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# Table of Contents

**Chapter I**

Theological foundation for spirituality

**Chapter II**

A fairy told in the woods

**Chapter III**

A story of Greece

**Chapter IV**

"The Child"

**Chapter V**

"The Awakening"

**Chapter VI**

"In the Garden of the King"

**Chapter VII**

Poems "Christian and Mystical"

**Essay**

**Bibliography**

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**THE MYSTICAL IN CANON SHEEHAN'S WORKS**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Problem.................................................................................i-x

Chapter I Celticism A Background For Mysticism..............1

Chapter II A Fairy Hill On The Avondhu.......................8

Chapter III A Memory Of Mystics.................................16

Chapter IV "The Hidden".....................................................26

Chapter V "The Revealed"....................................................36

Chapter VI In The Garden Of The King..............................46

Chapter VII Poems "Obscure And Mystical".........................56

Summary..............................................................................69

Conclusion............................................................................78

Notes and Remarks...............................................................81

Bibliography.......................................................................82
THE MYSTICAL IN CANON SHEEHAN’S WORKS

I. Mysticism
   1. Its significance
   2. As here accepted
   3. Examples of mystical life

II. Mystical Backgrounds
   1. Celticism
      a. Druidic legends
      b. Fairy-lore
      c. Celtic scenery
   2. Catholic Faith
      a. Basis of true mysticism
      b. Influence of Irish sanctuaries
      c. Holiness of life

III. Mystical Poems
   1. Cithara Mea
   2. "The Temple of Sleep"
   3. The Canticle of the 'Magnificat'

IV. Summary and Conclusion
In an attempt to discover how much of the mystical can be traced in the life and writings of the late Canon Sheehan, it is reasonable and proper to put aside altogether those forms of mysticism which he as a priest and Catholic author would have been obliged in conscience to condemn. Mere psychic phenomena, therefore, and the so-called mysticism of modern speculative metaphysics will not be considered in this paper. Much less necessary is it to notice the farther-removed and almost obsolete forms of mystical beliefs known now to have been but the natural outgrowth or accompaniment of gross oriental idolatry, even though those systems did actually demand of their votaries some sort of unitive contemplation.

Nor would it be profitable for the present purpose to stress much that state of spiritual passivity in which visions, revelations and ecstasies are sometimes vouchsafed, for while these things fall within the scope of mystical phenomena, they are only accidental occurrences and "by no means essential to the mystical life."  

By a gratuitous favor from God, human nature was raised to a supernatural level and destined to enjoy as its ultimate end the vision of God eternally. The same unerring authority that requires the faithful to assent to this doctrine allows them also to believe that even here below

God gives souls a very special grace by which they are enabled to feel His sensible presence. God becomes intimately present to the created mind and this, enlightened by special illumination, contemplates with ineffable delights the Divine essence.2

This is of course the highest form of mystical experience described in full by St. Teresa in her "Seventh Mansion" of the Interior Castle, and not less adequately by St. John of the Cross in The Ascent of Mount Carmel.

Mysticism is elsewhere defined as..."the special soul-experience of a human being, as yet a wayfarer on earth actually tasting and seeing that God is sweet." 3

There are, however, gradation and range in mysticism, just as there are degrees in the mystical life. These degrees are determined by the soul's ability to direct its faculties to the contemplation of God. All mystics have not the same contemplative powers, but every

human soul has a natural tendency towards union with the Divinity.

A tendency so universal and so persistent as that of mysticism which appears among all peoples and influences philosophical thought more or less throughout all centuries must have some real foundation in human nature.  

The Old Testament gives many instances of really intimate relations with God. On Sinai Moses held close communion with the Almighty; so did Elias in the cave of Horeb and on Mount Carmel, the hill of mystics. In the revelations made to St. Catherine of Siena there is much information about the mystics of the Old Law. God says of them:

They were illumined by My Truth to know and understand My Truth in darkness. By My Truth I mean the Holy Scripture which seemed dark because it was not understood....Wherefore I sent this light to illumine the blind and coarse understanding, uplifting the eye of the intellect to know the Truth....It was thus that the holy prophets and fathers understood, who prophesied of the coming and death of My Son.  

The chapter preceding that in which this revelation appears clearly shows the "eye of the intellect" to mean the condition of unitive contemplation. The soul

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becomes as it were impatient of her natural life on earth, viewing her mortal state as a hindrance to complete union with the Divinity.

Mystical, then, in its true sense must have been the life of Abraham, Job, Ezechiel and Isaiah.

In one treatise alone, The Living Flame of Love, St. John of the Cross reverts 128 distinct times to equally distinct passages of Sacred Scripture to prove that the Patriarchs and Prophets of the Old Law had attained high mystical contemplation. Nineteen Books of the Old Testament bear witness to him in this belief. The Canticle of Canticles, that Apocalypse of Hebrew mysticism, reveals as surely as does the Apostle-Poet in Patmos the mystical espousals of the soul with the Divine Bridegroom; and the Psalms show a daring familiarity with God.

If the Erythraean Sibyl was so wrapt and "up-lifted with Saints" that she viewed with the eye of a seeress the terrors of doom when

Sisted before Him are souls in the flesh for their judgment

Sounding the archangel's trumpet shall peal down from heaven

Over the wicked who groan in their guilt and their manifold sorrow

it ought not be difficult to believe that Our Savior's Cousin and Precursor, divested of all things on the banks of the Jordan, was endowed with the gift of rare unitive contemplation. Born free from sin and declared by Incarnate Wisdom to me "more than a prophet", the Baptist was surely a mystic as well as the world's greatest ascetic.

Penance and vocal prayer prepare the soul for the mystical life and must not be disregraded even in its highest state.

St. John the Baptist made himself by prayer and mortification the perfect example of active mysticism.

For believers in the Divinity of Christ there is no need to prove that Nazareth was the home of the holiest mysticism ever known on earth. The blessed pair who lived therein held daily and hourly, not only tender and close, but actually domestic relations with the Son of God. These relations were necessarily more familiar than those of the Psalmist of old, and though Joseph and Mary had passed their quiet, mystical life in the holy home, years before the sacramental system of grace was instituted, they are, and have been, and ever will be the prototypes and exemplars of all Christian mystics.

The learned Benedictine already quoted says that there were on Calvary five distinct types of mystics, and that they represented every degree of the mystical life. There was the chief pattern of all mystics, Christ Crucified; there was His Mother, the "Mystical Rose"; there was John, the young evangel of Divine love; near him knelt Magdalen, the penitent-lover to whom pardon had been granted commensurate to her love; and there, too, was a dying convict converted at last from a criminal course; made sensible of the divinity of Christ and turned into the first public herald of it; who was that very day to step from his gibbet of infamy into paradise.8

It is not too much to infer from this that as the mysticism of the Old Law disappeared in blood when its last impersonator perished under the axe at the instigation of an evil woman, so the mysticism of the New Law was inaugurated on the Cross, sanctioned and sanctified in blood while the weeping "Addolorata" stood by as a witness.

The way of divine union of which the mystical way is but an advanced stage, is necessarily a way of the Cross.

Faith and Charity conjoined with suffering are essential to Catholic mystical life. Faith is in fact the only reliable basis for union with God, and is as necessary to the active and practical state of mystical experience as to the high plane reached by St. Teresa or St. John of the Cross. St. Paul was caught up to the third heaven, but his faith was more to him than his rapture.

The mystical ascetic, Scaramelli, declares that "a plain act of faith is far more secure than the most ravishing visions of heavenly objects", and he would have his readers lean upon faith as upon a foundation that cannot give way.

St. John of the Cross, a master in mystical life, places more trust in faith than in ecstasies. He takes particular pains to make his position clear by assigning faith a proportionately large space for consideration in his spiritual "Maxims". He teaches that the way of faith is "sound" and expressly states that

The soul that seeks after revelations sins venially at least; so does the director who encourages or allows that seeking, be the end sought never so good;...The soul that desires revelations undermines the perfect guidance of

faith, and opens a door for Satan to deceive it by false revelations;...II

But faith itself of its own nature is mystical. St. Paul has a twofold way of saying or proving this when he defines faith as "The substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things that appear not."

Hope is a yearning for things not yet possessed, and implies an eagerness of soul surpassing mere desire; but the act by which eternal things are desired can never be produced by the human will unless aided by divine grace.

God is needed, therefore; for the movement of the will towards the eternal things which perfect belief promises.

The second part of the definition, "the evidence of things that appear not", implies even a greater intervention on the part of God; it is only by His grace that the soul can give its assent to things unseen, which are the subject-matter of theological faith. There is an etymological relationship between the words mystical and mystery, and this relationship is fairly well illustrated in St. Paul's definition of faith.


Of the four special petitions which St. Catherine of Siena begged of God, the first regarded solely the integrity of her faith. Once while in ecstasy she was reminded especially of that:

...one for thyself which I have satisfied, illuminating thee with My Truth,...explaining to thee how thou mightest come to the knowledge of it through the knowledge of thyself and Me, through the light of faith.13

The mysticism, therefore, sought in Canon Sheehan's life and writings is that system of spiritual thought and action consequent on the knowledge and practice of the moral and theological virtues, especially the virtue of faith—the faith which

...sees here in 'time' the things That through 'eternity' shall last.14

There can be no question of the "mystical elements" invented by modernism and elaborated into psychological systems that are at best but poor excuses for irreverence and irreligion. No mystical elements will be acknowledged in this thesis but such as can stand without apology in the light of Catholic doctrine, and no mysticism but that which is, so to say, the outcome of conscious, sustained effort towards the

interior life, and of faithful cooperation with the lights and motions of God's grace in the priestly state. Finally, it is what Edward Ingram Watkin fittingly defines as "Catholic faith in its highest intensity."
Is it the legends of that Isle
That hold my heart in thrall,
Its awful splendor mile on mile
Where thundering breakers fall!
Is it the spell of water-wraith,
That thrills me through and through
Or spirit of my fathers' faith
That springs in me anew? 1

This fragment of a poem by the late Rev. Charles L. O'Donnell is specific in its reference to the chief influences that impress more or less markedly the Celtic mind, namely: legends, scenery, magic-spells and Faith.

Legends perpetuate a people's romantic adherence to ideals. They are in a sense a tribute to what is venerable, heroic, or otherwise worthy of reverence. They manifest men's natural slowness to break with tradition, and an innate desire to participate in (if only by approving) the achievements of their ancestors.

According to Heinrich Gunter sacred legends "claim to show the auxiliary power of the supernatural and thus indicate to the people a 'savior' in every need." 2

1. The Ave Maria, CXXIII, 193, (August 12, 1911.)
The Gallo-Roman Saint sent to convert pagan Ireland to Christ...must have known that old legends made Emain Macha famous through all the land, and he allowed himself to be influenced by the Cycle of Conchobar, an epic work which he thought "wholesome, not harmful, like the ornaments handed down from old craftsmen".

