THE IMAGERY OF FATHER TABB

by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Among the Southern poets of the Reconstruction era, John Banister Tabb occupies a unique position, both because of the singular hiddenness of his career and because of the consummate artistry that marks the poetry of his maturer years.

Born on March 22, 1845, at "The Forest," the family estate near Richmond, Virginia, John Tabb spent a happy childhood, surrounded by the luxuries and comforts of a wealthy Southern home. Frail health and weak eyesight prevented him from participating fully in the pleasures of his brothers, but this loss was more than counterbalanced by his excursions into the realms of literature during hours of reading with his mother.

When John was sixteen, the Civil War broke out, and his only grief was that he could not enlist as his two brothers had done. During the second year of the war, however, he was offered the chance of serving as a blockade-runner under Major Ficklin, a friend of the family. For the next two years John's life was a series of adventures and hairbreadth escapes from Federal gunboats. Two of his poems owe their inspiration to incidents of this period. In August, 1862, four days after he had left Charleston, South Carolina, on his first blockade-running trip, he saw the island of San Salvadore in the distance, and the idea for "Off San Salvadore" flashed into his mind, though
he did not publish the poem until later.¹ The loss of the anchor of the Robert E. Lee in March, 1863, suggested "The Lost Anchor."²

With his capture on June 4, 1864, the harrowing experience of imprisonment at Bull Pen, Point Lookout, Maryland, began. But again his suffering was compensated by the friendship he formed with Sidney Lanier, a fellow-prisoner. Though the two men had little contact after John was released early in 1865, Lanier's friendship remained one of Tabb's most cherished treasures and became the inspiration for some of his finest poems.

The close of the war found the Tabb estate in ruins and John penniless. For a while he studied music in Baltimore at Major Ficklin's expense. Then he taught at an Episcopalian school for boys. It was in Baltimore that he met Alfred Curtis, Episcopalian rector of Mt. Calvary Church and future Bishop of Wilmington. Both men already had leanings toward the Catholic Church, and in 1872 both were received into it—Curtis in England on April 18, and Tabb in Richmond on September 8. Shortly after, Tabb entered St. Charles College near Ellicott City to begin his studies for the priesthood. After his graduation in 1875, he taught at St. Peter's Boys' School in Richmond for two and a half years, and then became an instructor in English and Greek at St. Charles College. In September, 1881, he entered St. Mary's Seminary, Baltimore, as a student of theology. From the seminary he issued his first

¹ Francis A. Litz, Father Tabb: A Study of His Life and Works, Baltimore, 1923, 10.
² Ibid., 16.
volume of poems, and during this period he contributed poetry to several magazines. On December 20, 1884, he was ordained to the priesthood by Bishop Gibbons in the Baltimore Cathedral. He had attained the goal of his desires.

The remaining twenty-five years of his life Father Tabb spent teaching literature and grammar to the younger boys at St. Charles College. These years of retirement bore rich fruit in poetry, for it was only then that he turned to the quatrains, his characteristic genre. When total blindness fell upon him in 1908, he had to give up teaching, but he continued to write poetry. Death, like his blindness, gradually drew near, and on the night of November 19, 1909, he died, leaving to American literature a comparatively small but rich heritage of poetry.

When, in the summer of 1892, Father Tabb defined poetry as

A gleam of heaven; the passion of a star
Held captive in the clasp of harmony;
A silence, shell-like, breathing from afar
The rapture of the deep—eternity,

he was at the same time demonstrating the role of the creative imagination in the production of poetry, for it is this faculty that distinguishes the poet from the ordinary run of men. The ordinary man sees with his senses; when he draws a picture, he selects his details on the basis of their practical—that is, their factual or informational—importance. The poet, on the other hand, sees not only with his senses but also with his imagination. Even as he

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3 Ibid., 34-35.

looks, the object he perceives with his senses combines with images already in his mind, and the result is his individual perception of the object. When he draws his picture, he selects his details on the basis of their imaginative or emotional importance, so that each detail contributes to the expression of the mood that dominated his perception of the object. Frequently he chooses only one detail; if he chooses more than one, the effect is nevertheless unified.

This is the work of the poetic imagination, which Coleridge defines as "the power by which one image or feeling is made to modify many others and by a sort of fusion to force many into one." This "capability of reducing a multitude into unity of effect, or by strong passion to modify series of thoughts into one predominant thought or feeling," can never be acquired. It is the faculty of which Horace speaks when he declares that "the poet is born, not made." Imagination, therefore, is the touchstone of the true poet, the ultimate test of real poetry.

But if imagination is first and foremost the poet's special way of seeing, it implies also his special way of saying, the language that distinguishes him from every other poet. Of all the elements that make up that

7 Ibid., II, 91.
8 Cf. Frederick Clarke Prescott, The Poetic Mind, New York, 1922, 139-140.
language—meter, rhythm, form, and the rest—none is more important in the self-revelation of a poet than his imagery. Every poet, particularly every lyric poet, gives himself away, as it were, through his images.

The imagery he instinctively uses is . . . a revelation, largely unconscious, given at a moment of heightened feeling, of the furniture of his mind, the channels of his thought, the qualities of things, the objects and incidents he observes and remembers, and perhaps most significant of all, those which he does not observe and remember.9

The imagery of a poet is the key to his likes and dislikes, his interests and his ideals—in a word, to his personality.

Of few American poets is this more true than of Father Tabb, because of two characteristics peculiar to his poetry: the sudden, almost spontaneous conception of the idea, and the immediately finished expression of that idea in verse. Both the faculty and the students of St. Charles College were accustomed to the sight of the priest walking around the campus or through the woods or fields, coming to a sudden stop, throwing his head back, and, apparently unconscious of his surroundings, gazing fixedly at the sky for two or three minutes. As time went on, they came to know that such an experience was always followed by a finished poem. Father Tabb used to insist that he could not write poetry to order but had to wait for the moment of inspiration. When he did write, he rarely made changes in the first draft of his work.10 One is justified, therefore, in holding that because of its


10 Lits, Father Tabb, 91-93.
spontaneity and condensation, his imagery definitely reveals his personality.

During the forty odd years since Father Tabb's death, brief critical essays on his poems have appeared at intervals in Catholic and secular magazines. The very brevity of these articles precludes any extensive study of the poet's imagery. Only one longer study of importance has been published, *Father Tabb: A Study of His Life and Works*, written by Francis A. Litz of Johns Hopkins University, a former pupil of Father Tabb at St. Charles College. Litz does treat at some length Tabb's images drawn from nature and religion; yet even this treatment is cursory when viewed in the light of the poet's work as a whole.

The present study deals with the imagery of all the serious poems—approximately 775—of Father Tabb published during his life and shortly after his death. His humorous verse has been omitted precisely because it is, in many instances, mere verse rather than true poetry. His poetry that existed in manuscript form until 1928 has likewise been omitted because Father Tabb never authorized its publication, and consequently it cannot be regarded as his completely finished work. The text used for the present study is that edited by Francis A. Litz, since it contains all of the serious poems of Father Tabb except *The Rosary in Rhyme*, now out of print and available only in the rare book room of large libraries.

After briefly discussing the technical aspects of Father Tabb's imagery,

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11 See above, n. 4.
the writer proposes to classify his images according to their sources and to interpret the personality of the poet in the light of these findings. She does not pretend that hers is an exhaustive study of Father Tabb's imagery. It is possible and highly probable that some of his images have escaped her attention, but her study has, she believes, been intensive enough to warrant the conclusions she has drawn.
The term image is here used in a broad sense and embraces every mental, emotional, and sense experience which the poet expresses in terms of comparison or identification. Since allusions can best be treated in the chapters dealing with the sources of Father Tabb's imagery, and since the implicatory figures—trope, metonymy, and synecdoche—are, in the final analysis, metaphors or similes or personifications, it seems wise to limit the discussion of the technical aspects of Father Tabb's imagery to these three large classes.

In view of the brevity of most of Father Tabb's poems, it is not surprising that metaphors should rank first in importance among his images. So intense were his mental, emotional, and sense experiences that he ordinarily identifies rather than merely compares two objects or ideas.

When he contemplates fame, life is to him the noonday, and death the night that distinguishes star from star.1 The toils and hardships of life make him think of it as a laborious day whose night, death, is so sweet

That God himself, o'erwearied of the light,
Within its shadows lay.2

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1 "Fame," The Poetry of Father Tabb, ed. Francis A. Litz, New York, 1928, 364.
2 "Death," ibid., 363.
Again, life is "but a leaf upon the tree," and birth and death the winds that blow upon it.\(^3\) Death becomes for him the reaper casting life to the ground that it may rise again,\(^4\) another Judas betraying Christ with a kiss,\(^5\) or the pilot quietly bringing the soul into port while she is asleep.\(^6\) Sleep, death's sister, is the "Unchiding mother of a wayward son,"\(^7\) the silent angel shod with snowy sandals who came down to keep the first Christmas watch.\(^8\)

He ponders the mystery of the Incarnation, and the world appears to him Christ's cradle, the stars His worshippers, and Mary

The one horizon never dim
With penitential tears.\(^9\)

And as he looks upon Mother and Child at Nazareth, he reminds Mary that

... earth and heaven—the footstool and the throne
Of Him who bowed obedient to thy sway

Pause, till their tongues are tutored of thine own,
"Magnificat" in wondering love to say.\(^10\)

Speaking in the person of Christ, he sees in Mary's motherhood "The mirror of

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3 "Autumn Song," ibid., 242.
4 "Earth's Tribute," ibid., 159-160.
5 "Rabboni," ibid., 229.
6 "Her Pilot," ibid., 129.
7 "Invocation," ibid., 253-254.
8 "At the Manger," ibid., 196.
9 "Christmas," ibid., 199.
10 "Child and Mother," ibid., 212.
Divinity, and he extols Our Lady as

... the blessed Tree
Whose fruit proclaimeth thee,
  O Mother mine!
For never laden bough
Such burden bore as thou,
  Of Love Divine. 12

Magdalen's shame is the shadow in which Christ reverences His Mother's name and therefore pardons her; the penitent, breaking the alabaster box of ointment at His feet, is herself an even costlier vase, distilling "The bruised balm of penitential love." 11:

These are but a few examples of strict metaphors in Father Tabb's poetry. Implicit metaphors also abound. So he speaks of the "sacerdotal trees," of the Judean stars keeping watch within the skies, of "brimming life," and the "winged soul." Time and thought keep him a prisoner, and he cries out:

12 "The Tree," ibid., 213.
13 "Mary, the Sinner," ibid., 211.
14 "Recompense," ibid., 229.
17 "My Messmate," ibid., 243.
18 "Resistance," ibid., 365.
When time is dead, and memory
Deserts the ramparts, I am free.19

Wrinkles are to him the effect of frost, sun, wind, and rain,

Each perfecting the Sculptor's plan
Upon the godlike image, Man.20

The martyr Afra pleads with Christ to clothe her "with purple penance."21

Father Tabb's apparent preference for the metaphor does not, however, blind him to the value of the simile. Indeed, it is in the use of this weaker image that he possesses a unique skill.

His simple similes are numerous and varied. As Christ walks down the road to Calvary, His enemies, "Like wolves upon a victim's trail,"22 gloat over His falls; but on Easter morning the reed of scorn which they had put into His hands,

Like Aaron's rod,
Hath blossomed to adorn
The risen God.23

A penitent soul grovels at Christ's feet like Magdalen,24 whose grief "like

19 "Release," ibid., 363.
20 "Wrinkles," ibid., 370.
22 "Easter Eve," ibid., 230.
23 "Two Easter Lilies," ibid., 265-266.
24 "A Lenten Thought," ibid., 226.
a flood In the strength of a rain-swollen torrent hath shriven her." St. Francis of Assisi must listen to the complaint of Brother Ass, his body:

"Whate'er I do
Like Balaam you
Requite me with a blow,
As for offence
To recompense
An ignominious foe."  

There is an intimate bond between the departed and those of us who are left behind, says Father Tabb:

For spirits in eternity,
As shadows in the sun,
Reach backward into time, as we,
Like lifted clouds, reach on.

Apt as these figures are, they do not represent Father Tabb's supreme achievement in the use of the simile. This he attains in what may be called the extended simile. Here the figure covers the entire poem. Sometimes the comparison is directly expressed somewhat in the manner of a Homeric simile; at other times the figure is an implicit one. "Mount Everest," "Blind," and "De Profundis" are examples of the first type; "Deep unto Deep" and "Transfiguration," of the second.

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27 "The Departed," ibid., 125.
28 Ibid., 367, 258, 205-206.
29 Ibid., 366, 223.
In "Mount Everest" the poet compares the snow-crowned top of the mountain to the youths who walked unharmed in Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace:

As in the furnace fared the holy feet,
Unblemished by the sevenfold fervor, so
Nearest the sun, cold-whitening in heat,
Is thine eternal chastity of snow.

His own blindness recalls to him the two guides of the Israelites in the desert, a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night; for him

... darkness wakens with the morn,
But dreams, of midnight slumber born,
Bring back the light.

In "De Profundis" he contemplates the message of the sea. Even if millions were standing on the shore, the sea could impart to them no more than to his listening heart; and he reflects:

So, long in silence sealed,
The Word Ineffable
To Mary's heart revealed
E'en all that God could tell.

"Deep unto Deep" compares the reflection of the sky in limpid water to the knowledge that is given to hearts through "the tide of mutual tears." The reflection of a cloud in its parent stream is the basic image of "Transfiguration"; as the cloud reflects the tranquillity of heaven to the stream, so a mystery of faith appears to the believing soul as

A cloud transfigured of the light
In every tide of tears.

Personification also plays an important part in Father Tabb's poetry. Again and again he identifies himself with some inanimate object and thus gives it a personality. "The Touch-Me-Not" explains the mystery of this plant's apparent aloofness; "The White Jessamine" pours out the tale of its
yearning to bloom and give joy to a dying child; "The Billows" identify themselves as the souls of tribes that fell in the desert and as the offspring of Ishmael.30 Perhaps the outstanding example of this first-person personification is "The Dews,"31 strongly reminiscent of Shelley's "The Cloud." Rain, hail, and snow wend their way "in the track of day," the dews declare, but

We drip through the night from the starlids bright In the sleeping bowers, And deep in their breast is our perfumed rest Through the darkened hours; But again with the day we are up and away With our stolen dyes, To paint all the shrouds of the drifting clouds In the eastern skies.

Frequently Father Tabb addresses inanimate objects. He speaks to the setting sun,32 to the cloud that heralds the dawn,33 to the pilgrim violet that come to Winter's sepulchre each year,34 and to the bird he is releasing from captivity.35 He loves to talk to the wind. "Art thou the selfsame wind," he asks, "that blew When I was but a boy?"36 He speaks to the breeze that brings the fragrance of the rose to the ocean, and the tang of the sea

30 Ibid., 21-22, 3, 365.
31 Ibid., 57-58.
32 "Westward," ibid., 241; "Finis," 249.
34 "To the Violet," ibid., 5-6.
35 "Released," ibid., 146.
36 "To the Summer Wind," ibid., 49.
to inland places. He reminds the gentle wind blowing over him of its dread power to work havoc on the earth.

As one would expect, however, the majority of Father Tabb's personifications are in the third person. Many of them are mere capital-letter personifications. Others, though they evoke no sense image, are a little more vivid than the first-named group because a metaphor is implicit in them. So he speaks of the "prophet Star, the maiden Dawn," and "widowed Twilight," of Joy and his sister, Peace, and of the stars, the warrior lovers of the morning-glories. Finally, there are personifications that evoke a definite sense image. At the sound of the young tenor's voice,

... silence seemed a listener
O'erleaning with delight
The slender moon, a finger-tip,
Upon the portal of her lip.

At Bethlehem the angel seeking his God beholds

O'ershadowing Death,
A Mother's hand above,
Swathing the limbs of Love.

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37 "The Breeze," ibid., 51.
41 "The Playmates," ibid., 145.
42 "Song of the Morning-Glories," ibid., 17.
44 "The Angel's Christmas Quest," ibid., 200-201.
When the sun has set,

... the forsaken sea—
Her glance a tear
Wherein all depths of tenderness appear—

looks back upon the forlorn poet on the shore.

Such, in brief, are the technical aspects of Father Tabb's imagery. So far as the man himself is concerned, they testify to his keen observation and emotional sensitivity, but they reveal nothing more. It is in a study of the sources of his imagery that the key to his personality will be found.

45 "Dejection," ibid., 259-260.
CHAPTER III

NATURE IMAGES IN FATHER TABB

Nature was one of Father Tabb's most fruitful sources of imagery. As he contemplated the visible world about him—the animal and plant kingdoms, the heavens in all their manifestations, majestic sea and bubbling brook, mountain and valley and hill—he peopled his imagination with sights and sounds that were to find new life and fresh beauty in his poems.

Birds and Other Animals

Repeatedly Father Tabb refers to the flight of birds. He sings of "the fettered pinions of desire,"¹ and of fancy rising "with radiant pinions spread to heights of poesy."² He watches the swallow vanishing "upon the wings of thought,"³ and listens to night speaking of noon, whose eye burns with a glance that sears the wings of tender thought.⁴

4 "A Prelude of the Night," ibid., 83-85.
He dreads to be borne along on "vain ambition's vaunting wing," but he bids the robin,

Come, ere oblivion speed to me, flying
Swifter than thou.6

Joy and Pain, Hope and Memory, are twin birds.7 At times the wind "from a shadeless wing" spreads famine and pestilence, but when it is in gentler mood, "fledged with odor," it goes wandering among the leaves.8 In autumn, when the swallows are speeding to warmer countries,

. . . leaves, alert to follow,
Are falling everywhere,
Like wounded birds, too weak
A distant clime to seek.9

At the Purification Mary, the mother-dove, offers herself and her nestling;10 and at the Assumption her Son, the Fledgling, calls the mother-dove home.11 The lark, outpouring "a rhapsody of love," is the symbol of Father Tabb's dead friend Sidney Lanier;12 the nightingale is the mate of Keats's "deathless song."13 These two birds, which "screened from sight—By

5 "To the Wood-Robin," ibid., 37-38.
6 "Robin," ibid., 131.
9 "October," ibid., 89-90.
10 "The Purification," ibid., 213.
13 "Keats-Sappho," ibid., 263.
voice alone prevail," are the models of the poet, who ought to

... sing his song
As far secluded from the throng
As lark or nightingale.14

The robin is an image of love; the petrel, of memory; the eagle, of the mind
of the poet pondering infinite love.15 "A crowing, cuddling little Babe"
makes Father Tabb think of a chanticleer;16 and the image of a swan comes to
his mind when he sees a water-lily drifting along17 and hears Ophelia's
dirge.18

Horses, dogs, cows, sheep, and wolves are the only four-footed
animals that appear in Father Tabb's images. The winds are race horses that

... from many a cloudy mane
Shake off the sweat of gathering rain
And whicker with delight.19

In December, however, the "hungry winds" go whining

Like faithful hounds upon the track,
Of one beloved that comes not back.20

The image of the dog takes on an original significance in the quatrain

16 "'Chanticleer'," ibid., 177.
19 "Racers," ibid., 52.
20 "December," ibid., 337.
entitled "Is Thy Servant a Dog?" In answer to this Scriptural question, the poet replies:

So must he be who in the crowded street,  
Where shameless Sin and flaunting Pleasure meet,  
Amid the noisome footprints finds the sweet  
Faint vestige of Thy feet.

