THE CATHOLIC ELEMENT IN ENGLISH POETRY

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"Poetry is the soul in vision, in flight, in ecstasy; its charm is tangible only by the soul."¹

This definition of poetry gives the sum total of its essence. Poetry requires soul appreciation. There is something of the spirit in it. According to its mission, it reaches out to take hold of facts spiritual in their nature, and so shapes those facts as to make them more universal in their appeal. For anyone who esteems poetry a mere sentiment, a bubbling over, an efflorescence, a froth of the imagination, there is no message in this form of expression. For them poetry has no stability, no firmness. It is a kind of an ethereal something that lends a passing charm.

Sometimes poetry is interpreted as having its beginning in natures that are imaginative, over sensitive, and carried away by fleeting moments of joy, enthusiasm, sorrow, spiritual emotion. But this is erroneous. Poetry is an inspiration; it is the music of the soul; it is higher than art. It is the finer way that the mind has of registering the reactions of the senses to the beauties of nature;

of representing the rebound of the mind in the contemplation of Infinite Beauty; and of expressing the joy of the soul in its possession of the Beatific Vision. Truly "poetry is the soul in vision, in flight, in ecstasy." Without the unfolding of the spirit, poetry would be fettered, tied to earth. It could not rise to great heights, for the soul alone is free. It would be discordant and out of tune for the spirit it is that creates the heavenly harmony. The thought and not the words colors the texture of the poetic masterpiece.

To speak of the Catholic element in English poetry, then, is to speak of the soul, the spirit, the life producing power of any poetry. Indeed without this element, there is no poetry in the true sense. There is nothing but sordidness, morbid display, intellectual buffoonery, or gross naturalism or materialism or paganism that associates itself with an idea of the supernatural that is false and not worthy of consideration. Pagan Rome had pagan, not aesthetic, poetry. The Catholic element it is that makes poetry aesthetic. It attunes it to the harmony of the soul. It makes poetry a medium, a contact point, as it were,
between the finite and the Infinite. By lifting it up to higher, holier things, the Catholic element definitely establishes the mission of poetry. Its office is sublime.

In the great body of poetic expression, the Catholic element stands out. To be sure, it appears in varied forms. Temperaments differ, but the plasticity of the element gives it a universality of which no other element can boast. And the Catholic note which may appeal to one poet, may pass another without being even recognized. But however the Catholic element appears it is to be judged as that compilation which has drawn its inspiration directly or indirectly from the Church that has been influenced in its ideas by Catholic truths, doctrines, practices, and ideals. For no matter at what altar a poet kneels, the evolution of his nobler thoughts betrays the impress of Christian doctrine. "Pagan poetry ministered to the senses; Christian poetry ministers to the spirit." To give the subject, then, a proper perspective and to show

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what part the Catholic element plays in English poetry, the works of very definite periods of time will be re-viewed. From the Chaucerian England when customs, and manners, and atmosphere were Catholic in tone and color, the discussion will pass to the war-torn England of the sixteenth century—the England of Shakespeare, when heresies and political schemings meant more than the eternal verities, when the Catholic conscience was practically deadened by the feverish turbulency of the times. Next the epic writer Milton—Milton the outstanding figure of the Puritan Age will be considered. After a brief review of a few of the minor Cavalier poets, attention will be directed to Shelley, Newman, Browning, Tennyson. The lesser but sweeter singers of the time who drew directly from the Fountain-head of all inspiration will engage not a small portion of discussion. A consideration of Thompson, a lesser writer in the sense that his contributions are comparatively few, but greater in the sense that he is a mystical writer, will make clear what is meant by the divine mission of poetry. More clearly than the others, he shows the infinite capabilities of the soul for finer things, and he gives us a more complete grasp of the spiritual. Without doubt, he attunes our minds to heavenly harmo-
nies by giving us short glimpses of the beauty of the Divine. A discussion of what the Blessed Virgin and the Crib meant to poets will elucidate the power of Catholic inspiration.

"To turn now to the line of English poets who may be said to have passed the torch of spiritual life, from lifted hand to hand, along the generations, the first is

"---the morning star of song, who made His music heard below;
Dan Chaucer, the first warbler, whose sweet breath Preluded those melodious bursts that fill
The spacious times of great Elizabeth
With sounds that echo still."

As the spring of the year ushers in a new life and a new growth and fills the air with a freshness that is exhilarating, so the fourteenth century is the "seed bursting of modern Christendom." The Canterbury Tales sheds the earliest light on the principles of Christianity and on Catholicism in particular, the most perfect expression of Christianity. For three centuries after his death, pilgrimages were made to the tomb of Saint Thomas a'Becket. Chaucer inspired by this devotion gave it expression in song. That was his reaction to the pilgrimage practice. Chaucer and his twenty-nine pilgrims journeyed to Canterbury

1. Tennyson, Poetical Works, p. 61
about the year 1370 in the third jubilee of the 'Feast of the Translation of Saint Thomas'. The persons who take part in the procession represent type characters of the human family "bound together by a common end or goal, Canterbury":

"The holy blissful martyr for to seke
That hem hath holpen whan that they were seke."

In the above lines we find the Catholic idea of prayer, the prayer of petition developed. The favor sought in this particular instance is a temporal one, relief in sickness. Individuals do not go alone to the tomb. Rather a number of people assembles for the journey, vindicating to us that in the fourteenth century as well as in the present age the truth of Christ's words "where two or three are gathered together in My name, there I am in the midst of them," was deep-rooted in the hearts of Christians. It is to be noted, too, that the bad as well as the good are represented in the assemblage. According to Catholic teaching, devotional exercises are held for everybody, not merely for the elect. The essentials of the Church are for king and pauper alike. From the world's view-point, Chaucer's society is democratic. All know that the motive of the journey is a real solid belief in the intercession
of the Saint—a trust that requests are granted through the power of a soul raised to God's altar by the ministry of the Church. Nor is it surprising that one Saint is the special favorite of these people. To the Saints, the Church attributes powers, specific and general. Travelers invoke Saint Christopher; the sick, Saint Rock; students, Saint Thomas Aquinas; the orphans, Saint Vincent; the Little Flower is sought on every occasion; Saint Jude is petitioned in discouraging situations. When the whole group is gathered together, and before departing, another little act manifests the governing principle of Catholic thought. For instance, the Squyer puts

"A crestofre on his brest of silver sheen."

He places himself and his companions under the protection of Saint Christopher.

The Catholic church points with pride to the ideals of sainthood and culture maintained in convents and monasteries. From the very beginning the church has been the guardian of culture, so that refinement and gentleness of soul are not infrequently accompanied with grace of manners. This calming, quieting, dignifying attitude results from the influence of the spirit on matter—the effulgence of God's grace shining out in all actions. When Chaucer represents the Prioress
as the essence of refinement as well as virtue, he is picturing a type character, but under one particular Rule of life. Evidently here the Benedictine Rule is described, because the Prioress lived at Stratford at Bow, at which place in the fourteenth century was a Benedictine Abbey of note. In so far as the inmates of convents and monasteries are possessed of culture and virtue, thus far do they come up to the ideal of the Catholic Church. The knight, too, is a type character.

"He never yet no vileinye ne sayde
In al his lyf, unto no manner wight
He was a verray, parfit, gentil knyght."

The institution of knighthood had its origin in the Church. It stands for noble manhood, for service to others, and for protection to the weak. In English poetry the idea of knighthood originated with Christ and His twelve apostles. In the process of development, issued Arthur and his knights. All the compositions show that no labor is too difficult for the true knight provided that by its accomplishment good is rendered to some one. Whole-hearted, noble, generous service is the slogan of the institution.

And we need not wonder why Chaucer had re-
course to a pilgrimage to convey his message. To appreciate thoroughly a piece of poetry, it must be re-created at the time and under the conditions in which it was written. Homer cannot be read understandingly without a knowledge of Greece; Dante cannot be appreciated without a knowledge of Italy; nor Chaucer without having an acquaintance with mediaeval England. The Canterbury Tales are Catholic because mediaeval England was Catholic. Reverence for martyrs, and especially for Saint Thomas a'Becket, was universally expressed because of miracles that had been worked at his tomb. England was yet in her simplicity of faith, and Chaucer imbibed that simplicity. And so down the ages the spirit of pilgrimages travels. Today there are pilgrimages to the Holy Land, to the shrines of our Lady, to the tombs of Martyrs, and to holy Wells.

The fact that Chaucer had the perverse as well as the virtuous enter the company is not strange. There are in life many paths all leading to the same goal. God's divine consolations are far-reaching. The Pardoner though a "trafecker of indulgences, of absolutions and a profaner of relics," is within the law. It is Catholic to believe that he has within
him the power to right his wrong, to rise above his misdeeds to a newness of life. By the mercy of God, he trusts in a "sudden, pitiful prayer, that Christ will forgive them all." It is orthodox to seek out the lost sheep and bring him back to the fold. Therefore it is truly Catholic to represent in poetry the wayward sheep of the fold as Chaucer has so aptly done.

The Canterbury Tales, then, are teeming with Catholic truth, thought, tradition, and practice. To try to interpret them without the consideration of the Catholic element, would be more impossible than to interpret a Latin author without a knowledge of the Latin tongue. The result in either case would spell confusion. And Chaucer, lost in oblivion, would not be studied as the representative poet of the fourteenth century. Nor would he be looked upon as the Father of English poetry, one who gave permanency to the English language by his Canterbury Tales; rather he would be listed as a blur among the long line of authors who graced the field of poetry.

II.