Prudent, politic and himself poetic, he would please the poets by his choice of Armagh, the ancient scene of MacNessa's triumph to be for all time Erin's primatial see.

Not long since there lived a semi-Celtic Knight, a man of fatal ventures whose Romance of Irish History remains to testify that Ireland "steps out of a story" as full of tragic happenings and deeds as heroic as those that made Greece a glory and Troy a ruin.

A people bred on such soul-stirring tales as these...could never be vulgar, could never be mean, but must repeat in their own time and in their own manhood actions and efforts thus ascribed as a vital part of their origin.

Information from many sources gives grounds to the opinion that belief in Ireland's pagan gods has had a firm

hold on the imagination and sensibilities of the Celtic people down to our own day.

The old bards, even after they were Christianized, never questioned the influence of beings whom a whole nation considered partially endowed with divine attributes. St. Patrick wore his "Lorica" to be defended from the spells of druidic prophets, from their powers of incantations and from "the black laws of heathendom." Christian Faith forbade of course the recognition or cult of heathen divinities, but it was useless to try to convince the Celtic mind that those beings did not exist.

Standish O'Grady thinks the old monks themselves were affected considerably by the widespread belief in gods and goddesses who (it was said) haunted the oak groves and the fairy springs. He says it is likely that they

...forbade the people to worship them but to root out the belief in their existence was so impossible that they could not even dispossess their own minds of the conviction that the gods were real supernatural beings.7

Heroes and the souls of the dead go hand in hand with gods and fairy-beings of many orders through all the

6. Dympna, Sprays of Shamrock, 10.

Celtic legends, and so surely as Faith has placed its special mark upon the moral and spiritual character of the people, those legends have set a seal upon the quality of Irish thought, and have aided Faith to save the mind and heart of Ireland from the grossness of materialism.

Mr. W. Y. Evans Wentz supposes that the scenery in Celtic lands has a large share in developing mystical tendencies in the Celtic mind; that by the close observation of natural phenomena, and of those sudden atmospheric changes which so wonderfully affect the aspect of air and sky, sea and land, the Celtic people acquire "an unusual power to feel invisible and psychical influences." He further declares that nothing can so surely "awaken the intuitive powers of man...equal to the solitudes of those magical environments of nature which the Celts enjoy and love."

Irish Celticism is elementally a reaching out for things unseen, a sort of mind-thirst for spiritualism, and it is symbolized by the Druid mound surmounted by the Cross.

Spenser, who hardly escaped this Celtic enchantment, celebrates in the finishing portions of The Faerie Queene

8. Ibid, xx.
the mountains and valleys of his vast estate as being "once the fabled resort of the Divine Huntress and her Nymphs, and the meeting-place of the Gods."

The poet of Kilcolman was not indifferent to the scenes around his castle for "the beauties of his home inspired more than one sweet pastoral picture in The Faerie Queene."

On the Island of Aranmore where the mallard and widgeon, the wild pigeon and sea-mew disport all day with the foam of the breakers, the spirit of poetry was enlivened and ennobled in the mind of John M. Synge. Home he came from Paris to give his genius fair play where the seawinds fall asleep on the grave of St. Enda. So also did the poet of Innisfree enhance his poetic powers when he hurried back to the low voiced waters lapping round his island in the lake.

The little group of poetic-intellectuals that tramped through Celtic highlands in the Kingdom of Kerry, and stood at last on the very spot where Tennyson wrote his "Bugel Song" are like the Irish poets mentioned above for they


sought not scenic beauty so much as the Celtic magic that accompanies it,—the subtle enchantment that steeps the soul in reveries from which it never again awakens. 12

The spiritual values of Irish legends and the meditative and mystical tendencies that follow from daily contact with natural beauty in the silences of Irish solitudes are explained and accounted for before The Intellectuals conclude their thirty-sixth Session. For the enlightenment of "The Sunetoil Assembly on its thirty-fifth meeting, Hester Hope declares herself confident that in Ireland practical belief in the supernatural far outmeasures the theoretical; that material existence is only a veil too thin and unsubstantial to conceal the spiritual world; that the Irish sagas were highly colored with the mysticism of the race; that where the supernatural and mysterious fail to reveal themselves, the Celtic mind clamors for their manifestation, or goes out in quest of them.

So much for Celtic scenes that cling to memory! It is nearly certain that such scenes produce an attitude of mind on which supernaturalism may be easily engrafted. The same is true of those old legends known and re-told

Wherever breathes the sea-borne Gael
Whose legends leak into the light. 13

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At present both Irish scenes and legends bring the problem of Canon Sheehan's mysticism into his native town, Mallow, the ancient residence of Cleena, Munster's fairy queen. Here is also found another element of Celticism, namely fairy-lore and magic spells.

Here, too, in Mallow may be found a clearer understanding of the question: In how far does the Celtic aid the mystical?
CHAPTER II

A FAIRY HILL ON THE AVONDHU

Mallow on the banks of the Southern Blackwater was an ancient township rich in legend and in fairy-lore and historically connected with the fame and final overthrow of the princely Geraldines. It lies almost midway in the valley of Desmond, a beautiful tract of nearly 580,000 acres confiscated by the Crown when the Geraldine Rebellion had ended in failure. The Tudor woman of hated memory vented her rage on the name and race of the Munster Geraldines; the head of John the great Earl was spiked above the central archway of London Bridge; his brothers were murdered; their estates were ravaged; their Munster strongholds were wiped out or left to blacken in ruined heaps. The strongest of the Geraldine keeps stands today an ivied ruin close to the town of Mallow.

Of this attainted valley Spenser received the "small seignory" of Kilcolman, an estate of 3,000 acres, with other frontier castles. These were not granted him in "substantial recognition of his genius" but quite

probably as a reward for his services in the massacre at Smerwick Harbor. Sir Walter Raleigh and Sir Christopher Hatton were more amply repaid in Desmond lands. They were Elizabeth's favorites.

Tragic centuries have trampled long on that beautiful valley. Scattered ruins give silent testimony, and the poets of Ireland will not let men forget. The Dirge of Desmond by Aubrey De Vere is known and sung from end to end of the Island, and in the shadow of desecrated abbeys and deserted castles another poet has recently written:

Go back, grim spectres of the past!
Relax your sightless, stony stare;
Call back your memories that o'ercast
Our sunshine with a cloud of care.2

But history often unveils the ironic inconsistencies of destiny. Spenser, who was the mortal enemy of the Geraldine princes and the would-be exterminator of the natives of Munster, immortalizes in his great poem the hills and streams of "deep valley'd Desmond," and lavishes upon an Irish country lass "such a dower of poetic glory as few poets have bestowed upon their brides."3

2. Canon Sheehan, Githara Mea, 168.

3. R. W. Church, op. cit., 166.
Even Mallow has had due compensation. By a sort of instinctive prescience Nature made amends for the "grim spectres" and the "clouds of care", and favored the little town in ways unusual. Close to its fairy-fort run Cynthia's favorite waters, the Mulla, the Mulanna, the Bregog and the Fanchia ingeniously endowed with nymphaean qualities in the Seventh Book of The Faerie Queene.

A spa of healing water made Mallow famous for centuries. Highly charged with nitrogen it dispensed cures for all known maladies and was frequented even in pre-Christian days for its healing powers. The well is now abandoned having lost its curative properties long since.

More significant still is the hill of Carrig-Cleena, chosen of old by Queen Cleena herself, as the royal court of all the Munster fairies. It stands near the town of Mallow and is called after the fairies' favorite queen even to this day.

While she lay asleep on the sands of Glandore Harbor, Queen Cleena was drowned by the incoming tide and from that far time to this "...the sound of the ocean billows breaking on the caverned cliffs of Glandore has been known as 'Tonn-Cleena', or Cleena's waves." 4

In the Kingdom of the Celtic Sidhe, Cleena is not dead. She queens it over the fairies of the South; loves Irish music, and often slips in uninvited to Irish festivals. When the fiddler at Lisnalee had roused the spirit of his violin to musical frenzy, there came dancing to the wedding...all the fairies of Munster with Cleena at their head."

Rosa Mulholland's "Faery Earl", Lord Garret Og FitzGerald mounted on his coal-black charger silver-shod, takes nightly rides through this valley of the Blackwater, his long delayed inheritance. From his fairy castle beneath Lough Gur he keeps patient watch on his ancient earldom and according to a prophecy shall rule the valley of Desmond before the Day of Doom.

It is as clear as fairy-lore can make it that Desmond was a fairy realm ruled mostly from Mallow the palace fort of Cleena, and the birth place of Canon Sheehan. Here he was christened Patrick Augustine on the feast of his first-named patron in 1852.

The Baptismal Register in his native town shows the Sheehans or the O'Sheehans numerous in the locality, and spells the name in six different ways. Sheehan is supposed to be a Gaelic alteration of "Sheewan" the

Celtic word for fairy-mount. It was the surname of an ancient Munster clan whose heraldic motto was "pro virtute patria." Their traditional coat-of-arms was a dove soaring above a green hill, and bearing in her beak an olive branch. Celtic heraldry represented a principle rather than an achievement, and as it antedated by many centuries the Christian knighthood of Europe, it was never regulated by the rules of ancestral records. Consequently the device upon the Sheehan shield was very likely a symbol for "peace as the gift of the genial spirit bearing the olive branch."

It is easy to believe that such family traditions, in scenes like these, would naturally dispose a sensitive mind to seek after, and prefer the supernatural. Of course the fairyhood of Canon Sheehan's native place could not alter the understanding that Faith gave him of life and its vast issues; but the hill of Carrig-Cleena with its palace of semi-spiritual beings brought one special phase of Celticism very close to his childhood. Father Francis Boyle quotes Father Phelan, S. J., as saying that nothing eluded Canon Sheehan's memory. "It stretched down to his childhood, and cast forth vividly on the canvas of to-day pictures of forty years

ago. Dr. Heuser states more than this when he writes: "His childish observations became incentives to meditation on the significance of nature and its relations to the actualities of life."

An enlightening comment on the poetry of Padraic Colum gives as a piece of incidental information that William Butler Yeats boasts of a closer friendship with the Celtic fairies than his poetic predecessors were privileged to enjoy. They roam about his room and come and go about his table, but the same comment calls the Poet of Tir nan Oge "a godson of the Fairies" and attributes to their love and patronage "...that other-world sense which never fails to mark the accepted poets of his race."

That the fairy-realm of Carrig-Cleana helped Canon Sheehan to an accepted place among the prose-poets of his race there is no good reason for doubting. The enchantment of fairy-lore colored his literary art and enlivened his emotional tendencies. A mental bent

toward the preternatural or the supernatural may be traced in all his literary works, and reflection on the things of eternity forms a marked characteristic of his writings.