Deprived of a loved one, the poet's heart "lows, wandering everywhere," like the restless mother whose calf has been taken from her. The clouds, like sheep, are scattered by the wind and then herded together again. A mourning mother confides her little lamb to the Lamb of God, "Lest waking it should bleat and pine for me." While a sail-boat lies at anchor in the twilight, it dreams of the gale That wolf-like o'er the waste deserted leaps.

Startles the wolfish winds that wilder grow  
As hunger mocks their howling miseries.

Two insects, the butterfly and the bee, complete the list of animals that provided Father Tabb with images. He asks an April flower: "From what chrysalis Of Silence hast thou come?" He believes that during the day

21 Ibid., 3147.  
22 "Bereft," ibid., 1147.  
26 "A Winter Twilight," ibid., 284.  
27 "An April Bloom," ibid., 16.
sleep, beelike, lies

... in the honeyed deep
Of her favorite flowers,
Where the drowsy drops distil
Dreams, the coming night to fill,
Or, to soothe the weary brain,
Sweet forgetfulness of pain. 28

Similarly his own thoughts fly to his absent friend

... as the bees
To find their favorite flower;
Then home, with honeyed memories
Of many a fragrant hour. 29

Growing Things

Flowers and leaves, trees, plants, and fields—these were familiar friends of Father Tabb. Not only did he write poems about them, but he used them as images to illumine his poetry.

He sees a close connection between the flowers of earth and the blossoms of the sky. In the twilight the moon appears as a "budding crescent" that grows "to its full-blown splendor." 30 As evening comes on,

... one timorous star appears,
Pale-budding as the earliest blossom white
That comes in winter's livery bedight,
To hide the gifts of genial spring she brings. 31

29 "Love's Hybla," ibid., 132.
With the dawn, the stars "that in the darkness bloom Wither in the light." 32
Dawn itself, in another poem, is "the blossom of the eastern skies." 33
Since form is visible tone,

Beckh, where in silence was drowned
The last fleeting echo of sound,
The rainbow—its blossom—is found. 34

Other objects are symbolized by flowers. Each year is a blossom
on "the never-failing Tree Of Life." 35
On the sea "the foam-flowers blossom
day by day." 36
When spring comes, the wood-robin's heart, "a bud of silence,
breaks To ecstasy of song." 37
The bluebird is a stemless flower into which
God breathed a song, 38
and the butterfly is a

Leafless, stemless, floating flower,
From a rainbow's scattered bower. 39

When morning awakes, her

. . . eyes are heavy with the balm of night,
And as reluctant lilies to the light,
The languid lids of lethargy unfold. 40

32 "Life's Gulf Stream," ibid., 77.
33 "Matin-Song," ibid., 75.
34 "Visible Sound," ibid., 158-159.
35 "The Birthday," ibid., 127.
37 "To a Wood-Robin," ibid., 329.
38 "The Bluebird," ibid., 46.
39 "The Butterfly," ibid., 34.
40 "Daybreak," ibid., 293.
But when a child awakes, "soft as lily white, The eyelids blossom with
delight." 41 Outside of God Himself, there is nothing so pure in heaven as
Mary, "This lily-gleam of earth." 42 The cheeks of the Babe Love are "young
apple-blossoms white," 43 and the mouth, toes, and fingers of little baby
brother are a bunch of roses. 44 The humble dandelion offers man a visual
history of his life:

          With locks of gold to-day;
    Tomorrow, silver gray;
    Then blossom-bald. Behold,
    O man, thy fortune told! 45

From the bubble man learns that both he and it were made by Love, and he
draws the conclusion,

    Kindred blossoms then are we—
    Time-blooms on eternity. 46

Man's thoughts too are blossoms that spring up in the garden of his soul. 47

    Leaves have a special message for the soul. Life is a leaf upon
the tree, on which the winds of birth and death blow. 48 Seen against the

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41 "Destiny," ibid., 312-314.
43 "Betrayed," ibid., 136-137.
44 "A Bunch of Roses," ibid., 175.
45 "The Dandelion," ibid., 325.
47 "Immortelles," ibid., 182.
twilight, a motionless leaf is a symbol of some crisis in life. The smallest prejudice may be a barrier to charity, just as

A leaf may hide the largest star
From love's uplifted eye.

Trees, plants, and fields are images of things natural and supernatural. At the sound of the mocking-bird's song, the soul, "like the sapless bough of some long-wintered tree," feels new life and leaps heavenward. Mary is the tree whose fruit proclaims her Mother of God. Love is so great a boon that even if the heavens were "an overladen bough of ripened benediction," they could offer nothing to the soul that knows itself to be loved. St. Afra, facing a martyr's death, exclaims: "Life's vintage drop by drop Fast fills the destined measure of my cup." A mother, mourning the death of her three-day-old child, tells of the little one's life, which only she has known:

As the grape and the vine have we grown
Hour by hour, day by day,
Flesh of flesh, blood of blood, bone of bone.

50 "Prejudice," ibid., 357.
52 "The Tree," ibid., 213.
55 "To Her Three Days' Child," ibid., 120.
The song of the thrush falls upon the fledgling's brain

... as scattered grain,
There to blossom tone for tone
Into echoes of his own.56

Only the Maiden June with her sickle of a moon goes to reap fields of Fancy
and to fill the granary of Sleep,57 but anyone who has eyes to see can

Behold, upon the field of night,
Far-scattered seeds of golden light,
which will bear "the heaven-full harvest, dawn."58

Celestial Bodies

Even more numerous than Father Tabb's images of animals and growing
things are those he drew from celestial bodies. The sky itself, sun and moon
and stars, light and shadow, spoke to him of the simplest and the most sublime
truths of life.

A baby, he says, "has no skies But Mother's eyes."59 He looks upon
a childhood portrait of himself and notes

... Upon the eyes
No shadow; like the restful noonday skies
They sanctify the teeming world below.60

He bids sleep bring with it dreams,

57 "The Reaper," ibid., 93-94.
59 "An Idolator," ibid., 179.
60 "The Portrait," ibid., 292.
"Still as in quiet streams
The pictured sky."  

When a soul is at the point of death, he notes that its loved ones on earth and in heaven surround it, "Breathless as the blue above" in their eagerness to know "Who shall win the prize." The horizon-line reminds him of death, which "on time's horizon-line Shuts out eternity," it also speaks to him of the singular beauty of Mary, who on Christmas night seems to her divine Child to be

The one horizon never dim
With penitential tears.

A bird's nest is a "world beneath the mother's wing, Secure from harm." Oranges are

Orbs of autumnal beauty, ...

The circle of three seasons compassing
In spheres of gold.

The sun is a symbol of faith, whose light surpasses that of reason. Newman's love for American converts is a light which, Tabb hopes, may flow

61 "Invocation," ibid., 253-255.
63 "Illusion," ibid., 134.
64 "Christmas," ibid., 199.
65 "In the Nest," ibid., 43.
66 "In My Orange-Grove," ibid., 24.
67 "Epiphany," ibid., 224.
"westward as the sunshine to our land."68 The beautifully colored walls of a sea-shell are "sunset skies,"69 but sunset is also an image of death.70 As the sun "through cloudless ether swims" even while it "Bedims the moon's distorted face," so spiritual graces may cast over man a shadow that seems to him an eclipse.71

Favorite among Father Tabb's images are those of stars. The siren stream addresses the outcast as an "erring star."72 To a widowed father, his child is a "pale star" appearing "In cheerless night."73 In the eye of a friend, love glistens "as a beacon-star."74 Indeed, Father Tabb's dearest friend, Sidney Lanier, is himself a star with whom he pleads:

Star of my life, pale planet, far removed,
Oh, be thou, when the twilight deepens, near!
Set in my soul thine image undisproved
By death and darkness, till the morning clear
Behold me in the presence I have loved,
My beacon here, my bliss eternal there!75

The destiny of Keats is starlike,76 and the poet's own unutterable dream is

70 "Westward," ibid., 241.
71 "Eclipse," ibid., 185-186.
72 "The Siren Stream to the Outcast," ibid., 68-69.
74 "Lindenwood," ibid., 315-316.
76 "At Keats's Grave," ibid., 298.
"like a star that in the morning glance Shrinks, as a folding blossom, from the sight." Of Sappho, the Greek poet, Tabb sings:

A light upon the headland, flaming far,
We see thee o'er the widening waves of time,
Impassioned as a palpitating star
Big with prophetic destiny sublime:

but after one momentary burst of song,

We wait, alas! in tedious vigils long,
The meteor-gleam that cometh not again.

Most beautiful of all stars is Mary, who hid her own splendor in Christ's light at the Nativity and who

Abides—a widowed satellite—alone
On tearful Calvary.

Birds and flowers too are symbolized by stars. The cry of the killdee comes to the poet

A rhapsody of light,
As star to star gives utterance
Between the day and night.

A night warbler confesses:

Perchance my warbling from afar
Appears a star.

77 "Unuttered," ibid., 282.
78 "Sappho," ibid., 264-265.
80 "Killdee," ibid., 34-35.
81 "In Shadow," ibid., 111.
The jessamine is a star flower. As night dews drip "from the starlids bright" of sleeping flowers; and during the day, flowers,

Like stars that in the waves below
With heaven's reflected splendor glow,

. . . . . . . . . . . .

Are shadows of a fairer light.

Light and shadow are images of life and death, joy and pain, grace and guilt, mother and child, and of the lark and fleeting friends and silent prayers. When sunshine smiled on the poet and of his image "wrought a shade," she taught him that

. . . Death is but a tenderness,
A Shadow, that unclouded love
Hath fashioned in its own excess
Of radiance from above.

Cleopatra addresses death as the "regal shade" upon whose bosom deep her heart is laid. To a loved one death came "As shadows to the evening hills." The souls of the departed

As shadows in the sun,
Reach backward into time, as we,
Like lifted clouds, reach on.

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84 "Reflection," ibid., 325.
85 "My Photograph," ibid., 122.
86 "Cleopatra to the Asp," ibid., 123-124.
87 "Unmoored," ibid., 289-290.
88 "The Departed," ibid., 125.
Joy and Pain

Like shadows parted by the sun
At twilight meet again!89

Magdalen’s shame is a shadow in which Christ reverences His Mother’s name.90

Whatever darkness may surround a soul because of its sin, the soul must confess:

'Tis not, 0 Lord, of Thee.
The light is Thine alone;
The shadows, all my own.91

It realizes too

That larger lights above it throw
These shadows in the vale below.92

A mother and her young child are

As light unto shadow ... 
Each in the other approved,
Two in one, and in God one in three.93

The lark is "A shadow kindling with the sun," whose ecstatic song makes light and heavenly song one.94 In the fleeting form of a shadow Tabb sees the friend of fortune:

89 “Killdee,” ibid., 34-35.
90 “Mary, the Sinner,” ibid., 211.
91 “Tenebras,” ibid., 353.
93 “To Her Three Days' Child,” ibid., 120.
94 “The Lark,” ibid., 329.
"In flattering light thy constancy is shown;
In darkness thou wilt leave me all alone."  

Finally, prayers that come to the fame of silence wait "shadow-like, with folded wings, In reverence apart," till time brings "Release from prisoned thought."  

Seasons, and Weather

Closely allied to Father Tabb's images drawn from celestial bodies are those taken from the seasons and the weather. Under this heading are included images from the seasons themselves, from day and night, from dew, clouds, fog, rain, lightning, and rainbows. The emeralds in a carcanet are

A memory of spring between
This frost of whiter pearls than snow.  

Moments of time come to man "Like the manna, mute as snow." At dawn night vanishes "suddenly as April snow." Throughout the winter months,

When snow, like silence visible,
Hath hushed the summer bird,
the voice of the snow-bird, "a never-frozen rill Of melody, is heard"; but

95 "The Shadow," ibid., 352.
97 "A Carcanet," ibid., 138-139.
when spring comes, his voice is mute and he vanishes suddenly "like snow." \(^{100}\)

As morn is the only-begotten of night, so

After a God, no room
For man in Mary's womb. \(^{101}\)

Day and night are symbols of hope and woe, \(^{102}\) of love and reason, \(^{103}\) and of
the life and death of famous people, whose

... noonday never knows
What names immortal are;
'Tis night alone that shows
How star surpassest star. \(^{104}\)

Death, "the night of life's laborious day," is such a treasure that even God
lay "Within its shadows." \(^{105}\) The night of blindness, Father Tabb holds,
dwelt with Milton because his poetic vision was so fair. \(^{106}\) Of the night of
his own blindness or of desolation of soul he sings in the quatrain "Proxi-
mity":

The day is nearer to the night
Than to another day;
If closer to the Living Light,
In darkness let me stay. \(^{107}\)

\(^{100}\) "The Snow-Bird," ibid., 36-37.
\(^{101}\) "Unigenitus," ibid., 344.
\(^{102}\) "Augury," ibid., 121.
\(^{103}\) "All in All," ibid., 221.
\(^{104}\) "Fame," ibid., 364.
\(^{105}\) "Death," ibid., 363.
\(^{106}\) "Milton," ibid., 347.
\(^{107}\) Ibid., 355.
Dawn, which proclaims the promise of immortality true,108 brings with it the dew, one of Father Tabb's best-loved sources of imagery. For as the sky is reflected in every dewdrop, so God's tenderness and love shine forth in every tear.109 The eyes of the babe Love are "twin dewdrops" that take "the light of noonday's perfect blue."110 The poet knows that the flowers dreamed of his loved one

And hailed the morning with regret,
For all their faces with the dew
Of vanished joy were wet.111

Indeed, his loved one is to him "What to the night its stars, its heavenly dew."112 Tabb's own heart holds the image of his dead friend Lanier as "the dewdrop holds the star the long night through."113 But the most perfect of all dewdrops is Mary Immaculate,

A dewdrop of the darkness born,
Wherein no shadow lies.114

Clouds speak to the poet of the soul and sin and the troubles of life. His soul, like the cloud, possesses no beauty in itself; without the

108 "Immortality," ibid., 130.
109 "All in All," ibid., 135.
110 "Betrayed," ibid., 136-137.
112 "Solitude," ibid., 283.
113 "My Star," ibid., 260.
114 "The Immaculate Conception," ibid., 261-262.
light of heaven, it is but "a vapor foul, The veil of nothingness." 115 Amid "a cloud of all-pervading sin," silence abides, "The voice of love's unutterable word." 116 Souls in mortal sin are "Clouds without rain." 117 In every human life, griefs come and go, for

Life is but a passing cloud
Whence the rain is falling. 118

To most human beings mist and fog are gloomy things; to Father Tabb they are symbols of some of the loveliest things in nature. The humming-bird is "A mist of rainbow hues." 119 The voice of the dove is "A tuneful mist above a silent sea." 120 Spring, wooed by her lordly lover, June,

... answers not; but, like a mist
O'erbrimmed and tremulous with light,
In sudden tears she vanishes
Before his sight. 121

The dews tell how through the night they drip "still as the fog in the dismal bog." 122

Not even rain seems dismal to the poet. Tears, "rain-drops of the

117 "The Bridge," ibid., 111-112.
118 "Grief-Song," ibid., 110.
120 "The Dove," ibid., 45-46.
121 "The Tryst of Spring," ibid., 87-88.
heart, arising from both joy and sorrow.\textsuperscript{123} The song of the thrush, "Like April rain, of mist and sunshine mingled," moves over hill and plain.\textsuperscript{124} The joyous song of the wood-robin brings delight to the woodlands "As when through slanting sun descends the quickening shower."\textsuperscript{125}

After the rain comes the rainbow. Again it is Mary Immaculate to whom Father Tabb applies this image. She is

A rainbow beauty passion-free,
Wherewith was veiled Divinity.\textsuperscript{126}

Only a few of Father Tabb's images are drawn from storms. The life of a reprobate woman is to him a "stormy day."\textsuperscript{127} The "thunders of an edict" burst, and soon the hurricane of a Christian persecution rages.\textsuperscript{128} But even a storm is not altogether terrifying to the poet, who sees in the humming-bird "A flash of harmless lightning."\textsuperscript{129}

Elements: Land and Water

Less numerous than the images considered until now are those drawn from land and water in general. Yet they too betray the sensitive soul of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{123} "Fountain-Heads," \textit{ibid.}, 111.
\item \textsuperscript{124} "Overflow," \textit{ibid.}, 40.
\item \textsuperscript{125} "To the Wood-Robin," \textit{ibid.}, 37-38.
\item \textsuperscript{126} "The Immaculate Conception," \textit{ibid.}, 204-205.
\item \textsuperscript{127} "Giulio," \textit{ibid.}, 306-307.
\item \textsuperscript{128} "The Boy Bishop," \textit{ibid.}, 299-300.
\item \textsuperscript{129} "The Humming-Bird," \textit{ibid.}, 36.
\end{itemize}
the poet.

Dreams, Father Tabb tells us, like to

Pause in their migratory flight
This side the continent of night
to rest in noonday nooks "till the shade of sleep the solitude invade."130

The babe born on New Year's eve crosses the desert with the New Year and arrives at the land of May. But when the babe wishes to rest, the year insists that they must go onward

Through the Vale of Autumn sere
To the Mount of Snow.131

Life without a loved one is a desert,132 and souls in mortal sin are "Sands in a desert thirst."133

As Father Tabb looks upon an ancient lute, eager to draw forth its inspired music, reverence stays his hand "upon the brink of sound."134 Wind flowers, half-visible "breezes blossom-drest," remind him of whispers, which "for a moment rest Upon the brink of sound."135 To attain its summit, joy must walk "near the brink of pain."136 Death is a chasm, and no one knows

130 "Harbors," _ibid._, 155.
132 "Solitude," _ibid._, 283.
133 "The Bridge," _ibid._, 111-112.
134 "To an Ancient Lute," _ibid._, 301-302.
135 "Wind Flowers," _ibid._, 328.
136 "Hazard," _ibid._, 144.
"How near the brink he goes." The poet's dream, waiting to be uttered, has often paused "upon the brink of twilight chill."

