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The Way of Purgation in the Works of Alice Meynell

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THE WAY OF PURGATION
IN THE WORKS OF
ALICE MEYNELL

BY
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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE MASTER OF ARTS
DEGREE AT LOYOLA UNIVERSITY

1949
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VITA AUCTORIS

Richard Ferdinand Bocklage, son of Richard Ferdinand and Ann Carter Bocklage, was born in St. Louis, Missouri, May 19, 1922. He received his elementary education at St. Ann's parochial school, and his secondary education at St. Louis University High School. He graduated from high school in 1940 and spent the two following years in the employment of the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis. During these two years he also attended the University College of St. Louis University.

In 1942, he entered the Society of Jesus at St. Stanislaus Novitiate, Florissant, Missouri, enrolling, at the same time, in the Arts and Science School of St. Louis University.

In 1946, he was assigned to West Baden College, West Baden, Indiana, to make his philosophical studies. Transferring to Loyola University, he completed his undergraduate work in 1947, and was awarded the Bachelor of Arts degree. In the same year he was registered in the Department of English of Loyola University as a graduate student.
PREFACE

This paper has had necessarily to deal, in passing, with mysticism, and, in a very great part, with asceticism. Both these phases of the flourishing Christian life are deep and profound subjects when treated in their entirety. The author, however, has not had as his intention to investigate the subtleties of either subject. He has accepted as his guide in these subjects treatises designed by their authors for an universality of appeal rather than for a completeness of treatment. This means that the emphasis made by the author of the thesis in treating of these subjects has always been on the universal doctrine accepted by all spiritual writers as fundamental. Chief among the sources for this work has been the Most Reverend Alban Goodier's treatise, Mystical and Ascetical Theology, and that of the Reverend Adolphus Tanquerey, The Spiritual Life.
INTRODUCTION

To many a reviewer and critic the poetic skill of Mrs. Meynell is fitly characterized by the subtle workings of her intellect and the mysticism of her religious spirit. Richard LeGallienne, in a book on the eighteen-nineties, says this about her:

There was the charm of a beautiful abbess about her with the added esprit of her intellectual sophistication.¹

Speaking about modern poetry, Alfred Noyes makes this comment on her poetry:

Twenty lines of these Mrs. Meynell's sonnets outsoar everything bequeathed to us by the earlier Sappho, for they embody a divine passion.²

There is no quarrel with these opinions because they are easily verified in her works. If she is not a mystic comparable to the great mystics of Christianity, she is certainly a mystic to the extent that she was gifted with

² A. Noyes, Some Aspects of Modern Poetry, Stokes, Boston, 1924, 56.
an extraordinary insight into God and the things of God. The term mysticism, however, can cause difficulty in grasping the mysticism of Mrs. Meynell.

The revival of interest in mysticism in modern times might lead to a misunderstanding of the way in which we use the word mysticism, for that type of mysticism so glibly spoken of in modern criticism by literary critics in critical essays of poets like Blake and Wordsworth and others is outside the tradition of Christian mysticism and is not the mysticism of Mrs. Meynell. Her mysticism, that of Christian tradition, is the mysticism of objective truth in which there is direct communion with God. Modern mysticism, on the other hand, is a subjective state, an emotional frame of mind which supports a vague religious belief. The mysticism of Mrs. Meynell, then, is the reality in which the work of God is carried on by God Himself, while the mysticism of the modern is a figment of the mind accepting no authority but its own judgment.

The work of God here on earth, however, is centered in the individual man, and in order that this work be done it becomes necessary that God have man's coopera-
tion. This cooperation on the part of man is Christian asceticism since it requires that a man make an effort towards the completion of God's work. Archbishop Goodier remarks:

Still it is true that asceticism and mysticism may be said to differ from each other in that they are engaged on quite different planes, the first being man's plane, the second the plane of God. One might distinguish them by saying that Ascetical Theology deals more with what a man must himself do that he may attain Spiritual perfection, while Mystical Theology deals more with perfection as it depends on God. ...God does not make a saint of a man without the man's own cooperation: ...3

The same eminent author gives us a basis for the statement that a mystic is not a mystic unless he is also an ascetic. He says:

Certainly in any case the two are concomitant. There is no true mysticism, whatever may be accepted as its definition, without asceticism, taken in the Christian sense, without at least some deep insight into the vision of God.4

And that which Archbishop Goodier states here already has had its own confirmation in the writing and example of

4 Ibid., 4.
holy, christian men, from the early Fathers of the Church to St. John of the Cross and St. Ignatius Loyola.

This quasi-identification of mysticism and asceticism, then, should be the guide to a fuller understanding of the spirit that animates Mrs. Meynell's works. By common acclaim she has incorporated into her work the Christian mystic spirit of her life; and according to Archbishop Goodier she should have along with her mysticism a spirit of asceticism also, and it is a study of Mrs. Meynell's asceticism, as she expresses it in both the theme and style of her poetry, that this thesis intends. Certainly in any case the two are concomitant.5

Critics have commented, in a general way, on Mrs. Meynell's asceticism without expressly calling it asceticism. Francis Thompson, Alfred Noyes, Father Calvert Alexander, S.J., and many others, all have found necessary some word concerning her renouncement, restraint, and silence. This is but commenting upon the ascetic side of Mrs. Meynell's mysticism, "since renunciation is but one expression for mortification,"6 and mortification is the very foundation of any Christian ascetical

5 Ibid., 4
life. St. Ignatius Loyola speaks for all spiritual directors when he says:

To the end that this degree of perfection, so precious in the spiritual life, be better attained, let it be each one's chief and most earnest endeavor in all things, as far as he can, to seek in the Lord his own greater abnegation and continual mortification.7

This study of Mrs. Meynell's asceticism, however, is an attempt to organize those various elements of asceticism found in her works under titles based upon the outlines of the better known writers on the ascetical life, especially the Ascetical and Mystical Theology of Archbishop Goodier.

CHAPTER ONE

EXPRESSIONS OF THE PURGATIVE WAY AND PURIFICATION IN THE POETRY OF MRS. MEYNELL

This mortification which we have pointed out as a fundamental condition of religious life is the very thing that gives substance to many of the thoughts that permeate Mrs. Meynell's literary work. It limits her thought and concentrates attention on the meaning of a definite theme. From this she gets profundity of thought which, in its turn, deepens her appreciation of everything contained in that theme. The subject matter of her poetry, as a consequence, is free from all extraneous matter, and becomes inspirational in its unqualified truthfulness. To retain the truth of the idea to which her mind had pierced, she carries this "lopping off" spirit over into her style. She never uses an extra word. Her sentences are clipped and concise. She is exact and severe in her style but she never loses melody, rhythm, or poetic beauty.

Mortification, however, is but a single subdivision in the broader division of the ascetical life called the Purgative Way. This thesis intends to show the understanding Mrs. Meynell had of penance and mortification. The many evidences of penance and mortification in her
poetry also enable us to indicate the various aspects of these two subjects. The term "Purgative Way" includes both concepts, and gives the goal towards which both are directed, that is, purification.

The Purgative Way of asceticism is the primary step taken toward sanctity. For that reason it is a way of preparation and, in this instance, the preparation is made by means of interior purification. This is a necessary step since the things of God and the things of man very often are totally opposed to each other; holiness belonging to the things of God, and the things of man being concerned more with man's selfishness, with his own honor and glory. Self-love and sanctity cannot be striven after simultaneously, and so, having chosen sanctity, there remains the necessity of eradicating self-love. As a garden grows beautiful in weedless soil, so too, the soul flowers into sanctity as it progresses in cleanness of heart. St. Ignatius expresses this clearly and succinctly in the First Principle and Foundation of the life of perfection:

Man was created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save his soul; and the other things on the face of the earth were created for man's sake, and in order
to aid him in the prosecution of the end for which he was created. Whence it follows, that man must make use of them in so far as they help him attain his end, and in the same way he ought to withdraw himself from them in so far as they hinder him from it. It is therefore necessary that we should make ourselves indifferent to all created things, in so far as it is left to the liberty of our free-will to do so, and is not forbidden; in such sort that we do not for our part wish for health rather than sickness, for wealth rather than poverty, for honour rather than dishonour, for a long life rather than a short one; and so in all other things, desiring and choosing only those which most lead us to the end for which we were created.¹

Cleanliness of heart, a necessary condition of spiritual growth, implies a freedom of conscience and a zest for living unhampered by the gnawing accusations of our own misdeeds. That such a state of soul should be a prime condition of growth in the spiritual life is attested to by every spiritual writer and especially by the supreme spiritual Teacher, the God-Man, Jesus Christ. Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God.²

² St. Matthew, Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ, A Revision of the Challoner-Rheims version edited by Catholic Scholars under the patronage of the Episcopal Committee of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, St. Anthony Guild Press, Patterson, New Jersey, 1941, V, 8.
Let the little children be, and do not hinder them from coming to me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven. 

Mrs. Meynell herself is a poetic, spiritual commentator on the above scriptural passages. Maintaining this same purity of heart, she alludes to the habit, or virtue, of purity as a shepherdess guarding her flocks, her thoughts. Everything is kept aright by this shepherdess. The sheep are kept from the "steep" of temptation and fed on the high, chaste thoughts of divine contemplation. Certainly a lady who keeps a soul so protected and free is "a lady of delight."

She walks-- the lady of my delight--
A shepherdess of sheep.
Her flocks are thoughts. She keeps them white;
She guards them from the steep;
She feeds them on the fragrant height,
She folds them in for sleep.