As a boy he was poetically inclined and much given to contemplation. One of his descriptions of himself in boyhood days in Mallow shows him

...a fair-haired, delicate boy with large, wistful eyes, that looked at you as if they saw something behind and beyond you...a bit of a dreamer too who with a book, or more often without one, would sit and think and look dreamily at fleeting clouds or running streams and then, with a sigh, go back to the weary desk again.  

The literature of his later life confirms the belief that the laws of environment or heredity actuate or govern human expression. Miriam Lucas alone would testify to this with its moorland of white pathways leading to the idols of death, its vanishing spectres who warn against fate, its unhappy heiress to Glendarrogh's haunted mansion, and the rude legend of Glendarrogh's curse written beneath a skeleton hidden by an angel's wings.

Just as surely as Padraic Colum, or Eva Gore-Booth, or Joseph Campbell, or William Butler Yeats has caught in the sounds of winds and rain, or in the haunted twilight silences, voices from worlds unseen, Canon Sheehan

has been able to descry that in the

Gray keeps o'erhanging lonely, inky lakes;
Spirits clank up the green and granite stairs
That lead from seawash to enchanted moat.\textsuperscript{11}

The works of the Irish poets themselves show
that visible or tangible things do not furnish the best
material for their poetry. Celtic genius delights in
the spectral, the illusionary, or the supernatural; in
these it seeks the substance and music of its poetry.
Of 172 Irish poets, among whom Canon Sheehan's name is
given, over 150 do their finest poetic work somewhere
in a world unseen, either in the realms of fairy en-
chantment, or in the older pagan world of the Celtic
gods; some under the spell of sea-wraiths, listening
to mystic sounds from far off bells at sea, and others
with the holier mysteries of Christian Faith.

The Herb-Leech of Joseph Campbell summarizes in
a short poem of thirty-six lines, magic, incantations
and wizardry enough to make another witches' cauldron.

Fairy memories brought down through the years
from Mallow had so affected My New Curate that six of
the original chapters were returned to the author by

\textsuperscript{11} Canon Sheehan, \textit{Cithara Mea}, 220.
the editor of The American Ecclesiastical Review because a witch in Clonmel received undue consideration, as did also the general condition of fairyship through the Island. The chapters were sent back for revision, as "...the application of the argument (concerning the fairy) was not likely to be understood by the reader unfamiliar with conditions in Ireland."

The poet of Kilcolman, necessarily aristocratic in his tastes, called upon The Faerie Queene to introduce him to royalty, and to proclaim him an immortal; but the poets that Celticism has created have roamed free with safe conduct through fairy-land, have sung in fairy castles, and have listened to the chanting of the Celtic Sidhes around the Fairy Thorn and the Fairy Springs. Here, if anywhere on earth "the poet is a mystery and divine," and here, too, among fays and fairies lovely creations of the Celtic mind, the poet's faith need suffer no injury or diminution. He can spread the white sails of his soul over all the

...gulfs of unencumbered thought,
Round the high seas where nothing impious dwells,
Only the sweet winds come;...
And let no anchor stay the hurrying ship
On its vast course towards th' eternal shore
Where breaking surges echo, Evermore!

13. Canon Sheehan, The Intellectuals, 133.
CHAPTER III

A MEMORY OF MYSTICS

Mallow and Doneraile— the two chief centers of Canon Sheehan's literary and spiritual labors, lie nearly equidistant from seven famous sanctuaries of Irish mystics of whom two were known and reverenced for holiness in pre-Patrician times. St. Kieran of Saighir was born in 352 not far from Doneraile in the country of the Osraig-clan, his kinsmen, whom at a later period he converted entirely to the Christian faith. The monastery in which his mother, Liadain, died was called by the Irish "Caell-Lidain" and came to desolation like all other Irish monasteries in the royal pillage of the Tudors. St. Kieran's own monastic house was called Sier-Keran, and his power over wild beasts was so great that he brought tamed to his home "a wolf as well as a fox, a badger, and a deer with her fawn."

Forewarned of his death and wishing to get ready for it in peace and union with God, Kieran passed over the sea to Cornwall, built for himself and other saintly companions a series of hermit cells on the sands of the Severn, and died there in great holiness some years later.

1. Alice Curtayne, St. Francis of Assisi, 20.
His memory is preserved in the little town known as St. Piran's in the Sands in Cornwall.

Stories about this old saint slipped down through ten centuries and prepared the Irish people to accept reverently the legends of St. Francis and to make the triumph of his Order in Ireland easy and enduring.

Not far north of Doneraile is the native place of Ailbe, the Saint of Emely, who is called in Ireland the patron saint of Munster. He was a contemporary of St. Kiaran and his "rule for saints" is still extant in old Gaelic. So frequently was he sought (and disturbed) because of the fame of his miracles that he wished to escape to the Shetland Isles in order to end his life in peace, but the King guarded the shore, and Ailbe was obliged to die at home after having lived for one century and a half.

In the scriptorium of St. Ailbe's monastery Sentan the Culdee was master-scribe. The monk allowed one proud thought a moment's space in his heart, for he could catch the colors and shades of sea and sky, and tint his vellum with all "the lights that dye the purple even," and well pleased he sat one evening musing over

2. Canon Sheehan, Cithara Mea, 125.
the glowing parchment. The pride of Sentan was revealed to Ailbe; then came the terrible sentence decreed also in Heaven:

I know not Sentan, whence those bitter tears, 
...But for thy soul's sake, and to humble him, 
Who in his craft hath deeply humbled thee, 
Leave thou this laura and thy brethren dear, 
And me, who love thee, though I banish thee, 
And where a high rock beetles o'er the sea, 
Its shadow dark'ning at the mid-day hour 
That grave of sainted Declan—there abide! 
Thy bed— the heather, salted by sea-winds; 
Thy books— the open manuscripts of God 
Thy food— whate'er the sea-fowl bring to thee. 
...When thou, through fires of discipline and prayer, 
Hast, in the sacred silences of seas, 
Pondered the dread exorbitance of God; 
Thou mayst go forth to see the blinding face 
Of Him, to whom the stars are blackened slags, 
...Thou knowest, I know, we shall not meet again.3

The banished Culdee sought the rock swept by storm and wave, and filled his days with penance until his soul was purified from pride, and senseless creatures of the sea won by his holiness drew near to comfort him. The wild birds round his rock, the teal and sea-gull ventured very close,

...chirping, in pretense of song 
As if to break the spell of solitude 4 
...And all the maimed, the halted and the blind, 
with the leprous and the sin-laden came to him for cure

3. Ibid, 122-123. 
4. Ibid, 124.
and pardon. That monk became a mystic who had struggled in the dark and cold through rugged places of necessary repentance

...into a radiance so serene—
A pale and tremulous ocean whose waves
Wash gently upwards, and then gently break.
In murmured meekness at the throne of God.

His mystical experiences have been told and retold through the ages, but to few Irish poets or mystics has St. Sentan conveyed so much of his "rapt prophetic vision" as to Canon Sheehan of Doneraile. The grave of St. Declan and the rock of St. Sentan with all their sacred memories are not far away from the "garden enclosed" where Canon Sheehan accustomed himself to view human things in the light of eternity and "to solve the problems of life by the light of faith". The solitude of the sea and the sanctuaries of saints did much for the mood that created the last fine passages of "Sentan the Culdee".

Another near-by sanctuary of Irish mysticism was the great abbey of Cluain-Credhuil in the ancient territory of Hi Conaill. It was founded at the command of God by St. Ita, a princess of the house of

5. Ibid, 126.
Desii, for the purpose it would appear of giving convent fosterage for five full years to the boy, St. Brendan, and she has been called for ages the "Mary of Munster". Next to St. Fursey she was Ireland's greatest mystic and had many revelations concerning things pleasing and displeasing to God. With bodily eyes she saw the place where virtues are rewarded and the regions of great woe where sin is punished. She was given to see also a land less dismal than hell where those suffer who offer no alms. The well known Irish custom of giving clothes as a charity for the souls of the dead is attributable to the vision in which St. Ita saw her uncle naked in "penal cold"—terrible as purgatorial fires, because "he gave no garments to the poor in Christ's name".

Sacred as any of these is the solitary island of Gouganne Barra hiding still within its "zone of dark hills" the river of echoes and the hermit-cells of St. Finbarr and his anchorites.

Lochan, son of the poet Amergin, was born about 540 in Temple Martin a few miles from Bandon. He was related to St. Colman, first bishop of Cloyne and founder of Cloyne Abbey near Doneraile. Lochan was surnamed

"Finn-Barr" on account of his comely appearance and his flaxen hair. In the vicinity of Gouganne Barra he built twelve churches. He was bishop of Corcash (Cork) for seventeen years. After he had named St. Nessan his successor, he went north to his cousin St. Colman and died in Cloyne on November 4, 604, having lived nearly 100 years. His sanctity is not forgotten; neither has his influence departed. He is particularly honored in the ancient see of which he was the first bishop, and the modern Cormac-Chapel erected near his cell in Gouganne Barra perpetuates his memory there.

Perhaps of greater influence and interest also is that other shrine of old-time holiness, the Abbey of Ardfert. It stands on a "hill of miracles" close by the sea with its purity and freedom, and its infinite expanse telling...of God. From that home of one thousand monks, St. Brendan set out for the Arran Isles on his way to the "Isles of the Blest." The plan for his voyage he laid before his foster-mother, St. Ita, and St. Enda of Arranmore. They advised him "to purvey for a good shyppe" and to take victuals for seven years. The saint sailed south from Arran, erected a cross on the strand

of Inisgloria and having taken twelve monks from the Abbey of Ardfert, turned the prow of his small vessel westward to the ocean-seas.

The marvels that accompanied that voyage have given material for romantic tales to several modern poets. The same marvels supplied stories for medieval chroniclers in seven different tongues. Denis Florence McCarthy thinks and says so in his notes on "The Voyage of St. Brendan," a long poem of ninety-two stanzas, that Southey's Madoc is merely a "lay" figure of St. Brendan himself, and that the enchanter Merlin tempting the high seas in a boat of glass is a Welsh variation of the "Irish Ulysses" daring the unknown and mysterious Shanarragh for the Islands of the Blest.

On his ocean-trip St. Brendan encountered demons, was consoled by angels, came upon a flock of birds of paradise singing vespers, and heard woeful secrets from the spirits of the damned. He demanded one day's respite from fierce pain for the soul of Judas who thanked Saynt Brandon so refully it was a pite to se, and then fendes came and took Judas away tremblying for fere with them to payne.9

Brendan was a mystic, and a prophet, too, who had foretold the eternal loss of one of his own companions. His visions, as well as those of St. Patrick in Lough Derg, and the revelations made concerning heaven and hell to St. Ita and St. Fursey are said to have been (among others) "the source of some of the most effective features in Dante's poem."

