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A Study of the Spiritual Sonnets of Henry Constable

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A STUDY OF THE SPIRITUAL SONNETS
OF HENRY CONSTABLE

by
Sister Mary Melora Mauritz

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

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BIBLIOGRAPHY
Sister Mary Melora Mauritz, S. S. N. D., was born in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, May 19, 1914.

She was graduated from Notre Dame High School, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, June, 1932. After her graduation from high school, she entered the Novitiate of the School Sisters of Notre Dame. She was graduated from Mount Mary College, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, with the degree of Bachelor of Arts.

For several years she taught in the Catholic elementary schools in Milwaukee and Madison, Wisconsin. She also taught English and Latin at St. Mary's Academy, Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, and St. Anthony's High School, Detroit, Michigan.

The writer took courses in English at Edgewood College, Madison, Wisconsin, and also at the University of Detroit. She began her graduate studies at Loyola University in June, 1948.
CHAPTER I

HENRY CONSTABLE, 1562-1613

The Elizabethan Age was a vital period which filled men's lives with a bewildering complexity of stark realism, emotional intensity, idealistic yearnings, and imaginative fancies as delicate and gossamer as the fairy's wings in Drayton's *Nymphidia*, or as grotesque as the legendary dragon in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. It produced a group of minor poets among whom Henry Constable, poet, convert, politician, spy, diplomat, and traveler, occupied a distinctive place. By his contemporaries, "Henry Constable has been termed the 'first, or principal, sonneteer of his time.'"¹

This man, so much esteemed by the poets of his own day, merits recognition today, not only because he was among the first of the sonneteers to write a sonnet sequence, or because of his slight but graceful genius, but also because he possessed the courage to live up to his convictions by embracing Catholicism in an era when such an act was considered treason. Therefore,

independently of his career as a poet, some estimate of Constable's character should be formulated from the letters which refer to his personal life, as well as from the body of correspondence relating to his activities in the service of his country and his religion. From these sources it appears that the poet was vitally interested in the religious and political questions of the day, that he possessed a patriotic spirit, and that he was gifted with good sense, shrewdness, and a certain amount of political acumen. Since he was a talented young gentleman, he made many influential friends, but his enlarged views also procured for him the unenviable reputation of a man dangerous to the safety and peace of the state, a distinction which made him an exile from home and a wanderer on the continent.

Constable was the son of Sir Robert Constable of Newark in Nottinghamshire. Sir Robert, a prominent man, was Lieutenant of the Ordnance to Queen Elizabeth, a circumstance which leads one to conclude that he was not a Catholic. He had also served in the wars in Scotland under the Earl of Surrey and had been knighted by him in 1570. He, too, was an author, for among the manuscripts in the British Museum is a treatise on the Ordering of a Camp which he wrote in 1576. Through his father, Henry was

allied to several noble houses. His paternal grandmother was Catherine Manners, the daughter of Sir George Manners, Lord Roos. Her brother was the Earl of Rutland, and she was the niece of King Edward IV by his sister, Anne, Duchess of Exeter. He was also related to the Earl of Shrewsbury and was the grand-nephew of the Sir Robert Constable who was hanged in chains in 1537 for his share in the Pilgrimage of Grace.

The poet's mother, the widow of Anthony Foster, was Christiana, the daughter of John Dabridgecourt of Astley in the county of Warwick. A distant relative, Zanches Dabridgecourt, had given protection to Queen Isabella and had been admitted into the Order of the Garter.

Little else is known about his family except that his works contain epitaphs on his brother Richard and his sister Martha. His sister Barbara married Sir William Babthorpe, a recusant, whose son numbered among his large family priests and nuns.

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3 Ibid., 4.
4 Louise Imogene Guiney, Recusant Poets, New York, 1939, 303.
5 Cooper, "Henry Constable the Poet," Register and Magazine of Biography, I, 4.
6 Ibid.
7 Guiney, Recusant Poets, 303.
Most of Constable's early life is cloaked in obscurity. Records in *Heralds Visitations* show him as living in 1563 and as aged thirteen in 1575. Therefore, the date of his birth may be assigned to 1561 or 1562. In the year 1578, at the age of sixteen, he matriculated as a fellow-commoner at St. John's College, Cambridge, and he received his B. A. degree in the January of 1579 or 1580.

In 1583, Constable was in Paris. A letter, written by his cousin Stafford to Walsingham in December of this year, reveals that he was at this time a favorite at Court. He wrote:

> I received yesterday by Mr. Constable your packet touching Paget and Arundel. . . .

Thus assuring you that my cousin Constable, for being my cousin, and for his own sake, and especially for your recommendation shall have all the favours I can show him. Paris, 15, Dec., 1583.

From this and subsequent letters from Stafford, it would seem that Constable was acting as a spy in the service of the government and was not yet a Catholic. On December 27, Stafford wrote:

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9 Ibid.

My cousin Constable would needs persuade me yesterday that he met Lord William Howard disguised like a serving-man.  

A letter written by Henry Constable himself confirms this idea.  
He wrote:

There is a trayterous libell printed hear by the Papists against Her Majesty, slandering her just proceedings agaynst them, and defaming Her Highness' person both with rayling verses and portratures . . .  

In May, 1584, Stafford again wrote to Walsingham and suggested that he should authorize him to send either Mr. Bacon at Bordeaux or "my cousin Constable" to comfort the French King in his religion. Whether Walsingham sent a favorable reply to this suggestion cannot be ascertained. Constable, however, continued in his good favor, for the young man wrote to him from Paris in this filial vein:  

I understand, by my father, continuance of your good liking unworthily had of me, which, as it is my greatest comfort, I must confess that your expectation is the heaviest burden I shall bear on my travels, which seeing your good opinion has laid it on me, I hope by your good advice and means to be able to bear it.  

11 Ibid., 282.  
13 Guiney, Recusant Poets, 303.  
During the following months, Henry Constable, either by appointment or through the influence of friends, was introduced to the French Court. On March 13, 1585, he wrote to the Earl of Rutland about the King of France and about court life. He also mentioned his intention of leaving Paris: "I doubt not my father has informed you of my determination to travel into Italy." The poet seems to have begun his travels shortly after this.

In May, Constable appears to have been in Hamburg. While he was in Hamburg, he defended Queen Elizabeth in a pamphlet, which has not survived, against the slanders of Thomas Throckmorton, a well-known English Catholic of the Spanish Party. The poet alludes to this pamphlet in the sonnet, "To the Queene: upon occasion of a Booke he wrote in Answer to certayne objections against her proceedings in the Low Countryes." His travels must have carried him to many countries during the next two years because no records of this period survive except

15 Manuscripts of His Grace the Duke of Rutland, I, 173.
16 Guiney, Recusant Poets, 303.
the sonnet, "To the Queene after his returne oute of Italye," in which he refers to the fact that he had traveled in the country of Poland.

After his return, Constable apparently became involved in some political intrigue since he went to Scotland to confer with King James. On October 20, 1589, Thomas Fowler, writing to Cecil from Edinburgh, disclosed that the poet had had secret conferences with King James, that he had fulfilled a commission to the King from the Earl of Essex and from Lord and Lady Rich, and had delivered a message from Lady Talbot, as well as commendations from the Countesses of Warwick and Cumberland. He also mentioned his close alliance with Lady Arabella Stuart, a rival claimant of King James for succession to the English throne.

Evidently, Constable returned to England almost immediately, for he received in November, 1589, a letter, written in Edinburgh, from R. Douglas, the nephew of the Scottish Ambassador in London, who informed him of the King's departure and of his failure to carry out a commission to the King entrusted to him by Constable. This letter, as well as another written in French by R. Douglas to V. S. P., in which he mentioned that Constable had carried reports on Scottish conditions, were inter-

18 Ibid., 31.
19 Guiney, Recusant Poets, 304.
cepted by Cecil. Douglas also referred to one of Constable's books which he was then reading, an incident which would seem to substantiate the fact that the poet's sonnets had circulated among his friends in manuscript form a few years before their publication.

The events immediately following his return to London are not certain. He was under suspicion because of his so-called treasonable dealings with James VI and because of his association with Arabella Stuart, an association on which Elizabeth would most assuredly have frowned. Whether he was arrested or whether he succeeded in fleeing the country at once cannot be ascertained. The only clues that remain are the records in the Westminster Archives which state that he was stripped of his inheritance and exiled twice, and the sonnet written by an unknown hand, "To Henry Constable upon occasion of leaving his countrye, and sweetnesse of his verse," which questioned his flight and pleaded for his return:

England's sweete nightingale! what frights thee so,
As over sea to make thee take thy flight?

Come, feare thou not the cage, but loyally be,
And ten to one thy Soveraigne pardons thee.

20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid., 305.
Some time after this, probably in 1591, the poet became a Catholic, an act which grieved his father and which may have hastened his death. Sir Robert died on November 12, 1591, leaving his son in such financial straits because of his debt to the Crown that Henry was forced to sell his Newark property to William Cecil, the grandson of Lord Burghley. Then the young man with great enthusiasm plunged into his new life. By October, 1593, he had become a militant Catholic absorbed in spreading his faith. This can be inferred from the testimony of Anthony Tyrrell who was examined by Richard Young:

Coram Richard Young X die Octobria, 1593.
He [Young] asked this examinee if he knew Mr. Constable, and he said very well, and marvelled that he would play such a part, having been so well affected in religion, as he was before both at Hamburgh and in England. And Ferris told him that Mr. Constable spoke very broad in maintenance of the Popish religion at a supper in Sir Roger Williams chamber, and that, fearing lest he be sent back into England, he took his horses the next morning and rode away, and is now in great favour with the King; as, Ferris said, but this examinee said that his revolt was the cause of his father's death.²⁴

Constable's movements during the next few years, 1590-1595, cannot be traced accurately. During these years, he was engaged in traveling and in publishing his sonnets, a procedure

²⁴ Great Britain, Historical Manuscript Commission, Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Most Honorable the Marquis of Salisbury, IV, London, 1892, 394.
into which the financial difficulties resulting from his father's death may have forced him. But in the late summer of 1595, his activities again brought him into prominence. A report to Cecil from Rome, dated August 11, 1595, stated:

Henry Constable is departed from Rome and gone into France. They do not trust him in anything, so I learn by their own speeches.

Endorsed 11, Aug., 1595—Tucker.

By September of this same year, he had already established himself in Paris according to a report written by Ed. Wylton to the Earl of Essex in which he said:

I have met with Harry Constable in Paris: hee protesteth love and loyalty to his country, hate to Spayne and al service to your lordship salva conscientia he hath a thousand crownes pention of the Keng (sic) his intelligence good with the Papiists both in England and on this side of the seas and I think the advertisements he is willing to give your Lordship in that behalf wilbe nothing offensive.—Paris 22 Sept. '95.

On October 6, Constable wrote to Essex and protested his devotion to his country, saying that his devotion to his religion did not engender a desire to see its restoration to England or the subjugation of his country to a foreign country. He called attention to the occasion on which he had dissuaded his Catholic countrymen from violence. He also asked Essex to procure for him a preferment from the King for his surer main-

25 Ibid., V, 313.
26 Ibid., 386.
tenance. 27 A letter to Anthony Bacon bearing the same date re-
iterates these thoughts:

An honest man may be a Catholic and be no fool and further
I need not write, because my purpose is not to prove my
Religion but to excuse myself. Howbeit if by looking into
the uncertain state of things to come (in other words the
succession to the throne) by reason of the said Division,
you did desire an Union, which neither by severity of Laws
against us, nor by the practice of ours is to be brought
to pass, it is the thing in the world I would desire the
most, to confer with so virtuous and so wise a Gentleman
as you, thereof. 28

It was my good fortune once to be beloved of the most part
of the virtuous gentlemen of my country: neither think I
that I have deserved their evil liking since. I trust I
have given my Lord of Essex sufficiently to understand the
dutiful affection I bear to my country: and all my Catho-
lic countrymen, that know me, are my witnesses how far I
am against violent proceedings. 29

Evidently Constable received no answer to these letters
because, on December 7, he addressed another appeal to Essex
beseeching him to let him know how he stood in the Earl's opinion,
and how he could win or increase it. 30 Between December 7, 1595,
and January 8, 1596, during which period he had gone to Rouen,
he addressed still another plea to Essex in which he mentioned
a copy

28 Ibid., 308.
29 Hazlitt, ed., Diana, introduction, x.
30 Manuscripts of the Marquis of Salisbury, V, 487.
of a little encounter between the ministers of the French gospel, and the which for sundry causes . . . I have not published as yet . . . though in particularities of religion we may be differing, yet I hope that in the general belief of Christ and desire of the union of his Church you agree with me . . . . if, either here or at Rome, Whither (if possible I can recover means to make the journey) I mind to go, I may do you or my country a service, which a Catholic or an honest man may do, I will not fail to employ myself therein. If it please you to vouchsafe me any answer, I beseech you to deliver it to Mr. Edmonds, who can inform you of my honest purpose . . . 31

Although no copy of this pamphlet has survived, there is, in the British Museum, a copy of Refutation de l’écrit de Maistre Daniel Tilemus contre de Discours de Monsieur l’Evesque d’Eureux, touchant les Traditions Apostoliques by the Bishop of Evreux, later Cardinal Davy du Perron, to which Constable lent his name although he had not written it.32

Constable’s ceaseless activities in the service of his religion not only debarred him from employment in the affairs of his country but also caused him to be shunned by his countrymen. His actions were carefully watched and merited from Cecil a warning to Gilbert, Earl of Shrewsbury, to avoid his company when the Earl went as an ambassador to France to receive the oath of Henry IV for the observance of a treaty with Elizabeth. Apparently the Earl carried out the directive, for he wrote to


32 Guiney, Recusant Poets, 308.
Cecil from Rouen in October, 1596.

Here is Mr. H. Constable; who lest he should have intruded himself into my company, I desired Mr. Edmonds to let him know my desire he should forbear either coming, writing, or sending unto me, which he hath hitherto performed. 33

In 1597, the poet was once again in Paris. He had re-established a more friendly understanding between himself and the Earl of Essex to whom he wrote the following:

Though I am rather in case to crave favour myself than to recommend others, yet being known by my abode in France, by my behavour in Rome and by the testimony of all to be a true Englishman and an honest man, I hope to be credited as well touching others' intentions as my own. I have publicly protested my lawful affection to my country . . . and have written to Rome to dissuade the Pope from giving credit to those who would have English Catholics favour the King of Spain's designs against the Queen . . . Paris 10, March, 1597. 34

He also informed the Earl that the bearer of his letter had just come from Rome to urge him and other Catholics in the same condition to oppose themselves by oath against all violent proceedings for religion. He likewise disclosed this messenger's intentions of going to Scotland to inform the Catholics there of the purposes of Spain. The messenger, he continued, wished him to impart this information to the English Catholics. 35

33 Cooper, "Henry Constable the Poet," Register and Magazine of Biography, I, 6.

34 Manuscripts of the Marquis of Salisbury, VIII, 86.

35 Ibid.
Nevertheless, the poet continued his ceaseless efforts to spread the faith among his countrymen. His plans included the conversion of the conversion of the Queen herself according to the testimony of John Petit who wrote to Peter Halins, alias Thomas Philippes, from Liége on October 31, 1597, the following:

One Constable, a fine poetical wit, who resides in Paris, has in his head a plot to draw the Queen to be a Catholic. It is to be wrought by means of M. Sancy, a great minion of the King of France, and of the bishop that went to Rome to procure him absolution.36

During this same period, he was also engaged in assisting his fellow countrymen abroad, for a long letter written by Father Persons, S. J., from Naples on August 31, 1598, acknowledges the receipt of a letter from the poet, dated July 20, and congratulates him on having procured some means of maintenance for the English in Paris.37

Like a true apostle, Constable desired the union of all in the true faith. He strove to attain this end by the conversion of the heads of the countries he loved. His first endeavors were to influence the Queen, but failing in this, his next efforts were in behalf of King James of Scotland who, he was certain, would succeed to the English throne after the death

36 Guiney, Recusant Poets, 309.

of Elizabeth. The first indication of this cherished hope is found in a report dated September 5-15, 1598. The report, sent from Brussels, stated: "An Englishman, thought to be Constable, is going from the Pope into Scotland, with Tempest, a priest."

Sir Thomas Edmonds in a letter to Cecil from Paris corroborated this news on September 12, 1598. He wrote:

It was projected there between the Legate and the English, to send Mr. Constable to Scotland, to encourage the King to allow the Catholics there a toleration of Religion; and to assure him, that the Catholics of England should be at his devotion. And because that King was curious in the knowledge of the controversies of Religion, wherein Mr. Constable was held to be very well exercised, that thereby he should seek to practice on the said King's mind.39

A few days later, an unknown French agent sent Cecil the following note, dated September 19, 1598:

Votre agent fréquente fort un homme nommé Mr. Constable, anglois, lequel est un double traître, car c'est luy qui fait tenir toutes les lettres, par un poste nommé Jean Symonds qui viennent des Jesuites et autres meschant en Angleterre.40

In December, Cecil again received information "that the English priests at Paris, by aid of the Bishops of Paris, labour

38 Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, of the Reign of Elizabeth, V, 90.

39 Guiney, Recusant Poets, 309.

40 Manuscripts of the Marquis of Salisbury, VIII, 351.
with the King for a new college or seminary there; especially Mr. Constable." 41 Another spy, who sent Cecil a list of English Catholics living in Paris during this year, headed the list with Constable's name. 42

In 1599, Constable again went to Scotland in company with the Laird of Bonington, a Papist. He had been sent there by the Legate of Paris to persuade James VI to grant toleration to the Catholic faith in his dominion. 43 Perhaps the Legate hoped that Constable might be able to induce the King to accept the religion of his mother, Mary, Queen of Scots. This project aroused much alarm, and the English agents in Edinburgh kept Cecil informed. On March 3, 1599, George Nicholson wrote:

Mr. Henry Constable is come out of France hither asking the King, but cannot get that favour . . . The young laird of Bonington, a great Papist and trafficker, is also come with him; but the King will yeald him neither presence nor favour . . . Mr. Hudson tells me that Mr. Constable hathe ben in hand with him to carry a letter to your honour when he returned; and that understanding he hathe acquaintance with Mr. Edmonds, and that possibly the letter may be of moment for her Majesty's service . . . 44

41 Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series of the Reign of Elizabeth, V, 138.
42 Guiney, Recusant Poets, 309.
43 Cooper, "Henry Constable the Poet," Register and Magazine of Biography, I, 6.
44 Ibid., 6-7.
On March 16, Nicholson deemed the matter of sufficient importance to report that Constable had not yet spoken with the King and that his actions were not worth noting since he seemed merely to have been seeking an unpaid pension. The poet, however, had been ordered to subscribe to the Articles of Religion or leave the country within fifteen days. 

Further light on Constable's mission is given by an advertisement sent to Cecil on August 21, 1599, by Sir John Colville, which had been drawn up by Colville's nephew:

18 April, 1599. Mr. Constable and the lord Boniton came conjunctly in Commission from the Pope to the King, and he has affred for the first to him a hundreth thousand Crownes for the lifting gardes . . . The King by word and promiss has accepted their offer, and Constable gois by Denmark, whar he is amply recommendit to the Pope with the King's great seall tharvpon. . . . With Constable and Boniton did Glesgo writ to the King that if he vold not now embrace the Pope's offres the Pope vold never againe know him, but would assist some other competitor to his preyudice . . .

Another indication of the significance of this mission is the fact that the French ambassador in London thought it expedient to inform the French King concerning it. On September 1, he wrote:

J'apprends icy que le Roy du dict pays [Scotland] est fort pressé de Sa Sainteté, par l'entremise de Constable, Anglois, et Boniton, Excossois, naguères arrivés de France, d'accorder aux Catholicques liberté de conscience et déclarer la

46 Ibid.
guerre a la Royne d'Angleterre, lui offrant pour cest effect
grand denier et l'assistance de tous les Princes catholiques
de la Chrestientè et d'ung grand nombre de Catholiques de
cet royaume.47

By August, rumors of Constable's activities had reached
Brussels. From this city John Petit wrote to Peter Halins during
this month that many believed that the King of Scots "intends to
cut the grass under Her Majesty's feet," and he refers later to
"what has been done in Paris by Constable and the English priests
of the Scottish faction."48

A letter to Cecil, written May 6, 1599, concerning
the examination of Thomas O'Muckloy, an Irish priest, further
clarifies the negotiations. The report follows:

There was an Englishman (servant to Mr. Constable) that re-
mained in Dundee with the Irishman till one Matthew Sempill
(serviteur to the Lord Sempill now in Spain, and going
thither to the same lord) did come to Dundee. This English-
man, as soon as he had spoken with the said Matthew, did
return back to Mr. Constable his master at the court of
Edinburgh. . . . After Mr. Constable had been with the
young lord of Boniton (who is excommunicate) at Brussels,
he returned to Paris, and after many days conference with
the Bishop of Glasgow, he went home to Scotland with the
said Boniton for whom the King did so earnestly write not-
withstanding his excommunication.49

Apparently the mission ended unsuccessfully because
John Petit sent the following notation to Peter Halins from

47 Guiney, Recusant Poets, 310.
48 Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series of the
Reign of Elizabeth, V, 298.
49 Manuscripts of the Marquis of Salisbury, IX, 156.
Brussels on November 13-23, 1599:

Mr. Constable has returned from Scotland to Antwerp, and enquired for Tempest, a priest, and then for the Earl of Westmoreland, with whom walking, they met an English youth that is with a printer, and asked him what books are printed against the King of Scotland's titles: he said he knew none. Constable says the King of Scotland relies on no party in England but the Puritans, and will enter with the pretense and before the tree falls, if he can find the opportunity.50

As time went on, and the political intrigues and pragmatic policies of King James became clearer to the poet, he began to lose confidence in his project. The informer, John Petit, revealed this awakened attitude of Constable's in a letter which he wrote to Peter Halins from Antwerp on December 7-17.

