

FROM HUNTING FIELD TO CLOISTER. By M. M. Xavier Gwynn.
(Clonmore & Reynolds; 8s. 6d.)

A pleasantly written book, giving us the lives of two Irish women, members of a large family of Ryans living near Limerick. It covers many years, for the eldest sister, Eugenie, known at home as Jinny, was born in 1853, while Bertha, the youngest but two of the family, only died in 1942. Eugenie became a nun of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus at St Leonards, where all the girls of the family were educated, two years after she left school as soon as the next sister came home to take her place, Bertha, eleven years younger, entered the same Community at the age of twenty-six when she had been 'in the world' some years.

Both sisters had the background of Irish country life. Each in her day rode to hounds, which in Eugenie's time was unusual for women; and each in her day rode hard and even 'led the hunt'. Both were thoroughly normal young women, enjoying their riding and tennis and dancing; neither was in the least the type which in popular imagination is likely to become a nun. But the normal cheerful type usually makes the best nuns. And so it turned out with these two. We are told that both reached a high degree of sanctity.

Except for their straight, simple outlook, the sisters were not much alike. Eugenie, or to call her by her name in religion, Mother Aloysius, was a delightfully spontaneous person. She had a habit of calling everyone 'darling', from the shyest of newly arrived postulants to (so tradition has it) the Prime Minister of England, then Mr Asquith, when as guest mistress she was showing him the historic old hall, now the chapel of the Mayfield Convent.

Mother Mary Magdalen, her sister, who had been the 'quiet' member of the family, was more reserved in her manner, though she, too, was blessed with the Irish sense of humour which, combined with her understanding of human nature and her sound common sense, made her a wonderfully successful mistress of novices. She would even use slang if it seemed to her the best way of dealing with a special case. It is recorded that once when treated to a would-be tragic tirade from a young novice, Mother Mary Magdalen merely replied: 'My dear, you know that's all bosh!' and walked on. It had the desired effect of bringing the young woman to her senses from sheer surprise at such an answer from the Mistress of Novices. We are told that the novice, recounting the incident later with many a chuckle, added: 'And it *was* all bosh!' Mother Mary Magdalen kept notes on spiritual matters as they occurred to her. Some of these notes, short and to the point, are given in the chapter on her interior life.

This book would be a welcome addition to any community library, and could most certainly be 'read in the refectory'.

FLORENS ROCH.