Nano Nagle (1728–1784)

By Unknown
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Nano Nagle was born at Ballygriffin, near Mallow, in the County of Cork, in the year 1728. She was descended from one of the most ancient Anglo-Norman families in Ireland; and her ancestors had for centuries played important parts in the history of their country.

The most remarkable of these, Sir Richard Nagle, was Secretary of State to James II., and Speaker of the Irish House of Commons. On the day of the battle of the Boyne, he waited in Dublin to hear its result, and went to meet the unfortunate monarch on his arrival. When the Council met, Sir Richard was one of those who pressed his Majesty to fly to France rather than take the chance of falling into the hands of his enemies. The King did fly to France, and Sir Richard threw in his fortunes with those of his royal master. He forfeited his estates of five thousand acres, followed the King, and became his Secretary of State at the court of St. Germains.

It was not, however, from her paternal ancestors that the family of Nano Nagle derived its principal distinction. Her mother was one of the Mathews of Thomastown, to which family Theobald Mathew belonged; and thus the Foundress of the Presentation Order was a near relative to the Apostle of Temperance. Her aunt, moreover, married Richard Burke, a Dublin solicitor, and her son was Edmund Burke, the friend of Johnson, the political philosopher, the impugner of Warren Hastings: it was at her knee that the great orator, whose eloquence shook the walls of Westminster, received his first lessons. The family which gave to the world Theobald Mathew, Edmund Burke, and Nano Nagle need not go back to the Council Chamber of James II. to prove its claim to honour and distinction.

Nano could receive no more than the rudiments of education at home, and even these were obtained with difficulty, for her parents were Catholics of gentle blood. The statutes of William and Mary were strict in the matter of forbidding Catholics to educate their children at home, and equally strict in forbidding them to send them abroad for the same purpose. Nevertheless Nano did go abroad to complete her education, though it was at the risk, in the terms of the statute, of incurring "disability to sue in law or equity, or to be guardian, executor, or administrator, to take legacy or deed of gift, or to bear office," and at the risk of "forfeiting for life."

Nano Nagle's life in Paris was not without its element of romance. When her school-life — of which but little is known — was over, her education was not thought complete; and she had to remain in Paris to be introduced in society, and acquire that degree of culture which was considered suitable to her position. Her admission to good society was no difficult matter, for the best salons were crowded with Irish nobles; the most welcome guests at the reunions of Louis XV. were the courtiers of St. Germains, and among these were to be found the descendants of Sir Richard Nagle, and the cousins of Nano. But however brilliant this society, it was eminently calculated to try the virtue of a young girl who had been brought up in a country place in Ireland, and educated in a French convent. Louis XV. was king, and Madame de Pompadour was at the zenith of her power: so

great was her influence, that even the queen, the virtuous Maria Leczinska, was forced to accept her position, and was the special protectress of the school of Voltaire.

Nano was, in fact, surrounded by a thousand dangers. She was of an ardent temperament, and, as we are told, very beautiful. She threw herself, moreover, with all her heart into the amusements which the gay city afforded her; and her life was a round of unceasing pleasure. Night after night was she to be found in the stateliest drawing-rooms, flitting among the dancers, and she could dress as well as any of the gayest court ladies at Versailles. It is no small tribute to Nano Nagle to say that she kept her soul unsullied in the midst of her corrupt surroundings. Had she married in Paris, and died the wife of a French noble, her children might have had engraved on her monument, as the highest praise, that she had remained pure amidst the pollutions of the court of Louis XV. This does not detract from her merit when she closed her eyes to the glittering vanities and refused a noble alliance to immolate herself for the spiritual good of her fellow-countrymen.

A very slight incident was destined to change the course of Nano Nagle's life. Early one morning she was driving home after a night spent at a ball, and while her chaperone slept wearily by her side she kept her eyes fixed vacantly on the streets through which the carriage rolled. But few people were abroad, but at length a small crowd attracted her attention. They were poorly clad, and looked like labourers ready for their day's work. She soon saw what it was that had brought them together. The big gate of the church outside which they stood was still locked, and inside was the abode of the King of kings, to whom they had come in the early morning to pay homage. She at once contrasted their life and hers. They, doubtless, had spent a night cooped up in miserable rooms, whence they had issued — the women to spend their days in kitchens and sculleries of the city, and the men to labour in the streets, attend in the shops, or run with messages from house to house. And she? She would return to her luxurious home, sleep half the day, spend an hour or two under the hands of her maid, and go out again into society when night came round. We need not pursue any further the contrast which she drew; enough that it did its work. The bright salons of Paris would know her no more; never again would a smile be brought to her lips by the flattering compliments of the courtiers of Versailles.