Midnight is "the dusky slope of noon" down which June, the maiden reaper, goes with her "sickle of a moon." At dawn

... the dead volcano Night
In silence cold
Throbs; and the prisoned lava, long controlled,
Bursts forth in molten gold—
A torrent mightier than rolled
From Aetna or Vesuvius of old.

So insignificant and frail a thing as a bubble is for Father Tabb an image of tremendous truths. A dying babe is a bubble bearing all heaven unsullied in its heart.

Man is

A bubble on the bosom of the sea,
Itself a bubble in the bound of space.

God's "beauty fills each bubble-dome Upon the waters wide;" may it likewise, the poet prays, abide in his own bosom.

Fountains, streams, and rivers provided Father Tabb with images that have captured some of the liquid music of their sources. At dawn, he

137 "The Precipice," ibid., 368.
138 "Unuttered," ibid., 282.
139 "The Reaper," ibid., 93-94.
140 "The Dawn-Burst," ibid., 74-75.
141 "To a Dying Babe," ibid., 349.
142 "Adrift," ibid., 353.
143 "At Sea," ibid., 342.
says, the music of the stars grows faint and is heard only in the song of some bird,

Whose heart, a fountain of the light,
Prolongs the limpid strain
Till on the borderland of night
The stars begin again.

The earliest birds of spring

Seem, fountain-like, to everflow [sic.]
With music melted from the snow.

The poet's soul drinks in the midnight melody of the mocking-bird "as from a fountain strong." Enamored of the song of the hermit thrush, that sings "as from a fountain," the poet bids it

In flame or torrent sweep through life along
O'er grief and wrong.

The "liquid melody" of the wood-robin leaps "along The dusky dell," and the voice of the snow-bird is "a never-frozen rill Of melody." In solitude, "When none but God is listening," the poet must sing to himself,

Like as a brook, that all night long
Sings, as at noon, a bubble-song
To sleep's unheeding ear.

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144 "Matins," ibid., 47.
147 "Overflow," ibid., 40.
149 "The Snow-Bird," ibid., 36.
150 "In Solitude," ibid., 168.
To the blossom begging a bit of moisture, the dewdrop laments:

The gulf impassable of Sleep
Henceforth between us lies.

When "the stream of night" subsides, it leaves a beauteous vision agleam Beneath the noonday skies." It is a blessed thing "To die in sleep—to drift from dream to dream Along the banks of slumber" until the stream bears the soul into eternity. The violet is a sacrament binding together time and eternity, things seen and unseen; and so, the poet muses, with its

... wafted breath
Alternate echoeth
Each sundering bank of Death.

The river is a symbol of life and love, and of the life-giving sap of a tree. "Like the strong tide below" the bridge, life surges along above. Just as tributaries do not realize that they are destined to become one with the sea, so the friends whom God's love has led to the poet did not know their destiny "Till heart was wedded unto heart." The grain in wood reveals "the way the sap-river ran From the root to the top of the

154 "To the Violet," ibid., 5-6.
155 "The Bridge," ibid., 111-112.
156 "Tributaries," ibid., 141.
The cataract, the torrent, and the flood complete the list of Father Tabb's images drawn from water in general. Contemplating Niagara, he reflects:

Where echo ne'er hath found
A footing on the steep,
Descends, without a sound,
The cataract of sleep.158

Mary Magdalene spills "The torrent of her tresses" at Christ's feet.159 Her grief is "like a flood In the strength of a rain-swollen torrent."160 At midnight

A flood of darkness overwhelms the land;
And all that God had planned,
Of loveliness beneath the noonday skies,
A dream o'ershadowed lies.161

The Sea

Sea images play such an important role in Father Tabb's poetry that they must be considered apart from water imagery in general. In all nature he finds no other symbol as rich as the sea itself, with its vastness and profundity. It is an image of both sound and silence, of time and eternity,

158 "Niagara," ibid., 98.
159 "Stilling the Tempest," ibid., 362.
161 "Midnight," ibid., 163.
of love and friendship, of sky and light and midnight darkness, and of other things besides.

Beethoven, Tabb writes in a passage that combines the Scriptural image of Moses' uplifted rod with a nature image, "made the surging sea of tone Subservient to his rod."162 The shell, exiled from its home in the sea, is sundered by silence, "a deeper sea," from all but its "mother's moan."163 Silence is indeed

A sea wherein the rivers of all sound
Their streams incessant pour,
But whence no tide returning, e'er hath found
An echo on the shore.164

In the hour of death the sea of life recedes wave by wave from the limbs of the dying person, and drifts into the everlasting sea of eternity.165 Again, when someone dies, death flings another pebble

Into the midmost sea,
To leave of Life an ever-widening ring
Upon Eternity.166

Consequently, though many traces of a vanished race are left on "the isle of time," yet on the sea of eternity, which surrounds time, no vestige can be found.167

162 "Beethoven and Angelo," ibid., 348.
163 "The Shell," ibid., 171.
164 "Silence," ibid., 364.
165 "In Extremis," ibid., 250.
166 "A Stone's Throw," ibid., 357.
167 "Vestiges," ibid., 366.
Love is a "tideless depth"\(^{168}\) and a friend, the poet's other self, is to him "as is the sea Unto the shell:" a life whereof he breathes, a love wherein he dwells.\(^{169}\)

A thousand ships cut through the waves of the sea, but no mariner has ever steered athwart the "tranquil tide" of the sky.\(^{170}\) Calm in her serenity, night never heeds

A prophecy of doom
To drown her stars in light
As fathomless as gloom.\(^{171}\)

To a sleepless person, midnight seems "An ashen sea."\(^{172}\) Sleep itself is a sea, and the sleepless person "A desert isle unsolaced by the sea."\(^{173}\) Sleep identifies itself as

"Foam from the fragrant deep
Of silence, hither blown
From the hushed waves of tone."\(^{174}\)

The grown man dwells "Beside a sea of memories In solitude," and on the forsaken shore he finds "no murmuring shell."\(^{175}\) The poet's wild desires,

\(^{168}\) "The Dove," \textit{ibid.}, 45-46.
\(^{169}\) "Alter Ego," \textit{ibid.}, 361.
\(^{170}\) "A Sigh of the Sea," \textit{ibid.}, 65-66.
\(^{171}\) "Security," \textit{ibid.}, 80-81.
\(^{172}\) "Sundered," \textit{ibid.}, 251.
\(^{173}\) "Sleeplessness," \textit{ibid.}, 355.
\(^{174}\) "Sleep," \textit{ibid.}, 360.
\(^{175}\) "To the Summer Wind," \textit{ibid.}, 49.
his unuttered songs, are "as the troubled main That slumbers not."176 In a
dream the poet hears the voice of a young tenor; he wakes to find that the
melody has

... crossed the slumber bar
And out upon the open sea
Of consciousness afar
Swept onward with a fainter strain
As echoing the dream again.177

Like the sea itself, tides, waves, and shore symbolize things seen
and unseen, natural and supernatural.

What is the relationship between eternity and the brief life of man?
As the stones against which the tidal roll breaks, endow the sea with the
gift of speech, so the human soul, abiding "in the way Of tides eternal," be-
stows the gift of free utterance upon the "prisoned thought" of God's love.178

The poet's lamp "stems the darkened tide" of night, "That floods the
outer prospect."179 The star, enamored of a sleeping child, longs for

A seraph-tone—to sweep
In throbbing syllables adown
The tide of sleep

and make the child smile upon it.180 The cradle song a mother sings to her

babe is no idle lay, for, like the ocean's tide,

176 "To My Lamp," ibid., 275-276.
177 "The Young Tenor," ibid., 246-247.
178 "An Interpreter," ibid., 142-143.
179 "To My Lamp," ibid., 275-276.
180 "Destiny," ibid., 312-314.
In the heart 'twill ebb and flow
All the life-long way. 181

Deprived of love, man lives in pain

Till love, the truant tide,
Comes back again. 182

The sap of trees

. . . ebbs and flows unseen;
Flooding the earth—a fragrant tidal wave—
With mists of deepening green. 183

Under the influence of inspiration, the poet fashions his own "image in the tide of thought." 184

Keats's epitaph, "Here lies one whose name is writ in water," is a most fitting one, for, like waves, his poems run

Now crested proud in tidal majesty,
Now tranquil as the twilight reverie
Of some dim lake the white moon looks upon
While teems the world with silence. 185

In solitude, the poet recalls, his mind was swept along

Far out of space and period, where yet of time
No wave had drifted to disturb the depth sublime. 186

"Night's dreamy waves of sympathy" overflow to soothe the pain of the mourning

182 "At the Ebb-Tide," ibid., 140.
183 "Sap," ibid., 360.
184 "Narcissus," ibid., 168.
185 "Keats," ibid., 281.
186 "Repose," ibid., 310-311.
dove. In a hospital, each prisoner of pain "Heaves through the billowed agonies of night" as he listens to the song of the hospital bird.

The passion in Magdalen's heart is a "troubled wave" that is calmed by the Master's word. She herself is a "sobbing wave, above her fellows blest," in that she alone caressed the feet of her God. Like the wave, which is not satisfied with all its sea-born liberty but must dash itself against some promontory, so the human heart, "of all compulsion free," is "Self-driven to the Rock, its barrier, Christ." The soul of the poet is the strand to which the tidal roll of inspiration flows; when it departs, his soul is strewn "with silence, as with sand."

Not only the sea itself but ships and sailing also provide Father Tabb with images. Fancy is to him

A boat unmoored, wherein a dreamer lies,
The slumberous waves low-lisping of a land
Where love, forever with unclouded eyes,
Goes, wed with wandering music, hand in hand.

At mid-day, the moon, "a phantom sail," travels slowly westward across the

189 "Stilling the Tempest," ibid., 362.
190 "On Sea and Land," ibid., 341.
192 "Inspiration," ibid., 182.
193 "Fancy," ibid., 364.
Spring is a vessel "in festival array," that comes "floating o'er the main;" autumn is the same vessel, which "with banners brave and bright," drifts away again. Each flower of spring is "a fragrant blossom-sail" that comes drifting "before the wintry gale Across the sea of night." Even the last dead autumn leaf is a vessel that slips its cable and goes from its moorings when the first snow falls. Floating clouds seem like unpiloted vessels, and the image of a star reflected in the sea is "a seeming anchor frail."

197 "The First Snow-Fall," ibid., 99.
198 "Waiting," ibid., 141-142.
CHAPTER IV

RELIGIOUS IMAGES IN FATHER TABB

The basis of Father Tabb's nature imagery was a keen and sympathetic sense perception. His religious imagery proceeded from a more profound perception, his insight into things of the spirit. He had drunk deep at the wellsprings of Catholic truth. Indeed, religion had become so much a part of his very being that he spoke of God and the things of God as naturally as other men speak of their business and their families. Small wonder, then, that his poems abound with images drawn from the Scriptures, from doctrine, liturgy, and the sacraments, and from other religious sources. Metaphors and similes occur in great numbers, but more often his religious images take the form of allusions, which by their very unobtrusiveness give his poetry a depth and richness unsurpassed by that of any other American poet of his day.

The Old Testament

Though Father Tabb used his religious images spontaneously, without thought of chronological order, an intensive study of his imagery reveals a sequence that is amazing. By means of his images he traverses the length and breadth of sacred history, from the dawn of the first creation to the noonday of man's second creation in Christ, and thence through the twilight of faith and the night of death to the dawn of eternity's bliss. It seems wise,
therefore, to consider his Scriptural images in their chronological order.

"Night is the elder child of God," for darkness hovered over the face of the deep before light was made; and so it is that

His brooding spirit mild, as ere
The light was wrought,
Still for its wonted rest returns
To her dark-sheltered breast. 1

The Spirit breathes, and as in the beginning the sea brought forth the land, so Mary brings forth Christ,

Out of whose wounded side
All life is satisfied. 2

At the end of the six days, God found His creation very good. "So be it,"

Father Tabb writes in a birthday wish to a friend,

... when—thy garden done,
And all thy labors one by one
Recorded—through the twilight dim
He comes to bid thee walk with Him
Into a vaster solitude,
Thou too behold it very good. 3

In the eternal Paradise, the blessed may enjoy the fruit of the tree of knowledge, "Time-ripened love." Here angels guard the gates, yet

... not with sword of flame,
But fragrant breathings of the holy Name,
That never more an after-thought of sin
May enter in. 4

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2 "Sicut in Principio," ibid., 115.
3 "The Birthday," ibid., 127.
4 "Beatitude," ibid., 224-225.
Winter is another Adam, from whose sleeping side Nature fashions the snowdrop, "a bride as fair as Eden's flower." Like Adam after the fall, man reborn to grace can say: "The woman gave, and I did eat." But the woman now is the new Eve, Mary, who gave man the fruit of her womb, Jesus:

She took and ate, and I did eat,
And saved alike are we;
    God saith,
    So dieth death.

At sunset on Christmas Eve

Once more upon the western skies
The flaming sword appears,
And Eve again from paradise
    Departs in twilight tears.

Milton's poetic vision is so fair that physical blindness is his lot, "lest the light, A flaming sword" before his eyes, should shut him out from Paradise.

From the story of the creation and the fall of man, Father Tabb moves on in his imagery to the aftermath of the deluge. What is the secret of the lovely colors in the "sunset skies" of the sea-shell, which lay deep down in the penal waters when God set His rainbow in the sky? The shell replies:

... when the bow was bended,
Hope, that hung it in the sky,

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5 "The Snowdrop," ibid., 325.
8 "Milton," ibid., 347.
Down into the deep descended
Where the starless shadows lie;
And with tender touch of glory
Traced in living lines of love,
On my lowly walls, the story
Written in the heavens above.9

The first swallow of spring is

A slanting arrow sent
From yon fair-tinted bow,
In promise bent;

it hovers over the earth as once the dove, "the gentle bird of love Poised
her white wing the new-born land above."10 Sleep is a tender gift of Infi-
finite Love,

Sent, as the holy dove
O'er waters wild;
The one remaining joy of Eden undefiled.11

Columbus is the Christ-bearer whom God sent from the crowded ark of Europe

... like the dove,
To find, o'er sundering waters dark,
New lands for conquering love.12

Swiftly Father Tabb passes on to one of his favorite passages in
Scripture, the story of Sarah and Hagar and Ishmael. Day, the fair handmaid
Hagar, has been banished by her rival, Night; the stars are Sarah's progeny,
and Hagar's, "sands beside the sea."13 Again, as Hagar, driven into the

11 "Invocation," ibid., 253-255.
12 "Christopher Columbus," ibid., 265.
desert, watched her Ishmael languish, so

Each Hagar month beholds her waning moon
Upon the desert night,
Like Ishmael, a famished wanderer, swoon
From darkness into light.  

In still another poem billows proclaim themselves

Wind-scattered seed of Ishmael
Upon the sterile sea. 

Jacob's dream at Bethel and his struggle with the angel provide
Father Tabb with his next group of Biblical images. In the world of nature, the sunbeam is "A ladder from the land of light" that rests on the earth,

Whence dewy angels of the night
Climb back again to God. 

In the world of the spirit, the earth's life-giving power is a ladder that enables man to attain the vision of heaven.  

The poet himself is another Jacob wrestling with the "Spirit of the Night That keeps the keys of Slumber." When dawn breaks and the angel pleads for release, the poet demands and receives his benediction—sleep. 

The story of Joseph bound and sold is Father Tabb's final source of imagery from Genesis. Conscience is, he declares,

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14 "Renewal," ibid., 334.
16 "The Sunbeam," ibid., 331.
17 "The Life-Giver," ibid., 223-224.
... that Joseph bound
    And sold in vain;
From dungeon darkness found
    To rise again;
At God's right hand, what'er of good redound,
    His sole vicegerent crowned.\textsuperscript{19}

The history of the Israelites' departure from Egypt and of their sojourn in the desert offers Father Tabb some of his finest images. God bade Moses remove his shoes because he was standing on holy ground; in like manner, Silence is forever pressing her finger-tip on her lip

To remind the Pilgrim Sound
    That it moves on holy ground,
In a breathing-space to be
    Hushed for all eternity.\textsuperscript{20}

Only the dwellings of the Israelites in Egypt warded off the avenging hand of God's angel on that fateful night when the first-born were slain; so at midnight, when "A flood of darkness overwhelms the land," shutting out all the loveliness God had planned at noonday,

Amid the universal darkness deep,
    Only the Isles of Sleep

can "stem the night."\textsuperscript{21} In his blindness Father Tabb, like the Israelites in the desert, has for his guides a cloud by day and a fire by night; for, he explains:

... darkness wakens with the morn,
    But dreams, of midnight slumber born,
Bring back the light.\textsuperscript{22}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{19} "Conscience," ibid., 221-222.
\item \textsuperscript{20} "To Silence," ibid., 172.
\item \textsuperscript{21} "Midnight," ibid., 163.
\item \textsuperscript{22} "Blind," ibid., 258.
\end{itemize}
Like Moses, whose uplifted rod caused the waters of the Red Sea to part, Beethoven "made the surging sea of tone Subservient to his rod."23 As the waters receded, the Israelites triumphantly walked through the sea; when the goldenrod lifts her staff,

The autumn's journeys on, nor fear
The winter's threatening tide.24

Manna, the mysterious, all-sufficient food with which God fed His chosen people in the desert, is a symbol of time, which comes to man moment by moment,

Each sufficient for the needs
Of the multitude it feeds;
One to all, and all to one,
Superfluous to none,
Ever dying but to give
Life whereon alone we live.25

Deprived of a loved one by death, the poet goes to his own heart to feed upon the hidden manna of memories, which he and his departed friend had gathered day by day as it fell from heaven,

To be, if haply one were gone,
The bread for both to feed upon.26

In the first commandment, God forbade the Israelites and all men to make unto themselves any "graven image." Yet for the sake of fallen man, made

23 "Beethoven and Angelo," ibid., 348.
26 "Memory," ibid., 156.
according to His own image, did God Himself consent to die. 27 As the light of God still surrounded the face of Moses when he came down from the mountain with the tables of the law, so the splendor of an exile's native skies lives on, unbanished from his eyes. 28 Because of their murmuring, many of the Israelites were doomed to die during their forty years of wandering in the desert; the billows declare that they are the "wandering souls" of these tribes. 29 While the Israelites were still in the desert, the king of Moab sent Balaam to curse them, but Balaam's ass refused to carry her master thither and was therefore severely beaten by him. Father Tabb makes use of this incident to illuminate the complaint of "Brother Ass," as St. Francis of Assisi called his body, to the saint:

Whate'er I do,  
Like Balaam you  
Requite me with a blow. 30

Father Tabb's remaining Old-Testament images are taken almost at random from Judges, Ruth, Kings, and Daniel. When, at the close of day, we rest our heads upon the bosom of sleep, the cares of noon are forgotten, because, "shorn of shadows," they lie helpless "As Samson in captivity." 31 Like Ruth, gleaning the ears of corn after the reapers, Twilight

28 "To an Exile," ibid., 349.  
31 "Nightfall," ibid., 165.
... follows where the reaper Day
Let's fall the slender shadows in her way;
Then, winnowing the darkness, home again,
She counts her golden grain.32

A small pebble from the sling of David slew the giant Goliath; so

One word of well-directed wit,
A pebble-jest, has often hit
A boastful evil and prevailed
Where many a nobler weapon failed.33

During the revolt of Absalom, Ethan pledged his loyalty to King David, de-
claring that he would be wherever his king was. Father Tabb gives a new turn
to this pledge by referring to God's constant abiding with man:

Lord, wheresoe'er I am, Thou art,
In love subservient to me,
Still tendering a lowlier port
Than saint or angel unto me.34

The brook Kedron is reminiscent of David "and the moan That shook his heart
in exile."35

Like the winged cherubim guarding the Ark of the Covenant in the
Holy of Holies, two cliffs facing each other guard the valley between them.36
God dwelt in a cloud between the cherubim; even now the shadow of divinity
clings to the cloud that heralds the dawn as when its "presence shrined

32 "Twilight," ibid., 336.
33 "David and Goliath," ibid., 372.
34 "My Servant," ibid., 342.
35 "Kedron," ibid., 295.
36 "Cliffs," ibid., 183.
divinity Between the flaming cherubim.\textsuperscript{37}

To Father Damien, the hero of Molokai, Father Tabb applies the words with which Scripture describes Giezi, the servant of Eliseus, who with Naaman's gifts received also his leprosy. In the case of Damien, however, the words imply a blessing rather than a curse:

O God, the cleanest offering
Of tainted earth below,
Unblushing to thy feet we bring—
"A leper white as snow!"\textsuperscript{38}

Snow-capped Mt. Everest recalls to Father Tabb the story of the young Jews who walked unscathed in 's fiery furnace:

As in the furnace fared the holy feet,
Unblemished by the sevenfold fervor, so
Nearest the sun, cold-whitening in heat,
Is thine eternal chastity of snow.\textsuperscript{39}

Nebuchadnezzar, king of Baylon, was reduced to the condition of a beast so that he might learn that God is the ruler of kingdoms. This is one of the allusions Father Tabb uses to illustrate his theme that beasts have the power to lift men up to higher things:

And he, the outcast of the East,
The lord of luxury, discrowned,
Again the dawn of reason found
In darkness of the beast.\textsuperscript{40}

\textsuperscript{37} "The Cloud," \textit{ibid.}, 55-56.
\textsuperscript{38} "Father Damien," \textit{ibid.}, 347.
\textsuperscript{39} "Mount Everest," \textit{ibid.}, 367.
\textsuperscript{40} "Ad Bestias," \textit{ibid.}, 231.
Like the writing on the wall that warned Baltasar, Nebuchadnezzar's son, of his impending ruin, the sun-dial's slender shade tells the day,

"Thou'rt in the balance weighed, O day,
Found wanting, and shalt waste away."

And "in Night's pavilion," the stars proclaim, "Behold, thy kingdom too must fall."

What is the meaning of sunset, the writing on the wall of "Nature's banquet-hall"? No Daniel comes to interpret its message. And so the poet asks:

Is it the Babylonian doom,—
A kingdom passed away—
A midnight monarch to assume
The majesty of Day?

The New Testament

Father Tabb's New-Testament imagery is a series of vignettes covering the entire life of Christ.

Like Christ, who came unto His own alone, unrecognized, so daybreak, that has not looked on Yesterday and will not see Tomorrow, comes to its own "A stranger and alone." As John leaped in Elizabeth's womb at the sound of Mary's voice, so the wheat seed that will one day become an altar bread springs to bloom and ripeness while the reapers sing.

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41 "The Dial," ibid., 77-78.
42 "A Sunset," ibid., 78-79.
43 "Daybreak," ibid., 72.
44 "The Good Seed," ibid., 219-220.
The stars are the shepherds that keep watch when "the manchild, morn, Again is born." On Christmas night, while "the snow, A flock un-numbered lies," the stars "Keep watch within the skies."

Day after day Nature suffers a renewal of the tragedy of Ramah: Morn is Herod, Dreams are the innocent children, and Love is Rachel:

Day after Day
The Herod Morn
Of Dreams doth slay
The latest-born;
And Love, like Rachel o'er her dead,
Will not again be comforted.

The cry of the lambs to be slain for the Paschal sacrifice "is the echoed cry Of helpless Innocents about to die."

It is

The selfsame miracle that led
The Magi and the star
which pilots spring blossoms "before the wintry gale, Across the sea of night." The seed of wheat, "A pilgrim from the hour of birth," traverses earth's dark bosom until it reaches daylight, for, like the Magi, it is destined to be "led To Christ, the living House of Bread."

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45 "The Expected of Nations," ibid., 335.
47 "Life's Ramah," ibid., 74.
49 "From the Underground," ibid., 12-13.
50 "The Good Seed," ibid., 219-220.
another Simeon, holding the new year, a tiny babe, upon its heart, and singing its canticle of thanksgiving:

According to thy word,
Let now thy servant, Lord,
In peace depart. 51

In the life of the mistletoe the entire story of Christ's infancy is re-enacted. The bough of a naked tree is the cradle, the mistletoe is the Child, the stars are the shepherds that "from their fleecy cloud" walk out to see what has come to pass, the north wind is another Herod trying to tear the mistletoe from the tree, and the old year is Simeon, blessing it in his heart and praying:

"With prophecy of peace divine
Let now my soul depart." 52

Father Tabb's images from Christ's public life begin, as does the sacred narrative itself, with John the Baptist, His precursor. The snow is the precursor who proclaims "The level road that leads to Bethlehem." 53 Birds of spring bring such sweet tidings that, like the crowds that came to hear the Baptist's message,

The hidden buds begin to swell,
Till suddenly, with lifted ears,
The leafy multitude appears. 54

51 "The Old Year's Blessing," ibid., 184.
52 "Mistletoe," ibid., 24-25.
53 "The Precursor," ibid., 338.
54 "Precursors," ibid., 42-43.
The sea too, "forever calling to the shore With menace or caress," is another John crying in vain in the wilderness.55 John warned his hearers not to place their trust in their descent from Abraham, since God could raise up children from the very stones; Michelangelo, the sculptor, "from the sterile womb of stone Raised children unto God."56 John proclaimed Christ the Lamb of God; a mother confides her dead child to the keeping of the Lamb of God,57 and Leo XIII, "the aged Lion," comes to lie down in death "Beside the Lamb."58

Christ's own words of instruction were fruitful sources of imagery for Father Tabb. As the lilies of the field grow without concern, so "blossom-thoughts" arise in the garden of Father Tabb's soul.59 Far more beautiful than Solomon in all his glory is Mary, Maid and Mother,

Whose loveliness and lowliness
God stooped from highest heaven to bless.60

The provident care of God for the birds of the air renders holy the spot where a fallen sparrow lies; hence the poet bids man:

Pause where apart the fallen sparrow lies,
And lightly tread;
For there the pity of a Father's eyes
Enshrines the dead.61

55 "'Vox Clamantis'," ibid., 63-64.
56 "Beethoven and Angelo," ibid., 348.
57 "Confided," ibid., 174.
58 "Jacet Leo XIII," ibid., 350.
59 "Immortelles," ibid., 182.
60 "A Lily of the Field," ibid., 206.
61 "Holy Ground," ibid., 345.
Mary is the blessed tree known by her fruit, "for never laden bough Such burden bore" as she who carried love divine in her virginal womb. The sight of a baby, whose mother is its all, draws from Father Tabb this application of Christ's teaching on children:

His angel sees the Father's face;  
But he the Mother's full of grace;  
And yet the heavenly kingdom is  
Of such as this.63

In "Potter's Field" occurs a similar poetic interpretation, this time the paradox between Christ's having no place to lay His head and the purchase of a burial ground for strangers with the price of His betrayal:

'Twas purchased with His blood, this holy ground,  
This place of refuge for the homeless dead;  
While He, alas! no spot secluded found  
In all the world whereon to lay His head.64

Perhaps the finest example of such poetic interpretation is found in "My Offering." Here Father Tabb inverts Christ's parable on the goodness of an earthly father to his child and makes God the suppliant, man the ungrateful giver. His conclusion combines the New-Testament figure of the rejected stone with the Old-Testament figure of the healing serpent:

He asked me bread, the bread whereby alone  
The beggar Love could live;  
I gave a stone.  
He asked me fish, and I, a Passion's slave

62 "The Tree," ibid., 213.
63 "An Idolator," ibid., 179.
64 Ibid., 342.
65 Ibid., 225.
(All that I had to give),
A serpent gave.
Then came his benediction: "Lo, in Me,
A Stone retributive,
A Serpent see!"

By Scriptural images Father Tabb portrays Christ as the fulfillment of all the desires of a pagan. "Sacerdotal trees" uplifted the pagan; Christ "hung upon a Tree." Reverential awe inspired by the sight of sun and moon, subdued the pagan; Christ is "the perfect Light." "Within a lifeless stone" the pagan sought Divinity; "The Corner-Stone am I," Christ declares. The Pagan slaughtered man and beast alike for sacrificial feast; and Christ, "a Lamb, was slain."66

While teaching His disciples the Our Father, Christ bade them ask for their daily bread. The wind passing through a wheatfield proclaims the ripe golden grain as the answer to their petition:

Give us this day our daily bread.
"O wheat," the wind in passing said,
"'Tis you that answer everywhere
This call of life's incessant prayer;
Bow, then, in reverence your head,
For 'tis the Master's gift you bear."67

In compliance with Christ's words on charity, Father Tabb humbly submits to the blows of the Great Smiter:

Since to my smiting enemy
Thou biddest me be meek,
Lo, gladlier, my God, to Thee
I turn the other cheek.68

67 "To the Wheatfield," ibid., 103.
68 "Submission," ibid., 354.
Mary exercised the works of mercy toward Christ. When He came "A stranger, to His own," she in her soul conceived To let Him in." He was naked, and she "Of her humanity A garment wove." He was hungry, and she gave Him

What most His heart did crave,
A Mother's love.69

Christ's parables, themselves figurative forms of instruction, are the sources of some of Father Tabb's most beautiful images. Night is the Good Samaritan who bears man "to the Inn of Sleep."70 A dead child, the favorite of its mother, is to her the lost sheep, for which she pleads with the Good Shepherd:

Thou that didst leave the ninety and the nine
To seek the one,
Behold, among the many that are mine,
A lamb is gone.

0 Thou, Thyself a mourning Mother's Son,
Fold close my little one.71

From the parable of the Prodigal Son comes the reflection that beasts have the power to lift man higher:

The Prodigal among the swine
Refound the pearl cast forth in mire,
The wisdom lost in wine.72

Less fortunate than the Prodigal Son of the Gospel, however, is the echo,
which seeks in vain its father's door now that its portion has been spent, for

His all with latest sigh bequeathed
To thee the wanderer—he breathed,
Alas! no more. 73

A wilted blossom reminds Father Tabb of Dives and Lazarus. The blossom Dives bids a dewdrop to moisten its fevered lip. But like another Lazarus, the dewdrop reminds the blossom that the impassable gulf of Sleep lies between them. 74 Summer blossoms recall the parable of the laborers in the vineyard.

The householder bee inquires:

Why stand ye idle, blossoms bright,
The livelong summer day?

But the reply of the blossoms is different from that of the laborers in the Gospel:

Alas! we labor all the night
For what thou takest away! 75

Easter lilies, "like the faithful virgins wise, With lamps replenished," arise to greet the risen King. 76

From incidents in Christ's public life Father Tabb gleaned a rich harvest of images. Nicodemus wondered whether to be born again meant that he must return to his mother's womb, "to the primal gloom Where life began"; Father Tabb, in the face of total blindness, knows that he must remain in

73 "Echo," ibid., 94-95.
74 "The Suppliant," ibid., 12.
75 "The Bee and the Blossom," ibid., 326.
76 "Easter Lilies," ibid., 9-10.
this "primal gloom," there to learn the meaning of things unseen. 77 When the poet's words, like the sick in the porches of Bethsaida, lie "palsied at the pool of thought," Lanier's flute brings the healing angel "To touch them into sound." 78 To his petition for daily bread, Father Tabb adds a plea for light, for, as he says, "more to me, O Lord, than food is sight." In broad daylight his fellowmen have seemed "As trees," but his physical blindness has become spiritual vision; and so, with the joy of the blind man healed by Christ in Palestine, he can cry out:

... amid the falling rain  
Of tears, I lift, O Lord, mine eyes to Thee,  
For, lo! I see! 79

The incident of the coin of tribute figures in three of Father Tabb's poems. Contemplating the purity of Mary in the Annunciation, he reflects that God must approve of love rendered through her, for

... 'tis Thy Holy Face,  
Not Caesar's, that I trace  
In her portrayed. 80

He ponders alternate growth and destruction in the life cycle of grain; then, turning to human life and death, he concludes:

So life, by death the reaper cast  
To earth, again shall arise at last;  
For 'tis the service of the sod  
To render God the things of God. 81

77 "Going Blind," ibid., 257.  
78 "Lanier's Flute," ibid., 348.  
79 "Flute [sic] Lux," ibid., 257.  
81 "Earth's Tribute," ibid., 159-160.
In recalling the death of a loved one, he combines the incident of the coin of tribute with that of the widow's mite. Grief makes the world a place of "everlasting twilight," for

... To the past
The present pays its tribute, whereupon
Each moment coins the selfsame effigy—
The more than all by wealth unwidowed cast. 82

The beauty of flowers reminds Father Tabb of Christ sleeping during the storm at sea; he believes that as we trace Christ's divinity in the face of a martyr, so in these flowers we behold His dreams during that night of terror for the Apostles. 83 Entirely different is the picture he draws of waves: they portray the restlessness of life, the lot of wind and wave and all mankind till Christ once again speaks His healing word, "Be still." 84

The reader cannot but be struck by Father Tabb's frequent allusions to Mary Magdalen. He combines the picture of Magdalen at Christ's feet with the calming of the storm at sea:

... The gift that Nature gave,
The torrent of her tresses, did she spill
Before His feet; and lo, the troubled wave
Of passion heard His whisper, "Peace, be still!" 85

During Lent he casts himself at Christ's feet, suing for pardon and mercy:

Like Magdalen, I grovel at Thy feet
In lowly pride. 86

83 "Beacon Lights," ibid., 15-16.
84 "Waves," ibid., 117.
85 "Stilling the Tempest," ibid., 362.
86 "A Lenten Thought," ibid., 226.
His own priestly consecration recalls the thought of Magdalen's anointing:

A Magdalen adored
Her God in Thee:—
A greater love, O Lord,
Anointed me.87

But it is spring, the season of rebirth both naturally and supernaturally, that he associates most intimately with Magdalen. The seed, bearing within itself a life unseen, brings to the feast of spring its broken heart,

To find, like Magdalen
In tears, a life again
Love-lost—and saved!88

Each spring sees the pilgrim violet coming to winter's sepulchre

... with balmier store
Than Magdalen of yore
To Love's anointing bore.89

It is the earth, "who daily kissed His feet Like lowly Magdalen," that keeps "The silent watches of His sleep" on Holy Saturday.90 Then, to recompense Mary for breaking her box of ointment at His feet, Christ "breaks anon the sealed sepulchre, And fills the world with rapture and with light."91 And from that day to this, each Easter

Like Magdalen, the tearful dawn
Goes forth with love's anointing sweet
To kiss again the Master's feet.92

88 "The Seed," ibid., 95.
89 "To the Violet," ibid., 5-6.
90 "Holy Saturday," ibid., 228.
91 "The Recompense," ibid., 229.
92 "Easter Morning," ibid., 340.
Hills and waves remind Father Tabb of Mary, sitting at Christ's feet, and her sister Martha, busy about household tasks:

The waves forever move;  
The hills forever rest;  
Yet each the heavens approve,  
And love alike hath blessed  
A Martha's household care,  
A Mary's cloistered prayer. 93

One of the most charming incidents in Christ's life is the story of Zacheus climbing a sycamore tree in order to see Christ. Father Tabb combines this scene with the picture of the good thief, who bids men "climb the tree of the cross And for His passing wait with me," for

Here, nearer to its native skies,  
No intervening darkness lies  
Between the soul and Paradise. 94

As the Passion is the focal point of Christ's sojourn on earth, so it is a most fruitful source of imagery for Father Tabb.