She roams maternal hills and bright,
Dark valleys safe and deep.
Into that tender breast at night
The chastest stars may peep.
She walks-- the lady of my delight--
A shepherdess of sheep.

She holds her little thoughts in sight,
Though gay they run and leap.
She is so circumspect and right;
She has her soul to keep.

3 Ibid., XIX, 14.
She walks-- the lady of my delight--
A shepherdess of sheep.4

The habit or virtue of chasteness in thought which Mrs. Meynell here alludes to as a shepherdess, is a protector and regulator. By this virtue man is constantly keeping himself free of sinful thoughts, black sheep amongst the many beautiful thoughts the mind is capable of. Even that automatic response of the human mechanism which psychologists call an instinctive act is carefully checked by this virtue before it can become part of man's deliberate willing. This is the way that the "flocks" are "guarded from the steep."

Under the salutary influence of this virtue every earthly place and condition of existence becomes a lovely thing to the chaste man whether it be the all-enveloping and exciting surroundings of high contemplation or the ominous environs of earthly thought wrapped in its dark hue of finiteness. The virtue itself is such a high, pure thing that it needs no apology when even the angels, the "chastest stars" of heaven, gaze upon it.

The thoughts of man are not hampered by this "shepherdess." They are free to come and go just like the gay lark. But their "shepherdess" doesn't get too far behind them so that she is unable to step in and set the errant ones aright. For the responsibility she undertakes, guarding a soul which is patterned after God, is too great that she should ever fail to keep her strict surveillance. She overlooks nothing and always judges correctly. "She is so circumspect and right."

A "lady of delight" too often is an idyllic lady, however, dwelling in realms of spun gold and feathery clouds, unperturbed by the demands of reality. Such, though, was not the shepherdess of Mrs. Meynell. The virtue of purity, her shepherdess, rose promptly to its tasks, climbed the steep hills of human nature's resistance, and retrieved the errant thought for her.

The thoughts Mrs. Meynell put into poetry when prudence and good sense had forced her to sever a particularly dear friendship are striking examples of this and they show clearly how closely she connected her life and poetry. "Renouncement" is a sonnet prompted by her ideals and high evaluation of purity and the self-denial
necessary to attain it. It was written after she and
the priest who had received her into the Catholic Church
both decided that their growing friendship was not in
keeping with their stations in life. Her sacrifice was
made doubly hard by the fact that it was from this same
priest that she had received encouragement in her writing.
The poetry he encouraged, though, was to become inevitable
by the great sacrifice of parting. It is interesting to
note that this sonnet was learned by heart by Dante
Gabriel Rossetti, and was pronounced by Dickens as the
most beautiful sonnet ever written by a woman.

I must not think of thee; and, tired yet
strong,
I shun the thought that lurks in all de-
light--
The thought of thee-- and in the blue
heaven's height,
And in the sweetest passage of a song.

O just beyond the fairest thoughts that
throng
This breast, the thought of thee waits,
hidden yet bright;
But it must never, never come in sight;
I must stop short of thee the whole day
long.
But when sleep comes to close each dif-
cult day,
When night gives pause to the long watch
I keep,
And all my bonds I must needs loose apart,
Must doff my will as raiment laid away,
With the first dream that comes with the
first sleep
I run, I run, I am gathered to thy heart.5

5 Ibid., 28.
Here the poetess is telling a dear friend that their friendship must be renounced in favor of the dedication that each had already made of life. She was a wife and mother; he was a priest devoted to the work of God and vowed to celibacy. That is why she had to say, "I must not think of thee." And the struggle this refusal cost her was a wearying one because like all devoted persons she found him continually in her thoughts, "the thought of thee waits, hidden yet bright." Weary though the struggle is, she still feels herself strong enough to make that renunciation and she makes this denial as complete as she can by maintaining it steadfastly throughout her waking hours. When she repeats her "never" for a second time she is making clear the stubbornness of her will to do no otherwise than renounce. Her only respite is her sleeping hours when her will is in abeyance and, like her apparel, is discarded for those subconscious hours.

This relationship had not become illicit. There was, however, the possibility that it could at least cause untold difficulty to each. Characteristically her sense of chasteness and modesty leads her to break off the friendship completely. The unhesitancy of her compliance
to this interior direction stands out in every line, and the tenacity of her will in this compliance is ably shown by the antithetic character of actions when awake and when asleep.

A situation quite similiar to this existed between Mrs. Meynell and Coventry Patmore. Of this her son says:

Her personal love brought him within the nearest range that anyone could attain to her scrupulous life. The ordinary measure of closeness is acceptness; for them it was denial. That was his distinction— he was allowed to come close enough for denial. 6

High ideals and noble living, however, are not adequately supported by a vacuum; rather are they sustained by strong and effective motives since it is in relation to his motives that a man is heroic or weak. The man of upright character and reputation is a hero, and the splendor of his heroism is judged by the splendor of the reasons for which he has striven to lead a life of meaning and purpose.

Common sense has always maintained that we have the power of "self-determination" and that we make use of it in every

voluntary choice. In every instance of such a choice "I decide" which motive is to prevail; ....

It is to our purpose here to establish the motivation behind the asceticism and, consequently, the notion of purification, in the life of Alice Meynell. For she could have been moved towards her ascetical acts by social regimen or by a love of purely natural virtue. But were this so, we could justly doubt the validity of the claim of mysticism made for her, since it would be without its proper ascetical foundation.

Mrs. Meynell's intellect, almost entirely free of the heart's undue or disordered influence, established her motives for her. In reality, these motives may be reduced to one that was forever dominant: in all her poetry she espouses Christ alone. She found in Him the Way, the Truth, and Life. In "I Am The Way" she says:

Thou art the Way.
Hadst Thou been nothing but the goal,
I cannot say
If Thou hadst ever met my soul.

7 H. Gruender, S.J., Ph.D., Experimental Psychology, Bruce, Milwaukee, Wisc., 1932, 419.
I cannot see--
I, child of process-- if there lies
An end for me,
Full of repose, full of replies.

I'll not reproach
The road that winds, my feet that err,
Access, Approach
Art Thou, Time, Way, and Wayfarer. 8

And this she confirms in Via, et Veritas, et Vita:

"You never attained to Him?" "If to attain
Be to abide, then that may be."
"Endless the way, followed with how much
pain!"
"The Way was He." 9

In most of her mystical poetry this same steadfast conviction of Christ as containing within Himself the goal of life is a dominating theme. There is a rapture of love for Him, a keen desire of drawing near to Him and being filled with His grace.

One of the crowd went up,
And knelt before the Paten and the Cup,
Received the Lord, returned in peace,
and prayed
Close to my side. Then in my heart I said:

"0 Christ, in this man's life--
This stranger who is Thine-- in all his strife,
All his felicity, his good and ill,
In the assaulted stronghold of his will.

8 A. Meynell, Poems, 64.
9 Ibid., 65.
"I do confess Thee here,
Alive within this life; I know Thee near
Within this lonely conscience, closed away
Within this brother's solitary day.

"Christ in His unknown heart,
His intellect unknown-- this love, this art,
This battle and this peace, this destiny
That I shall never know, look upon me!

"Christ in his numbered breath,
Christ in his beating heart and in his death,
Christ in his mystery! From that secret place
And from that separate dwelling, give me grace!"10

These passages leave no doubt as to what it was that led her on. She was a spiritual woman viewing the whole of life in the supremacy of the spiritual conviction she had. She deliberately used Christ as the focal point in her life. In doing this she made Him a goal that increased in its motivating power as it grew nearer to attainment. Into this conviction natural motivation does not enter too greatly. Social prestige and its extraordinary demands did not effect her actions in the matter of right and wrong. Natural virtue, too, was an empty thing when there was no reason for cultivating it; it did, however, merit her attention by reason of the dignity it attained when elevated to the supernatural.

10 Ibid., 78.
Two men went up to pray; and one gave thanks,
Not with himself-- aloud,
With proclamation, calling on the ranks of an attentive crowd.

"Thank God, I clap not my own humble breast,
But other ruffians' backs,
Imputing crime-- such is my tolerant haste--
To any man that lacks.

"For I am tolerant, generous, keep no rules,
And the age honours me.
Thank God, I am not as these rigid fools,
Even as this Pharisee."11

This is a vivid portrayal of the modern version of the scriptural Pharisees who were letter-of-the-law adherents and ceremonial purists. The insincerity and hypocrisy of the Jewish Pharisee affords Mrs. Meynell a fitting comparison for modern superficiality. Neither Pharisee, ancient or modern, is concerned with the spirit of God present in their hearts. Ostentatiousness is for them the virtue of prayer. If the "attentive crowd" approvingly attends upon their religious manifestations, then they, in their vanity and self-delegated prestige, feel their spiritual obligations fulfilled. Mrs. Meynell, however, makes them indict themselves by having them pray according to the acts hidden beneath that hypocritical

11 Ibid., 83.
exterior. Their pompous superiority to "ruffians," their deceitfulness, their independence of God, throw a cruel light upon them. But "the age honours me" and with this social position they are blindly satisfied. "Two men," however, "went up to pray," and the silent one, stiffly reverent in prayer, emerges from the superficial garrulousness of what the other thought himself to be, a humble, religious man. Mrs. Meynell's judgment is against that sanctimonious attitude assumed while others watch, and her plea is for humility.