To return to Ireland was now her obvious course. Her education was complete, and a further stay in Paris could serve no purpose but to add some attractive charms to her, for, to use her own words, she had always been a lover of dress and of vanities. Her dull home at Ballygriffin, with its lonely evenings and tame amusements, must have made a gloomy picture to her imagination when placed side by side with the magnificent ball-rooms, with their glare of lights and their music and dancers, to which she had been accustomed. But the reign of vanity was over; and solitude was now more acceptable to her than could have been the most thronged room and the gayest company in Paris.

Her return to Ireland had much to do with deciding her future life, for till now she had made no fixed resolution, and her only thought was to tear herself from the frivolities which had had such an attraction for her. The sight of the waiting crowd outside the church gate had driven her to no hasty conclusions, and the outlines of her future life were still but dimly seen by her. Her only definite wish was to do all she could do to save her own soul, and assist in saving the souls of others. Her stay at her father's house showed her one way of putting this resolution into practice. While going about among his tenants, she saw where her duty lay. These people were, it is true, Catholics, but superstition had almost driven out religion. She questioned them about God and their salvation, and, to quote the words of Bishop Coppinger of Cloyne, "how afflicted was she to perceive that these poor creatures were almost absolute strangers to everything she questioned them about. They put

error in the place of truth, and while they kept up an attachment to certain exterior observances, they were totally devoid of the spirit of religion. Their fervour was superstitious, their faith was erroneous, their hope was presumptuous, and they had no charity."

It was no wonder that the Irish Catholics were in such a lamentable state. They were only what those who framed the penal statutes had meant to make them. Catholics were forbidden, under a penalty of £20 and three months' imprisonment, to teach in any Catholic school; and they were equally forbidden, under pain of incurring various disabilities, to send their children abroad to be educated. Edmund Burke designated the war waged against the intellects of the Irish Catholics as "the worst species of tyranny that the perverseness of mankind ever dared to exercise." Under circumstances such as these it is not hard to account for the fact that Nano Nagle found her father's tenants sunk in immorality and hardened in crime, without any idea of remorse.

She soon, however, gave up her intention of remaining in Ireland. During her intercourse with the poor there, she had tried to impart to them some knowledge of God and of their religion, and to instil into them some idea of a future life. But all her efforts had been in vain, for they were too immersed in ignorance and superstition for her to make any impression on them. She had made up her mind to devote her life to the salvation of souls, but she came to the conclusion that she could do nothing in Ireland single-handed; therefore, she argued, Ireland was not the place for her.

She next resolved to return to France and enter a convent there; but Providence had a different life in store for Nano Nagle from that of the cloister. She was pursued across the Channel by the memory of the sad condition of the people she had left behind her, sitting, as it were, "in darkness and the shadow of death," and she seemed almost to hear the voice which St. Patrick had heard of old, saying to her: "Return and walk still among us." When she landed in France it was not, therefore, for a convent that she sought, but for a director to advise her as to whether she should enter religion. She laid bare all her desires and intentions to the Jesuit father whose counsel she sought, relating to him both the compassion she felt for the poor Irish, and the intention she had formed of becoming a nun in France. The point to be decided was whether she should carry out this last resolve, or whether she should return to Ireland and do her best to rescue the poor there from the shades of ignorance and death which surrounded them. The priest's decision was in favour of work in Ireland, and several other confessors whom she consulted confirmed his decision. Nano had left her home well-nigh broken-hearted and discouraged by what she considered the impossibility of the work, but now she returned to Ireland, never more to be shaken in her courage, and determined to sacrifice her life, if necessary, to the work she was about to undertake.

Cork was the first city in Ireland to which Miss Nagle turned her attention. At the time it rivalled Dublin in its commerce, and in a letter to Miss Fitzsimons she describes it as "a place of great trade." Dr. Smith, the historian of Cork, states that a hundred thousand head of cattle were slaughtered there every year, being destined principally for the consumption of the Royal Navy; and writing in 1775, Dr. Campbell says: "Except in the article of linen, its exports are more considerable than those of Dublin." Then, as now, its export in butter was one of the largest in Ireland. At that time only vessels of a hundred tons burthen could come up the river, and canals had to be made all over the city, the ground on which now stand Patrick Street and the Grand Parade and the South Wall being then covered with water.

