing with delight" at the thought of going home.

In August the Connellys were in Paris awaiting passage. Many other Americans were caught in the same financial bind, and berths were not easy to come by. Only in November could they finally take ship for America. Pierce would have to find work. For him, it was a brusque descent from glory to the prosaic need to provide for his growing family. The fairy tale had ended.

*See reflection questions on page 164*

*We have started; our boat has put off from the shore;  
now we must row!* cc

## *Beginning Again*

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BACK IN NEW ORLEANS IN JANUARY 1838, after two months on a crowded ship and at the worst season for a sea voyage, Pierce was casting about for a job. His brother John found him a post as clerk in a Natchez bank. This was quite an anti-climax to his brilliant passage through the capitals of Europe. There were compensations, however. He could go about his humble work in the bank smugly because, as he wrote Lord Shrewsbury, the “best society” frequented his house for evening gatherings—even his old parishioners, even the new rector of Holy Trinity church.

Natchez had recently been erected as a diocese of the Catholic Church with a bishop still to be named. Pierce was invited to participate actively and to help with its projects. Cornelia brought in a little income by giving music lessons at home. She was thinking of opening a little school.

These plans were interrupted when the Jesuits came upon the scene. They were at the point of founding a college for boys in a remote and unpopulated corner of Louisiana where the Religious of the Sacred Heart had already begun a school for girls. Bishop Blanc had suggested that the Connellys might be interested in collaborating and Bishop Bruté who had known the Connellys in Rome also suggested them.

One day, unannounced, the rector of what was to be St. Charles College, Père Nicolas Point SJ called on the Connellys. He stayed

for three days. During the visit he invited the Connellys to Grand Coteau and described this settlement on the banks of a minor bayou in a remote corner of Louisiana, the primitive conditions of the place, the crude house that would be put at the Connellys' disposition, and the terms of Pierce's employment—no salary but free education for Mercer. Cornelia, however, would be able to earn something in return for music lessons in the Sacred Heart school, and the nuns would take Adeline into the school free of charge. It was not an easy discernment. It would mean sacrifice and a frontier style of life but there would be opportunity to deepen their faith in a Catholic environment and the companionship of holy men and women. The Connellys accepted the invitation and so took another step toward radical transformation.

*See reflection questions on page 164*

*Dwell with God and speak often to Him in your heart,  
and from time to time help each other in the divine presence. cc*

## *Together in Grand Coteau*

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THE CONNELLYS WENT SOUTH AGAIN with the river and then into the maze of tributaries and bayou which took them to their final destination. Grand Coteau was a geographic outpost and a spiritual frontier. The party that arrived there included, besides Cornelia, Pierce and all their belongings, the three children—one, three and five years old—Mlle Mingard, the French nurse, and Sally and Phoebe, the Connelly slaves who had spent the two year interim with Dr Mercer.

This part of Louisiana was prairie broken up by a network of sluggish seasonal waterways overhung by moss-decked trees. It was a storybook world of romanticism and mystery made all too real by a humid and difficult climate. Grand Coteau itself was populated mainly by the priests and religious of the two schools and their pupils. For the most part they were French missionaries to a territory still very much under French influence.

Since the promised house was not yet available, the Connelly family spent their first nine months in a long wooden cabin divided into three compartments. It was an exercise in discovering how much they could live without, and they were happy.

Each day Cornelia walked to the convent for her lessons and Pierce went in the opposite direction to the Jesuit school. Almost the only society available to them was that of the nuns and priests they met daily.

As new Catholics, Cornelia and Pierce entered appreciatively into the quiet rhythm of the liturgical seasons. After the excitements and displacements of Europe, the stability and regularity of their way of life was a relief. Pierce sometimes complained of being in a backwater, but Cornelia was truly content. Each morning and evening the Connolly household would gather for prayer in front of the Fra Angelico Annunciation brought from Rome. Various visitors came to this “little house on the prairie”. The witness of Cornelia’s and Pierce’s devotion touched those who came under their roof. Visitors often commented on their spirit of joy and the charm of their domestic life. Bishop Blanc was a frequent visitor. There was a small house reserved for him on the grounds of the Sacred Heart convent. Pierce would always serve his Mass clad in his old Protestant soutane, provoking an amused smile from the bishop.

Sometime before Christmas, Cornelia conceived her fourth child. When the nuns invited her to add drawing lessons to her schedule the increased strain on the family income would be alleviated. In March, the Connollys were able to move into a real house, and it looked as if the shadow of Pierce’s vocational ambitions had disappeared. That he planned to buy it and put down roots was a promising signal. The house, *Gracemere* they called it, was half way between the two schools, a half-hour’s walk to either St Charles or the convent.

The convent belonged to the Society of the Sacred Heart, founded early in the century by Madeleine Sophie Barat and Cornelia already knew the congregation in Rome. She used to go for spiritual direction to their convent at the Trinità, but the nuns at Grand Coteau had come to Louisiana from France eighteen years before. Amidst great physical hardship as well as spiritual and material deprivation, they had struggled to build their gracious rose brick convent and school in the colonial style and surrounded it by well-tended gardens. Only when the Jesuits came did they at last have daily Mass, the sacraments, retreats and the possibility of spiritual direction.

Cornelia met the nuns daily and drank in their spirituality and their devotion to the merciful Heart of Jesus. Père Nicolas Point SJ,



*Gracemere*

known for his holiness, was their spiritual director and also hers. He was able to bring to Cornelia the combined spiritual tradition of the Jesuits and the Sacred Heart. The little spiritual notebooks which she kept while under his direction are still treasured in the Society of the Holy Child Jesus revealing the inner life of a deeply earnest and faithful apprentice in the spiritual life.

Pierce had met the Ignatian tradition in Rome and in England. The Jesuit General and the English Provincial were his acquaintances, and he was instructed in the faith by a Jesuit. When he joined the staff at St Charles he was rather shocked by what he found. The pupils were uncultured and ignorant, and the Jesuits were ill prepared to administer a proper college. Pierce undertook to remedy the situation. Behind his colleagues' backs, he wrote to the Jesuit General informing him of the poor quality of instruction and the low level of discipline. Neither did he spare the Jesuits or their Provincial about whom he wrote at length. The General responded mildly and counseled patience and a positive outlook. It is not surprising that, except for his friend the rector, the Jesuits at St. Charles were not overly fond of Pierce.

In July 1839, Mary Magdalene was born, a frail and sickly baby and she survived only seven weeks. The Sacred Heart journal records the great sorrow this was for the delicate Madame Connelly. More than ever Cornelia looked to her deepening and ever more personal faith to sustain her. Her regime of Mass, family prayer, spiritual direction and reading with Pierce chapters from the *Imitation of Christ* gave her the stability she needed to go on making her home a lively, happy place for the family she cherished.

The year 1839 would end with a great event—the arrival of family visitors from both sides. Connellys and Peacocks would fill the house but before that, even more importantly, Cornelia and Pierce would each make their first three-day retreat just before Christmas, Cornelia with the nuns and Pierce with the Jesuits.

*See reflection questions on page 165*



*A broken heart is love's cradle 'when our love is crucified'. cc*

## *A Crucial Year*

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THE CHRISTMAS RETREAT OF 1839 inaugurated a new stage in Cornelia's spiritual journey. Without knowing it, she was on the threshold of perhaps the most crucial year of her life. During that year the cross and the Crucified would become her portion and cup. The retreat fortified her for what was to come.

It followed the scheme of St. Ignatius in the *Spiritual Exercises*. Père Point directed the nuns and Cornelia; Père de Theux, the Jesuits and Pierce. Cornelia went each day to the convent for the three conferences of the director and stayed to meditate on the themes he proposed—fundamental truths about God's gracious plan for creation and all creatures, and the purpose of our existence. In the book of the *Exercises* they are dry topics, statements of fact without much apparent devotional content. But once a retreatant opens herself to the presence and action of God's own spirit as she dwells on these truths, she can discover great depths in their simple exposition. So it was with Cornelia. Years later, Cornelia remarked to a companion that these three days worked in her a complete conversion. Until now, Cornelia had been a model wife and mother and exemplary Catholic but that would not be enough. Under the influence of God's Spirit she conceived the desire to live her Christian vocation without reserves and to give God the fullness of her being. Accompanied by Père Point, she drew up a detailed plan of life designed to lead her to the desired goal of union with God. For the rest of her life her compass would not waver from this "north".

The retreat ended on Christmas Eve, probably with the contemplation of the Incarnation. Jesus the Child would have been very much in her mind as she returned to her own children. She would have gathered them with Pierce in front of the Bethlehem scene assembled piece by piece throughout Advent and perhaps sung songs learned in Rome. And certainly there were decorations, gifts, games and a festive meal. Cornelia knew how to celebrate.

Four days later, ten family members descended on the Connelly household to heighten the festivities. According to Pierce there was a happy uproar in the house. As hostess, Cornelia had to make all the arrangements and keep everyone comfortable, but she still found time to go back over her retreat and make entries in the tiny notebook Fr. Point had given her as a Christmas gift. Her resolution to do something about her lack of order must really have been tried in the face of the family invasion. Her more serious resolution to share the treasures of her new faith with her family was already bearing fruit. Mary Peacock, touched by the example of Cornelia and Pierce, asked to stay on indefinitely.

A letter Pierce wrote at this time reveals his continuing disquiet over his state in life. Indeed there was little scope for a man of his powers in Grand Coteau. His retreat would have reawakened the dormant issue of his ministerial vocation. To his friend he observed that his present life, so comfortable and happy, didn't much resemble the "royal road of the Cross". If Pierce had shared these sentiments with Cornelia, they would easily explain the tormented cry Cornelia confided to her notebook the day before going back to school, January 21, 1840: "O my God, *trim* Thy vine, cut it to the quick, but in Thy great mercy root it not yet up. My God, help me in my great weakness, help me to serve Thee with new fervor." It is as if the conversation with McCloskey in Rome four years earlier had never ended.

Outwardly, Cornelia went on as always. She attended Pierce, went to her classes, took care of the children, managed the house, supervised Phoebe and Sally, and helped Mlle Mingard with the children's lessons. Inside, Cornelia was suffering a storm of con-

flicting emotions. On the one side, never had she been so happy, so fulfilled as a woman, as a wife, as a mother. On the other side she was full of fear of an impending separation and the end of all that was dear to her.

The ambivalence resolved itself in one single moment of illumination. She was outdoors watching her children play and marveling at the surrounding beauty and the glorious day when the first theme of the *Exercises* leapt into life. "Oh my God!" she exclaimed, "if all this happiness is not for Thy greater glory and the good of my soul, take it from me. I make the sacrifice."

The fruit of Cornelia's offering was already evident in Mary Peacock's desire to become a Catholic. She is the first of a long list of family members who would become members of the Catholic Church through Cornelia's influence. Separated for four years, the two sisters had lived different lives, but Mary had witnessed the Connellys' break with Protestantism and followed from afar their spiritual evolution. Again reunited with Cornelia, she was drawn to her style of life and to the religious of the Sacred Heart who were her friends. She was ready to embrace the faith that had turned her sister and them into holy women. When Bishop Blanc arrived for a visit on the 26<sup>th</sup> of January, Mary asked his permission to begin instructions. Cornelia's joy knew no limits.

Mary was a witness of the terrible tragedy that befell Cornelia. In the same garden where Cornelia had made her offering, her little two and a half-year-old son, John Henry, the darling of her eyes, was playing with the dog near a low vat of boiling sugar water. Supposedly either Sally or Phoebe was with him. The circumstances are difficult to imagine. No one could have anticipated that rough and tumble play with the big Newfoundland would end in such a freak accident. John Henry landed in the boiling liquid and was horribly burned. There was no remedy. Cornelia held him in her arms for forty-three hours until he died.

The sun was just rising on the Feast of the Presentation of the Infant Jesus in the temple, February 2, when John Henry mercifully breathed his last. In her little notebook, Cornelia dedicated a memo-

rial page to him. At the top, she wrote the date. Underneath, she carefully designed a large M for Mary. Then in a centered column, she wrote Jesus, Marie, Joseph, followed by I. B. H. M. L. Connelly. Finally she added: "Fell a victim on Friday—Suffered 43 hours & was taken 'into the temple of the Lord' on the Purification." He was buried in the cemetery of the Jesuits in the same grave with Mary Magdalene. Today a simple tombstone bears words of Cornelia, "The thought of my children never leaves me."

Incredibly, Mary Peacock was received into the Church by Bishop Blanc on the evening of the same day. That Cornelia could have risen to the event, if she did, is hard to believe, but she would have found consolation in having Mary with her in the fullness of their common faith.

It is worth the painful effort to imagine Cornelia's thoughts during those forty-three hours. It is there that her life-long identification with Mary, Mother of Sorrows, came to be. There also, she conceived her profound insight into the sacrificial destiny of the Child in Mary's arms, and saw that destiny finally fulfilled in the embrace of death. Her son and God's Son both underwent their passion, and Cornelia, like Mary, was there with her compassion. She even held that passion to herself as it spent itself in her arms.

Cornelia glimpsed the hidden face of the Crucified and found it beautiful. So, a few days later, she was capable of writing in the same notebook, "I will ask of my God without ceasing & he will give me to drink. Oh, Jesus, give me the sorrow in meditating on thy blessed wounds or some portion, at least, that thy blessed mother had. *Stabat Mater Dolorosa*." With these words, she answered Jesus question: "Can you drink the cup that I will drink?" "Yes, Lord, always yes" was her typical reply. Her Lent had begun.

There is no record of how Pierce bore the tragedy. The death of a beautiful little son must have affected him no less than it did Cornelia. Both would have carried inside an open and permanent wound. Whatever they felt, life had to resume its accustomed rhythm—until October. During the summer, Cornelia became pregnant again. In July, Cornelia's great friend and spiritual director, Père Point, was

assigned to the Indian missions. It was a loss of a different kind, but an irreparable one. Point had just finished guiding Cornelia in three days of prayer and her soul was well known to him. Cornelia's farewell gift to her director was a pair of her own earrings for his new flock.

Pierce too would sorely miss him. They had become true friends, almost brothers. Perhaps it was Point's willingness, his desire even, to launch out farther into the deep that spurred Pierce to reexamine his state in life. Besides, Pierce was a little bored cloistered away teaching "low bred children" so far from the centers of action. These were his words in a letter to Baron Hübner, a diplomat in Metternich's circle. But he hastened to say, "not a day passes me that I do not tremble in the possession of the great star of happiness ... in one of the loveliest families the earth bears in its bosom."

Père François Abbadie assumed the direction of Cornelia while Père de Theux continued with Pierce. In September during vacation time Pierce made a retreat of eight days. He continued to express his nostalgia for Europe and his boredom, this time more directly in a letter to Shrewsbury. He compared his own obscure labor in a backwater to the great work of the earl's in winning back England for the Catholic Church. (Ecumenism was not yet imagined.) His thoughts were still in England and he had not forgotten Shrewsbury's offer to educate Merty there. Without realizing it, Pierce was probably looking for an escape. And the priesthood with its hint of heroic sacrifice would put him once more on center stage. His sacrificial lamb was going to be Cornelia.

In October, Pierce again made a retreat. Cornelia must have known that her own future and that of the children hung on his discernment. On Sunday, October 13, Feast of St Edward, Patron of England, Pierce and Cornelia were walking home from church when he divulged the outcome of his election. He wanted her permission to seek ordination as a Catholic priest. It would mean celibacy and separation. She told Père Abbadie how she had answered him: "This is a very grave matter," she told him. "Think about it deeply and twice over; but if the good God asks the sacrifice, I am prepared

to make it & with all my heart.” Cornelia’s heart was completely at God’s disposition but that didn’t mean it could not break. Years later, she told a confidante that the Society of the Holy Child Jesus was founded that day on a breaking heart.

Pierce had commented in a letter that their tranquil life in Grand Coteau was hardly the “royal road of the Cross”, but Cornelia was destined to walk it *in excelsis*. Beginning that day, the Connellys agreed to abstain from sexual intercourse as a trial of Pierce’s resolve. Cornelia was now five months pregnant with her fifth child.

*See reflection questions on page 165*

*I will have no reserves with my God.* cc

## *Apart Together*

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NO ONE EXCEPT THEIR SPIRITUAL DIRECTORS knew of Pierce and Cornelia's conversation on that St Edward's Day. Pierce had not yet confirmed his decision so Cornelia was left suspended in the air, ready to return to their old life or confide herself blindly to some unimaginable future if God were calling her there.

The year 1841 opened with tragic news from the Shrewsburys. Their daughter, Gwendaline Borghese, Cornelia's dear companion in Rome, had died from a galloping fever which also took her daughter and her three little boys. Cornelia's own health was delicate and her pregnancy did not improve it, but she went on with her lessons and the care of her family and house until just before giving birth.

Faced with Pierce's probable future, Cornelia had to ask herself if she too was called to the religious life. She never assumed that it would be the necessary consequence of Pierce's call because she was aware that a vocation is intimate and personal, and a matter for her own discernment. In January she began the process in a retreat of eight days with Père de Theux. Perhaps she thought that knowing her as well as Pierce he would be better able to advise them both.

On the 19<sup>th</sup> of March, Cornelia gave birth to Francis Pierce Connelly (Frank), a healthy baby. Mary Peacock stayed with Cornelia until June to help her over the first months, then she followed her own call into the convent of the Sacred Heart. Like Cornelia, she was not content with half measures. Mlle Mingard, with Cornelia since their time in Paris, also found her way into the convent. Little

by little, Cornelia was losing her closest companions and more and more God was filling the empty spaces. Shortly after Mlle Mingard left, Frank became ill and nearly died. Except for Sally and Phoebe, Cornelia had to face the crisis alone and Frank survived.

Contrary to his still secret intentions, Pierce wrote to his friends in the voice of a man permanently settled in his marriage and tied to his wife and children. He boasted of them—the beauty and sweetness of Cornelia, the innocence and piety of his children. He was apparently oblivious to the suffering that undergirded the happy atmosphere that Cornelia was able to produce in their home.

In September Cornelia seems to have reached some further clarity. She wrote in her notebook: “O my good Jesus, I *do* give myself all to Thee to suffer & die on the cross, poor as thou wert poor, abandoned as thou wert abandoned by all but thee O Mary.” There are key words there that tell what she was feeling: “suffer and die”, “poor”, “abandoned”. But the disposition to give all was her constant posture before God, come poverty, come abandonment, come suffering and death.

At St Charles, Pierce was more involved than ever in the Jesuit world. He had been in touch with the Jesuit General about joining the Society of Jesus. Cornelia knew that the final word of consent rested with her, but she was also aware of the rigors and hardships of the life. She wondered if Pierce was capable of persevering in it.

Later in September, after another retreat, a single terse entry in her notebook signals closure to her own discernment process: “Ex [amined] vocation. Decided.” With this, Pierce would be free to follow his own star. He was soon busy making plans. First he would withdraw from the college, then sell the house back to the Jesuits. He would take the whole family to England, put Merty in school there, and look for a place to install the family. Why England? Certainly because he had many influential friends there, including his great patron, Lord Shrewsbury. Also, there was an exciting effervescence in the Church with the conversion of so many Anglicans, and Pierce would have a leading role to play.





*Bishop's Cottage with some twentieth century additions.*

The plan was not realized in quite that way. Although he had wanted his whole family together on the same side of the Atlantic, he was advised to make a more radical break with wife and children to test his strength of will. Accordingly he arranged for Cornelia, Adeline and baby Frank to be lodged in the bishop's cottage on the convent grounds while he took Merty with him to England. Cornelia would become a quasi-postulant keeping the children in her care.

Meanwhile, until the final break in the spring of 1842, family life at Gracemere would continue as always in the eyes of those not aware of Pierce's intentions. This included all family members. Pierce's brother, John Connelly, now a Catholic, sent his wife Angelica to Cornelia for a long visit, Christmas to Easter. He hoped that Cornelia's holy influence would convert her too, and so it did.

Finally at the end of April, Phoebe and Sally, now almost members of the family, went sadly to the Jesuits. Pierce sold the furniture, handed Gracemere and his books over to the Jesuits and

went with Merty to live temporarily at St Charles. Cornelia he took to the Bishop's cottage where there was just room enough for her and Frank. Adeline stayed in the convent as a boarder with the other little girls.

Pierce departed with Merty on the fifth of May, Ascension Day, 1842. For Cornelia the separation from Merty doubled her pain at the parting. He was only nine years old. Bishop Blanc, to whom Cornelia had opened her heart, had opposed his going with Pierce, but his opinion did not prevail. Pierce had dreams of an English gentleman for a son and a first-class education for him thanks to Lord Shrewsbury's munificence.

Cornelia was left with more questions than answers and a heart torn in two. To encourage herself, she would have remembered what she wrote back in 1840: "What one is called to do, she is called to do with all her might". So, with all her might Cornelia began to live the religious life as perfectly as possible. Her dear Mary was there as a novice. Her mere presence would be a tower of strength.

*See reflection questions on page 166*

*It is a waste of time to dream of the future  
or to brood over the past. cc*

## *Two Continents, Two Lives*

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THE CONTRAST BETWEEN PIERCE'S and Cornelia's experience at this point is dramatic. With different itineraries, each one would advance toward a new destiny. Pierce and Merty went by way of Philadelphia to wait three weeks for the ship that would take them to England. In the interim Pierce was invited to give a series of talks in the Baltimore cathedral, and he visited the Jesuits in Georgetown and the convent of the Visitation in Washington. He wrote Cornelia that everyone admired Merty, even Isabella Montgomery who had been so cool to Pierce. Full of his own doings in the spotlight, he never asked about Cornelia, nor mentioned his main purpose.

Pierce arrived in England on the fourth of July. He went immediately to see the Jesuit Provincial to ask admission to the Jesuits and an avalanche of other questions. Fr Lythgoe wisely slowed Pierce's rush into the priesthood. Forced to await the Provincial's answers, Pierce went to seek hospitality at Alton Towers. There he found himself once again in the agreeable company of Shrewsbury's circle. When the answer finally came from Fr Lythgoe, it was not what Pierce expected. He should return to America and work to earn enough to provide for his children. He needed more theological study and a longer experience as a Catholic before taking such a step. It would mean a delay of at least three or four years.

Pierce did not follow his advice. First he took Merty to Oscott where George Spencer was rector and put him in boarding school

there. Poor Merty at nine years old, was separated from mother and father, without friends and in a foreign country. He did not prosper.

When finally Pierce had to explain to Shrewsbury his presence in England without Cornelia, his host was scandalized: "What do you want? To break the laws common and Divine? To give up your lovely wife and children? No such sacrifice is demanded of you. You are mad! By ambition the angels fell! Stop at once, and be a good Catholic husband and father". Bishop Walsh, ordinary of the District, took a different tack when he heard the news. He encouraged Pierce, no doubt thinking he would make a prime catch for his pool of priests. He found a post for Pierce as traveling tutor to a young man of wealth from an exemplary Catholic family, Robert Berkeley. Robert's home was Spetchley Park, a rambling estate happily overrun by a house full of children. The post would bring an excellent salary and freedom to roam the great cities of Europe with his charge.

Pierce set out with Berkeley in September 1842, making a great sweep through Brussels, Fribourg, Monaco, Milan, Ancona, Loretto, Rome, Florence, Genoa and Paris. During his travels, he wrote his brother John that the tour would have been much more pleasant if Cornelia had been with him. He much preferred, he said, to be with her and his children in Grand Coteau than in Europe without them.

In Grand Coteau the journey was toward the interior. Cornelia had already put her future in God's hands. Typically she gave herself to the present moment with all the energy of her soul. In the tiny Bishop's cottage, two rooms and a veranda, she gathered Ady and Frank in the evenings. During the day she continued to give music lessons, and with the permission of the superior, Madame Cutts, she was allowed to attend all the religious exercises in the convent.

In one way, Cornelia was already living the religious life. Madame Cutts had given her another little notebook in which Cornelia wrote down the virtues she wanted to acquire and practice, her daily timetable, and a mixture of resolutions, prayers, devotions

and quotations. With enormous determination and generosity she went about learning the interior discipline of the life Pierce had led her to embrace. Little by little Cornelia had come to her own sense of vocation and now her call was not just an echo of Pierce's, she claimed it and set herself to live it faithfully. Had Pierce changed his mind, Cornelia would have returned to him, but her heart was now with God. Ignatian spirituality, to which she was being introduced, taught her how to resist the inevitable temptations that would plague her soul, and temptations there were. She had to struggle against resentment, weakness, torpor, and the feeling of being abandoned. Strongest of all was the desire to turn back the clock. Another soul-searching retreat brought her to a yet more decided yes to God's invitation.

Letters went back and forth between Pierce and Cornelia. Ever since May, Cornelia had been waiting for some clear indication of what to do next—whether to put down roots among the religious of the Sacred Heart in Grand Coteau, or await a summons from Pierce to join him in Europe. In December, Pierce reached Rome with Berkeley in his charge and Cornelia knew that he planned to present his petition to the Pope. This he did and learned that Cornelia would have to come to Rome to give her consent to the Pope in person but he was busy with Berkeley's introduction to Europe and could not at that point leave him. Only in June of the following year did the grand tour bring Pierce and Berkeley full circle and home to England. From there they set out again for New York, docking in July. Pierce sent for Cornelia and went to Philadelphia to await her arrival.

Cornelia had now spent five years of her life in Grand Coteau. It was the scene of her greatest joys and deepest sorrows. She would leave behind in the Jesuit cemetery her two dead children never to see their burial place again. The religious of the Sacred Heart had been family to her and now she was to part with them.

She had to withdraw Ady from the convent school, pack up herself and the children, and say good-bye to her dear spiritual director, Père Abbadie. She managed to do all this in five days.

First, she went to New Orleans to bid farewell to her father in the faith, Bishop Blanc. Then, traveling up river on the Mississippi, she closed in Philadelphia the great circle that had begun there with her wedding and departure. How did Pierce and Cornelia greet each other after thirteen months apart? Did they kiss, embrace, shake hands, bow to each other? For lack of evidence, their meeting must be left to the imagination. We do know that Cornelia loved Pierce. His vocation only made her love him more. In loving him, she embraced that about him which made him the object of God's choice.

The Connellys had a month in Philadelphia visiting family and friends, and showing young Berkeley the birthplace of American independence from his own country. Cornelia could also see Mary, now a novice in the Sacred Heart novitiate just outside Philadelphia.

Cornelia was on the road to Rome again, this time for God's sake, to sacrifice her natural happiness. Rome would always be for her the symbolic altar on which her whole burnt offering was laid. On that very altar, there would go up the sweet fragrance of suffering turned to joy.

*See reflection questions on page 167*

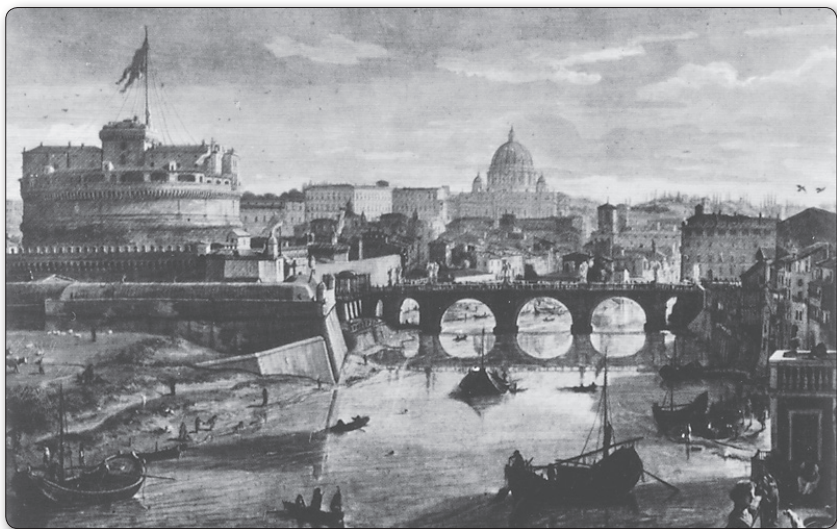
## *Europe Again*

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CORNELIA, PIERCE, ADY, FRANK AND ROBERT BERKELEY arrived in England in the autumn of 1843. Merty joined his family in Spetchley Park, the Berkeley's home in the Midlands, and for the first time since May 1842, the whole family was reunited. The children stayed with the Berkeleys while Cornelia and Pierce went to visit the Shrewsburys, but Frank suddenly became ill and they had to return.

