

**FLORENCE
L. BARCLAY**



**THE WHITE
LADIES
OF WORCESTER**

Florence L. Barclay

The White Ladies of Worcester

Enriched edition.

*Introduction, Studies and Commentaries by Michael
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Introduction

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At the meeting place of conscience and desire, *The White Ladies of Worcester* turns the slow hinge of duty to ask how promises sworn before God and community can bear the weight of a love that refuses retreat, tracing the inward argument between fidelity to a given path and the urgent call of a heart awakened, while the outer world—its customs, hierarchies, and watchful eyes—presses close, so that every word spoken across a threshold, every step beyond a gate, and every silence kept or broken becomes an irrevocable choice shaping identity, honor, and the possibility of grace.

Florence L. Barclay, an English novelist best remembered for the bestseller *The Rosary*, here turns to historical romance set in medieval England, with Worcester and a nearby religious house as the moral and geographic center. First published in the early twentieth century, the novel belongs to a moment when popular fiction revisited earlier centuries to probe questions of faith, loyalty, and gendered agency. The title's white ladies evokes a community of nuns whose customs and cloister shape the action, while the surrounding cathedral city and the noble households it serves provide the broader tapestry against which private loyalties meet public expectations.

In its opening movement, the book introduces a woman whose life within the convent has taught her order, restraint, and prayer, and a man whose duties in the world

have schooled him in courage, allegiance, and persistence; their paths cross under circumstances that make candor difficult and evasion impossible. Barclay's narration favors clear, measured prose, attentive to ritual and landscape, with dialogue that carries a courtly cadence. The reading experience is contemplative yet steadily suspenseful, gliding between the hush of cloistered corridors and the stir of halls and roads, so that emotional stakes are felt alongside the weight of place.

At its core lies the ethic of promise—how vows, troths, and pledged words bind the self and either protect or imperil human flourishing. Barclay explores obedience and freedom as a living paradox: the shelter of rule can fortify conscience, yet conscience also compels departures from custom. The novel examines the formation of character through patience, truth-telling, and self-mastery, balancing tenderness with moral clarity. It pays sustained attention to women's spiritual authority within communal structures, considering how guidance, mentorship, and mutual care create spaces of resilience. Love, in this telling, is not mere passion but an exacting discipline that tests integrity.

Historically, the narrative builds its texture from rhythms of medieval life: the liturgical calendar, the etiquette of hospitality, the obligations between liege and vassal, and the boundaries that separate sacred precincts from secular courts. Worcester, with its ecclesiastical presence and routes that gather travelers, merchants, and messengers, functions as a hinge between cloister and countryside. Without pedantry, Barclay uses detail—bells, garments, rules of address, the architecture of enclosure—to set mood

and motive. The result is an atmosphere where place exerts moral pressure, and where small gestures, like a lifted latch or a withheld message, carry ethical consequence.

For contemporary readers, the book's questions remain recognizable: How should one weigh vocational commitments against intimate claims; when does fidelity become enabling, and when is it courageous; what kind of love safeguards another's dignity. The story's attention to power asymmetries, to speech given under constraint, and to the ethical limits of persuasion speaks to modern conversations about consent, duty of care, and institutional accountability. Barclay's emphasis on community—its rituals of welcome, its healing counsel, its capacity to witness truth—offers a counterpoint to isolation, while her portrayal of disciplined affection resists both cynicism and sentimentality, inviting readers to practice steadiness in turbulent times.

Approached as a historical romance with spiritual gravity, *The White Ladies of Worcester* rewards patience with a deepening sense of moral contour and a tenderness earned by trial. Readers will find neither mere pageantry nor sensational intrigue, but a deliberate unfolding in which choices are weighed, counsel is heeded, and courage proves quiet before it is bold. The novel's enduring appeal lies in its conviction that love and truth must be held together, and that adulthood consists in learning which promises to keep and how to keep them. In that crucible, Barclay crafts a story as searching as it is consoling.

Synopsis

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Florence L. Barclay's *The White Ladies of Worcester* is a historical romance that sets a private crisis against the solemn boundaries of a medieval convent. A high-born wife, driven by conscience and wounded trust, withdraws behind the enclosure of the "White Ladies," while her husband, a notable knight, returns determined to mend a marriage sundered by silence and pride. Barclay frames the story where vows—marital and religious—press in opposite directions. The opening movement establishes the cloister's calm order, the social codes of chivalry beyond its walls, and the central question of whether reconciliation can honor both personal conviction and the sacred obligations each has undertaken.

