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## Robert Southwell, S.J.: Religious Poet of the English Renaissance

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ROBERT SOUTHWELL, S. J.,  
RELIGIOUS POET OF THE ENGLISH RENAISSANCE

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BY

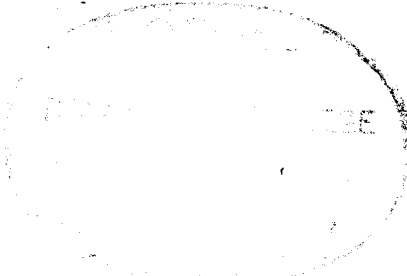
MOTHER JULIA S. HUGHES, R.S.C.J.

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A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in  
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Chicago, 1939



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## INTRODUCTION

The newly awakened interest in the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins, whose novel verse-forms have caused a revolution in poetic thought, recalls another Jesuit poet of an earlier period. There is little enough in common between Hopkins and Robert Southwell as poets. One recalls the other rather by contrast: Southwell typical of his age, Hopkins at variance with his; the later poet unrecognized until thirty years after his death, in opposition to Southwell's immediate popularity and influence. In the course of time the literary fortunes of these two men have been reversed, and where there is scarcely a phase of Hopkins's work, and especially of his prosody, which has been left untouched, Southwell's art is rather an unexplored field. He represents a phase of humanism which has been somewhat neglected, perhaps because it is negligible, namely, the religious aspect of the Renaissance.

### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The purpose of this study is to examine the union of two influences - the religious and the humanist - in the work of Father Southwell; to see how he blends in his poetry human and sacred elements, making his art not only typical of a humanist age, but also of Christian mysticism, since it was from religious inspiration that he drew the purest lyric

strains of his art. The problem then is to examine the work of Southwell as the religious product of the English Renaissance.

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Robert Southwell occupies the position of a secondary poet of the Elizabethan Age, and most general commentators on the period are content to assign him a biographical notice, to quote The Burning Babe, and to pay a brief tribute to the literary quality of his work. All agree that the lyric tone is pure and exalted, and that his lines ring true, even where marred by conceits.

An Appreciation of Robert Southwell, by Morton, is a general evaluation of the Jesuit as man and writer. It is perhaps too laudatory to be critically valuable, but the analyses of many of the poems is sensitive and sympathetic.<sup>1</sup> The volume contains a chronological listing of the complete works. W. J. Courthope, in a chapter of his book, A History of English Poetry, Vol. III, entitled "School of Theological Wit,"<sup>2</sup> gives a brief but discerning appreciation of Southwell's style. Many of the magazine articles are merely eulogistic and indiscriminating, as A. J. Hogan's "An Elizabethan Poet,"<sup>3</sup>

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1. Sister Rose Anita Morton, An Appreciation of Robert Southwell, pp. vi-103.

2. W. J. Courthope, A History of English Poetry, V. III, pp. 120-1

3. A. J. Hogan, "An Elizabethan Poet," in the American Catholic Quarterly Review, January, 1914, pp. 129-132.

and J. J. O'Shea's sketch, "Father Robert Southwell, Poet and Martyr."<sup>4</sup> A few are valuable in the field of biographical research: J. G. MacLeod's article is one of these - "Father Robert Southwell, Scholar, Poet, and Martyr,"<sup>5</sup> and also J. H. Pollen's two notices: "A Rare Catholic Tract,"<sup>6</sup> and "Father Robert Southwell and the Babington Plot."<sup>7</sup> The first refers to Southwell's "Supplication to the Queen," the second to some of Southwell's letters, as well as to the "Supplication." C. A. Newdigate's "New Chapter in the Life of Blessed Robert Southwell, S. J.," is a good piece of historical research, having reference to an unpublished portion of the Life of the Countesse Arundel for whom Southwell was private chaplain at the time of his capture.<sup>8</sup> From the literary viewpoint, a valuable article is Mario Praz's "Robert Southwell's Saint Peter's Complaint and its Italian Source," in which he compares the Complaint with Luigi Tansillo's Le Lagrime di San Pietro. In this scholarly treatise Praz confirms the already established fact of Tansillo's influence

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4. J. J. O'Shea, "Father Robert Southwell, Poet and Martyr," in the American Catholic Q. Review, November, 1914, pp.509-51
  5. The Month, December, 1877, Vol. XII, pp. 439-456.
  6. The Month, January, 1902, Vol. XCIX, pp. 93-96.
  7. The Month, March, 1912, Vol. CXIX, pp. 302-304.
  8. The Month, March, 1931, pp. 245-254.

upon Southwell.<sup>9</sup> Father Herbert Thurston, S. J., who has made a very complete study of Southwell, has several articles containing excellent critical analyses.<sup>10</sup> These include commentary on the poet's use of conceits, an exposition of the causes of his popularity during the Elizabethan period, a piece of research on the authorship of the Foure-Fould Meditation, and an article tracing the Italian influence in Southwell's poems.

The most exhaustive study has been made by Pierre Janelle, in his book, Robert Southwell, the Writer. It contains a detailed biography, and an equally detailed analysis of the works, treated in scholarly fashion. Southwell's religious background is examined, and the effect upon his work of Jesuit Neo-Classicism. A lengthy chapter is devoted to his artistic development from conceitism to directness; the euphuism of his prose too is discussed in some detail. Another chapter develops the Italian influence. In conclusion, Janelle shows that Southwell's work is essentially English in character and spirit, though the forms at times may be borrowed from foreign sources.<sup>11</sup> This very good study has

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9. Modern Language Review, July, 1924, Vol. XIX, pp. 273-290.
10. The Month, January, 1895, Vol. LXXXII, pp. 230-244.  
Ibid., February, 1895, Vol. LXXXIII, pp. 231-245.  
Ibid., March, 1895, Vol. LXXXIII, pp. 383-399.  
Ibid., September, 1905, Vol. CVI, pp. 318-321.
11. Pierre Janelle, Robert Southwell, the Writer, 336 pages.

two vulnerable points. It is not arranged according to the prevailing method of blending the biography and the writings. In thus separating the life and works, it fails to make a very essential relationship, viz., the effect upon Southwell's poetry of the political events which so vitally affected his career. This weakness is observable in the content of the book. The second has to do with the form. The author is a Frenchman writing in English, who, in many cases, has not conquered the English idiom.

It would seem that this very full analysis of the poet would leave nothing further to say upon the subject. It is true that a certain amount of overlapping may be inevitable, but not in the particular problem with which this paper is concerned. Janelle's book is an exclusive study of the poet, with a minimum of reference to external influence and circumstance. It focuses upon the man and any other lines or outlines come into the range of vision only incidentally. The purpose of this paper shifts the focus to examine one aspect - the religious - of the English Renaissance as exemplified in Robert Southwell. The focus then is upon Southwell inasmuch as he occupies a position in a larger scheme which includes the relationship of the Church to the Renaissance.



## CHAPTER I

### SURVEY OF THE RENAISSANCE IN ENGLAND, ITALY, AND FRANCE

To England the Renaissance came late like spring in high latitudes. "Almost two hundred years separate the great first-fruits of the literary and artistic movement in Italy from the full English harvest of literary treasure."

...Nor did the English soil prove equal to fostering the humanist development in all the fields of artistic endeavor which the new spirit fructified abroad. No original painting, no original music, no original architecture of Renaissance inspiration was cradled in Tudor England. There the Renaissance sought distinctive expression in literature and poetry. (12)

English humanism, though great only in the domain of letters, ran the full scale of achievement in that field from its initiators, Foxe, Colet, Grocyn, and Linacre, to Wyatt and Surrey, Sidney and Southwell in poetry, and Kyd, Heywood and Marlowe in drama; its most universally cultured expression was realized in More, Fisher, and Erasmus.

An intense national spirit amounting to insularism is at the root of England's tardiness in responding to the new impetus. To this cause, too, may be assigned her backwardness in exploring and settling the New World, in contrast to

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12. Sidney Lee, The French Renaissance in England, p. 4.

the alacrity of Spain, Italy, Portugal, and France.

In love of political independence, in physical bravery and endurance, in mercantile aptitude, Tudor England never feared rivalry with foreign nations. But slowness to appreciate nascent ideas and mistrust of artistic sentiment made it difficult for her during the epoch of the Renaissance to keep fully abreast of the intellectual culture of the other peoples of Western Europe. (13)

The Renaissance had been the revolt of Western Europe against the prevailing crudity of man's thought, and an effort to substitute humanistic and liberal culture of infinite scope. It was more than a literary revival; it was a rebirth of human sentiment, of intellectual, aesthetic, and spiritual aspiration. "Life throughout its sweep was invested with a new significance and a new potentiality."<sup>14</sup> Many forces tended to awaken and encourage the movement; not only sympathy with the modes and ideas of classical literature, but a new sense of joy, a love of beauty, a reawakened interest in nature and in man. The discovery, too, of a new world and the recasting of cosmography bred in men's minds a novel stimulus.

The new movement was born and nurtured in Italy.

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13. Sidney Lee, op. cit., p. 8.

14. Ibid., p. 3.

Petrarch in poetry and Giotto in painting disseminated the seed of the new doctrine and aroused their country to an enthusiasm in art and letters which maintained its energy until the close of the 16th Century. The opening years of the Italian Renaissance gave promise of a golden fruitage which found fulfilment in Tasso, Guarini, Raphael, Coreggio, Titian, Michelangelo, Tintoretto, and Paolo Veronese. "The Renaissance in Italy shows a tenacity and an enduring breadth and brilliance which have no precise parallel elsewhere. It came into being earlier, and lived longer and in more versatile strength than in any other country of Europe."<sup>15</sup>

Devotees of the New Learning driven from Byzantium by the Fall of Constantinople settled in the latter half of the 15th Century in Venice, Rome, or Florence, bringing with them their literary treasures. They wandered from place to place teaching and spreading a love of antiquity. "All Italy dreams of the gardens of Academus, and from north to south, in learned princely courts, academies are founded to keep up the cult of the classics."<sup>16</sup> Cosmo de Medici founded the first at Florence; Peter of Calabria followed his example in Rome; Cardinal Bessarion and Aldus

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15. Sidney Lee, op. cit., p. 4.

16. J. J. Jusserand, A Literary History of the English People, p. 11.

Manutius opened similar institutions in Venice. Classic texts were sought with a passion that was exclusive and jealous. Libraries were enriched, and as never before, Greek manuscripts held the places of honor. For three hundred years the Italian Renaissance poured its lifestream into European channels with inexhaustible resource, and did not enter upon its decline until the movement had spread and gained momentum in France, Spain, Germany, and last of all, in England.

Though not, as has been said, exclusively a literary revival, the Renaissance was fostered first in France by literary intercourse. The French kings took the lead; Francis I patronized the Italian poet, Alamanni, and founded the College de France for the diffusion of the new learning, whence the fame of Parisian teachers went abroad. As in Italy, France cultivated the antiquities; Greek manuscripts were sought, and to satisfy the growing taste for artistic beauty, Madonnas by Raphael and portraits by Titian were imported by Francis I. When Henri II came to the throne, the city of Lyons offered a celebration that was entirely a  
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l'antique, from Greek costume to gladiatorial combat.

The French Renaissance took form far later than the Italian movement. Its career was less versatile, less enduring; the scope of its triumph narrower. It ran its

course from the early years of the 16th Century until the close. Its finest inspiration glowed in the French poetry of Ronsard in the sixth decade of that century; but his spirit was foreshadowed in Marot thirty years before, and cast its radiance on Montaigne thirty years later. The French Renaissance, unlike the English, yielded stores of art as well as literature. "Places among the masterpieces of the world have been accorded portraits from the easels of the Clouets; the French sculptors Pilon and Goujon rank with the heroes of Italy."<sup>18</sup>

#### MEDIEVALISM AND THE RENAISSANCE.

It is not generally recognized that the term "Renaissance" has only been created in recent years. The name was applied to the transition from medieval to modern times by a small group of 19th Century critics who evince profounder acquaintance with classical literature than with the spirit of the Middle Ages.<sup>19</sup> The new period was not a break with medievalism, but a development; a ripening rather than a rejection. "All the roots and stalks of medieval planting and growth come now to blossoming and to flower."<sup>20</sup>

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18. Sidney Lee, op. cit., p. 20.

19. Blanche Mary Kelly, The Well of English, p. 66.

20. J. J. Laux, History of the Church, p. 114.

That is not the true conception of the Renaissance which represents the movement as a rupture with the immediate past and a return to ancient glories. Neither is it true to say that it introduced Greek and Roman culture to a medieval world. That had been done in the early centuries of the Church. The great molding elements of medieval civilization were its classical heritage and the Christian spirit. The continuity of classical with medieval culture is now definitely established, despite the fact that some of the early Fathers caused a certain break in that continuity when they turned their faces against a cult of paganism which the study of antiquity tended to encourage. But if the classics "survived to be revived," it was because the Church, the monastic scribe, and the Christian scholar's love of learning had preserved them.

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#### ECCLESIASTICAL PATRONS AND EXPONENTS OF HUMANISM

The patronage of learning which has always characterized the Catholic Church is an essential element in the initiation and development of the Renaissance. It was the churchmen of Italy and of England who launched and sustained it in both countries.

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21. B. M. Kelly, op. cit., p. 67.

Under Boniface VIII it was the artistic phase of the Renaissance which entered the service of the Church, with Giotto, Cavallini, and Arnolfo as its greatest representatives. Martin V was more exclusively devoted to the patronage of letters, and during his pontificate humanism penetrated into the heart of official activities; humanists recast the papal documents giving them a classic purity of style which makes of these Vatican papers models of latinity. <sup>22</sup> With the successor of Martin V opens the era of the "Renaissance Popes."\* Their influence upon the movement spanned almost a century. Munificent patrons of art and letters, they gathered about the Papal Court artists and poets, and erected magnificent buildings to house the treasures of manuscripts, pictures, and statues which they collected. The numerous cardinals who patronized the new learning were themselves illustrious scholars. Bembo and Sadoletto, cardinals under Julius II, were steeped in humanism; Contarini, Fregoso, Morone, and Pole were humanists as well as theologians; Cardinal Orsini devoted his entire private fortune to the diffusion of the new learning. <sup>23</sup> Cardinal Bessarion, upon

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22. Jean Guiraud, L'Eglise Romaine et les Origines de la Renaissance, pp. 14 and 22.

23. M. F. Jerrold, Italy in the Renaissance, p. 197.

\* Renaissance Popes: Eugene IV, Nicholas V, Pius II, Sixtus IV, Innocent VIII, Alexander VI, Pius III, Julius II, Leo X.

presenting the Doge of Venice with his library of Greek manuscripts wrote a memorable letter which is called the Manifesto of the Renaissance." The fame of Bessarion's "Marcian" library spread; princes and prelates who loved letters, Francis I and Wolsey, sent to have its manuscripts copied, and the Florentine Aldus Manutius established his presses in Venice to be near Bessarion's books.<sup>24</sup>

Through ecclesiastical channels, too, the Renaissance crossed from Italy into England. Towards the middle of the 15th Century, a small band of scholars - Grey, Free, Gunthorpe, Flemming, and Tiptoft, all Oxonians and all churchmen, spent some years in Italy assimilating the new learning, and returned to be its pioneers. Of these Bishop Grey and John Free (known in Italy as Phreas) were most significant and influential. Both were generous benefactors of Balliol College, Oxford, as was Flemming of Lincoln College. It seems probable that had these men, who began their travels and studies together, been content upon their return to make a concerted effort in the advance of humanism, their influence would have been stronger and more far-reaching.<sup>25</sup>

The Church Councils brought prelates from many na-

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24. J. J. Jusserand, op. cit., p. 14.