In the sixteenth century there was a tendency toward national unity and growth in England. The im-
petus that discovery and exploration gave was felt far afield. Pride in achievement of whatever nature, glory in success and power, the idea of a greater England took hold of the artists, the musicians, the writers. A new life had come. On awakening to the consciousness of greatness, England was astir. Henceforth allegiance was to be paid not to the feudal lord, not to the king, but to England, a nation. No longer was fealty regarded as a personal affair, it became a national issue. Patriotism evolved as a result. A creative spirit gripped the land. Not only in the political world but also in the field of literature, in prose and in poetry was the movement felt. The awakening, however, was rather one-sided. While new ideas jostled this way and that, the vision of England became narrowed. She closed in upon herself, contemplated her own power and glory, focused attention upon herself alone. As a consequence, she lost sight of the vision of God; Catholic conscience weakened under the stress and stir of feverish competition and vaulting ambition. Religion was on the wane. But while England was tottering wearily under political schemings and religious upheavals, and while Elizabeth was persecuting all who opposed her majesty's will, there were appearing in the Globe Theatre in London plays characterizing historical England. At an opportune time,
God raised up a great poet for the protection of his people. Shakespeare, the myriad-minded, came into his own. ¹

In *Henry VIII*, Shakespeare brings to view the evil conduct of men to whom authority has been entrusted. With the culture of a gentleman, yet with the virility of truth, he discloses to the public the corruption of England's high priest, Henry VIII, and the infidelity of Wolsey, the cardinal archbishop and legate. In the play, *Henry VIII*, written for presentation before Elizabeth, Shakespeare does not delineate Henry at his worst. He is too well acquainted with human nature to do that. To save too terrible an offence to her majesty, he glosses over some faults. Every other detail in the drama, however, is calculated to show how soon "mightiness meets misery" when power is wielded, not according to God's justice, but to man's ambition. The drama is a wonderful exposition of man's nothingness, and his dependency on the Almighty. To be sure, it is Catholic teaching that man's nature be as perfectly developed as possible. The more perfect a creature a man is, the better can he render praise to his Maker. But the development must be an

¹. Greenlaw-Miles, Literature and Life, Bk.III, p. 113 and *passim*. 
all-around growth, heart as well as mind. Man is a composite being made up of soul and body. Both must progress. If mental acumen alone is thought of, destruction is inevitable. The fall will come sooner or later, and so the punishment. Not always in time does Nemesis appear as in Henry VIII, but either in time or in eternity, or both, it will surely come. And this is a thought truly Catholic. The force and logic of Shakespeare's arguments, therefore, are derived from Catholic doctrine, Catholic truth.

In the divorce issue of Henry VIII and Katherine of Aragon, Shakespeare again grapples with a problem that is ever present. He, however, unlike many authors, does not find difficulty in his solution. Personal views and public opinion do not figure in his calculations when he is dealing with a divinely instituted sacrament. The work of an eternal Being must not be tampered with. And Shakespeare is sensitive to this fact. The sacrament of matrimony is given for a very definite purpose, not alterable at the hands of wealth or power. Henry VIII's political authority, therefore, cannot affect the sacrament. And Henry realizes his position only too well but he is too obstinate to heed the promptings of conscience. Nor can the Pope even,
the visible head of the Church, grant divorce. He has no such jurisdiction. The whole scene simply brings to the forefront the Divine origin of the Church whose authority is above and beyond human connivance and invention. Since the Church does not yield to his wishes, Henry VIII throws himself headlong into wrong, violates the law by divorce and an attempt at a second marriage. Thereupon there is a break with Rome, and the national religion of England is established. Wolsey, the adviser of Henry VIII, is visited by remorse for the ill fulfillment of his sacred trust as cardinal and legate. He falls from his high station. But instead of leaving him an outcast from heaven, Shakespeare again draws from the treasury of the Church's teachings. The poet raises Wolsey from the depths of his degradation and represents him penitent and confessing his sins:

"O Cromwell, Cromwell,
Had I served my God with half the zeal
I served my king, he would not in mine age
Have left me naked to mine enemies."

Without doubt poetry is the handmaid of religion. Whatever is worth while in the drama, Henry VIII, is Catholic, no matter whether it is the production of a Shakespeare, or a Fletcher. To eliminate the Catholic
element in the situation in which Wolsey is involved, would be to picture the cardinal less noble and less worthy of consideration. If the supernatural idea does not move Wolsey to repentance, then natural causes must motivate his attitude. As a consequence, the drama, lacking the spiritual touch, would lose the charm that transcends the material and allies itself with Infinite justice and mercy. Although the time during which Henry VIII was written was a period of confusion of religion in England, and the air was tainted with the works of heretics and malcontents, yet the drama, Henry VIII, is a "tribute of unfailing reverence for the old Church and her sacraments." ¹ "To hate sin, yet love the sinner" is the abiding lesson that Shakespeare intends to teach.

As the drama, Henry VIII, sounds the Catholic thought and feeling, and guides according to the norm of Catholicity at a time when the country was torn by political and religious upheavals, by heretics and proclaimers of new doctrines, so Macbeth, too, touches the fundamental status of the country severed in allegiance by unholy ambition, political

scheming, and unnatural crime. The latter is truly a religious play. Shakespeare simply draws back the curtain of life and represents men and women created by God. They are possessed of good qualities and bad. There is nothing in the whole range of literature comparable to Shakespeare's evolution of the passions in Macbeth. In his manner of treatment of the passions, he is aided by Catholic doctrine, and teachings.

But it is in the exhibition of will power that the drama, Macbeth, is truly Catholic. By making each individual responsible for his actions, Shakespeare develops the idea of freedom in its true nature. No environment, no society, no power forces the characters to do wrong. They swerve from the path of righteousness because that is the course they desire. In their short sightedness, they mistake the glamor of glory for an ambition of real value. They do not rebound to the voice of conscience, for their wills are averse to a virtuous, God-fearing life. The treatment from first to last, whether we agree that Shakespeare is a Catholic or not, is the result of Catholic reasoning and the Catholic idea of will power. The play evidences the
truth that although "the popular faith of the Middle Ages of Catholicism was gone as regards doctrine, yet it existed in all its magic in men's hearts and held its own in manners, customs and views."1

III.

The age following that of Elizabeth was characterized by two distinct parties, the Cavaliers and the Puritans. The Cavaliers were the adherents of the king; the Puritans were Calvanists who had become established in England. In their ideas, the latter were most rigid. In reality they were reformers so extreme at times that innocent frolics were condemned with as much rigor as the most abnoxious crimes. Strife and contention existed between the two parties. The atmosphere was restless and not at all conducive to poetic expression. But strange as it may seem out of the conflict existing between the parties there grew two schools of poets, the Cavalier and the Puritan. The war-like nature of the times did not measurably influence the poetry of the Cavaliers as we may expect. When the gaiety and frivolity of social life and romance lost their poetic attraction, these minor writers of the Cavalier period looked elsewhere for material. They saw the emptiness

1. James J. Walsh, _The World's Debt to the Catholic Church_, p. 117.
of the times. Their ambition was above and beyond the present hurry and jostle of forces. Quickly they withdrew apart from the crowd. In solitude and retreat, they found that their minds instinctively turned to religious themes.

Donne and Herrick dedicated worthwhile poems to the Blessed Virgin. At least they appeased their soul's poetic craving by finding a Being whose qualities were worthy of expression, and who measured so high in the realm of loveliness. It was George Herbert, though, who in his lyric form gave us a taste of that quiet, calm elevation of the soul characteristic of faith and resignation. The Gifts of God is a simply lyric vibrant with paternal solicitude:

"When God first made man
Having a glass of blessings standing by;
Let us, said He, pour on him all we can;
Let the world's riches which dispersed lie,
Contract into a span.

"So strength first made a way;
Then beauty flow'd, then wisdom, honor, pleasure:
When almost all was out, God made a stay,
Perceiving that alone, of all His treasure,
Rest in the bottom lay;

"For if I should, said He,
Bestow this jewel also on My creature,
He would adore My gifts instead of Me,
And rest in Nature, not the God of Nature,
So both should losers be.

"Yet let him keep the rest,
But keep them with repining restlessness:
Let him be rich and weary, that at least,
If goodness lead him not, yet weariness
May toss him to My breast."
Tenderness, love, solicitude are the emotions of this little lyric. Voice is given to the paternal affection of God. Just as any natural father likes to bestow his choicest gifts on his children, measuring and weighing each one and holding back those only which, though good in themselves, may be harmful because of circumstances, so God in the generosity of His Father's heart showers on His creatures all the gifts except rest. By His fore-knowledge God sees the destiny of each individual soul. In the twinkling of an eye, the past, the present and the future are present to His view. God is all-knowing, all-seeing, and all-loving. In his poem, Herbert acknowledges these attributes. God withholds one gift because He sees that its possession would work ruin for the soul. He gives to man strength, so that he may be able to accomplish his life's work; beauty, that he may more perfectly image his Maker; wisdom, that he may understand the ways of the Almighty; honor and pleasure, that he may be less weary during his earthly sojourn. But rest is excluded. It is the apple that he may not have. For if, after all the gifts man has received, he should be ungrateful, if he should use the will divinely bestowed to revile the Giver, there still would remain one longing desire to bring him back to the Bosom of the Eternal--the desire to rest. In the weariness of his
soul's agony, comfort can be found only in response to the Christ-given appeal "Come to me, all you that labor, and are burdened, and I will refresh you." ¹ Man is perverse, and inclined to evil, but

"If goodness lead him not, yet weariness
May toss him to My breast."

Among the number of Caroline Verse Writers, Richard Crashaw is by no means ranked among the least. Estimated inferior to Donne, he is in reality superior for thought value. He dipped into the joys and bliss of sainthood. The Flaming Heart is a picture of the seraphical Theresa as she is usually expressed with the seraphim "beside her." The poem is full of vigor and sincerity. The most striking lines, are those in which Crashaw petitions the Saint to enable him to so read her life that all life in him may die. He wants to become so imbued with the sanctity of Theresa, that he would die to self in order to live to Christ. Virtues peculiarly Christian find easy place in poetry. The following lines contain the whole essence of perfection, self-denial:

"By all of Him we have in thee,
Leave nothing of myself in me.
Let me so read her life that I
Unto all life of mine may die."

¹ St. Matt. 11:28.
There is no institution in existence empowered to investigate the mind and heart as is the Catholic Church, nor can any other so inspire a man to overcome his inclinations. The Sainthood of the Church is inspirational. The lives of the saints beckon onward and upward. From them come the courage and strength to deny the passions and to die to self. Self-abnegation is the spiritual food that nurtures and supports that innocence of life so beautiful in the sight of God and men. When stretched on the rack of pain, Roman Martyrs preached it; Christ’s Apostles taught it; Christ himself lived the life of mortification. "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air nests: but the son of man has not where to lay His head." 1

It is no wonder that poets grasp for Catholic ideals. There is no feast outside the association of the Church that can supply material for poetic construction in the true sense. It was the Wedding Feast of Cana alone that could suggest Crashaw’s immortal line "The conscious water saw its God and blushed." This line could not be interpreted, much less written, by any outside of Catholic affiliation, or at least by any whose sympathies were not Catholic. Byron with his poetic genius caught the suggestiveness of the situation but,

lacking faith, he lacked also content.