He said:

Mr. Constable has been to Paris, but since his return from Scotland, he has been as backward for the King of Scots as he was forward before; he speaks of him as little better than an atheist, of no courage or judgment, and says he and his intend to make havoc of England, when the day comes.51

Nevertheless, the poet continued to espouse the cause of the Scottish King. In the meantime, he had gone to Aragon, and from Spain had sent to the King a book on the succession to the English throne which he had written. One of Cecil's spies

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50 Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series of the Reign of Elizabeth, V, 343.
51 Ibid., 356.
in Edinburgh, a certain George Nicholson, reported on the book to Cecil. On July 30, 1600, he wrote:

There is also a printed book came to the King, intituled a counterfeit discourse between counterfeit travellers, etc. said to be written and sent by Henry Constable. It is against Doleman—but Persons he terms him—gainst them and their reasons that wold not have her Matie name her successor, in favour of the Pope's authority in such cases.52

By 1601, Constable had abandoned his hopes of obtaining freedom of worship for English Catholics through the mediation of King James and had formulated plans for furthering the cause by means of French aid. A document by Father Persons, sent early in 1601 to the Duke of Sesia, or Sessia, stated that he had received reports from England and Flanders during October concerning a new proposal which he hoped would reduce the realm of England by means of France. Henry Constable, who had been in Rome and had afterwards lived in Paris on an allowance from the Duchess of Vendôme, the sister of the King, had importuned His Holiness and Cardinal Baronius with proposals to convert England through French influence, but the plans had been rejected as impracticable. Constable, undaunted, continued to press his ideas and won over to his cause two great politicians in France, M. d'Epernon and M. de Sancy, who, in turn, persuaded the Pope's

52 Cooper, "Henry Constable the Poet," Register and Magazine of Biography, I, 8.
Nuncio in France. Constable had also written to three English doctors in Flanders: Thomas Stapleton, professor at Louvain; Richard Barrett, rector of the English seminary at Douai; and William Gifford, the Dean at Lille. The plan, in brief, was to bring England under the control of the King of France by obtaining certain forms of religious freedom during the lifetime of Queen Elizabeth and by alienating England from Spain. After Elizabeth's death, the same religious freedom would continue under the rule of James VI, who was involved in the affair. In fact, the King had already begun to make arrangements with his nobles and had appointed the Archbishop of Glasgow as his ambassador to France, for the Archbishop was so devoted to France that he would aid Constable's plans with all his power. Persons also informed the Duke of Sesia that their agents had begun negotiations with the Earl of Essex and other members of the Queen's Council. Lord Dacre, after a conference with the Archbishop of Glasgow in Paris, was to go to Scotland to discuss the matter with the King and Constable was to be sent to Rome on a similar errand.53

The Duke of Sesia forwarded this intelligence to Philip in a report dated February 1, which has been summarized

An English Catholic named Constable, a great confidant of the King of Scotland, has arrived in Rome, it is believed with the consent of the King, and has tried to persuade the Pope that the King may be converted; and that if his Holiness and your Majesty will help him to the English succession, both countries—England and Scotland—may return to the faith. Constable promises to promote this. Father Persons had been of the opinion that this man might be sent to sound the King of Scotland. His Holiness would not consent, but gave him leave to go on his own account without authority. . . . The Council approves the Pope's refusal to give a brief to Constable authorizing him to treat for the conversion of the King of Scotland. Last advices here state that he is of the same religion as the Queen of England. It is possible that Constable might come back with feigned profession of conversion. 54

For the next two years, Constable's movements were again veiled in obscurity. Very probably he continued his activities for promoting religious freedom since it was evident that Elizabeth's reign was coming to a close. On March 24, 1603, Queen Elizabeth died, and James VI of Scotland became James I, King of England. Then Constable, hoping that his former favor with the King might prove advantageous to him now, wrote to Cecil on June 11, 1603. He protested his loyalty to the King, to his country, and to Cecil, and he begged for Cecil's intercession on his behalf so that he might be allowed to return to his country. Moreover, the English ambassador had assured him that Cecil would not be unfavorable to his request. He went on to say that he had

54 Ibid., 682-683.
written to the King to acquaint him with his desires and had entrusted the letter to some of his Scottish friends. He also promised that he would conform all his actions to the King's liking insofar as one of his religion could.\textsuperscript{55}

On the same day he also wrote to the Earl of Rutland and said that he thought the King would dislike his staying in France, but that he would not return to England without acquainting the King with his desires and obtaining his permission to return. He mentioned his determination to go to Calais, to send his servant thence into England to sound out the King's attitude toward him, and to signify to the King his intentions, "howbeit this king will have allways a secret dislik and suspicion of me." He then begged the Earl to let him know how he stood since he intended, if he heard nothing to the contrary, to leave France and return to England.\textsuperscript{56}

Henry Constable must have received the permission to return, although there is no record of Cecil's reply to his appeal, for on April 18, 1604, Nicolo Molin, the Venetian Ambassador in England, reported to the Pope and the Senate:

A few days ago Henry Constable was sent to the Tower on account of some intercepted letters which he had written

\textsuperscript{55} Manuscripts of the Marquis of Salisbury, XV, 1930, 131.

\textsuperscript{56} Manuscripts of the Duke of Rutland, 1, 1888, 391.
to the Papal Nuncio in France (Del Buffalo), in which he said that he held it for certain that the King had no religion at all, and that everything he did was governed by political expediency.57

From this same source came the news of his release from the Tower and of his subsequent confinement to his own house, an incident which occurred prior to August 18, 1604.58

During his imprisonment in the Tower, the poet wrote to the Earl of Shrewsbury on May 1. In this letter he referred to two letters he had written to the Lords of the Council in which he had protested his loyalty to His Majesty and had requested permission for his friends to visit him, particularly his cousin, Sir William Constable, and his uncle.59 Although this request was granted and although he was released from prison, the King and his Council, as Constable had predicted earlier, distrusted him and planned to banish him. In an undated letter to the Countess of Shrewsbury, which may have been written during his confinement to his home, the poet informed her of this attitude. He begged her to ask her husband to procure for him two requests: "the one that I be not absolutely banished . . .; the


58 Ibid., 174.

59 Hazlitt, ed., Diana, introduction, xi-xii.
other that I may with the King's good liking . . . go with the Constable of Castile into Spain, for that the King of France . . . will be my enemy." 60

Despite his apprehensions, Constable apparently returned to France after his banishment. It was from this country that he wrote again to the Countess of Shrewsbury and expressed his longing to return to England. He declared:

God is my witness that the miseries of France be not such as should make me wish to return for any great benefit, if it were not only for your cause and yours. . . . [I]f by your favour I return, I will go about to ingraft an English humour into me; and if I do not, then may I freely follow my own natural disposition, and live contented with how little soever I shall have, serving no other Mistress than God Almighty, who I know will love me if I love him, and in whose company I can be when I will. 61

In this letter he also noted his intention of joining the King's army abroad.

One other dated letter from this period survives. It was written from Kingston on January 9, 1604-5, to Dr. Bagshaw, a Catholic divine at the college of Mignon in Paris, and gave information about the priests of England. In it he also mentioned that all the Catholic prisoners in England had been released except those in the Clink. 62

60 Hazlitt, ed., Diana, appendix, 77.
61 Ibid., 78-79.
After this date, Constable's movements cannot be traced until January 8, 1607-8. Some time during those four years, he had returned to England. A letter from the Archbishop of Canterbury to the Earl of Shrewsbury disclosed that the poet had been apprehended for his neglect in appearing according to his engagement. Shortly after his arraignment, he was committed to prison according to the testimony of John Chamberlain, who wrote to the gentleman, Sir Dudley Carleton, that "Harry Constable and Richard Carey are committed to prison." That this prison was the Fleet is evidenced by two letters to the Earl and Countess of Shrewsbury which he sent them from this prison on February 9, 1607-8.

During the next four years, the poet again disappears into oblivion. Some time within that period he was released from prison, and he returned to Paris. There, on September 4, 1612, in the home of Knevet, an Englishman, he attended a religious disputation on the question of the Real Presence between the Bishop of Chalcedon and Daniel Featley, a Protestant divine. It

63 Guiney, Recusant Poets, 315.
65 Guiney, Recusant Poets, 315.
is interesting to note that Ben Jonson and John Ford, a relative of Knevet, were also present.66

In 1613, Constable left Paris, at the instance of du Perron, to go to Liége to confer with Dr. Benjamin Carier, an English divine, who had become a convert and was at the Jesuit college at Liége. Here the poet was seized with an illness and died on October 9, 1613. This date is usually assigned without any definite authority, although it is approximately correct according to the testimony of one letter written by Dr. Carier on December 12, 1613, and another by George Hakewith who wrote of Dr. Carier's mission to France in these terms:

But God blessed not his vaine project, Mr. Henrie Constable dying within fortnight after he came from Paris, by Cardinal Perrons appointment to Liedge, to conferre with him; and himselfe a while after in Paris, within a moneth of his thither to conferre with the Cardinall.67

The Westminster Archives, which describes the circumstances of Constable's last illness and death, states that he had been imprisoned in the Tower for three years, that he had lived in Paris for many years, and that he had spent twelve years at Lyons, which is probably an error for Liége.68

66 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
68 Ibid., 316.
Constable's death brought to a close his comparatively brief life of fifty-one years, of which approximately twenty-three years had been spent in exile. All his dreams, hopes, and efforts to reunite England to the faith he loved had been as barren of results as most of his political ambitions. From the accumulated data of unfulfilled hopes, however, two characteristics of the man emerge: his unquenchable love for his country and his greater and more burning love for God and his faith.

Although Henry Constable's energies throughout most of his life were spent in the service of his country and his faith, he was a man of the Renaissance in every sense of the word. Like his contemporaries in England and on the Continent, he, too, believed that a gentleman should be proficient in the arts. Consequently he wrote some occasional sonnets at first, then one of earliest amorous sonnet sequences in the language. This was followed by a sequence of spiritual sonnets, which appears to have been the first attempt of its kind in the English language. A few other poems are also ascribed to him on the basis of the initials H. C. In extant letters, there are also references to pamphlets and books which have not survived.

In point of time, the poet's first work was a defense of Queen Elizabeth against the slanders of Thomas Throckmorton in a pamphlet which he probably wrote prior to 1585. He alludes to this pamphlet in one of his sonnets. Whether the particular
sonnet in which he mentions this pamphlet marks his first attempt at sonneteering cannot be ascertained, but it was followed by another, "To the Queene after his returne oute of Italye." Perhaps he wrote others of which we have no record during these early years, between 1585 and 1590, while he was traveling on the Continent. His sojourn in Italy and Paris, his travels, and his early attempts at writing were, however, but a preparation for his major work, the sonnet sequence Diana.

The Diana: the Praises of his Mistresse in certaine sweete Sonnets has been the subject of much speculation during the course of years, particularly in regard to the identity of his mistress, the date of composition, the predominant foreign influence, the arrangement of the sonnets in the two surviving editions published in 1592 and 1594, and the evaluation of the sonnets as literature. Some of these problems were solved in 1935 when Ruth Hughey discovered the Harington Manuscript at Arundel Castle. This manuscript, containing the twenty-two poems in the 1592 edition, has the heading "Mr. Henry Constables sonetes to the Lady Ritche. 1589," and has helped to identify his mistress and the date of circulation in manuscript. Several copies of the sonnets may have been in circulation in

1589 since R. Douglas also mentions a book of Constable's in a letter he wrote in this year. From this evidence we are able to conclude that Constable should take rank as one of the earliest sonneteers in England. But the subject of foreign influence cannot be disposed of so easily. From 1583 to 1585, the poet resided in Paris. During this period, he may have become acquainted with the renowned French sonnet writer, Desportes, who wrote *Amoures de Diane*. That Constable had read these sonnets is quite certain, for the name of his sequence is derived from the French poet's and according to the studies of an early twentieth-century scholar, L. R. Kastner, several sonnets are either direct translations or show a remarkable likeness to those written by Desportes. Nevertheless, the influence was not entirely a French one. After 1585, Constable traveled in Italy and other countries. During his travels he certainly came in contact with others interested in poetry. It is certain that he had read and knew Petrarch's poetry, for his own follows the Petrarchan model very closely, both in form and in general subject matter. It is probably safe to assert that Constable's sonnets are a synthesis of the two forces. To the blending of the two forms he contributed his own English personality so that the sonnets become

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individualized and personalized and, despite the decided foreign influence, were the fruit of his own skill and ingenuity.

Until 1592, these sonnets remained in manuscript form. The Harington Manuscript discovered by Ruth Hughey may be in the poet's own hand, for the writing of all but the first two sonnets, which are in Harington's hand, is in a hand which differs from Harington's. Moreover, the arrangement of the sonnets in this manuscript differs from the printed edition as well as from another manuscript known as Todd's, which no longer survives but which is minutely described by him. The 1592 edition of Diana contains twenty-three sonnets. This seems to parallel the Harington Manuscript at least in number. In 1594, another edition containing seventy-six sonnets was issued. Since it had been augmented by the printer with sonnets written by other honorable personages, it is difficult to establish the exact authorship of some of the poems included in this edition.

In addition to the praises of his mistress, Diana, Constable wrote a number of commendatory sonnets to honor his

71 The Huntington Library in California possesses the only known copy of the 1592 edition as well as one of the three extant copies of the 1594 edition.

many friends. In the 1594 edition and in the Harleian Miscellany are sonnets addressed to the Countess of Pembroke (sister of Sir Philip Sidney), to Lady Rich, to the Countess of Essex (Sidney's widow), to Arabella Stuart, to the Countesses of Cumberland and Warwick, to the Countess of Shrewsbury, and to the King of Scots. All of these he appears to have known intimately, as his letters seem to testify. He apparently was a friend, or at least an acquaintance, of Sir Philip Sidney since four sonnets which he addressed to Sir Philip's soul were appended to the Apologie for Poetrie.

Besides these commendatory sonnets, there are also four lyrics in England's Helicon which are signed H. C. They have usually been ascribed to him, although Lisle Cecil John believes that they are the work of Henry Chettle. The lovely pastoral poem, "Shepherd's Song of Venus and Adonis," has been assigned to him by most critics of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In fact, since it antedates Shakespeare's "Venus and Adonis," it is held by some scholars that Shakespeare knew the poem and may have received his initial inspiration from it. The "Pastoral Song between Phillis and Amarillis," "To His flocke," and "Damelus Song to his Diaphenia" are other pastoral

lyrics attributed to Constable. The "Diaphenia," in particular, is a delightful love song and is found in many anthologies.

Just as the problem of authorship has not been determined decisively, neither has his reputation as a poet been settled. Among his contemporaries he was esteemed as a master of the English tongue because of his many pure, quick, and high conceits. Ben Jonson, complimenting him in his Underwoods, wrote:

... Constable's ambrosaic muse
Made Diana not his notes refuse. 74

In Robert Allot's anthology, England's Parnassus, printed in 1600, as B. Nicholson points out, there are approximately twelve quotations from his published sonnets. 75 The university men of his day thought highly of his work and lauded him in the Return from Parnassus as follows:

Sweet Constable doth take the wond'ring ear,
And lays it up in willing prisonment. 75

In after years, he suffered the fate of all the Elizabethans until the opening of the nineteenth century. During this century, Thomas Park, William Carew Hazlitt, Martha Foote Crow, and John

74 Hazlitt, ed., Diana, introduction, xvi.
75 Hazlitt, ed., Diana, introduction, xv.
Gray edited and published his secular sonnets. Between the years 1871 and 1874, C. Elliot Browne and B. Nicholson carried on quite an interesting debate concerning his preeminence in the literary world. 77 In the beginning of the twentieth century, Sir Sidney Lee's *An English Garner* and Arber's *Transcript* included his secular poems. During the succeeding years, when there has been a reawakening of interest in Elizabethan literature, scholars continued to study his poems. However much they may disagree about their merits, most of them are of the opinion that, although his sonnets are marked by the conceits so indicative of his period, yet they show a mind rich in fancy, have a naturalness of sentiment and grace of expression, and are quite harmonious and pleasing. Indeed, Rosamund Tuve says that sometimes "he starts up images which are quite radical and subtle enough for the next century." 78

In addition to these secular poems, Constable also wrote another sonnet sequence after he had become a Catholic. These sonnets were devoted exclusively to spiritual matters. It is to these sonnets that the remaining chapters will be devoted.

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77 See *Notes and Queries*, Series IV, VII, March 18, 1871, 233; XI, June 11, 1873, 491; and Series V, I, January 3, 1874, 9-10.

CHAPTER II

THE SPIRITUAL SONNETS

The spiritual odyssey of a soul is both intriguing and inspiring, and Henry Constable's conversion is no exception. His transformation from political spy and genial dilettante into a man soberly intent on his own salvation and that of others is not a trivial one. The change in the poet was gradual. His sojourn in France and his travels in Italy, his acquaintance with the nobility both at home and abroad, and his engagement in political affairs matured his thoughts and emotions. The poet was conscious of this change in himself, for he noted it in a postscript which is preserved in the Harleian Miscellany Transcript. His light love poems no longer interested him; therefore, he indicated his intentions of writing poems in a more serious vein. He wrote the following:

When I had ended this last sonet, and found that such vayne poems as I had by idle hours writ, did amounte to the climatericall number sixty-three, me thought it was high tyme for my follie to die, and to employ the remant of my wit to other calmer thoughts lesse sweete and lesse bitter.1

1 Park, ed., The Harleian Miscellany, IX, 517.
Shortly after he wrote these words in 1589, he had to flee from his country and to become an exile on the Continent. During this exile he became a convert to Catholicism. His was no half-hearted conversion, but a whole-souled turning to God, as his later life testifies. His conversion marked the beginning of an enforced exile and brought him rebuffs, disappointments, and even imprisonment. All these experiences left their impress on the poet's soul. His conversion, however, made the deepest impression on his life. It gave him the spiritual stamina to endure and even to love whatever hardships might come to him in the service of God. That his was a deeply religious spirit we can glean from a letter written to the Earl of Shrewsbury from the Tower where he was confined in 1604. At that time he wrote: "Whether I remain in prison or go out, I have learned to live alone with God."² And in an undated letter to the Countess of Shrewsbury he said:

then may I freely follow my own natural dispositions, and live contented with how little soever I shall have, serving no other Mistress than God Almighty, who I know will love me if I love him, and in whose company I can be when I will.³

³ Diana, ed. Hazlitt, 79.
During the ensuing years, Constable devoted himself exclusively to prayer and to the study of the truths of his newfound faith. From his life we learn that he became skilled in religious disputation and that he wrote prose works, which have not survived, explaining points of doctrine. His meditations on the truths of his faith, accordingly, incited him to express his thoughts and emotions in the medium of poetry as well as in prose, and he bequeathed to posterity a small sheaf of religious sonnets whose subjects range from the great mysteries of the Catholic faith: the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the Redemption, to those which sing the praises of the men and women who loved God and attained sanctity.

These spiritual sonnets in honor of God and His Saints, reflecting his deeply religious spirit, were written in his maturer years. Just when and where he wrote them cannot be ascertained, except that it was after 1589. Sidney Lee dates them 1593.⁴ In a sonnet he addressed "To the King of Scots, Touching the Subject of His Poems Dedicated Wholly to Heavenly Matters," the poet indicates that age is an important factor in the writing of religious poems.

He wrote:

When others hooded with blind love doe flye
Lowe on the ground with buzzard Cupid's wings
A heavenly love from love of love thee brings,
And makes thy Muse to mount above the skie;
Young Muses be not wonte to flye too hye,
Age school'd by Tyme such sober dittie sings;
But thy love flies from love of youthfull things,
And so the wings of Tyme doth overflye.⁵

These quatrains corroborate the view that Constable believed that as a poet grows older and falls in love, as it were, with Divine Love, his Muse will mount above the skies. Then he will write poems of enduring worth because the poems, inspired by heavenly love, will enkindle a corresponding fire in others. This sonnet also helps to date the spiritual sonnets. The lines seem to indicate a closer acquaintance with the King which other sonnets addressed to the King before 1589 do not, for in them he mentions his eagerness to see the King. In 1589, however, he did meet the King. On this and other occasions, they may have discussed the relative merits of various types of poetry because the King chose one of Constable's sonnets as an introduction to a book of his own poems. Nevertheless, to establish the exact date of the composition of these sonnets, beyond the fact that they were written after his conversion, is not too important. But the knowledge that he felt a compelling desire to express his faith

⁵ Diana, ed. Hazlitt, 34.
in prose and poetry is vitally interesting to us since his desire made him a member of that small group of religious poets who wrote religious poetry during the time of persecution and counter-persecution.

These spiritual sonnets were not published during the lifetime of Constable, but were circulated among his friends in manuscript. Several reasons might be alleged for keeping them in this form. Since the poems are an expression of his own personal love and devotion, he may have felt a certain diffidence in exposing them to the critical eyes of those who, because they did not share his faith, would read them either superficially or dogmatically. By keeping them in manuscript, they could be transmitted only to friends who would cherish them as he did. Then, too, the sonnets may have been written during his travels abroad. Under the stress of a momentary inspiration afforded by a shrine, a picture, or a sermon, he inscribed them in his notebook without the careful revision accorded his amatory sonnets. Furthermore, Constable may have felt a decided disinclination to publish these protestations of his faith because he wished to end his weary exile and to return to his native land, where, save for his adherence to his faith, he might have lived a life of ease and comfort. Whatever the reason, no accurate statement concerning this matter can be made. One can only surmise and draw inferences from his activities during this period as to his
reticence in publishing these sonnets. Moreover, in the seventeenth century, such an attitude was not uncommon, for Donne, Habington, and others also permitted their poems to move about in private circulation.