25. Lewis Einstein, The Italian Renaissance in England, pp. 20 and 33.



tions in close contact. After returning from the Council of Siena, Henry Chicheley, Archbishop of Canterbury, gave valuable gifts to Oxford, and founded All Souls' College. Following the Council of Constance, Henry Beaufort, Bishop of Winchester and uncle of Henry V, met and invited to England Poggio Bracciolini, the most distinguished humanist at the court of Martin V. Concerning the part played by the Councils in the new movement, especially as regards England, E. C. Wright says:

It is a truism that the Council of Constance in 1415 first turned such humanists as Poggio Bracciolini and Aeneas Sylvius towards the north, although it is less often stressed that English ecclesiastics there came into direct contact with the best minds of Italy. The Council of Basel had an even greater part in drawing Englishmen towards the new light of Italy. Its history is a devious one. Opening in Basel in 1431, it dragged out its course until 1449. An offshoot from it adjourned in 1438 to Ferrara, and from thence to Florence on account of the plague. The question of the consolidation of the eastern and western churches brought to Florence many Greeks, some of them scholars who stayed in Italy. At this council, Zano Castiglione, Bishop of Bayeux, a friend of Humphrey (Duke of Gloucester) commissioned by him to buy books for his library, spread abroad Humphrey's love of learning. It was through him that Humphrey came in touch with Piero del Monte, Piero Candido Decembrio, and Leonardo Bruni, and that the name of Englishman ceased to connote barbarian in the understanding of the educated Italian. Simon da Taramo, later in correspondence with Bekynton and others in England, was at this Council. Both Adam Moleyns and

Abbot Whethanstead of St. Albans proceeded from Basel to Florence and joined the learned group of scholars associated with that city and Rome. (26)

Among those ecclesiastics who were noted both as scholars and patrons of learning, William Selling of All Souls and William Hadley, Benedictine monks, were the immediate predecessors of Linacre and Grocyn, with whom modern English scholarship may properly be said to have begun. Many English prelates too set examples of learning - Bishop Waynflete, and Peter Courtenay, Bishop of Exeter, had studied at Padua. Thomas Langton, Bishop of Winchester, upon his return from an embassy to Rome, established a boys' school in his house at Winchester after the manner of Vittorino da Feltre. The example of the cardinals whom William Warham, Archbishop of Canterbury, met when in Italy urged him to give a like patronage to learning in his own country. He was to Erasmus a "special Maecenas," and his wit, culture, and genial courtesy made him the friend and protector of all who spread the new learning in England.

Interest in humanism came later to Cambridge than to Oxford, and it was chiefly through the efforts of Bishop Fisher that the level of Cambridge was raised. In 1511 he

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26. E. C. Wright, "Continuity in XV Century English Humanism," in PMLA, June, 1936, Vol. LI, pp. 371-372.

27. Lewis Einstein, op. cit., pp. 53-54.

summoned Erasmus who for a time gave unofficial instruction in Greek. Fisher aided, too, in the establishment of St. John's College, and founded at Cambridge lectureships in Greek and Hebrew.

Up to this time, in the institutes of learning, the new plant had been grafted upon the old with more or less success, but in 1516, Richard Foxe, Bishop of Winchester, founded Corpus Christi College solely in the interests of humanism. A complete humanistic education determined the curriculum of the institute. A torrent of opposition arose against an innovation so daring but it was quenched by More's influence at Court, and by the opening of a similar foundation, that of Christ Church, by Cardinal Wolsey, who obtained through his agent, Ghinucci, the consent of Rome, and also many valuable Greek manuscripts from Italian libraries. These two colleges were filled with the spirit of the new learning, and set the vogue for similar foundations (Brasenose, Magdalen, and Trinity) which marked the overthrow of scholasticism in favor of humanism.

#### ATTITUDE OF THE CHURCH TOWARDS RADICAL TENDENCIES

The liberal and protective attitude of the Church towards this purely secular movement is noted by Jean Guiraud in his study, L'Eglise Romaine et les Origines de la Renaissance:

The Papacy was far from indifferent to

The movement. Hitherto, had not letters and the arts been developed in the shadow of the sanctuary? A renewed interest in antiquity inspired no mistrust in the Church. In Her libraries the literary works of Greece and Rome had found refuge from the barbarian; and Christian art had ever respected the traditions of classic aestheticism. The union was intimate between the Church and the Renaissance. Artists and literary men had found the domain of the spirit and its beauties a sufficiently vast field for their activity. (28)

There had been a period in the Renaissance which, in the light of subsequent development, seems almost legendary, - a period when the Renaissance acknowledged ideals of a lofty spiritual nature, entirely in harmony with the spirit of the Church though borrowed from antiquity. One reads with something akin to amazement the Platonic principles which guided the early Italian Renaissance:

Heaven only may be termed really beautiful; the beauty of the human body comes from contemplating that divine light which is reflected in the soul's beauty; virtue makes the soul approach this divine beauty because the soul shines in contemplating the divine...God is the Creator and Giver of all

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28. Jean Guiraud, op. cit., pp. 2-3: La papauté ne fut pas indifférente à ce mouvement. Les lettres et les arts ne s'étaient-ils pas développés jusqu'alors à l'ombre du sanctuaire? L'antiquité qui allait les vivifier n'inspirait à l'Eglise aucune méfiance; c'était dans ses bibliothèques que les œuvres littéraires de la Grèce et de Rome avaient trouvé un asile contre la barbarie et l'art chrétien avait respecté les traditions de l'esthétique antique. Cette union de l'Eglise et de la Renaissance fut intime. Artistes et lettres trouverent assez vaste pour leur activité le domaine de l'esprit et de la beauté.

beauty because He alone is absolute perfection, perfect wisdom and incomprehensible beauty. Angelic understandings contemplate His beauty face to face; the human intellect, however, so far as it forms part of the material body, is blind to it...The beauty of this worldly frame, and all the parts thereof depend on ideal form comprehended in the Divine Mind. (Plato's Theory of Beauty) (29)

That this ideal was too soon debased and tarnished, and the cult of spiritual beauty replaced by the worship of physical charm is of no consequence here. The point is that in its best and highest forms, the Renaissance was the child of the Church. Petrarch, Giotto, Michelangelo, Raphael bear witness to this fusion of human and divine elements. When the teeming power and genius of the Renaissance were held in discipline by the Church, and curbed by the great divine sanctions for which She stands, we come upon such activities as those of Leonardo da Vinci, who was indeed almost "un homme universel."<sup>30</sup>

As the movement spread, however, radical tendencies became manifest. With the cultivation of pagan literature and art many adopted too the cult of pagan morality, and the new spirit, in the fullness of time, demanded concessions of the Church which struck at the root of her doctrines.

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29. L. Einstein, op. cit., pp. 84-85.

30. L. H. Hough, "Types of Humanism," in the London Quarterly Review, Vol. CXI, p. 11.

She then refused to remodel her beliefs on the lines that the new spirit laid down.

At their best, the humanists remembered the demand for proportion and restraint... When they lacked restraint they allowed nature and not man to become master, and so their humanism began to be a soiled and undisciplined thing. At the very worst, having discarded divine sanctions, they discarded equally the great human sanctions and plunged into orgies of sensuality and license. So came vice, then abnormal vice, then cruelty and the darkest crime...(31)

In England where the new movement had from the first assumed, as fitting the northern clime, a sterner and more sober character, the reaction from the divine to the human plunged the country into the Reformation. Though many have advanced opinions to the contrary, it is now generally acknowledged that the Reformation was a check to the Renaissance. It stifled its most glowing inspiration, not only because it put to death its best representatives, but because it chilled the source of the literary lifestream, so that from the richness and maturity of Thomas More, the stream was thinned into the spun-out conceits of Lyly; and Southwell's full lyricism into the pedantry of du Bartas as interpreted by Sylvester. It stemmed the current of genius

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31. Ibid., p. 12.

within the very soul of the writer. Hooker's prose, which could toss its plumes in the lordliest manner of the Renaissance, was held in leash and hampered by Reformation canons.

That the Reformation had little enough to do with fostering culture is shown by its attitude towards the most eminent humanists of England. Henry VIII put to death on political grounds the most promising young poet of the English Renaissance, Howard, Earl of Surrey. The finest spirit of English humanism breathed in Thomas More whom the Reformation sent to death, as it sent that most gentle and renowned patron of letters, Bishop Fisher. It racked and tortured into silence the cultured eloquence of Campion, and quenched forever the lyric mysticism of Robert Southwell's songs. These were the men of the English Renaissance who, under the guidance of the Church, never forsook the early ideals, and who knew that the greatest thing about the human is its capacity to recognize and respond to the divine. In these men the movement may be said to have lived most fully; and when the Reformation condemned them, it cut off a vital element in the English Renaissance.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERARY ENGLAND TOWARDS THE CLOSE OF THE 16th CENTURY

At the end of the 16th Century, the English Renaissance reaped its harvest. Never in the history of its literature had there been a period for England so full and so varied in its production as that which marks the end of Elizabeth's reign, just before the Reformation closed its final grip upon the country.

#### CHARACTERISTICS of the PERIOD

Influence of Translations - Many causes contributed to the triumph of letters. For one thing, "the soil had been fertilized by a deep layer of translations."<sup>1</sup> Philemon Holland gave his country Pliny the Elder, Livy, and Suetonis, as well as Plutarch. North, using Amyot's text, retranslated Plutarch. Thomas Nicolls took his Thucydides from the French version by Claude de Seyssel who in turn had based his upon the Latin of Laurentius Valla. Adlington's translations, too, had French and Italian intermediaries. Where many of these indirect translations lost in accuracy of detail, they gained in originality of concept, and in literary merit. Many of the verse translations, however, were

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1. Emile Legouis and Louis Cazamian, A History of English Literature, p. 255.



were deplorable, like Stanyhurst's Aeneid with its impossible hexameter, and its vocabulary filled with slang and trivialities. Ovid, Ariosto, and Tasso were translated without distinction by Golding, Harington, Carew, and Fairfax. Sylvester improved upon du Bartas' bombastic style, and Chapman produced incontestably the masterpiece of poetic translation in his Homer. English style and prosody were influenced by these various translations, and the literary treasury enriched with new material.<sup>2</sup>

Italianism - Foreign influence was strong in Elizabethan literature, and the dominant note was that of Italy. Italianism - that most potent of the infatuations of the Renaissance - seems to have penetrated, for a time at least, every phase of English life. Most Englishmen of wealth traveled in Italy, spoke the language, and returning brought with them the manners, customs, and morals of the South. The Italianate Englishman was to be observed by his dress. Elizabethan gallants derived their courtly etiquette from Castiglione. The novellieri of Boccaccio, Cinthio, Bandello, Straparola were translated and appeared in scattered collections; and these tales of love, violence, blood and

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2. E. Legouis and L. Cazamian, op. cit., pp. 265-258.

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tears aided in the development of English drama. Indeed, Italy, with its minstrelsy and the fragrance of its romance completely captivated the English imagination. So strong became the fascination that English youth were warned of the southern danger. Roger Ascham writes with severity:

These bee the inchantementes of Circe, brought out of Italie to marre mens maners in England; much, by example of ill life, but more by preceptes of fonde bookes, of late translated out of Italian into English, sold in every shop in London...There bee moe of these ungratious bookes set out in Printe wythin these fewe monthes, than have been sene in England many score yeares before... They have in more reverence the triumphes of Petrarche than the Genesis of Moses. They make more account of Tullies offices than S. Paules epistles: of a tale in Bocace than a storie of the Bible...(4)

The southern genius was tainted with paganism, it is true, but the healthy constitution of the North was never so seriously affected by the sensuous Italian spirit as by the malicious work of the Reformers. England's literature yielded for a time to the spell of the pagan Renaissance, but soon purged out much of its baser elements, while at the same time the brilliancy of the Italian gave color and charm to English writing. "The debt of English to Italian

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3. Ibid., p. 258.

4. A. H. Welsh, Development of English Literature and Language, Vol. I, p. 293.

literature consists in material of production, the impulse towards creation, a keener sense of the tragic, a livelier sense of the beautiful, a more copious diction and a more finished style."<sup>5</sup>

Development of Language - The turning points represented by most literary movements almost invariably mark an interesting development of language, such for instance as the evolution from Alfred to Chaucer, and again from Chaucer to Shakespeare. Language in the Elizabethan Age was in a state of flux, with practically no rule or restriction. Writers improvised words with creative ingenuity; there was no fully constituted grammar nor spelling. "A dictum on Shakespearian grammar may be extended to the whole language:"

Any irregularities, whatever, whether in the formation of words, or in the combination of words into sentences are allowable...almost any part of speech can be used as any other part of speech. An adverb can be used as a verb... as a noun...or as an adjective...Any noun or adjective can be used as an active verb. (6)

Words were not written uniformly. Elizabeth, reputed mistress of eight languages, spelt sovereign seven different ways; Shakespeare's name appears in as many forms as may

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5. A. H. Welsh, op. cit., p. 293.

6. E. Legouis, op. cit., p. 265.

serve to express its sound or semblance. Attempts were made to standardize the spelling and pronunciation, but geographical differences made the task an impossible one. Orthographers, unable to reconcile their differences, became individual faddists. One wished to turn the language into a sort of music-book. "In true orthographie," he says, "both the eye, the voice, and the eare must consent perfectly, without any let, doubt, or maze." Another defines orthography as "conteyning the due order and reason howe to write or painte th' image of manne's voice, moste like to the life or nature." Shakespeare comments caustically on the whole science of philology: "Now he is turned orthographer; his words are a very fantastical banquet; just so many strange dishes."<sup>7</sup>

There is no doubt that the vocabulary was enriched by increased travel and commerce resulting from the rapid progress in geographical discovery. Classical writings, too, introduced by translation, were an important means of enrichment. "The far-journeyed gentleman," says Welsh, "returned not only in love with foreign fashions but equally fond 'to powder his talk with over-sea language.'<sup>8</sup>" The purists

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7. A. H. Welsh, op. cit., p. 294.

8. Ibid., p. 295.

who wished to retain the Saxon character were alarmed at the inpouring of foreign words, but as a matter of fact the Saxon element in the English tongue was found insufficient, and the affluence and variety which resulted to the language from literary commerce prepared it for the great and diversified conceptions of later masters. The close of the 16th Century witnessed a significant development of the English language, - the first setting of the mould, so to speak, which would later be constitutionally fixed, when additional training should have given the language flexibility and strength.