The working population of Cork at that period presented many attractions to the zeal of Nano Nagle. The various branches of trade and commerce for which Cork was noted had gathered within

its walls as numerous and uncivilized a crowd as could be found inside any Irish city. The exportation of meat brought thousands of butchers and salters, the linen industry gave employment to many weavers, and the butter exportation employed as many more. Though the vessels which plied between Cork and the city were very small, they could go up the river as far as Cork, and the number of hands employed on them must have been considerable. But with this multitude of butchers, salters, weavers, and sailors, there were only a few priests in the town, and only one chapel, in Blackamoor's Lane, planted down in the middle of salthouses and stables; in a loft over this church a few Franciscans contrived to exist, surrounded by hardships and troubles.

It was no marvel — as is shown by contemporary newspaper reports — that a very low code of morality prevailed among the lower classes. Many, despite the wealth of the city, were suffering severely from want; and exports to the value of thousands of pounds were leaving Cork under the eyes of those who were literally starving. What wonder that there should be discontent, or that it should take a reprehensible form? Some of the more prosperous inhabitants obtained their linen from Dublin, to the detriment of the local trade; and the Cork tradesmen expressed their resentment in a somewhat forcible way by sprinkling the clothes of the offenders with *aqua fortis*, to which they applied a match, and then calmly awaited the result. To show their disapproval of the enormous exportation, a crowd of butchers and others ran through the city, breaking into the merchants' storehouses, and making a bonfire of all the provision baskets on which they could lay hands.

Nor were their amusements much more civilized than their vengeance. Tuckey's *Cork Remembrancer* for June, 1770, gives an instance of this. A crowd of "inhuman savages," as the *Remembrancer* calls them, seized a bull from one of the immense herds which entered the city, and having infuriated him, drove him through the streets. Shopkeepers put up their shutters when they saw the mad beast making for their windows; passers-by were flung into the air, a decrepit beggar was thrown into a kennel, and a horse was tossed as high as a sign-post, the bull being eventually killed in one of the narrow lanes of the city.

Brandy and wine were cheap, and Father Mathew had not yet come on the scene. Thus a Cork gentleman, writing in 1778, says that he regarded a sedan chair as a heaven-sent contrivance for the conveyance of those who could not stand on their feet. There were many clubs in Cork; but the term conveyed a very different idea from what it does now. No tables were there, strewn with literature and newspapers; no lectures on scientific or other subjects; for in Cork the clubs were devoted solely to the worship of Bacchus!

Nano Nagle soon began her work of reformation. Her first desire was to establish a school for poor children; but an obstacle met her at the very outset. She was at the time staying with her brother in Cork. He might have suffered much from the anger of the Protestants, so that she thought it well to conceal her designs from him, and had at the first start to carry on her work through her maid. By this means a school was started with a mistress and thirty girls, and Miss Nagle used to steal out to look after it quite early in the morning, when her brother thought that she was at church. But her secret soon leaked out, for one day a man came to ask Mr. Nagle to use his influence with his sister on behalf of a child whom he wanted admitted to the school. Her brother's first feeling was one of amused surprise; he could not understand how his sister's name could in any way be connected with a school; and when Miss Nagle acknowledged the truth of the man's statement, rage took the place of his merriment. But he soon came round, and not only forgave his sister, but determined to sacrifice whatever worldly interests of his were at stake, and throw himself into the cause of charity. Nano had an uncle whom she feared to injure, for she believed that there was no man in all Ireland

more hated by the Protestants. He, however, had no fears for himself, and as soon as he knew of his niece's needs he placed his purse at her disposal, to keep a roof over the heads of the poor children who began to flock to her school from the lanes and quays of the city of Cork.

The work made rapid progress. Nine months after the opening of the school, two hundred girls could be seen morning after morning, with their books and baskets, making their way to it. Soon the respectable Catholics at the other end of the town perceived what an improvement had taken place in the manners of the children who attended the school, and began to think that the children who were running wild round their own doors, and whose cries were always heard in the streets, might with advantage to themselves and to others spend their days indoors. Miss Nagle was in consequence asked to do for these what she had already done for the children at the other end of the town, and promises from the wealthier inhabitants were forthcoming to do what they could to make the venture a success. In a short time there were two hundred children attending this second school. On her uncle's death all his property fell to Nano, and she had but one use for the money, every penny of which was spent in support of her schools for the poor children of Cork. Providence blessed her undertaking so that, writing in July, 1769, to her friend Miss Fitzsimons, she was able to state that there were in Cork five schools for girls and two for boys, all of which were in a flourishing condition.

