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R. A. COFFIN AND THE ENGLISH ORATORY

A previous article in *Spicilegium* treated the conversion of Robert Aston Coffin, one-time Vicar of St. Mary Magdalene's in Oxford and within a short time to become the first superior of the English province of the Redemptorists¹. Immediately after his conversion, however, Father Coffin spent a brief period among the first companions of John Henry Newman in his newly founded Oratory, an experience he described with some enthusiastic vividness in his letters to his benefactor, Ambrose Phillipps, copies of which may be seen in the provincial archives at Clapham². What he had to say is not without interest, even though the description differs no more than slightly from the one that has become more familiar, drawn from Newman's own extensive correspondence. However, the letters to Phillipps, which are offered as an appendix to this article, have the further advantage that they present the Oratory as seen through eyes not entirely in sympathy with the founder, since Coffin, in fact, left the young institute after only a couple of years. The interlude, brief as it was, is obviously of some significance for the Catholic career of Father Coffin, who exercised such an important influence on the young English province and indirectly on those that developed from it. It may well be, too, that another man's view of the beginning of the Oratory may provide just a little more knowledge of that figure that stood like a giant among the churchmen of last century, Cardinal Newman.

¹ *Spic. Hist.* 27 (1979) 355-374. Once again we draw mainly on material in the archives of the London province of the Redemptorists, quoted in this article ALP. In particular we use the two manuscript biographies: the anonymous *Life of Right Rev. R. A. Coffin C.S.S.R. First Part*, quoted as *Life*, and B. Lubienski C.S.S.R., *Mémoires sur la vie de Mgr. Robert Coffin C.S.S.R., évêque de Southwark*.

² The Phillipps correspondence is in ALP, Db 85.

It is not at all difficult to discern to what extent Coffin's view of the Oratory was affected by his own character and by his own peculiar religious needs³. His close association with Phillipps had revealed an enthusiastic and even intolerant medievalism. His journey to the Church had been, at least in its closing stages, a quest for the security offered by the doctrinal authority of the hierarchy. Both these tendencies made him incline almost instinctively towards the older Catholic traditions rather than remain with the newer fashions that enriched the Church with the coming of Newman and his companions; and in this Coffin was far from being alone among the Oxford converts, as Ward and Manning were emphatically of the same stamp. What was probably more particular to Coffin was his need of reassurance for his own personal spiritual development. He had spoken of this before he came to the Church⁴, seeing it as a need for a confessor and spiritual director such as was readily offered by traditional Catholic practice. Immediately, however, Newman was his guide. Newman had hustled him over his final hesitations in 1845, and a year later was once more urging him to come to the Oratory. Coffin had his misgivings, but again it was largely Newman's word that he took, and for a while he was quite happy that it should be so. But he remained what he had always been, very dependent on authority and always looking anxiously for a safe spiritual guide.

After his reception into the Church at the beginning of December 1845, Coffin at first experienced what the other converts had discovered, the sharp break with the past and the natural fears concerning his future among strangers. His letters to his Anglican friends brought two replies telling him that as a renegade he was no longer acceptable to his former associates⁵. His meeting with the Catholics, on the other hand, was made the easier and more agreeable by his reception in the household of Ambrose Phillipps. That he owed especially to Bishop Nicholas Wiseman, who busied himself with the welfare of the converts and recommended Coffin for the post of tutor to Phillipps' two sons⁶. His duties allowed him ample time to be initiated into Catholic practice according to the fervent, if eccentric,

³ On Coffin's religious development up to the time of his conversion cf. *Spic. Hist.* 27 (1979) 365-369.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Life*, 16.

⁶ Wilfrid Ward, *The Life and Times of Cardinal Wiseman*, London, 1897, I, 443.

ways of *Grace Dieu*, the Phillipps home, where he remained throughout 1846.

Towards the end of the year he took his young charges to Boulogne to give them some practice in speaking French; and from there he was summoned by Newman to meet him in Paris⁷. Newman and St. John⁸, his almost inseparable companion, were on their way to Rome, where they intended to make some important decisions for their own future and, so they hoped, for that of their fellow converts. In some circles in England there had been much excited speculation about what was to become of these distinguished new Catholics, and it was well known that Newman had for some months been much involved in discussions and planning as to how he and his friends could best serve the Church⁹. Coffin appears to have been particularly eager for something to come from the meeting in Paris, as he hurried there as soon as he received the message. Newman wrote to Frederick Bowles the day before he left England: « Poor Coffin is waiting for us in Paris »¹⁰.

As it turned out, the meeting offered nothing whatever to satisfy Coffin's hopes, as he confessed afterwards. Pleasant as the few days spent with the travellers had no doubt been, he returned to Boulogne still ignorant of Newman's plans¹¹. For that matter, at that stage, September of 1846, Newman himself had not yet made up his mind.

At the end of the year Coffin relinquished his position in the Phillipps household, with some reluctance one may be sure, but with a determination to come to a decision as to his own future. Like many another of the Oxford converts he had recourse to Father Robert Whitty, the genial and learned Rector of St. Edmund's College, Ware¹².

⁷ *Life*, 16.

⁸ Ambrose St. John (1815-1875), a student of Christ Church from 1834, had been one of the first Oxford converts, being received into the Church in 1843. Cf. Charles Stephen Dessain and Vincent Ferrer Blehl S. J., *The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman*, vol. XI, London, 1961, p. 355. Henceforward quoted as *Letters and Diaries*.

⁹ For the suggestions made by Wiseman and by Blessed Dominic Barberi, cf. Wilfrid Ward, *The Life of John Henry Cardinal Newman*, London, 1913, vol. I, p. 123-126.

¹⁰ Frederick Sellwood Bowles (1818-1900) was a student of Exeter College. He had been with Newman at Littlemore, and with him had been received into the Church. He was one of the first members of the Oratory with Newman, but he left in 1860. Cf. *Letters and Diaries*. XI, 1961, p. 334.

¹¹ *Life*, 17.

¹² Robert Whitty (1817-1895) was a native of Wexford and a student of St. Patrick's, Maynooth, from 1830. Ordained in 1840 for service in England, he held a

It was on his advice that early in the following year he set out for Rome, accompanied by his old friend Richard Macmullen, only recently received into the Church¹³.

While he was busily making his plans with Whitty's help Coffin received further word from Newman. As it is told by the author of the *Life*, in all likelihood according to Coffin's own reminiscences, early in 1847 while on a visit to his parents at Dover, he received a letter from Newman speaking of his intention to establish the Oratory in England, for which purpose the Pope had urged him to gather about him as many converts as possible¹⁴. From a letter Newman wrote to Phillipps on 7th January it appears he had written to Coffin at the same time¹⁵. But it is hard to see how Newman could have been in a position at this early stage to speak with such assurance of Pius IX's encouragement, even though he had been inclining himself towards the Oratory since December¹⁶. Very likely he had not really been quite as peremptory as the *Life* suggests.

It seems at least that at this time Newman proposed that Coffin join himself and the other converts he was gathering in a religious institute; and Coffin was not at all convinced that the scheme was a good one. In replying he suggested that a religious community composed of nobody else but converts might well turn out to be something rather less than Catholic¹⁷. His objection met with a short and sharp rejoinder: « Do you know better than the Vicar of Christ »¹⁸? Once again, lacking the correspondence itself, one's only evidence for the exchange is the possibly faulty memories recorded in the *Life*. That there was an exchange, at least substantially as described, can be verified from other letters of Newman. On 10th January he wrote to Richard Stanton:¹⁹ « We have thought of Coffin these days he has

number of important posts, which enabled him to assist the Oxford converts. He was in touch with Newman from as early as 1843 and always retained a warm affection for him. He joined the Oratory in 1849, but left in the following year. Becoming a Jesuit in 1857, he held the positions of English provincial and later of assistant to the Father General. Cf. *Letters and Diaries*, XI, 1961, p. 360.

¹³ *Life*, 17.

¹⁴ *Life*, 18.

¹⁵ *Letters and Diaries*, XII, 1962, p. 3.

¹⁶ Cf. Wilfrid Ward, *op. cit.*, I, 169.

