

playground the older boys instructed the younger, when the teacher was engaged elsewhere, in the facts of life. Even today the British cities in which Catholic schools are most numerous, and the most Catholic countries of Europe—Ireland, Portugal, and pre-war Poland—have the worst criminal and sex statistics. These are published officially, but not one of the moralists, sociologists or politicians who are so eloquent about the need of religion in the school ever glances at them.

Now at 7:30 every morning, winter (which is raw in Manchester) and summer, I walked to the great city. Train-fare would be a nickel a day, and we could not afford it. My mother's eyes brightened when I proudly brought home my first dollar. Somewhere about that time she received a letter from America enclosing \$35, the man explaining that he had cheated her of that in our little shop. She fainted. Four of us were at work, and my eldest sister was a schoolma'am. But there were still three youngsters, and quarters were carefully counted. How we slept in two bedrooms, occasionally squeezing in an aunt and uncle and their two children, is obscure in my memory. But the stork had brought his last gift, the income slowly rose, our comforts gradually increased. From errand-boy in one of those huge Manchester merchant-houses I became a clerk and made good progress. The boys and men came from areas which were at least superior to West Gorton—the few girls cheerfully acknowledged that they were street-walkers at night and sex rang in my young ears as persistently as ever—but my eye kindled with ambition. Daily I saw the merchant-prince old John Rylands, chief proprietor of the enterprise and a millionaire. I would . . . And here the line snapped. The first and mildest revolution in my life occurred. I resigned and went back to the Gorton monastery to begin preparatory studies for the priesthood.

2. IN THE SHADE OF THE CLOISTER

More than once during the last year or two the monks had plainly hinted that they would like me to join them. I had good character and, which was more important, I was considered the brightest pupil in their schools. Whenever some more important cleric or some rich lay patron visited the school I was put before the master's throne to sing "Save the Boy" or recite "The Cataract of Lodore" (a feat of memory, this, to which the school always listened open-mouthed). For two or three years I ignored all these suggestions and some that came presently from the Jesuits of the next district. My reason lies back in a misty patch of memory but I can faintly discern that, in a boyish way, I decided rather that when the time came I would marry and found a family. I fell deeply in love every year to the age of 15. But let me anticipate a little and tell the reader that, from poor health and hard study, my sexual maturity was delayed, in spite of my sultry surroundings, until the age of 24. Not that I was a sickly book-worm. I led in the cheap sports that we had, such as robbing the monastery garden of carrots and gooseberries. Only when the sport turned to such things as hunting stray cats or taking liberties with the school-girls did I evade the leadership. But often for weeks at a stretch I had to close my books and be sent off to breathe my native air.

When I was in my 14th year my father, whose piety was not so deep and docile as that of my mother, had an acrid quarrel with the clergy, and he at once packed his household goods and took them and us to a different part of Manchester, where we fell under the spiritual care of the Jesuits. I was never on the same familiar terms with any of these as I had been with the friars, though I served at their altar. A score of bonds held me to my old home and, perversely, I began now to be less repelled by their approaches. I had been the star boy-actor in the amateur parish dramatics, and they sent for me to take a difficult part in a play of Newman's. In short, to my mother's joy and with my father's

less confident consent, I agreed. I had no "vocation" to join the army of the Lord's servants, as they knew. They recruit their body by persuading boys that the career of a priest is one of such prestige as they would never normally attain: and, in my abnormal or retarded sexual condition the price was one that I could not then appreciate.

At the age of 16 I quit the wicked city and began to learn Latin in the preparatory college at the Gorton monastery, living at home and walking a mile or two every morning and evening. One other local boy, who later left the Order and became political boss of a suburb of New York which he would not care for me to name, and half a dozen raw Irish boys, sons of farmers who could pay the fee, made up the class. In realistic English what is called in Catholic literature the vocation to the priesthood means that either the boy must be intelligent and fairly behaved or his parents must be willing to pay \$100 a year for a year or two. Since I did not live in the monastery I paid nothing, and some Catholic writers have reproached me with using the "grand education" the Church gave me—some picturesquely say that it picked me "out of the gutter"—for the purpose of criticizing it. The one year of education in this college of "humane letters" was paltry. From a simple-minded and kindly young monk of mediocre ability we learned just enough of the elements of French and Greek—I found that he himself had never studied Greek and he learned his page the day before he gave it in class—for each pupil to forget them as soon as he passed on. Since Latin was the language of all church documents, ritual and domestic, this was our chief subject, but it was a nerveless medieval Latin. Few priests can read even Cicero. I worked so hard privately, at home, that by the end of the year I had read all Cicero's speeches and most of Vergil.

After that came the 12 months of trial, or the novitiate. This the authorities of the Order, who had hitherto had all their British recruits trained in Belgium, had established at Killarney, in Ireland. I still had no qualms until the week's holiday on the lakes was over and, dressed as monkings in the brown robe with knotted cord, sandalled feet, and shaven crowns, we were "enclosed" in the blue-limestone friary for a year. A younger brother of the Irish statesman John Dillon here joined us, though like all who joined after the age of 20, he later quit the Order.

Then began the grim round of prayers and holy exercises, with all lesson books and profane literature locked away. We had "left the world," even abandoning our names—I was now Brother Antony—and of this we had hourly reminders. From 6 in the morning we were, at intervals, droning out or chanting the psalms and lessons. We ate in silence while the Bible and holy books were read to us in Latin and English. We drank our coffee or tea, though many preferred beer at tea-time, from basins, not like the worldly folk who had cups and saucers. Our bedrooms (or cells) were Spartan in their simplicity. . . . But the calendar was relieved every few weeks by gorgeous feasts, and at Christmas it took us more than a week to clear the larders of the geese and turkeys, the cakes and puddings, which the Irish folk showered upon the holy friars. Many other nights, which were not saints' days, I heard, as I lay awake, the faint sound in the distant priests' quarters of song that somehow recalled the alcoholic noises of a Saturday night in Gorton. And why were we locked away every night behind a stout grille? Why so strictly forbidden not only ever to enter a brother's cell but even to lay a hand on him?