But her schools were not Miss Nagle's real work of charity. It has been shown how, in spite of the wealth and prosperity of the city, many of its inhabitants were in a state of the most abject poverty, some being actually starving, and many of the children without clothes in which to go to school. Most of the poor were beyond the reach of the few priests of Cork, and numbers were lying ill in dark garrets which had never been visited by a doctor. Miss Nagle made it her business to search throughout the lanes and quays of the city for such as these, and to visit those parts of Cork with such an object was an act of heroism. It was not very safe to walk through even the better streets, for the Corporation was too busy watching papist priests and papist teachers to look after the comfort and safety of the citizens. Lime was screened in the public ways, and the pathways were blocked with heaps of rubbish. One of the papers of that day says: "If the traveller be not run over by one of the cars which whirl along with lightning rapidity, he may felicitate himself on his return home." It was, of course, worse at night. "To survive a night walk," says the *Cork Mercantile Chronicle* of April 3, 1805, "is to become a matter of family thanksgiving." These words referred to the principal streets, so the state of the by-ways must be left to the imagination. But no dangers or disagreeables deterred Miss Nagle in her perambulations, and the older inhabitants used to love to speak of that familiar figure walking along in the rain and darkness on winter nights, guided only by the glimmer of the lamp which she held in her hand; they described how the ribald laugh and joke were hushed at her approach, and how the most hardened ruffians would stand aside and bare their heads respectfully whilst she passed.

The time was now at hand when Nano Nagle was to take that part in the restoration of Catholicity which makes her life so interesting to us at the present day. So far her schools depended entirely on herself, and her own income, and whatever funds she could obtain by begging were her only sources of revenue. This being so, anyone could foresee that in time the poor of Cork would return to a darkness greater than ever; for the result of her efforts would be but as a flash of lightning, to shine for a moment and disappear forever with her death. Some means were necessary to perpetuate her work, and none saw this clearer than herself. She took counsel with Father Doran, a Jesuit, and with the Rev. Francis Moylan, her intimate friend, afterwards Bishop of Cork. They prayed for

light, and came to the conclusion that a religious order would be the best instrument for such a work. Furthermore, the order selected by them was that of St. Ursula, founded in the sixteenth century by St. Angela de Merici, for the main object of the education of girls.

There were, however, many difficulties in the way of obtaining the assistance of this Order; for Ireland was not at that time a very inviting field for the labours of any religious. It is true that a few convents did exist in the island, but even these few were not settled places of abode. The Poor Clares had started a house in Dublin in 1628, but they had been driven out of the capital to Athlone, thence to Galway, and again from Galway to Harold's Cross, where they were allowed to settle. It would have been extraordinary if, in the face of such experiences, Miss Nagle's appeal to the Ursulines of France had met with an enthusiastic response. In Ireland success was very uncertain, while persecution and troubles were certain; and, moreover, a thousand ties bound the French nuns to their own convents. But God's arm is never shortened. Four young Irish ladies, resident in France, offered themselves to the Ursulines for work in Ireland. The first of these, Miss Fitzsimons, had intended to enter the Order of the Visitation, but Dr. Moylan having pleaded the cause of the new foundation, she placed herself in the hands of the superioress of the Ursulines in the Rue St. Jacques, to prepare for the Irish Mission. Miss Coppinger, a cousin of the Duchess of Norfolk, was induced by Miss Nagle herself to join Miss Fitzsimons as a second candidate for the Cork Mission. A third, Miss Kavanagh, related to Miss Coppinger, had already made up her mind to be a nun, and on meeting her cousin was persuaded to throw in her lot with those who had resolved to brave the difficulties of work in Ireland.

Miss Nagle was not behind the age in the matter of education. Whilst strenuously seeking to obtain candidates for the new foundation, she was definite in her views as to the essential requisites for one destined to be a teacher. It was not in her opinion sufficient that she should be pious, but she must also be learned. These two — virtue and ability — were the qualifications on which she insisted, and she took the utmost care that the nuns who offered themselves for the Irish mission should be well prepared to hold their own in the battle of education. Whatever tended to cultivate their minds, whatever was calculated to make them a credit, intellectually, to their profession, was to be obtained at whatever cost. "If," she wrote to the French superior, "it would be permitted to have anybody to teach them what you think might be hereafter an advantage to the house, do not spare any expense." In another letter she expresses a strong desire that the sisters "should learn what was proper to teach young ladies hereafter." Nano Nagle gave similar instructions to Miss Fitzsimons, the senior of the Irish candidates, for she was persuaded that secular learning came only second to religion, and this persuasion of hers has had a lasting effect on the Ursulines of Ireland. They have been moulded upon her ideas, and year after year the fruitful results of her anxiety on the subject have been shown, for the names of students at the Ursuline convents have become familiar on the lists of the Royal University. Miss Nagle would have done a good life's work had she done nothing more than give to Ireland this noble band of teachers, who in spite of adversity and prejudice even forced their way to the front ranks in the matter of the education of women.

