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RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCES REFLECTED IN WORKS OF AUBREY DE VERE

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A THESIS

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RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCES REFLECTED IN WORKS OF
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INTRODUCTION

This paper deals with the religious experiences of Aubrey De Vere as reflected in his writings and is an attempt to trace them with a view to making one of Ireland's foremost poets better known and appreciated. To this end most trustworthy aid was sought and obtained in Wilfrid Ward's Aubrey De Vere, a memoir based on his unpublished diaries and correspondence, in De Vere's own Recollections and in the various volumes of his poetic works. The magazine articles contained in The Catholic World and The Ave Maria were found to be either entirely or partially gathered from the authentic sources mentioned above. Therefore, it is only just to remark that Aubrey De Vere's own writings have been throughout the chief witness to himself in this thesis.

From earliest years Aubrey De Vere was more concerned with moral integrity than with mental culture. He was always open to conviction, and he valued truth wheresoever it was found. Born into the Anglican Church he loved it with an ardor "which Wordsworth tells us his love for his country had ever been".1 As a Protestant he showed marked eagerness

1. Edward Arnold, editor, Recollections of Aubrey De Vere, 312.
to defend the Anglican Faith, if not to devote himself entirely to its service.

When the Church of his youth failed to satisfy his spiritual needs, he left the Anglican communion, not with undue haste but with actual regret. The Church of his boyhood had strong claims upon his loyalty, but the command of conscience was for him the command of God. Many of his friends thought that his conversion to the Catholic Church was the result of his temperamental tendency to the novel and romantic. De Vere's *Recollections* gives the truest account of this period of estrangement from old-time friends and of that still more painful period that preceded his conversion. There were years of waste and waiting in his life and the grief of disappointment on finding the Church of England a failure.

It must have been a satisfaction to this highly spiritual and gifted writer to see scholars and Anglican divines groping for light and ultimately led to Rome by the sheer force of persuasion, convinced that the Catholic Church was the only one true Church.

The repudiation of the Sacrament of Baptism -- which was a formal denial of the Nicene Creed -- shattered the faith of many Anglicans, among them Aubrey De Vere who saw clearly that one way alone lay open before him.
Providence dealt kindly with Aubrey De Vere. He found spiritual consolation in the tenets of Catholicism and by further study and meditation discovered that the Church of Rome comprised not only the great truths cherished by Anglicans but the entire body of Christian doctrine.

His brother, Sir Stephen De Vere, had entered the Church some years before, and Aubrey's delay can be attributed less to his fear of a too impulsive readiness for change than to his eager study of the Sacred Scripture and the works of St. Thomas Aquinas.

His religious experiences are fairly evident in the writings that come at this time from his hand. The years added nothing to the certainty of his position while he was in the Anglican communion. In the Church of Rome he had discovered that Faith is certainty. Doubt and hesitancy were laid aside and Aubrey De Vere devoted his life and poetic energies to the spread of the Catholic Faith and the glory of God. This twofold purpose is fully attested to in his religious poems.

By the entrance of Aubrey De Vere into the Catholic Church, the Mother of God and the Sacred Humanity obtained at the order of Christ's vicar a new poet laureate.
CHAPTER I

AN ANGLICAN YOUTH

On January 10, 1814, Aubrey, the third son of Sir Aubrey and Lady De Vere, was born in the ancient manor of the De Vere's, Curragh Chase, County Limerick, Ireland. The culture of his Irish home and the beauty of the scenes among which his boyhood was passed did much to strengthen the poetic gift which was an inheritance in his family. Not far from the murmurs of the Maigue and the Feal, the care-free boy watched nature with somewhat of the same reverence as did Gerald Griffin, the poet of Adare. In his later poetry De Vere gives utterance to sympathetic wonder and love for the delightful spot where he had heard “the bird and the brook blend their carols with those of angels and of men”.¹

Aubrey De Vere did not attend the National Schools of his native county. His education was entrusted to a competent teacher who pronounced the boy an idiot whose moral qualities might be influenced by training, but whose intellectual gifts were not in

in evidence and possibly non-existent.

The tutor's declaration evoked an inquiry which did more honor to the boy than to his master, and young De Vere, being assured that the cultivation of the moral faculties was necessary for the attainment of heaven, abandoned the study of the classics and applied himself diligently to the things of moral worth.

Under the kindlier direction of a new tutor, young Aubrey learned that the intellectual and moral powers work well together, and he unlocked his fine mind to the literary and classic influence of Edward Johnston who introduced him to the beauty of Wordsworth's *Vernal Ode*.

Wordsworth's *Vernal Ode* was the first work to loosen the long pent-up qualities of the student and future poet.² Before he attained his fourteenth year he had become an enthusiastic and appreciative lover of the English poets and their poetry.

Shelley, Keats, Landor and Coleridge were his lasting favorites.³ At a single remark from his father, the boy's poetic affiliation was transferred from Lord

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3. Ibid., 4.
Byron to Wordsworth as being the foremost poet of his time.

At the age of seventeen Aubrey became acquainted with the Irish scientist and mathematician, Sir William Rowan Hamilton, and the acquaintance grew into a lifelong friendship. The religious convictions of this great genius and his certainty regarding the truths of Christian revelation deeply impressed De Vere and forced him to ponder and meditate. The convictions of the great mathematician became the more remarkable from the fact that he never accepted lighter matters without inquiry and examination and "To all reasonable objections listened with a deference..." characteristic of a truly religious mind.

It is worthy of note that it was his acquaintance with Gerald Griffin that gave De Vere his earliest and perhaps his most permanent respect for the Church of Rome and her teachings. He was much troubled and puzzled at Griffin's entrance into a monastery, and he attempted to analyze the attractive powers of monastic life which could outweigh ambition, pride, wealth and human love.

In years to come De Vere would understand that

4. Edward Arnold, _op. cit._, 43.
worldly glory bears no proportion to the spiritual joy that comes from self-abnegation in the service of God. The exhortation of St. Jerome to St. Paula is supposed to be the best poetic work of Aubrey De Vere. It comprises in short verses a Christian understanding of life and death and the significance of the reward that comes to those who conquer themselves for God.

Paula, what is earth?
A little bubble trembling ere it breaks,
The plaything of that grey-haired infant, Time,
Who breaks whate'er he plays with. I was strong:
See how he played with me? Am I not broken?
Albeit I fought with beasts at Ephesus
And bear their tokens still;...
...albeit this hand,
Wrinkled and prone, hurled to the dust God's scorners,
Am I not broken? Lo, this hour I raise
High o'er that ruin and wreck of life not less
This unsubverted head that bent not ever,
And make my great confession ere I die,
Since hope I have, though earthly hope no more.
And this is my confession: God is great;
There is no other greatness: God is good;
There is no other goodness. He alone
Is true existence: all beside is dream.5

Gerald Griffin was one of those poets "whose highest excellence lies in the soul rather than in the body of their verse"6 and whose highest achievement is the dedication of their literary talents to the service of God.