The early chapters trace the misunderstandings that have hardened into separation. The wife's retreat is not depicted as impulse but as a measured claim to spiritual space and safety; the husband's pursuit is equally considered, shaped by a strict sense of honor. He seeks admission through lawful channels rather than force, meeting the convent's gate, the rule of enclosure, and the scrutiny of those responsible for the women within. Barclay carefully reveals motives in dialogue and counsel, allowing readers to perceive the tension between outward propriety and the unspoken hurts that brought them to this impasse.

Ecclesiastical procedure becomes the arena in which private grief must be addressed. Clergy and advisors weigh

the legitimacy of a wife's withdrawal against the sacrament she already shares, asking where authority lies when conscience and canon intersect. Petitions are drafted, messengers dispatched, and time itself becomes an instrument of discernment. The novel emphasizes deliberation over spectacle, portraying the Church's processes as both protective and exacting. Through this, Barclay explores competing claims: the integrity of a vowed marriage, the dignity of a woman's interior vocation, and the community's duty to safeguard those under its care without extinguishing hope of rightful restitution.

Within the cloister, the narrative slows to the cadence of convent life: ordered prayer, tasks in garden and infirmary, and the quiet companionship of women who have chosen enclosure. The heroine finds mentorship and gentle challenge from superiors who insist on clarity of purpose. Beyond the walls, the knight confronts a different discipline—waiting, yielding his will to forms he cannot command. Barclay draws contrasts between interior obedience and martial decisiveness, using repeated images of doors, thresholds, and bells to mark the boundaries between worlds. These rhythms allow the characters' motives to ripen before any decisive step can be taken.

As the matter escalates, appeals move outward to higher authorities, and the couple's story gathers witnesses who must judge without presumption. Testimony, letters, and formal hearings bring both protagonists to narrate candidly what pride obscured. The husband wrestles with the temptation to assert rights that law might grant but love would regret; the wife confronts the cost of independence if

it hardens into isolation. The novel resists simplifying either stance, insisting that truth requires patience. Barclay uses journeys, vigils, and carefully timed meetings to test whether their intentions can withstand scrutiny and whether reconciliation can be just as well as tender.

Turning points arrive through clarifying revelations rather than sensational reversals. A senior church figure's counsel reframes duty, and danger from the turbulent world outside the convent briefly intrudes, proving the fragility of human protections and the need for rightly ordered bonds. Each protagonist must choose a path that neither betrays conscience nor violates what is sacred. Barclay keeps the suspense moral rather than merely situational, suggesting that the deepest resolution depends on humility, truthful speech, and mercy. By withholding final outcomes until her last movement, she preserves the quiet pressure that has refined both hearts.

The White Ladies of Worcester endures for its poised consideration of love under authority, the limits of autonomy, and the possibility of restoration without coercion. Barclay blends devotional seriousness with romantic feeling, offering a portrait of medieval faith that neither romanticizes nor condemns ecclesiastical power. The novel's careful pacing, attention to process, and respect for women's interior life give it lasting resonance. Readers drawn to stories where honor, patience, and forgiveness contend will find in this work a measured exploration of commitments that outlast passion, and a reminder that reconciliation, if it comes, must be freely and rightly chosen.

Historical Context

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The White Ladies of Worcester is set in twelfth-century England, centered on the city and diocese of Worcester along the River Severn. Worcester Cathedral, a Benedictine monastic cathedral-priory, dominated the religious and civic landscape, while the royal castle asserted secular authority in a strategic border region near the Welsh Marches. Female religious houses expanded during this period; communities of white-habited nuns—especially Cistercians—were commonly nicknamed “White Ladies.” Worcestershire preserves such associations in place-names like White Ladies Aston, reflecting estates once held by Cistercian nuns near Worcester. Against this backdrop of monastic influence and royal power, the narrative explores vocation, allegiance, and honor.