There was a grave conclave of the authorities on the question whether I should be dismissed. In the garden one day our special tutor found a few blades of grass on one of my comrades. I had playfully sprinkled them on him but he foolishly declined, and I out of pride refused, to give the explanation. There was another conclave later when my health broke down. The rich food brought on a dyspepsia that lasted 30 years. A minor crisis occurred when I was caught one day

reading a Greek grammar. How would my career have run if they had discharged me? One of them whom I met years later told me that I ought to have been recognized from the first as "a born anarchist," and they deeply deplored that consideration of my ability had held their hands.

So the weary year dragged out its length. One month I would sit, ill, in the garden moodily contemplating the melancholy blue Kerry hills beyond the lakes. Next month I would rally and face the holy treadmill. And gradually there emerged from the grey waters of my thoughts the fundamental doubt that was to haunt me for the next 10 years and in the end lead me to sanity and freedom. This unnatural life—pray remember that it did not then or for many years afterwards involve any sexual sacrifice for me—was part of a sacred commercial agreement, a contract with the Lord. It was a logical response to the Master's urge, to "leave all things" and you would receive "a hundredfold reward in heaven." So I would be sure of the other term of the contract. I might whimsically plead that the atmosphere of a great city and my little experience of its marts have given me this business conception of the religious life, but the truth is that from the time my mind unfolded it was ruthlessly logical. This green Irish earth about me, the cities way back in England, the warm home were real. Was the promised reward for sacrificing it all just as real? Faintly I traced the chief task of my thought-life for the next 10 years: prove the existence of God, the reality of immortality, the genuineness of the story of Jesus, the soundness of the Church's social claims.

Dutifully I told my doubts in confession, and the priest who had special charge of us, a kindly youngish man—though, as I learned later, under the cloud of an amorous adventure, so exiled to Ireland—who scarcely knew that such questions existed and would, if they occurred to his own mind, wash them away with a draught of Irish wine as whispers of the devil, used on me what we called in the later rhetoric class "the Blush Argument." How dare I, an ignorant boy, doubt what such legions of great men believed! He recommended the works of Cardinal Newman: the apologist whose maxim was, "Not by logic hath it pleased God to save his people." It was like giving port wine to a patient with fever. But I was captivated by Newman's style and read all his works to fix the pattern of it in my mind. . . . Years later I was dining one night at George Moore's with the French novelist Edouard Dujardin and, the talk falling upon Newman, I confessed my literary hero-worship. Moore, whose blood-pressure rose whenever he heard this literary praise of Newman, jumped up from the table with his customary bluntness and fetched his copy of the "Apologia," with a marked page. "Read that," he said truculently, "and tell Dujardin how many mistakes there are in that one page." I read it through. "Eleven," I confessed. "Thirteen," Moore snorted.

The spasm of doubt passed—it was to be a recurrent fever—and it was in complete sincerity that at the end of the year I knelt with the others before the altar and took the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience, while the ladies of Killarney shed tears. It never occurred to a Catholic woman to see that this encouragement of boys and girls to abjure life while they have still hardly a dim perception of its promises is the practice of human sacrifice in the interest of the Church. It is worse in the case of girls of 16 or 17 who are persuaded to take the veil. The priest finds his consolations. Once in later years, when I heard confessions in a convent, a young nun in her early 20's, kneeling at my side—not in a confessional "box"—confessed her peccadilloes, which you could write on a cigarette paper, and then said poignantly: "Father, I do want someone to love me." I had to murmur platitudes about the love of Jesus. To be sure, these vows of monkings and nunlings are only "simple" or provisional. On appeal the Pope can cancel them. But what Catholic boy or girl would ask his parents to approach the far-distant throne or, if they should do so, would go back to them

and their parish as one who had failed in, if not resisted, his or her vocation?

I was 17 when I reached the college in a suburb of London where the specific studies for the priesthood began. The deep impression of a morbid social order that the first phase of my life had given me was overlaid by these new and disquieting experiences, and my education, apart from a fair knowledge of Latin, had not yet begun. The faint traces of French and Greek nouns and verbs were nearly obliterated, and I could not even speak tolerable English. The head of the new college called upon each of us to read a paragraph from a book. He frowned at my Lancashire accent, and when I got to "us" and pronounced it "ooz" he visibly shuddered. "Oh," I corrected, "uz." I got my father to send me a pronouncing dictionary and polished my tongue; though, always a rebel, I refused to go the full length of the southern drawl in such words as "glarss" and "parss." For the first, if not only time, in my life I compromised.

There is no need here to go into detail about the next 10 years. I have described the life fully in my "Twelve Years in a Monastery," which has had more than 100,000 readers. An amphibious friend who lived with equal comfort in Catholic and Rationalist circles, each not knowing that he moved in the other, told me that at a Catholic dinner the talk fell upon this book. The cardinal-archbishop, near whom he sat, said: "It's all true, you know, but a malicious selection of the worst . . . How is it that we lose so many brilliant men?" I smile when I look back over its pages. The keynote was, as I will tell, given me by (Sir) Leslie Stephen: "Good-humored contempt." But I had little humor at the time and an adolescent style.

I set my teeth in spite of the chronic dyspepsia I now had—I fainted scores of times—and began the long program of study. The real head of the college part of the monastery, one of the ablest and most learned priests in London, extended to me from the start a friendship that became as intimate as the discrepancy of age permitted. As a result our teachers became known in the fraternity as 'The Removables.' Using my influence with him I got four of them removed for incompetence. For the first year we had rhetoric, and after a time I got the teacher, a dark, dubious, not unintelligent friar, deposed. Some years later he came back as head of the monastery in which I taught, but he was liberal enough to bear no malice: so liberal, in fact, that he twice departed with the contents of the treasury, had a comfortable month or two in Brussels, and, finding that he could not earn his living, returned to the monastic jail and became a popular preacher. He died a few years ago in the usual odor of synthetic sanctity.