Until the nineteenth century, the spiritual sonnets remained in obscurity. Then Thomas Park, William Carew Hazlitt, and John Gray edited them. In 1815, Thomas Park compiled the Heliconia: A Selection of English Poetry of the Elizabethan Age Written or Published between 1575 and 1604. Constable's poems were edited from a manuscript in the Harleian Collection, No. 7553, for the second volume of this work. In 1859, William Carew Hazlitt appended the spiritual sonnets to his edition of Diana. The Diana he seems to have obtained from Todd's Manuscript, but the spiritual sonnets he edited from Park. Hazlitt's work represents the most complete and careful edition of Constable's complete work; his edition remains the standard. John Gray, in 1897, issued The Poems and Sonnets of Henry Constable edited from early editions and manuscripts. This is a beautifully printed and executed book which is decorated with woodcuts. Except for variations in spelling and punctuation, and the omission of "Sweet Saynt," a poem in honor of St. Mary Magdalene, from the Heliconia, the three editions are similar. For purposes of study, Thomas Park's edition in the Heliconia will be used because he edited the spiritual sonnets from the original manu-
Since then, all others who have edited Constable's poems have consulted the Park edition. The poem in honor of Mary Magdalene, omitted in his edition, will be supplied from Hazlitt's edition.

That these seventeen sonnets may not comprise the complete body of Constable's religious poems is probable. Both Alfred Noyes in his Golden Book of Catholic Poetry and Shane Leslie in his Anthology of Catholic Poets list "Love's Franciscan" among his poems; they give, however, no manuscript sources. In the Oxford Book of Christian Verse, edited by Lord David Cecil, there is a poem titled "O Gracious Shepherd" which is also ascribed to him. Here, too, no sources are given. For this reason, neither of these poems will be included in the study, although it is not unlikely that the story of St. Francis would have intrigued Constable who was a visitor in Italy for a number of years. The possibilities of his having written "O Gracious Shepherd" are also great since there are specific references to a conversion in it. Nevertheless, it is this writer's opinion that their inclusion would add nothing to Constable's stature as a poet. The writer wishes to treat only those sonnets which are indisputably Constable's.

In the manuscript and printed editions of the religious sonnets, the poems are entitled Spiritual Sonnets in Honour of God and His Saynts. The poems are grouped under two headings,
those in honor of God, and all the others in honor of the saints. For convenience in study, the sonnets will be rearranged and grouped under three headings: sonnets in honor of God, sonnets in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and sonnets in honor of the saints. Those in honor of God include: "To God the Father," "To God the Son," "To God the Holy Ghost," and "In Honor of the Blessed Sacrament." In them he expresses his belief in the unity and trinity of God, in the Incarnation, in the Holy Spirit, and in the Holy Eucharist. The four sonnets, all bearing the title "To Our Blessed Lady," make up the Marian cycle. In these poems he repudiates all his ambitions to obtain favors from an earthly prince or princess, and he desires that Mary, his only Queen, should draw him closer to her Divine Son. The third division comprises nine sonnets in honor of an archangel and certain saints: St. Michael, St. John the Baptist, Saints Peter and Paul, St. Margaret, St. Katherine, and four in honor of St. Mary Magdalene for whom he seems to have felt a special kinship as a fellow sinner.

The sonnet form which Constable uses in writing the religious sonnets follows, in general, the Italian model. It has two parts, the octave and the sestet. The rhyme scheme of the octave is invariably the Petrarchan "abbaabba," but that of the sestet is an approximation of three influences, the English form used by Wyatt and Surrey, the French, and the Italian.
seven are Spenserian and follow the "cdecde" pattern; three are after the style of Wyatt, "cdecde"; one follows the French model "cdedde"; while the others are Italian variants, including the patterns, "cdecde," "cdedce," and "cdecde." In the octave the poet introduces and develops an image, usually the dogma he is presenting, and in the sestet he takes the thought and applies it. This is, ordinarily, a prayer of petition. The poem always reflects a single thought and mood, namely love, a personal love for God and the saints which could result only from a deep and intimate contemplation of the divine truths.

The sonnets, in their original form, are often difficult reading. This is due to the variance in spelling. Elizabethan orthography in itself is somewhat a barrier to the modern reader's immediate comprehension and enjoyment of Constable's poetry. In reference to this objection to Elizabethan lyrics, Norman Ault observes:

The essential beauty of a lyric lies in the melody of the oral word—sung, intoned, or spoken; it has nothing whatever to do with the orthography of the written word. The Elizabethans, poets and printers alike, appreciated this fact more truly than do some modern scholars; they cared little how a word was spelt, so long as it was readily recognizable as the written symbol of the spoken word. Thus frequently in the same poem, sometimes in the same verse, a word is spelt three or four different ways.6

This obstacle, then, is not insurmountable, and the melodic beauty of the sonnets can be discerned after careful reading, preferably oral. If the reader follows this procedure, he will begin to savor the quaintness of many of his expressions, feel the rhythmic movement of the lines, and appreciate the emotional and intellectual aspects of the poem.

Although the technical aspects of the poems cannot be disregarded, and even in this Felix Schelling says that "he practiced his art with a clearer understanding of the technical demands of the Petrarchan sonnet than any other man of his time," it is this writer's opinion that the intellectual and emotional content of Constable's poems takes precedence over any technical merits or flaws to be found in them. The title, Spiritual Sonnets in Honour of God and His Saynts, can only suggest the depth of his thought and the sublimity of his aspirations. He loved his faith so well that he could not help being an unwitting propagandist, and the poems seem to be his "Apologia pro Vita Sua" as well as his "De Profundis." They are the cry of this recusant exile who desired peace and rest at the last, and they were, in his estimation, his best work.

Among his contemporaries Constable enjoyed a high reputation for his Diana. It is impossible to determine from the existing evidence whether his religious poems were also known and admired by them. It is worthy of note that the Todd Manuscript contains two sonnets addressed to Henry Constable. In one of them he is addressed as "England's sweete nightingal,\"\(^8\) and in the other, which might be applied to the spiritual sonnets, he is praised by a contemporary as follows:

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Sweet Muses' son! Apollo's chief delight!
Whilst that thy pen the angells quill doth praise,
Thou mak'st thy Muse keeping with angells flight,
That he which charg'd blind love for love of light,
And left Tyme's wings behind, and Love's below,
Amazed stands to see so strange a sight,
That angells wings nor tyme nor love outgoe.
The danger is least when the beat of sun
The angells and other wings shall trye!
A highest pitch both Tyme and Love be done,
And only she find passage through the skie.
Then rest thy Muse upon the angells wings,
Which both thy Muse and thee to heaven may bring.\(^9\)
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Later critics did not always share this poet's enthusiasm for Constable's spiritual sonnets. Mr. Hazlitt, commenting on them, says that "these sacred effusions rarely rise above mediocrity."\(^{10}\) But Mrs. Crow, another of his editors, does not

\(^{8}\) Park, ed., The Harleian Miscellany, IX, 517.

\(^{9}\) Ibid.

\(^{10}\) Diana, ed. Hazlitt, introduction, vi.
entirely agree with Mr. Hazlitt's judgment. Her opinion is the following:

In this group, [Spiritual Sonnets] as in the other, [Diana] he expressed that passion for beauty characteristic of the Renaissance, but here he shows the lack of clear conception as to where the line should be drawn between earthly and heavenly beauty. In Constable we see the new revelation barely emerging from the darkness, the human hand reaching out in art toward the divine, but not knowing how to take hold the higher in its grasp. These sonnets are as 'conceitful' as the others, but the collection illustrated an early effort to turn the poetic energy into a new field, to broaden the scope of subject matter possible in sonnet form. 11

It is true, as Mrs. Crow has observed, that Constable's fondness for conceits can be readily discerned in his religious sonnets; however, they are not the exaggerated type found in his amatory sonnets. They evince, rather, his attempts to consecrate the tools of his earthly successes to a higher subject. Viewed in this light, they cease to be offensive. In Sidney Lanier's opinion, Constable's conceits, formerly so brisk, are somewhat chastened in these sonnets and are but the lively utterances of his devotion. 12

Thomas Park, in his preface to the spiritual sonnets in the Heliconia, says:

11 Crow, Elizabethan Sonnet Cycle, II, 87.
12 Sidney Lanier, Shakespeare and His Forerunners, I, New York, 1902, 235.
Several are marked by such mysteriousness as their highly spiritual nature might be expected to invoke, though with an altitude of expression which some pious minds would deem indecorous. Yet the 'Song of Solomon' may be referred to, as the natural authority for the use of such terms in religious poesies; and also for the figurative explication of some of the passages, which might otherwise be applied to the pen of a female writer.  

William Minto, a well-known critic of the nineteenth century who made an exhaustive study of English literature, makes this comment on the sonnets:

There can be little doubt that the beautiful 'spiritual sonnets' ascribed to him by Mr. Park, and printed in vol. ii of the 'Heliconia' are his composition. Those addressed to 'our Blessed Lady' are particularly fine.

Another critic of this same century, Andrew Lang, thought that Constable's sonnets were often overlaid with conceits, but that some of his lyrics were fresh and charming. Of the religious poems, he says:

The verses of his later days when he had learned, as he says, 'to live alone with God' are also sonnets in honor of the saints, and chiefly of Mary Magdalene. They are ingenious, and sometimes too cleverly confuse the passions of earthly and divine love.

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Early in the next century, Alfred Upham in his study, The French Influence in English Literature, comments on this group of Constable's sonnets saying:

It is probable, though, that Constable's sixteen Spirituall Sonnets were prompted by the example of Desportes. Their author was a Catholic like the French poet; and they were also composed during that sojourn in France, thus being entirely independent of the Protestant religious current that passed from France into England under the encouragement of the Sidneys. These sonnets as such have no particular significance. But they are serious and devout, and were counted by Constable among his best work.16

About this same time, Mr. Erskine expresses an opinion similar to that of Mr. Upham. Writing of the sonnets, he says:

The seventeen sonnets . . . have no other connection but the general theological tone of the subjects. It was the fashion to write religious occasional poems, and to pretend to think more of such performances than of secular verse, but these sonnets are not the most important of Constable's work. They are chiefly remarkable for the employment throughout of the Petrarchan form, and for using that form for other themes than those of love.17

Since the date of the composition of the religious sonnets has not been accurately determined, Mr. Upham's assertion that they were composed in France is speculative. Nor can his and Mr. Erskine's opinions as to the significance of these sonnets pass unchallenged. The poet lived in an age when Catholicity

16 Alfred H. Upham, The French Influence in English Literature from the Accession of Elizabeth to the Restoration, New York, 1908, 136.

was a crime. Yet he had the courage to give up what promised to be a successful career in the service of his country and to become a Catholic. Moreover, since he spent his energies in the services of his Church, his religious convictions must have been extremely vigorous. His religious poems are an expression of this spirit. Then, too, his contemporaries must have valued these poems, for they were circulated in manuscript among them, and at least one copy of them has survived over two hundred years.

Felix Schelling, discussing the religious poetry of the Elizabethan Age, writes:

But by no means were all the Elizabethan sonnets amatory. Second, but far from unimportant, was the devotional or religious sonnet, often written in sequences emulating the length, if not the extravagances of the amatory sequences themselves; . . . The 'Spiritual sonnets' of either Constable or Barnes could furnish examples comparable at least with the average level of either in worldly poetry.18

Brother Leo has also expressed his opinion on the controversial merits of Constable's religious poems. As a Catholic critic judging the work of a Catholic poet from the viewpoint of Catholicism and literature, his criticism seems to be the most tenable. He says:

18 Schelling, English Literature in the Lifetime of Shakespeare, 133.
He wrote love poems and religious poems, and especially in the latter he is distinguished for the depth of feeling and coherence of thought. He has grace and picturesqueness, a manifest but not excessive liking for 'conceits' and an exceptional structural skill; he generally manages to invest his concluding lines with emotional emphasis ... His religious poems, though remaining in manuscript, were widely read, and some of them were, until recently, ascribed to Donne and other poets.

In her study, *Elizabethan Love Conventions*, Lu Emily Pearson speaks of these poems as having an "introspective bent."

This somewhat tenuous stream of criticism culminates with the opinion of Lisle Cecil John who, while he does not evaluate the religious sonnets as such, does emphasize the poet's importance in the literary world of the Elizabethans. His opinion of Constable follows:

As for Constable, so much work remains to be done in the matter of the authenticity of the text that it is impossible to speak definitely of his style. Since, however, he now takes rank as one of the earliest English poets to write a sonnet cycle, his verse deserves careful editing and greater consideration in its relationship to the other verse of his day.

It is difficult to form an estimate of Constable's poetry from the varied criticism of the authors just quoted. It


would seem that these critics, for the most part, do not take cognizance of, or are unaware of, the circumstance that Constable as being among the first English sonneteers, faced a difficult task. Much of their disparagement, no doubt, is due to a misunderstanding of these hazards and of the poet's own personal vision which encompassed the mystery of God in all its immensity. This vision he crystallized in a verse form which was still in the experimental stages in England. Despite these difficulties, he succeeded in compressing sublime truths within the limits of fourteen lines. Sometimes, it is true, the meter is somewhat harsh as in Donne's poetry, but this does not detract from the thought which is always paramount in the religious sonnets. Nor do the traces of the Elizabethan conceit which are found principally in the sonnets in honor of the saints detract from their merit. Rather, they add a quaint charm because of their suggestiveness or because of their logical subtlety. Kathlees Lea in her article on conceits sets forth a canon for judging and appreciating Elizabethan sonnets, whether amatory or religious. She says:

The completion of a work of art is the responsibility of the reader; a poem, like a picture, until it is perceived, is only half created. . . . [T]he mood in which we derive the greatest amount of pleasure from a work of art comes nearest the mood in which it was written.

We do not read Elizabethan poetry to be gratified by an exquisite sense of form, to sigh at the perfect proportion of an ode, or the rigid solitude of a sonnet; the very lyric is 'to fit the atyre,' and has none of the patterning
of a triplet or a ballad. We read them for the peace that is given by profusion, and for those moments of inspiration which could only be reached after so much waste.\textsuperscript{22}

Moreover, it is sometimes precisely because of his limitations that a poet is interesting. Even a lesser poet has his unique and personal message to impart and, if his message is sincere and earnest, the world has need of it. No infallible authority for determining the status of an author exists.

The poems, therefore, should be evaluated in a spirit of empathy according to the spiritual and poetic standards which Constable envisioned and embraced, namely Infinite Holiness expressed in poetic form by a finite being. Other and greater minds, those of St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas, had been overwhelmed by the immensity of setting down the mysteries of Catholic dogma in comprehensible language. But, fortified by faith and fired by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they wrote their monumental works to the greater honor of God. Some such spirit, no doubt, compelled Constable, the convert, the militant Catholic, and the English poet to express his own burning faith. That he was able to give vent to his intense feeling and ardent love and longing in the restricted and conventional form of the sonnet marks him as a poet worthy of consideration on the basis of his spiritual sonnets alone.

CHAPTER III

THE SONNETS IN HONOR OF GOD

The year 1589 was a momentous one in the life of Henry Constable, since in that year, he resolved to put aside his "vayne poems" and "to employ his wit to calmer thoughts." What that resolution taken before his conversion included we cannot know. A few years later, he was indeed giving his thoughts to graver subjects. His conversion to Catholicism had made such an impact on his soul that thereafter he devoted his time and energies to making that faith known and loved.

From the outset, he delved deeply into the mysteries of this newfound faith, and he meditatively studied its chief truths. His first interest was to study the ineffable nature and the divine message of God—a study which had enthralled the Fathers and Doctors of the Church down through the centuries, and which had inspired them and countless others to leave all for His service.

1 Park, ed., The Harleian Miscellany, IX, 517.
The Trinity, the focal point of all Christian teaching, must have absorbed his mind for many hours. Once he had grasped its meaning, insofar as any human intellect can grasp infinity, his love and devotion flamed into a prayer in sonnet form which he addressed to God the Father.

God's love for men was another subject the poet loved to dwell upon. The most perfect expression of this God-love, the Incarnation, Constable portrayed in a sonnet to God the Son. In the Incarnation, the new convert was able to find tangible evidence of the goodness of God to His creatures, and he exulted in this knowledge.

In a third poem, which he addressed to God the Holy Ghost, the poet again sings a song in praise of love. This love is no mere embodiment of love, but is Divinity in love with Itself, the very essence and spirit of love. It is the poet's hope and prayer that his own heart will become inflamed with the fire of love for God through the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit.

No group of sonnets in praise of Divine Love would be complete without a poem in honor of the Holy Eucharist. Just as the Trinity is the central doctrine of the Catholic faith, so is the Holy Eucharist the mainspring of Catholic worship. It is Divine Love sacrificing Itself for the sake of the beloved. Throughout the ages, this mystery has inspired saints, theologians, and poets to break out in hymns of praise, and Constable
joined their ranks when he penned a sonnet to the Blessed Sacrament.

These four poems constitute the cycle "In Honor of God." They do not belong to that type of verse which is dashed off in some idle hour of inspiration; they are poems which were written by a man whose thoughts were deeply rooted in the love and worship of God.

To God the Father

Greate God! within whose symple essence wee
Nothyng but that which ys thy selfe can fynde:
When on thy self thou dyddst reflect thy mynde,
Thy thought was God, which tooke the forme of Thee.
And when this God, thus borne, thou lov'st, and Hee
Lov'd thee agayne with passion of lyke kynde,
(As lovers syghes, which meete become one wynde,)
Both breath'd one Spryght of aequall Deitye.
Aeternall Father! whence theis twoe do come
And wil'st the tytle of my Father have,
An heavenly knowledge in my mynde engrave,
That yt Thy Sonne's true image may become;
And sente my hart with syghes of Holy love,
That yt the temple of the Spright may prove. 2

Henry Constable begins his sonnet with an almost inarticulate invocation. The contemplation of God's greatness so overpowers him that he can only cry, "Greate God!" Then, in two succinct lines he compresses the concept of one of the mysteries of God's nature, His simplicity. In writing of God's nature, Constable uses the word essence which St. Thomas Aquinas also uses as an interchangeable term for nature. The poet also em-

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plies the term simple which in theology signifies an absence of parts. In other words, God is not a composite being. The conception of God underlying these lines is staggering.

According to St. Thomas, God is the same as His essence or nature. He does not have divinity, nor is He full of life. He is Divinity; He is Life; He is Existence. In Him there is nothing accidental, transient, or unessential. Therefore, He cannot enter into composition with others. Nor does God have potentialities since this would imply an imperfection, a lack of some quality which would make His Being more perfect. But God is pure actuality and is the source of all potentiality. Since God is the first and completely independent source of all being, He is free from all complexity. In other words, He is simple. This simplicity of God, St. Thomas points out, may be explained in various ways. God, as a pure spirit, has no body. This excludes the possibility of composition and quantitative parts in Him. Nor is God composed of matter and form. In like manner, God is not different from His nature, for His nature is the Godhead. Since this is true, Constable says we can find in God "Nothyng but that which ys thy self." Here Constable is also in

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accordance with St. Thomas, for the saint tells us that this intelligence is possible to man because a created intellect can apprehend, or "fynde" as Constable expresses it, God's essence since it is capable of knowing separate subsisting substances and separate subsisting being by grace.4

The poet, however, does not stop with this idea of God. In the remaining six lines of the octet, he gives a pithy exposition of the Trinity, that inscrutable and awesome mystery to which St. Thomas and St. Augustine had devoted their great intellects. The doctrine of the divinely revealed mystery is that there are three distinct Divine Persons in one and the same divine nature. The three persons are coequal, coeternal, and consubstantial, but are one God. From all eternity, the Second Person proceeds from the First by an eternal generation; the Third proceeds from the Second and the First by an eternal spiration.5

Now, there are many scriptural passages concerning this ineffable mystery which Constable knew and which he may have had in mind when he penned the octet, particularly in the New Testament in which the Evangelists make specific mention of the three

4 Pegis, Introduction to Saint Thomas Aquinas, 79.
5 Farrell, Companion to the Summa, I, 140-160.
persons. In the Gospel of St. John, the following texts forcibly bring out the truths of which Constable sings. St. John begins with the words: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God; and the Word was God." A few chapters later, he quotes the words of Christ: "Jesus said to them: 'If God were your Father, you would surely love me. For from God I came forth and have come; for neither have I come of myself, but he sent me.'"

Then St. John, again quoting Christ, gives a series of quotations about the Holy Spirit: "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to dwell with you forever." "But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your mind whatever I have said to you." "But when the Advocate has come, whom I will send you from the Father, he will bear witness concerning me."6

Finally, in his first epistle, St. John summarizes the teaching of Christ concerning the Trinity: "And there are three that bear witness in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one."7

Whether Constable was acquainted with St. Thomas' exposition of the Blessed Trinity, we cannot know for certain.

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6 The quotations just given are from John 1, 1; 3, 42; 14, 16; 14, 26; 15, 26.

7 1 John 5, 7.
From a study of his terminology, it would seem that he was. In the last two lines of the quatrain, the poet says:

When on thy self thou dyddst reflect thy munde,
Thy thought was God, which tooke the forme of Thee.