Twelfth-century reform movements shaped the institutions the novel depicts. The Cistercian Order, founded in 1098, spread rapidly across England after 1128, emphasizing austerity, manual labor, and a return to the Rule of Saint Benedict. The Premonstratensians (Norbertines), introduced in 1143, also wore white habits and maintained houses for women. Nunneries functioned as centers of prayer, charity, and estate management, governed by prioresses or abbesses and supervised by diocesan bishops or affiliated abbeys. Enclosure regulations, liturgical observance, and pastoral oversight formed the daily framework for religious women. This milieu provides

credible settings for decisions about taking vows, seeking sanctuary, or negotiating clerical jurisdiction.

Royal-ecclesiastical tensions under Henry II (reigned 1154-1189) directly inform the novel's world. The Constitutions of Clarendon (1164) attempted to delimit clerical privilege and legal immunity, provoking the famous conflict with Archbishop Thomas Becket. Roger of Worcester, the local bishop (1164-1179), supported Becket and spent time abroad during the crisis. Becket's murder in 1170 and canonization in 1173 galvanized piety, penitence, and debate over obedience to crown versus church. Worcester's clergy and laity navigated oaths of loyalty, appeals to Rome, and the practicalities of justice in a frontier county. The story's dilemmas echo this contested boundary between secular command and spiritual authority.

Developments in law and marriage are crucial to the era. Gratian's Decretum (c. 1140) systematized canon law, and papal decretals of Alexander III affirmed that free consent of the couple constituted marriage, even against familial pressure. Ecclesiastical courts handled betrothals, impediments, annulments, and the legitimacy of heirs. Feudal customs regulated wardship, dowry, and inheritance, while dower protected widows' rights. Religious houses could offer sanctuary or mediate disputes involving vows and property. These frameworks shaped choices available to noblewomen and knights, explaining why questions of consent, oath-keeping, and spiritual counsel naturally intersect with landholding interests and feudal obligations in the narrative.

Worcestershire's strategic position near the Welsh Marches fostered military readiness and aristocratic rivalries. The rebellion of Henry II's sons (1173–1174) drew castles and garrisons into a wider Angevin conflict, while raiding and patrols along the frontier were enduring realities. Knightly culture blended warfare with ideals of loyalty, largesse, and protection of the weak, influenced by crusading rhetoric after the Second Crusade (1147–1149) and before the Third (1189–1192). King Henry's itinerant court, sheriffs, and justices traversed shires like Worcestershire, enforcing order and collecting revenues. This environment lends historical plausibility to journeys, musters, and encounters between household retinues, clerics, and monastic officials.

The intellectual and devotional climate of the twelfth century, often termed the "twelfth-century renaissance," nurtured learning in cathedral priories like Worcester's, noted for manuscript production and preservation of Old English texts. Models of female sanctity—including Christina of Markyate in the early 1100s—demonstrated women's agency in pursuing religious life. Guidance texts for women's enclosure, exemplified slightly later by the West Midlands *Ancrene Wisse* (early thirteenth century), reflect a regional tradition of spiritual direction. Pilgrimage culture flourished, especially to Canterbury after 1173, and shaped lay and clerical piety. Such currents illuminate characters' recourse to prayer, pilgrimage, and learned counsel in moments of crisis.

Economic and material contexts round out the setting. Worcester's riverine trade connected the city to Bristol and

the Severn valley, while nearby Droitwich supplied salt crucial to regional commerce. Monastic estates managed agriculture, mills, and rents, funding almsgiving and hospitality. Architectural transitions from Romanesque to early Gothic marked churches and priories; Worcester Cathedral's fabric, rebuilt across the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, exemplifies this shift with its Norman crypt and later choir. Hospitals and leper houses multiplied, reflecting institutional care. Such tangible structures—the cloister, chapter house, guest hall, chapel, and fortified gate—frame movements between seclusion, public ceremony, and negotiated sanctuary.

Florence L. Barclay (1862–1921), an Anglican clergyman's wife and bestselling novelist of *The Rosary* (1909), published *The White Ladies of Worcester* in 1917, during the First World War. The era favored spiritually inflected historical romances that offered moral clarity and consolation. By dramatizing twelfth-century tensions—between crown and church, vow and desire, consent and compulsion—the book aligns with contemporary British interests in duty, sacrifice, and conscience under strain. Its attention to ecclesiastical procedure, chivalric honor, and monastic discipline reflects documented medieval structures while inviting readers to weigh loyalty and mercy. Thus the work both mirrors and gently critiques its own moment.

