

# Sisterhoods in the Episcopal Church.

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HOW WILLIAM AUGUSTUS MUHLENBERG GAVE THE IMPETUS TO ONE OF THE REMARKABLE RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS OF THE PAST HALF CENTURY—THE PRESENT STATUS OF THE SISTERHOODS, AND THEIR FINE RECORD OF CHARITABLE AND PHILANTHROPIC WORK.

ONE Sunday afternoon in 1845 a sermon was delivered in the chapel of St. Paul's College, which, standing on College Point, near Flushing, Long Island, looks across the East River toward the shore of the mainland. The preacher was the Rev. William Augustus Muhlenberg, and his subject was "Jephthah's Vow." After the service an unknown lady spoke to him in rather a general way of religious vows. Subsequently she made known to Dr. Muhlenberg her desire to enter the "religious" life as a member of some community of sisters.

Some time in the following winter, after the evening service in the Church of the Holy Communion, in New York, the congregation being dispersed, the good woman just referred to was consecrated by Dr. Muhlenberg, the only witness being the sexton, who was waiting to put out the lights.

Thus the first sisterhood in the Episcopal Church and in the whole Anglican communion was started. Its dim outline had long lain in the mind of Muhlenberg, saint and sage, and with it the purpose of founding St. Luke's Hospital.

He would often say: "No sisterhood, no hospital." A few more years passed, and the hospital took its place as one of the great charities of New York, with the Sisterhood of the Holy Communion to furnish its nurses. Together hospital and sisterhood have lived and prospered.

Sisterhoods began to spring up rapidly in the English church about this time. Some of them were transplanted to the United States, others were created here, as there was a need felt for such institutions, if the church was to adjust itself to the conditions of modern life.

In a general way, these sisterhoods were alike. Each one had a



SISTER HARRIET (HARRIET STARR CANNON), FOUNDER AND MOTHER SUPERIOR OF THE SISTERHOOD OF ST. MARY.

head known as the mother superior. The members were bound together by obedience to certain rules; in most of the orders the three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience were taken by the sisters. Each order had a distinctive dress, and all of them cultivated both the contemplative and the active side of Christian life.

#### THE DAILY LIFE OF THE SISTERS.

In the contemplative side of life the sisters seek to develop their spiritual nature and to offer themselves a living sacrifice to God. They observe the canonical hours in most of the houses; they attend the daily celebration of the Holy Communion; they have their private devotions, and they receive instructions from their chaplain.

But the active life of the sisters is more interesting to the public. As a rule, the several orders are not devoted to any one sort of Christian work exclusively, but each one pursues various lines of useful activity. When we scan the list of their undertakings we notice hospitals, homes for the poor and for the orphan, places of refuge for fallen women, schools, seaside and mountain resorts for the needy, visiting the indigent and the sick, mission work, and assistance rendered in parishes where it is desired by the rectors.

The Sisters of the Holy Communion—the order founded by Dr. Muhlenberg—visit and nurse in his old parish in New York, take care of a Home for Aged Women, and look after the vestments of the clergy and the choir. Another native organization, the Sisterhood of St. Mary, was, in a certain sense, evolved from the Sisterhood of the Holy Communion. Its founder was Harriet Starr Cannon, a member of a distinguished Southern family, and a woman of rare ability and character. She was a sister of the older body for a time, but in 1863 she and several others withdrew from the order. For two years they worked together without any special organization, carrying on various charities, but being subjected to no little persecution from people who regarded them as too much like the Roman Catholics in their spirit and methods. But they finally won their way, and in 1865 five of them formed

the Sisterhood of St. Mary, in New York, Sister Harriet becoming the mother superior.

The community has grown steadily, and has done invaluable work. A list of the charities it maintains will help the reader to realize what a power for good these sisterhoods are. In New York, the order manages the House of Mercy for fallen women, St. Agnes' House and St. Saviour's Sanitarium, St. Mary's Free Hospital for Children, the Trinity Mission on Fulton Street, and a school. It has a Convalescent Home for Children in Norwalk, Connecticut; the Noyes Memorial Home at Peekskill; a Summer Seaside Home for poor children at Great River, Long Island; the Church Home at Memphis, Tennessee; St. Mary's Mission and St. Mary's Home for Children in Chicago; St. Mary's Mission on the Mountain, Sewanee, Tennessee; and boarding and day schools at Peekskill, Memphis, Kenosha (Wisconsin), and Davenport (Iowa).

These good sisters, always thoughtful of others before themselves, have left for the last of their undertakings the erection of an adequate home for their own order. Plans for such a building have been prepared, and it is hoped that so useful a community will soon be properly housed by the generosity of those who appreciate its great work.

#### A BATTLE WITH YELLOW FEVER.

Before the story of the Sisterhood of St. Mary is closed, one incident of its life should be recalled. In 1875 a Southern branch of the community was established in Memphis, upon the urgent solicitation of the bishop of the diocese, the late Dr. Quintard. It is said that the women who were sent to the city on the Mississippi "were the flower of the sisterhood of that day." Five years later the yellow fever attacked Memphis with terrible force and fury. Two of the sisters were absent, taking a vacation in New York. Hearing that people were flying from the doomed city, they started to return to it without the loss of an hour.

