



1938

## The Holy Eucharist in Modern Poetry

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**THE EUCHARIST IN MODERN POETRY**

**THE HOLY EUCHARIST IN MODERN POETRY**

**A            T h e s i s**

**Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School**

**of**

**LOYOLA UNIVERSITY**

**In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements**

**For the Degree of Master of Arts**

**With English as Major Subject**

**by**

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**Chicago, Illinois**

**June, 1938**

## V I T A

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CHAPTER I

THE THEME OF THE EUCHARIST IN POETRY

THE EUCHARIST, DOCTRINE AND SYMBOLISM

LITERARY AND AESTHETIC BACKGROUND OF THE PERIOD

## THE HOLY EUCHARIST IN MODERN POETRY

Laudis thema specialis,  
Panis vivus et vitalis  
Hodie proponitur.

Instability and feverish restlessness mark the age to-day. This agitation has invaded the field of poetry both in subject matter and in a straining search for new rhythms, meters, and diction. Men are hungrier than ever for true reality, and grope for light. However, in their midst dwells the most Real of all reality--the Holy Eucharist. And reality will sing when nothing else can. Indeed, one cannot help feeling the divine fire of poetry when singing of what is at once "the last miracle of God's love and the fullest expression of it."<sup>1</sup>

Within the last few years there has been "a remarkable renaissance of poetry in both America and England."<sup>2</sup> Poetry has become so vital a force in modern life that it can no longer be ignored. In spite of the fact that the present Weltanschauung, or world view, is resolutely hostile to the concept of God, the subject of the Eucharist has a place in the poetry of to-day, albeit a humble one. No literary work, however, has been found which treats of modern Eucharistic poetry as such. Nevertheless, with the gradual emergence of Catholic thought in America and England, there has arisen a renewed

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<sup>1</sup> H. T. Henry, Litt. D., Eucharistica (Phil. 1912) p. 194.

<sup>2</sup> Harriet Monroe, A. C. Henderson, "Introduction" to The New Poetry. (New York, 1936) p. xxxviii.

enthusiasm for spiritual things; and the Holy Eucharist has its singers. Though the body of modern Eucharistic poetry may be apparently small and insignificant, it occupies at least a modest niche in the poetic field, and stands as a stirring challenge to the new artist.

Within the bounds of this thesis only the works of the representative English, American, and a few Irish poets will be treated. The time limit extends from the "Second Spring" of Catholic letters -- so called on the occasion of a sermon in 1850 by Cardinal Newman, who, though he maintained that the Protestant tone and character of the English classics were fixed forever, was himself a means of re-introducing the Catholic spirit into the literature of English-speaking people. "It is well," he said, "to have rich architecture, curious works of art and splendid vestments, when you have a present God; but oh! what a mockery when you have not!" Men were beginning to awaken to a great reality. Truth began to penetrate the arid wastelands of the last few centuries, and the great Cardinal's summons for England to return to her heritage left all his auditors in tears: "Shall the past be rolled back? Shall the grave open? Shall the Saxon live again to God?"<sup>1</sup>

In the literary treatment of the subject of the Holy Eucharist, it is necessary definitely to postulate two things: first, the reality of the supernatural, its importance and value to human life; and secondly, the importance of asserting the presence of continuity and tradition. For many

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<sup>1</sup> Blanche Mary Kelly, The Well of English (New York, 1936) p. 207.



years revolt from tradition has been the vogue. The swift-speeding Zeitgeist leaves the writer no time for reverence--"the lift of faith", for religious faith is now held as an anachronism; one must be "advanced" at all costs.<sup>1</sup> And yet, in life as well as in the consideration of the greatest Gift given to men whereby to live that life--the Holy Eucharist and in the poetry that springs from that great source - we must definitely posit tradition.

Pre-eminently, too, the Holy Eucharist belongs to the realm of the supernatural. As with tradition, so likewise critics to-day are reluctant to acknowledge the claims of the supernatural. Edmund Wilson in his critical work, Axel's Castle, says: "You can hardly have an effective Church without the cult of Christ as the Son of God; and you cannot have such a cult without more willingness to accept the supernatural than most of us to-day are able to muster."<sup>2</sup> As soon as a religious theme is mentioned, it is rendered "suspect." And for the intelligent appreciation of a religious poem, much imaginative recovery must first be done, declare many literary critics. In his essay on the works of T. S. Eliot, R. P. Blackmur remarks: "We have a special work of imaginative recovery to do...The literal believer takes his myths, which he does not call myths, as supernatural archetypes of reality; the imaginative believer, who is not a 'believer' at all, takes his myths for the meaning there is in their challenging application."<sup>3</sup> In our day of

<sup>1</sup> Spirit, in Book Review of Margaret Widdemer's "Hill Garden" by C. J. L. (Nov. 1936), p. 159.

<sup>2</sup> Edmund Wilson, Axel's Castle (New York, 1931, p. 126.

<sup>3</sup> R. P. Blackmur, The Double Agent (New York, 1935), p. 196.

communistic atheism when the most sacred beliefs are looked upon merely as "gults" or "myths", there is need of much imaginative recovery; it is time to assert that a Weltanschauung which takes in the supernatural, is required for the handling of poetic material to the best advantage.

Obviously Mr. Blackmur touched the crux of the entire situation with this pertinent remark: "Possibly it may be that we are unfamiliar with good contemporary Christian writers."<sup>1</sup> The Church, indeed, was once the mother of poets. The palm and the laurel, sanctity and song, Francis Thompson says, once grew together in her fertile soil; but for the last two centuries she had relinquished the chief glories of her poetry to aliens.<sup>2</sup> However, a hopeful light tips the horizon to-day. Perhaps it is the fact that the Church has been ignored rather than attacked that there has been lacking the motive to probe her depths and expand her implications. With penetrating insight into the problems of modern life, Dr. Fulton J. Sheen of the Catholic University alleges that despite the decline of intellectual opposition at the present time "we are about to witness the most intensive study of the Church since the Reformation. The reason is not that logic has been used against us, but rather because it has ceased to be used at all."<sup>3</sup> The time is ripe to explain her beauties to thirsting souls. "She is forced to look at herself, not from the outside where she was opposed, but from the inside where she leads her most spiritual life. In other words, the Church

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 201.

<sup>2</sup> Francis Thompson, "Shelley" Prose Works, Vol. III (New York, 1913), p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Dr. Fulton J. Sheen, "The Mystical Body of Christ" (New York, 1935), p. 2.

is no longer on the defensive; she is no longer on the offensive; she is on the descriptive -- revealing herself to hungry hearts and minds as the Bread of Life."<sup>1</sup> And this beautiful self, the Bread of Life is none other than the Holy Eucharist -- the Center and Source of life and society.

Religion far exceeds the bounds of art; though she uses art, especially the fine art of poetry, in her service. All art must be her humble handmaid -- and poetry, "the lesser sister and helpmate of the Church", as Thompson says.<sup>2</sup> "Poetry is to the mind what the ceremonies of the Church are to the eye"<sup>3</sup> - a way of raising the soul to God and eternal things. Because in the Holy Eucharist the divine is so intimately knit with the human, the poet is invited to look, paint, or write -- to penetrate its depths with the interior affectionate glance and spread the happy "news" to men.

In the survey of devotional poetry it is found that the favorite topic is the Incarnation or the Passion rather than the Eucharist. This may be accounted for by reason of their objectivity, since the appeal to faith in the Eucharist is without any support from the senses. Then, too, the reply to an enquiry made in regard to modern Eucharistic poetry in America gives, perhaps, a second reason: "The Blessed Sacrament does not seem to loom large in American poetry. That is easily understood because many of the older generation were afraid of the papistical thing, and most of the moderns know

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Francis Thompson, Op. cit., p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> McAstocker and Pfeiffer, in introduction to Current Catholic Verse (New York, 1926), p. 7.

little about it." The Incarnation is an historical fact; Et incarnatus est was "God stooping down from the heights to meet the limited faculties of man in his own bodily frame-work."<sup>1</sup> The Babe of Bethlehem was seen, while the Holy Eucharist lies wholly in the realm of faith; yet, there is between the two a most intimate relationship so that what is true of one aids in defining the other. The Holy Eucharist is but an extension of the Incarnation. Christ is our Contemporary in the world to-day.

Taken from a literary point of view, the importance of the literature grouped around the Incarnation cannot be overlooked because of its pertinency to Eucharistic literature. The Incarnation has a literature of its own, which treats of the things of the world from an entirely new point of view; it has a poetry of its own; it has formed modern language upon itself; and it has "introduced a whole circle of moral notions peculiar to itself: the strength of weakness, the triumph of defeat, the blessing of sorrow, the might of pain, the power of concealment, the glory of submission."<sup>2</sup> This applies still more fully to the Holy Eucharist, the projection of the Incarnation into the present time. "Nothing else," says Father Faber, "will explain the phenomena of the Church except the Blessed Sacrament...It is the living life of the Incarnate God...it is the sacrifice of the daily altar."<sup>3</sup> All of these ideas are reflected in modern Eucharistic poetry.

<sup>1</sup> Alfred Noyes, The Unknown God (New York, 1934), p. 379.

<sup>2</sup> Frederick William Faber, The Blessed Sacrament (London, 1855), p. 438.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 440.

In the present time, when modern literature is absorbed in its unsolved problem of pain, wickedness and frustration, when there are clashes of partial aspects professing themselves as views of the whole, it is fitting to point out the truth that everywhere joy is truer and more real than pain, good than evil and fulfillment than failure;<sup>1</sup> and that the Eucharist is the fulfillment of the joy of life. The frustration of hopes verges on the fact that modernism entirely misunderstands the nature of religion and its intimate relationship to man.

Since literature, in a relatively formless way, makes attempts to deal with man in his relation to the world and higher things, it is essential to have the correct concept of man. And it is here that T. E. Hulme, in his learned work, Speculations, seems to have struck the rock of the restless confusion at the present time -- the inability to realize the meaning of Original Sin. He distinguishes between the two concepts of man as they extend from the time of the so-called English Renaissance into our day: the first, "the belief in the subordination of man to certain absolute values, the radical imperfection of man, and the doctrine of Original Sin;"<sup>2</sup> secondly, the belief that man is fundamentally good, "the highest exaltation of human life and culture, personality developed to its highest intensity." The former is the Christian concept of man, the latter, the humanistic; and the latter leads to a complete change in values; the problem of evil disappears, and the concept of sin loses all its meaning; consequently,

<sup>1</sup> E. I. Watkins, The Bow in the Clouds (London, 1931), p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> T. E. Hulme, Speculations (New York, 1935), p. 49.

confusion blurs this view of life. To postulate Original Sin and the relative imperfection of man, he says, makes the religious attitude one of absolute values, and he emphasized the point that this "religious attitude" is possible even for the so-called "emancipated" and "reasonable" man.<sup>1</sup> One cannot grasp the meaning of the Eucharist, either in life or in literature, unless he has this Christian concept of man.

The Blessed Sacrament is the door to that mystic experience enjoyed by the Saints which marks the greatest achievement of the human spirit. As Francis Thompson has said: "Saintship is the touch of God. To most, even good people, God is a belief. To the Saints, He is an embrace. They have felt the wind of His locks, His Heart has beaten against their side. They do not believe Him, for they know Him."<sup>2</sup> Between the Creator and man, there is a deep chasm, and what God is in Himself no one can know unless God reveals it to him. "All creatures," says A. B. Sharpe, "are in a state of immediate dependence upon Him, and it is only in virtue of this dependence that they exist...This being so the only direct or experimental knowledge of God that man can attain must be supernaturally bestowed upon him."<sup>3</sup> Whereas the Saint and the Mystic is satisfied with the vision -- the embrace, the Poet is pressed with the need of communicating his spark of the divine, to all mankind. Though silence alone is adequate, his spirit is urged to utter the message, if only to itself. "We are lucky," says

<sup>1</sup> T. E. Holme, Speculations (New York, 1924), p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Francis Thompson, "Sanctity and Song," Op. cit., p. 90.

<sup>3</sup> A. B. Sharpe, Mysticism: Its True Nature and Value (London, n.d.), p. 12.

Henri Bremond in his essay entitled, "Poetry and Mysticism", "to find between us and the mystics some intermediaries easier to deal with -- the poets."<sup>1</sup>

The theme of the Holy Eucharist yields itself readily to the fine art of poetry. If a poem deserves its title only in so far as it succeeds in elevating the soul, as Edgar Allan Poe insists in his "Poetic Principle", the theme of the Blessed Sacrament eminently comprises within itself the distinctive quality of the sublime, and of the beautiful, which, as he says, is but as a "wild effort to reach the Beauty above," and also the Divine Passion of Love, the flame that stirs more "human hearts than any other single sentiment."<sup>2</sup> The poets pass from the surface of things to profounder depths. They penetrate to the spiritual which the outward form signifies,-to something which ministers to the immortal part of their being. In the Holy Eucharist the lowliest of outward forms - only bread and wine in appearance - there is a real challenge to the artist. Magnificent ceremonials, and the pageantry of processions construct, as it were, but a background for the imagery of the inner idea -- that the Eternal Son of God still walks the earth as our Blessed Contemporary. Hence it is that symbolism and poetic imagery serve the poet as humble means to bring out the significance of Eucharistic poems.

Poetry, as well as religion, lives by that which "the eye hath not seen, nor the ear heard." However, J. C. Shairp, in his work, Aspects of

<sup>1</sup> Henri Bremond, Prayer and Poetry (London, 1927), p. 87.

<sup>2</sup> Edgar Allan Poe, "The Poetic Principle," Best Known Works of Poe (New York, 1927), p. 774.

Poetry, critically discerns this difference; that religion turns its eyes directly on the unseen; while poetry "finds its materials in the things seen; but it cannot deal with them imaginatively, cannot perform on them its finer function, until it draws upon the unseen, and penetrates things visible with a light from behind the veil."<sup>1</sup> Inherently poetic is the subject-matter of the Eucharist, which, though it divests the senses of all things save the lowliest appearances, yet is the Source of the most sublime thoughts and affections.

Besides the vigor and elevation of ideas centering about the Holy Eucharist as a theme, a literary work possesses an architectonic structure which is determined, not only by the order of the ideas presented, but also in part, by the beauty of expression. In his excellent study, A Philosophy of Form, E. I. Watkins says that literary beauty depends not only on the truth of the ideas expressed, but likewise "on the embodiment of that truth in verbal pattern."<sup>2</sup> In modern Eucharistic poetry, it is notable that the poets, as if afraid to employ pomp of words and elaborate meters on approaching so magnificent a Mystery, have, in general, confined themselves to simple diction, a gentle flow of rhythm, and the less intricate metrical patterns.

The Holy Eucharist will be considered in the poetry of modern writers under the three-fold aspect: as our Divine Companion, as our Spiritual Food, and as our Daily Sacrifice. One who grasps but a little of

<sup>1</sup> J. C. Shairp, Aspects of Poetry (New York, 1881), p. 58.

<sup>2</sup> E. I. Watkins, A Philosophy of Form (New York, 1935), p. 334.



the significance of this great Gift to men, will never be filled with the "divine despair" of the prevailing Welt-Schmerz. Through the power of the Eucharist the clay of man becomes so great that angels might envy its dignity, that God Himself treats "with great reverence"<sup>1</sup> human dignity. For man, His masterpiece, -- half clay, half spirit, -- the Blessed Eucharist is a constant Boon. It is little wonder that the poetic flame stirs the dust, and that the poet is but a faltering voice because of the tremendousness of the vision. As a poet, he sees more than the ordinary man the tragedy of the modern spiritual decay -- of a society that has lost its capacity for Christ; and his voice, because it touches the supreme glory that is heaven itself upon earth, is a "stammering" sound, but one of joy and intense triumph.

It was by means of frequent repetition that Our Lord impressed upon the dull minds of His followers the Eucharistic Gift He had come into the world to bestow upon man. The sixth chapter of St. John rings with His predictions: "I am the bread of life; he that cometh to me shall not hunger; and he that believeth in me shall never thirst." (vi, 35); "If any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread that I will give, is my flesh, for the life of the world" (vi, 52); "He hath eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, abideth in me, and I in him" (vi, 56,57). His was the Oriental way of speaking--that you may "be filled with the fulness of life;" "that my joy may be in you, and your joy may be filled" (xv,11).

<sup>1</sup> Pope Leo XIII, Rerum Novarum, p. 23.

At the Last Supper all the pent-up love of His Heart pulsed through these words: "With desire I have desired to eat this pasch with you, before I suffer," (Luke XXI, 15).

It was His last meal on earth. A reverent hush fell upon the chosen group. With eyes lifted up to heaven, giving thanks, "He blessed, broke and gave to His disciples saying: 'Take and eat ye all of this, FOR THIS IS MY BODY'". Then, taking the chalice of wine, and giving thanks to His Eternal Father, "He blessed it and gave it to His disciples saying: 'Take and drink ye all of this; FOR THIS IS THE CHALICE OF MY BLOOD, OF THE NEW AND ETERNAL TESTAMENT; THE MYSTERY OF FAITH: WHICH SHALL BE SHED FOR YOU AND FOR MANY UNTO THE REMISSION OF SINS.'"<sup>1</sup> The greatest act of all history was accomplished. All the symbols of the Old Law were done away with. The Holy Eucharist was given to men. "Do this in commemoration of Me," He added, and the marvelous wonder of the Holy Mass was effected which would "perpetuate His presence among men until the end of time."<sup>2</sup> There yet remained the supreme price of that gracious parting Gift -- the greatest tragedy of all history -- the Sacrifice of His life upon the Cross. "Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John xv, 13).

It is precisely the Holy Thursday Gift and the Good Friday Sacrifice that give us the Holy Mass to-day. "His death," says Reverend Edward Leen, in his authoratative work, In the Likeness of Christ, "was the condition of

<sup>1</sup> Words in the Consecration of the Mass. Dom F. Cabrol, The Roman Missal,  
<sup>2</sup> Rev. Edward Leen, C.S.Sp., D.D. In the Likeness of Christ (New York<sup>46</sup> 1937),  
 p. 248.

His being able to give His Great Gift to men -- the Gift of Himself."<sup>1</sup> This sacrificial act is the diamond around which the magnificent liturgy of the Mass has developed through the ages. By it was effected the loving reconciliation of men with the Eternal Father.

This was God's part. But in the Holy Mass there must be "cooperation." Man has his part to enact. Unwelcome as the term "Sacrifice," is to the modern ear, nevertheless it is important to form a correct notion of the word for at least an ordinary understanding of the significance of the Holy Eucharist. Essential to sacrifice is the Offerre, the offering. In the first Christian ages, the faithful understood that they should contribute personally and publicly to the sacrificial gift offered to God. In 1078, Pope Gregory VII decreed that everyone "should bring a gift for the Mass, and none should come with empty hands."<sup>2</sup> As long as leavened bread was used, the people brought their own bread; likewise they brought wine in special cruets. However, when the use of unleavened bread was established (in Rome between the ninth and eleventh centuries), other offerings were substituted.<sup>3</sup> Speaking of the Offere, the Roman catechism says: "The whole significance of the sacrifice lies in the fact that it is offered."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 248.

<sup>2</sup> Rev. Joseph Kramp, S.J., The Liturgical Sacrifice of the New Law (London, 1927), p. 105.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., Footnote on p. 105. Father Kramp also gives this bit of information: "The collection now usually taken up at the Offertory is a reminiscence of the ancient custom of the faithful to bring the sacrificial gifts for the Mass." p. 105-106.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., quoted in The Liturgical Sacrifice of the New Law, p. 26.

But the offering is not enough. The import of sacrifice is that "the object sacrificed is prepared to be consumed as a meal, which is to be not only a source of physical strength, but also a means of spiritual power and its actual communication."<sup>1</sup> Now according to the Oriental custom a meal was one of the highest marks of friendship one man could give another. Man makes his offering, not with the intention of nourishing God, but to render Him a homage of love; and secondly, to give to God the very best thing in his possession--his own life. But God is above all human needs. Therefore, the sacrifice is invested with a deep symbolical character - a symbol of the sacrificer as well as a loving act of worship.

A sacrifice implies a change to bring out its symbolic meaning. In the Mass this change is wrought in our sacrificial gift by the solemn act of consecration.<sup>2</sup> The gift now becomes holy. Instead of the phrase "our gifts," the term "Thy gifts" is used,--the "Bread of eternal life and the Chalice of everlasting salvation." Note that the idea of sacrificial food is retained. Christ is present under the appearance of food for the nourishment of souls.

By reason of the symbolical character of sacrifice, it confers holiness upon the sacrificing person. The etymology of the word "sacrificium"--"sacrum facere" is to make holy. The entire sacrificial action is dominated by the idea of consecration and devotion to God, and of sanctifica-

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 5.  
<sup>2</sup> Supra, p. 12.

tion and union with Him."<sup>1</sup> That is why man regards his offering and dedication of himself as a real privilege. The best he can offer is none too good. He is filled with joyful sentiments: "In the simplicity of my heart I have joyfully offered all these things " (I Par 9, 17).

The sacrificial act of Consecration makes the tremendous Sacrifice of the Cross become present. The priest no longer acts in his capacity as a man; he is an "alter Christus." Here our gifts are changed into the true body of Christ. Toward this action everything else in the Mass converges. In our Offertory we have given to God the best in our possession. In the Consecration, God gives us in return the best in His possession. Christ has become the ultimate sacrificial Gift.<sup>2</sup> Now, once more we re-offer to God His return Gift. This time we are certain that our offering is acceptable to Him for It is His own Beloved Son. Note the exchange of gifts. Perhaps Father Kramp's words best express what has been accomplished:

The Sacrificial Repast is now finished. Christ, the sacrificial gift, has become our nourishment. Union with God, which is the purpose of all sacrifice, has not only been attained symbolically in the sacrificial action, but has become a sacramental reality through the Sacrificial Repast. Each of the faithful is a Christ-bearer, a God-bearer. All are united with Him, and He is united in all. Thus all are one, and we have the true Mystical Body of Christ -- the one Vine. The words of the liturgy continue to echo in every soul like the sound of music that has ceased, according to the individual capacity of each soul.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 32.  
<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 89 ff.  
<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 197-198.

"Agape" (Love-Feast), "Lord's Supper" (Coena Domini), "Eulogia" (Blessing), Eucharistia are titles given to this wonderful Gift.<sup>1</sup> Thanksgiving is the sentiment that fills the soul. The word "Eucharistia" itself means thanksgiving.<sup>2</sup> We cannot help being "stirred to become as He was..to become Christified." Unless we resemble Jesus Christ, we cannot please God, "and the Blessed Sacrament is instituted for the very object of perfecting in us this likeness."<sup>3</sup>

Our offerings, the bread and the wine, are themselves profoundly symbolical. They furnish the ordinary nourishment for the greater bulk of mankind and are found in all parts of the world. This consideration is important for the universal spread of Christianity. Bread and wine, likewise form the complete nourishment of man who requires both liquid and solid foods to sustain life. They also symbolize the unity of its members: "As the Church is one moral entity, compacted of many members of all nations, climes and times, of many degrees of culture, grades of wealth and classes of society; so the Eucharistic appearance of bread is one morsel composed of many particles of wheat;"<sup>4</sup> and the wine is made of many drops crushed from grapes gathered perhaps from many hillsides.

Likewise the bread and wine are apposite symbols of the Divine Person of Jesus Christ.<sup>5</sup> "The Bread of Life" and "The Vine" were Our Lord's

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<sup>1</sup> The Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. V, p. 572.

<sup>2</sup> C. C. Martindale, S. J., The Mind of the Missal (New York, 1929), p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Leen, Op. Cit., p. 252.

<sup>4</sup> McGlorey, The Gift of Love (St. Louis, 1926), pp. 13-14.

<sup>5</sup> Kramp, Op/ cit., p. 110.

own titles for Himself. The color of the wine (red) calls to mind the shedding of His Sacred Blood, as the White Host, His Sacred Body. The Holy Eucharist is a symbol of the death of Christ as well as of His burial. "He is laid in the sepulchre of the tabernacle," says McGlorey, "dead as far as external activities are concerned; His eyes, ears and lips swathed in the Eucharistic winding-sheet and His limbs enclosed by the confining, cramping circle of the tiny Host."<sup>1</sup>

The Holy Eucharist is symbolic of the Mystical Body of Christ, of which He is the Head and we are the members, just as the branch must be united to the vine in order to have life. Between Christ and His Church there is a truly vital, internal union--a living prolongation of Christ through space and time."<sup>2</sup> The Cross can never be far from the Eucharist. Calvary is prolonged through the ages to this day and its memorial is the Holy Mass. "On the Cross the Historical Christ offered Himself, in the Mass the Mystical Christ which is Christ and us, are associated in the offering...The Vine sacrificed Himself on the Cross; the Vine and the Branches now sacrifice themselves in the Mass."<sup>3</sup> At the Offertory, when the priest presents the bread and wine to God, he offers the individual members of the Mystical Body. We do not simply assist at Mass; we participate. We surrender our human natures to Him to become one with Him even to the Cross. Dr. Sheen throws light on this thought in the words: "If, then, the Offertory of the Mass is the co-offering of Christ and us, then the Consecration is the co-crucifixion

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<sup>1</sup> McGlorey, Op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Fulton J. Sheen, Op. cit., p. 342.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 338, 346-347.

of Christ and us...The Mass is the one thing in the world which makes it possible for us who live in the twentieth century to share in the sacrifice of Calvary. And our share, be it noted, is not merely that of a witness at a theatrical representation of events which are past; rather, we are contemporaries of Calvary."<sup>1</sup>

It is through the Mystical Body that Christians form a single whole. "We, being many, are one body in Christ. (Rom. xii, 5). The Eucharist incorporates one to another as brothers in Christ. "As the true bread," says Father Kramp, "is by sacrificial conversion changed into the true Christ, so the faithful, whom the bread symbolizes, are received through the same conversion into the Mystical Christ, Who is also symbolized by it."<sup>2</sup> Ever since the sixteenth century, the principal religious error has been that religion is only a personal concern between God and man. Note that in the Mystical Body, the individual never stands alone. He has a place, of course, in the liturgy, "but always as a member of a Christian community."<sup>3</sup> "If one member suffer anything, all the members suffer with it." (1 Cor. xii, 26).

Father Furfey in his thought-provoking work, Fire on the Earth, shows clearly that the doctrine of the Mystical Body implies charity not only to the individuals, but likewise towards social groups.<sup>4</sup> The love which gave us the Eucharistic Gift is the vital force which cements all personalities and social groups into one. And <sup>the</sup> flood-gates of love are opened wide at the

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 348.

<sup>2</sup> Kramp, Op. cit., p. 110.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 112.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Hanly Furfey, Fire on the Earth (New York, 1936), p. 49.



altar-rail where the supernatural meets the natural. "The basis of supernatural unity is LOVE,<sup>1</sup> as the basis of natural unity is BEING. What Being is to Metaphysics, that Love is to Theology....The full truth is that at the Communion rail we not only receive Communion with Christ, but we also receive Communion with one another."

The Holy Eucharist is also a symbol of Christ in Heaven--"glorified at His Father's banquet-board."<sup>2</sup> For us the Holy Eucharist is the beginning of the perfect life of love. Father Furfey observes that "the life of the Blessed in Heaven is not a complete change, but rather a consummation of this life of Eucharistic Union."<sup>3</sup>

Though the Eucharist has been shadowed forth both in the Old and the New Testaments by rich Symbolism, there is no toying with symbols. The Holy Eucharist is a Reality. The Symbolism is filled with deep internal meaning. Just because its domain is in the spiritual and invisible world does not mean that it is unreal. On the contrary it is the most vital reality on earth, it is His Divine Self remaining lovingly with man. The Holy Eucharist "contains nothing less than Christ Himself, the source and fount of all grace."<sup>4</sup> Around the Eucharistic Act and Words, the Liturgy developed. At first the Apostles said at Mass only what Christ had taught them and the Lord's Prayer. As time passed, different popes contributed to the Liturgy <sup>5</sup> the Psalm Judica, the Kyries, the Credo, until we have the magnificent Mass as it is today--the great Eucharistic rite.

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Sheen, Op. cit., p. 368; Kramp, Op. cit., p. 112; Furfey, Op.cit., p.39.

<sup>2</sup> McGlorey, Op. cit., p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> Furfey, Op. cit., p. 56.

<sup>4</sup> Right Rev. John Cuthbert Hedley, The Holy Eucharist (London, 1907), p. 116.

In the first days of the Church, the faithful flocked daily to the sacred Table.<sup>1</sup> When the persecutions ceased, daily Communion also began to decline. "By the end of the sixth century," says Sister Mary Loretta in her scholarly dissertation on the Holy Eucharist in Middle English Verse, "The practice of weekly Communion, that is, on Sunday, still existed in the Eternal City."<sup>2</sup>

Later, toward the middle of the ninth century, the devout communicated very rarely. Finally, in 1215, the Fourth Lateran Council passed a law confirming the necessity of at least annual confession and Communion for all.<sup>3</sup> The reception of the Holy Eucharist in the medieval times was seldom. In fact, even in the cloisters, "the lay brothers and the nuns received the Holy Eucharist not oftener than eight or at most fifteen times in the year, i. e., on the great feasts."<sup>4</sup> Between 1600 and 1900, the doctrine of daily or frequent Communion was established,<sup>5</sup> so that to-day frequent Communion is again common among the faithful.

Lastly, in fulfillment of His promise, "I will not leave you orphans," Our Divine Lord left His divine Presence as a Loving Friend among men. Servant and master, rich and poor--all have access to the King of Kings disguised under the sacramental veils. Royal Incognito, He is a hidden God who deigns to share our hospitality. It is as if the Divine

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<sup>1</sup> Father Kramp says that the first hundred years of Christianity, "The Body of the Lord was, before all things, the bond of Christian unity and the great symbol of the one and only Church." Op. cit., p. 256.

<sup>2</sup> Sister Loretta, Op. cit., p. 34.

<sup>3</sup> Donald Attwater, The Catholic Encyclopedia (New York, 1931), p. 298.

<sup>4</sup> Sister M. Loretta, Op. cit., p. 36.

<sup>5</sup> Hedley, Op. cit., p. 257.