The White Ladies of Worcester

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CHAPTER I

THE SUBTERRANEAN WAY

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The slanting rays of afternoon sunshine, pouring through stone arches, lay in broad, golden bands, upon the flags of the Convent cloister.

The old lay-sister, Mary Antony, stepped from the cool shade of the cell passage and, blinking at the sunshine, shuffled slowly to her appointed post at the top of the crypt steps, up which would shortly pass the silent procession of nuns returning from Vespers[1].

Daily they went, and daily they returned, by the underground way, a passage over a mile in length, leading from the Nunnery of the White Ladies at Whytstone in Claines, to the Church of St. Mary and St. Peter, the noble Cathedral within the walls of the city of Worcester.

Entering this passage from the crypt in their own cloisters, they walked in darkness below the sunny meadows, passed beneath the Fore-gate, moving in silent procession under the busy streets, until they reached the crypt of the Cathedral.

From the crypt, a winding stairway in the wall led up to a chamber above the choir, whence, unseeing and unseen,

the White Ladies of Worcester daily heard the holy monks below chant Vespers.

To Sister Mary Antony fell the task of counting the five-and-twenty veiled figures, as they passed down the steps and disappeared beneath the ground, and of again counting them as they reappeared, and moved in stately silence along the cloister, each entering her own cell, to spend, in prayer and adoration, the hours until the Refectory bell should call them to the evening meal.

This counting of the White Ladies dated from the day, now more than half a century ago, when Sister Agatha, weakened by prolonged fasting, and chancing to walk last in the procession, fainted and, falling silently, remained behind, unnoticed, in the solitude and darkness.

It was the habit of this saintly lady to abide in her own cell after Vespers, dispensing with the evening meal; thus her absence was not discovered until the following morning when Mary Antony, finding the cell empty, hastened to report that Sister Agatha having long, like Enoch, walked with God, had, even, as Enoch, been translated!

The nuns who flocked to the cell, inclining to Mary Antony's view of the strange happening, kneeled upon the floor before the empty couch, and worshipped.

The Prioress of that time, however, being of a practical turn of mind, ordered the immediate lighting of the lanterns, and herself descended to search the underground way.

She did not need to go far.

The saintly spirit of Sister Agatha had indeed been translated.

They found her frail body lying prone against the door, the hands broken and torn by much wild beating upon its studded panels.

She had run to and fro in the dank darkness, beating first upon the door beneath the Convent cloisters, then upon the door, a mile away, leading into the Cathedral crypt.

But the nuns were shut into their cells, beyond the cloister; the good people of Worcester city slept peacefully, not dreaming of the despairing figure running to and fro beneath them—tottering, stumbling, falling, arising to fall again, yet hurrying blindly onwards; and the Cathedral Sacristan, when questioned, confessed that, hearing cries and rappings coming from the crypt at a late hour, he speedily locked the outer gate, said an "Ave," and went home to supper; well knowing that, at such a time, none save spirits of evil would be wandering below, in so great torment.

Thus, through much tribulation, poor Sister Agatha entered into rest; being held in deepest reverence ever after.

More than fifty years had gone by. The Prioress of that day, and most of those who walked in that procession, had long lain beside Sister Agatha in the Convent burying-ground. But Mary Antony, now oldest of the lay-sisters, never failed to make careful count, as each veiled figure passed, nor to impart the mournful reason for this necessity to all new-comers. So that the nun whose turn it was to walk last in the procession, prayed that she might not hear behind her the running feet of Sister Agatha; while none went alone into the cloisters after dark, lest they should

hear the poor thin hands of Sister Agatha beating upon the panels of the door.

Thus does the anguish of a tortured brain leave its imperishable impress upon the surroundings in which the mind once suffered, though the freed spirit may have long forgotten, in the peace of Paradise, that slight affliction, which was but for a moment, through which it passed to the eternal weight of glory.

