

## WIDOWS AND VOWESSES.

By J. L. ANDRÉ, F.S.A.

————— A matrone grave and hore ;  
Whose onely joy was to relieve the needes  
Of wretched soules, and helpe the helpelesse pore ;  
All night she spent in bidding of her bedes,  
And all the day in doing good and goodly deedes.  
*Spenser,*

At the present time mankind may be said to be divided into two states of life—the married and the unmarried ; but in the early ages of Christianity, and until the middle of the sixteenth century, there were three recognised divisions. Ælfric, the Anglo-Saxon homilist, tells us of them in a sermon for the Feast of the Purification, in which he says, “there are three states which bear witness of Christ : that is maidenhood, and widowhood, and lawful matrimony.”<sup>1</sup> In another discourse, the same writer acquaints us with the comparative value of each. The marriage house at Cana, he tells his hearers, was believed to have been “three-floored,” the lowest of believing married laymen ; the second, of widows living reputably ; and the third, and highest, of the unmarried. The first, Ælfric, says, “receive the twenty-fold reward, the second the sixty-fold, and the third the hundred-fold rewards promised in the gospel.” The same idea occurs in a hymn for the festivals of Holy Women, in the Sarum Missal, which says of a saintly widow,

Fruit thirty-fold she yielded,  
While yet a wedded wife ;  
But sixty-fold she rendered  
When in a widowed life.<sup>2</sup>

I quote these passages to show how thoroughly this triple classification was acknowledged in the middle ages, which had however existed long before, and may be found in the primitive liturgy of S. Clement, in which an

<sup>1</sup> Ælfric Homilies, vol. i, p. 149.

<sup>2</sup> English Ed. Sarum Missal, p. 509.

offering of intercession was directed to be made "for virgins and all that live chastely, for the widows of the church, and for those that live in honourable marriage."<sup>1</sup> In the still older liturgy of S. Mark, prayer was made for "monks, ever virgins, widows and laymen."<sup>2</sup> The same theory entered into art as well as theology, and may be found exemplified at Canterbury Cathedral, where, in one of the windows of Norman date were pictured three figures, each holding a scroll with their names:—

VIRGO : CONTINENS ; CONJUGATUS.

Round these effigies ran a legend which appears to have indicated the reward proper to each.

Before entering upon the subject of vowesses, it may be as well to ascertain the causes which led to the formation of this half-secular, half-conventual state of life. The chief of these appears to have been the repugnance to, and prejudices against second marriages, which have existed from the earliest times, and which in some cases are not altogether extinct at the present day. This aversion has been by no means confined to one portion of the globe, and although it has died out in Europe, it still obtains in the East, where it arose in remote ages. The Jewish high priests were bound not to marry widows; but a priest having married one before his consecration was not obliged to repudiate her.<sup>3</sup> The Hindu *Manu* expresses itself thus on a widow's duties: "Let her consecrate her body by living entirely on pure flowers, roots, and fruits. Let her not when her lord is deceased ever pronounce the name of another man. A widow who slights her deceased lord by marrying again brings disgrace on herself here below, and shall be excluded from the seat of her lord."<sup>4</sup> According to Chambers, the Roman laws enacted that the effects of the husband or wife deceased should pass over to the children if the survivor should marry a second time.<sup>5</sup> The professional marriage-maker amongst the same people, if a woman, was obliged to have been married only once. The

<sup>1</sup> Neale's *Primitive Liturgies*, p. 86.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>3</sup> Continuation of *Josephus*, p. 257.

<sup>4</sup> Devendran Das, in *Nineteenth Century Mag.*, 1886, p. 364.

<sup>5</sup> Chambers' *Cyclopædia*, vol. ii; *Marriage*.