A disagreeable episode having to do with Merty's college, Oscott, was provoked by Pierce. It seems that he publicly criticized the college and some of its professors, giving the place a bad name. In December, he pulled Merty out of Oscott and put him to school with the Jesuits. Bishop Walsh, Ordinary of the District, wrote Pierce a stinging letter defending Oscott and taking him to task for unjustly attacking the college's reputation. Not for the first time did Pierce play the part of troublemaker. Perhaps his criticisms were justified, but he showed little tact in making them so public.

At the end of October, the Connellys left for the continent. Berkeley was still in tow, so the trip Romeward was leisurely. They stayed a month in Paris where Cornelia, now accustomed to a quieter existence, was plunged into the swirl of Parisian social life. Pierce was happy to show her off to his titled acquaintances. From Paris, the party followed the Rhone south stopping in Avignon and Marseilles where they took ship and sailed along the coast to Genoa,



## *Rome*

Leghorn and Pisa. They reached Rome on the seventh of December and took lodgings in the Via Ripetta.

Almost immediately, they presented themselves to the Pope who by now was quite familiar with the Connellys and their history. For Cornelia, it was the moment of truth, long feared and finally embraced. Ady and Frank were also present when she gave to Gregory XVI her formal consent to Pierce's ordination, and with the children before his eyes, the Pope was made aware of the importance of safeguarding the bond between parents and children. The whole audience took place in an informal atmosphere, the Pope, especially genial, and the children caught by his mood. As the audience ended and Ady bent over to kiss the Pope's toe, Frank, two and a half, jumped on her back, and over her shoulder kissed it too. Then he gave the papal toe a swat with his handkerchief. It probably made the Pope's day.

The Connellys left the audience with the impression that a decision about Pierce would be postponed to an indefinite future. But he had a plan that would give him employment for the next



few years. After finishing with Berkeley, he would take charge of the studies of the Shrewsburys' heir. Cornelia with Frank would stay with the Borgheses and Ady would enroll in the convent of the Sacred Heart at the Trinità. There's no doubt that Pierce was a confirmed snob. He wrote to his brothers bragging of his own cachet with the Roman nobility, and with the Borgheses especially. (The Borghese line dates from the Middle Ages and includes popes, cardinals, saints and sinners. The name itself simply means city dweller. The Connelly connection with this family was through the Shrewsburys whose daughter, Gwendaline, was married to the eldest son of the Prince.)

The first part of Pierce's plan was a prolonged stay in Rome with Cornelia, the children and Berkeley. Cornelia could once again take Ady and now Frank on a round of visits to the wonderful cribs in the Roman churches and herself attend Ventura's sermons. Although it was not her preference, she was expected to accompany Pierce into Roman society where she shone as before. But her heart was no longer in the brilliant world of dinners and soirées. She was more engaged with her inner life with God.

Cornelia lost no time in contacting the religious of the Sacred Heart. Ady entered the school in January 1844, and Cornelia joined the Sodality sponsored by the religious and became a "Child of Mary". In March she joined a group of laywomen at the convent for an eight-day retreat. The superior, Mère de Cariolis, was already aware of the Connellys' intentions, and had received permission from the Cardinal Vicar of Rome and approval by the Jesuit General, Father Roothan, to take Cornelia with Ady and Frank into the convent when the time came for Pierce to begin his studies. It was still Pierce's intention to join the Jesuits, but the General wanted Pierce to pay his debts, do his preparation and be ordained first.

The convent diary recorded the particulars of the retreat. It made special mention of "Madame Connelly" who took her turn serving table with touching humility. During the retreat, Cornelia subjected her vocation to scrutiny one more time. She experienced a great freedom about her still undefined future, and in peace and

consolation, offered herself unreservedly to suffer whatever God might send. Her notes end with “*Actions, not words. Gloria Patri etc. C. Connelly. March 1844*”

Only two days after the retreat, Pierce presented a formal petition for ordination as a Catholic priest, and with unexpected speed it was accepted the next day. His petition had set forth in detail the story of his conversion, and told of his long-term consultation with wise and holy directors. He mentioned his three years of uninterrupted celibacy, the willingness of Cornelia to enter the Society of the Sacred Heart and the provision he proposed to make for the children.

The children ... Merty was at Stonyhurst and his patron Lord Shrewsbury had promised to look after him. Ady was settled in the convent school of the Sacred Heart at the Trinità, and Frank was to stay with his mother at the Trinità until he reached the appropriate age to join his older brother at Stonyhurst. According to the custom of the times in well-to-do families, this was an ideal arrangement. With or without the peculiar circumstances of the parents, the children would have been fortunate to have such advantages.

The Pope had said to Pierce “*Io farò tutto*” (I will take care of everything) and in fact it is he who hastened the process and saw to it that the arrangements took the children into account. Cornelia would have to make a vow of perpetual chastity to free Pierce canonically, but not before his diaconate in case he did not persevere. Cornelia would not need to become a religious, although she did not learn this until later. Ady and Frank would stay with her, Frank living with his mother and an English nurse, Powell, in a house in the convent grounds. He would stay with his mother for as long as necessary. Ady would be nearby in the school. The plan was an exact replica of the arrangement in Grand Coteau. Although Cornelia and Pierce would be required to sign a deed of separation before Pierce began his studies, he and Cornelia would never be divorced in the eyes of either Church or state.

On the first of April, Monday in Holy Week, an ecclesiastical official went to the Connelly's apartment to interrogate them formally concerning their intentions. Each one gave the other a promise to live



*Trinità dei Monti*

thenceforth in perfect chastity. They signed their Act of Separation with Berkeley as witness. But the separation was not yet definitive. It would depend on Pierce's firmness of intention.

Tuesday in Easter Week, Pierce accompanied Cornelia, Frank and Powell to the Trinità and placed them in the care of the nuns. He then went to the Collegio dei Nobili (a seminary in the hands of the Jesuits) to begin his studies for the priesthood.

*See reflection questions on page 167*

*I abandon myself to Thee, O my God,  
and beg of Thee to preserve me from all illusion  
and to keep me in the holy justice of humility. cc*

## *Inside*

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THE SOCIETY OF THE SACRED HEART WAS RELATIVELY NEW. The founder, Madeleine Sophie Barat was still alive in France. In Rome there were two convents of the congregation competing for subjects. In fact, there was almost a schism between them. Various influential lay people took sides with one or the other convent and Cornelia found herself in the middle. Despite pressure from the old Princess Borghese for Cornelia to enter at the Villa Lante, Cornelia resisted. She already knew the religious at the Trinità and was on friendly terms with the young superior, Mère de Coriolis, who was faithful to the founder. Cornelia was known and admired at the Trinità as “*cette charmante et sainte petite femme*”. Unfortunately, one of Cornelia’s old spiritual directors from her first days in Rome, Padre Rozaven SJ, was confessor and spiritual director at the Trinità. It was he who was behind the near break by the Villa Lante community. He wanted to create an Italian congregation separate from the French Society. Cornelia was already aware of these rumblings in the Society which—as she thought—she was about to join.

When she crossed the threshold of the Trinità, Cornelia was thirty-five years old. Years later she confessed that it was a desolate moment when the great gate of the convent closed behind her. She felt isolated, and the place weighed upon her spirits. Unlike at

Grand Coteau, here she put herself under obedience to the superior. She was not in a habit, but wore a dark dress and went to all community exercises. In the school she gave music lessons and taught English. Expecting never to leave this convent, she took for granted that when Frank turned eight she would take on the religious life at the Trinità in all its fullness. Fortunately, Ady was very happy in the school, and around the convent there were stables, gardens and open spaces where she could take Frank to play. Outside, where Cornelia never went, (except once on business), there was all of Rome for him to explore with Powell.

The day after his arrival at the Collegio dei Nobili, Pierce received the tonsure and put on the soutane, this time a Catholic one, and the three cornered hat worn by clerics. He began his studies at the Roman College alongside men much younger than himself and seems to have leaped ahead of them to receive Minor Orders almost immediately. Cornelia was not only present for the liturgy which took place in the convent chapel, but she sang in the choir as well. The Pope, always a surprising man, sent along in a hand-cart an enormous fish for the banquet afterwards. The symbolism was not lost on anyone. Pierce must have considered himself the Pope's anointed.

All the arrangements made for Cornelia and Pierce were out of the ordinary. The Pope did not want the children to suffer from their parents' separation so he saw to it that the family reassembled in the convent once a week. Although Ady and Frank would have waited all week for these family gatherings, it must have been a weekly trial of Pierce's and Cornelia's resolve. We know that Pierce blamed himself for showing Cornelia too much tenderness at these times.

With the passage of time Cornelia lost some of her natural cheerfulness of spirit. At Grand Coteau she had known a community no less austere and fervent than that of the Trinità, but it was also affectionate, open and welcoming. At Grand Coteau Madame Cutts and Père Point had confirmed her spirit of total self-giving in joy. At the Trinità, under the influence of Rozaven, there was a rigid climate that provoked fear. The conflict between the two Ro-

man communities tended toward disunity and uncertainty. When the Feast of Pentecost came, Cornelia had to pull herself together and take heart. She blamed herself for being too serious and wrote in her notebook: "Give to the Holy Ghost many smiles".

Summer came and with it Pierce's vacation in the house of the college in Tivoli. He stayed on into October because of illness. There out of the noise of the city and in the cooler air of the hills, Pierce had leisure to look at where he was going. When he told Cornelia that he had decided not to join the Jesuits but would be ordained for the diocesan priesthood, it was a heavy blow. She admired the Jesuits and thought that they would have given Pierce the stability and companionship he needed. She began to be afraid for him.

It is not known what brought about this change of direction. Did the Jesuits reject him as a candidate? And if so, why? In the college they would have seen him up close and perhaps they glimpsed something in his character not apt for obedience. The Jesuit General had been critical of his frequent visits to his wife. Or perhaps it was because he became aware of the limits which would be put by the Jesuits to his freedom of action. Or did he see more chance of advancement to the purple among the secular clergy? Bishop Walsh had invited him to a pastoral ministry in his Midlands District in England. Such a post would give Pierce direct contact with men of influence in Shrewsbury's circle.

In November, the Sacred Heart community made a retreat of eight days. Cornelia too followed the exercises. It came not long after Pierce's disturbing news and in a moment of desolation for Cornelia. Her notebook records her struggle with tiredness and torpor: "incapable of listening or understanding or thinking ... my soul sleeps ... At the Mass I sang half asleep," she wrote. But out of her depths, a different declaration was wrung: "I belong all to God. There is nothing in the world that I would not leave to do his holy will and to satisfy him." And, finally, "My God, help me to know thy will and give me the grace and the strength to accomplish it". That she was unsure of God's will is evident, and that she needed

grace and strength suggests that something requiring courage was impending.

It seems that someone had advised Cornelia to send Frank away from the convent and this gave her enormous pain. It may have been Rozaven. Part of Cornelia's difficulty during the retreat must have had its origin here. On the other hand, she had received welcome advice from the Jesuit, Père Villefort, who told her she should keep Frank at her side until he was eight. "I think so too," she wrote. Then there comes a very typical remark: "but I am so much afraid of having any reserve with God ... and how could I ever refuse to *the love of love?*" Here one can catch sight of the essential Cornelia.

Around this time there was a change of spiritual director at the convent. The unbending Rozaven was replaced by Giovanni Grassi SJ. To Cornelia Grassi was a God-sent gift. He is the one who told her that the Deed of Separation in which she declared her intention to enter the Society of the Sacred Heart did not in fact require her to do so. There were other less cloistered forms of religious life that would allow her to keep Frank with her.

In the February following, Cornelia shared with the superior her doubts about her vocation to the Society of the Sacred Heart. Mère de Coriolis generously invited Cornelia to stay on at the convent until her path became clearer. From then on, Cornelia left herself open to other alternatives.

As the months went by, Cornelia saw that Pierce looked very much to her for support. His dependence on her and his emotional immaturity had not been so obvious when they were together. There was still time for Pierce to reconsider his decision, and although Cornelia was now completely set in a different direction, she offered to resume their married life. As once on St Edward's Day she was "ready to make the sacrifice" for his cause, so now she would do it again to prevent a disastrous mistake on his part. Several years on, while the court case, Connelly versus Connelly, was in progress, Cornelia recalled her "warnings and representations" to Pierce before he was to be ordained deacon. When he rejected her offer to return

and held to his chosen course, the stage was set for the tragedy that would unfold in the sight of all the world.

On the eighteenth of June, Cornelia made her solemn vow of perpetual chastity. Pierce was the official witness who signed the document. Four days later, on a Sunday, Pierce received the subdiaconate in the chapel of the Trinità. The following Sunday, he was ordained deacon in the private chapel of the Cardinal Vicar of Rome. Finally, on the third Sunday, July 6, after little more than a year of study, Pierce was made a Catholic priest in the chapel of the Trinità. Three days later, he celebrated his first Mass in the same chapel. It was a gala event with many guests in the congregation. Cornelia sang in the choir and Ady received her First Communion from the hands of her father. But just before, Pierce turned to his daughter and directed his words to her personally for fifteen minutes.

Someone who was there reported in a letter that contrary to what the American newspapers were saying about poor Mrs. Connelly pining away in a Roman convent, she was radiant with happiness. Her sacrifice had given a priest to the Church, someone empowered to summon Jesus Christ onto the altar.

Pierce's ordination freed Cornelia to pursue her own destiny. Although her future was still unclear, she could now make her discernment without being tied to Pierce's plans. Her new independence would bring out latent capacities to decide, lead and act.

*See reflection questions on page 168*



*Accept whatever God sends, whether it be joy or suffering,  
praise or humiliation. cc*

## *Man Proposes ...*

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NOW THAT PIERCE WAS ORDAINED PRIEST FOREVER, Cornelia could direct her thoughts to her own future. Her confessor, Padre Grassi SJ, a man with an open mind and much practical experience in Rome and the United States, saw Cornelia as someone destined for great things. He agreed that her vocation was not to the Society of the Sacred Heart, and his support and advice at this moment was a providential gift.

Cornelia now began to reflect seriously about what God wanted to bring about through her cooperation. It was a period of intense prayer, study, reading and discernment. With the collaboration of Pierce and Grassi, Cornelia envisioned a congregation without enclosure and responsive to the great needs of the day. Once when she was turning these things over in her mind, she heard interiorly the words “Society of the Holy Child Jesus”. She considered that the title of the Society came as a gift from God. Being an American, she naturally assumed that the congregation would begin in the United States. She was already in contact with the bishop of Boston, Monsignor Fenwick, about a possible foundation there.

Throughout the rest of 1845, Cornelia remained at the Trinità with Ady and Frank and continued to teach music and English. She was also working on a rule for the proposed congregation. Grassi was a great help because of his intimate knowledge of other congregations inspired by the same call to service in the world, and he

could extract pertinent texts from their rules to serve as models for Cornelia's rule. Pierce helped edit the texts that Cornelia wanted for her rule. The resulting document was only a first draft. Cornelia knew that experience would teach her what to keep, add or omit.

Although Cornelia and Pierce had withdrawn from their accustomed life in Roman society, many friends kept in touch, especially friends from England—Catholics with weight and influence. Pierce was free to accompany them when they came to Rome, but Cornelia remained in the convent and received them there. Probably these friends had much to do with the surprising decision to begin the Society in England. Tradition and Cornelia's own testimony indicate that it was Gregory XVI who missioned her to found the Society in England.

Why England? Because England was a Protestant country where Catholics were sorely neglected, even discriminated against. There was very little pastoral care for the poor or the masses of immigrants from Catholic Ireland. They lacked schools and teachers. At the other end of the social scale were the converts who came into the Catholic communion from Anglicanism through the Oxford Movement. The daughters of these converts would need to be taught their faith and educated well in their own country. So Cornelia's initial desire to dedicate the new congregation to all the works of spiritual mercy was channeled into education as a first priority.

As a new convert and still young in the Catholic faith, Cornelia could easily have turned down the proposal to begin in England, far from her own country and family and in a very different culture from her own. But when the Pope added his own urging and moral weight to the proposal, Cornelia recognized the will of God and threw herself wholeheartedly into the project. Her commitment was so total that she would visit her own country only once in years to come.

We are now ready to witness another moving scene. On Saturday, April 18, 1846, Pierce celebrated a farewell Mass in the Trinità chapel. The Berkeley family happened to be in Rome on a visit and joined the congregation. It was Cornelia's last moment inside a Sacred

Heart convent and among the religious who had nurtured her faith and her vocation. After the Mass, Cornelia bid farewell to Pierce, and with Ady, Frank and the nurse, mounted the carriage that would set her on the road to England. Cornelia was thirty-seven years old. Ten years before she had come to Rome full of enthusiasm for her new faith and surrounded by a host of friends. Now virtually alone, she took the road away from Rome with meager material resources and with only her faith to illuminate the way. In this state of total dependence on God she would discover within herself new spiritual depths and new capabilities to bring to the work that lay ahead.

*See reflection questions on page 168*

## *Between Two Worlds*

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PIERCE TOO WAS A TRAVELER. The earl of Shrewsbury, knowing that Cornelia would be in England, had presented him with the tempting invitation to come to Alton Towers as chaplain to his household. There was already a resident chaplain, so Pierce would no doubt find further outlets for his zeal among the members of the Shrewsburys' social circle and beyond. The diocese of Rome had given him a three-year leave to assume the post, so two weeks after Cornelia's departure, he was on his way. He accompanied the Earl on the journey enjoying along the route all the comforts that money could buy.

Between May and August Cornelia made her way toward England with Ady and Frank. She spent three months in the recently founded convent of the Assumption in Paris to learn about another way of organizing religious life. During her stay, Gregory XVI died in Rome. This was a great blow to Cornelia. Besides the affection she felt for him, she knew a new pope could never have the intimate knowledge of her situation that Gregory had. She was more alone than ever but one consolation brightened her spirits. She had a letter from Pierce telling how busy he was in his new ministry. She passed the news on to her brother-in-law, John Connelly, remarking that it was not for nothing that she had given Pierce up.

Upon arriving in England, Cornelia had to confront an unexpected situation. Bishop Walsh, in whose district Alton Towers was situated, was particularly sensitive to the prejudices of the Protes-

tant majority. He forbade Pierce any contact with his wife outside a convent, even though in Rome the couple had been accustomed to weekly reunions of the family. Cornelia was deeply disappointed to learn that Pierce could not even come to meet her at the train. She wrote him from Dieppe to ask if he was really telling her they could not see each other in the presence of all the world in a train station. She considered it too great a precaution and she would say so to the bishop when she saw him but after further contact with the English mentality, Cornelia came to understand and approve Walsh's regulation.

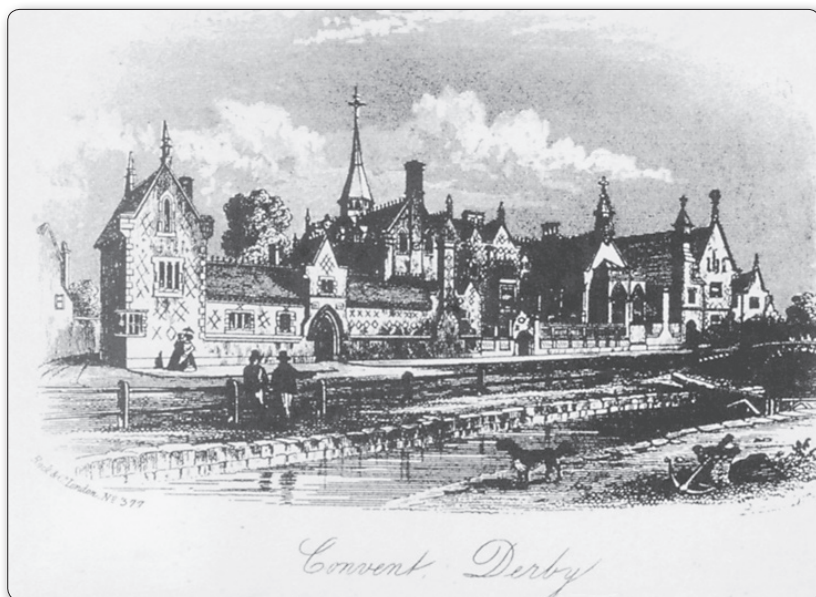
In small ways and in great, Cornelia had to establish her independence of Pierce. The fact that they were both in the same foreign country did not make it easier. She had to insist to Pierce that now it was she alone who would take decisions about the new congregation in consultation with the Church and her own advisors, in this case the Jesuits. She accepted the invitation of the Berkeleys to stay with them until her way became clear, and she would put her soul in the hands of their chaplain, Fr Mahon, SJ.

Spetchley Park, the Berkeley family home, was a paradise for children. It included extensive gardens and fields, a lake, horses and farm animals. There were eleven Berkeley children, and when Cornelia arrived with Ady and Frank, and Mercer came to join them from Stonyhurst, it was more than ever a noisy, happy household. Cornelia had the joy of all her children at her side. Surrounded by the peace and beauty of the place, she could pray, assist daily at Fr. Mahon's Mass in the family chapel and consult with him about the new congregation.

Already wheels were turning to decide Cornelia's future even as she continued to discern in semi-darkness. Bishop Wiseman who had known Cornelia in Rome when he was rector of the English College there, was now in England as auxiliary to Bishop Walsh in the Midlands District. He took great interest in Cornelia whom he considered a woman of promise for the Church. Already he had asked funds from Propaganda Fide in Rome to help launch the new foundation and Walsh was happy to give him full ecclesiastical

responsibility for it. At the same time, the Oxford Movement's most famous convert, John Henry Newman, already knew something of the Connellys' story and of Cornelia's mission to start a new congregation in England. Upon arriving there, Cornelia had gone to consult with him, and very soon his friend Emily Bowles expressed her desire to join Cornelia in the enterprise. The two women met and together went to consult with Wiseman in Birmingham. The Sisters of Mercy, not long in existence themselves, offered them the hospitality of their house there.

Cornelia had thought of beginning modestly in some poor area of London. And she also wanted to put distance between herself and Pierce. But Wiseman had other plans for her. Since she had no financial resources to invest in a site of her own choosing, she was constrained to accept Wiseman's proposal to settle in his District. He had heard of a vacant convent in the industrial town of Derby and was negotiating to acquire it for the future Society of the Holy Child Jesus. It was a recently built, pretentious neo-gothic pile, and



when Cornelia saw it for the first time, she exclaimed that it was far from the Bethlehem beginning she had envisioned. She was sure the new Society would not prosper there and she was right.

In the end, Cornelia had to accept Wiseman's offer of the Derby convent with its dependence on a difficult parish priest and his ungracious housekeeper sister. The convent itself carried an enormous debt which Wiseman blithely assumed. But before giving her final consent, Cornelia insisted on one condition, the guarantee of a Jesuit confessor for the community. Wiseman put his case to the Jesuit Provincial who reluctantly yielded to episcopal pressure.

Cornelia had still to face the most painful issue. Up to this point, she had always arranged to have her two younger children with her. Mercer, of course, was of school age and settled at Stonyhurst, thanks to the earl's generous scholarship.

But Wiseman thought that the presence of children in the convent would prejudice the new foundation's good beginning. Would Catholics take seriously a religious community with the founder's children underfoot? And what scandals would the Protestants invent? So Wiseman insisted that at least for Cornelia's year of novitiate Ady should be sent away to school, and Emily Bowles put pressure on Cornelia to send Frank away as well. With great sadness Cornelia gave in to their demands. Pierce was aware of Wiseman's ruling and was instrumental in having eleven-year-old Ady enrolled in a boarding school run by the Religious of the Holy Sepulcher in Essex. So, on the 8<sup>th</sup> of October, just before going to Derby, Cornelia sent her dear Ady to her new school. After her arrival in Derby, Frank, her five-year-old, would be placed in a school for little boys. Without knowing or wishing it, Cornelia was bringing about the permanent estrangement of these two much loved children.

*See reflection questions on page 169*

*So ought all to begin again with the most sweet  
and holy and loving Child Jesus—a humbled God. cc*

## *“Here Beginneth a New Life”*

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THE 13<sup>TH</sup> OF OCTOBER WAS A MEMORABLE DATE on Cornelia’s interior calendar. A heart broken six years before on the Feast of St Edward was to serve as the cradle of the future Society of the Holy Child Jesus. On this same day in 1846 the cradle was ready and the Society was born.

A small group of women, one with a five-year-old by the hand, made the brief journey from Birmingham north to Derby, arriving at noon. Who were they? Cornelia, of course, and Emily, Newman’s friend, and Mary Ann and Veronica, both youngsters. We can imagine their reactions when these last two first saw their new home. The big convent was empty except for a reception room and a few beds with mattresses and pillows. In the kitchen there was a leg of mutton in the oven and potatoes and carrots on the stove, but no plates, knives or forks. These they had to borrow from the parish priest before being able to sit down to a meal. Then, they rolled up their sleeves and settled in.

Cornelia had brought with her the draft of a rule drawn up in Rome with the help of Grassi and Pierce, but she had not realized that she was to be both novice and novice mistress. The fact is that all looked to her as leader of the group, and so she was. She was the oldest and the only one with experience of the religious life, an already profound experience. Wiseman, however, treated her as both foundress and beginner. It is true she had much to learn about



the customs and attitudes of English Catholics and would have to buy her experience at a high price.

Two days after their arrival, on the 15<sup>th</sup> of October, the Feast of St. Teresa, the little community assisted at their first Mass as a religious family. The liturgy was celebrated not in the cavernous church but in a small room with simple adornments—an improvised tabernacle and borrowed candlesticks. In this way the Lord of their desires came to dwell among them in the intimacy of their simple beginnings. Cornelia saw this first Mass as the real founding of religious life in the Society of the Holy Child Jesus. Even to this day, the Society celebrates its founding on the feast of St. Teresa.

Cornelia's spirit of simple joy in giving the Lord a new home and making him known overflowed to her sisters and the people of the area. From the first day she taught her community how to live fully all the typical practices of religious life, but in a natural, unforced sort of way. She set up a daily timetable which included Mass, spiritual reading, instruction, prayer and work, all in an atmosphere of recollected reverence. Silence helped foster the interior life and the twice-daily recreations were merry and delightful. Then, Cornelia was at her most spontaneous, often breaking into song or initiating a game. Her rejection of enclosure made it possible to involve the sisters from the start in the local apostolate.

For the first time in her life, Cornelia found herself in the midst of extreme poverty. The England she already knew was the England of Alton Towers and Spetchley Park. Derby was a town besmirched by the industrial revolution. The atmosphere was thick with factory smoke, and at the bottom of the convent garden an open sewer flowed. Masses of immigrants from Ireland crowded into Derby in search of work in the mines and factories. Workers could attend school only at night and on Sundays, so Cornelia and Emily organized classes within their meager free time. During the day, the sisters staffed a poor school for 200 or more children of whom never more than 60 were able to attend on a typical day.

The Jesuit spiritual director came once a week to hear confessions and give the sisters a talk. For Cornelia who had been formed in the Ignatian tradition, this accompaniment was indispensable.

During the first days in Derby, Wiseman wrote Cornelia a charter letter setting down on paper his dreams for the Society. He sketched out the main lines of an apostolate which was to grow naturally from a deep and solid spirituality—education of the poor and of the middle classes who form the backbone of the Catholic laity.

Postulants came to increase the founding group and some went away again. By December the community numbered six, four of whom were converts. This would be the pattern in the first years of the Society, almost half the members being converts. The community continued to grow little by little. Several women came to make a retreat or simply to look for somewhere to stay as converts rejected by their families. Several of these entered the Society.

Cornelia loved the liturgy of the Church she had first known in Rome and began a Society tradition rich in sung Masses, Benediction, processions, celebrations of Mary and the saints, First Communions, and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. The English, accustomed to a more reserved style, found such demonstrations of liturgical exuberance somewhat suspicious.