6. Ibid., 62.
Griffin's earnestness, sincerity and self-sacrifice in entering religious life made a lasting impression on the mind of De Vere, who attributed to this choice on the part of his friend the very highest motives possible to a man. Griffin's vocation must have proved a happy one for his "fellow-labourers declare that if Ireland had ever had a saint, Gerald Griffin was one". Where it not that things spiritual had a greater appeal for Gerald Griffin, Ireland might now be remembering him as an "Irish Burns or an Irish Scott".

Trinity College, Dublin, was the institution selected for the higher education of Aubrey De Vere — a happy coincidence, since Sir William Rowan Hamilton, head of the Department of Science and Mathematics, was afforded the opportunity of supervising and guiding young De Vere, especially along the lines of metaphysics and philosophy.

The philosophy of Coleridge, too, proved invaluable to Aubrey De Vere. From it he learned to view religion, and especially the Christian religion, as the

8. Ibid., 32.
expression of God's designs for the spiritual regeneration of fallen man "and as in some inadequate manner the partial reflection of the infinite mind of God". 9

With Coleridge, De Vere regarded human reason as the natural witness to truths "which the 'understanding' could not analyse" 10 and he thought man's attempt to create a religion for himself by private judgment in the highest degree unphilosophical.

A letter of May, 1838, to Sir William Hamilton on Schiller's Die Ideale discusses Church discipline as a useful cure for that religion which is the outgrowth of private or individual interpretation of the Scripture, and here may be seen the seeds of ideas which ultimately brought him to the Church of Rome. 11

Aubrey De Vere had many mental traits which of themselves would be conducive to his entrance into the Catholic Church. Among these may be mentioned a lifelong predilection for the romantic and the picturesque. His love of the grandeur and the heroism represented by the knights of the middle ages and his natural appreciation of the patience and fortitude of the Irish peasantry would lead a character as spiritual as his to

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10. Ibid., 23.
11. Ibid., 16.
seek and to find truth, beauty and goodness in that religion in which alone they exist. However, many years were yet to pass before Aubrey De Vere could make up his mind to say:

I "lift up mine eyes to the hills", and see something based on earth but irradiated from Heaven, which changes not in a world of change, and on whose impassive brow are written Strength and Peace.¹²

¹². Ibid., 169.
CHAPTER II

RELIGIOUS INFLUENCES INCREASED

It was the hope of Sir Aubrey De Vere to dedicate his third son to the service of the English Church. Young Aubrey was not indifferent, for he felt his interest in the Anglican religion to be sincere and deep. The truths of Christianity as taught by Anglicanism gave him subjects for long thought, and there still remains his correspondence with his cousin on matters theological. An English friend, Dr. Whewell, urged him to take Orders, and "Archdeacon Forster had already offered him a curacy". De Vere, however, discovered that poetry gave more to his spiritual nature than he could ever reach in the Anglican system of religious teaching.

The early and middle years of the nineteenth century were especially interested in religion and were significant for an attempted revival of spiritual life in the Anglican Church. Learned Englishmen were attracted by the leaders of the Oxford movement. "Religious interests were the inspiring passion of great lives, ...and De Vere came under the prevailing spell."

2. Ibid., 19.
His religious ideas were strengthened and enhanced by his reverence for good men, and he did not allow their influence upon his mind to be weakened by the differences of their opinions or thoughts. This fact is sometimes attributed to Hamilton's friendship and the excellent effect such friendship had on the mind of De Vere. It showed him how to seek and to find truth in views different from his own. In England De Vere learned that the watchword of the religiously-minded was "Back to the Fathers," and though he still regarded the Church of Rome as a center of superstition, its theology seemed for him the best known attempt to define the mind of God.

Such were his personal convictions for many years after his college life had ended. Subsequently these views were somewhat altered by his repeated visits to Oxford and Cambridge. However, in the Church of Rome he thought he saw such spiritual strength that all the evils ascribed to the Church could be regarded only as the natural accompaniments of the human weakness of her very human ministers.

Some years later De Vere was influenced by Maurice, to whose theological fallacies many Oxford

3. Ibid., 25.
divines were rigorously opposed. He was also influenced by Newman, and later still he grew to realize that the Church of Rome was the safe and true guardian which should keep in sacred custody the deposit of Faith, should administer to men throughout all ages the doctrines of Christianity and should "preserve the mysterious and life-giving truths for the spiritual polity, as the civil constitution...preserved the fundamental principles of secular order and well being".4

According to Aubrey De Vere's ideas of faith the duty of the Church was to give to men the doctrines of Christianity unaltered from the lips of Christ.

At times he allowed himself to discuss controversial subjects, but only for the better purpose of rescuing the ideas which he thought worth consideration from the fetters of petty sectarianism. He credited Burke, Coleridge and Newman with intense inward spiritual light, though these three men had many sectarian differences.

The three great centers of religious thought, Oxford, Cambridge and Rome, seem to symbolize the religious changes going on at this time in the mind of the

4. Ibid., 20.
Irish poet. Oxford represented English Anglicanism running back to the foundation of the University and trying to unify its religious system with the work and worship of an earlier form of Christianity. Cambridge seemed to stand for energy of thought and for a sympathetic appreciation of every form of good, while Rome (despite Aubrey De Vere's inborn prejudices) laid before his imagination the world-wide religion which alone proved able to dominate and actuate the souls of men. Yet in 1838 everything that Oxford symbolized was most pleasing to De Vere. Oxford seemed to keep the "golden mean" between the extreme opinions then rapidly developing, and the ideas of early Anglicanism and "English Churchmanship with its roots in the past".⁵ Here also religious sentiments seemed to be gathering power, and though reversed somewhat from those of earlier times, were also revived in a more spiritual form than was known for generations. Above all, Oxford adhered with reverence to tradition, and reverential adherence to religious tradition was a distinctive mark of De Vere's own mind.

In 1839 he visited Cambridge, the school which had formed the character of many of his most intimate

⁵. Ibid., 27.
friends. He could not help being interested in the religious attitude of Cambridge, and to his grief discovered that the spirit of Cambridge was far different from that of Oxford. The system of religious inquiry in this great school lacked the earnest, honest, reverential purpose which distinguished that of Oxford.

The love which prevailed in Oxford for sacred tradition stood in marked contrast with the clever irony of the Cambridge men "who seemed...to adopt bits of Christianity...rather than to strive for the renewal of the empire of revelation over the human heart".6

As early as 1838 the student body as well as the great masters in Oxford felt that Newman was about to create for his beloved Alma Mater a literary, philosophical and religious name that would signify unforgettable things for England and for the Church.