Of late, the old lay-sister, Mary Antony, had grown fearful lest she should make mistake in this solemn office of the counting. Therefore, in the secret of her own heart, she devised a plan, which she carried out under cover of her scapulary. Twenty-five dried peas she held ready in her wallet; then, as each veiled figure, having mounted the steps leading from the crypt doorway, moved slowly past her, she dropped a pea with her right hand into her left. When all the holy Ladies had passed, if all had returned, five-and-twenty peas lay in her left hand, none remained in the wallet.

This secret dropping of peas became a kind of game to Mary Antony. She kept the peas in a small linen bag, and often took them out and played with them when alone in her cell, placing them all in a row, and settling, to her own satisfaction, which peas should represent the various holy Ladies.

A large white pea, of finer aspect than the rest, stood for the noble Prioress herself; a somewhat shrivelled pea, hard, brown, and wizened, did duty as Mother Sub-Prioress, an elderly nun, not loved by Mary Antony because of her sharp tongue and strict fault-finding ways; while a pale and

speckled pea became Sister Mary Rebecca, held in high scorn by the old lay-sister, as a traitress, sneak, and liar, for if ever tale of wrong or shame was whispered in the Convent, it could be traced for place of origin to the slanderous tongue and crooked mind of Sister Mary Rebecca.

When all the peas in line upon the floor of her cell were named, old Mary Antony marked out a distant flagstone, on which the sunlight fell, as heaven; another, partially in shadow, purgatory; a third, in a far corner of exceeding darkness, hell. She then proceeded, with well-directed fillip of thumb and middle finger, to send the holy Ladies there where, in her judgment, they belonged.

If the game went well, the noble Prioress landed safely in heaven, without even the most transitory visit to purgatory; Mother Sub-Prioress, rolling into purgatory, remained there; while the pale and speckled pea went straight to hell!

When these were safely landed, Mary Antony rubbed her hands and, chuckling gleefully, finished the game at gay hap-hazard, it being of less importance where the rest of the holy Ladies chanced to go.

CHAPTER II

SISTER MARY ANTONY DISCOURSES

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As Mary Antony shuffled slowly from the shadow into the sunshine, a gay little flutter of wings preceded her, and a robin perched upon the parapet behind the stone seat upon which it was the lay-sister's custom to await the sound of the turning of the key in the lock of the heavy door beneath the cloisters.

"Thou good-for-nothing imp!" exclaimed Mary Antony, her old face crinkling with delight. "Thou little vain man, in thy red jerkin! Beshrew thine impudence, intruding into a place where women alone do dwell, and no male thing may enter. I would have thee take warning by the fate of the baker's boy, who dared to climb into a tree, so that he might peep over the wall and spy upon the holy Ladies in their garden. Boasting afterward of that which he had done, and making merry over that which he pretended to have seen, our great Lord Bishop heard of it, and sent and took that baker's boy, and though he cried for mercy, swearing the whole tale was an empty boast, they put out his bold eyes with heated tongs, and hanged him from the very branches he had climbed. They'd do the like to thee, thou little vain man, if Mary Antony reported on thy ways. Wouldst like to hang, in thy red doublet?"

The robin had heard this warning tale many times already, told by old

Mary Antony with infinite variety.

Sometimes the tongue of the baker's boy was cut out at the roots; sometimes he lost his ears, or again, he was tied to a cart-tail, and flogged through the Tything. Often he became a pieman, and once he was a turnspit[2] in the household of the Lord Bishop himself. But, whatever the preliminaries, and whether baker, pieman, or turnspit, his final catastrophe was always the same: he was hanged from a bough of the very tree into which, impious and greatly daring, he had climbed.

This was an ancient tale. All who might vouch for it, saving the old lay-sister, had passed away; and, of late, Mary Antony had been strictly forbidden by the Reverend Mother, to tell it to new-comers, or to speak of it to any of the nuns.

So, daily, she told it to the robin; and he, being neither baker's lad, pieman, nor turnspit, and having a conscience void of offence, would listen, wholly unafraid; then, hopping nearer to Mary Antony, would look up at her, eager inquiry in his bright eyes.

On this particular afternoon he flew up into the very tree climbed by the prying and ill-fated baker's lad, settled on a bough which branched out over the Convent wall, and poured forth a gay trill of song.