By the Cavalier poetry, however, the monumental work of the period is not represented. The Puritan poetry justly claims that honor because of the massive work of John Milton. By some, Milton is not rated high as a poet. He wields his pen with an artistic touch, but his swing lacks warmth of feeling. It is sure but mechanical. No doubt the criticism is just. As the last figure of the Renaissance, Milton stands cold and severe in his morality, but sincere in his representations of the spiritual. There is a forbidding sternness in his work that chills, a rebelliousness that smacks of insubordination. Early training molded his ideas thus. His mother was of a strict Puritan type to whom lightness or frivolity was odious. She brought up her son in the same atmosphere that she found herself. Milton's character naturally bore the marks of his home training and education. Upright, honest, independent always, Milton could never get away from a certain stiffness that unfitted him for the lighter task of poetic composition. Shuster says, "Milton was a born genius but he seems to have carried more baggage than a minstrel needs." He gets in his own way. His thoughts seem to be unwieldy, cumbersome.

From the study of Paradise Lost the high mindedness of Milton and the religious background of his composition are judged. The theme is suggested by the lines:

"Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit
Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste
Brought death into the world, and all our woe,
With loss of Eden, till one greater Man
Restore us, and regain the blissful seat,
Sing, heavenly Muse."

In the theme the bulk, the massiveness of the work, is suggested. No writer except a Milton or a Dante could be its author. The principles are thoroughly Catholic, and the invocations are such as any clear minded christian would utter:

"O Spirit, that dost prefer
Before all temples the upright heart and pure,
Instruct me, for Thou know'st."

To undertake an important task without invoking the aid of the Holy Spirit, is unknown among the ministers of the Church. Even before slight obligations are begun, it is customary with the fervent to invoke the blessing of God. It is a holy practice. Consciously or unconsciously, Milton follows the same custom here. Moreover he adds a beautiful sentiment which ennobles his intention and gives to his pen a kind of consecration.
"What in me is dark
Illumine, what is low raise and support;
That, to the height of this great argument,
I may assert Eternal Providence,
And justify the ways of God to men."

The purpose of his argument is to glorify God, to explain fully God's treatment of the rebellious angels, and to paint vividly the wickedness of evil and the goodness of virtue. Milton failed somewhat in picturing evil. Lucifer is too attractive a leader for so vile a character. To be sure, he loses his attractive personality later, but the first impression of his power tends to remain and, in a way, helps to obliterate the idea of ugliness that so readily associates itself with wickedness. The end, however, that Milton wishes to attain is without doubt sublime.

The poem is a sermon on the evil effects of disobedience of our first parents in the Garden of Eden, and that of Lucifer, the proud instigator of the first and last rebellion in heaven against the most high God.

Being of a well-balanced mind, Milton develops the seriousness of the act and follows up the offence by adequate punishment. Among the many impressions that remain after reading the poem, there is one which stands out forcibly: namely, any thought, word, or action that is contrary to the law of God must meet
the rigor of God's justice, punishment either in time
or eternity, or both.

Milton's shorter verse forms, especially the
sonnet On His Blindness give us a close-up view of
his soul. They have the personal touch:

"When I consider how my light is spent
Ere half my days, in this dark world and wide,
And that one talent which is death to hide
Lodged with me useless, though my soul more bent
To serve therewith my Maker, and present
My true account, lest He returning chide:"

There is an undercurrent of murmuring here. God has
seen fit to deprive Milton of his sight. The cross
is a severe blow to the poet. In his way of reckon-
ing, he does not understand the purpose of the tribu-
lation. As a poet he is serving his Maker. Could he
do more? Thus Milton reasons. The murmur, however, is
of short duration. Milton doubles back upon his own
thoughts and cut from the emotions of bitterness, anger,
and discouragement emerges a beautiful religious spirit.
In his reflections, he realizes his own nothingness,
and the greatness of God. Calm and resignation settle
down upon his troubled soul. By enduring now the trial
that is his, he can well serve his Creator:

"God doth not need
Either man's work or his own gifts. Who best
Bear His mild yoke, they serve Him best. His state
Is kingly; thousands at His bidding speed,
And post o'er land and ocean without rest;
They also serve who only stand and wait."
There is not a more effective form of expression than poetry. It is a plastic form capable of being fashioned to express variety of emotions. In no other field, however, does it seem so adequately to fulfill its mission as a contact point between the finite and the Infinite as in the field of mysticism. Here poetry truly comes into its own. Delicate and sweet and harmonious, it is a beautiful means of tinkling forth the beauty and happiness that are the essence of joy eternal. For this purpose it was created. Shelley appreciated the value of poetic composition and employed the form to convey his message of Power and Love and Beauty and Good. He, with the masterstroke of a true artist, demonstrated to the world the possibilities of the art.

Browning in writing of Shelley’s dominant trait remarks “that his noblest and predominating characteristic is his simultaneous perception of Power and Love in the absolute, and of Beauty and Good in the concrete.” In his youth Shelley was far from associating himself with mysticism. His poetic thoughts, on the contrary,

ran riot as is evidenced from passages from *Queen Mab*. Not only were his effusions not balanced by the illumination of Catholic insight and instinct, but they even ran contrary to the essence of Christianity. The genius was there, but the controlling force was wanting. True, it is claimed, that Shelley later repented the trend of his early works, and that parts of *Queen Mab*, were the outcome not so much of a malicious turn of mind as a result of a thoughtless impetuosity so strikingly characteristic of his boyhood and early manhood. This disposition, however, did not shield his poem, *Queen Mab*, from the obloquy it so justly deserved. As he advanced, and as his genius for poetic composition evolved more completely, things material lost their attraction for him. Gradually they were replaced by a finer, a more delicate conception of the spirit of Power, Love, Beauty, and Goodness. The craving in his soul for that something that was a spirit, lasting and mysterious, could not be satisfied short of the supersensible. As a consequence, Shelley reached out and filled creation with a Power, external to man. That Power he endowed with ideals and excellencies of perfection. Then he conceived a union existing between his aspirations and desires and that mysterious,
lasting Power. In some way, the association was calculated to fill the awful void in his soul. Shelley did not understand that the yearning, the craving, the cry of his inner consciousness was the soul-cry of his being for an eternal Spirit. His whole mental attitude was dominated by the idea of mysticism.

Of course to say that the mysticism of Shelley is Catholic would be to go too far. It stops short. Like Blake's, his mysticism is unorthodox. It is an analogy only. Shelley can never reach the object of his desire. His Power always escapes him. He does not have back of his desire the faith that grips. Yet, with all this granted, the idea he formulates is Catholic. Catholic mysticism is the longing for the union of the soul with the Divinity. It is God who places this desire for union in the hearts of men, and it is He who can give the grace for its accomplishment. The Infinite is reached through the finite. The union of the soul with God is complete only in heaven. But by a special predilection, God sometimes favors holy souls by a sensible feeling of His nearness. These are moments of mystical contemplation granted by special grace to saints. Saint Monica, Saint Augustine, Saint Catherine of Sienna, Saint Theresa,
were thus favored. Their senses were transferred from the joys of the earth to the beauty and glory of heaven. Again there is a close approach to the mystical idea at a moment when a soul is so enraptured by the contemplation of God that it enjoys a foretaste of heaven. But these instances are rare. However the beauty of Catholic mysticism is so evident, that it is not to be wondered at why Shelley grasped at the element, why he dedicated one whole poem to the praise of Intellectual Beauty.

Brother Leo in analyzing Shelley's works characterizes his vague seeking for something with ideal perfection as Platonic Quest. He says, "Platonic Quest means passionate attachment apart from desire, an affection in which the sensual element has no place."¹ It is the essence of perfection to be able to find in man the likeness of the Creator. It is Catholic, indeed, to be able to separate the imperfections and defects of human nature, abstract them and unite the perfections only to God. There is something immaterial in the process. That adjustment whereby the mind reaches out and takes hold of spiritual likenesses, projects them by the imagination, and recombines them with the infinite perfections of God, is in itself a Catholic note. It

is only the spirit that can reach the Spirit. The process is in itself a proof of the spiritual soul. The senses are short-lived. Their vision is narrow. They are caught in the meshes of tissue and nerve and are not able to transcend the material and wing their flight to heaven.

No other poem of Shelley is more calculated to give us a better notion of this Platonic Quest than is the Hymn to Intellectual Beauty. Dante has his quest center in Beatrice. She is the essence of love and perfection to him. But he is far-sighted enough to realize that she is not ultimate love and perfection. Rather, she is the agent whereby the poet will realize Love and Perfection, the Beatific Vision. For Dante nothing in mortal array arrests attention, unless that something leads onward and upward. Faith marks every step of his way. The quest of Wordsworth centers in nature. Ordinarily he does not reach God. His flights are terrestrial. There is manifest in his work a strong tendency toward pantheism. And thus it is with other poets also. They have the incomplete, Catholic element. Faith is wanting. In the Hymn to Intellectual Beauty, Shelley's opening lines strike the keynote of his theme:

"The awful shadow of some unseen Power
Floats tho' unseen amongst us."

...
The outstanding impression here is one of mystery. A Power, invisible, floats through the universe.

It is an intellectual Power. The senses have no part in giving it form. The lines strike a kind of terror in the soul. Shelley describes the Power as an "awful shadow" "floating unseen". No more is known. Again the poet addresses the spirit of Beauty:

"Spirit of Beauty, that dost consecrate
With thine own hues all thou dost shine upon
Of human thought or form, where art thou gone?
Why dost thou pass away and leave our state,
This dim vast vale of tears, vacant and desolate?"

In this address there is something more tangible. Nature is but a reflection, writes the poet, of this awful Beauty that permeates it. This Beauty is endowed with attributes that it can lend at will to nature and yet share no diminution in its bounty. Beauty's essence is not lessened by the giving, but rather its glory is enhanced by the external manifestation of its attributes. Without in any way minimizing the infinite span between this idea and the Catholic conception of God's essence, we can readily say that the element is Catholic. Nature is but a reflection of God's glory and power and goodness. His attributes are not lessened by His continual outpourings of benedictions, or His imparting of perfections. Rather, His glory is increased, because all nature proclaims the work of the Lord. Had
Shelley the touch that faith alone can yield, that would be all he needed to impart to his poetic thoughts a Christ-like tone.

The climax is the most exquisite passage in the whole poem. After the poet has mused over the strange happenings of his boyhood, over his mysterious dread of things invisible, over his longings to commune with the Spirit eternal, he stops of a sudden, struck as it were by a vision. The shadow of the spirit of Beauty falls upon him. For the first time, the transcendent glory of the Spirit is perceived in its true effulgence. Overpowered, awestruck, he exclaims:

"I shrieked, and clasped my hands in ecstasy."