De Vere reached Rome in April, 1839, and his first impression of the Eternal City was a mixture of the favorable and the hostile. It pleased him to find Rome resembling Oxford in its perpetual silence. He thought the Romans superior to the English in the virtues of meekness and kindliness but inferior in other respects. The City on the Tiber, however, increased

6. Ibid., 29.
its influence over his mind, and his letters from there attest to Rome's spiritual and intellectual fascination.

The Jesuits interested him in an especial way, and he was

...struck by certain resemblance which they all bore to each other in their expression, particularly in an air of habitual humility and stillness diffused over their countenances, in strange contrast with a certain unsubdued haughtiness about the eyes; not a visionary pride, but as I thought one full of a practical, restless, unsatisfied imperiousness. 7

Though he feared Rome, the City and the Faith had an attraction for him, and he expressed both the fear and the attraction in poems and letters written during that time. His real feeling is given in a later poem in which he expressed Rome's strong claim to spiritual domination:

Her beauty, and her venerable grace;
Her depth, her breadth, her cross-surmounted height;
Her planetary order, grave yet bright;
And all her hallowed claims of time and place.
These call you loudly back to that embrace
In which the world lay folded through the night
Of ages, dazzled by no harsher light
Than the meek halo round her reverent face. 8

And yet, at this time, the Faith of Rome was considered by De Vere as a sort of fragmentary thing which combined

7. Ibid., 37-38.
the spirit of sect with the ordinances of the Church. This misjudgment was, of course, the result of his training in the Anglican Church and his innate prejudices against everything Catholic, but the early training dropped its hold, and the inborn prejudices fell away with time.

It does not escape his observation that the stamp of the Church is on everything within the reach of her jurisdiction, and that the sacerdotal power is the greatest and most complete that was ever known. In discussing this influence, De Vere is strangely naive when he adds that spiritual supremacy is maintained in Rome "by keeping the people always ignorant and always amused."\(^9\)

At this time Aubrey De Vere did not heartily believe that the Catholic Faith was purely Christian — at least he reckoned it profusely adulterated with the old forms of superstition. The one good point about the Catholic system he thought to be the inculcation of humility and the preservation "among the mass of the people of a childlike spirit of submission...."\(^{10}\)

\(^9\) Wilfrid Ward, op. cit., 43.

\(^{10}\) Ibid., 43.
In a short letter to Mr. Rice, his Cambridge relation, he summed up the abuses tolerated by Cambridge men in questioning the orthodoxy of Anglicanism.

...Is not your creed that everything is everything else? Your practical code to try everything and hold fast to that which is bad? Your devotional system to...raise an altar to your own center of gravity? Further, do you not take up Church principles in the way of private judgment?

When De Vere wrote this letter he was also able to declare that he did not share the traditional prejudices common amongst Irish Protestants in regard to the Roman Catholic Church. He was the friend and disciple of Edmund Burke who used to say that "no religious body in Europe...resembled the early Christian Church so much as the Irish Catholic Church of his own day". De Vere looked upon that Church as wronged, misrepresented, misunderstood in the past, and to his own knowledge placed in recent times in a light "unfavorable to a right estimate of her religious character".

The individual interpretation of Sacred Scripture did not appeal much to De Vere. He expressed himself to the effect that private judgment made "the Christian Faith

11. Ibid., 49.
12. Edward Arnold, op. cit., 44.
13. Ibid., 45.
take the mould and shape of our own brain,”\(^{14}\) and he added the fear that this very thing became an actual necessity when men were left to themselves.

About 1841 Aubrey De Vere saw inconsistency creeping into the Church of his youth, and he felt his mind grow uneasy about the subjectivity of Anglican doctrines and systems of belief. Experience was revealing the fact that the Church of England was made by men, and the knowledge grieved him. "The Church must remember that God has His system and that her duty is to keep her face turned toward it; keeping the deposit of faith,...\(^{15}\)

Between 1841 and 1847 the substance of De Vere's spirituality altered so much that he found himself heartily in agreement with the Oxford Tractarians. His mind often reverted to his Roman experiences — the great Jesuit house with its magnificent chapel, the cells — "a strange contrast to all this grandeur, little low rooms with a chair, a bed, a shelf for books, and four bare walls".\(^{16}\)

The Miserere in the Pope's chapel and the bene-

\(^{14}\) Wilfrid Ward, *op. cit.*, 53.

\(^{15}\) Ibid., 54.

\(^{16}\) Ibid., 37.
diction from the balcony of St. Peter's (which he had commemorated in a Roman letter to his sister, Lady O'Brien) remained long in his memory and symbolized for him the spiritual power and care which Rome extends over the entire world. This power seemed to De Vere to be represented by the very structures of ancient Rome -- her system of roads that led everywhere, her aqueducts, which he compared to the arteries of the world through which glory and strength flowed in tides into her heart. The Coliseum and the triumphal pillars all seemed to De Vere to stand for and to represent the sway of "the Roman Church in its Papal character". 17

It was then, too, that he began to contrast the vague faith and uncertain arguments of Protestantism with the unshakeable trust in the souls of his Catholic countrymen. All through these years his letters showed him getting nearer to a sympathetic understanding of the Catholic position. He spoke out sincerely his inward convictions and partially prepared his friends for the outcome which they were already beginning to surmise.

The man who in his boyhood had cherished one great hope — to make the Church of England "trium-
phant here below, pure as the earliest day-dawn of the faith, venerable as the sagest antiquity..."18 was, in his own words, moving on now with acceler­ated step "towards the great Luminary, the centre of the whole mecanique celeste of my ecclesiastical aspirations".19

CHAPTER III

RELIGIOUS DOUBT

In his approach to religious truth, Aubrey De Vere, as previously stated, obtained most valuable aid from Coleridge's *Philosophy of Pure Reason*, from intensive study of the *Holy Scripture*, from the scientific works of Francis Bacon and from the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas.

The sound judgment and religious reverence of Sir William Rowan Hamilton contributed much to the widening and deepening of De Vere's mind; and much was due also to the inborn kindliness of Edmund Burke for the Faith in which his mother had lived and died.

Controversy never helped to explain Christianity to the satisfaction of De Vere, whereas the hard things which Coleridge had said of Rome were considered by De Vere but a poet's rhetorical manner of saying that the Catholic Faith "was a religion and not a mere philosophy".