¹⁷ *Life*, 18.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Richard Stanton (1820-1901), a student of Brasenose College, had refused on grounds of conscience ordination to priesthood by the Bishop of Oxford and joined Newman at Maryvale. A foundation member of the Oratory, he remained with it to the end of his life. Cf. *Letters and Diaries*, XI, 1961, p. 357.

been with you. I wrote to him about his own matters the other day »²⁰. Father Whitty, too, whom Coffin had consulted about his vocation, wrote to say that he had advised him to join Newman, adding that what Coffin had wanted was a religious life in the company of the old, traditional Catholics, but that he feared the association would have more effect on the older Catholics than on Coffin himself. For his own part, he assured Newman, « I do feel more and more drawn to your body »²¹.

Coffin was not yet convinced when he set out for Rome with Macmullen at the end of January²². Newman confided to Dalgairns²³: « I don't like Coffin's way of going on »²⁴. The editors of the *Letters and Diaries* explain that he was referring to a letter from Coffin speaking of his own inclinations towards the Oblates and his intention not to make up his mind before coming to Rome²⁵.

He had, in fact, seriously considered joining the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, a community of whom had been settled in the neighbourhood of *Grace Dieu* under the generous patronage of Phillipps²⁶. He clearly retained his attraction to the religious life of the style already established in the Catholic Church; and in spite of Whitty's assurances he wanted to see a little more of what was available before he fell in with the plans for the new converts. For his own part, Newman was quite evidently irritated by Coffin's backing and filling instead of being guided like the others by his own decision. A note in his diary for 6th March 1847 reported: « Coffin and Macmullen are come and called »²⁷. The following day, writing to David Lewis²⁸, he made short work of Coffin's objections. « The great advantage of the Oratory is that it leaves scope for persons of very different tastes and qualifications. It is a most pleasant thing for us to find since

²⁰ *Letters and Diaries*, XII, 1962, p. 11.

²¹ Whitty to Newman, 4 I 1847. *Letters and Diaries*, XII, 1962, p. 19.

²² *Life*, 18.

²³ John Dobré Dalgairns (1818-1876), a Scot, a keen Tractarian, became known as Father Bernard as an Oratorian. Cf. *Letters and Diaries*, XI, 1961, p. 338.

²⁴ Newman to Dalgairns, 14 II 1847. *Letters and Diaries*, XII, 1962, p. 36.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ ALP Db 85, Coffin to Phillipps, 8 IV 1847.

²⁷ *Letters and Diaries*, XXII, 1962, p. 57.

²⁸ David Lewis (1814-1895) was a student and later a Fellow of Jesus College, Oxford, holding the post of vice-principal from 1845 to 1846, when he became a Catholic. He had been Newman's curate during the latter's final year at St. Mary's. As a Catholic he won a reputation for his scholarly translation of the works of St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross. Cf. *Letters and Diaries*, XI, 1961, p. 344.

making our choice that in the Oratorian Rule our having lived together is an actual recommendation, and may (as it were) go for part of our novitiate. This is the answer we get at Rome to the fidgety talk in England about the danger of converts living together »²⁹.

Coffin was still « fidgety » as he went about making up his mind in his own way, as he had planned. On 22nd March Newman wrote to Dalgairns that « Coffin is going into retreat at Sant'Eusebio this day — and I trust on coming out will find his mind made up at once to join us. If so, he will go to St. John and St. Paul immediately after Easter Day »³⁰. And sure enough, nine days later he noted in his diary: « Coffin came out of retreat, having made up his mind to join us »³¹.

The retreat with the Jesuits, who at that time still occupied the house attached to Sant'Eusebio on the Esquiline, apparently put an end to Coffin's « fidgetiness », as his letter to Phillipps announcing the outcome reveals him as now calm and even quite optimistic³². He told his friend of his decision and of the ready support given to « Newman and his community » by the Pope and their hopes of expanding once they got themselves settled in England. He had made up his mind, he said, that the Oratory seemed to be what he had been looking for, and that there were besides « so many reasons for my keeping to Newman ».

The *Life* adds a little further information. The Jesuit confessor who helped him come to his decision was an English speaker whose acquaintance Coffin had made shortly after his arrival in Rome. To him Coffin now explained himself; and when it seemed clear that he had a call to the religious life, the confessor made him put down on paper the reasons for and against his becoming a Jesuit. The arguments for appeared to Coffin the stronger, but he was not at all attracted to the Society. The confessor, therefore, advised him that « for the moment he had nothing to do but follow Dr. Newman »³³.

He assured Phillipps of his regret at not being able to gratify his friend by joining the community of Oblates or « Conceptionists » as he called the current favourites of Phillipps' patronage. He added, though, how much he and Macmullen appreciated the warm welcome

²⁹ Newman to Lewis, 7 III 1847. *Letters and Diaries*, XII, 1962, p. 61.

³⁰ Newman to Dalgairns, 22 III 1847. *Letters and Diaries*, XII, 1962, p. 64.

³¹ Diary, 31 III 1847. *Letters and Diaries*, XII, 1962, p. 66.

³² ALP Db 85, Coffin to Phillipps, 8 IV 1847.

³³ *Life*, 19.

they had received in Marseilles from Mgr. de Mazenod and Father Aubert. The bishop showed « very great interest in *Grace Dieu* »³⁴.

Rome was proving full of interest to the new convert who quite evidently viewed it through spectacles tinted with the medievalism he had acquired at *Grace Dieu*. He was even moved to declare categorically « I hate Michael Angelo more and more and the Pagan things that one sees all over Rome in the way of statues etc. ».

His first experience of the society away from the shelter of *Grace Dieu* he was finding most satisfactory. In Paris he had met a person who had acquired some renown, the Russian Basilian abbess, Irene Makrina Mieczyslawska, the only survivor after her monastery in Minsk had been suppressed in 1845. She had been visited by many of the new converts and had been the subject of some correspondence in *The Times* in 1846³⁵. Rome, when he arrived there must have seemed simply full of English Catholics, both old like the amiably eccentric Lord Clifford of Chudleigh³⁶ and new, there being no fewer than eighty converts in the city.

Having made up his mind at last to join Newman, Coffin was sent to the Passionists at SS. Giovanni e Paolo, where he was met by another friend of Phillipps, John Morris, also newly converted, who reported: « He looks very well in his clerical dress »³⁷. His own letters speak of the beginnings of the Oratory and of the novitiate made at Santa Croce in very much the same terms as in the well known biographies of Newman. There are, however, some incidents to be gathered from the two manuscript lives of Coffin which seem to be of some significance. There were two occasions during the novitiate of slight disagreements between Newman and Coffin.

³⁴ Eugène de Mazenod had taken a close interest in the establishment of the Oblates in England, in this way making the acquaintance of Phillipps, for whom he retained his admiration. Cf. Jean Leflon, *Eugène de Mazenod*, III, 1965, p. 741-756. Father Casimir Aubert O.M.I., had played a part in the English foundation, and in this way, no doubt, had come to know Phillipps.

³⁵ Concerning the Abbess Makrina and the interest in her cf. *Letters and Diaries*, XI, 1961, p. 345.

³⁶ Hugh Charles, seventh Baron Clifford (1790-1858), was married to the daughter of Cardinal Weld. Cf. *Letters and Diaries*, XI, 1961, p. 336. Thomas Cardinal Weld, of course, was a widower when he was ordained priest. After being created Cardinal in 1830, he was a familiar and picturesque figure in his walks on the Pincio, where people were frequently intrigued to see his Eminence holding a scarlet umbrella over his little grandchildren. Cf. Shane Leslie, *Mrs. Fitzherbert*, New York, 1939, p. 325.

³⁷ John Morris to Phillipps, 23 IV 1847. J. H. Pollen S. J., *The Life and Letters of Father John Morris S. J.*, London 1896, p. 69. John Morris was a Cambridge scholar who, captivated by the *Tracts for the Times*, came into the Church in 1846. He later distinguished himself as a Jesuit for his historical studies of the Reformation in England.

The first occurred when Coffin and four of his fellow novices were taken by the Rector of the English College, Dr. Thomas Grant³⁸, to an audience with Pius IX³⁹. Occasions of this kind were by no means rare, as there is evidence that the Pope meant what he had said to Newman at their first meeting, that he wished to meet Mr. Newman « again and again »⁴⁰. This time, however, Newman was not present, and that was the trouble, because when the five happily recounted the Pope's friendliness, they were given « a round scolding from Dr. Newman because they went to the Vatican without a word to him ».