Two events in these beginning years were a source of great encouragement. In 1847, Wiseman brought from Rome a document giving preliminary approval to the little Society. This was an enormous consolation for Cornelia who was a daughter of the Church to the marrow of her being. As far as rules were concerned, they were in a state of constant evolution, as Cornelia had foreseen. She had a borrowed copy of the Ignatian Constitutions more and more of which found their way into the original sketch of a Rule brought from Rome. The other outstanding event was the formal recognition by the government school authorities of the excellent quality of education offered in the Derby poor school.

When Cornelia completed her year of novitiate in December 1847, Wiseman came to receive her vows of poverty and obedience. (She had already, before Pierce's ordination, made her vow

of perpetual chastity.) After the vow ceremony, Wiseman installed Cornelia as Superior General and led her to a seat in the sanctuary. Each of the then sixteen novices approached her to pledge their loyalty. In the Society December 21 was kept until Cornelia's death as her official feast day.

What was Cornelia like at this stage in her life? She was the "life and spirit" of the group, according to Maria Joseph Buckle, one of the converts who joined the Society early on. Buckle remembered Cornelia's many talents, her good humor, and her lovely voice, to say nothing of her natural beauty. It would be impossible to meet her without being struck by her manner, she said. In the convent, Cornelia's mere presence made for a climate of peace and spiritual happiness.

Because of her natural charm, Cornelia was careful not to attract the hearts of the sisters to herself but to God. At times, when it was a question of religious discipline, she could be demanding. God deserved everyone's best efforts. The results were secondary. She wanted each one to fulfill her God-given promise, so she would study her character and find ways to promote what was best in her. Her great respect for the work of the Holy Spirit in each person determined her mode of government and her way of dealing with the individual. Cornelia's intention was to form strong, independently motivated, mature and holy women, each one according to her own measure of grace. In fact, she would adopt God's perspective when dealing with anyone, and this allowed her an objectivity free of personal prejudice. "The Society of the Holy Child Jesus is not my work," she would insist in good times and bad.

Very soon the bad times were to come and Cornelia would need all her courage and wisdom to keep her little Society from falling apart.

*See reflection questions on page 170*

*I am so afraid of having any reserve with God. CC*

## *“Obstacles Exist ...”*

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HAVING TAKEN UP RESIDENCE AT DERBY with women whose lives depended on her, Cornelia now had a responsibility she could not renounce. This was all the more true as others came to join her. The Society was now a sacred charge placed in her hands by God through the medium of the Church. And God alone was to be her source of energy and wisdom.

Cornelia's health was delicate, but she was always the first to set the example, to sacrifice herself to provide for the others and to pitch in to hard physical work. The community was poor. Cornelia's only pair of shoes had patches on top of patches. In her heart of hearts, she was happy to share the poverty of her dear Lord. Her happiness spread to the others creating a climate of joy and light heartedness in the midst of hardship. The sisters learned from her to love their poverty and even to choose it. Deliberately chosen poverty is different from poverty imposed by others. It requires a deeper response, and a soul strong enough to shoulder the cross and meet God there. Cornelia's special gift was her capacity to do just that and to experience in the meeting not death but the fullness of life.

The parish priest, Mr Sing (“Mister”, not “Father” was the usual form of address for priests) accepted Cornelia's residence in his convent thinking she would be paying the interest on his building debt. But Cornelia had a letter from Wiseman saying he would make himself responsible for the convent and all its financial obligations. Before going to Derby, Cornelia understood from the bishop that

the property would be transferred to him for a sum agreed between himself and Sing. In fact there was never any document and the transfer never took place. Sing was left not only with the property on his hands but also with the debt and all the interest payments. Cornelia, for her part, had spent all her personal resources before many months were out. The income from the schools was meager and barely maintained the sisters. Wiseman, even after he was transferred to London, did his best to liquidate the debt but his most generous efforts were insufficient and Sing appealed to Bishop Walsh.

Sing had a string of more personal complaints against Cornelia—lack of due consultation with him over building matters; clashes with the Italian convent chaplain; suspension of classes to prepare a feast celebration for him; non-authorized liturgical celebrations in the convent chapel; and to top it all, exclusion of Sing from the classrooms without the permission of the Mother Superior. In general, they were complaints occasioned by Cornelia's inexperience and her spontaneous creativity. Being a convert and a foreigner, she had to learn the hard way the accepted protocol of a Catholic parish structure in her adopted country. As misunderstandings multiplied, Sing looked for ways to rid himself of Cornelia and her community. He used money as the pretext, but his deep enmity against her was the real reason. He told Walsh that the nuns were only playing at being religious. The convent chaplain knew otherwise and wrote to Walsh defending Cornelia and praising her for her great patience amidst Sing's petty provocations, and he invited the bishop to come and see for himself how things were.

During her first year at Derby, Cornelia valiantly bore the absence of Ady and Frank knowing that she would have them back when she finished her year's novitiate. Mercer was a worry to her. We have many of the letters she wrote him because he treasured and saved them but they show him to be an indifferent student with a difficult personality. He did not fit in, nor was he well liked by his peers. He appears to have adapted poorly to yet another change of school. The unusual status of his parents and the unfamiliar ethos of an English boys' boarding school made him an outsider. Cornelia's letters to

him are full of affectionate motherly advice, but her spiritual counsel was more appropriate to an adult than to a schoolboy. At the end of the year, Merty did poorly in his exams. Pierce, the only one free to attend the end-of-year ceremonies, did not go, causing Merty to feel abandoned. Cornelia, in anguish for him, was helpless to remedy the situation. The one consolation she had to offer was the prospect of a holiday with her once her vows were pronounced.

*See reflection questions on page 171*

## *Connelly Against Connelly*

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AS WE HAVE ALREADY SEEN, Cornelia said the Society had been founded on a breaking heart. Now that heart was more vulnerable than ever and it was Pierce who would finally shatter it.

Knowing that he should not have done it, Pierce went to the convent without permission to see his wife. Cornelia received him but took him to task for going against Wiseman's regulation, and she charged him not to repeat the visit. The following day, Pierce sent her a "very violent letter" about the blow she had dealt him and the wound she had inflicted. In anguish, she answered him and let him see what a struggle she too was undergoing and how she had to pay the cost of their separation in her own human flesh: "You have not the violent temptation that I have in thinking of the little Bethlehem room [at Gracemere], nor have you perhaps gone through the struggles of a woman's heart. No! you never have." It is not clear whether Cornelia was referring to their children or to the intimacies of their life together, but it is clear that she was deeply upset. What brought about this explosion of emotion on both sides?

When Pierce went to England in Lord Shrewsbury's employ, he thought he would be acting as tutor to the earl's nephew and heir, but this did not happen. In spite of his being an able man still young and full of energy, Pierce was underemployed and felt wasted. In the vicinity of Alton Towers there were already enough priests in pastoral ministry and he was not needed there either. On the other hand, Pierce had expected to have more to do with Cornelia's Society

in a consultative capacity. This too was denied him by Walsh and Wiseman. Walsh was fearful of scandal and Wiseman was protective of the new congregation and of Cornelia. The fact that Cornelia was only a few miles from Pierce at Alton Towers—in the same ecclesiastical district and under the authority of the same bishop—was due to Wiseman who had installed Cornelia at Derby. It is also possible that because of his involvement in Rome, Pierce considered himself a co-founder of the Society with some responsibility for it. If this were the case he would be resentful of Wiseman's usurpation of this role. It is also possible that Pierce suspected that it was Wiseman who was really behind Cornelia's call to England. And he may have been right. One can imagine a sort of gentleman's understanding between Shrewsbury and Wiseman to manipulate the destiny of both spouses, for the glory of God, to be sure, and even to induce the Pope to confirm Cornelia's mission.

Soon the green monster of jealousy came upon the scene with pride at its side. As husband, Pierce had, until the separation, authority over his wife. That was the prevailing concept of the relationship between spouses. Then it came about that Cornelia, separated from this conjugal authority, freely put herself under the ecclesiastical authority of another man—Wiseman, seen by some as founder of the congregation that he, Pierce, helped bring to birth. From then on, the well-being and future of the Society had nothing to do with him. Excluded from what was happening in the convent, even from Cornelia's reception of the veil, and forbidden by Wiseman to see his wife whom he had seen every week in Rome, Pierce rebelled. He went clandestinely to Derby as the anonymous companion to Dr Winters, first chaplain at Alton Towers. Cornelia arrived in the parlor and was taken completely by surprise. She had not seen Pierce since Rome and had to mask the intensity of her reaction in front of Dr Winter.

Then the situation became more acute, thanks to Emily. She was concerned lest Wiseman should think that Cornelia was a party to the deception, so she told him what had happened and relayed to Pierce the bishop's strong disapproval of his conduct. (It is impor-



tant to know that all this went back and forth through the penny post which delivered to its destination in the afternoon a letter sent in the morning.) It is easy to see how, gradually, Wiseman became in Pierce's eyes a rival for access to Cornelia and a symbol for all that stood in the way of his ambitions. Cornelia, meanwhile, was fully occupied with her own formation, the formation of her young community and the apostolate in the schools. Pierce's growing disaffection was a pain without relief.

Now, by means of various strategies, Pierce set out to regain control over his wife. First, he managed to persuade a priest friend of his in Rome, Samuele Asperti, to accept the position as chaplain in the convent. If Pierce could not go to the convent, at least he would have a friend inside to keep him informed. But first Pierce had to convince Wiseman and Cornelia of Asperti's suitability for the job. Asperti arrived with abundant enthusiasm and little English. He stayed to become an ally of Cornelia more than of Pierce, and so turned Pierce against him.

Next, Pierce tried to hasten Cornelia's profession thinking that she would have more liberty to see him as a professed religious. Wiseman would not hear of it. When finally it was nearly time for Cornelia's vows, Pierce did an about face and tried to prevent the profession claiming that Cornelia's vow of poverty would make him liable for her debts. Actually, he feared that her vow of obedience would put her more firmly under Wiseman's authority. He seems to have interpreted Cornelia's profession as an act of rebellion on her part and of moral injury on Wiseman's. He told Asperti that he wanted to destroy the convent and prevent "the Mother Superior" from having any contact with her children. He would go as far as Rome to defame the convent, Wiseman and the Jesuits, and he would get approval of the rule and himself found other convents. He had become insane with jealousy.

Pierce put his threats into action only days after the profession. Knowing that the three children could now spend their vacation with Cornelia and that Ady and Frank would be permitted to return permanently, he snatched them from their schools early without a

word to their mother and went with Merty and Ady to the continent. Frank he lodged with a Protestant friend before traveling.

There is no record of Cornelia's reaction upon discovering the loss of her children. But one month after, she recorded in her little notebook a private vow to back up her recently professed vow of obedience. United to the sufferings of Jesus on the cross, she vowed to have no further contact with her children and their father unless it were for God's glory and in harmony with God's will as interpreted by her spiritual directors. Pierce had played his cruelest card. He was staking everything on Cornelia's following him to recover the children and so falling into his hands. Aware of being manipulated and crazy to rush after the children, she had to nail herself to the cross to resist the impulse.

In fact, Pierce did go to Rome as threatened. There he presented himself at Propaganda Fide posing as founder of his wife's Society and applying for approval of the sketch of a rule that Cornelia had brought from Rome to England. He had added new elements of his own invention which Cornelia had never seen. The damage was compounded when Pierce spread malicious lies about the convent. Cornelia, meanwhile, knew nothing of these intrigues. When she did find out, she wrote immediately to the Prefect and old friend, Cardinal Fransoni, to reject this spurious rule. Pierce was not deputed to present it, nor was he her representative in Rome, she told him. Besides, she said, it was too early in the Society's history to ask formal approval of any rule. Unfortunately, this false rule was filed in Propaganda's archives and remained there to confuse every subsequent effort of Cornelia's to gain approval of her own rule.

Pierce had another item on his agenda in Rome. Behind the scenes he was scheming to prevent Wiseman from being appointed Archbishop. To Fransoni's face, he praised Wiseman as the Society's great benefactor, but from England he had already written a highly critical letter about Wiseman to an English diplomat in Rome. In this way he could deny the accusation that he defamed Wiseman during his stay in Rome.

At this point the situation became even more dramatic. Wiseman was indeed named pro-Vicar Apostolic of the London District and left the affairs of the convent up in the air. And Walsh was too ill to concern himself much with the convent and the question of Pierce's visits to Cornelia. Pierce returned from Rome armed with a medal for Cornelia from Pius IX and turned up on her doorstep to give it to her. He had asked Wiseman's permission, but had received no answer. Asperti, the convent chaplain, was the one who, according to Cornelia's vow, would decide if it was for God's glory and in harmony with God's will that she should see him. His answer was no. Cornelia admitted, years later, that if it had been up to her, she would have agreed to see Pierce at that moment. But she remained faithful to her vow and sent word that she would not receive him. In a rage, Pierce insisted. He stayed for six hours raging and crying. By his own witness, he threw himself on the couch in a convulsion of tears and cries. Asperti sat with him and tried to calm him, but did not change his mind about Cornelia seeing him. Upstairs, Cornelia was going through her own passion, nailed by her vow to the cross. She still loved Pierce, but God came first and she had given herself to God without reserve. She also knew that Pierce was manipulating her and her natural obstinacy helped her to hold firm.

When Pierce finally went away, he had already taken a crucial decision to wage a pitched battle against Wiseman, the Jesuits and the Catholic Church. He would rescue his wife "from the hands of devils". He had been humiliated in his manhood, stepped on, rejected. Or was he a child deprived of his playthings and of the comforts of his mother?

*See reflection questions on page 171*

*Take the cross our Lord sends, as it is,  
not as you imagine it ought to be. cc*

## *The End of the Beginning*

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CORNELIA HAD PREDICTED THAT SHE WOULD NOT STAY at Derby. It was not her idea of Bethlehem, a suitable place to begin, but in spite of the difficulties with Sing and the constraints of poverty, it was the place where the first members of the Society experienced religious life in its most idyllic form. The fervor and happiness of the community and its simple joys reflected Cornelia's own youthful, hopeful spirit. Together and with creativity and good humor, the sisters took on hard work, poverty and uncertainty. Religious life was demystified and reduced to a simple desire to please God at all times and in all things. What could be more delightful than to live like that?

There was support and encouragement for the high flyers called to advanced ways of prayer; and for those who had to plod, there was practical help shaped to their capacities. Cornelia studied the personality and spiritual attractions of each one and adapted herself to them, not requiring the sisters to reach for her own gifts or graces. She did, however, make war against anything slipshod, any duplicity, any divided loyalties.

Emblematic figures in Cornelia's pantheon were the great saints—Teresa of Avila, woman of strong character and of prayer; Francis of Assisi, in love with Lady Poverty; Ignatius, the practical mystic; Gertrude, friend of the Lord's own heart; and the Queen of this court, the valiant and sorrowful Mother. The Child Jesus

in the midst was a “humbled God” limited by his humanity and hidden in the crowd, but brightly standing out for those with eyes to recognize him. Cornelia taught the sisters to contemplate him so that they might grow as he did to the full maturity of the cross and the glory of the resurrection—grow without forfeiting their youthfulness of spirit.

Unfortunately this happy experiment in religious life was about to yield in the face of external forces. Wiseman, Sing, Pierce and poverty all hastened the end of the Society’s sojourn in Derby and almost brought about the end of the Society.

Bishop Walsh was ill. He did not respond to Asperti’s invitation to visit the convent to see if there was any real foundation to Sing’s complaints against Cornelia. Meanwhile, Cornelia had asked the Earl to calm Pierce’s spirits and direct his interest away from Derby and back to his ministry. With Pierce, she adopted a firm tone (which he called insolent), telling him in July 1848, that she would not see him unless he returned Ady to her care. Furthermore, she wrote him, his connection with the convent was at an end.

In August, there was a change of bishop in the Midlands District. Almost immediately, Ullathorne, the new bishop, became embroiled in the dispute between Sing and Cornelia. He went to the convent at Cornelia’s invitation and interviewed each of the 21 novices. Being a Benedictine and accustomed to religious life, he could readily evaluate the quality of their formation under Cornelia. The Birmingham archives still have his notes on each novice taken on that occasion. At the end of the visit he declared himself quite satisfied with the spirit of the community and impressed with the affection of the sisters for Cornelia (referred to either as the Mother Superior or Mrs Connelly).

Ullathorne saw that the apostolate, too, was going well. There was even the beginning of a boarding school with three boarders, and a plan afoot to begin a training college to prepare future teachers for the Catholic schools. During the bishop’s visit however, it became clear that behind Sing’s animosity toward the convent was his sister, Miss Sing, with a finger in every pie.

In spite of his good opinion of the convent, the sisters and their works, Ullathorne decreed that the nuns would have to leave unless they could pay the remaining debt. This being impossible, and Wiseman in London also being unable to help with more, Cornelia acknowledged defeat. This would not be the last time that a work for the Church begun by Cornelia would fail for want of money. Just at this moment, however, Wiseman came up with a better idea, and pulled another property out of his sleeve.

This time, the site was in the south. St Leonards-on-Sea was a small resort town facing the channel and looking across to France where precisely in this year, 1848, a revolution was forcing Louis Philippe off the French throne and into exile. The property, All



*The Reverend Mr Jones*

Souls, belonged to a quaint old priest, the Reverend Mister Jones, who lived and dressed in a style long gone. As the legatee of a wealthy benefactor, Lady Stanley, and in keeping with her desires, he had put up a set of buildings—a convent, a school, the foundations of a church, and his own residence. These were set among extensive grounds, six and a half hectares on a rise overlooking the sea. Already six different congregations had come and gone from All Souls, including the Benedictines and the Jesuits, chiefly because of difficulties with Mr Jones. By way of Wiseman, Jones expressed himself delighted to receive Cornelia and her community and said he had decided to make a legal transfer of the property to the Society. Cornelia did not want to commit herself once again without the relevant documents in order, and in her hands, but Wiseman reassured her all would be well. On one side, he was putting heavy pressure on her to take

All Souls, and on the other, Sing was pressing her to leave Derby as soon as possible. That is how in December of 1848 the Society came to move to St Leonards-on-Sea and take possession, without documents, of All Souls.

Typically, Cornelia asked Wiseman for time for a community retreat before leaving Derby. Asperti preached and Cornelia spent the eight days alone with God preparing her soul to begin once again.

When rumors of the transfer reached Pierce's ears, it drove him over the edge of reason. He knew St Leonards was in Wiseman's district. Now his control over Cornelia would be absolute. Obsessed by his resentment of Wiseman, and now Asperti as well, he wrote Ullathorne that he was a husband and a father before ever he was a priest. Upon the arrival of Cornelia at All Souls, he left Alton Towers and took up residence with Henry Drummond, a fanatical anti-Catholic. Then Pierce too would begin again, but this time to retrace his steps and go back the way he had come. From under Drummond's roof he launched a bitter public campaign against Cornelia, Wiseman, the Church, the Jesuits and his one-time friend, poor Dr Asperti.

*See reflection questions on page 172*

*Wait in patient hope for the increase that God will surely give  
to those who confide in Him. CC*

## *All Souls, St Leonards on Sea*

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THE “REFUGEES” FROM DERBY LEFT IN TWO GROUPS—some on the 11<sup>th</sup> of December, others on the 21<sup>st</sup>. With them went the three boarders, one of whom was intercepted by her father en route and whisked back home. She later recalled how the people of Derby came out to bid farewell to the nuns amidst cries and lamentations.

Once assembled again under one roof, the community settled in under the benevolent eye of the Reverend Mister Jones and his ancient housekeeper. These two occupied a far wing of the convent building. That first night there were not enough beds so some had to sleep on the tops of desks and tables.

Cornelia lost no time in organizing everything anew. There was no school or other work on the site, but that would soon be remedied. The convent was still under construction and there were workers everywhere. Mr Jones put his farm at the disposal of the nuns saving them considerable expense. The only thing lacking was the deed of transfer. As time went by, Cornelia grew nervous and wondered about the gentleman’s agreement that had brought them to All Souls. The delay was due to Mr Jones who was busy including clauses to protect himself and his own interests. The document exists to this day but without signatures or seal. It was never executed.

Within the first week, January 1849, the community celebrated the great feast of the Nativity and soon after, Wiseman came to



receive the vows of three sisters and give the veil to two more. He took the opportunity to bring Cornelia up to date on what Pierce was plotting—a legal campaign to force her back to him.

The Catholics of the area were invited to the vow ceremony and many came out of curiosity and interest. When the chapel was set up a little later, Cornelia invited them to attend Mass. And so began a long tradition of aesthetically beautiful and deeply reverent liturgical celebrations open to the area. Cornelia's educated taste allowed her to bring to the act of worship the best music and the best liturgical art available. Care for the dignity and beauty of the liturgy was one of her lifelong interests. Because of St Leonards nearness to France, it was a haven for exiled royalty from the continent. The revolution of 1848 brought several to the chapel at All Souls, where they heard Mass with fishermen and the simple folk of the town. Louis Philippe and his queen, Amélie, were typical. The queen was in sore need of comfort and she found it talking to Cornelia

Cornelia herself supervised the studies of the two girls who came as boarders from Derby, but also in the convent she very soon established a school for the poor of the neighborhood, and she hoped to provide for children of the middle class. At the same time, five of the young community were being prepared to form the core of a teacher training college but Cornelia's first priority was the formation of her young religious, some of whom had very little formal education.

Soon Pierce set out on his campaign to rescue Cornelia from her "captors". His Protestant lawyer told him that the only legal way to recover his wife was through a suit for the restitution of conjugal rights. In other words, he would need to prove that Cornelia willfully abandoned his bed. To Shrewsbury, whose house he had recently left, he had written on the very day Cornelia went to St Leonards: "The case is now fairly in legal hands. Unless Dr Wiseman requires her at once to put herself into my hands . . . she will be delivered to me under penal enforcement." Knowing how embarrassing to the Church a scandalous legal process would be, Pierce tried blackmail. Wiseman did not rise to his bait, but letters flew among Shrews-

bury, Wiseman, Ullathorne and Pierce to avert the crisis. The earl sympathized with Pierce because he felt that his good friend Wiseman had handled Pierce badly. Cornelia, sure that the truth would win out, remained confident and tranquil. Lady Shrewsbury tried to convince her to remove herself from Pierce's reach, but Cornelia would not hear of it. Her place was with her community and she would stand and fight.

A month after Cornelia's arrival at All Souls, a messenger appeared at the convent with a summons for Cornelia to appear in court. In Protestant England, all marriage cases were tried in an ecclesiastical court. In this case it was the Court of Arches, the highest ecclesiastical court in the country. Husband and wife were represented by proxies before the judge, one presenting the suit, and the other the defense.

Pierce's suit came up on January 17, 1849. His statement left out the whole of their life together from his conversion to the trial, and simply accused Cornelia of abandoning house and children. It was based on the Connelys' valid marriage by an Episcopalian minister in the state of Pennsylvania. On March 20, Cornelia's lawyers presented her allegation, her own statement of facts. This is a precious document for Cornelia's biographers because it is really an autobiography in the formal language of the court. The judge asked for documentation to prove the dates, and this was provided and reviewed at a second hearing in June. In November, Cornelia's allegation was debated and eliminated from the evidence, a very bad sign. Only in March of the following year would the verdict be handed down.

During this period, the daily routine of the community at All Souls was unaffected by the Case. The sisters, except for a few, were unaware of the anxious time they were living through because Cornelia stayed measured and cheerful. She could always find the peace of God within herself and often before the tabernacle but there were more concerns than the Case.

A conflict over the location of a proposed school created bad feeling toward the convent on the part of a group of lay people

led by William Duke, MD, a recent convert. He and Asperti wanted to separate the school physically from the convent and build it nearer to the townspeople. Mr Jones opposed the plan and his wishes prevailed. So, in May, with great solemnity, the cornerstone was blessed and laid right next to the convent. With it were planted the seeds of a long and bitter battle between Duke and his followers on one side and Cornelia and the convent on the other.



*Colonel Charles Towneley*

Mr Jones, like many benefactors, had his quirks. He was whimsical. He changed his mind as easily as he tore down walls he had just built. And one day he changed his mind about transferring All Souls to the Society. Without telling either Wiseman or Cornelia, he had a lawyer draw up a deed of conveyance of All Souls to Colonel Charles Towneley, the nephew of his great benefactor, Lady Stanley. He wanted Towneley to administer the property in accordance with the wishes of Lady Stanley, his aunt. The Holy Child Sisters would always occupy the terrain, be in charge of the apostolic works on it, and profit from its income. Jones executed this deed while he was still happy with Cornelia and the sisters.

But soon, like many before her, Cornelia ran afoul of the Reverend Mister Jones. She was youthful in spirit, creative, and

spontaneous; he was old, deaf, traditional and suspicious. Friction produced sparks which multiplied. Jones withdrew permission to use the produce of his farm, and the community, always poor, had to economize still more. One day, serving table, Cornelia announced, "Bones, blessed be God, bones". The phrase caught on and became a Society motto.

Asperti, too, was the object of Jones' suspicions. The young Italian, with the collusion of Wiseman and Cornelia, had infiltrated into the liturgy customs better known in Italy than in England. These sat poorly with Mr Jones.

It was a complex of causes, including the aggressiveness of Dr Duke, which disturbed Mr Jones, and he began to talk openly about changing his will. In a state of total uncertainty, Cornelia prepared herself and her community to face yet another uprooting.

*See reflection questions on page 173*

## *Mister Jones' Will*

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IT IS THE YEAR 1850, the year when Rome restored the ecclesiastical hierarchy in England after centuries of persecution and a period of grudging tolerance. The pope divided England into dioceses and named Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, Nicholas Wiseman. It provoked a wave of anti-Catholic hysteria.

It was the worst possible moment for Cornelia's cause. The case before the Court of Arches was already notorious, and Rome's action would further prejudice the outcome. An earlier case tried by the same judge had stirred up heated debate over theological issues and created a public hunger for more. It is important to know that the religious controversies of the day were news items of highest interest to the general public, and filled the columns of the press.

For Cornelia, the year began under a doubly dark cloud. Mr Jones' threats to change his will heightened the possibility of another exodus of the community, and the Connelly vs Connelly verdict was still pending. The judge had all the information in hand and was studying how to decree. Cornelia could only pray and live in hope while in the world beyond the convent the more fanatical Protestants fulminated against the Catholic Church, priests and convents.

In January, Cornelia discovered that Asperti was causing division in the community and asked Wiseman to remove him. He had joined forces with Duke over the school and it had been reported to her that he was bringing about a kind of schism. One of the more mature religious said he had a gift for interference and a habit of

intruding into the internal affairs of the community. However, when later in one of his crazy pamphlets, Pierce accused him of seducing one of the young nuns, Cornelia denied it categorically. Asperti went back to Italy in the spring, entered the Jesuits and became a highly respected spiritual director. With the best will in the world, he had played a not insignificant role in the disastrous Connelly drama.

The mercurial Mr Jones continued to have new ideas about his will and testament. At one point, he told Wiseman that he was going to give All Souls to Shrewsbury. Wiseman was pleased because he knew Shrewsbury would respect his wishes as to the disposition of the property. The Society would be permanently established at All Souls and he would have a refuge away from the noise of London. He did not share his thoughts with Cornelia.

In February, Cornelia told the nuns how precarious their tenure at All Souls really was. Actually, the only valid will in existence was the one making Towneley the legatee, but neither Wiseman nor Cornelia knew this. On the 14<sup>th</sup> of February, Cornelia gathered the community and began a novena urgently begging the Mother of Sorrows to bring them through the crisis. On the morning of the 21<sup>st</sup>, Mr Jones, who had just returned from London, fell gravely ill. The doctor and a priest were summoned and several sisters gathered round his bed to pray. He was, in fact, dying. Before expiring, Mr Jones reached out to Cornelia and took her hand. He begged pardon for all his unkindnesses to her. "It's all yours," he murmured. "The will has not been changed; the original has not been destroyed." Cornelia, profoundly moved, thanked him for his generosity to the Society. Then the Reverend Mister Jones, reconciled with Cornelia and the Society, breathed his last.

Later in the morning, a lawyer arrived sent for by Mr Jones to change his will in favor of a Protestant nephew.

The community received the news torn between mourning and rejoicing. Their relief at not having to move knew no bounds. Cornelia supposed that the will to which Jones referred was the one agreed to with Wiseman. Wiseman was convinced Jones' heir was Shrewsbury. So sure was he that he sent workmen to All Souls to set

up part of the building for his own use, and he took for granted the inclusion of Jones' extensive library. Of course rumors of Wiseman's plans reached Pierce's ears and inflamed his jealousy still more.