St. Thomas' explanation of the generation of the Son, although it is more technical and detailed, conveys the same thought. God, knowing Himself perfectly from all eternity, generates the Eternal Word Who is properly called the Son since He proceeds from the same specific nature of God, and this generation can properly be called birth. The Son proceeds by way of an intelligible action, and this concept of the intellect of God is a likeness of the object conceived and exists in the same nature because the act of understanding and of existence are the same in God.8

Then the poet with extreme simplicity and brevity shows that from the mutual love of the Father and the Son "Both breath'd one Spryght of aequal Deitye." The spiration of the Holy Spirit is explained by St. Thomas: "[T]he eternal and immanent breath of love of the Son for the Father and the Father for the Son is the Holy Ghost."9

Like all exegetes, the poet felt the necessity of clarifying his ideas by means of a comparison and, like all exempla

8 Farrell, Companion to the Summa, I, 156.
9 Ibid.
used in explaining the Trinity, it is defective. He compares the spiration of the Holy Spirit to the union of lovers' sighs as they breathe forth their love for each other. The spirated breaths proceed from love as does the Holy Spirit, but the conjoining of the two could never be termed a person even though, in the Platonic tradition, the sighs of lovers were an extension of their souls. The comparison is apt insofar as it brings out the idea that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the mutual love of the Father and the Son.

The sestet opens with an invocation to the Father. Immediately after this, the poet acknowledges the rightness of calling God Father, for He is the principle from which the Son and the Holy Spirit proceed. The poet regards God as his Father also, but he realizes his unworthiness to be the son of God. As a suppliant child, he begs the Father, not for temporal favors, but for that "heavenly knowledge" which will recreate him into a living image of the Son of God. In reality the poet asks for the theological virtues of faith and love. Constable asks for faith, an infused belief in the truths God has revealed, when he writes, "An heavenly knowledge in my mynde engrave." He asks for love in the line, "That yt thy Sonne's true image may become." The Son is the Word, God's knowledge and love of Himself.

The petition of the sestet continues with the poet's prayer to the Father to make his heart a worthy temple of the
Holy Spirit by giving him the spirit of constant and loving prayer. To convey his idea, he asks, "And sente my hart with syghes of holy love." The word "sente" must be interpreted according to the definition in the New English Dictionary which defines it as "to impregnate with an odour; to perfume." If his heart were impregnated with the odor of God's love, the scriptural significance of prayer as "golden bowls full of incense which are the prayers of the saints,"10 would be illustrated by this line of the poem.

This sonnet is no mere presentation of theology. There is in it an emotional intensity which is held in check by the inadequacy of words. There are no means by which man can express the immensity of God and the unutterable sweetness of His love. Man studies, he contemplates, he loves, and because his love is an impelling urge within him, he attempts, in a feeble way, to give expression to it. Constable's knowledge of God engendered love in his heart, and his love found expression in this sonnet "To God the Father." When he tried to utter his thoughts, he was forced, because of the paucity of words to express Divine Love, to borrow from his amatory sonnets. Thus he speaks of "passion of lyke kynde," "lovers syghes," "syghes of holy love."

10 Apoc. 5, 8.
There is, however, majesty and adoration in the invocation "Greate God," and filial piety in the address "Aeternall Father." The petition in the sestet manifests his hope, and the entire poem pulsates with his love for God.

The emotional and imaginative qualities of the sonnet are almost inseparable. The essential image seems to be one of movement, not a tangible but a spiritual one. From the first invocation, the poet's soul is wafted to heavenly heights where it contemplates the eternal generation of the Son and the eternal procession of the Holy Spirit. The procession of the Holy Ghost is like the spiration of lovers' sighs which become one breath, one "wynde." In the sestet the movement continues with the picture of God the Father engraving His Son's image on the poet's mind, just as a coin is stamped with the image of the sovereign. Finally, the poet's soul, suffused with heavenly desires, sends up "syghes of holy love" like incense.

Just as we are forced to acknowledge the inadequacy of words, so we must acknowledge the limitations of techniques. Even here, the poet overcame almost insuperable difficulties. The metrical pattern and the rigid rhyme scheme of the sonnet did not, apparently, hamper his expression of faith and love of God in this poem. The sonnet begins with a spondee, "Greate God," which is appropriate and effective. Then a rhythmic flow of iambic follows throughout the poem. Only in the second, third,
and last lines of the sestet is there a slight deviation in the meter. The third foot in each of these lines is a pyrrhic instead of an iamb, and the second foot in the third line is an anapest. The scansion following will illustrate his technique:

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And wiltst the title of my Father have,
An heavenly knowledge in my mind engrave,
That yet the temple of the Spirit may prove.
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The rhyming pattern, which is Petrarchan in the octet and English in the sestet, illustrates the poet's skill. Although the shift in vowel quantity which can be clearly discerned in the rhyming of "have-engrave" and "love-prove," changes the effect in present-day English, the modern pronunciation need not detract from the beauty of the sonnet.

After contemplating the eternal generation of Christ in heaven, the poet contemplates His birth in time. With tender love and adoration, he addresses to God the Son a sonnet honoring His nativity.

To God the Sonne

Greate Prynce of heven, begotten of that Kyng
Who rules the kyngdome that himself dyd make,
And of that vyrgyn-queene manne's shape did take,
Which from Kyngle Davyd's royal stock dyd sprynges;
No mervayle, though thy byrth mayd angells syngge,
And angells dyttes shepethyrs pypes awake,
And kynges, lyke shepethyrs, humbled for thy sake
Kneele at thy feete, and guyftes of homage brynge:
For heaven and earth, the hyghe and lowe estate
As partners of thy byrth make aequall clayme;
Angells, because in heaven God Thee begatt,
Sheepehyrdes and kynges, because thy mother came
From pryncely race, and yet by povertye
Mayd glory shyne in her humillitye.\textsuperscript{11}

The mood of this sonnet is sounded in the opening address, "Great Prynce of heaven." It is a mood of awed yet tender love, for, with dear familiarity, the poet unfolds for us the story of Christ's Incarnation and birth in the octet. The first two lines recall the beginning of St. John's Gospel, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God; and the Word was God."\textsuperscript{12} Later St. John continues, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us. And we saw his glory--glory as of the only-begotten of the Father--full of grace and of truth."\textsuperscript{13} This thought the poet also reiterates in the sestet.

After establishing the divine paternity of Christ, Constable, in a few brief strokes, sketches the absorbing mystery of the Incarnation in the words, "And of that vyrgyn-queene manne's shape did take." It is in St. John's Gospel that we read the story of the virgin "from Kynge Davyd's royal stock." In Nazareth dwelt the Virgin Mary who was espoused to Joseph of the

\textsuperscript{11} Park, ed., Heliconia, II, 4.
\textsuperscript{12} John 1, 1.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 1, 14.
house of David. God sent the Angel Gabriel to her to announce his message: "Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shalt bring forth a son; and thou shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the most High; and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father." In answer to her question, "How shall this be done, because I know not man," the angel said to her: "The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee; and therefore the Holy One to be born shall be called the Son of God." In the fourth line, the poet notes that Christ's body was derived from "Kyne Davyd's royal stock." David, the shepherd boy who became king, was the seed from which sprang the manhood of the Divine King who became the Good Shepherd.

The second quatrain of the octet continues the story. The poet says nothing of the birth except "No mervayle, though thy byrth mayd angells synge." The word "mervayle," an obsolete form of marvel, should be interpreted as no cause for surprise. The word "though" should be understood as meaning that because, according to the New English Dictionary, though was often used after negative clauses with marvell in this sense in the sixteenth century. The miracle of the Word's conception in a

14 The quotations are from Luke 1, 31, 32; 1, 35.
Virgin-Mother through the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit should occasion no surprise, for with God all things are possible. At Christ's birth, angels sang and announced the glad tidings to the shepherds who hastened to adore Him, as St. Luke tells us in his second chapter.

The story of the "kynges" who "Kneele at thy feete and guyftes of homage brynge," St. Luke does not mention, but in the second chapter of St. Matthew, we read:

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of King Herod, behold Magi came from the East to Jerusalem, saying, 'Where is he that is born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and have come to worship him.' And entering the house, they found the child with Mary his Mother, and falling down they worshipped him. And opening their treasures, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.15

In the sestet, the poet acclaims Christ as the God-Man, for "the hyghe and lowe estate [angels and shepherds] As partners of thy byrth make aequall clayme." Because Christ is God, the angels sing His praises and, because He is born of a mother, human but one sprung from "pryncely race," He is adored by "Sheepehyrdes and kynges." He is adored by "kynges" because His "mother came From pryncely race" and by "Sheepehyrdes," because of her "povertyse" and "humillitye" which, however, were made there glorious.

A mood of tender, adoring love permeates this sonnet. At first there is a sharp awareness of the majesty of Christ. He is the "Greate Prynce of heaven." But the prevailing emotion is rather one of brooding love. Christ is born, angels sing, shepherds and kings adore. The virtues of poverty and humility, however, preside over this epoch-making birth. There is glory and joy in heaven and on earth; yet the general tone of the poem is not one of intensity. The poet loves, adores, and rejoices; nevertheless these emotions do not flame out in flashes of pure passion. There is no white heat, but there is a deep, abiding awareness of God's goodness and love.

In keeping with the tender mood is an accompanying simplicity of imagery. Throughout the poem, the poet uses an unaffected language which becomes almost rustic in the line, "And angells dyttes shepehyrds pypes awake." The "Glory to God in the highest," sung by the angels is a "dytte" which inspires the shepherds to sing their praises to the new-born King. The poem is reminiscent of the pastoral poems of Edmund Spenser whose Colin Clout is inspired to pipe new songs after he has heard the shepherds' ditties. The effectiveness of the sonnet lies in the allusiveness of the imagery. Each line, or sometimes even part of a line is richly connotative because of the familiarity of the story.

The structure of the sonnet is extremely interesting.
The poet achieves unity of impression by showing the partnership between heaven and earth, divinity and mankind, in the mystery of the Incarnation. In the first quatrains, the poet emphasizes the divine paternity and the human maternity, the mysterious union of a Divine King with a "vyrgyn-queene" descended from an earthly king. In the second quatrains, the poet shows how heaven and earth joined in singing the praises of the new-born king. The rejoicing begins in heaven with the songs of the angels—songs which arouse the shepherds who join with the angels in adoring their King. Earthly kings also come to adore their Divine King. The sestet completes the unification with a summary of the octet.

"Heaven and earth,... As partners of thy byrth make aequall clayme."

The poet continues his theme of love in the next sonnet which he addresses to God the Holy Ghost. In loving adoration, he praises the Spirit of Divine Love.

To God the Holy-Ghost

Aeternall Spryght! which art in heaven the love
With which God and his Sonne ech other kysse;
And who, to shewe who God's Beloved ys,
The shape and wynges took' st of a loving Dove.
When Chryste, ascendyng, sent Thee from above
In fyery tongues; thou cam' st downe unto hys,
That skyll in utterlyng heavenly mysteryes,
By heate of zeale both faith and love myght move.
True God of Love! from whom all true love sprynges,
Bestowe upon my love thy wynges and fyre,
My sowle a spyrytt ys, and with thy wynges
May lyke an aungell fly from earth's desyre;
And with thy fyre and hart inflam'd may beare,
And in thy sight a seraphin appeare.16

The sonnet, "To the Holy-Ghost," is a return both to
the deep mysteriousness of the Divinity with its strong overttones
of love and adoration and to the structure of his poem "To God
the Father." This poem, too, is founded on scriptural knowledge
which Constable possessed in such an eminent degree and which he
so evidently cherished.

Again the octet begins with an invocation, "Aeternal
Spyrghl! which art in heaven the love." The poet iterates the
doctrine he presents in his earlier poem. The Holy Spirit is
the Spirit of Love because He proceeds from the love of the
Father for His eternal Son. The poet emphasizes this thought
with the arresting line, "With which God and his Sonne ech other
kysse." The suggested metaphor seems almost irreverent unless
we predicate the idea that Constable belonged to the Platonic
school which considered the kiss as a spiritual act. In the
Book of the Courtier, Pietro Bambo, speaking of the kiss of man
and woman says:

a man delights to join his mouth to that of his beloved in a kiss, not in order to arouse any unseemly desire in him, but because he feels that bond to be the opening of a passage between their souls, which, being drawn by desire for the other, pour themselves each into the other's body by turn, and so commingle that each has two souls, and a single soul (thus composed of these two) rules as it were over two bodies.

On this account all chaste lovers desire to kiss as a joining of the soul; and thus the divinely enamoured Plato says that in kissing the soul came to his lips to escape his body.

Bembo's final proof for the spirituality of the kiss is a quotation from Solomon which he proceeds to expatiate:

'Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth,' to express desire that his soul might be so transported with divine love to the contemplation of celestial beauty, that by joining closely therewith she might forsake the body.17

The revelation of the mystery of the Holy Spirit was presented in its entirety, however, only in the New Testament when the Evangelists recount the beginning of Christ's public life. Before Christ began to teach, He permitted His precursor and cousin, St. John the Baptist, to baptize Him in the River Jordan. Constable's lines,

And who, to shewe who God's Beloved ys,
The shape and wynges took'st of a loving Dove,

are echoings of the Gospel story according to St. Luke who wrote:

17 The quotations just given are from Baldesar Castiglione, The Book of the Courtier, tr. by Leonard Eckstein Opdycke, New York, 1929, 297.
"And the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form as a dove, and a voice came from heaven, 'Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased.' "18 Then the poet continues with "When Chryste, ascending, sent Thee from above," which is but a summation of a text from St. John: "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to dwell with you forever."19

The second quatrain continues the story of the manifestation of the Holy Spirit Who "In fyery tongues" came "downe unto hys." The Divine Wisdom chose the medium of fiery tongues to show Himself to the Apostles to symbolize the inward effects of His advent. Their tongues, formerly so prone to utter inanities and worldly advice, suddenly become skilled in the explanation of the very mysteries which they had been unable to comprehend before. Their hearts, so timorous in professing Christ at the time of His passion, were now bold because the fiery love of the Holy Spirit enkindled in them a loving zeal for souls.

The poet says that Christ had sent the Holy Ghost in this form:

That skyll in uttering heavenly mysteryes,  
By heate of zeale both faith and love myght move.  

The Scriptures bear this out. Christ had told His Apostles before His death: "But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the

19 John 14, 16.
Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your mind whatever I have said to you." But the story of Pentecost itself we do not find in the Gospels. The account, in the Acts of the Apostles, states:

And there appeared to them parted tongues as of fire, which settled upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and they began to speak in foreign tongues, even as the Holy Spirit prompted them to speak.

The Acts continue with the story of the conversion of the three thousand people through the preaching of the Apostles. Constable probably had this in mind when he writes that the Holy Spirit came that He "By heate of zeale both faith and love myght move."

The thought of this great wonder seems to have aroused in the poet an insatiable desire to possess a similar spirit. The sestet is his plea to the Holy Spirit for a love with "thy wynges and fyre." He begins by invoking the Holy Spirit as "True God of Love!" Then he asks that the God of Love should bestow on his soul wings that it might leave earth with its many pleasures behind. The poet also asks that He enkindle his heart with the same love He bestowed on the Apostles on Pentecost that it might glow with ecstatic love. This Pentecostal love would transform him and elevate him to the ranks of the seraphim, those

20 John 14, 26.
21 Acts 2, 3-4.
There is a particularly strong emotional appeal in the sestet. There is urgency in the poet's pleading for heavenly love. He reminds the Holy Spirit of his likeness to God. "My sowle a spyrytt ys," he says. Therefore give it those wings which you used to manifest Yourself to man. Enkindle my heart with the very flames of love which You used at Pentecost. With the help of the Holy Spirit, the poet feels that he can leave earth below like an angel. He can, indeed, become like an angelic spirit whose name signifies fiery love, the Seraphim.

The imagination also plays a vital role in developing the theme and in conveying the emotion in this sonnet. The imagery the poet uses is primarily kinesthetic and thermal. Fire and heat have always been used in reference to passionate love and, since this poem is dedicated to the Spirit of Love, we find it rich in thermal appeal. Such expressions as "fyery tongues," "heate of zeal," "fyre," "and hart inflam'd," and "seraphim" create an impression of burning love. Such love is not a static but a motile love; therefore, movement is an integral part of this imaginative treatment. Mutual love reveals itself in outward actions. From the mutual love of the Father and the Son proceeds the Holy Spirit. This eternal Spirit assumed the wings of a dove to descend to earth. Nevertheless, the upward sweep
of the movement is sharply defined, and it sweeps the soul to heaven almost immediately in the expression, "Chryste ascendyng." Love was responsible for the second descent of the Holy Spirit to earth in the form of fiery tongues. The movement continues in the allusive line, "By heate of zeal both faith and love myght move." Here the poet is probably referring to apostolic zeal which might arouse faith and love in others. Always, however, the motion tends toward heaven which the poet aspires to attain with the wings given him by the Holy Spirit.

The poetic diction in the sonnet emphasizes the emotional intensity of this song of love in praise of the Spirit of Divine Love. The opening exclamation of the octet, "Aeternall Spryght!" and the invocation, "True God of Love," which begins the sestet, indicates the poet's overwhelming desire. Love is the keynote, for we find echoes of it in the word love itself, which is repeated four times, and in its derivative beloved and loving, and in such analogous expressions as "heate of zeal" and "hart inflam'd." The poet likewise stresses the movement of love from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven, by using "wynges" and the analogous word fly and angel, a spiritual created being usually represented with wings.

Metrically, the sonnet follows the Petrarchan pattern of iambic pentameter quite closely in the octet. In the second foot of the second line, however, he does substitute a trochee,
and in the third foot of the fourth line he also uses a trochee. Another deviation is the pyrrhic in the first foot of the second line. It is interesting to note that both quatrains begin with a line which runs over into the second line. The sestet, however, admits of several variations. The rhyme scheme is "cdcdce." It begins with a forceful spondee, "True God," substitutes a pyrrhic in the third foot and spondees in the last two feet, and has the thought continue from the first tercet into the second. The last two lines, through the use of parallelism and an initial metrical pattern of three short syllables, brings the petition in the sestet to a strong close, for the movement, begun in heaven with God, concludes in heaven at the throne of God, when the poet prays,

   And with thy fyre and hart inflam'd may bære,
   And in thy syght a seraphim appeare.

The poet's technique can be observed in the following scansion:

   With which | Gód  and | his Sónne | éch óthér kýsse; ||
   . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
   Thé shápe, | ánd wýnges | tóok'st of | a lóving dóve. ||
   . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
   Trúe Gód | of Lóve; | fróm whom | áll trúe | lóve sprýnges, ||
   . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
   And wíth | thy fyre | and hárť | inflám'd | may bǽare, ||
   Ênd | in | thy syght | a séráphim | appéare. ||
After praising the Blessed Trinity, the poet turns his thoughts to the Holy Eucharist which is the visible expression of Christ's love for us, and he reveals to us the emotions he experienced when he meditated on this sacrament.

To the Blessed Sacrament

When Thee, O holy sacrificed Lambe!
   In severed sygnes I whyte and liquide see,
   As in thy body slayne; I thynke on thee,
   Which pale by sheddyng of thy bloode became.
And when agayne I doe behold the same,
   Vayled in whyte to be receav'd of mee,
   Thou seemest in thy syndon wrap't to bee,
   Like to a corse, whose monument I am.
Buryed in me, unto my sowle appeare
   Pryson'd in earth; and bannish't from thy syght,
   Lyke our forefathers who in lymbo were;
Cleere thou my thoughtes, as thou did'st gyve them light;
   And as thou others freed from purgying fyre,
Quenche in my hart the flames of badd desyre. 22

The sonnet, "To the Blessed Sacrament," is a meditative prayer on the most important function of the liturgy of the Catholic Church, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass by which we are enabled to receive Christ in Holy Communion. According to Catholic doctrine, the Holy Eucharist is both sacrament and sacrifice, and it is in the Sacrifice of the Mass that Christ offers Himself to His heavenly Father just as He had done on Calvary, but under the appearances of bread and wine.

The first quatrains of the octet shows the similarity

between the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and the Crucifixion. For every sacrifice a victim is necessary and, in the Mass as on Calvary, Christ is the victim. In the invocation, the poet addresses Christ as "holy sacrificed Lambe," a title which parallels the scriptural text, "a Lamb standing, as if slain." During the elevation of the consecrated host and the chalice of consecrated wine, the poet expresses his faith in the real presence of Christ. He says, "Thee . . . In severed sygnes I whyte and liquide see." The severed "sygnes" refers to the separate consecration of the bread and wine which sacramentally shows that the same Christ was slain on Calvary. The whiteness of the host and the redness of the wine remind him of the dead Christ hanging on the cross and of the pallor of His Body accentuated by the blood streaming from His wounds.

The second quatrain reveals the thoughts which filled Constable's mind when after the consecration he consummated the sacrifice by receiving Holy Communion under the appearance of bread as is customary in the Roman Rite. In his imagination he had recreated Christ's death on the cross and, a short time after, when he sees the priest bringing the Sacred Host to him, he says,

23 Apoc. 5, 6.
And when agayn I doe behold the same,
Vayled in whyte to be receav'd of mee,
Thou seemest in thy syndon wrap't to bee,
Like to a corse, whose monument I am.

In these lines we can see the poet's evident faith and his pre-
occupation with the sacrificial element of the Eucharist. He is
again impressed by the whiteness of the host. The appearance
which conceals Christ from his eyes reminds him of the "syndon"
which enveloped Christ's body in the tomb. The New English Di-
tionary defines "syndon" as the white linen shroud in which our
Lord's body was wrapped. This idea suggests to the poet that
when he receives Holy Communion, Christ will be buried in him just
as He was buried in the tomb. Accordingly, he will be Christ's
monument.