Father Lubienski describes some little awkwardness among the little group in Santa Croce⁴¹, some of them paying so much attention to their Oratorian companion that Newman showed himself offended and for a time would not speak. These « bashful fits » of his were not uncommon when he could not « speak two words if it was to keep me from starving », as he himself once put it to St. John⁴². Naturally, they made things a little uncomfortable, and on this occasion Coffin took it on himself to go to Newman and ask how he had been offended, and he received the reply: « Nobody treats me as superior »! Once it was explained that the others had assumed that he was for the time a novice like the rest of them, the misunderstanding seems to have been solved.

Newman, of course, was much preoccupied just at this time with writing *Loss and Gain*, which probably went far towards explaining this particular « bashful fit ». It is also probable, however, that incidents of this kind already caused Coffin to be troubled by the sort of misgiving he was to express to Faber some three years later. « It is most certain that up to the present time I have had no training, no novitiate, no breaking in »⁴³.

It rather looks as though the converts were not quite clear in their minds as to what they should expect in their novitiate. Newman's suggestion to Lewis that the community experience some of them had known in Littlemore and Maryvale « may (as it were) go for part of

³⁸ Grant at that time was Rector of the English College and was shortly to become the first Bishop of Southwark.

³⁹ *Life*, 21.

⁴⁰ Wilfrid Ward, *op. cit.*, I, 148.

⁴¹ Lubienski, *op. cit.*, 51-53.

⁴² Wilfrid Ward, *op. cit.*, I, 111.

⁴³ ALP Db 76, Coffin to Faber, 26 XI 1850.

our novitiate »⁴⁴ is at least vague. There is some vagueness, too, in the application made to the Pope on 20th June. The letter, written in Italian, asks that Father Carlo Rossi of the Roman Oratory be appointed as a guide to the *novello istituto* in the Oratorian Constitutions⁴⁵.

The novitiate itself, as Coffin described it to Phillipps, appears to have been well conducted by Father Rossi, the good Oratorian from the Chiesa Nuova, who showed himself « most devoted and interested in our cause »⁴⁶. He kept his charges well occupied with readings and instructions about the Oratorian life and other studies, particularly of moral theology, for which a teacher came four times a week. It was all, however, very short, since about the beginning of November the novices began to scatter. And if Father Lubienski's narrative is to be trusted, it would appear that Father Rossi himself was not quite satisfied. He relates that Newman announced one evening that he and St. John would leave next morning for Naples. Some time after their return after having been absent for about a month Father Rossi in his turn announced one evening: « Tomorrow I shall go to Breslau ». And so he did, as the Pope had sent him there on a diplomatic mission. Father Lubienski adds that Father Rossi had complained to Pius IX that his position was not satisfactory⁴⁷.

The English Oratory, one must say, had at least at its beginning the weaknesses of a forced growth. One can get a sense of the excited interest in the Oxford converts from Coffin's telling Phillipps that George Ryder⁴⁸ had organised an audience for fifty of the eighty converts then visiting Rome⁴⁹. Naturally enough, interest concentrated on Newman and the group close to him. Though Newman had repeatedly protested that he did not wish people to be so dependent on him, very likely all of his companions at Santa Croce had made up their minds just as Coffin had done, finding « so many reasons for

⁴⁴ Newman to Lewis, 7 III 1847. *Letters and Diaries*, XII, 1962, p. 61.

⁴⁵ Newman to Pius IX, 20 VI 1847. *Letters and Diaries*, XII, 1962, p. 87.

⁴⁶ ALP Db 85, Coffin to Phillipps, 8 VIII 1847.

⁴⁷ Lubienski, *op. cit.*, 53; cf. Wilfrid Ward, *The Life and Times of Cardinal Wiseman*, I, 463.

⁴⁸ George Dudley Ryder (1810-1880) was a son of the Bishop of Lichfield. Ordained in the Church of England, he left the country for the sake of his wife's health in 1845 and became a Catholic in the following year. He was a relative of Phillipps with whom he resided on his return to England. One of his sons became Father Cyril Ryder C.S.S.R. Cf. *Letters and Diaries*, XI, 1961, p. 355.

⁴⁹ ALP Db 85, Coffin to Phillipps, 8 IV 1847.

keeping to Newman »⁵⁰. The fact was that, whatever he may have preferred, Newman found himself right from the end of 1845 making decisions that affected all of his companions. And there was no lack of excited suggestions as to what was best for these distinguished converts.

Newman, for his part, favoured two proposals, that of Wiseman whom he had quickly learned to trust and one of Blessed Dominic Barberi, the saintly Passionist who had received him into the Church. He thus found himself and his friends faced with two alternatives⁵¹. On the one hand Father Dominic saw his famous converts leading a band of « preachers, missionaries, martyrs ». Wiseman's influence led in another direction, and Newman began to toy with a notion that remained with him for a very long time, that of a theological school. Wiseman hoped that his venture would help to fill the breach between old and new Catholics that had already manifested itself. But he at the same time shared Father Dominic's hope that the Oxford Movement would in time prove to be the beginning of the return of England to the Catholic Church, and in his enthusiasm he sent a circular letter appealing for prayers for that intention to his many friends among the European hierarchy⁵².

Wiseman's influence proved the stronger. What precisely he had in mind was in all probability something like what he was to propose later to Manning after he came to the Church in 1850. He possibly hoped from Newman some new institute similar to the later Oblates of St. Charles whom he intended to take charge of his seminary⁵³. Newman's correspondence suggests that he thought rather along these lines, as he considered in turn the Dominicans and the Jesuits and even took a brief look at the Redemptorists. By the end of 1846 he was beginning to become more and more preoccupied with the Oratorians.

An interesting comment by an Anglican visitor to Rome after Newman was already established in Birmingham reported current gossip in ecclesiastical circles. « They spoke of Newman as having adopted the Oratorian Rule on account of his character being too much set and matured to fall into a very strict and absorbing Rule without

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Cf. Wilfrid Ward, *op. cit.*, I, 123.

⁵² Cf. Jean Leflon, *op. cit.*, III, 747.

⁵³ Cf. Wilfrid Ward, *The Life and Times of Cardinal Wiseman*, II, 121-122.

difficulty »⁵⁴. He frequently spoke of the Oratorian rule as being so adaptable, and in the end, announcing the Holy See's approbation of the project to Wiseman, he said that the Papal brief would « impose such modifications as are necessary to adapt it to the state of England »⁵⁵.

As early as April Coffin was able to inform Phillipps that « Father Newman is most anxious, when we are fairly set off and know something of the rule, that old Catholics should join, as also others not immediately connected with him. So I hope whenever you have an opportunity you will mention it »⁵⁶. Wiseman had also been urging the same thing, and for a time Newman appears to have considered the possibility of a man like Whitty or Dr. Newsham becoming the first superior⁵⁷. In the event Whitty's membership of the Oratory did not go beyond an incomplete novitiate, and it was a few years before older Catholics joined Newman. In any case the idea of associating with them that he shared with Wiseman was to form more friendly relations with them rather than learn from them the old Catholic traditions, which was what Coffin was hoping to find.

That year when the converts were starting their Oratory was full of excitement for the numerous colony of English Catholics in Rome, as Coffin reported to his friend. In July Wiseman and Bishop James Sharples, Coadjutor to the Vicar Apostolic of the Lancashire District, arrived « on important matters regarding the Church in England », and rumour was busy with the whisper that Wiseman was to be a Cardinal⁵⁸. Then there was the brief disturbance caused by what people were calling the conspiracy that had been discovered in that year and which caused something of a flutter in diplomatic circles⁵⁹. The excitement interrupted Wiseman's business, on account of his being sent on what was to prove a very profitable mission to Lord Palmerston. In a short time the nature of the « important matters regarding the Church in England » was known. In October Coffin

⁵⁴ The diarist was John Wynne, who shortly afterwards became a Catholic and in time became a widely known Jesuit. Cf. J. H. Pollen S. J., *op. cit.*, 73.

⁵⁵ Wilfrid Ward, *op. cit.*, I, 461.

⁵⁶ ALP Db 85, Coffin to Phillipps, 8 IV 1847.

⁵⁷ Wilfrid Ward, *The Life and Times of Cardinal Wiseman*, I, 462. Newsham, President of Ushaw, was a man much admired by the converts for his learning and his ready understanding of their problems.

⁵⁸ ALP Db 85, Coffin to Phillipps, 8 VIII 1847.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* For Wiseman's part in the affair cf. Wilfrid Ward, *The Life and Times of Cardinal Wiseman*, I, 476-485.

was able to report to Philipps that the establishment of the hierarchy in England « was finally settled »⁶⁰. He was surprisingly well informed, even though much of the detail he recounted was not in the shape of things finally published three years later.