Aubrey De Vere's own comments on the influences brought to bear upon his religious tenets while yet an Anglican are clear, reasonable and satisfying. From boyhood he had an ardent affection for the Anglican creed.
He declared: "If from levity or waywardness, ... any one spoke against it, I was much displeased."¹

De Vere became acquainted with Newman in 1838, and this celebrated son of Oxford made a lasting impression on the Irish poet. When the Tractarians were progressing rapidly on their spiritual journey, De Vere met Newman again and acknowledged his indebtedness to the great Englishman. He has acknowledged it to the world openly in his Recollections when he said: "...to me nothing with the exception of the Divina Commedia and ...Mores Catholicus had been so impressive, suggestive and spiritually helpful."²

It is remarkable that Aubrey De Vere's best friends, when not poets or scientists, were among those on whose face he could see written the word sacerdos. Religion and poetry had ever been to him kindred phases of God's manifestation to men, and it is likely that even in his friendships he was able to verify the poet Wordsworth's belief that "the soul of poetry is truth".³

Anglicanism had failed to prove itself orthodox by its half-hearted acquiescence in the "Gorham Controversy", and Newman's famous sentence in which the Angli-

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1. Edward Arnold, op. cit., 312.
2. Ibid., 263.
3. Ibid., 124.
can position was fittingly condensed, made its own appeal to the earnest and truth-seeking soul of Aubrey De Vere. "A separated and national Church must be national first," observed Newman, "and after that as orthodox as it can afford to be." 4

This saying De Vere remembered long, as it seemed to be the touch of grace upon his soul. The separation, nationality and unorthodoxy of the Church of England were showing plainer than ever, and side by side with this conviction ran another series of facts, namely:— the teaching of the Church of Rome was more than a philosophy; it was a religion also and primarily so; and the evil charges made against that Church came from men who judged according to the things of sense, or from those who used only the "lower faculty judging according to sense," 5 in Coleridge's phrase.

Despite the inherited prejudice of Coleridge he surprised De Vere by his firm belief that the so-called philosophical accusations against the Faith of Rome would be destructive to the chief mysteries of religion, and so render Revelation doubtful, if not unfounded.

4. Ibid., 313.
5. Ibid., 315.
The *Summa Theologiae* of St. Thomas made it clear to De Vere that objections brought against the Catholic Faith were the outcome of human misunderstanding, and it was the study of St. Thomas that assured him once and for all that Faith is a certainty.

Aubrey De Vere's first Italian trip did much to lessen his prejudice against the Church of the Middle Ages. In a letter to Mrs. Villiers on December 8, 1848, he revealed his sympathies with the ages of Faith, which so long preserved for men the spiritual ideals expressed in the ethics and arts of medieval Christianity. He found also that the great Italian artists must have been imbued with Catholic Faith to a high degree to be able to depict such holiness and peace. He deplored the comparative lack of the Christian character in the "spectacled Muse of Biblical Criticism, who forsakes the temple and the wilderness alike, for the Synagogue and the market place".6

By these laudatory comments on the Faith of Catholic Europe, De Vere incurred the displeasure of his less generous and less loyal friends. Among the peasantry of Ireland he learned what power the Catholic

6 Wilfrid Ward, *op. cit.*, 149.
Faith exercised over the moral and spiritual life of the poor; it was of them he might well have been thinking when he spoke of holding "the great truths of the three Creeds as in Eagle-talons".7

He knew it was Faith only that could give the Irish peasant power to bear wrongs with patience and to create within his poor home a sanctuary of purity and peace.

To the Irish people who had already lost their lands, there remained nothing but their Faith. During the long night of persecution its truths shone out like stars, and wrote themselves indelibly on the heart of the race....In the failure of persecuting laws, and in the restoration of Ireland, one...sees the victory of Faith.8

He compared the true Faith to the Star of the Epiphany which will shine upon the world until God makes for men a new heaven and a new earth; hence he did not wish to see the doctrines of the Church "fashioned by the eccentric fancies of individuals".9

It has been said of Aubrey De Vere that he was by nature a Catholic, and this estimate of him is borne out by his absorbing interest in things Catholic. The

7. Ibid., 170.
notable events which occurred in the Anglican Church and which culminated in the conversion of many scholarly Oxford men, made a deep impression on De Vere. These happenings were what he afterwards called "the mere projected shadows...which had beckoned me forward all my life to a better land".

Aubrey De Vere prepared his soul for the gift of God by his charity to the suffering poor during the famine years of 1847 and 1848. The prayers of the poor were his only recompense for long months of wholehearted devotedness to the practice of the corporal works of mercy. The plague-stricken and the dead were his care all through "The Year of Sorrow" so pathetically summarized in the little poem of that name.

On quaking moor and mountain moss,
With eyes upstaring at the sky,
With arms extended like a cross,
The long-expectant sufferers lie.

Among the influences which governed his life and helped him on the road to Faith, were his own deeply religious convictions, his natural bent toward lofty thought, his constant search for and appreciation of truth, his preference for those themes which dealt

10. Ibid., 202.
solely with Catholicity and his "affectionate intimacy with medieval life".12

Regarding his medieval studies it has been said that he was quite at home in them, "for the two elements are present that suit his genius — religion pure and simple; and high and abstract conceptions such as would have delighted a dialectician in the ages of scholastic philosophy".13

De Vere devoted some chapters of his Recollections to an explanation of the causes and results of his Catholic convictions. He knew that the "Nicene Creed" (on which Anglicans thought their faith was based) was repudiated at one stroke by the "Gorham decision". Such repudiation had left the Church of England without the first and most necessary sacrament, and without any teaching authority. He knew also that many eminent Anglicans believed

...that the Roman Catholic Church, whatever its defects might be, was a true part of Christ's Church, and that no choice remained save that of accepting her authority if the Anglican body had ceased to be a part of it.14

12. Ibid., 56.
13. Canon Sheehan, Early Essays and Lectures, 196-197.
He realized, moreover, that the true Church

...is the temple of the Holy Spirit Who
descended upon her at the Feast of Pentecost. That Pentecost was no transient
gift. It is as permanent on earth as the
Incarnation...it is the witness of that
Divine Son, and to His whole Revelation;
and that witness which alone can be borne
to the successive generations so long as
a Church, organically and visibly as well
as spiritually one, affirms the one Truth
through the one spirit.15

However, Aubrey De Vere gave full credit for his
attainment of truth to the study of St. Thomas Aquinas
from whom he learned that

The Church is the dispenser of sacraments,
and the truth is a great sacrament. If
errors as well as abuses have grown up
locally, it is the Church alone...which
can correct those errors without commit­
ting her children first to petty local
tyrannies and then to mere opinions sub­
stituted for faith,...16

It was thus conviction grew upon De Vere until
by his entrance into the Catholic Church on November 15,
1851, at Avignon, he gave himself over entirely to the
service of Catholicity and truth. This submission to
the Church laid his motives open to severe attack on
the part of certain English friends. He himself passed

15. Ibid., 311-312.
16. Ibid., 318.
judgment upon his action when he said: "The difference between a seeming and a real belief is in religious matters tested by obedience to Duty."¹⁷

CHAPTER IV

CERTAINTY

Six days before his submission to the Church, Aubrey De Vere wrote from Paris to Mrs. Coleridge and gave a very sincere and lengthy account of himself and of his views regarding the Catholic Church. He assured her he had for a long time been trying "to avoid the chances of intellectual illusion, and to try...opinions in every way that they can be tried...." His words in this letter are significant in so far as they show a truly Catholic understanding of what may follow from the abuses of Grace.