It is doubtful that Canon Sheehan read the work written on the voyage of St. Brendan by St. Colman of Cloyne, whom the Irish named the "Royal Bard of Munster". If he ever read it, the evidence must have gone with his "Memoirs" into the flames. Colman was "endowed with extraordinary poetic powers", and kept on using them until diverted from poetic pursuits by the saint he was eulogizing. For this very reason it is possible that the angel who advised St. Brendan's return from the banks of

...the mighty stream
Whose broad, bright waves flowed from the east to west did not get a chance to appear in the poem, else the prophecy from the angel's lips might have given the Canon a kindlier view of the Irish exodus to St. Brendan's Land


of Promise.

The early training of Canon Sheehan was placed for some time under the patronage of St. Colman, in Fermoy; and while there is little or no proof that either sanctity or mysticism is influenced to a great degree by heredity or the accident of place, proximity to the home and to the ashes of a saint and a saint too of one's own kindred, ought to effect as great a control over an impressionable mind as that ascribed to Celtic scenery, fairy-lore or Celtic legends. On this assumption the above named memorials of Celtic mystics are introduced here.

Surrounded on all sides by evidences of sanctity and possessed of the same Faith which had in other days made such holiness a fact, Canon Sheehan grew up from childhood among a people whose conscientious adherence to that Faith was their sole "transgression"—the treason for which there were halters with quartering and quick-lime for centuries. There is an out-spoken advertence to this age-long woe in many lines of his best known poem, and most notably in these:

Long have ye mourned through the halting years
Ashes your bread, your chalice myrrhed with years
Your pathway paved with sherds of bitter pain.13

13. The Canticle of The 'Magnificat', 22, Stanza 58.
As a priest Canon Sheehan lived with these people for over thirty years and learned in their midst what not even bigotry itself has attempted to gainsay— that this earth can show no love so spiritual as that of the Irish people for their priests. His presence was a revelation to them of that unseen world of which they had been taught to dream from their earliest years...and his priesthood the living impersonation of principles and ideas that could never have dawned upon the human mind had they not been revealed...14

In "The Hidden" and in "The Revealed," two of his most mystical poems, Canon Sheehan interprets in his highly spiritual way what Ireland's people owe to their ancient mystics—a love for the truths of Faith, and a yearning for the things of eternity. He is their modern seer and prophet whose "whole personality is glorified by the light of the supernatural which shines through all his works and thoughts."15

CHAPTER IV

"THE HIDDEN"

...Thus far, no farther shalt thou come!
Within the Shechinah,—the presence cloud!
Only the High-Priest, Faith, sightless, dumb,
Shall lift the veil; unwrap the secret shroud.

This short passage from "The Hidden" proves its author was persuaded that to divine Faith belongs the high office of unveiling before the intellect of man the mysteries and secrets of eternity. St. Theresa of Jesus, St. John of the Cross and St. Catherine of Siena, mystics of the highest order, who had actual and frequent experience of the three acknowledged species of ecstatic visions, quite frankly attest to the greater certainty and safety of Faith. Twelve several times in the last chapter of her Dialogue, St. Catherine ascribes to Faith the sole trustworthy power by which man in this mortal state can know and understand the truths of God.

I have not known Thy truth and have not loved it...because I did not see Thee with the glorious light of holy Faith...2

and so convinced is she of Faith's pre-eminence that she declares its light a sea in which "the soul revels in the Eternal Trinity, the Sea Pacific." Such an avowal from


a saint and mystic is almost requisite for this thesis, and at this stage of the present work it is somewhat providential because it gives lofty sanction to the belief that the mystical is not sought in vain in works of genius transfused with Faith.

"The Hound of Heaven", an allegorical treatment of God's great love for man, won for Francis Thompson the title "Mystic Poet" but "Faith was his real muse." More remarkable still is the assurance that Faith shares in all the benefits of mysticism without any of its delusions, and "If mysticism is sometimes hailed as the inspiration of art its honors are borrowed from Faith."

But the genius of Sheehan was guided by Faith, the muse mystical, that led him through the darkness of "The Hidden" to the soul-introversion and light of "The Revealed." Here beyond "the wastes of space" and "the pallid days" of time, lay the ocean-shores of eternity whence the poet could look

Into the opal depths of the great Sea,
That murmurs round the central throne of Him
Whose eyes have lighted from eternity
The world of His wond'ring Cherubim.

5. Ibid, 648.
In fifteen parts of five stanzas each "The Hidden", mystical even in name, makes a vain attempt to search into and explain the mysteries of life, the "insolence of Death" and the place, power, and providence of God in His creation.

The soul encumbered with its sheath of clay, vexed also by the tyranny of the senses, and chafed by the thraldom of time and space, questions like the "querulous winds," and the "unmuffled thunder."

Where art Thou hidden? Whence Thy dread eclipse?
Thy children are grown covetous of Thee;
They clamor for Thy full apocalypse,
Thy sail of light athwart our sullen sea.7

It is this infinite yearning for the full apocalypse of God's presence that signalizes this poem and burdens it so to speak, from the "healing waters" of its first line to where its seventy-fifth stanza ends in the "cataracts of eternity." The central truth of Francis Thompson's mystical poem is God's insistent and unceasing love for thankless man; man's restless longing for union with God is the fact set forth in "The Hidden." Pushing on in its quest for Him, through darkness in which the soul "stagger against the walls of night", it finds Him at last above

the valleys where the less spiritual "pause and grope"; and it feasts its gladdened eyes upon the vision"...
on the embattled heights where Faith hath fields of freedom..."

St. Bernard of Clairvaux, a master of mediaeval mysticism, interpreting for his contemporaries the Canticle of Canticles, makes it very clear that "no search for God is altogether fruitless." This statement is verified in "The Hidden". The over-anxious soul in its spiritual destitution, tries as a substitute for Faith vain systems of human speculation, and seeks the truth and beauty of God in the haunts of sophists and of pagan poets. Irritated at its own impotency and the failure of human wisdom, it embitters its holy quest by selfishness and impatience:

I cannot see Thee in the dark and cold,—
Darkness of Erebus; cold that fiercely burns...
and it directs its eager pursuit again through "wastes of faded palimpsests" or back among the gods of heathendom sleeping long ages in their stony trance.

8. Ibid, 8.
But Faith triumphs over the wayward intellect. To the unwavering soul is given the highest recompense granted here below—a glance "swift and intuitive" where

God's vesture curves and floats around His throne, As float ensanguined clouds at eventide.11

"The Hidden" is not a Celtic replica of the Dark Night by St. John of the Cross. Save perhaps for the treatment of the obscureness of God's mercy and the gift of Faith, the two works have little in common. The soul portrayed by the Spanish Mystic puts on Faith as a "breastplate of defence against Satan". The other, full of Faith, sends up from its forlornness a strong heart-cry not to be unheeded:

Oh, for one flash of Thy resplendent Face! Oh, for one whisper of Thy voice to mark Assurance of Thy presence and Thy grace:13

This pleading for grace proves even here the soul's love and purpose genuine, and it obviates the likelihood of spurious mysticism. Out of the riches of his mystical experiences St. Bernard can testify

again, for he thinks that moral life to which of course both Faith and Grace are absolute essentials, is "a permanent and pervasive element in the organic unity of the mystical life".

"The Hidden" grows more significant the deeper it is studied. Not only is it the story of a yearning soul crying out like "one of blessed sense bereft", but it may be understood as the history of a nation whose eyes once

...irised with the fair dawn's gleam,
Have sunk to ashes of a sunset grief.15

It is undeniably a theme of Celtic sorrow and Celtic Faith in which Ireland's soul

"...dark cicatrizied with the time wounds and pain..." is shown conscious of the price it must pay for adhering to God; and says Dom. S. Louismet: "Mystical life is that: actually or perseveringly adhering or clinging to God..."

Without pride or defiance or voluntary discordance with His will, the anguished soul makes its

14. Watkin Williams, op. cit., 75.
complaint to Him, and centuries of woe and darkness are interwoven in the lines:

...Thou, who reignest over worlds destroyed,
Are cloaked and hooded in relentless night. 18

The poem is metaphorical also; it depicts the powers that attempt destruction under figures always connotative of ruin. Ireland, the pilgrim of darkness and storm, "is telling the beads of dumb despair and dole" but the "Cyclopean fury" set loose against that land is seen in lightnings, chaos, ooze, death and the black sea leaven.

Grey, shattered ruins where the ichneumon hides become the haunts of Ireland's lonely and yearning spirit. "The Revealed" admirably compensates for the Faith which in "The Hidden" lifts over

...Death and Ruin
The crimson standard of the Crucified. 20

No less mystical therefore in purpose than in name, this poem, "The Hidden," tries to unveil the unseen and to scrutinize the providence of God. It is as Celtic as it is mystic. Over seventy times it turns almost naturally to the mystery of pain and shows the

19. Ibid, 8.
dominant attractiveness of the Celtic mind in grief
drawing nature to its side in pure Celtic sympathy.
Ever since the far times of Erin's "Three Sorrows", the
soul of Celtic Ireland has woven into its being a weird
spiritual strength and comfort from the significantly
Celtic motto:

The highest bliss is aye the bliss of pain. 21

Hence from her four seas sweep in the strong
winds of Erin, shivering night-winds full of moaning
"seeking...o'er the mountain and the mere" for one
glimpse of His "vast...glory cast apace."

"Lazarlike and pitiful" the forest trees lift
naked arms to the skies pleading for His spring, and
out on the ocean wastes the foamy waters heave "their
wailing hands" as if to

...chide the weary soul's incompetence
To reach and challenge all that it has sought. 22

This is the mysticism that W. Y. Evans Wentz
referred to with remarkable insistency in the work
mentioned above; it is the Celticism which (being trans­
figured by Catholic Christianity) became the "exalted

mysticism of mediaeval Europe." It is also the mysticism of the Celtic saints that only saints can best understand.

23. Dr. James Walsh, (quoting Dr. Shahah), The World's Debt to the Irish, 75.
CHAPTER V

"THE REVEALED"

This poem is in a spiritual sense the sequel to "The Hidden". It is more than the "elevation of pure thought sublimated by Faith and raised by its power to regions otherwise impossible and inaccessible." It is the story of a soul's experience along the way of divine union, and Faith is the surest guide to the terminus of this mystical journey. With eyes "white-filmed" from the sacred quest the soul has come forth from the darkness of "The Hidden" unto a state of supernatural enlightenment in which its desires tend unalterably to God. Here, as frequently elsewhere in his works, Canon Sheehan gives Faith full mastery over the intellect and will. The soul becomes Faith's envoy commissioned to ascend to, and to survey the holy place where gleaming worlds circle the throne of God, and to bring hither word as to how He rules.

Cast thine eyes upwards to where the radiant zone Cinctures with studded stars the breast of God, Holds He His sceptred Hand before His throne? Rules He the lightnings with His shepherd's rod?  