Another trial of patience was in store for Nano Nagle. When everything was ready for the reception of the Irish sisters, Dr. Moylan agreed to go to Paris to escort them over. But his journey was postponed for some little time. His brother had died a short time before, and now, just as he was on the point of starting, his father was too old and frail to be left alone after all this trouble. Thus Dr. Moylan put off his visit to Paris for some months, and when he did at length arrive there he found his path beset with unexpected obstacles. None of the four young ladies had been professed, and it

was found to be distinctly against the constitutions of the Ursuline Order to found a new convent without at least one professed sister. The prospect of the Irish mission looked as dark and forbidding as ever to the French nuns, and the gloom increased when it became clear that not one among the most zealously missionary people in the world could be induced to venture out into the darkness. At length, an Irish nun, a Mrs. Kelly, professed sister at the convent at Dieppe, was found to take the risk, and offered to accompany the novices to Ireland. On Ascension Day, May 9, 1771, the little band landed at Cork, and on the 18th of September following, the first convent in Ireland since the Reformation, established with no attempt to conceal its real nature and object, was opened.

The Corporation of Cork was quick to take alarm. All Irish Protestants were bigoted in those days, but to say that this Corporation was bigoted would be to use too weak an expression. Its members had always regarded themselves as the guardians of what they called the liberties of their province; in other words, their mission in life was to uphold Protestantism, and keep a Protestant king upon the throne of England. Moreover, in their opposition to Catholicism they had other objects in view, which no one could pretend to be religious. The "fathers of the city" were merchants, and their most formidable rivals were Catholics; for out of the eight thousand families in Cork upward of five thousand were belonging to the Church. The most elegant carriages in the city, the largest storehouses on Charlotte quay, the busiest vessels on the river belonged to Catholics. The gentlemen of the Corporation beheld all this with envious eyes. The public affairs of the town had never been an object of much anxiety to them; people were trampled on in the streets, public peace was almost a thing of the past; but details such as these did not trouble the members of the Corporation. Now, however, little papists were about to go to school! What next? Stout aldermen trembled as they conjured up terrible visions of the future, of papists penetrating even within the halo of light which surrounded the Council Chamber, entering that region of inaccessible light, and taking their seats with the municipality of the city of Cork.

The Corporation held a meeting, at which was read the statute of William III. which obliged the mayor and magistrates to have all nuns removed, and their nunneries suppressed; failing the fulfilment of which duty they were liable to a fine of £100. Speeches were delivered by the aldermen, who pointed out that the position was a dangerous one, that Protestantism was slipping away, that the papists were growing bolder every day, and that the late encroachment was especially a serious menace to the Protestant ascendancy. It is quite likely that Miss Fitzsimons and her companions might have been sent back to France next day had there not been — as Dr. Hatch, Miss Nagle's biographer tells us — one sane man on that council of bigots. Alderman Francis Carleton did his best to soothe the fears of his friends. He threw ridicule on the idea that the Protestant ascendancy was in any danger, for he could not conceive how it could be disturbed by a few ladies who had come to Cork "to teach poor children, drink tea, and say their prayers." He assured them that the statute of William III. had become a dead letter, and that the magistrates could never be expected to discharge a duty such as was suggested against a portion of the community as numerous and influential as were the Catholics. He moreover pointed out that there was plenty of room for improvement in the morals of the lower classes in the city, and appealed to his colleagues as business men to decide whether it would not be better to keep in the country money which would otherwise be spent in Paris or at Dieppe. The councillors yielded to his eloquence; but it was not for years after this meeting that the Ursulines ventured to wear their religious habit in Cork.

The greatest blow to Miss Nagle was her disappointment in the Ursulines themselves. As has been shown, her life was devoted entirely to the poor, and all her efforts were directed to their relief. For

the poor had she established her schools; and it was for their sake that she had ventured into every slum and alley in the place. It was in the homes of the poor that her work chiefly lay, and it was to perpetuate this work that she had introduced a religious order into Ireland. That Order had been intended by her to take up its post in the schools and homes of the poor. But, far from able to do this, the Ursuline nuns were bound to enclosure, were never allowed to pass the limits of their convent, and the principal object of their rule was the education, not of the poor, but of the rich. In fact, the scope of the Ursuline Order did not include either of the works most dear to Nano Nagle's heart.