Guest uses the disguise of the Eucharist to multiply the power of loving.<sup>1</sup>

"The Presence," says Rev. T. E. Bridgett, C. SS. R., speaking of the medieval age, "took possession of every nook and corner of the land. The faith and the worship of the Blessed Sacrament pervaded all classes of society, entered into all public and private life, and gave birth to the most varied works and institutions."<sup>2</sup>

That this fact is generally acknowledged is confirmed by the following words of the modern historian, J. R. Green in his History of the

English People, Vol. 1:

If there was one doctrine upon which the supremacy of the Medieval Church rested, it was the doctrine of Transubstantiation. It was by his exclusive right to the performance of the miracle which was wrought in the Mass that the lowliest priest was raised high above princes. With the formal denial of the doctrine of Transubstantiation which Wycliffe issued in the spring of 1381 began that movement of religious revolt which ended more than a century after in the establishment of religious freedom by severing the mass of the Teutonic peoples from the general body of the Catholic Church.<sup>3</sup>

It is interesting to note how the Eucharist set its seal on every avenue of life in these happy, care-free days in "Merrie England," even to the ceremony of the coronation oath of the King. The colorful procession of ecclesiastics and members of the royalty bearing the royal crown, followed in the rear by the King and two bishops under a canopy of blue silk borne by four barons, proceeded to the Church, where, before the high altar, the Archbishop of Canterbury administered the oath to the king. Then the paper upon which the oath was inscribed was laid upon the altar. After the beautiful

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<sup>1</sup> Russell, Op. cit., P. 16.

<sup>2</sup> Rev. T. E. Bridgett, A History of the Holy Eucharist in Great Britain (London, 1908), p. 305.

<sup>3</sup> J. R. Green, History of the English People (New York, n.d.), Vol. I, p.488.

ceremony of the Mass was ended, the day was concluded with pageants and the usual joyous festivities.<sup>1</sup>

The fact that the Real Presence of Our Eucharistic Lord is a permanent Presence has given rise to a marked external observance and ritual. From the earliest Christian period, the Holy Eucharist "was held to be adorable with divine worship, or with <sup>4</sup>latria." The ritual which grew about the Eucharist was a gradual development. For had the Blessed Sacrament been presented "at first with the incense and lights of later days, with the genuflections and elevations which came in their good time, it would appear that the Church could not have taken in to the full the great truths connected with the sacramental and sacrificial aspects of the august dispensation."<sup>2</sup>

It was from about A. D. 500 to 1000 that the Roman See imposed her Eucharistic Liturgy on the West.<sup>3</sup> The elevation of the Sacred Host after the Consecration was certainly universal about A. D. 1250.<sup>4</sup> Immediately there was enthusiastic devotion to the Blessed Sacrament which culminated in the establishment of the Feast of Corpus Christi in 1264. It was at this time that Pope Urban IV sent word to St. Thomas Aquinas to compose a special office and Mass for the new feast. The result was the four most sublime Eucharistic

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<sup>1</sup> Sister Loretta, S. N. D., "The Coronation Oath-When England Believed in the Mass," The Sentinel (June, 1937), pp. 280-282.

<sup>2</sup> Hedley, Op. cit., p. 255-256.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p. 257.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 261; Sister Loretta, Op. cit., p. 31; Kramp, Op. cit., p. 149. Father Kramp says that the elevation of the Sacred Host "was introduced about the year 1200, probably to counteract Berengarius' denial of the Real Presence."

canticles ever produced: Sacris Solemnis, Lauda Sion, Verbum Supernum, and Pangua Lingua. The last two verses of Verbum Supernum and Pangua Lingua form respectively the O Salutaris and the Tantum Ergo of our Benediction today.<sup>1</sup>

Ringling the bell at the elevation was practiced in England in about the beginning of the thirteenth century. At the solemn sound, laborers in the field paused to bend their heads in reverence, and the boys of Eton and St. Paul's stopped their lessons to pray. "All the liturgical books of the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries," says Bishop Hedley, "insist upon this external reverence at the elevation."<sup>2</sup> In the fourteenth century the elevation of the chalice was introduced. The Sacred Liturgy had always been celebrated standing.<sup>3</sup> The custom of kneeling, whether at the elevation or before the Blessed Sacrament reserved in the tabernacle "took a long time to become thoroughly established in the Western Church. In Europe, even at Holy Mass, the practise of kneeling seems not to have been earlier than 1275."<sup>4</sup>

Shortly after the institution of the feast of Corpus Christi arose the custom of processions of the Blessed Sacrament.<sup>5</sup> In the fourteenth century, the ceremony of the Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament was introduced.<sup>6</sup> Subsequently the blessing with the Sacred Host was added to the

<sup>1</sup> Mary Fabyan Windeatt, "Thomas Aquinas, the Poet of the Eucharist," The Sentinel (Mar. 1937), p. 135.

<sup>2</sup> Hedley, Op. cit., p. 262.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 260. Donald Attwater says that "in most Eastern liturgies kneeling is practically unknown." Op. cit., p. 292. Father Kramp notes that the "liturgy assumes the standing position of the faithful, for it speaks only of "circumstantes." Op. cit., p. 249 n.

<sup>4</sup> Hedley, Op. cit., p. 262.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 260.

<sup>6</sup> The New Catholic Dictionary, Vatican Edition (New York, 1929), p. 355.

custom of Exposition, so in the sixteenth century was established the beautiful ceremony of the Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.<sup>1</sup> Likewise the Quarant' Ore was begun in the sixteenth century, probably in 1534--"the year in which Henry VIII made himself head of the Church, just before Fisher and More were put to death."<sup>2</sup> The days were just beginning to dawn when the worship of Our Lord beneath the Sacramental veils was called "idolatry," and the offering of Mass by priests was punished with violent death.<sup>3</sup>

It was natural, when the Blessed Sacrament was brought out of its hiddenness, to have lights, flowers, incense, music, and canticles in its praise. The liturgy is not simply a beautiful play of symbols; it is more than a magnificent pageant. Like religion, liturgy is a "necessity of man's nature."<sup>4</sup> Its purpose is to bring about a real union of the soul with Christ - to give honor to God who "in creating human nature didst marvellously ennoble it, and hast still more marvellously renewed it."<sup>5</sup> The Blessed Eucharist is "the center of Catholic liturgy."<sup>6</sup> It has always been and still is "the keystone of the arch erected by Jesus Christ to connect earth with heaven."<sup>7</sup> It is a powerful Leaven. It is a Life that cannot be ignored. Not at all surprising is it, then, that poets grapple in a struggle with words in their effort to touch at least the fringe of this exalted Gift.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>2</sup> Hedley, Op. cit., p. 269.

<sup>3</sup> Bridgett, Op. cit., "The Author's Preface," p. ix.

<sup>4</sup> Rev. Nicholas Maas, The Treasure of the Liturgy (Milwaukee, 1931), p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Words which the priest says while he blesses the water to be mixed in the chalice.

<sup>6</sup> Maas, Op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>7</sup> Bridgett, Op. cit., p. 305.

An angelic theme is that of the Bread of Angels which, from its very nature, hints at "that surpassing sweetness that attaches itself to Eucharistic hymns above all others."<sup>1</sup>

Though the date of "The Second Spring" is the time from which the present treatment of Eucharistic poetry proceeds, there are certain definite artistic and literary trends which it is necessary to trace in order to see the poets and their works in their proper perspective against the background of their complex age. When the chilling blast of the so-called Reformation, with its repudiation of the doctrine of the Real Presence, smote the land in the sixteenth century, it struck a blow that left its impress on every new generation until, in the Victorian Age, religion, for many, had become nothing more than a respected convention. There was an exaltation of man's earthly interests and his purely human propensities. Naturally this outburst found expression in all departments of letters which became artificial to a deplorable extent. The Catholic Church and her teachings came to be looked upon as superstitious. No longer was the supernatural supreme. After the subjective Eucharistic hymns of Father Southwell and Richard Crashaw, the Eucharistic voice ceased to be heard. While whole catalogues were often made of physical charms, references to spiritual realities were carefully evaded. The great tragedy is that the Eucharistic voice was stilled for many a year.

As a whole, the England of Victoria had settled down to a smug self-satisfaction; "Modernity," "Evolution," and "Progress" were their

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<sup>1</sup> H. T. Henry, Eucharistica, p. 194.

great concerns. A crass materialism fostered by the industrial revolution served to accentuate a Weltanschauung devoid of the supernatural. There were master-minds, however, who perceived the dangers of a life actuated by purely natural views. Carlyle was ablaze with indignation at the mediocrity of his environment and its utter blindness: Man, he insisted, is something more than what he is held to be by the Utilitarians; he is "a Soul, a Spirit.. a Spirit and an unuttered Mystery of Mysteries."<sup>1</sup> His was, as it were, a Sehnsucht nach einem verlorenen Glauben; it was the voice of a prophet shouting to a bewildered people who could not understand.

No Victorian saw more clearly than Arnold what the mechanistic order meant to man. "Philistin," and "Barbarian," were his anathemas to his period. Cheap money, and cheap literature produced changes on all sides. "Society, the intellectual life, and ethical movements were under a crust of habit, which, where it did not produce a complete inertia, distorted the ideas that broke through it."<sup>2</sup> Arnold pointed the way along the path of Culture; there should be, he said, "a disinterested endeavor to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world."<sup>3</sup> That he himself was dissatisfied with his remedy is evident in his poetry, but his only alternative to the lack of faith and to the anarchy of his day was his Cult of Culture.

It was Ruskin who came closest to discovering the cause of this spiritual restlessness. Life, he insisted, was a spiritual adventure; man

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<sup>1</sup> Blanche Mary Kelly, The Well of English (New York, 1936), p. 219.

<sup>2</sup> R. H. Gretton, A Modern History of the English People, Vol. 1. (London, 1913), p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew Arnold, Essays in Criticism (London, 1903), p. 38.



does not live by bread alone; there must be some increase in the life of the mind, some heightening of the spiritual sense. Ruskin's acumen is evident in his defense of the Pre-Raphaelite movement which was, as Blanche Mary Kelly says, "a deliberate and concerted attempt to return to the vantage point of the Catholic ages in matters of art and literature"--an attempt "to adopt the Catholic aesthetic without accepting the discipline which inspired it."<sup>1</sup>

As a movement toward the renovation of the arts, the Pre-Raphaelites, under the leadership of Rossetti, whose cultural heritage was Catholic, set out to paint fair pictures rather than present harsh facts. Their work was the record of "perfect moments" through the two media, verse and paint. Morris and Swinburne, Rossetti's two disciples, were never uneasy about the implications of their philosophy.<sup>2</sup> Although Rossetti sought to "teach art to fold her hands and pray", nevertheless the strong emotionalism of the poetry which was produced earned for the Brotherhood the appellation of the "fleshy school," and brought about its eventual degeneration and decay.

It was while Ruskin, the self-appointed champion of the Pre-Raphaelite movement, was professor at Oxford that Walter Pater became his ardent admirer. He, however, carried the gospel of "perfect moments" further than his master. For him every moment some form grew perfect, some tones on the hills or the sea were choicer than the rest--for that moment only. "To burn always with this hard, gemlike flame, to maintain this ecstasy," said Pater, "is success in life....Not the fruit of experience,

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<sup>1</sup> Blanche Mary Kelly, Op. cit., pp. 262-263.

<sup>2</sup> T. M. Parrott and Willard Thorp, "Introduction" Poetry of the Transition (New York, 1936), p. XXIV.

but experience itself is the end."<sup>1</sup> His gospel of Beauty which culminated in the aesthetic movement at the close of the century profoundly influenced all the writers of the period. It had its inception in the literary doctrine of Keats who held that "Beauty is truth, truth beauty," and in the Symbolists of France who advocated the worship of art for art's sake. From Pater the origin of the cult can be traced through Baudelaire to Gautier, who by his emphasis on form, color, and sound made the le mot juste, the exact word, an almost sacred character in his l'art pour l'art theory.<sup>2</sup> The precise word was to be perfectly expressive of the thought; form took precedence over content, and the artist was to hold an impersonal attitude toward his work. Like the Pre-Raphaelite Movement, this artistic and intellectual aesthetic movement with its emphasis on beauty, and its glorification of the fine arts was a reaction against the sentimental mediocrity of the age and an effort to save art from degradation. Only by self-discipline and moderation could the senses be purified and sharpened, declared Pater, so that we might become fit instruments to record the delicate impacts of beauty -- "to catch the fleeting glimpse of beauty on the wing, and by its intensity to compensate for the insecurity of the world's gifts; in a word to make of life itself an art."<sup>3</sup>

By raising beauty above truth and by placing emotional satisfaction before religious duty, Walter Pater really missed the goal of happiness for which he was aiming.<sup>4</sup> The philosophy of the aesthetes inevitably led

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Elmore More, The Drift of Romanticism (New York, 1913), p. 110.

<sup>2</sup> Sister M. Alise Ahern, Alice Meynell as Critic of Literature and Art, 1936, p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Elmore More, Op. cit., p. 111

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 113.

to weariness and impotence; this Hedonism which seized joy for the moment deprived life of its true values, and at the close of the century, Naturalism and a gross materialism prevailed.

It is against this unstable, naturalistic background that our modern Eucharistic poets found a voice. May it not be that the impetuous swing of the pendulum toward the material and the natural man is the very momentum to force the return stroke toward the supernatural and the spiritual? When modern pessimism reeled in delusion, when society had everywhere begun to decay, when commerce had become a god and the grand institutions of the past had been swallowed up in a pagan utilitarianism, when Man was either apotheosized or made a helpless puppet of fate, when "divine despair" and final darkness fell as a curtain over the entire nation, then a light silvered the skies - the Catholic Revival appeared - "almost in the twinkling of an eye, the members of a creed that had long been despised as impotent and ridiculous stood with their loins girt for battle...whereas the poetry of the old religion had been silent since Crashaw, singers took up the Catholic lyre with abounding and brilliant gifts,"<sup>1</sup> and it is at this time, that the first uttering of the Eucharistic voice was heard after the long silence of about four hundred years.

An Appendix is added to this work in which the poems specifically treated are cited, since for the real appreciation of the art, it is often necessary to see the relationship of the parts to the whole. Only those works, however, which are less easily obtained will appear.

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<sup>1</sup> George N. Shuster, The Catholic Spirit in Modern English Literature (New York, 1928), pp. 12-13.

## CHAPTER II

### FIRST MODERN EUCHARISTIC VOICES:

GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS, S. J.,

and

COVENTRY PATMORE

"With a fling of the heart to the heart of the Host."

There is no one upon whom, after the time of Crashaw, the mantle of Eucharistic poetry might more truly fall than upon the metrical innovator and poet priest, Father Gerard Manley Hopkins, S. J. He was unique among the Victorians, by reason of his superior poetic energy, stylistic subtleties, and metrical experiments, as well as by the fresh inspiration, which he brought to poetry.

Though Father Hopkins' death occurred in 1889, it was not until after the World War in 1918 that his executor, Robert Bridges, felt that he could submit these strange poetic productions to the world. Sprung rhythm, counter-pointing, outriding, internal assonance and repetition created a new poetry of rare concentration for the war-torn age. Immediately Father Hopkins was hailed with enthusiasm as a prophet of the new school, and modern poetry claimed him as her own. Bernard Kelly, in his scholarly treatise, The Mind and Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins, says: "Fifty years behind in

time, he is probably at least fifty more ahead of the present in both spirit and achievement. His technique established a mastery, complete in its kind, in uses of language with which many of the most daring poets are no more than experimenting."<sup>1</sup>

Yet, for Father Hopkins, the experiments with poetry were only "fascinating avocations for scant hours of leisure; they were 'literature', not an 'important subject.'" The important subject was God and God's work in the world."<sup>2</sup> At the age of twenty-two, Gerard Manley Hopkins, a member of the Anglican body, asked the great Cardinal Newman to receive him into the Church. "He made sure I was acting deliberately and wished to hear my arguments: when I had given them and said I could see no way out of them, he laughed and said, 'Nor can I!'"<sup>3</sup>

Two years later, in 1868, Gerard Manley Hopkins, entered the Jesuit order. It is said that to complete his oblation he renounced poetry by burning all his poems. His intimate friend, Canon Dixon, pleaded with him passionately alleging that "one vocation cannot destroy another," and that "composition is not to be foregone, because poetry in itself has a value in the sight of God." In a series of moving letters, "each a poet and each in his own communion a priest, exchanged a series of letters in which they discussed with earnest care the place of poetry in the religious life."<sup>4</sup> Eight years later the wreck of the ship Deutschland renewed his poetic inspiration; after that, with frequent intervals of long silence he continued

<sup>1</sup> Bernard Kelly, The Mind and Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins (London, 1935), p. 1

<sup>2</sup> Samuel C. Chew, "Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Robert Bridges," The Yale Review, XV (1935-1936), p. 210.

<sup>3</sup> Shane Leslie, "Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins," The Ave Maria (Apr. 13, 1935), p. 457.

<sup>4</sup> The Times Literary Supplement (Jan. 31, 1935), p. 59.

to write poetry in the scanty moments of leisure he might find.

The poems which treat of, or have any reference to, the Holy Eucharist are not included in the number of Gerard Manley Hopkins' best poems, nor do they represent his finest achievement. They were written either during the early period or when his technique was maturing. We cannot classify him as a Eucharistic poet though he represents one of the first voices of our modern times.

Among his early poems, in "The Habit of Perfection," there is an intimation of the transcendent marvel of the Eucharist remaining in the midst of men, and allowing the priest to be the dispenser of this immense Gift in the words: "O feel-of-primrose hands....And you unhouse and house the Lord." The Eucharist is a Spendthrift Giver of Himself. Not the high heaven alone could be His Home. Love has compelled Him to a hidden prison on earth. That men might not be afraid of His glory, He deigns to let dedicated men bring Him most intimately into human lives. "O feel-of-primrose hands" -- priestly hands -- that daily uplift the Sovereign Lord in sacrifice and dispense a Precious Food! The rush of words in "feel-of-primrose hands" is not unusual in Hopkins. If he could not find a word suitable, he would invent one or crowd the thought into a phrase. About a primrose there is a chaste beauty, a hint of innocence accorded to childhood, a lift, as it were, to God. There is something about the pale pink blossom that is unearthly. In this single phrase Hopkins combines the "tactile" sense with that of sight. It is not unusual for him to use words or phrases that combine two or three sense appeals, for the impulse of his imagery rushes like a river. In this respect he has more in common with Keats than any other nineteenth-century poet.

Unlike Keats, however, Hopkins was never wholly satisfied with the sensual element alone; instead he allowed the senses to provide him with ways of approaching God.<sup>1</sup> So here, in one word he is telling in terms of sight and touch the beauty of the hands that can intimately "unhouse and house the Lord."

The same double sense-appeal is made in the lines:

O feet  
That want the yield of plushy sward,  
But you shall walk the golden street,

The 'tactile' sense is evident in the words "yield of plushy sward"--human feet naturally want ease and comfort, but now they are raised to an exalted dignity, for "they shall walk the golden street" of the sanctuary to bring the Eucharist to men. In a word, there is a suggestion in these lines of the beauty, innocence, and purity that surrounds the sublime duty and privilege of the priest as the guardian and protector of the greatest Reality, the Blessed Eucharist.

Likewise, classified as being among Father Hopkins' first poems is the poetic meditation on the Holy Eucharist, "Barnfloor and Winepress." Humphrey House, in his recent book, The Note-books and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins, placed the date of the unknown draft in July, 1865.<sup>1</sup> Prefixed is the verse from 2 Kings VI. 27: "And he said, if the Lord do not help thee, whence shall I help thee? Out of the barnfloor, or out of the winepress?" Usually, a gift is prized according to the cost of the sacrifice made to give it. There are those who go through life starving in the midst of abundance. Here in the Blessed Sacrament there is the joy of the harvest, all garnered

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<sup>1</sup> Humphrey House, The Note-books and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins (London, 1937), p. 35.

and ready, but provided at a tragic cost. The Firstfruits were torn up by their roots, cruelly bruised and scourged, then crushed by the heavy mill stone. The "barnfloor" is symbolic of the earth which furnishes the material upon which sin, the heavy millstone, crushes the very life from the Divine Son of God. Then a wonderful miracle occurs:

At morn we found the heavenly Bread;  
And on a thousand altars laid,  
Christ our Sacrifice is made. <sup>1</sup>

Holy Mass, Holy Communion are the infinite "joy of harvest." He is the Heavenly Bread, the particles of which the crushed grain has furnished. He is both the Crushed One and the Giver--both Priest and Victim--spent by His Sacrifice, waiting to feed the starving, particularly, as he says, for him who "on sin's wages starvest."

Our Lord's own symbol for Himself was the Vine. Here the dry plot gapes for moisture, and though the vine is "fenced with thorn" and the precious branches are riven five ways, men still pursue their unremembering ways: "We shout with them that tread the grapes." In that acre of Gethsemane most precious wine was racked from the Press. But victory has risen from defeat for

Now, in our altar-vessels stored,  
Lo, the sweet vintage of the Lord.

In the last two stanzas an exultant note rings forth: from death springs life; from Calvary's defeat, Easter triumph. The Eucharistic mystery is one of paradox--not glory through glory, but glory through

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<sup>1</sup> Appendix, p. 152.



ignominy, triumph through defeat, greatest service through seemingly absolute uselessness. The rotten vine was cast away, but the tree went forth on Easter morn and spread over the whole world. Then an almost pathetic invitation is given: "Why not come into the shade?"

The last stanza bears the subjective note. It is for each of us individually that the Eucharistic Lord is hidden in every tabernacle throughout the world. He could do no more to come closer to us. His desire is not simply for contemplation but for intimate union:

We scarcely call that banquet food,  
But even our Saviour's and our blood,  
We are so grafted on His wood.

To each individual is extended a marvellous gift, a Heavenly Food which has the power of grafting the Divine life upon weak human frailty in an embrace of love. It is true language cannot express the intimacy of the union, but Father Hopkins gives at least an inkling of the truth when he says that the banquet food is "even our Saviour's and our blood."

Simple and direct as it is, both in form and treatment, this little poem deserves the recognition due to a devotional classic.<sup>1</sup> At the first reading, one scarcely feels that it is one of Father Hopkins' by reason of its simple diction and regular meter. None of his technical difficulties are met here, for the poem is written in the conventional meter and no startling images confront us, but we must remember it is one of his early works. Perhaps the greatness of the theme accounts for the relative simplicity of his imagery. Like Herbert, with whom Hopkins is often compared,

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<sup>1</sup> Katharine Brey, The Poets' Chantry (St. Louis, 1912), p. 79.

he may have felt that the "imagery of a homely concrete kind was often best adapted to poems treating of spiritual matters."<sup>1</sup> Then too, he is describing experiences of a kind which are generally supposed to be familiar to the Christian.

One notes that Hopkins does not use private symbols as is the vogue of the modern poets. In his note-books and papers which are eagerly studied by scholars today, in order to discover his secret of prosody and poetic style, there are minute sketches of scenes and lists of words and symbols to represent the flood of his thoughts. Illustrative of the many examples found in his note-books, the following example reveals not only his keen observation of nature, but also his attempt to grasp the meaning or to find the truth for which the object may be a symbol: "I do not think I have ever seen anything more beautiful than the bluebell I have been looking at. I know the beauty of our Lord by it. Its inscape is mixed of strength and grace."<sup>2</sup> Though the bluebell was to Father Hopkins a symbol of the beauty of Christ, it never occurred in his poems as a private symbol; he does not assume that it might have for others the significance it has for him. Hopkins always takes his Catholicism for granted, and uses only those symbols with which one, holding the religious attitude, is at any rate familiar.

Father Hopkins' religious poetry may be divided into two classes: the poems which are capable of being used as means to devotion because they are illustrative of Christian dogma and the working of God's providence and in which there might be some didactic intention; and the poems which deal

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<sup>1</sup> Elsie E. Phare, Op. cit., p. 119.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 97.

with his own experience as an individual soul rather than as a member of the Church. Very few, however, of his poems are of the second class. Particularly, the exquisite poem, "The Windhover," deals immediately with his intercourse with Christ; and even here he is speaking at, rather than to, our Divine Lord.<sup>1</sup>

In the first class, we find another Eucharistic poem, "The Bugler's First Communion", of which Charles Williams in his critical introduction to the second edition of The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins says: "'The Bugler's First Communion' is unsurpassed in its sense of the beauty of adolescence."<sup>2</sup> It is the solicitude of the heart of the priest for youth and innocence dangerously poised among surrounding evils that furnishes the occasion for this work. In this poem, Father Hopkins proves that he is not only "the priest of poetry; he is also the poet of the priesthood,"<sup>3</sup> for he sympathetically treats of the relation of the priest's service to the individual soul.

"The Bugler's First Communion" is dated 1879, when, as if his soul had been fashioned anew by his eight years of silence, his work reveals signs of unusual poetic genius. Upon the first reading of the poem, as Dr. Bridges observes in his Notes, one may term the new extravagances in meter and prosody "Oddity" or "Obscurity." That Father Hopkins was aware of the fact that this accusation might be brought against him may be seen in the following extract from his letters:

No doubt my poetry errs on the side of oddness....But as the air, melody, is what strikes me most of all in music and

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Bridges, Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins (London, 1933), p. XV.

<sup>3</sup> Bernard Kelly, Op. cit., p. 36.

design in painting, so design, pattern, of what I am in the habit of calling inscape is what I above all aim at in poetry....Now it is the virtue of design, pattern, or inscape to be distinctive and it is the vice of distinctiveness to become queer....but take breath and read it with ears, as I always wish to be read, and my verse becomes all right.<sup>1</sup>

Father Hopkins was a lover of music and his ultimate appeal was always to his own ear.

Such terms as Sprung Rhythm, overrove, and outride which take one into the technicalities of modern poetry are met with in the study of this poem. Samuel Chew observes that it is his celebrated theory of "Sprung rhythm that has had so great an influence on the poets of our own time."<sup>2</sup> Father Hopkins' mind was filled so much, as it were, with the stuff of the poem that he struggled to find an outlet for expression; his thoughts were so profound that they made him stutter in words and phrases with which the mind was unaccustomed. Repeatedly in his letters, he refers to 'sprung rhythm' which is measured by feet of "from one to four syllables, regularly, and for particular effects, any number of weak or slack syllables may be used."<sup>3</sup> It gives rise to four sorts of feet which are equally long or strong while their apparent inequality is made up by stress or pause.

It is natural in Sprung Rhythm for the lines to rove over, that is, for the scanning of every line immediately to take up that of the one before; and to be outrides, "so called because they seem to hang below the line or

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Bridges, Notes appended to Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins, p. 97.

<sup>2</sup> Samuel C. Chew, Op. cit., p. 211.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Bridges, "Author's Preface", Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins, p. 3.

ride forward or backward from it in another dimension than the line itself."<sup>1</sup>  
The slack syllables which are added to the foot are not nominally counted in it. In "The Bugler's First Communion," an overrope occurs in almost every stanza between the second and third lines, and an outside between the third and fourth foot of the fourth line of each stanza. Until Hopkins' time "almost all English verse since Langland had been written in meters divisible into feet of two or three syllables, iambic, or dactylic-anapestic in effect...his imagination was always breaking up and melting down the inherited forms of language, fusing them into new possibilities, hammering them into new shapes."<sup>2</sup>

But Father Hopkins was something more than a poet. He was a devoted Catholic priest. Living in the difficult underworld of Liverpool which was a meeting-place of unemployed sailors and cosmopolitan peoples, his joy, while toiling in the gray back streets, was to minister to the needy and to pour forth his soul in paeans of thanksgiving and love.<sup>3</sup> His secret support was the Blessed Sacrament of the altar. To be on sentinel duty for the Hidden King was his glory. Always he found the world charged with the grandeur of God, charged with the high destiny of man who is born for the Infinite but cannot in this life achieve it. For him the marvellous window into the unseen and eternal was the Holy Eucharist with all its tremendous significance to human life, whether He is found on an altar in a district of hovels or in

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 4, 5.

<sup>2</sup> C. Day Lewis, "A Hope for Poetry", Poems (New York, 1935), pp. 171 and 175.

<sup>3</sup> W. J. Blyton, "The Great Companion," The Sentinel of the Blessed Sacrament (April, 1937), pp. 171-172.

Hereafter when this magazine is referred to, it will appear under the title, Sentinel.

a cathedral as a Tender Friend; or as in Holy Communion, He is brought an "overflowing Boon" to "slips of soldiery."

The fact that the bugler boy had sent for him that he might receive his First Holy Communion furnished the particular incident for the poem. After telling that the boy comes from the barrack which is over the hill, the poet tries to rationalize the probable effects of the mixture of nationalities in the boy's character. Here Father Hopkins resembles the metaphysical poet, Crashaw, whose poetry "was injured by the predominance of the ratiocinative faculty."<sup>1</sup>

In the first line we find alliteration -- bugler, boy, born, barrack -- and, as the poem proceeds, repetitions and internal rhymes are frequent.<sup>2</sup> Very often the end-rhymes are repellent. Particularly regarding the second stanza of the poem, Dr. Bridges complains: "The rhyme to Communion in 'The Bugler' is hideous, and the suspicion that the poet thought it ingenious is appalling."<sup>3</sup> By many critics "The Bugler's First Communion" is held as a much inferior poem because of just such blemishes as this. But let it be remembered that Hopkins was still in the first part of his experimental stage.

Much criticism is launched against the third stanza in which Hopkins is accused of a want of simplicity. The fact that the boy is clad in a red uniform is given a portentous air that can scarcely be justified when one

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<sup>1</sup> Elsie E. Phare, Op. cit., p. 14

<sup>2</sup> The poem, "The Bugler's First Communion" is given in the Appendix, p. 153.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Bridges, Notes, op. cit., p. 98.

considers the greatness of the supernatural act about to be performed.

Then, too, the words "youngster" and "treat" fail of the directness he wished to convey.

Here he knelt then in regimental red.

Forth Christ from cupboard fetched, how fain I of feet  
To his youngster take his treat!

Elsie E. Phare complains of Hopkins' picture of the way in which Christ is present in the wafer, as being very odd and disagreeable:

It is not the fact that they contain the doctrine of Transubstantiation which makes these lines repugnant; there is nothing repugnant in St. Thomas Aquinas's Rhythmus ad SS. Sacramentum, "Adoro te supplex latens deltas," nor in Hopkins' translation of it. It is, I think, the unsuccessful attempt at childlike simplicity in the description of the doctrine--Christ dwelling in the wafer as in a little house of which the door is locked--which repels."<sup>1</sup>

However, as the line stands it conveys a tremendous thought, and Father Hopkins is fortunate in his choice of words to clothe it: "Low-latched in leaf-light housel his too huge godhead." Housel in Middle-English and husel in Anglo-Saxon means a sacrifice, the Eucharist, the Sacred Bread,<sup>2</sup> or the act of receiving the Sacrament. 'Low-latched' and 'leaf-light' by their alliterative euphony is an attempt at least to picture the condescension, and weakness of the Omnipotent Lover when He hides the immense Gift of Himself under the accident of a frail Host that men might not be blinded by His glory. 'Low-latched' so that men can reach Him and meet Him in His earthly abode if they would but take time to 'stop in'; 'leaf-light'--so

<sup>1</sup> Elsie E. Phare, Op. cit., p. 49.