The same writer says: "The Roman

laws speak of second marriages in very hard and odious terms; *matre jam secundis nuptiis funerata*, L. 3 C, de sec. nupt. By the law *Hæc edictali Cod. de sec. nupt.*, the survivor upon marrying a second time could not give the person married a portion more than equal to that of each of the children."

establishment of Christianity increased the repugnance to second espousals, and nothing can exceed the emphatic terms in which they were denounced by many of the prominent writers of the early church, such as S. Jerome<sup>1</sup> and Tertullian. Bingham, writing of those who formed second matrimonial alliances among the early christians, says that, "The penalty inflicted upon them is abstinence from the Sacrament for One Year or two, which I freely own, as it is worded and ordered by the canons of Neocæsarea, Laodicia and S. Basil, is one of the hardest Cases we have met with in all the History of the Ancient Church."<sup>2</sup> Some canons are said to have been enacted forbidding ecclesiastics from being present at a second union. Milman, in his History of Christianity, says, "The Eastern Churches had a horror of second marriage, and a presbyter was forbidden to be present at the wedding feast of a digamist."<sup>3</sup> The argument used against these unions, says Professor Donaldson, was, "That God made husband and wife one flesh, and one flesh they remained even after the death of one of them. If they were one flesh how could a second woman be added to them. She could not become one flesh."<sup>4</sup> This theory is quaintly insisted upon in a letter dated 625, of Pope Boniface IV. to "the glorious Edwin King of the English," as he styles him, and whose wife was the Christian Queen Ethelburga. In it the Pontiff says that he hopes for the King's conversion, since he continues, "We understand that your illustrious consort, which is known to be part of your body, is illuminated with the reward of eternity, through the regeneration of Holy Baptism."<sup>5</sup> The Pope at the same time wrote to Ethelburga herself, informing her that her husband's conduct in still serving "abominable idols" occasioned him no small grief, "for, that part of your body still remained a stranger to the knowledge of the supreme and undivided Trinity."<sup>6</sup> Although second marriages were common

<sup>1</sup> "St. Jerome assures us that when the clean animals entered the ark by sevens, and the unclean ones by pairs, the odd number typified the celibate, and the even the married condition. Even of the unclean animals, but one pair of each kind was admitted, lest they should perpetuate the enormity of second marriage." Lecky II., p. iii, quo. from Epistles, cxxiii.

<sup>2</sup> Bingham, Ant. of Christian Church, p. 765.

<sup>3</sup> Milman, Hist. of Christianity, vol. iii, p. 293. n.

<sup>4</sup> Prof. Donaldson in *Contemporary Review*, 1839. p. 446.

<sup>5</sup> Bede, Ecclesiastical Hist. p. 86 Ed. Bohu.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, p. 89.

enough in the middle ages, they were still looked upon with some disfavour, though the law of the land did not discourage them, in England at least. Among the Anglo-Saxons it was simply required of a widow that she should not marry until twelve months of her widowhood had expired; if she neglected this observance she lost all claim to the property she had obtained through her previous marriage.<sup>1</sup> Later on *Magna Charta* enacted that "no widow should be *desteined* to marry herself so long as she has a mind to live without a husband; yet she shall give security that she will not marry without our assent, if she holds of us, or without the consent of the lord of whom she holds, if she holds of another." But if no restraint was imposed by the civil law, the popular voice was opposed to second alliances. Chaucer makes his oft-wedded wife of Bath bear witness to this in saying:

But me was told not long time agone is  
That sithen Christ ne went never but onis  
To wedding in the Cane of Galilee,  
That by that ilke ensample taught he me  
That I ne shulde wedded be but ones."

On the occasion of a widow's second marriage it was customary, especially in France, to serenade the newly wedded pair with a concert of rough music. Wright says that "the earliest mention of this custom, furnished in the *Glossarium* of Ducange, is contained in the synodal statutes of the church of Avignon passed in the year 1337, from which we learn that when such marriages occurred people forced their way into the houses of the married couple, and carried away their goods, which they were obliged to pay a ransom for before they were returned, and the money thus raised was spent in getting up what is called in the statute relating to it a *Chalvaricum*."<sup>2</sup> In a MS. in the Imperial Library, Paris, is a fifteenth century representation of a *Charivari*, where the masked performers are playing on pots and pans and ringing hand-bells. "In the statutes of Meaux, in 1365, and in those of Hugh, bishop of Beziers in 1368, the same practice is forbidden under the name of *Charavalium*; and it is mentioned in a document of the year 1372, also quoted by Ducange under that of *Charivarium*, as there existing at

<sup>1</sup> Knight, *Hist. of England*, vol. i, p. 340.