National Spirit - Perhaps the strongest characteristic of the Elizabethan period was a spirit of national exaltation - a wave on the crest of which literature was carried along. England's pride had been aroused by the initiative and activity of other nations particularly in the field of discovery and exploration, and she determined in one bound to outstrip France, Portugal, Spain, and Italy. In the flush of this new enthusiasm, journeys were undertaken which furnished a mine of literary material. England, too, began to compare her literary poverty with the wealth of France and Italy, and her spirit of emulation was further roused. From a period in mid-century of relative inertia and languor, she suddenly sprang into intense activity and ventured into every field of literature - pastorals, epics, comedies and

tragedies, lyrics of every form...romance, criticism, history,  
 and philosophy.<sup>9</sup>

The very withdrawal of Religion tended to strengthen the national spirit. Those who "went over" to the Reformers did so for political reasons, for the Reformation in England was never anything but a political engine. The predominant tendency of the time was to identify religion with politics, and in the resulting mental confusion Anglican worship became essentially bound up with the idea of patriotism; "the living  
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 God was merely the English God."

An Age of Poetry - Phillemore, in agreement with other commentators, insists that the Elizabethan was in no sense a prose era, and his reason is interesting:

The semi-barbaric splendour of the Elizabethan Age - a little like the Grand Parade of a provincial "nouveau riche" who has "cultured" ambitions - must not blind us to the historical fact. The Elizabethan Age produced one supreme and many good poets. Poetry is a wind that bloweth where it listeth: a barbaric people may have great poetry; they cannot have great prose. Prose is an institution, part of the equipment of a civilization, part of its heritable wealth, like its laws or its system of schooling, or its tradition of skilled craftsmanship...(11)

The poet became, in the public mind, the first of men. The

9. E. Legouis, op. cit., p. 262.

10. Ibid., p. 260.

11. Phillemore, J. "Blessed Thomas More and the Arrest of Humanism," in the Dublin Review, July, 1913, Vol. CLIII, p. 8.

word was synonymous with hero. Drayton spoke of Sydney as "that heroe for numbers."<sup>12</sup> According to Elizabethan critical opinion, a certain exaltation, a "fine frenzy" must possess this typical hero of numbers. Such an attitude led naturally to a preponderance of lyric verse. "A generation lived in this fever...Poetry was widely disseminated, heated men's brains, and sometimes turned their heads, gave a lyrical turn to the whole of literature, beflowered and falsified the prose which was all poetic."<sup>13</sup>

As never before there was a rejection of the rules which had bound English as it had bound French prosody. Verse might be syllabic or accentual or governed by no law except the recurring ictus or beat. In many cases quantity and accent alike were ignored. Lyrics and solemm poetic forms retained their full phonetic value, but dramatic verse underwent changes which sacrificed metric regularity according to the situation or action of the play, or the need of speed or emphasis. Blank verse admitted of a thousand varying forms. The same type of poetic line might differ with different poets. For example, Spenser's rhymed heroic line is very different from Donne's; and the blank verse produced

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12. John Macy, Story of the World's Greatest Literature, p. 265.

13. E. Legouis, op. cit., p. 264.

by Marlowe, Dekker, Fletcher, and Massinger each represent a different type. This mobility, pliability of prosody was an advantage to the true artist; with the lesser poets, the freedom degenerated into license, with the result that much of the verse reads like very bad prose.<sup>14</sup>

The Elizabethan lyric had an exquisite and lucid grace, reminiscent of its Italian origin in its themes of nature or love; more spontaneous, if less perfect in craftsmanship. The taste for the Arcadian pastoral is manifest in these poems; they reveal a quality that is bright and fragrant, but they are, for the most part, lacking in depth of thought and feeling, devoid of spirituality, oftentimes frankly pagan. The age was characterized by extravagance of speech and artificiality of sentiment, though beneath the surface there ran a strong current of genuine life. This artificiality was partly fostered by court life under the Tudors when poets and writers were obliged to cozen and flatter the sovereign for their very sustenance. Another cause was the decadence into which the movement of the Renaissance had lapsed in Italy. In imitation of Italian forms, the Elizabethan lyrics were chiefly love lyrics; but love, that

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14. Ibid., pp. 265-266.



informing spirit of all lyric poetry, which had been allegorical and mystic in the Middle Ages, aesthetic and sensual in the flowering of the Renaissance, now became a mere rhetorical artifice, a leit motif, for infinite melodious and fantastic variations and images, which minced and prated in sensual trifles.

Surely we have the height of the fantastic in Lord Brooke's description of Myra "washing the waters with her beauties white"...Campion's comparison of his lady's face to a garden, and the madrigalist's likening of the hair of his beloved to the golden wires of a cage in which his heart is entrapped. (15)

It became the fashion to sing, not of virtue, but solely of physical charm, and most appropriate for this form of artistic amusement was the "conceit," a verbal artifice or word-play which reveals how completely the language of love had become the language of exaggerated compliment. Romance had lapsed from its former estate to become something less real than the trifling which had served to amuse the Provencal courts of love. Sydney who, like the rest, addresses his lady in far-fetched phrases, occasionally revolts and exclaims:

Leave me, O love, which reaches but to dust,  
And thou, my mind, aspire to higher things. (16)

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15. B. M. Kelly, op. cit., pp. 87-88.

16. Ibid.

The principles of literary criticism prevailing at the time may have been to some extent responsible for these ornamentations of style. George Puttenham, who in 1589 wrote the Art of English Poesy, considered that ornament is essential for the refinement of poetic style; that it yields smoothness and melody, "luster and light." It is "the beautiful habit of language...figurative speeches (are) the instruments wherewith we burnish our language...whence finally resulteth a long and continued phrase or manner of writing or speech which we call by the name of style."<sup>17</sup>

A style which is "pure and cleanly" may be sufficient for ordinary speech but it is not "so well appointed for all purposes of the excellent poet as when it is gallantly arrayed in all his colors which figure can set upon it."<sup>18</sup>

We find abundant examples to substantiate this theory of poetics. Greene sings to Samela:

Her tresses gold, her eyes like glassy streams,  
Her cheeks like rose and lily yield forth gleams;  
Her brows bright arches framed of ebony. (19)

Nashe, in one piece, reproduces several species of bird-notes:

Spring, the sweet spring, is the year's pleasant King:  
Cuckoo, jug-jug, pu-we, to-witta-wool! (20)

17. G. A. Thompson, Elizabethan Criticism of Poetry, p. 154.

18. Ibid.

19. Oxford Book of English Verse, p. 143.

20. Ibid., p. 201.

Drummond assures us:

Me here she first perceived, and here a morn  
Of bright carnations did o'erspread her face. (21)

The apex of "conceited" ornament is perhaps reached by John Lyly in such poetic tricks as "Cards and Kisses." Every form of short poem was subjected to this artificial treatment, but more than any other the graceful sonnet was turned to the uses of adroit insincerity. Sydney exhorts the sad Moone to be his companion in misery, but no excess of his grief compares, for variety of epithet, with Thomas Lodge's description of the wholly remarkable Rosaline:

Her eyes are sapphire set in snow,  
Resembling heaven by every wink!

Her neck like to a stately tower

The gods are wounded in her sight;  
And love forsakes his heavenly fires  
And at her eyes his brand doth light. (22)

The generally tolerant attitude of critics towards decorative and figurative features of poetic style, gaudy and unnatural to the taste of a different age, is not so hard to understand when one remembers that the esthetic emotions of the age of Elizabeth were pitched in another key. The world was younger, life was gayer and brighter. Taste was different. Ornaments of life and literature that now seem withered and "winter-starved" then seemed fresh and beautiful, not only delighting the senses but stirring the mind and heart, quickening the imagination, and thus accomplishing the purposes of poetry.

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21. Oxford Book of English Verse, p. 248.

22. Ibid., pp. 140-141.

Moreover, the movement toward ornamentation and refinement of poetic style, involving at once the motives of gratifying the spirit of national emulation and class distinction and of satisfying a newly stimulated sense of grace and beauty, was naturally bound to result in excesses as well as in excellence. (23)

Much has been written of the Renaissance as the great revival of classical learning - the return to ancient Greece and Rome for models of both form and matter; but any survey, however superficial, soon reveals that the literary fertility of the English Renaissance was not to any important extent classical. The classical influence is chiefly to be seen in the drama where Udall, Jonson, Fletcher, Sackville, and Norton attempted to make it "regular." Their models, however, were not the Greek dramatists, but Terence, Plautus, and Seneca, whose writings, it will be remembered, were to the taste of Nero. Classical themes were abundant, but these had been introduced before the Renaissance and their treatment was in the florid manner of the Italian humanist, or even betrayed a French ancestry like Aucassin and Nicolette.

Jonson was the most learned and successful of the "regular" dramatists, but even his plays are conspicuously lacking in the dignity and majesty of the classics. One reason why the classical influence did not prevail was that the romantic or Catholic tradition was too strong. The

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23. G. A. Thompson, op. cit., pp. 155-156.

unities struggled in vain against a dramatic literature built upon the Christian concept of life which had flowered so naturally in the mysteries, which saw nothing unseemly in a mingling of high and low, of the serious and the comic, and which consequently carried on a line of direct descent from Noah's Flood and the Second Shepherd's Play, through the comedies of Medwall, Heywood, Lyly, and Greene, linking Peele's Scriptural drama of David and Fair Bethsabee with the miracle plays, and the protagonists of Marlowe's tragedies with the allegorical characters of the moralities. (24)

The true significance of the Renaissance in the North does not consist in the passion for classical lore, but rather in the general awakening to new and varied interests by which every province of human intelligence and action was refreshed. With the exception of a few - a very few - great names, it was not an age of genius, nor a period of deep or lofty thought. It easily degenerated into formalism, especially when stricken by the Reformation; but on the other hand, by its vital and universal activity, it opened men's minds, and by its cultural influence it prepared and refined the ground which was to yield so richly in the two centuries that followed.

#### COMPLEXITY OF THE AGE

It would be untenable to emphasize the religious, or

even the anti-religious tendencies of a movement so thoroughly secularized as the Renaissance. The whole bent of humanism in all countries was towards a more complete enjoyment of life, and people gave themselves up to it with eager abandonment. "The intellectual paganism of humanism rested on the broad basis of an instinctive paganism scattered wide among the people."<sup>25</sup> The spirit of nationalism, in cutting off the restrictions imposed by Rome, fostered the naturalistic tendencies inherent in the Renaissance, and yet it is undeniable that this layer of new religious opinion and of pagan practice was superimposed upon a foundation which was still Catholic. This is the anomaly of the Elizabethan Age. Its literature represents a conflict, in which Catholic thought and spirit - the heritage of ages - is struggling with a new spirit which, Protean-like, is now pagan and unmoral, now Protestant and moralist, but which is in any case merely natural as opposed to the supernatural.

This struggle is easily to be observed in the writers who come into prominence at the end of the 16th Century. Few are as wholly given up to the realism of the senses as John Skelton whose "ragged, jagged rhyme" is full of popular

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25. E. Legouis, op. cit., p. 261.

instinct, virile to brutality, rooted in the soil, and untouched by diviner aspiration. Howard, Earl of Surrey, with his native genius, his Italian models, and his mystical love for the fair Geraldine, gave far clearer poetic promise than Skelton. He represents the more complex traits of the Renaissance - Platonism (but a Platonism which St. Augustine has metamorphosed) - spiritual aspiration mingled with a certain melancholy, together with grace and elegance of style. Welsh asks us to observe in Surrey the new-born art:

It is calculating and selective, contrasted and ornamented, eloquent and forceful; critical, exact, musical, balanced; uniting symmetry of phrase to symmetry of idea, and delight of the ear to delight of the mind. (26)

Sydney's work, too, is typical of the luxuriance and the irregularity of his century, but his mounting spirit marks a further evolution in poetic thought. Higher still in that empyrean where sense and spirit are joined is Spenser's art, at once pagan and Christian. Never has artist so reflected in his work the anomaly of his age. Protestant by profession (and politics), as sensuous as the Renaissance, he is still in the unconscious depth of his soul so Catholic that his very moralizing has for its staple Catholic doctrine and truth.

He writes:

And is there care in heaven? and is there love  
 In heavenly spirits to these creatures base,  
 That may compassion of their evils move?  
 There is: else much more wretched were the case  
 Of men then beasts. But O th'exceeding grace  
 Of highest God, that loves his creatures so,  
 And all his workes with mercy doth embrace,  
 That blessed Angels, he sends to and fro,  
 To serve to wicked man, to serve his wicked foe. (27)

Marlowe's "mighty line" with its "magnificent harmonies, lavish epithets, high-astounding metaphors, delight in resplendent color, in blazing jewels, in pomp and majesty," is a characteristic utterance of the Renaissance. But Marlowe's soul knew the struggle of his age, too. He professes a bold atheism and a system of thought which he considers to have been derived from pagan classicism, and yet Marlowe reveals a recognition of the supernatural as the very basis of most of his work. In Faustus above all he shows himself instinctively Catholic:

Ah, Faustus,  
 Now hast thou but one bare hour to live,  
 And then thou must be damned perpetually!  
 Stand still, you ever-moving spheres of heaven,  
 That time may cease and midnight never come;  
 Fair Nature's eye, rise, rise again and make  
 Perpetual day; or let this hour be but  
 A year, a month, a week, a natural day,  
 That Faustus may repent and save his soul!  
 O lente, lente, currite noctis equi!  
 The stars move still, time runs, the clock will strike,  
 The devil will come, and Faustus must be damned.



O, I'll leap up to my God! Who pulls me down?  
 See, see where Christ's blood streams in the firmament!  
 One drop would save my soul--half a drop: ah, my Christ!  
 Ah, rend not my heart for naming of my Christ!  
 Yet will I call on him: O spare me, Lucifer! (28)

Apart from Catholic belief these stirring lines are meaningless.

The more one observes the Elizabethan age of literature, the more it becomes evident that, while the classical influence was slight both in poetry and drama, the great substratum of literary thought was Catholic and medieval.

The reason is quite obvious:

The classicism...is imperfect, not only because it was indirectly derived through Italy, but also because it was difficult for a Christian people to accept all at once a classicism rooted in paganism. Elizabethan classicism is in reality romanticism gone to seed. The Plato who speaks in Spenser's Hymnes is a Plato who has known Christ. Loudly as the poet proclaims himself an Elizabethan in the symbolism of the Faery Queene, it is to the romantic ages, the ages of faith and chivalry, that he turns for his subject-matter. (29)

This turmoil of sense and spirit is to be seen at work in the soul of John Donne. It may have been one of the triumphs of the Established Church that the Crown persuaded him to take Anglican Orders, but in his blood the Roman Catholic strain ran strong. "There is only one phrase that adequately

28. B. M. Kelly, op. cit., p. 95.

29. Ibid., p. 90.

describes the tormented soul of John Donne as revealed in his Poems, and that is the Irish phrase 'spoiled priest.'<sup>30</sup> His passionately imaginative nature had the eager intense quality of which great mysticism is born; that he never realized this stature is owing to his inability to "look upon the heights." He never forgot those heights, however, and with a sense of frustration he pleads in poem after poem, especially in the Divine Poems, "Show me, deare Christ, Thy Spouse so bright and clear."<sup>31</sup>

That the literature was still instinctively Catholic in undertone does not mean that the period saw any appreciable production of religious writing, but that the bent of mind, the turn of thought was still Catholic, at the same time that the writers of this age felt and were influenced by the strong downward pull of the pagan Renaissance. Sense and spirit are joined in the literature of the time, though they are seen joined in conflict.