"Ha, thou little vain man, in thy brown and red suit!" chuckled Mary Antony, leaning her gnarled hands on the stone parapet, as she stood framed in one of the cloister arches overlooking the garden. "Is that thy little 'grace before meat'? But, I pray thee, Sir Robin, who said there was cheese in my wallet? Nay, is there like to be cheese in a

wallet already containing five-and-twenty holy Ladies on their way back from Vespers? Out upon thee for a most irreverent little glutton! I fear me thou hast not only a high look, thou hast also a proud stomach; just the reverse of the great French Cardinal who came, with much pomp, to visit us at Easter time. He had a proud look and a—Come down again, thou little naughty man, and I will tell thee what the Lord Cardinal had under his crimson sash. 'Tis not a thing to shout to the tree-tops. I might have to recite ten Paternosters, if I let thee tempt me so to do. For whispering it in thine ear, I should but say one; for having remarked it, none at all. Facts are facts; and, even in the case of so weighty a fact, the responsibility rests not upon the beholder."

Mary Antony leaned over the parapet, looking upward. The afternoon sunlight fell full upon the russet parchment of her kind old face, shewing the web of wrinkles spun by ninety years of the gently turning wheel of time.

But the robin, perched upon the bough, trilled and sang, unmoved. He was weary of tales of bakers and piemen. He was not at all curious as to what had been beneath the French Cardinal's crimson sash. He wanted the tasty morsels which he knew lay concealed in Sister Mary Antony's leathern wallet. So he stayed on the bough and sang.

The old face, peering up from between the pillars, softened into tenderness at the robin's song.

"I cannot let thy little grace return unto thee void," she said, and fumbled at the fastenings of her wallet.

A flick of wings, a flash of red. The robin had dropped from the bough, and perched beside her.

She doled out crumbs, and fragments of cheese, pushing them toward him along the parapet; leaving her fingers near, to see how close he would adventure to her hand.

She watched him peck a morsel of cheese into five tiny pieces, then fly, with full beak, on eager wing, to the hidden nest, from which five gaping mouths shrieked a shrill and hungry welcome. Then, back again—swift as an arrow from the archer's bow—noting, with bright eye, and head turned sidewise, that the hand resting on the coping had moved nearer; yet brave to take all risks for the sake of those yellow beaks, which would gape wide, in expectation, at sound of the beat of his wings.

"Feed thyself, thou little worldling!" chuckled old Antony, and covered the remaining bits of cheese with her hand. "Who art thou to come here presuming to teach thy betters lessons of self-sacrifice? First feed thyself; then give to the hungry, the fragments that remain. Had I five squealing children here—which Heaven forbid—I should eat mine own mess, and count myself charitable if I let them lick the dish. The holy Ladies give to the poor at the Convent gate, that for which they have no further use. Does thy jaunty fatherhood presume to shame our saintly celibacy? Mother Sub-Prioress did chide me sharply because, to a poor soul with many hungry mouths to feed, I gave a good piece of venison, and not the piece which was tainted. Truth to tell, I had already made away with the tainted piece; but Mother Sub-Prioress was pleased to think it was in the pot, seething

for the holy Ladies' evening meal; and wherefore should Mother Sub-Prioress not think as she pleased?

"'Woman!' she cried; 'Woman!'—and when Mother Sub-Prioress says

'Woman!' the woman she addresses feels her estate would be higher had

God Almighty been pleased to have let her be the Man, or even the

Serpent, so much contempt does Mother Sub-Prioress infuse into the

name—'Woman!' said Mother Sub-Prioress, 'wouldst thou make all the

Ladies of the Convent ill?'

"'Nay,' said I, 'that would I not. Yet, if any needs must be ill, 'twere easier to tend the holy Ladies in their cells, than the Poor, in humble homes, outside the Convent walls, tossing on beds of rushes.'

"'Tush, fool!' snarled Mother Sub-Prioress. "'The Poor are not easily made ill.'

"Tush indeed! I tell thee, little bright-eyed man, old Antony, can 'tush' to better purpose! That night there were strong purging herbs in the broth of Mother Sub-Prioress. Yet she did but keep her bed for one day. Like the Poor, she is not easily made ill!... Well, have thy way; only peck not my fingers, Master Robin, or I will have thee flogged through the Tything at the cart-tail, as was done to a certain pieman, whose history I will now relate.