There remained one great problem to do with the will. It could not be found. Jones had told Cornelia it was in his library. The Sisters searched everywhere and many times with no success. They even searched the library in his London residence. The day fixed for the reading of the will was March 25<sup>th</sup>. On the 22<sup>nd</sup>, it had still not been located. Again, the community took the problem to the Sorrowful Mother. Late at night, with another Sister, Cornelia went once more to the library. There, in Jones' desk where they had looked a hundred times before, they found the document. Cornelia rang the convent bell, woke all the sisters and called them to the chapel where they intoned the Te Deum.

On the 25<sup>th</sup>, various people gathered for the reading of the will. Wiseman was already informed of its contents because Cornelia had told him. He immediately sent for Towneley to inform him of his own plans for All Souls. The will, in fact, made no mention of Cornelia or of Wiseman. It gave no indications of how the property was to be used. Towneley was the total and unrestricted owner of All Souls and he could do with it as he pleased.

Fortunately it pleased the Colonel that Cornelia and the community should remain permanently at All Souls and that they should be the sole beneficiaries of the goods his aunt, Lady Stanley, had settled on the Reverend Mister Jones.

*See reflection questions on page 173*

## *Connelly Against Connelly: The End of the Case*

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ON THE 23<sup>RD</sup> OF MARCH, the day after the discovery of Mr Jones' will, the judge of the Court of Arches handed down his verdict. It supported Pierce's suit. Cornelia's lawyers immediately made an appeal to the Privy Council. Otherwise, the law could have obliged Cornelia to return to Pierce under pain of imprisonment. From that day on, she had to be very careful not to be found alone, even within the convent precincts, for fear of being snatched away. Under her bed she kept a change of secular clothes in case she had suddenly to flee, because it was probable that the Privy Council would find against her. She would have to wait fifteen months to know the outcome of her appeal.

Meanwhile, what had become of Cornelia's children? One of her worries was the high cost of the Case which was bound to drain Pierce's resources and affect the prospects of the three children. Like her they were in the south of England, but she had absolutely no contact with them. Pierce had made sure of that. All her letters to them were returned unopened. Actually, all three were with Pierce in a small house on the property of Henry Drummond, the fanatical anti-Catholic Member of Parliament.

Pierce had made contact with Cornelia's brother Ralph in Texas, to beg help for Mercer. "What will I do with Mercer?" he asked. "I have no idea." By way of response, Mercer would be invited to



go in October to live with his uncles. Ady had been placed by her father in a school in Nice while he was on the continent, but now she was with him. Frank had been at the Drummonds' since before Pierce had gone. During this time of close contact with his children, Pierce had more than enough time to eradicate their Catholic faith and make them into little Protestants with his own prejudices. Eventually he would send Frank to a Protestant boarding school, Marlborough College. Cornelia, knowing that they ran the risk of losing the treasure for which she had sacrificed her natural happiness, never stopped praying for them. "The thought of my children never leaves me," she told one of the Sisters.

All this while, Cornelia bore her hidden sorrow in the company of Mary at the foot of the Cross. Her community, especially the young ones, had no idea of the broken heart that lay behind so many projects and initiatives. Among other things, she was gathering up ideas for an education manual (her *Book of Studies*), and a children's booklet of meditations in the Ignatian tradition. She constantly kept up to date with the newest ideas in education, ordering the latest books and honing the skills of her young teachers. Both the poor school and the school for young ladies were showing excellent results.

Wiseman came often to officiate at professions or clothing ceremonies. And he was frequently called on to receive in the chapel converts from the Anglican Communion.

Soon after Mr Jones' funeral, Wiseman sent the Reverend Pius Melia to St Leonards to help Cornelia revise her rule. With his approval, she added to her text more material from the Constitutions of St Ignatius, and composed new paragraphs on education. On June 1<sup>st</sup>, Wiseman formally approved this rule and canonically established the Society in the District of Westminster. It was a high moment of affirmation and a deep consolation for Cornelia. In its wake Melia remained at the convent as chaplain and pastor to the area, and Wiseman appalled to have heard he would be made Cardinal and have to live in Rome, visited Cornelia to bid her farewell. Cornelia was convinced he would return, and she was right. At the end of September, Pius IX reestablished the hierarchy in England

and Wiseman was returned to London as Cardinal Archbishop. His first letter and his first blessing were for the Society.

It was January 1851 when Wiseman went to All Souls for the first time as Cardinal. At the convent gate a rabble had congregated to shout abuse as he passed, and an unruly gang of Irishmen had also come to defend him. On the beach, the Protestants had made a huge bonfire into which, amidst shouts and applause, they flung hastily assembled effigies of the Pope and Wiseman. Signs of the times!

It was reported that in London, while the Case was pending, figures of Wiseman and “Mrs Wiseman” (Cornelia) were carried through the streets of Chelsea and burned in effigy. It is not surprising that Cornelia opposed Wiseman’s plan to make for himself a “marine residence” within the convent precincts. Besides confirming Protestant suspicions, it presumed that Cornelia was the proprietor of All Souls, which she was not. The owner was Towneley. When workmen contracted by Wiseman arrived to begin renovations at one end of the convent building, Cornelia sent them away. Wiseman was angry. Apparently Cornelia had been willing to allow him the use of a separate building on the grounds, but this had not satisfied him. He summoned Cornelia to London and claimed the right to do as he pleased on the property. Cornelia tried to make Wiseman understand her position, and the “marine residence” was left in limbo, but the episode marked the first cooling of a warm friendship.

Cornelia was petite and rather delicate, but when principle was at stake, her strength of will came to the fore. Both Nicholas Wiseman and Pierce Connelly were products of a culture in which women were either under the authority of men or belonged to them under the law. As a wife, Cornelia had taken this for granted, but Pierce’s priesthood had forced her into independence. Neither Pierce nor Wiseman could easily imagine a woman who was both independent and at the same time good. Perhaps Pierce was right when he sensed in Wiseman an interest in Cornelia that went beyond simple interest in her project. Cornelia was a perceptive woman and it may be that she also guessed that there was more than met the eye

in Wiseman's desire to camp on her doorstep. Neither of the two men was accustomed to being opposed by a woman, and when this happened, their pride could not bear it. Cornelia had had to deny to Pierce his supposed visiting rights and to Wiseman his holiday house. She would never be forgiven.

The wheels of the Case turned very slowly. In May, Pierce became impatient, and thinking to hasten the verdict, sent to the House of Commons a petition so salacious in its contents that only the members were allowed to see it. In it he accused Wiseman and Asperti of gross immorality and brought in evidence personal letters Cornelia had written him. The letters themselves were innocent enough, but Pierce twisted their meaning to fit his purposes.

Finally in June 1851, the Case reached a climax. The panel of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council agreed that Cornelia's allegation should be reinstated as evidence and the Case sent back to the Court of Arches for review. Their decision saved them from the opprobrium of a verdict against Pierce which would certainly have infuriated a great many people, but they ordered Pierce to pay the court costs of both parties, a sure sign that they supported Cornelia's defense. They wrote an opinion that it would be cruel and inhuman of the court to force to return to Pierce the woman he himself had set aside to fulfill his own ambitions. This decision was the "break point" of the Case. Pierce had not the financial resources to keep it alive. In any event, the Privy Council was in effect saying he would lose if Cornelia's allegation were taken into account in the Court of Arches. Her lawyers were reportedly amazed by the breakdown of Pierce's lawyers into what sounded to them like confused nonsense and they hinted at supernatural intervention. Those who were following the Case in the *Times*, the principal English newspaper, were infuriated in any event. Cornelia's reputation as a heartless woman who had abandoned her marriage and her children was permanently fixed in many minds. Even today, there are people who would agree.

*See reflection questions on page 174*

*I have many crosses just now  
for which I must thank God as I ought. cc*

## *Crisis at All Souls*

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WHILE CORNELIA WAS WAITING FOR THE VERDICT of the Privy Council, she did not stand with her arms crossed. She was a living example of one of her favorite mottos, “Actions, not words.” Responding to the wish of the Sisters that she give them a spiritual focus for the year to come, she wrote her first letter to mark the feast of the Epiphany, the day when each one renews her vows. Cornelia’s annual Epiphany letter became a tradition in the Society. We still have some of these letters, and they have become a prime source for the study of the Society’s charism. Cornelia chose the Epiphany as the Society’s special feast because she wanted to show that through their vows the Sisters were sent “to the nations” and that all the Society’s works had their source in the Child Jesus. Then he was a “light to the Gentiles”, and now his light would shine through the Sisters.

Very soon, this outward thrust would be realized geographically. Wiseman, still well disposed toward the Society, invited Cornelia to make a foundation in London. For the first time the Society would be in two separate locations. A little group led by Cornelia set off for Gate Street, one of the worst districts of London, and she was enchanted. With this first offshoot at Gate Street, she realized her original desire to begin poorly in London. Installed in a tight little space on the third floor of a narrow building, she wrote back to All Souls: “We are 69 steps high and happy in the love of our poor and lowly Jesus.” From Gate Street, the works of the Society in London

multiplied. The Sisters set out for their various schools dressed in secular clothes, a miscellaneous array of oddments, so as not to provoke abuse wearing their habits in the public streets. Instead they probably provoked snickers.

Back in St Leonards, Cornelia continued to oversee the growth of the boarding school for young ladies, and a number of the Oxford Movement converts sent their daughters to her to be educated. In spite of her public image, those who knew Cornelia directly recognized not only the attraction of her personality and her gifts as an educator, but also an innate spirituality which made God real to them. Some of Cornelia's most faithful friends were the professional people she had to deal with—lawyers, doctors, architects, businessmen—as well as the fathers and mothers of her pupils.

Now the property of All Souls and all Mr Jones' other holdings belonged to Colonel Charles Towneley. This came as a shock to Wiseman when the will was discovered, and a surprise to Cornelia and to Dr Duke. Mr Jones had already fully informed Towneley of his aunt's hopes for All Souls, and the Colonel immediately made contact with Cornelia to plan with her how to realize his aunt's wishes. Neither Wiseman nor Duke was pleased by this, and in spite of Jones' will, Wiseman still considered himself the arbiter of matters at All Souls. After all, he reasoned, Jones was a clergyman subject to his authority and he had no right to dispose of his goods independently of his bishop's consent (he was wrong, of course) and Wiseman was that bishop. Because of this, Towneley should respect *his* wishes, not those of Jones or anyone else.

Dr Duke, a recent convert and a troublemaker, knew nothing of the connection between Jones and Towneley. To his face he insisted with Towneley that everything on the property except the convent belonged to the "mission"—a group of about 250 Catholics in the vicinity. Wiseman took sides with Duke against the Colonel, his rival, who had now come between him and Cornelia and his dream of a "marine residence" ... and so the battle lines were drawn.

It is 1851. The first skirmish took place in May. It was over a little school for boys that Asperti had begun inside the convent and Melia

had kept going with Wiseman's approval. Towneley did not want it there and said that Mr Jones had foreseen the education of girls only. He ordered it to be removed, even offering to help rent space somewhere in the town. There is no doubt that this was a relief to Cornelia who wanted the schoolroom for the growing community. Melia was furious that Towneley, a layman, had consulted Cornelia, a woman, over what he considered a Church affair.

At the end of June, when the Privy Council pronounced on the Case, Wiseman immediately wrote to inform Cornelia, addressing her as "Dear Daughter in Christ" and assuring her that she was out of danger. She was still within his good graces, but barely.

The Case remained open until 1858. Several times Pierce tried unsuccessfully to raise money to pay the court costs and go on with the trial. He wrote and had printed a series of shocking pamphlets that purported to reveal dark secrets about convents, the Jesuits and the Church in general, but he did not sell enough of them to finance his Case. (The pamphlets remain in the Society archives, some of them annotated in the margins by Cornelia. Systematically she refuted his lies with her own comments.) At the end of the day, to save Pierce from prison, Cornelia herself paid the court costs owed by him. Only then was the Case dropped from the books.

In spite of his satisfaction with the outcome of the Case, Wiseman was still displeased with Cornelia and the situation at All Souls. In August, he sent Melia to give the community a retreat. He was to convince the Sisters of the necessity of respecting the Cardinal's wishes at All Souls, which he duly did, advising Sisters to leave the Society if Cornelia continued in her presumed opposition. Finally Wiseman came in person to impose his authority. He preached a sermon about the pharisee and the publican, turned on his heel and left immediately without a word to Cornelia.

Cornelia found herself caught between two opposing authorities—Wiseman or later Grant with ecclesiastical authority and Towneley with the civil law behind him. When Duke refused to remove the boys' school from the convent, Towneley sent him an ultimatum: "The All Souls property is my present property & the

Community and School are only in the convent by my permission. The Cardinal himself could not come there without my leave.” And he insisted on the prompt removal of the boys’ school. He professed his respect for the ecclesiastical authorities but would not permit them to interfere with his temporal rights. Duke did not back down. Instead he appealed to Wiseman and to Melia, and later to Grant, to a great number of the clergy and finally to the authorities in Rome to support his territorial war over the control of All Souls. Only after thirteen more years of strife did Towneley and the civil law prevail. Even Rome had to yield to its decrees.

In the interim, there were other more serious skirmishes at All Souls between the powers civil and ecclesiastical. Cornelia stood between the sword and the wall attempting to absorb in her own person the pressure from both sides and so achieve reconciliation.

*See reflection questions on page 175*

*Is not our faith a sword of strength? I feel it so, my Lord. cc*

## *Enter: Thomas Grant*

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IN JULY, ROME HAD DIVIDED THE DIOCESE of Westminster in two, and All Souls and St Leonards would find themselves in the diocese of Southwark. Thomas Grant, rector of the English College in Rome (a seminary for young men from England) was to be ordained Bishop. In September 1851, he came to England and replaced Wiseman as Cornelia's immediate superior. Wiseman disappeared from the scene except in relation to the Rule. In Grant, Cornelia gained a friend without losing her antagonists, Duke and Melia. Although the friendship with Grant over almost twenty years was not exempt from tension and confrontations, under the sometimes perturbed surface there was a solid relationship based on mutual admiration—even affection, a profound spirituality shared, and an understanding which withstood many petty annoyances.

Pius Melia, in his double role as chaplain to the convent and mission priest, sympathized with Dr Duke and colluded in his machinations. There were rumors, too, of a secret liaison with a young widow of the area. Melia was a Jesuit, but little by little he distanced himself from the Society of Jesus and allied himself with Wiseman and his point of view. He was, besides, Wiseman's spiritual director. It is Melia in his capacity as chaplain who gave Wiseman a distorted picture of Cornelia in order to have her removed from the convent. He wanted all of All Souls for the mission. He confabulated with Duke against Towneley and planned to contest Jones' will before the law. This he never succeeded in doing, but



his animosity toward Cornelia changed Wiseman's good opinion of her character forever. Finally, Melia was removed from All Souls, but not before fomenting a war with the Society which ended only in 1864, twelve years later.

Cornelia was not the villain of the piece painted by Melia. She too wanted the good of the mission. When Grant took over, she begged him to persuade Towneley to give the mission unlimited access to the chapel, land for a boys' school and a cemetery.

In December, Grant visited the community for the first time and interviewed each Sister. (Southwark was in London just south of the Thames, so it meant a journey of some distance to the south coast.) His manner was friendly and simple compared to Wiseman's which was somewhat pompous. Grant and Towneley reached an easy understanding and together they conceived a charitable trust for the educational works of the Society into which Towneley would put everything Jones had left him in his will.

In January 1852, Towneley sent Grant a draft of the document, and in June it was formally executed. Seven trustees were named, Grant being the only one with lifetime tenure. The trust favored the Society but also made generous provision for the mission. A true friend to the Society, Towneley had studied how to guarantee the binding force of the trust legally so as to protect the Society's interests. He deliberately did not consult Cornelia because he wanted to shield her from Duke's and Wiseman's accusations of manipulating the trust in her favor. When this did happen, Towneley could roundly and truthfully deny Cornelia's complicity.

In the midst of these difficulties—the Case and the All Soul's wrangling—the Society continued to expand. Postulants arrived, and the educational authorities praised the work of the young teachers in the London poor schools. The boarding school at All Souls brought some of the outstanding Catholic families into Cornelia's orbit and created a circle of loyal friends. She was acquiring a reputation as an educator to offset the notoriety created by the press. Even Wiseman had to recognize the contribution the Society was making to Catholic education. And in the public sector, she had won the admiration of



*Thomas Grant, first Bishop of Southwark*

Sir George Bowyer, the highly respected lawyer and convert who defended her against Pierce's calumnies while the Case was in process.

Invitations began to arrive from different parts of England to staff or open schools. Cornelia sent Emily Bowles to Liverpool to take on two poor schools there, and she did this very successfully. As we have seen, she was a convert and friend of Newman and a companion of Cornelia's from the beginning of the Society, a gifted person, writer and

educator. Her brother, also a convert, had joined the congregation Newman had founded, and she kept in close contact with him and with Newman. At Derby and All Souls, she had worked harmoniously with Cornelia to develop the educational apostolate of the Society, but when she went to Liverpool as superior of a small contingent of Sisters to take over the poor schools there, she fell into the habit of acting quite independently of Cornelia. This led to grave consequences.

Pierce did not stop making news. One of his pamphlets, *The Case of the Reverend Pierce Connelly*, became a sort of bestseller among the more evangelical Protestants and was reprinted. Again Cornelia's name turned up in dinner table conversations and articles in the press. Grant, not used to hearing such scandal, and under considerable pressure, looked for ways to get Cornelia out of England. He discovered an excellent pretext, the rule. He would arrange for Cornelia to go to Rome to seek approval of her rule.

Already Melia had worked with Cornelia to perfect the rule. Behind her back, Wiseman had added several articles to restrict the powers of the Superior General, and Melia had presented the rule to the authorities at Propaganda Fide on one of his trips to Rome. They reviewed the document and made the observation that while there was no agreement between "founder" (Pierce) and "foundress" (Cornelia) it would not be convenient to approve the Rule. They had, of course, found in their files Pierce's spurious Rule dating from 1848 and were unable to reconcile it with this more recent one. Cornelia was never told of Propaganda's response.

Now, urged on by Wiseman, Melia and Duke, Grant asked the Roman authorities to send for Cornelia to consult about her Rule. From there they could dispatch her to America to make a foundation there. So it came about that Cornelia received an "invitation" to come to Rome on Rule business.

Cornelia was simplicity itself, but not stupid. She guessed that she was being manipulated because of "the noise of Mr Connelly". The Sisters, worried that they might never again have her in their midst, asked Cornelia to leave with them a written statement of the Society's charism. Before leaving for Rome, she gave herself to the task and produced the three beautiful paragraphs which introduce her rule. Over and over again, she used the words "humble" and "hidden" to refer to the Holy Child and to the spirit he inspired. She directed the Society's contemplative gaze to the Child in his mother's arms and spoke of "running with ardor" in his service. Education was to be the principal expression of the divine mercy.

On St Edward's Day, 1853, still trying to interpret the consequences of her invitation to Rome and suffering from one of her frequent attacks of gout, Cornelia received the devastating news of Merty's death. He had died in New Orleans of yellow fever. Cornelia's oldest son was only twenty. Pierce had convinced him that his mother had abandoned him, and Merty believed him because he never received any of the letters she had written him. There is no record of Pierce's reaction, but Cornelia kept herself from going crazy with grief by working through all the geometry problems in the textbook. For several days only the Mother of Sorrows could console her. There is a tradition, perhaps apocryphal, saying that at the hour Merty died, the convent bell tolled by itself, and Cornelia summoned the community to pray for a passing soul.

During December Cornelia and her Council worked against the clock to finish revising the Rule. Each part as it was completed was passed on to Grant for his review. As pressure built up, Cornelia's psychological and spiritual equilibrium were put to the test but it was her body which showed the tension she was under. She was afflicted by repeated bouts of gout. Christmas came and the Epiphany which she and the community celebrated with the special awareness that it might be her last in their midst.

The night before setting out for Rome, Cornelia gathered the community for a public reading of the revised Rule. All the professed Sisters signed it. Then Cornelia knelt down in front of them and begged their pardon for all the faults she had committed since the beginning of the Society.

The following day, knowing she might never return, Cornelia and two companions left for Rome.

*See reflection questions on page 176*

*What matters it who is for us and who against us?  
Let us only love and serve God. cc*

## *Actions: Emily*

### *Words: Cornelia*

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YES, CORNELIA WAS BUSY WITH WORDS—the text of the rule. She and her companions stayed in Rome until April 1854, not in a convent but just opposite the Jesuit church, the Gesù. This made it easy for her to consult with a Jesuit before presenting the rule at Propaganda. Cardinal Frasoni, Prefect of Propaganda Fide and an old friend, gave her further advice, and she made all the corrections he suggested, but still he kept her in Rome. The long wait was deliberate because Grant had confessed to him that his main purpose was to keep Cornelia away from England. As an expert in canon law, Grant told Frasoni that Cornelia lacked the expertise to draw up a rule, and he asked Frasoni to correct what she had done but not to give her approval just yet. Finally, said Grant, he should send her away with words of encouragement.

Wiseman, whose opinion of the rule was solicited by Grant, wrote in detail and at length to Frasoni. His remarks were a pretext for ventilating all his complaints against Cornelia, but after pages of commentary, he ended by praising the excellence of the Society's works. It was worth keeping the Society in existence if only for that, he said. His remarks too were filed in the Propaganda archives and affected the image Frasoni's successors would have of Cornelia.

During her extended stay in Rome, Cornelia went to several audiences with Pius IX, studied painting in oils (she began a full-length portrait of St Ignatius), visited the various shrines and went house hunting. She had always wanted the Society to have a foothold in Rome.

Fransoni knew Cornelia's story well. It is he who had told her she should keep Frank at her side throughout his childhood. No doubt she now shared with him what had happened to her at Derby and later at St Leonards. Fransoni was very sympathetic toward her, so instead of shipping her off to America, he sent her back to England explaining that the process of approval was a long one and that she should not wait for it in Rome. Disregarding Wiseman, Duke, and even Grant, Fransoni asked Grant to "try to promote the good of this devout Society".

The process of reviewing the recently submitted Rule would take ten years. The task of integrating the additions proposed by Propaganda was to fall between Wiseman and Grant. Cornelia was never even told that there were additions to integrate.

### *Emily in Liverpool*

Before Cornelia's trip to Rome, a new opportunity opened up in Liverpool. The very able Emily Bowles, now recognized for her success with the poor schools for Irish immigrant children, was approached by the Catholic Poor School Committee (CPSC) to know if the Society would be willing to open a training college for the formation of teachers. Cornelia was in full agreement provided the Committee was willing to help finance whatever building was necessary. (The Society was always on the brink of insolvency and only Cornelia's good management kept it from foundering.)

At a point in the past, Emily had made over £1,300, part of her inheritance, as a gift to the Society. Afterwards, when the training college was being considered, Emily asked and received permission from Cornelia to borrow from her brother Samuel, a Protestant

minister, that exact sum using her gift as collateral but only on the condition that it was necessary. Before traveling, Cornelia had come to an agreement with Emily that she could also invest her personal fortune to buy a property provided the sum never exceed the mortgage.

Emily found Rupert House, an ideal property for the training college in a good section of Liverpool. The price was £6,600, an amount way in excess of what had been agreed. Was Emily aware that Cornelia might not return? She had been put in charge in Liverpool and must have thought of herself as a surrogate for the absent Cornelia. Whatever her state of mind, she contracted to buy Rupert House, making the first payment of £1,300 borrowed from Samuel. She had Sisters sign the loan.

Upon returning from Rome in April, Cornelia learned what Emily had done. The price of Rupert House shocked her. In September when the bill came for the rest of the amount, Emily sent it on to Cornelia because her “personal fortune” could not begin to cover the cost. Cornelia sent it back to her with a note asking where the Mother Superior was to find £5,300. The debt was Emily’s. She would have to abandon the purchase of Rupert House.

Now Emily added stealth to imprudence. Counting on the contribution from the CPSC and not wanting to lose Rupert House, she went in secret to a bank and borrowed £5,000 against the signature of her brother John, also a Protestant. At the same time, she contracted for various renovations to the house. To pay for them, she used the £1,300 which she had given to the Society and which secured the earlier debt to Samuel.

In December Cornelia went to Liverpool. Only then did she discover the extent to which Emily had indebted herself, and she removed her from office

In May the CPSC withdrew its offer of a subvention for the college because another congregation was able to establish the training college at its own expense. It was the deathblow to Emily’s project.

Things now went from bad to worse. The consequences of the Rupert House episode plagued Cornelia until 1871. To force the

Society to pay her debt to her brothers, Samuel and John, Emily withdrew from the Society and launched a bitter and ferocious campaign against Cornelia and the very existence of the Society. Its lawyer, George Eyston, a just and balanced man, and a friend of the Bowles family, recognized that Emily had absolutely no grounds for her claim on Cornelia. Already John had been given the right to take the house should Emily not be able to sell it. But Emily went to Grant and Wiseman with a packet of lies and convinced them that Cornelia had given permission for both loans and was now perfidiously denying her just debts. Emily so bullied Grant, always nervous where money was concerned, that he insisted that Cornelia assume what remained of the debt, £2,850, and over and above, lawyers' fees and interest. Cornelia managed to pay off the debt to Samuel in 1866 and to John, only in 1871.

Ironically, Emily tried twice to return to the Society. Cornelia did not want even to lay eyes on her for fear of her own reaction, but she wrote her a friendly letter proposing alternatives for a person of her talents and interests.

It would be difficult to exaggerate the damage Emily caused Cornelia in clerical and lay circles. She had connections on all sides and she systematically set out to destroy Cornelia, representing her as an unscrupulous woman, avid for power and rebellious.

Cornelia had more important things to do than defend her reputation. She was always a fighter when justice was involved, and she did fight Emily's demands for money, but she left her reputation in the hands of God. She found her consolation in "the humble and hidden life of the Holy Child Jesus."

*See reflection questions on page 177*



*Be yourselves,  
only make those selves all that God wants them to be. CC*

## *Cornelia the Educator*

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WE DO NOT KNOW MUCH about how Cornelia was educated. Tutors probably came to the house; she did not go to school or college but she was an educated person in every sense of the word. Cornelia was able to take advantage of everything the dynamic and culturally rich city of Philadelphia had to offer; she married an educated man and shared his ideas and interests. As a parent she studied her children to discover the secret of each one's originality; in Rome she was avid to learn from the people who surrounded her and from the very churches and museums and she studied Italian, painting, piano and voice. From her spiritual directors Cornelia learned about the spiritual life and at Grand Coteau and the Trinità she learned how to teach in a formal setting. We know Cornelia was thinking of opening a little school in Natchez to help provide for the family when they came back Catholics and certainly Cornelia learned a great deal through her contact with Emily Bowles, an experienced educator.

Cornelia's originality in the field of education consisted in her ability to absorb ideas from many people and places and combine them in a system completely her own. For example, she kept abreast of the best texts and educational theories, drawing from them whatever fit into her ever-evolving synthesis.

The object of her synthesis was the unique person, and her model, the incarnate Son of God—the Holy Child. Each person who passed through her hands was of infinite value, dignified by a shared humanity with this Child. Each one was destined to grow into an original variation on the model with talents and gifts just suited to that purpose. Cornelia, therefore, understood education as an organic incremental process in which each one's potential would gradually be called into realization until the plenitude ordained by God was reached. She took it for granted, therefore, that education began in the cradle and was life-long. The school years, the formal part of the process, were to be organized in such a way that body, mind and spirit found delight in becoming, and just the right stimulus to open up to the next stage of becoming. Graced with the Ignatian optic, Cornelia saw connections, not divisions; God in all things did away with false distinctions between sacred and secular. A geology lesson was as much about God as a religion lesson.

The year 1856 was a high point in the application of Cornelia's educational insights. She opened the teacher training college at St Leonards (formerly called All Souls). Already she had collected material for her future *Book of Studies*, a manual for teachers giving detailed directions for the teaching of each subject—so she knew precisely what she wanted to impart to the young student teachers. Through them, she would multiply her influence and diffuse her philosophy and methods in many directions.

