

## BLACKFRIARS

### MOTHER MARGARET HALLAHAN AND THE CLERGY

A VERY pronounced factor in the success of Mother Margaret's work was the high repute and admiration in which she was held by all ranks of the clergy. She came into contact with all the eminent churchmen of her day in England, and though her work was practically confined to the dioceses of Birmingham and Clifton—only in the last six years of her life did she extend her foundations to other dioceses—no fewer than ten of the thirteen diocesan bishops held themselves honoured to be her friends. The other ranks of the clergy showed her equal respect and affection, and many of them were accustomed to call her their "Mother," as was done by the priest-disciples of Saint Catherine of Siena. Mother Margaret on her side accepted the relationship even to the extent of chiding them when she felt it would do them good. To one she wrote: "Let me tell you, my dear Reverend Father, that patience is the great thing you want. You know my real affection for you, and as you call me *Mother*, sometimes mothers may take liberties with great doctors, if they are their sons."

It seems probable from the words "great doctor" that the priest addressed was the well-known Dr. Northcote, afterwards Provost of Birmingham. He certainly regarded her as his spiritual mother and took a son's pride in serving her. When in 1858 she had to visit Rome on the question of the Constitution of the Congregation he attended her and her companion, Mother Imelda Poole, on their journey, arranged everything for their comfort, and on their return, knowing Mother Margaret's dread of travel and fear of the sea, most devotedly accompanied them back to the very doors of Stone convent. He then straightway returned to Rome to complete the transactions as her attorney. "A truly heroic act, and then to have again to cross that dreadful sea," was Mother Margaret's comment, and she promised the Holy Souls a thousand *De Profundis* for his safety.

When in 1869 he read her biography Dr. Northcote regretted it did not contain more of her homely and direct sayings, such as "God bless you and make you a saint, a big saint, and uncommonly hard work He will have of it." It seems evident that these words had been said to him. On another occasion she wrote to him, "I wish you would put into practice the strong inspirations of the Holy Ghost. You have enough in you to re-animate the faith of thousands. Much of your languor and weakness would disappear did you give out what is within you." And she told him he should do more for people than he did in view of his great reading. On his side he could never do enough for her, and in 1866 gave her no less a sum than £5,200 to buy the site of the present Hospital for Incurables in Greenbank, now Margaret Street, Stone. His final benefaction to her on earth was to say Mass for her almost continually during the six months she lay in agony on her bed of death.

When Mother Margaret was assured she was in the right and judged it useful to blame or rebuke she never failed to do so. To a young Dominican priest she said: "You may know your theology, but you do not know the A B C of the spiritual life—no, not even A." She said she thought he would never forgive her, but his truly wonderful life as a devoted foreign missionary proves he did, for shortly afterwards he volunteered for the distant missions in the West Indies.

Margaret used to say that if she saw the Pope do wrong she would tell him so. Once when her Sisters were reading the life of St. Francis of Sales they came to the letter in which he yielded to the Archbishop of Lyons in all his views with respect to the Visitation Order. She interrupted, saying: "That seems to me a weakness in him, a want of fidelity to the light of God. God does not put the same lights about an Order into the minds of everyone that He does in the minds of the Founder." One of the community suggested that had St. Jane Frances de Chantal been in the saintly bishop's place she would not have given way. "No, nor would I either," said Mother Margaret. "I would have seen the Archbishop in Jericho first." That this was no verbal