At the end of October Coffin and Penny⁶¹, the last of the novices to be ordained, received the priesthood⁶². During the following month the group broke up, each to make his own way back to England and come together in Maryvale. They waited only for the final brief establishing the English Oratory⁶³, and that came after a delay in the curia, naming Newman as superior and containing the completed statutes, adapted by Newman⁶⁴.

Coffin left Rome on 27th November and made his way to Bruges where his family, as was the practice among English gentlefolk, was residing for the winter⁶⁵. He had further experiences to interest him in his still new Catholicity and for him to hand on to his friend. Passing through the Tyrol, he visited a reputed stigmatic, an experience that attracted a surprising number of the new converts⁶⁶. In Munich he was introduced to Döllinger, who also exercised an attraction for the converts.

In Bruges he found that quite a large number of the English visitors were Catholics, and he was happy to find among them an opportunity for his first pastoral activity as a Catholic priest. In Bruges, too, he had his first meeting with the Redemptorists, when a Scots Catholic introduced him to the superior of the little community, Father Reyners⁶⁷. Through them he also made the acquaintance of the

⁶⁰ ALP Db 85, Coffin to Phillipps, 16 X 1847.

⁶¹ William Goodenough Penny (1815-1885), a student of Christ Church, became a Catholic in 1844 and was with Newman in Littlemore and Maryvale. He left the Oratory in 1851. Cf. *Letters and Diaries*, XI, 1961, p. 351.

⁶² ALP Db 85, Coffin to Phillipps, 8 XI 1847.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Wilfrid Ward, *The Life and Times of Cardinal Wiseman*, I, 464; ALP Db 85, Coffin to Phillipps 26 XII 1847.

⁶⁵ *Life*, 22; ALP Db 85, Coffin to Phillipps, 26 XII 1847.

⁶⁶ Cf. *Letters and Diaries*, XII, 1962, p. 133; J. H. Pollen S. J., *op. cit.*, 62-65. The *ecstatica* visited by Coffin and by many a distinguished Englishman was Maria Mörl of Caldaro or Kaltern.

⁶⁷ *Life*, 22. Father Paul Reyners was born 1 I 1812, was professed as a Redemptorist 8 IX 1839 and ordained 10 IX 1843. He was for a time novice master of the Belgian province and for a time also acted as Visitor, having authority over the English houses. He died 27 X 1887.

Redemptoristines, whom Father Reyners jokingly told to « pray the Rev. Mr. Coffin into the Congregation », a pleasantry which, it need scarcely be said, affected him as lightly as it was intended.

The English Oratory began its existence when the members, their numbers already beginning to swell, came together at Maryvale on 2nd February 1848. There are three short letters of Coffin to Phillipps in the collection in Clapham, all of them written during the early months of the Oratory. Though they offer no information about the new institute that is not to be found in other accounts, they do give a little knowledge of Coffin himself in those early days of his Oratorian life.

The picture one gets from the letters is of a happy, tranquil existence with opportunities for agreeable occupation, some preaching and time to publish a little devotional literature⁶⁸. There is a glimpse of the community which will probably arouse memories among religious: discussion of an article in *The Rambler* on screens, the occasion for some harmless gossip about a useless topic and some dreadfully condescending remarks about the Church of England. Altogether, it seemed an unruffled life⁶⁹.

Coffin himself was quite busy in those days. He was appointed minister, or bursar, of the rapidly growing community. Immediately after settling in he had to go to Cheadle in Staffordshire with Newman to see about bringing Faber and his community to Maryvale, raising the numbers from seven to sixteen⁷⁰. It was, of course, an embarrassment to Newman to find all of a sudden that he had on his hands, not only more recruits than the original number of members, but a second house as well. He found himself, he said, like the man who bought an elephant and then found he was too poor to keep it and too merciful to kill it and unable to persuade anyone to accept it as a gift⁷¹. As minister, Coffin found himself much concerned with St. Wilfrid's in Cheadle, and it was to figure very much in his future problems with the Oratorian life.

One gets the impression that Coffin was content while he was so busy. Those days of rapid increase were both thrilling and anxious ones for Newman. From the letters to Phillipps, however, one would draw the impression that everything was serene. But it was really an

⁶⁸ ALP Db 85, Coffin to Phillipps, 28 II 1848.

⁶⁹ ALP Db 85, Coffin to Phillipps, 29 VII 1848.

⁷⁰ ALP Db 85, Coffin to Phillipps, 12 II 1848.

⁷¹ Wilfrid Ward, *op. cit.*, I, 221.

uneasy time, of which there were soon indications; and before long Coffin, too, had to be affected.

There was, in fact, an uneasiness in the new institute. So much is apparent from the surprisingly rapid changes of membership, whatever the reason for it may have been, an insufficiently critical admission of postulants or possibly inadequate training. At any rate, Newman commented on it to Faber.

« I could laugh at our misfortunes were they not worries. Have you heard the 'last' ? E. is gone! He drank too much beer, laid himself out on the kitchen dresser, packed up and went! *Omnia tendunt visibiliter ad non esse*, as King Edward says in our Oriel statutes. Formby, Whitty, A, B, C, D, and now E!, et tu Brute. Fr. Minister was so anxious for him »⁷².

The number that joined the Oratory in the beginning, only to leave it within a short time, suggests that all was not well. Newman himself, one may be sure, found more serious considerations than amusement at the candidate drunk on the kitchen dresser. Other excellent men left after a very brief trial. Whitty, in spite of his initial enthusiasm, did not complete his novitiate, but went on to achieve some renown as a Jesuit. Newman also mentions Henry Formby, Vicar of Ruardean in Gloucestershire, who was received into the Church in January 1846 and joined the Oratory in Maryvale but did not remain. He and Whitty were certainly very different cases from the preposterous E. And one must remember that of the six men who were with Newman in Santa Croce three left the Oratory within a short time, Penny and Bowles as well as Coffin. Even in the case of Dalgairns, who left Newman to join Faber in London, there is occasion to question. Newman's comment to Faber suggests a disagreement of some kind. « Curiously enough, I have set down seven years for a long time as the term of *Contubernium* with my friends »⁷³. Stanton, too, joined Faber, which left of the six original members only « dear Ambrose St. John, whom God gave me when He took everyone else away »⁷⁴.

It was to be expected, of course, that the early days of the new institute should have been somewhat uncertain. It seems to be in order, though, to look closely at Newman's leadership — mainly for what light it may cast on Coffin's later departure.

⁷² Wilfrid Ward, *op. cit.*, I, 227.

⁷³ Wilfrid Ward, *op. cit.*, I, 217; cf. *Letters and Diaries*, XI, 1961, p. 338.

⁷⁴ Newman, *Apologia pro vita sua*, Everyman Library, London, 1912, p. 250.

The English Oratory was probably too much dependent on Newman at its start. Just a month after the inauguration he noted « I as superior, as novice master, as lecturer in theology, have enough to do — besides chance matters and going to Birmingham »⁷⁵. And he held those posts too long. He could scarcely have discharged well all his duties. His companions relied on him as they had since the days in Littlemore, and that in spite of his repeated and earnest protestations. Their being Oratorians at all was due principally to his initiative, and his were the modifications introduced into the rule they followed. One has to suspect that having the others depend on him for so long had its effect on himself. The misunderstanding and confusion over his relations with the London Oratory which caused him so much pain was probably due most of all to that cause⁷⁶. The same must be said about his appointment of a matron for the Oratory school over the protests of the headmaster, Nicholas Darnell, which occasioned the latter's departure⁷⁷.

Those who left the Oratory, including those like Whitty and Coffin who had successful careers in other religious institutes, had no criticism to make of Newman. They retained their veneration for him. Their dissatisfaction was more with the new institute struggling towards maturity. But it is not unfair to say that they would in all likelihood have found those growing pains less irksome if the superior had shared his multiple responsibilities.

For the time being, however, Coffin, the Oratorian, the new Catholic, revealed his character a little more. Whitty had mentioned to Newman his attraction to the older Catholics and their traditional ways, a result, no doubt, of his association with Phillipps. In any case, Coffin was definitely Catholic in his sympathies, even to the extent of speaking with regrettable condescension of his former Church of England companions.

He was already quite set, one gathers, in his religious attitudes. His medievalism, for example, he expressed to his friend in terms that could well have been used by Phillipps himself or even by the notoriously intolerant Pugin. Worthy of the latter was his expressed wish to whitewash Michelangelo's Last Judgment in the Sistine Chapel and replace it with something edifying by Overbeck⁷⁸.