The year was almost wasted, except that I perfected my knowledge of Latin and advanced in French (mainly by private work), and we passed on to the study of philosophy. It was a sort of primer of Thomas Aquinas, as little related to what Bertrand Russell calls philosophy as a primary school text-book of mathematics is to a work on Relativity. Yet our professor, an eccentric, red-faced, sloppy-limbed (from rheumatism) Belgian friar knew little more about it than we did. He promptly lost his chair. Years later, when I occupied that chair, I intercepted a love-letter he wrote to one of my pupils, and I got him transferred to the north, where his ardor might cool.

My learned friar-friend then took up "dogmatic theology," but I had two more scalps in my student days. As professor of "moral theology" (casuistry) he chose a more refined British friar who had been at public school (college) before he entered the Order. At least there were still traces of his earlier refinement in his kindly gentle speech, but he was one of the tragic wrecks of the system. Clearly he believed in it no longer, but the only alternative for him, if he quit, was the career of the hobo. He found consolation in beer, which he would even steal. He soon ceased to teach us the theology of virtue, and he died, of dropsy, in early middle age. My fourth victim was a

younger brother of my learned mentor, and the approach was difficult. But, a burly eupeptic young Irishman of considerable wasted ability, he was mildly insane from sex-repression—I learned later that in his visits to ladies of the parish he asked such questions as how many times a week they had relations with their husbands—and, in spite of his threats, I reported him.

These were just the few friar-priests in the little community with whom I came into contact. Others were at that time only enigmatic faces to me, for we students were still segregated, and for reasons which I was still constitutionally unable to imagine; though heaven knows there was not much of my ignorance left after I had emerged from the long and picturesque sexual section of our moral theology. We were training to hear confessions, and the theory was that the Lord insisted that when a man or a girl confessed a sin there was to be no vagueness about it. The priest must not absolve until he knew the precise degree of guilt, the physiological category, the local color, of the offense. But I will return later to the question of confession and the general level of character.

I have still the five Latin volumes of theology (3,432 quarto pages of closely printed matter) which we studied in three years. In the end I was sent to the archbishop's house for examination and the examiner, an elderly Belgian canon, stared at me when I asked him to conduct the examination in Latin. I spoke it more fluently than he did, and it seemed more fitted to the subject. This, and a course of the weird fiction which in Catholic seminaries is called ecclesiastical history, completed the grand education which they gave me. I taught myself. By some freak chance our musty and almost entirely sacred library contained a few old volumes of a cheap encyclopedia, and I read the scientific articles eagerly and admired the wonders that science had achieved—30 years earlier. My Gorton diction gave way to one so stately that the professor, with mild rebuke, bade us one day write an essay on the use of big words. He looked sadly at me when I handed him a few pages with the title "On the Employment of a Sesquipedalian Vocabulary." I fancy there were about four words to the line in the essay. But I was safely insolent. Somehow—I often wonder now what sort of a young prig I was in those days—even the head man muttered a suggestion or correction to me, if it were ever really necessary, almost in a tone of apology. I had, and have, no inclination to strut or boast. It was just a fact of life.

Through it all my malady, aggravated by the heavy food and the unhealthy life, persisted, and the clouds of doubt now rolled more frequently upon my mind and seemed to grow denser. I do not remember that I suffered acutely, but a few years after I had quit the Church I put my experiences, while they were still fresh, in a novel ("In the Shade of the Cloister," by "Arnold Wright") which that outstanding critic, Sir Clement Shorter, described in his review as "brilliant." This surprised me, but I am even more surprised today to read how somber life became and how the daily round of, one might say, mechanical prayer from 6 in the morning chafed my raw nerves. By this time I had begun to see the hypocrisy of the life, the fraudulent claim of superior virtue, the—to use clerical language—soulless routine of church life. But I was bound to it by "solemn" vows from the age of 19. Even the Pope could not relieve me of these oaths to the Lord; unless, as a few cases in papal history show, I became heir to great wealth or power. Papal interpretation of the Lord's will always coincided with the material interests of the Church.

But I had no mind to leave, and my learned father-confessor, to whom I spoke freely of the matter, never suggested that I should even postpone my advancement toward the priesthood. The right evidence for me, I felt, was somewhere round the corner, and I avidly read all relevant literature that I could obtain. When I became a priest my guide initiated me to the sort of secret society of Modernists among the

clergy. He was a friend of the famous French priest-scholar Duchesne and would often quote that historian's saying that there were those who would pull down the old ivy-grown fabric of the Church but wise men would be content to remove the ivy. But it was just the ivy by which the Church held the allegiance of its uneducated millions; and I was in any case never interested in dogma or sectarian controversy. Protestant writers who say that it was unfortunate that I knew only one Church and discarded it hastily for Atheism are entirely wrong. From the first my doubts hovered about the fundamental religious statements.

And this search for the solution of my doubts caused me to find a lead for the rest of my life. I soon broke through the brittle shell of what in the Catholic Church we called philosophy: a structure of medieval verbiage the foundations of which Kant had destroyed a century earlier and which provoked only the smiles of modern philosophers until, in our day, the wealth and political power the Church has attained intimidated professors and publicists and forced them to greet such a man as Maritain as a thinker. I found the larger philosophies not less barren for my search, and I increasingly explored the fields of modern science and history; and, as I will tell presently, the death of God in my mind compelled me to formulate a new creed of life, individual and collective, and pay equal attention to contemporary literature, sociology, politics, and economics, to read many languages and visit many lands.

At the time it was to be remarked only that I took an unusual interest in philosophy, and as soon as I was ordained priest, at the age of 23, I was appointed "professor of philosophy," the title in our rules. Why I went on to the priesthood I have explained. My skeptical fever was intermittent, and it disappeared in times of extraordinary religious emotion, such as the special preparation for some "holy order." At the time of my ordination my mind was as clear as a fleckless sky. There happened to be at the time in London an authority of our Order from Rome, and he wanted to take me to Rome to study in the Franciscan international school or university at Aracoeli. Had I gone there . . . Over the portals of these Roman universities they might inscribe "Abandon hope, all ye who enter here." They are laboratories for incubating the cleverer priests from all lands with the true indestructible papal virus.

