The Religious Element in the Poetry of Matthew Arnold in Relation to the Victorian Era

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THE RELIGIOUS ELEMENT IN THE POETRY OF MATTHEW ARNOLD
IN RELATION TO THE VICTORIAN ERA

By

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VITA

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A study of the kind undertaken here could be developed in various ways, depending upon the purpose and procedure of the writer. The broadness of the subject necessitates that it be limited, the extent being controlled by the individual making the study. To explain my purpose, procedure, and limits, then, is my aim in writing this preface.

Convinced, as I am, that a poet’s religion imbues his writing, I have endeavored in a brief introduction to show why this would necessarily be true. Having established this point, I proceeded directly to the next problem — a study of the religious conditions existing during the Victorian Era. For the content of this chapter, I read principally general histories of the period and books treating specifically of the rationalism, freethought, and religion of that age. From this broad reading, I learned the most important religious trends of the time which I briefly set down. After this general discussion of the conditions prevalent, I proceeded to study the manner in which these conditions affected Arnold specifically. For this I relied largely upon secondary sources. Wherever Arnold himself admits an influence, I have quoted him, but most frequently he merely shows the effect without explaining the cause. Hence I turned to his contemporaries and to later writers in order to learn why he developed into the kind of man he was. Some explanation is to be found in his character, some in the people with whom he came in contact, and some in the conditions of the times. In
my second chapter, therefore, I discussed the forces which molded Arnold, substantiating my statements with frequent quotations from critics of the poet.

Arriving in this way at a clearer understanding of the poet and his Age, I next considered the poetry of Matthew Arnold. In quotation after quotation I pointed out his religious beliefs, his doubts, his skepticism, and his melancholy longing for faith. All this, of course, is an expression of Arnold's innermost self, as he developed because of the influences by which he was surrounded. From his unrest and mental turmoil, Arnold had to find some relief — some escape. Where? In contemplation of nature, in flight to the past, and in stoical acceptance of conditions. These results, as they appear in his poetry, I explained in the last chapter.

The completed work I do not submit as an exhaustive treatment of Arnold's poetry or of his religion. However, in accordance with the purpose and limits which I set for myself, I have endeavored, by following the procedure outlined above, to present an adequate and satisfying discussion of the religious element in the poetry of Matthew Arnold in relation to the Victorian Era.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Literature is not necessarily the outgrowth of a man's religious convictions — although it may be — but it does unquestionably give an indication of his religious beliefs. The religion of an individual impregnates his thinking. Inevitably, therefore, it must enter into his writing, if his writing is sincere — and sincerity is essential to the production of good literature. Presumably, literature is a portrayal of life. The portrayal is made by one who is himself living, who has definite attitudes towards life, some knowledge or opinion of what is right and wrong, and ideals towards which his work tends. His religion, or lack of it, is the chief force which moulds these ideas within him. If his very life is governed by his religion and, at the same time, shows what his religion is, how can he help disclosing it? As used here, the word religion does not signify a formal sect, a body of accepted dogmas, or a form of a worship, but the principles which guide a man's moral actions and are dependent upon his attitude towards God. Thus for one religion is nothing more than the methods whereby he can gain more money; for another it may be only the rules of propriety and conventionality required to maintain a position of respectability and power; while for all it should be the means of knowing, loving, and serving God in order to be happy with Him forever. Although man may not conform in everything to the standards which he has set up for himself; nevertheless, he does set these up as
a norm for the governing of his actions. If his actions consistently deviate from this pattern then his religion is not what he claims. His life shows what his religion is. If this be granted as true, then literature must, of necessity, portray religion because life and religion are inseparable.

The connection between religion and literature is often seen in prose forms — essays, biographies, travel and historical writings, even in fiction. Although religion may not be ever mentioned directly in prose literature, there is present an undercurrent which has its source in the writer's religion. That it should be present in the essay is quite obvious; but its presence may not, at first thought, be as evident in the other forms. A second thought, however, will reveal that the incidents included, the characters described, and the interpretation given to them will be dependent upon the author.

If this is true of prose, it is even more true of poetry. Poetry is a verbal expression of man's deepest thoughts and emotions. Its very function, according to Francis Thompson, is "to restore the divine idea of things, freed from the disfiguring accidents of their fall." How can this be done if religion does not guide the thought of the poet? Some may object that it is possible for poetry to be good because of its merely "aesthetic beauty" alone — "art for art's sake." Many nature lyrics, they maintain, please because of the sheer beauty of their imagery. To a certain extent this is true, but the greatest poetry appeals to man's
aesthetic sense as it is adequately conceived; that is, it pleases the whole man in his human nature (with its purely sensual, emotional, and intellectual components) not merely the sensual man or that part of him which has an appreciation of technical excellence. Even nature lyrics often reveal the poet's religious beliefs. What contrast there is, for example, between Percy Bysshe Shelley and Francis Thompson, both of whom have written many nature poems. In Shelley the appeal is almost completely sensuous; his delight is in nature for itself. Thompson, too, has a sensuous appeal, but his love for nature reveals a love for nature's God. Again contrast William Wordsworth and Gerard Manley Hopkins. The former reveals a pantheistic attitude towards nature, whereas the latter portrays a sacramental view of nature. But this is not the only way in which religion affects poetry.

Matthew Arnold has referred to poetry as a "criticism of life."

It is important, therefore, to hold fast to this that Poetry is at bottom a criticism of life; that the greatness of a poet lies in his powerful and beautiful application of ideas to life — to the question how to live.¹

Unquestionably Arnold has overlooked many factors involved in poetry, but his statement is true in its limited extent. Emphasis should have been placed on the word beautiful, used with its

strictly correct meaning, for poetry is an expression of the beautiful. Any subject if treated in accordance with man's rational nature can be beautiful and hence a suitable subject for literature in general and poetry in particular. However, not all subjects are of equal value. They are the more suitable in proportion to their possession of intrinsic beauty and their ability to further the end for which beauty is given to us — to aid us in attaining the end for which we were created. Of necessity then, true poetry must reflect the religious tendencies of the poet and his age. This may not be true of all that is called poetry, but it is true of the greatest poetry — of that poetry which appeals to the complete man. It does not follow that all poetry (or so-called poetry) which has religious subject matter is great. In fact, the subject matter need not be religious at all. But to repeat, in order to be great, poetry must appeal to the complete man.

Another factor that must be recognized is that the poetry of any age reflects the spirit of the time and in reflecting this spirit, it reflects the religious attitudes.

... every religious movement leaves its mark in letters. "Literary men" are proverbially prone to sneer at religious revival; yet the sneer ill becomes those who love good literature. The literary prowess of Germany is inextricably linked to the spirit of the Reformation. The achievements of Queen Elizabeth's day in letters cannot be divorced from the searchings of heart and the awakenings of imagination.
and ambition which marked the reign of her father. The Evangelical Revival and its inevitable counterpart, the Oxford Movement, left ineffaceable imprints upon the English literature of the last century.²

At times men have questioned the connection between religion and literature or asked the reason for it, but the analysis of the literature of any period and reflection upon principles should make it clear that this connection has always existed and must necessarily exist. This was certainly true of the Victorian Era.

It is not so surprising as it might seem at the first blush that a period of doubt, transition, and sifting of evidences, such as our own undoubtedly is, should prove fruitful in religious poetry. . . . For whatever pertains to essential humanity in its strivings and its wants, its longings, its losses, and its joys, poetry seeks to record; and in recording this it effectively indicates, though not dogmatically, the curve on which lies the world's true path of advancement.³

In order, then, to understand the literature, and particularly the poetry of the Victorian Era, it is essential that one understand the religious movements and conflicts which were prevalent. Religion, a primary influence in the life and thought of man, and literature, an expression of his innermost emotions, have a


necessarily intimate connection. In the Victorian Era no other influence on literature is so great as that of religion, with the possible exception of science and its resulting doubts and uncertainties. The importance of science is in great part the result of its effect on religion. Before attempting to discuss the work of any writer during this period, therefore, it is necessary to consider the existing conditions. A discussion of these conditions, necessarily brief, follows.
CHAPTER II

RELIGIOUS CONDITIONS OF THE VICTORIAN ERA

Uncertainty, rationalism, utilitarianism, "progress," agnosticism, compromise, — all are characteristic of the Victorian Era.

It is an age blown about "with every wind of doctrine." It cannot make up its mind on any one simple subject, except that to have plenty of money is a good thing; and even on that point it has occasional miserable qualms of conscience, being ever and anon half-disposed to suspect that, after all, hair shirts and serge are better than purple and fine linen. It entertains the most serious doubts as to Christianity save as an historical phenomenon; and though it cannot bring itself really to believe in the old pagan deities, it would like vastly to revivify them. It is by no means sure even as to the existence of God; and if there be one, what He is like completely baffles its power of deciding. Between the doctrine that men have no souls, and that tables and pianos have, it swings in painful and ludicrous oscillations.¹

Whence came this sad condition? It was born on the day the Protestant Reformation began. When Man refused to submit to lawful authority, objected to the acceptance of truths without rational proof, and chose his own reason as his guide, on that day doubt and uncertainty entered into his religious life. The period of development was long, and the conditions for growth were favorable; the fruit was, in consequence, plentiful, and man reaped in this age an appropriate harvest.

It is an old axiom in the constitutional Church-law of England, that the National Creed is founded on a compromise. Upon the very first day of her revolt against the authority of Rome, a struggle arose between two principles, the antagonism of which, although often silenced, has never been subdued -- the principle of authority and the principle of private judgment. Each of these principles has, at various times, assumed very different forms, and has been asserted in very different degrees in the English Church.²

Gradually the conflict between authority and private judgment came to be called a conflict between faith and reason. Already at the end of the eighteenth century France had enthroned the Goddess of Reason, as a natural outcome of her revolt against authority during the French Revolution. In England during the Romantic period, this rebellion against authority had grown stronger and was to effect great changes in the years to come. The only phase of this turmoil to be considered here is that which concerned the religious conditions of the age.

For almost three centuries the Church of England had been separated from Rome. Although the "Thirty-Nine Articles" had long been the foundation of all Anglican doctrine and theoretically demanded conformity, private interpretation of the Scriptures had always been permitted. With the passing of the years, disagreements arose among the Anglican clergymen, and the church came to

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be divided into three broad groups. This development may be said to have been caused by three influences. There had been a loyal attachment to the principles of the Reformation in which the Anglican church was founded and a strong determination to preserve unchanged the standards of belief and worship then established. This fidelity to the Protestant character of the Anglican Church produced the Low Church, or Evangelical school of Anglicanism. A second influence, that of rationalism, had acted as a solvent of Protestantism, and often, in the effort to sublimate religion, induced an aversion to all that was dogmatic, supernatural, or miraculous. Its exponents were generally classed as the Broad Church, or the Latitudinarian school of Anglican religious thought. A third influence which had made itself felt upon Anglicanism was that of Catholicism, either as reflected in Catholic antiquity or as evidenced in the actual Catholic and Roman Church. The effect of this influence may be traced in what has been called the High Church party. An understanding of the general teachings of each school is necessary, because each had its effect on the development of religion during the Victorian Era.

In the early years of the nineteenth century the Evangelicals wielded the strongest influence. Their distinguishing characteristic being their adherence to the spirit of the Protestant Reformation, it was only to be expected that they would cling to the Bible as the source of all belief — the sole guide in matters of
faith. "For them the Bible was not simply the record of a divine revelation. The very page was sacred. It was not simply the word, it was the Words of God."\(^3\) From the Bible they obtained their dogmas. They believed that Christ was the crucified Savior of sinful man, but they held the doctrine of substitution. Man, because of his sinful nature, needed a Savior; so God accepted the sacrifice of Christ and punished Him instead of man. Moreover, the Evangelicals believed in the Holy Spirit and in the reality of His operation in the human heart. In accordance with their loyalty to Protestant principles they expected to be justified by faith alone. As Evangelicalism declined with the appearance of broader and more liberal modes of thought, their doctrines, too, became more liberal. The view towards the inspiration and authority of Scriptures was modified. Human nature was no longer considered to be completely depraved, and in consequence, the Atonement of Christ was given less emphasis. The doctrine of eternal punishment was not enforced with the same vigor as of old. In general their doctrines were relaxing more and more until they were very similar to those of the Broad Church.

Strictly speaking the members of the Broad Church school held no definite system of doctrine. Influenced by the spirit of ra-

tionalism which was becoming prevalent, they preached a religion (if it can be called that) free from dogma and based upon reason alone. They were united principally by their opposition to organized, dogmatic, and authoritative religion.

Unlike the Evangelicals or the Orthodox, the man whom we are now to consider flew no party banner, and championed no closely defined system of doctrine. Common ties indeed united them, such as their sympathy with movements of reform, whether in Church or State, their opposition to Tractarianism, and their advocacy of free inquiry in theology, but no more distinctive common name can be given them than that of liberal theologians, and of such there are many varieties. 4

This emphasis on reason was not new during the nineteenth century. There had always been as far back as the time of the separation from Rome an undercurrent of skepticism and rationalism, ever tending toward a broader and more liberal form of religion. As was explained in The Dublin Review for February, 1861,

And hence, although generally silent and unobserved, there has ever subsisted in the Church of England, a sceptical element which has lurked under the cover of her vague and inconclusive formularies, and at times has openly entrenched itself behind the legal technicalities which render the vagueness of these formularies still broader and more comprehensive. And the warmest advocates of church authority will admit the policy which has governed every legal decision arising out of each successive doctrinal controversy, has uniformly been to extend the borders of Church communion in the direction of Latitudinarianism, or we more truly say, of formal unbelief. 5

4 Ibid., p. 94.
5 Dublin Review, op. cit., p. 461.
In direct opposition to the members of the Latitudinarian school were the High Church adherents or the Orthodox group. Both in their rituals and in their dogmas they closely followed the practices of the Catholic Church. In their opinion the Anglican Church was a branch of the Church founded by Christ, just as the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of the Oriental Rites are branches. To them consequently, prejudice against the Roman Church was unreasonable. One of their most important teachings was that of the Apostolic succession of their clergymen, a condition essential to the efficacy of the Sacraments. If the sacraments be administered by men who cannot trace their commission back to the Apostles, they are not "seals of the divine covenant," but merely human ordinances. Hence the importance attached to this doctrine. But the tenet which most differentiated them from the other branches was their insistence that private judgment in religion could not be tolerated.

A greater divergence of religious beliefs among members of the same church could hardly be imagined. Furthermore, mingled among these groups were many individuals whose private faith varied in a greater or lesser degree from the general teaching. Such was the condition of the Anglican Church in 1830, just a few years before the opening of the Victorian Era. A general need was felt for revitalizing theology. The Church of England having lost hold on the masses, there was no longer a brotherhood of man in religion. Theologians showed not only interest but even alarm at the condi-
tions existing in their church and began to study the situation in order to arrive at some solution. The result was the great Oxford Movement, brought into existence at Oxford University.