exaggeration is proved by her well-known interview with the formidable Archbishop Errington, coadjutor of Cardinal Wiseman, and for a time Administrator of the diocese of Clifton. We must give it in her own words. "He said, 'I suppose you consider decorating your churches as preaching to the million,' and I answered, 'Yes, that is just what I do it for.' I am sure God helped me that day. I was so frightened beforehand lest I should not be able to speak, or should say too much. I am sure I prayed an hour and a half before the Most Holy Sacrament for light and courage, and when it came to the point, I didn't mind him a bit. I never thought whether he was an archbishop or a cabbage. I was speaking for God, and I was as quiet as I am now. One thing I said made him very angry. I said, 'the Blessed Virgin will pay you off for all those Hail Marys you have taken from her.' " (It seems the Archbishop had forbidden or curtailed certain devotions, including the recitation of the Rosary, then not a widespread devotion in England, but much advocated by Mother Margaret.) "And he answered, 'That's not the way to speak to me. Do you mean to say that I did wrong?' 'Yes, your Grace, you certainly did wrong, and *very* wrong.' What could I say else? It *was* very wrong, and he *would* suffer for it. Only I'm sorry he has suffered so much." In private life Archbishop Errington was gentle and affectionate, but in his official relations, stern and inflexible. This was the description of him by the Cardinal's secretary, Canon Morris, a great admirer of Mother Margaret, whom he quotes for the words: "You were hewn out of a rock, Dr. Errington, and I am sure you never had a mother." In 1860 the Pope, after himself personally asking Errington to resign the coadjutorship, but in vain, finally felt obliged to deprive him of his office. This of course is the meaning of Mother Margaret's reference to his punishment.

Her occasional use of the humorous phrase, "lords of creation" in reference to some priests, "sometimes suggested the notion," writes Mother Drane, "that Mother Margaret depreciated the priestly office, but such an impression could only have been received by those who did not know her. It

was her reverence for the priest of God which led her to desire that his proper influence should never be lessened by anything which tends to make the priest forgotten in the man." One of the saintliest members of the English hierarchy, Bishop Grant of Southwark, a friend of many years' standing, commenting on her love of the Blessed Sacrament, said: "One distinguishing feature of Mother Margaret's homage to the Blessed Sacrament was her respect towards priests."

She herself expresses this reverence in the following beautiful words addressed to the Community of St. Mary Church in 1867, on the death of their devoted chaplain, the saintly Dominican, Father Augustine Procter: "Pray all day as you go about your work that He may send more of those virgin souls, who present God to the people and keep themselves out of sight. Pray then for holy priests, men of prayer, men who may raise up and convert this dull, hard nation." On countless occasions she expressed herself in loving admiration of the works of devoted priests. Of the great missionary, Dr. Gentili, she constantly spoke as one of the chief instruments raised up by God for the revival of religion in England. Many times she referred to Fr. Ambrose Woods, Fr. Caestryck, and Fr. Whiteside, her early Dominican friends, as "fine men," "saints." There is little need to speak of the great Bishop Ullathorne, her friend, spiritual director, and superior from the time of her return to England in 1842 till her death in 1868. She never wearied of setting him up as an example of every religious virtue to her spiritual daughters, and time and again expressed her indebtedness to him for his influence on her spiritual life. One quotation we can give as it is so characteristic of her way of expressing herself. "I never in all my life saw so mortified a man as the Bishop. I never once saw him take anything to gratify nature. When we first began (referring to the early days of the first foundation in 1845) we often for days together had nothing but potatoes draped with a few onions for dinner. The Bishop lived as we did, and never had a thing different. His example taught me to mortify myself in many things that I had not thought of

before, for what you see you readily follow." He, on his side, always showed her a respect and consideration which amounted to deep reverence. Speaking of his first meeting with her at Coventry in 1842, he said to her spiritual daughters: "There gradually sprung up between us that spirit of intimate friendship which for six and twenty years has been the privilege and consolation of my life. The reverence which her pure and noble character inspired in me from the first, and the childlike confidence which she soon gave me, went on increasing until she passed from this world to God."

The trust she gave to the Bishop and her two confessors, Fathers Versavel and Maltus, was shared by none other; but of all other ecclesiastics she was most attached to Cardinal Newman. She herself was too humble to imagine that so learned a man as he could hold her in special regard, whilst he, on reading in her biography of "her singular tenderness towards him" wrote, with equal humility, that this was "most new to me yet ought not to be new to me. But how could I fancy that she would care about me more than she cared for a hundred persons like me to whom her Christian charity would impel her to be kind." After her death the Sisters found in her little leathern purse which contained "her treasures" a newspaper cutting of a letter written long years before by Newman, containing "a noble profession of his unalterable attachment to the Catholic Church." Almost twenty years after her death, when the great Cardinal was writing to Provost Northcote in connection with the fortieth anniversary of Bishop Ullathorne's episcopal consecration, he said he well remembered that occasion, in 1846, "for it was the day he, Bishop Ullathorne, introduced me to that holy woman, Mother Margaret Hallahan."