From his "high rapture" with its glimpse of God

Paul of Tarsus awoke to record his vision in the borrowed negations of Isaiahs. He even denied to that speculative faculty by which men can conceive impossibilities, the ability to formulate so much as an approach to the glory prepared for us above; but here Faith would have its mandate as effectual as it is imperious and daring. The soul is ordered in to where the song of

...quiring worlds
Leashed from the mighty hand of Him who girdles
His universe with zones of sun-spun light

rises up in an unceasing Sanctus before the throne of God; it is bidden also to notice and to report as to
His glory and His providence.

There can be no merely human interpretation of Faith such as this. It can have no substitute here below, and only One in Heaven— the Vision of God. It cannot exist in the soul apart from holiness, and it includes the natural childlike intimacy of the Hebrew prophets with Jehovah and the reverential simplicity and familiarity of the Apostles with Christ. It was of course in the soul of Patrick when he refused to leave his cave in Lough Derg unless his penance should be accepted and his pleading heard. The old saint's

prayer prevailed. "Fides manebit" in letters of light was written across the midnight skies. But the Faith that made mystics of the Celtic saints has come down unimpaired through the centuries. Barbara Wilson possessed it "in its highest intensity" when ready for sacrifice she stood at midnight before the "High Altar and its Tabernacle" and answered the voice of "the Unseen" by a sacrificial vow that stopped the Thrones in "their adoring flight" around the altar and made the Heart of Christ beat faster "under the accidents of His great Sacrament."

It was just as surely in the heart of the old woman who stared with unseeing eyes at the darkness in which the Sacred Host was soon to be elevated near her, while she was getting ready in the poetry of Gaelic prayer her morning welcome for His coming; for she was of that "mighty race...who lived by Faith and their vision of eternity."

St. John of the Cross teaches that a soul earnestly desirous of divine union, "receives a Faith so

clear as to trace most distinctly certain divine glimpses of the majesty of God...and turns to Faith for its most vivid vision..." With manifest and well authorized trust, therefore, in "dark pure" Faith, Canon Sheehan gives us "The Revealed." In one sense it is the antithesis of "The Hidden;" in another sense it is its explanation and fulfilment. In both poems, though by somewhat different means, the problems of human life find in Faith their only satisfactory solution. While occasional light-rays short and sudden dart here and there through "The Hidden," there are in the other poem wide spaces of deep shadow, obscurenesses dark enough in which the soul seems to dread the "senses' subsidence" and to waver before the great task is accomplished. Conscious of its lowly state, it wonders how it can aspire to those things granted only to saints and seers. It begins its supernatural career on the high plane indicated in the third part of the poem by attacking directly the moral and intellectual hindrances that crossed its path in "The Hidden." It turns away from vain philosophies; awaits God's time in patience; it attains humility in awareness and avowal of its own lowliness; it acknowledges its innate powerlessness to reach God, and its unwor-

thiness to see Him.

...How shall one poor, broken wing
Touch the high altitudes of the Holy Mount?
How shall the wavering jet of faith upspring
To fill its tulip-chalice at His fount?

Hereunto Faith has been a sort of sovereign, a
guide and preceptor for the intellect, a tamer of the
fancy, a "High-Priest" who could enter the Shechinah
wherein the "presence cloud" concealed or unveiled the
Face of God. It has been spoken of as the soul's ruler
who could issue orders and demand obedience. Now the
poet alters the metaphor, and Faith becomes an unsteady
jet forced upward from an earthly spring, hardly high
enough to re-fill its tiny chalice at the fountains of
the river of Life.

An interpretation of this involves the primary
principles of Catholic mysticism, but it is not beyond
reach nor unwarranted.

In the realms of mystical relationship, there
are two chief actors, God and the soul; and two conse­
quent essentials, namely: special grace, and the soul's
free co-operation with it. Now such Faith as shows the
"Face of the All-Perfect One" and stands where the foot­
stool of God "stretches thro' the cloud," or fears not
the "deep-bowed faces" of the "tremulous choirs" that

sing around His throne, is employed in this poem as a symbol of manifold benefits for which the grateful soul confesses its indebtedness of God. Furthermore it may be taken as a similitude under which divine gifts perfect themselves in the life of the mystic. As has been said elsewhere, Faith of this kind entails all virtues, and is coexistent with every grace. The "wavering jet", however, typifies the soul's humble estimate of its own efforts to attain mystical union; and the upleap to fill its "tulip chalice" at God's fountain represents the soul's inborn need of His perpetual aid, and its native inability to match His wide munificence.

Certain obscurities in "The Hidden" are, as one might expect, cleared up in "The Revealed." The positive pain of mind and body with which the nun alone in her white-walled cell stared at the figure on the Cross, blood-covered, insensate and insensible to her prayer, is obviously softened down, or compensated for in "The Revealed." In midnight darkness "pierced by one red star," a priest stood at the altar and petitioned in vain for the help which only God could give. "The Revealed" finds him at the altar again, within his hand the "white Circle of the Host."
Here he understands that trials in darkness and loneliness are but a small price to pay for this touch of God. The nun is back too, watching in "almost complete blessedness" the "silent gate" of the Tabernacle and the blood-stained Figure that seems not heedless now. The Crucifix and the Host are the two great magnets of the soul on its mystical journey; and

...Who shall say beneath that thorn-crowned head God's eyes flash not from out their film's eclipse? And who shall say, beneath the mystic Bread Gleams not, to Faith, Christ's white apocalypse?  

It is in the light of "Christ's white apocalypse" that "The Revealed" makes its most sacred revelations. From the moment in which the soul denies to the tomb the right or power to "narrow in its grooves our destinies", it believes and knows that immortality is not bestowed in vain. It prepares for a new and higher revelation—the great condescension by which God comes to live among men. Then there is a glimpse of a scene on the banks of a Syrian river, a sloping place not far from where the highways of Galaad and Moab meet. The "scaled and soiled" fishermen look on with "visage bold" and "blank unconscious stare" at the white-descended Dove that

Hovers with gleaming breast and wings outspread
In all the rapture of the Triune Love

to sanction and bear witness to that Baptismal rite from which the Jordan flows on blest forevermore.

Across the valley northward and to west the winds are lifting a veil of mist from the brow of Thabor, and then the mountain top grows bright with glory. But the glory vanishes, and the mountain mists come back for...

...all the joy Transfiguration wrought
Pales with a sudden splendor and grows wan
And Faith assumes what the far vision brought.10

The Humanity of our Lord seems to be the intense reality set forth in "The Revealed." This revelation is as necessary as it is suitable, because the sacred Humanity of a Divine Person "is the grand secret told by God to the world."11

The mystic of Avila understood this well. She ventures not a step within her Interior Castle, nor a step on her mystical way without leaning for support on the sacred Humanity of Christ. Such self diffidence is great wisdom, as she proves from the example of Catholic mystics at their best, namely: St. Bernard, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Anthony of Padua and St. Catherine of Siena. Much of


her autobiography is taken up with what Christ is and must be to the true mystic, for the spiritual favors bestowed upon mystics must come as she says through "the hands of this most sacred humanity....I have known this truth by experience, she says and besides our Lord himself has told me so."

"The Revealed" is, therefore, a mystical poem in which the soul not only seeks but finds God and establishes with Him as close a union as can be formed here on earth. It shows too that Canon Sheehan's mystical theology revolves around the Eucharistic Presence in our Tabernacles, and that he considers the soul's union with God proportionate to its intensity of Faith, and its appreciation of this great Sacrament. Dom S. Louismet is with him in this respect. He says:

...To the eyes of the mystic the death of our Lord is a never ending reality and actuality...on our Altars and...on the Altar of Heaven,...and the mystic feels himself caught up in it, and a part of it, now and forever. 13

A few critical remarks by Father Heuser on the poems in Cithara Mea justify the opinion that "The Revealed" is a good example of what mystical writers term

12. Life of St. Theresa, 200.

"introversion", an act by which the soul finds God within itself. In this case the soul comes also unto the full attainment of all that human life can offer in the earnest which is given of eternal blessedness to be. The soul

...finds the realization of all promise here when the "...dream of death in waking day expires."14

The dream that dies in the waking day is of course mortal life fading away in the dawn of eternity. This poem is symbolic of the author’s Faith. Canon Sheehan sees the "key to every mystery" in "Christ’s white Apocalypse" or in the light of eternity.

But the last word of the last line of the seventy-fifth stanza bids one believe that the poet-priest who wrote it had in mind his country’s unfaltering devotion to the Sacrifice of the Mass. The abbey-ruins of his native Munster daily proclaim that fealty. The altar, the priest and the Sacred Host are Ireland’s mystical inheritance, and any price demanded for that is but a "transient cost". The "Sibyl of the Seas" holds and shall hold her gift of God.

CHAPTER VI

IN THE GARDEN OF THE KING

Call me once more! Hush every clamorous bird!
Hush, 0 my beating heart, for this one word!
...Once more! Be silent, 0 ye restless stars!
The shadow of a whisper from my love debars!
...Once more! It cannot be. He was asleep
There where the lilies to the night winds weep;
And yet the secret thrill bids me rejoice,
Like light's first murmur from the quickening voice.

The King does heed her pleading and calls Thirza
by name. She recognizes His voice, and all that her
heart can feel of joy is summed up in the one word,
"Rabboni".

In this manner ends at dawn and out in the wil-
derness the poem which began at the "noontide of night"
near the garden of spices to which Thirza has come hum-
ble and penitent to be reconciled to the King. Of the
thirty-seven poems which Canon Sheehan's *Cithara Mea*
wakens to sweetness from their "slumbering strain",
this last is the most mystical. It resembles somewhat
in its setting and sentiment the "Song of the Soul and
its Bridegroom" by St. John of the Cross; for here also

the night search is so steeped in desolation that the soul breaks out into conscious complainings of the seeming apathy of the Bridegroom; and it longs for death:

0 that Thou the clouds would'st scatter
That between us darkly lie;
Show Thy face, and in the beauty
Of that vision let me die.

The desert, the darkness, the dawning, the slowness of God's revelation and the pain of the long quest are common to both poems, yet "Thirza" is not an attempted imitation of the Spanish Song; it makes its own peculiar disclosure of great spiritual beauty, for behind its poetic symmetry and music there are evident the holiest aspirations of the soul.

Furthermore "Thirza" is oriental in manner and mood. The same may be said of its imagery, its diction and subtleness. One may safely assert that the spiritual quest herein recorded did not take place by the cold seas of the North. Their thunders would dull the fine sense that fears even the "shadow of a whisper". The restlessness of the stars could hardly be disquieting on shores where the ocean keeps tumbling all night. Lilies might weep to the winds (it is true) in the vale

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of Adare or Avoca, but gardens of balm imply (topographically at least) the Syrian side of the Levant. There, too, are to be found those indwelling inconsistencies of character which have marked oriental peoples since the days when babes were made a "holocaust....for a winged Numidian beast."