In the early years of the nineteenth century Oriel was the most distinguished college in the university. For more than thirty years it had welcomed liberal thinkers, and among its "Fellows" counted Copleston, Whately, Hawkins, Davison, and Arnold. Among them those who indulged in "free inquiry" were called "Noetics" because they called everything into question; they appealed to first principles, and disallowed authority in intellectual matters. It was to Oxford that the Anglican clergy had always looked for leadership, and Oxford now had within its very walls the seed of Liberalism. Because Liberalism meant freedom for thought and discussion, it encouraged a spirit of independence which was detrimental to the supernatural. Oxford would never yield completely to these French and democratic ideas; a reaction was certain to follow.

While Liberalism was growing, Jeremy Bentham — an English jurist and reformist, political economist, and father of Utilitarianism — became significant in the field of religion through a movement which he inaugurated. In his opposition to specific abuses in the English system of penal legislation, he attacked the Established Church as a factor in the general system of abuse. From the Church he passed to the Catechism, then to the New
Testament, and finally to religion itself. Judging religion from a utilitarian standpoint, he found religion wanting. Bentham maintained happiness to be the sole end of conduct; pleasure and pain, the criterion whereby to determine right and wrong; and moral obligation he reduced to the mere sanction inherent in the pleasant or painful results of action. The spread of his ideas contributed much to the agnosticism and positivism of the latter part of the century. But there was also an immediate effect of the spread of his ideas.

Conflict was dividing the Anglican leaders; Liberalism was becoming stronger; Utilitarianism was making advance. If religion was to preserved, some reaction must come, but who could resist these trends intent upon destroying established religion?

In 1833 a small band of zealous Oxford students and writers gradually gathered under the informal leadership of John Henry Newman with the avowed intention of counteracting these irreligious forces in order to save the Anglican Church. Among this group were John Keble, C. Marriott, Hurrell Froude, Isaac Williams, Dr. Pusey, and W. G. Ward. Their purpose was to save the Church of England, to free her from a benumbing slavery to the State, to fight off threatened aggressions, to stimulate a renewal of fervor, to spiritualize an Establishment which had become a sort of philanthropic society, smug, satisfied, and sunken to a state of lethargy with no higher ideals than respectability and comfortable living in the world. The remedy for this condition was sought in a return to the Apostolic origins of the Church.
and in a reassertion of her sacramental character. Personal holiness and the spirit of sacrifice, humility, charity, and zeal in the exercise of the ministry were the first practical means employed.  

Unconsciously, at least in the beginning, they drew nearer to the Catholic Church. Eager to show their sincerity in action, they did not shrink from preaching the performance of liturgical devotions and the need for private direction. As a medium they had recourse to vigorous propaganda — books, pamphlets, letters, and above all the *Tracts for the Times*. It was the first few "Tracts" which revealed the spirit of the movement — the insistence on the Catholicity of the Anglican Church and the Apostolical succession of its clergy. The Doctrines were not new; there was merely a new emphasis put on dogmas which the High Church group had always held.

The Oxford Movement was not so much the resurrection of principles long buried underground, as the corporate assertion, in more vigorous fashion, of teaching which had always found a place among Anglican divines, and was in the early years of the century maintained by the Orthodox group.

... The change which came about with the Oxford Movement was mainly a change in doctrinal emphasis and spiritual atmosphere. While the whole body of High Church doctrine was enthusiastically taught, a new importance was given by the Tractarians to the two dogmas of the Catholicity of the Church and the Apostolical Succession.

Within a few years the hope aroused by the Oxford Movement

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7 Storr, op. cit., pp. 80-81.
was crushed, when the organizers themselves again divided. One
group turned to Rome, another relapsed into Liberalism, while the
third maintained a shifting position as leaders of High Church
Anglicanism. It is not possible here to enter into a detailed
discussion of the results of this movement, but one can readily
see that many who had followed it hopefully were thrown into a
new state of confusion and doubt. Some knowledge of the movement
is necessary in order to interpret the life of the times. Because
of its impact on the English world of letters, it is of the utmost
importance to the student of literature.

While this general revival was occupying the High Church
Anglicans, a very different movement — that of Biblical criticism
— concerned the Liberal or Broad Church Anglicans.

Already in the eighteenth century the so-called historical
method of criticism had risen in Germany, but it was not until the
nineteenth century that it became important in religious circles.
Then it was that the method was applied seriously to the study of
the Bible. This method of criticism, born at the hands of Lessing
and Herder, was one of the foremost influences which shaped the
thought of the nineteenth century. Its most important effect was
felt in the application of the method to the study of the Bible.

The most important effect of the method upon
theology has been the creation of the science
of Biblical Criticism, which has profoundly
modified our conceptions of revelation and
inspiration, and has given a new meaning to
the authority of Scripture. It is probably here that the method has most influenced the public mind.

This method of Biblical criticism, referred to as Higher Criticism, subjects to severe tests the previously accepted and traditional views on the human and Divine authorship, the time and manner of composition of the sacred writings, and discriminates as to their historical value. In reaching its results it sets more store on evidences internal to the books than on external traditions or attestations, and its undeniable effect is to depreciate tradition in a great measure, so that there exists a sharply-drawn line between the expositions of the critical and those of the traditional school. In the process whereby critics arrive at their conclusions there is a divergence of attitude towards the supernatural element in Holy Writ.

Always advocates of freedom of inquiry and a progressive theology, the Liberals took up this Higher Criticism and with it soon revolutionized current beliefs relating to the Bible. One by one the old dogmas were "disproved," inspiration was denied, and miracles were scoffed at. First the authority of the Church had been taken away, and the Anglican was told to make the Thirty-Nine Articles and the Bible his guide in matters of religion. The Thirty-Nine Articles had long been ignored, and now the Bible was

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held up as a mere human document which could not be of much help.

The new history

... insisted upon treating the sacred documents, the inspired Word of God, as it treated all other historical documents, asking when they were written and by whom, with what purpose, with what bias, and under what human disabilities. The Bible was put into the witness-box, and under cross-examination contradicted itself again and again.9

To what could a man now cling for support? Faith had, for the most part, yielded to reason. Doctrines which the Church had long regarded as being beyond the reach of criticism, reason now began to investigate. Where would it end?

The importance of this system of criticism cannot be overestimated. Its contribution to the general confusion and spiritual unrest was tremendous. Probably no other single element was as influential as this.

The rise of Biblical criticism probably contributed more than any other cause to create a spirit of unrest. The older theories of verbal or plenary inspiration had clearly broken down; there was need of a new theory. ... abundant evidence is found that many drifted into a condition of doubt, because the Bible had for them lost its authority. They were not prepared to accept the authority of the Church, as defined by Newman and the Tractarians, and they could no longer fall back upon the authority of the Scriptures. There was no shelter for them anywhere in "the furnished lodgings of tradition," and they

set out to camp in the wilderness. ... A Church which, like the Church of England, everywhere made Scriptures the source of its dogmatic teaching could have no peace, until it determined what it meant by the authority of the Bible.  

Although the advocates of this Higher Criticism had hoped that it would lead men to a pure, rational religion, the natural outcome was bound to be a state of doubt, uncertainty, and pessimism.

Among the most ardent promoters of Biblical criticism in England was Benjamin Jowett. He had come to Oxford when the Oxford Movement was at its height and was swept along with the High Church movement. Soon, however, having come under the influence of A. P. Stanley, a definite change came over him. The summers of 1845 and 1846 he spent in Germany, where he became a student of German criticism. He learned his lesson well, and on his return to England became extremely active in applying the method to the study of the Bible. His fundamental law for the interpretation of the Bible was, "Interpret the Bible like any other book." He maintained that its meaning was to be interpreted and understood in the very "same way as the meaning of Sophocles or Plato." Another rule of Jowett, second only to the above in importance, is that the "Bible is to be interpreted from itself." Neither did he stop here. The extent to which he carried his studies is evident in Essays and Reviews.

This volume was published in 1860 by Jowett in collaboration

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with various writers including Temple (a future Archbishop of Canterbury), Henry Bristowe Wilson, and Rowland Williams. In this book Jowett declared that there is no evidence in the Bible pointing to its Divine inspiration and nothing to prove that the Evangelists were inspired or preserved from error. He admitted of no theory of inspiration which does not admit the possibility and even the existence of error. The general aim of the book was merely to provoke free discussion among those who were united in a common Christianity, but the result was far different.

Frederick Harrison, who was not a Christian at all, welcomed the book as showing that its authors had already gone half way along the road from Christianity to infidelity, and invited them to step out boldly and complete the journey. 11

A review of the book, published in the Dublin Review clearly indicates the serious effects of Jowett's teachings as they are contained in Essays and Reviews.

The principles of that book wage practically a war against the supernatural in religion; and too many of its readers have probably carried them out to their legitimate consequences. The mathematician can predict to what point his curve will reach when extended; unfortunately the moral and religious teacher often learns the real scope of his principles only from a younger generation, which has adopted them but which has not inherited those happier

11 Somervell, op. cit., p. 119.
traditions with which, in the case of the teacher, they were blended, and by which they were in part neutralized.\(^\text{12}\)

During this same period the advance of science was extremely significant. The relation in which revealed religion stood to inductive science and to Biblical criticism was the great religious problem of the day. This difficulty, too, originated with the Reformation — with its rejection of authority and its emphasis on reason as opposed to faith.

Beside the cradle of that "Reformation," the greatest revolution the world has yet known, two dragons had kept watch unseen; . . . the Portents waited and watched, and their day has arrived. . . . Those two Portents are Biblical Criticism and that portion of Inductive Science which treads the border land between science and religion. These two things ought to have proved friends to Faith; but great gifts may reverse their functions when circumstances have placed them in false relations with other gifts. The question at issue is whether that new knowledge which knocks at our doors is to assail or sustain Revealed Religion.\(^\text{13}\)

Long ago this question was answered — the growth of physical science resulted in theological doubt, agnosticism, and even atheism. Although true science and true religion can never conflict because the object of both is truth, nevertheless, science and religion did conflict during the Victorian Era. The new emphasis


\(^{13}\) Ibid., p. 346.
on rationalism caused the scientists to demand a rational basis for every religious truth as well as for every scientific fact. Neither religion nor science expects the acceptance of anything irrational, but they do hold that some truths are beyond the comprehension of reason. The differences which the scholars of the day found it difficult to reconcile arose principally from their reluctance to accept anything on faith alone.

Consequently there followed as a matter of course a refusal to believe in miracles. The conflict between science and religion raged around the efficacy of prayer and the possibility or impossibility of miracles. If the reign of law is universal, and according to the scientist it is, could there be any interference by God, in answer to prayer, with fixed order of nature? Was a miracle possible in opposition to the natural law? Continuing in a logical manner the scientist next questioned the reasonableness of belief in the Christian story of redemption in the face of the revelation made by science as to the vastness of the universe. Is it surprising that the theologians felt the general outlook of science to be hostile to religion?

The greatest damage to religion effected by science came from within, for the two were in no way independent of each other. As the science of Biblical criticism became better known, its advocates not only attacked the doctrine of inspiration and the occurrence of miracles, but also denied many of the truths contained in
the Bible. Insisting upon a literal interpretation of the book of
Genesis, for example, they denied the veracity of the Bible's ac-
count of creation. If the story of creation could not be accepted
as correct literally, other parts of the Bible would also be false.

Science had begun her conquering march and every
fresh discovery with regard to the true nature and
constitution of the universe appeared to make the
old conception of man's place in it less and less
credible.¹⁴

Individuals began to propose varying theories to account for the
existence of all created things or, as was more common, to give
reasons to disprove existing beliefs. As a rule their proposals
were only theories which could not be accepted with any feeling of
certainty and tended to leave people in an attitude of doubt.

Herbert Spencer, for instance, was completely negative.

Atheism he defines as the theory that the Universe
is self-existent, Pantheism as the theory that the
Universe is self-created, and Theism as the theory
that the Universe is created by external agency.
None of these theories, he insists, is really a
solution of the origin or explanation of the exist-
ence of the Universe, nor is any one of them really
thinkable.¹⁵

Probably the most widely accepted of the proposed explanations
of creation was that of evolution. Although Darwin was not the
first to set forth the theory of evolution, it was he who first com-

¹⁴ Hugh Walker, The Greater Victorian Poets (London: Swan Son-

¹⁵ Richard A. Armstrong, Agnosticism and Theism in the Nine-
bined the principal ideas into a system, and gave them new form by endeavoring to explain the origin of species by means of natural selection. According to his explanation in *The Origin of the Species*, the breeding of the new species depends on the survival of the fittest in the struggle for existence. Haeckel, with other materialists, enlarged this selection theory of Darwin's into a philosophical world-idea, by attempting to account for the whole evolution of the cosmos by means of the chance survival of the fittest. As to the human species, as early as 1837 and 1838, Darwin was of the opinion that it was likewise no special creation, but a product of evolutionary processes. That God could have made use of natural, evolutionary, original causes in the production of man's body is not impossible, but the soul could have come only from the direct creative act of God. However, the most enthusiastic propounders of the theory of evolution did not teach this. Being agnostics, they were opposed to religious faith.

Further evidence ... of the antagonism subsisting between religious orthodoxy, as then constituted, and evolutionary views, will be found in the religious opinions of the pioneers themselves and of their opponents. Darwin, Spencer, and Huxley were avowed agnostics, Wallace apparently not a believer in the Christian revelation, Baden Powell an unsparing critic of miracles; while Dr. Carpenter, whose acceptance of Darwin's views is described as "somewhat limited and reserved," was a Unitarian.16

It is easy to see, therefore, that the views of evolution current during the Victorian period were not contributive to belief in dogmatic religion. Even bishops and dignitaries of the church invented extraordinary hypotheses to reconcile the theory of evolution with the traditional teaching.\textsuperscript{17}

In general this was only one more factor in the general tendency to destroy faith and exalt reason. It was this attitude toward religion which caused people to refuse to accept anything on faith and which found expression in statements such as this:

Proof is almost impossible, and agreement refers always only to a certain number of persons. Doctrines or theories in this region of thought cannot be accepted and taken for granted. . . . but every person must go over the same ground for himself before he has any right to accept or make use of what is given to him.\textsuperscript{18}

In addition to these general movements and their inevitable results, there were many individuals, outstanding because of their effect on the religious thought of their day. John Stuart Mill was of special importance during the Victorian Age. The son of James Mill (an Evangelical Liberal and promoter of Rationalism), he had deeply rooted within him a Utilitarian philosophy of life; to him moral value was identical with utility. As would be ex-

\textsuperscript{17} Walker, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 83.

\textsuperscript{18} J. T. Merz, \textit{History of European Thought in the Nineteenth Century} (London: W. Blackwood and Sons, 1896 - 1914), Volume I, p. 70.
pected, he was an agnostic, opposed to the acceptance of religious dogmas on faith alone. In his opinion his age was an age of weak beliefs in which belief was much more determined by men's wish to believe than by any mental appreciation of evidence. The wish to believe, he thought, induced people to continue laying out their lives according to doctrines which had lost part of their hold on the mind, and to maintain the same attitude of belief towards the world as they had exhibited when their personal conviction was more complete.\(^{19}\)

Just how extreme his ideas were, how opposed to ancient and traditional religious views, how utterly hopeless, can be seen from his essays written between 1850 and 1858. He wrote among other things

> It seems to me not only possible but probable, that in a higher, and, above all, a happier condition of human life, not annihilation but immortality may be the burdensome idea; and that human nature, though pleased with the present, and by no means impatient to quit it, would find comfort and not sadness in the thought that it is not chained through eternity to a conscious existence which it cannot be assured that it will always wish to preserve.\(^{20}\)

Belief in a dogmatic religion had been taken away; the authority of the Bible had been destroyed; and now the hope of happier life


\(^{20}\) Ibid., p. 122.
after death was being attacked. It is no wonder that many Victorians lived lives of sham or mere conventionality. They did not wish to yield completely to the despair to which they were being led; consequently, they assumed an attitude which they did not really feel. At times, however, the pose gave way to the sincere feeling beneath, and it was then that doubt, scepticism, and a longing for the earlier days came to the surface.