But my learned patron, who had influence in Rome, would not part with me. He had no other friar under his charge who even knew definitely what the word philosophy meant. So I gravely mounted the rostrum and, as our rules enjoined, dilated for an hour in Latin on the meaning and aim of philosophy. In the course of the day I found that the pupils had not understood a word, such was their training even in Latin. I was compelled to give the classes in English, from a Latin text book, and I soon found that learning philosophy meant only memorizing formulae.

This Catholic or "scholastic" philosophy was not only a system that must not promote thinking but it had an unsound lineage. It was ultimately based upon the metaphysics of Aristotle, and Aristotle had rendered the world an ill service when he deserted the Ionian line of research and founded metaphysics. The Arabs when they took up the heritage of the Greeks and found his works in the monasteries of Greek heretics, realized that they must remain in Aristotle's world of compromise and verbiage while so many Muslim fanatics watched them, and it was from translations of the Arab works that the medieval schoolmen learned philosophy; and they further twisted and strained its formulae to make them support Christian theology. The reader may wonder how I spent four years in that galley, but the scheme was in some ways capable of expansion. It began with logic and passed on to "ontology" or metaphysics proper. But the three remaining sections were cosmology, psychology, and ethics; and here I could discreetly

borrow from science to put flesh on the dry bones. It was a dangerous enterprise and was slowly spelling out my clerical doom; and my faith might have collapsed earlier but for a year's suspension of my studies.

Owing to some reorganization I had no students for a year, and my superior sent me to our friary at Louvain (Belgium) to learn Hebrew and Syriac at Louvain University. I attended also the course of philosophy under Msgr. (later Cardinal) Mercier, who suspecting the grossness of life amongst the ignorant friars, invited me to live at his house and was kind and friendly. Before I returned to England he offered me a Ph.D. over the tea-table, but I had to explain that the rules of my Order forbade us "humble friars" to accept. He was, like my London confrere, an advanced Modernist, but he disarmed and was made a cardinal when Rome started its truculent campaign against Modernism. Hebrew, of which I had a fine first year course under Van Hoonacker, and the Syriac, the supposed teaching of which by Lamy was a senile comedy, were never of the least use to me. The lessons in Syriac were indeed such—they were just rambling talks on everything except Syriac—that after one a week for six months Lamy demanded that each of us (or all three of us) should bring a translation of the Syriac text of 20 lines of Genesis next week. By careful comparison of the Hebrew text I wrote it out, and my fellow-students tore it up. They could not translate a line. I carried my Greek, which was never good, a step further, perfected my French, and learned German with the friendly aid of German students.

As to the horrors of the friary—the lavatory and toilet arrangements reminded me of the slums of Manchester, though the friars had plenty of money—and the miserable hypocrisy, the sordid mixture of ascetic professions and greedy, greasy practices . . . See my "Twelve Years in a Monastery." It was, as far as that was concerned, with profound relief that I found myself recalled at the end of a year to London to resume my classes—and my private search for God. No man had ever more of the will-to-believe or prayed more passionately for light. The search nearly came to a premature end soon afterwards. After lecturing on astronomy to a parochial gathering of 1,000 or so and imprudently talking afterwards in the icy air I contracted pleurisy, and the moment came when through filmy eyes I saw all the friars kneeling by my bed in prayer for the dying . . . In a month or two I was again seeking God and showing raw Irish pupils how to prove his existence ineluctably by means of the arguments of Aquinas.

The dull ache of life grew worse. The clouds of doubt became dark and permanent. The hypocrisy of the life in which I was ensnared was no longer mere suspicion. Only one man in a dozen priests was what the expert would call deeply religious. Most of them were just men who would probably have made honest traders but the life in some degree or other demoralized them. I rubbed shoulders now with friars whom I had known in my boyhood at Manchester, and the mask of saintliness soon fell away. One friar I had known, a dark gaunt man, had sent so many girls to become nuns in a strict convent at York that his confessional was frivolously called "the booking office." He had been transferred to London, and his superior told me that he was so pitiful a dipsomaniac that if you put a glass of whiskey before him and threatened to shoot him if he touched it he would snatch it up. He called at certain Catholic homes every day while the husband was at business, demanding whiskey, perhaps more. Other friars had what were amongst ourselves notorious liaisons. In the end I found that my learned mentor had a suspicious tenderness for a sensual girl of 17 who boasted to me, with a smirk, of their "friendship."

Since I was a professor I was excused from this arduous duty of taking teas with ladies in the afternoons which is the chief escape of the friar-priests from the dreariness of the life. It troubled me little. My sexual development came on at the age of 24, but my health was poor; and as long as I believed in the ideal of the life I was faithful to it. But I had to help in hearing confessions, and the work was so tiresome

and morbid that it was the first priestly duty I began to evade. I have a full chapter on it in my "Twelve Years" and must here dismiss it summarily.

The more lurid accounts or suspicions of the confessional are fiction. Priest and penitent are so separated in the "box" in the church that no contact is possible. There is, however, no absolute prohibition of hearing the confessions of women elsewhere, and the amorous priest would not observe it if there were. I have known one of these induce young married women to feign illness and take to their beds . . . But the priest has such opportunities for adventure in his visits to the homes or in his own home that the confessional plays a small part in the romance of clerical life. Doubtless it is used for assignations. In large numbers of cases it demoralizes, even debauches, girls and young women. In it they are, they understand, licensed to talk intimately about their sex feelings to a man. For the great majority of Catholics it is a mechanical routine, an unwelcome obligation, and it is only in a small minority of cases—generally of refined women—that it may be the moral aid which non-Catholic admirers of the Church affect to find in it. Broadly it is just part of the Church's technique to make the laity inferior and docile to the clergy.

Of the character of the priests themselves one can say only what commonsense would expect in such circumstances. One of their most common pleas is that without religion there can be no character. This is not merely a controversial device. It is in large measure a reflection of their condition. The man who normally loses the religious basis of his code of conduct easily finds that it has a sound social basis in the life which he shares. But the priest who becomes skeptical yet remains in his position—and few have the least hope of securing a life of equal comfort in any other way—has no social pressure or direction. He concentrates on the 11th Commandment, Thou shalt not be found out. One might call "No Scandal" the supreme commandment of the Church to the clergy in non-Catholic countries; and even in Latin countries today the growth of Communism and Socialism, which they naturally hate, turns an innocent love-affair or a rich table into a scandal.