<sup>2</sup> Wright, *Hist. of Caricature*, pp. 85, 86.

Nimes. Again in 1445," continues Mr. Wright, "the council of Tours made a decree, forbidding, under pain of excommunication, "the insolences, clamours, sounds, and other tumults, practised at second and third nuptials, called by the vulgar a *Charivarium*."<sup>1</sup> In Spanish villages at the present day it is said to be the custom to serenade a widow who re-marries, with a concert of pots and pans, doubtless a survival of the *charivari*.

In Brabant the law disfavoured second marriages, the legislators having established "a custom known as the right of Devolution, by which, on the death of a husband or wife, the inheritance of the fiefs possessed by either passed at once to the existing children, and could not be shared by any who might be the fruit of any subsequent alliance."<sup>2</sup>

Although now practically extinct, the disapproval of second marriages, formerly so universal, can still be occasionally traced; thus at the present day the Greek clergy are forbidden to marry a second time, and in the greater part of Western Christendom no blessing is bestowed by the priest who performs a second marriage.<sup>3</sup> The modern Italians dislike these alliances, as they have a theory that they trouble the souls of the deceased wife or husband. According to an old book called *The World Displayed*, the Hottentots expressed their disapproval of such unions in the following manner. A widow, for every husband she marries after the first, being compelled to cut off a joint of a finger, beginning with the little fingers, which she presents to her husband on the wedding-day. It will be seen from the above that a dislike of second marriages has not been confined to one age, people, or religion.

The opinions and customs adverse to second alliances

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* The word Charivari is still used in French to signify "paltry music, a clatter."

<sup>2</sup> Yonge's History of France under the Bourbons, vol. ii, p. 214.

<sup>3</sup> In the Sarum rite the sacramental blessing was allusive to the union of Christ and his church, and was not said at the second marriage. See Sarum Missal, p. 556 n. A note p. 558, of the same translation, says, "Here follows a long dissertation regarding blessing a second marriage (by which it means only the sacramental blessing) a practice for-

bidden apparently by the canon law. It appears, however, that many priests were in the habit of blessing second marriages, and in 1321, the case was brought by an English priest, John Waystede, before Pope John XXII, who forbade the practice; but in the case of either or both the parties of a second marriage not having been before blessed, he henceforth permitted them to receive the benediction. He also mitigated somewhat the penalties against priests who had erred in this respect."

have been somewhat fully entered on, as I think they contributed very materially to cause the formation of the order of widows or vowesses; for when they prevailed a widow would be very strongly induced to lead a quiet and retired existence, and as any fresh connection was virtually denied her in this life, she would naturally and instinctively direct her thoughts into a religious channel, and be led to fix them upon the world to come. Probably there is truth in this reasoning, as we find that the order of widows was most numerous and prominent when the opinions discouraging second marriages were acted upon, and decreased and died away as these ideas became modified.

The passage before quoted from the Hindu Manu, shows the theories entertained in the East from pre-Christian times, regarding the life which should be led by a widow; and in spite of a law which would lead to an adverse conclusion, similar opinions must have found favour with the Hebrews, as the great example of the vowess life is derived from that led by the widow Judith, and which is thus described in the book bearing her name. "She was," it says, "a widow now three years and six months, and she made herself a private chamber in the upper part of her house, in which she abode shut up with her maids, and she wore hair-cloth upon her loins, and fasted all the days of her life, except the Sabbaths, and new moons, and the feasts of the house of Israel; and on festival days she came forth in great glory, and she abode in her husband's house a hundred and five years."<sup>1</sup>

Maitland says, "The order of widows strictly so-called was either instituted or confirmed by St. Paul, who admitted none under the age of sixty. He required them to have been but once married and to be well reputed for good works." The order of deaconesses of the primitive church appears to have been commonly composed of widows. Tertullian and some others call them *viduæ*, and their office *viduatus*. Moreover Bingham states that "Epiphanius and the Council of Laodicia style them elderly widows because none but such were ordinarily taken into this office."<sup>2</sup> There appear to have been many varied rules and regulations as to the choice of those

<sup>1</sup> Judith XVI., vv. 27, 28.