I...could hardly expect to retain the power of belief, if I were to trifle with the Grace accorded as well as with the Providence which has helped me thus far in many special and undeserved ways.

This letter was followed by another from Avignon on the morning of his reception into the Church which was "confessed in the Creed and commissioned from on high by God Himself."

2. Ibid., 197-198.
3. Ibid., 198.
This was the first of a series of letters and essays in which De Vere gave full scope to his newly acquired power, for power it was which could so describe...

...what we might call the purification and elevation of a soul to a higher level of sanctity: and the education of all its faculties and their fullest development until they become proportioned to that spiritual universe which is man's destined heritage.4

No one can fail to remark the spiritual freedom and the mental joy and contentment manifested in De Vere's writings from this on. There is no doubt or difficulty of belief. He insists on certainty and on the moral urgency that left him no choice but to obey the will of God and to submit to that "authority which He has Himself set up upon earth".5 On that assumption Aubrey De Vere regarded Faith as

...a transcendent spiritual power crowning our intellectual being, as our intellect crowns our animal being; and where it has its perfect work, religion shows itself so plainly to reason thus enlightened and emancipated that not to believe seems a thing self-willed and unreasonable.6

Two years after his conversion Aubrey De Vere entered on a whole half-century of poetic endeavor in

which his mental energies are devoted almost solely to make Faith better known and appreciated. The spiritual vocation of his native Island seems to call forth that poem of which De Vere says:— "No other poem of mine was written more intensely, I may say more painfully from my heart than 'Inisfail'." The reason was that he wished to show Ireland's true destiny to be one of spiritual and missionary significance.

Father Faber of the Oratory had shown agreement with Aubrey De Vere to this extent in the matter, that he exhorted the Catholic people of the City of Limerick to appreciate the spiritual mission of their race and to seek their destined greatness in the fulfillment of that vocation.

It is no material obstacle, no historical accident [said Faber] that stands in her way. It is a holier greatness, more exalted destiny, that forbid a lower one. Ireland's vocation is, as it has ever been, an Apostolic one.... -- the heathen are her inheritance: let her remember that first, and then all that she needs beside will be "added unto her"!

The happiness which the Faith brought to De Vere can be traced in his correspondence and through his es-

8. Ibid., 354.
says, even though these latter writings often deal with politics or poetry.

The satisfaction which he experienced is attested to especially here:

I have had a grave and solid satisfaction from the first; moral, intellectual and spiritual, and that satisfaction has been progressively deepening the more I have seen, thought and felt. The Roman Catholic Church is so very much more than I had expected to find it, and that...I ever imagined that a Church could be.9

He found the Catholic Church raised high above its own most precious possessions, equally independent of books, science and art. He became daily more conscious that Catholicism is really a service of freedom compared with which all other so-called religious freedom is either despotism or anarchy. This Catholic freedom seemed to enter into his writings, even such writings as were directed to friends who disapproved or censured his Catholicism. He attempted to win those he loved most on earth to "what was to his eyes so beautiful, and so evidently a fuller realization of Christianity".10

Five years before De Vere's conversion to the Catholic Faith, the greatest of the Oxford Tractarians

10. Ibid., 215.
had made his obedience to Rome. The Oxford Movement which had given so many illustrious converts to Catholicism was followed with intense interest by Aubrey De Vere. Naturally the issue of this Movement had great influence on his religious affiliation. The very subject which turned many minds against the Anglican Church, the "Gorham judgment," on which Newman made his remarkable dictum was the same which weakened the loyalty of De Vere to the Anglican Communioh. Moreover, the impressionable Irish poet always admired the subtle genius of Newman, and more than once he felt himself moved by the impassioned eloquence of Oxford's most gifted son. Furthermore it is likely that the Dream of Gerontius gave De Vere the poetic daring necessary for The Higher Purgatory — "a poem of notable beauty and elevation".11 His commemorative sonnett on Cardinal Newman expresses more than any other of De Vere's words the love and esteem in which he held the great Churchman.

Best Work is Prayer; and they
Who plead, absolved from bonds of Space and Time,
With Lordliest labour work that work sublime,
Order our planet with benignest sway.
So work, great Spirit! Thy toils foregone each year,
Bear fruit on earth! Thousands but praise thee now:
Those laureates soon will bend a brightening brow
O'er tomes of thine; on each may drop a tear

For friends that o'er blind oceans pushed their prow
Self-cheated of a guiding light so clear.12

Another of De Vere's friends on whose brow was written *sacredos* and whose influence was as great as that of Cardinal Newman was Henry Edward Manning. At this time Manning was discussing the religious prospects of Europe with two of the most distinguished contemporary theologians, Dollinger and De Ravignan. The three "agreed that the world would eventually be polarized into two great sections, the Roman and the Infidel, and that all the intermediate theories were used up and worn out".13 It is interesting to note that Manning was then a parson in the Anglican Church. De Vere described him as the "most spiritual and at the same time the most ecclesiastical man I ever met".14

In the thirteenth line of the following sonnett, Cardinal Manning alludes to a later meeting.

I learned his greatness first at Lavington:
The moon had early sought her bed of brine,
But we discoursed till now each starry sign
Had sunk: our theme was one and one alone:
"Two minds supreme," he said, "our earth has known;
One sang in science; one served God in song;

Aquinas — Dante." Slowly in me grew strong
A thought, "These two great minds in him are one;
'Lord, what shall this man do?'" Later in Rome,
Beside the dust of Peter and of Paul.
Eight hundred mitred sires of Christendom
In Council sat. I marked him 'mid them all;
I thought of that long night in years gone by.
And cried, "At last my question meets reply."15

In his Recollections De Vere summed up the Catho-
lic life of Manning in a concise and meaningful sentence:
"Religion was the root of that peace which belonged to
more than the last forty years of a life that had escaped
neither its trials nor its frustrations."16 Long years
later, when the Catholic Archbishop of Westminster was to
be raised to the Cardinalate, a letter left Rome on March
26, 1875, addressed to Aubrey De Vere. It was written by
Manning, and it expressed a wish that De Vere were in Rome
to witness this elevation which was neither sought nor de-
sired. De Vere saw Cardinal Manning in Rome but not until
later.

.......

.......

Later in Rome,
Beside the dust of Peter and of Paul,
Eight hundred mitred sires of Christendom
In Council sat. I marked him 'mid them all;17

The spiritual trials which had beset the Rome-

15. Aubrey De Vere, Lady Margaret Domvile, editor,
"Cardinal Manning," Poems from the Works of Aubrey De Vere,
135.


17. Aubrey De Vere, "Cardinal Manning," Poems
from the Works of Aubrey De Vere, 135
ward journey of his great convert contemporaries were not wholly unknown to Aubrey De Vere. What doubts and spiritual difficulties he experienced prior to his own conversion are hinted at, if not set forth fully, in "The Death of Copernicus". In this poem he alluded to his own dependence on the prayers of the poor.