I have repeatedly discussed the matter with other ex-priests and we were agreed that the great majority of priests are skeptical in some degree or shade and that large numbers of them are entirely skeptical as regards religion. The level of conduct corresponds.

Few are deeply religious and free from hypocrisy. A large proportion are completely unscrupulous and amorous. Not that a priest has to be skeptical to indulge in love-affairs. I have in various works given ample evidence of the conduct of priests in Italy, Spain, France, and Latin America. It is a large subject and one in which precision is impossible. Let it suffice that in the kind of conduct that matters it is ludicrous to represent the clergy as superior to the laity, and that probably the majority of them in America and Britain are occasionally or habitually immoral in the narrower sense. I still think that nuns, who in any case have little opportunity, are rarely unchaste. Several ex-nuns have confirmed me in this while admitting that the unnatural life leads to an intolerable amount of quarrelling and unhealthy feeling; while doctors who have served convents have told me that masturbation is a common evil in them.

In the summer of 1895 I was offered, and I accepted, charge of a small college that the friars had built in the country (Buckingham) to give recruits of 13 to 15 the preliminary studies, chiefly Latin. I was now the Very Reverend Professor Father Antony, according to our statutes, at the age of 27, and before me . . . But I smiled. I had taken the quiet rural position because the time had come when I must wrestle with my soul. For months I was immersed in framing a more or less modern curriculum and was, with one young and ill-educated assistant and all the cares of a college of slenderest revenue, teaching it to a dozen pupils, several of whom had the brains of their Irish cattle.

I was not allowed to reject them—their parents paid. At the Christmas vacation I shut myself in my cell and faced my destiny. I was already watched. I had a telescope, a microscope, a collection of modern books. I took a sheet of paper and—was it the Manchester influence?—divided it into debit and credit columns on the arguments for God and immortality. On Christmas Eve I wrote "Bankrupt" at the foot.

It seemed to me that I had the right to linger on a little, preparing for the new life, allowing a margin for an improbable return of faith; and it was in misery that I got through—closely watched—such ceremonies as were inevitable. On the night of February 18th my mentor, Father David, walked in from London. He drank my whiskey as genially as ever, but I knew. The one Catholic lady I had taken into my confidence had betrayed me.

Smilingly I watched him next morning—it was Ash Wednesday—go out, for I knew that he was going to close the bank account; and I still smiled when he came back with a new face. "On information received" the grand council deposed me and ordered me to repair to a monastery, a virtual prison, in the heart of the country. I shed the brown robe and sandals, put on the black clerical suit, and packed my civvies and my books. Non-Catholic friends I had made had urged me to do this. I had not myself conceived that the friars would stoop to the level they did, but Father David had become in a day my bitterest enemy. He offered me at parting the usual brotherly kiss, but I refused the Judas gesture. When he asked, nervously, if I was going to the secluded friary I shook off the prudence recommended to me and told him to mind his own business. Too excited to appreciate the magnitude of my first rebellion and revolution, I walked out with my eyes on the sun of a new world. My "friend," I soon found, walked out to the police-station and heavily charged me with theft from the college. The Church must be protected whatever hearts and lives are broken.

3. STEPPING OUT

For some time I had taken part in a cheerful Sunday evening meeting in the doctor's house. The banker, solicitor, curate, and a few leading businessmen formed the circle. None knew until the end of January that I was not a conventional orthodox priest. I then told one or two, and they surprised me by first urging me to stay where I was, with all my skepticism, but it happened that just about the middle of February one of them had to dismiss his junior cashier and he offered me the modest job as a temporary means of support. So from the monastery I went to my friend's house, changed to civvies, and trusted to hear no more of the miserable world from which I had escaped.

I was awakened at 7 in the morning by a nervous postmaster who said that by a trick a representative of the monastery had secured my letters and had threatened that they would "soon silence me." At 9 Father David, handing in a letter of introduction in which he put M.A. after his name—it meant Missionary Apostolic, he later explained—called upon my friend and represented me as a dishonest youth, in temporary charge of the college, whom they had had to discharge. He went away with burning ears, but in the afternoon he came back with a police-sergeant to claim the "stolen goods." For the sake of peace I let him have some of the books, though the thick-skulled sergeant, who (I later learned) committed a serious legal offense in letting them bring him, was hopelessly bewildered about ownership. Twenty years later a Catholic attorney introduced this point in the course of a lawsuit in which a monastic body impudently claimed property and I was called as an expert witness. The estimable judge was just as puzzled as the rural sergeant by the "vow of poverty" and the claim of ownership—he made contemptuous remarks on the abbot at the close—and when he asked me who *does* own the books and other property in a monastery

I was able to reply: "My Lord, nobody knows—our theologians agree only that the monks do not." His expression implied that we seemed to have dropped back from the Central Law Court of modern London to the Middle Ages.

It was the beginning of the venomous and unprincipled persecution I was to endure for the next half-century. All my Catholic friends, except my parents, who nobly defended my honor, melted like snowflakes, and soon they believed the scurrilous stories the priests put into circulation about me. Not only had I robbed the monastery but I had left solely to drink and continue my amours more freely. "Punch and Judy," the Irish priests smirked, with all their greasy vulgarity. Twenty years later a Scottish schoolmistress wrote me that a high Catholic dignitary told her that I had compromised a nun and had had to leave to marry her. Ten years earlier men had written me that Catholic barbers had whispered this story into their ears. They all knew, or could quite easily ascertain, that I did not marry until nearly three years after leaving the Church, and I then married a young lady of whose existence I had been unaware until 13 months after leaving. As time went on and I won some public prestige the tactics changed. An ex-member of the inner circle at Catholic headquarters told me that every effort was to be made to ruin me, and for years no London paper has reviewed any books of mine or published any letter I wrote it. More than once Catholics have threatened my life, and I have learned of the meanest tricks to hamper my work as a writer and lecturer.