The first tercet begins with the poet's petition to
Christ. He has been meditating on Christ's death and burial. He
continues his meditation with the descent of Christ into Limbo,
the place of repose, where all who had died before the death of
Christ waited for the coming of the Redeemer. He compares him-
self to these people. He views his body, as did all Platonists,
as a prison for his soul. The great longing of the souls in
Limbo to see the Beatific Vision is shared by Constable. There-
fore, he pleads with our Lord, "You are now 'buryed in me' as
You were buryed in the tomb. Appear to my soul which is '['p]ry-
son'd in earth; and bannish't from thy syght, Lyke our fore-
fathers' who were also in Limbo for so long a time."
The final tercet concludes his petition with an almost anguished plea. The poet seems to be undergoing some trial. It seems as though doubts are assailing his mind. He, therefore, begs Christ, "Cleere thou my thoughtes, as thou did'st gyve them [forefather in Limbo] light." The poet asks Christ to "cleere" which, according to the New English Dictionary, means to fill with light or to brighten, for he is in his Limbo which, too, is dark, without light, and full of flames. These mental afflictions, however, were not all he had to suffer. His heart, too, was fired by temptations to lust. He can only cry, "Quenche in my hart the flames of badd desyre."

The emotional intensity of the sestet has its source in the octet. Even a superficial meditation on Christ's passion and death is capable of arousing deep feelings of remorse and contrition; in one who loved Christ as sincerely as the poet seems to have loved Him, the feelings must have been intense. The pervading sense of desolation in "Pryson'd in earth; and bannish't from thy syght," echoes the sense of abandonment which so frequently troubles souls who are trying to live for God. The urgency of his appeals for help in his distress is also apparent. Each petition is illustrated by examples. He tells Christ: "You appeared to our forefathers; You gave them light and consolation; You freed them from 'purgying fyre.' My soul, too, is a prisoner; my thoughts are troubled; my heart flames
with 'badd desyre s.' Therefore, 'unto my sowle appeare.'
'CLEERE THOU MY THOUGHTES,' and 'QUENCHE IN MY HART THE FLAMES OF BADD DESYRE.'"

The imagery used to heighten the feeling that this sonnet is the revelation of a soul tormented with doubts is admirable. Consciously or unconsciously, the poet gives us the idea by the use of imagery portraying the hidden, the dark, or the lower depths. He believes in the Real Presence of Christ, but Christ is "Vayled in whyte." Christ is there, but the poet complains, "Thou seemest in thy syndon wrap't to bee." After he has received Holy Communion, Christ is "Buryed in me." His own soul is "Pryson'd in earth; and bannish't from thy syght." His thoughts are obscured by clouds of doubts. He begs Christ, "CLEERE THOU MY THOUGHTES." His heart is enveloped by the flames of passion, and he begs, "QUENCHE IN MY HART THE FLAMES OF BADD DESYRE." However fierce the temptation and the "badd desyre" which assail the poet may be, his faith never wavers. He believes and because he believes, his petition is filled with hope. The basis for this hope can be discerned in his words, "thou did'st gyve them light," "thou others freed from purgying fyre."

The close alliance of technique with emotion and imagery is apparent. The simple diction, with its predominance of long open vowels, promotes the feeling of gravity and sadness in the octet, and this feeling is furthered by the "s" and "m" and
"n" sounds in the last two lines of the octet. The poet sighs,

Thou seemest in thy synod wrap't to bee,
Lyke to a corse, whose monument I am.

The changed tempo of the sestet, however, is an indication of a soul charged with emotion. A verse analysis of the sestet will illustrate his technique.

1 Búryéd in më, || ūntō m'y sōwlε āppēare
2 Prŷsōn'd in ēarth; || ānd bānnish't from m'y sŷght,
3 Lyke our fōrefatherēs wēho lŷmbō wērē;
4 Clēere thō m'y thōughtēs, || ās thō dīd'st gyvē thēm līght;
5 Ānd ās thō ōthers frēd from pûrghyng fyŗē,
6 Quenche ūn m'y hárť the flāmes of bādd dēsyrē.

Rhyme shēme: cdcdee

Line 1. The introductory trochee directs the thoughts to Christ sacramentally present in the poet. The caesura, followed by another trochee, reverses the movement from Christ to the poet. The use of the word unto is emphatic.

Line 2. The run-over phrasing from the first line to the second foot of line two, together with another initial trochee, stresses the thought and the imagery.

Line 3. The line opens with a pyrrhic and is followed by a spondee. The brief caesura serves to strengthen the close connection between the soul of the poet prisoned in the body and his forefathers buried in Limbo.
Line 4. The petition is given force by the opening trochee and the caesura after the second foot.

Line 5. Note the sound pattern: a-a, th-th, fr-fr-f, and the sound of "r" in the last five words. It seems to slow down the movement and gives force to the last line.

Line 6. The last line, with its opening trochee, brings the sonnet to an emphatic close. The word quenche is onomatopoeic and forceful. The repetition of "d" in "badd de-syre" creates a feeling of weight and heaviness.

In these sonnets in honor of God, Constable reveals his great love and reverence for God. He also gives us a glimpse of his struggles to attain a more intimate union with God in his petitions. This note of yearning love continues in the sonnets which he addresses to his Blessed Lady.
CHAPTER IV

THE SONNETS IN HONOR OF MARY

In the hearts of all Catholics, Mary, the Mother of God, has a unique place. Throughout the Christian Era, they have venerated her under various titles. Henry Constable seems to have had a particular devotion to Mary, Queen of the Universe, for he wrote four sonnets in which he addressed her as "Sovereigne of Queenes," "Queene of queenes," "O Queene," and "Sweete queene."

Mary is indeed the "Queene of queenes." From all eternity, God had chosen her to be His Mother in Time. Through gifts of grace God conferred on her the singular privilege of freedom from sin from the first moment of her conception until her death. Inasmuch as she was conceived without sin and retained her virginity throughout all her life, we call her Queen of Virgins. Mary, however, ostensibly lived a life common to all Jewish girls her age and, in the course of time, she was betrothed to Joseph. In their little home at Nazareth she reigned as queen over his heart. Because she possessed such singular graces, she became womanhood's model in her role as wife, and she can be fittingly called Queen of Wives.
After Mary had consented to become the Mother of Christ, she was exalted to a still higher position in the order of grace and nature. Christ's conception in her womb was miraculously effected through Mary's mystical espousal with the Holy Spirit. Now, more than all the other creatures, Mary was intimately linked to the Trinity. She was God the Father's beloved daughter; she was the spouse of the Holy Spirit; she was the Mother of the Son of God. Not only can we justly call her Queen of Mothers, but we can also acclaim her Queen of Heaven and Earth.

It is in this light that Constable, the Elizabethan poet, praised Mary. She was his Queen, a queen who surpassed all others in dignity and worth and beauty. He loved her and he venerated her. To show his love for her, he sang her praises in these four sonnets. In our own day, Father Farrell beautifully sums up the truths Constable wrote of centuries before.

He says:

In the perfection of Mary's grace, we can distinguish three somewhat similar stages. The first, the stage of disposition, makes her worthy to be the mother of God and is called the Immaculate Conception. The form of perfection really took full hold on her soul in the conception of Christ and her constant life with Him. Finally, in the glory of heaven, she is a blazing holocaust of grace, one with God in the beatific vision.¹

¹ Farrell, A Companion to the Summa, IV, 141-142.
In the first sonnet to our Blessed Lady, Constable gives reasons for the great honor and reverence Christians give to Mary their Queen. His reasoning leads him to call her "Queene of queenes."

To Our Blessed Lady

In that, O Queene of queenes! thy byrth was free
From guylt, which others do of grace bereave,
When in theyr mother's wombe they lyfe receive,
God, as his sole-borne daughter loved thee.
To matche thee, lyke thy byrth's nobillitye,
He thee hys Spyryt for thy spouse dyd leave,
Of whome thou dydd'st his onely Sonne conceave,
And so wast lynk'd to all the Trinitye.
Cease then, O queenes! who earthly crownes do weare,
To glory in the pompe of worldly thynges;
If men such hyghe respect unto you beare,
Which daughters, wyves, and mothers ar of kynges;
What honour should unto that Queene be donne
Who had your God for father, spowse, and sonne. 2

Three outstanding mysteries of our Blessed Lady's life are expressed in the octet of this sonnet: her Immaculate Conception, her mystical espousals, and her divine maternity, for as Constable points out, it was she "Who had ... God for father, spowse, and sonne," and "was lynk'd to all the Trinitye." Appropriately then, he greets her with the invocation, "0 Queene of queenes."

In the first quatrain, the poet sings the praises of

Mary's sinless conception. "Thy byrth was free from guilt," he says. The guilt of original sin, our heritage from Adam and Eve, never for an instant touched the soul of Mary. The doctrine of Mary's Immaculate Conception became the common opinion of the universities as early as the thirteenth century and was accepted, but not defined, by the Council of Trent in 1546, just a few years before the poet penned his sonnet. Constable does not explicitly state that Mary was exempted from sin from the first moment of her conception, but only that she was born free from that guilt which all other children inherit "When in theyr mother's wombe they lyfe receive." It is this line, however, from which we infer that he believed in the Immaculate Conception, for he specifically states that others inherit the sin when conceived in their mother's womb. The quatrain closes with the thought that God loved Mary as His "sole-borne daughter." Although we are all children of God and heirs of heaven through the sacrament of Baptism, Mary alone, by a divine dispensation, was His beloved daughter always.

The poet continues his canticle in praise of Mary's perfections in the second quatrain. Since Mary's preparation for her divine maternity began from the first moment of her conception,

she was always consecrated to God's service. When the fullness of time arrived in which the Son of God should be conceived and be born of a woman, God sent to her the Angel Gabriel to ask if she would consent to the plans of the Triune God. She accepted, and in that moment she became the bride of the Holy Ghost who conceived in her womb the Son of God. This Constable expresses in the lines:

He thee hys Spyrtyt for thy spowse dyd leave,  
Of whome thou dydd'ist his onely Sonne conceive.

St. Luke in recording the event confirms Constable's words. He writes: "The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee; and therefore the Holy One to be born shall be called the Son of God." Although the Apostle makes specific mention that Mary conceived of the Holy Spirit, yet Constable is correct when he says "And so wast lynk'd to all the Trinitye," for the three Divine Persons are in the one Godhead, and all share in the activities of each Person.

The contemplation of Mary's great dignity in her threefold role of daughter, spouse, and mother through which she was "lynk'd to all the Trinitye," leads Constable to contrast the attitude of earthly queens with that of his Blessed Lady in the sestet. His comparison reveals that they glory in "the pompe of

4 Luke 1, 35.
worldly thynges," that men hold them in "hyghe respect" because they are the "daughters, wyves, and mothers . . . of kynges."
The acquaintance the poet had with the courts of France, England, and Scotland in which the courtiers fawned over their sovereigns in order to obtain favors may have occasioned his closing couplet:

What honour should unto that Queene be donne
Who had your God for father, spowse, and sonne.

Thought, emotion, and imagination are fused into an inseparable whole in this sonnet. The direct imagery is remotely visual since it suggests a picture of regal splendor in the address to the "Queene of queenes" and in the reference to her "byrthes nobillitye." From the vision of this most glorious queen, we pass to that of "queenes! who earthly crownes do weare."

The visual appeal continues in such terms as "glory in pompe of worldly thynges," "hyghe respect," "daughters, wyves, and mothers ar of kynges," and in the simple word "honour." The most effective expression, however, is indirect and symbolic. It is based on the mystic number three. Our Blessed Lady's threefold vocation as daughter, spouse, and mother has raised her to the dignity of "Queene of queenes" because it is so founded on the threefold mystery of her life: her Immaculate Conception, her mystic espousal to the Holy Ghost, and her divine maternity, and these, in turn, link her to the Triune God. Earthly queens are also daughters, wives, and mothers, and by implication we view kings as their fathers, spouses, and sons. It is only Mary, however,
who has her God for "father, spowse, and sonne."

In the octet, the intellectual appeal is greater than that of the emotional appeal. The mood is dispassionate because the poet has presented his arguments in such a calm and logical order. The sestet is charged with emotion. In the third quatrain, the tone is distinctly didactic. "Cease, then, 0 queenes! the poet cries, "To glory in the pompe of worldly thynges." Then the poet proceeds to point out the great difference between their rank and that of our Lady. He asks these earthly queens to consider "What honour should unto that Queene be donne," if "men such hyghe respect unto you beare." "You," he tells them, "are only the daughters, wives, and mothers of earthly and human kings. But she 'had your God for father, spowse, and sonne.'" The epigrammatic force of the final couplet clinches the poet's thesis that our Lady is the "Queene of queenes."

In the sonnet "Queene of queenes," Constable sounds a warning to earthly queens about the dangers of excessive ambition and desire for earthly pomp and adulation, but in the personalized sonnet, "Sovereigne of queenes," he recognizes in himself these same stirrings towards ambition and passion, and he pleads for assistance from his Blessed Lady.
To Our Blessed Lady

Sovereigne of queenes! if vayne ambition move
My hart to seeke an earthly prynce's grace,
Shewe me thy Sonne in his imperiall place,
Whose servants reigne our kynges and queenes above.
And if alluring passions I doe prove
By pleasying sighes,—shewe me thy lovely face,
Whose beames the angells beauty do deface,
And even inflame the seraphins with love.
So by ambition I shall humble bee,
When in thy presence of the highest Kynge
I serve all his, that he may honour mee,
And Love my hart to chaste desyres shall brynge;
When fayrest queene lookes on me from her throne,
And, jealous, byddes me love but her alone.5

The first quatrain, in which the poet speaks of "vayne ambition" and of seeking "an earthly prynce's grace," evokes from the reader the question: "Which prince was he courting at the time he wrote this sonnet, Queen Elizabeth, King James, or the King of France?" It would seem that his quest had been unsuccessful from his words "vayne ambition." His words, however, may be merely an echoing of other writers of this period, such as Raleigh and Spenser, who simulated disdain for the favors of the court. The poet, nevertheless, recognizing the futility of striving for favors from the court, felt the need of assistance in overcoming his temptations in this regard. Accordingly, he calls on his Blessed Lady. His invocation, "Sovereigne of queenes," reminds him immediately of Mary's preeminence over all

sovereigns. He asks her to quell his "yayne ambition" with the vision of her "Sonne in his imperiall place" where even the "servants reigne our kynges and queenes above." The poet feels that the vision of heaven where Christ reigns in glory and where the angels serve Him would dispel any inclination to seek grace from an earthly prince.

The problem of "allurying passions" is the burden of the second quatrain. "Shewe me thy lovely face," he pleads if "by pleasying syshes" I seem to "prove" these passions. His use of the obsolete prove for approve is at first disconcerting to the modern reader, but the thought is apparent. The last two lines, in which the poet says that the beams from her face "the angells beauty do deface," and that these beams "even inflame the seraphins with love" may seem a conceit to the non-Catholic even though he may interpret the word deface as efface. Mary, however, who is below the angels in the order of nature, succeeds them in the order of grace. The Church recognizes her sublime perfections and dignity in the Office of the Feast of the Assumption when she has the faithful say at Vespers: "The Holy Mother of God has been exalted. Above the choirs of Angels to the heavenly kingdom." 6 Nor is it an anomaly to claim that

her beauty inflames the seraphim with love. Jean Mouroux is as extravagant in his praises of her when he says:

When a soul is so totally possessed by God that it totally possesses its own body, when the radiance of its love is of infinite purity, then it is something so beautiful that we hardly dare to look it in the face. When she is an image unstained, a vocation fully accepted, a perfect daughter of God, and when all this culminates in a divine Maternity, then she is so bathed in the consuming Fire of the Holy that she becomes altogether lost to our eyes.]

The sestet, which begins with a metaphysical conceit, is somewhat obscure. Literally the poet proclaims "by ambition I shall humble bee." The word ambition and humble are antithetical. His "ambition" is to serve "all his," God's servants, humbly. Then God will honor him and the love of God will make his desires chaste. The "fayrest queene" is our Lady who jealously "byddes [him] love but her alone." The poet realizes that he cannot serve his Blessed Lady with a divided heart. He visualizes Mary seated on her throne. She commands him to devote himself entirely to her service, and she also commands him to leave earthly loves for love of her.

The entire sonnet is extremely personal in tone. The spirit of renunciation in "So by ambition I shall humble bee" and in "Love my hart to chaste sesyres shall brynge," runs through the poem like a somber thread. The total effect is not somber,

however, for the poet's renunciation of earthly fame and love is only a stepping stone to a spiritual and more lasting heavenly love and fame. Constable recognizes the difficulties inherent in this renunciation, and his prayers for help give us a glimpse of his hope and faith and his tender, confiding love for his Blessed Lady.

In this sonnet, Constable again gives evidence of his sense of structural balance. Like the iambic foot he uses, the tendency of the movement is to begin with the element of life that should be non-stressed, for it moves from earth to heaven, from man to God. In the first quatrain, he contemplates earthly love and fame, finds them wanting, and then contemplates heavenly love and fame wherein even the servants outrank the lords of the earth. In the second quatrain, he recognizes that the heavenly love and beauty of the Virgin can obliterate earthly love and beauty although they are strong indeed. The third quatrain and the final couplet press the idea home. Again there is the careful weighing of values—earthly fame and love balanced with heavenly fame and love, but the poem ends at the throne of Mary, thus giving the reader a feeling of completion and fulfillment.

After contemplating the glories of Mary's vocation and her enthronement in heaven, the poet becomes enraptured with the beauty he has envisioned. He sees his Queen as she is described in the Office of the Immaculate Conception in the hymn
"Praeclara custos":

Fair guardian of the virgin choir,
Unsullied Mother of the Lord
Our hope, the Angels' joy, in whom
A door to heaven is restored;
Thou lily, white amid the thorns,
Thou dove, with wondrous beauty girt,

and in the responsory:

She is the brightness of eternal light, and an unspotted mirror.
For she is more beautiful than the sun, and compared with light, she is found brighter.

The idea, however, with which the poet seems to have been preoccupied is the great beauty of Mary and the more wondrous beauty of God. This concept finds expression in the remaining two sonnets which, because of their kindred thought, will be taken together.

To Our Blessed Lady

Why should I any love, O queene! but thee;
If favour past a thankfull love should breed?
Thy wombe dyd beare, thy brest my Saviour feede,
And thou dydd'st never cease to succour me.

If love doe followe worth and dignitye,
Thou all in theyr perfecions doest exceede;
If Love be ledd by hope of future meede,
What pleasure more than thee in heaven to see?

An earthly syght doth onely please the eye,
And breedes desyre, but does not satisfye;
Thy sight gyves us possession of all joye,

---

9 Ibid., Nocturn II, 611.
To Our Blessed Lady

Sweete queene! although thy beuty rayse upp mee
   From syght of baser beutyes here belowe;
   Yett lett me not rest there, but higher goe
   To Hym, who tooke hys shape from God and thee.
   And if thy forme in hym more fayre I see,
       What pleasure from his deity shall flowe,
   By whose fayre beames his beutye shineth so,
   When I shall yt behold aesternally.
   Then shall my love of pleasure have his fyll,
       When beuty self, in whom all pleasure ys,
   Shall my enamored sowle embrace and kysse,
   And shall newe loves and newe deylghtes distyll,
       Which from my sowle shall gushe into my hart,
   And through my body flowe to every part.

The two sonnets "O queene" and "Sweete queene" seem to be based on Christian Platonism which was so popular among the poets of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Drayton, Daniel, Drummond, Sidney, and the greatest of them all, Edmund Spenser, had incorporated the Platonic conception of beauty and love in their poetry. Constable, a graduate of Cambridge, the Platonic stronghold, also appears to have been a disciple of Plato. To his Platonic concept of heavenly love and beauty, he brings a Christian concept of the effects of grace and the sublime beauty of the Divinity. In these two sonnets in honor of

11 Ibid., 10.
Many we find the ideas fused.

One of the fundamental doctrines of Platonism which the poets of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries held "was the reality of a heavenly beauty known in and by the soul, as contrasted with an earthly beauty known only to the senses." In order to reach this heavenly beauty, it was necessary first to contemplate the beauty of earth, but the poets in their "progress through ever ascending gradations of beauty up to the first absolute beauty changed only in the externals as required by the Christian conception of the heavenly hierarchy." In the Elizabethan Age, the heavenly beauty and love which Plato described in his Symposium became identified with God, the Absolute Beauty. Mr. Harrison, in his treatise on Platonism in the poetry of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, says:

The appeal which Platonism made to the English poets in its doctrine of heavenly love was through its power to stir the minds with a deep sense of that beauty which God was understood to possess. The application of the principle of beauty to God resulted in a note of joy and in an exaltation of soul in the religious mind, which, after forsaking the beauty of this world of sense, could enjoy the great principle of beauty in the beatific vision of God.


13 Ibid., p. 75.
The sight of God in His absolute beauty is considered by these poets as the end of the soul's endeavor.\(^{14}\)

In man's ascent to the contemplation of heavenly beauty, woman plays an important part. A beautiful woman is the quintessence of all earthly beauty. This beauty, however, is not due to her physical attractions but to an inner beauty of mind and soul. Spenser's Una is beautiful because she is truth. A virtuous woman, through her inner beauty, leads men to God. Mr. Harrison sums up the Platonic conception of the influence of woman's beauty over men in these words: "Woman is identified with virtue; she is the source of all virtue in the world, others being virtuous only by participating in her virtue."\(^{15}\)

All these poets, and Constable belongs to their group, have a passionate love for beauty. In them we see verified Mr. Harrison's assertion:

Platonism, then, came as a direct appeal to the religious mind of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries which was so constituted that the element of philosophic revery was blended most naturally with a strain of pure devotional love. Although the ultimate postulates of that philosophy were intellectual principles, they were such as could be grasped by the soul only in its deep passion of love for spiritual beauty.\(^{16}\)

\(^{14}\) Ibid., 85.

\(^{15}\) Ibid., 163.

\(^{16}\) Ibid., 91.
Constable begins his sonnet "queene" with the question:

Why should I any love, 0 queene: but thee;
If favour past a thankfull love should breed?

It is gratitude which inspires his love for his Lady—gratitude to her because she gave birth to the Saviour and nourished Him during His infancy. Above all, he is grateful to his heavenly Queen because, as he tells her, "Thou dydd'st never cease to succour me."