<sup>2</sup> James A. H. Murray, A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles, Vol. V, p. 423.

weak, so easily brought down from Heaven, so gently accessible that even the heart of a child can bear Him--'his too huge godhead!' The poet is touching a powerful truth--any human words would fail of expressing the magnitude of the reality. At least a light is thrown on the marvel, and the note of the joy in the priest's heart when he is bearer of the King of Kings to a humble bugler is unmistakable throughout these few lines.

Again, stanza five presents new difficulties which are not so much problems of thought as of language. "Squander the hell-rock ranks sally to molest him" means simply, "Scatter the ranks that sally to molest him." One of the causes of obscurity in Hopkins' poems is the omission of the relative pronoun, though this was not carelessness on his part; he needed in his scheme all his space for his poetical words so he wished to crowd out every grammatical colorless element. Dr. Bridges throws light upon the confusion brought about by this line with this explanation: "Since the words squander and sally occupy similar positions in the two sections of the verse, and are enforced by a similar accentuation, the second verb deprived of its pronoun will follow the first and appear as an imperative." Should the reader mitigate the accent and in so doing lessen the caesural pause which exposes its accent, "then ranks becomes a genitive, sally a substantive."<sup>1</sup> Such are some of the verbal confusions we must face in Hopkins' poetry. It takes patient perseverance to glean the meaning of the author's genius, but there is a joyful recompense, for under the jumble of root words lie thoughts of extreme delicacy and exquisite sensitiveness. Just such a gracious and felicitous line as, "Dress his days to a dexterous and starlight order" is

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Bridges, Notes, Op. cit., p. 78.



often the immediate reward.

Throughout the poem the element of tenderness is well under control. The priest enters sympathetically into the mind of the boy, "Christ's darling" God's own Galahad.... "breathing bloom of chastity." In his solicitude, he begs the angel-warder to march abreast with the boy to shield him from encompassing dangers, of which he is still completely innocent. Nothing so strains him as their apprehension for the welfare of the youth's soul--the youth who yields so easily to the good now. It is here that critics again have found fault with the poem: "The apparently unconscious sensuousness of

Limber liquid youth, that to all I teach  
Yields tender as a pushed peach,

Fresh youth fretted in a bloom-fall all portending  
That sweet's sweeter ending

jars in a poem which contains praises of chastity."<sup>1</sup> It is true that the simile is very unusual and strained, but the author is one who might be called an objective poet, one who was always searching for the characteristics of an object to bring out a deeper reality. Like Keats, Hopkins uses words and phrases that denote two or three sense-appeals; it is doubtful if Keats appeals as strongly to the senses as Hopkins does. However, with Hopkins, there is a restraint which admits of the fact that he is more self-conscious. His aim was not to produce poetry characterized by softness or rich abundance. Indeed, with him preoccupation with sensual things alone was unworthy; he considered the senses only in connection with, and as influenced by, divine grace. So that in connection with these lines it is not the sensuous the

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<sup>1</sup> Elsie E. Phare, The Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins, p. 50.

poet wishes to stress; rather it is only a means of expressing an apprehensive fear that the youth who yields so readily to every impulse of good at this tender age will surrender even more easily to evil which will encompass him as he daily travels the road of life.

The same tender solicitude for the innocence of youth is shown in another poem, "On the portrait of Two Beautiful Young People:"

A juice rides rich through blueballs in vine leaves,  
And beauty's dearest veriest vein is tears.

But particularly in the poem, "The Candle Indoors," this soul-anxiety is manifest. Beyond the light of the candle of the lives of the children he cannot see; though he yearns for their perfection, all is darkness there. Then, in the last lines, he turns the candle light into his own soul. How futile, he feels, it is to be so keenly sensitive to room for improvement in others and be blind to his own perfection:

Come you indoors, come home; your fading fire  
Mend first and vital candle in close heart's vault.

He can best help the "Jessy or Jack" behind the candle by being his own master.<sup>1</sup>

But in the "Bugler's First Communion" the apprehension is more profound. It has done the heart of the priest good "visiting at that bleak hill" to bring Christ's royal ration to "just such slips of soldiery." He does not wish to think of the disappointment of his hopes in "that brow and bead of being, An our day's God's own Galahad.." Youth is so beautiful

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid ., p. 46.

that one trembles for the risks it faces in life.<sup>1</sup>

Not as the contemporary Naturalist or Pagan does the Catholic poet sing of the human body simply for its own glorification, nor as the Puritan does he despise it. The Catholic poet can love the body, for well he knows that it harbors an immortal soul; and he can have a mingling of pity and fear for the eternal soul which may very easily be betrayed by the extreme frailty of its temple. To assure the victory in the tremendous conflict, our Divine Lord bridges heaven with earth by leaving Himself in the world -- in all parts of the world in order that He might be accessible to all men at all times -- so that what is impossible to man of his own power may be made possible by His strength and life in the Blessed Sacrament. The one remedy for fear, for anxiety, for uneasiness is trust in the power of the Holy Eucharist. And this is exactly the climax of this unique poem. Though disaster may be immanent, though the lad may "rankle and roam in backwheels though bound home," yet he would leave him to the Lord of the Eucharist:

but may he not rankle and roam  
In backwheels though bound home?--  
That left to the Lord of the Eucharist, I here lie by;

Such is the supernaturalized humanism of the poem. The priest's entire confidence is placed in the Holy Eucharist, for if his own human soul could feel such deep apprehension for the simple bugler that his prayer "would brandle adamantine heaven with ride and jar" for the preservation of the tender grace of youth, how much greater concern must there be in the infinite Heart of the Eucharistic Lover who keeps Himself silently and

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<sup>1</sup> Stanley B. James, "Father Gerard Manley Hopkins, S. J.," The Sentinel (Sept. 1936), p. 470.

constantly among men only waiting to be of service to them at all times!

Father Hopkins' translation of the Rhythmus ad SS. Sacramentum of St. Thomas is neither a liberal paraphrase nor an uninspired, bare version. Rather he has caught the spirit of the poem; instead of copying, he has, so to speak, re-created it.<sup>1</sup> As an example of the simplicity with which he has treated the theme, in speaking of the sense of hearing which is the only sense which cannot be deceived in regard to the Holy Eucharist because by its very nature the Mysterium Fidei is spiritual and can only be believed because Christ's own words assure us of it, he uses the simple question and answer:

How says trusty hearing? that shall be believed.

Throughout the seven stanzas, he uses the simple iambic rhythm employed by St. Thomas and also the rhyme which formerly met with much objection as being unworthy of adoption in the treatment of sublime themes. For the translation of:

Credo quidquid dixit Dei Filius,  
Nil hoc verbo veritatis verius.

Father Hopkins simply says:

What God's Son has told me, take for truth I do;  
Truth Himself speaks truly or there's nothing new.<sup>2</sup>

Like the Angelic Doctor, Father Hopkins used only the simplest of expressions throughout the poem. There is here none of that welter of diction, and flocking of words that often sting and bewilder. To approach so

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 468.

<sup>2</sup> Appendix, p. 154-155.

tremendous a mystery, he must have felt that the simplest language was the most appropriate. And like Crashaw, the individual note is uppermost; his, too, is a soul in solitary communion with the Lord:

See, Lord, at Thy service low lies here a heart  
Lost, all lost in wonder at the God Thou art.

Even the steady flow of the rhythm suggests the greatness of the subject and the feeling of true humility with which the Divine Mystery should be approached. As if pausing in reverence, the simple iambic measure moves steadily onward until the complete hexameter fills the rhythmic sense with the well defined content of the thought.

With Father Hopkins, the new diction sprang from a fresh grasp on reality. "His eyes blazed outwardly on things" seeing them, full and deep, with a Chaucer-like vision<sup>1</sup> The aestheticism of Pater, he saw, drew many from religion; while arts and scholarship could best be revived through sanctity. There would have to be a deeper renovation of the arts than that offered by the Pre-Raphaelites--there was need of a new inspiration, a new hold on reality. The stupendousness of his vision demanded a new language or at least a new technique. If, today, the Marxians wish to claim Father Hopkins, both because of his keen interest in common people and because he is one of the most significant poetic influences of the age<sup>2</sup>, they fail to take into account the fact that the source of his message is the vision of a Divine Power directing the world and in the world. The praise and honor that

<sup>1</sup> Francis MacManus, "The Return of a Victorian," The Irish Monthly (May, 1937), p. 330.

<sup>2</sup> Alfred Barrett, S. J. "Gerard Manley Hopkins" America (Oct. 31, 1936), p. 90.

creation can give God, he says, is "less than a buttercup to a king", but man can give glory to God--"a thing to live for. Then let's make haste so to live."<sup>1</sup> Such is the high inspiration of one who in his poetry as well as in his life "fled with a fling of the heart to the heart of the Host," with a positive enrichment to both. Through Father Hopkins, Catholic tradition again found its way in the field of English poetry.

Like Father Hopkins in that his transcendent mystic message was little understood by his contemporaries, Coventry Patmore, though he died in 1896, "is only now coming into his rightful position in critical appreciation."<sup>2</sup> His audience, indeed, is limited to the "fit but few."

From the date of his entry into the Church, one finds that he had written in his diary: "The relation of the soul to Christ as his betrothed wife is a mine of undiscovered joy and power." Later he speaks of the same symbol as the "burning heart of the Universe."<sup>3</sup> About this symbol, his greatest work, The Unknown Eros, is built. In one of his letters, Patmore says: "Very few good poets have ever attempted to write religious poetry, knowing the almost insuperable difficulty....The Incarnation, in fact, is merely a dogma. It has not got beyond mere thoughts. Perhaps it will take thousands of years to work itself into the feelings, as it must do before religion can become a matter of poetry."<sup>4</sup> The world, at length, he feels,

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<sup>1</sup> Criterion, a Literary Review: "Early Poems and Extracts from The Notebooks and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins," (unsigned), Vol. XV, No. LVIII, (Oct., 1935), p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> George Carver, The Catholic Tradition in English Literature (New York, 1926), p. 305.

<sup>3</sup> Basil Champneys, "Introduction" to Poems by Coventry Patmore (London, 1906), pp. XXXI.

<sup>4</sup> Osbert Burdett, The Idea of Coventry Patmore (London, 1921), p. 134.

is finding out that it cannot do without religion, for then love would wither; and Patmore himself is the poet of love, especially of wedded love.

Love must really be less than human if it is nothing more, he declares in his essay, "Love and Poetry." What love is able to do in transfiguring life, that religion does in transfiguring love. All religions have sanctified love, he says, "and the Catholic has exalted it into a 'great Sacrament,' holding that, with Transubstantiation--which it resembles--it is unreasonable only because it is above reason."<sup>1</sup> This transcending mysticism he carried into his best works. The heart-shattering truth of a Mystic Lover wooing the heart of man was the subject of his deepest thought. For him the true poet is always a mystic, for he penetrates the "secret of the King." His one great function is to assist the reader to see past the present flux of things into deeper realities, for the unseen must be viewed through the seen.

Perhaps no poet has ever made such a keen search for the deliciae of love as Patmore has done, but for him the key was to be found in the intimate relations of human lovers. In his essay, "The Precursor," he brings out the fact that natural love is the precursor of the divine; the symbol of something which is far greater than itself.<sup>2</sup> That the soul is the bride-elect of God was understood even when the Greek myths were written. But Patmore could not part with the body; both body and soul were necessary to maintain the unity that exists:

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<sup>1</sup> Coventry Patmore, Religio Poetae (London, 1913), p. 334.

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., "The Precursor" p. 229.

The naked truth is to be found in the body in its simplicity, and for this reason the most ecstatic mystical doctrines have never been far removed from the physical, and have grouped themselves, among Christian mystics, round the doctrine of the Incarnation as their natural center....Consequently when we turn from the doctrine that the soul is Sponsa Dei, to its details, to the course of the courtship of God, the process in which His infatuation expresses itself, we find analogies at every point between the behaviour of the human and the divine lover. The latter plays the part which the human lover has reversed. The theme is single, the drama is one.<sup>1</sup>

In his poem, "The Body," Patmore praises the great "wall of infinitude" and truly longed for from eternity as being a

Little, sequester'd pleasure-house  
For God and for His Spouse.

"As a garden enclosed," says the Canticle of Canticles, here as a "sequester'd pleasure-house" entrusted to the "soles of the simple, earth-confiding feet" with a dignity so great "that Heaven and Hell fight chiefly for this field" is the temple that can house the Immense God. Mystical literature has always found expressive symbolism in the concept of the spouse and the garden. The part as it were reflects or contains the whole. The creature is a counterpart of the Creator. Here the influence upon Patmore or Coleridge who defined a symbol to be a part which contained the whole can hardly be exaggerated.

Patmore uses the mystical symbolism of the Eucharist in his short ode, "Vesica Piscis" where he pictures a fisherman, who, having labored

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<sup>1</sup> Osbert Burdett, Op. cit., pp. 137-138.



through the long night and caught nothing, at the words of the Master again casts forth his net with the result of finding, not the rich harvest of the sea, "for food, my wish, but Thee." The Eucharist is a Divine Food; even while performing the most ordinary tasks, and all appears hopeless, yet one great Hope remains for the fisherman -- Communion with Him. Then, is the Divine Lover filled with joy -- He loads the beloved with favors far beyond his most extravagant thought. Helpless, useless, to man's eyes, even as Simon's coin hid within the fish, yet He is the Master Power, Who lovingly sighs a command; to give the first place to His Love.

In strenuous hope I wrought,  
And hope seem'd still betray'd;  
Lastly I said,  
'I have labour'd through the Night, nor yet  
Have taken aught;  
But at Thy word I will again cast forth the net!'  
And, lo, I caught  
(Oh, quite unlike and quite beyond my thought,)  
Not the quick shining harvest of the Sea,  
For food, my wish,  
But Thee!  
Then, hiding even in me,  
As hid was Simon's coin within the fish,  
Thou sigh'st with joy, 'Be dumb,  
Or speak of forgotten things to far-off times to come.'

Imagery of the sea, of the darkness of the Night, of the fruitless hard toil--these furnish the spiritual insight to a greater Reality. In the Dark Night of the soul when all things seem void of meaning, then does the Heavenly Lover draw nearer than ever before. In the great sea of the world, when exhausting labor appears useless; when, in spite of the darkness one is still obedient to the voice to cast in the net once more, then only can life take on a newer, holier meaning -- a meaning which he could never

have understood had he really caught "the quick shining harvest of the sea." There is a throbbing joy in the soul. "Her Lord has entered into new relations with her, and she is relieved of obligations, while He has assumed them. He wants nothing of her which she does not delight to give."<sup>1</sup>

To the Soul, however, who knows "both how to have and to lack", the Master gives a command: "Be dumb, or speak of forgotten things to far-off times to come." The Holy Eucharist is that "touch" of love, the Food which makes weakness strong. "Be dumb!" Some there are who teach and preach best by silence, by their simple God-filled lives. "Those who know the most speak least...The Bridegroom of the Soul loves to reserve to Himself the office of her instructor in His secrets; and the more she has learned the less will she be willing to speak."<sup>2</sup>

To account for the second portion of the charge, "or speak of forgotten things to far-off times to come," it is necessary to cast a glance into the Victorian era of materialism and dark pessimism. Coventry Patmore was well aware of the fact that his mystical poems could not have been understood by his age, but that only spurred him on to make his message all the stronger. As far as literature was concerned there had been no prominent Catholic voice for the last few centuries. Catholics having been excluded from the universities, Catholicism became associated with a false idea that its members were lacking in culture. That no great works had arisen from their ranks had finally become an axiom of criticism.<sup>3</sup> These inarticulate

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<sup>1</sup> Coventry Patmore, Religio Poetae, p. 357-358.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., "A People of a Stammering Tongue," p. 260.

<sup>3</sup> Stanley B. James, "Coventry Patmore," The Sentinel (June, 1936), p. 316.

Catholics! In his poem "Prophets who cannot sing", Coventry Patmore hurls the challenge:

The hedge-flower hath its song;  
Meadow and tree,  
Water and the wandering cloud  
Find Seers who see,  
And, with convincing music clear and loud,  
Startle the sadder-deafness of the crowd  
By tones, O Love, from Thee.  
Views of the unveil'd heavens alone forth bring  
Prophets who cannot sing....  
At least from David until Dante, none,  
and none since him.

The close of the poem shows that it is the age itself which does not possess the capacity to appreciate spiritual truth. So in this reference to speak of forgotten things to far-off times to come, the Master would save the soul from the mockery of "casting pearls before swine." In the Middle Ages a reference made to the Holy Eucharist was understood by everyone; but if made at this time, it would perhaps be understood only in the future when the age might be less mechanistic. Also the Blessed Sacrament here may be regarded as the "source and inspiration of poetry....It is the Christ within him"<sup>1</sup> Who bids the poet "be dumb or speak of forgotten things to far-off times to come."

As if to exculpate himself from the accusation of irreverence in his intimate treatment of such a wonderful mystery, Patmore says in his essay,

"Dieu et Ma Dame:

Should any believing reader object that such thoughts as I have suggested to him imply an irreverent idea

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 317.

of the intimacies of God with His elect, I beg him to remember that in receiving the Blessed Sacrament with the faith which the Church demands, he affirms and acts a familiarity which is greater than any other that can be conceived.<sup>1</sup>

The depth of Patmore's thought called for a meter capable of a variety of modulations. For this end, he employed the ode on which he appeared to stamp his individuality, for in his hands the form fused with substance as with the "integrity of fire." Mrs. Meynell declares that no other form could be so living a means of communication: "As for their meter, it is their very poetry. They move with indescribable dignity, and with the freedom of the spirit."<sup>2</sup> It was his metrical principle throughout the Unknown Eros that the length of line should fluctuate with the emotional control, and he attained skill in rounding the thought with this metrical emphasis. Unlike Father Hopkins, he was only to a small extent an experimentalist, having used the simple meters based on the iambic foot modified occasionally by the introduction of anapests. For him rhyme was a mere accessory. His admirable effects are produced by his skillful use of accents and pauses.<sup>3</sup>

Careful and accurate student of form as he was, yet was he strongly antagonistic to the critical principles of the aesthetic school. Greater than any amount of fine language was genuine humanity. In his essay, "Poetical Integrity" he accused the followers of the l'art pour l'art theory of shallowness. "There is no surer sign of shallowness....than that habitual

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<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., "Dieu et Ma Dame," p. 361.

<sup>2</sup> Alice Meynell, "Preface" The Poetry of Pathos and Delight (London, 1896), p. IX.

<sup>3</sup> Benjamin Musser, Franciscan Poets (New York, 1933), p. 164.

pre-dominance of form over formative energy, of splendor of language and imagery over human significance."<sup>1</sup>

Much attention was given him by the Pre-Raphaelites, but he was an intellectual artist and what the crowd thought mattered not a whit to him. His vision was fixed on higher things. He was made for poetry and for love, and the great connecting link he happily found in religion.<sup>2</sup>

Frederick Page, a Patmorean student of more than twenty years, says that Patmore's poetry deals with the restlessness of the soul for God, that his mystical poetry "has for its subject the heart, restless, or at rest. With one's self as one's only datum perhaps we need not--perhaps we cannot--say more of God than that He is its counterpart."<sup>3</sup> For his age Patmore stands as one of the few surviving defenders of the faith, and this alone gives him an interesting position in Catholic letters. Despite the fact that he devoted the deep implications of his faith to the service of his art in a sophisticated over-luxuriant age, he is accorded the position of "one of the most essential poets of our time."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Poetical Integrity", Op. cit., p. 36.

<sup>2</sup> MLSL "Portrait of My Family" by Derek Patmore (Nov. 30, 1935), p. 799.

<sup>3</sup> Frederick Page, Patmore: A Study in Poetry (London, 1933), p. 19.

<sup>4</sup> Arthur Symons, Dramatis Personae (Indianapolis, 1923), p. 198.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### EUCCHARISTIC SYMBOLISM IN THE WORKS OF FRANCIS THOMPSON,

MRS. ALICE MEYNELL, LIONEL JOHNSON  
and  
ERNEST DOWSON

It is not strange that in an age grown cold with materialism there was a Sehnsucht for something better than simple mortal life--a desire for the Infinite Itself. "For," says Arthur Symons in his Symbolist Movement in Literature, "after the world had starved its soul long enough in the contemplation and re-arrangement of material things comes the turn of the soul.... and the unseen world is no longer a dream."<sup>1</sup> The Catholic poet, in particular, sees beyond the symbol a tremendous reality which gives his work a positive note of confidence. He employs it as a means of giving a fuller measure of spiritual appreciation to the commonplaces of life with which man cannot be satisfied since they are only the sensible media of something better. Man craves for the full life, the development of the whole man; the spiritual demands food as well as the physical, and it is here that Symbolism serves its high purpose.

Toward the close of the century the Symbolists of France wielded an

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Symons, The Symbolist Movement in Literature (London, 1911), p. 4.

influence in the English literary field, though it is spoken of in connection with this group of poets mainly as a means of contrast. As a revolt against the exteriority of the Parnassians who cultivated a completely impersonal attitude, an objectivity of vision, and a precise way of saying things rather than suggesting them, the French Symbolists used the details of the phenomenal world exclusively as symbols of the inner spiritual meaning. However, "their rejection of the objective as utterly devoid of significance, of truth, even of existence, their search for the strange and mysterious"<sup>1</sup> made their poetry very obscure. The idea, though expressed in a decorative manner, always remained subjective. Finally, in daring to speak so intimately as only religion had hitherto done, it took upon itself a heavier burden; of itself it became, says Arthur Symons, a kind of religion and "the soul was of use mainly as the agent of fine literature."<sup>2</sup>

But Symbolism has a deeper significance. It is, as Ruskin says in his Stones of Venice, simply the setting forth of a great truth by an imperfect or an inferior sign. It is employed by men who possess insight into the spiritual significance of things. "For is not a symbol, ever to him who has eyes for it," says Carlyle in his chapter on "Symbolism", "some dimmer or clearer revelation of the Godlike?"<sup>3</sup> It is the poetization of objects for us who are so cabined, cribbed and confined by the material, sensible world that we can see no further than the space bound by our physical vision. Saintly and poetic souls have always attached uplifting symbolism to liturgical objects. This discerning insight perhaps account for the close affinity that

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<sup>1</sup> Ludwig Lewishon, The Poets of Modern France (New York, 1919), p. 20.

<sup>2</sup> Arthur Symons, Op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Carlyle, Sartor Resartus (New York, 1838), p. 178

exists between Symbolism and Mysticism. "The world about us is filled with a beauty faintly surmised, dimly glimpsed; to be expressed, or rather insinuated, by symbolism rather than by words; a veritable paradox of increate Beauty. And out of this Mysticism....come 'thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.'<sup>1</sup>

To emphasize merely the externals the real values are inverted. It is as unreasonable as the implication of the question asked by Arthur Symons in his essay on "Rimbaud", if it is not rather foolish "to worship the golden chalice in which the wine has been made God, as if the chalice were the reality, and the Real Presence the symbol."<sup>2</sup> Our Catholic poets were keenly alive to such a fallacy. As we see from the works of Father Hopkins and Coventry Patmore, both poets employed symbolism to express spiritual realities.

Indeed it was Patmore's interpretation of symbols that particularly attracted Francis Thompson. He himself says he found Patmore to be "deeply perceptive of the Scriptures' symbolic meanings scouted by moderns." If Patmore was the poet of love, Thompson likewise makes the vision of impelling love which spurs on both the saint and the poet his great theme. For him sanctity is essential to song, for it is only through the energizing principle of strength derived by the touch of God upon the soul that there is found a hidden significance in all things which force their attention upon the vision of man. Both poets found that through pain, "choice food of sanctity and medicine of sin,"<sup>3</sup> the most delicate refinements of love could be traced

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<sup>1</sup> Msgr. Hugh T. Henry, Catholic Customs and Symbols, (New York, 1925), p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Arthur Symons, Op. cit., p. 66.

<sup>3</sup> Coventry Patmore, "Pain", Poems (London, 1906), p. 352.



between the Divine and the human; between God, the Divine Lover, and the human soul, His beloved.

Like Father Hopkins' fascinating observations of nature, sketches, phrases, strange words, symbols and imagery of all kinds found in the Note-books and Papers, so, too, one finds in Thompson's notebooks scattered material concerning the impressions made upon him by his wide reading in comparative religion. This jotting down of ideas and rough drawings reveal his earnest search for symbols. Images came toppling into his thoughts. For him, the imagination played a most important role in the formation of a poet. What for others were really the go-betweens were for him the essentials. Symbolism was but the manifestation of imagination:

"Imagination discerns similarity rooted or enskied; it is the origin of the symbolism that may be traced back to the heart of truths and mysteries to which it supplies outward shows. Imagination is the spring; symbolism is here the manifestation of imagination, is the identity-bearer, partaking of the very essence of the Divinity. The symbols of Divinity are Divine; flesh is the Word made flesh; the Eucharist is the true Presence; and Christ Himself is the way to Christ." <sup>1</sup>

No poem of Francis Thompson better reveals his artistic skill with Eucharistic symbolism than his "Orient Ode," in which the sun is the mystical symbol of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. His approach is really that of the ritual, for it was his belief that poetry was an affair of ritual--of images, and that "ritual is poetry addressed to the eye."<sup>2</sup> The sun whose rays supply life to the earth, to nature and to man is the light which

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<sup>1</sup> Everard Meynell, Life of Francis Thompson (London, 1913), p. 215.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

enlighteneth every man. Always Thompson leads to the broad implications of St. John's Gospel of love. In the sun as the incarnated light he had found a suitable symbol for Christ.

Both the imagery and the symbolism are borrowed from the liturgy of the Church. Shortly after Easter Sunday, Thompson wrote his "Orient Ode," many parts of which had been suggested by the magnificent liturgy of Holy Saturday. It was the triumph of life over death, of the ringing Gloria after the empty tabernacle, the darkness, and the silence of the Good Friday service, that left its vivid impress upon him. He threw, as it were, the riches of his imagination on the altar of worship. Past the Resurrection, he saw a wonderful fulfillment of the words, "I will be with you all days" and "I will not leave you orphans;" The fulfillment of the promise is the Blessed Sacrament, Christ Himself under a tiny Host, inviting, awaiting and constantly living in men's midst to pour the riches of His blessing upon them. The opening of the poem represents the Sacramental Christ blessing mankind at the close of the day:

Lo, in the sanctuaried East,  
 Day, a dedicated priest  
 In all his robes pontifical exrest,  
 Lifteth slowly, lifteth sweetly,  
 From out its Orient tabernacle drawn,  
 Yon orb'd sacrament confest  
 Which sprinkles benediction through the dawn;  
 And when the grave procession's ceased,  
 The earth with due illustrious rite  
 Blessed,--ere the frail fingers featly  
 Of twilight, violet-cassocked acolyte,  
 His sacerdotal stoles unvest--  
 Sets, for high close of the mysterious feast,  
 The sun in august exposition meetly  
 Within the flaming monstrance of the West.

Through the symbolism of the sun, all things are brought into clear relief; the sun is likened to the Sacred Host with the burning sky for a monstrance; to the Sacrament with the horizon for the bleeding Rood; to the Altar-wafer signed with the cross. In other words, "the sun is to the earth only what Christ is to the human soul."<sup>1</sup> But in Christ, there is no thought of Himself; it is all for men, to help them, to scatter beauty before them, to give them joy. Christ Himself is the Oriens, "the One rising in the East like the sun."

Here Thompson shows himself the supreme poet of the liturgy for he introduces the reader to one of the most beautiful services of the Church, Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, in which the priest vested in a colorful cope, removes the Blessed Sacrament from the tabernacle and places it in a golden monstrance for the adoration of the faithful while the benediction hymns are sung, after which he blesses the people and again replaces the Sacred Host in the tabernacle. It is a short ceremony but deeply significant; Christ dwells on earth, incognito, but it is not His wish simply to dwell on earth in a house of wood or stone; he wants to be in the heart of man, to share their lives most intimately; and, as if the flaming desire of His Heart could not await their tardy advance, He permits Himself at times to be raised in loving benediction before the sight of men.

The poet has drawn the poetic elements of the analogy with happy success; the East is the Sanctuary, Day is the gorgeously vested priest, the Sun is the Sacred Host, the West is the flaming monstrance, while Twilight is

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<sup>1</sup> Everard Meynell, Op. cit., p. 211.

the assisting Acolyte.<sup>1</sup> Edmund G. Gardner, in an article in The Month (Feb., 1898) says that "Nature and the Catholic Church are one in their ritual; the former, in her changes and pageantry, merely offers on a large scale the same homage to God as the Church in her solemn offices."<sup>2</sup> The "grave procession" is the sun making its way across the heavens as a solemn and magnificent Eucharistic procession, closing with a blessing before it drops below the horizon:

O salutaris hostia,  
Quae coeli pandis ostium!

. . .  
While the Earth, a joyous David,  
Dances before thee from dawn to dark.

This is a new mystical poetry in which Nature, who "speaks by silences," is employed as a means of providing ecclesiastical imagery for the service of Something higher than itself. All creation bounds with joy as the triumphant "O Salutaris" heralds the Redeemer's blessing. How naturally, then, one expects to hear from the lips of Thompson his oft-repeated words: "To be the poet of the return to Nature is somewhat; but I would be the poet of the return to God."<sup>3</sup> Even a finer apprehension of the service of nature to a glorious supreme end is skillfully interwoven in the imaginative elements of this imagery:

To thine own shape  
Thou round'st the chrysolite of the grape,  
Bind'st thy golden lightnings in his veins;  
Thou storest the white garner of the rains.

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<sup>1</sup> Terence L. Connolly, S. J. Poems of Francis Thompson (New York, 1932), p.452.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., as quoted by Terence L. Connolly, p. 452.

<sup>3</sup> Everard Meynell, Op. cit., p. 205.

Destroyer and preserver, thou  
Who medicinest sickness, and to health  
Art the unthanked marrow of its wealth;

. . . . .