<sup>2</sup> Bingham, p. 301.

who were considered fit for the office of deaconess; but practically it seems that both unmarried women and those that had been once married, were deemed suitable, provided that they were forty years old, but great stress was laid upon the necessity of the widows having been only espoused once. The order conferred a certain status or dignity on its members, and in the Liturgy of S. Clement they were allowed to communicate at the Eucharistic Sacrifice, before the ordinary laity a rubric enjoining that after the reception of the elements by the Bishop should follow that of the "Presbyters and Deacons and Sub-deacons and Readers, and Singers, and Ascetics; and of the Women, the Deaconesses, Virgins, and Widows, afterwards the Children and then the people."<sup>1</sup> An epitaph of one of these early vowesses is cemented to the wall of the Vatican Library and consists of these simple words:—

OCTAVIÆ MATRONÆ VIDUÆ DEI.

The deaconess received a benediction or quasi-ordination by the imposition of the hands of the Bishop, with a form of prayer in both Greek and Latin communions, and although the order ceased in the eleventh or twelfth century, its place seems to have been taken, as far as the widowed portion of its members is concerned, by the mediæval vowesses; an assertion which I think is supported by a prayer in the Sarum Missal, where amongst the intercessions made on Good Friday is the following:—

"Let us also pray for all bishops, Priests, Deacons, Sub-deacons, Acolytes, Exorcists, Readers, Door Keepers, Confessors, Virgins, Widows, and all the holy people of God."

It will be noticed in the above that there is no mention of deaconesses, as there is in the just-quoted rubric from the liturgy of S. Clement, but widows are still prayed for. Between the order of deaconess and that of the vowess there was this difference, that whereas the former bound its members to the performance of certain active works, the latter only obliged its votaries to take the vow of leading a single life till death, and being mystically espoused to Christ in a manner similar to that of nuns.

It may be asked why there was any necessity for this order of semi-religious, or conventual women, and why all

<sup>1</sup> Neale, pp. 88, 89.

those who wished to retire from the world, did not enter into convents of nuns? To these queries it may be replied that at the time of life at which women usually became widows their habits have been formed, and the little individual peculiarities which nearly everyone acquires in the course of life have become fixed and unalterable by the time middle age has been reached. Moreover, the independence which, as married women, they had enjoyed in domestic affairs, and the authority which the headship of a family conferred, would with difficulty be exchanged for a state of submission to the dominion of a superior, such as that exercised by an abbess over her nuns.

It is a mistake to suppose that the regular, celibate, or religious life has at all times compelled residence within the four walls of a convent, and there are numerous examples to the contrary. William of Malmesbury tells us of the two daughters of King Edward, son of Alfred the Great, that they "vowing celibacy to God renounced the pleasures of earthly nuptials. Elfleda in a religious, and Etheldreda, in a lay habit; they both lie buried with their mother at Winchester."<sup>1</sup> In the thirteenth century, S. Elizabeth of Hungary, bound herself by vow to obey her confessor Conrad, and received at his hands a habit made of coarse cloth, of the natural colour of the wool, without being dyed. Thus she imitated the state of nuns, though by the advice of her confessor she remained a secular, that she might better dispose her alms for the relief of the poor.<sup>2</sup> In the same century, S. Rose of Viterbo, professed the rule of the third order of S. Francis, and lived always in the house of her father, where she died in 1261. Strict perpetual enclosure of nuns was not a necessary part of their state before the Council of Trent. From early times widows were allowed to reside in convents by special leave. Roger of Wendover tells us that in 929 there was a noble matron named Elfleda, a niece of King Athelstan "who on her husband's death had resolved to pass her life in widowhood and fixed her abode in the western part of the monastery at Glastonbury."<sup>3</sup> As a late example, it may be mentioned that on

<sup>1</sup> *English Chronicle*, p. 124, Ed. Bohn.