Mill and Hume (also significant for his religious influence in this century) proposed a theory to explain the circumstances which prevented sincere people from adhering to the old beliefs. According to Merz

Both Hume and Mill state clearly the difficulties and objections in the way of upholding existing traditional beliefs. With both the negative portion of the argument forms the most important and stimulating contribution. Neither of them ventures to pronounce against religion altogether, and this not from want of moral courage, but probably from two distinct and honourable motives: first, the respect -- nay, even the reverence which they have for opposite opinions if honestly held; and, second, possibly a lurking suspicion that they have themselves not succeeded in thoroughly grasping and fathoming the problem. Having adduced various arguments, mostly of a negative bearing, they leave their readers to form their own final judgment, if not to remain in a state of doubt, perplexity, and confusion.21

Just how much respect and reverence they really had for the faith of others is difficult to determine, but it is certain that this

21 Merz, op. cit., Volume IV, p. 365.
respect and reverence did not prevent their undermining the faith of their contemporaries.

The unhappy condition effected by the fostering of false ideas was aggravated by a lack of correct knowledge. People lacked true religious education, and, in consequence, religion was not a living, vital force to them. Moreover, its absence rendered real happiness impossible for them.

A great deal of the scepticism of the day is due to the insufficiency of people's knowledge of Christianity, to their very superficial acquaintance with it, the complete absence of any preparation for sounding its depths, and surveying its wide horizon, and apprehending the inner harmonies of its spiritual teaching. And, in fact, this is often impossible with the meagre amount of life which remains to be thrown into the search for spiritual truth after all the other excitements of life have been provided for. There is now no adequate economy of human strength for the higher objects of life, too much a great deal being lavished on its petty interests. People are attached to their religion much as Amiel said that he was attached to his ennui. They have not the strength requisite either to give it up or to give themselves up to its demands, and so they hover in a miserable state of nervous tension on the boundary that divides faith from doubt, their worldly energy being diminished by the faith which they half-believe, and their spiritual energy being "sicklied o'er by the pale cast" of sceptical hesitations.

What was the reaction of the Victorian to the conditions by which he was surrounded? His gaze was in two directions — one

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glance towards the past with a feeling of love and longing, the
other towards the future with an earnest timidity straining to
find a light, but ever turning away from utter weariness and de­
spair. The leaders had emptied the heavens and the earth "of every­
thing but Man and the indefinite unknowable," and all that remained
was the vacant space they had created. 23 The result was a compro­
mise — an attempt to reconcile the old faith with the new errors
being taught and especially with evolutionary science. As Ches­
terton points out this compromise was in the process of develop­
ment for many years. The French Revolution in the latter part of
the eighteenth century enkindled in the English Romantics a spirit
of freedom and liberalism. This, in turn, started a bent towards
independence and eccentricity. With emotion supreme in the
Romantics, a kind of idealism gradually developed against which
the Victorian revolted. Utilitarianism and rationalism replaced
idealism and emotionalism. For the greater part of the Victorian
Era, the Utilitarian tradition held the center of the field and
sustained the "march of codification and inquiry" until it made
possible the great victories of Darwin and Huxley. The old
culture met the new and the Victorians, incapable of accepting
either in its entirety, solved their problem by compromise. 24

23 Austin, op. cit., pp. 30 - 31.

The compromise is in brief an attempt to bring the religious spirit, which yearns for the Changeless, the Eternal, for permanence in the world of change, into relation with material progress, finding rest in the new science that involved ceaseless change. Scientific evolution and evolutionary progress are the negation of permanence, which is the port of rest for the religious soul. Specifically, it was an earnest attempt to reconcile the older Christian orthodoxy with the disturbing new science that through the efforts of Darwin and his friends was gradually usurping the intellectual leadership of the time. 25

The relation of the poets to the Victorian religious compromise can be read throughout the literature of the period. At all times the writer is a product of his age and must inevitably give expression to the spirit of his age, unless he rises superior to his age. Especially is this true of the poet. The Victorian poet, then, must be different from the poet of other literary periods.

Victorian poets cannot be spontaneous in the same sense as our ancestors were. Like Iago, they are nothing if not critical. . . . A simple faith in God and the Bible yields to critical inquiry, comparative theology, doubts and difficulties of all kinds. Religious liberty in this age consists more in the right to disbelieve as we think best than to believe according to our conscience. Pessimism, already strong in Byron, has grown and gathered strength with introspection until we find it lurking in nearly all the sincerest utterances of the present. 26


Probably in no poet is the spirit of doubt, uncertainty, and scepticism as evident as it is in Matthew Arnold. Other poets express it, certainly, but it is in Arnold's poetry that the effects of religious turmoil can be most easily detected. That is why some explanation of the Victorian Era is necessary if one is to interpret his poetry at all adequately. Furthermore, it is essential that one first study the personality which Matthew Arnold possessed, the people whose influence helped to form his character, and the circumstances under which he received his education. Only with this knowledge can one explain the grave effect which Arnold's times had upon him. It is this problem, then, which will be discussed next before any attempt is made to criticize his poetry.
CHAPTER III

INFLUENCES AFFECTING MATTHEW ARNOLD'S RELIGION

Liberalism was making steady advances, and the Noetics were persistently gaining power when Matthew Arnold was born on December 24, 1822. His mother, Mary Penrose, was a deeply religious person, and the relationship between her and her oldest son was always exceptionally close. Letter after letter written by Arnold to his mother shows the tender love which existed between them and proves the deep effect which the mother had on her son. Nevertheless, it was the influence of another which was much stronger and much more evident in the life of the poet — that of his father.

A man of no small significance was Thomas Arnold, the famous headmaster of Rugby. No study of Matthew Arnold could ever be adequate unless it included a consideration of his father, who is important for his influence on both education and religion, if these can be separated. A Broad Churchman throughout his life, he joined and eventually became a leader in the liberal and rationalist movement which was steadily growing during the childhood and youth of Matthew. At all times he advocated a broad-minded interpretation of religious "dogma" and favored a questioning attitude towards religious teachings. Although he was not radical in his desire for new practices, nevertheless he was not conservative in his willingness to accept them. For him religion was at all times a personal matter — something for the individual to consider and accept according to his own light.
... he was, if not exactly "cupidus novarum rerum" in church and state, very ready to entertain them; he was curiously deficient in logic; and though the religious sense was strong in him, he held, and transmitted to his son, the heresy — the foundation of all heresies — that religion is something that you can "bespeak," that you can select and arrange to your own taste; that it is not "to take or leave" at your peril and as it offers itself.  

From his father, likewise, Matthew received his first lessons in what was later to develop into higher criticism of the Bible.

Thomas Arnold defended an intellectual, questioning approach to the Scriptures and thereby helped to prepare the way for the scholars who, in the second half of the nineteenth century, revolutionized the study of religious documents by allowing the understanding and the critical faculties to play freely upon them.2

Thomas Arnold himself was not interested in the details of literary and textual criticism, but he was deeply interested in the large principles of Biblical interpretation. He saw clearly that changes were coming and that the rise of historical criticism as applied to Scriptures would affect the whole of traditional theology. Consequently, he set himself to the task of showing how the coming changes could be accepted without any real loss to vital faith, and how criticism did not affect the abiding faith in the

1 George Saintsbury, Matthew Arnold (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1899), p. 3.

An understanding of the father's rationalism helps to explain many things which appeared later in the life of the son.

The first strong influence of his father, Matthew Arnold received at Rugby. In 1828 when his father had been appointed Head-master of the school, the state of English education was not satisfactory. Dissatisfaction was growing and a complete reformation was inevitable. This reform was the task which Doctor Arnold set out to accomplish. Being himself a serious-minded individual with many years of clerical education, he proposed to do this work by means of religion. A professed liberal Evangelical, definitely favoring a rational attitude towards all matters of religion, Dr. Arnold began energetically to inject his philosophy of life into the important phases of education in his school — and eventually into all public schools in England.

When Dr. Arnold was appointed to Rugby in 1828 it was said of him that he would change the face of education throughout England. Arnold was not exactly an Evangelical; he was devoted to Coleridge's fantastic scheme for making the Church once again co-extensive with the nation by the comprehension of all Christian sects, and he held liberal views on doctrine and Biblical criticism which shocked the average Evangelical. None the less it may be said in a general sense that with him Evangelicalism began its conquest of the public school.4


Dr. Arnold's great ambition was to make Rugby a place of really "Christian education." Intellectual training was not to be underrated, but the end of his training was to form Christian men in whose lives Christian principles would be practiced. At all times he stressed true manliness and the need for earnest principle and moral thoughtfulness as the great distinguishing mark between good and evil. Though Rugby boys had their faults and mannerisms, they grew into high-minded young men, with a strong moral sense. However, the training at Rugby was not without its limitations.

Dr. Arnold's training, admirable though it was, doubtless stimulated to unwholesome precocity the moral and religious instincts. The boys were plunged with the first dawn of consciousness into modern brooding over personal moral problems. At the same time the intellectual convictions fostered in them were those of the Broad Church — liberal and somewhat vague.

Frequently after his appointment as chaplain, Dr. Arnold gave religious sermons at chapel services. At such times he always stressed the need for high moral principles, which were in reality nothing more than the Victorian code of conventionality. He endeavored always to awaken the minds of the young men to the greatness of things around them, and his most earnest efforts were devoted to giving them that which he thought the best means of attaining

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a firm hold upon the truth. But at all times it was his wish that his pupils should form their opinions for themselves and not take them on trust from him. "It would be a great mistake," he said, "if I were to try to make myself here into a Pope."7

But Dr. Arnold's most fatal error in dealing with the young was his insistence upon the duty of moral thoughtfulness, and the self-scrutinizing habit was formed in the son before he was strong enough to support the weary burden of himself.8

Matthew Arnold himself voices this great loss in his poetry as will be seen a little later. Thomas Arnold's idea was without doubt, a strong contributing factor to the later doubt and uncertainty of his son. Youth needs certainty — the certainty which it can get from dependence on those whom it can trust — if it is to develop correct principles and attitudes of which it can always be sure. This Matthew Arnold lacked; consequently, he later began to doubt — to doubt almost everything connected with his philosophy of life. One should not be surprised to note that critics again and again point out the weakness of Dr. Arnold's training at Rugby.

With all its unquestionable excellences, there was a fatal flaw in the Rugby training under the Arnold regime. In many cases — and these

cases necessarily the most important -- it had a tendency to overstimulate the moral sense. It sent boys out into the world with a dangerously premature moral equipment; an education that yielded a good deal of dogmatic brain-force, but at the sacrifice of intellectual accuracy and the finer moral discriminations. An old head upon young shoulders is a doubtful blessing in any case; but when it takes the special form of an adult faith grafted on a spiritual anatomy whose bones are set not yet, there is no doubt in the matter. With the great majority of strong natures, it is simply the best conceivable arrangement for ultimate moral shipwreck.9

Matthew Arnold realized the influence of his Rugby training as a contributing factor in the development of his later religious state of doubt and refers to it in his "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse."

For rigorous teachers seized my youth
And purged its faith, and trimm'd its fire,
Showed me the high white star of Truth,
There bade me gaze, and there aspire;
Even now their whisper's pierce the gloom:
What dost thou in this living tomb?

Forgive me, masters of the mind!
At whose behest I long ago
So much unlearnt, so much resign'd.10

But there were other factors influencing his development.

While Dr. Arnold was inculcating his ideas of Liberalism, Rationalism, and morality into the minds and lives of his son and

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the other young men at Rugby, John Henry Newman and the other Tractarians were promoting a very different movement at Oxford. Thomas Arnold sought for a comprehensive or inclusive Church, intimately allied with the State, which would reabsorb the sects outside the Established Church. He even went so far as to urge the removal of theological tests in order to permit dissenters to enter. Newman, on the contrary, sought a Church of absolute authority with heavy insistence on Catholic orthodoxy in tradition and science. As early as October, 1833, when the Oxford Movement was first beginning to gain impetus, Thomas Arnold had expressed his view of it in a letter to Coleridge.

I cannot say how I am annoyed . . . by these extravagances, at Oxford . . . because if these things do produce any effect on the clergy, the evil consequences to the nation are not to be calculated; for what is to become of the Church, if the clergy begin to exhibit an aggravation of the worst superstitions of the Roman Catholics only stripped of that consistency, which stamps even the errors of the Romish system with something of a character of greatness.11

Dr. Arnold was stirred to the very soul by dislike and dread of the Tractarian movement. He wrote and he preached against it, and he did everything in his power to strengthen his pupils against it. His most potent service to Liberalism was in the training which he gave the boys under his direction. But despite all this, the

11 Stanley, op. cit., p. 373.
Headmaster of Rugby seems to have had some misgivings about sending his own son to Oxford where the Tractarian movement was at its height. To him it seemed that all young men who matriculated there required "a firmness of character and a discernment of inadequacies which he failed to see in the boy." 12

Nevertheless, after much deliberation on his father's part, Matthew Arnold matriculated in Balliol College, Oxford, in Michaelmas Term, 1841. Because Rugby students often won scholarships in the competitive entrance examinations given at Balliol, Liberalism was strong in this college. Consequently, the Tractarians were, at this time, making a concentrated effort to gain control of it. By the beginning of the next year, it was evident to everyone that the Oxford Movement had reached a crisis. Into the midst of this whirlpool of thoughts, hopes, and ideals — principally religious and theological — Matthew Arnold was thrown. He absorbed Oxford and its battlings of thought into his very marrow and is representative of the tempestuous tossing of his time.