The Platonic strain in the second quatrains is very evident. He again uses a rhetorical question which demands an affirmative answer. The poet loves his Lady because, he tells her, "Thou all in [theyr] perfections doest exceede." Since Mary exceeds all in the order of grace and nature, he must love her, for "love doe followe worth and dignitye." Love, thus born, is nurtured and encouraged by "hope of future meede." The joy of earthly love finds its fulfillment in union. Love of Mary, too, finds joy in fulfillment, but the joy and pleasure are spiritual. The vision of her in heaven will satisfy all desires and will bring untold joy. This the poet recognizes in his question, "What pleasure more than thee in heaven to see?"

A Platonic didacticism colors the theme of the couplet which follows this question. Earthly beauty merely pleases the eye "And breeds desyre, but does not satisfye," he warns us. This concept of earthly beauty, one of the tenets of Platonic philosophy, the poet probably experienced in his own life before
his conversion.

In the last four lines, the poet answers the question he poses in the second quatrain. He tells Mary, "Thy sight gyves us possession of all joye." He enumerates the joys her vision will bring. "Ech sense" shall be filled with delight. His "hart shall wyshe" to see her always, and if this last desire is fulfilled, he "ever shall enjoye" her beauty, her goodness, and her perfections. A passage from Sidney's *Arcadia* quoted by Mr. Harrison, a passage with which Constable may well have been familiar, expresses the emphasis the poets of this age placed on the idea of beauty in virtue. Sidney says: "Did ever man's eye looke thorough love upon the majesty of vertue, shining through beauty, but that he became (as it well became him) a captive?" 17

The sonnet "Sweete queene" is even more Platonic in tone. It is reminiscent of Spenser's "Hymne in Honour of Heavenly Beautie" and of Bembo's final rhapsody in praise of love in the Book of the Courtier. Constable's sonnet might well be entitled a "Hymne in Honour of Heavenly Beautie" also, for it expresses his great desire to contemplate "beuty self, in whom all pleasure ys." It is, at the same time, a tribute to Mary because it is through her that he hoped to attain this pleasure.

The poet begins his ascent to "beauty self" in the first quatrain. Mary's spiritual beauty raises him up "From sight of baser beauty here belowe." The beauty of Mary, however great, cannot compare with the beauty of her Son. Therefore, he begs her to bring him "To Hym, who tooke hiss shape from God and thee." From this line and those following, it appears that Constable is thinking of Christ as He appeared on earth when His divinity was veiled from human eyes.

As Constable contemplates the fair form which Christ had obtained from His beautiful Mother and as He begins to delight in His physical beauty, he suddenly exclaims:

What pleasure from his deity shall flowe,
By whose faire beames his beautye shineth so,
When I shall yt behold eternally.

If Christ's physical perfections have the power to captivate his senses, the vision of His divinity unveiled in heaven will ravish his soul with delight.

The sestet is a rhapsody in praise of the vision of Absolute Beauty which all Platonic poets of the age desired to see. Constable's description of his joy and delight in the beautific vision, however, transcends the Platonic idea of an Absolute Beauty. The vision of the Godhead, "beauty self, in whom all pleasure ys," will be a constant source of joy and pleasure, for always it "shall newe loves and newe delyghtes distyll." The joy and pleasure are spiritual and bodily because they fill
his soul, and from his soul they "gushe" into his heart "And through my body flowe to every part." Here he is in perfect accord with Catholic doctrine which teaches the resurrection of the body and life everlasting in which the body will participate in the rewards of the soul.

Although the Platonic theory of love and beauty seems to be the basis for the intellectual phase of the two sonnets, the Christian doctrine underlying the veneration of Mary is the basis for the imaginative and emotional aspects of the poems. In the octet of "O quene" the emotion of the poet is restrained. He analyzes the reasons for loving his heavenly queen. Love is bred by "favours past"; it follows "worth and dignyte"; it is fostered by the hope of "future meede." In Mary, Constable finds all these conditions fulfilled.

The cool balancing of values continues in the following couplet. He compares the values of earthly beauty with the values of heavenly beauty, and he finds that only heavenly beauty can satisfy him. Having reached this conclusion, the poet, in the last quatrain, dwells on the delights the soul shall experience when it sees Mary in heaven. The degree of emotional intensity has increased, but it is tempered by the ephemeral quality of the imagery. The vision of Mary in heaven is a sight that "gyves us possession of all joys," but the poet does not expatiate on the substance of these joys or on the beauty of Mary.
These are left to the individual's imagination. The sonnet ends on this plateau, and it is here that the sonnet "Sweete queene" begins. The yearning love in his petition "let me not rest there, but higher goe" increases until he ascends to the vision of the deity. The thought of the beatific vision sets his soul on fire with love. His soul is "enamored"; "beuty self" shall "embrace and kysse" his soul; his soul shall always be filled with "newe loves and newe delughtes," and these shall "gushe" into his heart and "flowe" to every part of his body.

The Platonists, too, were enamored with "beuty self." Constable's life, however, proves that to him "beuty self" meant more than the principle of beauty found in Plato or in the Sapience in Spenser. The poet used the Platonic terminology to express his deep inner convictions about the happiness of heaven. There love will eternally generate love; there the Blessed will delight in the pleasure of seeing and resting in God.

Just as the emotions seem to be held in abeyance in the sonnets "O queene" and "Sweete queene," so is the imagery. The first quatrains of "O queene" is the most picturesque inasmuch as it conveys a fleeting image of the Nativity: "Thy wombe dyd beare, thy breast my Saviour feede." The imagery in "Sweete queene" is just as intangible. There is some kinesthetic appeal in rayse, higher goe, flowe, fyll, embrace and kysse, distyll, and gushe. It is difficult to actualize these movements, how-
ever, for they are spiritual, not physical.

Although modern critics often decry the fantastic conceits employed by the Elizabethans, and Constable often offends in this respect, there are few, if any, in the Marian sonnets. There are some figures of speech which he repeats. He uses the exclamation in every sonnet. In "O queene" he uses the question to prove that Mary alone is worthy of his love. There is suggested personification in "Soveraigne of queenes," especially in such expressions as "if vayne ambition move my hart," and "Love my hart to chaste desyres shall brynge." The sonnet "O queene" contains a few instances of this figure also in the phrases "If favour . . . breede," "Thankfull love," and "An earthly syght . . . breedes desyre." The outstanding figure in "Sweete queene" is vision--the vision of a celestial beauty found in God alone.

Technically, the four sonnets to our Lady are very similar. All four follow the Petrarchan rhyme scheme in the octet and, in all but "O queene," the first two lines of the octet are enjambed. The same technique is employed in the thirteenth and fourteenth lines of "Queene of Queenes," in the fifth and sixth lines of "Soveraigne of queenes," and in the third and fourth lines of "Sweete queene." The pattern of pauses is varied throughout the sonnets. The meter, too, shows little deviation from the iambic foot. In "O Queene of queenes" the poet substitutes a trochee in the first foot of the fourth and ninth
lines, and this same substitution occurs in the first foot of the first line in "Sovereigne of queenes." A scansion of these lines follows:

God, as his sole-borne daughter loved thee.

Cease then, O queenes! who earthly crownes do weare.

Sovereigne of queenes! if vayne ambition move.

The inversion is effective in that it stresses the poet's emotional state.

The sestets are varied in rhyme. Two, "O Queene of queenes" and "Sovereigne of queenes," follow the Spenserian pattern, "cddcee," while that of "O queene" is the Italian "ccdee," and "Sweete queene" is in the English pattern begun by Wyatt, "cddce." The poet's structure of sound and his structure of sense are harmoniously blended in these four sonnets. Since there are so few deviations from the iambic meter, it will not be necessary to give a metrical analysis to illustrate Constable's excellence as a versifier.

Constable's use of simple diction, much of which is Anglo-Saxon in origin, is effective in conveying his intellectualized emotion and imagery. In "Queene of queenes" the word bereave conveys a sense of loss, and the adjective sole-borne characterizes Mary as the privileged daughter of God. The verb lynk'd, too, is effective, for it not only joins Mary to the
Trinity, but it also helps to unify the octave into a composite picture of Mary as many artists have depicted her in the Nativity scene where she is being watched over by God the Father and by the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove. In "O queene," the word meede instead of reward is suggestive and euphonious. In this sonnet, the use of the word breede is significant. Favors breed love; earthly sights breed desire. Significant, too, is the stress the poet places on the satisfaction he shall receive from the vision of his heavenly Queen. In the sestet he uses the word sight twice and the word see three times. The sonnet "Sweete queene" is an elaboration of the theme of heavenly beauty. Four times he uses the expression beauty, or the analogous term fair. The Platonic idea that beauty gives pleasure is very pronounced since pleasure is reiterated three times and delight is substituted in another line. It is in this last sonnet that Constable displays the richness of his Christian Renaissance culture.

These four sonnets in honor of his Blessed Lady are indicative of the poet's tender devotion to the Mother of God. For him, as Janet Scott points out, "Notre-Dame est une reine honorée comme les reines terrestres." Constable also revered the saints whose queen she was. In his devotions, "les saints

ont une existence bien réelle et bien humaine."¹⁹ He expressed his love for them in a group of sonnets which will be discussed in the following chapter.

¹⁹ Ibid.
CHAPTER V

THE SONNETS IN HONOR OF THE SAINTS

From the earliest ages, the Church has esteemed and honored the angels and saints. As the Church emerged from the catacombs, for example, it brought forth the relics of the martyrs for the veneration of the faithful. Churches were erected in their honor, and artists painted pictures and carved statues of them for the edification of the people.

Although very little is known about individual angels, three archangels are mentioned by name in the Bible. One of them, St. Michael, has been honored since the earliest centuries, for it was he who led the good angels in their fight against Lucifer and his cohorts. Constable, too, honored him by writing a sonnet praising his great power.

St. John the Baptist, whom Christ called the greatest man ever born of a woman, was another saint whom Constable venerated. This austere man, the subject of so many paintings, was revered by the poet as the precursor of Christ and the greatest of the prophets.

During his sojourn in Rome, Constable must surely have
visited the tombs of St. Peter and St. Paul and the beautiful basilicas erected in their honor. These two Apostles, whose names are linked because both labored in Rome and both, according to tradition, suffered martyrdom there on the same day, are the subject of another of his sonnets.

Constable's long residence in France also influenced his preference for certain saints. There, until the early part of the seventeenth century, the feast of St. Catherine of Alexandria was observed as a holyday of obligation. Poets sang her praises, and preachers extolled her virtues. Both she and St. Margaret, who are ranked among the fourteen auxiliary saints, were praised by Constable.

The saint, however, for whom he seemed to have a special devotion was St. Mary Magdalene since he wrote four sonnets in her honor. The French people had a strong devotion to this saint because, according to tradition, she had lived in a cavern in France the last thirty years of her life.

This small group constitutes the subject matter for the sonnets the poet wrote in honor of certain saints. Although they are written in sonnet form, many of them are essentially narratives in which he details the outstanding characteristics of their lives. A few, however, reveal flashes of Christian mysticism in which he yearns for a rapturous communion with God.

The sonnet in honor of St. Michael is rich in scrip-
tural and traditional background. In it the poet, in vivid and picturesque words, recounts the prelude to the great battle which St. Michael and his followers fought with Satan and the bad angels. He also tells of St. Michael's victory then and through the succeeding years.

To St. Mychaell the Archangel

When as the prynce of angells, puft'd with pryde,
Styrr'd his seditious spyrittes to rebell,
God chose for cheife his champion Michaell;
And gave hym charge the hoste of heaven to guyde.
And when the angells of the rebells syde,
Vanquish't in battayle, from theyr glory fell;
The pryde of heaven became the drake of hell,
And in the dungeon of dyspayre was tyed.
Thys dragon, synce lett loose, God's Church assail'd,
And shee, by helpe of Mychaell's swoarde, prevail'd.---
Who ever try'd adventure lyke thys knyght,
Which, generall of heaven, hell overthrewe?
For such a lady as God's spouse dyd fyght,
And such a monster as the dyvell subdue? 1

In the first quatrain, Constable describes the leaders of the angel battalions. Satan, before his fall, is "the prynce of angells." He, however, "puft'd with pryde, styrr'd his seditious spyrittes to rebell." The leader of the faithful angels, St. Michaell, is God's "cheife" and His "champion." It is fitting that God selected Michael as His champion, for the angel's name signifies "Who is like God?" Since every being reflects

the Divine Essence in some way, Michael, according to Revelation, represents the Almighty in the wielding of power.²

The poet details little of the great battle waged in heaven which St. John describes in the Apocalypse saying:

And there was a great battle in heaven; Michael and his angels battled with the dragon, and the dragon fought and his angels. And they did not prevail, neither was their place found any more in heaven. And that great dragon was cast down, and the ancient serpent, he who is called the devil and Satan, who leads astray the whole world; and he was cast down to the earth and with his angels were cast down.³

In the second quatrains he tells us that the "angells of the rebells syde [were] vanquish't in battayle, [and] from theyr glory fell." When the great prince of the angels, whom Constable calls the "pryde of heaven," fell from glory, he became the drake, or the dragon of hell. Hell he describes as a "dungeon of dyspayre," and Satan, bound, was thrown into this dungeon. This characterization of hell is one in which the Elizabethans delighted, for many of the writers, like Spenser, described the "dungeon of dyspayre" in detail. A scriptural basis for this concept of hell is found in the parable of the man who came into the wedding feast of the king without his wedding garment. The king, being angry, said to his servants: "Bind his hands and feet

³ Apoc. 12, 7-9.
and cast him forth into the darkness outside, where there shall be weeping, and the gnashing of teeth."

In the Apocalypse, St. John describes Satan as a great dragon who "leads astray the whole world." The great power of the devil is recognized by Constable. In the couplet, which opens the sestet, he tells us that the dragon, loosed by God, "God's Church assail'd." The poet here is referring to the persecutions against the Church, probably those of the first three hundred years, for he concludes with the line, "And shee by helpe of Mychaell's swoarde prevail'd."

The concluding quatrain describes Michael as a "knyght," calls him the "generall of heaven," compares his defense of the Church, "God's spouse," against the "dyvell," to the medieval knight's defense of his lady against the dragon. The poet's concept of Michael as a knight has a parallel in Christian art and tradition. For many centuries, artists have represented him as a young warrior, clad in arms, carrying a sword and shield, and standing over the devil in the form of a dragon. During his long sojourn in Italy, Constable may have seen St. Michael pictured in this manner in many of Rome's churches. According to

5 Apoc. 12, 9.
Christian tradition, St. Michael has the office of fighting against Satan and of championing the Christian in his struggles against Satan. So great was the veneration of Michael in the Old and New Testaments that he became the patron of the order of knights.6

The visual imagery in the sonnet is vivid and rich. Satan, before he falls, is beautiful. He is the "prynce of angells," and the "pryde of heaven." St. Michael, his adversary, reflects God's power. He, therefore, is God's "champion," a "knyght," and the "generall of heaven." The poet also describes Satan's attitudes and activities. He is "puft'd with pryde"; he "styrred his seditious spyrrites to rebell"; he "God's Church assail'd." Michael's attitude and his actions are diametrically opposed to Satan's. He champions God's cause; he vanquishes the devils; he defends "God's spouse." The Church prevails "by helpe of Mychaell's swoarde." The two angelic armies are contrasted also. Satan's followers are "seditious spyrrites," but Michael's army is the "hoste of heaven."

The poet's portrayal of the fall of the angels is graphic. They "from theyr glory fell." Satan was no longer beautiful. He became the "drake of hell." Hell is a "dungeon of

dyspayre." Satan is "tyed" in this dungeon. Thereafter, Satan is the "dragon," the "monster," and the "dyvell."

The bold visual images are accentuated by the kinesthetic imagery. Satan swells with pride and insolence; he is "puft'd" up. He "styrre[d]" the angels to rebel. Michael takes "charge" of and "guyde[s]" the "hoste of heaven." The bad angels are "vanquish't" and they fall. Satan is "tyed" in hell. Later he is "lent loose" and assails the Church. Michael "try'd" adventures, "overthrew" the devils, "dyd fyght" for the Church, and subdued the devils.

In keeping with the imagery, Constable uses metaphors to elucidate his ideas. Michael is a "knyght." The devil is a "dragon" and a "monster." The Church is "God's spouse."

The narrative element of the sonnet, the angelic nature of the protagonists, and the lack of personal quality militates against emotional intensity. There is, however, a sense of dread and fear at the thought of the power of the devil. There is also a feeling of admiration for St. Michael and a sense of confidence in his power.

In this sonnet, the poet shows the French influence. The sestet follows the French rhyme scheme "ccdede." Such expressions as "pynce of angells puft'd with pryde," "styrre[d] his guditious spyrittes," "chose for cheife his champion," and "hym • • • hoste of heaven" give evidence of his skillful use of
alliteration. It is significant, too, that the final quatrain is composed of two rhetorical questions.

Just as St. Michael was God's champion in heaven, so was St. John the Baptist, Christ's cousin, His champion on earth. He was Christ's precursor on earth, and of him Christ said: "Amen I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen a greater than John the Baptist." 7

To St. Jhon Baptist

As Anne, longe barren, mother dyd become
Of hym, who last was judge in Israel;
Thou, last of prophetts borne, like Samuel
Dydd'st from a wombe past hope of issue come.
Hys mother sylent spake;--thy father dombe,
Recoveryng speache, God's wonder dyd foretell:
He after death a prophett was in hell,
And thou unborne within thy mother's wombe:
He dyd annoynte the kynge whom God dyd take
From charge of sheepe, to rule his chosen lande:
But that highe Kynge, who heaven and earth did make,
Receav'd a holyer lyquor from thy hand,
When God his flocke in humayne shape did feede,
As Israel's kynge kept his in shepeherd's weede. 8

The two great prophets of the Old Law, John the Baptist and Samuel, whose lives are intertwined with their own era and the beginning of a new one, are compared by Constable in the sonnet he addresses to St. John the Baptist. The poet's extensive

7 Matt. 11, 11.
knowledge of the Scriptures is apparent in the incidents he selects to illustrate the similarity between these two men, Samuel, the last of the Judges of Israel, and St. John, the precursor of Christ.

Anna, Samuel's mother, and Elizabeth, the mother of John, had the misfortune of being barren. In the Book of Kings we read: "Anna had no children . . . and the Lord had shut up her womb."9 St. Luke records the misfortune of Elizabeth and Zachary: "But they had no son, for Elizabeth was barren; and they were both advanced in years."10 The miraculous conception of these two prophets, which was an answer to the prayers of the mothers, is the burden of the first quatrain. The poet addressing St. John says:

Thou, last of prophetts borne, like Samuell
Dydd'tst from a wombe past hope of issue come.

In the second quatrain, Constable refers to the singular incidents preceding the births of John and Samuel. The clause, "Hys mother spake," gives a terse summary of the story of Anna's pleading prayer to God to grant her the joy of becoming a mother. Heli, the high priest, observing Anna at prayer, thought her drunk since "Anna spoke in her heart, and only her lips moved,

9 1 Kings 1, 2, 5.
10 Luke 1, 7.
but her voice was not heard at all."\textsuperscript{11} When Heli upbraided her, she revealed her plight, and he blessed her. God heard her prayer, "And it came to pass when the time was come about, Anna conceived and bore a son, and called his name Samuel: because she had asked him from the Lord."\textsuperscript{12}

An occurrence similar to this can be found in the life of St. John as Constable notes in the phrase, "thy father \textsuperscript{was} doombre." St. Luke, who gives the most complete story of St. John, tells us about the apparition of Gabriel to Zachary during which he told him that Elizabeth would bear a son who "shall be great before the Lord; he shall drink no wine nor strong drink, and shall be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb."\textsuperscript{13} When Zachary pointed out that both he and Elizabeth were advanced in years, Gabriel said: "And behold, thou shall be dumb and unable to speak until the day when these things come to pass."\textsuperscript{14}

After his son's birth, Zachary, "Recoveryng speeche, God's wonder dyd foretell." While all the neighbors were

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{11} 1 Kings 1, 13.
  \item \textsuperscript{12} 1 Kings 1, 20.
  \item \textsuperscript{13} Luke 1, 15.
  \item \textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 20.
\end{itemize}
assembled to rejoice in Zachary's joy, he recovered his speech when he wrote that he wished his son to be called John, the name the angel had bade him bestow on the child. In St. Luke's account we read: "And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he began to speak, blessing God."15

The poet stresses the fact that Samuel and John, although not contemporaries, are remarkably alike even though John is unborn while Samuel is a "prophett . . . in hell." Both are hidden, and both are awaiting the coming of Christ. Samuel, confined in Limbo with the other Blessed, longs for his deliverance by Christ. John, still unborn, will leap with joy in his mother's womb when Mary, bearing the unborn Christ, visits Elizabeth.

In later life the activities of Samuel and St. John also bear a resemblance to each other. Samuel

... dyd annoynte the kynge whom God dyd take
From charge of sheepe, to rule his chosen lande.

The king was David who, as a youth, tended his father's flocks. God commanded Samuel to seek out David because Saul was no longer worthy to be king. Samuel recognized David as God's choice when God said: "Arise, and anoint him for this is he. Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: And the spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day

15 Ibid., 64.
forward."16

St. John's mission eclipsed Samuel's. Samuel anointed a shepherd boy, but St. John gave a "holyer lyquor" to "that highe Kynge, who heaven and earth did make." The "holyer lyquor" refers to the waters of baptism which John poured on Christ. While John was preaching and baptizing at the river Jordan, "it came to pass, when all the people had been baptized, Jesus also having been baptized and being in prayer, that heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form as a dove . . ."17 With the beginning of Christ's public life, John's work was almost completed. The Gospel story tells us little more about him except his imprisonment and beheading. Constable tells us nothing more. For him, this act is the climax of John's life. He concludes his sonnet with a couplet comparing the Good Shepherd to David. David, Israel's king, tended his flock attired as a shepherd in "shepeherd's weede." Christ fed His "flock" in "humayne shape."