<sup>2</sup> Alban Butler, *Lives of the Saints*, Nov. 19.

<sup>3</sup> *Flowers of History* i. p. 246.

July 23, 1527, a concession made to the prioress of Dartford was confirmed, that she might receive "any well-born matron widow of good repute to dwell perpetually in the monastery with or without a habit according to the custom of the monastery."<sup>1</sup> At other times widows fully entered into a religious order, as may be seen by the inscription on the brass of John Goodrington, at Appleton, Berkshire, dated 1519, which informs us that at his death his wife "toke relygyon a y<sup>e</sup> monastery of Syon."

In 620 a company of widows joined in the first establishment in Jerusalem of the order which became known as the Military Order of the Temple, and assisted the monks in ministering to the poor and sick pilgrims to the Holy City. In the fifteenth century, S. Frances, an illustrious Roman widow, was joined by several ladies of that city, and put themselves under the direction of the Benedictines of the congregation of Monte Oliveto, without leaving the world, making vows or wearing any particular habit.<sup>2</sup> The community thus formed afterwards became the Collatine order. The widow S. Bridgett of Sweden, about 1344, founded the order of the Saviour, and another widow foundress was Isabel de Laon, who in 1489 instituted an order of Lady Hospitallers.

If a mediæval widow neither took the vows of a nun or vowess, she was nevertheless bound to lead a respectable life under heavy penalties. Thus the manors of Enborne, Berks, and of Tor, in Devonshire, also others in the west of England, had a law that if a widow enjoying a copyhold of her former husband's should lead a bad life she forfeited the property, and which she could only regain by a public penance of a humiliating nature. We also find that by the customs of the manor of South Bersted, Sussex, the widow of a tenant had her rights admitted only on condition of her life being reputable.<sup>3</sup>

The vow of celibacy taken by a widow was considered very stringent, and when broken brought much disgrace upon the offender. An example is furnished by the case of Eleanora, third daughter of King John, who, "on the

<sup>1</sup> *Archæological Journal*, vol. xxxix. p. 178.

<sup>2</sup> See *Sussex Arch. Coll.*, vol. xxv. p. 118.

<sup>3</sup> Alban Butler, vol. iii, p. 11.

death of her husband, the Earl of Pembroke, in 1231, in the first transports of her grief, made in public a solemn vow in the presence of Edmund, Archbishop of Canterbury, that she would never again become a wife, but remain a true spouse of Christ, and received the ring in confirmation, which she, however, subsequently broke, much to the indignation of a strong party of the laity and clergy of England, on her marriage with Simon de Montfert, Earl of Leicester." Another instance is recorded of a breach of the vow by Lady Elizabeth Juliers, Countess of Kent, who "after the death of her first husband in 1354, made a vow of chastity in solemn form before William de Edyndon, in the church of Waverley Abbey; but afterwards, on 29th of September, 1360, privately married without licence Sir Eustace Dabridgecourt, Knight, whereupon proceedings were commenced against her by the Archbishop of Canterbury, who imposed upon her a severe and life-long penance. The irregularity of this lady's second marriage seems to have been duly acknowledged, as at her death she was buried near the tomb of her first husband, John Plantagenet, in the Grey Friars' Church at Winchester.<sup>1</sup> The vow was sometimes taken when the postulant was very young; of which there is an instance in the case of Mary, widow of Louis, King of Hungary, who made her profession when she was only twenty-three years of age. The vowess was entitled to be addressed as dame, in the same way as a regularly professed nun, and as the wife of a baronet at the present day.