One poet, however, seems to have achieved harmonious fusion between lyric passion and religious thought. Robert Southwell is the only religious poet of the 16th Century of literary significance. There were occasional devotional

30. B. M. Kelly, op. cit., p. 109.

31. Ibid.

effusions, and there was much controversial and didactic verse which must be precluded from the realm of pure literature; but poetry specifically concerned with religious mysticism was practically non-existent in the Elizabethan age.

Southwell may be said to have had three reasons for writing: to express his own thoughts and feelings; to comfort and strengthen the suffering Catholics of England, and to try to rescue the art of poetry from the worldly uses to which it had been so exclusively devoted. "Still keenest wits are stilling Venus' rose," he wrote in one of his poems. There is little doubt that he had read Shakespeare's Venus and Adonis, published in 1593, and no doubt regarded by him as an instance of the poetry he wished to supplant. His Saint Peter's Complaint was written in the metric and stanzaic forms of the Venus and Adonis.

Most poets (he writes) now busie themselves in expressing such passions as onely serve for testimonies to howe unworthy affections they have wedded their wills. And, because the best course to let them see the error of their works is to weave a new webbe in their own loome, I have here laide a few course threds together. (32)

His attempt to give charm and literary merit to sacred poetry did not pass unnoticed. His works enjoyed immediate and

widespread popularity. Imitators were not lacking who rang the changes on St. Peter's Complaint, and Mary Magdalen's Teares; nor was adverse criticism lacking: Joseph Hall in his eighth satire attacks both the Complaint and the Teares:

Now good St. Peter weeps pure Helicon!  
And both the Maryes make a musick-mone! (33)

One commentator thinks it strange that Southwell should have sought in Italy an antidote to the heady stanzas of the Venus and Adonis;<sup>34</sup> but his use of imagery and conceit in the Italianate manner is quite consistent with his purpose of weaving a "new webbe" in the old loom. It is to be remembered that Southwell is a typical Renaissance poet in most respects—too typical to be merely a reactionary against humanist trends. He was in no sense a revolutionist, an innovator in poetic thought, like Gerard Hopkins. He wished rather to see the poetry of his time purged of licentiousness, and to some degree, spiritualized. His desire was to point the eternal contrast between the reality of things spiritual and the unreality of things merely sensual. With this intent he used every poetic device within his reach, which might appeal to the taste of the age. He had been a first-hand student of the Italian cult of conceit, epigram, and paradox, and he

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33. Ibid.

34. E. Legouis, p. 328.  
op. cit.

knew the power of the Italian poetry in England. He used its forms then with set purpose, "in an effort to express the eternal through the imagery of the temporal."<sup>35</sup>

...At its best Southwell's poetry, with its accent of profound conviction, its epigrammatic turn of phrase, its thought-packed metaphors, its flaming spirit, its never-cloying harmonies, marks the continuity of the Elizabethan Age with the poetic tradition...(36)

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35. Cambridge History of English Literature, Vol. IV, p. 149.

36. B. M. Kelly, op. cit., p. 104.

## CHAPTER III

### ROBERT SOUTHWELL, THE MARTYR

When Elizabeth mounted the throne of England, she was faced with the same complex situation which had broken Mary Tudor. The new vigor which had characterized the Renaissance of letters was making itself felt in every phase of existence, causing change at least, if not improvement. These new forces were full of strife, impetuosity, and uncontrol, though strong with a new infusion of life, and possessing a rich inheritance. The ruler who could bring order from such mixed elements must indeed bear the mark of genius. Mary, with her virtues as great and numerous as her sorrows, had tried to conquer the problem by fighting against the current. Perhaps because she had witnessed her sister's failure, Elizabeth upon her accession decided to swim with the tide.

After an interview with the young queen, the ambassador from Spain reported his apprehensions to Philip II.

She is a woman extremely vain and acute, very similar in her manner of proceeding to her father. I greatly fear that in matters of religion she will not be right, because I see her inclined to govern by men who are held to be heretics, and because the women about her are all so. (2)

His apprehensions were soon confirmed. The panegyric delivered by Dr. White, Bishop of Winchester, upon the death

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1. J. M. Stone, Reformation and Renaissance, p. 363.

2. Ibid.

of Queen Mary caused his arrest, and shortly after, at High Mass in the Royal Chapel on Christmas Day, Bishop Oglethorpe was ordered by the Queen not to elevate the Sacred Host. Upon his refusal she left the Chapel. At the insistence of the same prelate, she permitted her coronation to proceed regularly according to Roman ritual, but in the subsequent choice of her ministers, only eleven of Mary's Privy Council of thirty-five were elected to office. Within her Council Elizabeth formed a second more intimate body who alone had her confidence, and at whose head was William Cecil, a zealous protestant under Edward VI.

Elizabeth's policy was a fencing one but it became increasingly evident that she contemplated another change of religion for the nation, in spite of her protests to the contrary. She had an invincibly strong opposition, however, in the clergy who had been appointed during Mary's reign. Henry VIII's break from the Church had surprised and terrified the prelates into hasty submission, but when Elizabeth veered round, she met the united opposition of the whole hierarchy, the heads of all the colleges in both universities, the majority of the secular clergy, and many Catholic laymen. She - through Cecil - set about breaking this opposition by means of a cleverly contrived engine which enriched the royal treasury at the same time that it gradually fastened Protestantism upon the country. If a priest

or layman refused to adopt the New Prayer Book or to take the Oath of Supremacy, his goods were forfeit to the State and he was committed to life imprisonment or banishment. Indulgence was exercised at first, but little by little the screw tightened, and for ten years Elizabeth's Catholic subjects endured an unbloody persecution which came to an end only with the inauguration of a bloody persecution in 1577. Then began for England a period of butchery, hanging, quartering, disembowelling, unequalled since the early days of Christian martyrdom. The Faith was in real danger of perishing from dearth of priests. Consequently seminaries, like Douai, were established abroad which yearly sent new recruits into England who worked secretly for the preservation of Catholicity.

Robert Southwell, S. J. landed between Folkestone and Dover, with a companion, Father Garnet, on the morning of July 17, 1586, (New Style dating), July 7, (Old Style). Fortunately for the arrivals the Old Style dating was still in honor. It was a day of celebration - the Feast of St. Thomas a Becket - and they were better able to conceal themselves in the crowds that thronged to and from the fairs held throughout Kent.

Southwell was descended from an old family who for generations had intermarried with the nobility of Suffolk and Norfolk. His father was the natural son of Sir Richard

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3. Pierre Janelle, Robert Southwell, the Writer, p. 37.



Southwell who had taken an active part in suppressing the monasteries under Henry VIII, and for his services had been rewarded with the Benedictine Abbey of Horsham St. Faith's. Sir Richard changed his convictions - religious and political - a few times under Edward and Mary, making a profit each time. His son, also named Richard, married into the family from which Shelley was descended, and of the three sons given to this marriage, Robert was the youngest, born in 1561 or 1562 in the old Benedictine Priory which had been given to his grandfather.

The scion of this race which had grown rich by plundering the Church and by unscrupulous time-serving is the mystic among the English martyrs--though circumstances made him a man of action and bold adventure. Fire, sweetness, purity and gentleness were features of Robert Southwell's nature. Few pages in the history of the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation shine so spotlessly as those which bear the names of the English martyrs. They were a motley band--fighters, dreamers, plain, straightforward men of action, converts and born Catholics... But there can scarcely be one among those acquainted with this band of heroic saints who has not conceived a peculiar affection for Robert Southwell. (4)

As a boy, he studied at Douai and, inspired with enthusiasm for the Society of Jesus, entered the novitiate at Rome, October 17, 1578. He took his vows, was ordained priest, and filled the office of Prefect of Studies at the English

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4. Sigrid Undset, Stages on the Road, p. 148.

College at Rome between the years 1578 and 1585.<sup>5</sup> At this time he began to attract attention as a writer of verse.

The period of his Latin poetry, however, is the least inspired phase of his literary development. In addition to his extreme youth, he was too completely dominated by the Neo-Classicism prevalent at the time in Christian literary theory, a system which, in its laudatory attempt to "clean up" Renaissance poetry, had damped lyricism into lifelessness by banishing all feeling, and trying to substitute reflection for inspiration.<sup>6</sup> Under this chill influence Southwell essayed two Latin epics with Christian themes in the classic style, revealing a thorough mastery of Ovid and Vergil, but falling far short of the grandeur or flight of the epic genre. His Latin elegies (about nine in number) strike a truer poetic note, though they, too, are inferior to his English lyrics. They possess, in common with the latter, harmony of diction and warmth of feeling, but the faults are obvious, particularly in the case of the poem purporting to be A Letter to his Father by the Prodigal Son (a highly probable theme) where the style is artificial, the thought conventional, and the whole a very close imitation of Ovid's Tristia.<sup>7</sup>

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5. S. Undset, op. cit., p. 149.

6. P. Janelle, op. cit., p. 116.

7. Ibid., pp. 133-134.

These poems mark the period of Southwell's apprenticeship. The ideas of poetic craftsmanship absorbed at this time are to be seen in the preciousness of his earlier English poems; but no theory was able to stifle wholly the lyric qualities inherent in the poet and fostered by the religious influences he encountered in Rome.

There was little time for verse-writing upon his arrival in England. Having first found refuge with Lord Vaux of Harrowden, he set about immediately riding through the country, "saying Mass, hearing confessions, celebrating marriages, baptizing, re-admitting apostates, giving the Sacraments to the dying." He even visited Catholics in prison and said Mass there. Prisoners of means enjoyed a fair amount of liberty, and such privileges as hearing Mass and "communicating" might be bought from easy gaolers. Southwell's only literary output during his first years in England were his letters, many of which have been preserved, and present a lively picture of his adventures and hair-breadth escapes. Two of his letters tell of the anxiety caused him by the defection of his family. The well-known Epistle to his Father is full of affectionate prayer that he may return to the Church before his death. To his brother

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8. S. Undset, op. cit., p. 153.

he writes:

Shrine not any longer a dead soul in  
a living body...Weigh with yourself at how  
easy a price you rate God, Whom you are  
content to sell for the use of your sub-  
stance...Look if you can upon a crucifix  
without blushing; do but count the five  
wounds of Christ once over without a bleed-  
ing conscience. (9)

The return to the Church of his father is uncertain, but the Jesuit succeeded in winning his brother who in 1590 was exiled to the Netherlands for his faith.

In the same year Robert Southwell became chaplain to Anne, Countess of Arundel, whose husband, Philip Howard, Earl of Arundel, was kept a close prisoner in the Tower following his "defection" from Anglicanism and loss of favor at court. There was a private printing press in Arundel House, and Southwell, while in residence with the Howards, wrote many of his poems, as well as a number of controversial and apologetic pamphlets which were printed in the house and spread about privately. To this period between 1587 and 1592 belong his prose-poem Saint Mary Magdalene's Funerall Teares, the Epistle of Comfort to the suffering Catholics of England, and the beautiful correspondence between Southwell and the imprisoned Howard, fragments of which are to be found in an early 17th Century

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9. S. Undset, op. cit., p. 155.

biography printed in 1857, The Lives of Philip Howard, Earl of Arundel and of Ann Dacres, His Wife.<sup>10</sup>

Much research in the matter of dating Southwell's poems has gone unrewarded. A certain evolution in his poetic thought observable in his work points to a progression but leaves the time-element still indefinite. There is in reality no authentic external evidence to fix the chronology of his verse; but on rather slender internal evidence one might assign to the period of his residence at Arundel House the poems which reveal his contemplative adoration of the Child Jesus, New Prince, New Pomp, A Childe my Choyse, The Burning Babe, New Heaven, New Warre, and others written to the Infant and His Mother. His seclusion at Arundel House gave opportunity for the contemplative within him to come into its own. His poems on the Mysteries of Christ's life are written in the figurative language of the Elizabethan age and he evinces the Renaissance taste for similes which are rather artificial -

But his Christmas poems have a dark golden lustre of their own. And there is an unforgettable power in his image of Christ--the eternal God Who unwearied through all eternity supports the earth on His finger-tip and encloses all creation in the hollow of His hand--but in His humanity breaks down and falls beneath the

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10. P. Janelle, op. cit., p. 43.

weight of a single person's sin. And his vision of the Child Jesus appearing as a blazing meteor over the frozen fields of earth - as a ball of fire from the glowing love which is the primal element behind all things created--is strange and startling in the interplay of its Renaissance extravagance, the naturalism of its imagery, and the unrestrained passion of its feeling. (11)

Among those who had profited much by Father Southwell's apostolic work were the Bellamys' - a family remarkable for fidelity to the Faith, having paid the full price of it year after year. The Jesuit had frequently said Mass in their home at Harrow-on-the-Hill and on more than one occasion had been their guest. Anne Bellamy, a daughter of the house, had been imprisoned for her rather too demonstrative loyalty to the Church, and while in prison came under the power of Topcliffe, the priest-hunter, who used her as a tool and afterwards married her off to one of his underjailers. The unhappy girl, removed from prison, summoned Southwell to a house where she was residing in Holborn presumably to hear her confession. He told her in the course of the interview that he would celebrate Mass the following Sunday in her home, June 20, 1592, at Uxenden Hall. Anne accordingly warned Topcliffe in a letter, enclosing a sketch of her father's home with the secret

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11. S. Undset, op. cit., p. 163.

chamber marked. Southwell was arrested while still wearing his vestments and sent off to Topcliffe's house in Westminster. Here he was almost instantly subjected to torture with a view to discovering whether he knew Lady Arundel, and whether he would reveal the names of other priests. He was therefore hung up by the wrists for two days and nights. When he seemed about to die they took him down and applied burning paper to his nose until he revived and vomited blood; then he was suspended again. Nothing ensued beyond the admission that he was a priest and a Jesuit; he would mention no names, nor even so much as reveal the color of the horse that took him to Uxenden to avoid implicating the owner. From Topcliffe's house he was removed to Gatehouse Prison and put into a cell so foul that his father interceded for him with the Queen, who then gave orders that he be sent to better quarters, and provided with books, clothes and other necessaries. He was once more removed, this time to the Tower where he remained for three years before his death, and where, according to Cecil's record, he underwent torture thirteen times.<sup>12</sup>

It seems probable that his beautiful poems on death were written in prison. Looke Home, I Die Alive, What Joy to Live? Life's Death, Love's Life, At Home in Heaven are

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12. S. Undset, op. cit., pp. 163-168.

written in the haunting and pathetic measures of a man who is desperately homesick.

O Life, what lets thee from a quick decease?  
 O death, what draws thee from a present prey?  
 My feast is done, my soul would be at ease,  
 My grace is said, O death! come take away.

I live, but such a life as ever dies;  
 I die, but such a death as never ends;  
 My death to end my dying life denies,  
 And life my loving death no whit amends.

Thus still I die, yet still I do remain;  
 My living death by dying life is fed;  
 Grace more than nature keeps my heart alive,  
 Whose idle hopes and vain desires are dead.

Not where I breathe, but where I love, I live,  
 Not where I love, but where I am, I die;  
 The life I wish must future glory give,  
 The death I feel in present dangers lie. (13)

It would appear that his longest poem, the Saint Peter's Complaint was written during his imprisonment. The fact that it so closely resembles in form the Venus and Adonis of Shakespeare which did not make its appearance until 1593, and Southwell's line, already quoted, "Still finest wits are stilling Venus' rose," point to the probability that the Complaint was composed sometime between 1593 and the poet's death in 1595.