The Ursulines must not be censured on this account. Their object is the education of the higher classes of those who are destined to grace the drawing-room, take their place in fashionable society, and encounter all the dangers peculiar to such a sphere. For this class the facilities for education are daily becoming greater, for universities are thrown open to them, degrees are conferred, and no fine lady considers it an insult to be called a scholar; nevertheless, the most important item is neglected in this system of higher education, for religious knowledge is not essential to an examination for a degree. Thus, religious instruction is not always insisted on in high-schools for ladies, and it is probable that these often know more about the sciences than they do about the commandments. To remedy this is the main object of the Ursuline Order. The formation of a Christian womanhood is their primary aim, every branch of secular knowledge and every graceful accomplishment which serves to perfect and ornament coming only second. Their system of blending religious instruction with secular learning has, even from a worldly point of view, been a success, for they have proved conclusively that proficiency in the one is of no detriment to the other; and those interested in education in Ireland have come to look as a matter of course for the names of the Ursulines' pupils in the lists of the higher university examinations. The practical result of their system of training is not merely the formation of good wives and mothers, who raise the moral tone of the society in which they move, who keep their husbands on the path to heaven and who teach their children to raise their hearts to God; for there is even a higher work which they accomplish. It is while under the care of these nuns, and as a result of their training, that the ears of many a young maiden are opened to the voice of the Bridegroom, which says to them: "Go out from thy parents and from thy father's house." Year after year do pupils leave the Ursuline schools, not to go back to the world, but to recruit the ranks of the Orders of the Presentation, Visitation, or others of a like nature.

To an Order with such an object and such a work no one would deny an important place in the economy of the Church. Nevertheless, Miss Nagle was dissatisfied. Her work was no more complete nor assured than it had been, and she found that after all her efforts she had made no provision for the wants of the poor of Cork. When death took her from them, the miserable garrets, which seemed to serve no purpose except to conceal the poverty and suffering of their inhabitants, would have no charitable visitor to penetrate their secrets; distress and want would have no advocate. No wonder that the head of Nano Nagle was bowed with thought as such a state of things presented itself to her mind; and she at once sought how she could apply a remedy to the need, nor had she far to seek.

About this time two young ladies of her acquaintance offered to help her in the work she had so much at heart; and this fully decided her in the course she meant to adopt. With these two she determined to form the nucleus of a new congregation, the members of which should devote themselves entirely to the service of the poor. On the 25th of January, 1775, her friends retired with her to a humble house in Douglas Street, the same in which the Ursulines had dwelt while their

convent was in preparation. On the 29th of June she herself received the habit of the new congregation she had formed, taking in religion the name of John of God. One of her companions, Miss Fouky, took the name of Sister Joseph, while two others who had joined her, Miss Elizabeth Burke and Miss Anne Collins, took respectively the names of Augustine and Angela. On Christmas Day, 1777, the new convent, built for the Congregation, was opened, and on that day Miss Nagle invited fifty poor beggars to dinner, and waited on them herself with the help of her companions. It was a fitting beginning for an Order, the members of which were to be so closely connected with the poor, and the habit of which, and the convent in which the sisters dwelt, were to be a constant reminder to the citizens of Cork of those words of Our Lord's: "The poor you have always with you."

The rule was given to Miss Nagle and her companions by the Curé of St. Sulpice. She had at first been anxious to adopt the rule of a French Order known by the name of the Grey Sisters; but when she studied it more closely she found that it would be unsuitable to her purpose. Those nuns had to fast half the year, and had the office of Our Lady and many other prayers to recite every day; and Nano saw plainly that such a rule would be impracticable for Sisters who had to spend most of their time in the schools, and the remainder in the homes of the poor. Dr. Moylan then wrote for her to the superioress of another religious body known as the Hospitallers of the Brothers of Villeneuve. She would have at once sent him a copy of their rules, but this was forbidden by the Superior-General of the Order. Nevertheless, she was able to give him some idea of the objects of the Order, and the direction taken by the labours of the nuns. It appeared that they took care of the sick, looked after old men and women, and assisted in the education of young ladies of distinction. The superioress added that the work in which she herself found most consolation was that of visiting and instructing prisoners. The Curé of St. Sulpice, who had formerly been Superior-General of the Order, now drew up a new rule for Miss Nagle and her companions, based upon that of the Hospitallers, but in which no solemn vows were to be taken.

On the 24th of June, 1777, Mother Nagle with Sisters Collins, Burke, and Fouky pronounced their simple vows in the presence of Dr. Butler, Bishop of Cork. The Order was still in its youth, but it was destined for great things, and would ere long be the subject of a papal brief. The time was, moreover, at hand when other Bishops would be eager to hear pronounced in their presence those vows which Nano Nagle and her companions took that day before the Bishop of Cork. This extension of sphere and influence lay before the Order of the Presentation; nevertheless a painful period was to intervene between its foundation and its full development.