The spirits that taunt Thirza make their cruel charges with stoical coldness and unconcern, and yet these reproaches swing to a rhythm that throbs like a heart in the triumph of vengeance:

Did we not see thee at noontide of night Stabbing its sable with spears of the light Kindled at feet of Astarte, the Queen?... Thou could'at not endure that the darkness should mourn The death of thy God as he passed to the bourne Sepulchred to white resurrection of day. Get thee back! get thee back! to thy vestal display

Perjury, idolatry, ingratitude, demon-worship in the "brown air of Shoel", and wanton rejection of Christ are the chief accusations which heap up her grief, but Thirza scorns each imputation with the ready certainty of one who knows that she is not only guiltless, but that she is the object of the King's special love and

I know ye not, ye voices of the night!
I only know ye do not speak for Him
Who hath espoused me in his royal love...
Lo! his ring on my third finger gleaming!...
Lo! his white pearls on my bosom streaming!...
Who chaseth back the shadows that encompass,
And sweeteneth the myrrh chalice of his sadness...

I shall not answer your thrice bitter words;
My secret the King's secret to myself!
He alone shall waken my soul's chords.
Should He rise in anger dire, to smite me,...
Only I should pass among the shadows...
In the deserts of the world, and their darkness,
Hiding nought, but mindful of his hate.

But her enemies are persistent. New attacks
break down her courage. The weary night quest has
weakened her body. Satan and his angels are assaulting
her soul, while not one word of comfort comes from the
darkness of the "garden trees" near which she knows
the King is hiding.

The desert lies before her, and on the air of
night float the maledictions of her accusers. Despair
and shame are about to seize her soul. She is sinking
down close to

...the gloomy horror of that moat,
Where lie of earth and heaven rejected souls,
And the dread knell of Orcus ever tolls.

5. Ibid, 237.
when in from the desert in the "paling darkness" of the
dawn comes the voice of her beloved Rabboni, and Thirza
is safe with the King.

Some understand this poem to mean the progress
of a soul to Christ. First, the approach is timid. Thirza
speculates as to how He will receive her. The very place
near which she stands—outside the gate of the King's
garden—is symbolic of this timidity. The darkness of
the hour in which her mystical journey begins is equally
symbolic of spiritual trials and uncertainty; but her
generosity is commensurate with her love and with the de­
mands made upon her Faith and confidence. She is deter­
mined to come to Him though she be forced to face hard
paths and to endure much pain along the way. The spears
of sharp thorns shall wound her feet, and the white spines
of the cactus shall pierce her hands to blood; but the
hands of Christ shall heal her hurts and wipe away the
blood stains.

Thou shalt take my white hand— it is whiter than thine,
For thine shall be stained with my rubies of blood,—
And down the dim aisles, interlaced with the vines,—
Shall we walk in the dawn, in the day, in the night,
Where no time shall diminish the strength of our Love?7

Here her resolution receives its first challenge. The "Voices of the Night" arise to rebuke her; the remembrance of past infidelities brings shame to her heart; the consciousness of her unworthiness impedes her progress; there is a cloud hanging above the soul of Thirza, for the "Voices of the Night" multiply their reproaches. The loveliness of earth, represented by Astarte, green fields and flowering things, symbolized by Thammuz, were forms of creature worship to which Thirza was prone; penitence cannot shield her now from the unpitying spirits who denounce her past life. The accusers would ask how a soul so enmeshed by the love of pleasure could seek now the hard ways of self-conquest and sacrifice for the single purpose of union with One whose head was "thorn-crowned" and "sceptre-stricken," and whose beauty was marred by men. Thirza's spiritual strength is about to break, but Christ is waiting for her "among the shadows." His grace grows within her soul until her confidence in Him is fully restored. At last dawn is breaking above the desert sands. A blessed voice is calling. It is the voice of Christ "silver-toned as of a thousand rills." Thirza hears, and answers, and comes to where the Beloved is waiting.
Orby Shipley answers affirmatively the following interesting question:

Is it permissible to read into a poet's inspirations...meanings...which either were, or might have been present to the poet's mind at the supreme instant of conception?

Without being overbold with the permission which this affirmation allows, one may classify "Thirza" as an allegorical poem representing in a highly mystical manner the repentance and final reconciliation of the Jewish people with Christ, the King. The poem seems to lend itself to this interpretation, and Thirza comes close to making the admission. Her unrepressed anxiety as to the outcome and manner of their meeting stamps her as one who seeks more than ordinary forgiveness for more than ordinary infidelity. Crime there is somewhere and the stain of blood fresh upon it, with apprehension, uncertainty and shame lurking beside it. Thirza had seen from her midnight balcony the torch lights glimmer through the olive trees at the hour of His arrest; she had heard unheedingly the yells that broke the silence of the "City of Peace" as the lictors went forth to prepare His cross. Now she hushes her beating heart that no murmured whisper of His voice be...

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lost upon the "seas of her sorrows," but fear takes possession of her soul and, unlike the Christian mystic, she allows distrust of His clemency and love to embitter her yearning for His pardon and mercy. There is painful uncertainty in her question:

Wilt thou rise to bid welcome and hail to my soul?  
Wilt thou pity my weakness and bind the bruised feet,  
And stain thy white fingers with rubies of blood?\(^9\)

Penance has no terrors for her. She is willing to make reparation—to give the blood of repentance for the Blood that redeemed her, and down the rough highway of the ages she brings many a wound in her bleeding feet, in her long quest for His forgiveness. Her eagerness for His "welcome and hail" is a clue to the story of their long estrangement, and it gives a hint at her dread of an unreal or unready conciliation. The accusing spirits with "thrice bitter words" try to deter this "vestal of death" from seeking the "pavilions of the King," \(^{10}\)

Lest the fires of his wrath should upleap to smite her who had tears for Thammuz and adoration for Astarte.

The anguish of Thirza is deepening to despair.

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10. Ibid, 238.
She calls upon the "Precursor and prophet of the Lord" to lead her to the King; but a voice comes out of the night reminding her of her one-time complete and formal rejection of Him.

Would'st thou know Him?
...sceptre-stricken, gyved and fettered,
When thou seest, thou'lt reject Him once again.\textsuperscript{11}

This is Thirza's Gethsemane, and here in the loneliness of midnight she makes her final petition for mercy where she knows Him to be hidden among the garden shadows.

Her prayer is humble; her love is sincere, her contrition heartfelt. She will wait at His portals until He opens them to her, and then her generosity will outdo that of the Saint of Magdala whose fragrant wastefulness was to be "a memory of her" unto all days. For the "purple cloak" which mocked her King's claim to royalty, Thirza would robe Him in silks of purest Tyrian dyes.

All the frankincense of Araby I would burn,  
All the purple of sea-cities I would bring,  
To bathe in sweetest fragrance His forehead  
To drape in richest royalty my King.\textsuperscript{12}

Still the King heeds not, nor answers her. This indifference and the malignant upbraidings of the spirits

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid, 244.  
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid, 240.
of night destroy the last vestige of Thirza's courage.
Her wretchedness is complete.

Hopeful I came; despairing I depart;
Break forth, thou Rose of blood again, and draw
The fountains of my wrecked and broken heart.
Before me is the desert...13

But there is a light above the eastern mountains. It
is whitening the desert sands. It is His mercy dawning
over her despair. The day of her peace has come and
with it the knowledge that

Love is all the retribution He demands. 14

"Thirza" represents the "chosen people" coming,
or brought to Christ, and the poem is mystical both as
an analogy and as a prophecy.

CHAPTER VII

POEMS "OBSCURE AND MYSTICAL"

Then did I see in my vision the pictured angelic Face;
Dreamed by genius and Faith in the swift, sweet rapture of thought,—
The visioned perfection of Heaven
The prophetic fate of our race
Eyes enclosed and adoring with light from far spaces brought. 1

The poem from which this stanza is taken was introduced at the twenty-third session of the "Sunetoi" and characterized as obscure and mystical. The author would abide by the decision of his listeners as to whether or not the poem had any real claim to intelligibility.

It is mystical, and vague enough in places, but it is not unintelligible. The first fourteen stanzas may be understood to mean the confusion and moral degradation which blighted human happiness prior to the coming of Christ, and the sway which Satan held unhindered over the souls of men.

Nations became the sport of the demon-gods they worshipped when they bent before speechless idols

...Gigantic 'gainst backgrounds of blackness
Thunder-bearing and turbid and crass. 2

2. Ibid., 232.
It may also be considered symbolical of intellectual pride grown insolent, having poisoned the fountains of knowledge by false philosophies. Souls thirsting for truth are led to broken cisterns or are forced to drink from tainted vessels of sophistry or irreligion:

Their lips parched and parted in sunder their anguish did slake
From goblets half fulvid with gold and half rubied in flame.
And their lips from the twain-chased goblet Their twain-tainted colors did take.
And fear followed fear in the snake-shapes of horror and shame.3

The second part, nineteen stanzas long, is in allegorical accordance with the first, whichever view be taken of its meaning. Only the dawning of Christ's day could scatter the shadows that lay upon the lives of men and restore a fallen race its "lost beatitude"; and only in the sunlight of His mercy could souls see the clear fountains of truth that rise and flow onward to unending life.

Spreading the plumage of light far down through the breaking skies,4 the "Light of the World" came to repair the evils which unbelief and misbelief had occasioned amongst men and to win the willing assent of the human mind to divine truths.

The "plumes of the dawn" glittered with the "pearls and gold" of His great mercy. His brightness was to clear away permanently the shadows that bounded the pagan wastes of nearly forty centuries, and was to bring hope to hearts as dull and dark as the

...wings that sweep through Gehennah. 5

The purpose of the poem is to show the necessity of Revelation, and of supernatural Faith; and here, too, do the elements of mysticism assert themselves anew; for the soul of the poet spreads its wings for something more exalted than mere poetic flight—"the mystical ascension to the Highest, where the ways of God do not need justification and the ways of men are forgotten."

Genius and Faith, rapt in "swift, sweet" thought, contemplate in the light which they bring from "spaces afar"

The visioned perfection of Heaven 7 and listening to the music of stars newly wakened by the "Sons of Light", Genius and Faith bow down to worship and adore, silent with wonder or with voices of praise sweet as "spheral song".

Yet the vision and its glory are not complete. They

5. Ibid, 234.
never shall be while the soul is entrammelled in its tegument of clay. Genius can search afar where shining worlds make their "giant parade" before the Face of God, but it cannot "uncoil them from suns" nor halt the "mighty orb-worlds" that hinder its view; hence there is complaint in the song:

Dark is that Face as yet in the wake of a luminous screen,
Whilst the universe glides in front, marshalled by prophets' rod
Through the deep unchannelled eternities,
Through grooves in the ether serene.
How then shall we ever behold It—this
Throne of the Hidden God?

The answer must be left to Faith, because Faith transcends human genius.