Having castigated the social minded agnostic, as Chesterton says, with these verses, she turned now to pay homage to the body and its rightful dignity:

Thou inmost, ultimate
Council of judgment, palace of decrees,
Where the high senses hold their spiritual state,
Sued by earth's embassies,
And sign, approve, accept, conceive, create;

Create-- thy senses close
With the world's pleas. The random odours reach
Their sweetness in the place of thy repose,
Upon thy tongue the peach,
And in thy nostrils breathes the breathing rose.

To thee, secluded one,
The dark vibrations of the sightless skies,
The lovely inexplicit colours run;
The light gropes for those eyes.
O thou august! thou dost command the sun.

Music, all dumb, hath trod
Into thine ear her one effectual way;
And fire and cold approach to gain thy nod,
Where thou call'st up the day,
Where thou awaitest the appeal of God.12

Only the keen mind of Mrs. Meynell could have penetrated so deeply into the human body's secret and then revealed that secret so economically, so beautifully, and so awe-inspiringly.

Immediately she gives the human body its great distinction and its crowning glory, --its rationality. Only the body of man contains within it the power of judgment, of decreeing, approving, accepting, conceiving, and creating. For all this a man is a man.

The cognoscitive part of man's make-up is what makes tasting, smelling, hearing, feeling, and seeing capable of being appreciated. For the senses do no more than receive impressions from the surrounding world, so that the mind can know and appreciate things outside of it. How appropriately, then, is it that the body's "senses close with the world's pleas." Wonderful are the faculties, then, that bring to us the sweetness, the color and splendor, the beauty of the world.

12 Ibid., 89.
There is profound beauty and consummate artistry in her final allusion to the body and its glory. Like the rhythm of music does the body take fire at birth and eagerly look for every new day, and then gradually lose this youthful heat to the declining fires of life, until at last it feels the chill of death from God's hands.

Music, all dumb, hath trod
Into thine ear her one effectual way;
And fire and cold approach to gain thy nod,
Where thou call'st up the day,
Where thou waitest the appeal of God.

Indeed, Mrs. Meynell has found in the body a fitting "temple of the Holy Ghost."
CHAPTER TWO

EVIDENCES OF THE PURGATIVE WAY AND PENANCE IN THE POETRY OF MRS. MEYNELL

The first chapter pointed out the end to which the Purgative Way as a whole is directed, namely self-purification founded on a worthy motive. We demonstrated, too, that Mrs. Meynell gives evidence of an understanding of this general notion of the Purgative Way. More particularly we want to consider, now, the two great and principle elements of the Purgative Way; penance and mortification. After pointing out what these terms mean, we shall trace Mrs. Meynell's expression of them in her poetry.

Penance and mortification are at two different poles within the concept of purgation. Penance belongs to mere justice; mortification is chiefly the result of charity. One corrects, the other develops. One is made obligatory by man's honesty while generosity suggests the other. But both are essential to religious progress and when brought together for a concerted effort, they enable the religious-minded person to advance rapidly towards sanctity.

Archbishop Goodier expresses it thus:

If, therefore, humility and atonement are essential to all progress in the spiritual life, no less are penance
and mortification; .... Penance belongs to mere justice; mortification is chiefly an outcome of charity.¹

Father Tanquerey has the same thought:

For the sinner penance is an act of justice; .... He is bound to make reparation for the outrage. This he does through penance.²

Of mortification Thomas A'Kempis says this:

In proportion as thou dost violence to thyself the greater progress wilt thou make.³

Penance takes precedence over mortification because the effectiveness of mortification depends on an already existing state of penance. This means that mortification is conditioned on the removal of the actual guilt of sin. And since it is designed for that purpose, penance is the most effective means of removing the guilt of sin. Its whole action is linked with satisfying the debt of justice incurred by us in our misdeed. For, like any conscientious debtor, the sinner knows that in offending God he has incurred a debt of reparation which it is just and right

¹ Goodier, 162.
² Tanquerey, 341.
that he should requite.

Moreover, penance is negative rather than positive in its results. That is to say, that in correcting a fault a sinner is chiefly concerned with setting aright what has already happened. He looks backward, therefore, in his penitential action in an attempt to rectify his offending conduct. The transgressor's concern for the moment is not with his own future development; his primary concern is to repair the damage he has done. On the other hand, penance does imply that there should be some resolution against future offense. Father Goodier describes penance thus:

Penance, in other words, has reference to justice. It is making up for wrong that has been done, it is paying a debt so far as one is able, it is doing what one ought to do if one would be held an honest man. Penance is, therefore, rather negative than positive, passive than active, it looks backward rather than forward, correcting rather than developing, even if a penitent inflicts it upon himself.4

From these characteristics of penance we can form with Father Tanquerey the following definition of penance.

4 Goodier, 150.
Penance is defined as a supernatural virtue allied to justice, which inclines the sinner to detest his sin because it is an offense against God, and to form the firm resolve of avoiding sin in the future, and of atoning for it.\(^5\)

Mrs. Meynell has acknowledged herself as a sinner. She does this specifically when she versifies some of her thoughts on free will. She does not hesitate to write that there were trespasses, debt-incurring misdeeds. And while her spiritual faith and vision enables her to see sin as a source of humility, love and hope, all of which make sin a treasure after it has been abjured, she is, nevertheless, sincerely repentant and has thoroughly renounced her sin.

Dear are some hidden things
My soul has sealed in silence; past delights;
Hope unconfessed; desires with hampered wings,
Remembered in the nights.

But my best treasures are
Ignoble, undelightful, abject, cold;
Yet 0! profounder hoards oracular
No reliquaries hold.

There lie my trespasses,
Abjured but not disowned. I'll not accuse
Determinism, nor, as the Master says,
Charge even "the poor Deuce".

\(^5\) Tanquerey, 341.
Under my hand they lie,
My very own, my proved iniquities;
And the glory of my life go by
I hold and garner these.

How else, how otherwhere,
How otherwise, shall I discern and
grope
For loneliness? How hate, how love,
how dare,
How weep, how hope?6

Deep in every human breast there lingers the memory
and delight of things that were done years before, or
there lingers the unfulfilled desires and hopes that have
gone through our life with us, knowing no other existence
than that of our mind. Reminiscence and reverie are lux­
urious pastimes which build on these stored-up images.

Such pleasurable dreaming is common to the human race.
But it isn't for everyone that grave omissions and im­
perfections become treasures. It is the uncommon soul who
gathers his forgiven sins to him instead of shrinking from
them. But in all fact every saint has acted so and in her
own way Mrs. Meynell says that she, too, would act this
way. For she says that there isn't any treasure that can
tell her as much as does the embarrassment and repulsion of
her failures.

6 A. Meynell, Poems, 110.
But my best treasures are
Ignoble, undelightful, abject, cold;
Yet O! profounder hoards oracular
No reliquaries hold.7

Her guilty actions are before her and she has begged forgiveness for them. But she can never forget that once she did commit these sins. And it was her own doing; it wasn't any undeniable persuasion or evil power, but simply her own deliberate doing. "There lie my trespasses, abjured but not disowned." In the beautiful paradox that belongs to sin, however, she can put a high evaluation upon it. For from her sins she has learned her human weakness; she has learned from them humility, and with the perspective of humility she can hate sin, and weep over it, but she can, also, love, trust, and hope in Almighty God because of His mercy towards her.

In a poetic contemplation on the Lord's Prayer she says quite emphatically "... Restore Him what is His." Here, in deepest reverence for Almighty God, she accepts His Creatorship and petitions that man restore Him what is His-- the "all human iteration day by day" of life's tasks. Indeed the whole poem is but a repetition of this demand.

7 Ibid., 110.
THE LORD'S PRAYER

"Audemus dicere 'Pater Noster'."—Canon of the Mass.
There is a bolder way,
There is a wilder enterprise than this All-human iteration day by day.
Courage, mankind! Restore Him what is His.

Out of His mouth were given
These phrases. O replace them whence they came.
He, only, knows our inconceivable "Heaven",
Our hidden "Father", and the unspoken "Name";

Our "trespasses", our "bread",
The "will" inexorable yet implored;
The miracle-words that are and are not said,
Charged with the unknown purpose of their Lord.

"Forgive", "give", "lead us not"—
Speak them by Him, O man the unaware,
Speak by that dear tongue, though thou know not what,
Shuddering through the paradox of prayer.8

Unendingly she demands, she begs, that every little thing of our daily routine should be offered back to Him whose Providence has directed it our way. "O replace them whence they came"; replace, that is, our faults, our sustenance, our free will, the providential acts of God. She wants man to beg forgiveness, to be generous himself, and to seek aid in avoiding the pitfalls of life. With the real Lord's Prayer before you both poem and

8 Ibid., 112.
prayer reach exquisite heights of devotion.

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come, the will be done on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.\textsuperscript{9}

She has four more short lines on the debt that man owes to God by reason of his finite creature-hood.

"LORD, I OWE THEE A DEATH"  
Richard Hooker  
(in time of war)  
Man pays that debt with munificence,  
Not piecemeal now, not slowly, by the old:  
Not grudgingly, by the effaced thin pence,  
But greatly and in gold.\textsuperscript{10}

The allusion here is to a young man who loses his life in wartime and hence dies while life is very precious to him. His death is not the prolonged affair that an old man experiences. But, even so, Mrs. Meynell acknowledges that death is inevitable for every human being. There is no reticence about God; who He is and what His relation is to her. A debt to Him is a debt

\textsuperscript{9}\textsuperscript{St. Matthew, VI, 9.}  
\textsuperscript{10}\textsuperscript{A. Meynell, Poems, 124.}
that must be expiated just as surely as it must be among human beings. For her, justice in this case is no more to be strained through mercy than it is in a civil court of law.