Matthew Arnold, therefore, entered Oxford at a most interesting time. His career as an undergraduate coincided with the eclipse and collapse of Tractarianism as a party movement; and he himself as a scholar of the college where the Catholic party laid its last siege, lived in the midst of ecclesiastical turmoils. 13


13 Ibid., p. 403.
Conflict existed not only between the High Churchmen and their opponents, but also between these two parties united and the Neologians, as the critical school was then called. Matthew Arnold hated noise, quarrels, and confusion as much as he loved quiet, tolerance, and tranquility — especially in religious matters. With great difficulty he controlled his natural abhorrence of this tumultuous shouting about things which seemed to him to have no connection with religion. "It is a sorrowful time," he might have said, "to live in; the outward noise about things indifferent doubles my inward trouble."^14

The precise effect which the Oxford of his day had upon Arnold is difficult to determine. Some writers hold that he was unmoved by all that he heard and retained the ideals of Rugby through all of the turmoil. Courtney,^15 for example, considers Matthew Arnold to be a typical son of Oxford — a representative of Liberal Oxford, not of the theological battleground of Newman and the Tractarians, nor of the troubled scene of Pusey and Liddon's attempts to silence the "Essayists and Reviewers." He represents, as it were, the typical compromise between tradition and the newer scepticism. When Arnold went up to Oxford in 1841

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The Tractarian controversy was at its height; but it seems to have left him quite untouched. Now and again he went to hear Newman preach, more from a love of beautiful language than from any zeal for, or against, the principles of the Tractarians. To Dr. Arnold they were "the Oxford Malignants," and Newman was the archdeceiver. Matthew seems to have regarded them with indifference at that time though thirty years later he wrote feelingly of Newman's exquisite and delicate genius.\(^{16}\)

Hutton\(^{17}\) takes a slightly different position. He believes that Arnold must have felt the spell of Dr. Newman, although probably not the whole force of the spell. The reason he gives is that Arnold belonged to the stoical rather than to the religious school — the school which magnifies self-dependence and regards serene calm, rather than passionate worship, as the highest type of the moral life. Cunliffe\(^{18}\) maintains that Arnold was greatly affected by Newman. The latter, he maintains, shook the young student's confidence in the liberal and evangelical ideas instilled into him by his father, but did not give him a "consolatory faith in the authority of the Catholic Church." Arnold must have heard much in criticism of Newman from his father's lips, because Dr. Arnold was always opposed to the Tractarian Movement and its leader. In February, 1842, the Rugby master even went so far as to advise a

\(^{16}\) Ibid., p. 71.


former student not to enter Oxford because of the great influence which Newman was exercising.

I think the question of the expediency of your residing for some time at Oxford is rather difficult. But on the whole, unless you have some special object in coming here which I do not know, I think that I should advise against it. This place appears, at this moment, to be overridden with one only influence, which is so predominant that one must either yield to it or be living in a state of constant opposition to those around one.\(^\text{19}\)

It might be expected that Matthew Arnold would have imbibed the attitude of his father. Such does not seem to have been the case. As an "Arnoldite" it might have been anticipated that he would have held aloof from the Newmanites or the "Oxford Malignants," as Dr. Arnold called them. But it was not so. Perhaps thus early in his life he felt what many years later he expressed: "Dear Dr. Arnold was not infallible." As a matter of fact many of Arnold's pupils, when they passed from Dr. Arnold's influence, fell for a time under that of Newman; and Matthew Arnold was no exception.\(^\text{20}\)

Matthew Arnold never accepted in their entirety the ideas which Newman advocated, but he was undoubtedly influenced by them. He could never yield the unquestioning obedience to authority which Newman advocated, but he did examine more deeply the intellectual foundations of his own guiding principles, and eventually he became one of the leaders of a skeptical reaction. Even for this,

\(^{19}\) Stanley, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 311.

the seed was planted by the teaching of Thomas Arnold at Rugby, only to develop later under the influence of Newman.

The sceptical reaction was in no small measure the outcome of the teaching of Thomas Arnold; . . . Its two great poets were one of them his son and the other a favourite pupil; and the characters of both were moulded by him. But Thomas Arnold's relation to Newmanism was by no means as simple as at the first glance it appears. He was himself irreconcilably hostile to the movement, and he said and wrote some exceedingly strong things against it; yet Bagehot in his essay on Clough has a profoundly true remark, that, in spite of this hostility, Arnold prepared men for Newmanism. It was not the Rugby men who stood in bitterest opposition to the Tractarians. Ultimately, the leaders of the opposition arose from among them; but they were never bitter, never unsympathetic, and the deepest tones in the poetry both of Clough and of Matthew Arnold are struck by just this emotional sympathy with a creed which their intellect compels them to reject. 21

The names of Matthew Arnold and Arthur Clough are usually coupled together as poets of skepticism and doubt. Indeed, it is hardly possible to consider Arnold at Oxford during these years without speaking of his friendship with Clough. Of Clough's influence, Arnold speaks significantly in a letter of February 21, 1853.

... remember that I am and always shall be, whatever I do or say, powerfully attracted towards you, and vitally connected with you: this I am sure of: the period of my develop-

ment coincides with that of my friendship
with you so exactly that I am forever linked
with you by intellectual bonds — the strongest of all.22

How much Clough had to do with deepening his younger friend is
difficult to say. "The depth was there, but it needed sounding" and in
this Clough unquestionably had a part.

Although his influence was completely different, Benjamin
Jowett also was significant in Matthew Arnold's development.

Jowett ... was to be an abiding force in
Matthew Arnold's intellectual life, for it
was he who remaining in Oxford after Tait's
withdrawal continued the Arnoldian tradi-
tion until it fructified in victory. ... Having saved himself from Tractarian en-
gulfment by his relentless and disintegrat-
ing scepticism, under the ceaseless play of
his acute mind, Jowett made it impossible
for Matthew Arnold completely to embrace
Newmanism.23

His Higher Criticism of the Bible, in particular, affected Arnold.
At first disturbed, then dismayed, he was finally thrown into a
skepticism which profoundly troubled him. Had he come to Oxford
a little later this probably would not have disturbed him, be-
cause eventually men came to see that scientific methods are really
quite inapplicable to the sphere of moral truth; the scientific
assumption that whatever is true can be verified (in the sense of

22 Howard Foster Lowry, editor, Letters of Matthew Arnold to

23 Knickerbocker, op. cit., pp. 412 - 413.
the word verification which science applies) was recognized to be a very serious blunder. However, Arnold was at Oxford most of the time from 1841 to 1847 and he "seems to have imbied the prejudices of the scientific season of blossom."24

When Matthew Arnold left Oxford in 1847, he entered a world which was definitely out of order. To him the prevailing religion was a dead faith. Intellectual and scientific questionings were debasing "spiritual revelation into a materialized concept of bar­
gain and trade with a 'magnified and non-natural man'".25

In their cultural and spiritual life, moreover, the people were sacrificing to cheap utility and the machinery of externals all their abid­
ing human values and reasonable principles. Science, which should have served the spirit as well as the intellect, was used to aggrandize intellect to the impoverishment of the spirit. Materialisms or untenable idealisms were the order of the day. It was an age inimical to deeply satisfying literature. In short, soci­ety had neither preserved nor discovered any sound basis of values for thought, for spirit­ual action; with all its science and its in­vention, the age did not think deeply, did not feel deeply, was not truly beautiful or poetic.26

Matthew Arnold was not prepared for life in this kind of world. He had been made a perfect gentleman and a true scholar, but he had not been prepared for the times of Darwin and Spencer and Huxley.

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24 Hutton, op. cit., p. 127.

25 John Hicks, "The Stoicism of Matthew Arnold," University of Iowa Humanistic Studies, Volume 6, No. 1, p. 17.

26 Ibid., p. 18.
By training and nature he was essentially religious; yet his religious ideas were necessarily changed by the new learning. The task of integrating his principles with the new movements in the world in which he found himself was too difficult for him. Among the young men of his day there were three general attitudes of mind towards the existing condition. Some accepted the new philosophy altogether; others became frightened and fled from it. Between these two was a group who were profoundly religious in feeling, but were at the same time strongly attracted to the new methods of science. In this latter class was Arnold. He could not continue to believe in the old way, and yet the new way caused him pain and sorrow. Intellectually he was a skeptic; emotionally and by education he was intensely religious. Reconciliation of these two tendencies was too difficult for Arnold, and he developed the attitude of doubt and uncertainty for which he is usually remembered. Although he never succumbed completely, he did drift towards Agnosticism. Throughout his entire life he was never able to take a really definite position on ultimate subjects. True, in the later years of his life, he appeared to be more calm, but the calmness was not that of certainty which knows no doubt, but rather that of Stoicism which shows no feeling. Even so, it is the earlier mood which predominates in his poetry.

After leaving Oxford, Arnold came in sharp contact with the wave of scientific Agnosticism which was sweeping over England. He was never overwhelmed by it. From much in its attitude he shrank; with several of its leaders he waged an urbane feud. Yet we may trace throughout his work the effect of the movement, in play with other forces. Thus living the life of the scholar and the thinker, both in and of the world, able rather to reproduce and to combine than to originate, Arnold reflects for us with singular truthfulness the composite and conflicting tendencies which marked the second third of the century.

During the third quarter of the century — those years which saw the publication of most of Matthew Arnold's poetry — there was a steady growth of the undesirable movements of the preceding years. In all phases of human activity there was a forward pressure of reason steadily besieging and undermining the position held by tradition, prescription, and religion. The main movement of mind was directed toward the sway of reason over all things. The period, indeed, might be correctly designated as a time of theological revolution. The foundations of faith were shaken. Serious-minded men (to whom the past with its traditions was sacred, the present with its long-established institutions was valuable, and the future with its great possibilities was hopeful) looked upon the scene with great concern. Even some advocates of the new ideas grew troubled as they contemplated the possible

28 Scudder, op. cit., p. 251.

29 Stuart P. Sherman, Matthew Arnold: How to Know Him (New York: Peter Smith, 1932), p. 53.
extent of their influence. They were not destructive men and it began to seem as though the negative result of their work might prove so far-reaching as to preclude the possibility of reconstruction in the realms of ethics and religion.\textsuperscript{30}

Arnold's conviction that the faith which had shaped Europe was gone accounts for the wonderful attractive power exercised over him by Senancour, the author of Obermann.\textsuperscript{31} Obermann deals with two great subjects: the considerations of practical ethics and the need of its reconstruction.

It shows constant efforts at evolving some theory of moral regeneration of mankind, which has become imperative because of the inroad made upon tradition by science and the spirit of individual liberty.\textsuperscript{32}

It is in the attempt to solve this problem that the kinship between Obermann and Arnold is evident. That Senancour did exert an influence over Arnold, no one can deny. It may have been an "unconscious infiltration" but it must have been important. His poems, "In Memory of the Author of Obermann," and "Obermann Once More," are undeniable evidence. In Senancour Arnold admires one who has lived in troublous times and mastered the difficulties.


\textsuperscript{31} Walker, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 469.

Yet of spirits who have reign'd
In this our troubled day,
I know but two, who have attain'd
Save thee, to see their way.

After a tribute to Goethe and Wordsworth, whose influence will be considered later, Arnold turns once more to Senancour.

And then we turn, thou sadder sage,
To thee! we feel thy spell!
— The hopeless tangle of our age,
Thou too hast scann'd it well!

Immoveable thou sittest, still
As death composed to bear!
Thy head is clear, thy feeling chill,
And icy thy despair.

Yes, as the son of Thetis said,
I hear thee saying now:
Greater by far than thou art dead;
Strive not! die also thou!

Much of this tone is evident in Arnold's own poetry as will be shown in the chapter following. It could be in two men a similar outcome resulting from a similar outlook on life. Arnold's deep admiration for Senancour, however, would indicate that in Arnold this Stoicism is the result of his reading of the French poet. In fact, after several more lines in which he continues to speak of Senancour in this same strain, Arnold expressly states that he seeks from the other poet the help which he needs.

33 "Stanzas in Memory of Obermann," ll. 45 - 48.

34 Ibid., ll. 81 - 92.
To thee we come, then! Clouds are roll'd
Where thou, O seer! art set;
Thy realm of thought is drear and cold —
The world is colder yet!

I go, fate drives me; but I leave
Half of my life with you.35

Twenty years later, when Arnold was passing from the years of his poetical work to those of his prose works, he paused once more, as it were, to pay tribute to Senancour in "Obermann Once More."

After several stanzas in which he describes the country in which Senancour lived, he is reminded of Obermann again.

And who but thou must be, in truth,
Obermann! with me here?
Thou master of my wandering youth,
But left this many a year!

Again I feel the words inspire
Their mournful calm;36

The poem continues with the imaginary words of the author of Obermann to Arnold, but the lines quoted clearly indicate that Arnold himself knew that Senancour was an influence in his life and that that influence was exercised because in the troubled times in which he lived, the French poet was one of those who could "see their way."

Goethe was another of these. Just how much of Arnold's religious attitude is to be attributed to Goethe is difficult to say. That he admired the German poet, no one will deny. In a letter to his mother in 1848, Arnold writes,

I have been returning to Goethe's life, and think higher of him than ever. His thorough sincerity -- writing about nothing that he had not experienced -- is in modern literature almost unrivalled. 37

This admiration is noted by Arnold's critics also.

If there were any man whom he regarded with a feeling akin to idolatry, that man was Goethe. No influence penetrated so deeply or so permanently into his mind. There was, indeed, what Goethe would have called an elective affinity between the two. . . . Both laid stress on the self-culture that makes for self-expression, for lucidity, for equipoise of mind. . . . The nature and extent of Goethe's influence on Arnold is difficult to define with precision. Perhaps it is best described as a "Way of looking at things," the power of getting outside oneself, the quality in short, of intellectual disinterestedness. 38

The name of Goethe appears over and over again in his poetry; but, of course, the mention of him is not enough to prove influence.

He says, for example,

And Goethe's course few sons of men
May think to emulate.


For he pursued a lonely road,
His eyes on Nature's plan;
Neither made man too much a God,
Nor God too much a man.

Strong was he, with a spirit free
From mists, and sane, and clear;
Clearer, how much! than ours —
Yet we have a worse course to steer.\(^39\)

In "Memorial Verses," Arnold praises Goethe's wisdom and calmness in troubled times.

When Goethe's death was told, we said —
Sunk, then, is Europe's sagest head.
Physicians of the Iron Age,
Goethe has done his pilgrimage.
He took the suffering human race,
He read each wound, each weakness clear —
And struck his finger on the place
And said — Thou ailest here, and here —
He looked on Europe's dying hour
Of fitful dream and feverish power;
His eye plung'd down the weltering strife,
The turmoil of expiring life;
He said — The end is everywhere:
Art still has truth, take refuge there.
And he was happy, if to know
Causes of things, and far below
His feet to see the lurid flow
Of terror, and insane distress
And headlong fate, be happiness.\(^40\)

To Arnold it seemed that Goethe held the answer to most of the problems of the age; still it is difficult to decide just how much Arnold learned from his master.

Whether Arnold has learnt any ruling ideas from Goethe must depend on one's definition of a rul-

\(^39\) "Stanzas in Memory of the Author of Obermann," ll. 55 - 64.

\(^40\) "Memorial Verses," ll. 15 - 33.
ing idea. He had acquired some of his theories and opinions from that source and received for others a reinforcement often proceeding from a biassed interpretation of Goethe's ideas. The only idea he has constantly with him is his own conception of Goethe's role as physician, moralist, and high priest. The name of Goethe is, as we have seen, forever on his lips, and he has borrowed many of Goethe's individual judgments. He received, too, a good deal of inspiration from his conception of Goethe.41

Indeed, Goethe may justly be called Arnold's master — the writer who had the largest share in determining the characteristic principles in his theory of life.42

Nevertheless, it was not foreign poets exclusively who contributed to Arnold's development. Among English poets Wordsworth is the one to whom he was most indebted, although in a different way. The English poet did not contribute to Arnold's skepticism and religious uncertainty so much as he taught him how to find relief from it — in Nature.

And Wordsworth — Ah, pale Ghosts, rejoice!
For never has such soothing voice
Been to your shadowy world convey'd,
Since erst, at morn, some wandering shade
Heard the clear song of Orpheus come
Through Hades, and the mournful gloom.
Wordsworth has gone from us — and ye,
Ah, may ye feel his voice as we.
He too upon a wintry clime
Had fallen — on this iron time
Of doubts, disputes, distractions, fears.