The poems with which The Intellectuals instructed and spiritualized their meetings are (in seven cases at least) truly mystical. They stretch out before the mind worlds wherein the activity of the senses is less needed than that of the soul; they bring within range of the poet's hand beings from realms unseen and show with deeper insight than is proper to the muse...

...imperial visions forecasting the things that be
Like a poet's dreams when he saddens behind an infinite sea.

Father Michael Phelan, S. J., ascribes to Canon

9. Ibid., 27.
Sheehan a sort of spiritual perception so refined as to come quite close to mystical inspiration; and a knowledge of eternal things which would rightly suppose the complete subjugation of soul and sense to the immediate action of God. Were the Canon not given this "ethereal sense", as he himself calls it, he could not have treated of it with such ease and clearness when his "night thoughts" were at their deepest, and the stars were out above the cedars in his "garden enclosed". Surely there were times when he found himself

in Patmos and genius transfused by the light of Faith dared to open its unabashed eyes and pierce even unto the white splendors of the eternal throne.

One such hour there was of sudden and joyful revelation which brought not only a ray from Patmos, but a song from Hebron. Silence was deep on all things around and the white, jasmine stars looked meekly up at their bright namesakes in the sky. His hortus conclusus was growing dusky in the shadows when Canon Sheehan, priest and bard of our Lady, wrapped his soul in the "sanctities of night" that he might hear aright every "bell-tone" of her "Magnificat" and sing again in a great poem of 100 stanzas the "sacred syllables" of an anthem which the

eager world awaited ever since Eve had deserted Eden.

Now will I listen, hushed in every sense;  
I will withdraw my soul from light intense,  
And wrap it round in sanctities of night.  
And I will watch thy sacred syllables,  
Tolled on the air like peals of fairy bells;  
And I will think and teach thy words aright.\(^7\)

So well does he keep promise with our Lady and  
so sacred is his great poem in her honor, that reverence  
must pardon the necessity which dares to comment on it  
here. \textit{The Canticle of the 'Magnificat'} by Canon Sheehan  
is the last and best gift of his genius to Mary, and its  
mystical elements are manifold.

The "Magnificat" itself, Mary's inspired song,  
is by nature mystical; its motives and allusions are mys­
tical; it is a prophecy as well as a song of praise and  
as such truly mystical; time and place and occasion are  
all in this one instance, circumstances that abound in  
mystical elements; and the Canticle in which these are  
re-sung gives formal assurance that its author was a  
mystic. Five times does the "Prologue", fearless it would  
seem of contradiction, attest plainly to the mystical  
experiences of Canon Sheehan. Here indeed Faith and  
Genius unite to lift the veil not for a "vision from  
among the dead" but for the sight of a Woman gloriously  
living. And if a question could be admitted into such

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11. Canon Sheehan, \textit{The Canticle of the 'Magnificat'},  
\(^7\).
a work as this paper attempts, it might stand as follows:

Who will discredit the earnest declaration of a poet to the Lady from whom he has received his dowry of song? -- or who would dispute the sincerity or truthfulness of these lines:

And when thy form did glimmer and grow pale,
Thy angel dropped his consecrated veil,
And still in sleep thy face I did divine? 12

The sleep which is signified here must be some other form of sense-suspension, for the first line of this stanza shows him "slumberless".

Since the warriors of Queen Scotia laid her bones to rest in Glaunscoheen—a wild glen that still claims Scotia's name among the mountains of Kerry, Ireland has had no queen but our Lady. She could most easily have granted a glimpse of her "shy, sweet beauty" to one who dedicated not only his genius but his life to her service, and who crowned her in Mariae Corona as Erin's Queen and Mistress. This tribute to her praise is of all his works regarded as the greatest, every page of which "exhales the sweet odor of the Holy Spirit".

Therefore, it might impugn or dishonor his loyalty to her to doubt him when he sings:

And often in the wild and windy dawn,
The sable skirts of night not yet withdrawn,
I saw thy form shine through my lattice bars;
I knew it from thy beauty shy and sweet,
From the curved scythed crescent round thy feet;
The sun thy vesture; and thy crest the stars.14

The "Prologue" is a consecration of his poetic gift to Mary. It is an acknowledgment of his debt to her for the swift bright glances of her beauty. It is humble with the reiteration of his spiritual needs. The last fine stanza reveals his soul in partial ecstasy while Mary's Son is near in the gleaming Host. The things of time sink out of sight, for the music of her "Magnificat" tolls across the world from the vale of Hinnim and brings to his listening heart the rapture of her song.—

Dumb as the white-haired priest that listeneth,
Reverent as the awed Elizabeth,
Silent as stars or angels shall I be,
As when the white Host gleameth 'gainst the dawn
Mine eyes are sealed my very soul withdrawn,
So shall I harken to thy prophecy.15

Sixty stanzas of the Canticle explain and amplify the meaning of Mary's verses from the moment her soul magnifies God till the

Day far-destined breaks on Salem's steeps.16

14. Canon Sheehan, The Canticle of The 'Magnificat'.
15. Ibid, 8.
But the "Epilogue" is creation's challenge to the masters of human song to return once more and re-learn the art of poetry at Mary's feet. It is a call to prophets and sibyls, and to the "shades of Grecian song", to the blind bard long sleeping under "the palms of Chios" and to that Augustine of the Greeks, the mystic Plato, supposed to have learned the Messianic prophecies from the lips of Jeremias. The "Magnificat" of a Jewish maiden can teach them all more than their wisdom could ever fathom or their poetic genius could ever reach because it is inspired by Him for Whom

The mightiest Titans of philosophy
May pile in vain their clouds and canopy
The footstool of His feet with wreaths of gold;
But the embattled cloud-cities that they raise
Turn into tapestried tents of praise
Whence burst orchestral music, tempest-souled.

Moreover, it is in the final stanzas of the "Epilogue" that Canon Sheehan estimates by means of unsurpassed similes the musical, poetical and spiritual values of the "Magnificat". It is the world's "one immortal hymn" for which the audience detained in Limbo would shiver the bars of their prison

Not for delight of freedom but to hear
In its strong accents tremulous but clear,
Presage and promise of the morning-star.18

17. Ibid., 21.
18. Ibid., 31.
Each similitude brings its proper suggestion of mystery, and when the music of Mary's Canticle is declared

Like to the melody of the sons of God,
When morning-stars their early cycles trod,
Each sang to other on his pilgrimage,

the mind goes back to the morning of creation when young stars set out singing, with bright faces turned towards their yet untrodden orbits.

But the eighty-eighth stanza gives a great scene as well as a great symphony. The harmony of angelic adoration was broken by revolt, and angels clashed their flaming swords around the throne of God. The chorus of the conquerors resounded from the battlements on high, for Mary's "Magnificat" (long foreknown in Heaven) became the "star-song" of the Seraphim against Satan's "non-serviam".

The arch-enemy of the Incarnation was cast down, and the chivalry of Heaven leaped to the defence of a Woman and her Child. Fitly is it sung thus:

Like paeons of archangels on the height
Whence Satan's hosts had leaped into the night,
And trumpet spake to trumpet on the towers
The battle-cry of Michael, "Who is like

19. Ibid. 32.
Unto our God? thy wondrous song doth strike
Its bell-tones on the Aëons and the hours.20

The "Magnificat", first sung to evening, has made a conquest of the vesperal hour and in vesperal silence

...from the starry lyres
Quiv'ring with echoes all their lambent fires,
Fall fainting dews of music on the sea;
And the hushed envious night wind comes and wakes
Through olive groves and dim umbrageous brakes
A stammered echo to this litany.21

There are also strewn here and there through the "Epilogue" beautifully delicate allusions to the fulfillment of the prophecy concerning the "wide orbit" of Mary's blessedness. The generations that verify her prediction prolong her "mystic melody" until this old earth, the sunless and forlorn "theatre of sin and dole" becomes the envy of the "infant planets" whirling sinless by. Where burning skies pour "red-lava-tides" on the Nitrian sands, the evening song of our Lady ascends in praise. It is heard in Moslem tents where the fallen Arab begs mercy for "Miriam's" sake and is granted it in her name. Her blessedness is acknowledged where the white-haired, white-winged winds of the North lash black surges hoarse on desolate shores, as well as where the mountains and islands of classic memories stand mirrored in the Aegean:

20. Ibid, 32.
Where the white monks of Athos dream and dwell,
Lingering o'er lost traditions, as a shell
In its curved caverns holds the whisp'ring seas;
Thy song is heard along the dizzy heights
Where in the past wild Sophoclean flights
Were wafted o'er the breakers and the breeze.

The **Canticle of the 'Magnificat'** by Canon Sheehan is not ended yet. The part which has reached us began with an appeal to Mary for the gift of song, while its author stood listening at evening to the "sacred syllables" of our Lady's great prophecy. Neither is this Canticle "a wavering rhyme" woven by the lowliest in the "bardic train", as the Canon in his humility would designate it. It is a great poem inspired by Faith and sung by genius. Every stanza "touches a lute" to the melody of divine mystery.

When the last Host consecrated on earth shall find its lasting home in the heart of Mary, this master-song of Canon Sheehan shall begin anew. There is a belief in Ireland that this second Canticle (which is to be unending) began with the bell-tolls of the Angelus on the evening of Rosary Sunday, 1913, when his genius was "upgathered with the soul", and at the feet of Mary and her Son, his Faith gave way to Vision.

And when the last Host consecrate on earth
Shall find its home eterne where God found birth--

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22. **Ibid., 33.**
The crystal depths of thy most holy Heart,—
May this weak voice of mine uplifted be
Throughout the silence of eternity 23
Upheld by Love, thy love and grace impart.

On the face and forehead of Dante Sheehan's works the mysticism has set its seal, unmistakable on that "particular stem" upon the axis of day.

His own words inform us, and his writings are a living witness of his claim to mysticism. The above cited poems, chosen for the personal genius of their material value, are not the sole examples of his mystical nature. Every book in existential line is a crystal by a direct observation of spiritual realities, and all have three—
"She Lawyers", the "Smiles of Allah" and "To the East"—are in a greater or less degree really mystical. Two of these three, "The Lawyers" has its play in a mystical scene in the East, there is a poet with an mystical song. Shade Sheehan's verse is less than his great prose works "receive theirFor the light of the

23. Ibid, 36.
SUMMARY

'Tis the doubt and dread
That clamors for assurance or for proof.
In the high forehead and the regal front
Of day there shineth one particular star
Which needs no purchased eloquence to prove
That there it is.¹

On the face and forehead of Canon Sheehan's works
the mystical has set its sign, unmistakable as that "par-
ticular star" upon the brow of day.