Hundreds of years before Christ's coming, the brook Kedron echoed with David's canticles of praise and with his mourning for his son Absalom. When "David's Son In after years on love's vicarious way" crossed the brook, the "torrent told Its music to the wide-proclaiming sea." 95 That night it was the Paschal moon alone that witnessed

Amid the shadows of Gethsemane,  
The mingled cup of sacrifice o'erflow;

93 "The Sisters," ibid., 95-96.  
95 "Kedron," ibid., 295.
and so, as the holy night returns year after year, the face of the Paschal moon "is whitened with remembered woe." 96

While the Apostles slept, Christ agonized for men's sins. It was then that Christ blessed even the pain of sleeplessness,

For 'twas while others calmly slept around,
That thou alone in sleeplessness wast found
To comfort me. 97

Christ's betrayal by Judas is renewed each morning when a sunbeam kisses the morning star:

"Whom I shall kiss," I heard a Sunbeam say,
"Take him and lead away!"
Then, with the Traitor's salutation, "Hail!"
He kissed the Dawn-Star pale. 98

Peter's denial is re-enacted at cock-crow, when

... the hidden Day,
The thrice-denied, appears;
And Darkness, conscience-stricken, steals away,
His face bedewed with tears. 99

After the trial before Caiphas, Christ was blindfolded, but He remained silent when He was asked who it was that had struck Him. Not so Father Tabb in his blindness:

... When to-day
Mine eyes are holden, and again they say,
"Who smote thee?" Lord, I tell them it is Thou. 100

97 "Insomnia," ibid., 243-244.
98 "Betrayal," ibid., 334.
100 "The Smiter," ibid., 355.
Because Christ has left the imprint of His redeeming blood not only on man but also on nature, Father Tabb sings:

Because Christ has left the imprint of His redeeming blood not only on man but also on nature, Father Tabb sings:

Behold in every crimson glow
Of earth and sky and sea
The Hand that fashioned them doth show
Love crucified for me. 101

In the dread hour of Christ's dying, Mary, the Mother of Sorrows, stood beneath the cross, steadfast to the end; so too

... maternal Autumn grieves,
As blood-like drip the maple leaves
On Nature's Calvary,
And every sap-forsaken limb
Renews the mystery of Him
Who died upon a Tree. 102

The piercing of Christ's side, like so many other incidents in the Passion, has its renewal day after day, when a spear of light pierces "the side of Night, And from the red wound wide" fashions "the Dawn, his bride." 103

The dawn of Easter day brought Mary Magdalen to the tomb, seeking the body of her Lord. But the stone had been rolled away, an angel sat upon it, and the winding cloths lay there, folded; Magdalen stood outside the tomb weeping until the risen Christ again flooded her soul with joy. At Easter time the flowers proclaim:

We are His witnesses; out of the dim,
Dark region of Death we have risen with Him.
Back from the sepulchre rolleth the stone,

101 "Good Friday," ibid., 344.
102 "Mater Dolorosa," ibid., 91.
And Spring, the bright Angel, sits smiling thereon.

We are His witnesses. See, where we lay
The snow that late bound us is folded away;
And April, like Magdalen, weeping anon,
Stands flooded with light of the new-risen Sun.  

Again, the periwinkle is another Magdalen weeping at the tomb of her Lord,

Till the wonder of surprise
Clears her over-clouded eyes,
And the Resurrection lies
In each chalice-bloom.  

As the risen Christ kept the scars of His wounds, so every wave that breaks upon the shore,

Christ-like, within its lifted hand
Must bear the stigma of the land
For all eternity.  

Outside the life of Christ, Father Tabb did not draw many images from the New Testament. St. Peter's teaching on charity is the source of his poem "Charity," which proclaims that if the world would but give to love the crumbs that fall from its table,

... love, that still the laurel wins
Of sacrifice, would lovelier grow,
And round the world a mantle throw
To hide its multitude of sins.  

From the Apocalypse comes his image of perfection. Its path proceeds from

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104 "Easter Flowers," ibid., 10.
105 "Periwinkle," ibid., 18.
106 "The Life-Tide," ibid., 111.
107 Ibid., 220-221.
flame to snow. It must be cleansed in fire till, when passion is completely subdued,

It stand at last
Unblushing on the topmost height
With sister souls in white,
To follow still the Lamb
Wherever He may go.\textsuperscript{108}

Other Sources

Although Father Tabb drew the majority of his religious images from the Scriptures, he was fully conscious of the richness of other religious sources—the liturgy, the sacraments, doctrines, Church history, and religious life.

A number of his poems portray Nature re-enacting the splendid pageantry of the Church's ritual. Night is a priest pouring "The chrism of the light" on dawn, his last-born child, and bidding

\[\ldots \text{him to the altar come,}
\text{Whereon for sacrifice}
(A lamb before his shearsers, dumb,)
A victim shadow lies.\textsuperscript{109}\]

In autumn the aster is the priest who dons purple vestments

To suit the solemn antiphon
Of Autumn's ritual;

And deigns, unwearied, to stand
In robes pontifical

\textsuperscript{108} "Purification," \textit{ibid.}, 235-236.

\textsuperscript{109} "Dawn," \textit{ibid.}, 71.
Till Indian Summer leaves the land,
   And Winter spreads the pall. 110

A mountain is the

   Altar whereon the lordly sacrifice
   Of incense from the reverent vales below
   Is offered at the dawn's first kindling glow
   And when the day's last smouldering ember dies. 111

Flowers are Nature's senseers. As Father Tabb contemplates a lily, he muses:

   'Tis not the radiant star above
   That breathes for me the lore of love
   As doth the dewy censer sweet
   That heaven enkindles at my feet. 112

At Keats's grave violets bloom the whole year through,

   And swing their fragrant censers till the tomb
   Forgets the legend of mortality. 113

The Church's admonition on Ash Wednesday must have had a peculiar charm for Father Tabb, for he uses it a number of times in his poems. Addressing a babe, Niva, who had died in winter, he says:

   Niva, Child of Innocence,
      Dust to dust we go;
   Thou, when winter wooed thee hence,
      Wentest snow to snow. 114

The wind uses this admonition as an argument to man to join the winds and be free of his "prison-house of clay":

112 "Consider the Lilies," ibid., 170.
113 "At Keats's Grave," ibid., 298.
114 "To the Babe Niva," ibid., 347.
Better far the soul to free
From its cold captivity,
And with us, thy comrades, go
Where so'er we list to blow.
Come, for soon again to dust,
Playfellow, return thou must.\textsuperscript{115}

"Dust to Dust" is the title of a third poem, whose theme is the scientific truth that "In the centre of each snow-crystal or drop of rain is found a minute particle of dust":

\begin{quote}
Earth wedded, life atwain
In heaven, were endless pain.
Uplifted from the plain
To realms of snow or rain,
Of dust each lonely grain
To dust will come again.\textsuperscript{116}
\end{quote}

The Requiem, Mass of eternal rest, is for Father Tabb a symbol of sadness. The mournful song of the dove is a requiem, at the sound of which "Night's dreamy waves of sympathy o'erflow."\textsuperscript{117} The seasons chant a song of joy in summer, but as winter with its frosts comes on, they sing a "holy requiem."\textsuperscript{118} Though sunbeams write the epitaph of night, and gray shadows that of day, yet there is heard

One requiem of wind and wave
Above each grave.\textsuperscript{119}

\textsuperscript{115} "A Wind-Call," ibid., 52.
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., 161-162.
\textsuperscript{117} "The Dove," ibid., 45-46.
\textsuperscript{118} "At Keats's Grave," ibid., 298.
\textsuperscript{119} "Inscriptions," ibid., 77; cf. "Poe," 297.
From the sacraments of Baptism, Penance, and Holy Eucharist Father Tabb drew some exquisite figures. When Creation's morning broke, the sea was "Baptised of light." The rose knows nothing of sin; yet "Baptismal drops" of dew shine within its chalice "At morning's birth, at evening's calm decline." God alone takes care of wild flowers, whose

... morn and evening dew—
The sacrament
That maketh all things new—
From heaven is sent.

As sinful man kneels humbly at the tribunal of Penance, so the breeze confesses to the Infant Christ in the manger:

I that have lashed the sea
And from the forest torn the rooted tree,
Come now, my passion spent,
A lowly penitent,
Sweet Child, to Thee.

His sin forgiven, man is again arrayed in the dazzling robe of sanctifying grace; in early spring the cherry tree, "From darkness shriven," brings to earth "the breath And light of heaven in its blossoms." Autumn, with its harvest of wheat and grapes, is

121 "To a Rose," ibid., 7-8.
123 "The Breeze at Bethlehem," ibid., 199.
... the messenger divine
With love's celestial counter-sign,
The sacrament of bread and wine.  

Even such abstract matters as the doctrines and mysteries of faith were sources of imagery for Father Tabb. The Holy Trinity is a symbol of the trinity on earth—Christ, the poet, and his fellowman. Addressing Christ, the poet says:

Thou hast on earth a Trinity—
Thyself, my fellow-man, and me;
When one with him, then one with Thee,
Nor save together Thine are we.  

The violinist knows still another trinity, formed by the meeting of string and bow in music:

Love thy violin;
Let thy soul therein
Learn the unity
Of the mystic three,
When the string and bow—
Parted lovers—meet
And in music know
Life in love complete. 

Clouds, formed from the waters of the sea, "Clean of original stain," recall the doctrine of Mary's Immaculate Conception. Silence speaks of her virginal motherhood:

A silence, by no breath of utterance stirred—
Virginity in motherhood—remains,

125 "Autumn," ibid., 338.
126 "To the Christ," ibid., 339.
127 "To an Amateur," ibid., 139-140.
Clear, midst a cloud of all-pervading sin,
The voice of love's unutterable word.129

Are snowflakes ghosts of fallen leaves, Father Tabb asks, or are they

... angels, bearing home
The host unseen
Of truant spirits, to be clad
Again in green?130

Sleep is the silent angel that came down on Christmas night to keep watch at Christ's manger.131 During the heat of noonday, a cloud is like an angel who brings a heavenly balm to earth "as to a weary child."132 To the man of today the child of yesteryear is an angel leading him home again to innocence of life.133

From religious life, too, Father Tabb draws images. A mother, looking upon her first child, recalls that before its birth she could not, "save in fancy, gaze Soul-centered" on its "cloistered face."134 A full-blown rose bids the shadows come and lead her "home from the world away To the calm of the cloister Night."135 Wearied of light, Evening comes, "a

130 "Phantoms," ibid., 99.
131 "At the Manger," ibid., 196.
134 "To Her First-Born," ibid., 111-115.
tearful novice, soon To take the veil of night.\textsuperscript{136} Because the moon dreads 
to see the ghost of yesterday,

Still closer doth she cowl with night
Her visage white.\textsuperscript{137}

A chord is a narrow cloister wherein

Dwells a sisterhood of sound,
Far from alien voices rude
As in secret solitude.\textsuperscript{138}

A few images remain which, broadly speaking, may be included under 
religious imagery, though they really come from religion falsified, that is, 
from superstition. Fog proclaims itself the ghost

Of winds that die
Alike on land or sea,
In silence deep
To shroud and keep
Their mournful memory.\textsuperscript{139}

Moon-flowers are ghosts of morning-glories that have been slain.\textsuperscript{140} The 
North is the ghostland, whence swallows must speed before winter comes.\textsuperscript{141}

Birds and leaves alike are phantoms that flee "From winter's wild domin-
ions."\textsuperscript{142} The shadows around a dead tree are

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{136} "The Postulant," \textit{ibid.}, 332.
  \item \textsuperscript{137} "The Haunted Moon," \textit{ibid.}, 82.
  \item \textsuperscript{138} "The Chord," \textit{ibid.}, 149-150.
  \item \textsuperscript{139} "Fog," \textit{ibid.}, 59-60.
  \item \textsuperscript{140} "Moon-Flowers," \textit{ibid.}, 327.
  \item \textsuperscript{141} "A Pair of Swallows," \textit{ibid.}, 13-44.
  \item \textsuperscript{142} "October," \textit{ibid.}, 89-90.
\end{itemize}
like a wizard's widening snare,
Spun of the moon, in midnight sorcery,
Down gazing with a madman's vacant stare.  

As a storm bursts upon the island of St. Helena, Napoleon's prison-home,

...the mountains strong
Are livid with the lightning's leprous tongue,
As nations smit of some malignant star  

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143 "The Dead Tree," ibid., 286.
144 "At St. Helena," ibid., 302.
CHAPTER V

DAILY-LIFE IMAGES IN FATHER TABB

The preponderance of religious and nature images in Father Tabb's poems might lead one to conclude that the things of ordinary life were left untouched by the muse of this poet. Yet such a conclusion would be unfounded; for his images run the gamut of everyday experience. Classes and types of people, all kinds of human relations, buildings, clothing and jewelry, light and fire, sports and games, war, travel, trades and occupations—all were points of departure for Father Tabb's flights of fancy.

Classes and Types of People

From childhood and old age Father Tabb draws some picturesque images. Music is a babe "In swaddling clothes of silence bound," which the lute-player wakes "to light and sound." The cloud brings a celestial balm to the earth, "as to a weary child." While the shadow of a mountain broods above the poet, his own shadow "Sleeps as a child beneath it." Echoes are


"Children of the distance,"\(^4\) and the wind is at one time "a whistling boy," at another "a blind, demented giant."\(^5\) On the snows of December

The aged year
His testament and will
Records: . . . 6

Royalty and kingship are favorite sources of imagery for Father Tabb, who looks upon earth as the footstool, and heaven as the throne "Of Him who bowed obedient" to Mary's sway in Nazareth.\(^7\) Sleep is the "Queen of Peace," who seals him with her benediction.\(^8\) At break of day, "Dawn's imperial crest appears" above the mountain,\(^9\) but in the evening, eager to feel the warm radiance of the sun,

Rich vapors spread,
Beneath their monarch's feet and o'er his regal head.\(^10\)

Fancy is in very truth

... sole sovereign of the strange
Uncharted region of that wide demesne
Where Truth the tyrant never yet hath been.\(^11\)

\(^4\) "Echoes," ibid., 92-93.
\(^5\) "The Wind," ibid., 50.
\(^6\) "December Snow," ibid., 100.
\(^7\) "Mother and Child," ibid., 212.
\(^8\) "Invocation," ibid., 253-254.
\(^9\) "Ad Montem," ibid., 277-278.
\(^11\) "Restraint," ibid., 299.
For in the poet's eyes, the wind, the dainty crocus, the acorn, and the hickory and maple have just claims to royal honor. The wind,

Controlling all, of none controlled,
O'er earth and sky and sea,

bends all to reverence his majesty.12 Whether the yellow crocus, "little monarch," was crowned "Under ground" or whether daylight made him "king Of the spring,"13 the poet does not know; but he has no doubts about the coronation of the hickory and the maple. As the Gypsy Breeze came wandering through the wood, the lover trees bade her tell their fortunes. Her answer came:

"Sir Hickory the king shall be
Of all this wide demesne;
And you," she added tenderly,
"Fair maple, shall be queen."

They listened, smiling as she spoke,
Nor heeded what she told,
Till came the morning when they woke
Arrayed in red and gold.14

The acorn boasts of his royal lineage:

I am the heir, the Acorn small,
To whom as tributaries all,
The root, the stem, the branches tall,
Do homage round my castle wall.15

At the antipodes of royalty stand the jailer and his charges. Like a jailer, the sun

14 "Fulfilled," ibid., 28.
... prisons many a life indeed
Within the narrow cells of seed.16

As light is a prisoner of the iris, so life lies "in time's captivity" within
the poet's soul.17 Water changed to ice rejoices that it will again be its
former self, for, though Frost and Snow, the guardsmen of Cold, are keeping
watch,

No keep of Cold
May captive hold
A spirit of the Sea.18

A photograph is a "Lone captive of enamoured light."19 On Christmas day the
Babe Christ is a prisoner in the hearts of children.20

Frequently Father Tabb uses pilgrims in his imagery. The seasons
are to him "pilgrim periods of time."21 In a marsh the tides move on "As
pilgrims to the shrine of sleep."22 An evening shade is a "pilgrim, ever
yearning for the east,"23 and the violet is a "pious pilgrim" coming year by
year "To Winter's sepulchre."24 At noon, memory renews "her pilgrimage of

16 "The Sun," ibid., 331.
17 "Limitation," ibid., 109.
18 "Ice," ibid., 62.
19 "To a Photograph," ibid., 184-185.
20 "Prisoner's Base," ibid., 196-197.
21 "At Keats's Grave," ibid., 298.
23 "To an Evening Shade," ibid., 332.
24 "To the Violet," ibid., 5-6.
pain . . . with fainting footsteps, overworn."25

Pale pilgrim prayers with upward glance
And falling tears and lifted hands,
And lips with stanched emotion dumb,

come to the temple of silence "To ask for utterance."26 Asked why she perpetually keeps her finger-tip on her lip, silence replies:

"To remind the pilgrim Sound
That it moves on holy ground,
In a breathing-space to be
Hushed for all eternity."27

Most striking of all the pilgrim images is the quatrains in which Father Tabb expresses the age-old notion of life as a pilgrimage in his unique way:

We are but pilgrims; and the skin
That covers us, the tent wherein,
Awake or sleeping, we abide
Till death a dwelling-house provide.28

Heralds and messengers, too, are represented in the imagery of Father Tabb. The brook proclaims:

It is the mountain to the sea
That makes a messenger of me.29

The first snowfall is "The selfsame silent messenger" imparting to the fir tree "the shibboleth Of life," but to the last dead leaf on a tree "The

27 "To Silence," ibid., 172.
28 "Nomads," ibid., 369.
29 "The Brook," ibid., 94.
countersign of death." A cloud is "the herald of the dawn." An April flower outseeds

... in the distance far
The herald glances of a star
As yet unseen.

Still other kinds of persons provided Father Tabb with effective imagery, types as far removed from each other as warriors and shepherds, hermits and fugitives, chroniclers and pirates and tollmen.

To morning-glories, each lover star is

A warrior true,
That plighted faith afar
In drops of dew.

At dawn "countless arrow-heads of light" await the signal bidding them "slay the slumbering, dusky warrior, Night." Are a blind baby's dreams dark, the poet asks, or do the stars, like shepherds, "their vigils keep" in its "hemisphere of sleep"? The wood-robin is a warbling hermit. On a stormy night the fugitive winds, "a frightened legion, flee with wailings of distress." The cock is

30 "The First Snow-Fall," ibid., 99.
32 "An April Bloom," ibid., 16.
33 "Song of the Morning-Glories," ibid., 17.
34 "The Indian of San Salvador," ibid., 280.
35 "To a Blind Babe, Sleeping," ibid., 176-177.
36 "To the Wood-Robin," ibid., 37-38.
37 "Fugitives," ibid., 50-51.
To man of every age and clime
The oldest chronicler of time. 38

Across the Arctic "come the ghostly galleons The pirate sun to brave." 39
Along the road of life three tollmen—Silence, Sleep, and Death—await all men,

To take of each the tribute breath
That God Himself did pay. 40

As man's life draws to an end,

... death—the pilot—stands
In seeming doubt before the tranquil deep,
The fathom-line still trembling in his hands,
As when upon the treacherous shoals of sleep. 41

Human Relations

Since Father Tabb employs such a variety of classes and types of people in his imagery, it is not surprising to find that human relations should figure prominently therein.