There is, however, a difference between the two poets in their attitude towards Nature. This will be treated in more detail in the discussion of Arnold's use of Nature as an anodyne to the religious doubts and uncertainty.

In addition to the influence of the poets of his own country and of Goethe's writings upon Matthew Arnold's genius, there was another all-powerful mental and moral force stirring during his school days which left a distinct effect in his after-thoughts. The scientific spirit of the age was greatly responsible for the philosophic views spreading in the sphere of religion everywhere. This, in turn, was greatly responsible for the attitude of doubt and longing for the old days which was so strong in Arnold.

... his critical mind, so keenly aware of the necessity of seeking a "modus vivendi" of some sort, if the precious tradition which was his by cultural inheritance might adequately meet the fierce attacks of the modern spirit,

43 "Memorial Verses," 11. 34 - 57.
played freely upon the great problem that
troubled intelligent men ... Arnold felt
to the full the immense loss which the world
sustained as it gave itself into the power of
material science, but his eminently reasona­
ble nature set to work in an effort to save
the essential qualities of the Christianity
which after all remained the only light for
the wandering feet of men as they trudged
through the night of materialism. It is true
he looked back with regretful yearning to
those precious possessions of his youth and
we may perceive even better in his poetry
how very keen was the wistful melancholy
which the passing of the age of hope and faith
had left in his soul.44

Darwin's *The Origin of the Species* did not appear until 1859, but
the ideas which gave birth to it were in the air for several years
before its publication. Undoubtedly it was this theory that
Arnold had in mind when he wrote

> But, if the wild unfather'd mass no birth
> In divine seats hath known:
> In the blank, echoing solitude, if Earth,
> Rocking her obscure body to and fro,
> Ceases not from all time to heave and groan,
> Unfruitful oft, and, at her happiest throe,
> Forms what she forms, alone:45

The influence of the theory of evolution is even more clearly
evident in this stanza which was the last one in the 1869 edition
of the poem.

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44 Percy H. Houston, "The Modernism of Matthew Arnold," *The

45 "In Utrumque Paratus," ll. 22 - 28.
Thy native world stirs at thy feet unknown,
Yet there thy secret lies!
Out of this stuff, these forces, thou art grown,
And proud self-severance from them were disease.
O scan thy native world with pious eyes!
High as thy life be risen, 'tis from these;
And these, too rise.46

As can readily be seen, then, Arnold lived in the midst of many conflicting tendencies. Immersed in questions of the day, he was moulded by his age — not by the lower phases nor the material activities, but by the intellectual and moral influences. Because his personality was receptive rather than assertive, his poetry mirrors, directly or indirectly, the grapple of science and the church, the social friction, the fierce industrialism, the desperate appeals for leadership — in general, the spiritual confusion which left so deep a mark on Arnold himself.47

Arnold's poems reflect that movement in a peculiarly fascinating because in an intimately personal way. The conflict of aristocratic with democratic impulses, of traditional belief and dogma with scientific knowledge, of romantic inclination with classical discipline and conviction, of emotion with intelligence, he not only perceived in the world around him but also felt very sharply within himself. He felt these conflicts and he expressed them poetically. He betrays thus a somewhat unhappily divided personality, yet a personality very resolutely divided. His reason commands him to march in the "main movement of mind;" and he obeys

46 Ibid., 11. 35 – 42.
with undeviating loyalty what he is constrained to accept as the supreme authority. But as he advances toward the Truth, keeping step with his convictions, his innermost self turns again and again, like the homesick heart of a soldier to bid a reluctant farewell to his sympathies. With most of the finest spirits of his time he felt the pathos and the melancholy of disillusion.48

And now, after this discussion of the skeptical spirit of the Victorian Age and the explanation of how this spirit came to take possession of Arnold, it is time to look at the poetry of Matthew Arnold in order to study his religious views in his own earlier writings. His verse is freighted with a thousand-and-one distressing spiritual inquiries which must beset a soul which has ventured, as Arnold did, "on the shoreless sea of ever-undulating doubt."

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48 Sherman, op. cit., p. 53 - 54.
CHAPTER IV

EVIDENCES OF DOUBT AND SKEPTICISM IN HIS POETRY

The period during which Matthew Arnold grew up was a period of transition — in the political, social, and religious world. Now a period of this kind is necessarily one of doubt and turbulence; one whose characteristics must be borne in mind in order to obtain a true appreciation of the poets who represent it. Through his sensitive organization the poet is greatly affected by the spirit of his time; in order to render his work of future importance he seeks either to reflect that spirit or to express spiritual experiences common to all ages and all mankind.1 Certainly no thinking person needs to be convinced that Matthew Arnold does reflect the religious spirit of the Victorian Era. Arnold had a strong will but it was not strong enough to master within him the skeptical spirit of his age. Instead he merely reflects the conflicting ideas with which he was surrounded. As Hutton says,

When I come to ask what Mr. Arnold's poetry has done for this generation, the answer must be that no one has expressed more powerfully and poetically its spiritual weaknesses, its craving for a passion that it cannot feel, its admiration for a self-mastery that it cannot achieve, its desire for a creed that it fails to accept, its sympathy with a faith that it will not share, its aspiration for a peace that it does not know.2


Arnold himself recognized this fact, and wrote in a letter to his mother,

> My poems represent, on the whole the main movement of mind of the last quarter of a century, and thus they will probably have their day as people become conscious to themselves of what that movement of mind is, and interested in the literary productions which reflect it.\(^3\)

Not only do they reflect the main movement of mind, however. They reflect as well the effect of this movement on Matthew Arnold. In his first volume of poems, published in 1849, he has several poems which give expression to his dissatisfaction with the religion of the day, to the doubt and uncertainty of his own mind and to the resulting melancholy.

Often this is a weakness in Arnold. The spirit of self-analysis which accompanied his habit of skepticism was not poetic. Inquiry is a good thing, but it is prosaic. At first he was too contemptuous of the world in which he lived and too aloof to regard it with poetic sympathy. He had courage, but little firm faith or hope in God or in man or in himself. He had insight into the evils, the dullness, the decay and death of his age; but he had little insight into its good, into the hopes and ideas which were arising or the life which was collecting under the decay. Not only was he lacking in joyousness, but also in sympathy with

the temper of the formative time in which he wrote. He did not break out in wrath against the elements of his world, but he sat apart from them in a silent, brooding, wrathful, even contemptuous opposition.

Already in "Written in Butler's Sermons" this note of disapproval is evident. Arnold tells how men with all their powers have rent into a thousand shreds the peace and harmony of this life.

Affections, Instincts, Principles, and Powers,
Impulse and Reason, Freedom and Control
So men, unravelling God's harmonious whole,
Rend in a thousand shreds this life of ours.5

In just this way was Arnold's own peace of mind destroyed by all the conflicting claims of the advocates of Liberalism and Rationalism. Throughout his poetry Arnold expresses the bewilderment and despondency which smote upon him as he came to realize the immense spiritual confusion of contemporary society and the false scale of values which dominated it.6

Before continuing it might be well to point out that the religion of Matthew Arnold was, for the most part, a negative thing. At no time, that is before 1870 when he turned almost exclusively

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5 "Written in Butler's Sermons," ll. 1 - 4.

to prose, did he write anything from which one can determine the guiding principles of his life. The truth of the matter is that he had no positive guiding principles. He was dissatisfied with the tendencies of his day, but he did not know with what to replace them. A very great proportion of his poetry is occupied with passing judgments on life or portions of life—society and religion. But his reflection never reaches any conclusion. Usually it ends with a questioning or skeptical tone. Even then his religion does not reach a supernatural level. For Arnold religion was "morality touched with emotion," and he does not rise above this. True, he is often referred to as a poet of the intellect, one who writes from an intellectual viewpoint, but for the most part his emotion seems to predominate over his intellect. It was the intellectual and rationalistic tendency of the age which caused Arnold to develop into the kind of man he was. With reference to religion this was a man of emotion, doubt, skepticism, negativism, conventionality, stoicism, and weakness with a certain amount of good will. With this as a foundation his poetry contended, mourned, and analysed. Arnold, as it were, sat by the tomb where he thought the religious life of England lay dead, and mourned over its disappointed hopes.

In "New Sirens" Arnold laments that the reasons man gives are not lasting, but he thinks that perhaps God can give better answers to life's problems.
... Alas! too soon, all
Man's grave reasons disappear:
Yet, I think, at God's tribunal
Some large answer you shall hear. 7

A little farther on he bewails the uncertainty and changeableness of life.

But, indeed, this flux of guesses --
Mad delight, and frozen calms --
Mirth today and vine-bound tresses,
And to-morrow -- folded palms --
Is this all? this balanc'd measure?
Could life run no easier way?
Happy at the noon of pleasure,
Passive, at the midnight of dismay. 8

Arnold lacked both a complete view of life and a correct view of life; consequently, he could not see the purpose behind the events of life. To him it was all a kind of gamble in which one looked for the easier way and merely endured the difficulties with no understanding of their object. Faith was wanting to him, and he realized it. Having lived through many changes during his life, he knew not what would come next. Still he had not the courage to turn to the only source of help, but instead merely endured.

Then, when change itself is over,
When the slow tide sets one way,
Shall you find the radiant lover,
Even by moments, of to-day?
The eye wanders, faith is failing:
O, loose hands, and let it be! 9

7 "New Sirens," ll. 89 - 92.
8 Ibid., ll. 197 - 204.
9 Ibid., ll. 221 - 226.
He would not or could not make the effort to grasp what he thought he wanted as he saw it slowly slipping away.

Again Arnold gives voice to the questioning and answering within his own soul in the poem "Progress." Opening the poem with a picture of Christ giving his sermon on the Mount, Arnold goes on to give the reaction of the disciples, "The old law is wholly come to naught!" The Master answers by telling them that the old law must still be observed, that it will never pass away. With this Arnold parallels the conditions of his own day. If Christ said this eighteen hundred years ago, what is to be said of those today

Who cry aloud to lay the old world low
To clear the new world's way?10

Loudly were men crying out against the old beliefs, the old religious practices, and the old laws

Religious fervours! ardour misapplied!
Hence, hence, they cry, ye do but keep man blind!
But keep him self-immersed, preoccupied,
And lame the active mind.11

With this Matthew Arnold could not be in full sympathy. He calls out for some one to answer, to show the value of the old way.

Ah! from the old world let some one answer give.
"Scorn ye this world, their tears, their inward cares?
I say unto you, see that your souls live
A deeper life than theirs.

10 "Progress," ll. 15 - 16.

11 Ibid., ll. 17 - 20.
"Say ye: The spirit of man has found new roads,  
And we must leave the old faiths, and walk therein?  
Leave then the Cross as ye have left carved gods,  
But Guard the fire within!

"Bright, else, and fast the stream of life may roll,  
And no man may the other's hurt behold;  
Yet each will have one anguish -- his own soul  
Which perishes of cold."12

This anguished cry of Arnold's soul changes to a calmer plea as he continues. If man cannot adhere to the old completely, he begs him at least to cling to some religion for God does not scorn any religion which effects in man some good.

Children of men! the unseen Power, whose eye  
For ever doth accompany mankind,  
Hath look'd on no religion scornfully  
That man did ever find.13

But then he slips back into the theory so prevalent in his day, to the principle laid down by his father already in his Rugby days: Not what man believes, but what he is, is important — and believing and being do not have to be interdependent.

Children of man! not that your age excel  
In pride of life the ages of your sires,  
But that you think clear, feel deep, bear fruit well,  
The Friend of man desires.14

Reading on through the poems of Matthew Arnold, one finds a selection better known and expressing more clearly the feeling

12 Ibid., ll. 21 - 32.  
13 Ibid., ll. 37 - 40.  
14 Ibid., ll. 45 - 48.
which dominated the poet at this time. "The Scholar Gipsy," for example, is the story of a poor Oxford scholar, who, weary of the strife and struggle of a student's life, forsook his friends to roam through the world leading a kind of gipsy life of freedom and proximity to nature. After several stanzas picturing the desirable experiences of the Scholar Gipsy, Arnold carries on a soliloquy in which, in imagination, he addresses the returned scholar. The poet envies the gipsy who has been preserved from all the change and shocks and strifes which have worn him out.

No, no, thou hast not felt the lapse of hours. 
For what wears out the life of mortal men?
'Tis that from change to change their being rolls:
'Tis that repeated shocks, again, again,
Exhaust the energy of strongest souls,
And numb the elastic powers. 15

Continuing, he states that the Gipsy is fortunate in having escaped the "sick fatigue" and "languid doubt" which result from the idle fluctuations of those who know not for what they strive.

For early didst thou leave the world, with powers
Fresh, undiverted to the world without,
Firm to their mark, not spent on other things;
Free from the sick fatigue, the languid doubt,
Which much to have tried, in much been baffled, brings.
0 Life unlike to ours!
Who fluctuate idly without term or scope,
Of whom each strives, nor knows for what he strives,
And each half lives a hundred different lives;
Who wait like thee, but not, like thee, in hope. 16

15 "The Scholar Gipsy," ll. 141 - 146.
16 Ibid., ll. 161 - 170.
The reason for this, too, Arnold does not hesitate to give. Man has lost his firm and living faith. Having relinquished this, he no longer has a motive sufficiently strong for doing the deeds which he knows would effect an improvement of conditions.

Thou waitest for the spark from Heaven: and we
Vague half-believers of our casual creeds,
Who never deeply felt, nor clearly will'd,
Whose insight never has borne fruit in deeds,
Whose weak resolves never have been fulfill'd;
For whom each year we see
Breeds new beginnings, disappointments new;
Who hesitate and falter life away,
And lose tomorrow the ground won to-day —
Ah, do not we, Wanderer, await it too?\(^17\)

It is not only the "half-believers" who suffer because of this loss of faith. The intellectuals, those who have killed faith by their emphasis on rationalism and their insistence on finding a positive proof for every truth which they accept, have also reaped the result of their own ideas. But still they are strong and capable of mastering the feeling which arises within them. But, Arnold goes on

This for our wisest: and we others pine,
And wish the long unhappy dream would end,
And waive all claim to bliss, and try to bear,
With close-lipp'd Patience for our only friend,
Sad Patience, too near neighbor to Despair:
But none has hope like thine.\(^18\)

Matthew Arnold refers again to the effect of the times in his

\(^{17}\) Ibid., ll. 170 - 179.

\(^{18}\) Ibid., ll. 191 - 196.
tribute to Arthur Clough, perhaps his closest friend. Clough could not endure the turmoil and unrest and died an untimely death.

