

The gentle Autoerat of the Breakfast Table reminds us that 'sin has many tools, but a lie is the handle that fits them all.' Hoyte found a handle for his tool (Maria Monk) in a filthy pamphlet that had seen the light in 1781.* He had it reprinted, merely altering the proper names so as to make the Hotel Dieu Nunnery at Montreal the scene of the abominable fiction. Hoyte and his fellow-conspirators of the thirties took special care to avoid mentioning the real name of any nun living at the Hotel Dieu. We shall see as we proceed that a like precaution has been observed by Slattery and his female partner in what the Auckland *Observer* terms his 'sordid mission.' Hoyte's reprint was published under the suggestive title of *The Fatal Disclosures of Maria Monk*. Maria herself was induced, in the face of the steady protests and denials of her Protestant parents, to pose as an 'ex-nun.'† And thus was set afoot what the Protestant editors of Appleton's *Cyclopaedia of American Biography* term 'one of the most remarkable impostures on record.'‡

Such were the auspicious beginnings of Mrs. Slattery's trade—that of the sham ex-nun. It was inaugurated by two lewd creatures who had never been members of the Church whose alleged enormities they professed to 'disclose.' The male partner in the conspiracy was a low rascal; his inevitable female companion was a thief, gaol-bird, and prostitute. But Hoyte's reprint sold amazingly. Money flowed freely into his pockets. The whole purpose of the conspiracy of falsehood was thus attained. When the half-witted sham nun had served her purpose, and met with the exposure which she courted, Hoyte flung her aside penniless and left her to shift as best she could for herself and her illegitimate child.

The New Maria Monks.

To this day the 'ex-nun' business is conducted on practically the same lines on which it originated. In A.D. 1900 a successful campaign of the kind requires, as it did in 1836—

1. A male Stiggins or Chadand of discreditable antecedents—frequently a non-Catholic; sometimes—as in Slattery's case—a cleric unfrocked for conduct unworthy of his holy calling.§

2. The second requisite is a bold, trained, and determined female impostor that is impervious to exposure. A conspicuous example of this fraudulent class of sham nun is Mrs. Slattery. Another 'distinguished' member of the 'profession' is the notorious Margaret Shepherd (*alias* Parkyn, *alias* Edgeston, *alias* Egan). This woman, like her forerunner, Maria Monk, was never a Catholic. She is still living and posing as an 'ex-nun,' and her career furnishes a telling instance of how a bold-faced impostor and criminal can at the same time preach and pray and wheedle the coins out of the pockets of well-meaning but gullible bigots and of people whose minds are lewd and whose hearts are rotten. Margaret Shepherd's career has many points of resemblance to that of Maria Monk. She was taken off the streets and cared for by the Sisters of the Good Shepherd at Arnos Court, Bristol. She was well known to the English police, served terms of imprisonment at Bodmin and Milbank, was denounced by Rev. G. P. Merrish (Church of England prison chaplain), and by the Rev. C. B. Simpson, Anglican chaplain of Bodmin, was described as 'an accomplished swindler.' Mr. W. T. Stead has had a good deal to say of her history. For instance, in the *Review of Reviews* for July, 1891 (p. 601), he says of her that she 'is a woman whose past history is deeply stained with both vice and crime.' Among other things she stated that she was closely associated with Mr. Stead during the investigations which resulted in the publication of *The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon*, and in the campaign which led to the passing of the Criminal Law Amendment Act. 'If,' says Mr. Stead (*loc. cit.*), 'I may judge her revelations concerning nunneries by her revelations concerning the share which she had in *The Maiden Tribute*, their value must be put down as a minus quantity. Like the street-woman of Montreal and Mrs. Slattery, this other 'famous nun' lectures 'to women only' and adds to her fraudulent revenue by the sale of prurient books and pamphlets. It is pitiful to relate that pulpits and churches were placed at the disposal of Margaret Shepherd by well-meaning but misguided clergymen and committees, chiefly of the Baptist denomination. It does not need a Solomon to forecast the moral evils that are likely to result from such crusades as those of the Shepherd woman and the Slatterys. The Rev. Joseph Baird (of 336, Willis Avenue, New York) denounced Margaret Shepherd in scathing terms in a published letter bearing date April 21, 1891, and stated that, owing to her conduct and the evils arising from her work, her mission in his church had to terminate as speedily as possible. A still stronger condemnation of the woman and her methods of 'evangelising' appeared in the *Canada Presbyterian* of December 20, 1893, from the pen of Rev. J. A. Macdonald, a Presbyterian minister of St. Thomas, Ontario. He describes her as 'one of the worst frauds, one of the most dangerous agents of political and social strife and moral corruption that—whether as a journalist or preacher—I have ever come into contact with.' In the same letter he tells how

* This, says the editor of the Boston *Pilot*, was a translation, and was entitled *The Gates of Hell Opened*. The editor of the *Pilot* had a copy of this in his possession, and he declared that, with the exception of the proper names, it is word for word the same as the *Fatal Disclosures* attributed to Maria Monk. See *The Irish in America*, by J. F. Maguire, M.P., 1th ed., pp. 413-414.

† See the affidavit of Maria Monk's mother in *The True Story of Maria Monk*, reprinted from the *Dublin Review* of May, 1836, by the C.T.S. (London) Price 1d.

‡ Ed. 1889, vol. IV., p. 137.

§ The non-Catholic Editor Biam, of the Texas *Iconoclast*, in an article in his paper in July, 1895, pointed out that Slattery, by his own showing, studied Catholic theology and obfuscated as a priest for several years 'before discovering anything immoral in the teachings of the Mother Church, when it suddenly occurred to him that it was but a tissue of falsehood, a veritable cesspool of rottenness. His [Slattery's] transformation appears to have been almost as sudden as that of Saul of Tarsus—or that of Judas Iscariot. I have no objection to his leaving the Catholic priesthood—his Bishop stopped his pay.' For the character of other 'ex-priests'—real and bogus—see our pamphlet, *Joseph Slattery*, pp. 6-6.