And the vision has its natural result too. The ideal is visualized. It has taken as it were a palpable form. Its perfections find shape in Shelley's consciousness. Henceforth he can not but dedicate all his poetic gifts to the glory of this spirit of Beauty. The command of his soul is imperative; he has to obey:

"I vowed I would dedicate my powers
To thee and thine"

Beautiful in its delicacy, this reflection is really a form of worship. The dedication of one's faculties
for the promotion of the glory of perfection as seen indicates a self-sacrifice that is indeed worthy of admiration. The dedication in this particular case is Shelley-like, it is true. The light of Faith is lacking. But the act is Christ-like in its very essence.

V.

Robert Browning is one of the outstanding figures of the Victorian age. With Tennyson, he has the honor of being classed as the representative of the period. Without doubt, the association of these two writers is strange. Their personalities are entirely different. In the field of poetry, too, they produce unlike types. Tennyson, while deeply religious in many regards, is light and free and clear. He is a lyrist. Oftentimes he touches the lighter vein of life. Browning on the other hand is deep, learned and full of obscurities. His message is weighty always. From commentators, we learn that it was not Browning's direct intent to present poetry whose philosophy is so unintelligible, but that his poetic oddities are the outcome of his early training and peculiar turn of mind. Like many another genius, Browning did not have the chance of a higher education. In part, at least, this may account for many
obscurities. Being naturally of an inquisitive mind, he unaided tried to find solutions for the most intricate problems. And again by studying and reading in private, he grafted into his nature ideas that are obscurely expressed even if clear to himself. Besides, he fashioned for himself a task difficult of accomplishment—a poet of the individual soul. To fulfill this chosen mission effectively, it was necessary that he should have more than a mere acquaintance with inner workings of the soul. By nature, if not by profession, he was a psychologist. Consequently by keen observation and by study of human reactions, he became alert to the inner workings of consciousness.

For the student of poetry, there is always a worth-while feature in Browning. Anyone who delves deep down into his works is sure to be rewarded by a newness of life and a vision that is exhilarating. At no time is Browning oblivious of the inborn hope that is joy and salvation. As a reformer, he had the true spirit of moral and social uplift. To be sure, we sometimes think that he has written rather severely of Catholic customs and practices and that he was untrue to his calling when he falsified the religious life of the Italian Renaissance in the poem, The Bishop Orders His Tomb At Saint Praxed's Church, but, like
the physician, we believe in his judgment he was cutting
only to heal. His idea of life was service in the
place where God willed.

In the consideration of Browning’s best works
we find two fundamentally great ideas, knowledge and
conduct. The first gives an insight into Browning’s
philosophy of life; the second into his spiritual turn
of mind. Without doubt many of his poems, argumenta-
tive in nature, are fruitful of much influence. The
power, however, is more material or physical than
spiritual, that is, the appeal is more to the intellect
than to the soul. The knowledge is not spiritualized.
But this not true of the poems, **Saul**, and **Prospice**.
They are of the spirit. To influence the period which
was Browning’s, **Saul** has done more than the accumula-
tion of all his argumentative poetry. "It is, indeed,
a veritable fountain head of spiritual power".¹ To be
a power for **good** is in accord with the spirit of
Catholicity. Therefore the poems that put into the
mind thoughts calculated to make men deeper thinkers,
keener searchers after truth eternal, contain elements
of Catholic trend. Many touches in poetry are sacred,
not because they explain a Catholic doctrine or defend
a truth, but for the reason that they are capable of

ennobling the aspirations by gentleness and holiness. Putting the idea more explicitly, they plant worthy desires in the human heart, which if fostered, can determine the individual to good and honorable actions. But the poem, Saul does more than encourage good and honorable actions; it emphasizes the power of Catholic teachings.

"Browning is the poet of the human soul."¹ The idea for his dramatic monologue, Saul, Browning took from the Bible. In the first book of Kings we read: "But the spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him". According to the biblical text, David, the son of Isai, a skillful harpist was called. He found favor with Saul and by his devotion drove out the evil spirit that had by divine consent taken possession of the king. In the study of the poem, we are brought in direct touch with the evil spirit. We are introduced to a human being with all his religious convictions; we are confronted with the thought of the futility of earthly power and the omnipotence of the Almighty. Grappled and wrecked by an evil spirit, Saul, as we are told by Abner, Saul's uncle,

"for a space of three days
Not a sound hath escaped to thy servants, of prayer
or of praise,
To betoken that Saul and the spirit had ended their
strife,
And that faint in his triumph, the monarch sinks
back upon life."

One of the servants knows of a man who can heal the
king. The shepherd lad David is called. David is a
great musician, an harpist and he fully realizes the
power of music. When he receives the message, "he
kneels down to the God of his fathers" then rises "on
his feet"

"And runs o'er the sand burn't to powder"
Before entering the tent of Saul he again prays and
calls out to Saul, "Here is David, thy servant!" No
voice responds, but David can see Saul hang, a limp
figure in the darkness. Knowing the appeal of music,
he tunes his harp and plays various harmonies. The
first one of folding,

"All our sheep know as, one after one,
So docile they come to the pen-door till
folding be done"

With the delicacy of the artist's touch the tune changes.

Transcribed in word it is the tune,

"For which quails in the cornfield will each
leave his mate
To fly after the player; then, what makes
the crickets elate
Till for boldness they fly one another; and
then what the weight
To set the quick jerboa a-musing outside his
sand house"
Saul still manifests no signs of awakening; there is no hearkening to the harp-notes. David climbs higher. From animal creation he appeals to man.

"Then I played the help-tune of reapers."

Higher and still higher the theme of song rises. David tunes his harp to burial, to the jubilance of marriage, to the march of men, to praise, to friendship, and finally to worship:

"Then the chorus intoned
As the Levites go up to the altar in glory enthroned,
But I stopped! for here in the darkness Saul groaned!"

David has faith in the power of prayer. He prays twice before undertaking his task. This faith in the power of prayer inspires David to use both the natural and the supernatural means to deliver Saul from the evil spirit. Earthly music has no charm. Not until the chorus of worship, the bond between man and God, and the bond which sanctifies the relationship between man and man is the only power which brings the "shudder of life and only a shudder to the grand frame of Saul: there is not yet motion, the evidence of life." David, however, is not discomforted. Borne up by faith, he again strikes the harp to the joy and happiness of living, to the blessings that God has given to his creatures. Through his prayers, David accomplishes his work. The music, of course,
elevates the senses and helps to lift Saul out of his pitiable condition:

"How good is man's life, the mere living!
how fit to employ
All the heart and the soul and the senses
forever in joy."

This expresses the fulness of physical life. Next David stirs his harp to the beauty of family life, of boyhood, of service to country, all these were

"Brought to blaze on the head of one creature
-----King Saul".

Browning emphatically brings out the idea of the necessity of God in our lives. This idea is pre-eminently Catholic. Through sin, Saul fell and lost sanctifying grace. David petitions in prayer for Saul acknowledging himself as God's servant:

"And behold while I sang........But O Thou
who didst grant me that day,
And, before it, not seldom has granted Thy help to essay,
Carry on and complete an adventure, my shield and my sword
In that act where my soul was thy servant, thy word was my word."

David, too, seems to have a glimpse of the infinite love of God for man; he says,

"He is Saul, ye remember in glory, ere error had bent
The broad brow from the daily communion, and still though much spent;
Be the life and the learning that front you, the same, God did choose
To receive what a man may waste, desecrate, never quite lose."
Then there is the marvelous credo by David:

"I believe it. 'Tis thou, God, that givest,
'tis I who receive
In the first is the last, in thy will is my
power to believe.
All's one gift: thou canst grant it moreover,
as prompt to my prayer,
As I breathe out this breath, as I open these
arms to the air."

And as the king is restored to the fullness of life,
the reader feels the freshness of God's grace over­
flowing on the sinner. "Then comes the great Epilogue.
A stupendous revelation opens the eyes of David." He
realizes now his power for good of which he had not
knowledge before. Through David's prayer, Saul is
made to feel the need of divine Love. He returns to
God. Saul's experience throws him in contact with
the terror of hell, as the poet expresses it "hell
loosed with words her crews." David keeps watch. "It
is so! Not so be it. This is better than Amen; for
possession is better than desire; and attainment is
better than aspiration."¹

Winchester remarks that Saul is the "noblest
religious poem of the last half century."² The Catholic
belief in the power of prayer is as clear in the conduct
of David as it is evident in the life of every good
Catholic. David believes in the power of prayer because

2. Winchester, An Old Castle and Other Essays
p. 356.
he has faith in the omnipotence of God. The spiritual love that prompts David to acts of sacrifice for the king so that he may be freed from sin, is typical of the greater spiritual love exemplified by Christ on the Cross. The former love, however, represents only limited endurance and mortification; while the latter, stands for all-embracing suffering and humiliation. Without question, Browning's power in this poem, Saul, is the power of the Catholic element. Saul is a great poem, and its greatness is due to its Catholicity.

In Prospice, Browning contemplates the last moments of life. The title Prospice is suggestive. It is from the Latin and means look forward. Without doubt, the death of Mrs. Browning occasioned this, the "most characteristic work of the poet". In fact as in fancy, Browning looked forward to a reunion in heaven. He is not, however, pessimistic in his representation of death. Agitated and moved as the soul is and awed into fear by the idea of eternity so vast and interminable, still there is an uplifting spiritual notion that dominates the whole atmosphere, and carries the soul from the servile dread of God's chastisement to the contemplation of Divine justice. Prospice is really a beautiful meditation. At the beginning, the imagination is called upon to picture the physical
accompaniments of departing life:

"--------the fog in my throat,
The mist in my face,
--------------------
The power of the night, the press of the storm,
The post of the foe:
Where he stands, the Arch Fear in a visible form,
Yet the strong man must go."