Southwell was brought to mock trial in February, 1595. The finding of the jury was of course guilty, and

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13. Robert Southwell, "I Die Alive," in the Complete Works, p. 68.



he was sentenced to be hanged, cut down before dead - with all the ghastly details. The priest saluted the court with a bow and expressed his thanks for the favor granted him. Crowds thronged the streets leading back to Newgate Prison, marveling once more at these extraordinary papist priests, while Southwell shone with interior radiance at the imminent fulfilment of his long desire.

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"Tyburn Tree" was a triangle of beams supported by three tall pillars of masonry, beneath which the cart of execution was accustomed to be drawn, the rope adjusted, the cart driven forward, and the condemned man left hanging. Great masses of people gathered on the morning of Southwell's execution, among them "persons of high rank" because of his noble family and his reputation as a writer. So great was the admiration and sympathy aroused by his final address to the crowd that there was an insistent demand that he should not be taken down and dismembered before death. "And so he was not cut downe," reads the account, but remained some-time alive, "makinge at dyuers tymes as well as he coulede the signe of the Cross." The noose had been clumsily arranged. At last someone, to put an end to his torment, ran forward, seized his legs and pulled him downward, "at

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14. S. Undset, op. cit., p. 171.

15. P. Janelle, op. cit., p. 90.

which tyme he moste happely yealding up his blessed spirit,  
 closed his eyes, and looked moste cheerfully." <sup>16</sup> Mr. Garnet,  
 who had accompanied Southwell into England, wrote that day  
 to the General in Rome, in the florid manner of the time:

Behold, now at length I present to his  
 Paternity a lovely flower gathered from  
 his gardens, the sweetest fruit from his  
 tree, a priceless treasure from his bank,  
 silver weighed, tried and seven-fold  
 purged from earthly dross in the fire; an  
 invincible soldier, a most faithful disciple  
 and courageous martyr of Christ, Robert  
 Southwell, my former most beloved companion  
 and brother, now my patron...reigning to-  
 gether with Christ...(17)

Following his death Southwell's poems knew immediate  
 and enduring success. Possibly this is accounted for by  
 the attractions of his personality and sanctity, and by the  
 circumstances of his martyrdom. But it is almost equally  
 to be accounted for in the content of his poems which was  
 of a type especially adapted to suit the taste of his time.  
 The Peter's Plaint which saw sixteen editions within forty  
 years, set the mode for a whole series of "Teares," "Plaints,"  
 and "Laments." Of this poem, one edition appeared in 1595,  
 the year of Southwell's martyrdom, another in 1597, another  
 in 1599, and again in 1602. There were others in 1610,  
 1630, and 1634. Besides the '1595 edition of the Maeoniae

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16. P. Janelle, op. cit., p. 90.

17. Sigrid Undset, op. cit., p. 173.

(collections of shorter poems) there were further issues in 1596 and 1598. Father Thurston writes:

It is pleasant to think that Father Southwell really did achieve a notable success in this apostolate of good literature, to which he consecrated the many hours of enforced seclusion in his hunted existence as a priest. Apart from the direct work of the ministry pursued with untiring zeal, the talent so generously surrendered with all its brilliant promise left a mark upon the age. It was something to have induced Nashe, even for a time, to turn aside from his ribaldry, and to have enlisted such pens as those of Lodge, Breton, Rowlands, and Markham in the case of morality and religion. It may be that literature was not greatly the gainer thereby, but the new interest thus created can hardly have failed to lend its aid in stemming the tide of licentiousness and atheism which threatened to sweep everything before it, amid the convulsions of the change of religion. Neither do we know what the indirect effects of this new taste for devotional poetry may have been, nor how much we are indebted to it for the work of Milton and of Crashaw, of George Herbert, and the 17th Century divines. This much at least the evidence seems to me clearly to establish, that there was such a fashion, which manifested itself in the last ten years of Elizabeth's reign, that the initiative may be traced without hesitation to the writings of Father Southwell, and that the influence which the new fashion exerted cannot have been otherwise than good. (18)

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18. Herbert Thurston, S. J., "The Popular Poet," in The Month, March, 1895, Vol. 83, p. 383.

## CHAPTER .IV

### MYSTIC POET OF THE RENAISSANCE

Robert Southwell's place as the "mystic among the English martyrs," also gives him in a certain sense his position in English literature. We use the term "mystic poet" advisedly because of popular misconception which confuses the terms "lyric" and "mystic" as representing indistinguishably the same sort of exaltation. A lyric poet may be carried away by the beauty which he perceives in created things and to which he is more than ordinarily sensitive. By Divine condescension the mystic is permitted glimpses of Divine and Uncreated Beauty. Hence the poet is in love with created loveliness, but the mystic is in love with God. When poet and mystic are identified - as in Southwell's case - then the many-faceted beauty of the world is to him a mirror of its Uncreated Source, and far more truly than the Neo-Platonist, he perceives Essential Beauty in the charm of material things.

During his long seclusion in Arundel House, Southwell had opportunity to give expression to the contemplative within him. His inner qualities emerge before us in the poems of this period - gentleness, purity, fire, and a certain tinge of melancholy - the longing of one who has tasted Divine Joy in the inmost regions of the spirit.

The best known of his poems, The Burning Babe, presents that mingling of the spiritual and the humanist<sup>x</sup> which is the peculiar characteristic of Southwell's genius. Its images so captivated Ben Jonson as to draw from the wish that "so he had been the author of the Burning Babe," he would have been content to see many of his own works<sup>1</sup> destroyed. The poem is quoted in full:

As I in hoary Winter's night stood shivering in the snowe,  
 Surprised I was with sodayne heat, which made my hart to glowe;  
 And liftinge upp a fearfull eye to vewe what fire was nere,  
 A prety Babe all burninge bright, did in the ayre appeare,  
 Who scorched with excessive heate, such floodes of teares  
 did shedd,  
 As though His floodes should quench His flames which with  
 His teares were fedd;  
 Alas, quoth He, but newly borne, in fiery heates I frye,  
 Yet none approach to warme their harts or feel my fire but I!  
 My faultles brest the fornace is, the fuell woundinge thornes,  
 Love is the fire, and sighes the smoke, the ashes shame and  
 scornes;  
 The fuell Justice layeth on, and Mercy blowes the coales,  
 The mettall in this fornace wrought are men's defiled soules,  
 For which, as nowe on fire I am, to worke them to their good,  
 So will I melt into a bath to washe them in my bloode:  
 With this He vanisht out of sight, and swiftly shroncke awaye,  
 And straight I called unto mynde that it was Christmas-daye. (2)

It is not difficult to imagine the pleasure that the intellectual Jonson took in such play of wit as the lines:

Who scorched with excessive heate such floodes of teares  
 did shedd,  
 As though His floodes should quench His flames which with  
 his teares were fedd.

On the whole, however, the poem is singularly free of conceits.

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1. E. Legouis and L. Cazamian, A History of English Literature, p. 328.
  2. Christobel M. Hood, The Book of Robert Southwell, p. 91.

It has the warmth and color of Renaissance art, and the emotional quality runs strong, almost unrestrained. The poem is a study in contrasts: the world in that spiritual "outer" darkness which is the bleakest and most hopeless desolation, and the "Babe all burning bright" Who suddenly pierces the blackness with His radiance. It is only the mystic who grasps the deeper significance of light. St. Augustine speaks of the "changeless light" seen only by the eye of the soul, and different in kind, not merely in degree, from that which all men see;" and St. Teresa says that the revelation of God is preceded by an illumination which shines on the spirit like a most dazzling cloud of light.<sup>3</sup> It is then that the soul lifts up its "fearfull eyes to vewe what fire is nere." The sudden heat which in Southwell's poem surprises the frozen way-farer is a soul-penetrating fire of which God has the secret, and which affects no sense directly, but "makes the heart to glow." It is the same power which later was to cause the disciples of Emmaus to wonder: "Was not our heart burning within us, as He spoke by the way, and opened to us the Scriptures?"<sup>4</sup> It is the fire which has burned in the hearts of all the saints. The contrasted image of these most famous lines

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3. Sharpe, J. Nature of Mysticism, New York: Benziger Brothers, 1902, p. 10.

4. St. Luke, XXIV, 32.

of Southwell recalls the age-old lament of one of the first contemplatives: "The Light shineth in darkness and the darkness did not comprehend it."<sup>5</sup>

In Synne's Heavy Loade, the poet rises above his burdensome theme in the expression of his desire for union with God. The use of antithesis is pushed far in the poem but it is effectual. The contrasted ideas of earth and heaven are blended in the image of Christ's union with the soul. In the opening lines one glimpses something of the infinite condescension of this union:

O Lord! my synne doth overcharge Thy breste;  
The weight thereof doth force Thy knees to bowe;  
Yea, flat Thou fallest with my faults opprest...

The poet describes three successive falls of Christ: the first when he identified Himself with earth in Mary's womb; the second, when He kissed the earth in His most painful falls on the way to Calvary; and these are made the prelude for the third descent of God - the union of heaven with earth, when Christ is identified with the human soul, changing it in some manner into Himself.

O prostrate Christ! erect my coked mynde,  
Lord! Let Thy falls my flight from earth obtain:  
Or if I still in Earth must needs be shrined,  
Then Lord! on Earth come fall yet once again;  
And either yeeld with me in earth to lie,  
Or else with Thee to take me to the skie! (6)

5. St. John, I, 5.

6. C. M. Hood, op. cit., p. 94.

There is great lyric power in many lines of this piece, and climactic force in the consistency with which the figure of the falls is borne out.

A similar idea is expressed in Man to the Wound in Christ's Side, but whereas in the first poem the Divine condescension is shown linking Itself to sin in order to bring the sinner back to God - in the second, sin is the deterrent which prevents man from entering into the Heart of Christ. The Wound by Which he seeks to enter has become a glorified Wound, and imperfections must be left before passage may be found. Though the versification and much of the language is commonplace, there is not perhaps in the whole range of Southwell's work anything more pathetic than the long-drawn sigh of this poem. The simplicity of thought and expression, the lack of conceit and word-trick mark it definitely as one of the later pieces in which Southwell seems to have renounced conceitism for directness of speech. Except for the opening lines of apostrophe:

O pleasant port! O place of rest!  
O royal rift! O worthy wounds! (7)

the verses are simple statements: 1) the happiness of contemplating the sorrowful Wound in Christ's Side; 2) the

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7. C. M. Hood, op. cit., p. 140.



necessity of living and dying within the refuge of the Divine Heart where the soul may be able to contemplate the manifold griefs gathered there; and 3) the joy of soul which results from dwelling in the Wounds of Jesus Christ. There is unity of concept and of purpose, emphasized by a skilfull use of repetition which gives the forcible impression of concentration upon the object loved. The poem is a prayer of simplicity.

There is evidence throughout the "mystical" pieces of a gradual simplification both in matter and treatment, in striking contrast to the artifices of the St. Peter poems. In one of his most beautiful and moving verses, The Virgin Mary to Christ on the Crosse, Southwell has altogether freed his art from affectation; one finds here no trace of Italian preciosity. The image called up by the chastened simplicity of the lines has the unadorned power of liturgical literature. The sorrowful Mother is descending into the valley of grief. The cry that Southwell puts upon Her lips serves only to reveal the selflessness of Her suffering, and Her union with Her Son in His Passion:

You cruell Jewes, come worke your ire, upon this  
worthlesse flesh of mine:  
And kindle not eterna'll fire, by wounding Him which  
is Divine.

Thou messenger that didst impart His first discent  
into my wombe,  
Come helpe me now to cleave my heart, that there I  
may my Sonne intombe. (8)

That intuitive knowledge of spiritual realities which may be termed mystical knowledge does not consist in looking beyond and above the circumstances of life into a sort of dream-world, but rather in seeking spiritual significance in the material, intellectual, and emotional life in which we find ourselves. The world is seen as a fragment of a great whole; to the true mystic, the situations in which his lot is cast are parts of an immense design - a Divine Plan - all the elements of which are not discoverable to him; but he sees his own experiences as symbolic of something infinitely greater.

His mind constructs from the broken arc of natural experience the "perfect round" of heavenly beatitude; in the discords of earth, his ear catches echoes of celestial harmonies, and the darkest places of this world are invested with clouds of glory for those who see into the life of things. (9)

The opening lines of At Home in Heaven manifest something of this spiritual insight:

Fayre soule! how long shall veyles thy graces shroud?  
 How long shall this exile withhold thy right?  
 When will thy sunn disperse this mortall cloude,  
 And give thy glories scope to blaze their light? (10)

In his Nativity poems Southwell has caught the radiance which illumined the dark cave in the Judean hillside. We find here

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9. J. Sharpe, op. cit., pp. 9-10.

10. C. M. Hood, op. cit., p. 119.

again the recurring theme of heaven upon earth in the Word made Flesh, where the poet addresses the angels thus:

Come to your heaven, yowe heavenly quires!  
Earth hath the heaven of your desires;  
Remove your dwelling to Your God...(11)

He draws, too, with a fine sense of contrast, the proportion between the poor circumstances of earth - the broken arc - and the "perfect round" of heavenly beatitude:

Agnize\* your Kinge a mortall wighte,  
His borrowed weeds letts not your sight;  
Come, kysse the manger where He lies;  
That is your Blisse above the skyes. (12)

And there is loving familiarity with the things of God in the frequent blending of the sublime with the simplest and homeliest images:

Let Graces rocke, when He, doth crye,  
And Angells sing His lullybye. (13)

### INFLUENCE OF NEO-PLATONISM

During the period of the Renaissance, the attempt to harmonize Christianity with both earlier and later Platonism was no new thing, for this form of pagan philosophy had been in the atmosphere of Italy for two centuries, and formed, as we have seen, the early principles of Renaissance artistic ideals. It is impossible, then, to deny the influence of

11. C. M. Hood, "New Heaven, New Warre," in The Book of Robert Southwell, p. 89.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.

\*Recognize

neo-Platonism in the religious poetry of Robert Southwell.

Platonic doctrines dwelt much on the part played by beauty as an incentive to love, and by love itself, in the creation and harmony of the universe. Human love was the aspect of Platonism seized on by the Italian Renaissance.