⁷⁵ Wilfrid Ward, *op. cit.*, I, 201.

⁷⁶ Wilfrid Ward, *op. cit.*, I, 450-452.

⁷⁷ Wilfrid Ward, *op. cit.*, I, 456-457.

⁷⁸ ALP Db 85, Coffin to Phillipps, 1 VI 1847.

Just as he had been before his conversion, he was very much dependent on spiritual directors. His waiting for word from Whitty and from his Jesuit confessor in Sant'Eusebio Newman obviously found quite irritating. For Coffin, though, it was to remain a matter of some anxiety up to the time of his leaving the Oratory.

In those early months of the English Oratory, busily occupied as he was at Maryvale and at St. Wilfrid's, he was peaceful and apparently uncritical. The Oratory, however, hardly met his personal needs as Whitty had recognised them. It offered neither a religious life in the old Catholic tradition nor the ready access to guidance in Catholic ways of the kind he desired. Like those others of his companions at that time who had second thoughts, it was inevitable that once the first excitement had passed, Coffin in his turn should become restless.

DOCUMENTS

1. - Coffin to Phillipps, Easter Sunday (8 IV) 1847

I have now been in Rome a month, nearly ten days of which I passed in retreat with the Jesuits of S. Eusebio in the house beyond S. Maria Maggiore. I went in to be able quietly to think over my future state of life and to have the opportunity of doing so in perfect quiet and with many helps in the way of religious exercises. After much consideration I have determined to join the Oratorians, of whom you doubtless know much more than I do. You will of course have heard that Newman and his community had settled to join the Congregation, much to the delight of all people and especially those in authority, who all seem to think it is an Institute exceedingly well fitted for the present wants of England. St. Philip Neri, the founder, as you know is the great saint of Rome and called its Apostle, and the many memorials he has left behind him in the way of devotional practices, confraternities etc. and all of which still work so well, make me hope that we shall be blessed even in England with his patronage, and that he will help to establish in time some of these most edifying and beautiful practices. The Pope has taken up the matter most warmly and will do all to forward it, but under the most express understanding that England is to be the scene of our campaign; and I suppose the Central District, only we must be in some large town, probably Birmingham, Maryvale being a kind of Mother house, Novitiate and place of retreat. When I came to think over the matter with regard to my joining

them, I found that the Congregation was so much what I wanted myself and that there were so many reasons in favour of my keeping to Newman that with the help of a good and sensible Jesuit confessor I decided to enter the Congregation. We shall make our Novitiate abroad under an Oratorian Father. Newman is most anxious, when we are fairly set off and know something of the rule, which by the way is rather a strict one, that old Catholics should join, as well as others not immediately connected with him. So I hope whenever you have an opportunity you will mention it. The Jesuits here, with whom I am most delighted, approve most highly of the plan and think it exceedingly well adapted for England at the present time. Indeed there is but one opinion about it. I hear from Penny and Stanton who have arrived here that Bishop Walsh⁷⁹ and Bishop Wiseman are both highly satisfied.

And now I must say one word as to my idea about the Conceptionists, and that is that, though I fear both yourself and they will be disappointed with my decision, yet you will believe me when I say that I have tried to follow only what appeared to be the course marked out by Providence for me, putting aside all things of my own or any preconceived plans. If this be really so, then all is best as it is and all will be well, and this you, I know, will be the first to acknowledge; and though my future work may not be immediately in the parts in which you are most interested, yet it will be in the same District, and I shall have frequent opportunities of seeing you, the Oratorian rule allowing of a month's absence from the house in the course of the year.

I have seen the Abbess Makrina and recommended to her prayers your missions and all your present works. I also took the enclosed picture for her to sign and which I hope you will like. She is not a striking-looking person, and I cannot but say I was a little disappointed, but then she cannot speak French and her Confessor acts as interpreter and so I did not hear much that she said. She is stout and very good-tempered looking and is a most cheerful person.

I am in the same house with Lord Clifford and Talbot⁸⁰ and some of the converts. I need not tell you that I am delighted with Rome. The devotion of the people and the real, thorough, practical religion that one meets with here is most wonderful. They fail in ceremonies, except in those of the *quarant'ore*, which devotion is the great thing here.

I do not like the style of music at all — was quite disappointed with the *Tenebrae* in the Sistine. I hate Michael Angelo more and more and the Pagan things one sees all over Rome in the way of statues etc., and though I am wonderfully struck by the churches, and especially with the old basilicas, I see, nevertheless, more and more that Gothic is the style for Christianity and the only style which thoroughly harmonises with its

⁷⁹ Thomas Walsh had been Vicar Apostolic of the Central District since 1826, Wiseman his coadjutor since 1840.

⁸⁰ George Talbot (1816-1886), of the family of Baron Talbot, had been received into the Church by Wiseman in 1842. Newman was unwilling to admit him into the Oratory. Introduced by Wiseman to Pius IX, he became the Pope's adviser in the affairs of the Church in England. In 1868 he was confined to an asylum at Passy near Paris. Cf. *Letters and Diaries*, XI, 1961, p. 357.

mystical and sacramental rites and services. I have not as yet tried many of the conventual churches, so have heard hardly any plain chant. The only approach to it was at Santa Croce, which was good compared with the ordinary style. I was delighted with the Easter Day Mass at St. Peter's, and with the Benediction from the Loggia, as also with the illumination of St. Peter's, all of which are wonderful. Certainly one has no idea of the grandeur of the Church until one sees Rome. The Pope is a most striking-looking man, most benevolent, yet at the same time he has firmness and great decision of character marked in his countenance. He is greatly beloved and the people continue most enthusiastic about him. All he does is most wise and everyone seems most hopeful about him. Mr. G. Ryder has got up a large number of converts who are to go one day this week to be presented to the Holy Father — about fifty out of eighty who are here are going.

I am going in a day or two to stay at the Passionists', where Penny and Stanton are and where we shall remain until our Oratorian house and other matters are settled. Dalgairns will join us shortly. Mr. Edward Petre⁸¹ to whom Mrs. Phillipps was kind enough to give me a letter has been very kind to me. Mrs. Petre has been very ill, but is now much better. William Clifford⁸² is at the *Collegio Nobili*: he received two of the Minor Orders at St. John Lateran on Saturday. Lord Clifford is very well and seems quite at home in Rome. He is much taken up with Russian and Irish politics, and I hear writes a great deal on these subjects and then tears up what he writes.

(Easter Tuesday) Since I wrote the above I have removed to the Passionists'. This seems a most edifying community. The situation is lovely, and the view from my window charming. I look out on the Coliseum, that wonder of all wonders, and St. Peter's. The interest of Rome is intense, both of ancient as well as of Christian Rome. The very old churches, such as St. Clement's, SS. Nereus and Achilleus, with their beautiful mosaics delight me exceedingly. I have been much struck with the mosaics in S. Maria in Trastevere. They are a most striking proof that the Gothic vestments were not confined only to the North, as here you have the Apostles dressed in the ample chasuble, just like those of Pugin. These mosaics are of the XII century, if not earlier. Will you tell me when you write which is the church you mention in the preface of your *Little Gradual*⁸³. Is it St. Paul's? I was there today and the monks were chanting vespers very nicely. I am very fond of the Gesù as a devotional church, as also S. Ignazio where St. Aloysius is buried; and I often go to the church of S. Andrea delle Fratte where Ratisbon was converted: it is close to the Propaganda.

⁸¹ Edward Petre was of the traditionally Catholic family of Lord Petre. One of the family to achieve some renown was Maud Petre, friend and biographer of George Tyrell.

⁸² William Joseph Clifford, son of Lord Clifford, was ordained in 1850, becoming Bishop of Clifton in 1857. During the first Vatican Council he was the principal exponent of Newman's views. Cf. *Letters and Diaries*, XI, 1961, p. 336.

⁸³ *The Little Gradual* edited by Phillipps was published in London in 1847.

Newman is very well and in good spirits. He sends you his kind regards as also to Mrs. Phillipps. Macmullen likes the English College. He has not got his dress yet, but will have it in a day or two. Mr. Morris told me he was going to write to you, so I need say nothing of him, except that he appears to be a very agreeable person.