This description, awe-inspiring as it is, does not depress. It simply brings into vividness good, wholesome sensations calculated to make readers more concerned and wary for the inevitable hour. Forcibly, too, does Browning show that not only the weak and powerless creatures, but also the mighty and strong are subject to decay and dissolution of body. Humility is the abiding lesson. The virtue that is so often the essence of poetry truly inspiring—the mainstay of that which is permanent, and the virtue which rings down the ages since it brought Christ from His heavenly throne to take a place among the sons of men. It is this, with like principles, that captivates and holds in poetry. Music and rhythm and rime are only mechanical features, beautiful and useful as far as they go. They are, however, never sufficient to produce lasting effects. Their results are ephemeral, a sweet tinkling sound that vanishes with time just as mists fade before the mid-day sun.
The next thought that impresses itself is the idea of the purpose of life. Browning says in substance that it is a journey in which battles are to be fought and wherein the issues of the battle are recognized by reward or punishment after death. The last and fiercest of which is the death struggle and the one which in final analysis fixes the price in gain or loss. Again the element is true to the Catholic conception of the last struggle. But were Browning a Catholic and not merely a student of Catholic ideals, he could have vivified and enlivened his scenes by the warmth and glow of Christ's love which is as much present in storm and thunder as in flowers and sunshine. He could have made his death-bed scene aglow with the refulgence of God's grace. Browning knows Catholic ideals, but lacks Catholic insight and instinct.

VI.

Newman gives a colorful view of death. What Browning's poetic genius suggests, his confirms. By representing life after death, he goes farther than Browning. In the Dream of Gerontius, the soul, reconciled to God, quits its earthly abode. The initial scene which Newman paints is that of the death bed. With a true insight of priest and writer, the poet draws
the contending forces in the final struggle. The angels of light are pictured helping the soul in its departure to eternity, soothing and calming; the spirits of darkness, on the other hand, are represented dragging the soul away from its God, warring and confusing. The belligerents are beings of wonderful intelligence; so the battle hotly contested hangs on the balance. The prayers, and petitions of relatives mix with the commingling sounds. While they are still praying a hush, the hush of death, falls upon the place. The spirit takes flight, and quick as thought finds itself in the presence of God.

Throwing back the veil that separates time from eternity, Newman gives a glimpse of the soul trembling on the threshold of the mansion of God. Filled with an overpowering desire to flee and be with Christ, the soul rushes into the presence of its Maker. But before the desire is well nigh formed, the poet pictures the soul withdrawing, hiding, and finally running swiftly away from the object of its quest as if stricken by an unseen hand. Pleadingly, the soul addresses the guardian angel:

"Take me away and in the lowest deep
There let me be,
And there in hope and the lone night-watches keep,
Told out of me."
There motionless and happy in my pain,
Lone, not forlorn,—
There will I sing my sad perpetual strain,
Until the morn.
----------------------------------------
There will I sing my absent Lord and Love:—
Take me away,
That sooner I may rise, and go above,
And see Him in the truth of everlasting day."

Never before was the heinousness of sin properly perceived. In the presence of the all pure God, the soul cannot withstand the slightest stain and so pleads with the guardian angel to be led to purgatory and there remain until all crime is purged away.

In the next phase of the poem, the guardian angel is pictured going to purgatory to claim the soul. Effulgent in God's grace, the soul emerges fair and beautiful. No longer does it tremble at the thought of the Beatific Vision. Quicker than a flash, the two spirits come into the presence of God. With one bound, the soul leaps into the arms of Christ. There is now no reason for separation. Union eternal and everlasting bliss are the abiding state of the soul.

Life after death is not extensively pictured by many poets; he who attempts the task must be well grounded in the Catholic conception of the hereafter. The richness and fullness of life to come is seen only by those who have drunk of the knowledge of Catholic
belief. But it is only the priest pre-eminently who is able to pierce the veil and follow the soul in its journey through labyrinthine space and see it safely resting in the bosom of the Father. The Catholic element only could make the Dream of Gerontius possible. The beauty, the culture, the refinement, the infinite variety of even the verse form, emanate from Catholic thought. From Catholic thought also, are gleaned the qualities that Newman uses in depicting the characters. The demons, grasping, wrathful, jackal-like in speech are typical of the Catholic idea in art; while the angels gentle, and ever solicitous toward the soul are the abiding representation of the angels of the Church.

From the psychological viewpoint even, the poem is dominated by the Catholic atmosphere. Music is employed. In the ceremonies of the Church, music holds a prominent place. "It is one of the arts of life which the Church has used constantly and consistently in her services from the very earliest times." Consequently when the poet brings in the heavenly choir to sing and to chant, he is only carrying over the idea from the Church that music is heaven-born, that it is

1. Walsh, The World's Debt to the Catholic Church, p. 100.
associated with the spirit and has the power to turn
it to the contemplation of God. Newman appreciates
music. He puts into the mouth of Gerontius:

"And hark! I hear a singing; yet in sooth
I cannot of that music rightly say
Whether I hear or touch or taste the tones,
O what a heart-subduing melody!"

and,

"But hark! a grand mysterious harmony:
It floods me, like a deep and solemn
Of many waters."

And again———

"Hark! for the lintels of the presence—gate
Are vibrating and echoing back the strain."

The occasion of the poem was Newman’s apprehension of the near approach of death, an idea based on a medical opinion. The opening lines of the poem confirms this statement:

"Jesu, Maria—I am near to death"

and again,

"---------------------------a visitant
Is knocking his dire summons at my door."

That the death of a friend occasioned the poem is scarcely true. Nowhere in the poem is the friend mentioned. Moreover the meaning of the word Gerontius definitely proves that Newman himself is
the Gerontius of the composition. Gerontius is from
the Greek and it means "an old man". Gordon Tidy in
his introduction to the poem tells us that this ex-
pression "an old man" was a favorite of Newman's.
In speaking of his inability to undertake heavy literary
work Newman remarks, "It is killing work to an old man."
And again "But I am an old man."

But whether or not commentators agree as to
the occasion of the poem makes little difference in the
interpretation. It measures up to the test. It has
the "power of forming, sustaining and delighting".
"And the central idea is true as it is noble:-----
The longing of the soul to behold Deity, converted by
the mere act of sight, into a self-abasement and self-
annihilation so utter, that the soul is ready, even
glad, to be hurled back to any depth, to endure any
pain, from the moment that it becomes aware of God's
actual perfection and its own utter impurity and mean-
ness."1

VII.

We are not surprised when Catholic poets
give voice to sentiments Catholic. We say that such

1. Gordon Tidy, Introduction to the Dream
of Gerontius, p. 33.
expression is natural. Rather we would be astonished were they to turn aside from their rich Catholic inheritance and cast themselves floundering on protestant treasures. The Catholic instinct is strong. It is active, mighty. On the other hand, when poets not of the Faith are read and the burden of their song is Catholic in tone and color, we halt. An idea is presented which gives pause for thought. It is not surprise that arrests our attention, but rather a deep admiration for the Faith that can supply inspiration to all. Such a fact is a universal appeal to Catholic doctrine. The poetry of non-catholic writers that bears the stamp of permanency, whether they know it or not, is that marked by the impress of the Church in one way or another. The poetry of the Restoration period had no such mark. It drew from what the world had to offer. As a result, like things of the world, it perished. In the field of poetic art, this period has no part. It was a period of transition. Minds had wearied of the strict puritanical religion and had called for freedom. Without a loss to the religious life of the soul, the freedom that was demanded could not be secured. But it was attained. As a result, the life of the soul suffered and so did poetry.
It is, likewise, significant to note that the period was a preparation for an age of prose. In the literary field, uniformity and regularity took precedence over poetic values and restrained poetry. Dryden and Pope are recognized writers of prose, not of poetry.

Tennyson, a Victorian, drew from the Church’s knowledge. Pre-eminently a lyrist, it is in this lighter, sweeter tone we see him at his best. Into his poem *In Memorian* he pours in the consecrated fragrance of his genius and gives us a masterpiece in conception and execution. For every one who reads it there is a message. It embodies a two-fold aspect—one, of the grief stricken man; the other, of the man of thought. Tennyson’s friend, Hallam, died very young. The sorrow cuts deep into the poet’s soul. The very loss constitutes Tennyson a mourner and a thinker. From his sorrow, he is led to examine the cause of his being and the end of his creation. It is the Catholic element that he plays upon when he seeks solace for his disconsolate mind. And well he may; for there is no more human institution in existence that the Catholic church. She, like an artist, knows how to finger every note of joy and sorrow. She feels with the sorrow stricken but she supernaturalizes the grief. Through twenty-seven cantos of the poem,
Tennyson gives vent to his despondency bordering on despair. He is in a haze of sadness. Hallam is dead, but Tennyson is beginning to philosophize about himself. Control seems impossible to him until the Christmas bells ring out:

"The time draws near the birth of Christ;
The moon is hid; the night is still;
The Christmas bells from hill to hill Answer each other in the mist.

"But they my troubled spirit rule,
For they contrall'd me when a boy;
They bring me sorrow touch'd with joy,
The merry, merry bells of Yule."

The spirit of peace and good will of the Christmas Season steals in upon Tennyson's sorrow and soothes his aching brow. From thence on he seems to be able to pull himself out of the meshes of despair and to rise gradually to thoughts of hope:

"O Father, touch the east and light
The light that shone when Hope was born."

As his sorrow becomes more subdued the poet's reason asserts itself. Tennyson becomes a thinker. The eternal truths take hold of him. He becomes reflective. That personal grief is losing its individuating notes and is beginning to take on characteristics common to humanity. Lazarus was raised from the dead:

"Behold a man raised up by Christ!
The rest remaineth unreveal'd;
He told it not; or something sealed
The lips of that Evangelist."
If there is a Power that can bring the dead to life, then there must be a Love Superior to earthly love. To come close to that Love which supersedes all others, Tennyson argues for a spotless life and a prayerful one. This idea is a testimony to the reasonableness of the Faith that is Christ-born:

"Thrice blest whose live's are faithful prayers,
Whose loves in higher love endure."

Wavering and vascillating at times, Tennyson is beginning to pin his sorrow to a Being unchangeable. There must be life hereafter:

"My own dim life should teach me this
That life shall live for evermore,
Else earth is darkness at the core,
And dust and ashes all that is."

It is Catholic indeed to look beyond time to the eternal and unchangeable. One of the beautiful sublime traits of Catholicism is the fact that the vision of Christ is always present, Christ himself is present for all who seek Him.

In Memoriam by some is regarded as a poem of doubt. And the judgment is correct. Hallam's death awakened the soul of Tennyson. He questions, he doubts, but the very doubt embodies Catholic principles.

"You tell me doubt is Devil-born"
I know not; one indeed I knew
In many a subtle question versed,
Who touched a jarring lyre at first,
But never strove to make it true."