Love is the most fundamental of these relations. Again and again Father Tabb reverts to it. So he tells the life story of spring in terms of love. Stern Winter seeks "the hand of Spring," but dies upon her breast. After she has wept for him "her April tears," June woos her and "through the listening silence breathes A bridal vow." But

40 "The Tollmen," ibid., 123.
41 "Becalmed," ibid., 358.
In sudden tears she vanishes
Before his sight. 42

A peach blossom, "The blush of nature," betrays "A passion of these April
days." 43 All day long the Sunbeam professes love for the little Shade, which
always shrinks away before him; but at twilight, the Shade is "weeping at his
side," and he feels "her tresses softly trailing on him." 44 Once the wind has
begun to woo the rose, he cannot depart as he came, for

Her fragrance whispers in his heart
Wherever hence he goes. 45

Night soothes away the "Fevered glow" of Day's "o'erworn feet" by her
"kisses sweet." 46 In Poe's cottage at Fordham "to pinching penury the gloom
Of death was wedded." 47 In 1901, the date of Father Tabb's poem, the Isthmus
of Darien or Panama still parts

. . . sea from restless lover-sea
That, yearning, dream and wait
The wedding of the waters, soon to be
When Science opens the gate. 48

Man, composed of body and soul, is a

42 "The Tryst of Spring," ibid., 87-88.
43 "Peach Bloom," ibid., 326.
44 "Light and Shadow," ibid., 78.
45 "Influence," ibid., 328.
46 "A Prelude of the Night," ibid., 83-85.
47 "Poe's Cottage at Fordham," ibid., 349.
48 "Darien," ibid., 368.
Child of the humble sod,
Wed with the breath of God.49

Death and Life are rival lovers of man, waging perpetual strife for his possession, and though Fate adjudges the victory to Death, yet man is "Life's eternal spoil."50

Love finds its natural fulfillment in the ties of family life, which likewise yield rich images to Father Tabb. For him Night is the blind mother of sleep, and Silence her dumb sister.51 Again, sleep is the "Unchiding mother of a wayward son."52 Into her arms we, "like to little children, creep Defenceless" as night comes on.53 The state of Virginia is the poet's mother, upon whose "mountain-breast" he seems to be nearer heaven "And closer to her heart."54 Gazing upon her first-born child, a mother muses on the role of pain in life, and reflects that just as she cannot see her babe until she has passed through the travail of childbirth,

So, life that vanishes anon,
Perchance about us lies,
Too near for Love to look upon
With unanointed eyes,
Till, past the interval of pain,
We clasp the living form again.55

49 "Nekros," ibid., 121.
50 "Foiled," ibid., 126.
51 "Sleep," ibid., 162-163.
52 "Invocation," ibid., 253-255.
54 "In the Mountains of Virginia," ibid., 356.
55 "To Her First-Born," ibid., 114-115.
The New Year and a babe born at midnight on New Year's Eve are two brothers who travel together through the desert of Winter to the land of May, thence through the vale of Autumn to the Mount of Snow. Here both sleep; but before dawn breaks, "Brother Year" is gone. Throughout the summer day, the leaf and its twin, a shadow, play together. In autumn, the leaf hangs between

A heaven above and heaven below—
Twin sisters, mirrored in the glow
Of limpid waters.

Jack Frost and his sister Snow are twins, as are also barren sea and sterile sand. Devoted pairs of sisters are a child and Innocence, silence and sleep, light and beauty, the dewdrop and a drop of rain, and silence and a whisper.

Outside the family, no bond is stronger than that of friendship. Small wonder that Father Tabb, who had drunk deep of the cup of friendship, should use this relationship as the source of some of his finest images. Of his own shadow he sings:

Friend forever in the light
Cleaving to my side,
Wind-flowers are dear friends of a dying boy. So close is the friendship between a blossom and the dawn that they would even die together. In the words of the blossom:

"Where were you, dear, before the light?  
For I was dreaming all the night  
That we should meet anon  
To drink a dewdrop here today  
And then together pass away."

A special bond of friendship unites the mouth, toes, and fingers of little baby brother:

A rosy mouth and rosy toe  
Of little baby brother  
Until about a month ago  
Had never met each other;  
But nowadays the neighbors sweet,  
In every sort of weather,  
Half way with rosy fingers meet  
To kiss and play together.

At times rivalry supplants friendship. Cleopatra proclaims the rivalry between death and Antony's love when she bids the asp:

Lie thou where life hath lain,  
And let thy swifter pain  
His rival prove.

62 "To My Shadow," ibid., 149.  
63 "The Dying Boy to the Wind-Flowers," ibid., 22-23.  
64 "Come True," ibid., 20.  
65 "A Bunch of Roses," ibid., 175.  
Was it darkness or his rival, dawn, that awakened the lark to song?

For either rival to declare
The winds are loth;
And blossoms, nodding everywhere,
Affirm for both.67

The star whose image a dewdrop let fall into the heart of a violet, vanishes at the approach of "rival Dawn."68

Hospitality, sympathy, and peacemaking are the final human relations from which Father Tabb draws his images. Night, he declares, is a genial hostess; not so Day:

When Day goes down to meet the Night,
She welcomes him with many a light;
When Night comes up to meet the Day
He drives her trooping stars away.69

All the year round chimney stacks offer hospitality to

Their never-failing guests;
For when the sparks are upward gone,
The swallows downward come anon
To build their neighboring nests.70

The dew that covers "a nameless tomb" at dawn is Nature's way of expressing sympathy at death:

All night the cypress sighs; the waning moon
Sinks, pale with vigil, where the sun has set;
The morning wakes; and, lo! an altar strown—
A grave with deathless sympathy is wet.71

67 "A Query," ibid., 73.
68 "Brotherhood," ibid., 4-5.
69 "Day and Night," ibid., 338.
70 "Chimney Stacks," ibid., 44-45.
71 "Sympathy," ibid., 83.
Night shows a tenderness unknown to pitiless day:

Nay, within the twilight
Returning from afar,
She wakes again from memory
The dawn-extinguished star.72

A shower is a cloud that "wept itself away" and caused the "moistened eyes" of earth.73 Daisies, "from the soil Upbreathing wordless messages of love," are peacemakers, bringing solace to those who labor and "lifting e'en the lowliest" to a higher plane.74

Life and Death

The mystery of life and death, a subject on which poets of all ages have written, was to Father Tabb a source of a variety of images.

Both the joy and the pain of birth find expression in his poems. Dawn is for him "perennial birth."75 Dreams are "begotten of the gloom," but with the coming of dawn, they take to flight.76 The appearance of the stars at night is an "Unwombing" of a hidden world.77 Before the sin of Adam, all creation was at peace; but when he sinned,

72 "Light in Darkness," ibid., 85.
73 "The Shower," ibid., 57.
74 "Daisies," ibid., 327.
75 "New and Old," ibid., 326.
76 "Life's Gulf Stream," ibid., 77.
... blind Confusion, from the womb upturn
Of haggard Hell,
Spun o'er the dizzy world... 78

Above the waters of a mountain lake the poet sees

A phosphorescent glow,
That suddenly, all quivering wan,
As smitten with the throes of birth,
vanishes, to reveal a wondrous lily. 79 At twilight

... light and darkness have alternate birth,
And nature in her agony sublime
Shrouds with a veil of mystery the earth. 80

Death, with all its attendant circumstances, is an even more significant source of imagery for Father Tabb than birth. If twilight speaks to him of birth, it also reminds him of death, for it is the time "when the evening dies." 81 Sunset is "dying sunshine," 82 and the silence brooding over a mountain lake is "counterfeit of death." 83 The year is "a parting soul" that records its testament on December snow. 84 Indian summer reminds Father Tabb of the saying that some of the grace and beauty of infancy returns to the face of a person in death:

79 "The Vision of the Tarn," ibid., 316-318.
80 "Sympathy," ibid., 33.
83 "The Vision of the Tarn," ibid., 316-318.
84 "December Snow," ibid., 100.
'Tis said, in death, upon the face
Of age, a momentary trace
Of infancy's returning grace
Forestalls decay;

And here, in Autumn's dusky reign,
A birth of blossoms seems again
To flush the woodland's fading train
With dreams of May. 85

At dawn, when the "hesitating sky" is pale, waiting "For Day to bloom or Night to die," 86 the dews are up and away
To paint all the shrouds of the drifting clouds
In the eastern skies. 87

When the sun sets at sea, the waves make no sound
To break the silence sweet
Where sky and ocean meet
Above his grave. 88

Then, as the last glow of light dies away, "Long funeral waves of darkness flow," and the poet understands too late the meaning of the sea's moaning. 89
As sunbeams write the epitaph of night, so gray shadows write the epitaph of day. 90 In autumn, the fire of frost lights the funeral pyre, 91 the leaves fall, and "through naked trees the winds A-mourning go." 92 When spring

85 "Indian Summer," ibid., 89.
86 "Brink-Song," ibid., 76.
88 "Sunset at Sea," ibid., 64.
89 "Interpreted," ibid., 64-65.
90 "Inscriptions," ibid., 77.
returns, the violet comes as a pilgrim "to Winter's sepulchre."93

The contemplation of the Arctic calls forth a series of death images from Father Tabb's pen. Does a "shroud or a bridal veil" hide it from sight, he asks. Is it

The lonely sepulchre of day
Or banquet-hall of night?

What are the Northern lights? Are they

... the lights of revelry
That glimmer o'er the deep
Or flashes of a funeral pyre
Above the corpse of sleep?94

Buildings

So ordinary a thing as a house, together with some of its appurtenances, is to Father Tabb the symbol of simple and lofty truths.

Life is a house; death is time shutting the door of life and evicting the tenant.95 The body is the "earthly habitation" of man's soul.96 The stars form an arch that links twilight with dawn.97 The gate of sunset is a ponderous one,98 but that of dawn is a "pale glimmering portal."99

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93 "To the Violet," ibid., 5-6.
94 "The Arctic," ibid., 102-103.
95 "Homeless," ibid., 277.
97 "A Prelude of Night," ibid., 83-85.
98 "The Vigil," ibid., 128.
Cradle, bed, and mirror, a phonograph, an hourglass, and a knife—these common furnishings of a house figure in Father Tabb's imagery.

The world is the cradle of the Infant Christ, but the poet pleads in childlike simplicity:

Let my heart the cradle be
Of Thy bleak Nativity!
Tossed by wintry tempests wild,
If it rock Thee, Holy Child,
Then as grows the outer din,
Greater peace shall reign within. 101

The heart of a rose is a meet resting-place for a ladybird, for

When into the rose
A ladybird goes
And o'er her couch the petals close,
Was ever bed
So canopyed
For lids in maiden slumber wed? 102

The Church hails Mary as the Mirror of Justice; to Father Tabb she is the mirror of love. 103 A woodland lake that knows naught but the trees growing round about and the skies above, proclaims its function in life:

The mirror of their dreams to be
Alike in shade and shine,
To clasp in love's captivity,
And keep them one—is mine. 104

The mocking-bird is a phonograph that repeats at night what other birds

100 "Christmas," ibid., 199.
102 "A Sleeping-Place," ibid., 19.
104 "The Lake," ibid., 197.
uttered during the day. The span of human life is an hourglass through which "the sands of life" fall. Light is a knife, "the keen-edged blade that cleaves The spirits kindred made in dreams."

Other buildings, too, provide Father Tabb with images. Sleep is a granary. A seed, time, the human mind, and a block of marble—each of these is a prison. Clover leaves were once "Captives of a prison seed." Life flies "from the prison-walls of time," lest "love and innocence and crime Alike must die." If a pagan idol could speak, it would reveal humanity's sighs and tears of agony

... confined
Within the sunless prison of the mind,
Walled up of doubt and locked in mystery.

A sculptor finds his vision of beauty hidden in a block of marble "As in a donjon keep."

The temple, however, seems to be Father Tabb's favorite building image. Morn is a temple from whose

106 "Genevieve," ibid., 267.
111 "To an Idol," ibid., 294.
Silence is a
Temple of God, from all eternity
Alone like Him without beginning found. 114

To this temple, "the fans of silence," prayers come as pious pilgrims. 115 In a Druid grove,

... the meditative trees
Reared of their strong fraternal branches rude
A temple meet for prayer. 116

The Body of Christ, formed in the womb of Mary, is a temple of flesh built by God, "Wherein, through all eternity, to shrine His inexpressive glory." 117

Light and Fire

Light and fire are some of God's most precious everyday gifts to man. Father Tabb recognized them as such and used them repeatedly as sources of imagery.

The redbird is "a flame Of fire and song." 118 The song of the

113 "Forecast," ibid., 293–294.
hermit thrush sweeps along through life "In flame or torrent," surpassing even the ethereal song of the lark, whose "scintillations fling the spark that fires the dark."119 The song of the morning stars is echoed "in the scintillating note of some dawn-awakened bird," and "each silver scintillating note" of the hospital bird calls forth a blessing from the lips of sufferers, "Whilst over them, a glittering foam of light, Drifts" his unshadowed song.121

Flowers are

But lights of God
That through the sod
Flash upwards from the world beneath.122

The cleansing waters of a stream are

Like fire, refining, but apart from pain,
All dross and stain.123

Less tender than the stream, the eye of noon

Burns with a glance that sears the wings
Of tender thought.124

Magdalen's passion, "the flame that hath driven her Downward, is quenched" in the torrent of grief and love that floods her soul.125 But when

119 "Overflow," ibid., 40.
120 "Matins," ibid., 47.
123 "The Siren Stream to the Outcast," ibid., 68-69.
the Virgin Mary utters her "flaming word," her fiat to God's messenger, the 
Spirit of God proclaims "the doom far heard Of death and night," and Mary's 
womb, 

A sealed, untainted tomb—
Wakes to the birth and bloom
Of life and light.126

The fire of love is stronger even than the penal fires of purgatory, where 
souls must abide

Till love with fiercer flame
The strength of torture tames.127

Indeed, until the end of time the path of all human perfection is "From 
flame to snow"; for

Each pure desire
Is fledged with fire
And needs must grow
From dark to light,
Till, passion past,
Transfigured in its flight,
It stand at last
Unblushing on the topmost height
With sister souls in white,
To follow still the Lamb
Wherever He may go.128

Clothing : Jewels and Jewelry

Freshness and originality are characteristic of the images Father 
Tabb draws from such commonplace things as clothing and jewelry.

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126 "The Annunciation," ibid., 205.
127 "Purgatory," ibid., 362.
128 "Purification," ibid., 235-236.
"Whence comes the water lily?" he queries. After considering various possibilities, he comes to the conclusion,

... methinks the maiden moon,
When the daylight came too soon,
Fleeting from her bath to hide,
Left her garment in the tide. 129

No such question puzzles him when he contemplates the foliage of a tree, the ancient livery that has come down through the centuries, for "Old-fashioned raiment suits the tree." 130

When the sun rises, "The tender dawn, a virgin," blushes and makes "of mist a folding mantle pure" to hide her charms. 131 At twilight, gray shadows "Across the sunset draw their lengthening veil." 132 Ordinarily the stars burn away "The web of darkness" with which night clothes the day, 133 but at high noon on Good Friday

... the night its mantle flung
O'er the Divine Humanity that hung
To brutal gaze exposed. 134

At the grave of Ophelia, Hamlet stood "Mantled in thought." 135

When erstwhile friends become estranged, their friendship is "like a garment

133 "The Vigil," ibid., 128.
134 "Golgotha," ibid., 291-292.
worn in youth" which they have now outgrown. The body is the soul's vest-

ture. When memory recalls some sorrow of the past, "nought of pain, Its

fleeting vesture, doth remain." Purple penance is the fair garment in

which St. Afra would appear before Christ, while a new maidenhod, the

bridal gift of silence, is the robe of St. Mary of Egypt, the "Penance-
crowned" queen of the desert.

Sleep keeps golden caskets of "jewel-dreams," which she offers to

"the friend Who has half-an-hour or more to spend." The island of San

Salvador is "an emerald bar across the gold of sunset." Though friends

may be physically separated, their souls behold the same sky above, the same

horizon-line around them, "like a mystic ring That love has set, encompassing"

kindred lives.

Games and Sports

A comparatively small number of Father Tabb's images are drawn from

136 "Estrangement," ibid., 361.

137 "The Soul's Quest," ibid., 160-161.


140 "St. Mary of Egypt," ibid., 215-216.

141 "Bargains," ibid., 166.

142 "Off San Salvador," ibid., 247.

games and sports.

The butterfly is "Like a bubble of the air Blown by fairies." 144
A baby's dimples are the result of a game of hide-and-seek between Love and Laughter. 145 Was the Boy Christ playing hide-and-seek with Mary and Joseph when He remained in Jerusalem? Father Tabb thinks He was:

You hid your little self, dear Lord,
As other children do;
But oh, how great was their reward
Who sought three days for you. 146

On Christmas day Christ leaves His heavenly home to find "His ball, the earth,
That sin has cast away." 147

Swallows fly upward "Like arrows from a quiver." 148 Throughout the winter the trees

Like champions of old,
Their garments at their feet,
Defiant of the cold,
wrestle with their adversaries, the winds. 149 Poetic inspiration is akin to mountain climbing: there is no sign of climbing feet on the mountain either before or after the ascent; so too no celestial sign precedes poetic inspiration, and silence follows it. 150

144 "The Butterfly," ibid., 34.
145 "Baby's Dimples," ibid., 174-175.
146 "Hide-and-Seek," ibid., 341.
147 "Out of Bounds," ibid., 203.
150 "Inspiration," ibid., 182.
War and Warfare

In view of Father Tabb's experience in youth, it is not surprising that war and warfare should have a place among the sources of his images, although it is medieval rather than modern warfare that arouses his poetic imagination.

Nature assails Napoleon in his prison on the island of St. Helena. Night encamps around him.