Moreover it was to Newman that Bishop Ullathorne, on the occasion of her death, described Mother Margaret as "the greatest woman and religious of this age."

With the two Cardinals of Westminster, Wiseman and Manning, she did not come into such close contact, but she met Cardinal Wiseman several times and he more than once came unheralded to visit her. He was particularly

struck with admiration at her offer and keen desire to provide a home and every comfort free of all cost for the retired Bishop Hendren of Nottingham. Her relations with Cardinal Manning were chiefly concerned with the attempted foundation of a convent at Walthamstow in order to look after an orphanage he had established there. Mother Margaret, however, could not rest content in the fine house he had purchased for this foundation, and broke out with the words "Oh! your Grace, can't you send us to some *dirty place*." He laughed and told her of the needs of Father M'Quoin in the slums of Bow, to whom she hurried, armed with the archiepiscopal letter. When, shortly after her death, Cardinal Manning laid the foundation stone of the new convent there, he compared her to the Curé d'Ars, and said she had done the greatest work in England for the Church and religion of anyone he had ever known.

Her kind offer to Bishop Hendren was only one of many she paid to that kindly Franciscan prelate who in 1848 succeeded Bishop Ullathorne in the Western District where Margaret and her community were then lodged. The loss of Bishop Ullathorne's guidance was indeed a severe blow, but she would not let his successor receive any hint of her sadness and always treated him with the affection of a daughter. Once when he felt too ill with gout to come to some special procession of Our Blessed Lady as he had promised to do she told him if he would come he would be free from his complaint for a year. And he used to relate that for the whole twelve months he was untroubled by his old enemy. On the news of his appointment she sent him a little offering out of the slender store of the Community, to which he touchingly replied: "It is I, rather, who should make the offering to you; for the evening services at your chapel are sanctifying my people." After a short stay of three years in the West he became, in 1851, the first Bishop of Nottingham, but his health broke down finally in the following year, and he was forced to resign his charge. It was then that Margaret, hearing he was in difficulties as to a residence, made him her generous offer, but it appears her friend, Dr. Newman, had forestalled her in a similar offer. "A prince

of the Church," she had exclaimed, "in difficulties about a home! He must come to us." Not very long afterwards she made a similar generous request to Archbishop Nicholson of Corfu before she knew that hospitality had already been offered him by Mr. Leigh of Woodchester Park.

Another great bishop-friend was Dr. Amherst of Northampton, a Dominican Tertiary. He frequently met her when he was a young boy at his mother's house in London where the Thompson's, whose maid she then was, were frequent visitors. He himself relates the wonderful respect and even awe which she inspired in him from the very first. It was his mother, the charitable Mrs. Amherst of Kenilworth, who had the privilege of bringing back Margaret from Belgium to achieve her great work in this country. It is more than likely that Mother Margaret's example drew him to join the Third Order.

Archbishop Gonin, O.P., of Trinidad, who as Prior of Woodchester knew her well, Bishop Vaughan of Plymouth, Bishops Burgess and Clifford of Clifton, Bishop Grant of Southwark, and Bishop Brown of Shrewsbury, were all her friends and admirers of her great work. It was the same in Rome during her visit. Archbishop Talbot could not do enough for her, Archbishop Sallua, O.P., acted as her cicerone and wanted her to found convents in Italy, and when she was ill she was to her great astonishment visited by no less a prelate than the Grand Inquisitor, who showed her very great kindness. Sometimes after this visit, Bishop Ullathorne came to Rome on business, and in an interview with Cardinal Barnabo began to tell him of Mother Margaret and her admirable qualities. "I know," said his Eminence, "I've seen her." Father Vincent Jandel, the Dominican Master-General, it need hardly be said, worthily appreciated her, for he was a religious after her own heart. When she was on her death-bed he wrote to Stone asking her to promise to pray for him in heaven, and told the Sisters they should address to their dying mother the prayer which the Order has prayed to St. Dominic for six centuries. "Imple Mater, quod dixisti nos tuis juvans precibus."

