April 5, 1899
Good Friday.
(mistake for April 4 RB)

The Revd
F. Butler

My dear F. Butler,

I feel constrained by motives which I hope, are not unreasonable, to put into your hands a written refutation of a statement made by the Whitehall Review on Feb. 13, 1881. It was as follows “There is a whispered tradition among the clergy a deity of the Diocese that he proposed to a lady, who afterwards was married to a distinguished poet, and was rejected from which time began his historical career.”

When I saw this I at once believed that the source of this fable was M. ~ Patmore, and the channel of it was M. ~ Rouse who was in close intimacy with him. M. Rouse was believed at that time to be in communication with M~ Millage the author of a series of Scandalous letters on the English Bishops in the Whitehall Review.

I therefore at once decided to speak to M~ Rouse. I did so in the Sacristy of the Pro Cathedral, And his manner confirmed me the belief that he was the man not at least of the fable to use no harder word. My statement to him was as follows.

My historical career began in 1837.

In 1838 a family came to live in Lavington close to my house – a widow, a daughter, and a cousin. Except my curate who lived a mile away there was not an educated person in my Parish.

I had daily service, morning and evening in Lavington Church. They always attended. Daily meeting led to intimacy. I constantly went to them in the evening after the evening service. And I used to read books to them. After a while I foresaw the possibility of intimacy being misunderstood.

I therefore said to the mother: “I ought to tell you that I believe God has called me to live and die alone in the world: and I am afraid of any misunderstanding. If you see any danger, it will be better to see less of you. “Let this be known and understood.”

She said, “I see no danger.”

Later on I was able to say the same in the hearing of the daughter and afterwards again, when she began to come to confession w[ith] me, I said explicitly --
From that time we corresponded. Not one word in all those letters had reference to any subjects but matter of confession, or of religious guidance.

In 1851 I became Catholic – I had for a year or two restrained her from becoming Catholic. In 1851 she did so. After that we rarely met.

She had been very intimate with Mr. P. Lockhart from Abbey at Bay of Water: and later with the present Abbott. They both know all the facts as I have written them.

About 1865 she married M~ Patmore: and I officiated the marriage.

About 1873 or 4 for I have no record she died. My letters to her we e all laid out and arranged. Mr. Patmore, according to her directions, brought them to me. He asked me to give him some of them. I selected some that had no reference to confession and sent them to him destroying the rest.

Out of this I believe came this brutal fable, I call it brutal because nothing could wound me more. “My historical career” as all my contemporaries know, began in 1837 since which time, more than 50 years ago, never by word or will have I swerved from the decision and calling of God to live or die as a Priest. In 1837 I believed that I was a Priest, God in His mercy in 1850 made me to share the true Priesthood for which I have lived.

I do not think it is any undue sensitivity that makes me put this statement into your hand with the desire that if this fable be ever heard again you will keep it among my papers which will come to you. Yours affectionately,

Henry E. Manning, Archbishop

P.S. I made this statement at the time to my Vicar Gent. And to Canon Johnson.

Transcription developed by Mary Rachel Taylor and Elizabeth Sprouse