Educational authorities noticed the success of the schools run by Holy Child Sisters in different places and the inspectors of Catholic schools praised their thoroughness and excellence. Cornelia was recognized as a pioneer, very sure in the methods she employed and systematically practical, even daring.

In a time when education for girls was generally superficial and banal, Cornelia conceived a way of educating that was integral and demanding. It included the subjects boys were expected to study. Once when a government examination sent watered-down questions to the girls in a subject studied by both girls and boys, Cornelia was indignant.

In the schools of the Society, each child learned through interacting with her peers. Recreation, spontaneous celebrations, games, outings, concerts and plays brought fun and variety to the school experience. Cornelia taught the children to meditate and they learned to recognize God's closeness in the chapel before the Blessed Sacrament and to carry that awareness to whatever activity awaited them outside. Each part of the day had its part to play in forming character and instilling values.



*St Leonards, 1887*

Cornelia wanted the learning process to be dynamic and lively, full of satisfaction for the children. The joy of mastering a single step brought its own reward. She placed special emphasis on the education of the senses and emotions. Art, music, movement and drama helped children to see, hear, taste and touch the beauty of the invisible hidden in the here and now.

The boarding school at St Leonards for upper and professional class pupils and the school for the middle classes, both on the same property (in England of the day, they could never be mixed together), served as proving grounds for Cornelia's educational theories. Al-

though the schools were separate, the children studied the same subjects, took the same examinations and reached equivalent levels of proficiency. Often, too, the children came together in the choir, at Mass, at games, and in dramatic productions.

Having been a mother, Cornelia knew how important a warm home atmosphere was for the happiness and growth of each child. In Cornelia's system, discipline was never rigid or hard but encouraging of self-discipline, integrity and honor. Trust was the corner stone of all her dealings. Throughout her religious life, with both religious and children, she projected a youthfully fun-loving, enthusiastic and infectious spirit. School was a happy place and the nuns made it so by their naturalness and affectionate way with their charges—as mothers with their dear children. But they were discouraged from creating dependencies and little cliques. They were to direct the



*St Leonards*

children's affections to God. If the model was the Holy Child Jesus, his attractiveness and his own reaching for growth and maturity, day by day and step by step, was to inform the growth of each child.

St Leonards was called specifically a "School of the Holy Child" because it was meant to be just that. It was the cradle of a typical spirit. But in all the schools inspired by Cornelia's methods, there could be found the same climate of happy diligence, freedom of spirit, affection, and desire to give of one's best on the part of teachers and pupils. To this day, in Holy Child schools, there's something of what an early St Leonards pupil called a spirit "delicious and heavenly". It is Cornelia's spirit and her legacy to us passed on from generation to generation, but very particularly through her educational vision.

*See reflection questions on page 178*

*Why are we not all saints?*

*Only because our hearts are not fixed on God. cc*

## *Cornelia and God*

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GOD WAS CORNELIA'S SECRET. Rarely did she allow any indication of what was going on in her inner world to escape her lips. Even so, her actions and reactions spoke and betrayed her secret. Her spontaneous response to whatever was happening to her is one clue to her inner world. The energy and perseverance with which she persisted in doing good is another. These two witnesses to Cornelia's interior life, one passive and the other active, lead to God known and loved in the intimacy of her soul.

Let us follow for a bit the path of the passive. We might call it the way of the crucified Christ. By this path, God came to Cornelia and she learned to welcome the mode of God's coming. Very early in her life Cornelia knew suffering—the loss of her father and soon the death of her mother and older brother and the break-up of the close family circle. Very probably her Protestant faith with its emphasis on Christ's redemptive sacrifice helped her to take up these crosses with Christian resignation, accepting them as God's providential will. Later, Cornelia lost the security, even the respectability, of the Episcopal Church, and her place in it as a minister's wife, and she suffered the shock and disapproval of those closest to her. She embraced these losses because they not only brought her into the arms of the Catholic Church but they put her more definitively with Christ on what *The Imitation* called “the royal road of the cross”. The tragic death of John Henry was preceded by a

moment of total self-offering: "Oh my God, if all this happiness is not for Thy greater glory ... take it from me". She was taught during those crucial forty-three hours of her son's dying in her arms that she in turn was held more closely than ever in the embrace of a compassionate God.

This last experience, lived as only a mother could live it, might have made Cornelia rebel against a divinity whose will demanded so tender a victim. Instead, she saw in John Henry that other Son allowed by that other Parent to share the lot of those he had made his own. From then on, the Cross was for Cornelia a place of meeting and a source of life. She discovered that suffering accepted in faith led to union with a God who accepted to suffer out of love. Joy was never far away.

Cornelia had much more to bear. Already we have seen what befell her at Derby and All Souls, how the Case turned a love match into a nightmare, how early friendships with Emily Bowles and Nicholas Wiseman cooled, and how financial constraints foiled some of her most cherished projects. By means of these trials, Cornelia found her way to the God within. Each new suffering only confirmed and deepened the bond of union.

It is impossible to penetrate the deepest secret of a person or to describe it. What was the color, the taste, the feel of Cornelia's inner life with God? Sometimes her vocabulary gives a hint. She loved the word "hidden". Other words appear frequently: "ardor", "union", "undivided heart", "simplicity", "accepted suffering" "truth", "delight", "sweetness", "joy", "silence", "attention", "humility", "peace", "beauty". These words point to something holy and at the same time comfortable and familiar, the furniture of her inner room. They signal a mutual love which goes beyond the power of words to express—a love that wants to pour itself out to the other and is realized only in that way. Surely Cornelia's married life with Pierce was a powerful symbol of what she came to know as union with God.

We notice too the things that appealed to Cornelia and drew her inward. Her devotions, for instance: the Blessed Sacrament, the Holy Child, the Sacred Heart, the cross, the Mother of Sorrows, Holy

Communion and the saints, especially Teresa, Francis, Ignatius, Catherine, and Gertrude. She spoke of her heart being in heaven and recognized in the liturgy of the Church and its feasts a “delicious” foretaste of heaven. Even Pius IX, was “a little bit of heaven gradually disappearing” after one of her conversations with him. For Cornelia these realities were tangible signs of God incarnate, God present, and God enticing her to “come to the waters” of her heart’s center. This particular combination of attractions lent color, taste and feeling to her unique way of experiencing the divine encounter.

Cornelia’s inevitable response to life’s contradictions was “*fiat*”, “yes, always yes”, “be it done as you will”. Far from being a type of fatalism, her response revealed the deepest attitude of her soul. It is as if she had said, “Here, in this moment, by means of this very thing which crosses my path, I say ‘yes’ with all my strength”. In the moment, she clung to Christ obedient unto death. And she did it again and again. It was her “way in” by means of the cross, her passive path to union. Paradoxically, this “way” led to the source of all her energy and prompted her to act with a boldness which shocked her critics and amazed her friends.

Now let us watch Cornelia as she takes the initiative and runs to meet God. In the going she traces a positive, active way of union. It is no less interior since it begins from an inner impulse prompted by the Spirit, goes forward in faith and ends in some work to advance God’s cause. Let us call it the way of the Child.

Cornelia gave birth five times. She knew that the experience of childbirth with its extreme pain gave way to euphoria and the feeling that something miraculous had occurred. Childbirth brought God very close. Cornelia was able to follow each step in the development of her children. She had time to contemplate the growth process and to observe the inner dynamic of each one. She knew that every child’s destiny and birthright was adulthood.

It is not through chance that Cornelia chose for her congregation the name Society of the Holy Child Jesus. The title may have been heard interiorly, but it also arose from her physical being. Her experience told her that children were a gift and manifestation of

God, and that the Holy Child was God's supreme gift. The Child made God accessible, welcoming and wholly lovable. Contemplating him, Cornelia was charmed by an all-powerful, eternal, invisible God who became a weak, limited infant, small enough to hold in one's hands. This Child God showed Cornelia another way of approaching him—the way of humility. Access to God by way of the Child was access to the God who acts, who moves everything from within, and who invites every person to the fullness of being. Union with God in the Child was the surest way to growth into the "full stature of Christ".

Cornelia's insight into the Incarnation as a process moving the whole of creation to its fullness made her a reverent observer of and enthusiastic participant in the action of God. Actions that harmonized with God's dynamic were holy—occasions of encounter and of union. So Cornelia's active love made her run along a positive way never losing sight of whose company she was in, always centered on God alone. "A love full of action" was what she asked and what she received in full measure.

Cornelia and God; God and Cornelia—an inseparable duo because early on Cornelia declared, "I belong all to God". It would be interesting to imagine a Cornelia never parted from Pierce, the two always in their Grand Coteau setting with their children at their side. She would not have suffered the same persecutions or left an institutional legacy like the Society of the Holy Child Jesus; but even so, her life would have been "hidden with Christ in God". It was her spiritual nature to be drawn that way. The effect of that conjunction of her soul with God would have enriched the Church in a different but no less real way. But God has purposes which sometimes can be seen only after the fact. We were given a very public Cornelia. She shows us at least two ways in to the God who awaits us in the secret of our own heart's core.

*See reflection questions on page 178*



*We are what we are in the sight of God,  
nothing more nor less. cc*

## *Cornelia, Who Do They Say You Are?*

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ONE OF CORNELIA'S BEST-KNOWN SAYINGS is "Be yourself, but make of that self all that God wants it to be." This combination of "be" and "make" gives us one key to understanding who Cornelia was. On the one hand, she was what her genes and the circumstances of her life determined—woman, Philadelphian, of the nineteenth century, Protestant, member of a comfortably-off family, gifted with beauty and intelligence, physically delicate, separated wife, founder, cosmopolitan, etc. In some of these matters, there is a dose of consent, of "make", but the initiative was not hers.

On the other hand, Cornelia was what she could "make" of herself: wife, mother, Catholic, religious, director of novices, business woman, spiritual guide, educator, author, artist, theatrical manager, litigant, administrator, musician, architect, builder, liturgist, negotiator, defender of just causes. Cornelia made herself all these things because she was a contemplative in action and radically open to whatever God called her to do.

But still we do not know her. What was her voice like, her laugh, her way of tilting her head to listen, the pace at which she walked, the speed with which she did things, her gestures and quirks, her posture in chapel, her manner in recreation, in the classroom? We



*Pope Gregory XVI*

have already seen how she looked as a bride. Now let us hear what people who knew her or lived with her had to say, and let us not forget her detractors.

As a schoolgirl and later as a member of the Society, Francis Bellasis knew Cornelia and loved her. She said that Cornelia had nothing of the coward in her. In fact, she totally disregarded what

others thought or said of her. She was brave to an extreme when a principle was at stake, or in pursuing a course of action she considered right, or in defending a member of the Society. Pierce had called her his “angel of a wife” and his “blessed little wife”. He had problems recognizing the intrepid, strong and independent woman she made of herself because of him. Although she was a fighter, she was no virago. Another of her companions said it would be impossible to convey in words the impression her radiant and joyful spirit made on others. The charm of her personality, her peacefulness and reverent way with others conveyed something of her presence to God. Someone who once heard her read the words “Christ has loved us with an everlasting love” never forgot her tone of voice, and the words left a lasting impression.

There is no doubt that Cornelia was lovely to look at, vivacious, entertaining and spontaneous, the “life and soul” of the community, but there was also about her a natural air of authority. One young woman, a past pupil, said that if Reverend Mother asked her to kiss her feet, she would have to do it. Francis Bellasis’ father, a well-known Serjeant-at-Law who sent four of his daughters to St Leonards, said that if he had a hundred daughters, he would give them all into Cornelia’s hands to be educated. But Cornelia’s innate authority, so necessary to the good beginning of the Society and to the maintenance of its unity as problems cropped up, came to be seen as an impediment by a small group of disaffected members. Behind her back, they accused her of being arbitrary and authoritarian. The loyal majority saw it differently. As she aged, Cornelia’s calm dignity and peaceful bearing amidst great trials seemed to them wholly appropriate to one long in authority.

Cornelia’s mere presence often affected people deeply. A former pupil remembering her school days at St Leonards, spoke of Cornelia’s striking personality, her marvelous love of God, and the power of her influence for good. Novices used to steal into the chapel just to watch her kneeling in adoration. They had the impression that she passed her days in a state of continual prayer. One Protestant

minister was actually converted to the Catholic faith listening to her sing in church. There was a spiritual quality to her voice which cut to the heart.

We have seen Cornelia's persevering, persistent, even stubborn side. Time and again she exercised her legitimate authority to defend the Society which the Pope himself had placed in her hands. Her sense of responsibility sometimes put her on a collision course with bishops. As an American in a country not her own, a country which nearly condemned her to return to her apostate husband, she had to be strong. Newman, who when he first met her recognized her as "an enthusiastic person in the best sense," changed his mind when his friend Emily Bowles fell from grace. Then, Cornelia became "that Yankee". At first Wiseman admired her and probably had much to do with her being called by Gregory XVI to found the Society. But later he had some terrible things to say about her: In his eyes, she was ungovernable, power hungry, dominating, and to sum it all up, American. With Cornelia, yes was yes, and no was no. She was direct, and this earned her other damning words from Emily's brothers: "insolent", and "despotic". Bishop Ullathorne wrote that Cornelia had to be controlled with a strong hand; "rosewater" would have no effect on her. A Devil's Advocate need not look far for other harsh judgments on Cornelia. In the mouths of her critics, she comes across as a thoroughly disagreeable person.

This "bold" woman managed to plot a straight course between praise and blame, admiration and contempt. Like an arrow to its target, she kept herself steady and focused on a single point, God alone.

Who are you, Cornelia? She wastes no time trying to tell us. Ask elsewhere, she says, because I belong wholly to God. And God readily answers: Cornelia is a woman who made of herself all that I wanted her to be.

*See reflection questions on page 179*

*Let us be just as glad in adversity as in prosperity.* cc

## *Ten Years of Ups and Downs and a Duchess*

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THE TEN YEARS THAT FOLLOWED THE DEPARTURE of Emily Bowles from the Society saw a spurt of growth, a number of threats to the Society's stability, and a fateful encounter between Cornelia and the eccentric Duchess of Leeds.

Growth was owing to the increased number of vocations and the success of the Society's educational apostolate in different parts of England. New schools opened or were staffed by Holy Child Sisters in Blackpool, Preston, and London, and an orphanage began near St Leonards. The Society acquired a ruined palace in Mayfield, and Cornelia took a giant step when she sent a first contingent of Sisters to America in 1862. For the school children, Cornelia produced a book of meditations and for the teachers, a *Book of Studies*.

Threats abounded. The diffusion of the Society to new areas and the damage caused by Emily highlighted the urgent need for a rule approved by Rome. Without such approval, the Society was vulnerable to the whim of whoever wished it ill. Wiseman, influenced by Emily's lies, tried to convince the authorities in Rome to impose on the Society an already existing rule. He proposed that the Society be broken up into diocesan units with Cornelia as a mere figurehead. Only the intervention of other bishops saved the unity of the Society and defended its right to a rule of its own.

In 1858 a newly ordained priest arrived at St Leonards and was appointed to the mission. The Rev Mr Foy was 23 years old and would become one of Cornelia's worst enemies. He immediately identified with Dr Duke and his campaign against Cornelia, the convent and the Towneley Trust. Duke convinced both Foy and Grant that the Society had an obligation to build a church for the mission on the foundation left by Mr Jones. Urged on by Foy, he sent eight indignant letters to Rome insisting that Propaganda Fide order Cornelia under pain of sanctions to pay the cost of the construction. As a form of coercion, Grant suspended any further vows in the Society. Wiseman added his voice to the chorus, convinced that Cornelia had dictated to Towneley the terms of the Trust. When Cornelia received from Propaganda an order to obey and build the church for the mission, Towneley stepped in and blocked any such action. It violated the terms of a Trust protected by the civil law of the realm. Rome could not interfere with it. Cornelia was brought to a standstill, powerless to obey Rome because she was bound by the Trust. The altercation dragged on and on as orders and counter-orders flew back and forth. Duke, Foy, Grant, Wiseman and Propaganda in Rome all joined forces, but Towneley and the Trust were protected by the laws of England. At last, the convent chaplain, Mr Searle, a man who understood Cornelia's predicament and recognized Towneley's claims, went to Rome with Bishop Roskell, a trustee, and put Propaganda straight. The Trust, he said, was guaranteed *in perpetuo* by the civil law and the Church had no right to intervene. Already the convent had been overly generous to the mission, he said.

At last, in 1864, Propaganda realized it had been seriously misled by Duke backed by Foy, Grant and Wiseman. It took Cornelia's part against her detractors. Wiseman's only comment when Propaganda reversed its stance was to say that he had not correctly understood the situation. Cornelia was vindicated but that was not the happy end of the story. Foy survived all the other actors in the affair and was able to perpetuate among the clergy of the diocese the worst possible image of Cornelia.



*Cornelia in 1860*

In 1858, the Privy Council dropped the case of Connelly vs Connelly because Cornelia paid Pierce's court costs. Otherwise he might have been carried off to jail. He then left England definitively taking Ady and Frank with him. He went to Belgium and finally, after disappearing from view for ten years, put down roots in Florence. There he assumed the rectorship of the American Episcopal Church and never that we know of returned to England. Cornelia never saw him again and never stopped praying for him. At one point she heard a rumor that he was seeking to divorce her, but nothing came of it.

In the same year that the Case ended Cornelia reached a ruinous settlement with the Bowles brothers. Such were Emily's threats to Grant—the "swift justice of the Times"—if he did not force Cornelia to cover all her debts to them, that he collapsed from sheer terror and ordered her to pay a truly unjust sum of money.

### *The Duchess*

In 1860, Louisa Catherine, Duchess of Leeds, entered Cornelia's story. She was both benefactress and bother. American and very Catholic, the duchess was one of three famous nieces—the three graces—of Charles Carroll, signer of the Declaration of Independence. All three married into English nobility. Louisa was twice widowed and passing the winter in the fashionable seaside town of St Leonards when she met Cornelia, probably through going to Mass in the convent. Attracted to Cornelia and to religious life, the Duchess, then sixty-seven years old, became a frequent visitor and finally asked to join the Society. Wisely, Cornelia refused. But when Lady Stafford, Louisa's sister, died Cornelia offered to make space for her in the convent as a lady boarder. The duchess sold her coach and horses, gave the money to the poor and began to live what she considered the frugal life of a nun. Nevertheless, she required for her breakfast the recently laid egg of one of her own chickens segregated from



the convent chickens. And each morning, she needed two hours to achieve the proper toilette of a woman of her class.

The Duchess was autocratic, unpredictable, erratic and generous on her own terms. She remained under Cornelia's roof for the rest of her days, a figure out of *Alice in Wonderland*. When a niece of Cornelia's arrived from the United States on a visit, the idea of making a foundation there took shape. The duchess had properties in Pennsylvania, and the parish priest on her land had asked her to build a school next to the chapel. It would be an ideal place for the Society's first foundation in America. Louisa offered the property to Cornelia along with the rents from the land. Her land agent in America assured her that the house on the property was in perfect condition. All that was lacking then, was Bishop Grant's permission.

Grant, always afraid of falling into debt, refused to let the venture go forward. Who would pay the maintenance of the Sisters? Already running the diocese on a shoestring, he did not want any new financial burdens. Under Cornelia's urgings—to the point of stubbornness—he yielded a bit, laying down strict conditions. The Sisters would need permission from their parents, and he would not be held responsible for their support, nor once departed would



*Louisa Catherine, Duchess of Leeds*

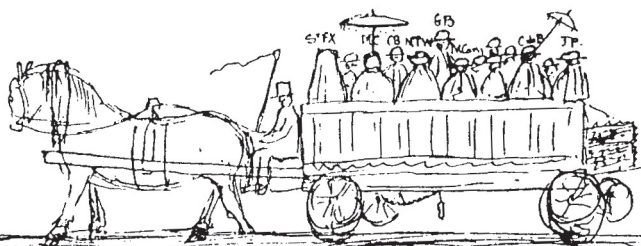
they be allowed to return. When Cornelia managed to fulfill all his conditions, he could refuse no longer.

On August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1862, six Sisters sailed from Liverpool on the *Scotia* bound for New York. After a series of amusing adventures, they arrived at Towanda in Pennsylvania to discover that their new home was a shack with a broken roof already occupied by rats and spiders. In the pioneering spirit bred in them by Cornelia, they good-humouredly made the place habitable and prepared to receive their first pupils. On the appointed day not a single one arrived. The duchess' wonderful gift was a mere phantasm. The coming winter would be very cold and would test the Sisters' courage to the limit. But they would endure and manage to establish themselves at a high cost physically and with very little help from the parish priest.

Others of the duchess' schemes ended differently. Always moved by the sad situation of orphans, Louisa bought a large house and opened an orphanage near St Leonards. She prevailed on Cornelia to staff it with Holy Child Sisters until a robbery and profanation



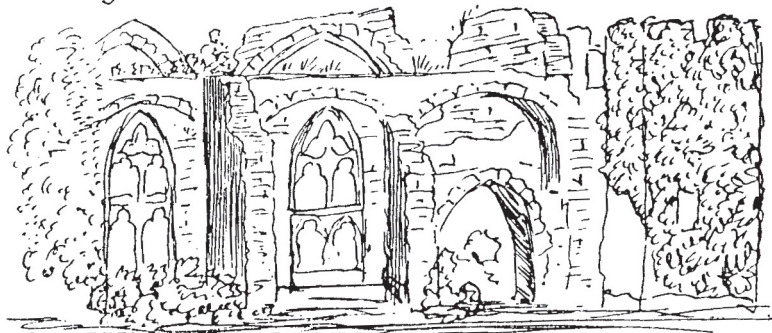
*Towanda, Pennsylvania*



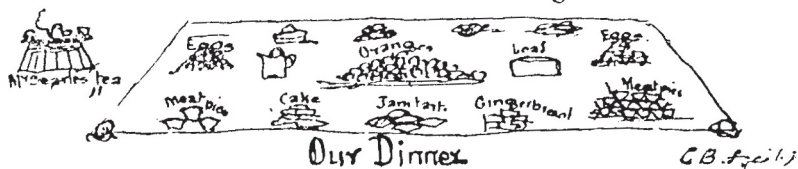
Another of the carriages, containing Dr F Xavier M Christian MT Weld, May  
Corry Jane Power, Camille de Bou ay, Henriette Exclody, Gabrielle  
Bedingsfeld, Julia Gonzalez Clossy Walmsley Catherine Lambert  
d Cecie Bellasism The trampers etc



Walkers. Catherine Harper M Deavle Mary Alfico, Theresa d'Arcy  
Mary d'Arcy, B de Castro Dr Angelica Julia Eyre Florence Colegrave



The old Palace . Mayfield . The refectory



of the chapel led to its transfer to a more distant location. There, Louisa built on a royal scale with no thought of the cost. As the buildings were going up, Louisa was heard to remark, "I will build a better church than *hers* [Cornelia's]. *I* will have marble pillars." She left the huge institution to the Society but without provision for the maintenance of the orphans.

One day, the convent chaplain, Mr Searle, discovered in the village of Mayfield not very far from St Leonards a large property with a farm and the ruins of an ancient palace. It had been the summer residence and Synod Hall of the Archbishops of Canterbury. Searle asked the Duchess to buy it and give it to Grant for a seminary. The Duchess fell in love with it and was on the point of buying it, but Grant turned it down. Some time later, Searle suggested to Cornelia that Mayfield be the destination of the annual Pentecost picnic. So they all set out—Searle, Cornelia, and the whole school—by train, horse-drawn wagons and on foot. The Mayfield picnic was a huge success and became an annual event. Cornelia too fell in love with the place, and Searle suggested that she buy it herself. She was interested. It would serve as a novitiate for the growing Society, a source of food for St Leonards, and a refuge if All Souls were ever taken over by the mission. With her council Cornelia studied how it might be financed, and they decided to ask Grant's permission to buy. His answer was a flat "no" and Cornelia obediently backed down. The Duchess, incensed by her "inexplicable weakness," bought it and decided to farm the land herself. Knowing nothing of agriculture, she had no idea where to begin. So she offered the property first to the Jesuits, then to the Benedictines, and finally to Grant. At that point, Grant did an about-face and told the Duchess to offer it to Cornelia. This she did, but on the one condition that Cornelia restore the Synod Hall and Palace to their former glory. Cornelia accepted the challenge and Mayfield—ruined Palace, farm and outbuildings—passed to the Society and became its mother-house for years to come.

With great solemnity, Grant blessed the ruins and their surroundings. A little group of Sisters took possession of the farmer's

little villa, and Cornelia contracted a leading architect of the Gothic Revival, Edward Welby Pugin, to restore the buildings. To finance the project, she sent Sisters out across Europe to beg, two by two and on foot. Catholics were asked to help return one of the jewels of pre-Reformation England to the Catholic fold, and they responded generously. She also launched a raffle and sent out 80,000 books of tickets. Even the Pope contributed a raffle prize, a “Mosaic Brooch Mounted in Fine Gold”. Other prizes included an Alderney cow and calf. Returns were so heavy that each morning they had to be delivered from the post office to the convent in a wheelbarrow.

In 1864, Cornelia was 55 years old. In the account of her life prepared for her canonization, there appears the following summary



*Ruins of the Old Palace at Mayfield Sussex, formerly the residence of the Archbishops of Canterbury.*

of these past ten years: “For most of [this time] she has been Superior General, local superior, principal of a teacher training college, and visitor to houses in London and the north. She has composed a *Book of Studies*, wrestled with constitutions, borne the financial brunt of the Bowles affair and Pierce’s suit, made foundations in America,





*Ruins of the Old Palace at Mayfield Sussex*

launched a massive restoration project and undergone the anguish and impotence of the St Leonards property dispute. Perhaps her greatest trials have been the calumnies of foes, the accusations of one-time friends, and the impugning of her honor .... Not gifted with robust health, she has kept going steadily. Amidst her labors and difficulties, she has managed to convey to sisters, students and school children the impression of serene joy and enthusiastic zeal.”

The path ahead will be no less steep.

*See reflection questions on page 180*

*How full of sorrow is this passing world,  
and yet how full of joy in the depths of sorrow. cc*

## *The Ever-evolving Rule*

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THE SUBJECT OF THE RULE IS NOT AN ENGROSSING ONE for someone who is not a member of the Society, but it is not possible to walk in Cornelia's footsteps without taking into account its importance to her. If God was the axis around which her life revolved, the rule was her never-ending task. The life and death of the Society depended on Rome's approval of the rule and its acceptance by the membership.

One of Cornelia's great problems was how to combine in one rule her vision as founder, all that experience had taught her of religious life, and everything that Rome required for approval. Another problem was her need to work with consultants in Rome without being able to consult at the same time with the Sisters back home to keep them informed, step by step, about any required changes. The result was incomprehension and sometimes resistance when Cornelia had to introduce some unwelcome or unfamiliar element.

Cornelia was not an elected Superior General. Wiseman had appointed her in 1847 and no chapter had been allowed subsequently, so she was obliged to continue in office indefinitely. Her authority was never confirmed by the membership. She recognized that the Society urgently needed an approved rule to provide structures for good government, regular elections, role descriptions and terms of office.

When Searle went to Rome in 1864 to defend the Towneley Trust, he took with him on Cornelia's behalf a rule translated into Italian in which she had added provisions for provinces, chapters (deliberative bodies) and elections along with terms of office. He left the packet in the porter's office at the English College to be delivered to someone from Propaganda. It sat there for five years, never opened, never read.

Again and again Cornelia begged Grant to authorize the holding of a General Chapter to give voice to the members of the Society, but Grant consistently refused. His reason was that there was no constitutional provision for a chapter because there was no approved rule.

Meanwhile, we remember that back in 1854 Grant sent Cornelia to Rome on the pretext of revising her rule. Afterwards, Fransoni had forwarded to Grant and Wiseman the consultants' comments, but these were never acted upon nor were they passed on to Cornelia. Now, ten years later, Grant decided to share them with her, urging her to get on with the job of revision.