Many suffer mental tribulations. Perplexed, they face their doubts and from the determination to resolve issues usually they garner strength to overcome obstacles to understanding and emerge resplendent in the light of truth. For it is Catholic to think that God will offer assistance to the willing and upright. Tennyson, too, believes in the omnipotence of the Unseen. He writes:

"And Power was with him in the night,
Which makes the darkness and the light,
And dwells not in the light alone."

When the soul is tempest tossed and driven almost to despair, Christ's voice is heard in the darkness, urging and encouraging to steadfastness. There is a nobility in the thought that God does not forsake us in the night of trials. It is a Catholic element that readily touches poetic fancy because it is so human. It proves the friendship of Christ. Sympathy is a divine gift, and if divine sympathy is ever needed, the time is propitious when doubts harass the soul because it is then that comfort is so seldom forthcoming from natural sources.

Tennyson aptly pens the attributes of the In-
finite. He acknowledges God as Creator:

"Thou madest life in man and brute."

Again he voices the fundamental idea of Catholic religion, the immortality of the soul:

"Thou wilt not leave him in the dust."

The freedom of the will he recognizes:

"Our wills are ours to make them thine."

Not only does Tennyson here acknowledge the freedom of the will; he implies the conformability of the will to God's as the essence of perfection. In Catholic terms the expression is interpreted as resignation to the Divine Will, or submission to God. In a word, the elegy *In Memoriam* deals with the great truths of religion. It leads from the desolation of a soul caused by the death of a friend to the peace of light and faith. Comfort is found not in the wild speculation of science, but in the contemplation of Love eternal.

The *Proem* shows the faith of Tennyson, as well as manifesting the beauty of the faith that is Catholic:

"Strong Son of God, immortal Love
Whom we, that have not seen thy face,
By faith, and faith alone, embrace,
Believing where we cannot prove."

The lines expressive of faith are not unlike the lines of our great adoration hymn, Catholic in tone and
authorship, The Pange Lingua:

"Faith for all defects supplying
Where the feeble senses fail."

VIII.

The poetry of the eighteen-nineties shot out in two directions—one, was marked by sharp impressionism; the other, by mysticism. The former presented clear-cut images without "sentiment or reflection"; the latter turned to picturing the higher spiritual life. The Imagism of the nineties introduced the beginnings of modern poetry. Amy Lowell sponsored the type. Tints, shades, lights, colors, and sounds, and all used in the abstract are the only essentials to call a poem perfect in this class. The following from Sharp is an example of the type:

"Breath o' the grass,
Ripple of wondering wind,
Murmur of tremulous leaves,
A moonbeam moving white
Like a ghost across the plain."

This is a poetic description. Its kind has been used before by Shelley in his Skylark and Tennyson in his Lotus Eaters but concretely. Like a dependent clause, the impressionistic poetry expressed incomplete thought. An overtone is wanting. Later developments endeavored to picture "actual details of life, sketchy suggestions
of characters which helped to lift modern poetry out of the realm of dreams and connect it with the world of facts, and character. Henley writes:

"Master of masters,
O maker of heroes
Thunder the brave,
Irresistible message
'Life is worth living
Through every grain of it
From the foundations
To the last edge
Of the cornerstone, death'."

Francis Thompson with his selective ability took from the new movement its choicest morsels, adopted them and elevated the whole trend by imparting a Catholic note that is always and truly ingratiating. To a Snow-Flake has not an equal in the nineties:

"What heart would have thought you?---
Past out devisal
(O filigree petal!)
Fashioned so purely,
Fragilely, surely,
From what Paradisal
Imagineless metal
Too costly for cost?
Who hammered you, wrought you,
From argentine vapor?---
"God was my shaper
Passing surmisal,
He hammered, He wrought me,
From curled silver vapor,
To lust of His mind---
Thou couldst not have thought me!
So purely, so palely,
Tinily, surely,
Mightily, frailly,
Insculped and embossed,
With His hammer of wind,
And His graver of frost."
By his genius Thompson was pre-determined to leadership. It was never intended that he should warily step on the foot-prints of the Imagists; that he should be trimmed to fit the canons of the day. His was a too independent literary spirit for that. Out he stepped into the field of mysticism. With spontaneity and fervor, he presented the most spiritual and mystical ideas that have been written since Saint Theresa's time. So far Thompson has had few companions of his journey, but many admirers of his "swift desire". Francis Thompson is a true Christian mystic. With him all individuality is eventually absorbed in the presence of Christ, the Beatific Vision. By suffering and affliction, Thompson is well prepared for his arduous task of writing. By the touch of sorrow his emotions are sobered and his feelings refined. In his own words his life was "etched by the fumes of necessity". God charred the wood before He could perfectly limn with it.

In his early youth, Thompson had a desire to become a priest. His calling no doubt was a true one. And his poetic compositions are manifest testimonials of this fact. Thompson's father was disinclined that his son should follow this vocation. His future for Francis was otherwise. He opposed him and sent him to a school
of medicine to become a physician as he himself was. Studious as Thompson was, yet he could never apply himself to the medical profession. The science was not to his taste and his time was ill spent. Instead of trying to acquire knowledge and skill in medicine, he strolled away to a nearby library and there in utter disgust whiled away his time in reading. As a consequence, he failed in his examinations. The father, infuriated, sent him from home penniless. In his plight Francis went to London, a woe-be-gone creature, and destitute of the necessaries of life. For a time he was addicted to the use of drugs so that not only his body but even his mind was threatened with disease and destruction. But God had planned Thompson's life, and his grace found echo in the poet's soul. Forced by absolute poverty, Thompson wrote an article for one of the current magazines. For some time he got no word from the editor. In sheer despair, he walked to the office to inquire about the article. His ghastly appearance aroused the sympathy of the editor, and as a result his article was published. The Meynell family recognized his literary ability, befriended him and took him to their home until his death. He continued to write and thereafter produced one of the masterpieces of poetry, *The Hound of Heaven*. 
To some critics *The Hound of Heaven* seemed laden with unintelligible expressions. Its message was too elusive, too far afield for the ordinary mind to grasp. Of necessity "its public would have to be circumscribed". Time, of course, has falsified these remarks. The teachings of the Ode are so universal and so clear, if the omniscient character of God's knowledge and the power of His love are taken into consideration, that any serious minded student could not but grasp their meaning. And the reader need not be of any special ecclesiastical affiliation to understand the poem. A Buddhist even can follow its turnings and be held captive by its lessons. Once the Reverend Mark J. McNeal, S.J., was on the examining board at the Tokyo Imperial University. It happened that a young student with Mongolian eyes presented himself for examination. Francis Thompson had appealed to him and so for his thesis he had selected the study of the poet. If the priest had been a little astonished at the choice, he did not manifest it, but proceeded with usual formalities. Soon admiration replaced wonder, and the Priest and the Buddhist had something in common when the latter acknowledged that he had chosen the study of *The Hound of Heaven* because its author was a famous poet, an orthodox mystic, and because the poem represented a moral pursuit, God out of love following the soul.
Together they unraveled the windings of "one of the few great Odes in the English language", The Hound of Heaven.

The conquering power of God's love is the theme voiced in The Hound of Heaven. God is represented as pursuing the soul with such persistency that there is no escape. And the overmastering thought of all is the way the Hound pants and thirsts for the soul, wayward though it is. In the opening stanza, the soul is pictured fleeing night and day down the "arches of the years" to get away from the ever-constant Pursuer. The poet so artistically paints the scene that without effort the soul can be imagined darting hither and thither in the midst of tears and laughter, "up vistaed hope" and down "Titanic glooms of chasmed fears, "solely to escape the "strong Feet that followed after," and to hush forever the voice,

"All things betray thee, who betrayest me."

After this first mad on-rush, weary and tortured, the soul pauses for breath. But quick as thought again it shoots ahead to find happiness somewhere apart from God. Of a sudden the soul is arrested. In little children's eyes there seemed to be a reply to the cry of the soul:

"-------------------In little children's eyes
Seems something, something that replies,
-------------------
But just as their young eyes sudden fair
With dawning answered there
Their angel plucked them from me by the hair."
Within the very reach and grasp of happiness the soul becomes confounded and confused. Bewildered, it flees on and on, halting, leaping, bounding, hiding, side tracking from the insistency of the Follower. But beyond, above and around, comes a Voice "like a bursting sea:"

"Lo, all things fly thee, for thou flyest Me! Whom wilt thou find to love ignoble thee Save Me, save only Me."

As if hit by a bolt of lightning, the soul stops, stunned for a moment. An ineffable sweetness and calm hover over all. A light and a peace break in the soul. The night of darkness is gone. In a moment of ecstasy, the soul becomes oblivious of surroundings. Wrapped in contemplation, its heavenly communings begin. The Voice of the Master is heard:

"All which I took from thee, I did but take Not for thy harms, But just that thou might' st seek it in my arms. All which they child's mistake Fancies are lost, I have stored for thee at home: Rise, clasp my hand and come."

For the first time the "human smart" is eased. The earth "over plussed with griefs" loses its attractions; its pleasures appear as baubles, bright-colored play things, "strange, piteous futile," entanglers of the nobler part of man. Closer the Pursuer comes, the foot-fall halts beside the soul:
"Ah, fondest, blindest, weakest
I am He whom thou seest,
Thou dravest love, from thee, who dravest Me."

In The Hound of Heaven Love Divine is prime cause of the chase. The soul makes a mistake in thinking that it can be satisfied with any beauty or pleasure less than God. Of course the idea back of the poem is Catholic. Indeed, Psalm One Hundred Thirty-eight, expresses completely the ground thought:

"Whither shall I go from they spirit?
Or whither shall I flee from thy face?
If I ascend into heaven, thou art there; if I descend into hell, thou art present.
If I take wings early in the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea:
Even there also shall thy hand lead me: and thy right hand shall hold me.
And I said: Perhaps darkness shall cover me:
and night shall be light as the day;
The darkness thereof, and the light thereof are alike to thee."

French, the poet Archbishop, sketches prettily the theme of persuivant Love but much briefer than Thompson:

"If there had anywhere appeared in space
Another place of refuge where to flee,
My soul had found refuge in that place
And not in Thee.

"But only when I found in earth and air
And heaven and hell that such could nowhere be,
That I could not flee from Thee anywhere
I fled to Thee."

Besides the spiritual, there is a personal touch in The Hound of Heaven. The chase is the recounting of
Thompson's own life. No matter how turbulent his days, or how disastrous, or "grimed with smears," God's presence is never effaced from his heart. Suffering is the arrow that brings the poet's heart close to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and pins them both together.

IX.