According to Castiglione:

...human beauty was said to be the reflection of divine beauty; it was good in itself, and of necessity denoted virtue in the person gifted with it. Those whom it attracted were raised to the perception of the highest spiritual truths; and thus human love was but the first step towards the love of God. Beauty is born of God, and is like a circle, of which goodness is the centre; and as there cannot be a circle without a centre, there can be no beauty without goodness; whence it follows that a bad soul seldom inhabits a fair body; and therefore outward fairness is a true sign of inward goodness...The lover should worship the beauty of his mistress, not in its concrete reality, but in its abstract essence; and thus he will rise from the notion of personal delight to that of the eternal scheme of things. (14)

One may readily see the fallacies latent in such a philosophy if followed to its extremes, as occurred in the later years of the Renaissance. On the other hand, there is strong resemblance in this spiritual view of beauty and love, to the tenets of true Christian mysticism. Neo-Platonism in its purest interpretation was averse to sensuality, and took

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14. P. Janelle, Robert Southwell, the Writer, p. 268.

delight in the contemplation of spiritual objects; hence its appeal to Southwell. But in his acceptance of Platonism, and his use of it in the mystical poems, he was dominated by the principles which guided his religious life. He replaced the love of woman by the love of God, and put an entirely religious and devotional construction upon the Platonic theory of beauty.<sup>15</sup>

At the time of the English Renaissance the air was permeated with the Platonic and Plotinian conceptions of earthly beauty as partial manifestations of Divine Glory. Nicholas Breton wrote in praise of humility:

It maketh beawty like the sunne to shine,  
As if on earth there were a heau'nly light...(16)

Elsewhere God is spoken of as "Place of beawtie; beawtie of all place."<sup>17</sup> Plotinus had previously described the gradual ascent of the soul to the vision of God, the first step of which was contemplation of material objects in their multiplicity and harmony, and a further step, the withdrawing of the soul into its inmost being to contemplate another world which, more closely than material things, reflected God. This is a remarkably close approach to Christian mysticism which seeks God in the depths of the soul, - and Southwell

15. P. Janelle, op. cit., p. 269.

16. Ibid., p. 270.

17. Ibid.

has reproduced the idea in his poem Looke Home in which he addresses the soul as not only the image but the dwelling of God.

Retyred thoughtes enjoy their owne delightes,  
 As beauty doth in self-behouding eye;  
 Man's mynde a mirrhour is of heauenly sightes,  
 A breife wherein all marveylls summed lye,  
 Of fayrest formes and sweetest shapes the store,  
 Most gracefull all, yet thought may grace them more. (18)

Janelle suggests that the titles of Southwell's poems Looke Home and At Home in Heaven show the influence of the Platonic doctrine of previous existence. Such an interpretation seems a trifle strained. Southwell was a saint as well as a poet, and to the simple spirituality of the saint, the supernatural becomes the atmosphere he breathes. It is with the intensity of realization that the Jesuit regarded heaven as his true home, and himself an exile in a valley of death. There is no vain philosophic research in this simple Catholic truth.

Love is the great differential between Southwell's mysticism and the coldly intellectual tenets of Plotinus, who considered the vision of God to be found in the "world of ideas" within the intellect. Reason alone never attains supernatural levels, nor experiences that union with God implicit in such tender outpourings as we find in the religious lyrics of Robert Southwell, where, in the rapt serenity of his soul, he sings his joy in the Presence of God. It was

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18. P. Janelle, op. cit., p. 270.

for this reason that he venerated the beauty of the human soul, because he saw there the reflection of Divine Love.

Hence he writes:

O soule! do not thy noble thoughtes abase,  
 To loose thy loves in any mortall wight;  
 Content thy eye at home with native grace,  
 Sith God Himself is ravisht with thy sight.

. . . . .

Quene Hester was of rare and peerelesse hew,  
 And Judith once for bewty bare the vaunt,  
 But he that could our soules' endowments vew,  
 Would soone to soules the crowne of beuty graunt,  
 O soule! out of thyself seeke God alone...(19)

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19. C. M. Hood, op. cit., p. 120.

## CHAPTER V

### ANALYSIS OF THE LYRIC POEMS OF ROBERT SOUTHWELL

The lyric poems of Robert Southwell, by which he is now almost exclusively known, divide into clearly marked groups. About the St. Peter's Complaint are clustered a number of shorter works which may be termed the "St. Peter pieces," because, like the Complaint, they are adaptations either from Italian sources or from the fashionable poetry of the time. The Maeoniae, on the other hand, is a group of lyrics of purely sacred and liturgical inspiration which do not attempt reform through the adaptation of worldly forms to religious themes, but are the simple, quite original expression of the poet's religious feeling. These are superior to the earlier pieces in treatment and inspiration.

The Complaint was one of a number of tearful poems which made their appearance in the wake of Luigi Tansillo's Le Lagrime di San Pietro. Research has definitely established Southwell's debt to Tansillo, and in order to examine into the extent of this indebtedness, a few facts are necessary with regard to the source itself. A first edition of the Lagrime by Tansillo circulated in manuscript in 1559, and was published in 1560 as an appendix to a translation of the Aeneid. It was a comparatively short poem of forty-two stanzas in the octava rima, and was sufficiently popular to



warrant six reprints between 1571 and 1582. Another edition appeared in 1585 under Tansillo's name, altogether different from the first, the editor having withheld the second manuscript from publication since the author's death in 1568. Alterations in the text quite alien to Tansillo's florid manner are apparent, though in rare instances the 1560 stanzas are reproduced in the 1585 edition. But throughout the later edition, Tansillo's amorous vein has been expunged, and corrections made to bring the poem into line with the canons of "elegance."<sup>1</sup> The earlier Lagrima is purely lyrical, - a soliloquy by St. Peter in which he expresses his remorse through similes that must have drained the resources of the most poetical imagination.

In the first stanzas, the effect of the glance which Christ cast upon Peter is described by means of successive similes: the Lord's looks are compared to arrows shot from a bow, his eyes to a mirror, then to a speaking tongue; while the disciple melts into tears like snow thawing in the sunshine. Then Peter calls upon death to rid him of a life that he can no longer bear, and thus introduces a long passage on true death and true life...Peter envies the happiness of those who die young...He has denied Life itself through fear of death...After further exhorting himself to grief, Peter comes to the Garden of Olives...falls flat upon the ground, which is all trampled about with footmarks. He recognizes those of Christ from

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1. P. Janelle, op. cit., pp. 205-206.

their sweet perfume, and begins to wash them  
with his tears...(2)

The later Lagrime, though frequently breaking into lyrical expression, was evidently intended to be of epic scope. It was a lengthy piece of nine hundred and ten stanzas; but the sole incident of St. Peter's denial and remorse is found to be insufficient and collapses beneath the weight of artificial episode which Tansillo endeavored to construct upon his meagre foundation. He achieved a "shallow brilliancy rather than spiritual depth...as foreign as possible to Southwell's meditative reflectiveness."<sup>3</sup>

In Grosart's Complete Edition of Southwell's Works, there is a fragment, the Peter Playnt, described in error by the editor as "interlineations and studies" for the Complaint. Professor Mario Praz has since discovered that the piece is no more than a very exact translation of the beginning of Tansillo's earlier Lagrime.

...What everybody seems to have as yet overlooked are the so-called additional stanzas which Dr. Grosart quotes at the end of his edition of Southwell's works, labelling them "interlineations and studies" for the poem. These stanzas, headed Peeter Playnt, are, in Southwell's autograph, written in three pages and a half of a little quire (otherwise blank) of twelve pages...The interlineations and studies prove to be nothing more than a close translation of Le Lagrime di San Pietro, Canto I, stanzas 51-63, and the two first lines of 66...(4)

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2. P. Janelle, op. cit., pp. 206-207.

3. Ibid., p. 208.

4. Mario Praz, "St. Peter's Complaint and Its Source," in Modern Language Review. Vol. XIX. July 1924. pp. 273-290.

The Peeter Playnt, which was known only in manuscript is lacking in literary values and is strikingly unlike the later text of the Complaint which appeared in 1595. An earlier and later form of the same stanza may be compared to show the evident superiority of the second:

Early Version:

If tyrants bloody thretts had me dismay'd,  
 Or smart of cruell torments made me yelde,  
 There had bene some pretence to be afraid,  
 I should have fought before I lost the feilde;  
 But o infamous foyle, a maydens breathe  
 Did blowe me downe and blast my soule to death.

Later Text:

Threats threw me not, torments I none assay'd;  
 My fray with shades; conceits did make me yeeld,  
 Wounding my thoughts with feares; selfely dismay'd,  
 I neither fought nor lost, I gave the field:  
 Infamous foyle! a maiden's easie breath  
 Did blowe me downe, and blast my soule to death. (5)

The subject and much of the content of the Complaint were taken from Tansillo's later poem, but the episodes are arranged with a certain order and sequence, quite unlike the straggling narrative of the Italian source. The emotion, too, is spiritualized; from the black remorse of Tansillo's version, Southwell raises the level of the theme to one of mingled grief and love, of hope and of final reconciliation with God. Resemblance is to be observed throughout these

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5. P. Janelle, op. cit., p. 211.

verses to the conventionalities of Renaissance poetry.

...Southwell made use, in order to express his love of God, of the phraseology and conceits generally applied to the love of woman. Nor was this borrowal and transposition confined to words alone; it also extends, as in the case of St. Peter's Complaint, to those feelings and reflections which are the commonplaces of amorous poetry. The lover's lamentations over the fickleness of woman and his own uncertain fate; his alternate fits of hope and despair; his exultation when in favour, his woe-begone complaints when out of it; his prayers for mercy; his soliloquies amidst the woods, rocks, and springs, which he begs to witness how deeply enamoured he is, and how harshly treated; his remorse at having fallen a victim to such deceit, and resolve to forsake it forever; his warnings to other wooers, lest they fall into the same trap; his endlessly gushing tears, and exhortations to himself to weep on; his passionate requests to death to put an end to his sufferings and grant him the only peace he can henceforth aspire to; all these reappear in a religious garb. Love's thrall now becomes the Christian's bewailing of his sins; who decides to weep forever more, since no depth of contrition can make up for the hatefulness of his offense; who bemoans his own wretchedness in the midst of desolate landscapes; who warns his neighbors of the vanity of worldly love, of the transiency of all beauty; who exhorts them to embrace the only true, worthy and happy love, which is that of Christ; who eagerly waits for the coming of eternal life and the full enjoyment of God. (6)

The poem opens with an elaborate conceit on a ship at sea in which Peter exhorts his soul to weep:

Launch forth, my soul, into a sea of teares...

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6. P. Janelle, op. cit., p. 263.

The twenty stanzas which follow describe his sin, and his reflections upon his weakness. In these lines he deplures his loss of life by means of various conceits on the life-versus-death idea. The greater part of the poem contains Gospel incidents related in the order in which they appear in the Sacred Scriptures, and developed as reminiscences which tend to feed the flame of Peter's contrition. The close is a prayer of love and repentance. Southwell has improved upon his source in the arrangement of material, in depth of thought and in genuine emotion. He makes use of Tansillo's imagery and conceits, but he combines them with surer art, and by the sincerity of his poetic sentiment, he redeems them from the artificiality which deadens Tansillo's work.

Much the same set of images recurs in the Complaint that is to be found in the love lyrics of the Elizabethan period which had drawn inspiration from Petrarch. The Petrarchan influence and manner is clearly to be perceived in many lines of the St. Peter's Complaint. The Italian poet, for example, rapturously extols the beauty of Laura's eyes:

Oh, never sure were seen such brilliant eyes,  
 In this our age or in the older years,  
 Which mold and melt me, as the sun melts snow,  
 Into a stream of tears adown a vale,  
 Watering the hard roots of that laurel green,  
 Whose boughs are diamonds and gold whose hair. (7)

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7. The Sonnets, Triumphs, and Other Poems of Petrarch,  
 Sestina II, p. 57, translated by MacGregor.

Similarly Southwell describes the "divine flame" of Christ's glance upon St. Peter:

These blazing comets, light'ning flames of love,  
 Made me their warming influence to knowe;  
 My frozen heart their sacred force did prove,  
 Which at their looks did yeeld like melting snowe...

O sunnes! all but yourselves in light excelling,  
 Whose presence, day, whose absence causeth night;  
 Whose neighbor-course brings Summer, cold expelling,  
 Whose distant periods freeze away delight...(8)

Like his contemporaries and his models, Southwell endeavors to put his thought in relief by series of rhetorical devices. There is in the Complaint an almost constant use of antithesis such as the following:

I, though too hard, learn'd softnes in Thine eye...

and

Unkind in kindnesse, murthering while it saves...(9)

Many instances occur of the verbal repetition so characteristic of the period:

The blaze of beautie's beames allur'd their lookes;  
 Their lookes, by seeing oft, conceiued loue;  
 Loue, by affecting, swallowed pleasure's hookes;  
 Thus beautie, loue, and pleasure, them did moue...(10)

Concerning the Italian influence it is safe to say that Southwell never permitted his work to be entirely dominated

8. P. Janelle, op. cit., p. 216.

9. Ibid., p. 221.

10. Ibid., p. 223.

by his models. He used foreign sources with discrimination, retaining only those elements which suited his purpose.

"In his verse as in his prose, he rejected the colour and exuberance of the South; Italian poetry was only acceptable to him in so far as it was refined, terse, and tenderly delicate; and his fondness for Petrarch matches - all differences being duly allowed for - his partiality for Ovid."<sup>11</sup>

His Italianism was deliberately assumed in a form that was chastened and restrained. In this he differs from most of the writers of the period who were swept away by the Italian current.

In harmony with his contemporaries, Southwell manifests throughout the Complaint a tendency to over-analyze and to dissect the object of his thought, whether abstract or concrete, through a complexity of "conceited" images. There is a noticeable resemblance between Gascoigne's Anatomye of a Lover, and the stanzas in the Complaint which describe the "anatomye of sinne." In the first "every part shall playe his part, to paint the panges of love;" and the lover's head, locks, cheeks, shoulders, limbs, heart, are described in turn. In the second, Peter says:

All things character are to spell my fall...

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11. P. Janelle, op. cit., p. 218.

My eye reads mournfull lessons to my hart,  
 My hart doth to my thought the greefes expound;  
 My thought, the same doth to my tongue impart,  
 My tongue, the message in the eares doth sound;  
 My eares, back to my hart their sorrowes send;  
 Thus circling griefes runne round without an end. (12)

The superiority of Southwell's poem by comparison with many of the Laments and Teares which dripped from 16th Century pens is found in the deep poetical reality underlying the conventional forms. The lyric quality rings true in spite of verbal tricks, because the poem is penetrated with Southwell's own sorrow for sin, and burns with his love for God. It does not repay a first reading. The closely concentrated thought and intensity of emotion are concealed from the casual eye by a metrical form that is tiresomely regular, and by stilted and far-fetched conceits. But a study of the Complaint reveals genuine lyric power. There is even majesty in such lines as these where the demons gloat upon Peter's fall:

Our rocke (say they) is riven; O welcome howre!  
 Our eagle's wings are clipt that wrought so hie;  
 Our thundring cloude made noyse, but cast no showre:  
 He prostrate lies that would haue scaled the skie. (13)

Father Herbert Thurston quotes an appreciative criticism of Robert Southwell by Professor Hales which appeared prefixed

12. Ibid., p. 220

13. Ibid., p. 226



prefixed to the extracts in Ward's English Poets:

Apart from their attraction as revealing the secret of his much enduring spirit, his poems show a true poetic power. They show a rich and fertile fancy, with an abundant store of effective expression at its service. He inclines to sententiousness, but his sentences are not mere prose edicts, as is so often the case with writers of that sort; they are bright and coloured with the light and the hues of a vivid imagination - the imagery indeed, being singularly opulent. In this respect St. Peter's Complaint reminds one curiously of the almost exactly contemporary poem, Shakespeare's Lucrece. There is a like inexhaustibleness of illustrative resource. He delights to heap up metaphor on metaphor. Thus he describes sleep as:

Death's allye, oblivion of tears,  
Silence of passions, balme of angry sore,  
Suspense of loves, securities of feares,  
Wrath's lenitive, heart's ease, storms calmest short;  
Senses' and soul's reprieval from all cumpers,  
Benumbing sense of ill, with quiet slumbers.