But the stringency of justice does not mar the glory of a "rescued sin." The sincere penitent who now walks free from sin presents for her a phenomenon that is beyond all knowledge.

"Your sins... shall be white as snow."

Into the rescued world newcomer,
The newly-dead stepped up, and cried,
"O what is that, sweeter than summer
Was to my heart before I died?
Sir (to an angel), what is yonder
More bright than the remembered skies,

A lovelier sight, a softer splendour
Than when the moon was wont to rise?
Surely no sinner wears such seeming
Even the Rescued World within?"

"O the success of His redeeming!
O child, it is a rescued sin!" 11

This is what Mrs. Meynell's faith told her about the glory of a forgiven sin. Putting herself in the condition of the soul of a person just dead, she looks at the soul of repentant sinner. In this condition her soul is dazed by a ray of shining beauty. In

11 Ibid., 93.
comparision to the lovely things of the earth, this thing of radiant beauty far surpasses anything the soul had ever known on earth. In a petition to angel for enlightenment, the soul even rules out the possibility that any sinner could be so radiant, not even in his forgiveness. But the angel, dumbfounded himself by the awfulness of Christ's Redemption of man, can say no more than that it is really a forgiven sin.

That is what is "beyond all knowledge," a sinner who has repented his sin. The poem is an attempt to fathom the joy that Christ said would be in heaven over one repentant sinner.

Even so I say to you, there will be joy among the angels of God over one sinner who repents. 12

This is a clean-cut appreciation of penance and the rewards it brings. In any course of events, penance is what is expected and it is what Mrs. Meynell took for granted. She did not see how a man could be just and be otherwise than penitent over his sins. The point of consideration for her, however, was not the difficulty penance involves, but rather the effect it accomplishes.

Thorough penance, however, demands a wide atonement. Besides that made to God, there is also that which the sinner has to make to himself, to his fellow man, and to the whole incorporated body of human kind living under the aegis of Jesus Christ. The sinner has, therefore, four recipients of his atonement.

Penance, therefore, considered only as an act of justice, has a duty to atone, so far as it is able, to each of the four who have been injured. 13

We have already discussed the atonement that has to be made to God and in discussing it we have included the atonement man owes himself. For when he commits a sinful offense the sinner is not only offending God but also himself, since he is shutting himself off from communication with God and hence offending against his own interior religious bent. Both these aspects of atonement were fully demonstrated as such in previous analyses of poems referring to justice and penance.

In regard to the two recipients of atonement mentioned last, it can easily be seen that atonement is necessary both to other men individually and collectively when it is considered how far-reaching the consequences of a

13 Goodier, 152.
single evil deed can be. Such consequences may not be apparent on the surface, but as it has been pointed out by Pope Pius XI,\textsuperscript{14} sins of individuals are sins of the human race; and as the race must atone for them, so must the individual know that by his sin he involves, not only himself, but the body of which he is a member.

This point is made in the last stanza of Mrs. Meynell's paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer. "Forgive" is the one word carrying the meaning of the full sentence, "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." Moreover, she encourages this petition be made "by Him" as king and center of the whole human race.

"Forgive", "give", "lead us not"—
Speak them by Him, O man the unaware,
Speak by that dear tongue, though thou know not what,
Shuddering through the paradox of prayer.

Then, too, when she considers the question of pain in "Two Questions", she includes the suffering caused an innocent bystander by the evil deed of some other man. And what she says is true of one man, is true also of the whole human race.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
"A riddling world!" one cried.
"If pangs must be, would God that they
were sent
To the impure, the cruel, and passed
aside
The holy innocent!"  

In another poem she acknowledges a sweetness in the
pain of seeking pardon, of forebearing with another.

So humble things Thou hast born for us, O God,
Left'st Thou a path of lowliness untrod?
Yes, one, till now; another Olive Garden.
For we endure the tender pain of pardon,-
One with another we forbear. Give heed,
Look at the mournful world thou hast decreed.
The time has come. At last we hapless men
Know all our haplessness all through. Come,
then,
Endure undreamed humility: Lord of Heaven
Come to our ignorant hearts and be forgiven.  

These are specific references to the respect and
dignity of man and mankind Alice Meynell upholds in her
works. Throughout the bulk of these works, however, there
is a general tone of compassion with all mankind. She
sees man in his glory at his reception of Jesus Christ
in the Blessed Sacrament; she honors parentage; she
points out to him the dignity of his body; she also
chastises him for his wars, for his pride and selfishness,

15 A. Meynell, Poems, 111.
16 Ibid., "Veni Creator," 69.
and for the sins he commits. This personal feeling for the neighbor and the human race fostered in her a respect for each so that they make both quick and satisfactory reparation for any offense of hers. "She was selfless, compassionate, and one would have said, was made of love,..." 17

In a letter to a nun she says:

All my troubles are little, old, foolish, trivial, as they always were—the troubles of my spiritual life, I mean. But as to sorrow, my failure of love to those that loved me can never be cancelled or undone. So I never fail in a provision of grief for any night of my life. 18

Katharine Tynan, the poetess, has this to say of Mrs. Meynell:

Even in an intimate friendship she very seldom talked of herself. The same absence of personal detail was noticeable in her letters, beautiful and affectionate letters in the most graceful handwriting, but fuller of the person to whom they were written than herself. 19

18 Ibid., 122.
19 Ibid., 145.
CHAPTER THREE

MRS. MEYNELL'S EXPRESSIONS OF THE PURGATIVE WAY AND MORTIFICATION IN HER POETRY

By far the element in the Purgative Way that is of more importance is mortification; for in mortification we are encountering something that is building, something that is developing. There is no longer any question of the atonement about which we were speaking in the previous chapter. The chief purpose, however, of mortification is to safeguard against the danger of sin by weakening in us the natural propensity we have for doing evil.

This type of self-discipline is voluntary though its presence is necessary to some extent in every life. Each one of us performs the mortification we conceive to be necessary for our spiritual well-being, and there is no debt of justice pressing us to it. However, mortification goes beyond justice for it is in part magnanimous and there is no obligation that proceeds from magnanimity. Since, then, mortification has as its end union with God, it must be voluntary and proceed from man's own interior life, for God makes no man love Him against his will.
Mortification, therefore, is something beyond the rigors of justice; its whole, great purpose is to serve as a means whereby man can render himself fit for sanctity, the ultimate in the way of perfection.

From Father Tanquerey we get a definition of mortification:

Mortification, then, may be defined as the struggle against our evil inclinations in order to subject them to the will, and the will to God.\(^1\)

Thus mortification is a real warfare in which the inclination man naturally has towards evil is checked and brought under control, so that whatever is hindering him in his spiritual progress is removed; or the obstacle is made to serve the end for which he is striving. A few of the words used to designate mortification help towards grasping the intensity of the struggle involved and its breadth of scope. "Renouncement" is one word and is used more for external mortification, though not necessarily for this alone; "abnegation" and "self-renunciation" are others; mortification is often expressed by the word "crucifixion." Thus Saint Paul says: "They that are Christ's have crucified their flesh."\(^2\) This crucifixion can

\(^1\) Tanquerey, 364.  
become, if it is persistent, "a death" and "burial."
Saint Paul again uses such expressions: "For you are dead: and your life is hid with Christ in God."3 Other words also used to signify mortification are: "self-control," "will-power," "self-discipline," "self-reform."4

Archbishop Goodier happily sums up mortification in this paragraph:

But mortification is much more than doing penance; in the strict sense it has nothing to do with it. It is independent of mere atonement for the past, and will usually be found most active among those who have least in the past for which to atone. It refers to the present and the future; it considers that which is best here and now, and will lead to greater perfection hereafter. When a religious determines to follow a hard rule, it is not penance, but mortification. When nurses or doctors sacrifice themselves for the sake of a patient, they are not doing penance, but they mortify themselves and are honoured for it. A convict in his cell does penance; a hermit in his cell practices mortification. The former is unhappy, looks forward to his release, and is pitied by those who see him; the latter is happy as the day is long, seeks only for more privation and confinement, and is the envy of those who know him and understand.5

Mrs. Meynell has not found any difficulty in expressing this concept. Indeed her greatest poetry, and

3 St. Paul, Epistle to the Colossians, III, 3.
4 Tanquerey, 362-363.
5 Goodier, 153.
her sonnets in particular, has been built on this theme. An attractive austerity of expression is also characteristic of her style. As a matter of fact, in arguing for simplicity of expression, she has given the literary world an excellent essay and an excellent example of the great power simplicity achieves in successful literature.6

But her poetic works incorporating the idea of mortification and its spirit have been especially felicitous. Gracefully and inspiringingly she tells of her own renunciation, separation, and dedication to a spiritual life over nature's repinings. She reflects on the great and noble things in man's life and finds in them a pervasive note of self-discipline and self-control. And all this she notes not as an effective instrument for the fleeting moment of spiritual exaltation, but as a successful means for attaining to the goal that never changes, her spiritual perfection and sanctity.

The analysis of "Renouncement" on an earlier page in this paper7 amply demonstrates this spirit of mortification. In that poem she shows that her self-discipline and her self-control effectively call a halt to this

6 A. Meynell, The Rhythm of Life and Other Essays, Elkin Mathews and John Lane, London, 1893, 79.
7 Cf. above, p.7.
friendship of hers because it is friendship threatening to exceed the bounds of real friendship. Decisively she hinders any continuation of this friendship by refusing to allow any of her waking hours to be taken up with the thought of it.