Thy proper blood dost thou not give,  
That earth, the gusty Maenad, drink and dance?  
Art thou not life of them that live?  
Yea, in glad twinkling advent, thou dost dwell  
Within our body as a tabernacle!

In the context of the poem preceding these lines Thompson speaks of Nature as "lashed with terror, leashed with longing", for, ever since the great evil of original sin, even the equilibrium of nature has been shaken; it is as if Nature, inanimate and dumb, longs for the One Who can restore all things to their original, happy state.<sup>1</sup> And so the Sun, the great "destroyer and preserver", by its rays provides light and nourishment to the chrysolite of the grape and stores the "white garner" -- in other words, constantly provides the wine of the grape and pure white bread from grain so that the great mystery of the Holy Mass might continue as long as time will last to keep the Divine Son of God on earth through the miracle of the Holy Eucharist.

Here indeed, Nature herself is redeemed; she is elevated to a high level of nobility for she gives herself to be the accidental means of uniting the two worlds, the natural with the supernatural -- of uniting the life-blood of a Creator with the life-blood of His creature. How significant, then, is the line, "thou dost dwell within our body as a tabernacle!" The Holy Communion is the Food which elevates the recipient to a share in a higher life. Ordinary food produces an intimate union between external nature and man,

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<sup>1</sup> Calvert Alexander, The Catholic Literary Revival (Milwaukee, 1935), p. 170.

but man himself is far superior to this creature of his strength. In Holy Communion, however, it is no longer the food which is assimilated by man, but it is the Food which assimilates man to itself, and brings him to a higher sphere.<sup>1</sup> The supernatural after a fashion absorbs the natural. Nature serves the supernatural. Perhaps no modern poet has more vividly portrayed this solemn mission of nature. Not only in "the Orient Ode" but also in "A Corymbus for Autumn", Thompson places Nature on her knees before this great mystery:

All Nature sacerdotal seems,---  
 The calm hour strikes on yon golden gong,  
 In tones of floating and mellow light  
 A spreading summons to even-song:  
 See how there  
 The cowled Night  
 Kneels on the Eastern sanctuary-stair.  
 What is this feel of incense everywhere?  
 Clings it round folds of the blanch-amiced clouds,  
 Upwafted by the solemn thurifer,  
 The mighty Spirit unknown,  
 That swingeth the slow earth before the embannered throne?

Perhaps, too, there has been no poet more sacerdotal in his outlook on the world. For him, all nature is like a mighty cathedral, the one function of which is to provide an artistic shelter for the Holy Eucharist, and to render Him continual worship. First, there is the sound of the bell, "the tones....of mellow light" are struck from the golden gong of the sun, an excellent example of "color hearing" on the part of the poet;<sup>2</sup> then Night, as the cowled monk, kneels on the sanctuary stair as in the service of evening benediction, for wafts of incense cling about the blanch-amiced clouds.

<sup>1</sup> Frederick William Faber, The Blessed Sacrament (London, 1855), p. 483.

<sup>2</sup> Terence L. Connolly, Op. cit., p. 337.

There is great strength in the simple word "unknown" in its reference to the Holy Eucharist. "The mighty Spirit unknown" , as the "solemn thurifer" might well symbolize the Blessed Sacrament which as the propitiatory link between heaven and earth, swings the sinner, "the slow earth before the canopied Throne," as a mediatorial connection between the Infinite and the finite.

The Holy Eucharist is a silent Pleader for the human race offering infinite satisfaction. This one fact alone is enough to account for the myriad beauties of nature. All objects now take on a new meaning--a feeling of reverence for the Divine Guest whose Presence assures us of a higher destiny. As Thompson says, the very simple and the very learned see great depth of meaning in the little things of life, and find that they can be used as a means of sanctification. Dr. Fulton J. Sheen develops aesthetically this idea in these words:

The universe is a great sacrament....Everything is and should be a stepping stone to God: sunsets should be the means of reminding us of God's beauty, as a snowflake should remind us of God's purity. Flowers, birds, beasts, men, women, children, beauty, love, truth, all these earthly possessions are not an end in themselves, they are only means to an end. The temporal world is a nursery to the eternal world....Sacramentalizing the universe ennobles the universe, for it bestows upon it a kind of transparency which permits the vision of the spiritual behind the material. Poets are masters in sacramentalizing creation for they never take anything for its mere material expression; for them things are symbols of the divine.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Fulton J. Sheen, The Life of All Living (New York, 1929), p. 215. The words in italics are our own.

Not as the Pagan and the Pantheist of his time does Thompson exalt nature; she herself is exalted by her reference to the supernatural. He sees divinity through the sacramental veil of Nature and he would have her always on her knees. The mystic and the poet note that the energy that works through the universe is an expression of love; that is perhaps the reason why Thompson has so deeply tapped the spiritual in connection with Nature.

After speaking of the ennoblement of nature through yielding herself to be a means of bearing the Divine Food to man, Thompson in his "Orient Ode" continues:

Thou to thy spousal universe  
Art Husband, she thy Wife and Church.

Through the Holy Eucharist on earth, Christ rules over human hearts and society, Hidden King, but King nevertheless. The Sun by its light makes the earth beautiful and fruitful. The earth depends upon the sun for its existence. Here Thompson likens the relationship between the sun and the universe as that between Christ, the Son, and His Spouse, the Church.

One can scarcely make a study of Thompson's works without noting the intimate influence of Patmore on his best productions. In his essay, "The Precursor", after speaking of the natural first and the spiritual afterwards, Patmore says, "The Love between God and the soul is constantly declared to be, in its highest perfection, the love that subsists between Bridegroom and Bride....and our only means of understanding....these supernatural relations are the meditation and contemplation of their types in nature."<sup>1</sup> It is

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<sup>1</sup> Coventry Patmore, Religio Poetae, p. 227.



love which keeps Him Captive upon the earth; and His Church, His beloved, brings back, nourishes, and lovingly cares for the souls He longs to make sharers in His eternal Kingdom.

The last reference made to the Eucharist are the climactic lines of the poem:

Thou, for the life of all that live  
The victim daily born and sacrificed;  
To whom the pinion of this longing verse  
Beats but with fire which first thyself didst give,  
To thee, O Sun--or is't perchance to Christ?

As the sun by being a victim "daily born and sacrificed" gives life to the world, so the Divine Son of God is daily "born and sacrificed" by the powerful words of the Consecration of the Mass: "This is My Body; This is My Blood," as a Victim for the redemption of the souls of men. The fire is the love the Sun gives. Earth is filled with a new joy and, in the depths of the hearts of men there is a realization of a love surpassing all human love. "Let the earth be filled with joy....: and let men know that the darkness which overspread the whole world is chased away by the splendor of our eternal King. Let our mother the Church be also glad, finding herself adorned with the rays of so great a light."<sup>1</sup> Here the symbol of the sun merges into that of the Christ as a sacrificial Victim, who remains today through the miracle of the Mass, a Divine Guest and Food for hungering souls. Et vita erat lux hominum. Life and light the sun gives to the world, and Christ is "the true light which enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world." Here, indeed, Francis Thompson touches the true Catholic mysticism.

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<sup>1</sup> Taken from the "Exsultet" of the Mass of Holy Saturday.

For him the poet's life is full of visions, but the life of the mystic is one vision - sole Deus. Loud as is the "Orient Ode" in its faith, yet later in his life, the poet cancelled even that, for "what profiteth it a man, he asks in effect, if he gain the whole sun but lose the true Orient--Christ?"<sup>1</sup> Like the priest, the poet touched heavenly mysteries, and enriched the field of poetry by his touch. R. L. Mégroz in his study of Francis Thompson, the Poet of Earth in Heaven says: "His quest of the sun's secret has brought him the response not only of knowledge which we call scientific, but of a conviction of 'Christ everywhere'".<sup>2</sup>

One other Eucharistic reference is made by Thompson in a poem entitled "To the English Martyrs," when he speaks of the direful consequences which came upon the faithful after they had been deprived of the consolations of their faith by the persecution in the sixteenth century:

When God was stolen from out man's mouth,  
 Stolen was the bread; then hunger and drought  
 Went to and fro; began the wail,  
 Struck root the poor-house and the jail.

. . . . .

Christ, in the form of His true Bride,  
 Again hung pierced and crucified.

When men were deprived of the Sacrifice of the Mass, of Holy Communion, and the open practice of their faith, then charity grew cold; they became selfish and cruel, and those still loyal to their belief suffered the sting of hunger and thirst; crime flourished, and the poor-house and jail "struck root." With poetic insight the poet sees the connection between robbing the people

<sup>1</sup> Everard Meynell, Life, p. 201.

<sup>2</sup> R. L. Mégroz, Francis Thompson, the Poet of Earth in Heaven (New York, 1927), p. 96.

of the Bread of Life and depriving them of ordinary bread by which their physical life is nourished. The Consecrated Bread is the food of charity-- is love itself, and as surely as a people are deprived of the spiritual food, so surely will the whole social and economic life of the entire nation suffer. As a Source of living charity, the Blessed Sacrament courses through all the various departments of life; when men are deprived of this intimate communication with God, then the stream of charity runs dry; life becomes a barren waste and "man's inhumanity to man" spreads swiftly.<sup>1</sup> In short, the Holy Eucharist is necessary not only for the spiritual welfare of man, but also for his temporal, economic, and social happiness.

For Thompson, the boundary line between the two worlds, natural and supernatural, was the altar rail. Like Father Hopkins, he sought to bridge the gap between the two worlds that Hulme has very vividly portrayed.<sup>2</sup> The symbol he found "all in one and one in all" is Christ. His vision was that of a Christo-centric universe--with Christ as the bond to unite all disparate things.

It is not Thompson's mysticism that displeases, say recent critics, but his diction<sup>3</sup>--his use of magniloquent terms, his new-coined words. It is true that his powerful imagination impelled a magnificence of style and that he enriched the language with one hundred and thirty new word-coinages; nevertheless, his language is not the "cameos" of the French Symbolists; rather it is language shot through with heart-deep emotion, the product of refined intellectual and spiritual thought. Such ecclesiastical terms and

<sup>1</sup> London Times Literary Supplement (May 19, 1927).

<sup>2</sup> Supra, pp. 7-8.

<sup>3</sup> London Times Literary Supplement (May 19, 1927).

images as 'maniple', 'monstrance', 'violet-cassocked acolyte', and 'blanch-aniced clouds', were necessary when he was using liturgical symbolism for mystical conceptions. The careful position of his words and phrases shows an attention to details that was aesthetic as well as intellectual. In his vocabulary he was adventurously creative. According to Mégroz's verdict, he has dealt the hardest blow given by anyman's poetry to the preciousness of style which characterized the literary works of the late nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> He likewise maintains that no English poet since Wordsworth has perhaps had a more influential and energy-releasing effect on poetic diction.

Francis Thompson's poetry reveals the fact that he was no aesthete. He had little sympathy for the l'art pour l'art theory, and he objected strenuously to the excessive searching after the le mot juste; he believed that the reader needed more than an "impersonal" art. For him, there was no clinging to objectivity as the Parnassians had done, nor did he reject the objective and use the soul merely as an agent of fine literature as the Symbolists were wont to do; but he employed the object as a means of penetrating spiritual reality.

In his excellent essay, "Form and Formalism", he condemns the materialistic worship of form as a special object of the age's blasphemy; the poet need not feed on the breath of the multitude. He fought bravely against the defect of his age, which in his essay on "Shelley", he maintains is "the predominance of art over inspiration, of body over soul."<sup>2</sup> One can only reach literary majesty by rising to sanctity; one's will, he believed, must first

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<sup>1</sup> R. L. Mégroz, Op. cit., p. 60.

<sup>2</sup> The Works of Francis Thompson, Vol. III: Prose (New York, 1913), p. 4.

have undergone the "heavenly magnetization by which it points always and unalterably towards God."<sup>1</sup> This is perhaps the key to the secret of the "Divine embrace", which characterizes the closing thought of all his poetry.

It has been said that no artist of first rank is a solitary pioneer. The idea had already been afloat, had been expressed more or less perfectly or vaguely by "precursors in the same literary milieu--is, as we say, 'in the air' and finds a public prepared to understand it."<sup>2</sup> This, perhaps, accounts for the encouragement of Thompson's poetic genius by the publication of his poems in the periodical founded by the Meynells, Merric England, which was a vehicle at least for Catholic thought. It was through reading the slender volume of Mrs. Meynell's poems that Thompson discovered that he, too, was a poet. To him she was as a guardian angel, his constant poetic inspiration.

Delicate artist as she was, Mrs. Alice Meynell was eminently fitted to be the organizer of the Catholic Literary Movement in the early nineties, and her far-reaching vision of making the Catholic tradition the center of all things, and of insisting that the Catholic artist be filled with so deep an appreciation of his faith that his art must naturally spring from his own personal sanctity,<sup>3</sup> finds consistent expression in her own carefully wrought craftsmanship, particularly in her Eucharistic poems.

In "A General Communion," Mrs. Meynell is taking into account the strong social note which profoundly influenced the religious conceptions of her day. She observes the congregation, "deeply separate" all "fed at one only board" who move about devoutly intent on their great act--converse

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., "Health and Holiness," p. 261.

<sup>2</sup> E. I. Watkins, "Aesthetic Contemplation," A Philosophy of Form, p. 356.

<sup>3</sup> Calvert Alexander, Op. cit., p. 116.

with their devoted Lord. The idea of separateness is emphasized. Each individually has received the miraculous Food:

As each asunder absorbed the multiplied,  
The ever unparted, whole.

The austere restraint and rigid economy of words which characterizes Mrs. Meynell's verse is often the cause of obscurity. She is here presenting a profound thought. Perhaps the best interpretation of these lines is that of the eighth stanza of the incomparable Lauda Sion which is sung on the Feast of Corpus Christi:

Whether one, or thousands eat,  
All received the self-same meat,<sup>1</sup>  
Nor the less for others leave.

Though the Wonderful Gift multiplies Itself, yet each individually receives the whole. Each communicant receives the Body of his Lord, while the "throng" constitute the Mystical Body of Christ. The poet is here treating of the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ, which at the close of the century, was beginning to be stressed as it had not been for centuries. Not to understand the dogma is to fail to understand the imagery of the poem. It is simply this: that Christ is the head of the Church exercising in a mystical supernatural manner, the life-giving influence of the Church as the human head in the human organism; from Christ comes that supernatural life which unites the members among themselves and with Him. Increase, both intensively in personal holiness and extensively in numbers, depends on this vivifying union which is fostered and preserved principally by the great Sacrament of

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<sup>1</sup> Taken from the Mass for the Feast of Corpus Christi.

## the Holy Eucharist.<sup>1</sup>

The poet then sees the people as a field of flowers, each at an infinite price, "the sun of unimaginable powers" -- each soul at the price of the life-blood of the Son of God, which made possible the daily Sacrifice of the Holy Mass and the priceless gift of holy union, Communion, with Him. The imagery of the field and flowers reaches its climax in the last two lines of the poem:

A thousand single central daisies they,  
A thousand of the one;  
For each, the entire monopoly of the day;  
For each, the whole of the devoted Sun.

No longer now in the abstract is there simply a field of flowers; the poet now reaches the concrete and she is happy in the choice of the flower. The daisy, in Anglo-Saxon daeges, literally day's eye,<sup>2</sup> from daeg, day, and eags, eye, a common flower which abounds in England having a yellow disk with white, pinkish, or rose-colored rays, is symbolic of the Eucharist by reason of its prodigality and its light and gold rays. Again, the intensity of the poetic conception is thrown on the social aspect -- the congregation, yet each "single central" -- a thousand of the one. As in a flower, each separate part is a necessary part of the whole, or as each single flower contributes to the beauty of the field, so each communicant receives his Undivided Lord and all together form the great Mystical Body of Christ. Holy Communion does not blot out individual differences; Christ's full blessing is given to each. In the climactic line of the poem, Mrs.

<sup>1</sup> The New Catholic Dictionary, Vatican Edition (New York, 1929), p. 659.

<sup>2</sup> Little, Fowler and Coulson, The Shorter Oxford Dictionary, Vol. I, 1933, p. 450.

Maynell uses Francis Thompson's symbol, "For each the whole of the devoted sun." As the sun warms and gives life to the earth, so the devoted Sun, giving Himself wholly to each individual heart, is the Mystical Head which unites the members with Him and to each other.

In "The Unknown God," the poet sees Christ, not in the Eucharistic splendor of Himself as did St. Thomas, but as hidden within the depths of the heart and will of a stranger who had just returned to his place after receiving Holy Communion. The entire poem is a prayer addressed to Christ enclosed within this "brother's solitary day," -- in his lonely conscience, his unknown heart, his intellect, his will, his love, even his "numbered breath:"

Christ in his numbered breath,  
Christ in his beating heart and in his death,  
Christ in his mystery! From that secret place  
And from that separate dwelling, give me grace.

Each life has its destiny, each life is a mystery, and each is shut away from the other by a "wall of flesh;" but the Eucharistic Lover can intimately enter in the secret recesses of the heart and mind for the soul is His beloved. He remains in the Blessed Sacrament just to be able to come to His beloved, so the poet closes with the humble supplication, "Look upon me! give me grace!"

In these two Eucharistic poems, Mrs. Maynell uses the established form of iambic quatrains, although the imagery is at times somewhat confusing. Here there is none of Thompson's profusion of language. A pure loveliness stamps her work with the air of austere classicism, although, like her favorite Shelley, at heart she was a Romanticist. One finds



dogma treated in these poems, not sentiment. Her entrance into the Catholic Church did not take her into any flights of the mystical world.<sup>1</sup> To her Christ lived in the world, as her poetry points to a fuller consciousness of the Eucharistic Presence of Christ on earth. With great depth of thought and emotional intensity, she reaches spiritual profundities, the truths of which are clothed in a rigid economy of words. It is subjective, not objective verse, sincere, delicate and restrained.<sup>2</sup> The chastened style lends it a consistent, classic charm.

Besides the poems treating of the Mystical Body of Christ, Mrs. Meynell has written two other Eucharistic lyrics. For the Holy Eucharist, the grain is always ripening brown and the vineyards cluster the hills, since the Divine Lover is constantly providing the means to care for His beloved.

#### THE FUGITIVE

Yes, from the ingrate heart, the street  
Of garrulous tongue, the warm retreat  
Within the village and the town;  
Now from the lands where ripen brown  
A thousand thousand hills of wheat;

Not from the long Burgundian line,  
The southward, sunward range of vine.  
Hunted, He never will escape  
The flesh, the blood, the sheaf, the grape,  
That feed His man -- the Bread, the Wine.

Mrs. Meynell's lyric, "In Portugal" re-echoes the thought of Francis Thompson's poem, "To the English Martyrs" in his picture of the

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<sup>1</sup> Viola Meynell, Alice Meynell: A Memoir (New York, 1929), p. 42.

<sup>2</sup> M. Jourdain, "Alice Meynell," Poetry Review (May, 1912), p. 213.

destitution that befell the nation "when God was stolen from out man's mouth." When the Faith is driven out of the country, the corn-fields and the grape-vines are, as it were, fettered; they pine to reach their supreme mission of being the Consecrated Host and the Precious Blood of the Eucharistic Saviour, but loneliness is their portion. The corn, ripe in the ear, holds the unconsecrated Host - the wine-press, the unbidden Christ; "the Victim lurks unsacrificed." Persecution has driven away charity. Even Nature, particularly the wheat and the grape which provide the mainstay of life, is suffering; and the Holy Eucharist is denied Its loving tryst with men.

To appreciate Mrs. Maynell's contribution to Eucharistic poetry it is well to place it against the background of her period, the various moods and tendencies of which she was extremely sensitive. L'art nouveau had filtered in from France, a new Hedonism and Paganism had arisen, a powerful leaven in the yeast of the new generation. Holbrook Jackson in his interesting work, The Eighteen Nineties vividly pictures the age as being one of many intellectual, imaginative and spiritual activities, the main concern being that of social life and culture: "No family was immune from new ideas. Life-tasting was the fashion, and the rising generation felt as though it were stepping out of the cages of convention and custom into a freedom full of tremendous possibilities."<sup>1</sup> It was a time of experiment -- of testing for themselves, and people went about freely and cheerfully trying to solve the question "How to Live." It was a decade of "a thousand movements" when men were passing from one culture to another, from one morality to

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<sup>1</sup> Holbrook Jackson, The Eighteen Nineties (New York, 1927), p. 31.

another, "from one religion to a dozen or none!"

There was an open receptivity among the people for any new ideas. This fact accounts for the awakening of the intelligence that welcomed the aesthetic movement, for a renaissance of art depends upon both the artist and the people; the one is the complement of the other.<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Maynell, however, was too wise to subscribe to the false tenets of aestheticism which exalted beauty above truth. Surface effects in art could not satisfy her artistic and intellectual needs. Art for Art's sake alone she regarded as a heresy, yet no one could have been more careful in using the precise word. To her artistic mind, genuine art should be sincerely religious.

Mrs. Maynell's home at Palace Court in London became the rendezvous of the artists of the period; Parnassus, George Meredith, Aubrey De Vere, Francis Thompson, Michael Johnson, William Butler Yeats, La Gallienne, Joyce Kilmer, Alfred Noyes, Gilbert K. Chesterton, Hilaire Belloc and many others. On account of the dangerous trends of the period, Mrs. Maynell preferred to make her most intimate associations with the Catholic group, "the small but rare band of Catholic poets in the charming home circle of Mr. and Mrs. Wilfred Maynell" as Richard La Gallienne styles the group in his interesting book, The Romantic Nineties: "There was the charm of a beautiful abbess about her, with the added esprit of intellectual sophistication. However quietly she sat in her drawing room of an evening with her family and friends about her, her presence radiated a peculiarly lovely serenity, like a twilight gay with stars."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>2</sup> Richard La Gallienne (New York, 1925), p. 129.

Mrs. Meynell's special effort with this selected group was to carry on the work of Catholic letters in accordance with Catholic tradition which was not an isolated thing but stood in the line of continuity with the best culture of the past. To do this she would have the artist first live the life of his faith so that it would be the burning inspiration of his art. That she succeeded at least in a humble manner is seen in the Eucharistic voice raised during this time, esoteric as it was and understood only by a minority. Yet it was a voice that pointed to a fuller consciousness of the presence of the Eucharistic Christ on earth and the unity that is possible through this gracious truth in the social, political and economic life as well as in the artistic field.

Like Alice Meynell, Lionel Johnson belongs to the austere school of art, and like Gerard Manley Hopkins, he regarded poetry as a high vocation to which might be dedicated the noblest powers of mind and heart. In an age grown weary with Welt-Schmerz and indifference, through his religious poems, he fearlessly lifted the standard of the Cross and the Chalice hallowed with the Blood of the Eucharistic King.

To rescue the Holy Grail, valiant knights gloried in vowing themselves to long years of pain, humiliation and the exposure to the elements. Just to catch a fleeting glimpse of the Mysterious Cup, they felt, was worth a whole life-time of suffering. And this was only romance woven about the Vessel grown dear to the hearts of the people because of its Eucharistic reference. It is not the Holy Grail out of the reach of men that Johnson celebrates in his short poem, "Old Silver", but the Chalice of the Holy Mass

in which the Blood of God daily nestles. Bitter, indeed, is the criticism he hurls at the modern age when he finds in the confusion of a "common mart" some precious sacred altar vessels:

Behold, what thrones of the Most High  
Are here within the common mart!  
True God hath entered  
These crystal-centered  
Silvern stars: Men! come and buy  
If you have the heart!

Melt down the royal throne, break up  
The sanctuary of Deity!  
Is then God's glory  
So transitory,  
Mortal men? Christ! is Thy Cup  
But a memory?

"Thrones of the Most High" these chalices have been, when, at the whisper of the mighty words of Consecration, the Eucharistic God had again found a place on the earth He had loved, had "entered these crystal-centred silvern stars." To touch the Sacred Blood of the God-Man, silver and gold and the most precious jeweled vessels are none too good. The best that the world holds is given in loving tribute to Him, but here the beauty itself is a reproach. Once the Chalice was lifted daily at Holy Mass, but now a heartless commercialism is indifferently bargaining for the simple "Cup" He used to keep His Divine Self with the human race. How reproachful is the thrust of irony: "come and buy if you have the heart!" The most sacred objects the world contains are bartered for money by men whom He intended to serve and save!

The immense tragedy of the deed lies in the fact that the Holy Eucharist by inviting men to the most sacred intimacy of His Love under the

sensible appearance of bread and wine has put an easy weapon in the hands of His enemies. The invitation itself to His Agape, His Love-Feast, by daily thrusting Himself, as it were, into the world of time and space, lays Him open to attack and desecration. Johnson noticed that reverence for sacred things in his day was fast becoming atrophied. It is scarcely too much to say that the Western civilization was losing its capacity for reverence.

"Is then God's glory so transitory, mortal man?" The chalice in itself is a symbol of the Eucharist; if, then, the sacred vessel was profaned, what about that for which the symbol stands, the glory of the Holy Eucharist itself? "Christ! is Thy Cup but a memory?" Is there no more genuine faith? Again the tragedy is repeated. The thought content of the poem, "Old Silver", is the same as that found in Francis Thompson's "To the English Martyrs."

In the poem "Darkness", Johnson goes to the Eucharistic Prisoner to beg for light in the prevailing darkness of a false philosophy which was fascinating him with its promise of beauty and of "perfect moments" in the gloomy decadence which was enveloping his sensitive spirit. He asks for light--light which is always symbolic of the Eucharist by reason of its power to sustain life. In his poem "The Dark Angel" he portrays the tremendous spiritual struggle that was his; his triumph consists in going to the Divinity. It is evening when the poet approaches the Lonely Friend in the Tabernacle:

Master of spirits! hear me: King of souls!  
 I kneel before Thine altar the long night;  
 Besieging Thee with penetrable prayers;  
 And all I ask, light from the face of God.

.....

Thou from the still throne of the tabernacle  
Wilt come to me in glory, O Lord God!  
Thou wilt, I doubt Thee not: I worship Thee  
Before Thine holy altar, the long night.

Johnson's sincere religious spirit is manifest here. His was an intense struggle with the forces of evil. "The Changeling" is one of the titles accorded to him by his circle of friends. He was as a citizen destined for "a city not made with hands." Like Francis Thompson it might be said of him that he scarcely belonged to the nineteenth century: "He did not seem of our world or of our era," is Wilfred Meynell's tribute to him. "Here he had no abiding city."<sup>1</sup> He needed the vision of the altar; otherwise life were death for him, "for what I would, I cannot," he owns with the great St. Paul, save Thou "have mercy, and give light, and stablish me!" One observes in this last line of the poem the same prayerful petition characteristic of Mrs. Meynell's Eucharistic poems, and throughout the poem, the same fondness for the symbol of light, "house of light," "flying fire," that is distinctively characteristic of Francis Thompson.

Against the austere background of "sad, dear days of Lent", the charming poem, "Ash Wednesday", centers about the Divine Person of the Lonely Prisoner before Whom, as if to break the stern, severe silence, "the lone lamp burns." The simple alternately rhyming quatrains flow evenly with a delicate portrayal of the mystic meaning of the cross and passion until it reaches the culmination of the cost of the Passion, His Eucharistic Presence in the world. Though men may go their unremembering ways and the world may be estranged or indifferent to Him, yet He remains to be their comfort and

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<sup>1</sup> Wilfred Meynell, "Preface" to The Religious Poems of Lionel Johnson (New York, 1916), p. IX.

the source of their sanctity. Abiding Peace remains among men if only they would come within Its sweet healing influence:

Imprisoned there above  
The world's indifferency;  
Still waits Eternal Love,  
With wounds from Calvary.

"Come! mourning companies;  
Come! to sad Christ drawn near;  
Come! sin's confederacies;  
Lay down your malice here.

Here is the healing place,  
And here the place of peace:  
Sorrow is sweet with grace  
Here, and here sin hath cease.

Prevailingly ascetic as he shows himself to be in these lines, he had at one time been an ardent follower of Pater's gospel of "perfect moments" of burning "always with this hard, gemlike flame", in order "to catch the fleeting glimpse of beauty on the wing,"<sup>1</sup> and he found the philosophy wanting. That it had met with defeat in his own life and caused him intense mental anguish is seen in his two poems: "The Dark Angel" and "The Darkness." That he entirely rejected the Pateresque philosophy is attested by this poem "Ash Wednesday" in which he would teach the Hedonist that the pleasures he so eagerly longed for could be purchased only by the austerities which he repudiated.<sup>2</sup> Not that he condemned the joys that life offered to others. He had found a deeper, sweeter source of joy--his Eucharistic Friend, and he would gloriously share his discovery with the world, especially with mourning companies - "mourning" because his age was one of so much pleasure and so little joy, as Francis Thompson says in his essay, Moestitiae Encomium, "that

<sup>1</sup> Paul Elmore More, The Drift of Romanticism (New York, 1913), p. 110.

<sup>2</sup> Stanley B. James, "Lionel Johnson", The Sentinel (October, 1936), p. 530.



"the one divine thing left to us is Sadness."<sup>1</sup> Peace and healing he had found.

Pain and sorrow, likewise the subject of so many of Patmore's and Thompson's poems, were for Johnson only means of spiritual sanctification and had become sweetened by the grace of His Sacred Presence; but best of all, "here sin hath cease" - sin, the only great calamity in all the world had no place here. In the tremendous ferment of the nineteenth century there was at least one place where peace, joy, grace, and love could be found -- under the sanctuary lamp.

In charming, musical iambic rhythm, the long poem, "A Dream of Youth", depicts in magic imagery the various enthusiasms and delights of youth when "life grows fuller with each hour" in beauty and glory. One of the thrilling joys is that of marching in the fragrant white and gold procession in honor of the Blessed Sacrament. Perfumes of incense swung from golden censers, flower wreaths strewn along the way, praises from "full lips curving into song", and eyes that gleam "with deep delight of dream on dream" are enthusiastic expressions of the care-free, tender love of youth for Someone powerful and beautiful who yet disdained not to walk on earth with His children. To present the picture in Johnson's delightful manner, one stanza will suffice:

Vested in white, upon their brows  
 Are wreaths fresh twined from dewy boughs:  
 And flowers they strew along the way,  
 Still dewy from the birth of day.  
 So, to each reverend altar come,  
 They stand in adoration: some

<sup>1</sup>Francis Thompson, Prose Works, Op. cit., p. 111.