St. Peter's Complaint reminds one of Lucrece also in the minuteness of its narration, and in the unfailing abundance of thought and fancy with which every detail is treated. It is undoubtedly the work of a mind of no ordinary copiousness and force, often embarrassed by its own riches, and so expending them with prodigal carelessness. (14)

The Foure-Fould Meditation.

The Foure-Fould Meditation on the Foure Laste Thynges

is a long poem on a much lower level of achievement than the Complaint, so inferior indeed that Father Thurston hazards the explanation that it was a "youthful effort suppressed

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14. Herbert Thurston, S. J., "An Unknown Poem of Father Southwell, the Martyr," in the Month, Vol. 82, p. 230.

by his more mature taste," and only coming to light two hundred years after his death.<sup>15</sup> Grosart seems unaware of its existence; the earlier collected editions do not include the poem, and no biographers mention it. In 1895, the British Museum acquired and exhibited at the King's Library a fragment of the poem, together with a score of other rare booklets. In an effort to trace the complete poem from the fragment, Thurston discovered that "an apparently perfect copy...according to Mr. W. Carew Hazlitt, was disposed of at Sotheby's in July, 1881."<sup>16</sup> In the year 1895 appeared the complete poem in a folio volume, as No. 4 of the Isham Reprints, at present in the Newberry Library, Chicago. There is no extant manuscript.

The piece, in common with other Euphuistic writings—whether prose or poetry — is packed with antithesis, alliteration, conceit, tricks of metre, which hamper the flow of thought. The message is lost in its own elaborate expression; lacks coherence, and is marred by disproportion. It is a striking example of Renaissance excess in style.

In the Foure-Fould Meditation, it would be hardly an exaggeration to say that the stanzas might be printed in reverse order, or in no order at all, without any very serious disparagement to the poem to which they belong.

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15. Ibid., p. 233.

16. Ibid., p. 231.

There is much reiteration of the commonplaces of human morality in verses more or less harmonious, and pointed with more or less skilfull antithesis, but there is nothing to carry us forward or rouse our interest. (17)

The St. Peter Pieces.

Southwell's earlier lyrics, printed with the Complaint and hence termed the St. Peter pieces, fall into several groups, partly determined by their sequence in the printed editions, and partly by their content. Concerning the form of these poems, it is in harmony with the taste prevailing in England from 1580 to the end of the century. With regard to the matter the poet owes much to the writers of the early 16th Century - Wyatt, Surrey, Vaux, and to Gascoigne, who though Elizabethan, belonged to the first decade only of the Queen's reign.<sup>18</sup>

The first of these groups of early lyrics is made up of six philosophic poems whose titles suggest their themes: Tymes goe by Turns, Fortune's Falsehoode, Scorne not the Leaste, Content and riche, Losse in Delayes, From Fortune's Reache. The background of these poems is furnished by a whole cycle of verses celebrating the same well-worked themes, and appearing in Tottel's Miscellany and the Phoenix

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17. Herbert Thurston, op. cit., p. 238.

18. P. Janelle, op. cit., p. 255.

Nest. Southwell's poem, Content and Riche, is an adaptation of Sir Edward Dyer's My Mind to me a Kingdom is, in which all the ideas of the latter reappear transmuted: the egotism banished which finds complete satisfaction in self, and the principle of Christian asceticism substituted. The contrasting attitudes of the two poets may be observed in the following stanzas from each:

Dyer:

My wealth is health and perfect ease;  
 My conscience clear my chief defence;  
 I neither seek by bribes to please,  
 Nor by deceit to breed offence;  
 Thus do I live; thus will I die;  
 Would all did so as well as I! (19)

Southwell:

My conscience is my crowne,  
 Contented thoughts my rest;  
 My hart is happy in itselife,  
 My blisse is in my breste...

I feele no care of coyne,  
 Well-dooing is my welth;  
 My mynde to me an empire is,  
 While grace affordeth helth. (20)

Southwell's purpose in adapting these fashionable lyrics was to transform Stoic philosophy into the semblance of Christian asceticism. The attempt however fell short of the purpose. The Christian element is not harmonized and blent with the

19. P. Janelle, op. cit., p. 258.

20. C. M. Hood, op. cit., p. 135.

pagan philosophy but merely superimposed. The result is artificial. In addition, the "wisdom" poems are full of banalities; many of the thoughts descend to the commonplace: For example:

Seeke thy salve when sore is grène,  
Festered wounds ask deeper lancing...(21)

Very seldom does the verse rise to the level of the following:

I seeke and finde a light that ever shynes,  
Whose glorious beams display such heavenly sightes  
As yield my soule the sum of all delightes. (22)

The "wisdom" group are perhaps the least felicitous of Southwell's lyrics.

The "life" poems are four in number: Life is but Losse, I dye Alive, What Joye to Live, Life's Death, Love's Life. These are all variations of a conceit upon the words, "life," "death," and "love." In no other of Southwell's works is preciosity so dominant a feature. One poem suffices for illustration, as all are built upon the same theme. Life's Death, Love's Life is an elaborate piece of verbal jugglery in which the "contraries" are paired by half lines. It is quoted in part only:

Who lives in love, loves least to live,  
And, long delays doth rue,  
If Him he love by Whom he lives,  
To Whom all love is dewe...

21. C. M. Hood, op. cit., p. 123.

22. Ibid., p. 133.

When love is hott, life hatefull is,  
 Their groundes do not agree;  
 Love where it loves, life where it lives,  
 Desyreth most to bee.

And sith love is not where it lives,  
 Nor liveth where it loves,  
 Love hateth life that holdes it backe,  
 And death it best approves. (23)

In previous years George Gascoigne had written a series of love lyrics using many of the same puns:

I live in love, even so I love to live...  
 Love lendeth life, which (dying) cannot dye,  
 Nor lyving live: and such a life leade I...(24)

The literary value of this group lies rather in ingenuity than in beauty of concept.

In a third set of poems belonging to the St. Peter pieces, Southwell openly imitates the love poetry of his time, but from an objective point of view, and with a different purpose from that of the Elizabethan lyricists. These sing of love as a hopeless slavery from the thrall of which, however, they have no desire to escape. They rail bitterly against the cruellest and the sweetest of the passions, but one senses that they love the chains that bind them. Southwell had consecrated his earliest years to Divine Love, and this added to his innate spiritual qualities caused him to revolt against the licentiousness of his age. He discounts

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23. Ibid., p. 117.

24. P. Janelle, op. cit., p. 261.

human love - even where guiltless - in a way that is perhaps extreme, if not Puritanical, but it must be said, on the other hand, that he had real cause for disapproval. The moral tenor of England during the Renaissance and the Reformation was at low pitch; and in an attempt to raise its level, the Jesuit wrote several short lyrics in which, using the language of the proverbial grieving lover, he deplores the evil effects of unbridled passion. These pieces include Love's Servile Lot, Lewd Love is Losse, Love's Gardyne Greife, and an interesting adaptation of Sir Edward Dyer's Phancy, which with a few adept changes was transformed from a lover's to a Sinner's Complaint. Southwell makes full acknowledgment to his source in the title of the last poem: Dyer's Phancy Turned to a Sinner's Complaint. Two stanzas from each author will suffice to show how closely they parallel. The departure in theme of course lies in the substitution of the Grace of God for Dyer's beloved.

Dyer:

Hers still remaine must I,  
 By wronge, by death, by shame;  
 I cannot blot out of my mynde  
 That loue wrought in her name...

Syth then it must be thus,  
 And thus is all to ill,  
 I yeelde me capture to my curse,  
 My hard fate to fulfill.

Southwell:

Yett God's must I remayne,

By death, by wronge, by shame;  
I cannot blot out of my harte  
That grace wrote in His name...

But since that I have synned,  
And scourge none is too ill,  
I yeld me captive to my curse,  
My hard fate to fulfill. (25)

The irrepressible delight which Renaissance writers took in word-play is to be perceived in the following stanza from the same poem:

In was stands my delighte,  
In is and shall my woe;  
My honor fastened in the yea;  
My hope hang'd in the noe. (26)

It is doubtful whether this adaptation improves upon the original except perhaps in the sincerity which stamps it and which is expressed in the closing lines:

Yet is my greife not fayned  
Wherein I sterve and pyne. (27)

The Sinner's Complaint ends like Dyer's poem with a resolve to live in rigorous and joyless solitude, but the motive is amendment of life, rather than despair over lost delights.

Love's Gardyne Greife, too, is an adaptation of a poem by Nicholas Breton, entitled the Garden Plot, which appeared in the Phoenix Nest published in 1593. Breton's piece is an elaborate, rather incoherent description of an allegorical garden of grief divided into four parts - love,

25. P. Janelle, p. 264-265, op. cit.

26. C. M. Hood, op. cit., p. 101.

27. Ibid., p. 105.



care, friendship, and maidenhood. Southwell seems to have made use of the title only, as the poems present few traits in common. The first is written in heavy hexameters:

"My garden ground of grieffe: where selfe wils seeds are sowne..!" Southwell's version is in the popular metric form of the Venus and Adonis. The first poem is the usual complaint of a mistress' cruelty; Southwell's is an invective against "vayne loves." The allegory is uninspired: love is a garden tended by grief, hedged in with thorns of envy, gravelled with jealousy, sown with seeds of iniquity whose fruit is misdeed and whose sap is sin, etc. But the second poem is superior to Dyer's in clarity of thought and in musical quality of line.

Love's Servile Lott, in nineteen quatrains, inveighs further against the deceits of vain love. One or two graceful stanzas relieve the tedium.

May never was the month of love,  
 For May is full of floures;  
 But rather Aprill, wett by kinde,  
 For love is full of showers.

. . . . .

With soothing wordes enthralled soules  
 She cheynes in servile bandes;  
 Her eye in silence hath a speeche  
 Which eye best understands. (29)

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28. P. Janelle, op. cit., p. 265.

29. C. M. Hood, op. cit., p. 127.

In the groups thus far considered, the tone is saved from didacticism and retains its lyric force through sincerity of emotion, and by the singing quality of the language. The themes are didactic but the treatment is lyric - a strange combination, perhaps, but one quite consistent with Southwell's purpose, who, in the interests of religion, strove to take advantage of prevailing fashions in literature.

The work which most fully typifies Southwell's genius is the group of short lyrics called the Maeoniae - the devotional poems. These again sub-divide into two groups. No attempt will be made in this study to cover every one of the religious pieces, as such a treatment would be beyond our scope, but those poems most characteristic of their groups will be chosen for comment.

#### The Maeoniae.

The liturgical pieces deal with successive episodes in the life of Our Lady and of Her Son according to the Feasts of the Ecclesiastical year. Some of them, the "Gospel" poems, closely paraphrase the Scriptural narrative, as for instance, The Visitation. Those written to honor Our Lady borrow much from Her litany or the Breviary hymns:

Spell Eva backe and Ave shall yowe find...(30)

recalls the well-known Latin lines:

Sumens illud Ave,  
 Gabrielis ore -  
 Funda nos in pace,  
 Mutans Hevae nomen.

All reflect an attitude of tranquil and tender devotion and many do not rise above the level of quiet narrative. With scarcely an exception they are written in the popular six-line stanzaic form with rhyme scheme, ababcc, - Southwell's favorite form of versification. Of this group a characteristic piece is The Nativitye of Christe:

Behould the father is His daughter's sonne,  
 The bird that built the nest is hatched therein,  
 The old of yeres an hower hath not outrunne,  
 Eternal life to live doth nowe beginn,  
 The Word is dumm, the Mirth of heaven doth weepe,  
 Mighte feeble is, and Force doth fayntely creepe.

O dyinge soules! behould your livinge springe!  
 O dazeled eyes! behould your sunne of grace!  
 Dull eares, attend what word this Word doth bringe!  
 Upp, heavy hartes, with joye your joy embrace!  
 From death, from darke, from deaphnesse, from despayres,  
 This Life, this light, this Word, this Joy repaires.

Gift better then Him self God doth not knowe,  
 Gift better then his God no man can see;  
 This gift doth here the giver given bestowe,  
 Gift to this gift lett ech receiver bee;  
 God is my gift, Him self He freely gave me,  
 God's gift am I, and none but God shall have me.

Man altred was by synn from man to beast;  
 Beaste's food is haye, haye is all mortall fleshe;  
 Now God is fleshe, and lyes in maunger prest,  
 As haye the brutest synner to refreshe:  
 O happy feilde wherein this foder grewe,  
 Whose taste doth us from beastes to men renewe! (31)

It will be observed that the play of wit in the verses quoted is upon ideas and images, rather than upon words. Southwell, though he makes use of most 16th Century devices, rarely descends to mere play of words, irrespective of ideas. In the first two stanzas, the birth of the Man-God is apostrophized by means of twelve paradoxes, most of them figurative. In the first four lines of the second stanza the "contraries" are by half lines:

O dyinge soules! Behould your livinge spring!  
 O dazeled eyes! Behould your sunne of grace, etc.

The last two lines of the same stanza present the trick of running images in parallel columns, a mannerism for which Crashaw was later famous:

From death, from darke, from deaphnesse, from despayres,  
 This Life, this light, this Word, this Joy repaires.

The third stanza reveals technical agility in the use of the word "gift," which appears at least once in every line. In thought it recalls the Ignatian meditation upon the Love of God. The closing stanza is an ingenious development of the Scriptural phrase: "All flesh is grass," in which God made Flesh is identified with the hay in the manger, as the Food of man who has been altered by sin into a beast.

Despite the artificiality of certain images, the "Gospel" pieces represent a distinct artistic advance upon the St. Peter pieces. They are not so weighted with moral instruction, and in form they begin to be liberated from

much of the conceitism of the earlier poems. Their emotional quality is simple and penetrating, and frequently recalls the tenderness of medieval Latin hymnology:

Old Simeon cheap penyworth and sweete  
Obteyned when Thee in armes he did embrace;  
His weeping eyes Thy smiling lookes did meet,  
Thy love his hart, Thy kisses blissed his face. (32)

In strong contrast to the serenity of the "Gospel" pieces are the last four poems of the *Maeoniae*: Man's Civill Warre, Upon the Image of Death, The Prodygall Chyld's Soul Wracke, and A Vale of Teares. The sigh of disillusion breathes through these verses; there is regret for the wasted transiency of life, which could have had little personal application to the poet himself, and there is expressed wistful desire:

My hovering thoughts would fly to heaven,  
And quiet nestle in the skye. (33)

He seems to be trying to depict in these poems the endless struggle of spirit and sense, as if he felt the full weight of those forces in England which were tearing the nation's soul in its most sacred citadel. The pieces reveal lyric qualities of a high order, but their significance must be taken in not too personal sense. They may rather be considered

32. The Complete Poems of Robert Southwell, S. J., edited Alexander B. Grosart, p. 133.

33. C. M. Hood, op. cit., p. 111.

as symbolic of his country's disaster. The haunting melancholy that pulses with slow rhythm through the lines is the personal grief of one who is witnessing the divorce of two institutions dearest to his heart, - the Church of Whom he is the son in a most intimate way, and his country of which he is no less a son. More completely to identify himself with the desolation he everywhere encounters, he writes in the first person, and assumes the guilt as well as the despair of his countrymen.