... From afar
The bannered hosts of outer darkness throng,
And crested billows shout their battle song
To greet the awful summoner of war.\textsuperscript{151}

But the forces of nature battle with each other the whole year round. As the shadows of night are routed by dawn, they leave upon each blade of grass dew-drops,

The tokens of a fray—
Pale life-drops from the heart of night,
Mute witnesses of sudden flight
Before the host of day.\textsuperscript{152}

Again, countless arrow-heads of light are

... back-drawn
With deadly aim, at signal of the Dawn,
To slay the dusky warrior, Night.\textsuperscript{153}

The annual battle between spring and winter always ends in victory for the

\textsuperscript{151} "At. St. Helena," ibid., 302.
\textsuperscript{152} "Onset," ibid., 83.
\textsuperscript{153} "The Indian of San Salvador," ibid., 280.
former; spring flowers leap the barriers of ice, set free both song and
laughter, and loudly proclaim their victory. 154

There are also lesser battles in the realm of nature. The glow-
worm dares to challenge night, and a slender shade is undaunted in the pres-
ence of noonday:

Against the night, a champion bright,
The glow-worm, lifts a spear of light;
And, undismayed, the slenderest shade
Against the noonday bares a blade. 155

Leaves form the armor of the tree, which is

Fastidious of chivalry,
Rejecting as in scorn
All other than the panoply
His ancestors have worn. 156

St. Afra bids the flames "Leap the barriers and fire The citadel"
of her heart. 157 Chastity is the armor of one consecrated to God; in it he
conquers all his foes. 158 The first snow-fall is "The countersign of death"
to the last dead leaf on a tree. 159 Death is a seeming conqueror; yet his
victim is the real victor, for death's fatal thrust "A mortal raised to im-
mortality.": 160

155 "Heroes," ibid., 333.
159 "The First Snow-Fall," ibid., 99.
160 "Nekros," ibid., 121.
Travel: Trades and Occupations

Travel images are rare and relatively unimportant in Father Tabb's poetry. The sun, its daily journey done, sinks to rest;\(^{161}\) and the declining day laments:

"I go the darkened way
Whence none returns to tell
Of those that hither stray
What fate befell."\(^{162}\)

If night could ask a gift from day,

'Twould be upon his twilight way
A lengthened hour with her.\(^{163}\)

Love of neighbor is the bridge that the poet would have man build above all strife.\(^{164}\) Man's neighbor is his stepping-stone to the throne of God.\(^{165}\)

Figures drawn from various trades and occupations conclude the list of Father Tabb's daily-life images. Weaving and spinning seem to have had a special attraction for him. The lotus flower is to him a weaver of dreams.\(^{166}\) Spring "weaves The fragrance of her sheltering leaves" around the bluebird, which sings the first song of welcome to her.\(^{167}\) While man's

\(^{161}\) "Finis," ibid., 249.
\(^{162}\) "Adieu," ibid., 81.
\(^{163}\) "Ideals," ibid., 79.
\(^{164}\) "The Bridge," ibid., 111-112.
\(^{165}\) "My Mediator," ibid., 339.
\(^{166}\) "A Lotus Bloom," ibid., 16-17.
\(^{167}\) "The Bluebird," ibid., 329.
dream-visions flee with the coming of dawn, those of the wood-robin remain, for

Night weaves of golden harmonies the thread,
And fills thy brain
With joys that overflow in love's awakening strain.\textsuperscript{168}

"With gathered sweets of every varying clime," the pilgrim periods of time weave around Keats's grave "one perpetual spring."\textsuperscript{169} The name of Love "is a balmy word Of Sound and silence wove."\textsuperscript{170} The sun spins the vesture of the fern.\textsuperscript{171} For the poet her beams spin

\begin{quote}
A memory that one
Alone could bring and none
Can take away.\textsuperscript{172}
\end{quote}

The rainbow leaves as the fruit of its blossom naught but a dream, whereon the poet's fancy

\begin{quote}
Shall spin anon her golden thread,
And then, of fetters free,
Arise with radiant pinions spread
To heights of poesy.\textsuperscript{173}
\end{quote}

Gardening and farming yield several beautiful images to Father Tabb.

Pain is to him

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{168} "To the Wood-Robin," \textit{ibid.}, 37-38.
\item \textsuperscript{169} "At Keats's Grave," \textit{ibid.}, 298.
\item \textsuperscript{170} "Betrayed," \textit{ibid.}, 136-137.
\item \textsuperscript{171} "Fern Song," \textit{ibid.}, ll.
\item \textsuperscript{172} "Adieu," \textit{ibid.}, 155.
\item \textsuperscript{173} "The Rainbow," \textit{ibid.}, 61.
\end{itemize}
As Christ ascends Calvary, the trees recognize Him as "the Gardener... Of Eden and Gethsemane." The wind winnows "with lusty flail The ripened grain." June goes out to reap with her "sickle of a moon." Three more occupations—the tending of sheep, mining, and the art of illuminating letters—yield a single figure to Father Tabb. The wind, he declares, scatters "the fleecy clouds" and then herds them together again. He wonders whence goldenrod comes, and asks:

Doth a vein that the miners know not yield
Such wealth of gold?

If the beauty of autumn is the preface of death,

In crimson, red, and gold,
What wondrous art illumineth
The story yet untold?

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174 "Pain," ibid., 145-146.
175 "Recognition," ibid., 227-228.
177 "The Reaper," ibid., 93-94.
179 "Autumn Gold," ibid., 11.
180 "Autumn Glow," ibid., 368.
CHAPTER VI

OTHER IMAGES IN FATHER TABB

The remaining sources of Father Tabb's imagery—the body and its functions, learning, and the arts—play a distinctly minor role; yet they cannot be omitted in a study of this type.

The Body and Its Functions

Under this heading are included images drawn directly or indirectly from various parts of the body, the senses, sleep and dreams, sickness, food and drink. To all of these Father Tabb turned spontaneously for the expression of his inmost thoughts.

The sky is to him "heaven's unclouded face," and dawn is the smile of Darkness. The strain of a lute-player rises and falls "As waters dimple to the rain." Drops of rain are "tear-drops of the skies," whereas human tears are "rain-drops of the heart." As the sun sets, leaf and flower are

2 "Dawn," ibid., 71.
3 "The Lute-Player," ibid., 187.
4 "Fountain-Heads," ibid., 111.
"with tears of twilight wet" to see him go. To a widowed father, his child is a "pale star" that appeared "as a crystal tear of sorrow born." The message of the first birds of spring is so sweet that

The hidden buds begin to swell,
Till suddenly, with lifted ears,
The leafy multitude appears.

The petals of a rose close softly, "Like folded hands, of labor long oppressed." With beating heart a young girl listens for the footstep of some popular idol; so, as sheet-lightning swiftly casts "A glance of love or jealousy" about in Night's seraglio,

... many a starry favorite
In reverence profound
Awaits with palpitating light
A step without a sound.

The Ocean, as well as Earth and Air, claims Shelley for its own; therefore it sent "the panting wave" that clasped him "like an overflowing heart." The mocking-bird is a "heart that cannot sleep for song." Michelangelo "from the sterile womb of stone Raised children unto God."

5 "Finis," ibid., 249.
7 "Precursors," ibid., 42-43.
8 "To a Rose," ibid., 7-8.
12 "Beethoven and Angelo," ibid., 348.
In a number of Father Tabb's images the senses of sight, hearing, and smell are subtly interwoven. "The blush of nature" betrays a peach blossom, "A dream in fragrant silence wrought." To a bird the music of the spheres seems to be "A twinkling silence." Sleep is blind like its mother, Night, and dumb like its sister, Silence. The voice of a whip-poor-will is a "sobbing voice," while that of the dove is "A tuneful mist above a silent sea." Snow is "like silence visible." On Christmas night

The womb of silence bears the Eternal Word,
And yet no sound is heard.

The touch-me-not humorously explains its name in an image drawn from the sense of touch:

So ticklish is my skin
That if you touch my side
The little seed within
Will laugh and split me wide.

So when I see you near
The mirth-provoking spot,
No wonder that I fear
And bid you touch-me-not.

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13 "Peach Bloom," ibid., 326.
14 "In Shadow," ibid., 44.
15 "Sleep," ibid., 162-163.
16 "The Whip-Poor-Will," ibid., 39.
17 "The Dove," ibid., 45-46.
Sleep and dreams are inseparable in Father Tabb's imagery. A star, bidding farewell to a watcher at break of day, promises him, "in the bosom of the noontide sea I'll dream of thee." The timid note of a song at dawn, "dreamlike," speeds away. The ceaseless music of Shelley's soul

Breathes in the Cloud and in the Skylark's song,
That float as an embodied dream along
The dewy lids of morning.

The faint chorus of echoes is

Like a dream returning
In the light of day—
Too fond to flee; alas! too timorous to stay!

Dreams sometimes come true after the dreamers themselves have vanished. So it is in the realm of nature, where

Night dreams of day, and winter seems
In sleep to breathe the balm of May.
Their dreams are true anon; but they,
The dreamers, then, alas, are dreams.

While life surges above a bridge, and below it the stream glides along "as a lordly dream," the bridge itself remains

Still as the shades that sleep
On the reflecting deep.

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22 "Brink-Song," ibid., 76.
24 "Echoes," ibid., 92-93.
25 "At the Year's End," ibid., 180.
26 "The Bridge," ibid., 111-112.
Some people hold that life and death are merely things that seem. If this be so, the poet declares,

If Death be sleep, and Life a dream,  
May not the everlasting sleep  
The dream of life eternal keep?  

Father Tabb's images drawn from sickness and torture are few in number; perhaps this very fact gives them their peculiar forcefulness. A lost anchor, no longer feeling the strain of the ship it was to hold in place, complains that its

... prisoned power  
Deep-yearning, heart-like, hour by hour,  
Unquiet aches in cankered rest.  

The present moment is the moment of decision, for

The future yet of mastery  
Is palsied as the past.  

When the whip-poor-will sings its mournful song at twilight, Father Tabb wonders

What scourge of fate has left its loathed mark  
Upon the cringing dark.  

Though the memory of childhood is a happy one, the poet would not call back his childhood, lest the sight of him "on the rack Of Age" should sadden it.  

The Paschal moon that witnessed Christ's agony in Gethsemane had no "utterance

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27 "In Aeternum," ibid., 346.  
29 "A Hairbreadth," ibid., 222.  
30 "The Whip-Poor-Will," ibid., 39.  
31 "Childhood," ibid., 172-173.
to show The wasting wound of silent sympathy."32 On Good Friday

... The conscious light
To sudden blindness withered at the sight
Of mortal pangs from wounds immortal wrung.33

Since the damned soul can never partake of the joys of heaven, hell is, in a sense, a mercy on God's part; as Father Tabb puts it:

Better for sin to dwell from heaven apart
In foulest night
Than on its lidless eyeballs feel the dart
Of torturing light.
Better to pine in floods of sulphurous fire
Than far above
Behold the bliss of satisfied desire,
Nor taste thereof.34

In food and drink Father Tabb finds images of nature and of human life. The song of the mocking-bird is "poured upon the thirsting silence" of midnight, and the poet's soul, "flushed as in the wakening strength of wine, Leaps heavenward."35 To an autumn leaf, the redbird's song is "The bubbling vintage of his brain," which the leaf quaffs eagerly.36 The dawn star would feed on the light of morning.37 An old wassail cup reminds the poet of the vain folly of Youth and Laughter, lingering long

33 "Golgotha," ibid., 291-292.
34 "Better," ibid., 233.
37 "The Dawn Star," ibid., 335.
To quaff delight, with wanton song
And warm caress.38

Love is the food of life,39 and if

... the world would give to love
The crumbs that from its table fall,
'Twere bounty large enough for all
The famishing to feed thereof.40

Learning

More numerous than the figures drawn from the human body and its functions are those which history, science, books in general, mythology, and fairy lore suggested to Father Tabb.

From history, especially ancient history, come exquisite images of life and nature. Great as was the power of Solomon and of Caesar, it is surpassed by that of the tollmen Silence, Sleep, and Death, who

Await us on the way
To take of each the tribute breath
That God himself did pay.41

The home of the Sphinx is not only Egypt, but every human heart seared by the sands of passion.42 The pyramids stand in the desert "Like Sibyls waiting for a doom far-seen," and between them is "thought's unending caravan."43

38 "To an Old Wassail-Cup," ibid., 111.
39 "Formation," ibid., 361.
40 "Charity," ibid., 220-221.
41 "The Tollmen," ibid., 123.
42 "To the Sphinx," ibid., 359.
43 "The Pyramids," ibid., 360.
From the ancient city of Hybla in Sicily, noted for its honey, comes the following image of a dear friend:

For with thee is the place apart,
Where sunshine ever dwells,
The Hybla, whence my hoarding heart
Would fill its wintry cells.

"Ave atque Vale" is the title of a poem in which Father Tabb greets the song that has long delayed to come to him and then bids it farewell in the manner of the ancient Romans. This same custom is the background for "Moon-Song," his fanciful interpretation of the moon's setting and her reappearance as "a phantom white." The poet himself, like another Columbus, "sailed into the night The sunset gold to find;" less fortunate than his model, however, he discovered that this gold was but "the phantom of the light! Life's Indies lay behind!"

The sciences of biology and geography likewise yield rich images to Father Tabb. The grain in wood betrays "the way that the sap-river ran From the root to the top of the tree." The poem "Bread" narrates the life-history of wheat in order to supply man's need:

From the burial-place of seed,
From the earth's maternal bosom,
Through the root, and stem, and blossom,  
To supply thy present need,  
Have I journeyed here.49

Twilight is "the silent isthmus-hour of time, Where light and darkness have alternate birth."50 Othello, mourning the tragedy of Desdemona, is "dark in destiny's eclipse."51 Sleep is a hemisphere wherein, mayhap, stars keep their vigils for a blind baby, whose waking hours are denied light.52 Each human being ultimately lives his life alone, for

Around us lies a world invisible,  
With isles of dreams and many a continent  
Of thought and isthmus fancy, where we dwell  
Each a lonely wanderer intent  
Upon his vision, finding each his fears  
And hopes encompassed by the tide of tears.53

The majority of the images Father Tabb draws from books are allusions rather than metaphors or similes. He makes a passage from *King Lear* the theme of "Destiny."54 In "Regret" he alludes to *Romeo and Juliet* when he says of dawn:

She listens! "'Tis, alas, the Lark,  
And not the Nightingale!  
0 for the gloom-encircled sphere,  
Whose solitary bird

49 Ibid., 96.
52 "To a Blind Babe, Sleeping," ibid., 176-177.
53 "Lone-Land," ibid., 114.
54 Ibid., 312-314.
Outpours for Love’s awakening ear
What noon hath never heard!"

At Tennyson’s death, Father Tabb writes of the author of the *Idylls of the King*:

> The lordliest at Arthur’s Table Round
> No loftier than thou,
> The laureate, with England’s glory crowned,
> Whom death has knighted now.56

In his poems on Poe and Shelley, he makes subtle allusions to some of their outstanding poems.57 He identifies himself with conscience and declares:

> I am that Tamerlane,
> The Scourge of God;
> With me alone remain
> The sword and rod
> Wherewith in wrath throughout His world-domain,
> Doth Love, avenging, reign.58

Besides alluding to literary works and characters, Father Tabb draws upon the art of writing itself as a source of imagery. He speaks of "the mystic scroll of Life,"59 of "the scroll of nature," on which the name of Keats remains "a deathless syllable,"60 and of December snow as

> the mystic scroll
> Whereon a parting soul,

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55 Ibid., 76.
56 "Alfred Tennyson," Ibid., 350.
58 "Conscience," Ibid., 221-222.
60 "Keats," Ibid., 281.
The aged year,  
His testament and will  
Records: . . . 61

A friend is to him  
A single letter in a word  
Whose absence all the context blurred. 62

A cherry blossom may seem as unprofitable "As doth a poet's dream;" yet without it, no tree will bear fruit. 63

Mythology provides Father Tabb with both allusions and metaphors. 
The storm raging round the island of St. Helena is a "spirit wroth, from Erebos upturn." 64

The poet's inspirations are "Promethean fires" within his "throbbing temples"; 65 they wait for words, as the vapors of night

    Expectant, wait the oracle of light  
    Interpreting their dumb significance. 66

Between him and his dead friend Lanier, the stars,  
Of Hope the sacred oracles divine--  
Steadfast above the vault of darkness shine. 67

He wonders whether the mournful voice of the dove is

61 "December Snow," ibid., 100.  
62 "Import," ibid., 251.  
63 "Cherry Bloom," ibid., 25.  
64 "At St. Helena," ibid., 302.  
65 "To My lamp," ibid., 275-276.  
66 "Unuttered," ibid., 282.  
67 "To Sidney Lanier," ibid., 300.
... an oracle
Interpreting the souls that tell
No vision of their own.68

Men worship the stars, the moon, and the sun, changing their allegiance as each of these gods appears.69 Darkness is the web

That Night, the grim Arachne, weaves between Wan Twilight and her roseate sister-queen, Imperial Dawn.70

The mist is another Eurydice, who follows Orpheus, the lark, as he

... leads her to the dawn
With rhapsodies of star-delight,
Till, looking backward in the flight,
He finds that she is gone.71

A person suffering from sleeplessness is

A Tantalus denied
The draught wherewith all thirst is satisfied.72

During the dry heat of summer,

The hills, like Tantalus accurs,
In silent anguish lie.73

All men seeking Christ are Argonauts, who move along the road to Bethlehem

To find at last the Golden Fleece,
The spotless Lamb of God.74

68 "The Dove," ibid., 41.
69 "Mutation," ibid., 82.
70 "Yesterday," ibid., 276.
72 "Sleeplessness," ibid., 355.
73 "Resignation," ibid., 98.
74 "The Argonauts," ibid., 197.
Beauty was the heritage of both Poe and Chopin; but mingled with it was 

... the breath  
Of music that the Sirens sung,  
Whose utterance is death.\(^7\)\(^5\)

Christ is the Siren stream that bids the outcast sinner come and find rest.\(^7\)\(^6\)

Like another Narcissus, the poet does not recognize his own image in his work, but deems it "a glimpse in darkness caught Of light above."\(^7\)\(^7\) Keats's versatility is reflected

In each Protean rainbow-tint that stains  
The breathing canvas of the atmosphere.\(^7\)\(^8\)

Fairy tales and legends are the final sources of Father Tabb's imagery drawn from learning. Laughter, he says, is a little imp playing hide-and-seek with Love amid the roses on a baby's cheek.\(^7\)\(^9\) Morning mist is an "elfin bright" over which the poet bends with delight, but the warmth of his breath dissolves "the magic charm Into a tear."\(^8\)\(^0\) He longs to understand the threefold mystery of clover: how its "fairy fabric" was spun and fashioned; whether its fairy godmothers, Sky and Sunshine, chose its livery of green; and

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75 "Poe-Chopin," ibid., 348.

76 "The Siren Stream to the Outcast," ibid., 68-69. This is the interpretation of the poem given by Francis A. Litz, Father Tabb: A Study of His Life and Works, Baltimore, 1923, 133.

77 "Narcissus," Poetry of Father Tabb, 168.

78 "Keats," ibid., 281.

79 "Baby's Dimples," ibid., 174-175.

80 "A Fleeting Guest," ibid., 73-74.
whether, like the Genie, it can go back again into its seed prison. 81 Rain is the sesame without which the sun cannot call forth the lives it has imprisoned in seeds. 82 The shadow belongs to the ancient race of giants:

At sunrise he’s a giant tall,
At noon he’s withered, lean, and small;
At sunset he regains his height
And covers all the land at night. 83

Finest of all the images Father Tabb draws from fairy tales and legends are the two that present his idea of art and thus give a new turn to the old story of Sleeping Beauty. The sculptor finds her hidden in marble as in a dungeon; he gently takes away the coverlet but leaves her fast asleep. 84 Indeed, art alone can awaken beauty, who

... sleeps, her hiding-place unknown
To other worshippers,
Till Art, her lover, comes alone
To press his lips to hers. 85

The Arts

In view of Father Tabb’s devotion to art, it is not surprising that the arts themselves—music, sculpture, and painting—should hold a place among the sources of his imagery. Of the three, music ranks first in importance.