"Once upon a time, when Sister Mary Antony was young, and fair to look upon—Nay, wink not thy naughty eye——"

51 Refers to two early medieval liturgical books (sacramentaries) containing the prayers and rites used by priests; the Gelasian and Gregorian traditions were compiled and used in Western Christendom roughly between the 6th and 9th centuries and reflect slightly different liturgical texts and rubrics.

52 Female members of a religious community analogous to canons (clerical members attached to a church or cathedral); historically canonesses often followed a rule and participated in communal worship but were distinct from enclosed nuns.

53 A promenade or path lined with cypress trees on the convent grounds; cypress-lined walks and avenues were a common feature of monastic and cemetery landscapes in Britain and Europe.

54 A pillion is a secondary seat strapped behind a rider's saddle, used to carry a passenger on horseback (and later on motorcycles); historically it was commonly used to transport a passenger, especially a woman, on a short journey.

55 A 'prioress' is the head of a convent; here it designates the female superior of a religious house referred to as the 'White Ladies,' a community of nuns — the text does not specify the exact order or historical foundation of that house.

56 A medieval expression meaning to have vowed to join a Crusade to the Holy Land; such vows were common from the late 11th century through the 13th century and signified a formal commitment to military pilgrimage.

57 In medieval literature this term usually denotes the 'Holy Land' around Jerusalem and the eastern Mediterranean, the region to which Crusaders traveled; in modern terms it roughly corresponds to parts of Israel, the Palestinian territories, and neighboring areas.

58 An ermine mantle is a cloak trimmed or lined with ermine fur (the winter coat of the stoat) and was historically used as a luxury material and a visible symbol of high social rank or nobility.

59 Salve Regina is a traditional Latin Marian hymn and prayer (the title means 'Hail, Queen') long used in Roman Catholic devotional practice and in monastic liturgies, dating from the medieval period.

60 A prioress is the woman who heads a priory (a convent or religious house of nuns); in the passage it refers to the leader of the convent called the 'White Ladies,' who would have conducted blessings and overseen the community.

61 A phrase referring to promotion to the rank of Cardinal in the Roman Catholic Church; historically this elevation was symbolized by a broad red hat (the galero) conferred by the

Pope, marking seniority, advisory duties, and membership in the college that elects a pope.

62 Lucca is a city in Tuscany, Italy; in the medieval period it was an important religious centre where crusaders and pilgrims venerated relics, so the phrase refers to swearing an oath at a sacred object or site in Lucca (the text does not identify a specific relic).

63 Members of a monastic community who were not ordained priests or choir monks, often responsible for manual labor and practical tasks in medieval and later convents and monasteries.

64 An official order or authorization issued by the Pope; in context it refers to a papal document (for example a dispensation or directive) that could affect a nun's vows or status.

65 A devotional exclamation invoking the 'keys of Saint Peter', a Christian symbol of papal authority (from Matthew 16:19); used here as an oath appealing to ecclesiastical power.

66 A ceremonial cross worn as an insignia of ecclesiastical authority by holders of certain church offices; in this context it likely denotes the Prioress's badge or symbol of office that would be displayed on her person or habit as proof of her rank.

67 The title 'Fra' is Italian for 'Brother' and denotes a friar in certain Catholic religious orders, so 'Fra Andrea Filippo' refers to a friar (here a member of the monastery) whom the Bishop summons; the name appears to be a fictional character in the novel.

68 A breviary is a liturgical book containing the Divine Office—that is, the set of daily prayers, psalms, hymns and readings used by clergy, monks, and nuns; the phrase “open breviary” here indicates the Hermit’s prayer book, whose exact contents or edition could vary by period and rite.

69 A formal authorization or instruction issued by the Pope; historically such a mandate could grant dispensations, confirm appointments, or authorize actions by bishops and religious houses.

70 Items of a traditional female monastic habit: a scapulary is a shoulder garment or apron-like piece, a wimple covers the neck and lower face, a veil covers the head/hair, and a girdle is a belt or cord worn at the waist.

71 A palfrey was a type of saddle-horse prized in the medieval and early modern periods for a smooth, ambling gait and ease of riding, especially by women and the nobility; here ‘Icon’ is the personal name of Mora’s white palfrey.

72 Refers to Blondel (often called Blondel de Nesle), a medieval French troubadour or trouvère who, in later legend