Many of the ideas in the Image of Death are to be found in St. Bernard whose writings Southwell knew well; but no source has been discovered for Man's Civill Warre,<sup>34</sup> and the Prodygall Chyld's Soule Wracke. Southwell has achieved a certain power and momentum in these poems by cumulative epithet. Waves of woe, toilsome tides, wrastling winds, raging blasts, boisterous seas, swelling floods succeed one another in ever mounting fury. The Vale of Teares, the last of this group, suggests a similar atmosphere but by more skilfull means. There is picturesque realism in the opening verses of this piece, the purpose of which is to draw a comparison between the bleak grandeur of the eternal mountains, and the deep places in the human

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34. P. Janelle, op. cit., p. 279.

soul where sorrow lives. The effect is produced by accuracy of detail. The first part of the Vale of Teares is quoted in full:

A vale there is, enwrappt with dreadfull shades,  
Which thicke of mourning pynes shrouds from the sunne,  
Where hanging clyftes yelde shorte and dumpish glades,  
And snowy fludd with broken streames doth runne.

Where eye rome is from rockes to clowdye skye,  
From thence to dales with stony ruyns strowd,  
Then to the crushed water's frothy frye,  
Which tumbleth from the toppes where snowe is thowde.

Where eares of other sounde can have no choise,  
But various blustringe of the stubborne wynde  
In trees, in caves, in strayts with divers noyse;  
Which now doth hisse, now howle, nowe roare by kinde.

Where waters wrastle with encountringe stones,  
That breake their streames and turne them into fome,  
The hollowe cloudes full fraught with thundring grones,  
With hideous thumpes discharge their pregnant wome.

And in the horror of this fearfull quire  
Consistes the musicke of this dolefull place;  
All pleasant birdes their tunes from thence retyre,  
Where none but heavy notes have any grace.

Resort there is of none but pilgrim wightes,  
That passe with trembling foote and panting hart;  
With terrour cast in colde and shuddring frightes,  
They judge the place to terror framed by art.

Yett Nature's worke it is, of art untowch't,  
So straitte in deede, so vast unto the eye,  
With such disordered order strangely cowcht,  
And so with pleasing horreur low and hye,

That who it vewes must needes remayne agaste,  
Muche at the worke, more at the Maker's mighte;  
And muse how Nature suche a plott could caste  
Where nothing seemed wronge, yett nothings right. (35)

The vivid portrayal of nature has something in common with Wordsworth's art, where he associates high thoughts with the solitude of high hills. The work shows more artistic maturity than previous poems. One commentator cites it as Southwell's most valuable composition.

...His poetical personality, matured by the hardships of his jeopardous life, was beginning to assert its power. A rare combination of artistic beauty with moral greatness was in the making, and would soon have been perfect. The Queen felt it and withheld her blow for a time. It was one of the saddest mistakes of her servants to bereave England of the young priest who might have been her greatest religious poet. (36)

It has not been the intention to strive to place Southwell among the poets of first rank in Elizabethan literature. He will ever remain a secondary poet because, for one reason, he limited the scope of his art to fulfill a certain purpose. He used poetry as a means to an end. But within his sphere, Southwell has produced a pure vein of lyric verse which ranks high in literary values. He excels for nobility of sentiment, refinement of expression, an easy and harmonious versification, and compact thought. His faults were those of the Renaissance era: too frequent use of antithesis, obscure inversions, play of wit, and misuse of the parts of speech. The melody and sweetness

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36. P. Janelle, op. cit., p. 281.



of his lines, too, are characteristic of his time. The lovely minstrelsy of the Elizabethan lyric plays in his verse, and plays deliberately to attract wayward minds and hearts and win them for God. He devoted his leisure hours to what may be called the apostleship of good literature, "which in its form would please the taste of the readers he had in view, and which in its matter might lead them to more serious views of life."<sup>37</sup> A Reformist pamphleteer addressed the ministers of his day in terms which accurately express Father Southwell's attitude:

If you count it profane to art-enamel your speech, to empierce, and make a conscience, to sweeten your tunes to catch souls, Religion through you shall reap infamy. Men are men, and with those things must be moved that men are wont to be moved by. They must have a little sugar mixed with their sour pills of reproof, the hooks must be pleasantly baited that they bite at. Those that hang forth their hooks and no bait may well enough entangle them in weeds, enwrap themselves in contentions, but never win one soul. Turn over the ancient Fathers, and mark how sweet and honeysome they are in the mouth, and how musical and melodious in the ear. No orator was ever more pleasingly persuasive than humble St. Augustine...(38)

"Both in verse and in prose, Southwell's style simply reflected the taste of the day, and was consciously intended to lend to nobler themes the same attractions of rhythm,

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37. Herbert Thurston, "Robert Southwell, the Euphuist," in the Month, February, 1895, Vol. 83, p. 243.

38. Ibid., p. 244.

alliteration, and antithesis which allured so many in the  
worldly and not unfrequently licentious writers of his time." <sup>39</sup>

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39. H. Thurston, op. cit., p. 245.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In this study of the Catholic aspect of the English Renaissance, with specific reference to the religious poetry of Robert Southwell, an effort has been made:

1) To show the relationship of the Church to the great secular movement which originated in Italy and took tardy root in England. From observing the attitude of the Church towards humanism, it became clear that She had not only encouraged the movement, but had fostered and developed it by furnishing resources and patrons; that as long as the Renaissance remained subject to the principles and doctrines of the Church, its own artistic ideals were exalted, and only lapsed when the humanists threw off the restraining hand. From the ranks of the Church, too, humanism drew many of its most distinguished representatives.

2) We have endeavored to reproduce in broad outline a picture of literary England at the close of the 16th Century, which might provide a fitting background for the humanist poet, whose work is the chief consideration of this paper. The characteristics of the period were dwelt upon, many of which are to be found exemplified in the poetry of Robert Southwell.

3) The political and religious situation in England has been briefly introduced and treated in connection with

the life and martyrdom of Father Southwell. As nearly as possible an attempt was made to correlate the circumstances of his life with his work. In all instances it was not possible, as research has not definitely established the chronology of all his writings.

4) The mystical content of Southwell's religious lyrics was considered, with emphasis upon the neo-Platonic element, so prominent a feature of Renaissance poetry.

5) In the final analysis of his poetry, the general characteristics of the Elizabethan period outlined in Chapter II are particularized. His use of foreign, and especially Italian sources, the mobility of his language, the use of current mannerisms and tricks of speech, all stamp him a typical Renaissance writer. In his religious inspiration, however, he differs from, or rises above his contemporaries. In conclusion, therefore, we may say that as a Jesuit-poet of this period, he stands between the Church and humanism, representing one no less than the other, and blending in his work, with admirable harmony, both sacred and human elements. He used the forms of popular poetry in which to cast the thought inspired in him by his love of God; hence the term "Mystic Poet of the English Renaissance," in all its implications, may justly be applied to him.

From a study of the progressive stages of his art,

it seems that, given time and opportunity, Southwell might have risen to a higher position as poet than he now occupies. However, his own attitude, adequately summed up by Egan, was a strong deterrent to such an advance:

Southwell did not think much of poetry as an art; but this fault was not uncommon among the Elizabethan poets. His richness of expression is unbounded, unhusbanded. Nature, as nature, had no message for him. Nature was God's footstool; of the myriad voices, of the myriad phases in earth and heaven, he took no note for themselves. The rose and the lily were for him in their best place before the tabernacle, and the breath of the new-mown fields was less sweet to him than the incense that wreathed the pillars of a church...Verse in his hands was the nearest approach to that divine expression which the seraphs have; (but) it was powerless to hold the fervor of a heart that burned with desire for union with God. (1)

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1. Maurice Francis Egan, "Three Catholic Poets," in the Catholic World, October, 1880, Vol. XXXII, p. 121.

# B I B L I O G R A P H Y

of

Father Robert Southwell, S. J.  
Elizabethan Poet (1561-  
1595)

Robert Southwell, S. J., Elizabethan poet, b. 1561 (?)  
Attended Jesuit College at Douai, France, 1569-70. Entered  
Jesuit Novitiate, Rome, October 17, 1578. First Vows, 1580.  
Ordained priest July 10, 1584, at the English College in  
Rome. Prefect of Studies at the English College 1585. Re-  
turned to England July 16 (New Style) July 7 (Old Style), 1586.  
Betrayed and captured July 6/June 26, 1592. One month later  
transferred from Gatehouse Prison within the precincts of  
Westminster Abbey, to the Tower. On February 18 (O.S.)  
February 28 (N.S.) removed to Newgate Prison. On same day  
underwent trial. Executed at Tyburn February 22 (O.S.)  
March 4 (N.S.) 1595. Dates of poems unknown.

## Editions of Individual Works.

1606 - A/FOURE-FOULD/MEDITATION/of the Foure last things:/  
viz./ of the/ Houre of Death./Day of Iudgment./  
Paines of Hell./Ioyes of Heauen/shewing the estate  
of the Elect and Reprobate:/Composed in a Diuine  
Poeme/By R. S./The Author of S. Peters Complaint./  
ROBERT SOUTHWELL, S.J./Imprinted at London by  
G. Eld: for Francis Burton./1606./With a Biblio-  
graphical Preface/By Charles Edmonds;/Published by/  
Elkin Mathews,/Vigo Street, London./MDCCLXCV./

The volume of which the title page is reproduced  
above is "Isham Reprint No. 4 of 1606" made in 1895.  
The original title page of 1606 edition is as follows:

A/FOURE-FOULD/MEDITATION/Of the foure last things:/  
viz./of the/Houre of Death./Day of Iudgment./Paines  
of Hell./Ioyes of Heauen/shewing the estate of the  
Elect and Reprobate:/Composed in a Diuine Poeme/  
By R. S./The Author of S. Peters Complaint./ (Con-  
ventional ornament)/Imprinted at London by G. Eld:  
for Francis Burton,/1606./

One vol., fol., sigs. a-g (in body of text only,  
preliminaries unsigned). No pagination. Contents:

LOVELL

Two title pages; Dedication; Bibliographical Preface; Text of the Poem. The volume is to be found in the Rare Book Collection of Newberry Library, Chicago, which includes all the Isham Reprints.

- 1823 - MARIE MAGDALENS/FUNERALL TEARES/FOR THE/Death of Our Saviour./"Say unto wisdom, thou art my sister, and call understanding/thy kinswoman."/Reprinted for Charles Baldwin,/London./1823./

One vol., square 16mo., pp. XI-204. A reprint in modernized spelling. Collated with the British Museum MS. Contents: Dedication; Foreword; Text: a prose tract on the Love of God.

#### Letters of Southwell

- Catholic Record Society Publications, Vol. V, Chap. XCIV, "Letters of Father Robert Southwell," pp. 294-332. London: 1908.

Lists eleven letters of Southwell between the years 1580 and 1590, with one letter to him, reproduced from Fr. Greene's MS Collectanea at Stonyhurst, and translated by Fr. John Hungerford Pollen, S. J.

#### Collected Works

- 1822 - ST. PETERS COMPLAINT/AND/OTHER POEMS./BY THE/REV. ROBERT SOUTHWELL,/Reprinted from the edition of 1595, with important/Additions from an original MS./AND/A SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR'S LIFE,/BY W. JOS. WALTER,/LATE OF ST EDMUNDS COLLEGE./LONDON;/PUBLISHED BY KEATING, BROWN AND CO. 38 DUKE STREET, GROSVENOR SQUARE;/TRIPHOOK 27, OLD BOND STREET;/AND G. AND W.B.WHITTAKER, AVE MARIA LANE,/1822./

One vol., 8vo, pp. XXXII-128. Contents: St. Peter's Complaint and thirteen short lyrics. This edition upon being collated with the Stonyhurst MS showed many changes; hence considered not too reliable.

- 1856 - THE/POETICAL WORKS/OF THE/REV. ROBERT SOUTHWELL,/NOW FIRST COMPLETELY EDITED BY/WILLIAM B. TURNBULL, ESQ./OF LINCOLN'S INN, BARRISTER AT LAW./LONDON:/JOHN RUSSELL SMITH,/SOHO SQUARE,/1856./

One vol. 8vo, pp. LXVIII-168. The most complete and authentic edition of the poet's works until the Grosart edition of 1872.

1872 - The Fuller Worthies' Library./THE COMPLETE POEMS OF/  
ROBERT SOUTHWELL/S.J./FOR THE FIRST TIME FULLY COL-  
LECTED AND/COLLATED WITH THE ORIGINAL AND EARLY  
EDITIONS AND MSS./AND ENLARGED WITH/HITHERTO UN-  
PRINTED AND INEDITED POEMS FROM MSS. AT/STONYHURST  
COLLEGE, LANCASHIRE./AND ORIGINAL ILLUSTRATIONS AND  
FACSIMILES IN THE/QUARTO FORM./EDITED, WITH MEMORIAL  
INTRODUCTION AND NOTES/BY THE/REV. ALEXANDER B.  
GROSART,/ST. GEORGE'S, BLACKBURN, LANCASHIRE./  
PRINTED FOR PRIVATE CIRCULATION./1872./

One vol., 4to, pp. C-222. Contents: Supplementary  
leaves pp. 1-10, containing Fr. Garnet's letter of  
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1914 - THE/TRIUMPHS OVER DEATH/BY/THE VEN. ROBERT SOUTHWELL,  
S.J./Martyred March 3, 1595 N.S./TOGETHER WITH/THE  
EPISTLE TO HIS FATHER/THE LETTER TO HIS BROTHER/  
THE LETTER TO HIS COUSIN "W. R."/AND/A SOLILOQUY/  
EDITED FROM THE MANUSCRIPTS/BY/JOHN WILLIAM TROTMAN/  
LONDON:/THE MANRESA PRESS, ROEHAMPTON, S.W./B. HERDER,  
68, GREAT RUSSELL STREET, W.C./1914./

One vol., 8vo, pp. XVI-136. The text is collated  
with four MSS.: 1 Stonyhurst College MS., 2 British  
Museum MSS., and the Oscott MS. Variants are indi-  
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critical.

1926 - THE BOOK OF/ROBERT SOUTHWELL.PRIEST, POET, PRISONER/  
By CHRISTOBEL M. HOOD./F.R.HIST.S./ (Mrs. Ivo Hood)  
OXFORD: BASIL BLACKWELL/1926./

One vol., pp. 157. Contents: Historical introduction  
and selection of poems. Brings no new material.  
Historical sketch well annotated.

Work Included in a Compilation.

ARCHAICA/Containing/A REPRINT OF SCARCE/OLD ENGLISH PROSE  
TRACTS/with/PREFACES CRITICAL AND BIOGRAPHICAL./In  
2 Vols./By Sir E. Brydges, Bart.M.P./Vol. I./Con-  
taining Tracts of Robert Greene, Robert Southwell,  
Nicholas Breton/And Thomas Nash./ (Ornament, Monk  
writing)/LONDON:/FROM THE PRIVATE PRESS/of/LONGMAN,  
HURST, REES, ORME, AND BROWN./PRINTED BY T. DAVISON,  
WHITEFRIARS./1815./

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