Some life of men unblest
He knew, which made him droop, and fill'd his head. He went; his piping took a troubled sound
Of storms that rage outside our happy ground; He could not wait their passing, he is dead!\(^{19}\)

Arnold himself was a profoundly troubled man. He had no belief and was honest enough to admit it; but he was likewise serious enough to know by bitter experience that it is hard to live in this way. Only his loyalty to his own dignity as a human being kept him from seeking self-oblivion in blind activity. To him society seemed dead and its motives sordid. In vain did he seek relief from all this. Probably in no place is there a better expression of the difficulties which confronted the poet and of the resulting distress and mental turmoil than is found in "Empedocles on Etna." Here Arnold was able

... to express, on the lips of Empedocles, the problems which confronted him in his own time, to tell with a certain passion how he felt concerning them, to relieve his heart by giving words to the profound discouragement and confusion into which they put his soul, and to suggest what means of escape from their tyranny occurred to him.\(^{20}\)

Empedocles, whose melancholy state borders on madness, laments the sad condition of man in a long conversation with Pausanias.

\(^{19}\) "Thyrsis," ll. 46 - 50.

\(^{20}\) Brooke, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 70.
According to him, God created the soul of man and then left it to be blown hither and thither by the ever-changing winds of popular conflicting ideas.

The out-spread world to span
A cord the Gods first slung,
And then the soul of man
There, like a mirror, hung,
And bade the winds through space impel the gusty toy.

Hither and thither spins
The wind-borne, mirroring soul,
A thousand glimpses wins,
And never sees a whole;

Looks once, and drives elsewhere, and leaves its last employ.

The Gods laugh in their sleeve
To watch man doubt and fear,
Who knows not what to believe
Since he sees nothing clear,
And dares stamp nothing false where he finds nothing sure.21

The burden of this uncertainty is almost too much for any man to bear, and Empedocles, as well as Arnold, seeks some cure.

And we feel, day and night,
The burden of ourselves —
Well, then, the wiser wight
In his own bosom delves,
And asks what ails him so, and gets what cure he can.

The sophist sneers: Fool, take
Thy pleasure, right or wrong.
The pious wail: Forsake
A world these sophists throng.
Be neither saint nor sophist-led, but be a man!

These hundred doctors try
To preach thee to their school

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21 "Empedocles on Etna," ll. 242 - 257.
We have the truth! they cry;
And yet their oracle,
Trumpet it as they will, is but the same as thine. 22

The answer to man's dissatisfaction and want of ease is not difficult — he simply refuses to accept his lot, to realize that he has "no right to bliss," and to submit to the will of the gods.

We would have inward peace,
Yet will not look within;
We would have misery cease,
Yet will not cease from sin;
We want all pleasant ends, but will use no harsh means;

We do not what we ought,
What we ought not, we do,
And lean upon the thought
That chance will bring us through;
But our own acts, for good or ill, are mightier powers. 23

When man's lot is contrary to his liking or when he is unable to cope with his difficulties, he rails against the gods and Fate, and thus exonerates himself. At other times man reverses the order and imagines "kind Gods who perfect what man vainly tries."

So it is that man studies, for example, science until he reaches a point from which he can go no farther.

We rest our faculties
And thus address the Gods:
True science if there is
It stays in your abodes!
Man's measures cannot mete the immeasurable All. 24

22 Ibid., ll. 293 - 207.
23 Ibid., ll. 398 - 407.
24 Ibid., ll. 443 - 447.
And as he grows still more weary he finally addresses the gods with a last sad plea.

The world hath fail'd to impart
The joy our youth forebodes,
Fail'd to fill up the void which in our breasts we bear.

Changeful till now, we still
Look'd on to something new;
Let us, with changeless will,
Henceforth look on to you,
To find with you the joy we in vain here require.  

Through all of this can be seen Arnold's own mental and religious confusion. In his heart dwelled the desire for happiness and relative certainty which resides in the heart of every man. With Empedocles he tried to explain the means by which he sought to satisfy his desire, the circumstances which prevented his success, and the weariness which was the inevitable result. He felt the need of the "white star of Truth" which had been purged from his soul, and he could not find it. A realization of this caused Chapman to write,

... it is doubtful if any two poets besides Arnold and Clough of their century better illustrate the vital connection between literature and religion, or bear more unimpeachable testimony to the fact that, however poetry may seem to regard the forms of faith, it can never get on for very long without faith's essence. No candid reader of their writings is likely to deny that religion was a paramount concern of both and a chief source of inspiration in their work.  

25 Ibid., 11. 480 - 487.

Even the part played by science in Arnold's loss of faith and subsequent spiritual breakdown is brought to the foreground in "Empedocles on Etna." But here the parallel between Empedocles and Arnold must be concluded. Empedocles solved his problem by suicide; Arnold never resorted to such a means of escape; such a conclusion of the drama would suggest that Arnold thought of this as a possible solution to his own difficulty. With the passing of the years, though, he developed an attitude of stoical acceptance. Because of this, no doubt, he suppressed the poem for several years, for "Empedocles on Etna" is a painful portrayal of a painful condition of soul. In summing up a discussion of the poem, Hutton says,

What alone renders all the delineation of spiritual bewilderment which pervades the poem endurable, is that there is a steady current of resistance, a uniform "sanity" of self-control in the treatment of the painful symptoms so subtly described. Empedocles, in the course of his meditation on suicide on the slopes of Etna, no doubt dwells much on the feeble and false religious philosophy of the time, the credulous self-flatteries of human sophistry, and the sharp antagonism between clear self-knowledge and the superstitions of the age; but he also makes a vigorous appeal to the manli-ness, fortitude, and sobriety of spirit with which all the disappointments and failures of humanity ought to be met, asserts that it is the part of a man of true wisdom to curb immoderate desires, to bow to the might of forces he cannot control, and, while nursing no "extravagant hope," to yield to no despair.27

27 Hutton, op. cit., p. 318.
Thus it was that Arnold acted. Yet in no other poem did he come as close to despair as he did in this early work. From then on his works express melancholy, uncertainty, and skepticism, but never complete hopelessness. A kind of weariness clouds his life and finds expression in his poetry.

In "Youth's Agitations," one of his earlier poems, Arnold considers the possibility of his being more happy as he grows older. Immediately he represses the idea and sighs "that one thing only has been lent to youth and age in common — discontent." Hope and buoyancy had disappeared from his life and he had assumed an attitude of apathetic indifference. Consequently his poetry is dreary from the tone of dissatisfaction. In "Consolation" he writes

Mist clogs the sunshine.  
Smoky dwarf houses  
Hem me round everywhere;  
A vague dejection  
Weighs down my soul.  

At another time the contrast between the peace of Kensington Gardens and the turmoil of his own soul caused the poet to write,

In the huge world, which roars hard by,  
Be others happy if they can!  
But in my helpless cradle I  
Was breathed on by the rural Pan.  

I, on men's impious uproar hurl'd,  
Think often, as I hear them rave,  
That peace has left the upper world  
And now keeps only in the grave.  

28 "Consolation," ll. 1 - 5.  
Again melancholy restlessness permeates the whole of "The Buried Life." It opens with a direct expression of a sadness from which there is no relief.

\[
\text{Light flows our war of mocking words, and yet,}
\text{Behold, with tears mine eyes are wet!}
\text{I feel a nameless sadness o'er me roll.}
\text{Yes, yes, we know that we can jest,}
\text{We know, we know that we can smile!}
\text{But there's a something in this breast}
\text{To which thy light words bring no rest,}
\text{And thy gay smiles no anodyne.}^{30}
\]

Going on he gives the reason for this sadness — the old uncertainty. Fate, seeing that man would be distracted from following the correct course of life

\[
\text{Bade through deep recesses of our breast}
\text{The unregarded river of our life}
\text{Pursue with indiscernible flow its way;}
\]

\[
\text{And that we should not see}
\text{The buried stream, and seem to be}
\text{Eddying at large in blind uncertainty}
\text{Though driving on with it eternally.}^{31}
\]

Of course, rational man could not be satisfied to pursue a blind course. At least Arnold could not. And consequently —

\[
\text{But often, the world's most crowded streets,}
\text{But often, in the din of strife,}
\text{There rises an unspeakable desire}
\text{After the knowledge of our buried life;}
\text{A thirst to spend our fire and restless force}
\text{In tracking out our true, original course;}
\]

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31 Ibid., ll. 38 - 44.
A longing to inquire
Into the mystery of this heart which beats
So wild, so deep in us — to know
Whence our lives come and where they go.32

Nevertheless, it scarcely ever happens that anyone delves deep enough to learn the correct answer. Hence the nameless feelings "course on forever unexpress'd."

Yet still, from time to time, vague and forlorn,
From the soul's subterranean depth upborne
As from an infinitely distant land,
Come airs, and floating echoes, and convey
A melancholy into all our day.33

Often Arnold with a kind of sigh breathes out the reason for his deep dejection — regret for the loss of faith and longing for the early Christian days.

Through all his poems there runs, in mournful and touching undertone, a note of deep regret. His sympathetic insight into many phases of past thought has often proved perplexing to his readers. Himself no Christian, he wrote most tenderly and wistfully of the early Christian days. Most modern of moderns, he identified himself in a common loss with the strictest medieval order. He reproduced for us, with a heart on flame, the cold and statuesque nobility of the Hellenic world. To all this paradox the answer stands plain. He turned back yearningly to each and all of these phases; for in all alike he found what he missed and lamented in himself — a faith that was clear and a life that was serene.34

32 Ibid., ll. 45 - 54.
33 Ibid., ll. 72 - 76.
"The Future," for instance, portrays man as a wanderer on the river of Time, with the ability to know and think only of what he sees. Of objects other than these, particularly those of the supernatural world, he can have no correct conception.

What bard,
At the height of his vision, can deem
Of God, of the world, of the soul,
With a plainness as near,
As flashing as Moses felt
When he lay in the night by his flock
On the starlit Arabian waste?35

For this faith would be required — the ability to believe what cannot be seen — and this was now a thing of the past.

Gone is the calm of its earlier shore.
Border'd by cities and hoarse
With a thousand cries is its stream
And we on its breast, our minds
Are confused as the cries which we hear,
Changing and shot as the sights which we see.

And we say that repose has fled
Forever the course of the river of Time.36

A later poem, "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse," expresses an even greater longing for the faith of old. The setting of the poem is an old abandoned Carthusian monastery situated high up in the Alps. As Arnold views in imagination the scene as it was in earlier days, he sinks into a reverie, from which he rouses at length with an agonizing cry of regret. He is wandering between

35 "The Future," ll. 41 - 47.
36 Ibid., ll. 52 - 59.
two worlds — the old world of faith and the newer one of reason
-- and he feels utterly helpless.

Wandering between two worlds, one dead,
The other powerless to be born,
With nowhere yet to rest my head,
Like these, on earth I wait forlorn.
Their faith, my tears, the world deride --
I come to shed them at their side.

Oh, hide me in your gloom profound,
Ye solemn seats of holy pain!
Take me, cowl'd forms, and fence me round,
Till I possess by soul again;
Till free my thoughts before me roll,
Not chafed by hourly false control. 37

Going on he tells of the melancholy and restlessness which have
taken possession of him, and which he is powerless to throw off,
and he pleads for help.

For the world cries your faith is now
But a dead Time's exploded dream;
My melancholy, sciolists vow,
Is a pass'd mode, an outworn theme --
As if the world had ever had
A faith, or sciolists been sad!

Ah, if it be pass'd, take away,
At least, the restlessness, the pain;
Be man henceforth no more a prey
To these out-dated stings again. 38

A very good summary of the significance of this poem is given by
Tinker and Lowry.

The Grande Chartreuse is but the symbol of a
thought and belief which for him is no longer
possible. In the back of his mind is, not the

37 "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse," ll. 85 - 96.
38 Ibid., ll. 97 - 106.
Chartreuse, but Rugby Chapel, with Dr. Arnold, and St. Mary's at Oxford, with Newman, "gliding in —" . . . The whole poem should, in fact, be read with the background of the Oxford Movement in mind. It embodies Arnold's opinion of the ecclesiastical tendencies of the day and, in particular, of that which directed attention back to the ancient institutions and practices of the Church. These the poet regards as extinct. He is even incapable of believing that their adherents can defend their faith as intellectually acceptable in modern times. He is between two worlds, one dead the other powerless to be born.39

The clearest expression of his regret for a lost faith is contained in "Dover Beach." In this poem he mournfully gives expression to a wistful yearning for some impossible shore, an agitated stretching out for something beyond. The calm beauty of the sea as the waves break against the shore brings "the eternal note of sadness in." This, to Arnold, is a picture of the condition of the world; the tide is a symbol of the Sea of Faith, once strong and full. Just as the tide, so the Sea of Faith was once full — encircling the whole world. As the tide recedes, so Faith had weakened and withdrawn leaving man without hope, for the world "Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light."

The Sea of Faith  
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore  
But now I only hear  
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,

Retreating, to the breath
Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world. 40

These lines bring out again the writer's religious cravings; they could have been written only by a profoundly religious man, albeit a man whose religious yearnings had been forever disappointed. 41

A deep understanding of Arnold's state of mind seems to be common among his critics. Houston, for example, writes,

Arnold's basic appeal to the modern reader rests upon the relation to the Time-spirit of contemporary life which the bulk of his verse bears. As the wind of material science blew across the old orthodox belief in God and Providence, taking away the traditional faith and offering a poor substitute of evolutionary progress in its place, Arnold felt himself suddenly set adrift in a world of lost faiths and blind desire. His intellectual fibre was too tough to allow him to compromise with what he knew to be but a reliance upon a reed and too fearless to join with the Tractarians in their blind rejection of the obvious fact; yet he expressed a poignant regret at the loss of the faith and the impossibility of accepting the new philosophy of science with its alluring appeal . . . Arnold manfully faces the new age, as his later social studies will prove, but he cannot look back upon the earlier peace of spiritual assurance as something for which there can be no compensation. 42

With Him disbelief does not involve antagonism. Rather his attitude is one of passive sympathy for a faith which he does not have.

40 "Dover Beach," ll. 21 - 28.
Hence in his poems skeptical questioning alternates with spiritual 
yearning after faith and peace. Envy of one who believed is the 
predominant tone of "East London." Chancing to meet a preacher 
whom he knew, Arnold asked him how he was faring. With enthusiasm 
the man answered, "Bravely! for I of late have been much cheer'd 
with thoughts of Christ, the living bread." Arnold then lapses 
into a short soliloquy.

O human soul! as long as thou canst so
Set up a mark of everlasting light,
Above the howling senses' ebb and flow,

To cheer thee, and to right thee if thou roam
Not with lost toil thou labourest through the night,
Thou mak'st the heaven thou hop'st indeed thy home.

Arnold's own hope for a home in heaven was fluctuating. At 
times he expressed an unquestioning belief in life after death; at 
other times he was not so certain. In one of his earliest poems 
addressed to a Republican friend, he speaks of the day of death 
when man will stand face to face with God.

Nor will that day dawn at a human nod,
When bursting through the network superposed
By selfish occupation -- plot and plan,

Lust, avarice, envy -- liberated man,
All difference with his fellow-mortal closed,
Shall be left standing face to face with God.

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43 William A. Sibbald, "Matthew Arnold as a Popular Poet," 


45 "To a Republican Friend," ll. 9 – 14.
Another poem written in the same year questions what life after
death will be like. Life on earth is a succession of joy and sor-
row.

Joy comes and goes, hope ebbs and flows
   Like the wave;
Change doth unknit the tranquil strength of men.
   Love lends life a little grace,
   A few sad smiles; and then,
   Both are laid in one cold place,
      In the grave.46

But then follows the important question. Man buries his hopes,
and leaves behind his doubts and fears, but to what does he go?

