



The dancing season may be said to have commenced and as previously intimated in THE COURIER there is every prospect of much activity in store. The clubs will soon reorganize for the winter and then with the private dances that will be given will furnish an abundance of Terpsichorean revelry. The Pleasant Hour club will effect an re-organization about October 1.

Ex-Senator VanWyck of Nebraska has given the society people in Washington something to talk about by taking up his residence in the picturesque little church on Massachusetts avenue, just opposite the residence of Chief Justice Fuller. It is in the swellest portion of the city, and for the past few days Mr. and Mrs. Van Wyck and their daughter have made their home in the edifice formerly devoted to divine service. Mrs. Van Wyck owns the property, it having been bought by her husband and presented to her as an after-dinner favor the day they were leaving Washington for Nebraska at the conclusion of the latter's senatorial career. It has been the scene of high church Episcopal and Swedenborgian services, but lately had been idle. When Mr. and Mrs. VanWyck came here to attend the repairs then in progress upon their other property the former suggested that they camp out in their empty church. Mr. VanWyck, since his long illness, has a horror of mounting steps, and thought it would be a great scheme to live on the ground floor. So they moved to the church and divided off the auditorium by imaginary lines into parlor, bedrooms, dining room and picture gallery. Pictures they had in plenty and a shopping expedition quickly provided the necessary furniture. The vestry was turned into a kitchen and the shining pipes of the organ and the decorations of the chancel helped out the art gallery. Rugs, lamps, small tables, easy chairs and sofas dot the space all around, and papers and books give evidence of their enjoyment. A big rocker under the trees which shade the porch made a resting place for the man of millions, as he sat reading or chatting. Nobody could have more fun over the fact that within easy reach hung the bell rope, a pull on which would have caused a familiar sound in that locality. With plenty of servants and every comfort possible the little household spent the last few days very pleasantly in their novel quarters and liked it so well that it is quite probable the church will become their winter home. They intend to put up partitions and make a good many alterations to transform it into a proper dwelling and have had plans drawn up for that purpose.

A matter of sensational interest is the reported defection of Miss Catherine Drexel, a daughter of the Philadelphia branch of the wealthy Drexel family, from the ranks of the Catholic sisterhood. The story is the more interesting, as it is coupled with the rumor that the lady is shortly to enter into the holy bonds of matrimony. This has created considerable of a stir in the highest social circles of New York and Philadelphia. Miss Catherine Drexel's story is a very romantic one. She is the second of three daughters of the late Francis Drexel. In very early youth she placed her affections on Walter George Smith, the son of an intimate friend and near neighbor of the Drexel family, at their country home at Torresdale, near Philadelphia. Her successful rival was her oldest sister, Elizabeth, though the latter had no suspicion that she was such. When all arrangements for the marriage of Elizabeth Drexel and Walter George Smith were completed Catherine Drexel announced her intention of retiring from the world and of devoting her great fortune to the church in missionary work among the Indians. She took her vows at a convent in Pittsburg, and was thereafter known in religion as Sister Catherine. In a short time Sister Catherine became Superioress of a new convent that owed its existence to her wealth. Mr. and Mrs. Smith passed the first year of their married life in Europe. Mrs. Smith's failing health induced the pair to return to

the Torresdale homestead, where she died. And it is the brother-in-law to whom Sister Catherine had so long ago given her heart that she is to marry, according to the story as it comes from Philadelphia. Now arises the question: Are nun's vows irrevocable? The popular notion is that a women once vowed to the cloister is under a sort of life sentence. And yet nothing is further from the truth. The Pope has the power of fully dispensing what with are called "solemn vows." The bishops have the right to release from "simple vows." Both the Holy Father and the Bishops are called upon to exercise their rights in this matter much oftener than people think, for, as a matter of church policy, the promoters of a monastic life do not furnish such data to the public. To look at this subject historically, we find from the very early days of the church down to the tenth century many decrees of councils and orders of Popes relating to the breaking of monastic vows, in all of which it is ordained that the unhappy nun be treated with tenderness. Persuasion and a change of convent are recommended—not one word to justify the popular belief that the terrible punishment suffered by Constance, the faithless nun of Scott's "Marmion," was the usual penalty decreed by the church upon her daughters who broke their vows. Yet the authority of Scott is cited as sufficient proof that in the dark ages recreant nuns were buried alive. The Vestal Virgin of antiquity was the prototype, so to speak, of the Christian nun. And there seems to be no doubt that burial alive was the punishment of the faithless Vestal. Yet even the Vestal Virgins were not vowed for life. They were dedicated at a very tender age—between 6 and 10 years. The period for which they were vowed was thirty years. The first decade was spent by the Vestal in being trained for her duties, the second in practising them, and the third in instructing the young Vestals. After that she was free to return to the world, and even to marry. In these times there does not seem to be much encouragement given to the practrice of perpetual vows. By the laws of France life vows are invalid, but such disapproval by the civil power has no weight with the canon law. St. Vincent de Paul, who established the order of the Sisters of Charity in 1634, ordained that their vows should be taken for one year only. He was the first founder of a religious order who took the ground that it was possible for the members of a religious community to boldly use their talent and labor with it in the world instead of burying it in the seclusion of the cloister. He said: "Your convents must be the house of the sick; your cell, the chamber of suffering; your chapel, the parish church; your cloister, the wards of the hospital; your rule, the vow of obedience; your grille, the fear of God; your veil to shut out the world, holy modesty." In the many political upheavals of France, during which various religious orders have suffered abolishment, the Sisters of Charity have always allowed to exist, even in the days of the Terror and of the Directory. The "Little Sisters of the Poor" is the only other order looked upon with Government favor in France. In looking about us now, with nineteenth century eyes, one wonders at the power of a tradition, that, in the popular mind, dooms a nun, who repents of her vows, to penances and penalties of the most severe nature, and cuts her off from good standing in the church. This belief exists in spite of notable examples of women forsaking the cloister and subsequently leading exemplary lives in the world. There is the case of Miss Rosecrans, daughter of General Rosecrans, of Ohio, who for some years was an Ursuline nun in an Ohio convent. She secured a release from her vows and is now the companion of her father in his declining days. Then one of the daughters of the late General Phil Kearney, first in the Sacred Heart Convent, and subsequently with the Carmelites, in Paris, found that she was unfitted for the life of the cloister. A dispensation from the vows was granted by the Holy Father, and she now makes her home with her mother in Washington. In this country, as in Europe, the nunneries have had many distinguished inmates, with the great difference that while here the cloistered life is an entirely voluntary one, in the old world a girl is frequently, from her very birth, destined for a convent. One of the daughters of General Winfield Scott was a nun of the Visitation Convent, of Georgetown, D. C., where she died some years before her distinguished father. It is not generally known that Fannie Allen, the beautiful daughter of rugged old Ethan Allen, of Ticonderoga fame, forsook all the joys and pleasures of the world for a life of prayer and meditation in a Canadian convent of the strictest rule. Her parents made many efforts to lure her from her nunnery. But, to the end, she was steadfast and faithful. She died in her Montreal convent.