The pontifical of Bishop Lacy, of Exeter, contains the office of the Benediction of a Widow, which took place during mass, and the rubric prefixed to the office directs that the ceremony should take place upon solemn day, or at the least on a Sunday, when between the epistle and the gospel, the bishop being seated in his chair turned towards the people, the widow kneeling before the prelate, was asked by him if she wished to be the spouse of Christ; she then publicly in the vulgar tongue made her profession, after which the bishop rose and blessed the claimant. He then recited four prayers, during one of which he blessed the habit; then kneeling he began the hymn *Veni Creator Spiritus*, which being ended, he blessed and gave the

See Sussex Arch. Coll., vol. iii, p. 209 n.

vowess the mantle, veil and ring. After these observances he recited further prayers, asking God to be the postulant's consolation in sorrow, council in doubt, defence under injury, patience in tribulation, abundance in poverty, food in fasting, and medicine in infirmity. The ceremony concluded with a final commendation of the widow to the care of God. The sixty-fold reward allotted to widowhood, as before stated, is spoken of in the above-mentioned prayers as being the fruit of the victory of the vowess over her ancient enemy the devil. The postulant appears to have made her vow with her hands joined within those of the bishop, after the manner of swearing fealty in the middle ages, and as it is performed in some parts of the East at the present day. The benediction of the vowess was made in the presence of accredited witnesses, as for example: when in 1369, Joan, widow of Simon de Shardlowe, Knight, professed before the Bishop of Norwich, the Archdeacon of Norfolk, Sir Simon de Babingle, and William de Swinefleete were the witnesses to a deed in which the promise of the widow was registered, and to which document she affixed her consent by making the form of a cross upon it.<sup>1</sup> In like manner, Isabella, Countess of Suffolk, on taking the vow in 1382, made it in the presence of the Earl of Warwick, the Lords Willoughby, Scales, and others.

Although the pontifical of Bishop Lacy directs the vow to be made in the vulgar tongue, it was sometimes spoken in French, as was done by Isabella Golafré, on Sunday, Oct. 18th, 1379, before William of Wickham, when Bishop of Winchester, and also by the Countess of Suffolk, in 1382. At other times the vow was in Latin, as was that taken by Domina Alicia, Seynte Johan domina de Bagenet, who made her profession April 9th, 1398, in the chapel of the Lord of Amberley, Sussex.<sup>2</sup>

With the exception of the prohibition to marry the vowess had all the freedom and privileges of any other woman, as is exemplified in the will of Katherine Riplingham, an "advowess" as she styles herself; the document is dated Feb. 8th, 1473, and in it we find the testatrix "in the full exercise of her rights of property, devising

<sup>1</sup> See *Excursions in Norfolk*, vol. ii, p. 137.

<sup>2</sup> See *Surrey Arch. Coll.*, vol. iii, pp. 210, 211.

estates, carrying out awards, and adjusting family differences."<sup>1</sup> The wills of vowesses frequently refer to their rings, which were naturally cherished objects. In the *Testamenta Vetusta* is an abstract of the will of Lady Alice West, widow of Sir Thomas West, dated 1395, and in which she bequeaths to her son Thomas the "ring with which I was yspoused to God," and the before-mentioned Katharine Riplingham left to her "daughter's daughter Alice Saint John her gold ring with a diamante set therein wherewith she was sacred." Occasionally, as if to avoid profanation, the spousal ring is bequeathed to the Church, of which two instances may be cited from *Gough's Sepulchral Monuments*. The first is an extract from the will of Lady Joan Danvers, dated 1453, stating that she gave the ring of her profession of widowhood to the image of the crucifix, near the north door of S. Paul's, a popular object of devotion; the second is from the will of Lady Margaret Davy, who by it leaves her profession ring to another celebrated image, that of our Lady of Walsingham.