In America, the Society was growing but not without complications and some friction with Bishop Wood of Philadelphia. There came a moment when he proposed separating the Society in America from England, reducing it to a diocesan group, but he met with such resistance from the Sisters that he had to back down. This was but one more reason why Cornelia needed a rule which would guarantee unity and the security of a strong central government. Otherwise, bishops could simply carve off from the main body the Sisters in their dioceses. In general, bishops tended to want unlimited control over the religious in their sectors and not have to deal with superiors outside their jurisdiction.

Finally, in May 1869, Grant once more sent Cornelia to Rome, this time with a rule that incorporated all the corrections proposed after her 1854 visit. Cornelia had spent four years working to bring this draft to perfection and she had added new legislation on the vows as required by Grant. She took with her to Rome two companions and favorable testimonies from bishops in whose dioceses



Holy Child Sisters were working. On arrival, she visited the English College and found there the unopened packet containing the Italian rule left there five years earlier. It was no use crying; there was work to be done. It would take two months. Copying and recopying texts in English and Italian was drudgery, but Cornelia was thrilled to be in Rome again and took every opportunity to revisit her favorite haunts.

The consultor assigned her by Propaganda was a Franciscan priest who took a very positive view of the proposed rule. He declared himself impressed by Cornelia's readiness to take his suggestions, and together they brought the text to what he said was "perfection". There were some changes she had to make but disliked because they went against the open family spirit and the trust which prevailed in the communities of the Society. The Church required a more rigid rule of enclosure, a more marked division between the Sisters who did domestic work and those who had more education, and it wanted stricter vigilance. Cornelia had to accept these requirements or lose the chance to achieve at last Rome's much needed approval. So she signed the rule and would eventually have to secure the signatures of each of the professed Sisters—a requirement of Propaganda, and a good one.

Before leaving Rome, Cornelia had a final audience with Pius IX. She and her companions sat with him and answered his many questions. They took away with them his blessing and his consoling assurance that "Propaganda is looking over your rule and doing for you".

Upon her return, Cornelia read aloud to some of the superiors from her own copy of the revised rule, not asking for comments or making explanations. Grant, aware that he was very ill with cancer, was so anxious to leave the Society provided with a fully approved rule that he impressed upon Cornelia the need to have the text translated into English. Then, as soon as the official version arrived from Rome, the Sisters could sign it and bring the process to a close.

In February 1870, Cornelia was in France hoping to establish a permanent foundation, when the rule arrived from Propaganda

in Italian. She was surprised by several new articles to do with the authority of bishops over the religious in their dioceses. Worried that this might lead to a loss of unity in the Society, she asked the superiors to consult with experts in church law. She sent from France copies of the rule in English and, remembering Grant's anxieties, asked the superiors to read the rule aloud to their communities without soliciting comments. In this way she hoped there would be nothing to impede the signing of the rule for Propaganda. Cornelia's long desired goal of an approved rule to secure the Society's future was just within reach. It was, alas, destined to elude her once again.

Other happenings between the years 1864 and 1870 provide us with a context for what was going on with the rule. The Society grew rapidly in America. The severe climate in Towanda caused the death of one Sister and frequent illnesses among the others. The valiant community tried to hang on but the hardships of the place defeated them, and finally they had to move to Philadelphia. The first profession of an American Sister in 1867 seemed to justify the hope that the Society would put down roots in American soil and the rapid acquisition of a boarding school in Sharon Hill near Philadelphia, a parochial school and a day school in the city, indicated that Holy Child Sisters were gaining a reputation as fine educators.

An imminent crisis at Sharon Hill brought about Cornelia's one visit to America in October 1867. Besides resolving the crisis, she acquired St Leonard's day school for the Society and had the joy of family reunions on all sides. Especially moving were two visits with her sister Mary, now Mother Peacock, RSCJ. They knew they would not meet again. Cornelia was delighted with her two nieces, Cornelia and Bella, children of her brother Ralph. They were at school at Sharon Hill, and she invited them to come to school at St Leonards in England. They would return with her and remain for two years. Her visit was short because she became dangerously ill with a lung infection and had to go home earlier than she had planned. The suddenness of her departure without seeing Bishop Wood, who was in New York at the time, offended him. He blamed her for a want of respect. It was not until she appointed a new Vicar

for the American branch that old antagonisms were patched up. Wood then became a staunch friend to the Society.

During this period, death removed both Duke and Wiseman from the scene. In America, Cornelia's beloved brother Ralph died while Bella and Cornelia, his daughters, were with their aunt in England. When in 1870 Cornelia went to France chiefly for reasons of health, they went with her. She spent most of the six months in the seaside town of Hyères, either in bed or in a wheel chair, but she managed nevertheless to supervise their studies and was cheered by their presence.

Grant continued fearful as always. He discovered that some of the Sisters at St Leonards had been allowed to swim in the sea and put a stop to it. Salt water in the bath would do just as well, he said ... and the pupils at St Leonards were reported to be dancing the polka and the waltz as well as playing whist, all with the consent of the Sisters. Dancing was forbidden forthwith, and whist restricted to holiday time under the Sisters' supervision.

Three great events, however, marked these years, all having to do with churches. In 1865 Edward Welby Pugin completed the restoration of the Synod Hall at Mayfield. It became the chapel of the convent and as such brought to light the unsuspected elegance of the medieval structure. Thanks to the duchess, to Cornelia, to Pugin, and to all who contributed to the project, it remains to this day an architectural gem of the south of England.

In the second case, Cornelia's desire to satisfy some of the demands of the mission at St Leonards led her to contribute £1,500



*The restored Synod Hall at Mayfield*

toward the construction of a church for the Catholics of the area just outside the convent grounds. The dedication of this church in 1866 was a gala moment, but Foy, the mission chaplain, still looking for ways to bring Cornelia low, managed to secure from Propaganda an order which prohibited any lay person from attending Mass in the convent chapel. It was an absurd ruling.

The third event was the most joyous of all, the dedication in 1868 of the church at All Souls built upon the foundation left by Mr Jones. The night before the dedication, Cornelia and a young Sister went into the dark church to make sure that everything was ready for the next day's ceremony. Overcome with emotion, Cornelia burst into song and went on singing, hymn after hymn, filling all the space with her lovely voice. This church became the center of the liturgical life of generations of St Leonards pupils and Sisters. It was also to be the site of the Duchess of Leeds' splendid funeral in 1874.

Finally, Cornelia's family in these years ... In 1868 Pierce became rector of the American Episcopal Church in Florence. Frank and Ady lived with him, and he would remain at his post until he died in 1883, four years after Cornelia.

In 1867, just as Cornelia was about to travel to America, Frank went to England to visit her. He was then a handsome 27 year-old and an emerging sculptor. As far as we know, he had not seen Cornelia since 1846. He stayed with her for eight days and together they visited Mayfield, London, and Hornby Castle, the duchess' home in the north. A Sister was with Cornelia in Victoria Station where Frank took leave of his mother. She remembered that for a long time after, Cornelia sat mutely while the tears ran down her cheeks and formed a little pool in her lap. There would be one further meeting between mother and son, a sad one.

Adeline, a convinced Protestant, stayed at her father's side and cared for him until he died. She went once to visit family in Philadelphia and was reported by them to be surprisingly immature and ill provided for, for a young woman her age. She would see her mother once, and after Pierce's death come back to the Catholic Church.

*See reflection questions on page 181*

*Try to be just in your judgments, my dear one. cc*

## *An Uncivil War*

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WE ARE NOW ENTERING THE FINAL STAGE of Cornelia's life. It is perhaps the most painful both spiritually and physically. Once more the rule takes center stage, this time as the cause of division within the Society. A group of Sisters in the north take matters into their own hands and bring about a near schism.

In the town of Preston, the Society had charge of three well-run parochial schools. The Catholics in the north, culturally distanced from their counterparts to the south, were tenacious of their own tradition and interconnected among themselves. They are the ones who as a group most staunchly kept the faith during the centuries of persecution and they were proud of it.

In Preston there existed a network of connections among some of the Sisters, their Jesuit brothers, the priests of the sector and the bishop of Liverpool, Alexander Goss. A priest brother of one of the Sisters was in the Vatican, well placed to relay gossip. Cornelia had long been aware that in Preston a certain professionalism and what she called a "schoolmistress spirit" among the Sisters had taken hold and obscured some of the root values of religious life, but she miscalculated the degree of alienation that had already set in. Their physical and psychological distance from St Leonards and Mayfield over a period of years had caused some of these women to view Cornelia as remote, arbitrary and out of touch with their interests and concerns. In the widening affective gap, suspicions and misinterpretations bred easily. It should not be surprising that in Liverpool,

Emily had made a confederate of Bishop Goss over the Rupert House debacle and its aftermath, already prejudicing him against Cornelia. And two of the superiors in Preston had been with Emily since the beginning. Their sympathies merged and meshed. So the stage was already set for what came to be called the “Preston Cabal”.

When the Sisters received the latest edition of the rule sent by Cornelia from Hyères, it looked different in size, shape and format. The order of its contents was different and there were new articles about government, the vows and lifestyle which felt alien. This strange new rule was all that several of the disaffected superiors in Preston needed to mobilize a campaign against Cornelia.

The most neuralgic issue was that of the vows. In 1859, Grant had removed from the formula of vows the word “perpetual” which had canonical [legal] force, but he allowed the words “I promise to live and die in it [the Society]” which had the force of a promise only. The revised rule of 1869 provided for perpetual vows after a period of nine years under temporary vows, and it made the Preston group, especially, wake up to the fact that vows made since 1859 had been only temporary from a canonical point of view. Up to then, they had made no distinction between a vow and a promise, and Cornelia insisted that from the beginning the intention was always to be vowed for life. But the Preston group claimed that the omission of the word “perpetual” had been a strategy to give Cornelia the freedom to dismiss without recourse. They said that they were, therefore, at the mercy of her whim and unchecked authority.

It seems that the other communities accepted what Rome required about the rule, some with more, some with less satisfaction. And the Sisters simply signed their acceptance. But in Preston, there was a delay. It was 1870, and Grant was in Rome to attend the First Vatican Council but, as we have seen, he was ill and now very near death. Reacting to his heavy pressure for the signatures, Cornelia in turn, wrote several peremptory letters to Preston which were deeply resented. Her natural respect for the Sisters’ freedom of conscience was momentarily eclipsed by the sense of urgency transmitted by Grant.

Now, in Preston, the network of Holy Child Sisters, diocesan priests, Jesuits, and families of the Sisters went into action. The town was buzzing with rumors, and Cornelia was branded as autocrat and despot. Two of the superiors, Alphonsa Kay and Lucy Wooley, decided to take matters into their own hands. They would sign the rule as required and have the Sisters do the same, but before sending their signatures to Propaganda, they would dispatch to Rome a formal protest saying that they were sending their signatures under duress from Cornelia. They asked Propaganda to suspend the process of approval and send someone to England to investigate the government of the Society.

Not long after, Cornelia went to Preston on a formal visit. The community received her amicably without a word about the rule. Cornelia did not bring it up thinking that all had signed and that the matter was settled. She returned to St Leonards in the dark about what had happened.

Grant died in Rome before the end of the Council. For Cornelia his death was a sad personal loss, but for the rule, a disaster. The Preston Cabal became still more active. With the support of Bishop Goss, Alphonsa Kay sent to Barnabo, Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda, a long, detailed and very critical memorandum about Cornelia's government and her "limitless authority". She included criticisms of the revised rule.

All during 1871, there was a steady flow of letters and representations to Rome from Goss, Alphonsa Kay and Lucy Wooley. Goss visited the three communities in Preston, the center of opposition to Cornelia, and sent to Rome very negative observations about the government of the Society. To Cornelia he wrote that he was "well satisfied" with all that he had seen.

A final protest in May 1871 signed by five Sisters was sent to Propaganda. The signatories, however, did not take into account the conscience of a young religious named Agatha Gray. She had signed the rule under Alphonsa's influence, but in fact she did not approve the revised rule and should have withheld her signature. She knew that her endorsement of the protest an-



*Cornelia in 1863*

nulled her signature, but realized she had not been straight with Cornelia. By way of confession, she sent Cornelia the note she had given to Alphonsa for Propaganda annulling her signature along with her heartfelt apology: "Really dearest, I feel I shall never get this out of my mind ... I am ashamed of myself." This was the first Cornelia knew of the machinations that had gone on behind her back. She confided to an old friend, "It is the duplicity with which the one in authority acted, withholding the truth from me.... It is the want of truth I complain of and the betrayal of all trust in them."

*See reflection questions on page 182*



*Do not allow your heart to be wounded, & if it is wounded in spite of your efforts, stitch up the wound with the love of God. cc*

## *Enter Bishop Danell*

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DURING THE FIRST PART OF THE 70s Cornelia was ignorant of the intrigues of Lucy and Alphonsa in Preston. She was busy with a new foundation in Toul, France. Why France? Because the Church in France had been heroic in the midst of persecution, and she wanted the Society to absorb its spirit. And she had been formed as a new Catholic by French religious and priests and had been nurtured in the French school of spirituality both at Grand Coteau and the Trinità. She was a great admirer of the French clergy and tended to compare them favorably with what she had met so often in England—a Jones, a Sing, a Foy, a Hogan, not to mention several bishops.

Unfortunately, the school in Toul was barely established when the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 broke out. Toul was in Lorraine, just on the line of combat between the French and German armies. As the town came under siege, women and children were allowed to evacuate to safety. The Sisters and pupils made their way through enemy lines hidden in farm carts and arrived safely in Paris. Once the war was over, they returned to put down permanent roots in France, to Cornelia's great satisfaction.

In 1871, Grant's successor, James Danell, took up his post. He had been Grant's vicar so he was already somewhat familiar with the Society and would now be Cornelia's bishop until she died. Their relationship would not be an easy one, but Cornelia would be un-

failingly, almost foolishly loyal, and never would she compromise her obedience to him.

In his first months as bishop, Danell received complaints about Cornelia and her government from Sisters in Preston, from Goss and from some of the domestic Sisters offended by their separation from the “choir” sisters required by the 1869 rule. One of them called Cornelia a stepmother. As soon as she learned through Agatha Gray of the climate of opposition in Preston, Cornelia informed Danell and asked him to make a formal visit to the communities and to secure the swift approval of the rule in order to avert an imminent schism.

In spite of this new cloud over the Society in England, its work continued to prosper. A boarding school opened in Blackpool, new schools for the poor in Preston, and a boarding school at Mayfield where the restoration of the palace was the next project. Only for lack of money did an invitation to establish a teacher training college in London come to nothing. Once again!

Then in 1872, Cornelia went north and spent several weeks visiting the schools and consulting with the Sisters. She had received a number of petitions to remove Lucy Wooley from the office of superior over the three communities in Preston, and from her self-appointed role as supervisor of the schools. This Cornelia did. The consequences were not long in coming. Amidst protests from Lucy's supporters, Goss issued a decree to Cornelia forbidding her to change a superior without his consent. So Lucy remained. This intervention on Goss's part put him at odds with Danell's authority as bishop of the motherhouse. It also highlighted the anomalous situation of a congregation united under a single head but dispersed in dioceses whose bishops claimed authority over the Sisters. When Cornelia asked Goss for an appointment to speak to him about the protests sent to Rome, he pleaded illness, but he sent a message through his vicar that he knew nothing of any protests or of any disaccord between the Sisters and herself.

In the south, Danell made his formal visits to the houses under his jurisdiction and spoke to each Sister in strictest confidentiality.

His questions to them derived from the complaints made to him from the Preston dissidents. He had, for instance, already heard from the Jesuit Provincial complaints channeled to him through Preston Jesuits. Moreover, a former Provincial and old friend of Cornelia's had said to him that the beginnings of the Society were very irregular and that the foundress was a married woman who could not find in the whole Church a congregation that suited her, so she had founded her own. This remark is typical of the misinformation that was being propagated on all sides.



*James Danell, 2nd Bishop of Southwark*

Through his visits, Danell discovered that there was not much support for the revised rule, so he decided to restore for the moment the rule with which each sister had been familiar since 1861. It was, with a few additions, the first part of the rule Cornelia had taken to Rome in 1854. Danell also told Cornelia that there was to be a General Chapter in August. This was wonderful news. At last, the Society would have a properly constituted government. Danell's plan was to revise the 1869 rule

to the Sisters' satisfaction with the help of his canon lawyer, and have it ready in time for the chapter.

Meanwhile, Frank came to visit his mother again and stayed for three days at St Leonards. We do not know what his purpose was nor what they talked about, but one Sister who witnessed Frank's departure, heard him arguing with Cornelia and saying that she

loved the Sisters more than she loved him. Cornelia pleaded, "O Frank, Frank, that's not true". Then he bolted down the stairs kicking



*Frank and Adeline aged 18 and 23*

his suitcase ahead of him. Cornelia called after him, "Frank, come back, come back!" He left in anger and never saw his mother again. It may be that he had come to ask for part of the money Isabella Montgomery had left to Ady, because she left nothing for him.

Danell's behavior now became curiously contradictory. After his visits, he suspended Rome's ruling which would keep the domestic sisters apart from the choir sisters, and he allowed them to join together for recreation more frequently. But he had Cornelia set aside for them a separate community room. When she did so, the sisters blamed Cornelia and

complained to Danell. Although the directive had been his, Danell allowed the sisters to think ill of Cornelia. In another instance he decreed that only the superiors should be called to the chapter meeting, and Cornelia faithfully carried out his order. A while later, he accused her of not providing for elected delegates. Instead of laying the blame for the confusion on him, Cornelia took it upon herself.

Because of this confusion over who should come to the chapter, the date was postponed time and again. In the interim, Danell went secretly to Preston to consult over the changes he had made in the

1869 revised rule. He approved Lucy's and Alphonsa's recourse to Propaganda and took their part. But he also decided that the Society needed a totally new and different rule and he would need time to compose it. So, leaving Cornelia in the dark as to his intentions, he postponed the chapter for two years but allowed Cornelia to go on begging him to fix a date.

She tried to extend a hand to Lucy Wooley after her betrayal, but Lucy acknowledged no wrongdoing and therefore needed no forgiveness. Then Cornelia invited her to spend Christmas at St Leonards and enjoy a holiday, but she declined on grounds of ill health.

In 1873, Cornelia's beloved sister Mary Peacock died after a long and holy life as a religious of the Sacred Heart. The next year, the duchess, reduced to a state of dementia and more arbitrary than ever, died at St Leonards leaving directions for a funeral more splendid than that of her sister, Lady Stafford. In her will she left not a penny to support the great works she had left in the hands of the Society. Bishop Goss also died, but his successor, Bishop O'Reilly, inherited his prejudices against Cornelia.

O'Reilly imposed his authority in such a manner that Cornelia could not transfer a Sister in his diocese from one community to another, and it was doubtful that he would allow anyone to attend the General Chapter. Against the advice of a brother bishop who clearly said it was beyond his jurisdiction, he allowed attendance at the chapter conditionally: the three Preston communities were to be amalgamated, Lucy was to be removed from office and superiors were to be named only with his consent. Cornelia complied to the letter. When Lucy, relieved of office, withdrew from the Society she joined the ranks of Cornelia's overt opponents.

By the eve of the chapter, Cornelia was an ill and exhausted woman. On all sides the perspective seemed one of failure and hostility. Her heart should not have been able to bear much more. In fact, she had hidden resources which enabled her to suffer without intermission and give without reserves. She awaited the long-desired chapter in hope and in peace.

*See reflection questions on page 183*

*I have begun the work, others will bring it to perfection. cc*

## *The First General Chapter and After*

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IN AUGUST 1874 THE DELEGATES ARRIVED AT ST LEONARDS to attend the first General Chapter in the Society's history. They came from America, France and, of course, England. They were nineteen in all, with equal rights to speak and vote. Included in the group were Lucy Wooley and Alphonsa Kay from Preston. Danell presided over the chapter with Bosio, his expert in church law by his side. There were two great tasks to accomplish—the election of the Superior General and council and deliberations over the controversial revised rule of 1869.

On the first day, Cornelia was elected Superior General in the first balloting—fifteen votes for, four against her. It is not difficult to guess where those four votes came from. Then her delegates voted for four councilors. Neither Lucy nor Alphonsa received more than a single vote (each one probably voted for the other).

Now came Danell's big surprise. Thinking that he was presenting a marvelous gift to the Society, he produced his own rule, the product of three years' work with Bosio, and totally different in spirit and content from any former Society rule. Gone were Cornelia's beautiful first paragraphs composed in 1853. All the Ignatian material which had become the spiritual backbone of the rule, was relegated to an appendix. Danell made himself Bishop-Superior of the Society leaving the Superior General with a vague moral authority. Before

the stunned delegates, Danell read his rule aloud. He asked for comments on each article. But what difference would they have made? The rule was already printed and bound in leather.

Cornelia sat, pale and silent, watching the undoing of the work of almost thirty years. When it became obvious that the delegates did not like this new rule, Danell showed his displeasure by his treatment of Cornelia whom he humiliated publicly. As he was leaving, Cornelia, crippled with gout, bent over to kiss his ring. Danell indicated his displeasure at so small a gesture. Begging his pardon, she then knelt painfully, whereupon he turned on his heel and left. One of the Sisters had to help her to her feet.

In spite of the negative reception his rule received, Danell imposed it on the Society for a trial period of three years. Cornelia undertook to oversee its faithful observance, but she remained alert to everything which would need to be changed at the end of the three years.

During those years a three-way schism became a real possibility. Actually, it was a conflict among three centers of authority represented by Bishop Wood in Philadelphia, Bishop O'Reilly in Liverpool, and Bishop Danell in Southwark.

In Philadelphia, Wood once again tried to separate the Society in America from England. Many congregations had divided along these lines and there was logic to it, but the Sisters in his diocese firmly opposed such a break with the parent stem. Their loyalty was such that they simply put Danell's rule on the shelf and went on as before with the rule they knew and loved. When she heard of this, Cornelia scolded them insisting that they obey until the time came to make representations to Rome. Wood seeing the confusion of rules refused to give the veil to or receive the vows of any Sister until Rome clarified the legal situation of the Society. Cornelia sent two of her councilors to America to explain the situation to Wood and pacify spirits all round. (Here it should be explained that at this time there was as yet no canon law covering apostolic religious congregations, a relatively new phenomenon in the Church. The spheres of authority of bishops and religious superiors were not

clearly marked out, so there was room for much difference of opinion. Even with a body of law, confusion perdures.)

In the north, Bishop O'Reilly was furious with Cornelia because the superior of the Blackpool house, Gertrude Day, was named superior at St Leonards. He complained that no one had informed him of the results of the General Chapter and the election of Gertrude as a member of the council. Danell had undertaken to announce the results but forgot to do it. Conveniently, he told O'Reilly that it was Cornelia's responsibility. Nevertheless, O'Reilly refused to allow Gertrude to leave his diocese putting himself in conflict with Danell, the self-proclaimed Bishop-Superior of the whole Society. For a short time, there were two superiors in every northern house—one newly appointed who was not allowed to take office and one incumbent who was not allowed to leave. On the positive side, the Society in Blackpool had opened a beautiful new boarding school overlooking the town, Layton Hill. Many future members of the Society would be educated there.

For a short time there was an interval of relative peace and relaxation for Cornelia. She was no longer local superior at St Leonards as well as Superior General, so she left the young superior to establish herself without having to meet her Superior General at every turn and went gladly to visit Mayfield. The peace and beauty of the place always gave her joy. She was delighted to be with the novices who were there with their "mistress", Francis Bellasis. Francis had been Cornelia's old pupil and she understood Cornelia's mind and heart as well as anyone. For her novices it was a privileged time to be with the foundress. For Cornelia, mixing with the zealous young novices lifted her spirits and renewed her youth.

She also had the pleasure of helping to set up a new community in London. It would be the future home of all Holy Child Sisters working there. In the company of two of her oldest companions, she was completely at home and free to exercise all her creative home-making gifts. One of these friends was Teresa Hanson whom she had met in Rome before 1846 and who knew intimately Cornelia's family sorrows. The other was Ignatia Bridges, secretary to Cornelia



for years. These two were some of the “cronies” the Cabal liked to say ran the Society.

There were developments in France. For economic reasons the Toul foundation did not survive and the community moved to Paris. The Archbishop of Paris was very welcoming because of the warm recommendation from the Archbishop of Westminster (London), Cardinal Manning, and Cornelia went over to Paris to help with the moving. She stayed from October 1876 to March 1877. In the little community with its five pupils brought from Toul, she taught singing and added her still lovely voice to the choir. She delighted in all things French, especially daily Mass in the tiny convent chapel, and once more she became the life and spirit of the group transforming a mixture of ages and personalities into a happy family. Later, when an ideal property came on the market, she acquired it almost miraculously. *Le Petit Château* of the Duc d’Orléans became a Holy Child boarding school and a center for the Society in France. Meanwhile she was compiling a list of all the points concerning Danell’s rule that she wanted to bring to the attention of Propaganda. Two of her councilors would take them to Rome.

At the same time, Danell was preparing his rule for approval at Propaganda. In his introduction, he gave his version of the history of Cornelia’s rule and wrongly stated that she had been a Catholic only two years before founding the Society. Her two councilors arrived in Rome at the same time with a different account of the story, however, and they were able to make Propaganda understand that Danell’s rule was alien and unacceptable to the members of the Society. They asked for a Cardinal Protector (many international congregations had a Roman cardinal to look after their interests), and for a representative of Propaganda at the next General Chapter. A very cogent written declaration from Cornelia on the tradition of government in the Society enabled them to prevent Danell’s rule from being approved.

Cornelia’s never robust health declined while she was in France. Maria Buckle, another of her oldest friends, met her after a long intermission and said that some of her brightness and natural authority

were muted, but that she was even more humble and clearly more holy. Before leaving France for England, she gave a farewell talk to the community. Her legacy to them was *The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius*, the foundation of the Society's spirituality and its living patrimony.

In March 1877, Cornelia returned to England. Cardinal Manning was very pleased with the Society's work in London and greatly helped Cornelia's cause when he wrote to Propaganda that the competence of a bishop to interfere in the government of the Society should be restricted, and that the bishop of the motherhouse had no more authority over the Society than any other bishop.

The second General Chapter took place in August, and Cornelia was reelected by an even greater majority than before. Again Danell presided and Bosio was present although Cornelia had asked that he not be. This time, however, the delegates felt free to express themselves. As a result, her introductory paragraphs were reinstated and the Ignatian material restored. Nevertheless, for another three years the Society would have to submit to a rule much of which did not inspire them because it did not breathe the spirit of the Holy Child Jesus.

*See reflection questions on page 184*

*Our life, even when the longest, is but a little dream. Eternity will soon be decided for us and then—Ah then! Shall we not be glad to have had some little share in the passion of our dear Lord ... and when shared with him is it not sweeter than honey? cc*

## *Onward to Eternal Life*

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IN THE PUBLIC LIFE OF JESUS there was a moment when he was no longer the one who directed the course of events. From then on, he let events overtake him. From being the herald of God's reign, he became through suffering the embodiment of God's reign. During Cornelia's final years, something like that happened to her. In the measure that her sufferings accumulated, her capacity to accept and take them up increased. She had long known that accepted suffering was union with God, and union with God was the fullness of joy. This learned wisdom of hers was nothing less than the folly of the Cross that St Paul talks about. It is the secret core of her charism and her legacy to us.

The second General Chapter lasted only a week. Angelica Croft, key member of the chapter, could not attend because she had suffered a nervous breakdown. Cornelia needed her, and soon afterwards needed her again. A serious problem arose relating to the will of Francis Kenworthy, a young religious who had died suddenly. She was an heiress who, before making her vows, had left most of her wealth to the Society, and when she died, her family claimed that undue influence had been exerted and they began litigation to recover the inheritance. It looked as if Cornelia would once again

be dragged through the courts. Around the same time there had been a highly publicized case in which the “avarice” of a convent had defrauded someone. So here was another sensational “scandal” to entertain the public. In very poor health, Cornelia waited six months before the citation to appear in court was finally served on her. The case would be tried in the Court of Westminster. Placards appeared in the London streets announcing “The Great Convent Case—forty nuns in court”. Cornelia’s doctor did not allow her to leave the convent, and at the last moment the family withdrew their charges. The sixteen religious who had come to bear witness went home again and Cornelia received the good news by telegram. Once more, the Strong Novena to the Mother of Sorrows had saved the day at the last moment. The Kenworthy inheritance stayed in the Society and solved several serious financial problems.