Yet it is sheer nonsense to say, as some do, that this bitter hostility explains why I have written and lectured so much on the Church. Smilingly I acknowledge that I have given as much as I have taken, though I have never fought with unclean weapons or stooped to mean or dishonest devices. Over the mantel in my study hang two symbolic ornaments: an oriental pipe and an oriental dagger (which is not poisoned). Any man who wants a literary duel with me may choose the weapon; but I prefer the pipe. It is true that in Britain, where the law of libel is a law and at least the law courts are impervious to Catholic influence, they never ventured to put in print one word of their magpie chatter reflecting on my character. A few years ago a correspondent sent me a booklet ("I Can Read Anything") in which an American Jesuit, Fr. D. A. Lord, explains to Catholics how wise and kindly is the order of the Church that they must not (under pain of hell) read my criticisms of it. One passage ran:

"Has it occurred to you that when you read books of this sort, you pit your minds, as yet not fully matured or trained, against the trained, clever, brilliant minds of men skilled in their lines and adept in their methods? And when they are utterly unscrupulous, as, let's say, Joseph McCabe is, and will twist any bit of history to make a case, pile yarn on yarn to construct a proof, and use fable for fact and supposition for solid argument, what chance has the average reader against them? He is fighting unfairly against men who fight fairly, and we wisely decline to meet an unfair fighter."

Ah, I reflected, at last they break into print, and the law shall decide. But on looking again at the imprint I found that the booklet had been published by The Catholic Truth Society of *Ireland*, and, as Catholic Irish ladies who have several times come to consult me about the frauds of their priests and nuns have told me, you have no more chance of finding a solicitor who will accept a case against the Church in de Valera's Eire than you have in Vatican City. The British Catholic Truth Society did not publish the booklet; but I found that it quietly gave inquirers about me the address of the Dublin publisher.

Since I must have written more than 50 substantial works on the Roman Church one would think that Jesuit writers who found me so recklessly unscrupulous would have in my works a magnificent field for their well-known zeal to expose "lies about the Church": and the excuse that they are too dignified to engage with a man who fights unfairly is

amusing. More plausible is the assurance that Mr. Poynter, who was for years in the inner councils of the Westminster Catholic Federation (the British equivalent of Catholic Welfare), once gave me that it was a standing order to propagandists that it was safer to avoid all reference to my works. In America, I believe, some misguided or ambitious priest once wrote a serious book—I did not trouble to get a copy of it—on "The Philosophy of Joseph McCabe"; whereupon the Jesuit organ, which I *did* see, stamped on the poor worm for taking so seriously "a man with the brain of a peasant." The only attempt at an express reply that I have ever seen is a tortuous and evasive booklet by the Jesuit Keating written and published by the Catholic Truth Society 37 years ago! Once, a correspondent told me, a Catholic preacher explained that "as an historian McCabe is completely discredited." On challenge afterwards he said that in my "Haeckel's Critics Answered," which had been published 27 years earlier, I had, casually, given the wrong name of a French preacher.

The reader will expect at least a few pages on my attitude to the Roman Church, but I will be brief. It is, in the first place, an entirely wrong idea that it has occupied the chief place in my mind and work. Of my books only one in four or five is concerned with it, while of my thousands of lectures in nearly all parts of the British Empire and America, I should say that 10 times as many were on science alone as on Rome. Simply, the one subject on which I was an expert when I quit the Church was the Church, and folk wanted to know why I had quit it; or, as a dour Scot said at one meeting, "what the de'il he was doing in the galley at all." When I wrote my "Twelve Years in a Monastery" and it had at once a large circulation, the demand increased, and even Sir Walter Besant, with whom I was then friendly, urged me to continue on that theme. I did not feel the holy spirit of a crusader, and the demand rather surprised me. A little society in Manchester asked for the lecture "Why I Left the Church of Rome," and a surprising number of the citizens came to hear. Incidentally—and to my annoyance—they advertised me with large posters that had my name and "Ex-Priest" in enormous letters, though I never pandered to those who were eager for spicy tales. I learned later that my eldest sister, a devout Catholic schoolmistress with whom I was afterwards cordially reconciled, spent a whole night on the streets tearing down such bills as she could reach. When I asked my brother what my father had said he replied, reflectively: "Well, you see, the old man had never seen the family name that size before." George Moore told me that was worth a book.

In the monastic college I had taught "ecclesiastical history" as well as philosophy. I opened my serious literary career with biographical studies ("Peter Abelard" and "St. Augustine and His Age"). They were reviewed (by Leonard Courtney, Leslie Stephen told me) in editorial articles of the *Daily Telegraph*, one of London's higher-class dailies, and were for years on the reading list in the historical school of a number of American universities, and this led me to take up history as my principal line of study. I now saw the monstrous falsity of the Catholic version and began to write the true version. I was already painfully aware how hypocritical the priests were. I saw this now, not merely as a morbid effect of an unnatural life, but as part of a vast scheme for duping the Catholic laity, and indeed the world. From the earlier pre-monastic stretch of my life I had an abiding sentiment of pity that in the 6th millennium of civilization the mass of the people should live as they did, and I now saw that the Church had, instead of creating or promoting European civilization, as it boasted, retarded it for 1,000 years and had, for the protection of its own wealth and power, taken sides always with the enemies and exploiters of the people.

I had been taught to tell folk not to judge the Church by its life in Protestant countries. I now traveled and found that non-Catholic atmosphere really gave it some decency to which it was cynically in-

different in Catholic countries. In time I became a citizen of the world, closely watching the pageant of life—social, political, and economic—and I found Rome as unscrupulously, though now less openly, putting its wealth and power as high above the interests of the race as it did in the age of Gregory VII or Innocent III. I saw the clerical or professionally Catholic body, from the Pope to the local journalists, as forming the richest, most powerful, most selfish, most unscrupulous corporation in the world, now not only keeping blinkers on the eyes of their "subjects" but bribing or intimidating editors, education authorities, publishers of encyclopedias, radio-controllers, film producers, and politicians until it could, in cooperation with the Axis, even drag the race into a world-war and none dare utter the flagrant and indisputable truth about its share.