The church force for the serious work of caring for the sick in Memphis consisted of two clergymen, four regular sisters, and two women, residents in the

sisters' house, but not members of the order. Later on two other clergy came to take part in the work, and three more sisters, one of them a member of St. Margaret's Sisterhood, which has its American home in Boston. Like soldiers fighting through a long and bloody siege,

liantly illuminated with the colors and the gold."

#### THE SISTERHOOD OF ST. MARGARET.

As we have given some attention to two sisterhoods in New York, both of American origin, I will now sketch one



ST. ELISABETH'S HOUSE, AT RIVERBANK, CONNECTICUT, A HOME FOR CRIPPLED GIRLS, MANAGED BY THE SISTERS OF THE ANNUNCIATION.

these brave and patient men and women labored and suffered and dared during the dark days of the epidemic, attending the service of the Holy Communion every day, and working day and night for the fever-stricken people. Two of the clergy died, both of them Northern men, one an officer of the Union army in the Civil War. Four of the sisters and one of their lay assistants also succumbed to the fever. Dr. Morgan Dix well says that "in the record of the community this is the page most bril-

in Boston, which came to the United States from England.

The Sisterhood of St. Margaret was founded in 1855 by the widely known Dr. J. M. Neale, with its headquarters at East Grinstead, in Sussex. In 1873 a branch of it was brought to Boston, specially to take charge of the Children's Hospital. The mother house of the order in America is on quaint old Louisburg Square, once a seat of fashion. The chief work of the English sisterhood was the visiting of the sick poor. The

sisters naturally took up the same duty in Boston, not only nursing the poor in their own homes, but teaching them how to take care of the sick and to make home more comfortable for those who were well. Their example led to the establishment of the system of district nursing in Boston, which has been for many years an important institution.

Besides their service to the sick poor and their management of the Children's Hospital, the Sisters of St. Margaret work among the colored people of Boston, having a hospital for them known as St. Monica's. They have established themselves in other parts of New England, in New York, and in Philadelphia. One of the largest of their undertakings is St. Margaret's Hospital, in Louisburg Square, Boston, where a pleasant home is provided for the sick, with skilful and sympathetic nursing. Any physician can send a patient to the hospital and attend him while there. In the summer the sisters provide country homes for needy children. During the Spanish war, two of them went to Porto Rico with the American troops, while three others nursed in the army hospitals of Jacksonville.

#### OTHER EPISCOPAL SISTERHOODS.

If the limits of this paper permitted, I might describe some of the other sisterhoods, but I have space to give only the briefest mention of them.

The Community of St. John the Baptist, an English order, founded in 1851, sent out a branch to this country thirty years later, which has grown into one of the greatest of the sisterhoods. The ancestral home of Helen Stuyvesant Folsom became its abiding place, and she, under the name of Sister Helen Margaret, its guiding spirit. The first great work of the order in the United States was the care of the Germans on the East Side of New York, a labor in which it has been signally successful; but it has entered into other fields which it cultivates with no less diligence and skill. Among the institutions under its control are schools for different classes of girls, hospitals, and homes, in New York and elsewhere.

The All Saints Sisters of the Poor have been working successfully in Baltimore for more than a dozen years in behalf of women and children. The Sisterhood of St. Mary, composed of colored women, has been caring for needy people of its own race in the same city, with the help and guidance

of the All Saints Sisterhood. It has found a large field for its benevolence, and one in which there is a lamentable scarcity of workers.

The Sisterhood of the Holy Nativity, founded by Bishop Grafton, of Fond-du-Lac, has justified its establishment by the useful work that it has done, especially in giving religious instruction in parishes and missions in Providence.



A MEMBER OF THE SISTERHOOD OF ST. MARGARET, AN INTERNATIONAL ORDER WHOSE AMERICAN HEADQUARTERS ARE IN BOSTON.



A SCENE IN THE CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL, BOSTON, AN INSTITUTION MANAGED BY THE SISTERHOOD OF ST. MARGARET.

Rhode Island, and several near-by places.

#### THE VALUE OF THE SISTERHOODS.

Enough has been said to show that the sisterhood movement is not a mere fad, and that those people are mistaken who believe that, while it is adapted to Latin countries, it has no place among native-born Americans. The simple, pure, and unselfish lives of the sisters are an inspiration and a model to the charitably inclined and a silent rebuke to the selfish, the worldly, and the pleasure-seeking. Their daily work is of no small practical service. The relief of poverty, helpfulness to the sick, the guidance and uplifting of women who are "more sinned against than sinning," the instruction of the ignorant, the hopefulness inspired in the wretched by sympathy and encouragement—all these things and others like them employ the time of the women who have abandoned worldly position and given up wealth, in

many cases, that they may be sisters indeed to those who need their ministrations.

When the great orthopedic surgeon, Dr. Lorenz, returned to Germany after his first visit to the United States, he said to an audience in Berlin that the difference between German and American nurses was that the Germans were servants, the Americans were ladies. The sisters were among the first ladies in this country to take up nursing, and they perhaps set the fashion.

Social service has become popular in the United States, and social settlements are multiplying in our large cities. Well-born and well-educated women are taking part in the work of bettering the conditions of the poor and needy by living among them and sharing their experiences. In this movement, too, the sisters were pioneers and leaders. They may be said to have blazed the way along which conservative social reform has been moving for some years past.

#### THE PESSIMIST.

THE path was cool. Sweet nature threw  
Wide-spread the doors of her abode.  
He turned from paths of sparkling dew,  
And chose to tread the dusty road.

*Kenneth Bruce.*