

into the Community as a "Clothed Tertiary" of the Order. This is the rank which used to be held by Lay Sisters for a settled period before they began their year of Canonical Novitiate, therefore the lowest in the house. Thus she continued her humble life of work and prayer until the year 1376.

One cold day she was sitting by the infirmary fire recreating with some of the other Sisters, when one of them remarked during the conversation, that a recent visitor had brought news of the war between England and France. It was said the King of England's eldest son was dead and his body taken back to England with great pomp. This was the Black Prince, Euphemia's eldest brother. On hearing the news Euphemia was visibly affected and one of the Sister's, noticing her emotion, drew her apart and induced her to reveal the cause of her sorrow on the condition of keeping her secret. Euphemia then told her her story. This Sister, herself of noble birth, did all in her power to gain Euphemia's consent to her telling the truth of her parentage to the Prioress, so that she might take the place in the Community due to her rank. But all her persuasions were useless and Euphemia remained the humble Tertiary laysister until the end of her life.

She died not long after, in the odour of sanctity, and her confidant, now released from her promise of secrecy, told the Community who it was that had served them so long and so faithfully.

Princess Blanche of England, the humble Sister Euphemia, was buried with royal pomp in a stately tomb which was to be seen in the Church of her Monastery of Pfortzheim until it was destroyed by the Lutherans during the troublous times of the religious upheaval in the 16th century.

It is said that many miracles were wrought at the tomb of her, who had humbled herself in this world that she might reign in glory in the next.

SISTERS OF MARTYRS : A SIDELIGHT ON DOMINICAN HISTORY

By

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John Bridgewater, the martyrologist, writing in 1588, makes the interesting statement that the Dominican convent at Dartford numbered in its ranks not only a sister of St John Fisher, but also some sisters of the Carthusian martyrs. He is enumerating those Catholic women who had suffered persecution under Elizabeth, among whom Elizabeth Cressner, the Prioress of Dartford and her nuns occupy a rightful place. The passage in question is contained in an appendix at the end of the *Concertatio*

Ecclesiae Catholicae, published at Trier in 1588. This book being rare, we give the extract as it stands:—"Elizabetha Chresnera Priorissa monialium D. Dominici cum toto conventu, in quo erat soror Sanctissimi Martyris Ioannis Roffensis Episcopi et sorores aliquot Carthusianorum martyrum"

That St John Fisher had a sister in this convent (a royal foundation by Edward the third) is fairly well known; but that there were sisters of the Carthusian martyrs in the community is less so. On checking up on Bridgewater's assertions we have found that no less than eight of the nuns were related to martyrs of Henry the Eighth in one way or another—a fact which, no doubt, goes far to explain their subsequent heroic history.

As Bridgewater himself was ordained priest in Queen Mary's reign and left England in 1576, he could hardly fail to know something of the Dartford nuns who were refounded under her and afterwards, like him, went into exile for the Faith. But a study of the list of nuns⁽¹⁾ who received pensions at the time of the dissolution of the monasteries in 1539 amply bears out his statement. At that date the members of the community were as follows:—

Joan Vane, Prioress,
Elizabeth Cressner,
Beatrice Marshall,
Catherine Clofield,
Joan Dryland,
Catherine Evelyn,
Margaret Cooke,
Alice Davy,
Anne Lago,
Elizabeth White,
Mary Bentham,
Dorothy Sydley,
Margaret Warren,
Maude Fryer,
Elizabeth Exmew,
Margaret Oakley,
Anne Bowson,
Agnes Roper.

There were also six lay sisters and two novices:—

Mary Stoney,
Elizabeth Saygood,
Ellen Bostock,
Eleanor Wood,
Alice Greensmith,
Catherine Garrett, and
Mary Blower and Mary Kitson.

(1) *Letters and Papers of Henry VIII* (Vol. xiv, Pt. 1, no. 650).

Now the biographer of St John Fisher tells us that by a second husband his mother had four children:—"John White, merchant of the Staple who dwelt in Beverley in the Merchant Row in St Mary's parish; Thomas, who dwelt in Lynn and a merchant also; and Richard White, priest, B.D. and Vicar of Buckden, in Huntingdonshire, imprisoned in the time of Henry VIII by Goodrich, Bishop of Ely, for religion. Also a nun, who was so like the said Bishop of Rochester in person that Queen Mary knew her".⁽²⁾ This was, of course, Elizabeth White, the Dominicaness of Dartford, who appears in the list above and to whom the Bishop dedicated, while in prison, two books:—*The Ways to Perfect Religion* and *A Spiritual Consolation*.

Elizabeth Exmew, to whom we next turn, was the sister of the Carthusian, Blessed William Exmew. After the monastery was suppressed she retired with one of the lay sisters to Bury St Edmund's and afterwards to Walsingham. She was living there at the beginning of Queen Mary's reign. In this year (1555) a report was drawn up for the Exchequer concerning all the ex-religious, men and women, and also ex-chantry priests throughout England who were drawing pensions. If they had 'married' during the interval or acquired additional income this was carefully noted. Many of these returns are lost, or at least unpublished, but we do happen to possess the one which was then made of all pensioned religious dwelling in the diocese of Norwich, among whom occurs:—⁽³⁾

"Elizabeth Exmew, a nun of Dartford within the county of Kent, dwelling at Walsingham in Norfolk and living continually, hath an annual pension of five pounds paid to her at Bury. She hath nothing more than the same pension to live upon, and she is of an honest conversation and is reported to be a Catholic woman.