Just after the chapter, and for the first time, Ady visited her mother at St Leonards. She was now a 43 year-old spinster. Her whole life after leaving England had been spent at her father’s side, a consoling presence in the absence of his wife. The visit was not an unhappy one. Cornelia found her daughter to be a sincere believer and a Protestant in good faith. During the years in which Pierce had censored all communication between Ady and her mother, Teresa Hanson had maintained contact with her. This link would make it possible for Ady to return to the Church once her father had died.

What most deeply wounded Cornelia in these last years was the way she was treated by some of the Sisters at St Leonards. Her spiritual notes show her struggling with hurt feelings and a sense of being ignored. This may have been the heightened sensibility of old age, but she certainly had an enemy in the chaplain, Mr Hogan, who fomented among the domestic Sisters the conviction that Cornelia wanted to relegate them to some limbo apart, and the young superior, nervous with the foundress under the same roof, complained of her presence as interference. Some even proposed moving her to a small house at the bottom of the garden. This never

happened, but Cornelia was sometimes seen painfully walking alone in the garden and weeping.

Already in January 1878, Cornelia had been in danger of death and had received the last sacraments, but then she rallied and went on working. The situation in the Paris house became very precarious financially and closing was imminent, but the Kenworthy inheritance saved the day and the school began to prosper.

Again, Cornelia went to Mayfield. She was accompanied by Teresa Hanson and Ignatia Bridges who would stay with her through her last illness and death at St Leonards. There she enjoyed a respite and delighted the novices by letting them push her around the grounds in a bath chair (a hooded wicker chair on wheels). It was at Mayfield, she said, that she wanted to be buried.

In the autumn, Cornelia returned to St Leonards and continued to govern in a limited way. With the beginning of 1879, one problem of very long duration, that of perpetual vows in the Society, was finally resolved. Francis Bellasis, as novice mistress charged with preparing novices for their profession, found herself in a false position. In instructions to the novices she presented final vows as binding for life, but the formula used left room for arbitrary dismissal or unceremonious withdrawal. Her conscience troubled her and she insisted on a solution. It was within Danell's competence to restore the word "perpetual" to the formula of vows, and he finally did so. For Cornelia, the act of receiving the perpetual vows of five Sisters was a crowning joy. It was her last official act.

Now too ill to participate in community life, Cornelia followed the business of the Society from the confines of her room. As her last spring came around, she busied herself mentally organizing the convent garden, working out what should be planted where.

Cornelia's agony began in March. Rheumatic gout, actually chronic nephritis, ran through her whole body. She became covered from head to foot in a burning rash.

In April, she was still conscious and occasionally lucid, but her brain and the nerves of her spine were affected. In spite of excruciating pain, she was sometimes heard singing hymns.

On Holy Saturday she was sufficiently alert to respond to the church bells that announced the resurrection. In a firm voice, with those who clustered around her bed, she sang the *Regina Coeli*.

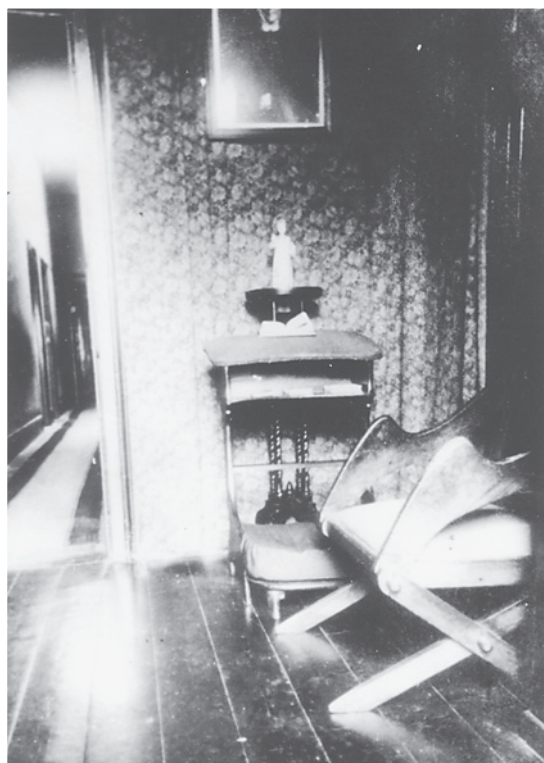
On Monday she received the last rites for the second time and begged the prayers of the community. Something of her Protestant upbringing moved her to say that though God is merciful, God's justice must also be

satisfied. The day before her death, Thursday in Easter Week, she opened her eyes and three times struck one hand with the other quoting Job: "In this flesh I shall see my God". That night she cried out in her pain, pleading not for justice but for mercy.

At 12:55 pm on Easter Friday, Cornelia died. Easter ... Friday

Those who surrounded her deathbed witnessed a striking change. Her face recovered all its earlier beauty. All signs of the inflammation disappeared, and her features took on an expression of perfect peace.

*See reflection questions on page 185*



*Cornelia's chair and prie-dieu in the room where she died at St Leonards.*

*I have begun the work, others will bring it to perfection. cc*

## *What Happened Afterwards*

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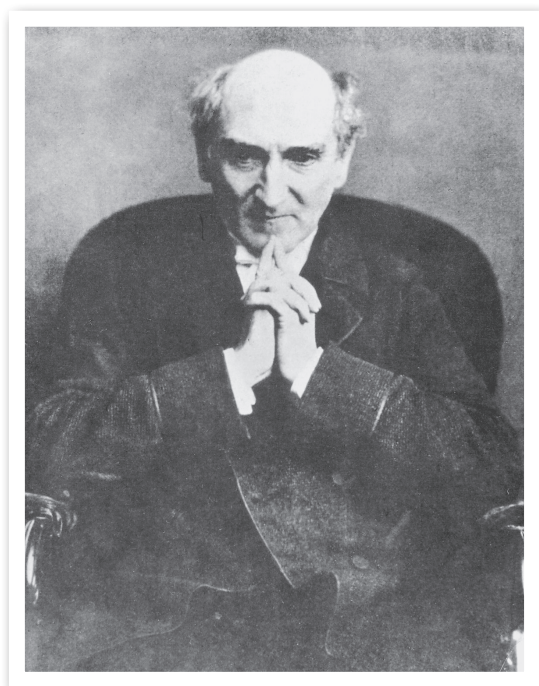
CORNELIA WAS BURIED IN THE CEMETERY AT MAYFIELD just as she wished. Years later her body was transferred to a tomb in a niche of the chapel she restored. Her body lies there to this day.

Angelica Croft became the next superior general. Again ill when Cornelia died, she was not able to attend her funeral. She was known to be Cornelia's choice to succeed her.

For the good of the Society and in order to overcome Cornelia's bad reputation among some bishops, clergy and laity, her name was not put into circulation for a number of years. Her unusual, even scandalous story was not told to novices. One superior even ordered that manuscript recollections about Cornelia written by Maria Joseph Buckle, one of her early companions, be destroyed. A Jesuit, suggesting to Francis Bellasis an act of holy disobedience, was responsible for its preservation.

Pierce died in 1883 in Florence. Adeline then went to Paris to visit Teresa Hanson who put her in contact with a French priest who brought her back to the Church. She died a holy death having gained a reputation for goodness and many charitable works.

Frank became a well-known sculptor who frequented the society of aristocrats and artists. He accused Ady of betraying her father when she returned to the Catholic Church but asked for her crucifix when she died. He never married but fathered a natural daughter who married into the Borghese family. He died in 1932, *a bon vivant* to the end.



*Pierce Connelly in old age*

The original rule—the one Cornelia took to Rome in 1854—became the basis of a finally approved rule which Francis Bellasis helped bring back to life. It was promulgated in 1887. After its having been cast aside by consultors at Propaganda, a Jesuit cardinal recognized in it the spirit that made Cornelia holy and intervened to restore it to the Society.

The Church declared Cornelia Venerable—worthy of veneration and imitation—in 1992. Only one fully documented and proven miracle is needed for her to be declared Blessed, and then a second miracle to make her St Cornelia in the eyes of the world. But it is difficult to imagine a God who would not have immediately taken into the divine embrace this woman whose lifelong prayer was “Yes, Lord, always yes”.

*See reflection questions on page 186*



## *Acknowledgements and Afterwords*

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There are many people to thank for making this little biography possible. It was first compiled in Spanish so I must thank my Spanish tutor, Ondina Victoriana for bringing me to a degree of literacy in her tongue. My sister Virginia Kelly and her husband Frank let me go into hiding in their pool house with a dictionary and a laptop for company and kindly left me alone for three weeks. My community in Chile, Edwina Menten and Jennifer Ibach, took all my cooking days while I gave January to “Spanish Cornelia” and as “English Cornelia” got under way, they went on cooking for me. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart kept up my spirits with his piano concertos as I too composed. Finally, Casa Cornelia in Rome made me welcome for a whole month while “English Cornelia” finally came to an end. I owe special thanks to Radegunde Flaxman. She is the expert who wrote the real biography, but she willingly made herself my research assistant and editor. And thank you, Sharon Risoldi, for instant assistance in matters computational.

I am a thief. Without the *Positio for the Canonization of Cornelia Connelly* composed principally by Ursula Blake, SHCJ, and the biographies of Cornelia by Radegunde Flaxman and Catherine Gompertz, I would not have had the courage to begin. I followed their story lines as faithfully as possible and I effortlessly picked out facts that had taken them years of research to uncover.

My purpose has been to tell Cornelia's story—a very complicated one—as simply as possible and to invite others to tell theirs. For reasons of brevity, I have omitted much that is interesting and that illustrates other facets of Cornelia's personality. For this I am sorry.

Each biography is a distortion and reveals something of the distorted perspective of the biographer. I hope that whoever reads this will later read Radegunde's *A Woman Styled Bold* and other biographies of Cornelia to correct the distortions and arrive at their own way of telling the story.

Elizabeth Mary Strub, SHCJ  
Casa Cornelia, Rome  
June 28, 2002

# *Reflections*

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## *Background*

Cornelia changed her religion three times during her seventy years. But it was always the same God who drew her and inspired her to give of her best. “God alone” was the constant theme that gave coherence to her life. Is there a theme, a “red thread” that weaves through your life and gives it coherence?

Cornelia’s family experience left an indelible mark on her personality, especially her affectionate relationship with her brothers and sisters. She kept up her family connections throughout life and, in spite of being the youngest, became the recognized focus of family unity. What kind of relationships do you have with the different members of your family? How has belonging to your family influenced the course of your life and your way of being? Can you identify some of the good qualities of your parents and siblings which have “rubbed off” on you? And the negative traits?

Is there a childhood anecdote about you that foretells something about the person you would become?

Cornelia bore the loss of her parents and a brother in her first fourteen years. From one perspective her young life was a series of mortal losses. But this was not her way of perceiving it. She never lost her joyful, optimistic spirit or her capacity to fight her way through the blows that came her way in life. Have you, like her, lost dear ones early on in life? How did the loss affect you? How did you recover your balance and your natural happiness?

## *At the Montgomerys*

At the beginning of her new life with the Montgomerys, Cornelia must have felt very alone and isolated. Besides, an adolescent girl needs the understanding of her mother as never before. Do you remember what you were like at age fourteen? How did you feel? In whom did you confide?

You may or may not have had the advantages that Cornelia had, but as a young person you had your dreams, pleasures and good friends. What and who were they? Make a list of the most important ones and share it with another person.

When Cornelia fell in love with Pierce, neither Isabella's opposition nor the relative poverty of Pierce could deter her. Do you think Cornelia made a mistake in loving Pierce? Have you ever experienced the same certainty and invincible determination about a decision in your life? Have you ever had to set yourself in opposition to an authority figure over something? What were the results?

## *The Minister Takes a Wife*

Cornelia and Pierce married without the blessing of Cornelia's half-sister and under difficult circumstances. Having to defy the person who had generously taken her in, educated her and given her every advantage, must have cast a shadow over Cornelia's wedding day. Do you remember any day in your own life—your graduation, your wedding, your moving into a new house, the birth of a child—which was affected by some small shadow?

As a young married couple, Cornelia and Pierce began their new life far away from family and friends and in a strange place. They were pioneers who could depend on no one except themselves. What was your experience of setting out in life? Did family and friends accompany you or did you have to go it alone? What challenges did you encounter?

At the beginning of her married life, Cornelia filled a role clearly defined by her husband's ministry. She was a minister's wife. She was his companion and the mother of his children but this role changed over the years. Have you seen an evolution of the role in which you were cast? In what ways did it change?

Mercer was Cornelia and Pierce's first baby. He was born without today's conveniences in a time when infant mortality was high. Every pregnancy puts mother and child at risk. What were the circumstances of your own birth, if you know them, or of the birth of your first child, if you have one? What was it like being a parent for the first time?

In spite of the difficulties they had to overcome together, Cornelia and Pierce were blissfully happy. Pierce was respected and Cornelia was loved by the people of Natchez. They had good friends, a demanding but fulfilling work, a healthy child, and the companionship of Cornelia's sister, Mary Peacock, a dear and efficient presence among them. Think of a very happy period in your own life—a time that you would like to have stretched out indefinitely. What made this time so special? Why were you so happy?

## *More About Pierce*

Pierce was very impressed with the Chevalier Nicholas Nicollet. His scholarly company satisfied his need for intellectual companionship and flattered his ego. Think of some impressive person you have come to know. How did you feel in his or her presence? What memories do you have of the encounter?

Cornelia would have closely accompanied her husband while he was coming to his crucial decision. Have you ever walked with someone in the throes of making a life-changing decision? What was it like? How did you show your support?

If you had been in Cornelia's shoes, what would have been your reaction in the face of Pierce's decision?

## *Several Months in Suspense*

This period was a sort of parenthesis in the lives of Cornelia and Pierce. The past and the old life were forever behind them and what lay before was yet to be defined. Only their faith and the conviction that they would be led to truth sustained them. Have you ever been suspended in time like this? When? What sensations did you experience? Was there a moment of clarity which allowed you to move forward?

Cornelia and Pierce were truth-seekers. They were willing to sacrifice all for truth. Cornelia explained their decision as motivated by the desire to find “the truth, the blessed truth”. Is truth a value that is important to you? Have you ever had to suffer the hard consequences of telling or searching out the truth? What does it mean to you to live “in spirit and in truth”?

Cornelia and Pierce burned their bridges and took an irrevocable step when they left the shelter of the Episcopal Church. What bridges have you burned? How difficult was it? Did your decision(s) prove correct or have there been regrets?

## *From New Orleans to Rome*

Cornelia was moved by the impact of her first Mass and Catholic sermon. They made her desire a deeper relationship with God. Do you remember any very moving liturgies or sermons—ones that touched you and made you act in a new way?

Cornelia was motivated by an inner conviction that embracing the Catholic faith was an imperative for her. She took specific measures to follow her conscience—asking for instruction from Bishop Rosati and taking a surprising decision to precede her husband into the Catholic Church. Think of some time in your life when conscience caused you to do something unexpected or even heroic.

You obeyed that inner imperative. What did it cost you, and what were the consequences?

Do you remember your First Communion? Try to recall the setting and circumstances. Was it memorable? And why? Or was there some other sacramental experience whose spiritual impact was more profound?

The Connelly family had what must have been a unique adventure crossing the Atlantic at very close quarters in a sailing ship. What is the hardest physical challenge you have ever experienced? Can you tell the tale? How did it affect the way you interacted with your companions in the same situation? What psychological effects did it have on you?

## *Journey to the Center*

The Connellys were immediately introduced into the high society of Rome. In a letter, Cornelia referred to herself as “little American me”. She was overcome by the welcome that she, a stranger, received. Have you ever lived in a culture not your own? How did you feel? How were you received? How do you receive those who come to live in your culture?

The matter of Pierce’s priestly vocation was a constant shadow over Cornelia’s marriage. She grew to embrace the shadow, but not without deep anguish and struggle. Suppose your spouse or a close friend declared that he or she felt called to an ordained ministry. What would be your reaction? How would you advise them?

What would you say to a married person who wanted to become a priest or religious?

Cornelia received the sacrament of Confirmation in Rome as an adult. She would have been deeply conscious of all its implications. Have you been confirmed? What did it mean to you? If you haven’t been confirmed, what would you need to do to remedy the situation?

We will see how the relationship developed between the Connellys and their godparents, the Shrewsburys. Both took the spiritual bond very seriously. Are you a godparent? And who are your godparents? Is the relationship a significant one?

## *The Cosmopolitan Life*

Imagine what it must have been like for Cornelia to live abroad for two years with two children and another on the way. What do you think were some of the challenges of her situation? Have you ever lived abroad? From your point of view, what were the benefits and what were the costs?

If you had the opportunity to spend a year in Rome, what would you most like to do there?

While Pierce was in England for almost six months, Cornelia found ways to “improve” herself both spiritually and in human terms. What are your interests and what do you do to develop them? Are there any “dreams”, like building something, taking up an instrument or learning another language that you could turn into reality? Have you thought of finding a spiritual director?

Cornelia and Pierce were apart for six months. How would you deal with a six-month separation from your spouse or “significant other”?

## *Beginning Again*

Knowing the Connellys’ story to this point, what advice would you want to give them about accepting or not Père Point’s invitation? What would be the pros and what the cons?

What must have been Cornelia’s motives for accepting? Would they be different from Pierce’s? If so, in what way?



The Connellys took time to “discern” their decision. What does that word mean to you? Have you ever used a discernment process to reach a decision? Can you describe what you did? What kinds of issues might require discernment in your life?

## *Together in Grand Coteau*

After her years of privilege, Cornelia adapted easily to the life of a frontierswoman. What does that tell you about her character? If you’re a man, what qualities do you most look for and admire in a woman? If you are a woman, what qualities would you like to be known for? How many of those qualities do you find in Cornelia?

Imagine some of the conditions Cornelia must have had to adapt to in Grand Coteau. What might they be? What kind of reasons would you need to motivate a choice to live like that?

In spite of the hardship of her life in Grand Coteau Cornelia was supremely happy there. Why do you think that is? What is it that gives you the greatest happiness?

Cornelia lost a child. Perhaps there was no medical help available; perhaps she blamed herself for the death. Can you think yourself into her mind, or feel your way into her heart? What was going on there? What about Pierce?

## *A Crucial Year*

Knowing what the year 1840 held for Cornelia and how she responded, some think she was heroically generous. Others think she was either misguided or crazy. What do you think? What could have prompted the response she gave to God and to Pierce?

Try to imagine those forty-three hours of John Henry’s dying in his mother’s arms, and the reactions of the others in the household.

What can you say about this tragedy? Have you known tragedy in your own life? If so, how did you cope?

Some people link John Henry's death with Cornelia's prior offering as cause to effect. Do you think that is valid? Why so or no? What other ways are there to look at what happened?

Put yourself in Cornelia's shoes that Sunday morning in October. Can you imagine what was going on inside?

Cornelia was an intelligent, intuitive woman. How is it that early on she did not recognize Pierce's weakness of character and see that he was driven by ambition and unfulfilled needs? In your case, have you ever blindly mistaken someone's character or misinterpreted their motives—for good or for ill?

## *Apart Together*

Cornelia could not share her situation with anyone but her spiritual director. She would not have let Pierce know the anguish his decision had caused her. So she turned to God alone as her refuge. Have there been moments in your own life when you had no one to turn to but God? Did your faith grow through the experience? What happened when the crisis passed?

Cornelia spent from October 1840 to April 1842 in a state of uncertainty about a future that in one way depended entirely on Pierce and in another way, entirely on her. Have you ever been in what could be called a no-man's land of uncertainty for a long period? What put you there? What was it like? How did it end?

Cornelia experienced a progressive reduction of the physical space that contained her until she was finally lodged in a tiny two-room cottage in the convent garden, almost a doll's house. Can you see some symbolism in this? What kind of space do you live in? What effect does the space you live in have on the way you feel?

Imagine that Ascension Day when Pierce left with Merty. He himself remembered it saying, "We did not know that we should

ever see one another again until we both had on our long gowns". What do you think he meant by that?

## *Two Continents, Two Lives*

Are you familiar with the Jesuits and their charism? Can you picture the interview between Pierce and the Jesuit Provincial? Why do you think Pierce wanted to be a Jesuit?

Cornelia and Pierce made a number of Ignatian retreats on their spiritual journeys. Have you ever made that kind of a retreat? If so, what was it like? What would you say were some of its characteristics?

From her first retreat on, Cornelia always kept a spiritual notebook. It was a miscellaneous collection of thoughts, prayers, retreat notes, and quotations. There was no order or plan to their contents, but they serve as one of the few windows on Cornelia's inner life with God. Do you keep such a notebook? What is the use of such a practice?

Now that you know Cornelia, think of her five days of packing up before she left Grand Coteau. Was she sad? Happy? Agitated? Calm? Do you think Cornelia was looking forward to seeing Pierce again? Have you ever had the experience of meeting again someone very close to you after a long separation? What were your feelings?

## *Europe Again*

Within the ambit of the life decisions which Pierce imposed upon his wife, Cornelia made her own life. She appeared to be the victim of Pierce's whims, but she always maintained her integrity and interior autonomy. Have you ever found yourself in the situation of being apparently forced to do something then finding it was what

you really wanted to do? Perhaps it was a career chosen for you or a decision made for you about where to study or where to live.

If Pierce and Cornelia's story were unfolding in our time, how do you think it would end?

Picture Cornelia serving table during her retreat. What might have been going through her head?

Put yourself in young Berkeley's place as he witnessed the Connellys signing the Act of Separation. What is the scene that you see through his eyes?

Try to imagine the moment in their apartment in the Via Ripetta when Pierce and Cornelia said goodbye before leaving for the Trinità that Easter Tuesday. How was the parting? If you were writing a play, how would you represent the dialogue between them?

## *Inside*

Cornelia felt oppressed in the convent at the Trinità but not at the convent in Grand Coteau. The reasons seem obvious. What about you? Does the atmosphere created in a place by good or bad human relations affect you?

What was lacking to Cornelia for her well-being at the Trinità? What do you need around you for your own sense of well being?

What do you think of Cornelia's offer to return to Pierce? Should she have made it? Would you have done the same in her place?

Cornelia's life is full of dramatic moments. One of the most striking is Pierce's first Mass. Picture the scene in all its poignancy. Accompany Cornelia as she lives through it. What strikes you?

## *Man Proposes ...*

Cornelia spent a year knowing that she would not join the Society of the Sacred Heart but in the dark about her future. Have you

lived through a comparable time of uncertainty? What helped you to come to clarity? Do you regret the direction your life took or do you see it as right for you?

Grassi came on the scene just at the moment when Cornelia needed him most. Almost always there is someone with this role in one's life. Who is your Grassi? Have you played the role of Grassi to someone else?

Cornelia took for granted that the Society would first begin in the United States. Logic pointed her in that direction. Then suddenly everything changed. She would spend the rest of her life, exactly the second half, in a foreign country. What would you be willing to leave behind if God were to ask it of you?

Cornelia heard interiorly the title of the Society. Have you ever had a similar experience or known someone who did?

Imagine that you have lived the first half of your life or more. How do you want the second half to be?

## *Between Two Worlds*

Is there a moment in your life that you can relate to the moment when Cornelia left the Trinità with her children not knowing what her final destination would be?

Cornelia's stay with the Berkeleys was a marvelous parenthesis between her old life and the life to come. Have you enjoyed similar golden moments, perhaps on vacation or between jobs? What was it that made them so wonderful? How did you feel while you were under their spell?

There came a time in Cornelia's life when she had to make herself independent of Pierce and take on the whole responsibility for her own decisions. She took possession of herself and grew as a person. And you? Have you had a similar moment of taking up the baton of your life and running with it? What happened?

What do you think of Cornelia's accepting Wiseman's offer of Derby? If you were in her shoes what would you have done?

Why do you think Cornelia yielded to Wiseman's and Emily's insistence that she send Ady and Frank away to school for her year of novitiate? Have you ever had to be separated from one or more of your young children? How did it make you feel?

Up to this point you have come to know Cornelia as wife and mother. It is true that her circumstances were extraordinary, but she was never without her children. Have you enough of a feel now for who Cornelia was to describe her to someone else? What would you say about her?

## *"Here Beginneth a New Life"*

For Cornelia, October 13, October 15 and December 21 are dates heavy with significance. What are the key dates on your own interior calendar?

The day the little group of four women arrived at Derby to found the Society of the Holy Child Jesus, Cornelia must have experienced a mixture of many sentiments. Putting yourself in her place, what do you experience?

There was no one at Derby to welcome Cornelia and her companions when they arrived. It was a cold reception and a first hint of the cross taken up with alacrity. In your life, have you ever had such a cold reception? What happened and how did it make you feel?

Cornelia left the Trinità because God was showing her a form of religious life which was more flexible and open to the world. In this sense, she was a pioneer who makes the road by walking it. Do you know other pioneers? Have you had to forge your own road at some point in your life?

Between Cornelia and God there was an invisible bond which formed the axis of her existence. Looking back over what you know of Cornelia, what outward evidence do you have of her inner bond with God? What meaning does the term "interior life" have for you?

## *“Obstacles Exist ...”*

Many disappointments awaited Cornelia in Derby, and there must have been moments when she wanted to abandon the convent and the community, but she didn't do it. Certainly you too have had such moments of temptation to escape and run. Can you identify those moments? What held you?

At Derby Cornelia experienced both kinds of poverty—chosen and imposed poverty. Have you known one or other of those kinds of poverty or both? Is there, do you think, a good kind of poverty? What might it be?

A serious conflict arose between Cornelia and Sing, much of it caused by lack of clarity at the outset and subsequent misunderstanding. Have you ever found yourself in a similar conflict situation—one caused by misunderstanding rather than bad will? How did you resolve the conflict?

Cornelia had high hopes for her oldest son which were sadly disappointed. Merty became the first victim of his parents' separation. Many people blame Cornelia for allowing this to happen. What do you think?

## *Connelly Against Connelly*

Much of what happened between Cornelia and Pierce was a tragedy of errors. From your point of view, should Cornelia have changed her posture in regard to Pierce? If your answer is yes, when? Have you ever had to live with the painful consequences of one of your own decisions? Looking back, was it a good decision or should you have decided differently?

This part of Cornelia's life has attracted the attention of playwrights and is the theme of actual dramas. What moment in Cornelia's story do you consider the most dramatic? What emotions do you feel as you read this chapter?

Pierce's fury overflowed all limits. He was beside himself with rage. What is your normal reaction faced with someone so enraged? Have you ever been the object of such fury? How did the experience affect you? How do you feel now as you look back on the experience?

Try to project yourself into Pierce's situation. What can you say in his defense? As a friend, how would you advise him at this moment?

## *The End of the Beginning*

Now you are meeting Cornelia as a religious. One of her companions of this period said that she was already very advanced in the "science of the saints". This "advance" had already taken place when she was still a laywoman. Do you think it is possible in your own lay life to make similar progress in holiness? What, according to your way of thinking, is the raw material of sanctity?

The life of an apostolic religious in Cornelia's day was not very different in practice from monastic religious life. Cornelia wanted for her daughters the freedom to exercise all the spiritual works of mercy, but Church law often blocked her way. Since Vatican Council II, many things about apostolic religious life have changed. What do you think of the changes? Do you think the essence of religious life is still intact?

Many of the early members of the Society mentioned Cornelia's charm of manner. Her mere presence evoked the presence of God. Do you know anyone like that whose manner alone can transmit to you a sense of God's closeness?

Who are the religious you have known in your life? In general, what was your impression of them? What did you like about them? What put you off? Have you discovered any common traits among the Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus you have met?

Peek into Cornelia's soul during the retreat just before leaving Derby. What do you see there?



## *All Souls, St Leonards on Sea*

St Leonards was and still is a very beautiful spot. All Souls was set back from the sea front and elevated above the town. There was nothing to impede the view of the channel. Cornelia always responded to natural beauty, and at St Leonards she loved to gaze out to sea in the evenings and she would be moved to pray. What are your favorite places in the world? Do you remember a time when natural beauty so overwhelmed you that you wanted to cry, or a place where God came very close and you were filled with awe?