We had a prosperous journey and were most delighted with the Bishop of Marseilles, who was all kindness to us. Will you tell the good Conceptionists how kindly we were entertained and lodged in their house and how pleased we were with their young Oblates at the seminary. Father Aubert was most kind. The Bishop is a very striking person. He spoke in terms of very great interest about Grace Dieu and the Mission.

2. - Coffin to Phillipps, 1 VI 1847

On Trinity Sunday Newman and St. John were ordained Priests by Cardinal Fransoni in the chapel of the Propaganda and will say their first Mass on Corpus Christi. You may suppose that it was a very happy day for all Newman's friends, and indeed I think that everyone who knows anything about him is much pleased that he is now in a position to act and teach in the Catholic Church.

I was to have received the Tonsure and Minor Orders the same day, but owing to some technical difficulty in making out the Letters Dimissory etc. it has been put off; but I hope shortly to have entered the clerical state and to be as far as an Acolyte on the road to the Priesthood.

My next bit of news is that we are to make our Novitiate at Santa Croce, a part of which monastery the Bishop has directed the Abbot to give up to our use. Yesterday we went to see the rooms etc. which we like very well. As you know, it is in a nice position, with a lovely view of the mountains above Tivoli, Frascati and Albano. It will be a perfect retreat for the time, as it is so far distant from the town and now that the heat has set in, I suppose we shall not be allowed when there to go out until two hours or so before the *Ave*. We shall be eight to begin with including the Oratorian Father, but there is a chance of one or two more joining us, though not quite at the commencement. The Pope has been most kind and considerate: indeed as yet we are indebted entirely to him for the arrangement of the whole affair. We are all very well and stand the heat very fairly. As to myself, I was never better and find I can bear the heat much better here than I can in England.

I continue to like Rome very much, but cannot get converted to the Italian style of architecture or to Michael Angelo or to the innumerable naked figures which meet one on all sides in the churches, but especially in St. Peter's, and which really are dreadful. I need not tell you how delighted I am with the frescoes of Pinturicchio, Perugino, B. Angelico da Fiesole, with the mosaics, some of which are most striking, and with the earlier pictures of Raphael executed before he thought it necessary to leave devotion and deep Christian feeling for anatomy and anatomical development of the human form. As to the Last Judgement in the Sistine, I think it perfectly awful. Doubtless it is most wonderful as a work of

art, but I think if I were Pope I should feel very much inclined to paint it all over and then get Overbeck to draw something Christian and edifying in its stead.

I quite agree with you in thinking that the ceremonies in France are much more imposing than in Rome and infinitely better done. Indeed, excepting the Papal « functions », as they are called, and which are *sui generis* and not to be seen elsewhere, they have no grand ceremonies here, and you can see that it is not the line of the people to take pleasure in them. It is difficult to meet with Solemn Vespers; and as for services corresponding to the cathedral services in France, I have never seen any yet that gives me any pleasure, but I do not wish to be over critical on the one hand or to pretend to like everything here on the other, merely because it happens to be done in Rome. I think the Northerners have much to learn from the Italians, and they in their turn would do well to take one or two hints from us.

The Pope is a wonderful person, and if his life is spared must do great things. There seems to be no doubt that he has his eye on the old religious orders with a view to a just and proper reform. I cannot say that I am particularly taken with the old orders, excepting the Capuchins and Carthusians, who appear very striking men indeed. Pugin was here for a week or ten days, was horrified with everything he saw, excepting for a few details. All he says seems to me most true, though I think there may be a doubt as to the policy of saying all you think on matters about which people are so divided, and about which many are so ignorant that you cannot expect them to alter their opinions in a hurry. You will doubtless see him on his return and will hear his own opinion of Rome etc. from himself. I was very glad to find him so well and in such good spirits.

As to our return to England, it seems at present uncertain when that wished-for day will come, but I think it is not very far off — perhaps Christmas or a little later may see us back again. Bishop Wiseman and Bishop Sharples⁸⁴ are expected here soon, and I hope the former may urge a speedy return, which I think we all desire.

Dalgairns, Bowles and Penny desire their very kind regards to yourself and Mrs. Phillipps, in which I am sure Newman and St. John heartily join. Lord Clifford and William Clifford are both quite well. I have seen Mr. C. Weld⁸⁵ once or twice since I last wrote and like him very much. Conversions seem at a standstill just now, but we must hope that there will be another before long. We hear bad accounts of the scarcity and disease in England. O'Connell's heart has been brought here, and there was a dirge for him yesterday at the Irish College.

We hope to go to Santa Croce in ten days or so.

⁸⁴ James Sharples (1797-1850) had been coadjutor to Bishop George Brown, Vicar Apostolic of the Lancashire District since 1843.

⁸⁵ Charles Weld, a nephew of Cardinal Weld, was an enthusiastic amateur painter whose work in the chapel of the English College was much admired at the time. Cf. J. H. Pollen S. J., *op. cit.*, 74.

3. - Coffin to Phillipps, 8 VIII 1847

Your very kind and most welcome letter of the 28th June ought to have been answered by me before, but you will excuse my delay when I tell you that it reached me just as I was in the midst of preparing for my examination for my subdiaconate. Then came the retreat and this last week I have been for three days at Monte Porzio staying with Macmullen, who has not been well. Today, however, I take the advantage of the quick post to write you a few lines. And first I must tell you that I am a subdeacon, fairly embarked now in the Holy Ministry of Christ's Church. I hope to be a Priest in November, and must ask your and Mrs. Phillipps' prayers that I may prepare myself with all diligence for such a tremendous undertaking. Three of us were ordained subdeacons last Sunday by Bishop Wiseman in the Chapel of St. Philip at the Chiesa Nuova. Penny and Stanton will be priests almost at once and Bowles and myself in November. At least we hope so, and so it is at present arranged. Then if we are all alive at the time of our return, we shall be seven Priests to commence the foundation of an Oratorian Congregation in England.

We continue to like our residence here exceedingly, as also our good director, Father Rossi, who is most devoted and interested in our cause. Our time is well occupied in learning the different customs of the Congregation, in our private reading, and now we have a Professor in Morals four times a week. We have a Refectory to ourselves in which we read by turn, as also serve at dinner and supper. Before the end of each meal some moral doubt is proposed and discussed. This is a distinctive feature of the Congregation, and I fancy peculiar to it. In the evening we have the Oratory, consisting of a half-hour's mental prayer, the Litany of the Saints, the Antiphon of the BVM with several *Patens* and *Aves* said in silence for particular intentions. So our days pass. In the evening as the sun goes down we go out for our exercise. One day is much the same as another, varied now and then by some great Festival, when we go to visit the remains, if so be, of the Saint whose day it is, or the church particularly dedicated to him. We manage to bear the heat very well, though by all accounts it is nothing to be compared with that of last year. The mornings try me a little, as one gets as hot in getting up as in taking a walk, and this brings on a kind of languour which for an hour or two quite unfits me for the duties of the particular time.

You will have seen, no doubt, much in the papers about the politics of Rome and the late attempt at a disturbance. I should fancy you will believe nothing of what you read, as even here it is impossible to get to the bottom of things. Some say the old conservative party, that is Pope Gregory XVI's party, urged on by the Austrians, if not in their service, are the fomentors of all the disturbances; others that Young Italy is to blame, and that they are discontented because the Pope will not go far or fast enough for them. The Jesuits are, as usual, very unpopular, and I cannot but think are greatly calumniated. Cardinal Lambruschini is also said to be concerned in the matter; but that he is so actively seems very improbable, even though everyone knows he is not of the same views as the Pope⁸⁶. The last report is that they are putting up some state rooms

⁸⁶ Cardinal Lambruschini, Secretary of State under the recently deceased Gre-

at S. Angelo as if they were expecting some occupants soon, but I dare say this is false. In fact it is impossible to know what to believe and the gossip and rumours of Rome beat anything I have ever heard of. The Pope has granted a National Guard, and this has given great satisfaction, and for the present all the young Romans are well occupied in being drilled, and for a while I suppose they will be quite absorbed in the admiration of themselves and their new uniforms. The Pope, it is said, is full of anxiety and is much fatigued with the constant work he has upon him. He stands alone in the midst of all the European powers, but I take it he is stronger than all of them together, for if God is for us who shall be against us?

Bishops Wiseman and Sharples are at the English College on important matters regarding the Church in England. They have much to do at Propaganda, and their return is at present uncertain. People talk, but I fancy at present it is mere talk, that Bishop Wiseman is not unlikely to be the English Cardinal.