Swing up gold censers; till the air  
Is blue and sweet, with smoke of rare  
Spices, that fetched from Egypt were.

The combination of sense appeals and suggestions of the imported riches of the South reminds one of Keat's poems. The same picture of homage to the Eucharistic King is represented again in Johnson's sonnet, "The Church of a Dream,"; this time, however, it is an old Priest "swaying with tremulous hands the old censer full of spice, in gray, sweet incense clouds; blue, sweet clouds mystical." Johnson's fondness for the imagery of the censer again puts one in mind of Francis Thompson. In direct contrast to "A Dream of Youth," this poem portrays a desolate church, gray, weatherworn, with dead leaves rustling about it in the whistling wind; yet it is the house of God and the Eucharistic Christ remains there with only one adorer, "desolate else, left by mankind." Emotion and intellect are here combined into a fusion of sympathetic plaintiveness which is a characteristic mark of Johnson's best works.

To Francis Thompson, Johnson dedicated his flawless lines, "Sursum Corda"<sup>1</sup>; the first stanza of which is unmistakably a Eucharistic reference:

Lift up your hearts! We lift  
Them up  
To God, and to God's gift,  
The Passion Cup.

Again His Passion Cup, symbol of the Eucharist, infinite height for mortal man to reach is yet the goal to which he would have the human heart be

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<sup>1</sup> Wilfred Meynell, "Preface" to The Religious Poems of Lionel Johnson, p. VIII.

lifted. And it is here that he sums up the strange paradox of man's strength by virtue of his weakness which is strongly re-echoed in the powerful lines of Thompson's poem, "Any Saint:"

Rise; for Heaven hath no frown  
When thou to thee pluck'st down,  
Strong clod!  
The neck of God!

The marvellous power that God has left to men whereby he can touch Divinity and bring the Creator intimately into his individual life is his own approach to the Cup of the Passion, Holy Communion. But the Divine Lover awaits the coming of the soul. So great is man's power of free will that even the Sacramental God respects it; yet the least approach to Him is magnificently rewarded; it is as if He could hardly wait to bestow, not His gifts, but Himself upon the soul—a union of Omnipotence with impotence. Strange paradox in which man's humility exalts him to infinite heights!<sup>1</sup> It is the same paradox which Shakespeare expresses in the celebrated words: "What a piece of work is man!...And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust?" Man, by lifting his heart to the Passion Cup, by approaching Holy Communion, possesses the power of bringing Christ into the clay house of his flesh, and thereby attaining the "fullness of life" which is the sublime plan of the Divine Lover for His children.

Although Lionel Johnson is not ranked with our major poets, his careful craftsmanship entitles him to a distinctive position in contemporary poetry. His talent is less robust than that of Coventry Patmore, Francis

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<sup>1</sup> Terence L. Connolly, Poems of Francis Thompson, p. 475.

Thompson and Mrs. Meynell, yet his many verbal felicities, his delight in beauty and graceful rhythm denote a distinctive poetic gift. In his critical work, The Art of Thomas Hardy, he declares himself to be weary of the sick and haggard literature of throbbing nerves and subtle sensations.<sup>1</sup> He felt the need of discipline and of rule not only for his art but for his life also. That he is a traditionalist is clearly manifest in his literary credo: "I wish to declare my loyalty to the broad and high traditions of literature; to those humanities, which inform with the breath of life the labors of the servants, and the achievements of the masters of art."<sup>2</sup>

Johnson's phrase that "life is a ritual", says William Butler Yeats in his essay "The Trembling of the Veil," when explaining the meeting of the Rhymers' Club of which both were members, "expressed something that was in some degree in all our thoughts."<sup>3</sup> In his poetry, he conveyed an emotion of joy and of intellectual clearness; he gave what was triumph in his life. Richard La Gallienne, in speaking of the brilliant literary figures of the time who passed swiftly to an early grave, describes Johnson as being so fragile that it was hard to believe so much intellectual force could be housed in so delicate and boyish a frame; and yet "his was perhaps the most definite personality of them all."<sup>4</sup>

Lionel Johnson was a sincerely religious soul. Throughout his poetry, "The Changeling" shows that he was too big for any local boundaries.

<sup>1</sup> Lionel Johnson, The Art of Thomas Hardy (New York, 1928), p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> William Butler Yeats, "The Trembling of the Veil"; Autobiographies (New York, 1927), p. 372.

<sup>4</sup> Richard La Gallienne, The Romantic Nineties (New York, 1925), p. 191.

He was more intellectual than imaginative, and "his home-sickness was for the dogma and stern thinking of scholastic philosophy."<sup>1</sup> One is not surprised, then, that through his contact with the Oxford Movement in his student days, he entered the Church. Himself a victim of maladie de siècle, his faith was his one support in his daily struggle with pain. His room, says La Gallienne, "was paradoxically monkish in its scholarly austerity with a beautiful mon-  
strance on the mantelpiece and a silver crucifix on the wall."<sup>2</sup> To come close to the spirit of his religious poems which best represent his talent, one must understand what it is to love God, to know Him in His Eucharistic beauty, and have experienced what it is to love Him Who alone can pour into human hearts the abundance of the "fullness of life."

One who fashioned a perfect lyric to Cynara in praise of "stronger wine", from a healthier source also carved exquisite verse in honor of the Eucharistic Bread and Wine which proves that "to God as well as to Cynara he was faithful in his fashion."<sup>3</sup> Such a one is Ernest Dowson, who with Johnson and Thompson shares not only the poetic gift but likewise the habit of intemperance which accounts for the note of pathos in their lives and works.

For anything to be appreciated by Dowson it was necessary for it to come to him by way of France. Likewise a victim of the maladie de siècle, he was strongly under the influence of the French decadence. Perhaps it is because he flung himself with zest into a riotous life, really as an escape

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<sup>1</sup> Osbert Burdett, The Beardsley Period (New York, 1925), p. 176.

<sup>2</sup> La Gallienne, Op. cit., p. 193.

<sup>3</sup> Blanche Mary Kelly, Op. cit., p. 286.

from life,<sup>1</sup> which was to him as a wild dream, that he gained the wisdom to penetrate the deeper and more spiritual issues which contribute to true happiness, an insight which is discernible in his delicately restrained lyric, "Nuns of Perpetual Adoration." One notes the rare beauty of Verlaine in many of his lines.

Around the symbol of "the sacred lamp" abounds the imagery of the poem. The lamp--symbol of the Eucharist, of the Sun of Justice, Lumen Christi, "a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn and the day star arise in your hearts" (II Peter, 1:19)--only "exteriorizes", so to speak, the glorious truth that the Eucharistic Christ, the Divine Spend-thrift of Love, is dwelling on earth, especially in the midst of His chosen ones. Their joy is a spiritual one not bounded by time, for "it is one with them when evening falls, and one with them the cold return of day." Like fragrant incense to the Sacrificed, their nights and days are threaded into a long rosary of prayer, penance, and virtue. The roar of London beats from without but it cannot disturb their silent, serene watch with their Lover:

They saw the glory of the world dismayed;  
They saw the bitter of it and the sweet;  
They knew the roses of the world should fade,  
And be trod under by the hurrying feet.

Calm, sad, secure; with faces worn and mild;  
Surely their choice of vigil is the best?  
Yes! for our roses fade, the world is wild;  
But there, beside the altar, there, is rest.

In all of his best poems, Dowson has a fondness for the word, rose, the symbol of love. One can scarcely understand the importance of the

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Symons, Studies in Prose and Verse (London, 1904), p. 268.

allusion here without noting its use in his poem No sum qualis eram bonae sub regne Cynarae, which Arthur Symons in his biography says is "a lyric which is certainly one of the greatest lyrical poems of our time."<sup>1</sup>

I have forgot much, Cynara! gone with the wind,  
Flung roses, roses riotously with the throng,

.....

I have been faithful to thee, Cynara! in my fashion.

The tragedy consists in the fact that he found the forces of evil too enticing. This tremendous spiritual impotence was due in no small measure to the life of vivid sensations, to the effort of burning always "with the hard, gemlike flame" in the "ecstasy"<sup>2</sup> of Walter Pater's Hedonism and false aestheticism. Like Johnson, he found that this doctrine emptied life of true values; in losing the vision of the infinite, he had failed to comprehend the greater meaning of life. In Dowson, there could be no compromise with Victorian mediocrity; with him it was either high spirituality or its direct opposite. Both Johnson and Dowson, shortly after leaving Oxford, became Catholics. Le Gallienne speaks of receiving a letter from Johnson in which he refers to "my dearest friend Dowson, who is now, Laus Deo, a Catholic."<sup>3</sup>

The references to the roses in the two verses above are now clear. "For our roses fade, the world is wild", but when the best love of the heart is given to the Divine Prisoner of the Altar, then only is the human spirit peaceful - "beside the altar, there, is rest." Theirs is the "Better part" which no power can take from them.

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Symons, "A Memoir", The Poems and Prose of Ernest Dowson (New York, 1900), p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Elmore More, Op. cit., p. 110.

<sup>3</sup> Le Gallienne, Op. cit., p. 187.

The same lyric overtone of beauty is apparent in the delicate portrayal of the poem, "Carthusians." A sacred silence, as of death, obtains here, where each, "tired at last of the world's foolish noise", follows a higher calling -- "to dwell alone with Christ, to meditate and pray." Lonely, they are banded together for more loneliness; humanly speaking, that the soul, unshackled by material bonds, might until death intimately share the loneliness and abandonment of the Eucharistic Lover, Who to win men's hearts by His seeming impotence, confines Himself within the encircled limits of the Sacred Host hidden in the darkness of the tabernacle. A burst of triumph surges through the last two stanzas which presents the same antithesis to his Cynara as that noted in the poem above. Roses and wine at the price of evil--fail when compared with the triumph of the "white company" who freely give the rose of their love in continual gratitude to and for the Living Bread and Wine, the Host of the tabernacle:

We fling up flowers and laugh, we laugh across the wine;  
With wine we dull our souls and careful strains of art;  
Our cups are polished skulls round which the roses twine:  
None dares to look at Death who leers and lurks apart.

Move on, white company, whom that has no sufficed!  
Our viols cease, our wine is death, our roses fail:  
Pray for our heedlessness, O dwellers with the Christ!  
Though the world fall apart, surely ye shall prevail.

A quiet beauty all its own enfolds the musical lyric, Benedictio Domini. Most vividly here the same contrast is noted as that in the two poems already mentioned, of the silence surrounding the tabernacle with that of the "voice of London", hoarse and blaspheming. Silence in itself is a characteristic of the Blessed Sacrament. It is as if the message of Christ's



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Eucharistic Love is so tremendous that words fail in their mission to make clear the thought. It teaches and preaches through silence; the reverent silence rings forth the truth that the Beloved is not only in His heaven but in His world also.

The same variety of sense appeals made by Johnson in his poem, "The Church of a Dream" is found here also--incense-laden air, the tinkle of the silver bell, the darkness dimly veiling the worshippers, the light radiating from the altar which houses the Lord, where one old priest exalts the Holy Eucharist, "the one true solace of man 's fallen plight." "Dressed like a bride" is the altar, adorned with flowers and lights for the visible approach of the Divine Lover, Who, as if He could not wait until morning would fain fill the afternoon or evening with His Sacramental blessing.<sup>1</sup> Unspeakably precious is this "solace" to man -- Benediction, perfect, complete:

Dark is the church, save where the altar stands,  
Dressed like a bride, illustrious with light,  
Where one old priest exalts with tremulous hands,  
The one true solace of man's fallen plight.

A great lover of beauty was Ernest Dowson. His pure lyric gift reveals the scrupulous artist, who, by the sweetness and charm of subdued emotion has produced exquisite poems of rare beauty. In poetry he was felicitously at home, says his biographer: "There never was a poet to whom verse came more naturally, for the song's sake; his theories were all aesthetic, almost technical ones."<sup>2</sup> All the lyrics treating of the Holy

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick William Faber, The Blessed Sacrament, p. 508.

<sup>2</sup> Arthur Symonds, Studies in Prose and Poetry, p. 275.

Eucharist are written in the simple iambic pentameter or hexameter quatrains. The simple but lofty diction adds a distinctive note to the musical flow of the rhythm. In these exquisite lyrics there is not a touch of the sordid.

There was a genuine sincerity about Dowson, who, in his extreme sensibility found the decadence an agonizing experience. Like Johnson he, too, was a member of the Rhymers' Club which met to discuss ideas of art and literature as a protection for art. Dowson's contribution to the Club were his two books of verse. Though not a great poet, yet he is one of the very few writers, says his biographer, to whom that name may be applied. La Gallienne describes him to have been "delicate as a silverpoint, recalling at once Shelley and Keats, too worn for one so young....finding peace at last like others of his generation, 'too avid of earth's bliss' in the bosom of the Catholic Church."<sup>1</sup> Victory, in the battle of life, he found, could be achieved through the leavening power of the Holy Eucharist.

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<sup>1</sup> The Romantic Nineties, Op. cit., p. 87.

## CHAPTER IV

### EUCCHARISTIC VOICES IN ENGLAND AND AMERICA

Breaking that Bread whereof His Body was made,  
In union and communion with man's own;  
A sacramental sign, earth's common Bond;  
Bread of a thousand grains, compact in One--

Upon learning that Frederick William Faber had become Catholic, Coleridge said that England had lost a great poet. By this he meant that Faber's promise was so great that he would have been one of England's greatest poets, but that as a Catholic he would not have the time to develop his talent, or if it were developed he would not get recognition. Though Father Faber is the author of popular hymns, many of which could not be given a high place in the realm of literature, nevertheless he is essentially a poet even in his prose works, and his supreme theme is the Blessed Sacrament.

Father Faber's ecstatic language addressed to the Sacred Mystery of the Altar verges on sentimentalism, is too emotional, say his many critics; but they fail to take into account the fact that his sentiments have a solid basis in Revelation. True it is that his references are constantly made to the gentleness and love of God, that he places his emphasis on the sweetness of the personal experience of God's love, and that he mirrors the ritual in his poetry. It is as if he were afraid that, in the midst of so much that is supernatural and heavenly, men might persist in being purely natural and earthly. His is the voice of the missionary, for he reaches the popular

audience, but he is not simply wandering in a poetic, emotional mist; rather his verses about the crowning gift of Salutaris Hostia, the "wondrous Gift so far surpassing hope or thought," as he triumphantly sings in the Eucharistic poem, Corpus Christi.<sup>1</sup> What burst of praise should attend such infinite condescension as a vast Creator deigning to repose within a creature's hand-- bells, earth, flowers, sunshine, song--silence, and an answering love:

Our hearts leap up; our trembling song  
Grows fainter still; we can no more;  
Silence! and let us weep--and die  
Of very love, while we adore.  
Great Sacrament of love divine!  
All, all we have or are be Thine!

Before Faber's reception into the Church, on his two continental tours, he had been deeply impressed by Catholic ceremonial and devotion.<sup>2</sup> In vivid contrast to the emptiness and desolation found in the other churches, the beauty of the ritual of the Catholic Church made a tremendous appeal to his sensitive nature. To him might be applied the answer given by Father Hecker, the founder of the Paulists, who, upon hearing that Emerson said that he supposed it was the art and ritual of the Church which had influenced the convert, said, "No, it was what caused these things."<sup>3</sup>

Faber was sincere. It were certainly meaningless to grace the altar with flowers and decorate it as if it were the court of a king, if there were no Real Presence there. Throughout his poetry, we find the fondness for

<sup>1</sup> Frederick William Faber, Hymns (Baltimore, 1890), pp. 144-146.

<sup>2</sup> George Carver, The Catholic Tradition in English Literature (New York, 1926), p. 296.

<sup>3</sup> Stanley B. James, "Frederick William Faber," The Sentinel (Jan. 1936), p. 12.

outward signs of reverence. Very especially is this noted in his poem, "Holy Communion" imitated from Saint Alphonsus. It is man's earthiness, his dullness that accounts for his coldness and insensibility when in intimate contact with divine things. "The affectionate extravagance of St. Alphonsus appears to our chilly hearts utterly unreal," says Father Matthew Russell, contemporary poet and critic of his day: "Probably the sainted Redemptorist has not suffered but gained in being translated by so true a poet as the saintly Oratorian."<sup>1</sup> The yearning of the flowers, the watching of the lights, the poet envies; yet still more the happy Pyx, the little palace of the Sacred Host

Where He, who is the world's true light,  
Spends all the day, and stays all the night

forms the burden of his grateful and graceful song.<sup>2</sup>

Judged either from a literary or a religious standpoint, though it has been allocated to the children's section in the collection of hymns, the poem, "Thanksgiving After Communion", is one of Father Faber's greatest achievements. Eloquent in its simplicity and glowing with faith in Him Whom Nature cannot hold and Whose glory stretches infinitely "beyond the shining of the furthest star," he proclaims the tremendous paradox of greatness in littleness, so predominantly the theme of Francis Thompson's best poems:

Nature cannot hold Thee,  
Heaven is all too strait  
For Thine endless glory,  
And Thy royal state.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Russell, S. J., "At Home Near the Altar," p. 79.

<sup>2</sup> Frederick William Faber, "Holy Communion", Hymns (Baltimore, 1880), pp.307-308.

Yet the heart of children  
Hold what worlds cannot,  
And the God of wonders  
Loves the lowly spot. <sup>1</sup>

It is after Holy Communion, and the poet marvels at the wonderful truth that "Thou Thyself art dwelling in us at this hour." Far different is this from the Pantheistic conception of a "presence that disturbs me with the joy of elevated thoughts: a sense sublime of something far more deeply inter-fused,"<sup>2</sup> in which the poet seems to identify the 'presence' and 'something' with nature itself. Nature nor the world can hold Him, according to Father Faber's poem; He is far above His gifts; yet in Holy Communion His Divine Presence is ours; He takes up His abode within the narrow bounds of the human heart. Here is no nebulous mysticism, nor vague sentimentalism. On the contrary, the poet touches the loftiest achievement of the human soul-- "the divine embrace," as Patmore and Thompson would say, of the Divine Lover with the soul. Wordsworth's conception is not so poetical as Faber's; "his deification of nature" so pleasing to intellectuals who quote Wordsworth "finds here a corrective," says Stanley B. James; "a corrective which retains all that is beautiful and gracious in the lines of the great Lake Poet but adds the incomparably greater truths of the Christian Revelation and the Catholic Creed."<sup>3</sup>

It is the simple attractiveness of God's hidden ways with men that forms the warp and woof of Faber's best songs--His helplessness in trusting

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 309-311.

<sup>2</sup> William Wordsworth, "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey."

<sup>3</sup> Stanley B. James, *Op. cit.*, p. 16.

Himself to "our childish love;" His free ways with us to prove our love; and, as if to cap the climax, the poet exults that "His love seems very foolishness for its simplicity." He could never tolerate the narrow limits men place upon His Sacramental love. Today, by possessing the Holy Eucharist, the world is filled with "greater good because of evil" and larger mercy by reason of the Fall. If men but possessed enough real simplicity to take Him at His word, the Eucharistic triumph would fill human lives with sweetness:

They know not how our God can play  
The Babe's, the Brother's part;  
They dream not of the ways He has  
Of getting at the heart.<sup>1</sup>

Invariably, Father Faber presents the shining side of things. He brings home the truth that all men are bound up in their influence and their action both with time and eternity. The material and spiritual world are in closest relationship. "He has made us feel that grace and redemption are as intimately blended with our spiritual life," says Brother Azarias in his Memoir of the poet, "as is the air we breathe with our physical organism."<sup>2</sup> He sought to lift man into the sphere of the supernatural, to bring heaven and earth in closer relationship through a personal love of the Blessed Sacrament. He touches a new world of thought and expresses truths in such a striking manner that they leave a deep impression on the reader. In facing the realities of life, he endeavors to reflect glimpses of the Eternal Beauty.

One notes in reviewing Father Faber's poems, the recurrence of the simple iambic meter, the smooth flow of rhythm, and his fondness for the

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick William Faber, "True Love," Op. cit., p. 383.

<sup>2</sup> Brother Azarias, "Father Faber's Hymns" Introduction to Hymns (Baltimore, 1880), p. V.

ballad form. A considerable sacrifice from a literary point of view was not unfrequently required on the part of the poet to attain his two-fold object; first, to provide simple and original hymns for singing; secondly, to furnish English Catholics with a hymn book for reading with the simplest meters possible. "There is scarcely anything," he says in his Preface, "which takes so strong a hold upon people as religion in meter, hymns or poems on doctrinal subjects."<sup>1</sup> He found that anything like elaborate meter conflicted with the understanding and enjoyment of the poems by the poor, for which they were composed. This accounts for his employment of the least intricate meters with the simplest diction. Though there are prosy sections in some of the poems, and weak stanzas, nevertheless Father Faber presents poetry of a high order and "'thoughts that glow in words that burn' may be read on almost every page."<sup>2</sup> Through the vast depth of thought and imagery, there is a unity of feeling--a lift to the supernatural. They serve to refine our grosser conceptions of the marvellous mysteries of our faith. Today the poems have become a permanent part of English devotional literature.<sup>3</sup>

Akin to Father Faber in his poetry and prose works concerning the Blessed Sacrament is the saintly Jesuit, Father Matthew Russell, the first editor of The Irish Monthly. For him, life was compacted with mysteries because the Sacrament of the Altar is a marvellous miracle, and we ourselves live in the midst of miracles, even upon them. That this was his constant theme is attested by the number of Eucharistic poems from the pens of others

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick William Faber, "Author's Preface" to the Edition of 1849, Hymns, p. XIX.

<sup>2</sup> John Fitzpatrick, "Preface" to Characteristics from the Writings of Father Faber (New York, 1903), p. VIII

<sup>3</sup> George Carver, Op. cit., p. 297.



which dot his prose works. Though for thirty-nine years the busy editor of The Irish Monthly which he founded in 1873, he still found time, in addition to his manifold spiritual duties, for personal literary activity in the field of poetry so that he may be said to be the special poet of the Blessed Sacrament in these later days.

In his poem, "The Sacramental Presence," taken from A Soggart's Sacred Verses, the poet contrasts the "sterner dispensation" with that of "love's new law", Not a cold, unloving creed is ours with God more distant from us than the clouds. We know that He, who had twined His Arms in love about His Maiden Mother's neck, and who "could unmake and make a million worlds as easily and as quickly as He plants a daisy in the sod," had kept His promise of giving Himself to us:

We know  
That Christ is priest forever of His kind  
Who offered bread and wine; and we believe  
With eager gladness that the Infinite God  
Who could unmake and make a million worlds  
As easily and quickly as He plants  
A daisy in the sod--yes, we believe  
That He who could feed thousands with a crumb  
Fulfilled His plainest promise, and bequeathed  
Unto His people, whom He bought so dear,  
His very body and his very blood,  
The one great sacrifice renewed forever.<sup>1</sup>

Father Russell has made a very poetic translation of Madame Swetchine's French prose version of an old German hymn under the title "Praise to the Blessed Sacrament." To translate with keen penetration the color, beauty and meaning of the work as Father Russell has done in this poem required no small poetic talent. Always beyond all count are they: the stars

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<sup>1</sup> "The Sacramental Presence" App. p. 166-167.

serenely blue in the clear vault of Heaven, the grains of sand in the world, the blades of grass in the meadow, rays of light from the sun, fruits and flowers, water-drops in the briny ocean--yet, for each, the refrain re-echoes in every stanza: Praised be the Holy Sacrament as many times a day!<sup>1</sup> Both in the expression of thought and in its diction, the poem is admirable in its simplicity.

In the poem, "A Eucharistic Garden," taken from A Soggarth's Last Verses, a garden, clothing a terraced hill, yields precious blossoms, not indeed, to deck a banquet hall; theirs is a nobler destiny--to be martyrs of Eucharistic Love.

They pine not idly on their stems,  
But in their holy death  
They waft through all the church hard by  
The perfume of their breath.

He would have them spend their Eucharistic hours in adoration with human worshippers. The subjective note in the last verse in which the human heart may be the garden courses likewise through the poem, "The Story of the Sacred Heart," in which humble compassion is the controlling emotion:

But nearer, nearer to the altar steal;  
Perhaps 'tis lonely now--yet One is there!  
Alone with Him in timorous worship kneel,  
And murmur soft what love and faith may dare,  
When heart meets heart. Ah! why doth my heart feel  
So numb, so prayerless, as if scarce aware  
How, in yon narrow cell where Jesus sleeps,  
His Heart each hour for me Its vigil keeps.

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<sup>1</sup> "Praise to the Blessed Sacrament," App. p. 165.

The shorter poem, "Prisoner of Love," puts one in mind of the series of wishes in Father Abram Ryan's poem, "A Child's Wish". As the hours speed on to the Eternal Years, he wishes to be Love's captive. For him earth held nothing like the Blessed Sacrament, which is a triumph of spirit over matter and of faith over sight.

Besides his interests in literary activities, Father Russell was a busy priest ever intent on aiding the souls confided to his care. One might say that "the personal atmosphere surrounding him was due to his apostolic selflessness and fervor, his singleness of aim at God, his ardent human feeling."<sup>1</sup> His rare personality was gifted with an inexhaustible store of human sympathy. One notes his reverent solicitude for the soul and his appreciation of his priestly dignity as a "Christ-bearer" in every line of the poem, "Viaticum." He pictures how there is not the least sign of glory about the lowly tabernacle; there are no clouds of incense, no costly robes, as he reverently places the King of Kings in the pyx.

The pyx within my bosom I reverently lay,  
And so, a new Christ-bearer, I take my lonely way.

Not lonely: He is with me who dried the widow's tear,  
Yet through Judea journeyed unrecognized as here.

. . . . .

No tinkling bell gives warning, no taper lights the road,  
By all but me unheeded.<sup>2</sup>

Then, as if lost in wonder, he marvels at the greatness of his calling which bids him tend and feed the flock, "in spite of faith so

<sup>1</sup> Rose Mulholland Gilbert, "The Late Father Matthew Russell, S.J." The Irish Monthly (Sept., 1913), p. 466.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew Russell, S. J., Vespers and Compline: A Soggarth's Sacred Verse, pp. 24-25.

feeble, in spite of love so cold." The climactic line puts one in mind of Chaucer's "poure person of a toun" of which the poet in his Prologue says:

But Cristes lecre and his apostles twelve  
He taughte, but first he folwed it hymselfe.

The poem ends with the prayers that the verdict of his priesthood may be: he practised what he preached. The simple quatrains carry the thought unflinching to the close where, as if victory had been attained, the Poet asks the true Viaticum to aid each dying creature. There is triumph in the littleness and hiddenness of the Holy Eucharist whose power makes pain a blessing.

Father Russell throws down the gauntlet with a contemporary poet<sup>1</sup> who spoke of life as a 'brief calamity.' His own view of life was colored by his love of the Holy Eucharist. "It is not right" he says "to speak of life as a 'brief calamity' but rather as a magnificent capability."<sup>2</sup> For when the power of the Eucharist is reckoned with, of what great things is not a generous soul capable?

The Blessed Sacrament, he says, works in us a marvellous transformation of body and soul. The poet sees life as compacted of miracles. "The mysterious natural miracle that goes on year after year, every winter, and spring, and summer, and autumn--the miracle of the renewal of life in plant and tree--has its counterpart in the mystic life of souls."<sup>3</sup> For Holy Communion spiritualizes the body itself and seems to change the very substance of the soul. It would be strange if the world did not reflect

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Dalton Williams' poem on the Blessed Sacrament, last stanza. Quoted in Father Russell's At Home Near the Altar, pp. 66-67.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew Russell, S. J. At Home Near the Altar (London, 1911), p. 67.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

beauties when man's life is so unutterably blessed. Nothing can bear so much as even a comparison with so great a wonder. That is perhaps why he has included in his prose works the poem by Father Rawes entitled, "To Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament."

Where in the height of heaven is light like Thee?  
Where in the deep abyss is strength like Thee?  
Where in creation is there bliss like Thee?  
Where among creatures is there love like Thee?<sup>1</sup>

In Father Russell, one notes a devotion and passion for letters. His object in founding The Irish Monthly was to afford an opportunity for young thoughtful minds to express themselves, to develop latent talent, and to educate and refine the artistic and literary taste of the people.<sup>2</sup> He was interested in the mysteries of human speech in its marvellous varieties; in connection with the Holy Eucharist, he was impressed with the sameness of the few Eucharistic words that have been repeated so many thousands of times "for at every moment it is morning and the hour of Mass somewhere over the Earth's surface." . Next to the Pater and Ave, he says, "the words of the Liturgy of the Mass are those that go oftenest from earth to heaven."<sup>3</sup>

There is simplicity of diction in the treatment of the sublime theme by Father Russell. There is also a special fondness for the rhythmic iambic meters, though they are marked with dignity and grace. In a criticism of his works made during his lifetime, it was said that his "jewels five words long" are truly from deeps unsummed by fame. "Does anyone," it says

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<sup>1</sup> Father H. A. Rawes was one of the first Oblates of St. Charles in London. The poem is cited in the Appendix, p. 164.

<sup>2</sup> Rose Mulholland Gilbert, "The Late Father Matthew Russell, S.J., The Irish Monthly (Sept., 1913), p. 474.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew Russell, S. J., Op. cit., p. 87.

"still maintain that we have no Catholic literature in England? Let him read Father Russell and be convinced that we have, and a varied one, alas! too little known."<sup>1</sup> Both in his prose and poetry, the Holy Eucharist was Father Russell's supreme theme, for to him, even the most enthusiastic romance was barren in comparison to what the Holy Eucharist means to human life.

In Father Russell's Irish Monthly, there often appeared profoundly spiritual and beautiful lyrics signed "Michael Field." A keen perception of beauty, a delicate sense of color and high elevation of thought won for the poet many admirers.

At a dinner party given in his honor just a few years before his death, Robert Browning, upon making the announcement that he had made a new discovery - had found a new poet, there burst forth from that cultured group almost with one voice the name, "Michael Field." The mystery of the author of about twenty plays and many admirable lyrics was long unsolved, until in the nineties, the secret was out--"Michael Field" was the pseudonym adopted by two women, Ruth Bradley and her niece, Blith Cooper, who collaborated so perfectly that it is difficult to find a similar parallel in the history of literature. Upon the discovery of the twin talent, there followed a lack of interest in their work; and after their entrance into the Catholic Church in 1907, critics ignored them so completely that, upon the publication of their last volume, Poems of Adoration in 1912, it scarcely received any notice outside the Catholic press.<sup>2</sup> Both women felt keenly the injustice

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<sup>1</sup> T.F.R. "Michael Field," The Irish Monthly (Mar. 1914), p. 162.