It is human to try to express an appreciation or give a personal evaluation of a character that is esteemed. And in the supernatural as well as the natural order this holds true. An outlet for expression is sought. By analogy, by comparison, by contrast, by all literary devices an attempt is made to carry over a true picture of the nobility of character as perceived. In the process of transfer, however, traits frequently lose their loveliness by the superficiality of composition, oral or written. The master touch that is needed for the proper coloring of the character is oftentimes wanting. Besides, the little details that make for perfect completion can never be penned. These belong to the soul, to the spirit and are manifest only at times and to a privileged few. If this is true, and it is, that it is hard to give a sincere representation of what is flesh and blood, how much more difficult it is to sketch that which is of the spirit only! By keeping this view in mind, it is possible to evaluate properly the labor of the poets in their attempts to
represent the Queen of all beauty, Mary Immaculate, the Virgin Mother. Catholics and non-Catholics alike pay tribute to Mary. Non-Catholics agree that the Blessed Virgin in some way accords with their conception of ideal womanhood. She fits their notion of feminine perfectness. And while they do not give her the reverence of the Catholic mind because they do not understand, yet they set her apart as one above and beyond the human. They pen her in varying spheres and moods, as maiden and mother, in joy and in sorrow. In every vicissitude of life she lends herself as a model, always a representative of purity and holiness.

In his *A. B. C.*, Chaucer addresses Mary as the 'Quintessence of Courtesie' and again as the "All potent Queen." These two attributes alone make Mary a mighty intercessor in heaven, and endow her at the same time with qualities which endear her to the hearts of men. The "Quintessence of Courtesie" as a title brings Mary close to men, makes them feel that she sympathizes with their weakness and is ever ready to listen, to help, and to plead in their behalf. The title implies that Mary is at all times at the disposal of her children, and on no occasion is she found wanting in graciousness. Chaucer in writing of the Blessed Virgin gives a touch more human than many other poets. Being a Catholic, he
knows how dear the Mother of God is. He does not picture Mary as a far-away creature and aloof, but rather expresses her as having close relation with every individual soul—a mother to all. And Mary does more than merely listen to petitions. She is more than the 'Quintessence of Courtesie.' An "All-potent Queen" is her befitting title. By her intermediary power, she pleads for her clients before the throne of the Most High. Her wishes, love-laden, always find favor in heaven.

Shelley's attitude toward Mary is different from Chaucer's. In his mystical way, Shelley speaks of Mary as the "Harmony of Truth". A peculiar way, indeed, of expressing the idea of all-loveliness. By comparison he tries to carry over his idea of her. But words are inadequate. They can not paint sincerely for him. The material seems too gross to embody so beautiful a creature as his mind conceives. It is his spirit that feels the touch of her ever-abiding presence, that is cognizant of another spirit, all beauty and all sweetness:

"There was a Being whom my spirit oft
Met on its visioned wanderings far aloft".

He sees her on "fairy aisles" and amid "enchanted mountains". "Her voice comes whispering to him in solitudes."

"From all sound and from all silence, he beheld her."
Her presence surrounds him:

"Seraph of Heaven too gentle to be human,
Veiling beneath that radiant form of Woman
All that is insupportable in thee
Of light and love and immortality."

And it is not with Mary's beauty alone that Shelley is impressed. To be sure his conception of her beauty influences many of his poems. Her power, too, captivates his attention. In a gush of faith and fervor he places under her protection one of his poems, Epipsychidion.

He wants the production to live, and in a moment of almost religious enthusiasm he calls upon Mary to blot out from the poem all its "mortality and wrong" and bestow upon his handiwork her smile of approval:

"I pray thee that thou blot from this sad song
All its much mortality and wrong,
With those clear drops which start like sacred dew
From the twin lights thy sweet soul darkens through,
Weeping, till sorrow becomes ecstasy:
Then, smile on it, so that it may not die."

Robert Browning, a deep philosophical writer, found qualities worthy of praise in Mary. We read in Act. II, Colombe's Birthday, in a "part of Valence's speech to the young Duchess:"

"There is a vision in the heart of each
Of justice, mercy, wisdom, tenderness
To wrong and pain, and knowledge of its cure,
And these embodied in a Woman's Form
That best transmits them pure as first received,
From God above her to man below."

The poet looks upon Mary as the embodiment of all virtue
and as a mediatrix between God and man. Unlike Shelley
his fancy plays no part in featuring her beauty. The
characteristics that make their appeal to reason are the
ones that arrest Browning's pen.

Lord Byron, too, pays Mary the tribute of a
song. His note carries a strain of humility. A gentle
quietness and reserve characterize his sentiments. Con­
sidering the turbulenc y of his youth, the waywardness of
his passions, we pause a moment when we find Byron stepping
aside to honor the Mother of God and to petition her too.

Truly we say Mary is the inspiration of the Poets:

"Ave Maria! 'tis the hour of prayer!
Ave Maria! 'tis the hour of love!
Ave Maria! May our spirits dare
Look up to thine and thy Son above."

These few lines are a thrill with music, love and devotion.

Charles Lamb, after looking at a picture painted
by Leonardo De Vinci, entitled, The Virgin of the Rocks,
was so impressed that he transfers the picture to words:

"While young John, runs to greet
The greater Infant's feet,
The Mother standing by, with trembling passion
of devout admiration,
Beholds the engaging mystic play and pretty
adoration."

While Lamb does not favor us with any supernatural view
he had of Mary, yet it is significant to note that even
in her natural actions Mary is an inspiration, and impels
recognition. "Trembling passion", "mystic play", and
"pretty adoration", all expressions aptly describe Lamb's reaction to the picture.

Of all the dedications of non-Catholic poets, Wordsworth's sonnet holds the foremost place. It is an acknowledgment of the innocence of Mary, her freedom from even original sin, and her power as an intercessor. The poet addresses the Blessed Virgin under the two most beautiful titles known, 'Woman' and 'Mother'. The latter was used by our Lord on the most momentous occasion of his earthly career. "Mother, behold they Son" were used by Christ on the Cross. The former term was employed when our Lord was about to work His first miracle in order to save embarrassment at the Wedding Feast. "Woman, what is it to thee?" were the words of Christ to His Mother's request for more wine. The line of special significance refers to Mary's freedom from original sin:

"Our tainted nature's solitary boast."

"Scott regarded Mediaeval Christianity from the outside---he had a keen eye for the picturesque so he could describe vividly."1 "There is no inner glow of spiritual insight in Scott,"2 such as is found in Browning yet according to Cardinal Newman "by his works

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2. Shuster, English Literature, p. 306.
in prose and in verse he prepares men for some closer and more practical approximation to Catholic truth." 1

And there are few poets who invoke Mary's intercession with the simplicity and the faith of a Scott. In the Lady of the Lake, for instance, when Ellen finds herself in a grotto unprotected as far as human aid is concerned, the poet conceives the idea of heavenly guardianship. And with the delicate stroke of a true artist he pictures Ellen's voice permeating the lonely atmosphere and calling upon the Blessed Virgin for succor:

"Ave Maria! maiden mild!
Listen to a maiden's prayer!
Thou canst hear though from the wild
Thou canst save amidst despair.
Safe may we sleep beneath thy care
Though banished, outcast and reviled,
Maiden! hear a maiden's prayer
Mother, hear a suppliant child
Ave Maria!

This tribute from a non-Catholic is teeming with the idea of Mary. The words "Ave Maria" are whispered daily by thousands of worshippers. They are the words around which centers the world-wide devotion of the rosary. The appellation, "Maiden" is significant too. The virginity of the Blessed Virgin is her time-honored title. She is the maiden-mother.

Something unique in poetry is Rossetti's pen

picture of Mary's girlhood, written in two stanzas of sonnet form. In part we catch a glimpse of the portrayal:

"This is that blessed Mary, pre-elect
God's Virgin, gone is a great while, and she
Dwelt young in Nazareth of Galilee.
Unto God's will she brought devout respect,
Profound simplicity of intellect,
And supreme patience. From her mother's knee
Faithful and hopeful; wise in charity;
Strong in grave peace; in pity circumspect."

Mary, as sorrowful Mother, appeals to many poets. Crashaw represents her enduring all the bitterness and sufferings of her Divine Son without a word of complaint:

"She sees her Son, her God, bow with a load
Of borrowed sins; and swim
In woes that were not made for Him
Oh, hard command
Of love, here must she stand.
Charged to look on, and with a steadfast eye
See her life die;
Leaving her only so much breath
As serves to keep alive her death."

Francis Thompson finds consolation for his own troubles in the Passion of Mary. Beautifully he expresses her cross in the lines,

"O Lady Mary, thy bright crown
Is no mere crown of majesty;
For with the reflex of his own
Resplendent thorns Christ circled thee."

Immediately following and in the Envoy, the poet supernaturalizes his own trials. There is no rebellion, no dissatisfaction in the sorrows that shadow his path. To him in his own words,
"Christian sadness is divine,
Even as thy patient sadness was;
The salt tears in our life's dark wine
Fell in it from the saving cross."

Elizabeth Barret Browning takes an entirely different view of the Passion of Mary. Comprehensive, indeed, is her estimate of Mary's grief. In a few brief lines she explains that Mary's sorrow is the world's consolation:

"All other hearts find other balm today---
The whole world's consolation is my woe."

Aubrey De Vere shows how by anticipation the sword of sorrow cut the heart of Mary. He represents her asleep. While at rest her mind visions the future. She dreams. And in her dream she trods the path of the Cross. She sees her Snow-white Lamb, bleeding and helpless:

"There was---------------
A tree in sight, save one seared leafless trunk,
Like a rude cross---and there stood,
Close to its foot, a solitary sheep,
Bleating upon the edge of a deep pit,
--------------------------------
And into this a snow-white lamb
Had fallen. It was dead
And cold, and must have lain there very long;
While all the time, the mother had stood by
Helpless-------------------Strange the things
We see in dreams, and hard to understand.
For stooping down to raise its lifeless head,
I thought it changed into the quiet face
Of my own Child."

X.