I must not think of thee; and, tired yet strong,
I shun the thought that lurks in all delight--
The thought of thee--and in the blue Heaven's height,
And in the sweetest passage of a song.

She herself affirms that this was a rigorous task:

But when sleep comes to close each difficult day,
When night gives pause to the long watch I keep,
And all my bonds I need must part, ....

The dominating theme of the whole poem is the surrender that is necessary for her continued advancement in her chosen way of life. There was no obligation to sever the ties of this friendship; it could have gone on, and, more than likely, it would never have exceeded the affection of a strong friendship. But there was the possibility that the "human equation" would have overbalanced the scales of their attachment. In the light of this possibility she had no alternative but to deny herself and
renounce her friend.

The "Young Neophyte" is a poem that enables us to understand why she wrote "Renouncement." It expresses the dedication of her life to the unalterable principles of Christian doctrine. Her desire for prayer, the direction of her mind, her patience in pain, her moderation in happiness, and her perseverance until death in leading a life pledged to Christ, are fundamental elements of the poem as they are fundamental elements of any spiritual life. The poem was written at the time of her conversion to Catholicism, a time when many of the things of Catholicism were new to her.

Who knows what days I answer for today?
Giving the bud I give the flower. I bow
This yet unfaded and a faded brow;
Bending these knees and feeble knees, I pray.

Thoughts yet unripe in me I bend one way,
Give one repose to pain I know not how,
One check to joy that comes, I guess not how.
I dedicate my fields when Spring is grey.

O rash! (I smile) to pledge my hidden wheat.
I fold today at altars far apart
Hands trembling with what toils? In their retreat
I seal my love to-be, my folded art.
I light the tapers at my head and feet,
And lay the crucifix on this silent heart. 8

In any great action which promises to change the course of a life, some anxiety is attendant before the new routine is fully accepted. There is something of that in "Young Neophyte." "Who knows what days I answer for today?" But the poem lacks the indecision and hesitancy that clouds some other conversion in a man's life. The only fear is the fear that, perhaps, she is not strong enough "to fight the good fight." She does not doubt her course of action but only her own capability.

Giving the bud I give the flower. I bow
This yet unfaded and a faded brow;
Bending these knees and feeble knees, I pray.

Nevertheless she dedicates herself completely. She makes no compromise and, offering herself as a young girl, she is ready to carry her offering through to her death. Talents that may be hidden within her and capable, perhaps, of one day bringing her renown and fame, these and the art she loves are tucked away awaiting the pleasure of a heart enraptured by the love of the Heart that found

8 A. Meynell, Poems, 24.
no better way of manifesting its own love than by dying on the cross.

O rash! (I smile) to pledge my hidden wheat.
I fold today at altars far apart
Hands trembling with what toils? In their retreat

I seal my love to-be, my folded art.
I light the tapers at my head and feet,
And lay the crucifix on this silent heart.

Death was always a peril for Alice Meynell. As for the ordinary human, death was a sobering thought to her, but she was taken up with the fact even more than is ordinary. She saw her burial gown in the wool on the sheep's back; she saw her coffin standing in a forest; and she saw her monument in the massive stone on the hillside. These thoughts had pestered her as a young girl. At the same time, however, she was roused to live her life and to use the time allotted to her for accomplishment rather than for bemoaning the death that was to be. As a matter of fact, she was surrounded by life's feverish activity, unable to escape. Life and death were waging a battle,—life without, death within her.

She wonders, though, what the struggle will be when death is drawing near, especially when there has been so little done that will remain profitable after death. Then
it will be better if she has with her the things that life attempts to obviate; sorrow, labor, pain, and fear. These are the things she would rather have than the gayety, ease, and luxury of an irresponsible life. This is the unexpected peril, that she should go to death without these "comforts."

Unlike the youth that all men say
They prize—youth of abounding blood,
In love with the sufficient day,
And gay in growth, and strong in bud;

Unlike was mine! Then my first slumber
Nightly rehearsed my last; each breath
Knew itself one of the unknown number.
But Life was urgent with me as Death.

My shroud was in the flocks; the hill
Within its quarry locked my stone;
My bier grew in the woods; and still
Life spurred me where I paused alone.

"Begin!" Life called. Again her shout,
"Make haste while it is called to-day!"
Her exhortations plucked me out,
Hunted me, turned me, held me at bay.

But if my youth is thus hard pressed
(I thought) what of a later year?
If the end so threatens this tender breast,
What of the days when it draws near?

Draws near, and little done? yet lo,
Dread has forborne, and haste lies by.
I was beleaguered; now the foe
Has raised the siege, I know not why.

I see them troop away; I ask
Were they in sooth mine enemies—
Terror, the doubt, the lash, the task?
What heart has my new housemate, Ease?
How am I left, at last, alive,
To make a stranger of a tear?
What did I do one day to drive
From me the vigilant angel, Fear?

The diligent angel, Labour? Ay,
The inexorable angel, Pain?
Menace me, lest indeed I die,
Sloth! Turn; crush, teach me fear again!9

This is an unshrinking acceptance of the fact that by the rigor of mortification man prepares himself for the full life of beatitude. Self-denial and self-discipline are inestimable means in attaining to the fulfillment of a spiritually dedicated life. We need only consider death and our helplessness if unprepared, to realize their value.

More detailed consideration shows us that the mortification Mrs. Meynell advocates can be divided into three types: mortification of defense, mortification of development, and mortification prompted by pure love. The first of these three is elementary since its nature is mere preservation from evil. Its proper function is not to increase the spiritual stature of a man but simply to help him maintain the position in the spiritual life he has already attained. Practically speaking, mortification of this kind consists in being able to deny

9 Ibid., 90.
oneself, of being able to say "No" in an occasion of spiritual danger. Thus, being of a negative nature, mortification of defense is preventative; it prevents sin from making inroads into the spiritual life. In such a manner Archbishop Goodier remarks:

Mortification is a defense when one denies oneself something which would lead one, or would tend to lead one, into evil. This, because it is imposed as a preventive and no more, we have called 'negative' mortification; it does not look, primarily, to anything positive. And yet it is the first condition of all true manliness, whether natural or supernatural;...

Father Tanquerey is in complete harmony with this statement, for he says:

We must secure our perseverance in good, and mortification offers without one of the best means we have to keep free from sin. ... Our safety demands, therefore, a warfare against self-love as well as against sensuality and greed.

There is a perfect analogy between mortification on the supernatural plane and mortification on the purely natural plane, and these men indicate this fact in their treatises. This analogy helps towards a comprehensive

10 Goodier, 153.
11 Tanquerey, 368.
picture of the supernatural aspect of this type of mortification. For instance, every sane man is interested in preserving his life and takes precautionary measures with that purpose in mind; he respects the right of way of automobiles; he adheres strictly to regulations for firearms and explosives, and he refrains from consuming poisonous matter. Returning to the supernatural plane, the same respect for the health of the soul excites a man to guard this life diligently, and whatever puts the moral good of his life in jeopardy is painstakingly avoided or carefully checked.

Mrs. Meynell's daughter, Viola, quotes a letter in which she gives her mother's reason for joining the Catholic Church. In emphasizing her need for a legislator and executor of morals in this letter, Mrs. Meynell indicates the importance she attached to preserving a spiritual way of life.

I saw, when I was very young, that a guide in morals was even more necessary than a guide in faith. It was for this I joined the Church. Other Christian societies may legislate, but the Church administers legislation. Thus she is practically indispensable. I may say that I hold the administration of morals to be of such vital importance that for its sake I accepted, and now accept, dogma in matters of faith-- to the last
Right and Wrong (morals) are the most important, or the only important, things men know or can know. Everything depends on them. Christian morality is infinitely the greatest of moralities. This we know by our own sense and intellect, without other guidance. The Church administers that morality, as no other sect does or can do, by means of moral theology.¹²

Moreover, through Viola she openly admits her need for the way of self-discipline.

When I was about twelve I fell in love with Tennyson, and cared for nothing else until, at fifteen, I discovered first Keats and then Shelley. With Keats I celebrated a kind of wedding. The influence of Shelley upon me belongs rather to my spiritual than mental history. I thought the whole world was changed for me thenceforth. It was by no sudden counter-revolution, but slowly and gradually that I returned to the hard old common path of submission and self-discipline which soon brought me to the gates of the Catholic Church.¹³

These realizations she had embodied in her poetry. Especially is it discernible in "The Young Neophyte"¹⁴ in which she shows how she accepts and uses the protective measures of the Catholic Church by disciplining her life according to them.

¹² V. Meynell, 330.
¹³ Ibid., 42.
¹⁴ A. Meynell, Poems, 24.
Thoughts yet unripe in me I bend one way,  
Give one repose to pain I know not how,  
One check to joy that comes, I guess not how.  
I dedicate my fields when Spring is grey.

And her talents, too, she subjects to a restraining influence.

I seal my love to-be, my folded art.  
I light the tapers at my head and feet,  
And lay the crucifix on this silent heart.

"Renouncement" is the expression of what she had to do for her spiritual well-being. In this act of renunciation she was defending herself from any possible spiritual dangers.

It is not these poems alone, however, that contain this message. She delicately insinuates the notion in the following poem:

Why wilt thou chide,  
Who hast attained to be denied?  
O learn, above  
All price is my refusal, Love.  
My sacred Nay  
Was never cheapened by the way.  
Thy single sorrow crowns thee lord  
Of an unpurchasable word.