<sup>2</sup> T.F.R. "Michael Field," The Irish Monthly (Mar. 1914), p. 162.

meted to their poetry which had won the praises of such high authorities as Browning, Pater, and Meredith.

In answer to the many inquiries made regarding their entrance into the Church, their constant reply was: "Paganism made us Catholics."<sup>1</sup> They, too, could not be satisfied with the spiritual dryness and pessimism of the nineteenth century. Now, however, the subject-matter of their poetry was new, for they dealt almost exclusively with religious themes. Their poems are not meant for the uncultured mind; they generally require very thoughtful reading, but such effort is always well repaid. There is that noble sentiment and human sympathy united with a deep penetration of discerning love that fuses itself into impassioned verse. One finds here "the tender, sincere song of a Browning-like mind meditating deeply on religious subjects, and of a pious Catholic heart dwelling with affection in the recesses of divine love."<sup>2</sup> The religious poetry which was written after the author's conversion deserves far greater recognition than it has received.

Michael Field's favorite theme in the realm of religious poetry is attested by the inscription on the cover of the volume, Poems of Adoration, which reads: "Adoremus in Aeternum Sanctissimum Sacramentum." It was difficult to make a selection of a few poems for study since all bear the stamp of penetrating spiritual insight and beauty. The fresh gift of song, truth of feeling, vividness of style, and felicity of expression are manifest in every lyric.

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<sup>1</sup> Calvert Alexander, Op. cit., p. 146.

<sup>2</sup> T.F.R. Op. cit., p. 169.

The poem, "An Antiphony of Advent,"<sup>1</sup> is laden with phrases of beauty and profound sentiments. There is an invitation to a revel amid colorful imagery--hills, white and gold, running milk and honey rivers; the distant city exulting in song; torches lit that turn the sky bright; waterbrooks where revelers can drink as the thirsty stag, and where One dwells "among the freshets of the stream." The sense--appeals to color, touch, and taste are re-echoed with the suggestiveness of beauty and soothing peace, until in stanza V, we meet the figure of Tiresias, the celebrated soothsayer of Greek fable. Yet not for him are the waterbrooks; not for him, but "a prophet neither blind nor old, spare and of solemn brow, is risen to make all young; He dwells among the freshets of the stream." The terse contrast is both vivid and penetrating.

The last stanza is extended over many lines as if the thought were so great that it could hardly be expressed. This revel, is ascetic, "of a joy that cannot be unless we fast and pray and wear no wreaths," unless by self-renunciation and abnegation, we bring out a purification, a refinement, "since of our flesh we welcome the divine."

Since by our fast and reticence, our food  
From honey-bees in haunts of solitude,  
O mighty Prophet of the river-bank,  
We see that light which makes the sun a blank,  
As a white dove makes a whole region dim;  
See in the greatness of the great Light's rim  
One we must fall under would we win  
The ecstasy of revel--all our sin  
Borne from us by the Wine-Cup in a hand  
That bleeds about the vessel's golden stand,  
Heeds as the white throat of a lamb just slain.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "An Antiphony of Advent," App. p. 159-161.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Field, "An Antiphony of Advent," Poems of Adoration (London, 1912), p. 89.



Here the author portrays the gain that comes through loss and the fulfillment of life that comes through renouncement. Penitence and humiliation win for us spiritual enlightenment; but there is a force far stronger than anything in man's power. The Mighty Prophet bears in His hand the Wine-Cup which has not only purchased the human soul but is likewise its nourishment--its Food and Drink. No ascetic renunciation on the part of man could ever deserve this favor; it is simply His Gift of Love. "He dwells at the freshets of the stream. Come to the Waters, O Sons of Adam, haste, and Eva's daughters!" Men need not suffer from dryness and thirst, for the One at the stream with the Wine-Cup is waiting to replenish the human heart with His fullness.

In many ways the thought in this poem may be contrasted with that of T. S. Eliot's Waste Land in which Tereias is the symbol of modern desolation and decay. By reason of the fact that he is omniscient concerning all things of the past and present, he is become utterly impotent. He is the modern symbol of the dryness and frustration that enters a life devoid of the supernatural. Hope pulses through the Poem, "An Antiphony of Advent;" instead of drought, the hills are running rivers of milk and honey, for the Fountain of Life ever dwells among the streams. Ascetic renunciation, too, Eliot makes essential to a new life, for it is only by losing life that one finds it, and the waters of peace are free at last to flow through the waste land. This might be said to be the human quest of the divine whereas the Mighty Prophet with the Wine-Cup <sup>is</sup> really the divine quest of the human.

Unnoticed, but "still as the blooms of an apple-tree" the

Well-Beloved is borne down the street - such is the imaginative content of the first stanza of the poem entitled, "The Blessed Sacrament," in which the poet sings the praises of the divine helplessness of the Sacred Host:

In the harvests He hath His room;  
From the lovely vintage, from the wheat,  
From the harvests that we this year have grown,  
He giveth us His flesh to eat,  
And in very substance makes us His own.<sup>1</sup>

Much like Father Hopkins' "Barnfloor and Winepress" is this poem of the harvest and the vintage. Against the imagery of the sundown hour, there is tender beauty in the silent adoration of the heavens for Him Who "is come in the breaking of the Bread." Though He Who is encircled in the Host is King of the Universe and attended by choirs of angels, He will not break the Sacramental silence to appeal for help. The Immense God in such helpless littleness where He exists without any dimensions at all submits Himself to great indignities, even to be trampled upon by men:

He is King and with an orb so small:  
And not a word will He say,  
Nor on the angels call,  
Though we trample Him down on the way...  
Oh, guard Him with breasts impregnable!<sup>2</sup>

The poetic imagery in the poem, "Pascal's Mass" vividly clothes the setting in delightful phrases of delicate beauty: incense of flowers steeped bright; the sky in sun; "the bees in the wind of the dawn;" and the high, singing daylight of gold. At the sound of the "sacring-bell"--a bell which is rung at the most sacred parts of the Holy Mass, at the singing

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<sup>1</sup>"The Blessed Sacrament" App., p. 158

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., App., p. 159.

of the Sanctus and at Holy Communion, the shepherd boy kneels in the dew to worship the new-born Host in the priest's hands. All at once the mountain blazes with fire. A wonderful miracle occurs:

Lo, in chasuble, living and rich  
Golden rays cross-stitch,  
Foreshown by magnificent light--  
Lo, an angel grows firm on his eyes!

As an altar of marvellous stone  
Before him the mountain hath blazed,  
Round him the angel, who lifts in the air  
A Sun that is there:  
To the sheep and the shepherd-boy shown,  
With the ringing of larks? God is raised.<sup>1</sup>

The poet uses daring metaphors. The angel lifts in the air the Sacred Host, the Sun; with "the ringing of the larks" the Host is elevated; and the earth, as thurifer--an acolyte who carries the censer to scatter the odors of incense, flings her incense of adoration to God. The last figure is much like Thompson's reference in "A Corymbus For Autumn:"

The solemn thurifer....  
That swingeth the slow earth before the embannered throne.

If magnificent imagery should clothe nobility of thought, the poet has certainly achieved its purpose here. Powerful is the force of the description of the Angel who lifts the Sun in the air:

O Angel-priest, fragrant with thyme,  
Girt with sixfold glorious wings!  
O sky of the mountains above  
Adventurous Love!

Light, fragrance, tinkling of bells, freshness of the dew--such are the

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<sup>1</sup> "Pascal's Mass," App., p. 157-158.

means by which the poet combines the sense--appeals whereby to bring the imagination into play. Victory and joy pulse throughout the entire poem. The Holy Eucharist has conquered, for now "he is Thine for his lifetime,". For St. Pascal there could be but one vision, one love--that which he had learned in that singing daylight of gold.

"Fregit"---"Thy own Body Thou didst take in Thy holy hands--and break." New-glowing flowers are snapped in their best bloom; willow trees are cloven by lightning; a vase crashes on the floor; but the Flower of Heaven, the Vase of Chrysolite, by the strength of His own Will

Thyself didst break  
Thy own Body for our sake;  
Thy own Body Thou didst take  
Into Thy holy hands--and break.<sup>1</sup>

The metaphors find their strength in the last line; it was by His love and power that the Holy Eucharist was lavished on man.

In the poem, "Aurum, Thus, et Myrrha,"<sup>2</sup> the poet compares the Holy Eucharist to the gifts of the three Kings: as gold is valuable, so the Blessed Sacrament--my Gold, buys life for me hour by hour, and clothes me with such royal greatness that my spirit scarce "hath spring to hold its treasure;" as incense is a symbol of sacrificial prayer, so the Blessed Sacrament, my Frankincense, is my mystic offering "that pleads for me;" as myrrh is a healing stimulant, so the Blessed Sacrament, my Myrrh, will preserve my soul, will not let it feel mortality "if Thou confer on it Thy

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<sup>1</sup> "Fregit," App., p. 155.

<sup>2</sup> "Aurum, Thus, et Myrrha," App., p.156.

bitter strength of cherishing."

"Of Silence" is the title of a short poem in praise of the constant, pleading Eucharistic silence. "Dumbness", the poet calls it--unbroken dumbness, "past measure--as night-dew." The thirty three years passed swiftly by, but the Son of the Silent Maid would not pass away; rather He chose her silence to cover His glory so that He could linger on, stay always with His people:

O quiet, holy Host,  
Our wondering Joy and Light,  
In Thy still power engrossed,  
As a mute star pleads light,  
Thou pleadest, Infinite!

The Holy Eucharist is engrossed in mediating with the Eternal Father for His loved people. "Reparation," exclaims Father Faber in his admirable treatise, The Blessed Sacrament is "the very thing for which He Himself exists in the Blessed Sacrament; for if it had not been necessary He should come in humiliation to redeem us, it had not perhaps been necessary He should have hidden Himself in this lowest depth of secret silent love."<sup>2</sup> The imagery of the Holy Host pleading as the mute star pleads light is especially impressive. Forceful, too, is the power of the word, "Infinite!" placed, as it is, beside the pleading littleness of the Sacred Host.

In all of Michael Field's works, there is found that ethereal quality that always distinguishes true poetry. Intensity of thought is fused with emotional sincerity in a style enriched with suggestive word-

<sup>1</sup> Michael Field, Poems of Adoration (London, n. d.), p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Frederick William Faber, Op. cit., p. 537.

painting and easy flow of rhythm. In other words, it is poetry which is, as Wordsworth says, "the breath and finer spirit of knowledge."<sup>1</sup> While it charms and delights the heart as well as the mind, it is poetry that truly elevates, for it reaches the loftiest conception of human life and destiny. "This is the finest form of poetry, and those who bemoan the low standard of much modern literature, and bewail the fact that it is so hard to find genuine poetic art coupled with Christian sentiment, would do well to turn to these works of Michael Field."<sup>2</sup>

The two women who wrote under the name of "Michael Field" were very especially devoted to the Blessed Sacrament. Edith Cooper died in 1912. In spite of the fact that she was suffering acute physical pain, Katharine Bradley attended Mass and was a daily communicant until the very day of her death.<sup>3</sup> The Eucharistic voice of these admirable women deserves to be far better known.

Akin to Michael Field in the enthusiasm of a mystic for the Holy Eucharist; and one, who, though not a great poet, sang his songs of truth and love into the very hearts of the people, is the Post Laureate of the Confederacy, Father Abram J. Ryan. Though his works lack the elaborate finish and grandeur of poetic genius and are incomplete, they are at least true in tone. In the "Preface" of his Poems, he says, "His feet know more of the humble steps that lead up to the Altar ~~and its~~ Mysteries than of the steepes that lead up to Parnassus and the Home of the Muses. And souls

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<sup>1</sup> William Wordsworth, "Preface" to the Lyrical Ballads, Taken from The Poetical Works of Wordsworth by Thomas Hutchinson (London, 1932), p. 938.

<sup>2</sup> T.F.R. Op. cit., p. 170.

<sup>3</sup> Theodore Maynard, Modern Catholic Verse (New York, 1927), p. 125.

were always more to him than songs."<sup>1</sup>

Too facile, too verbose, too sing-song, and too sentimental are some of the criticisms launched against Father Ryan's poems, yet he was a "born weaver of words."<sup>2</sup> Though he did not take time to hew his verses with beauty, yet in his best poems he has stirred the depths of the human heart.

In one of his longer poems which is entitled "The Immaculate Conception," there is a glowing description of Benediction. As the two beautiful hymns of the O Salutaris and Tantum Ergo are sung, the poet speaks of the Host as if awakening from its slumbers "to come forth so strangely and silent, and just for a sweet little while, "yet during this time wonders are occurring:

O beautiful Host! wilt Thou win

In the little half-hour's Benediction  
The heart of a sinner again?

Then the poet contrasts the world as it is with a world without the Host:

Came a hush, and the Host was uplifted,  
And It made just the sign of the cross  
O'er the low-bended brows of the people.  
O Host of the Holy! Thy loss

To the altar, and temple, and people  
Would make this world darkest of night;  
And our hearts would grope blindly on through it,  
For our love would have lost all its light.<sup>3</sup>

Like Father Russell, the recurring thought in Father Ryan's poems is that the

<sup>1</sup> Abram J. Ryan, "Preface," to Poems (New York, 1904), p. vii.

<sup>2</sup> Benjamin F. Musser, Franciscan Poets (New York, 1933), p. 205.

<sup>3</sup> Abram J. Ryan, Poems (New York, 1904), pp.441-450.

Holy Eucharist is Love's Captive imprisoned by his jailer, the priest, whose hands hold the key. All his life he stood in awe and wonder at the marvel of the Holy Mass and the Sacraments.

The story of "the little Host on its love-path still doing His Father's Will" is gracefully expressed in one of the poet's best works, "Feast of the Sacred Heart." The setting is that of the Holy Mass at the gracious moment of the Consecration--silence, awe, wondrous grace and power, as the words of an "olden Thursday" brings us Friday's Victim "in His own love's olden way."

As red as the red of the roses,  
As white as the white of the snows!  
But the red is a red of the surface  
Beneath which a God's Blood flows;  
And the white is the white of a sunlight  
Within which a God's Flesh glows.<sup>1</sup>

The same enthusiasm for the marvels of the Eucharist is manifest in his fiftieth anniversary poem to Father E. Sourin, S. J. in memory of the happy hours spent with him at Loyola College, Baltimore. "O chasubled soldier," he asks, "Art weary of watching the Host" or lifting the chalice? There is a repetition of the same gracious story:

Every day passes  
A part of one, great, endless feast,  
That moves round its orbit of Masses,  
And hath nor a West nor an East ....  
To lift up a Host with a chalice  
Till the story of grace shall have ceased.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Feast of the Sacred Heart," Ibid., pp. 114-116.

<sup>2</sup> "Fifty Years at the Altar," Ibid., pp. 451-456.



But perhaps nowhere does he so well reach the lofty spiritual heights as in his "Song of the Mystic." For him the Mystical Valley of Silence is prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, where, beneath the veils of obscurity and littleness, lie vistas of the inexhaustible beauties of God. In the hush of the Valley of Silence, he found his true inspiration, he found songs "too lofty for language to reach."

In the simplicity and directness of expressing the wish of the child to be "the little key that locks Love's Captive in," the tinkling bell, the chalice, and the altar, in the poem "A Child's Wish,"<sup>1</sup> the poet anticipated the sameos of the greater poet-priest of the South, Father John Bannister Tabb.

The ability to say much in little, to suggest profound thoughts by a single word--this is the extraordinary contribution to literature by Father Tabb. In his delicate workmanship he best resembles the seventeenth-century Anglican poet, Robert Herrick.<sup>2</sup> He was able to capture very powerful emotions and thoughts and confine them artistically within the limits of quatrains or very short poems.

The poem "The Good Seed," there is a direct reference to the Holy Eucharist:

The Magi came to Bethlehem,  
The House of Bread, and following them,  
As they the Star, I too am led  
To Christ, the living House of Bread.

...

<sup>1</sup> "A Child's Wish", Ibid., pp. 104-105.

<sup>2</sup> "F.A.L." "Introduction" to The Poetry of Father Tabb, p. viii.

Through waves of palpitating flame,  
The Bread upon the altar came.

...

And here, O mystery of Love,  
Behold, from highest heaven above,  
Through Me, the Son of God again,<sup>1</sup>  
A victim for the sons of men.

It was through suffering--the scythe, the flail, the stone of sacrifice that the Bread came upon the altar. Men, like the Magi, are travelling heavenward strengthened with the Life and Light of the Mystery of Love. Father Tabb always pointed to an antithesis between heaven and earth. Earth was a powerful magnet for the Eucharistic King. By abiding with men and in men He formed the bond of uniting the earth with the mystery of heaven's love.

Father Tabb's brief lyric, "Dawn," with sacerdotal Night bidding the new light to come to the sacrificial altar, is suggestive of Francis Thompson. In "Earth's Tribute," the poet declares that the greatest service that Nature can give is to furnish the things necessary for the sacrifice, for Death reaps Life by rendering to God the things of God.

Concerning the Holy Eucharist, Father Tabb rarely wrote explicitly; though all his various themes have a deep religious implication.<sup>2</sup> By reason of his careful economy of words and exquisite rhythm and diction, the superb art of his brief lyrics have achieved for him "an immortal place in American Literature."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John Bannister Tabb, The Poetry of Father Tabb (New York, 1928), pp. 219-220.

<sup>2</sup> Theodore Maynard, Op. cit., p. 317.

<sup>3</sup> F.A.L. Op. cit., p. ix.

Like Father Tabb, Joyce Kilmer was one of America's soldier poets, and one to whom the Holy Eucharist was a constant vital Power in his daily life as well as in his art.

Concerning his conversion, he wrote in one of his letters that he had believed for some time in the Catholic view of ethics and aesthetics; "But I wanted something not intellectual, some conviction not mental--in fact I wanted Faith.... Well, every morning for months I stopped on my way to the office and prayed in this Church for Faith."<sup>1</sup> In the same year, he and his family entered the Catholic Church.

This event was the turning point of his life. He became a daily communicant.<sup>2</sup> He yielded himself entirely to his new Faith. To it he ascribed the renewal of his art, for toward the close of the War he said that if what he was writing at this time was considered poetry, then he became a poet in November, 1913, the date of his Baptism.

Outstanding is his love for the Mass and the Blessed Sacrament. In his letters from war-torn France, his words ring of a deep personal love for his Tabernacled Friend. A letter to Aline Kilmer dated April 27, 1918, says: "There is no priest now in this town, but there is a fine old church, with God in it. Since there is no priest, I can't get my daily Communion, but I go in occasionally to say my prayers."<sup>3</sup> At the end of the letter he speaks of the many ways there are to go to Heaven, "but only one Lamp."

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<sup>1</sup> Joyce Kilmer, Poems, Essays, and Letters, Vol. II (New York, 1918), pp.127-128.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Inbs, "Vocation of Sergt. Kilmer," The Dauphin (June, 1932), p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Joyce Kilmer, Op. cit., p. 203.

It was his felicitous poem, "Multiplication," to which he was referring.

To treat of the poem in sections would mar its beauty of rhythm and sincere personal appeal:

I take my leave with sorrow, of Him I love so well;  
I look my last upon His small and radiant prison-cell;  
O happy lamp! to serve Him with never ceasing light!  
O happy flame! to tremble forever in His sight!

I leave the holy quiet for the loudly human train,  
And my heart that He has breathed upon is filled with lonely pain.  
O King, O Friend, O Lover! what sorer grief can be  
In all the reddest depth of Hell than banishment from Thee?

But from my window as I speed across the sleeping land,  
I see the towns and villages wherein His houses stand.  
Above the roof I see a cross outlined against the night,  
And I know that there my Lover dwells in His sacramental night.

Dominions kneel before Him, and Powers kiss His feet,  
Yet for me He keeps His lonely watch in the turmoil of the street:  
The King of Kings awaits me, wherever I may go,  
O whom I that He should deign to love and serve me so?

The intensity of the emotion is heightened by the poet's love of the Prisoned Guest and his humble grasp of what that Presence means to human life. Not the vague Presence is this "that rolls through all things," but the Divine Presence of a Personal Lover. Pathos courses through the lines—abandonment, indifference, loneliness, are His rewards; but His love surmounts ingratitude. The simplicity of the words and the rhythmical effect carry the emotion to a heightened climax, so that in the last stanza, the reader is made conscious of the infinite gulf between God and man, and our Blessed Lord's Eucharistic way of spanning that abyss.

Almost the cameos of Father Tabb are found in the simple lines of the poem "Citizen of the World." The even flow of the couplets rivals his better known poem, "Trees." One is reminded of Lionel Johnson's fondness for the symbol of the lamp:

In every land a constant lamp  
Flames by His small and mighty camp.

. . .

Cloistered beside the cloistered street,  
Silent, He calls me to His Feet.

for this Divine Citizen Whose Splendor shines through the veils, some room must be found. Though cloistered and imprisoned, the Divine King has found in every land a place whereon "to lay His Head." Characteristic it is of Kilmer's poems to have in the closing lines a note of sincere humility.

For Kilmer, the most beautiful and the most necessary thing in life was his Faith. "You see," he wrote in one of his last letters, "the Catholic Faith is such a thing that I'd rather write moderately well about it than magnificently well about anything else." He added that he could honestly offer "Main Street" and "Poems" to Our Lady that she might present them to her Son: "I hope to be able to do this with everything I write hereafter--and to be able to do this is to be a good poet."<sup>1</sup>

It was Joyce Kilmer's belief that Faith should radiate through everything one wrote whether serious or gay. Aline Kilmer, whom he begged

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<sup>1</sup> Letter to Aline Kilmer, dated Apr. 21, 1918. Ibid., p. 199.

to be zealous in using her "exquisite talent in His service,"<sup>1</sup> wrote one poem definitely about the Blessed Sacrament entitled "Vigils." A proud virile note rings throughout the first stanza:

Once I knelt in my shining mail  
Here by Thine Altar all the night.  
My heart beat proudly, my prayer rose loudly,  
But I looked to my armor to win the fight.<sup>2</sup>

The internal rhymes of the third line form a pleasing variation. The brief rhythmic poem proudly glorying in physical strength pulses to victory through a direct spiritual antithesis, humility.

The lance was but a broken reed, the mace a toy, and cruel wounds were the cost of pride; self alone was not sufficient for winning the battle. But humble prayer before the Blessed Sacrament could renew strength, could mend the broken heart and guide the arm so that the hero might again go "back to the fight." The triumph of humility characteristic of Joyce Kilmer's last lines is likewise plainly evident in this charming poem.

If through the eyes of sincere Catholic poets the Holy Eucharist triumphed over Nature and the works of men, there were others who visioned forth the scientific world conquered by the strength of the Eucharist. Of these poets, Alfred Noyes is important. When he began work on his trilogy, The Torchbearers in 1924, Alfred Noyes was a non-Catholic; but at the completion of the third book, The Last Voyage in 1930, he was a convert. The marvellous order and law he found in Science convinced him that behind existence there must be a powerful Being--so great that He can wrap Infinitude

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 198.

<sup>2</sup> Aline Kilmer, Vigils (New York 1928), p. 42.

within a tiny Host and welds earth with heaven by the strength of His King-  
liness.

The main preoccupation of Noyes was the place of Science in the field of knowledge. His solution is that Science is but the handmaid of religion; that the victories of scientific discoveries confirm belief in God rather than destroy it. As Thompson would have Nature on her knees before the Eucharistic Christ, so Noyes would have Science in adoration before the little White Host.

In the final book of the masterly epic of Science, The Last Voyage, the poet is homeward bound on a sea voyage. He is searching many of the deepest questions that can fill the human mind--the eternal reaches of the starry heavens; the limitation of Time and Space; beauty, truth, eternity, and death--for a child is dying aboard ship.

The colours of the world are in our eyes;  
The music of the world is in our ears;

...

This means, I take it, that the world is made  
For souls; and that God's image here on earth  
Communes with its Creator...

What does it mean--this order, this growth of control over the space-time world? Armies of facts melt into wilder chaos. Fragments of truth are found, but where is the bond that will unite them into a whole? He calls for the Angelic Doctor; a new Aquinas "a pontifex to make our sun-dered truths as true a whole as...the orchestral personality of man."<sup>1</sup> Each

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<sup>1</sup> Alfred Noyes, The Last Voyage (New York, 1930), p. 59.

separate fact fits into the general body of Truth. In all things, especially in man, the poet perceives a mysterious unity where each separate note "not only plays its part within that Whole, but is itself a symphony in little," so great that it reflects the music of the spheres.<sup>1</sup>

In man's midget world, we read letters and words, not sentences; we see only broken images of the Completeness for which the heart longs. The dying child is the center of the most serious thoughts of time, of eternity, and of the nearness of God.

So Space and Time,  
As Plato, Hegel, Einstein, groped to see,  
Dissolve into a shadow of man's mind;  
And the one God is ever Here and Now,  
God in the heights and on ten thousand altars,  
Revealed to man, when the blind doors are opened,  
And the Bread broken, and the Incarnate Word  
Breathes thro' the worlds which veil Him from our sight,  
Est enim Corpus Meum.

There are arguments that Science had dissolved the ancient Faith into a rose-pink myth, but the reply comes swiftly and surely that behind all facts there is the Infinite, and that "he who discerns the Infinite in his heart transcends all human science...When this vision dawns on our human minds, we can but kneel."<sup>2</sup> Then, indeed, is the spirit of man strengthened. Against a mocking world, he stands up alone "and drinks defeat like victory."<sup>3</sup>

But blind men cannot see, nor deaf men hear. Through Nature's laws, through the sunset rift, through the cry of birds and the rainbow's

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 112-113.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 131.



magic ring, there is the gracious power of an Eternal Will pulsing a wonderful love through all His gifts, especially His best Gift, the Blessed Sacrament.

Not thine to understand  
How the two worlds accord--  
The will of Love, our Lord,  
With this dark wheel of Time.  
Yet thou didst hear them shine  
Like one deep Sanctus bell  
For the pure Host revealed  
In the exquisite miracle  
Of that white chance-dropt flower;  
A flower from a known field,  
And dropt by a mortal hand...<sup>1</sup>

In our earth-bound age, men cannot be looked upon as puppets to be jerked into position by a string. The constancy of His laws which runs through all things like music is God's seal on His Remembrance of men. It is love that forms the melody. Not until we realize this wonder do we perceive that the very best things have never been seen. Then, as a rich undertone, the voice of Aquin comes through the ages:

Visus, tactus, gustus,  
In te fallitur.  
Sed auditu solo  
Tuto creditur.

Men clutch at bubbles in the shadowy flux of things. They thirst for reality. From the marvel of a starry-flecked sky-land to the tinting of the poorest blossom there is a control ruling each atom--the Final Cause, God. The poet exultantly cries out with St. Augustine: "Whose Will, O God, but Thine? Our minds are restless till they rest in Thee." It is as if

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 151.

the voice of the angel thrilled through the years: "He is not dead. The Light you seek is risen!"

Risen and still remains! The one mind-shattering Miracle--the one Impossible Fact is and lives. The Divine Lover is with His people, present on land or sea, wherever there is Holy Mass. The poet follows a throng on the deck of the ship until he finds a group kneeling before an altar "spread with a linen cloth, whiter than snow," with two candles ablaze:

Those twin flames  
With that dark Crucifix, standing in the midst,  
Of that pure altar, on the moving ship,  
Marked but a moving shrine in one vast Fane.<sup>1</sup>

As the heaving ocean swells and tosses, all eyes are directed to one Center - to the Mystery of the Chalice and the Host. It is the solemn moment of the Canon of the Holy Mass:

Santus, sanctus, sanctus,  
Dominus Deus. Heaven and earth are full  
of Thy pure glory.

Then the heights and depths  
Met in one point,--I saw the Host upraised,  
Above the struggling sea, against the sky,  
Gathering a million thoughts into one centre,  
With all those cloud-like drifting earth-bound dreams  
Of Something far more deeply interfused  
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns;  
Closed in Reality now.<sup>2</sup>

The solemn act is a clear Fact -- a fulfillment of the words:  
In memory of Me. Through the distance of Time and Space, the living, present, personal Act continues for He uses mortal hands of flesh and blood

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 178.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 180.

"to break that Bread and pour that Wine." There is no marvel either in Science or in life comparable to this miracle. Then for the past Time and Space dissolve. It is two thousand years ago. By His own transfiguring entrance the God-Man ennobled the Nature He had made, that human life might share His own on high at last. And now the poet brings out the real significance of the Holy Eucharist. It is God "stooping to Man, that men might rise to God." So great is the Little White Host that the poet can turn neither to art, nor science, nor life. He marches straight to a triumphant close with the Host victorious over land and sea:

There, as that Host, upraised against the sky,  
Bowed every head, I saw ten thousand shrines,  
Ten thousand altars, in the self-same Act  
Made one, and shadowing forth that Act in heaven  
Before which all those heavenly armies kneel...  
All these and more made one by that one sign,  
One thin white disk upraised against the sky,  
There, in one strict centering point at last,  
Closed all the thoughts and aims of earth and heaven,  
Shone the one signal that could never change,  
The ultimate sea-mark of our voyaging souls. <sup>1</sup>

With the Mystical Body, the poet is concerned, "earth's common Bread, Bread of a thousand grains, compact in one." It was exquisite love that involved the supernatural and eternal Being in our mortal destinies, our mortal pains and griefs.<sup>2</sup> Our lives are touched with light from a nobler realm. Our voyaging souls find peace only in the abyss of His Eucharistic love, the love that veils the white disk which is heaven on earth for man.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 181-182.

<sup>2</sup> Alfred Noyes, The Unknown God (New York, 1934), p. 382.

## CHAPTER V.

### AN AESTHETIC AND CRITICAL APPRECIATION

"The most enthusiastic romances are cold and tame compared with the simplest and barest statement of what we believe about the infinite bounty of our Emmanuel."

Father Matthew Russell, S. J.

The limitations of this study preclude the complete presentation of modern Eucharistic poetry, especially the excellent occasional poems which are produced in the field of the new poetry of to-day. However, within these narrow bounds, the investigation has yielded certain facts which are of literary and historical interest.

With the exception of Francis Thompson<sup>1</sup> and Father Matthew Russell, the poets of the early group whose works have been treated, were all converts to the Faith. It is their glory that they were the pioneers in re-opening the four-centuries-closed-trail of Catholic poetry in English literature.