The many sidedness of the Catholic Church lends
itself readily to poets of different religious convictions. No matter what their diversities, the Church either in doctrine or worship or tradition proffers a common starting point—a field where all ideas converge and are lost in one unified whole. The Church is truly Catholic, universal. There is no sentiment, no feeling, no emotion, high and noble, that does not find its counterpart in some phase of the life of Christ. And the life of Christ is the life of the Catholic Church. Many of the poets have taken the Sacred Infancy of Christ as poetic theme and built round it compositions of marvelous weave. Not only in structure, but in deep religious feeling as well are the works noteworthy. The utter helplessness of the Babe of Bethlehem has awakened the sympathy of some, and they have attuned their souls to pay tribute to helplessness; the humility that has drawn the Christ God from heaven to earth has evoked the admiration of the others and their strings are taut ready to echo the music of the gentle maid,

"Behold the hand-maid of the Lord
Be it done unto me according to thy word."¹

The wonderful sacrifice of mother and child has

¹ St. Luke, I:38
elicited the sweetest songs not only of the mighty poets but also of those who play a minor role in the field of poetry.

Those who feel close to the Sacred Humanity of Christ imbue their productions with a warmth of feeling that only a Christ-like thought can yield; the others who have not completely pierced the veil and have not investigated the love that called Christ from heaven are rather cold and rigid. Their praise results from natural admiration of what is really good and beautiful, apart from any connection with the supernatural. The Tabernacle has no meaning for them. Neither the sentiment of a Thompson nor the emotion of a Newman could ever cross the threshold of their consciousness. They drink of the Fount of Knowledge, but they do not recognize their Source. Milton is a poet of such a type. His poetry is sublime. *The Ode On The Morning of Christ's Nativity* makes one almost aghast with the idea of greatness. Regal power, pomp, glory, display mark its every line. Somehow his conceptions do not accord with the idea of Christ's birth. By making appeal to royalty, the poet strikes a discordant note. The Catholic mind is satisfied with swaddling clothes, the little manger, and the stable, and the helplessness of Infancy. Not so with Milton. The Babe to him is invested with regal power. He is the "Prince of
Light" the "Sleeping Lord" the "Maker". With such representation, there is no approach to the Crib. It is aloof, distant. The poem lacks life and spirit. Milton does not create that atmosphere of love and humility which led a God from His transcendent throne and caused Him to lend, as Sheehan says, "Highest thought with the lowest intelligence, man."

Elizabeth Barret Browning, strikes a different note. For her the Crib is a little poem of sanctity and song. The idea of high and low she commingles with the warmest feeling. Nor does the Infinite God lose His ineffable greatness when thus coupled with the human. Rather His sweetness is glorified. One feels that He is truly "God with us". By taking upon Himself the infirmities of human nature, He endears Himself to the hearts of men. He enjoys and He suffers just as any babe:

"Sleep, sleep, mine Holy one
My flesh, my Lord,---what name? I do not know,
A name that seemeth not too high or low,
Too far from me or heaven."

While Tennyson is inspired by the quiet holiness of the Yule-tide, yet he does not grasp its meaning fully. From him Christmas is just an event in the course of time. The manger throne is not surrounded by those beautiful sentiments that overflow in the hearts of Catholics. The one virtue that Tennyson connects with the Crib is Hope. The death of his friend Hallam has put the need of hope
into his life and he knows not where to turn to find it except to the Crib. There is his answer. The birth of Christ is a mysterious event which reaches out to gap time with eternity—an event which links his spirit to the soul of his friend Hallam. But the Crib has more message than the one of hope:

"Arise, happy morn, 'rise holy morn,
Draw forth the cheerful day from night
O Father, touch the east and light
The light that shone when Hope was born."

A cruder nature like Thomas Hardy's can also be sympathetic with the spirit of Noel. The Oxen is a little poem having the Christmas touch. Hardy does not rise very high in the contemplation of the Babe, yet in his own way he gives us a complete Catholic conception of our Saviour's birth. He develops the idea of the divinity of the Babe by expressing the worship of the oxen:

"We picture the meek mild creatures where
They dwelt in their strawy pen,
Nor did it occur to one of us there
To doubt they were kneeling then."

The whole atmosphere bespeaks faith in the Divine Babe.---

Robert Bridges had a truer note in his poem Noel. By chance, as he is walking by the hillside, peals of distant music reach him. He listens. There is something in the harmony that suggests the Yule-tide; for in a spirit of
holiness he calls up the first Christmas:

"Then sped my thoughts to keep the first Christmas of all
When shepherds watching by their folds ere the dawn
Heard the music in the fields and marveling could not tell
Whether it were angels or bright stars singing."

Trained in Catholic thought the very sound of sacred music was sufficient to start in Bridges' mind a train of pictures which, because of previous connections, loomed up sacred and holy as are the picture of Christmas and the Infant.

The color and external beauty of Christmas make appeal to any poet. It is a sensible appeal, to be sure, but still an appeal. There can be no Scrooge poets. Therefore, every true poet is a thrill during Christmas season. In justice to Himself, Christ is bound to make replete with happiness and peace His advent as a Babe. The true poetic soul rebounds with the atmosphere. He is filled with enthusiasm and exhilaration. But not many poets are touched with that sweet familiarity with the Infant as is Francis Thompson. He seems to understand the Infant so thoroughly:

"Little Jesus, wast Thou shy?
Once and just so small as I?
And what did it feel like to be
Out of heaven and just like me?

Faber does not reach the sublime heights of the inspired but he always visions the beauty of the
spiritual. With child-like simplicity he addresses the Infant:

"Dear little One! how sweet Thou art,  
Thine eyes how bright they shine,  
So bright they almost seem to speak  
When Mary's look meets thine."

Alice Meynell proffers a novel idea in connection with Christ's birth. She speaks not of the poverty of the manger nor of the shepherds who watch at the Crib, nor the bitterness of the cold that chills the heart. She sees the Infant of Mankind come on earth to remain here not for a day but forever:

"Given, not lent,  
And not withdrawn—once sent—  
This Infant of Mankind, this One,  
Is still the little welcome Son.

"New every year  
New born and newly dear,  
He comes with tidings and a song,  
The ages long, the ages long."

This thought is the keynote of the Catholic faith. Christ is given, not lent, the abiding Companion of the Tabernacle. No note but a Catholic one could ring out with such sincerity and truth. And in turn no interpreter but a Catholic can well appreciate not so much the beauty as the consolation that the lines suggest. Christ in the Tabernacle is always waiting, waiting to hear the joys and the sorrows of souls—Christ the Consoler, the Comforter.

Gilbert Chesterton, a convert to the Church, enhances English poetry by his contributions to the Crib.
His is a natural picture, beautified of course by the presence of Mary and Child. Chesterton chooses to represent the Blessed Virgin as a loving Mother holding the Babe in her lap. From the suggestiveness of the picture we glean that the mother acts as any mother caressing and loving her child. Of course Mary's affection is spiritualized; it is not of the earth:

"The Christ-child lay on Mary's lap
His hair was like a light.
(O weary, weary were the world
But here is all aright)."

The most perfect expression of true love in English poetry is "The Burning Babe" by Robert Southwell, S.J. He burned to give vent to the thoughts he had of Christ. By the mechanics of verse, the free gush of his love-laden heart was hampered. He yearned for union with God. In reality and directly his soul could not take flight to its Maker, but it did through a natural medium, poetry. His song is the outpouring of a soul in ecstasy. Its overmastering note is love—love eternal. For atmosphere and color, The Burning Babe is unsurpassed. The glow of enthusiasm, the religious fervor of the author, his love and devotion for the Babe stand out prominently. Truly it is a little love poem, a lyric. To Southwell it is not the manger, the poverty of the environment that appeal. These accessories are lost in the contemplation of Infinite Love. Indeed they fade as morning mists that
melt away in the warmth of the noonday sun. In complete abandon, Southwell paints the subjective in the Christmas spirit:

"As I in hoary winter's night
Stood shivering in the snow,
Surprised I was with sudden heat
Which made my heart to glow:
And lifting up a fearful eye
To view what fire was near,
A pretty Babe all burning bright
Did in the air appear."

The Protestant, the Catholic, the Convert writer, all turn to the Crib and there find a message worthy of transcription. And still the messages of the Crib have never been exhausted. It remains for the genius and holiness of a future poet to kneel before the Crib and to catch the breath of that inspiration which means wisdom for the understanding and strength for the will; to know that something which commands poets to rise, like the morning lark, to melodic bursts of song; to feel the desire to soar higher and higher until song is lost in sanctity and both are dissold in God.

XI.

There is no variety of form or verse to which the Catholic element does not lend itself, nor is there any poet to whom it does not appeal in one way or another. It is found alike in the epic, lyric, and dramatic structures. In the epic, it gives attributes that are necessary for the hero to overcome obstacles. It yields the fibre
of which leadership is made. In the lyric, it is found elating the heart with joy or comforting it in sadness. It has a smile for a smile, and a tear for a tear. Joy and sorrow are Christ-like. In the dramatic compositions, the Catholic element has the power of sustaining the truth that colors, and of giving the tone that is exhilarating. In gratitude, the writers of these verse forms have a duty of making a return for values received by acknowledging the inspiration of the Church. Neither the Catholic, nor the non-Catholic, nor the Convert writer would have labored as he has done had it not been for the vision which he saw of the high principles of the Church carrying out into the world love for fellow men and for God.

The genuineness of poetry is determined by its power "of forming, sustaining and delighting us as nothing else can."¹ Truth and beauty are its essence. The Catholic element alone possesses these qualities in their fullness. It has the truth that engages the intellect and the beauty that satisfies the moral nature. The religious poems are great because inspiration is higher than art, the soul nobler than the body, eternal life more than evanescent joy. Poetry, to be sure, need not

¹. Arnold, Essays in Criticism, p. 281.
treat of religion directly to sustain and delight as
nothing else can. The flower that blooms by the way-
side shows forth the glory of God; the smile that lights
up the innocent face of a babe speaks no less of heaven
than the weighty theme of a profound philosopher. The
Catholic element is in the song of the bird and in the
blowing of the wind, as much as it is in The Hound of
Heaven and The Dream of Gerontius. In the former, it is
for appreciation and enjoyment; in the latter, for study and
analysis.

Poetry then is the highest achievement of man.
At the time when all heaven was hushed to catch the
whisperings of the sublime Ave, poetry had its renaissance.
It was a form of response to a heaven-sent message. From
thence on as hand-maid, poetry has fingered every stop in
religion, and has artistically touched out the spirit of
the Catholic Church. In a way, as Walsh tells us, poetry
proves the divinity of the Church: "For if Christ's
Church had not proved the foster mother of great poetry,
if there had not been an immense wealth of poetic material
under Church inspiration and the stimulus of feeling in-
spired by her services, that would of itself have been
almost a demonstration humanly speaking of the lack of
anything divine in the church's constitution."

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