Miss Nagle did not live to see the growth of her Congregation. Although not fifty-six years of age when she died, death could hardly in her case be called premature; for if anyone "fulfilled a long space in a short time," it was she. Labour, disappointment, and anxiety had made her their prey, and had begun to put in their claim on her while she was still young. She had returned from school to her own country only to see how thoroughly the penal laws had done their work, how effectually they had accomplished the degradation of her countrymen. She had asked them about their religion, and had found that she might as well have spoken to the natives of Africa. She had gone back to France to shelter herself in the cloister from the dangers of the world, and looked forward to ending her days in the peace and seclusion of a French convent. But that desire had to be renounced, for the voice of God told her through her confessor that this happiness was not for her, and that Ireland, the land of persecution, the country so effectually despoiled by William and Anne, was the post destined by heaven for her. So she had returned to Ireland, established her schools, and braved the

indignation of her brother. She had by dint of labour arranged for the introduction into her native country of the Ursulines, she had sought for and found novices, and had had them, as she hoped, educated and trained in every way for the work. But when they had crossed the Channel she found that she had aimed above the mark, and that after all the Ursulines were never destined for the education of the poor. All through her labours for the spiritual wants of Ireland she had been, as it were, marching up hill, and then turning back and marching down again. She had had, after this disappointment, to begin anew, and look for fresh postulants, and obtain the Bishop's approbation for what might turn out to be another failure. It was only after thirty years of labour that the object of her life was attained, and her work for the welfare of the poor of Cork placed on a sure basis.

Disappointment was only one ingredient in Nano's cup, for her health caused her much suffering. When writing to Miss Fitzsimons in 1769, we find her even then complaining of the weakness in her chest, and spitting of blood. It is not hard to account for this last symptom, which she took the greatest care to conceal from those around her, though it was eventually the cause of her death. Her work of teaching, her journeys from school to school, her excursions, by night and by day, into the slums of Cork, would have tried a stronger constitution than hers. When preparing children for their first Communion she would speak for upwards of four hours every day. She gave daily instructions during Lent, and on the Monday and Tuesday of her last Holy Week on earth she read the Passion three times at different schools. As has been already shown, the roads about Cork were never properly looked after by the city fathers, yet Nano Nagle, on her way to and fro between her home and the miserable abodes of which disease, poverty, and wretchedness of every kind were the tenants, had to make her way along the worst of the streets, regardless of rain and darkness.

All these labours would of themselves have been but dry bones unless animated by her charity. A letter of Miss Fitzsimons, in which she describes the devotion and austerities of her Mother, reads like a page from the lives of the Saints. She fasted on bread and water every Wednesday and Friday, she took the discipline four times a week, and on the night of the last Holy Thursday which she spent in this life, she passed eleven hours kneeling before the Blessed Sacrament. Every day of her life she spent four hours in prayer. Her sisters saw all this, but they never knew how much it cost her. They could all see her absorbed in prayer on that last Holy Thursday, but what they did not know was that her knees were pierced with ulcers. Kneeling even on a soft cushion would have caused torture under those circumstances, but it never occurred to anyone who beheld her motionless figure that she was enduring agonies of pain.

For years she had been declining in health, but the end itself was sudden. She was caught in a heavy rain on her way to the schools, and remained wet through all day. Next morning she was seized with violent spitting of blood at a house where she was having breakfast. The lady of the house urged her to return home at once and go to bed. "What a coward you are!" was Nano Nagle's reply; "I have a mind to go to the schools and walk it off as I have often done before." Yes, she had often walked it off, but that remedy would not do this time. The doctor was called in, and she was bled, blistered, and bled a second time. All in vain! Worse symptoms set in, and she received the last sacraments. This was only seven hours before her death. She expired on Monday, the 20th of April, 1784, in the fifty-sixth year of her age. The treasure she bequeathed to her children was the same which St. Lawrence pointed out to the Roman tyrant as the riches of the Church, namely the poor of Jesus Christ. Her last words were those which the aged St. John had been so fond of repeating at Ephesus. "Love one another," she said to her companions as her parting bequest, "as you have hitherto done."

It was only after the death of the foundress that the congregation developed fully, and the mother's hopes were realized only in her children. The daughters of Nano Nagle became as well known in the purlieus of the city as their mother had been before them. The face of Cork was changed. Now, when a priest came to pay his last visit to a dying person, he found the candles lighted, the holy water ready, and everything as well prepared as if Nano herself were still at work. Moreover, the crowds of children flocking daily to school told as plainly as words could have done that there was still someone left to keep alive the sacred flame which she had enkindled, and which bigots had hoped to extinguish. Other Irish bishops became anxious to possess in their dioceses the treasure hitherto confined to that of Cork. They saw the community growing in size and importance, and appealed to Dr. Moylan — lately appointed to the See of Cork — to send to their flocks some of those nurses and teachers who had done such a great work in his own diocese.