O strong, O pure!  
As Yea makes happier loves secure,  
I vow thee this
Unique rejection of a kiss.
I guard for thee
This jealous sad monopoly; none dare
Hope for a part in thy despair. 15

Evidently she is telling of a refusal of a kiss that had no right to be desired. Her refusal, however, was not one designed to sever her relations with the petitioner but rather one that strengthens the relationship by its denial. For, in denying the kiss, she admits her love and affection for the other, since not even refusal should have been made,-- but only complete severence of relations. The loved one, however, had found a place in her heart, a legitimate place indeed, that allowed him a closeness to her life even though it was subordinated to the union she had with another. And it was this closeness that allowed him the "unique rejection of a kiss." For her this was doing him an honor because she valued her real and great love supremely. She valued it so highly that the 'Nay' by which she preserved it was unchangeable at any price. The guardianship of this 'Nay' was very sacred to her and neither the past had seen it sullied nor would the future see it so.

15 Ibid., "Why Wilt Thou Chide?" 62.
O learn, above
All price is my refusal, Love.
My sacred Nay
Was never cheapened by the way.

Mrs. Meynell has a beautiful eulogy of a nun in her poem "Soeur Monique." In it she describes from an admiring glance the consecrated life of a nun. She admires the simplicity, the generosity, the dedication, the sanctity, and the vigilance of the life of this nun. In contrasting the nun's happiness, transcendent of the earth's finiteness, she has this to say of people not graced with the same high vocation:

We are beguiled,
Sad with living as we are;
Ours the sorrow, outpouring
Sad self on selfless thing,...16

In revealing this vacuity of earthly happiness, she was picturing herself and others whose quest does not reach the same fulfillment as that of the nun. To picture the nun's more substantial happiness, she thinks is an easy task; she finds that she need only describe the things that represent it and insure it. Therefore, she says:

And your picture, O my nun!
Is a strangely easy one,

16 Ibid., 11.
For the holy weed you wear,
For your hidden eyes and hidden hair,
And in picturing you I may
Scarcely go astray.17

These are the safeguards of religious recollection and heavenly communion she is describing, things which guard against the inroads of the world and its spirit. This is an accurate appreciation of mortification's defensive powers.

The second division made of mortification is that of self-development. It is this aspect of mortification that leads to spiritual maturity, for spiritual maturity is dependent on mortification. The analogy of the supernatural and the natural is again applicable for a better understanding of the spiritual idea. In the natural order of things we find athletes who practice a rigorous "training" schedule in which they abstain from things harmful to their prowess. Tobacco and alcohol are outlawed by the athlete who depends upon the condition of his lungs for success. Excess weight is the anxious concern of the jockey. There is a similar situation in society. Gentlemen are graded on the progress they have made in cultivating good manners and refined conduct,

17 Ibid., 13.
which means a complete avoidance of all vulgarity in speech, dress, and deportment. The same thing is true in the spiritual life. Here, too, progress is dependent on the selection of those things that advance perfection; and very often this selection is made between two things whose value is only relatively different and not contradictory. Hence it may be that the things to be selected may both be good in themselves. It is, then, choosing the thing better calculated to help spiritual advancement which makes up this type of mortification. Furthermore, its nature is positive since it consists in assenting to what is the better choice. Just as the athlete chooses to practice his art in preparation for success, so the spiritual athlete chooses a more difficult task in preference to an easier one when there is an opportunity for greater spiritual advancement by this course of action. Tanquerey makes this distinction:

And since this is not done without struggle, St. Paul says that life is a fight: "I have fought the good fight", and that Christians are the athletes who chastise their body and bring it into subjection.

From these and similar phrases it follows that mortification comprises a twofold element: one negative—... the other positive— the struggle against the evil tendencies of nature, the
effort to curb and deaden them, a crucifixion, a death of the old man and his lusts, in order to live Christ's own life.18

Archbishop Goodier says much the same thing:

But the soul must not only learn to defend itself, it must also grow; and for any growth at all in perfection a new kind of mortification is essential. Indeed, for continuous growth this mortification must be continuous, for the highest perfection it must be present in the highest degree.... Exteriorly, this positive mortification is practised, by deliberately choosing to do the better thing, even when there is no question of sin, when I may quite lawfully 'do what I like', and my inclination draws me in one particular direction.... Interiorly, this degree of mortification consists in the development of self-mastery;...19

Quite aptly Thomas A'Kempis says:

In the cross is height of virtue; in the cross is perfection of sanctity. There is no health of soul, nor hope of eternal life, but in the cross.20

Mrs. Meynell's choices inevitably shine through her work. In the following poem she indicates a choice she made in which the part forgotten certainly seems to merit its selection. But a wiser choice must have been

18 Tanquerey, 363.
19 Goodier, 166.
20 T. A'Kempis, 142.
the one she made since she did make it in the face of such allurements. This is her choice:

We never meet; yet we meet day by day
Upon those hills of life, dim and immense—
The good we love, and sleep, our innocence.
O hills of life, high hills! And, higher than they,

Our guardian spirits meet at prayer and play.
Beyond pain, joy, and hope, and long suspense,
Above the summits of our souls, far hence,
An angel meets an angel on the way.

Beyond all good I ever believed of thee,
Or thou of me, these always love and live.
And though I fail of thy ideal of me,
My angel falls not short. They greet each other.

Who knows, they may exchange the kiss we give,
Thou to thy crucifix, I to my mother.21

Despite the fact that she tries to ease this separation by dwelling on the spiritual union of their souls, the separation, which is very real, is unchangeably present. However akin their thoughts may be, there is still that omnipresent denial of physical closeness. "My angel falls not short," but, by implication, the affection of two in each other's company does fall short. And this was of deliberate intention as she tells us when she says:

Who knows, they may exchange the kiss we give,
Thou to thy crucifix, I to my mother.

21 A. Meynell, Poems, 21.
The poem tells us that though the "memory lingers on," the separation is still an accomplished fact to which she firmly adheres so that the other may progress in religion and so that she may not be retarded in her own progress by allowing herself to become an occasion of unbecoming conduct.

One cannot get too far away from "The Young Neophyte," not only because of its exquisite beauty, but also because it is such a perfect expression of mortification and its different aspects. We have already quoted it on another page under a different heading, but it is apt for our present purpose too; because it manifests a choice she made, a choice which was for her the better, indeed the best, election; because this election entailed restriction and self-discipline, it shows her concern with her self-development and her rapid strides to a mature spiritual life. To say that

Thoughts yet unripe in me I bend one way,
Give one repose to pain I know not now,
One check to joy that comes, I guess not how,
I dedicate my fields when Spring is grey.

is, in fact, to say, "I have chosen a goal in life; to it I am giving my life, my whole life, in order that I
may be a success in that life and reach that chosen
goal." And her roguish smile belies any fears the
timidity of her soul may suggest. She is not afraid
because every sacrifice is an altar on which she offers
herself. And in this way her heart is suffused with
divine love and effortlessly carries the cross.

O rash! (I smile) to pledge hidden wheat.
I fold to-day at altars far apart
Hands trembling with what toils? In their
retreat

I seal my love to-be, my folded art.
I light the tapers at my head and feet,
And lay the crucifix on this silent heart.

"San Lorenzo's Mother" tells a beautiful story of
that mother's denial and her spiritual advancement coming
from it. She speaks, in the poem, of the separation
every saintly mother suffers when her son chooses a re-
ligious vocation. The parting of these two, mother and
son, is always crowded by the futile attempt to get as
much of each other as can possibly be had at the time
of parting so that the years of deprivation to come can
be salvaged by memories. But those memories fail at
times and succor is then found in other members of her
son's Order. To a strange monk, her son's spiritual
brother, will go all the lavish love of a maternal heart.
But even this is unsatisfactory to her, and in the silence of her heart and soul she finds that it is to Christ she makes the offering of son and alms; the son that he might attain to the summit of his calling, the alms that she might herself meet her son on the same summit. Many a mother in her sacrifice and in her greatness has breathed this prayer:

I had not seen my son's dear face
(He chose the cloister by God's grace)
Since it had come to full flower-time.
I hardly guessed at its perfect prime,
That folded flower of his dear face.

Mine eyes were veiled by mists of tears
When on a day in many years
One of his Order came. I thrilled,
Facing, I thought, that face fulfilled.
I doubted, for my mists of tears.

His blessing be with me forever!
My hope and doubt were hard to sever.
--That altered face, those holy weeds.
I filled his wallet and kissed his beads,
And lost his echoing feet forever.

If to my son my alms were given
I know not, and I wait for Heaven.
He did not plead for child of mine,
But for another child divine,
And unto Him it was surely given.

There is One alone who cannot change;
Dreams are we, shadows, visions strange;
And all I give is given to One.
I might mistake my dear son,
But never the Son who cannot change.22

22 Ibid., 30.
Mothers are the holocausts of their own sacrifices. But how few are the holocausts to the Creator of the world and the Redeemer of mankind! Too much of the nobility of maternal sacrifices has been surrendered to the god of self and to the god of finite emptiness. The splendor of their lives is dulled to a slight glow by their cupidity for a son's advancement in a material world, and their own consequent elevation, be their spiritual condition what it may.

Not so is San Lorenzo's mother. Loving her son with a tremendous love, she accepted his vocation. And though her mother's possessiveness will be with her all her life, still she has come to a detachment that lets her turn from her thoughts of her own son to the thoughts of a "Son who cannot change." "I might mistake my dearest son, but never the Son who cannot change." And it is to Him that she has given not alms, but "All I give is given to One." It is such wholeness of denial that gives her the cheerfulness, the calm, the serenity of a woman wise in the ways of God. The maturity she has attained in the sacrifice of her son has brought Jesus Christ closer and it has given her the precious patience of waiting for heaven. "...and I wait for Heaven."
This use of mortification as a source for spiritual development proceeds to the point where its goal changes from self-consideration into a mortification entirely motivated by the love of God and by the love of one's neighbor for God's sake. Self-protection and self-development have been put aside as reasons for mortification, since mortification now rests content in being absorbed in God whatever the sacrifices this absorption demands.