It would be a heavy task merely to set down the names

of the many excellent priests who came in contact with Mother Margaret, and henceforward regarded her with unfeigned admiration mingled with great humility at the sight of her many sterling qualities and great sanctity. On the occasion of her death, May 11th, 1868, a pæan of praise went up on all sides, but one strong dominant note runs through all the many letters addressed to the Dominican Sisters by Cardinals, Bishops, and Priests—the conviction that she was already a saint in heaven. Cardinal Manning said: “It is a loss beyond words to you, at least visibly in this world, for in a better she who has reared you all will have a greater power with God for all your needs.” Cardinal Newman wrote: “Now after her intense sufferings your dear Mother is at rest or rather in heaven.” We have already seen Father Jandel’s words when she was dying. Bishop Brown of Shrewsbury wrote: “Doctor Northcote’s note assured me that a new saint had gone from you to join the many saints of your Order in the enjoyment of God. Of course I will offer the adorable sacrifice for her, but in the assurance that it be rather for her accidental increase of bliss than for the relief of her soul.”

Father Aylward, the Provincial of the English Dominicans, wrote to Stone: “Your telegram came just before Mass. I said it for her, and I not only prayed for her but felt it right to pray privately to her.” In a later letter he referred to “the old and close friendship between us and which I always felt did me so much good. I more than fancy, I may say, I feel, she does me good yet.” Father Millard, a Franciscan, wrote to her confessor, Father Maltus: “I can congratulate you and the whole Community, as well as your brethren collectively, for the accession in the communion of saints in heaven by her happy and meritorious death.”

The celebrated Fr. Dalgairns, for so many years one of her chosen friends, said: “Never have I felt so confident of the eternal rest of anyone”; and his fellow Oratorian, Father W. B. Morris, wrote: “I have felt your dear Mother with me in a wonderful way since her death. She ever belonged to the other world than to this. She is now in her true place.”



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Fr. W. Amhurst, S.J., wrote: "I think the English Catholics should say, *Laudemus Deum Nostrum in operibus Beatae Margaritae*. If she had lived 600 or 800 years ago, my strong impression is, that we should be obliged to say and repeat some such words in the beginning of Matins for the 11th of May."

Bishop Grant wrote to a young novice: "When a great servant of God dies it is the duty of those who survive to unite their efforts and aspirations in order that His Glory may not be diminished. To you, the novice clothed to-day, we may suppose her bequeathing the duty of honouring the Most Blessed Sacrament as your portion and charge." That novice is, at an age well advanced over ninety, still in Mother Margaret's convent at Stone and still carrying out that saintly bishop's charge.

We might be led to conclude from these many wonderful testimonies of clerical esteem that Mother Margaret's work was achieved with no opposition from the clergy. This, however, would be far from the truth, and in the early days of the Coventry foundations both she and Dr. Ullathorne had much to suffer both from contempt and opposition. Several of his own Benedictine brethren blamed him for the "fuss" he made of Mother Margaret and her companions as if they were professed nuns of their own Order. But neither he nor Mother Margaret let this opposition in anyway affect their determination to establish the Conventual Third Order in England, and as the work progressed the opposition died down. Speaking of this period of persecution, Bishop Ullathorne wrote in 1869: "Bishop Challoner laid it down as being a sign of God's work that it should be gainsayed by good people. The humiliating and degrading things said of Margaret and her Sisters, and said by Priests and Religious who did not know them, and that for some years and until they arose into a success, I will not repeat, although this persecution of the tongue forms part of their history. Afterwards reparations were made, to Mother Margaret's distress and dismay, even more than one priest and those of religious Orders knelt down before her and asked pardon for all they had said to her disparagement."

WALTER GUMBLEY, O.P.