So closely does the sonnet follow the scriptural account that it evokes a series of pictorial images which, in turn, arouse in the reader corresponding emotions. We see Anna and Elizabeth sorrowing because God has not blessed their marriage

16 1 Kings 16, 12-13.
with children. We see them pleading for this blessing. We pity them and hope that God will hear their prayer. God does. We rejoice in their joy, and we are amazed at the singular happenings preceding John's birth.

In the sestet we envision Samuel, now grown old in the service of God, anointing the head of the young shepherd boy David. We admire Samuel and wonder at his wisdom and holiness. The picture of Christ's baptism by John is also vivid. We visualize the two young men, the one clad in rough garments, the other distinguished by his dignified mien. When John baptizes Christ at His insistence, we see and hear the manifestation of the Trinity. We feel an admixture of emotions. The concluding couplet shows us the shepherd king David from whom Christ descended, followed by Christ, the Good Shepherd. The tender love of the Master for us, "his flocke," enkindles in us a love for Christ, Who while in "humayne shape" left us His precious Body and Blood as our food and Who fed us with divine doctrine also.

The chain of images and the emotional reaction, however, depend in large measure on the knowledge the reader has of Holy Scripture and on the devotion he has toward St. John. In the early centuries, the veneration of St. John the Baptist was widespread. Artists, intrigued by his strong personality, often painted him. Churches were built in his honor. We cannot doubt that Constable, too, loved and venerated St. John.
In the following sonnet, addressed to St. Peter and St. Paul, Constable pays homage to the Prince of the Apostles and to the Apostle of the Gentiles who have left their impress on the Church. By their preaching and writing, by their indefatigable labors, and by the example of their death they spread the kingdom of Christ on earth. After having spent their lives in serving Christ, they completed the sacrifice by the shedding of their blood.

To St. Peter and St. Paul

He that for feare hys Mayster dyd denye,
And at a mayden's voyce amazed stoode,
The myghtyest monarche of the earth withstoode,
And on his Mayster's Crosse rejoyc'd to dye:
He whose blynde zeale dyd rage with crueltye,
And helpt to shed the fyrst of martyrs bloode,
By lyght from heaven hys blyndenesse understoode,
And with the cheife Apostle slayne doth lye.
O three tymes happy twoe! O golden payre!
Who with your bloode dyde lay the churche's grounde
Within the fatall towne which twynnes dyd founde,
And setled there the Hebrew fisher's chayre,
Where fyrst the Latyn sheepehyrd rais'd his throne,
And synce the world and church were rul'd by one.18

It is fitting that Constable should devote the first quatrain of the sonnet to St. Peter, the Prince of the Apostles. In it he shows St. Peter as he was before and after Christ's death. At first, Peter lacked the courage to profess his faith.

"He . . . for feare hys Mayster dyd denye." He denied his Master because of a "mayden's voyce." All the Evangelists record Peter's threefold denial of Christ in the courtyard of the high priest on the night Christ was taken captive. St. Matthew tells us: "Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard; and a maidservant came up to him and said, 'Thou also wast with Jesus the Galilean.' But he denied it before them all, saying, 'I do not know what thou art saying.'"19

Years later, Peter dared to withstand the "myghtyest monarcke of the earth," the emperor Nero. He confessed Christ openly even to the shedding of his blood, for "on his Mayster's Crosse [he] rejoyc'd to dye." That Peter was crucified at Rome under Nero has been attested to by many historians. J. P. Kirsch writes:

Concerning the manner of Peter's death, we possess a tradition--attested to by Tertullian at the end of the second century and by Origen . . . that he suffered crucifixion. Origen says: 'Peter was crucified at Rome with his head downwards as he himself had desired to suffer.'20

St. Paul, the Apostles of the Gentiles, is the subject of the second quatrain. Here, too, Constable shows the transformation of the man Saul from persecutor to apostle. As a young


man, Paul, whose Hebrew name was Saul, was one of the chief per­secutors of the infant Church. His "blynde zsale" drove him to seek out the Christians, load them with chains, and treat them with "crueltye." He "help't to shedd the fyrst of martyrs bloode," the poet tells us. This "fyrst of martyrs" was St. Stephen and, as the Acts of the Apostles tells us, Saul was one of the chief witnesses against this young deacon because when the Jews cast Stephen out of the city in order to stone him, "the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul."21 Christ, however, gave to Paul the grace of conversion. While he was "yet breathing threats of slaughter a­gainst the disciples of the Lord," he went on a journey to Damascus, and "suddenly a light from heaven shone round about him." Paul fell to the ground, and Christ spoke to him. When he arose, "his eyes were opened, [but] he could see nothing."22 All these events Constable tells us in the line, "By lyght from heaven hys blyndenesse understoode." Saul, blinded, went to Damascus, and there he was baptized. His life, like St. Peter's, was climaxed by his martyr's death in Rome where he "with the cheife Apostle slayne doth lye." When he says this, the poet is

21 Acts 7, 56.
22 Ibid., 9, 1-8.
expressing the beliefs of the early Christians. The great Biblical scholar, Ferdinand Prat, S. J., writes:

Ancient tradition makes it possible to establish the following points: (1) Paul suffered martyrdom near Rome at a place called Aquae Salviae . . . (2) The martyrdom took place towards the end of the reign of Nero . . . (3) According to the most common opinion, Paul suffered in the same year and on the same day as Peter . . .

The sestet begins with the poet's exclamation, "O three tymes happy twoe!" These two saints were indeed blessed in many ways. Their glory in heaven and on earth, their eloquence, their sanctity—all entitle them to the poet's encomium, "O golden payre!" One of the earliest representations of the two Apostles is a "bronze medallion with the heads of the Apostles; this dates from the end of the second or the beginning of the third century, and is preserved in the Christian Museum of the Vatican Library." The poet may have seen this representation and been inspired by it.

Constable continues his praise, saying to the Apostles, "You 'with your bloode dyde lay the churche's grounde.'" By the word "grounde" the poet means foundation. It is true that St. Peter and St. Paul had founded the Church in Rome by their preaching and by the administration of the sacraments, but


it is also true that the blood of the martyrs is the seed from which springs a new and vigorous Christianity, and both Apostles had shed their blood.

This Church the Apostles established "Within the fatall towne which twynnes dyd founde." The "fatall towne" founded by "twynnes" refers to the tradition that Rome was founded by the mythical twins, Romulus and Remus. The town was "fatall" for Peter and Paul because it was the emperor of Rome who condemned them to death. In Rome, Peter, the fisherman, established his residence as head of the Church. Constable calls this establishment of the episcopal chair in Rome the "Hebrew fisher's chayre."

Approximately eight centuries before the time of Peter, Romulus, the "Latyn sheepehyrd," had reigned as king, but when the Apostles established in Rome the "Hebrew fisher's chayre," the Popes, in future centuries, became its spiritual and temporal rulers.

The establishment of the Church in Rome by the Apostles is founded on the testimony of the early bishops, particularly that of Irenaeus who "described the Roman Church as the most prominent and chief preserver of Apostolic Tradition, as 'the greatest and most ancient church, known by all, founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious Apostles, Peter and Paul.'" 25

25 Ibid., 749.
The poet's negotiations with the Pope concerning James VI of Scotland may have confirmed his opinion that "the world and church were rul'd by one." This may also be a reference to the dispute concerning the direct power of the Popes over kings at this time.

Because of the narrative element of the octet, the emotional appeal in it is inextricably fused with the emotions experienced by St. Peter and St. Paul. Peter denies his Master "for feare." A "mayden's voyce" astonishes him. After Pentecost, however, he becomes courageous, for a year later he withstands the "myghtyest monarchof the earth." He served God with joy and even "rejoyc'd to dye" on his "Mayster's Crosse." Paul, on the contrary, rages with "crueltye." He helps to "shedd the fyrst of martyrs bloode." At last, he succumbs to Christ and gives up his life for the love of the Master.

In the sestet, the poet becomes more personal. We experience his feeling of exalted joy in his invocation, "O three tymes happy twoel!" We sense his admiration of these saints who laid the foundations of the Church with their blood, and who, despite all difficulties attendant on the persecutions rampant at the time, settle in Rome the "Hebrew fisher's chayre."

The imagery is essentially active. Peter fears, denies, stands amazed, withstands the monarch, dies. Paul rages, kills, is slain. The Apostles lay the foundation of the Church, settle the Chair of Peter in Rome, and since then the Popes have ruled
the Church from that city where the "Lätyn sheepehurdy" raised his throne.

This sonnet is also interesting because of its structure. The two quatrains are almost perfectly balanced. Both begin with the word he, both begin with a trochee, both introduce the Apostles as sinners, as the following scansion illustrates:

Hé that for feare hys Máyster dyd dénye.
...
Hé whose blynde zéale dyd ráge with crueltýe.

Note the alliteration in the first line and the onomatopoeia in the words in the second. The second line of both quatrains continues to present the faults of the Apostles. In the last two lines of each, however, the poet shows the change in the Apostles. Both quatrains close with the martyrdom of the Apostles.

The sestet opens with a double exclamation in which there is a play on the number two. The saints are the "happy twoe" and the "golden payre." The poet indirectly draws a comparison between the throne erected by St. Peter and St. Paul and the throne erected by Romulus and Remus, the "twynnes." We can find this same indirect comparison between the spiritual empire of the Church and the worldly empire of Rome.

Except for the substitutions already noted, the metrical pattern is regular. The rhyme scheme in the sestet follows Wyatt's pattern "eddcee." For the modern reader the rhymes
"crueltye-lye" and "throne-one" are strange because of the change in pronunciation. For Constable, however, they presented no difficulties.

Another sonnet which grew out of the years the poet spent in France is the one in honor of St. Catherine of Alexandria. Her feast day, November 25, was observed by many dioceses in that country as a holyday of obligation until the seventeenth century. Some representation of her was to be found in almost all churches. Artists, poets, and preachers united in praising her name, Constable, inspired by the solemn veneration of the saint, wrote the praises of the saint in a sonnet which, as he tells us, he wrote with "an angell's feathers."

To St. Katharyne

Because thou wast the daughter of a kyng,
Whose beautye dyd all nature's workes exceede,
And wysedome wonder to the world dyd breede;
A Muse myght rowse ytself on Cupid's wynge.
But syth theyr grac'd which from nature sprynge,
We're grac'd by those which from grace dyd procede,
And glory hath deserv'd: my Muse doth neede
An angell's feathers, when thy prayse I syngel.
For all in thee became angelycall:
An angell's face had angells puritye,
And thou an angell's tongue did'st speake withall.
Loe, why thy sowle, sett free by martyrdom,
Was crown'd by God in angells company,
And angells handes thy body dyd intombe.27

According to legend, St. Catherine of Alexandria was of noble birth; therefore, the poet addressing St. Catherine says, "[T]hou wast the daughter of a kynge." When Catherine was only eighteen years of age, the legend continues, she possessed both physical and mental beauty. This young girl was so well versed in the sciences and in the truths of her faith that she astounded the scholars whom the Emperor Maximinus called in to confound her and to lead her to apostatize.\(^{28}\) Constable, acquainted with the legend, exaggerates it by telling Catherine that her "beautye dyd all nature's workes exceede." Still following the legend, which reports that Catherine's wisdom and eloquence were so remarkable that she converted the empress, her jailers, and many others, the poet says, "Your 'wysdome wonder to the world dyd breede.'" Since Catherine is noble, beautiful, and wise, she arouses in others a love which inspires them to use their talents to praise her in poetry, art, and eloquence. Constable, who begins his address to Catherine with the word because, indicates this idea in the concluding line of the quatrain, "A Muse myght rowse ytself on Cupid's wynge." The "Muse" the poet refers to may well be Calliope, the Muse of poetry, and "Cupid's wynge" probably refers to the natural love a man has for a beautiful

and wise woman like his former mistress, Diana.

He begins the second quatrains with a comment on the difference between other beautiful women who are "graced because they from nature sprynge." These women are endowed with beauty by heredity. Seeing that (syth) they are so favored by nature, "we're grac'd," i.e., we are supplied with heavenly grace "by those which from grace dyd proceede. And glory hath deserv'd." We receive favors from those saints who, like Catherine, advanced by means of grace and have, therefore, merited eternal glory. In order to praise St. Catherine adequately, Constable says that his "Muse doth neede an angell's feathers." His Muse, Polyhymnia, the muse of sacred lyrics, needs more than an ordinary quill to pen a eulogy for Catherine. She must pluck feathers from some angel's wing for him because he needs the wings of an angel, as previously he needed the wings of Cupid, so that he can write this sonnet.

The sestet is a paraphrase of the concept of Catherine as a saint who excels in beauty and wisdom to such a degree that only an angel's feathers can do her justice. All perfections in Catherine "became angelycall." Her beautiful countenance is an "angell's face" which mirrors "angells puritye." When she speaks, she does so with an "angell's tongue." After Catherine is beheaded, she receives from God a crown of glory in heaven while angels surround her. Meanwhile, according to legend, the
angels carry her body to Mount Sinai and bury her there.29

The fantastic and diffuse descriptions in the legends about Catherine, together with the great devotion which Catholic France accorded her, account for the extravagant conceits in this sonnet in her honor. The imagery is never sensuous despite the emphasis placed on Catherine's beauty. Her beauty transcends the sensuous, for in her all "became angelycall." Throughout the sonnet, Constable stresses the idea that Catherine is one of the holiest and one of the most illustrious of the virgin saints. He is not content to use ordinary similes, but he uses metaphors such as "angell's face," "angells puritye," and "angell's tongue." The "angellycall" saint's body is buried by "angells' handes." Finally, he needs the wings of an angel, "angell's feathers," to pen a panegyric for her.

Usually such extravagance of expression militates against the emotional power of a poem. This sonnet, however, does reflect a sincere love and admiration for the virgin martyr who was invoked by preachers, by virgins, by students, and by mothers, particularly in France. Constable, who may have received the gift of faith in France, shared the enthusiasm of the French people for the saint they loved so well.

29 Ibid.
To harmonize the versification with the figurative expressions and the extravagant devotion in this sonnet, the poet deviates from the established metrical pattern of the sonnet, especially in the second quatrain. In the first line, the poet substitutes a spondee in the second foot and a trochee in the third foot. The second line begins with a spondee, has a pyrrhic in the third foot, and a trochee in the fourth. The last two lines of this quatrain are enjambed. A metrical analysis will illustrate the poet's technique.

But syth theyr graced which from nature sprynge,
We're graced by those which from grace dyd proceede,
And glory hath deserved: my Muse doth neede
An angell's feathers, when thy prays ye i syme.

Throughout the sonnet, the poet repeats several sound patterns. The most prominent is his use of the long a sound in the word angel which he uses six times, and in the word nature which appears twice, and in the word prays. The sound of long i is repeated in such words as by, my, thy, why. The long e is heard in exceede, breede, proceede, neede, speake, and free. There is also alliteration in the phrase "wysdome wonder to the world," "Muse myght," and "sowle sett." Just as the sound of long a is the dominant vowel sound, so is the g sound dominant in the repetition of grace and glory. There is, likewise, internal alliteration in the use of the sounds of n and m.
Essentially the diction used by the poet is simple. The phrase "angell's feathers" instead of wings is picturesque. In the sonnet he also uses the Anglo-Saxon "syth" for seeing that or since. The interpretation of the second quatrains is dependent on this word and on the word grace. Mr. Hazlitt, finding the lines meaningless, changes the manuscript wording and punctuation to read:

But, syth the graces which from nature sprynge,
Were grac'd by those which from grace dyd proceede.

If, however, we use the New English Dictionary meaning seeing that for "syth" and the word favor or honor for the graced in line five and "supply with heavenly grace" for grac'd in line six, the lines of the manuscript would read: "But seeing that they which [who] from nature spring are favored by nature, we are supplied with heavenly graces by those which [who] from grace did advance and thus have deserved glory."

By means of repetition of words and sounds, by the use of metaphysical and Elizabethan conceits, and by changes in the metrical pattern, Constable succeeds in conveying his great admiration for the beauty of St. Catherine in soul, mind, and body.

Another virgin martyr who ranked with St. Catherine in the esteem of the French nation was St. Margaret of Antioch. These two saints, who were said to have appeared to St. Joan of Arc in a vision and to have counseled her, were numbered among
the fourteen helpful saints. The poet admires St. Catherine, but he seems to have felt a more personal love for St. Margaret and a more urgent need for her intercession with God on his behalf.

To St. Margarett

Fayre Amazon of heaven! who took'st in hand
St. Mychaell and St. George to imitate;
And for a tyrante's love transformed to hate,
Wast, for thy lylly faith, retayn'd in bande.
Alone on foote and with thy naked hande
Thou dydd'st, lyke Mychaell, and his hoste; and that
For which on horse arm'd George we celebrate,
Whylst thou lyke them a dragon dydd'st withstande.
Behold my soule, shutt in my bodye's jayle,
The which the drake of hell gapes to devoure:
Teache me, O virgyn! how thou dydd'st prevayle?---
Virginity, thou saiest was all thy ayde.
Gyve me then purity in steade of power,
And let my soule mayd chaste, passe for a mayde.30

The invocation, "Fayre Amazon of heaven," with which Constable begins his poem, as well as the entire octet, recalls the picture of St. Margaret leading a chained dragon who represents the devil whom she conquered by her steadfast purity. St. Margaret's beauty and courage inspired the poet to call her "Fayre Amazon," fair warrior. "You," he tells her, "imitated St. Michael and St. George. St. Michael the Archangel conquered Satan with the help of his angelic host, and St. George fought the dragon, armed and seated on a horse. You, however, 'a dragon

30 Park, ed., Heliconia, II, 8.
dydd'st withstand, Alone on foote and with thy naked hande."

The legend of St. Margaret accounts for the third and fourth lines. Margaret, having been disowned by her father for becoming a Christian, was adopted by her nurse. One day, while she was tending the flocks in the field, Olybrius, the Roman prefect of Antioch, saw her and became enamored with her beauty. When she refused his proposal of marriage, he became enraged and had her bound and tortured. Constable describes this episode in Margaret's life saying,

And for a tyrant's love transform'd to hate,
Wast, for thy lylly faith, retayn'd in bande.

The first tercet is the poet's appeal to St. Margaret to teach him how to conquer Satan, "the drake of hell," who "gapes to devour" his soul imprisoned in his body. The reference to the body as the prison of the soul is a repetition of the Platonic concept of the body which he expresses in his sonnet "To the Blessed Sacrament." Constable's idea of the rapaciousness of Satan, whom he represents as a dragon, has a parallel in the Scriptures. St. Peter, in his first epistle, advises the people to be sober and watchful because "your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goes about seeking someone to devour."

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32 1 Peter 5, 8.
In the final tercet, the poet gives Margaret's answer to his question. She tells him, "Virginity was all my ayde." Evidently the poet interprets virginity in its broad sense as purity of soul and also in the restricted sense as purity of body, for he asks St. Margaret to give him "purity in steade of power." If Margaret, a young defenseless maiden, could conquer the "drake of hell" with no other weapon than her beauty of soul, her purity and virginity, he, too, needs only purity. After his soul is "mayd chaste," he can be numbered among the virgins who "follow the Lamb wheresoever he goes." He tells us this in quaint phraseology, "And let my soule mayd chaste, passe for a mayde."

The imagery in the sonnet, although principally visual, is dependent on the reader's acquaintance with pictures of St. Michael, St. George, and St. Margaret. The effectiveness of the imagery is also dependent on the metaphors "Fayre Amazon of heaven" and "drake of hell" and on the extended simile in which St. Margaret is compared with St. George and St. Michael. The poet does stress the concept of purity in the use of such terms as fayre, lylly, virgyn, virginity, puritye, chaste, and mayde.

The emotional plane of the octet is, on the whole,

33 Apoc. 14, 4.
dispassionate. The poet admires Margaret's faith and courage, for he calls her "Fayre Amazon," mentions her "lylly faith," and stresses that she met the dragon "Alone on foote and with thy naked hande." In the sestet the emotional intensity increases with the personal element he injects. "My soul," he tells Margaret, "is 'shutt in my body's jayle.' There, alone and powerless, I see the devil threaten to devour me. Tell me how you overcame such perils." The note of pleading continues in his request, "Gyve me then purity in steade of power." The urgency of this last request, however, is almost negated by the pun in the last line, "And let my soule mayd chaste, passe for a mayde." The pun may have been unintentional, for, without doubt, Constable was sincere in his desires for purity of mind and heart, but the total effect is marred.

This sonnet, after a technical analysis, reveals a number of changes in the metrical pattern. These changes occur in the first two lines and in the sestet. An analysis follows.

Fáyre Amazón' of hēaven;∥ whó took'st∥ in hānd
St. Mychāell and∥ St. Gēorge∥ to imitate;∥

Behold∥ my sowle,∥ shūtt in∥ my bōdy's jāyle,∥
The which∥ the drāke∥ of hēll∥ gāpes∥ tū∥ dēvōure;∥
Tēach mé,∥ hō∥ Vīrgyn∥ hō∥ thō∥ dýdd'st∥ prēvāyle?∥
Virginnity, thou said'st, was all thy ayde.

Give me then purity in stead of power,
And let my soule mayd chaste passe for a mayde.

The sonnet begins with a forceful spondee. This is followed by a pyrrhic. The caesura after the invocation gives additional emphasis. Note the run-over phrasing from lines one to two. In the second line, the second foot is a pyrrhic. Placing the saints' names first gives balance to the first two lines.