   Do we go hence and find they are not dead?
      Joys we dimly apprehend,
      Faces that smiled and fled,
      Hopes born here, and born to end,
         Shall we follow?47

Arnold does not know. The uncertainty is even stronger in a poem
written a little later, in which he questions the very existence
of an end after life.

      Ah! some power exists there, which is ours?
      Some end is there, we indeed may gain?48

A poem written in 1867 refers to death merely as the beginning of
a long period of calm. Arnold wonders, though, if this is a de-
sirable end.

47 Ibid., ll. 17 - 21.
But is a calm like this, in truth,  
The crowning end of life and youth,  
And when this boon rewards the dead,  
Are all debts paid, has all been said?  

He does not think so himself; for although calm is a worthwhile  
good in itself, it cannot be life's crown. "Immortality" gives  
the nearest to a correct conception of life after death, and the  
view expressed here is so hazy that it could not have inspired  
much hope in Arnold.

Foiled by our fellow-men, depress'd, outworn,  
We leave the brutal world to take its way,  
And, Patience! in another life, we say,  
The world shall be thrust down, and we upborne.  

But whether or not he would enter into this other life, Arnold was  
very doubtful.

... only he,  
His soul well-knit, and all battles won,  
Mounts, and that hardly, to eternal life.  

It is not surprising that Matthew Arnold was a deeply troubled man.  
He was suffering in life and had no certainty of anything bet-  
ter after death. Hutton believed that Arnold had no confidence  
in the promise of immortality. To him this would have been  

49 "Youth and Calm," ll. 5 - 8.  
51 Ibid., ll. 12 - 14.  
52 Richard Holt Hutton, Essays on Some of the Modern Guides of  
English Thought in Matters of Faith (London: Macmillan and Company,  
1887), p. 120.
'Aberglaube," belief in excess of evidence. As grounds for this opinion he cites,

Stern law of every mortal lot! death
Which man, proud man, finds hard to bear,
And builds himself I know not what
Of second life I know not where.53

Not positive disbelief, but the ever-recurring doubt and skepticism.

In this Arnold was one with many other earnest seekers of Truth. The old foundations of religious life having been undermined, he felt compelled to relinquish his belief in an authoritative religion. Yet unwilling to resign his religious convictions, he passionately yearned for some firmer basis upon which to rest his belief in "the great spiritual realities of the unseen world."54

Inevitably a discussion of Matthew Arnold's religion must be concerned with what he did not believe rather than with what he believed. It is difficult to determine from his poetry whether or not he was really a Christian.

On this subject dogma, Matthew Arnold is liberal enough. Nowhere does he plainly declare himself a Christian, and we cannot always be sure of the meaning he attaches to the word "God." He uses the word frequently; but he may use it in a signification which is not by any means Christian, nor even religious in the sectarian sense.

... In one place we have a plain statement of sympathy with a Christian definition, but you

53 "Geist's Grave," ll. 29 - 32.

54 Ann Swanwick, Poets the Interpreters of Their Age (London: Bell and Sons, 1892), p. 370.
must not suppose this sympathy to mean that the poet accepts the definition in the original meaning.55

This one place referred to by Hearn is in the sonnet, "The Divinity," where Arnold writes,

'Tis God himself becomes apparent, when
God's wisdom and God's goodness are display'd

For God of these attributes is made.56

The lines quoted Arnold attributes to Saint Bernard whom he apparently supports. However, as the critic points out, one cannot be certain that Arnold is Christian, even in this.

Among his poems are lines which indicate that he at least questioned the Divinity of Christ. In "The Better Part," he answers the one who says that Christ was merely human — not by refuting the assertion, but by suggesting how to conform life to this possibility. With a regretful longing for the days past when Christ lived on earth, Arnold practically denies the divinity of Christ in "Obermann Once More." Life in the days of Christ would not have been lonely for then one could have gazed upon the Mother and her Child — received advice and encouragement from them. As Arnold says,

Oh, had I lived in that great day,
How had its glory new

56 "The Divinity," ll. 3 - 5.
Fill'd earth and heaven, and caught away
My ravish'd spirit too.

No thoughts that to the world belong
Had stood against the wave
Of love which set so deep and strong
From Christ's then open grave. 57

But Alas! it is too late for him to receive help here.

Now he is dead! Far hence he lies
In the lorn Syrian town;
And on his grave, with shining eyes,
The Syrian stars look down.

In vain men still, with hoping new,
Regard his death-place dumb,
And say the stone is not yet to,
And wait for words to come. 58

And what must man do now that Christ is dead and can no longer offer any help?

Unduped of fancy, henceforth man
Must labour! -- must resign
His all too human creeds, and scan
Simply the way divine! 59

These lines certainly seem to indicate that Arnold had no belief in Christ's way of life -- hence no belief that Christ is divine. At any rate he was unquestionably in a state of doubt. He wishes to believe many things which he cannot prove and which he is convinced can never be proved.

Throughout his poetry, Arnold is affected by the age in which

58 Ibid., ll. 173 - 180.
59 Ibid., ll. 185 - 188.
he lived.

He condenses its spirit into concrete utterance, he interprets its truest yearnings, he catches the meaning of its deepest need, and so holds the mirror up to its inmost nature, that in him coming generations recognize the true index to its character. 60

The tone of his poetry is the result of his conviction that he is fighting a battle which can hardly be won. He is, in a sense, benumbed by the spirit of his age — almost crushed beneath the burden of life. Nevertheless, he carries on striving incessantly to find some means whereby to bear the burden more easily.

His poetry is virtually the confession that his culture has failed. In him the personal note is supreme; it is the problem of his own life which fascinates us. He can strike chords of great power and sweetness, and sometimes of deep tenderness, but he is greatest as a poet when he expresses his own heartfelt mournfulness and yearning. The two worlds he stands between are the old world of faith which is dead, and the new world of culture which is "powerless to be born." He cannot disguise the fact that his culture has failed to satisfy him. In one of his most notable poems, which perhaps, more than any other, distils the very essence of the disturbed religious spirit of the age, he cries with an exceeding bitter cry after that Cross which he has declared a vanished myth, and that assured creed which he has dismissed as a beautiful imposture. He confesses the cruel conflict that is within him, the devoutness which has survived his doubts, the religious yearnings which are not quenched by his denials. In this respect his position is unique: he sings as one believing in his unbelief, and he is only saved from utter

despair by this devoutness which he has not dared to destroy. But beyond that, the most memorable feature of his poetry is its acknowledgment — wrung from him rather than confessed — that his lack of faith has sapped the very sources of his thought, and that culture in its utmost beauty and refinement has proved itself but shifting sand when the storms have beaten and the winds of trouble blown.61

So it is that Arnold's poetry is the troubled expression of a troubled soul. His dissatisfaction with the world in which he lived remained only that. He was never able to effect any improvement, nor even to master the undesirable in his own soul. The prevalent intellectualism and the liberalism in his education deprived him of faith — faith in God, faith in an after-life, and faith in established religion. An agnostic for many years, he doubted the divinity of Christ and denied the loving care of a Providential Being. As a natural consequence, Arnold questioned the immortality of the soul and the possibility of a happier life after death. He regretted that belief in an established religion was no longer possible for him, and he longed for an answer to all his doubts and questions which acceptance of a dogmatic religion would give. Instead on every side he encountered teachings and theories (especially those of science) which served to aggravate his mental and spiritual difficulties. A permanent feeling of

61 Ibid., p. 136
melancholy eventually took hold of him and in his poetry it is this tone which predominates. Because his emotion and religion were so intimately connected, his poetry is best when his theme is religious. Attempts to restrain this natural expression of his innermost sentiments are also evident in his poetry, and the results of these endeavors will be discussed in the following chapter.
CHAPTER V

RESULTS OF THE RELIGIOUS CONFLICT EVIDENT IN HIS POETRY

No man could endure indefinitely the mental pain and torment with which Matthew Arnold was afflicted. If he had had a strong trust in God and a faith which would have enabled him to consider the period of darkness as a trial sent by an all-loving Father, he could, perhaps, have accepted the sorrow willingly. But he did not have this trust and faith. Had he been more cowardly, he might have sought relief in self-destruction. Neither in this, however, did he find an answer to his difficulty. One must look farther to find the solution of his spiritual struggle — to the same place where the religious unrest is evident — to his poetry. This reveals two principal results: 1. a release from himself, either in a return to the ancient classical stories or in an escape to the beauty and peace of nature, and 2. a stoical endurance of pain. It is difficult to say which is more important, although it is interesting to note that his earlier works show the tendency to escape, whereas the later ones show more of the stoical quality.

The effect of the classics is shown in different ways. Sometimes in writing a classical story or one based on classical characters, Arnold makes no reference whatsoever to religion. He is merely attempting to forget himself. This is seen in "Sohrab and Rustum," although even in this the unlucky fate ordained by the gods is not pleasant. Again in "The Sick King of Bokhara," "The Strayed Reveller," "Tristram and Iseult," and "Balder Dead" the
weary, self-inquiring, self-controlling Arnold does not appear. These poems serve merely as an escape.

Others, however, are more closely connected with Arnold's spiritual unrest. They show the contrast between the moral peace of the classics and the turbulence in Arnold's own soul — show Arnold's longing for a similar peace and restfulness.

Two themes run through Arnold's poetry; the Greek ideal of serenity as seen for example in his favourite Sophocles "who saw life steadily and saw it whole;" and a profound and melancholy conviction that such serenity is impossible to one who is truly alive to the facts of modern life.

An early poem of this kind is "Epilogue to Lessing's Laocoon." It tells of a conversation between Arnold and a friend who were discussing the relative value of art, music, and literature in their power "to soothe our pains." After a long interchange of comments, Arnold concludes in favor of the ancient writers — Homer, of the classical writers, being specifically mentioned.

They speak the happiness divine
They feel, runs o'er in every line;
Its spell is round them like a shower —
It gives them pathos, gives them power.
No painter yet hath such a way,
Nor no musician made as they,
And gather'd on immortal knolls
Such lovely flowers for cheering souls.
Beethoven, Raphael, cannot reach
The charm which Homer, Shakespeare teach.


2 "Epilogue to Lessing's Laocoon," ll. 298 - 317.
"Palladium," a poem of a different kind, also compares a classical situation with a modern one. Just as the Palladium stood high, majestic, and unnoticed above the place where the Trojan war was being fought, so the soul of man is often alone and forgotten while he struggles on through life.

Then we shall rust in shade, or shine in strife,
And fluctuate 'twixt blind hopes and blind despairs,
And fancy that we put forth all our life,
And never know how with the soul it fares.

Still doth the soul, from its lone fastness high,
Upon our life a ruling effluence send.3

Among all classical influences, Sophocles is, by far, the most important. During Arnold's student days he had grown familiar with all that is worthwhile in early literature, but Sophocles seems to have been his favorite. Of the Greek poet he says,

... But be his
My special thanks, whose even-balanced soul,
From first youth tested up to extreme old age,
Business could not make dull, nor passion wild;
Who saw life steadily, and saw it whole.4

Perhaps it was Arnold's melancholy longing to see "life steadily" that interested him in Sophocles; perhaps it was the feeling of a kindred spirit that made him turn to the Greek. At any rate in "Dover Beach," that poem in which he expresses so clearly his longing for a faith that is gone, Arnold turns to Sophocles and parallels his own thoughts with those of the classical writer. After

3 "Palladium," ll. 20 - 25.
4 "To a Friend," ll. 8 - 12.
describing the mournful sound of the sea as the waves dash against
the cliffs, he refers to his favorite.

Sophocles long ago
Heard it on the Aegean, and it brought
Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow
Of human misery; we
Find also in the sound a thought,
Hearing it by this distant northern sea.\(^5\)

Although there are in Arnold's poetry many other references to
Greek literature, these examples will suffice to show that there
is a relationship between his own religious difficulties and the
prominence of classical allusions in his poetry.

Even more important, though, as a means of escape is Arnold's
use of Nature. Desiring some assuagement of intellectual unrest
and moral perplexities, he turns to Nature. He does not find in
her the key to any of life's mysteries or the source of hope, but
only the best kind of distraction. While it does not relax but
rather elevates the tone of the spirit, it does, by its cooling
and refreshing influence, furnish a certain number of symbols for
his thought and emotion.\(^6\) Most critics agree that Arnold was in-
debted to Wordsworth for his love and use of Nature. The two poets
are most closely related in their recognition of the "intimate re-
relationship between man and the external world, and of that soothing
and elevating influence on the human spirit of communion with

\(^5\) "Dover Beach," ll. 15 - 20.

\(^6\) Richard Holt Hutton, *Literary Essays* (London: Macmillan and
Nature. In tone, however, the two poets are very dissimilar. Wordsworth spiritualizes nature; Arnold, in keeping with his own disquieted spirit, gives an intellectual presentation. His inspiration is emotional and intellectual rather than spiritual — "A lyrical impulse which reflects the soul's inquietude at being driven back upon itself and forced by mental convictions to relinquish what had once been so precious." Walker contrasts the two poets in these words:

Among English poets the man to whom Arnold was most indebted was Wordsworth; ... As a student and lover of nature he followed Wordsworth, but his method and his results in some respects differ widely from those of his master. He has Wordsworth's calm, but neither his cheerfulness nor his detachment. Wordsworth lives and thinks with the hills for his sole companions, but Arnold never rests in nature alone. For the steady optimism of Wordsworth there is substituted in Arnold the sense that a destiny so rarely yielding great results as the life of man,

"Though bearable, seems hardly worth
This pomp of worlds, this pain of birth."

In general Wordsworth's nature was a satisfied one; that of his follower, an intensified one. So many influences met and pulled Arnold in such divers ways that he was never able to attain

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Wordsworth's calm and exaltation of soul. Where Wordsworth went about with deep exultation in his heart, Arnold possessed only an exalted compassion and a serene fortitude. Where Wordsworth said, "Rejoice," Arnold says, "Endure."  

One of Arnold's earliest poems, "Quiet Work," pleads with Nature to teach him one lesson, that "Of toil unsever'd from tranquility!" He is weary of the "thousand discords" which ring, of "man's fitful uproar," and of his "vain turmoil," and begs Nature to help him learn peace. A desire of calmness of soul is the theme of "Self-Dependence." Weary of ceaseless questionings, he asks the sea to calm him.

Weary of myself, and sick of asking
What I am, and what I ought to be,
At this vessel's prow I stand, which bears me
Forwards, forwards, o'er the starlit sea.

And a look of passionate desire
O'er the sea and to the stars I send:
"Ye who from my childhood up have calm'd me
Calm me, ah, compose me to the end!"

Ah, once more, I cried, "Ye stars, ye waters,
On my heart your mighty charm renew;
Still, still let me, as I gaze upon you,
Feel my soul becoming vast like you!"

"A Southern Night" contrasts the beauty and serenity of a

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"moon-blanch'd night" with the sadness and restlessness of Arnold's heart. After two picturesque stanzas in which Arnold describes the fairness of the night,

... the calm moonlight seems to say:
Hast thou then still the unquiet breast,
Which neither deadens into rest,
Nor ever feels the fiery glow
That whirls the spirit from itself away,
But fluctuates to and fro,
Never by passion quite possess'd
And never quite benumbed by the world's sway.\textsuperscript{13}

Arnold then states his own problem.