'when it was whispered that her record was shady,' lewd characters gathered to her like vultures to the carcass'; that nevertheless the 'brazen hypocrite' opens her meetings with prayer'; that the results of her mission are 'simply appalling'; that the details thereof are 'horribly disgusting'; that many men and women whose names are a guarantee for truth and prudence wrote him particulars of the woman's work which were so 'frightfully damning' that he 'dare not publish them'; that the great temperance worker, Miss Lillian M. Phelps, wrote 'imploping me in the name of wronged womanhood to address a wider than my own congregation "and if possible save our women and girls from the awfulness of this woman's touch."' And much more to the same effect regarding the still notorious sham nun, who, he declared, 'has prostituted truth and honour, and who runs riotously in the error of Balaam for hire.' Mrs. Slattery is the next most notable adornment of the malodorous profession of sham nun of which Maria Monk and Margaret Shepherd are the bright particular stars.* The triplet cluster shines out boldly above the lesser lights of the profession, thus—

MARIA MONK;
MARGARET SHEPHERD,
MRS. SLATTERY.

3. Another indispensable requisite in the 'escaped nun' trade is a good, round, lying tale of phenomenal immorality. To succeed, it must, above all, be a prurient or filthy one. In practically every instance it is, as in the case of Maria Monk, concocted by the male partner in the 'venture.' Thus, an affidavit of Slattery's nephew and assistant attributes the authorship of Mrs. Slattery's lectures to the ex-priest; and there is internal evidence to show that considerable portions of her publications—and especially the doctrinal clap-trap, the preface to her *Convent Life*, etc.—are his work. Attempts have been made by enterprising male speculators to exploit even those very rare specimens of genuine ex-nuns that have at long intervals left their convents. This Miss Cusack tells us with sufficient plainness in a letter written to the *Bournemouth Observer* of November 8, 1893, in condemnation of the falsehoods of Ellen Golding. Referring to a disreputable, though well-dressed, class of bigots who organise, arrange, and support filthy and lying crusades of the Slattery kind, she says:—

'If I were to tell something of what I have been made to suffer by persons of this class, professing to be Christians, because I could neither make statements which I knew to be false, nor endorse statements made by others which I doubted, Miss Golding's case would, perhaps, be better understood.'

In plain terms, those anti-convent fables are still—as was the case with the Maria Monk imposture—concocted by designing *impresarios*, and are, after a course of preparation, recited in public by the genuine ex-nun or, more frequently, by her bogus counterfeit, Edith O'Gorman and Ellen Golding allowed themselves to be exploited in this way. The 'ventures' prospered till the publication and persistent circulation of Father Sydney Smith's and Mr. Britten's pamphlets and the investigations to which they led. Then the gaudy bubbles burst. Sham nuns defy exposure other than that of the police and criminal courts, and keep on the boards till their audiences melt away. But Edith O'Gorman and Ellen Golding had sufficient sense of shame left to hide their diminished heads in the friendly obscurity of private life. They were the first, the only, and the last representatives of the genuine lecturing ex-nun.

'Tell me your Company.'

To this day *Maria Monk* is the quarry out of which the grosser anti-convent romances are hewn and shapen. It is being hawked around by Mrs. Slattery and sold indiscriminately by her along with her own noisome publications. The character of the Slattery crusade may be gauged from the following further facts:

(1) Mrs. Slattery has an unbounded admiration for the fallen woman of Montreal, whom she terms 'the famous nun.' †

(2) Like Maria Monk, Mrs. Slattery never was a nun, as stated by her. We have not the slightest evidence beyond her own worthless word that she was ever even a Catholic. Rumour—for what it is worth—has it that she never was.

(3) Joseph Slattery, her partner in the business, was, as we have shown in another pamphlet, ‡ dismissed from the ranks of the Catholic clergy for persistent intemperance, and was imprisoned at Pittsburg (U.S.A.) for the sale of indecent literature.

(4) Mrs. Slattery was, according to her own showing, the friend and for two years guest (148) of ex-priest Macnamara, who had been dismissed from his Order. After his 'conversion,' he was, in 1878, associated with the notorious female swindler known as the 'Countess' Ann O'Delia Dis Debar. § Later on he appeared as the

* A few years ago two females were sent to prison, the one in Scotland, the other in England, for obtaining money by falsely representing themselves as ex-nuns. One of them was a non-Catholic factory-girl from near Glasgow. Her filthy tale was concocted and taught to her by a male impostor, who was likewise a non-Catholic. To the great regret of the Bench, he was permitted by the police to vanish when the girl was arrested. In May, 1899, an attempt was made to manufacture an 'escaped nun' story in connection with the Carlsbrooke Convent, Isle of Wight. The attempt was promptly frustrated by the action of a Protestant barrister, Mr. J. Alderson Foote, Q.C. (of 3 Temple, London) and the *Isle of Wight County Press* of May 6, 1899. A notorious 'ex-nun,' Mrs. Mary White (Miss Windsor), according to the *Philadelphia Press* (a non-Catholic paper) of January 23, 1897, made a dying declaration before a Notary Public in which she retracted all that she had said against the Catholic Church and the lives led by nuns.

† *Convent Life*, p. 76. Unless where otherwise stated we quote from the American edition of this book. Edith O'Gorman will probably not feel much complimented by being linked with Maria Monk under this designation.

‡ *Joseph Slattery. The Romance of an Unfrocked Priest*. See p. 4 of cover of this publication.

§ *New York Sun*, January 27, 1894.