We are all much grieved to hear of Mr. Spencer's⁸⁷ illness, indeed the account was so bad as to make us think that ere this he must have been taken away. If so, it is, to speak humanly, a great loss to us, and yet surely we may confidently hope that he will benefit the Church more by his prayers, and so we must not repine. It seems as if Almighty God were visiting Catholics in a very mysterious manner just now, cutting off so many priests at a time when there was such a call for them. We dare not pry or examine into His all good designs and can but say: « His ways are not ours... ».

Your account of the procession of the Blessed Sacrament interested us all very much, as also the advance of Catholicity in your parts. I look forward with the greatest pleasure to coming to Grace Dieu, and next to my own home my first visit shall be there, please God. Oh, how happy I shall be to say Mass at the altar of your nice chapel, where I have knelt so often; but I must not look forward or I get impatient of where I am. We hear that Burns, the publisher⁸⁸, has become or is about to become a Catholic. If so it is a very great gain for the Church, and I hope you will soon get acquainted with him. I wish he had the publication of the Oratory books. It is a pity so good a cause is in the hands of Protestants.

gory XVI, was well known of course for his reactionary views.

⁸⁷ George Spencer (1799-1864), son of the second Earl Spencer, had been a student of Trinity College, Cambridge and had been received into the Church in 1830. From 1839 he had been teaching at Oscott. In 1840 he came to Oxford to ask Newman to join him in prayer for Church unity. Becoming a Passionist in 1846, he took the name of Ignatius, under which he won some renown as a Catholic writer. Cf. *Letters and Diaries*, XI, 1961, p. 357.

⁸⁸ The conversion of James Burns, the publisher, captured the interest of the group at Santa Croce to the extent that Newman was said to have written *Loss and Gain* to assist the man who had published the *Tracts for the Times* and many other important Anglican works. Cf. Wilfrid Ward, *The Life of John Henry Cardinal Newman*, I, 191; Cyril Ryder, *Life of Thomas Edward Bridgett C.S.S.R.*, London, 1906, p. 217-218.

4. - Coffin to Phillipps, 16 X 1847

On All Saints' Day I hope to have the wonderful privilege of offering the Holy Sacrifice for the first time, and please God I will say Mass for your intentions. My ordinations have come so rapidly, and now the crowning point of all, that I can hardly realise that the blessings in store for me are so near at hand. I hope I do not forget on the other side the fearful responsibilities of a Priest, and I beg you and Mrs. Phillipps to pray that I may remember them more and more. Penny will be ordained with me. We go into retreat on the 21st at S. Eusebio and are to be ordained deacons on the 24th and Priests on the 31st.

Excuse my saying so much of myself. I hasten on to tell you that that which you have so long desired and prayed for has at last been granted, namely the establishment of the hierarchy in England. It is finally settled that there are to be twelve bishops, to be increased to sixteen if we can but find persons to appoint. Westminster is an archbishopric, and they say here good Bishop Walsh is to be the archbishop. Southwark to be a bishopric. Bishop Wiseman to be Bishop of Birmingham, which *entre nous* I do not believe, for I cannot but think he will remain in London. However, they say he is *fixed* for Birmingham. Dr. Ullathorne⁸⁹ to be Bishop of Plymouth, Dr. Brown⁹⁰ of Lancaster, Dr. Sharples of Liverpool, Dr. Briggs⁹¹ of Leeds. (poor Dr. Hook⁹²!!) This is all that I have at present heard as being fixed. They talk of Southampton as one of the new sees. I shall be anxious to hear how this is received in England, both by the Government and by the poor old Church of England, if she has life or strength sufficient to give an opinion on the subject. Certainly it is a great move. The Pope, I believe, has simply settled it himself, and we cannot but hope that coming from such a Vicar of Christ as Pius IX, the measure will receive his Master's blessing. May we Catholics of England show ourselves worthy of it. This is the great point.

I have just seen Faber's translation of Bacci's life of St. Philip Neri⁹³. We had been reading the original in the refectory, and from the

⁸⁹ William Bernard Ullathorne O.S.B. (1806-1889) had already distinguished himself as Vicar General to Bishop Edward Slater, Vicar Apostolic of Mauritius, having jurisdiction over all of Australia from 1832 to 1840. In 1846 he became Vicar Apostolic of the Western District, being transferred to the Central District when Wiseman went to London in 1848. As Bishop of Birmingham from 1830 he showed himself a constant friend to Newman. Cf. Cuthbert Butler O.S.B., *The Life and Times of Bishop Ullathorne*, London, 1926.

⁹⁰ George Hilary Brown (1786-1856), Vicar Apostolic of the Lancashire District since 1840, became Bishop of Liverpool in 1850. Cf. *Letters and Diaries*, XI, 1961, p. 334.

⁹¹ John Briggs (1788-1861) had been Vicar Apostolic of the Yorkshire District since 1836. He became Bishop of Beverley in 1850.

⁹² Walter Farquahar Hook, Anglican Dean of Leeds, was a redoubtable controversialist against the Catholics. Cf. Cyril Ryder, *op. cit.*, 162-166.

⁹³ The *Vita di San Filippo Neri* of P. G. Bacci was published in Verona in 1624. Faber's predilection for Italian devotions dated from his visit to Italy in 1843 while he was still an Anglican. His translation of Bacci was one of the first volumes of the series *Lives of the Modern Saints* which he commenced before coming to the

first I lamented that Faber had determined simply to translate it as it stands. I quite agree with what you say about it; but do not let my opinion go beyond yourselves, as Faber has many objections without my adding to them.

As to the Post-tridentine period, I have not read its history sufficiently to be able to give an opinion about that part of your letter in which you refer to it, though I feel much inclined to think that it is a dreary period of the Church's history; and if so, I suppose that one great value of the lives of the Post-tridentine Saints is to show that when things seem to be looking bad and gloomy all around, yet God has ever His great witnesses and that the Church is ever making fresh conquests and giving fresh proofs of her Divine power. Thus England is lopped off and India sends forth a marvellous shoot. Luther and Calvin and their crew appear to be doing somewhat: St. Ignatius is raised up and averts in great measure the consequent evils; and so it has been ever since. But if you speak of imitation, I cannot but agree with you in thinking that the spirit and principles of the middle ages, so far as they can be carried out in this, our XIX century, are infinitely preferable to those as far as I know them of XVI and XVII centuries, in which for my part there is sadness enough for a Catholic. But we must keep this and many other interesting subjects for the hospitable fireside of Grace Dieu, where if all goes well, I hope to be some time in January next, supposing of course that you are able to receive me. We shall be leaving Rome the end of next month. I go to my family at Bruges, and before I join the rest of the community at Maryvale my plan is to come to Grace Dieu.

We are all well here and are expecting our Brief shortly. Then we shall become Fathers of the Oratory. As to the music, you must bear in mind that the Oratory is not a church and that the Blessed Sacrament is not reserved in it, and then it would admit of figured music, the idea being in part to give a kind of recreation to young men and so to keep them from dangerous resorts. If we are so fortunate as to have a church, as we hope to have, you need not fear that I shall cease to advocate, as far as is in my power, the use of the Plain Chant with an organ accompaniment. Pugin when here did not master the idea of the Oratory, and seemed to confuse it with a church, from which it is meant to be totally distinct. When I say figured music, of course, I mean grave and edifying music but harmonised. The services of the Oratory are quite in the power of the Fathers and thus ritual directions and rubrics do not come into play. Newman, Dalgairns, Penny and Bowles desire their very kind regards.

5. - Coffin to Phillipps, 8 XI 1847

You and Mrs. Phillipps will, I am sure, be glad to learn that I was ordained a Priest on the 31st and I had the happiness of saying my first

Oratory. In the course of 1848 when the series aroused criticism, Bacci's *Life* was found to be one particularly singled out as unsuitable for English piety. Cf. Wilfrid Ward, *op. cit.* I, 206-214.

Mass on All Saints' Day at the tomb of St. Philip Neri in the Chiesa Nuova (the Oratorian church). On St. Charles' day I said Mass as I promised for you all, and I need not say I shall be but happy to do so often: it will be the best way in which I can show my gratitude to you and Mrs. Phillipps for so many kindnesses and for the interest you are still good enough to take in me. Yesterday I sang High Mass for the first time in the Basilica. The Monks are most obliging people, and allow us to have High Mass whenever we like. They sing for us, real good Plain Chant, and well sung too. The same Creeds and Glorias as you have at Grace Dieu and which always recall the little chapel to my recollection. I hope by the time I arrive in England to be quite at home in the Mass, and great pleasure will it give me to say it at Grace Dieu before your image of the Blessed Virgin.