Hatred is, in my code, one of those sentiments that belong to the same dark damned world as pugilism and war; and I have not the least prejudice against the Catholic laity, which would be stupid. My work is to tell the world facts, as I have done in the unanswered works—they would now fill a hundred books of the size of ordinary novels—I have published in Britain or America; to say nothing of translations of some of them into French, German, Danish, Russian, Spanish, Italian, and Japanese. My friend H. G. Wells twitted me for years about my seeing "a Jesuit behind every bush." In his later years he said harsher things about the Church of Rome than I have ever said. "It is," he wrote, "the greatest evil in the world." It is one of them, and I have fought it; and there, as far as this book is concerned, I leave it and turn to describe the next day's journey, now with peas in my boots and no cheerful companions, of my pilgrimage to some unknown shrine. I had not even the encouragement now of knowing in what direction the stony road led.

At the age of 16 I had worked industriously in a humble position in the great commercial army in which every soldier had a million dollars in his pack. I was going places, rapidly. Then I had my little revolution and had to begin to advance along a different road. In 12 years I got well on the foothills, though to this rise I had never aspired. I was a professor of philosophy and university-scholar of oriental languages, a Very Reverend . . . And at 28 I was a clerk earning \$7.50 a week, brooding at night in the cottage of a poor widow who housed and fed me for \$5 a week, with not one friend in England except the few professional men of the town, little cheered by an occasional letter from home in which my mother bravely tried to hide her feelings of pain and shame. It was a bywater, and after I had saved some \$50 or so, I set out, badly dressed, awkward as a school-girl, to make my fortune in the Big City.

One non-Catholic friend I had made while I had been a priest in London, and he hailed me. He was one of those curious little men who pester well-known men with letters and, if they are weak, maintain a correspondence with them. He introduced me to the then poor and obscure Rationalist society, and for them I wrote a booklet, radiant with adolescent fire, on "Why I Left the Church" and a dreadfully stodgy small book, "Modern Rationalism," which for a month or so paid my \$6 a week for board and lodging in a bed-sitting-room in East London. My friend sent me to Bernard Shaw. He was kind but seemed to have some presentiment of the coming feud between us; and when his literary advice was "take infinite trouble about what you are going to say and dash it down as frivolously as you like," and it seemed to me that this was the exact opposite of what he did, I did not see him again until years later. My friend introduced me also to the Ethical Lecturer Moncure D. Conway, and he fell diplomatically ill for the next Sunday and made me his substitute.

But my small hoard of dollars was shrinking. Tutorial agencies offered me ill-paid jobs at private schools on condition that I would describe myself a Protestant, which I refused. A printing works in the

country offered me the position of special reader, but I found that they expected to get, for \$15 a week, a man who would detect every microscopic mistake in Latin, French, and German school-books. Presently I was back in a poor widow's back room in East London; and she watched me hungrily, as if she could X-ray my pocket. An answer to an advertisement secured an appointment as private secretary to an aristocratic lady of 90, and at least I spent six quiet and healthy months looking over Nice and the Mediterranean, or north over the lower Alps, from her villa on the hillside at Brancolar.

And here something of a path broke upon my mind, though the new life still dazed and thwarted me. My London friend had put me in touch with Leslie Stephen, then the Dean of British Letters, and he was my cordial and most generous friend until he died. At some social meeting a few years later I overheard a man ask Dr. Stanton Coit, the Anglo-American Ethical leader, how it was that a quite unimportant person like McCabe had become, apparently, so close a friend of Stephen. Coit had married a rich German widow and taken a large house in Hyde Park Gate; and he would have given his eyes to have the *entree* of Stephen's house on the other side of the same street; at which, he knew, I lunched, without invitation, whenever I cared. I now heard him explain: "Oh, McCabe just hangs on to his coat-tails, and Stephen is too kind to brush him off." Stephen died in 1904, and in Professor Maitland's "Life and Letters" you will find a letter of Stephen's to me in which he says: "I have thoroughly liked and respected all that I have ever known of you and your work." He was then (1902) Sir Leslie Stephen and the most distinguished literary man in Britain. I may say, in fact, that it was largely under my persuasion that he accepted the offer of a title. Everyone knew, he said, that these titles were sold by the political party in power. But I pointed out that worthy men must accept in order to keep some decent meaning in the title, and he was one of the finest men I ever met. As to the gentleman who assured folk that I held on to Stephen's coat-tails, he would have had an apoplectic fit if Maitland had published the second part of the letter, which—I still have it—describes *him*.

I told Stephen that I had used my ample leisure at Nice to put my monastic experience in the form of a novel and I asked him to look at the manuscript. He did so but, saying that he was no judge of fiction, he got the distinguished novelist Mrs. Humphrey Ward also to read it. I can imagine that prim lady's verdict. A few years later I had my revenge. Stephen was slowly dying of cancer, and his doctor allowed him an hour each afternoon to say good-bye to friends. Near the end it was the turn of Mrs. Humphrey Ward and myself. We met at the house and were to have half an hour each. But after 20 minutes the nurse called me, and I had 40 minutes with my generous friend and patron. He told me, with a glint of his old humor, that his nurse read both Mrs. Ward's books and mine from his library, and the time she had allotted each of us was a measure of her judgment. The manuscript of my novel ("In the Shade of the Cloister") was gladly taken later by a son of George Meredith, who was then manager of Constable's publishing house, and from critics of recognized distinction like Sir Clement Shorter it received more praise than I thought it deserved.

Stephen's verdict was: "If this incredible stuff is true, for God's sake tell it in non-fiction." That was the origin of my "Twelve Years." The Hon. Mrs. Ives—so old that she had been presented to three Sultans and three Popes and had seen Napoleon—died in the Spring and, after a giddy whirl in the Nice Carnival, I returned to London and began to write. From the cooking of an expert chef and the airy rooms of a gaily painted villa I had returned to a mean lodging, but at least I had an objective. Stephen read my manuscript, as he read the manuscripts of my early works. Beyond translating into Anglo-Saxon many of the big words I still loved he hardly touched my work. He said that

I needed no literary help. He recommended the manuscript to the best publisher in London (Smith Elder), and it soon appeared.