Likewise I sued
The poor beside whose beds I ministered —
For their sake I had learned the healing craft —
To fence me with their prayers....18

"The Death of Copernicus" is De Vere's tribute to the reconciliation of Faith and Science. The old astronomer communing with himself valued scientific discoveries as new gifts from God,

To the Soul
Far more than to the intellect of man
I deemed the gift vouchsafed when on me first
This new-born Science dawned....19

These lines epitomize De Vere's own reasoning about the truths of science. Since all truth proceeds from God, there could be for Aubrey De Vere no conflict between the supernatural truths of Faith and the natural truths


19. Ibid., 390
of science. This was the attitude taken by his father, Sir Aubrey, by the friend of his boyhood, Sir William Rowan Hamilton, by the scientist and philosopher, Francis Bacon and by Coleridge, who could see no clash between scientific truths and the doctrines of the Catholic Faith.
CHAPTER V

CONTEMPLATION

Great and grave thoughts, high and holy thoughts: such were the habitual companions of Aubrey De Vere. He weighed life by those spiritual values which were to him the only realities.¹

According to his own avowal his youth was spent in the study of poetry, history, philosophy and theology, -- subjects adapted to a mind contemplative and serious by nature, subjects which would, if earnestly adhered to, cleanse any mind of the trivial and the vain. Free from excitability and from any extremes of impressionableness and imaginative sympathy, De Vere took a common-sense view of men and things, and he seemed to be ever in the disposition to keep a watch over the innate characteristics of his mind and soul. Personal freedom was dear to him and he has declared in his Recollections his aversion to a binding power which would settle him perpetually in "any final position".²

His favorite meditations were on the principal mysteries of religion — the Trinity, the Incarnation of

2. Edward Arnold, op. cit., 308.
the Son of God and the Redemption consequent on the Incarnation. The doctrines of the Catholic Church he often weighed against the charges brought against her, and medieval scholars and their writings had a natural attraction for his mind. He did not indulge in skeptical or in vain self-questioning. Men and nature were subjects to which he devoted hours of meditation and he studied human life always in its relationship to God. He showed no uncertain preference for Catholicity even before he received the grace of Faith, and he "goes back to medieval times for those themes, Catholic and chivalrous, in which he takes such delight".3

As a boy he gave assurance of his logical and contemplative spirit when he inquired of his unsympathetic, over-eager tutor whether the classics were necessary for one's salvation. The habit of putting salvation first never deserted him — rather grew with his years and gave a peculiar significance to his whole career.

The very fine poetic eulogy which De Vere addressed to his friend, Edward O'Brien, might be equally applicable to himself:

He lived alone, and fixed a steadfast eye
On the fair prospects of the world above.
...The streams of sunset, and the starry sky
He watched; and he had heard that harmony
Which Spirits leave behind where'er they move.
. . . . the deep and precious things
Most real, ever stood before his view:
His tendency was upward: without wings
His sympathies ascended — yet below
Where Duty called him, he was prompt to go.  

The aim of De Vere in writing poetry, especially
that which deals with historical or legendary matters,
was to "illustrate the supernatural in the form of super­
natural truth..." De Vere lived a life of self-renun­
ciation, for he considered "self" a false center in which
could easily be destroyed the service of Him Who is the
sacred and true center of worship and love, and his defi­
nition of a saint shows that his meditations on sanctity,
and on the way conducive to sanctity, were intense and
frequent. The considération of the Incarnation brought
with it the thought of the Creation, and the necessity
of Creation as it is, if God's plans were to be fulfilled.
For De Vere Nature had one true purpose, namely to reveal
God. He saw it "only as the work and the expression of
the one all-holy and infinite God". 

5. Grace Smith, "De Vere," The Catholic Encyclo­
pedia, IV, 763.
He was ever on the alert to show that the beauty and order of the universe manifest the law of loveliness to which the Creator subjected His external works. In a sonnet called "Religious Literature" he invited a friend to retire from the unblest ways of common life and to seek alone in autumnal alleys for wisdom found only in solitude.

...Beware! a presence that thou deemest not of
Is here concealed. From out the air-rocked nest
Of every leaf, looks forth some Dream divine:
... -- the weeds, are cyphered o'er
With mystic traces, and sibylline lore:...7

Without apology or compromise with the heresy he had renounced, Aubrey De Vere devoted his energy and talents to the service of the Church. "I wrote Poetry, he says, in the conviction that themes solely secular and therefore divested of spiritual significance can do little justice to Poetry,...8

Critics may disagree with him in this statement but it has its value in that it shows De Vere's high regard for the subject which had engrossed his mind from boyhood upward. His 461 purely Catholic poems, nearly all of which are poetic expositions of our Lady's prerogatives, contain no theological errors, and this fact

alone proves the intensive and careful study which De Vere gave to this one phase of Catholic truth — the Divine Maternity.

Mary! through thee the idols fell:
When He the Nations longed for came —
True God, yet Man, with man to dwell,
The phantoms hid their heads for shame.

De Vere's meditation on our Lady must have been for him a source of almost intuitive understanding of the Mother of God. It took more than a convert's fresh study of Catholic doctrine to give him such a thoroughly Catholic attitude towards "the 'Woman' of Primeval Prophecy" in her relation to God, to human life and to Catholic theology.

The very preface to his May Carols bespeaks a meditative power that struck its roots back in his quite early boyhood. To souls that habitually meditate on holy things "light is communicated...by virtue of their almost continual recollection and attention to God in spirit". De Vere's high spirituality is reflected in his work; yet he is not an autobiographical poet. He

10. Ibid., xxxviii.
11. Dom B. Weld-Blundell, Contemplative Prayer, 44.
traced the progress of spiritual thought in the growth and development of the nations, yet so little of self is in his works that

...We shall never be able to trace his mental growth and experiences through the long series of beautiful poems he has given to the world. There is not a trace of egoism in them all. He had completely obliterated self.12

The Memoir which prefaces Lady Margaret Domville's selection of De Vere's poems makes it plain that the May Carols were written at the express wish of Pope Pius IX, who advised the poet to choose "some purely religious subjects for his verse".13 De Vere took up the work and completed it. Newman ordered these Carols to be sung in the London Oratory during May, and the Pope who declared the Immaculate Conception an article of Faith was soon afterwards able to read:

The Church had spoken. She that dwells Sun-clad with beatific light, From Truth's uncounted citadels From Sion's Apostolic height

Had stretched her sceptred hands, and pressed The seal of Faith, defined and known, Upon that Truth till then confessed By Love's instinctive sense alone.14

Long consideration on the defective systems of modern philosophies had taught Aubrey De Vere that the poet or scientist who omits or ignores that influence which is divine, would also, and of necessity, degrade and belie the human:— "...for behind the visible there ever remains the invisible, and with it both man and nature have relations strong as those of flesh and blood".15

Aubrey De Vere believed that men make for themselves the dangerous obstacles they find in religion. From his Recollections we learn much about his spiritual combats. There too we catch glimpses of his spiritual victories which were the result of deep meditation. In such communings he came to realize the infinite malice of sin.