When Pierce sued for restoration of conjugal rights, Shrewsbury and his wife and a great many of the clergy wanted Cornelia out of England to avoid scandal. The Case was going to do harm to the Church which was already the object of much prejudice. Do you think Cornelia should have yielded to their pressure? What do you think motivated her to stay?

Once more we see Cornelia in the midst of conflict, and this was only the beginning. Truth, integrity and justice were for her prime, non-negotiable values, and many people came up against their intransigence and became antagonists. Others saw in Cornelia a firmness of character and a stability from which they could borrow strength. Do you have any non-negotiable values? What are they? How have they been put to the test?

## *Mister Jones' Will*

As a Catholic religious in England, Cornelia belonged to a minority held in contempt by many people. The Case made her famous and the object of public reprobation. In an atmosphere charged with suspicion and hatred, she carried on tenaciously with the mission that had been given her. Have you ever lived through anything comparable—having to go against the current of opinion and stay

faithful to your ideals and values in the face of religious or political prejudice?

Because of his inexperience and impetuosity, Asperti complicated Cornelia's life. He clashed with both Sing and Jones. Do you know any such people who in their innocence and lack of tact and sensitivity have complicated your own affairs? Can you give an example?

It looks as if Jones' sudden death was an answer to the Sisters' prayers for a solution to their problem. Do you think that was the case, or was it mere coincidence?

Cornelia always prayed what she called the "Strong Novena" to the Sorrowful Mother when she needed something urgently. What are the things you beg God for with greatest urgency? Some people promise God or the Virgin a very difficult or penitential act in order to obtain what they want in return. Do you agree with this?

What do you think? Was the finding of the will a miracle? Did someone put it there at the last minute? Or did the Sisters just not look hard enough in the first place? Do you believe in miracles? Do you know of any miraculous answers to prayer among people you know or know about? And you?

## *Connelly Against Connelly: The End of the Case*

The profound bond between Cornelia and the Mother of Sorrows was forged in Grand Coteau. When Cornelia lost her children, the thought of Mary brought her strength and consolation. Does Mary play a part in your life? If so, under what title do you turn to her? Do you have an example to share of how she might have intervened in your life?

Cornelia had to struggle against many obstacles to assure the existence and stability of the Society. Often she had to fight alone and unsupported. What are the great battles of your life? What sustains you when it is hard to keep going?

Wiseman is a complex figure in himself, and an ambiguous one in Cornelia's story. He was a friend who became an enemy when his plans were frustrated. Do you know people like that—friends when one agrees with them, adversaries when they are crossed?

Cornelia lived for almost two years with the possibility of being put under arrest or having to flee arrest. This fear accompanied her night and day. If you could ask Cornelia one question about this time, what would it be? And what would be her answer?

## *Crisis at All Souls*

The Epiphany letters that Cornelia wrote to the Society form part of the patrimony of the congregation. Are there documents which you keep—letters, diplomas, drawings, poetry, photos—and which have great personal value? Did you receive any heirlooms from your parents to pass on to future generations—jewelry, furniture, a story, a memory, a saying, a document?

The Society always celebrates the Epiphany with a certain solemnity. It is the day the Sisters renew their vows and their covenant with each other in the Society. It is the custom, as well, to prepare for it with three days of retreat. In your family are there special days when everyone comes together to celebrate and experience family unity? What do you do on these occasions? Or is there some other family tradition?

The foundation at Gate Street, London, marked the first division of the original community. Cornelia was aware of the pain of separation. In her letter she says that the tears that were shed were to be dried “in the *soul-strengthening* flame of love”—a strong love, not a sentimental one. How have you lived through the breaking up of the family circle—the marriage of a son or daughter, a departure for a foreign country, a divorce or separation? What was it like when you left the family circle for any of these reasons?

Have you ever escaped from a great danger? Do you remember what happened and how you reacted? Now put yourself in the place

of Cornelia when, against all expectations, she heard that Pierce's suit had not won the day. Imagine her reaction.

All Souls belonged to the Society and it didn't. Cornelia was secure there and she wasn't. She had a good relationship with Wiseman and she didn't. Wiseman admired her and he criticized her harshly. Have you ever been in a similar set of contradictory situations? What effect did it have on you?

## *Enter: Thomas Grant*

Many times during her years in England Cornelia experienced discrimination as a woman and as an American. Not only discrimination but also calumnies. On more than one occasion, what was said of her by Pierce, Duke or Melia was deliberately false. In your culture, do you think women are still discriminated against? In what respect? Have you ever been the object of deliberate lies?

For the third time Cornelia suffered the loss of a child. Merty's death was a double loss because he died outside the Church in which she had brought him up. Have you had the experience of accompanying someone mourning the loss of a child? What did you do? If you had been at Cornelia's side when she heard of Merty's death, how would you have accompanied her?

Cornelia never knew that Grant was behind her invitation to Rome. When it arrived, she wrote to him: "It nearly upsets me not to see things clearly or not to come at what anybody is meaning." Then, as an afterthought, she added: "Is not our faith a sword of strength? I *feel* it so, my Lord." Have you known moments when your own faith has been "a sword of strength"?

Cornelia left with her community a deeply thought-through statement of the founding spirit God had inspired her to impart to the Society. It was, in effect, her legacy to them and to those who were to come after. What words would you want to leave with those dearest to you if you had suddenly to leave them?

Picture Cornelia kneeling before her community the night before she left for Rome. Then picture yourself in the same attitude before your own family. What words come to mind?

## *Actions: Emily, Words: Cornelia*

Throughout Cornelia's whole life, the Rule continued to evolve. On one hand she wanted the Society to live its way into a final text of a rule. On the other, she needed an approved rule to protect the Society from outside interference, to unify it, and give it stability and credibility in the eyes of the public. The rule would also keep a balance in the Society between healthy internal autonomy and the proper degree of dependence on ecclesiastical authority. As a layperson, you too have to balance your personal freedom with what your Church asks of you. Can you identify any difficult or ambiguous areas? Do you think the Church should make laws for the "faithful"?

Emily brought about a financial disaster that crippled the Society for many years. Have you experienced serious financial reverses either through your own doing or someone else's? How did you cope with the situation?

Cornelia paid the debts Pierce incurred pursuing his suit. She also paid Emily's debts to her brothers. The money she had to spend unjustly was money made unavailable for apostolic projects. If this money were available to you, what would you do with it?

Cornelia's refuge was the humble and humiliated Child of the Father. Do you have a refuge? What is it? What happens when you take yourself there?

Do you think Cornelia should have taken Emily back into the Society or at least allowed her to visit?

## *Cornelia the Educator*

The style of education which Cornelia experienced and encouraged included many non-formal elements. Can you identify some of the non-formal ways you have been educated? What are they?

Given the scandal that followed Cornelia and the disapproval of certain ecclesiastical personages, it is amazing that she had the psychological and spiritual energy to carry her educational project forward. It is also amazing that there were people who believed in her enough to entrust their daughters to her. If you had a daughter would you send her to Cornelia to be educated? Why yes? Or why no? What aspects of her way of educating do you most approve?

Remembering your own schooling, how was it like or different from what Cornelia wanted to establish? How would you describe the spirit of your own school?

If you had the means of founding a school for children or teenagers, what would it be like? What elements would you want to incorporate? Can you describe your phantom school?

## *Cornelia and God*

It would be a mistake to think that Cornelia achieved a profound oneness with God because she was a religious. Certainly the practices of the religious life helped her to maintain her focus on God alone, but she knew how to make everything in life the “holy ground” of meeting with God. Her desire for God was the lamp which lighted up and revealed the presence of God in all things. With how much desire do you seek God? Think of the times you have truly found God. What would “finding God” mean for you? Can you remember an occasion? What stands out in your memory?

The passive way by which Cornelia was led to an encounter with God was not a chosen but an accepted path. Her great “Yes” to whatever “cup” it was that could not be taken away, opened

the inner door to a God of consolation, of mercy and of peace. In the midst of a great personal trial have you experienced a similar consolation?

As a convert, Cornelia learned to love the traditional devotions of the Catholic Church. By means of them her five senses were brought to the experience of God's presence lending taste, color and warmth to her faith. She wanted the children in her schools to come to God by the same way. Which devotions help you to be in God's presence? Is there a favorite one which lets you "taste and see" the goodness of the Lord?

Cornelia had some traits in common with the Holy Child Jesus—his simplicity, his joy, his confidence, his active energy, his young aliveness, his optimism, his eagerness to reach out to new things, his humility, his charm. People who are attracted to Cornelia, and to associates and members of the Society have many of the same traits. What are some of the traits you share with the Holy Child and with Cornelia?

## *Cornelia, Who Do They Say You Are?*

"Be yourself . . ." By this, Cornelia affirmed transparency, simplicity, sincerity, self-acceptance and much more. This is what she urged when Merty wanted her to practice the small deception of hiding some petty cash in a cocoa tin so he would not have to hand it over. Her reaction to duplicity was visceral. Most people are tempted to small duplicities, to appear different from the way they really are. Can you identify your particular temptation? Is it in the area of the physical, or the intellectual, or the financial? When do you feel most comfortable being the person you really are?

"Make that self all that our Lord wants it to be." Cornelia believed firmly in the freedom of the will. She thought that holiness depended on the exercise of that will to choose the good and reject the bad.

Think of what you have made of yourself—homemaker, business person, scientist, educator, lawyer, doctor, artist, whatever. What do you still feel called to make of yourself in order to realize your destiny? What stands in your way? Is it possible to become your best self in the setting in which you live? What do you think?

Cornelia is someone who provoked contrary reactions. Some people came up against her immovable integrity and put the blame on her. Others, attracted by her, discovered through her the God of their own lives. It was not very different with the Lord himself. Do you know people like that—strong characters with admirers and detractors? Can you name any? How do you feel in their presence?

Cornelia had her faults, as does anyone of strong character. And it is important to recognize that some of her detractors were people of many virtues and real holiness. In your opinion, is it possible to be a saint without eliminating these flaws of character?

## *Ten Years of Ups and Downs and a Duchess*

A biography, even when it is most complete, can never tell the whole truth about a person. It is far more than the sum of its facts. There is in the biography's subject an elusive thread of consistency around which the facts gather. In your opinion, what gives consistency to Cornelia's story to this point? What do you admire most about her? In what way would you like to resemble her?

Looking back, Cornelia could probably name a long list of things, which as a girl she never expected to accomplish. That will be the case with you as well. Can you list some of those things you never dreamed of doing but which life has put in your path?

At one point during the St Leonards property dispute, Cornelia reached an impasse. She could satisfy neither her bishop, nor Rome nor the mission. In desperation, she wrote to Grant: "My Lord Bishop, I took your letter ... after having read it twice myself, and read it



to Our Lady of Sorrows asking her in her own sweet meekness to listen to it, and the interior answer I got was 'burn the letter & tell the Bishop to forget what he wrote & come and tell you what more you can do than you have done'. I have burnt it my Lord, & now will you come down and tell me what more I can do than I have done?" What do you think of this answer to Bishop Grant? Have you ever sent a letter that took all your courage to write unsure of how it would be received? What happened?

The world is full of eccentric people like the duchess. In spite of causing many complications, they add spice to life. Cornelia's capacity to befriend this woman of erratic and peremptory ways is a measure of her own character. Is there a "duchess" in your life? What is she like? How do you manage to get on with her?

Grant and Cornelia represent two sides of a single coin: fear faced with confidence; cautiousness with risk-taking; and nervousness with tranquility. The coin which joined these opposites was a common love of God, a total dedication to God's work and deep mutual respect. Do you have friends who are completely different from you? How would you describe the differences?

## *The Ever-evolving Rule*

The rule of 1869-70 which Cornelia worked on in Rome with the Franciscan consultor, was, she believed, the last and final version. Her interpretation of obedience led her to accept the changes imposed by the Church in the spirit of faith. She trusted that the Sisters formed in her "school" would respond as she did. For this reason, she refrained from expressing her own disappointment over some of the changes. Do you think this was a mistake?

Imagine the moment when Cornelia entered Mr Jones' finished church the night before its consecration. All the grief of the long property dispute was turned to joy as she realized that here God would come to dwell. Her singing was the euphoric overflow of emotion. Have you known such moments when you couldn't contain

your joy and had to show it in some spontaneous way—singing, dancing, shouting, turning somersaults?

Cornelia was up-to-date on the popular dances of the day and not easily scandalized. If she were here now, what do you think her reaction would be to popular culture? What is your opinion of it?

Put yourself in the place of Cornelia's companion when mother and son said their farewells. They were sitting in a train in Victoria station for about a half hour, we are told. How would you have accompanied Cornelia after Frank left?

## *An Uncivil War*

There are people who sympathize with the Preston Cabal. It is easy to understand the distance they felt from what was going on in the rest of the Society. They were immersed in their work and their world and dedicated to what they were doing. Very respectable people like the bishop and the Jesuit parish priests took their part against Cornelia. . . as did Emily Bowles. It is a common temptation to enclose oneself in a world of one's own, shutting out the wider reality. Can you point to examples of this in politics, family life, economics, social life, church affairs, personal life?

Once more, Cornelia found herself caught between two opposing interests—Grant and his sense of urgency, and the Preston Sisters who needed time and careful explanations. What do you think she could have done to resolve the situation? Do you have some helpful advice for her?

For Cornelia, the most wounding part of what happened in Preston was the duplicity with which the Sisters acted and their betrayal of her trust. Dante puts traitors in the lowest place in hell. Would you go so far as to accuse the Preston group of treason? Have you ever been betrayed by anyone? What happened to the relationship as a result?

Agatha Gray was the only one who admitted to her deception. She was the youngest but she had the courage to go against the

current of opinion in the north. It helped that she knew Cornelia personally and had been recently formed in her spirit of “courage, confidence and cheerfulness”. Put yourself in Cornelia’s place as she received Agatha’s “confession”. How do you think she reacted? How would you have reacted? If you have ever received the “confession” of someone who deceived or betrayed you, how did the story end?

## *Enter Bishop Danell*

In spite of the rebel group in the north, many Sisters were devoted to Cornelia and remained loyal to her and to her values and spirit. Danell discovered this during his interviews with the Sisters. Imagine that Danell is interviewing you under the seal of the confessional. What do you want to say to him about Cornelia? It would be interesting to dramatize this interview with another person in the role of Danell.

Cornelia’s last words to her son were “Frank, come back, come back”. The memory of this farewell must have haunted her. All the losses of her life were encapsulated in these brief words. But she could bring nothing and no one back. Have you known bitter farewells like this one? Or last words heavy with anger? What can be done about it?

Twice Cornelia tried to soften Lucy Wooley’s hardness with forgiving words and failed. Lucy could not admit the duplicity of her actions. Have you ever tried to reconcile yourself with someone who refused your overtures? When this happens, what does one do?

Because Danell had neither the humility nor the courage to admit his own mistakes, he made Cornelia his scapegoat. Has anyone ever done that to you? What did you do? Can you remember your feelings?

# *The First General Chapter and After*

Cornelia was a victim of prejudice against women who were capable of thinking and acting for themselves. Besides this, her strong character and her manner of speaking without circumlocution irritated Victorian sensibilities. She was not their ideal woman, withdrawn from public affairs and submissive to male dominance, but she was in no way against men. She was simply an American and a Philadelphian. Have you ever in a foreign country experienced cultural discrimination? What did it feel like? Are there some things you think women should not do that men legitimately may do? If so, what might they be?

In Cornelia one meets a tremendously enterprising and independent person, yet she was deeply obedient; a strong defender of justice and truth, yet humble in the extreme. How do you explain that? Have you encountered apparently opposite traits combined in the same person? In yourself? Can you identify them?

Those who knew Cornelia over the years said that she became less agile and less energetic, more humble and more suffering. What changes have you noticed in yourself as you grow older? Which characteristics are “more” marked, which “less”? Which ones are you happy with; which ones do you regret?

Try to penetrate Cornelia’s mind and heart as Danell made her kneel to kiss his ring. What do you think she was feeling? Has anyone ever publicly humiliated you? If so, can you describe the experience and your feelings about it?

Once Cornelia said: “I am cosmopolitan; the whole world is my country”. But France was special to her. Have you been to France? Do you have any French friends or acquaintances? What are they like? What experience do you have of other cultures? How have they enriched you?

## *Onward to Eternal Life*

Only when someone's life is over and their task is completed can one say definitively who the person was. Now, who do you think Cornelia was?

If Cornelia could speak to you personally today, what do you think she would say to you? What would you say to her?

We have seen that God alone was Cornelia's center of gravity, her life's continuity. What would you now say was her most impressive or most inspiring quality?

The thought of heaven fascinated Cornelia and gave her great joy. Do you really believe in eternal life? If you have in your mind an idea of heaven, how do you imagine it? How would you like the panorama of your life to appear as you pass from this life to the next?



# Who's Who in Cornelia's Story

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## A

François **ABBADIE**, SJ

Cornelia's spiritual director at Grand Coteau after Nicholas Point, SJ had left.

Samuele **ASPERTI**

Italian chaplain at Derby and St Leonards. Precipitated the Connelly vs Connelly crisis by holding Cornelia to her vow not to see Pierce. Well-intentioned, zealous and indiscreet.

## B

Edward **BELLASIS**

Serjeant-at-law, convert, good friend to Cornelia. Sent four of his daughters to St Leonards and three joined the Society.

Francis **BELLASIS**

Pupil at St Leonards, Holy Child Sister, Novice mistress, biographer of Cornelia.

Robert **BERKELEY**

Traveled with Pierce who was his tutor, witnessed to the Deed of Separation in Rome. Cornelia and her three children stayed at Spetchley Park, the Berkeley home, in 1846.

Antoine **BLANC**

Bishop of New Orleans. Both Connellys attended his consecration in 1835. Gave Cornelia First Communion. Personal friend to her.

Prince Marcantonio **BORGHESE**

Married to Gwendaline, daughter of Lord Shrewsbury. Befriended the Connellys on their first visit to Rome.

Gwendaline Talbot **BORGHESE**

Daughter of the Earl of Shrewsbury. Known as “Mother of the Poor” in Rome. Early friend to Cornelia. Introduced her to the poor of Rome. Died young of a sudden fever. She had three children.

Emily **BOWLES**

Protégée of John Henry Newman. Convert. Joined Cornelia at Derby. Ran the Society into heavy debt in Liverpool. Left the Society in 1856. Created a faction against Cornelia.

Sir George **BOWYER**

Convert and lawyer. Defended Cornelia before the Privy Council in Connelly vs Connelly. Staunch friend and ally of hers.

Maria Joseph **BUCKLE**

Convert. Joined the Society in Derby. Collected materials for a first biography of Cornelia.

## C

Mme de **CARIOLIS**

Sacred Heart superior at Trinità during Cornelia’s stay.

Adeline **CONNELLY**

Second child of Cornelia Peacock Connelly and Pierce Connelly. Born March 6, 1835, died January 29, 1900.

Elizabeth Pierce **CONNELLY**

Pierce’s mother. Relations were strained between her son and herself.

Cornelia Peacock **CONNELLY**

Seventh child of Mary Swope Bowen Peacock and Ralph Peacock. Wife of Pierce Connelly. Convert. Mother of five children. Founder of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus



Henry **CONNELLY**

Pierce's father. Noted cabinet maker and civic-minded Philadelphian

John **CONNELLY**

Pierce's brother. Convert and great admirer of Cornelia. Cornelia prepared his wife Angelica for reception into the Church.

John Henry **CONNELLY**

Third child of Cornelia Peacock Connelly and Pierce Connelly. Born June 22, 1837, died February 2, 1840.

Mary Magdalen **CONNELLY**

Fourth child of Cornelia Peacock Connelly and Pierce Connelly. Born July 22, 1839, died September 19, 1839.

Mercer (Merty) **CONNELLY**

First child of Cornelia Peacock Connelly and Pierce Connelly. Born December 17, 1832, died about September 20, 1853.

Pierce **CONNELLY**

Episcopalian minister. Married Cornelia Peacock. Convert. Of their five children, two—Mary Magdalene and John Henry—died in Grand Coteau. In Rome Pierce converted, in England apostatized and abducted remaining three—Mercer, Adeline and Frank—from their schools. Went to court to recover his wife. Wrote polemical pamphlets against Church.

Pierce Francis (Frank) **CONNELLY**

Fifth child of Cornelia Peacock Connelly and Pierce Connelly. Born March 29, 1841, died March 28, 1932.

Angelica **CROFT**

Elected General Councilor in 1875 at first General Chapter. Elected Superior General in 1879 after Cornelia's death.

Maria **CUTTS**

Sacred Heart superior at Grand Coteau when Pierce left with Mercer for England.

## D

James **DANELL**

Succeeded Grant as Bishop of Southwark. His rule was imposed on the Society until after Cornelia's death.

Prince Placido **DORIA**

Married Shrewsbury's elder daughter Mary. Friend of the Connellys in Rome. Gave Cornelia three-volume collection of Ventura's sermons on the Incarnation. She kept them for life.

William **DUKE**

Convert, doctor at St Leonards, claimed All Souls for the Mission, led opposition against Towneley and Cornelia.

Adeline Peacock **DUVAL**

Cornelia's sister. Convert. Lifelong friend to her.

Lewis **DUVAL**

Wealthy husband of Adeline Peacock. Cornelia and Pierce were married by Episcopal bishop White in their house on Chestnut Street, Philadelphia.

## F

Giacomo Filippo **FRANSONI**

Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda. Helped Cornelia with her rule. Defended her when Pierce tried to claim the Society as his foundation.

## G

Thomas **GRANT**

When the Westminster diocese was divided, became first bishop of Southwark, and St Leonards ceased to be in Wiseman's jurisdiction. Cornelia's bishop until 1870. Sympathetic but difficult friend to her.

John **GRASSI**, SJ

Brought broad international experience to work with Cornelia on her rule and discernment of her vocation at the Trinità.

Pope **GREGORY XVI**

Friend to the Connelly family. Allowed Pierce and Cornelia canonically to live separate celibate lives so that Pierce could be ordained as a Catholic priest. Did not annul the marriage but required Cornelia to make a vow of chastity.

Alexander **GOSS**

Bishop of Liverpool. Supporter of the Preston cabal.

## H

Teresa **HANSON**

Prepared at the Trinità by Cornelia to become a Catholic. Joined the Society at Derby. Maintained contact with the Connelly children.

## L

Louisa Catherine, **DUCHESS OF LEEDS**

American. When the duke died, retired to St Leonards convent. Promoted Society growth by benefactions in America and England.

Randall **LYTHGOE**, SJ

Provincial superior in England. Warned Pierce against precipitate action in his plans for family and ministry.

## M

John **Mc CLOSKEY**

Student at College of Propaganda, Rome, 1835-1837. Cornelia confided to him her fears of the consequences of Pierce's priestly aspirations. Later became Cardinal Archbishop of New York.

Pius **MELIA**, SJ

Chaplain at St Leonards and Wiseman's confessor. Enemy of Cornelia in league with Duke and Wiseman. He left the Society of Jesus.

Prince **METTERNICH**

Powerful political manipulator of European politics. Pierce had an interview with him in Vienna.

Mlle **MINGARD**

French governess with Cornelia at Gracemere, Grand Coteau. She entered the Society of the Sacred Heart.

Isabella Bowen **MONTGOMERY**

Cornelia's half-sister by Cornelia's mother's first marriage to John Bowen. Married to Austin Montgomery. The Montgomerys welcomed Cornelia into their home when her mother died.

James **MONTGOMERY**

Brother to Austin. Episcopalian minister in the church Cornelia and Pierce both attended.



John Henry **NEWMAN**

Most famous of the Oxford converts. Knew Cornelia when she first arrived in England. Friend of Emily Bowles, but of Cornelia only in the Society's early years.

Chevalier Joseph Nicholas **NICOLLET**

French explorer-scientist. Influenced Pierce to examine Catholicism and accompanied his process of conversion.



Carlo Cardinal **ODESCALCHI**

The pope's vicar general. Received Pierce into the Church. Confirmed both Connellys. Advised Pierce to remain a layman.

Bernard **O'REILLY**

Bishop of Liverpool who succeeded Goss. He upheld Goss's restrictive policies regarding Cornelia and the Society.

James **OTEY**

Protestant. Episcopal bishop of Tennessee and Pierce's bishop. He visited Natchez and praised Pierce's work there.

## *P*

Mary Frances **PEACOCK**

Cornelia's sister. Became a convert and entered the Society of the Sacred Heart while with Cornelia in Grand Coteau.

Mary Swope Bowen **PEACOCK**

Cornelia's mother. Widow of John Bowen, Jamaica planter. Then married Ralph Peacock and with him had six surviving children: Dodsworth, Ralph, Adeline, George, Mary Frances and Cornelia. She died when Cornelia was fourteen.

Ralph **PEACOCK**

Cornelia's father. Yorkshireman. Philadelphia merchant. Married the widow Mary Swope Bowen and died when Cornelia was nine.

Ralph **PEACOCK** (Bowen)

Cornelia's brother. Father of Bella and Cornelia Bowen who were at school at Sharon Hill and went to St Leonards in England with Cornelia. He took his step-brother's family name for financial reasons.

Ambrose **PHILLIPPS** de Lisle

Distinguished English convert known to both Connellys. His two daughters went to St Leonards.

Nicolas **POINT** SJ

Offered the Connellys employment in Grand Coteau. Friend to both and spiritual director to Cornelia. Departed for the Indian missions.

## **POWELL**

Frank Connelly's nurse at the Trinità.

Edward Welby **PUGIN**

Son of Augustus Welby Pugin. Designed churches in the Gothic style. Helped restore the Synod Hall at Mayfield.

## *R*

Carlo von **REISACH**

Cornelia's confessor on her first visit to Rome until he was named Bishop of Eichstatt.

John **ROOTHAN**, SJ

Superior General of the Jesuits. Pierce met him in Rome and corresponded from Grand Coteau. Later he disapproved of Pierce's too many visits to his wife at the Trinità at a time he was still proposing to join the Society of Jesus.

Joseph **ROSATI**, SM

Bishop of St Louis. Encouraged Pierce to visit Rome and consult about possible ordination. Instructed Cornelia for reception into the Church.

Richard **ROSKELL**

Bishop of Nottingham. Trustee of Charles Towneley's Trust for All Souls and a benefactor. He went with Searle to Propaganda in Rome and settled the legality of the Trust.

Jean-Louis **ROZAVEN** SJ

Regular confessor at the Trinità and during a difficult time, Cornelia's spiritual director.

## *S*

Joseph **SEARLE**

Chaplain at St Leonards. Supporter of Cornelia, especially in the St Leonards property dispute.

John Talbot, XVIth Earl of **SHREWSBURY**

The “Good Earl John”. Friend of the Connellys since first meeting in Rome. Paid for Mercers’ education. Invited Pierce to Alton Towers as assistant chaplain. Two daughters married into Italian nobility.

Thomas **SING**

Parish priest at Derby. So actively hostile to Cornelia and her Italian chaplain that the community had to leave.

George **SPENCER**, CP

Aristocrat, convert, Passionist priest. Ministered to the very poor in the industrial Midlands of England. Zealous for the conversion of England. Spiritual director at Oscott College. Friend of Pierce in his first years as a Catholic.

Lady **STANLEY**

Left the All Souls property to Rev Mr Jones who in turn left it to her nephew, Charles Towneley

## *T*

Théodore de **THEUX**, SJ

Pierce’s spiritual director at Grand Coteau.

Colonel Charles **TOWNELEY**

Member of Parliament. Justice of the Peace. High Sheriff. Inherited All Souls property from Mr Jones and put it in trust for the educational works of the Society.

## *U*

Gioacchino **VENTURA**

Theatine priest. Delivered discourses in Rome on the Incarnation which Cornelia attended as a new convert. Influenced the first paragraphs of her rule.

# W

Thomas **WALSH**

Bishop of the Central District in England where both Derby and Alton Towers were located. Had jurisdiction over both Pierce and Cornelia when first in England as priest and religious.

Nicholas **WISEMAN**

Knew Connellys in Rome as Rector of English College. Sponsored both Connellys in early days in England as Bishop in Central District. Became Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster and fell out with Cornelia.

James **WOOD**

Bishop of Philadelphia. Invited the Society to his diocese. Friend to early Society in America.