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<sup>1</sup>Coventry Patmore admitted this difference in regard to Thompson, "He is of all men I have known most naturally a Catholic. My Catholicism was acquired, his inherent." Parrot and Thorpe, in the "Introduction" to Poetry of the Transition, p. xxxi.

Panis vivus et vitalis, the Life-Giving Bread was known to everyone in the days of St. Thomas Aquinas. With the repudiation of the doctrine of Transubstantiation in the sixteenth century, those who still treasured the Truth were forced, as it were, to hide it from view. Catholics, because they had been excluded from the universities, missed the broader culture which might have been theirs, and up to the close of the nineteenth century were reduced to the level of a despised and impotent sect.<sup>1</sup> Naturally the effect of this isolation is reflected in the scantiness of the Eucharistic works of the brave little coterie of the nineties.

The poets themselves were conscious of the fact that they were not writing for the general public. The thought having grown esoteric, even the language they used seems strange; "What is known as preciousness clings about their work."<sup>2</sup> The Eucharist was a Thing of the past for their audience. Their song was sweet, but it was only for a selected group. Though their poetry is characterized by a refined delicacy rather than by a staunch robustness, nevertheless their achievement was so great that its influence is still felt to-day.

Another characteristic which is strongly apparent in their Eucharistic poems is that the poets emphasized the subjective rather than the objective attitude. In the democratic medieval days, the objectivity of the Church was stressed; it was the Mass more than the Holy Communion that they described. Now, however, surrounded by a Protestant atmosphere in which

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<sup>1</sup> Stanley B. James, "Alice Meynell," in The Sentinel, (July, 1936), p. 369.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 370.

individual introspective piety was emphasized, like their non-Catholic contemporaries, the Catholic poets dwell "more on the experience produced by the Blessed Sacrament than on what It is in Itself."<sup>1</sup> Very particularly is this subjective attitude evident in the Eucharistic poems of Mrs. Meynell and Father Hopkins' translation of the Adoro Te.

It will be noted likewise that references to the Holy Eucharist are often more implicit than explicit, and that there are only a few Eucharistic poems in comparison to the general field of subject-matter in the poets' works. Especially in the poetry of Thompson and Patmore is this noticeable. Chesterton, the master of paradox, has scarcely touched the deepest source of paradox and truth, the Holy Eucharist. This is not surprising by reason of the nature of the theme which so far transcends man's thought; then, too, there may be the fear that the modern reader is not fitted to conceive such ideas, as Blackmur says, without "imaginative resurrection."<sup>2</sup> The Eucharist is God's secret and the soul's -- words, at best, falter in their mission before its magnitude.

One notes with enthusiasm that in reference to the Eucharist, the whole creation of nature takes on a fresh significance, a new beauty. No longer is nature pictured as bleak and bare, "red in the tooth" to destroy and crush, but is exalted to a high plane by her reference to the supernatural. Christ walked the cornfields and roads, plucked fruit from the trees, and frequented the sea-side and the mountains. Artistically and poetically, all

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 370.

<sup>2</sup> R. P. Blackmur, "T. S. Eliot," The Double Agent, p. 205.

nature takes on a rich symbolism. All objects have become elevated by the dignity of His Presence--the grapes on the vine, the yellowed grain, the ears of corn, the flowers of the field, the wax of the bees, incense, gold--all are but external things manifesting to the senses a profound spiritual reality. Nature, as it were, lifts her heart and hands in adoration. Francis Thompson makes nature serve her highest purpose when she yields herself--crushes the chrysolite of the grape and the golden sheaves of grain--immolates herself for the Holy Eucharist, the "Victim daily born and sacrificed."<sup>1</sup> The Christian poet comes in much closer relationship to nature than the atheist or agnostic, for he knows that the Divine Son of God chose the common appearances of bread and wine to be the physical media whereby He would leave Himself with men. Surely nature could not be more highly honored and exalted.

If nature is elevated by her relationship to the Eucharist so that all creation is enriched with new values, symbolism and meaning, so, too, the Eucharist is the Power that ushers in the novus homo, God's masterpiece. The Eucharist gives a "sadly decrepit humanity" a chance to be re-born, to be renewed in spirit "and put on the new man." (Eph., iv, 23). Pre-eminently this is the role of the Holy Eucharist--to "connect" the Immortal with the mortal, God with man, and by this touch to elevate man. That your lives "may be filled unto all the fulness of God," (Eph. iii, 19) is St. Paul's manner of expressing this tremendous thought. The Oriental method of speech is significant. To be filled with the "fulness" of the divine Life--such is the intense desire of the Eucharistic Companion for His loved one--Man.

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<sup>1</sup> "The Orient Ode," L. 192.

Friendship has always been a favorite theme in literature, but this surpassing love of Christ is somewhat more than friendship. It was He who took the initiative, who bridged the gulf between the Infinite and the finite in order that men might "abide" with Him and in Him. Paradoxical as it may appear, the inner loneliness of our generation because of its emphasis on naturalism and devotion to externalism, finds its remedy in the rendezvous of the Blessed Sacrament, where "the graciousness of God meets the special need of our age"<sup>1</sup>— man's desire for the divine. The Eucharistic poets have woven into their poetry the old yet new meaning of the exquisite love of Him who "graced us in His beloved Son" (Eph. 1, 6). Surely man can be elevated to no higher dignity than that to which the Holy Eucharist exalts him.

Of such a character is the burning mysticism of a Coventry Patmore, a Francis Thompson, a Michael Field, and a Father Faber. The essential note of Catholic poetry lies precisely in this mysticism which must be mined beneath the surface of things. "A valid mysticism is dependent on the Blessed Sacrament...Through this humble gateway we pass into the palace of the King and into the Inner Chamber of the Royal Lover."<sup>2</sup> How different, indeed, this mysticism is from the doctrine of the pseudo-mystic, who, as Arthur Symons says, "demands no authority for the unseen hand whose fingers he feels upon his wrists."<sup>3</sup> He conceives life as a wandering ship blown about in an angry sea from which there is no sight of land; of himself he will never know why his hand should turn the rudder one way or another. With the Eucharistic

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<sup>1</sup> James Langland, "The Great Companion" in The Sentinel (Sept. 1936), p. 465.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 466.

<sup>3</sup> Arthur Symons, The Symbolist Movement in Literature, - p. 63.



poets there is only one Way, one Truth, one Life; and the certainty of their aim pulses through their work with a note of joyful triumph. Not for them the pessimism of the agnostic poet, A. E. Housman, who complained:

Who made the world I cannot tell,  
'Tis made, and here I am in hell.<sup>1</sup>

. . . . .

When shall this slough of sense be cast,  
This dust of thoughts be laid at last,  
The man of flesh and soul be slain  
And the man of bone remain? <sup>2</sup>

Rather the Catholic poet can sing of the wonders possible to human life simply because of the Holy Eucharist. With Francis Thompson, he joyfully exclaims:

Short arms needs man to reach to heaven,  
So ready is heaven to stoop to him.

or the pleading lines of his poem, "Any Saint:"

Ah, Love! somewhat let be--  
Lest my humility  
Grow weak  
When Thou dost speak.<sup>3</sup>

"With Christians," declares the great Cardinal Newman, "a poetical view of things is a duty...Even our friends around us are invested with un-earthly brightness--no longer imperfect man, but beings taken into divine favor, stamped with His seal, and in training for future happiness."<sup>4</sup> We

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<sup>1</sup> A. E. Housman in More Poems, (London, 1936), p. 36.

<sup>2</sup> A. E. Housman, "The Immortal Part," in A Shropshire Lad (New York, 1935), p. 58.

<sup>3</sup> "Any Saint," L. 25-30.

<sup>4</sup> John Henry Newman, Poetry, With Reference To Aristotle's Poetics (Boston, 1894),

are truly brought into a new world of sublimest ideals and of tenderest, purest feelings. Soon after the time of Newman, poets began to appreciate the fact that style borrows beauty, as it were, from the literary content; and that spiritual things offered the very best subjects for artistic treatment.

For beauty of content, there could be no subject more glorious than the Holy Eucharist. No doubt this accounts for the fact that one of the loveliest and oldest concerns of the Church is her devotion to the artistic and poetic.<sup>1</sup> It is her glory that she houses the Source of Beauty, Goodness, and Truth--The Blessed Sacrament. Francis Thompson said that the whole world was a thing of beauty to him because it was "so secretly bridal and divinely sacramental." The poets caught the significance and the beauty of the Divine Guest's earth-abiding home. In all human arts there are certain canons by which beauty may be discerned. With the Holy Eucharist, however, the Sacramental Guest Himself is all beauty, all goodness, all wisdom; yet there are certain special canons of beauty, Father Faber observes, which are united in a very remarkable manner in the Blessed Sacrament.

There are really five criteria<sup>2</sup> by which this Divine Beauty is evident; first, the lowest depth of condescension possible; the Blessed Sacrament by its littleness and humiliation under the lowly guise of a thin wafer

<sup>1</sup> Commonweal, "The Ministry of Beauty," Article unsigned (Jan. 1931), p. 295.

<sup>2</sup> Frederick William Faber, The Blessed Sacrament, p. 38-40. In Section I of Book I, Father Faber treats of the canons of the Divine Works, and in Section II, he shows how these canons are united in the Transubstantiation.

carries the divine condescension to the very lowest depths possible; secondly, the greatest height to which a human creature can be elevated; there can certainly be no greater privilege or honor for man than the reception of the Bread of the Altar; thirdly, the purely spiritual character of the operation; The Blessed Sacrament ministers to the refinement and enlargement of our spiritual faculties; fourthly, the union of continuity and multiplicity; constantly the Mass is being said in some part of the world, and multitudes of Hosts are received daily or repose in the tabernacle; fifthly, the presentation of the greatest number of the Divine Perfections; the Holy Eucharist is the overflowing Boon of Goodness, Mercy, Truth, Beauty, and Love--all perfections in One. In Catholic poetry, beauty can never be divorced from Primal beauty.<sup>1</sup> It is welded in the souls of saints as well as in the liturgy of the Church. In sublimity, all the mountains and oceans cannot rival the Holy Mass, nor in the vast creation of nature is there anything half so lovely.<sup>2</sup> In a word, the Holy Eucharist is Beauty itself.

Likewise the Holy Eucharist is the embodiment of truth. We cannot agree with the modern schools that would empty poetry of all thought and etherealize it till it melts in the strains of music."<sup>3</sup> "The aim of poetry," says S. H. Butcher, in his learned work, "Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art, "is to represent the universal through the particular, to give a concrete and living embodiment of a universal truth."<sup>4</sup> If, then,

<sup>1</sup> Francis Thompson, "Shelley" Op. cit., p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Bishop Kelley in "Dominus Vobiscum" as quoted in The Sentinel (July, 1936)p.372.

<sup>3</sup> S. H. Butcher, Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art (London, 1927) p.147.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 192.

poetry is the art of giving expression to the beautiful, and as E. I. Watkins affirms, "beauty is the expression and index of truth,"<sup>1</sup> then poetry should vision forth truth. In regard to the Blessed Sacrament, the artist deals with no figure nor promise. He deals with the fulfillment of the promise and types--the divine Fount of Truth Itself.

For the Eucharistic poet, the romantic irony of the nineteenth century and of to-day is unthinkable. We find the situation of romantic irony to be like this:

There is the assumption that Truth is indifferent or hostile to the desires of man; that these desires were formerly nurtured on legend, myth, all kinds of insufficient experiment; that Truth being known at last in the form of experimental science, it is intellectually impossible to maintain illusion any longer, at the same time that it is morally impossible to assimilate Truth.<sup>2</sup>

To the poet, then, life is a frustration. In his revolt from truth, he defies the cruel naturalistic world to break him if it can. A Shelley is broken, and a Hart Crane cries out, "Lie to us! Dance us back our tribal morn." His one hope of escape from life is a return to the past,-to the Golden Age.<sup>3</sup>

A direct antithesis to this romantic irony is the glorious truth of the Eucharist. Experimental science cannot be in conflict with truth. In his epic, The Torchbearers, Alfred Noyes makes each fact of science fit into the general body of truth. Then he searches for a bond to unite all

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<sup>1</sup> E. I. Watkins, A Philosophy of Form, p. 329.

<sup>2</sup> Allen Tate, Reactionary Essays on Poetry and Ideas (New York, 1936), p.96.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 97.

the scattered bits of truth into a whole. That principle would have to be something in the world and at the same time above it, something both human and divine.<sup>1</sup> That Bond is none other than the greatest Gift the world can possess, the Blessed Sacrament. Instead of being broken, man is elevated, refined, and spiritualized by Truth Itself Who still "abides" in his midst.

In the modern ferment of ideas, poets are seeking for some link strong enough to unite disparate things that they may be assured of stability. It cannot be the bridge of a Hart Crane, nor any material thing for objects pass away with time. It cannot be poetry,<sup>2</sup> as I. A. Richards maintains, nor anything abstract as beauty or music. It cannot be man, for man being mortal, is subject to death and oblivion. The immense power that is higher and yet most intimately linked with man is again the Holy Eucharist.

And this union is no slight bond. It is an integration of Blood with blood, the most intimate union, "communion" which can ever be imagined. It is contact of Life with life. Its power is so great that it can level national and racial boundaries, for the altar-rail knows no measuring line but love. All belong to one great race and one great nation--children of the kingdom of Heaven. Alice Meynell sees in the social aspects of the Mass and Holy Communion how man is truly brother to man in Christ.<sup>3</sup> The superb democracy of the Eucharist where the laborer kneels beside the employer and the peasant beside the king is unequalled in the annals of men. Dr. Sheen's words again are pertinent:

<sup>1</sup> Calvert Alexander, Op. cit., p. 267.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 267. "It is capable of saving us;" are I. A. Richards words, "it is a perfectly possible means of overcoming chaos."

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

The Communion rail is therefore the most democratic institution on the face of the earth, for there all men are made equal because all sons of God. The modern world tries to unite men on the basis of economic equality, namely, by sharing wealth, as is done in Communism. The Eucharist, on the contrary, unites men on the basis of brotherhood. Men are not brothers because they share equally; otherwise, thieves who share loot would be brothers. But brothers may share. The Eucharist, because it starts with brotherhood, makes all men equal...infinitely precious as sons of God.<sup>1</sup>

It is here that one learns "the charity of Christ which surpasseth all knowledge" (Eph. iv. 19) in order to be able to "walk in love" as St. Paul repeatedly counsels. In his stirring book, Fire on the Earth, Paul Hanly Furfey of the Catholic University of America asserts that it is only by turning to the Holy Eucharist as the Source and Center of strength that there will be true charity to social groups.<sup>2</sup> A social revolution may be brought about by the regeneration of souls through the mighty power of the Eucharist. The poet can merely grapple with the thought through the poverty of words.

Political, national, and racial ideas received a new direction in the Eucharistic works of Francis Thompson, Alice Meynell, Alfred Noyes, and Michael Field. They visioned forth a Christocentric universe with the Sacred Host as the triumphant explanation to the deep meaning of life, as the fulfillment of a great promise, and the ground of the eternal hope walling in the heart of man. "The Eucharist is a greater Leveller than

<sup>1</sup> Sheen, Op. cit., p. 367.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Hanly Furfey, Fire on the Earth (New York, 1936), p. 56.

death;" says Dr. Sheen, "it dissolves all boundaries, nationalities and races into a supernatural fellowship where all men are brothers of the Divine Son and adopted sons of the Heavenly Father."<sup>1</sup>

The Pre-Raphaelites, the Symbolist and the aesthetic schools as well as the movement of the little Catholic group at the close of the century were wedges against the Naturalism and mechanism of their day. The almost universal religious indifferentism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries together with the advent of rationalism had produced confused restlessness and spiritual nostalgia. The Pre-Raphaelites, by the abundant external details of their symbolism, missed the soul that inspired these beauties. The aesthetic movement, though it likewise had spiritual implications, in its pursuit of beauty for its own sake in the L'art pour l'art theory, developed into a veritable religion which brought about its eventual downfall. "The cult of the beautiful, the deification of man, and the triumph of technical achievement" drove the age to a "progressive moral bankruptcy of humanity."<sup>2</sup>

In the Symbolist movement, which flourished in France rather than in England, poetry was more a matter of the sensations and emotions of the individual. So much was it a private concern of the poet that oftentimes the reader could not understand it. The symbols the poet chose were to stand for certain ideas of his own.<sup>3</sup> In his efforts to "approximate the indefiniteness of music" there arose a medley of images and mixed metaphors.

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<sup>1</sup> Sheen, Op. cit., p. 368.

<sup>2</sup> Frederick M. Lynk, The Holy Eucharist and Christian Life (Illinois, 1926), p. 26.

<sup>3</sup> Edmund Wilson, Axel's Castle, p. 20.

In this manner he hoped to produce a suggestive indefiniteness of the vague and a species of spiritual effect.<sup>1</sup> How different is this vague symbolism from that employed by the Eucharistic poet whose symbolism is invested with a tremendous spiritual significance.<sup>2</sup> He does not simply express his own personal feelings. He does not confuse the real with the vague, the unpractical, the undefined. There is no blur of the infinite with the finite, nor the mystical and mysterious with the indefinite. For him, "things are symbols of the divine."<sup>3</sup> For him there is only one Way, one Truth, and one Life--and the Light of the Way, the Torch of the Truth, and the Breath of the Life is the Blessed Sacrament.

It is significant that in the turmoil of these trends, the poets who most successfully battled the storms "were mured within the Catholic faith. The Church of Rome is experienced in crises of this sort...Patmore, Alice Meynell, Hopkins, Dowson, and Johnson submitted themselves to find authority, a permanent peace, and fulfillment."<sup>4</sup> They found the things which had ennobled and elevated life in the Church, - not only peace, but likewise the desire of their day for cultural satisfactions. Fearlessly, they kept to the supernatural viewpoint; they linked life with mystery, and time with the grandeurs of eternity; they sang of the glories of life and of the universe because they knew that earth housed the magnificent King and Guest of the Eucharist. In a survey of the literature at the close of the century, the efforts of the little Catholic group cannot be ignored.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Supra pp.16 - 20.

<sup>3</sup> Sheen, The Life of All Living, p. 216.

<sup>4</sup> Parrott & Thorpe, "Introduction" to Poetry of the Transition, p. xxxi.



Paradoxical as it may appear, this is a Eucharistic age. Perhaps never before has there been such elaborate, public demonstration of devotion as has been attested at the Eucharistic Congresses within the last few years-- at Chicago, Dublin, Cleveland, and Manila. The Sacred Host has blessed mankind with human hand from the airplane; and at Budapest, Hungary, where the thirty-fourth International Congress is being held this May, plans are made for a solemn procession of boats on the Danube with the Blessed Sacrament held in blessing over the waters and war-racked neighboring lands. It was left to this age to be a time of frequent Communion. When Pius X, the Pope of the Eucharist, in 1905 issued the decree on frequent Communion in general for all Christians, and in 1910<sup>1</sup>, the decree on early and frequent Communion of children, he may be said to have ushered in a Eucharistic century. It was left to this age also to establish the beautiful feast of Christ the King: "In the dispensation of the fulness of times, to re-establish all things in Christ" (Eph. 1, 10.) A King of Kings, truly, is the Eucharistic Prisoner. By His royal silence, the Divine King powerfully proclaims from the tabernacle His triple office of King, Teacher, and Priest. It were strange if the mutterings of the Eucharistic poet could not find articulation.

The Holy Eucharist is a tremendous Reality. "Res mirabilis" indeed it is to walk the earth and carry heaven within the depths of one's heart. "The present epoch," says Bishop Hedley, "is the epoch of frequent and fervent Communion."<sup>2</sup> Life cannot be a negation, a frustration; the Divine Life is the Power to rejuvenate the heart of man. The Pope of the Eucharist once said, "Once for all, beloved children, the surest, easiest

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<sup>1</sup> Lynk, Op. cit., p. 28.

<sup>2</sup> Hedley, Op. cit., p. 258.

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shortest way is by the Eucharist. It is so easy to approach the Holy Table, and there we taste the joys of Paradise."<sup>1</sup> All the year round, the festive board of the Church is spread for her 350,000,000 adherents.<sup>2</sup> And the Food she gives is the Flesh and Blood of Christ to keep her children in the bond of love and truth, irrespective of race, class, or nation. Every second four chalices are lifted; and every day 350,000 Masses are said.<sup>3</sup> Here is Reality. We need not go back nineteen hundred years to find Christ. He is our Contemporary in the Blessed Eucharist. In our God-hungry times, when poets are straining for new subject-matter and hopeful themes, there could be found no theme which is so intimately bound with human life as the Eucharist. The approach, however, could only be one of love and deep reverence.

If this is a Eucharistic age, it is likewise the Sturm-und-Drang Periode of a New Paganism, agnosticism, and atheistic communism. For the so-called intelligensia, religion is somewhat antedated, outworn. But "religion is one of the fundamental needs, even an instinct, imbedded in man's nature."<sup>4</sup> Take it away and there must be some substitute for it. To-day Culture tends to usurp religion. One hears the challenge, "The Christian faith is of course impossible to the man of culture."<sup>5</sup> For the romantic and the modern humanist, evil entirely disappears. Then again, there are those who profess faith in civilization and material progress. It is refreshing to note the attitude of T. S. Eliot, one of the foremost literary

<sup>1</sup> F. A. Forbes, Life of Pius X (London, 1919), p. 103.

<sup>2</sup> "Testing the United Church," Article unsigned, The Sentinel (May, 1937), p. 222.

<sup>3</sup> Mass Clock.

<sup>4</sup> A. Longfellow Fiske, "Our Mutual Need," The Sentinel (June, 1936), p. 301.

<sup>5</sup> T. S. Eliot, Selected Essays (New York, 1932), p. 347.

critics of our day; "If you mean a spiritual and intellectual co-ordination on a high level, then it is doubtful whether civilization can endure without religion, and religion without a Church."<sup>1</sup> But the Church exists only to throw her huge arms lovingly about the Tabernaclcd King. Within her precincts she houses the Noblest Hero of all times. That is her only excuse for being. There can be no Ersatz for her Treasure.

A tender, divine tragedy elings about the Blessed Sacrament. "Noblese Oblige" is man to have the Mighty God think so much of him as to dwell constantly in his midst and to enter into such intimate relations with him. Man will never be able to realize the vast wonders of which his soul is the theater.<sup>2</sup> It is as if all things were the Divine Master's except the Kingdom of men's hearts, and that is precisely the one thing He wants. "Everywhere," says Father Faber, "the Blessed Sacrament is regarded an an Intruder in His own creation."<sup>3</sup> In his very excellent essay, "Aesthetic Contemplation," E. I. Watkins touches the truth of this tragedy in these words:

Great tragedy arises therefore only where, though the presence or surviving memory of a great religious tradition solicits the soul with desire for God, and keeps in view the depths of the human spirit with its capacity and need of the infinite, that tradition has been rejected or so seriously questioned that a more or less conscious agnosticism prevails, at least among the intelligensia.<sup>4</sup>

The tragedy of Protestantism is that men lost belief in the Real Presence.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 390.

<sup>2</sup> Catholic World, "The Actuality of the Supernatural," by Rev. Edward Leen, C.S.Sp., (October, 1937), p. 96.

<sup>3</sup> Faber, Op. cit., p. 536.

<sup>4</sup> E. I. Watkins, A Philosophy of Form, p. 347.

The Blessed Sacrament has been from the time of its institution and all through the centuries the very "heart and soul" of Christianity, a prolongation or extension of Christ-Life, a present Christ. The Saints, and the poets, as we have seen, have caught glimpses of this "Pearl of Great Price." "The greatest tragedy of life," said Msgr. Fulton J. Sheen in a radio speech last year, "is not what happens to souls, but what they miss!"

It would exceed the bounds of this humble study of the Angelic theme in modern poetry to treat of the many occasional Eucharistic poems that are produced to-day. Especially noteworthy are the excellent translations of the Latin poems by the Rt. Rev. Hugh T. Henry, the devotional poems of Emily Hickey, and Mary Dixon Thayer, the lyrics of Helen Parry Eden, Sister M. Madeleva, J. Corson Miller, and many other contemporary poets of both England and America. It is gratifying to note the Eucharistic lyrics that appear in The Catholic World, The Sign, America, Spirit, The Sentinel as well as in various other Catholic publications. No longer is the Eucharistic voice a hushed one, reduced to the works of a little coterie of artists. It arises from any section of the nation and from every class of peoples. Just last year from Ireland came a new voice in the terse and impassioned poems, "Post-Communion,"<sup>1</sup> and "Immolation," of Roibeárd Ó Faracháin. A tender simplicity and appeal rings from his short burning lines:

On taut air -- bells: lifted, adoring eyes;  
and sinner, seraph, G O D, look upon G O D.

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Christ, star-told in the east,  
Christ, lover of "these least,"  
Christ of the marriage-feast  
in this White Host.

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<sup>1</sup> Roibeárd Ó Faracháin, (Robert Farren), Thronging Feet (New York 1936), p. 11-12. The poem is cited in the Appendix on p. 163.

Christ of the uncast stone,  
Christ in the garden prone,  
Christ agonized, alone  
in this White Host. 1

"A dedicated spirit" is the true poet. Like Milton and Wordsworth, we find a similar dedication in the austere and ascetic life of Lionel Johnson who once wrote to a friend, "I am a priest consecrated, but I won't have a parish but try to get the loaves and fishes by literature."<sup>2</sup> Especially in Francis Thompson, one notes the sacerdotal purpose. In Nature, Thompson could see "God's daughter, who stretches her hand only to her Father's friends."<sup>3</sup> In his poem "Carmen Genesis" he says of the poet:

And what thy Maker in the whole  
Worked, little maker, in thy soul  
Thou work'st, and men know not.

As the tiller of the soil by his labor brings forth bread and wine from the earth to be the material food of man, and as the priest consecrates the bread and wine into the Flesh and Blood of Christ to be man's spiritual food, so the poet, as a representative midway between these two spheres, supplies appropriate food to the minds and hearts of men.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps no one has made a better analogy of this thought than E. I. Watkins in his learned work, The Bow in the Clouds:

And the artist, nature's priest, does on his lower plane what the liturgical priest does on the higher. Both are to offer a sacrifice of praise, respectively natural and supernatural. The rubric bids the

1 "Immolation," Appendix, pp. 161-163.

2 Stanley B. James, "The Poet as Priest," The Sentinel (Dec. 1936), p. 629.

3 "Nature's Immortality," Prose Works, p. 82.

4 Stanley B. James, Op. cit., pp. 629-631.

priest at the opening of the Canon spread out, raise and join his hands, lifting his eyes to heaven to drop them immediately to the altar in a profound reverence. The artist also spreads out his hands to embrace the whole of nature, sub-human and human, in a generous and universal acceptance and love, then raises his hands and eyes in aspiration to that higher World of Spirit whence its patterns derive."<sup>1</sup>

The poet ministers to the intellectual life. He re-creates his intense soul-vision. "Thus does the poet," says Stanley B. James, "in the very nature of his work, recall the Blessed Sacrament. With the priest, the prince and the peasant, he is a representative man necessary to the very existence of human society."<sup>3</sup>

But poetry, be it remembered, is but the humble handmade of religion. To-day drama shares with poetry in being a vital force in life. The time is ripe, many critics declare,<sup>3</sup> for real poetic drama; for in intense emotion, the human soul seeks an outlet in verse. The first drama centered about the Holy Eucharist. "The perfect and ideal drama," T. S. Eliot asserts in his scholarly essay, "A Dialog on Dramatic Poetry," "is to be found in the ceremony of the Mass."

I say that the consummation of the drama...is to be found in the ceremony of the Mass. I say...that drama springs from religious liturgy, and that it cannot afford to depart far from religious liturgy. I agree...that the problem of drama was simpler for Aristotle, and for Dryden and for Corneille than for us. They had only to take things as

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<sup>1</sup> E. I. Watkins, The Bow in the Clouds (London, 1931), p. 100; Philosophy of Form p. 349.

<sup>2</sup> Op. Cit., p. 632.

<sup>3</sup> T. S. Eliot says that "the tendency of prose drama is to emphasize the ephemeral and superficial; if we want to get at the permanent and universal, we tend to express ourselves in verse." Cf. Selected Essays, p. 34. And T.E. Hulme says, "I prophesy that a period of dry, hard, classical verse is coming." Cf. Speculations, p. 133.

they found them. But when drama has ranged as far as it has in our own day, is not the only solution to return to religious liturgy? And the only dramatic satisfaction that I find now is in a High Mass well performed. Have you not there everything necessary? And indeed, if you consider the ritual of the Church during the cycle of the year, you have the complete drama represented. The Mass is a small drama, having all the unities; but in the Church year you have represented the full drama of creation.<sup>1</sup>

But T. S. Eliot does not make the mistake of substituting drama for religion. In the Mass, he says, one is in an entirely different state of mind; one is not simply attending a drama; "he is participating--and that makes all the difference."<sup>2</sup> The Mass is no shadow-land of symbols; rather it is the performance of the most tremendous and awful mysteries wherein God approaches man. "What takes place at the altar," says Karl Young in his criticism of medieval drama, "is not an aesthetic picture of a happening in the past but a genuine renewal of it."<sup>3</sup> The Mass is a solemn act of worship; literature and art must simply minister to her magnificence and beauty.

And this brings us to the strong assertion that poetry must be subordinated to something higher than itself. It must die to live; it must be crucified. The Christian artist must ever keep before his mind that the very end of man is to glorify God. When he neglects this end, then indeed, is his art degraded. Francis Thompson, in his poem "Mistress of Vision," "announces the awful truths of Christian asceticism--the necessity of sacrifice for the salvation of an individual soul as well as for the

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<sup>1</sup> T. S. Eliot, Selected Essays, p. 35.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>3</sup> Karl Young, The Drama of the Medieval Church, Vol. I (Oxford, 1933), p. 84.

regeneration of the world and of poetry."<sup>1</sup> When the artist sacrifices his art, when he obliterates himself as an artist "to think of himself only as a man and a child of God," then is his art purged and his genius reborn.<sup>2</sup> In modern criticism, this constant surrender of the artist to something which is more valuable is called depersonalization. T. S. Eliot insists that the progress of an artist "is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality."<sup>3</sup> Of Francis Thompson, the late G. K. Chesterton said that the Victorians were little able to understand his "sky-scraping humility, his mountains of mystical detail, his occasional and unashamed weakness, his sudden and sacred blasphemies."<sup>4</sup> To him the supernatural, which meant little or nothing to his contemporaries, was everything; for to God he had dedicated his art. The unseen was more real than the seen. These were poets who could "see" the Eucharistic Christ present in the turmoil of the twentieth century.