Something further had, however, to be done before such an extension of the Order could take place. Hitherto it had existed only by episcopal sanction, and Dr. Moylan considered it necessary, before the Congregation spread itself over other parts of Ireland, to procure for it the approbation of the Supreme Pontiff, and accordingly wrote to Rome for that purpose. The Pope rejoiced at receiving such a request. At that time and in every part of Europe the very mention of either convent or monastery was sufficient to render men furious, yet in Ireland a new society of religious was being formed. "More grateful or more seasonable intelligence we could not receive," said Pius VII., in his reply to Dr. Moylan. Nor did he neglect to give to the new Congregation some incentive to work by "giving and granting to it all the same indulgences and spiritual graces granted by his predecessors to the religious of St. Ursula." The result of the papal confirmation and apostolic benediction soon became apparent, for in the course of the next nine years six new convents were established in Ireland; and when Dr. Moylan had to apply to Rome for a further favour for the Congregation, it was no longer in his own name only that he spoke, but in that of all the Archbishops and Bishops of Ireland.

This new request was to the effect that the Institute of the Presentation should be raised to the rank of a religious order, and its sisters be allowed to take solemn vows. This request was not easily granted, for the Pope insisted upon the observance of enclosure. This meant that they were never to pass the limits of the monastery except for the most weighty reasons expressed in the constitutions and sanctioned by canon law; and if this were observed the Presentation nuns could never leave their convent, and their foundress's desire that they should be as much at home in the houses of the poor as in the cloister, and that their proper place should be either by the side of a sick-bed or in the schools, would be nullified. The rule of visitation must be abandoned, or the Congregation could never become a religious order. The Bishops saw the dilemma, and consented to remove the rule; and after this concession compliance to their request followed soon. The brief of Pius VII., dated the 8th of April, 1808, declared the Presentation Institute a religious order, and gave its members permission "to be freely admitted to the solemn profession of the usual religious vows, to which a fourth was added, namely, the education and instruction of young girls, especially the poor, in the precepts and rules of the Catholic Faith," the obligation of visiting the sick being disposed of.

To see the full effect of Nano Nagle's work, seas must be crossed and continents traversed. If, as Dr. Hatch, Miss Nagle's biographer, affirms, the destiny of the Irish race be "to plant the standard of Catholicity wherever the English tongue is spoken," it is the destiny of the Presentation to prepare at least a portion of the Irish race for that noble mission. It is ceaselessly engaged in apostolic work by impressing the truths of Christianity on its subjects, one fourth, at least, of whom are destined to

spend their lives in Australia. Thus are the seeds of religion and religious knowledge taken to a new continent, to be planted there in the hearts of husbands and children, and wafted by the winds of example into the minds and souls of those among whom they move. Nor are the Presentation Sisters satisfied with this. Wherever the scattered members of the Irish race have found a home, they have thought it their duty to follow; and in whatever country Irish people and Irish priests have built a church, there in their wake do we find the Presentation nuns, even as we find nurses in the wake of an army.

Within sixty years of the foundation of the Order, Nano Nagle's daughters had opened a school in a slaughter-house in Newfoundland, and others were trying to teach the little children of the gold-diggers in California that gold is not the one thing necessary. Some others were holding a night-school for factory girls in Manchester, while five sisters had set out from Kildare, the home of St. Brigid, to look after the Irish whom she had loved in their faraway home in the Antipodes, and had left the "Hill of the Oak, to dwell beneath the rays of the Southern Cross." The work in which they are engaged is everywhere the same — that of teaching. But they never forget the especial mission entrusted to them by the brief of the Supreme Pontiff, namely that of "educating and instructing young girls, and especially the poor, in the precepts and rules of the Catholic Faith." This is the one great duty of every Presentation nun in whatever part of the world her lot may be cast, whether in Ireland, England, America, or Australia, in Cork or in Manchester, in New York or in San Francisco, in Melbourne or in Wagga-Wagga.

The story of Nano Nagle is not without its moral for us at the present day. She is a witness and an example; for her life is a testimony to the importance of Catholic education, and it is an example of what a Catholic can do in the face of prejudice, opposition, and discouragement. Her brother's expostulations, her uncle's danger, the loss of her own fortune, the threats of the Cork Corporation, the dark forest of ignorance into which she had to plunge, might have made another woman pause, but not Nano Nagle. On she went; and wherever Catholic education flourishes, whether in Ireland or England, we should ever gratefully remember that it is but the crown of that edifice, the laying of the foundations of which were her life-work.