The exact time of our leaving Rome is still uncertain, though I hope for many reasons it will not be later than the 1st of next month. We are now waiting for the Pope's Brief, which is quite finished, but has to pass as a matter of form the Congregation of Briefs. When we have once got it, we shall then be free to move when we please. Though we are going home, and to England too, yet we cannot leave Rome without much regret. It is a place to which you become so attached from its numberless holy associations and the churches and tombs of the Saints which are all around become like old and dear friends whom we shall miss very much when once we are no longer amongst them.

We are much interested in the ecclesiastical arrangements in England at present. It is said here that good Bishop Walsh is to be Archbishop of Westminster and Bishop Wiseman to remain in Birmingham; but I should think that the former was not equal to such a post now, while the latter in every respect seems so well adapted for London and likely to do so much good there. I have been sad to hear bad accounts of Bishop Walsh's health. I fear all these changes will have made him very nervous and really impaired his health. We have only heard reports as to who the new bishops are likely to be. There seems to be some difficulty in the choice, and I expect it is a real one.

Dalgairns leaves on Friday for Guernsey. Lord Clifford is as usual engrossed in politics. We see him from time to time. He is a wonderfully saintly man, and I think your cousin, Mr. C. Weld, is also. I see him some times. He is still hard at work in his chapel in the English College, which he has painted in fresco in the real Gothic style. Beautifully has he done for an amateur. William Clifford is at the *Collegio Nobili* pursuing the regular course of studies. I shall not be surprised to hear he is ordained subdeacon shortly, as he has been making a retreat at S. Eusebio. Mr. Newman begs to send his very kind remembrances to yourself and Mrs. Phillipps.

6. - Coffin to Phillipps, 26 XII 1847

I arrived here (Bruges) on Monday last, having left Rome on the 27th and had a very interesting and prosperous journey through Florence,

the Tyrol, where I saw the Ecstatica, and Munich, where we stayed five days, which gave me an opportunity of making Dr. Döllinger's acquaintance. I travelled with two Catholic gentlemen, Mr. Berkeley jnr. of Spetchley⁹⁴ being one of them. He has been obliged to relinquish his intention of studying for the Priesthood owing to an affection of the eyes which quite prevented his reading.

My chief object in writing to you now is to ask you whether it will be quite convenient to yourself and Mrs. Phillipps for me to come to Grace Dieu about the middle of next month: the exact day I would let you know as soon as I arrive in London.

I am at present staying with my family who have been residing here this year. I have heard nothing of our « Superior » since I left; but I suppose he must be in England by this time. Nor have I heard if Bishop Wiseman's appointment is finally settled. There was a hitch the day before I left Rome, and Newman was to stay either for the Brief establishing the hierarchy or for the Pallium for the new Archbishop. Our own Brief establishing us as a Congregation in England and appointing Newman Superior came the day I left Rome. We commence our community life on the first of February. I said Mass for you on St. Ambrose's day in a beautiful little chapel in the Tyrol near Caldaro. How consoling is the state of religion in the Tyrol. One can hardly believe it even when there, so unlike, alas! is the ordinary state of countries.

7. - Coffin to Phillipps, 12 II 1848

I am going today to St. Wilfrid's with the Father Superior. On Monday he will admit Father Faber and his community, and we shall bring back with us Brothers Wells⁹⁵ and Mills⁹⁶. With them and the two Mr. Gordons⁹⁷ who will arrive in a day or two we shall be sixteen in number, six priests, five novices and five lay brothers. On Sunday last Father Dalgairns and myself preached at St. Chad's. The former will go to Birmingham every Sunday, and some of the rest of us are, I believe, to serve

⁹⁴ Robert Berkeley, son of Robert Berkeley, squire of Spetchley Hall in Worcestershire, was born in 1823. He was a close friend of John Morris. Cf. J. H. Pollen S. J., *op. cit.*, 51.

⁹⁵ Frederick Fortescue Wells (1826-1849) was a student of Trinity College, Cambridge. Becoming a Catholic in 1845, he joined Faber's Brothers of the Will of God in 1847. Cf. *Letters and Diaries*, XI, 1961, p. 360.

⁹⁶ Henry Austin Mills (1823-1903), also a student of Trinity College, Cambridge, became a Catholic in 1846. He remained in the Birmingham Oratory until his death. Cf. *Letters and Diaries*, XI, 1961, p. 347.

⁹⁷ John Joseph (1811-1853) and William Philip Gordon (1827-1900) belonged to a West Indian family. Both were educated in England, John at Trinity College, Cambridge, and William at Christ Church, Oxford. They became Catholics in 1847 and in the following year Oratorians. William was for several years superior of the London Oratory. Cf. *Letters and Diaries*, XII, 1962, p. 431-432.

the Convent of Handsworth⁹⁸. The new church there is beautiful and one of Pugin's most successful works.

We should like much to see Lord Shrewsbury's letter⁹⁹ if you will kindly send it. I am sorry that I shall not have the pleasure of making his Lordship's acquaintance while at St. Wilfrid's, but I believe he has left Alton.

8. - Coffin to Phillipps, 28 II 1848

If you have no objection, I wish very much to bring out those devotions of Blosius which I translated for your *Manual*¹⁰⁰ in a cheap form. We think here they would form a very useful little book for the poor and those who have not the means to purchase the *Manual*. I shall be glad to have your opinion; and if you see no objection to the plan I will write to Richardson to tell him to print them off, and I would like them to be in the same type and form as in the *Manual*.

We are getting on here, I hope, very well and are now quite a large community. The Father Superior has been preaching on Sunday evenings at St. Chad's. Father Dalgairns has regular work on Sundays and Mondays in Birmingham, and three others of us have taken the Mass and Sermon (a course on the Roman Catechism) at the Convent church at Handsworth.

What a terrible affair is this in France; and where will it lead to? It seems really as if all the dynasties were coming to an end. The whole of Europe seems ripe for a general Revolution.

I was at St. Wilfrid's a fortnight back and was most charmed with the place, as also with Alton. I did not see the Towers, and it was so dark when I went into Cheadle church that I can hardly be said to have seen it, though what I did see pleased me exceedingly¹⁰¹.

9. - Coffin to Phillipps, 29 VII 1848

Many thanks for your kind letter, which I am sorry to say came too late, for we had just received the *Rambler* with a huge article about screens. Our Father Superior is away in retreat at Mt. St. Bernard¹⁰². I

⁹⁸ Convent of the newly founded Sisters of Mercy. The chapel, the work of Pugin, was much admired.

⁹⁹ John Talbot, sixteenth Earl of Shrewsbury (1791-1852), was known as « the millionaire saint » because of his donations to the Church, reputed to have been more than half a million pounds sterling. A friend of Phillipps and Pugin's most generous patron, he commissioned the latter to design his residence, Alton Towers. Cf. *Letters and Diaries*, XI, 1961, p. 356.

¹⁰⁰ *The Oratory of the Faithful Soul*, Coffin's translation of *Sacellum animae fidelis* of L. Blosius, was published in London in 1848.

¹⁰¹ The Church in Cheadle had been designed by Pugin at the request of Lord Shrewsbury, who endowed it generously enough for his architect to give uninhibited expression to his taste for the Gothic.

¹⁰² Mount St. Bernard was the foundation of the Cistercians from Mt. Mellerau

am sure he would agree with you, as I think most of us, in thinking a newspaper controversy on such a subject most undesirable. To me it seems like children playing at battledore and shuttlecock when the house is on fire, or perhaps, and which is one reason why I deprecate this discussion so very much, it is like the Puseyites squabbling about what kind of cassock should be worn by the clergy. Surely when thousands and thousands are living in mortal sin and millions around us are out of the Church, it is not a time for Priests and Laity to be frittering away their energies and losing time and, as will certainly be the case, temper if not brotherly charity about a subject which, after all, however interesting it may be, is not sufficiently important in our times to be made the matter of public debate. But now they have begun we must pray that all will be directed to God's glory and any breach amongst us may be mercifully avoided. I hope to make a retreat in Autumn at the Monastery¹⁰³, when, if all goes well, I look forward to seeing yourself and Mrs. Phillipps.

made in the neighbourhood of *Grace Dieu* through the generous assistance of Phillipps. The monastery and church were designed by Pugin.

¹⁰³ The Monastery, of course, is Mount St. Bernard.