In Maitland's life there is no reference to Stephen's breach at this date with his old friend Dr. H. D. Traill, editor of the chief literary weekly and writer of distinction. It was because Traill, who feared to offend Catholics (I inferred), refused to admit Stephen's review of my book. In his sense of justice and loyalty to me Stephen shed one of his oldest friendships and a profitable connection.

I had the vanity in those days of paying for press cuttings—for 20 or 30 years I have not crossed a room to read a review—and I felt the first flush of success. I had stepped out, and I met many well-known folk. Somehow—I forget how—I made the acquaintance of a lady who had 20 years earlier set fire to America with her bold feminism. Mrs. Biddulph Martin, as I knew her, was now the widow of a rich British banker and so mellowed that the Parable of the Vine and the Elm was painted on marble over the mantel in her drawing room. She had one of the richest houses in Hyde Park Gate, a few doors from my friend Stephen, who almost shuddered at the proximity, as Coit also did, because she and his sister Lady Cook had once advocated something like free love. I became curiously intimate with her and her daughter, both rigorous puritans, and roamed at will over their beautiful house.

Sir John Robinson, editor of the *Daily News*, sent for me, but it came to nothing. He had just read my book and he paid me the sterile compliment of saying, "I was expecting a *man*." Passmore Edwards, the philanthropist, was kind and gave me work on his paper, the *Echo*, but he sold it before I reached the staff. Domville, a retired lawyer, who talked of having me trained for the bar, introduced me to Professor Westlake and others. Sir Walter Besant saw me for a time—at his suggestion I wrote a second book (a dead failure) on monastic life—but when he saw that I dabbled in Rationalism he wrote:

"Drop that or drop literature. We have to tolerate it from a man like Stephen but we will not stand it from you."

W. T. Stead tried to lure me into Spiritualism, others into the Church of England, Unitarianism, or Congregationalism. Robertson—later the Right Honorable—took me into an anarchist free-love circle. I lived in a world of 'isms: a beggar at the feast.

The sudden elevation was too much for a brain that had lingered so long on the monastic lowlands. It was the most difficult year of my life to recall, but I seem to have lost appreciation of my contacts with distinguished people—writers, editors, professors, lawyers, etc.—and been blind to the opportunities they afforded. Probably the economic uncertainty of my life disturbed me. At all events when a friend told me that the Leicester Secular Society, an old Owenite foundation but chiefly regarded as an atheist center, wanted a sort of chaplain I applied for the post. I bade good-bye to my elegant London friends, and it was final with most of them. But I saw in a few months that I had put myself in a false position. I had expected mainly to be a lecturer: they had expected me to maintain and enlarge the society much as a parson manages his parish. I had never done parochial work, and they innocently assumed that I had. We parted at the end of a year on friendly terms; and still once a year I go to the little Midland society to lecture, though I have almost abandoned lecturing. It was a worth-while experience that I have never regretted, and I had leisure to begin to write my first historical work, "Peter Abelard," my prototype in so many respects. There too I met the girl of 18, daughter of a hosiery worker, a fine little man and great reader, whom I married a year later. Then back to London to resume my literary work, insure a steady income, and prepare a nest for the bride.

4. I BECAME AN ARCH-HERETIC

A friendly correspondent recently surprised me by saying that I seemed still to be "more of a priest than a Freethinker," and it is not many months since a representative of the Catholic Welfare organization asked me if he might have the honor of confirming a rumor, current in American Catholic circles, that I was about to return to the Church. This latter amazing experience inspired me to write a profession of faith which my friend Haldeman-Julius published. The reproach that I still seem to be much of a priest recalled to my mind an experience I had on a New Zealand boat plying between Auckland and Sydney. The Australian Opera troupe were abroad, and I was told that one of the leading actors, a Freethinker, was looking for me on the crowded boat. He was half—a good half—intoxicated when I met him in the evening, and he insulted me. Penitent but still cloudy next morning he apologized; but when I pressed him to say why he had mistaken me for a clergyman (which, to his mind, fully explained the insult), he said or muttered: "Well, you see, you have that silly sort of mug they have." Possibly in an hour of perfect sobriety he would have said "that spiritual expression."

Once a London theatrical manager, despairing of making a profit out of G. K. Chesterton's play "Miracles," got me, with the economist J. A. Hobson as support, to hold a debate in his theater with Chesterton (a mountain of flesh) and Hilaire Belloc (a hill of flesh)—Hobson was even leaner than I. In one of the papers next morning a reporter observed that the labels on the performers seemed to have been confused: that the materialists were too spiritual and the spiritists too material. The truth, as is not uncommon in these transcendental matters, is that Chesterton and Belloc were eupeptic and Hobson and I dyspeptic. But I suspect that there is more than this in the suggestion that I am still a cleric, an atheistic chaplain. It will appear in the course of this narrative that I am as impatient of hypocrisy in leaders of or workers in an "advanced" movement as I am in the case of priests; and that I loathe the hard dogmatism that pushes some eccentric opinion—as that Jesus really was a fish-god of ancient Palestine or the hero of a rustic passion-play—because it has such a destructive air.

To the many people who *do* know my name, since several of my books and booklets have sold more than 100,000 copies and at least a million folk have heard me lecture, in America and Britain it is that of one of the leading rebels against religious traditions. From their clerical writers in fact they get the idea that, from some mysterious impulse or diabolical guidance or anger at the waste of my youth, my life is "devoted to the destruction of religion." This sketch of my life will, I fear, show that I am a much less melodramatic and colorful personality, and I must explain how the accidents of life so shaped my early career that I came to devote so much of my writing and lecturing to religion. I have explained that I had set out on a definite literary path in writing my "Peter Abelard" and "St. Augustine and His Age." This field of historical biography, studying the age even more than the man, had a fascination for me, and Leonard Courtney, then editor of the *Fortnightly Review*, and others as well as Sir Leslie Stephen, assured me that I would go far along that line. But, with all respect to Voltaire, I must live. I had married, and, although we lived sparingly in three rooms in a cheap district, bread and beef could not be paid for in compliments. Just at this juncture the Ethical movement and the Rationalist movement offered me a steady basic income. The expert on the moral instruction of children, F. J. Gould, succeeded me in Leicester, and I took his place in London; and the work of writing and lecturing on both lines was entirely congenial.