Such is but the natural consequence of love since the greatest demonstration true love can have is had through sacrifice. Hence, St. Ignatius of Loyola can say in his "Spiritual Exercises":

...love consists in mutual interchange on either side, that is to say, in the lover giving and communicating with the beloved what he has or can give, and on the other hand, in the beloved sharing with the lover, so that if the one have knowledge, honour, riches, he share it with him who has them not, and thus the one share all with the other.23

Thus a lover never hesitates to do things which at another time he would not do; and there is no thought of self-denial in such action since it is now done for the happiness that comes by means of such abnegation.

23 St. Ignatius of Loyola, Spiritual Exercises, 74.
Such a spirit of mortification was the driving force in the lives of many of the saints. To be like Christ, and hence to give Him pleasure, they mortified themselves continually. They seldom acted thus for their own profit but merely because they were pleasing Christ by doing what He had done. The repugnance, too, in many a task of self-abnegation became a joy in the presence of the love of God. For this reason saints have said: "To suffer or to die;" "not to die but to suffer." St. Teresa said this:

For fervent love can suffer much for Him, while tepidity will endure but little. For my part, I believe that our love is the measure of the cross we can bear. 24

In this type of mortification, however, Christ Himself is the greatest example. By His passion and death on the cross He carried out to the fullness of their meaning His words, "Greater love than this no man hath but that he lay down his life for his friend."

Mortification is this love's best expression. It is, to a person of this love, one of the trivial things which help toward a fuller expression of love's sentiment. The sufferings undergone by persons at this stage of spiritual

perfection are looked upon as the highest gift capable of being bestowed upon God by man. And while it is the supreme achievement of a saintly soul, it is, nevertheless, prepared for by rigid discipline and self-training. Archbishop Goodier views this mortification as a mortification transcending mortification:

The third degree of mortification is that which is done from the motive of love, of God or of one’s neighbour for the sake of God.... True love inevitably leads to the desire to give, and is most fully expressed by giving; the truest love gives 'its life for a friend'.... Love will gladly do what naturally it would rather not do, provided it knows that the Beloved will be served, or helped, or even only pleased by what is done.

Love will go further. It will try to discover what the Beloved wants, and will itself, not only supply it beforehand, but want the same, even though on other grounds it does not want it.... Greatest love will go further still. For the sheer delight of giving to its Beloved it will deprive itself of its richest treasure, will undertake hard tasks, will find a positive joy in pain, will 'rejoice that it has been accounted worthy to suffer' something for his sake.

...They will mortify themselves, not for any gain to themselves as before, but merely to be like Him and to please Him, to do what He has done, to be what He has been. They will fulfill His pleasure, and find in it their own. They will be glad that they are privileged to bear His wounds; suffer indignity because of Him, become a matter of honor. Thus in a true sense perfect mortification comes to transcend itself; it ceases to be mortification.25

Tanquerey succinctly expresses the common doctrine of this grade of mortification:

...Reading the lives of the saints we meet two striking facts: the dreadful ordeals they sustained, the mortification they willingly embraced; and their patience, their joy, their peace in these sufferings. They came to love the cross, to lose all fear thereof, nay, to sigh after it, to count as lost the day wherein they had but little to suffer. This is a psychological phenomenon which puzzles the worldly, but which is a comfort to men of good will. No doubt, one could not ask of beginners such love of the cross; but one can, showing them the example of the saints, make them understand that the love of God soothes the pain of mortification, and, if they consent to enter whole-heartedly into the practice of offering small sacrifices within their strength, that they will come themselves to love the cross, to long for it, and to find in it true spiritual comfort.26

Since this height and perfection of mortification is the culminating point of a whole life of mortification, it seems, too, that its expression is had best in the culmination of all that Mrs. Meynell wrote concerning it. In her profoundly contemplative poems she gives ample evidence of a life that is centered around Christ and His Love. In Him she confidently puts her whole summation of life, its goal, and its perfection. "O Jesus", she says, "Access, approach; "Art Thou Time, Way and Wayfarer."27

26 Tanquerey, 370.
27 A. Meynell, Poems, "I am the Way," 64.
And it was in this conspectus of life that the hard things of the path to the goal lost their severity. "Endless the way, followed with how much pain!" "The way was He."28 This love, though beset by her fine intellectual perception, was not bereft of tenderness and sweetness, for she could await Him at Christmas time with this song in her heart:

New every year,
New born and newly dear,
He comes with tidings and a song,
The ages long, the ages long;

Even as the cold
Keen winter grows not old,
As childhood is so fresh, foreseen,
And spring in the familiar green-

Sudden as sweet
Come the expected feet.
All joy is young, and new all art,
And He, too, Whom we have by heart.29

But when she begs the Creator of the world to come unto His world she can ask Him:

Left'st Thou a path of lowliness untrod?
Yes, one, till now; another Olive Garden.
For we endure the tender pain of pardon,—
One with another we forbear....30

With the firmness of a confident faith she acknowledges the sublimity, the augustness, and the awfulness of Al-

29 Ibid., "Unto us a Son is Given," 68.
30 Ibid., "Veni Creator," 69.
mighty God as He takes up His abode in the lowly place provided by the heart of one of His creatures.

"O Christ, in this man's life—
This stranger who is Thine— in all his strife,
All his felicity, his good and ill,
In the assaulted stronghold of his will,

"I do confess Thee here,
Alive within this life; I know Thee near
Within this lonely conscience, closed away
Within this brother's solitary day.

"Christ in his unknown heart,
His intellect unknown— this love, this art,
This battle and this peace, this destiny
That I shall never know, look upon me!

"Christ in his numbered breath,
Christ in his beating heart and in his death,
Christ in his mystery! From that secret place
And from that separate dwelling, give me grace!"31

Filled with this feeling for God she acknowledges how insignificant are the "spiritual sorrow" and "corporal pain" of man in relation to the depths of sorrow and pain plumed by God in the person of Jesus Christ crucified.

Oh, man's capacity
For spiritual sorrow, corporal pain!
Who has explored the deepmost of that sea,
With heavy links of a far-fathoming chain?

That melancholy lead,
Let down in guilty and in innocent hold,
Yea into childish hands delivered,
Leaves the sequestered floor unreached, untold.

31 Ibid., "The Unknown God," 78.
One only has explored
The deepmost; but He did not die of it.
Not yet, not yet He died. Man's human Lord
Touched the extreme; it is not infinite.32

Moreover, the freedom of her will makes her confess that
she has sinned. But she repents and holds those tres-
passes to her as "my best treasures" because this is the
path to self-knowledge and self-discipline, for

How else, how otherwhere,
How otherwise, shall I discern and grope
For lowliness? How hate, how love, how dare,
How weep, how hope?33

And this she says because "submissive we shall find a
splendour in that dust."

When it came time for Mrs. Meynell to accept the
supreme mortification of human life, death, she could
joyously say: "This is not tragic. I am happy."34 And
so it was throughout her whole human life; the difficult
things that had to be done were the best couriers of joy
because they were not purposeless. Her spiritual life,
too, shared this lovely fulness of life because it was
heading towards its ultimate satisfaction. "As for the

32 Ibid., "The Crucifixion," 82.
33 Ibid., "Free Will," 100.
34 V. Meynell, 345.
spiritual life—O weary, weary act of refusal! O waste but necessary hours, vigil and wakefulness of fear."35

Taking the total effect of these thoughts contained in various poems and essays, it seems safe to say that in loving God as completely as she did, she enabled herself to bear the sufferings and hardships of life as cherished tokens of her love for God. The reticence that shrouded her life does not give us many actual recorded facts for confirmation of this. But Katherine Bregy felt that from her association with and her analysis of Mrs. Meynell she could say this:

One of her most shining and lovely virtues was being able to give up without anyone but herself and God being aware of it. There is a little poem of hers in which I find that abnegation (Via, et Veritas, et Vita)... She had supremely the secret of setting aside, of giving up.36

And in the same article she says:

For the characteristic note of Mrs. Meynell's music is not yearning or aspiration; it is not the dear and consummate fruition of life; still less is it the mourning over things lost. It is the note of active renunciation. There is that renunciation of the beloved by

35 A. Meynell, Essays, 43.
the lover so that both may be true to the Heart of Love; there is that renunciation by the poet, by the artist, not only poor precious human comforting, but likewise of her own sweet prodigality in art, that she may see things clearly without excess; in fine the ultimate and inevitable renunciation of an elect soul.37

And this estimation by Miss Bregy we make our own. Certainly there are not many other lay-women, if, indeed, there are some, whose spiritual insight was as keen as Mrs. Meynell's; nor are there many who saw as clearly as she did the infinite value attached to sacrifice and suffering.

37 Ibid., 496.
CHAPTER FOUR

MRS. MEYNELL'S EXPRESSION OF THE PURGATIVE WAY AND MORTIFICATION IN HER POETRY CONT'D.

In the previous chapter no distinction was made between interior and exterior mortification. It is well to make this distinction, however, since one, the interior, takes precedence over the other in value. Both the interior, mental discipline, and the exterior, the denial of sensible pleasures, are found as themes or as random references in Mrs. Meynell's poetry. Interior mortification, however, is of prime importance since it elevates our mental appreciation and strengthens the will in desiring only that which is worthy of a rational nature. It is of this that we speak in this chapter.