The least of Sins is Infinite: it throws
A shade into the face of the Most High.16

To De Vere Eternity was the great reality and this fact also could be learned only in earnest meditation on eternal truths. Habitual contemplation gave him a strong hold on the abstract and helped him over the religious doubts which fatally beset the paths of other men.


His manner of life is fairly well expressed in a sonnet written long before he entered the Church of Rome.

Blessed is he who hath not trod the ways Of secular delights, nor learned the lore Which loftier minds are studious to abhor: 
Blessed is he who hath not sought the praise That perishes, the rapture that betrays; 
Who hath not spent in Time's vainglorious war 
His youth; and found, a schoolboy at fourscore,...17

Solitude, meditation and conquest of self were requisites to his spiritual life as an Anglican, and his Catholic Faith did not lessen the necessity for these great sources of spiritual strength. Meditative as his Oxford friend Newman, the poet of the May Carols could say:

With downcast eyes, not heeding aught on earth, 
Man must employ in worship every power, 
Will, reason, understanding, heart and sense; 
And should he on some dull or fond pretence 
Neglect but one, then from devotion's flower 
He cuts a leaf that drank the heavenly dew, 

If, tasked beyond my strength, I crave delay 
And weakly wish that to another hand 
Had been committed what divine command 
Has sent to mine;... 
If, wearied with the men, the clime, the land 
Which I call mine, I seek another strand, 
That on the wings of chance I lightly may 
Outstrip the homely cares which day by day 
Hum in my ears;...you needs must understand... 
Myself shall blame myself: all may be well: 
Love, without self-love, soothes the bitterest smart.18

17. Ibid., 145. 
Religion, she that stands sublime
Upon the rock that crowns our globe;
Her foot on all the spools of time,
With light eternal on her robe;
But they — her daughter arts — must hide
Within the cleft, content to see
Dim skirts of glory waving wide,
And steps of parting deity......
For where her court true wisdom keeps
Mid loftier handmaids, one there stands
Dark as the midnight's starry deeps,
A slave, gem-crowned, from Nubia's sands.
O thou whose light is in the heart
Reverence, love's mother! without thee
Science may soar awhile; but art
Drifts barren o'er a shoreless sea.¹

De Vere was true to his convictions set forth charmingly in this short poem when he gave us the preface to the volume named The Household Poetry Book. This preface gives what he considered the true office of poetry as a fine art, and the no less worthy aim of the kindred arts, painting, sculpture and architecture. Poetry should not deal with those things that merely give pleasure, because its office is higher than to minister to the senses, higher even that the loftier work of increasing intellectual culture. Its true function is, and ought to be, to elevate human ideals, to strengthen the human heart,

¹. Aubrey De Vere, "Prologue," The Poetical Works May Carols or Ancilla Domini. IV, 3-4.
and to express to the human soul some portion of "truth in the frankest, brightest and most genial moods".\(^2\)

Poetry can likewise be abused by ascribing to it loftier functions than it can justly claim or by making it a substitute for religion. In those instances "everything that it inherits of good is perverted to evil".\(^3\) Every beauty symbolized by poetry is but the emblem of a vaster and more real beauty in a world beyond our sight. The things of Faith are as certain as they are supernatural and divine, and De Vere would have the first offices of poetry be to brighten with a ray of Faith the things we see, and to consecrate the world of sense "with some broken beams of that light which properly belongs to the future reign of glory".\(^4\) He believed that the young should be made to see the spiritual aims and moral basis of poetry, since poetry teaches mainly by suggestion and does its greatest good by addressing itself chiefly to the heart.

Poetry is a deliverer from the tyranny of the arbitrary, the petty and the sordid.

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3. Ibid., vi.

4. Ibid., v.
It flings a radiance around the great realities of life....There is hardly a virtue belonging to the youthful character which poetry does not help to train.5

The purely secular poems of Aubrey De Vere had an ethical, if not a religious basis. According to his own estimate of these poems, the one most earnestly written, "Inisfail", took over the task of showing that though Ireland had from pre-Christian times lacked political unity, it had maintained from the days of its Apostle, Patrick, a religious unity that the centuries could not destroy, and that it was this unity that gave meaning to Irish history.

"Alexander the Great" and "St. Thomas of Canterbury" are both dramas, but in purpose they were meant to show a deeply significant contrast. One illustrates a hero, ambitious, vain, arrogant and given to action rather than to thought, who is ruined at last by pagan pride and avarice. In death Alexander saw his failure and confessed it; in death the Archbishop of Canterbury reached the summit of Christian greatness. His martyrdom proclaims that fact.

"Hero" is the highest name that can be applied to Alexander, but "Saint" is the title of St. Thomas of

5. Ibid., v.
Canterbury. Alexander was the exponent of pride and its consequences; St. Thomas perfected his priesthood in humility.

The poem called "The Saxon Saints" was written to show that England's Christianity, implanted in the hearts of her people during the seventh century, was the foundation "on which has ever since rested her liberty, civilization and greatness".  

Aubrey De Vere's May Carols are his highest poetic attempts to glorify the Mother of God and the Incarnation of her Son. Every title which Catholic fealty or Catholic theology has given to our Lady was made the subject of De Vere's poetic art, and was beautified in a human way by his own love and reverence. With truly Catholic instinct he kept the Mother near her Son and saw that meditation on the Incarnation meant also meditation on the Virgin Mother and on the mystery of the atonement. He has said, "Christian poetry must ever be a 'Rosa Mystica' the palest leaf of which has a suffusion from Calvery." No writing of Aubrey De Vere, his religious poems not excepted, explains more fully his devotion


to Mary and the grandeur of his Catholic belief than does his preface to the *May Carols*. The *May Carols* are divided into three distinct parts in which our Lady is regarded as the fulfillment of ancient prophecies and of that reconciliatory promise made to fallen man. Her three-fold relation to God as Father, Son and Spouse takes up another part, and Mary's own excellence as Virgin-Mother are considered also. The Mysteries of the Rosary are taken each by each, and so, too, are the seven-fold sorrows that pierced our Lady's heart. Mary's power over heresy, her empire of mercy over the Christian Church, her queenship of the angels and her triumph over Satan are the subjects of other poems in this work.