Occasionally a simple promise appears to have sufficed for the more solemn episcopal benediction, as is indicated in the will of John Brakenbury, dated 1487, who leaves his mother certain real estate, with the condition that she never marry, the which she promised afore the parson and the parish of Thymmylbe, "and if she keep not that promise," the testator adds, "I will that she be content with that which was my fader's will, which she had every peny." Wives promised their husbands that they would take the vow on the latter's deaths, as is seen by the will of William Herbert, Knight, Lord Pembroke, a document dated July 27, 1469, in which he thus appeals to his lady, "and wife, that you remember your promise to take the order of widowhood, so ye may be the better maistres of your owen, to perform my will, and to help my children, as I love and trust you."<sup>2</sup> Goods were left on condition of taking the widow's vow. Thus, Sir Gilbert Denys, Knight of Syston, in his will dated 1422, says, "If Margaret, my wife, will after my death vow a vow of chastity, I give her all my moveable goods, she paying my debts and providing for my children; and if she will not vow the vow of chastity, I desire that my goods may

<sup>1</sup> Jones, *Finger Ring Lore*, p. 242.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid* (from Gough), p. 243

be distributed, or divided into three equal parts." Wives were left executrices on the same condition, as seen by the will of William Edlington, esquire, of Castle Carlton, (?) who in this deed, dated June 11, 1466, states that, "I make Christian my wife, my sole executor on this condition, that she take the mantle and the ring soon after my decease; and, if case be, that she will not take the mantle and the ring, I will that William my son (and other persons named) be my executors, and she to have a third part of all my goods moveable."<sup>1</sup>

The order of vowesses differed materially from the third orders of S. Dominic and S. Frances, though each was intended for persons living in the world; the vowess simply promised to lead a celibate life, for the sanctification of her soul, and entered into no further engagements; the members of the third orders, on the contrary, whilst free to live in the marriage state, or enter into it, were bound to the daily recital of a short form of the Breviary office of the regular and secular clergy if they could read, and if not they were to say a certain number of Pater-nosters and Aves in its place; they were also required to add certain fasts to those exacted by the Church, and in return for these pious works were entitled to all the spiritual benefits conferred on the two first Dominican and Franciscan orders of monks and nuns. The vowess entered into none of those obligations, nor was she granted their corresponding advantages.

After the Reformation widows in some cases kept up the old custom of leading a retired life in sober costume, an example of which is furnished by Anne Clifford, Countess of Dorset, who died in 1676, and is recorded to have lived very abstemiously, and to have dressed in black serge after the death of her last husband.

The memorials of English vowesses may be met with occasionally. Leland mentions the tomb of a member of the Marmion family at West Tanfield, Yorkshire, and says of it, "There lyeth there alone a lady with the apparill of a vowess." In Norfolk there are two brasses of ladies, widows and vowesses. The smallest and earliest of these is about 1500 in date, and is in the church at Witton, near Blofield; the edifice is of little interest except for this

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

brass, which is placed close to the threshold of the south door. It bears the figure of a female in a perfectly plain dress, consisting of a gown, mantle, barbe or gorget and veil. The inscription in two lines is as follows :—

Orate pro anima domine Juliane Angell  
Votricis cujus anime propicietur deus.

The second example is at Frenze, a small mutilated church near Diss. The building itself retains but little worth notice, but still possesses a number of interesting brasses, amongst them being one which represents a lady clad as in the first example, in gown, mantle, barbe and veil, but the costume is not so plain as the gown is confined with an ornamental girdle, and has cuffs ; the mantle, moreover, is provided with long cords ending in tassels. Beneath the figure is the following inscription :—

Hic jacet tumulata domina Johanna  
Braham virdua ac deo dedicata Olim uxorem  
Johannis Braham Armigeri qui obit xviii die  
Novembris Anno domini Millino cccccxix cu  
jus anime propicietur deus Amen.

Beneath are three shields, the dexter with her husband's arms, the sinister with those of dame Braham's family, and the central one with the two coats impaled. Considering the importance of the ring as the badge of the vowess, it is somewhat remarkable that neither of these examples of the memorials of vowesses show it on their fingers.