In the Cambridge History of English Literature, such poets as Coventry Patmore, Francis Thompson, and "Michael Field" occupy a humble place under the title, "Lesser Poets."<sup>5</sup> Mention is scarcely made of the genius, Gerard Manley Hopkins. It is only within recent years that Coventry Patmore and Father Hopkins were given their rightful place in critical appreciation,<sup>6</sup> though both should be more widely known. Francis Thompson and Coventry Patmore should be much better known through their excellent prose works as well as their poetry. These poets kept their works clear from the

<sup>1</sup> Terence L. Connolly, in the Notes on Poems of Francis Thompson, p. 429.

<sup>2</sup> Stanley B. James, "Drama or History?" The Sentinel (Mar. 1937), p. 122.

<sup>3</sup> T. S. Eliot, Selected Essays, p. 7; The Sacred Wood, p. 49.

<sup>4</sup> G. K. Chesterton, The Victorian Age in Literature (New York, 1931), p. 202.

<sup>5</sup> Cambridge History of English Literature Vol. XIII. (Cambridge, 1933), p. 164.

<sup>6</sup> Supra, p. 47.



rocks of materialism. Chesterton says that the very fact that "Patmore was, as it were, the Catholic Browning keeps him out of the Victorian atmosphere as such," while of Thompson he has this to offer: "Perhaps the shortest definition of the Victorian Age is that he stood outside of it."<sup>1</sup> The joint poets, "Michael Field", likewise, ought to be far better known through their dramas as well as their exquisite lyrics. The religious poetry written after their conversion merits far greater recognition than it has received, especially the little sheaf of Eucharistic poems.

In conclusion, there are certain definite notes distinctively characteristic of Eucharistic poetry. Instead of the proud fling of "rugged individualism," which needs neither the encouraging voice of contemporaries nor the sanction of tradition, there is especially evident a note of sincere humility. Not for the Christian poet, the haughty egotism of a Walt Whitman who sings of the glory of being "my own master total and absolute," and boasts: "I celebrate myself and sing myself."<sup>2</sup> There is a tender delicacy of love in the Eucharist which defeats the sturdy intellectual pride of our day. One who would so generously whisper Himself into a tiny disk of bread and breathe Himself into the chalice of wine so as to become a Thing surely is the Master of humility:

"This is My Body...This is my Blood..." This! if this bit of bread is to be Christ's Body, then Christ must deny Himself outward glory and beauty, and become a thing to man's eyes. If this is to be Christ, then Christ in the Eucharist must deny Himself His liberty and become a thing in the hand of men. If this is to be Christ,

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<sup>1</sup> Chesterton, Op. cit., pp. 202-203.

<sup>2</sup> Louis Untermeyer, Modern American Poetry (New York, 1930), p. 42.

then Christ Eucharistic must go down lower even than Christ the Son of Man, hide the human and divine in Him, deny Himself utterly, become as nothing, as it were, annihilate Himself.<sup>1</sup>

He denied everything that would make self stand out. In His littleness and weakness lie His immense strength. He can go straight to the hearts of men. Only one thing Our Blessed Lord asked us to learn of Him: "Discite a me quia mitis sum et humilis corde." He has "lowered Himself beneath our level in the Eucharist, so that to imitate Him, to be like Him, we must go down to Him."<sup>2</sup> Hard it is for the proud mind to fathom the truth that the "foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men," and "that no flesh should glory in His sight" ( 1 Cor. 1, 25, 29). The Eucharistic poets have tasted this well of truth, for all through the works in this study, a sincere humility shines forth.

Secondly, a feeling of triumphant hope pulses through the Eucharistic lyrics. Here entirely unthinkable is the despairing pessimism of a James Thompson--that there is no future life, no God, nothing but perpetual change with the dismal prospect of the final annihilation of the human race.<sup>3</sup> In his gloomy poem, "The City of Dreadful Night," he finds no single star in the heavens, no track on earth:

...None can pierce the vast black veil uncertain  
Because there is no light beyond the curtain;  
That all is vanity and nothingness.

<sup>1</sup> "S.S.S." "The Adoration Hour," The Sentinel (Sept. 1936), p. 477.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 479.

<sup>3</sup> Parrott & Thorpe, Poetry of the Transition, p. 186.

Nor less understandable is the hard doctrine of a Thomas Hardy that the Supreme Mover must be cruel or very much limited in power. Speaking of God in his poem, "New Year's Eve," he says:

He sank to raptness as of yore,  
And opening New Year's Day  
Wove it by rote as theretofore,  
And went on working evermore  
In his unweeting way. <sup>1</sup>

On the contrary, the Eucharistic poet, with Father Russell, exults in the great things of which man is capable both for time and for eternity because of the abiding presence of the Blessed Sacrament. Love is the basis of that eternal hope in the human heart. Man, in spite of his "potential cousinship with mire," is capable of nourishing, developing, and repairing his soul so that he can always receive the "fulness of life."<sup>2</sup> The "Wild Knight" flares forth the motive of his unbounded vitality in these lines:

For in my soul one hope forever sings,  
That at the next white corner of the road  
My eyes may look on Him.<sup>3</sup>

For the Eucharistic poet, there is no time for Wehmut. Life is serious and glorious--immortal as well as mortal, and the Eucharist is the mighty Power-house of the Divine which perfects and completes the human life "formed for a dignity prophets but darkly name." With Patmore, the Christian poet marvels:

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., "New Year's Eve," p. 428.

<sup>2</sup> Pere Jules Lintalo, S. J., The Eucharistic Triduum (London, 1909), p. 54.

<sup>3</sup> J. R. N. Maxwell, S. J., "Mr. Chesterton as a Poet" America (Oct. 18, 1930), p. 44.

How full of bonds and simpleness  
Is God,  
How narrow is He,  
And how the wide, waste field of possibility  
Is only trod  
Straight to His homestead in the human heart.<sup>1</sup>

Especially characteristic of the Eucharistic poet is the spirit of joy which courses through his works. Recently an Irish critic, in contrasting the works produced at the present time with the old masterpieces, has made this remark, "The moderns are not great, because they lack joy."<sup>2</sup> The Eucharistic poet cannot share the modern lament of the pessimists: On ne rit guere aujourd'hui -- "There is but little laughter nowadays!"<sup>3</sup> A distinctive Catholic custom is heart joyousness. Even Matthew Arnold in his Literature and Dogma concedes this: "Catholicism...laid hold on the 'secret' of Jesus... The chief word with Catholicism is the word of the secret: peace, joy."<sup>4</sup> One who knows that God has so great a "love-thirst and love-hunger, a great heart-need" of him that He is continually accessible in his midst must be thrilled with joy. To this compound of earth and heaven He deigns to give a divine nourishment. And Bl. Cure d'Ars has said that when God willed "to feed our souls, raised by Him to share His own life, He searched through all creation. But He found nothing fit for their nourishment except Himself, and accordingly He gave Himself and His whole self."<sup>5</sup> The Eucharistic poet sings of this surpassing dignity and supernatural joy. Hard it is for him to fathom the dark thought of a Housman, a John Davidson or a Robinson Jeffers: "Joy is a trick in the air; pleasure is merely contemptible:"

<sup>1</sup> "Legem Tuam Diloxi," Poems, p. 325.

<sup>2</sup> Aodh De Blacain, "The World of Letters," The Irish Monthly (July, 1937), p.493.

<sup>3</sup> Rt. Rev. Msgr. Hugh T. Henry, Catholic Customs and Symbols, (New York 1925), p.3.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., "Preface," p. x.

<sup>5</sup> Pere Jules Lintelo, S. J. quoted in The Eucharistic Triduum, p. 53.

The world's God is treacherous and full of unreason; a  
torturer, but also  
The only foundation and the only fountain...

The pure air trembles, O pitiless God,  
The air aches with flame on these gaunt rocks.<sup>1</sup>

How different the voice of the Eucharistic poet! Almost every line thrills  
with joy--O happy light! O happy flowers! O happy Pyx!

Ring joyously, ye solemn bells!  
And wave, oh wave, ye censers bright!

. . .

O earth, grow flowers beneath His feet,  
And thou, O sun, shine bright this day!<sup>2</sup>

. . .

He is Thine for his lifetime, cast  
On his mountain vast,  
In his joy, his great freshness of joy  
From that high, singing daylight of gold!<sup>3</sup>

Lastly, a note of triumph surges through the Eucharistic poems.

The Blessed Sacrament helps man to "see life whole." To see man in the  
light of the natural and the supernatural--as being both material and  
spiritual--to place man in the marvellous plan of a loving, intelligent, and  
powerful Father, who sacrificed His Best Gift so that through the God-Man all  
men might become His adopted children, is to see life whole. Without the  
fundamental concept of the supernatural, the world becomes a desolate waste  
to the poet. But with it, the whole world becomes home-like. Men know that

<sup>1</sup> Louis Untermeyer, American Poetry, p. 409, 405.

<sup>2</sup> Frederick William Faber, "Corpus Christi," Op. cit., p. 145.

<sup>3</sup> "Michael Field," "Paschal's Mass," Op. cit., p. 69-70; App. p. 157-158.

there lives with them the Tabernacled King in the by-paths of a crowded city as well as in the lonely churches which dot the far-flung prairies, to bring the Divine Life into their individual lives. This is triumph in the spiritually-starved world to-day.

This superficial, mechanistic age is truly the Eucharistic poet's opportunity. The modern man is in a state of feverish distrust and discontent. "He feels heavy and depressed; he is yearning for something that will free and redeem him. The modern soul is waiting for a Redeemer."<sup>1</sup> He is hungering for God. Amid all this confusion, there is one bond of union--faith in the supernatural and in the truth of the extension and continuation of the Incarnation into our own day. The Eucharist is a sublime Reality. And true Reality finds a voice. It is the task of the Catholic poet, as Paul Claudel says, "to restore Catholic imagination and sensibility-- which have been withered and parched for four centuries."<sup>2</sup> Of our own age, the late Cardinal Faulhaber made this pertinent observation: "The old stars are still shining above our modern age, and our Catholic hearts still sing the old psalms."<sup>3</sup> The twentieth century, as we have noted, has its Eucharistic poets. And their voice when singing of the Eucharist, "the last miracle of God's love and the fullest expression of it,"<sup>4</sup> rings forth a message of marvellous things-- things that are impossible and yet are-- glorious truths that to this storm-torn age seem too good to be true.

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<sup>1</sup> John S. Zubura, Contemporary Godlessness (St. Louis, 1927), p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Claudel, as quoted in America by Katharine Brégy, (May 23, 1931).

<sup>3</sup> Lyak, as quoted in The Holy Eucharist and Christian Life, Op. cit., p. 27.

<sup>4</sup> H. T. Henry, Op. cit., p. 194.

## A P P E N D I X

Only the Eucharistic works of the poets less known appear in the Appendix. A few of the poems in this study can be found in anthologies. All the poems are easily accessible in the collected works of any of the authors.

Gerard Manley Hopkins

BARNFLOOR AND WINEPRESS

'And he said, if the Lord do not help thee, Whence shall I help thee?  
Out of the barnbloor, or out of the wine-press?'

2 Kings vi. 27.

Thou that on sin's wages starvest,  
Behold we have the joy in Harvest:  
For us was gathered the first-fruits  
For us was lifted from the roots,  
Sheaved in cruel bands, bruised sore,  
Scourged upon the threshing-floor;  
Where the upper mill-stone roof'd His Head,  
At morn we found the Heavenly Bread,  
    And on a thousand Altars laid,  
    Christ our Sacrifice is made.

Those whose dry plot for moisture gapes,  
We shout with them that tread the grapes:  
For us the Vine was fenced with thorn,  
Five ways the precious branches torn;  
Terrible fruit was on the tree  
In the Acre of Geseemane;  
For us by Calvary's distress  
The wine was racked from the press;  
    Now in our Altar vessels stored  
    Is the sweet Vintage of our Lord.

In Joseph's garden they threw by  
The riv'n Vine, leafless, lifeless, dry:  
On Easter morn the Tree was forth,  
In forty days reach'd Heaven from earth,  
    Soon the whole world is overspread;  
    Ye weary come into the shade.

The field where He has planted us  
Shall shake his boughs as Libanus,  
When He has sheaved us in His sheaf,  
When He has made us bear His leaf.-  
    We scarcely call that Banquet food,  
    But even our Saviour's and our blood,  
    We are so grafted on His Wood.



Gerard Manley Hopkins

THE BUGLER'S FIRST COMMUNION

A bugler boy from barrack (it is over the hill  
There)-boy bugler, born, he tells me, of Irish  
Mother to an English sire (he  
Shares their best gifts surely, fall how things will),

This very very day came down to us after a boon he on  
My late being there begged of me, overflowing  
Boon in my bestowing,  
Came, I say, this day to it--to a First Communion.

Here he knelt then in regimental red,  
Forth Christ from cupboard fetched, how fain I of feet  
To his youngster take his treat!  
Low-latched in leaf-light house! his too huge godhead.

There! and your sweetest sendings, ah divine,  
By it, heavens, befall him! as a heart Christ's darling,  
dauntless;  
Tongue true, vaunt-and tauntless;  
Breathing bloom of a chastity in mansex fine.

Frowning and forebending angel-warder  
Squander the hell-rock ranks sally to molest him;  
March, kind comrade, abreast him;  
Dress his days to a dexterous and starlight order.

How it does my heart good, visiting at that bleak hill,  
When limber liquid youth, that to all I teach  
Yields tender as a pushed peach,  
Hies headstrong to its wellbeing of a self-wise self-will!

Then though I should tread tufts of consolation  
Days after, so I in a sort deserve to  
And do serve God to serve to  
Just such slips of soldiery Christ's royal ration.

Gerard Manley Hopkins

Nothing else is like it, no, not all so strains  
Us; fresh youth fretted in a bloomfall all portending  
That sweet's sweeter ending;  
Realm both Christ is heir to and there réigns.

O now well work that sealing sacred ointment!  
O for now charms, arms, what bans off bad  
And locks love ever in a lad!  
Let me though see no more of him, and not disappointment.

Those sweet hopes quell whose least me quickenings lift,  
In scarlet or somewhere of some day seeing  
That brow and bead of being,  
An our day's God's own Galahad. Though this child's drift

Seems by a divine doom channelled, nor do I cry  
Disaster there; but may he not rattle and roam  
In backwheels though bound home?--  
That left to the Lord of the Eucharist, I here lie by;

Recorded only, I have put my lips on pleas  
Would brangle adamantine heaven with ride and jar, did  
Prayer go disregarded;  
Forward-like, but however, and like favourable heaven  
heard these.

S. THOMAE AQUINATIS

Rhythmus ad S.S. Sacramentum

'Adoro te supplex, latens deitas!'

Godhead here in hiding, whom I do adore  
Masked by these bare shadows, shape and nothing more,  
See, Lord, at thy service low lies here a heart  
Lost, all lost in wonder at the God thou art.

Gerard Manley Hopkins

Seeing, touching, tasting are in thee deceived;  
How says trusty hearing? that shall be believed;  
What God's Son has told me, take for truth I do;  
Truth himself speaks truly or there's nothing true.

On the cross thy godhead made no sign to men;  
Here thy very manhood steals from human ken;  
Both are my confession, both are my belief,  
And I pray the prayer of the dying thief.

I am not like Thomas, wounds I cannot see.  
But can plainly call Thee Lord and God as he;  
This faith each day deeper be my holding of,  
Daily make me harder hope and dearer love.

O thou our reminder of Christ crucified,  
Living Bread the life of us for whom he died,  
Lend this life to me then: feed and feast my mind,  
There be thou the sweetness man was meant to find.

Bring the tender tale true of the Pelican;  
Bathe me, Jesu Lord, in what thy bosom ran--  
Blood that but one drop of has the world to win  
All the world forgiveness of its world of sin.

Jesu whom I look at shrouded here below,  
I beseech thee send me what I thirst for so,  
Some day to gaze on thee face to face in light,  
And be blest for ever with thy glory's sight.

Michael Field

FREGIT

On the night of dedication  
Of Thyself as our oblation,  
Christ, Beloved, Thou didst take  
Into Thy very hands and break....

O my God, there is the hiss of doom  
When new-glowing flowers are snapt in bloom;

Michael Field

When shivered, as a little thunder-cloud,  
A vase splits on the floor its brilliance loud;  
Or lightning strikes a willow-tree with gash  
Cloven for death in a resounded crash;  
And I have heard of one who could betray  
His country and yet face the breath of day,  
Bowed himself, weeping, but to hear his sword  
Broken before him, as his sin's award.  
These were broken; Thou didst break....

Thou the flower that Heaven did make  
Of our race the crown of light;  
Thou the Vase of Chrysolite  
Into which God's balm doth flow;  
Thou the willow hung with woe  
Of our exile harps; Thou Sword  
Of the Everlasting Word--  
Thou, betrayed, Thyself didst break  
Thy own Body for our sake:  
Thy own Body Thou didst take  
In Thy holy hands--and break.

AURUM, THUS, ET MYRRHA

ALLELULIA

O Gift, O Blessed Sacrament--my Gold,  
All that I live by royally, the power  
Like gold, that buys life for me, hour by hour,  
And crowns me with a greatness manifold  
Such that my spirit scarce hath spring to hold  
Its treasure and its sovereignty of dower!

O Blessed Sacrament--my Frankincense,  
God raised aloft in His Divinity,  
Sweet-smelling as the dry and precious tree,  
That spread round sacrifice an odour dense,  
Hiding with mystic offering our offense;  
O holy balm of God that pleads for me!

Michael Field

O Gift, O Blessed Sacrament—my Myrrh!  
Thou art to die for me—a holy Thing,  
That will preserve my soul from festering,  
Nor may it feel mortality, the stir  
And motion into dust, if Thou confer  
On it Thy bitter strength of cherishing!

PASCHAL'S MASS

The sheep still in dew, but the sky  
In sun, the far river in sun;  
And the incense of flowers steeped bright--  
    Their smell as sweet light;  
And the shepherd-boy tethered on high  
To his flock and his day's work begun.

The bees in the wind of the dawn;  
The larks not yet climbing aloft  
    As high as the Aragon Hills...  
What bell-ringing thrills  
Through the bell-wether's pastoral horn?  
From the valley a bell clear and soft.

The shepherd-boy kneeling in dew;  
The bell of his wether rung sharp;  
Below him the tinkle and sway,  
    From far, far away,  
Of the sacring-bell, clear as a harp  
In its chime of God lifted anew.

For his God, in the vale, on the height  
He weeps; while the morning-larks rise.  
    Lo, in chasuble, living and rich  
    Golden rays cross-stitch,  
Foreshewn by magnificent light--  
Lo, an angel grows firm on his eyes!

Michael Field

As an altar of marvellous stone  
Before him the mountain hath blazed,  
Round him the angel, who lifts in the air  
    A Sun that is there:  
To the sheep and the shepherd-boy shown,  
With the ringing of larks, God is raised.

O Angel-priest, fragrant with thyme,  
Gift with sixfold glorious wings!  
    O sky of the mountains above  
    Adventurous Level  
How through air and the larks' watchful shine  
Earth her incense, as thurifer, flings!

O Sacrament, shown to a boy,  
More blest than the Shepherds of old,  
He is Thine for his lifetime, cast  
    On his mountain vast,  
In his joy, his great freshness of joy  
From that high, singing daylight of gold!

THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

Gather, gather,  
    Drawn by the Father,  
Drawn to the dear procession of His Son!  
They are bearing His Body....Run  
To the Well-Beloved! Haste to Him,  
    Who down the street passeth secretly,  
    Adorned with seraphim,  
Still as the blossoms of an apple-tree.

Gather, gather,  
    Drawn by the Father!  
Not now He dwelleth in the Virgin's womb;  
    In the harvests He hath His room;  
From the lovely vintage, from the wheat,  
From the harvests that we this year have grown,

Michael Field

He giveth His flesh to eat,  
And in very substance makes us His own.

Gather, gather,  
Drawn by the Father'.  
The sun is down, it is the sundown hour.  
He, who set the fair sun to flower,  
And the stars to rise and fall--  
Kneel, and your garments before Him spread!  
Kneel, He loveth us all;  
He is come in the breaking of Bread.

Gather, gather,  
(Drawn by the Father),  
To our God who is shown to us so mild,  
Borne in our midst, a child!  
He is King, and with an orb so small:  
And not a word will He say,  
Nor on the angels call,  
Though we trample Him down on the way.  
On the Holy Angels He will not call...  
Oh, guard Him with breasts impregnable!

AN ANTI-PHONY OF ADVENT  
AD LAUDES

Come to a revel, happy men!  
Far away on the hills a wine of joy  
Makes golden dew in drops, that cloy  
The fissures of the glen,  
The crevices of rocks;  
Caught in its sweetness thyme and cistus lock;  
The hills are white and gold  
In every fold;  
The hills are running milk and honey-rivers;  
Yet not a thyrsus one a mountain quivers.

Michael Field

Does not the distant city cry,  
As if filled with an unexpected rout,  
    Alleluia, shout on shout?  
    Nor can the city high  
Exult in song enough,  
Tuning to smoothness all her highways rough.  
And yet the Bromian god  
    Hath never trod  
With choir the pavements, nor each grape-haired dancer  
Given to the mountain streams a city's answer.

Behold, O men, a vivid light!  
Is it the lightning-fire that blazes wide,  
    Or torches lit on every side  
    That turn the sky so bright?  
    Through this great sudden day,  
No levin-gendered god's triumphant way.  
    The brands of pine confess:  
    A loveliness  
Within that mighty light of larger story  
Is come among us with exceeding glory.

Ye that would drink, come forth and drink!  
Within the hills are rivers white and gold;  
Clear mid the day a portent to behold.  
    Steep at the water's brink,  
    Seek where the light is great!  
Why should the revellers for revel wait?  
Now ye can drink as thirsty stags  
    Where no source flags.  
Forth to the water-brooks, forth in the morning;  
Forth to the light that out of light is dawning!

Tiresius, with thy wreath, not thou!  
Gray prophet of the fount of Thebes, behold  
    A prophet neither blind nor old,  
    Spare and of solemn brow,  
Is risen to make all young:  
    He dwells among  
The freshets of the stream. Come to the waters;  
O sons of Adam, haste, and Eva's daughters!



Michael Field

This revel, children is a revelry  
Ascetic, of a joy that cannot be  
Unless we fast and pray and wear no wreaths,  
Nor brandish cones the forest-fir bequeathes,  
Nor make a din--but sweet antiphonies--  
Nor blow through organ-reeds to sing to these,  
But of ourselves make song: it is a feast,  
That by the breath of deserts is increased;  
And by ablution in the river lifts  
Its grain to crystal-earth so full of gifts  
Most exquisite, breaths that are infinite  
Of infinite judgment, hesitations light  
Of infinite choiceness, life so fine, so fine,  
Since of our flesh we welcome the Divine;  
Since by our fast and reticence, our food  
From honey-bees in haunts of solitude,  
O mighty Prophet of the river-bank,  
We see that light that makes the sun a blank,  
As a white dove makes a whole region dim;  
See in the greatness of the great Light's rim  
One we must fall under would we win  
The ecstasy of revel--all our sin  
Borne from us by the Wine-Gup in a hand  
That bleeds about the vessel's golden stand,  
Bleeds as the white throat of a lamb just slain.  
Behold! No Evce at that poured red stain,  
No Evce--Allelulia! He is dumb:  
But let us laud Him, Eleutherius come!

Roibeárd Ó Faracháin

IMMOLATION

On tenant air--bells: lifted, adoring eyes;  
and sinner, seraph, G O D, look upon G O D.

PRAISE OF ANGELS AND PEOPLE

Honor to Thee and praise!  
Love unto Thee and praise!

Roibeard O Farachain

Honour and love to Thee, O Lord, and praise.

Christ, star-told in the east,  
Christ, lover of "these least,"  
Christ of the marriage-feast  
in this White Host.

Christ by the kings adored,  
Christ come to bring the sword,  
Christ the Incarnate Word  
in this White Host.

Christ of the uncast stone,  
Christ in the garden prone,  
Christ agonized, alone  
in this White Host.

Christ with ensanguined cheek,  
Christ from the scourging weak,  
Christ with his mockers meek  
in this White Host.

Christ of the supper room,  
Christ of the empty tomb,  
Christ of the Day of Doom  
in this White Host.

Who was, before the Sun  
Who lived, ere Life begun,  
Who shall, when Time be done,  
in this White Host.

Who dreamed this realm of earth  
Who called the seas to birth,  
Who made the stars for mirth,  
in this White Host.

Who Glory is and Light  
Who Majesty and Might  
Who Fullness and Delight  
in this White Host.

Who dread Divinity  
Who One in Trinity,  
Who is Infinity,  
in this White Host.

Roibeard Ó Paracháin

Jesu, with Magdalen I join my plea,  
with him who craved remembrance  
from the tree,  
with drowning Peter: "Lord deliver me"  
by this White Host.

POST COMMUNION

This ancient earth has never known more  
spirit-splendouring tryst  
than now I keep:  
not on the dizziest rock,  
in dim profundities of seas,  
nor vasty, yawning halls of the spread skies;  
nor tryst of daffodil with spring,  
moon with impertunate tides,  
of June with roses;  
not when  
the sky-housed Lord of sculless things  
unhoods the East, and floods  
her cheek with flame finds my incomparable tryst  
compeer.  
Not the impassioned reach of soul  
to soul sublimed with love the world holds peerless  
peers my tryst; the flight of dreams,  
born in the mind of God, to burden with glory,  
with chants of glory the singing mouth of a poet;  
O not  
the latest-left-of-man's appalled  
impulse upon Eternity,  
nor when  
the shining earth stupendously  
is swayed to nothingness in the tempestuous  
breath of God  
And Death is dead,  
shall more tremendous rendezvous be held  
than now I keep,  
whelmed in deep on deep  
of love, of love of Christ  
in whom I live, in me Who lives, Who lives.

Father H. A. Rawas

TO JESUS IN THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

O Jesus, dearest Lord, I cry to Thee;  
With all the strength I have I worship Thee;  
With all my soul I long to be with Thee,  
And never fear to fail nor fall from Thee.

O Jesus, sweetest Lord, come Thou to me;  
Come down in all Thy beauty unto me;  
Thou Who didst die for longing love of me,  
And never, never more depart from me.

O God, most beautiful, most treasured One!  
O God, most glorious Uncreated One!  
O God, eternal, beatific One!  
O ever loving, ever gracious One!

How melts my heart receiving Thee, my own!  
My eyes are dim for lack of Thee, my own;  
My flesh doth hunger, needing Thee, my own;  
My soul doth faint, apart from Thee, my own.

Where in the height of heaven is light like Thee?  
Where in the deep abyss is strength like Thee?  
Where in creation is there bliss like Thee?  
Where among creatures is there love like Thee?

Free me, O beautiful God, from all but Thee;  
Sever the chain that holds me back from Thee;  
Call me, O tender Love, I cry to Thee--  
Thou art my all! Oh, bind me close to Thee.

O suffering Love, that hast so loved me!  
O patient Love, that weariest not of me!  
Alone, O love, Thou weariest not of me.  
Ah, weary not till I am lost in Thee--  
May, weary not till I am found in Thee!

Father Matthew Russell, S. J.

PRAISE TO THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

(From Madam Swetchine's French prose version of an old German hymn.)

Clear vaults of Heaven, serenely blue,  
How many stars come shining through  
Thy azure depths?

"Beyond all count are they."

Praise be the Holy Sacrament as many times a day!

Fair world, the work of God's right hand,  
How many are the grain of sand  
In all thy frame?

"Beyond all count are they."

Praised be the Holy Sacrament as many times a day!

Green meadow, wide as eye can see,  
How many o'er thy sward may be  
The blades of grass?

"Beyond all count are they."

Praised be the Holy Sacrament as many times a day!

O, groves and gardens rich and fair,  
What bounteous harvests do ye bear  
Or fruits and flowers?

"Beyond all count are they."

Praised be the Holy Sacrament as many times a day!

Great ocean, boundless, uncontrolled,  
How many do thy waters hold  
Of briny drops?

"Beyond all count are they."

Praised be the Holy Sacrament as many times a day!

High sun, of all things centre bright,  
How many are the rays of light  
That from thee dart?

"Beyond all count are they."

Praised be the Holy Sacrament as many times a day!

Eternity, O vast sublime!  
How many moments of our time  
Are in thy length?

"Beyond all count are they."

Praised be the Holy Sacrament as many times a day!

Father Matthew Russell, S. J.

### THE SACRAMENTAL PRESENCE

In ancient Hebrew days, ere love's new law  
Of grace and mercy had begun its reign,  
...No nation was so great, or had its god  
So nigh as God was present to their prayers.

Yes, 'neath that sterner dispensation, God  
Was very near and dear unto his own,  
Prompting their cries of longing for the day  
When He who was to come should come at last.  
And when at last He came, how near and dear  
He made Himself--a Babe in maiden's arms,  
And then through each pathetic phase of life,  
"Lo, Adam is become as one of us"--  
He, of the second Eve not spouse but Son.

Is this communion of divine and human  
Ended on earth and all for heaven reserved?  
Is God more distant than the cloud that hung  
Above his people toiling o'er the sands?  
Not so within the one true Church of Christ.  
Without, they say to Him, "Lord! Lord!" yet hold  
That man is more estranged now from God  
Than were the stubborn Hebrew race of yore,  
E'er yet the Almighty's arms had twined  
In love around the Maiden Mother's neck.  
Not ours this cold unloving creed. We know  
That Christ is priest forever of His kind  
Who offered bread and wine; and we believe  
With eager gladness that the Infinite God  
Who could unmake and make a million worlds  
As easily and quickly as He plants  
A daisy in the sod--yes, we believe  
That He who could feed thousands with a crumb  
Fulfilled His plainest promise, and bequeathed  
Unto His people, whom He bought so dear,  
His very body and His very blood,  
The one great sacrifice renewed forever.

Father Matthew Russell, S. J.

"Do this for My remembrance." We obey  
The loving mandate, with most humble faith  
In this last depth of God's compassionate love.  
Before the altar of Emmanuel,  
Before his poorest shrine we kneel and cry:  
"Behold the tabernacle of God with men,  
And He will dwell with them, and they shall be  
His people, and the Lord shall be their God."

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