And I, I know not if to pray
Still to be what I am or yield, and be
Like all the other men I see.\textsuperscript{14}

To him the life of other men is one of two things — slavery to an unmeaning task work, whose result is that "Gloom settles slowly down over their breast," or a vain effort to escape into a new field of adventure, only to perish while seeking "for some false impossible shore." Only Nature, of course, can lift man above this hopeless fate.

But I will rather say that you remain
A world above man's head, to let him see
How boundless might his soul's horizons be,
How vast, yet of what clear transparency!
How it were good to abide there, and breathe free.\textsuperscript{15}

Arnold feels that Nature is the great restorer for the human heart

\textsuperscript{13} "A Summer Night," ll. 26 - 33.
\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Ibid.}, ll. 34 - 36.
\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Ibid.}, ll. 86 - 90.
disturbed by unsatisfied cravings. Whether he wanders through the
Lake country, parts from Marguerite in the Alps, or floats along
the Rhine, Nature has but one tale to tell him — that of quiet
peace. 16

As was mentioned in the previous chapter, "Lines Written in
Kensington Gardens" shows Arnold's unhappiness. Likewise it shows
his effort to secure peace from the tranquillity of Nature. In a
plea addressed to Nature he says,

Calm soul of all things! make it mine
To feel, amid the city's jar,
That there abides a peace of thine,
Man did not make, and cannot mar.

The will to neither strive nor cry!
The power to feel with others give!
Calm, calm me more! nor let me die
Before I have begun to live. 17

In "The Scholar Gipsy" Arnold expresses his belief that those
who live close to Nature will not lose their faith and hope, will
not contract the disease of modern life, will not become like him.
He tells the Scholar Gipsy to fly from all contact with modern so-
ciety and so retain his happiness.

Still nursing the unconquerable hope,
Still clutching the inviolable shade,
With a free, onward impulse brushing through,
By night, the silver'd branches of the glade —
Far on the forest-skirts, where none pursue,
On some mild pastoral slope

16 Lucy Allen Paton, "A Bit of Art from Matthew Arnold,"
Post-Lore, 8: 137 (1896).
17 "Lines Written in Kensington Gardens," ll. 37 - 44.
Emerge, and resting on the moonlit pales
Freshen thy flowers as in former years
With dew, or listen with enchanted ears,
From the dark dingles, to the nightingales!\textsuperscript{18}

If he does not flee he will suffer the same mental affliction, loss of hope, and unhappiness with which Arnold was troubled.

But fly our paths, our feverish contact fly!
For strong the infection of our mental strife,
Which, though it gives no bliss, yet spoils for rest;
And we should win thee from thy own fair life,
Like us distracted, and like us unblest.

Soon, soon thy cheer would die,
Thy hopes grow timorous, and unfix'd thy powers,
And thy clear aims be cross and shifting made;
And then thy glad perennial youth would fade,
Fade, and grow old at last, and die like ours.\textsuperscript{19}

Cause and effect are reversed in "Dover Beach." The calmness of the sea and the tranquillity of the night sea awaken in the poet the melancholy regret over a lost faith — a poignant memory of a time when the "Sea of Faith" was full and life was peaceful and happy. From all this one can readily see that Arnold's attitude towards Nature is distinctive. He never, like Shelley, ascribes to natural forces the emotions of his restless soul; yet he never loses the consciousness of self. The contemplative and impersonal rapture of Wordsworth is never found in Arnold. At all times he remains aloof, an unimpassioned spectator, noting every detail,

\textsuperscript{18} "The Scholar Gipsy," ll. 211 – 220.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., ll. 221 – 230.
but feeling keenly that there is between his life and the life of Nature a great gulf. 20

"On the Rhine" is another poem in which Arnold praises the calm of Nature and longs to share it.

Awhile let me with thought have done.
And as this brimm'd unwrinkled Rhine,
And that far purple mountain-line,
Lie sweetly in the look divine
Of the slow-sinking sun;
So let me die.

Ah, Quiet, all things feel thy balm!
Those blue hills too, this river's flow,
Were restless once, but long ago.
Tamed is their turbulent youthful glow;
Their joy is in their calm. 21

Addressing Nature in "The Youth of Man," Arnold praises her constant youth and ever-surviving freshness. Youth may spurn the beauty of Nature, but when youth has grown old, Nature remains the same. May Nature, then, he pleads, breathe her spirit into the human soul and comfort it when trials and pain are its portion.

Murmur of living,
Stir of existence,
Soul of the world!
Make, oh, make yourselves felt
To the dying spirit of youth!
Come, like the breath of spring!

Leave not a human soul
To grow old in darkness and pain!
Only the living can feel you,
But leave us not while we live. 22

"Morality" is another poem which contrasts the serenity of Nature with the gloom that lay over Arnold's soul. Gently Nature chides the troubled soul for its struggling when it, too, should be at peace.

Then, when the clouds are off the soul,
When thou dost bask in Nature's eye,
Ask, how she view'd thy self-control,
Thy struggling, task'd morality —
Nature, whose free, light, cheerful air,
Oft made thee, in thy gloom, despair.

And she, whose censure thou dost dread,
Whose eye thou wast afraid to seek,
See, on her face a glow is spread,
A strong emotion on her cheek!
"Ah! child!" she cries, "that strife divine,
Whence was it, for it is not mine?" 23

The most striking contrast of all is given by Empedocles in his soliloquy on Etna. Addressing the stars he asks them if they, too, are lonely and weary without friend and home. Immediately he answers his own question.

No, no, ye stars! there is no death with you,
No languor, no decay! languor and death,
They are with me, not you! ye are alive —
Ye, and the pure dark ether where ye ride
Brilliant above me! And thou, fiery world,
That sapp'st the vitals of this terrible mount

22 "The Youth of Man," ll. 51 - 60.
Upon whose charr'd and quaking crust I stand --
Thou, too, brimmest with life! -- the sea of cloud
That heaves its white and billowy vapours up
To moat this isle of ashes from the world,
Lives; and that other fainter sea, far down,
O'er whose lit floor a road of moonbeams leads
To Etna's Liparean sister-fires
And the long dusky line of Italy —
That mild and luminous floor of waters lives,
With held-in joy swelling its heart; I only,
Whose spring of hope is dried, whose spirit has fail'd,
I, who have not, like these, in solitude
Maintain'd courage and force, and in myself
Nursed an immortal vigour — I alone
Am dead to life and joy, therefore I read
In all things my own deadness. 24

After a long silence, Empedocles breaks out into a mournful, al-
most hopeless wish, ending in despair

Oh, that I could glow like this mountain!
Oh, that my heart bounded with the swell of the sea!
Oh, that my soul were full of light as the stars!
Oh, that it brooded over the world like the air!

But no, this heart will glow no more; thou art
A living man no more, Empedocles!
Nothing but a devouring flame of thought —
But a naked, eternally restless mind. 25

A better anodyne for the pain of a sick mind, doubting if its life
could be harmonised with the life of the great universe, would be
difficult to find. It solves no problem, lifts no veil, but merely
hushes for a moment the restlessness of his troubled heart. And
this is Arnold's habitual use of Nature — it is an escape "from
restlessness and doubt, a draught in which he can find not joy but

25 Ibid., ll. 914 - 921.
relief, not peace but a sad serenity." Truly, the words of Empedocles give a good picture of Arnold himself. He yearned that his "eternally restless mind" might share in Nature's peace. Vida Scudder summarizes Arnold's use of Nature in these words,

This self-sufficing calm, remote from the passions and interests of man, is felt throughout Arnold's pellucid interpretation of Nature. He sees in her no mere mirror of human experience; she is to him a perpetual example and a silent reproach. To man's restlessness she opposes peace; to his passion, an impersonal coolness; to his wild and ungoverned license, the steadfastness of perfect obedience. In contemplating her the poet does not find a wild inspiration nor an uplifting joy; but he does find a refuge and refreshment in weariness, and, higher yet, a stern and moral power.

One more point still to be considered in a study of the religious element in Matthew Arnold's poetry is his stoical endurance of the mental suffering with which he was afflicted because of his own personal doubt and the skepticism of his age. As has already been mentioned, his "rigorous teachers" took faith from him, forbade the surrender of intellect, and enjoined the facing of all difficulties at whatever cost. A strain of that old pagan stoicism which enabled a man under the sternest dispensation to keep his serenity of soul lay in Arnold. This, without doubt, he owed to his study of Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius. True, there were times

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27 Scudder, op. cit., p. 258 - 259.
28 Sibbald, op. cit., p. 397.
when this stoicism broke down into sadness for himself and the world. As he grew older, however, these times grew fewer, so that by the time he reached the end of his poetical career, the stoical attitude was almost constant.

"Resignation" is one of the first expressions of Arnold's resigned acceptance of whatever happens. The poem opens with a contrast of two types of people. Some there are who say, "To die be given us, or attain." Unwilling are they to put forth effort, to endure difficulties, or to suffer pain without gaining their goal. Others there are whom Arnold considers more praiseworthy.

But milder natures, and more free --
Whom an unblamed serenity
Hath freed from passions, and the state
Of struggle these necessitate;
Whom schooling of the stubborn mind
Hath made, or birth hath found, resign'd --
These mourn not, that their goings pay
Obedience to the passing day.

To Arnold this unresisting submission is the wiser course. Continuing, in words addressed to Fausta, Arnold shows that gipsies, whom they had chanced to meet, accept their lot as it comes without questioning or complaining. The poet, a far more sensitive man, lives a richer, fuller life; but he, too, must be content to accept events as they come and not to expect joy. Eventually all things will fit into one harmonious whole. As he concludes,

29 "Resignation," ll. 22 - 29.
Enough, we live! and if a life,
With large results so little rife,
Though bearable, seem hardly worth
This pomp of worlds, this pain of birth;
Yet, Fausta, the mute turf we tread,
The solemn hills around us spread,
This stream which falls incessantly,
The strange-scrawled rocks, the lonely sky,
If I might lend their life a voice
Seem to bear rather than rejoice.30

The poem sets forth as an ideal the resigned attitude by which all events assume their places in a unified and reasonable whole of the universe. If man achieves such a fearless serenity of mind, he will reach the stoical ideal of tranquillity which will enable him to accept the problems of life with an untroubled mind.31

Some of the stern acceptance of an inevitable fate is present in a poem already referred to — "Stanzas in Memory of the Author of Obermann." It was this characteristic which drew Arnold to Senancour.

And then we turn, thou sadder sage,
To thee! we feel thy spell!
— The hopeless tangle of our age,
Thou too hast scann'd it well!

Immoveable thou sittest, still
As death, composed to bear!
Thy head is clear, thy feeling chill,
And icy thy despair.

Yes, as the son of Thetis said,
I hear thee saying now:

30 Ibid., ll. 261 - 270.

31 John Hicks, "The Stoicism of Matthew Arnold," University of Iowa Humanistic Studies, Volume 6, No.1, p. 27.
Greater by far than thou art dead;
Strive not! die also thou! 32

Arnold studied and strove to practice the lesson which Senancour taught and not in vain. At length he reached a point where he thought his teacher would be satisfied.

We, in some unknown Power's employ,
Move on a rigorous line;
Can neither, when we will, enjoy,
Nor, when we will, resign.

I in the world must live: but thou,
Thou melancholy shade!
Wilt not, if thou canst see me now,
Condemn me, nor upbraid. 33

Throughout his poetry one sees that Arnold's strength is largely negative. Because of his own deep hopelessness he cannot goad his readers on to active and joyous effort. His feverish doubt, his vague unrest, and his intense yearning, he meets with repression. 34 There is no relief from it to be expected in this life.

Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! for the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night. 35

32 "Stanzas in Memory of the Author of Obermann," ll. 81 - 92.
33 Ibid., ll. 133 - 140.
35 "Dover Beach," ll. 29 - 37.
One must simply endure what one can do nothing to change — can do nothing because there is nothing to be done.

For some, hope is possible, but not for Arnold. Lines quoted before in another connection are also apropos here.

This for our wisest! and we others pine,
And wish the long unhappy dream would end,
And waive all claim to bliss, and try to bear;
With close-lipp'd patience for our only friend,
Sad patience, too near neighbor to despair —36

Arnold finds great difficulty in maintaining his attitude of "close-lipp'd patience," and expresses his need for help. He begs Thyrsis,

Let in thy voice a whisper often come,
To chase fatigue and fear:
Why faintest thou? I wander'd till I died.
Roam on! The light we sought is shining still.37

"Memorial Verses," too, expresses his need for help — the help which formerly he received from Goethe and Wordsworth. But they are gone. Nevertheless he still expects to receive help.

Others will teach us how to dare,
And against fear our breast to still;
Others will strengthen us how to bear.

An unusual expression of Arnold's admiration for stoical endurance of suffering is contained in a poem inspired by the sight of a poor little gipsy child. He addresses her first, commenting

37 "Thyrsis," ll. 235 - 238.
38 "Memorial Verses," ll. 64 - 66.
on her patience.

But thou, whom superfluity of joy
Wafts not from thine own thoughts, nor longings vain,
Nor weariness, the full-fed soul's annoy —
Remaining in thy hunger and thy pain;

Thou drugging pain by patience; half averse
From thine own mother's breast, that knows not thee;
With eyes which sought thine eyes thou didst converse
And that soul-searching vision fell on me.39

Arnold goes on to say that he has not known gloom so deep as that of the child, but he thinks that her calm suffering enhances and glorifies this earth. He wonders, though, if the child's calm is the same as that of the stoic.

Is the calm thine of stoic souls, who weigh
Life well, and find it wanting, nor deplore;
But in disdainful silence turn away,
Stand mute, self-centered, stern, and dream no more.40

The poet almost envies the child for having acquired a virtue which he is still striving for. When she has "foreknown the vanity of hope," she "yet proceed'st to live." He, too, has lost hope, but he has, in a sense, ceased to live.

Slowly, though, his utter hopelessness passed completely away, and he attained what to him was the only solution to his religious problem — a stoical acceptance of existing conditions which crushed all his natural longing for the old days of faith. Once he had reached this state of mind, his poetical work was completed.

39 "To a Gipsy Child," ll. 9 - 16.
40 Ibid., ll. 29 - 32.
Because he always faced with determination the problems of life and because at the same time his nature was deeply religious, his poetry became, necessarily, the poetry of intellectual doubt and philosophic regret.\textsuperscript{41} In all of his poetry Matthew Arnold was most sincere. Truthfully he reflected the confusion and the pain that surrounds the life of man, the serene and joyous calm wherein moves the life of Nature. From his own agitation and emotion he sought escape in the untroubled calm of self-poise. The result was inevitable. Poetry, regardless of how cold, sustained, or remote, "yet knows emotion for its soul." One who aims to reject emotion can express himself in poetic form only so long as his aim is not perfectly attained. Arnold achieved his desire, and the end was silence. Control had repressed his poetry out of existence.\textsuperscript{42}


\textsuperscript{42} Vida Scudder, \textit{The Life of the Spirit in the Modern English Poets}, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 264.
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APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Sister M. Maristella Wagner 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.

January 15, 1949

Date

[Signature of Adviser]