Elizabeth Seygood, lately a nun of Dartford within the county of Kent, hath an annual pension of forty shillings paid to her at Bury, and hath nothing beside the same pension to live upon. She dwelleth at Walsingham and liveth continually and is reputed an honest and Catholic woman".

It was, no doubt, of set purpose that the two sisters chose to retire to the desecrated shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham, where together they were trying to keep up what they could of their religious life.

Alice Davy has been thought to be the sister of yet another Carthusian, Blessed John Davy.⁽⁴⁾ and this, in view of what Bridgewater says, has every prospect of being true.

The Carthusian martyr, Blessed Sebastian Newdigate, appears

(2) *Blessed John Fisher*, by Fr. T. F. Bridgett (1890) n. 462.

(3) *English Historical Review* (1933, Vol. 48, n. 211), by Geoffrey Baskerville.

(4) By Dom Adam Hamilton in *The Poor Soul's Friend* (1906, p. 72).

also to have had a sister who was a nun at Dartford (though she must have died before the dissolution) for Henry Clifford in his *Life of Jane Dormer, Duchess of Feria*, states that he had one sister, a nun at Syon, and another at Dartford, both being "exemplars for government and sanctity of life". This is, however, a piece of evidence which we have so far been unable to follow up more closely.

The connection of four more of the sisters with the martyrs, though more remote, is not unworthy of note. Agnes Roper was the sister of William Roper, the son-in-law of St Thomas More, while three others had been, before entering religion, maids in waiting to the Countess of Salisbury, Blessed Margaret Pole. In the will of Sir John Rudstone, Alderman of London, dated August the 16th, 1530, after making a bequest to Elizabeth Cressner of Dartford, he leaves to "Beatrice Marshall, Margaret Mountney, and Felyce, sometimes gentlewomen to my Lady of Salisbury, now nuns in the said monastery, a white habit".⁽⁵⁾

When the Catholic religion for a short time came into its own again, the Dominican nuns of Dartford were among the few of the old houses to be reconstituted. On June the 25th, 1557, seven of the original community took up their abode at the former residence of the friars at King's Langley in Buckinghamshire, and so re-entered the religious life. These seven were:—

Elizabeth Cressner, who now became Prioress,
Catherine Cloffield,
Catherine Evelyn,
Mary Bentham,
Maude Fryer,
Elizabeth White, and
Elizabeth Exmew.

These were soon joined by four others:—Sisters Dryland, Cooke, Oakley, and Stony. For a few months they even returned to their old Dartford home (on the death of Anne of Cleves, who resided there) and they also received one young postulant. The situation, however, was changed completely by the accession of Elizabeth.

The oath of Supremacy was proffered to them but refused, and on July the 4th, 1559, the Dominicanesses of Dartford, together with the nuns of Syon and various other Catholic exiles, were allowed to leave the country and sail to Antwerp in a vessel specially chartered by Philip of Spain. Fr. Hargrave, O.P., who had charge of the party, says that three of the nuns were over eighty years of age and none were under fifty. Among those over eighty, he writes, was "the sister of the Bishop of

(5) *History of Dartford Priory*, by Fr. Raymund Palmer, O.P. (Arch. Journal 1879, p. 263).

Rochester, a martyr of no less constancy, could it be shown, than was her brother". There were ten nuns in all.

In the following year (October the 13th) the papal almsgiver, Vincenzo Parpaglia, who had been sent to assist the English exiles, mentions her in a letter which he wrote to Cardinal Morone. "I have received," he wrote, "the letters of exchange for 500 scudi to distribute to the poor English now in these parts for the zeal for the Catholic religion. And above all, I have in consideration, the sister of the Bishop of Rochester, who is now in the island of Zeeland in a very poor monastery and an unhealthy locality. Having sent to visit her a few days ago, I hoped to persuade her to come to this side of the sea, but she would not do so, not wishing to abandon the other English nuns who came there with her."

This is the last we hear for certain of Sister Elizabeth White, who bore so strong a resemblance, not in features only, but in courage to her sainted brother. However, preserved in the library of Exeter College, Oxford, is a service book or psalter which once belonged to a Catholic family, Cooke. In the calendar at the commencement are written in the anniversaries of many Catholics of Elizabeth's reign, priests, martyrs, and the like, including also the date of death of the last Abbess of Wherwell (otherwise unknown) and of various members of the Cooke family. One of the entries is:—

"March 1. Obitus Elizabeth Ryght, 1563."⁽⁶⁾

Is it too fanciful to suggest that there is here recorded the decease of Sister Elizabeth White, whose name is more than once miswritten as 'Wright'? The Christian name is the same; the date (1563) is not inconsistent with what we know of her age and career, since at the time we last hear of her (the year previous) she was over eighty; moreover, her anniversary is not unlikely to be noticed since she was, owing to the relationship to St John Fisher, a fairly prominent Catholic figure of those days.

We were more fortunate in being able to trace what became of Sister Elizabeth Exmew, thanks entirely to a member of the community of the Dominican convent of All Souls, Old Headington, Oxford, who permits us to make use of what follows from her as yet unpublished *History of the Priory of Dartford*. In 1572, when the Master General of the order visited the Low Countries, only the Prioress, Elizabeth Cressner and three nuns were still alive. During the interval they had been driven by a Calvinist uprising to Bergen-op-Zoom. He now ordered the Dominican convent of Val des Anges, near Bruges, to take them in.

⁽⁶⁾ See *Academy* for April 15th, 1876, p. 360, by W. C. Boase; and *Notes and Queries*, Nov. 26th, 1921, p. 421, *A Catholic Necrology under Elizabeth*, by J. B. Wainewright.