In the first line of the sestet, the trochee, occurring as it does after the caesura, stresses the poet's idea that his soul is "shutt in." A trochee has been substituted in the fourth foot of the second line. There is assonance in the long a sound in drake and gape, and alliteration in drake and devour. In the following line, the exclamatory address occurring after the first foot is indicative of strong feeling since it breaks the line into three sections. The spondee in the first foot adds to the effect of urgency.

Note the two caesuras in the first line of the final tercet. In the following line, the initial spondee gives force to the petition. In the last line, the caesura after the third foot and the trochee in the fourth emphasizes the poet's wish to belong to the band of virgins.

Another woman saint who has been venerated in France as early as the fifth century is Mary Magdalene. The cult of
the saint, whose identity has never been accurately determined by scholars, was established by a legend that she, with Lazarus, her brother, and Martha, her sister, evangelized Provence. She spent there the last thirty years of her life as a solitary. The mystery which surrounds her life has intrigued poets throughout the years. Blessed Robert Southwell, the Jesuit martyr, Desportes, the French ecclesiastic, and Marino, the Italian poet, celebrated her in poetry. Constable, their contemporary, Southwell's countryman, a resident of France, and a traveler in Italy, loved her and praised her in four sonnets charged with his intense personal emotions.

To St. Mary Magdalene

For fewe nyghtes solace in delitious bedd,
Where heate of luste dyd kyndle flames of hell,
Thou nak'd on naked rocke in desert cell
Lay thirty yeares, and teares of griefe dyd shedd.
But for that tyme thy hart there sorrowed,
Thou now in heaven aeternally dost dwell;
And for ech teare which from thyne eyes then fell
A sea of pleasure now ys rendered.
If short delyghtes entyce my hart to straye,
Lett me by thy longe pennance lererne to knowe
How deare I should for triflyng pleasures paye;
And if I vertue's roughe beginnyng shunne,
Lett thy aeternall joyes unto me shewe
What hyghe rewarde by lyttle payne ys wonne.34

34 Park, ed., Heliconia, II, 7.
The theme of the sonnet "For.fewe nyghtes solace," is penance and its reward, and this theme is repeated in the sonnets "Such as retyr'd," and "Blessed Offendour." In the first sonnet, the poet tells us a little about the saint. Mary Magdalene, before her conversion, was a sinner. This accounts for Constable's references to "delitious bedd" and "heate of luste." Mary, according to tradition, did penance for these sins by spending thirty years in a cavern in a rock, La Sainte-Baume, high above the Maritime Alps. The poet tells us that she lay on "naked rokke in a desert cell [for] thirty yeares." During these years she "teares of griefe dyd shedd." Now, however, that Mary is in heaven, the years of penance have added to her glory. "Ech teare" she shed now rewards her with a "sea of pleasure."

This last thought impresses the poet so deeply that he asks the saint to give him the spirit of penance. He says,

Lett me by thy longe pennisance learne to knowe
How deare I should for triflyng pleasures pay.

His next petition is that the saint should entice him to walk in virtue's path by showing him the "aeternall joys" she has won for the "lyttle payne" she suffered on earth.

Mary Magdalene, a figure of sorrowing repentance, is the outstanding image in the poem. She lay "nak'id on naked

rooke in desert cell [for] thirty years." She shed "teares of griefe." Her "hart there sorrowed." She performed a "longe penance." The image of sorrow is relieved by flashes of glory. "Ech teare" she shed during these thirty years now gives a "sea of pleasure." Now in heaven she enjoys the "hyghe rewarde [of] aeternall joyes."

A mood of somberness accompanies the penitential imagery. Magdalene does penance for her sins and receives her reward. The poet, while he does not confess any actual sins, does reveal the attraction sin has for him. Sin is represented as enticing him. It gives "delyghtes" even though they be of short duration. Sin must be atoned for by "longe penance." "Vertue's roughe beginnyng" causes him to shy away from it. The entire sonnet is a brief picture of the first step in Christian mysticism, the purgative way.

The fusion of sound and sense in this sonnet is evident. The long open vowels in nyghtes, delyghtes, entyce, haste, sea, flames, and naked, and the repetition of the a sound in nyghtes, solace, delitious, luste, flames, yeares, teares, sorrowed, and sea heightens the feeling of melancholy. The rhyme in the fourth line, "Lay thirty yeares, and teares of griefe dyd shedd," is extremely effective. The burden of grief seems almost insupportable. Then the mood changes. The substitution of pyrrhics and spondees in the first three lines of the second quatrain and the
alliteration of the th and f sounds drive home the change in
thought and emotion.

But for that tyme thy hart there sorrowed,
Thou now in heaven aeternally dost dwell;
And for ech teare which from thyne eyes then fell
A sea of pleasure now is rendered.

The meter of the sestet also shows variations which
emphasize the poet's feelings. This is particularly noticeable
in the tenth and thirteenth lines which begin with the same word
and with a spondee.

Lëtt me by thy longe pennance learne to knowe!

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

Lëtt thy aeternall joyes unto me shewe.

The theme of tears and repentance, continued in the
sonnet "Blessed Offendour," is, likewise, very personalized. The
poet compares his sentiments with Mary's and pleads for the spir-
it of true compunction, the very foundation of the purgative way.
This sonnet is also rich in scriptural significance.

To St. Mary Magdalen

Blessed offendour! who thyself hast try'd
How Farr a synner differs from a saynt;
Joyne thy wett eyes with teares of my complaint,
While I sigh for that grave for which thou cry'd.
No longer let my synfull sowle abyde
In feaver of thy fyrst desyres saynt;
But lett that love, which last thy hart did laynt,
With panges of thy repentance pierce my syde.
So shall my sowle no foolysh vyrgyn bee
With empty lampe; but, lyke a magdalen, beare
For oyntment-boxe a breast with oyle of grace:
And so the zeale, which then shall burne in mee,
May make my hart lyke to a lampe appere,
And in my spouse's pallace gyve me place.36

The epithet, "Blessed offendour," with which the poem begins sets the tone for the poem at once. Mary is the penitent saint, an idea which is reiterated in the next line. He tells Mary that she has tried "How farr a synner differs from a saynt." He, too, is a sinner, and when Mary weeps, he weeps. When Mary sighs for death, he sighs "for that grave for which [she] cry'd."

In the second quatrains he continues his comparison and his plaint. He asks Mary to free his soul from the fever of passion and to allow instead the "panges of [her] repentance [to] pierce [his] syde." These pangs of repentance are not bitter, however, because they are caused by love.

The sestet, with the richly figurative language found in the Old Testament, is reminiscent of the Canticle of Canticles. In it he compares his soul to a virgin, his breast to an ointment box, his heart to a lamp, and his soul to a flame.

He begins by asking the saint not to permit his soul to be like a "foolysh vyrgyn" who because of her improvidence has an "empty lampe." The petition is based on the parable Christ

related to His Apostles about the ten virgins who were waiting for the bridegroom. The five foolish virgins had not supplied themselves with any extra oil. While the bridegroom tarried, the lamps of the foolish virgins burned low. Since the five wise virgins refused to share with them the additional oil they had brought along, the five foolish virgins went out to purchase some. Thus they missed the bridegroom's arrival and were excluded from the wedding feast. The poet tells Mary that if she hears his prayer, his heart will be filled with the "oyle of grace" and will be an ointment box like the vessel which Mary, the sister of Lazarus, carried when she "anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped His feet dry with her hair." Then the zeal which impels him to seek for an increase of grace will illumine his heart so that it will appear like a burning lamp. His soul, alight with sanctifying grace, will be admitted into heaven, his "spouse's pallace," just as the wise virgins whose lamps were burning brightly "went in with him [the bridegroom] to the marriage feast." 

Somber imagery and emotions distinguish the octet. Mary's "wett eyes," the poet's "teares of . . . complaint," his

38 John 11, 2.
39 Matt. 25, 10.
"sighe for that grave for which [Mary] cry'd," and the "panges of repentance" are indicative of the deep sorrow which animated the soul of Mary and the soul of Constable when he meditated on her penance, or on his own sinfulness. In the sestet, however, the mood and imagery lighten as the poet contemplates Mary's love for Christ. In metaphorical language, he tells us that his soul, now purified by penance, is like a wise virgin carrying a lighted lamp, but his lamp is his heart aglow with love and zeal. The lamp will always be bright because he, like Magdalene, carries with him the "oyle of grace."

The striving of the soul for union with God by means of penance and solitude is the burden of the sonnet "Such as retyr'd." The stirrings of earthly love are still strong, but the poet feels that with Mary's help and example he will, despite all difficulties, find rest in God.

To St. Mary Magdalen

Such as retyr'd from the sight of men, lyke thee,
By penance seeke the joyes of heaven to wynn;
In desartes make theyr paradice begynne,
And even amongst wylde bestes do angells see.
In such a place my sowle doth seeme to bee,
When in my body she laments her synne,
And none but brutall passions fyndes therin,
Except they be sent downe from heaven to mee.
Yett if those graces God to me impart,
Which He inspyr'd thy blessed brest withal,
I may fynde heven in my retyred hart;
And if thou change the object of my love,
The wyng'd affection, which men Cupid call,
May gett his syght, and lyke an angell prove.40

The courageous solitaries of the deserts, such as St. Anthony, St. Paul, and St. Mary Magdalene, who spent thirty years in a cave, are the subject of the first quatrain. "You," says Constable, "seek to win the 'joyes of heaven' by penance. You leave your homes and go to deserts inhabited by wild beasts. You make your 'paradice begynne' in your wild retreat because God grants you visions of angels. You win all these favors because of your penance."

The poet, in the second quatrain, compares his soul to these hermits. His body is like a desert. His "brutall passions" are like the wild beasts which inhabit the desert. His soul, like the solitaries doing penance, inhabits the body and is tormented by the passions.

In the sestet, Constable muses over the state of his soul. He comes to the conclusion that the grace of true compunction which Mary received from God would cleanse his heart from sin and would make of it a heaven. In his youth, the poet tells Mary, he has celebrated earthly love and has called on blind Cupid for inspiration. But, if Mary will change his affections

40 Park, ed., Heliconia, II, 11.
and make them God-centered, Cupid will prove himself an angel.

In comparison with the sonnets in honor of Mary Magdalene already studied, this sonnet has no significant imagery nor is the emotional appeal as intense. It is more a revery than a passionate appeal for assistance. The poet is reaching toward the contemplative stage in his mystical ascent toward God. In the following sonnet, the last in the Magdalene group, he passes from contemplation to "sweete conjunction" with God.

To St. Mary Magdalen

Sweete Saynt, thow better canst declare to me,
What pleasure ys obtaynt by heavenly love,
Than they whych other loves dyd never prove:
Or which in sexe were differenyng from thee:
For, lyke a woman spowse, my sowle shall bee,
Whom synfull passions once to luste did move,
And synce betrothed to Goddes sonne above,
Should be enamoured with his deitye.
My body ys the garment of my spyryghte,
Whyle as the day-tyme of my lyfe doth last:
When death shall brynge the nyght of my delyght,
My sowle unclothed shall rest from labors past:
And clasped in the armes of God injoye
By sweete conjunction everlastyng joye.

This entire sonnet, which is addressed to Mary Magdalene, presents a picture of the soul's final intimate union with God. In the first four lines, Constable tells Mary that she, better than any other saint, can tell him about the blissful

41 Diana, ed. by Hazlitt, 60.
pleasure of heavenly love because she has tasted love just as he has. Moreover, she is a woman, and his soul is "lyke a woman spowse." She allowed "synfull passions" to move her soul to lust. His soul, too, has been tainted by sinful lusts. Now, however, that he has been baptized, "betrothed to Goddes sonne above," he knows that earthly love is mere dross in comparison with heavenly love. Now his soul "Should be enamoured with his deitye," i. e., his soul should be filled with heavenly love.

The sestet details the nuptials of the poet's soul and "Goddes sonne." His spirit is clothed with the garment of his body during the "day-tyme" of his life. The day, however long, finally ends, and death "brynge[s] the nyght of [his] delyghte." His soul is no longer hampered by his body. It can rest from labor. For all eternity his soul will be "clasped in the armes of God." For all eternity his soul can enjoy the infinite sweetness of God's embrace and of God's love in the intimate union of their spiritual nuptials.

There is tenderness, passionate longing, and burning love in this poem. The intimate figure of the nuptial day which the poet uses charges the thought with emotional intensity. His soul is betrothed to "Goddes sonne." His body is the soul's wedding garment. Life is the "day-tyme" during which there is feasting and rejoicing, but like all lovers, the soul longs for the night when it can be alone with the beloved and enjoy the
beloved's embrace. The night is death. The body is thrown aside. The soul and her spouse, "Goddes sonne," complete the union which brings the soul "everlastyng joye."

The mystical significance of the four sonnets in honor of Mary Magdalene and the extremely personal tone which permeates them has its foundation in the religious belief and devotion of the poet. He lived in France during a period which sought beauty and found it in the saints, especially in Mary Magdalene. The religious attitudes of the French people are summed up by Henri Bremond in the following excerpt. He says:

In the Magdalene the Humanists perceived an epitome of Diotima's ladder; her perfect beauty is for them a reflection of Divine Beauty, such beauty seeming to invite, or in some measure to achieve, or at least adorn, the graces of holiness. Pulchior veniens in corpore virtus. She triumphs over terrestrial instincts, but her penitence adds to her charm; in her the best of earth is naturally loved; she is supremely the saint of Pure Love and of mystic quietude. No wonder that three generations of saints and poets knelt before her.¹⁴²

Without doubt, Constable shared the enthusiasm of the French people for this saint. He, too, knelt before her in loving homage, and he poured out his love for her in four sonnets in which he reaches out, with the help of Mary Magdalene, for that mystical union with God which he desired so ardently.

All Constable's religious sonnets, in fact, reveal this same yearning to be united with the Triune God. They are outpourings of adoration, of love, and of petition. In them he expresses his deep faith and trust in God, in the Blessed Mother, and in the saints.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION: A SYNTHESIS OF THE STUDY

The spiritual sonnets of Henry Constable, although they are a minor contribution to Elizabethan religious literature, place him among the mystical poets of his day. His poems give us a glimpse of his devotional world which knew visions of rapture, tears and joy, love and sorrow. His sonnets are, likewise, so many facets which reflect the currents of thought and emotion which stirred his age, for in them we find traces of disillusion, spiritual unrest, political aspirations, and religious yearning. His was an age when men worshipped that beauty which would lead them to the vision of the Absolute Beauty, and Constable, the ardent Renaissance Catholic, also desired to be united with the Absolute Beauty, God Himself.

As we have noted, the intellectual aspect of the sonnets is of prime importance, for they are contemplations of God, of our Blessed Lady, and of a few chosen saints, subjects which are familiar to the devout. The poet received his inspiration and impetus from his own interest in and his knowledge of the doctrines of the Catholic Church. These he had studied so
assiduously that he was able to discuss them and dispute about them with others. The Bible, too, was the source of much of his inspiration, for in his poems can be found biblical and other symbols traditional in Catholic liturgy and literature. Another powerful influence on his spiritual sonnets was his association with French Catholicism and French idealism. Concerning this, Joseph Collins notes:

In England, the French influence was undoubtedly felt by Barnabe Barnes and Henry Constable, who with Henry Lok are representative English sonneteers employing this form not only in a religious vein, but also definitely in the spirit of Christian mysticism.¹

In his devotional sequence, Constable places his sonnets in honor of God first. Writing about these, Collins says:

The first three poems on the Persons of the Blessed Trinity are strictly theological with the mystical ascent expressed in the final sestet.²

Unless the reader possesses the key to the theological background of the sonnets in honor of God, their significance and their implications are lost. The intellectual effort to acquire this key, however, repays the reader with a deeper and richer understanding of the infinite beauty and mystery of God, for as Dr. Hamm observes:

¹ Joseph Collins, Christian Mysticism in the Elizabethan Age with its Background in the Mystical Methodology, Baltimore, 1940, 137.

² Ibid., 140.
If literature is an art that ministers to the delights of the contemplative reader, it ought to please. But we are here speaking of rational delight. Such delight implies mental attention. Of its very nature this attention is often effortful, and the more complex, the more profound a work of literature is, the more difficult the perception of it will be. The human lot requires labor before enjoyment of fruits.

The sonnets in honor of our Blessed Lady praise her as the Queen of heaven and earth, but they also reflect the Renaissance love for beauty which has its foundation in the Platonism taught by Ficino. In them, too, we can sense the poet's disillusionment in the political affairs of his country and his growing aversion to the outward trappings of court life. The prevailing theme of these beautiful sonnets is love and beauty as Collins points out in the following paragraph:

The sonnets "To our Blessed Lady," apart from the usual treatment of this theme, noticeably reflect the prevailing cult of love and beauty. This admixture of mysticism and 'Petrarchism' in the following 'Sweete Queene' is a significant warning against driving too sharp a distinction between the poetry of mystical love and verses celebrating earthly love and beauty. The Elizabethans found the difference, if any, exceedingly slight, and they have ample precedent from the Renaissance love and beauty poets.

In the group of sonnets in honor of the saints, the narrative, rather than the lyrical, quality predominates, as we


have already noted. The legendary basis for the sonnets in honor of St. Catherine and St. Margaret increases the difficulties of interpretation. These sonnets, in many respects, bear a closer relationship to his amatory sonnets, for in them he occasionally alludes to Cupid as a familiar personage, and in them we find conceitful expressions praising love and beauty which are the common language of the Elizabethan love poets. In the poems in honor of Mary Magdalene, however, he again places his emphasis on the soul's ascent to its Creator. Of these last poems Collins writes:

The series of pieces in honor of Mary Magdalene are significant in their emphasis upon her 'teares' of repentance, and for the familiar distinction between earthly and heavenly beauty, and the distinct note of mystical union in the closing sonnet.5

Nevertheless, Collins, even though he places him among the mystic poets, adds:

The sonnet form does not lend itself to the adoption of the full methodology of Christian mysticism such as one finds in the Fowre Hymnes of Spenser; hence one finds in the sonneteers portions only of the three ways or stages of the mystical life and of Christocentric and Theocentric types of contemplation. The treatment of love and beauty in Lok and even in Constable is significant in view of similar emphasis in Spenser; and it affords further evidence of the partiality of the mystics for noble love and transcendent beauty.5

5 Ibid., 141.
6 Ibid., 143.
Although the intellectual concept of the poems is founded in theology and legend, the imagery is chiefly biblical. The many scriptural allusions are profuse and indicate the poet's love for the Bible. Nevertheless, the poet was an Elizabethan love sonneteer before he was a religious poet, and this is evidenced by his love for figurative language. We find in his religious sonnets examples of antithesis, hyperbole, paradox, metaphor, and simile. We find also that he appeals to our sense of sight, to our sense of feeling, to our sense of motion, and finally, to our sense of hearing in his use of assonance and alliteration. Occasionally, he conceals his meaning by using what may be termed dark or hidden conceits. Sometimes the images are somber, sometimes glorious. But the poet always spiritualizes these images and elevates the reader's mind, for he directs the thoughts toward the Absolute Beauty Who is the Source and End of all love. His imagination is spiritual because he uses it in the service of religious insight in these sonnets.

To separate the affective element from the thought and imagery is almost impossible. The spiritual sonnets are fundamentally capable of evoking an intense emotional response because Constable was writing on subjects about which he felt deeply. T. S. Eliot thinks that most religious verse is bad and does not reach the highest levels of poetry because of pious insincerity. It is his contention that the
capacity for writing poetry is rare; the capacity for religious emotion of the first intensity is rare; and it is to be expected that the existence of both capacities in the same individual should be rarer still. People who write devotional verse are usually writing as they want to feel, rather than as they do feel. 7

Although Eliot's criticism may apply to a few of Constable's sonnets, the one in honor of St. Catherine being an example, those in honor of God, of our Lady, and of Mary Magdalen, however, produce in us a sublimated awareness and perceptiveness of the bliss of union with God. Today, materialism clouds our spiritual apperception, but in the Elizabethan Age, men's zest for living extended to their spiritual life also. Men gave up their wealth and their opportunities for their faith, and Constable belonged to their number. Many went even further, for they gave up their lives. We cannot dismiss the fact that the poet was imprisoned on several occasions, that he lived in exile for many years, and that he died in exile. Nor can we doubt his sincerity when he wrote that he had learned to live alone with God. His zeal and love, his contemplation of God's beauty flame out in his yearning for a mystical union with God.

The technique of the sonnets is, likewise, admirable. He shows his versatility in his adoption of various types of rhyme schemes in the sestet. Deviations from the basic iambic

foot occur only when the line is charged with emotional intensity. Janet Scott says: "La versification de ces sonnets est soignée, le poète employant une forme savante. . . . Constable a toujours écrit avec beaucoup de soin, et tous se poèmes supportent facilement la lecture."8 The thought development is always basically firm, and he always leads the reader to a definitive and conclusive end which is contemplation of God or a contemplation of God through the perfections of his creatures.

After analyzing the poet's religious sonnets and reappraising them in the light of his own convictions and actions and in the light of Joseph Collins interpretation, we may conclude that the sonnets should be more widely known and read. The reviewer of Hazlitt's edition of Constable's poems writes: "The Devotional Sonnets, although thought lightly of by Mr. Hazlitt, are, in our mind, of great beauty."9 We may conclude with Shane Leslie's pithy criticism that Constable was a "marvelous strong songster beating against cloud."10 We may add that the poet not only beat against the cloud, but he also pierced the cloud and gave us, through his religious sonnets, a glimpse of the vision of Absolute Beauty which he had seen in his spiritual imagination.

8 Scott, Les sonnets elizabethains, 220.
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APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Sister Mary Melora Mauritz has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

November 11, 1952
Date

Signature of Adviser