82 "The Sun," ibid., 331.
84 "The Sleeping Beauty," ibid., 164.
85 "Beauty," ibid., 371.
Again and again Father Tabb alludes to the harmony in music. The hermit, he says, feels "all the elements that move in Nature's prayerful harmonies," and blends his voice with theirs "In one majestic utterance of praise." The wind, unseen by human eye, in a mystic silence supplies The subtle harmony Of Nature's tuneful choir divine. Together with the waters, it has "chanted the primeval tone Since Nature first began," and though other voices change, these two Abide, the soul of harmony Interpreting the man. Like a maestro who scans his music before a note is sounded, so Nature ponders The tidal symphony of Spring, As yet unheard. Leaf and flower, bird and wind are kinsmen of the poet; without their fellowship he might not have been a poet, and they had been "but vagrant melodies Till harmonized" to him.

The harmony that Father Tabb finds in human life is even more profound than that of Nature. A friend, he declares, supplies the missing note

86 "The Hermit," ibid., 296.
88 "Choristers," ibid., 53.
89 "Anticipation," ibid., 87.
90 "Fraternity," ibid., 242-243.
without which "the perfect harmony" would have been marred. All the circumstances of each human life have been imaged in the mind of God from all eternity,

For in the mystic harmony of Nature kind,
These kindred elements fulfil a chord designed
. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
For all to man are ministrants of heavenly love,
Out-breathings from the Fountain-head of rest above.92

The soul, which makes man the image of God, is "the spirit's octave-span Harmonising God and Man."93 When a soul goes astray by sin,

The Master leaves the ninety and the nine,
Nor rests till-love-controlled,
The Discord moves in harmony divine.94

Other images drawn from music refer to music in general, to musical intervals, to instruments, and to song. When the evening star appears, the voice of Night comes over the waters "Like music low."95 A dream is woven of the mysteries of consciousness and slumber, which "pause above it with abated breath, Like intervals in music."96 The blind beggar Bartimeus protests to a bird that its heart is the "hidden instrument" employed by divine love to waken his.97 The cry of the killdee and his mate's response form "a

91 "Import," ibid., 251.
92 "Repose," ibid., 310-311.
93 "Limitation," ibid., 109.
95 "A Prelude of Night," ibid., 83-85.
97 "Bartimeus to the Bird," ibid., 42.
rhapsody of light."98 Vapors rising from the sea live on, for

Soon the silent clouds again
Melt in rhapsodies of rain.99

The face of the new day seems familiar to man, and the wonder of its wakening glance

Is like an old refrain
From silence come again.100

As evening comes on, "the choral waves" sing "a hoarse triumphal hymn."101

Before the first bird of spring appears, the croaking of frogs, "A choir invisible," is heard in every marsh. "Whence comes the liquid melody?" the poet asks;

The summer clouds can bring
No fresher music from the sky
Than here the marshes sing.
Methinks the mists about to rise
Are chanting their rain prophecies.102

At the approach of winter, the twin birds Hope and Memory find shelter in the branches of a pine tree: the former is yet too timid to fly; the latter "comes to sing her coronach and die."103

A few images drawn from painting and sculpture remain to be considered. After the Deluge, when hope had hung the rainbow in the sky, it

98 "Killdee," ibid., 34-35.
100 "Daybreak," ibid., 72.
102 "Meadow-Frogs," ibid., 104.
103 "The Pine-Tree," ibid., 27.
descended into the depths of the sea and on the walls of the seashell

    Traced in living lines of love
    ... the story
    Written in the heavens above. 104

Such is the origin of the rainbow tints of the seashell. When God, the Great Artist, had finished His work of creation, He saw that it was good

    ... and smiled thereon:
    His glory in the picture shone,
    But name upon the canvas none. 105

Facetiously Father Tabb writes:

    All men the painter Youth engage;
    And some, the famous sculptor, Age. 106

Death is a pale sculptor who works on human stone. 107 A dead child is "A moon-pale masterpiece of Death In marble." 108 Night and day, too, are sculptors, but gentler ones than death, for oranges, "Orbs of autumnal beauty," are

    Rounded between the touch of lengthening night
    And lessening day. 109

The greatest of all sculptors, however, is God, who uses as His tools biting

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106 "Decorators," ibid., 372.
108 "Destiny," ibid., 312-314.
109 "In My Orange-Grove," ibid., 24.
Frost, branding Sun, Wind, and drenching Rain to produce the wrinkles which men despise, but which have a share in "perfecting the Sculptor's plan Upon the godlike image, Man." 110

110 "Wrinkles," ibid., 370.
CHAPTER VII

FATHER TABB THE MAN

A definite portrait of Father Tabb emerges from a study of his imagery. For if the subjects of a poet are an index to his personality, his images are this in an even higher degree, since they are his spontaneous and distinctly personal reactions to a subject. In the case of Father Tabb, this is particularly true because of the brevity and condensation of the majority of his poems. What, then, do Father Tabb's images reveal?

In the first place, and quite obviously, his interests. As a poet, he was interested in the arts, especially music, since poetry is very much a matter of sound and rhythm. As an educated man, he showed interest in various fields of learning: in history, particularly classical and Biblical; in science; in mythology and fairy lore, an interest that appears almost self-evident in view of the impress made on literature for twenty centuries by classical mythology. As a man, he was interested in all things human: in classes and types of people, in human relations, in trades, roads, and travel—in all the seeming trivialities of daily life. As a child of God, he was interested in nature, God's handiwork, and in religion, the bond uniting man with God.

But his images do much more than this. They give an insight into his philosophy of life, a thing much deeper than mere interest. A person's
philosophy of life is manifested particularly in his concept of love and of life and death, and in his attitude toward what constitutes a peculiarly personal challenge in life.

Father Tabb's images leave no doubt as to his concept of love. For him, life is complete in love; without love, it is naught but pain. He bids a young violinist love his instrument and learn from it the oneness of the Trinity,

When the string and bow—
Parted lovers—meet
And in music know
Life in love complete.¹

But when love has departed, life must abide

In silent pain,
Till love, the truant tide,
Come back again.²

Three types of love occur in human life: love of friendship, conjugal love, and love of God. Father Tabb shows his understanding of all three types by the choice of his imagery. All of his poems on friendship proclaim the complete sufficiency of true friendship. "Beggared am I of want," he writes, "this boon possessing, That thou dost love me."³ His friend is the "sovereign of his heart,"⁴ another Hybla, where his hoarding

¹ "To an Amateur," The Poetry of Father Tabb, ed. Francis A. Litz, New York, 1928, 139-140.

² "At the Ebb-Tide," ibid., 140.

³ "Content," ibid., 130-131.

"heart Would fill its wintry cells" with the honey of love. Though the night be dark and dismal, for him and his friend it is brighter than day, and it

\[
\text{Needs not the glimmering orbs above,  
But only love.}
\]

His friend is indeed another self to him. To use his own words:

\[
\text{Thou art to me as is the sea  
Unto the shell:  
A life whereof I breathe, a love  
Wherein I dwell.}
\]

At times, his admiration of a friend makes him intolerant of the slightest criticism. When Poe is denied the recognition Father Tabb considers his due, the hall of fame becomes to him a charnel house, in which the living name of Poe should not be written. When Henry Thurston Peck criticizes Poe severely, Father Tabb in childish irritation writes:

\[
\text{His Peck-ability to show,  
Let Harry Thurston Peck at Poe,  
And thank his stars like Matthews Brander  
That Poe is silent now to slander;  
Or by the scourge with which they score him  
He'd make them bite the dust before him.}
\]

His exquisite images of mother-love and childhood testify to his understanding of conjugal love; but his most delicate tribute to this type

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5 "Love's Hybla," ibid., 132.
6 "Sufficit," ibid., 140-141.
7 "Alter Ego," ibid., 361.
8 "Excluded," ibid., 351.
9 "For the Poe Centenary," ibid., 269.
10 Cf. chapter V, p. 88-89.
of love occurs in the flower imagery of a wedding-day message:

"Sweet it is for Love to live,
Thus a blossom whispered me.
"But for Love a life to give
(Tell my sister Violet,
For a blossom too is she)
Sweeter yet."

Greatest of all loves is the love of God for man, a love that makes Him come as a suppliant to every human heart, "Love's prisoned thought to free."12 Such is God's tenderness that it is

Subdued in every teardrop to express
The whole of love.13

How does Father Tabb regard life and death? Life is compact of many unknown influences, he says:

Each separate life is fed
From many a fountain-head;
Tides that we never know
Into our being flow,
And rays of the remotest star
Converge to make us what we are.14

Life on earth is not the be-all and end-all of man's existence; it is rather a prisoner of time,15 a child of Eternity.16 The wonder about it is that

11 "To Violet B. on Her Wedding Day," Poetry of Father Tabb, 266.
12 "An Interpreter," ibid., 142-143.
13 "All in All," ibid., 135.
14 "Influences," ibid., 117.
16 "Life," ibid., 119.
men are so disdainful of it. When Science discovers a new celestial body, men turn their wondering eyes upon the heavens "The livelong night," heaving a sigh of regret when morning comes. But consider their attitude toward

Another birth—
A soul to earth
But newly come!
Its destiny
Eternity.
With wonder dumb
The heavens look down to see
Our faces turned therefrom. 17

In view of man's eternal destiny, death is nothing to be feared.

Death is a brother, sharing man's life breath by breath. 18 He is a lover, waging perpetual war with his rival, Life, for the possession of man. 19 For one brief moment he seems to be the conqueror; then the venom of his shaft is quenched and a mortal is "raised to immortality." 20 Again, as a photograph is a shade-image wrought by the smile of sunshine, so

... Death is but a tenderness,
A shadow, that unclouded love
Hath fashioned in its own excess
Of radiance from above. 21

It is a drifting away of earthly life into the everlasting sea of eternity. 22

---

19 "Foiled," ibid., 126.
20 "Nekros," ibid., 121.
21 "My Photograph," ibid., 122.
22 "In Extremis," ibid., 250.
It is the consummation of human endeavor, the twilight hour when God, as in
the Paradise of old, comes to bid man "walk with Him Into a vaster solitude."23

Sometimes a theoretically ideal philosophy of life collapses in the
face of some practical challenge. Judging from Father Tabb's poems, this was
not the case with him. For him the peculiarly personal challenge of life was
total blindness, which threatened him from boyhood and became a reality about
a year before his death. As he sees it inevitably descending upon him, he
recalls the story of Nicodemus and Christ, and reflects that he must return
to the primal darkness as to his mother's womb,

Not to be born again,
But to remain;
And in the School of Darkness learn
What mean
"The things unseen."24

This, then, is the meaning of blindness to him: physical blindness is to
lead to spiritual vision. A little later he speaks of his Lady Light hidden
within her convent, but again the note of spiritual vision is dominant:

I may not greet her; but a grace—
A gleam divine—
The rapture of her hidden face
Suffuses mine.25

Now his guides, like those of the Israelites of old, are

... a cloud by day,
A flame by night,

23 "The Birthday," ibid., 127.
24 "Going Blind," ibid., 257.
25 "In Blindness," ibid., 258-259.
For darkness wakens with the morn,
But dreams, of midnight slumber born,
Bring back the light.26

He does not, however, fear the darkness, for it is his Mammy's face, that beloved

... countenance whereon,
Despite the longest day,
The tenderness of visions gone
In shadow seemed to stay.27

Nevertheless, he suffers keenly. There is deep pathos in his pleas for daily bread and light. He confesses that at high noon he was in twilight and, like the blind men in the Gospel, saw his fellow-men as trees walking before him. Yet even here the light of faith shatters physical darkness, and he concludes:

... amid the falling rain
Of tears, I lift, O Lord, mine eyes to Thee,
For, lo! I see!28

But more than anything else, Father Tabb's images reveal his two great loves, nature and religion. To him nature is a sacrament, binding man to God:

It is His garment; and to them
Who touch in faith its utmost hem
He, turning, says again, "I see
That virtue hath gone out of me."29

Small wonder, then, that he tells his God:

26 "Blind," ibid., 258.
27 "Mammy," ibid., 258.
28 "Fiat [sic] Lux," ibid., 257.
I see Thee in the distant blue;  
But in the violet's dell of dew,  
Behold, I breathe and touch Thee too.  

The gentler aspects of nature are his favorites. He loves to speak of small flowers and plants and birds: violets and jessamine, morning-glories and crocuses, clover and fern and touch-me-not, the lark and the nightingale, the dove and the swallow, the robin and the killdee. Stars, rather than the greater heavenly lights, frequently appear in his images. Again and again he refers to dew and to the murmuring of brooks. When he speaks of the great things of nature, of mountains and sky and sea, he rarely deals with their terrifying aspects; rather does he stress their vastness, their majesty, their haunting beauty. This preference for the gentler, smaller things in nature would seem to indicate gentleness of character as well as attention to the trifling details that enrich life.

A similar preference is manifest in Father Tabb's Scriptural images. Here he chooses those passages of Scripture which portray the love and mercy of God. The story of the dove sent out by Noe when the waters of the Deluge were subsiding, God's care of the Israelites at the Red Sea and in the desert, God's presence with His people in the Temple—these are his favorite Old-Testament images.  

His principal New-Testament image is that of Mary Magdalene bathing the feet of Jesus or weeping for Him at the tomb. Other

30 "Gpd," ibid., 218.

31 See appendix II, p. 142, for a list of the poems containing Scriptural images, together with the Scriptural reference and the subject matter of the passage. It has seemed wise to arrange these poems in the order of Scriptural references rather than in alphabetical order.
important images are those drawn from various phases of the Passion, the Sermon on the Mount, the coin of tribute, and the parable of the Prodigal Son. All of these point to Father Tabb's profound understanding of the mercy and providence of God, his own submission to that providence, and his personal endeavor to reproduce divine mercy.

Love of nature and religion, combined with deep poetic sensitivity, led Father Tabb to a high degree of mysticism, of union with God. This mysticism is the distinguishing characteristic of his poetry and of his personality, and it is in his imagery rather than in his subject matter that it is revealed. 32

Again and again Father Tabb makes use of religious imagery to illuminate nature. Darkness is Peter stealing away, bedewed with tears, at the coming of Day, another Christ. 33 Morning is the spear piercing the side of Night and bringing forth light. 34 Night is a priest pouring the chrism of light on his latest-born child and bidding him come to the altar.

32 Francis Litz devotes a chapter of his study of Father Tabb to this aspect of his work (Father Tabb, 123-142). In his notes he lists a number of poems that show this tendency toward mysticism. Yet his list is by no means a complete one, and his remarks are necessarily somewhat limited because of the general nature of his work. An adequate handling of the mysticism of Father Tabb would require a thesis in itself. The writer, therefore, is limiting herself to what is necessary to establish her point. In appendix III, p. 150, she presents lists of the poems demonstrating Father Tabb's distinctly personal correlation of nature and religion.


Whereon for sacrifice,
(A lamb before his shearer's dumb.)
A victim shadow lies. 35

A blossom at noonday is Dives bidding Lazarus, a dewdrop, lay his "finger-tip of moisture" on the blossom's fevered lip. 36 In autumn the aster puts on its purple "robes pontifical" and stands unwearied

Till Indian Summer leaves the land,
And Winter spreads the pall. 37

Then, like the martyrs of old, the maples "stand Ablaze in autumn fire." 38

Autumn herself is Mary grieving,

As blood-like drip the maple leaves
On Nature's Calvary,
And every sap-forsaken limb
Renews the mystery of Him
Who died upon a Tree. 39

Similarly, Father Tabb uses nature imagery to throw light on some religious subject. He identifies the Immaculate Conception with a dewdrop, a blossom, and a rainbow. 40 Mary, he says, is the mother-dove, and Christ the Fledgling, whom she offers in the Temple and who, at her death, calls her home. 41 She is the star that hid her light at Christ's birth and stands, "a

35 "Dawn," ibid., 71.
38 "Victims," ibid., 29.
39 "Mater Dolorosa," ibid., 91.
40 "The Immaculate Conception," ibid., 204-205.
widowed satellite—alone, On tearful Calvary. To the man of faith, suffering is a cloud revealing "a far-reflected dream of heaven's tranquillity."

In a third class of poems, Father Tabb employs a religious image to elucidate a religious theme. In "Stilling the Tempest" he combines the incident of Christ's calming the storm at sea with that of His forgiving Mary Magdalen's sins. Again, he speaks of Christ's reed of scorn blossoming "Like Aaron's rod . . . to adorn The risen God." Immediately he draws a further inference: Magdalen,

... the broken bloom
That balmed His feet,
Is first before His tomb,
Her Lord to greet.

He describes conscience as another Joseph, bound and sold by his brothers, yet

At God's right hand, whate'er of good redound,
His sole vicegerent crowned.

He gives a new and subtle meaning to Adam's words, "The woman gave, and I did eat," which merited God's sentence, "Ye die the death!" For a Christian, the woman is Mary, who gave the fruit of her womb for man's food, and God's verdict is: "So dieth death!"

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43 "Transfiguration," ibid., 223.
44 Ibid., 362.
45 "Two Easter Lilies," ibid., 265-266.
46 "Conscience," ibid., 221-222.
Ultimately, all of Father Tabb's ideas and ideals converge in this profound spiritual insight into things seen and unseen. He belonged to the chosen few to whom God "speaks in every sight and sound."\textsuperscript{48} What he saw and heard he distilled in the alembic of his imagination until it came forth a new creation, a treasure to be shared with others through the medium of his poetry. He longed to sing a song

\begin{center}
\textit{Brief to the ear, but long To Love and Memory.}\textsuperscript{49}
\end{center}

The key to the fulfillment of that ambition lies in his imagery.

\textsuperscript{48} "Vox Dei," \textit{ibid.}, 194-195.

\textsuperscript{49} "To a Songster," \textit{ibid.}, xviii.
APPENDIX I: COMPARATIVE CHARTS OF THE SOURCES
OF FATHER TABB'S IMAGERY

A. General Sources
APPENDIX II: A LIST OF POEMS EMBODYING SCRIPTURAL IMAGES

(All page references are to the text used for this study.)

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The thesis submitted by Sister Stella Marie Spitzley, S.C.C. has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English. The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

October 7, 1957

James J. Young
Signature of Adviser