The consideration of our Lady's spiritual motherhood gave De Vere great spiritual joy. He reverted to it frequently and said that the "Stabat Mater" penetrates our hearts "because it makes us gaze on the Cross, not so much with our own eyes, as through those of the chief of the Bereft".8

The Divine Childhood constitutes perhaps the loveliest series of poems in the *May Carols*; the spiritual motherhood gives us the clearest aspects of our Lord's mercy and the "Unknown God" shows more forcibly the cre-

ative power of God and the creatures' dependence upon it.

The Christian idea of womanhood came to our civilization from Mary, and this view is set forth worthily in the Preface to the *May Carols*. In the Temple, Mary had made her first great offering:

...and with it she had offered up the tribute of a gratitude such as the earth had never offered before. But she had offered up herself no less, and the answer was that predicted Sword by which her Heart also was to be pierced. ..Thenceforth there dawned upon man's thought the Christian Idea of Womanhood. It came from Mary.9

In the "Dei Genitrix" our Lady's sacrifice and the sacrifice on the Cross are poetically linked with the hard lot brought to the Mother of God and her Infant Son in the cave of Bethlehem.

I see Him: on thy lap He lies
'Mid that Judaean stable's gloom:
O sweet, O awful Sacrifice!
He smiles in sleep, yet knows the doom.

Thou gav'st Him life! But was not this
That Life which knows no parting breath?
Unmeasured Life? unwaning Bliss?
Dread Priestess, lo! thou gav'st Him death!

Beneath the Tree thy Mother stood;
Beneath the Cross thou too shalt stand:--
O Tree of Life! O bleeding Rood!
Thy shadow stretches far its hand.

That God who made the sun and moon
In swaddling bands lies dumb and bound--

Love's Captive! darker prison soon
Awaits Thee in the garden ground....10

The Legends show De Vere a lay theologian, but the May Carols prove him a poet, a Catholic and a lover of Mary. Canon Sheehan would assign to De Vere because of the May Carols a place among the first Catholic thinkers and he considered these poems and their preface "as an example of how beautifully Catholic philosophy and theology can be rendered by a poet".11

10. Ibid., 18.

CONCLUSION

The saying that a man is greater than what he does is truly applicable to Aubrey De Vere. Katherine Bregy thinks that his works are overshadowed by his qualities of character and reckons it a "misfortune, even if a flattering one, for an author's personality to overshadow his literary reputation".¹

On carefully following the literary career of Aubrey De Vere, one is able to discern manifest tokens of his spiritual development, especially after his entrance into the Catholic Church. Critics think that his poetic works suffer for their remarkable adherence to religion. The greatness of this subject binds the poet to labor in the presence of Truth. Not for the sake of honor or poetic renown may the Catholic writer forget that presence. "He must write as if on his deathbed and leave no line that he would wish to blot."²

Lovers of truth ought to find in the poetry and essays of De Vere those qualities which add an inherent value to works of literary art. It is certain that intellectual pride must be barred out of all truly Catho-

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¹ Katherine Bregy, op. cit., 52.
² Canon Sheehan, op. cit., 343.
lic productions, but this fact does not diminish the intrinsic value of Catholic poetry. There was no intellectual pride, nor irreligious arrogance in the Comedy called Divine, nor can unrestraint of the intellect be discovered in the Compendium of the Summa Theologiae from which De Vere learned that Faith is a certainty. Yet the Divine Comedy is the great poem of the Christian world; the Summa is the greatest exposition of Faith ever written, "with that sacred word 'veritas' ...stamped on every page..."3

The Church has never objected to the poetic theology of the Divine Comedy, and Christ thanked St. Thomas for the Truth in the Summa.

Aubrey De Vere dedicated his poetic gifts to explain and enhance as well as poetry could enhance the name and graces of God's Mother who has ever been for Catholics the inspiration of Christian art. He reckoned the subjects that pertain to the Humanity of our Lord and the graces given to His Mother more within the reach of poetic art than other less tangible mysteries of the Faith. If the study of art can introduce mankind to a truer and deeper knowledge of life, the study of Our Lady who has ever been the Sedes Sapentiae of Christian artists, should

3. Ibid., 344.
make the religious poetry of De Vere proportionately valuable. "It was the glow, the fervor, the human appeal and heavenly beauty of our Faith that kindled... purest genius"\textsuperscript{4} of De Vere.

Even as an Anglican, he sought Catholic subjects for his poetic themes; as a convert to the Faith he devoted nearly fifty years to subjects preeminently Catholic. His secular works were not without their religious purpose, but his religious poems comprise every mystery of the Faith and every endearing and sacred title which Catholic love had framed for Mary. The Immaculate Conception, the Divine Maternity and the universal Motherhood purchased by the Dolors of Our Lady, gave wide scope for the poetic devotion of one of the world's great Catholic poets.

Of De Vere's hymns of praise Canon Sheehan says: "One can imagine how St. Augustine would have prized them -- the great saint who has written so many beautiful things of God in a kindred spirit and with equal sublimity."\textsuperscript{5}

De Vere was of the belief that the Incarnation was the inspirational idea which gave artistic power to the ages of Faith, because this mystery was in itself a

\textsuperscript{4} Edward F. Garesche, S. J., \textit{Great Christian Artists},
\textsuperscript{5} Canon Sheehan, op. cit., 196.
new revelation of divine Beauty which added a fresh charm to truth; and because it was the real source of "the sweetness and graciousness of Virtue itself".  

The humility of Mary he believed to be the chief Christian antidote against intellectual pride at that time working havoc by the unprovable theories of boasting sciolists.

Thus boasteth Pride with brazen brow
That Pride which still 'believes a lie':--
The counter-boast of Grace art thou,
Immaculate Humility!

De Vere dedicated his best gifts to the Faith that gave him certainty. The literary inheritance of his house and name was never better used than when he sang his May Carols to Mary Immaculate. No man was gladder than he when the country and people he loved were consecrated publicly and with the whole nation's consent to the Sacred Heart. Some lines, from a sonnet such as might have come from the soul of St. Margaret Mary, commemorate the event and end this thesis:

...Heart that, throned on high,...
In glory reignest,...and in love dost burn!
To Thee this day a People's heart doth yearn;
To Thee, all eagle-winged, yet tremblingly

6. Aubrey De Vere, The Poetical Works May Carols or Ancilla Domini, IV, xxxi.
7. Ibid., 144.
Makes way; in Thee would live; for Thee would die,
Zealous for Thee terrestrial crowns to spurn.
'Lift up your heads ye everlasting gates,'
And give a nation leave to enter in!
The centuries ended of her adverse fates
This day with God she hides her from the sin
Of prosperous realms that trample gifts divine —
Heart of the God—man, make Thy captive Thine!8

8. Aubrey De Vere, The Poetical Works Inisfail
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