His own words inform us, and his writings are a
lasting witness of his claims to mysticism. The above
cited poems, chosen for the persuasiveness of their mys-
tical values, are not the sole examples of his mystical
works; every poem in Cithara Mea is a symbol or a direct
utterance of spiritual realities, and all save three--
"The Lascars", the "Swallows of Allah" and "In the Mart",
are to a greater or less degree really mystical. Even
of these three, "The Lascars" has its mist on a mystical
sea, and in "In the Mart" there is a poet with his mystical
song. Canon Sheehan's verses no less than his great prose
works "receive their crowning glory from the light of the
supernatural thrown over all. Every page exhales a spiri-
tual aroma".²

¹. Canon Sheehan, Cithara Mea, 137.
Although the "umbrage and gloom" of dusky forest-trees had a narrowing influence on his mind, and tram-melled his spirit to a degree, it is from the cedar-shaded walks of his garden that his highest mystical thoughts come out to us. A mystic he is, and a true one, not merely by virtue of his ability to analyze or explain mystical tendencies, or to speculate regarding the origin of certain mystical beliefs, but by actual experience in mystical life—the direct result of extraordinary Faith and of great personal holiness. That he can and does give the philosophical exposition of the "swift perception of the infinite" is quite plain from many passages in that mystical book of his, begun under "the eye of God looking through the interminable azure" and finished in a manner mystical enough where the moonlight throws the shadow of the cross upon the graves of "the beautiful, mysterious dead" who sleep undisturbed in cities silent with the peace of eternity.

Section XX of Under the Cedars and Stars interprets certain phases of mystical vision wherein the soul gets a glimpse beyond the "shadowy intermediary of sense", as the immediate action of God on souls of His choice; and

3. Canon Sheehan, Under the Cedars and Stars, 5.
this interpretation agrees doctrinally (and almost in words) with the explanation given by the masters of mysticism, whose teachings have been referred to for guidance in the preparation of this thesis. After studying "The Revealed" and The Canticle of the 'Magnificat' one may aver that Canon Sheehan's brief but adequate commentary on this "penetration of the spirit behind the veil" is due not so much to "philosophical intuition" as to the fulness of his own spiritual life.

Again it shall be said: The mystic death of Christ daily on the Altar was the center round which the life and literature of Canon Sheehan untiringly moved, and those poems "aloof and mystical" with their strange, deep music in Cithara Mea are the outpouring of uncommon Faith in our Lord's Sacramental Presence. Significant is this sentence of his: "And He is with us so long as the eternal Sacrifice shall be offered--our Emmanuel, God with us forever." Faith colored whatever he touched, and brought light from eternity upon the ordinary scenes around him and the common occurrences of daily life.

In that fine paragraph which discusses philosophically and theologically the limitations of the soul im-

5. Ibid, 18.

6. Ibid, 121.
prisoned in its house of clay, he points out and decries the errors that permeate modern literature, and that have become the favorite theories of certain poets who rightly or wrongly claim for themselves and their poetry the qualifications of the mystical. He gives good reasons why any form of spiritual yearning or desire based on pantheism, or on the old pagan doctrine of pre-existence is less mystical than it is superstitious; for true mysticism can be found only in the soul that has reduced "the life-giving doctrines and ethics of Christianity to practice".

He does not "strain his stature" to announce this truth. It is the teaching of all acknowledged Catholic mystics. St. Bernard is so insistent on conformity on conduct to the principles of Faith that his mystical doctrines "involved a moral discipline which...one seems to recognize in the Exercitia of St. Ignatius."

Faith was for Canon Sheehan the source of inspiration of his mystical works. In its light the world unseen was as real and as near as his native town on the Avondhu. He judged human happenings in their relations to eternity. It was on those "beetling crags" above the shining sea "that swelled and made no sound" that he was able to view

7. Ibid., 90.

and review in its proper perspective men’s "tapestry of thought" and prophet-like to await and watch

...the unrolling of the scroll
That Time, God's child, is stealing from God's hand,

and it was there, too, he learned like Dante's "second Beatrice" the spiritual value of the great golden key which is "Charity", and of that other one of silver, which is marked "Prayer".

As if he were shy of the word "mysticism" he used it not at all in the spiritual quests recorded in "The Hidden" and in "The Revealed". He permitted it in The Canticle of the 'Magnificat' but only adjectively to dignify or intensify supernatural and poetic beauty. Yet these poems express more of the truly mystical than do the "half-beliefs" of those so-called mystic poets whose Opium dreams and Orient reveries

And all the twilight visions of the East

might well have been imported from the Kutab Mosque.

Canon Sheehan wrote his literary works in a land ancient in Faith and traditionally spiritual. W. Y. Evans Wentz is almost certain that no western peoples are so deeply concerned with eternal interests as the Irish people; that they study more earnestly the problems of life

9. Canon Sheehan, Cithara Mea, 221
10. Ibid, 122.
and death and have a "mystic consciousness" of a supernatural and sacred destiny compared with which this mortal life and all external nature are only as a "symbol or an echo". This belief he sums up when he says: "Of all European lands, I venture to say that Ireland is the most mystical."

The impress which the consciousness of supernatural realities has left upon the Irish character is often attested to by men who are in other matters utterly indifferent or inimical to Irish interests. Mr. Harold Begbie's investigations, which it was hoped would do much to discredit those "wild Celts" clamoring for freedom, astonished the London Chronicle and the world as well.

In the South where Catholic influence is supreme the people are almost enchanting in their sweetness of disposition, entirely admirable in the beauty and contentment of their domestic life, wonderful beyond all other nations in the wholesomeness and sanctity of their chastity... The charm which every traveler feels in the south of Ireland is the character of the Irish people, and my investigations forced me to the judgment that this character is the culture of Irish Catholicism. My problem lay, therefore, in squaring the admiration I felt for these gracious people with my detestation of the Church which has guarded Irish character from the dawn of its history.12

The Saturday Review, quoted by Father Heuser,

a like complimentary tribute to this "peculiar people" whose past is "...an Island...with an eternal chaunt rising to Heaven from old abbeys."

Of this spiritual inheritance Canon Sheehan received his share. His lot was cast in holy places...

...where Life's great tidal voice Lisps to the far eternal shore,

and the years of his priesthood were passed mostly among the Irish poor from whom the "veiled eternities" hide few secrets. Those Druidic legends which he knew and often used could not taint or diminish his love for those saints whom he canonized again one by one in Mariae Corona.

Through the fairy haunts of Desmond he often wandered far, and brought back in "peals of fairy-bells" one gracious simile for the "sacred syllables" of Mary's "Magnificat". The signally Celtic pages of his books sparkle here and there with glints of fairy gold and gems from Cleena's crown. The spell of Irish solitudes had its way with him from boyhood. But the sea was for him a symbol of eternity. He laved his senses in its


Great baptismal wave
Poured from the Godhead's affluence

and he kept the barque of his soul always moored upon its shore.

To Canon Sheehan as Catholic mystic and man of Faith there could be no trifling with such things as the "soul of the world", or the spirit of the hills, or the more poetically conceived spirit of the sea which the ancients glorified with the quality of paternity. Neither did he divine a god in every stray cloud that might chance to enmesh the sunlight in a golden net. Nature was for him the manuscript of God, proclaiming from wide open pages the might and order and beauty

Of Him, who, throned afar holds deathless watch O'er all His plastic hands have deftly made.

In hours and places of silence he communed not with nature, but with God, and for greater facility in such sacred intercourse he sought solitude and the "silence of seas". When he knelt at the "rosary hour" in his chapel or walked under the cedars in his "grove of Academe", he could say with his own Geoffrey Austin:

Behold I see Thee now in the light of setting suns and hear Thee in the whispers of the wind, ...but most of all do I feel Thee in the sacred

15. Ibid, 207.
silence of Thy Tabernacles, and unutterable things breathe round about my soul from behind the mystic veils of Thy sacramental Presence.\textsuperscript{17}

and oftener than Charlie Travers did he walk with the Master and St. John on the sands of the lake-shore, and the words he wrote for us he had learned from them in their "evening walks by the Sea of Galilee".\textsuperscript{18}

Sweetened by the incense of Heaven and beautiful from their contact with God, the ideas and thoughts of Canon Sheehan make a more potent appeal than that of mere literature. They are a challenge to our appreciation of spiritual values and they question man's sensitiveness to things supernatural as did Brendan of old and his seamen back from the Isles of the Blest: "Nonne cognoscitis in odore vestimentorum nostrorum quod in Paradiso Domini fuimus?"\textsuperscript{19}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{17} Canon Sheehan, \textit{The Triumph of Failure}, 383.
  \item \textsuperscript{18} \textit{Ibid}, 321.
  \item \textsuperscript{19} John Colgan, \textit{Acta Sanctorum Hiberniae}, 722, (Note in \textit{Poetry and Song of Ireland}, 314.)
\end{itemize}
CONCLUSION

This paper concludes as it began by the declaration that divine Faith is the only sure basis for true mysticism. Edward Ingram Watkin has it so, and with him stand Dom S. Louismet, O. S. B., and "the glorious phalanx of Jesuit mystics whom H. Bremond has called the 'vanguard of the Society of Jesus'"

Father Faber is of the opinion that conformity to God's will is the safest road to the mystical life; but such conformity is of course the outcome of great Faith. Speaking of our Lady, he is emboldened to say: "The will of God was her sole mystical theology".

St. John of the Cross, many times in his most important mystical book, expressed the belief that God unites Himself to the human soul primarily by Faith which he declares is "the proper and adequate means of union".

Especially significant is this statement written as it was in a Spanish dungeon when the magistracy of

21. Rev. Frederick W. Faber, Foot of the Cross, 421.
the Inquisition was testing with unwarranted rigor the quality and extent of the Saint's great Faith.

It is to be regretted that Canon Sheehan's most mystical book, the one which fully exhibits its author's Faith, *The Triumph of Failure*, has received in this thesis only a chance attention. The "swift diurnal march" of time outran the opportunity for intelligent consideration of the mystical elements all through that work—Charlie Travers, for instance, in his spiritual trance among the mystics of Mount Melleray, or Geoffrey Austin open-eyed at last to the follies he pursued, beaten and conquered now by "the Prince of Ages, the Christ of the Transfiguration and the Apocalypse."

It is not entirely absurd to assert that the author of "The Hidden" and the mystical "Nocturne" is teaching still even from his grave, true mysticism. The Celtic cross above his resting place is in itself the truest symbol of Catholic mysticism which the Irish mind has ever conceived for the expression of Faith. Hewn out of one piece it has three distinct parts and the circle enclosing the cross is an emblem of the eternity and immensity of God. The transverse beam touching the circle at opposite sides represents the adequacy of Redemption and the fulness of the satisfaction

offered to the majesty of God for the sins of men. The cross itself symbolizes the Incarnation and Death of Christ.

Below the cross is the epitaph, a prescript and the Canon's own choice. It seems to epitomize Catholic mysticism as the "Eagle of mystical lore" summed it up and understood it in Patmos, and it gives hope and promise of the Vision in which Faith shall end at last.

"Where dwellest thou, Rabbi?"
And Jesus said,
"Come and See."