Mental discipline, or interior mortification, has as its end to correct the purposelessness of much of the action of the human mind, and give it a training by which it will come to see and think aright. "Flabbiness of thought" and phantastic wanderings in a conceptual world are diseases of the mind which eventually rob it of any capability of decisive action. The only remedy for such illnesses, of course, is counter-action; the subjects for thought must be controlled so that the mental capacity is
not debilitated and rendered ineffectual in man's composite nature. Naturally, this will call for denial and resistance by man. He will have to think his thoughts clearly, accurately, and without any undue coloring of the imagination. On the other hand, it is not an austerity of thought which stifles the imagination and hinders creative thought. It is, rather, thought dealing with worthwhile material in a constructive way so that it is at once useful and inspiring. Archbishop Goodier says:

There is discipline of the mind, control of its subjects of thought, and of the way it deals with them. To allow the mind to have its own way, to allow it to 'do what it likes', inevitably leads to flabbiness of thought, to wandering imagination, to say nothing of other evils; the meandering, unbridled mind can never be spiritual. It must be taught to see and think aright; it must be trained, not only to accept what is given to it, but itself to go forward and pursue the better things. Such is mental mortification.¹

Tanquerey's agreement with Archbishop Goodier's statement is convincing in the proper distinctions it makes. He has reference here to the faculties of memory and imagination as the two interior senses to be mortified. This is the way he speaks of interior mortification:

¹ Goodier, 159.
These are two valuable faculties, which not only furnish the mind with the necessary material whereon to work, but enable it to explain the truth with the aid of images and facts in such a manner as to make it easier to grasp, and render it more vital and more interesting. The bare, colorless and cold statement of truth would not engage the interest of most men. It is not question, then, of atrophying these faculties, but of schooling them, of subjecting their activity to the control of reason and will. Otherwise, left to themselves, they literally crowd the soul with a host of memories and images that distract the spirit, waste its energies, cause it to lose priceless time while at prayer and work, and constitute the source of a thousand temptations against purity, charity, humility and other virtues. Hence, of necessity they must be disciplined and made to minister to the higher faculties of the soul. 2

This type of mortification is basic to all other mortification. Denial of the body and the senses is not done merely for its own sake. It must be done in order to insure the body's subjection to the soul and in order that the soul may not be seeking its satisfaction in the body. This is to say that the soul, too, must be mortified; such soul-mortification is properly called interior mortification.

The practical application of this doctrine of interior mortification is found under the guise of the simple
directive, "Do what you are supposed to do." The person who steadily applies himself to the task at hand will be mortifying himself interiorly. Concentration is a disciplinary measure held over the mind. To do what is to be done implies a freedom from preoccupation with other interests, and this is had only by disciplining the mind to concentrate on the thing at hand. Hence this mortification leads to a power of self-determination and to the necessary will-power to force the action proper to the determination made. Archbishop Goodier expresses it thus:

Mental mortification implies the power to 'make up one's mind', to decide for oneself what is right; and that dispassionately, independently, without any bias in one's own favor....

Having made up one's mind, discipline of the will implies the power to act in accordance with one's decision; the power of true self-command....

Above all, discipline of the will implies control of the passions....

This discipline of mind and will is what Mrs. Meynell always desired, and her constant effort was to insure its continued presence. It is what she asks in the following poem which she wrote in memory of her father. In this poem she subscribes with Dryden to the saying, "Thy

3 Goodier, 160.
father was transfused into thy blood," and therefore she makes an appeal to her father that he give her those virtues with which he was endowed. Through the strength and courage he bequeathed to her, she wanted to subdue her fiery spirit, discipline her mind, and stir in herself an appreciation of the noble things in life. These were things she knew in her father and they were the things she wanted in herself. In her poem she says it in this fashion:

Our father works in us,  
The daughters of his manhood. Not undone  
Is he, not wasted, though transmuted thus,  
And though he left no son.

Therefore on him I cry  
To arm me: "For my delicate mind a casque,  
A breastplate for my heart, courage to die,  
Of thee, captain, I ask.

"Nor strengthen only; press  
A finger on this violent blood and pale,  
Over this rash will let thy tenderness  
A while pause, and prevail.

"And shepherd-father, thou  
Whose staff folded my thoughts before my birth,  
Control them now I am of earth, and now  
Thou art no more of earth.

"O liberal, constant, dear!  
Crush in my nature the ungenerous art  
Of the inferior; set me high, and here,  
Here garner up thy heart."

Like to him now are they,  
The million living fathers of the War--  
Mourning the crippled world, the bitter day--  
Whose striplings are no more.
The crippled world! Come then,
Fathers of women with your honour in trust;
Approve, accept, know them daughters of men,
Now that your sons are dust.⁴

She seeks of her father his own noble character, and the things that made it noble were courage to meet life, quiet restraint of temperamental flare-ups, controlled thoughts, and a dissatisfaction with inferiority. No one of these things can be had unless they are sought by a self-controlled, self-disciplined man. They are the things that soften the hard reality of life.

Just how hard life's realities were for her is apparent in an apostrophe to sleep that Mrs. Meynell makes. She hails sleep as "Dear fool" because with its dreams of phantasy it endears itself to the care-laden mind; but it is reality that we live in, not phantasy, and to avoid reality consciously is the part of the fool. Listen to the things sleep releases her from:

Dear fool, be true to me!
I know the poets speak thee fair, and I
Hail thee uncivilly.
O but I call with a more urgent cry!

I do not prize thee less,
I need thee more, that thou dost love to teach--
Father of foolishness--

⁴ A. Meynell, Poems, 95.
The imbecile 'dreams clear out of wisdom's reach.

Come and release me; bring
My irresponsible mind; come in thy hours.
Draw from my soul the sting
Of wit that trembles, consciousness that cowers.

For if night comes without thee
She is more cruel than day. But thou, fulfill
Thy work, thy gifts about thee--
Liberty, liberty, from the weight of will.

My day-mind can endure
Upright, in hope, all it must undergo.
But O afraid, unsure,
My night-mind waking lies too low, too low.

Dear fool, be true to me!
The night is thine, man yields it, it seems
Thy ironic dignity.
Make me all night the innocent fool that dreams.5

"Bring my irresponsible mind" means that she lives with her responsible mind,—the mind that accepts the liability of human actions. It is only a disciplined mind which carries this burden. So, too, is sleep a release from the momentousness of decision, "the wit that trembles," and the awareness of each act's morality, the "Consciousness that cowers."

Liberty of will is a weight because it means a choice of right and wrong, a choice made difficult sometimes by

5 Ibid., "To Sleep," 121.
wrong's allurement. But through all consciousness her "day-mind" can endure upright "against every contrary motion." To such a self-controlled person the surcease of watchfulness afforded by sleep would surely be welcome.

In two beautiful poems Mrs. Meynell tells us the cause of all this interior mortification and how sweet that cause makes the task.

The first is an eulogy of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, In the poem she compares the real conception and birth of Christ by the Blessed Virgin with the struggle every man has in forming this same Christ in his own heart and soul.

We too (one cried), we too, We the unready, the perplexed, the cold, Must shape the Eternal in our thoughts anew, Cherish, possess, enfold.

Thou sweetly, we in strife. It is our passion to conceive Him thus In mind, in sense, within our house of life; That seed is locked in us.

We must affirm our Son From the ambiguous Nature's difficult speech, Gather in darkness that resplendent One, Close as our grasp can reach.
Nor shall we ever rest
From this our task. An hour suffice for thee,
Thou innocent! He lingers in the breast
Of our humanity.6

"To shape our thoughts anew" requires vigilance and direction. Thus it is that "in strife" we develop Christ in our souls. "Nor shall we ever rest from this our task" because in counterdistinction to the innocence of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who had Christ in her soul at the moment of her Immaculate Conception, we bring Christ into us over a path cleared away by mortification.

The second poem is one based on a passage from Thomas A'Kempis and concerns Christmas. A'Kempis says this: "If I cannot see thee present I will mourn thee absent for this also is a proof of love." Mrs. Meynell comments thus:

We do not find Him on the difficult earth,
In the surging human-kind,
In the wayside death or accidental birth,
Or in the "march of mind".

Nature, her nests, her prey, the fed, the caught,
Hide Him so well, so well,
His steadfast secret there seems to our thought
Life's saddest miracle.

6 Ibid., "To the Mother of Christ the Son of Man," 135.
He's but conjectured in man's happiness
Suspected in man's tears,
Or lurks beyond the long, discouraged guess,
Grown fainter through the years.

But absent, absent now? Ah, what is this,
Near as in child-birth bed,
Laid on our sorrowful hearts, close to a kiss?
A homeless childish head.7

Humanity and nature hide Christ rather effectively.
The happy man overlooks Him; the sorrowful man suspects Him as the cause of his sorrow; and the atheist is annoyed by the faint glimpses he gets of Christ. Yes, He does seem to be hidden from us, but now at Christmas time, as we would a baby, so we gather Christ to our heart repentant for our irregularities.

These poems show that Mrs. Meynell saw Jesus Christ inhabiting the Universe, that she was most eager that He should find a permanent dwelling place in her heart, and, knowing that the pure Christ must have a pure home, that she did not shrink from keeping her life in order by discipline and control.

What we have shown here is but a further proof of that which we have carried over from the previous pages. The theme of most of the poems quoted was centered around

7 Ibid., "Christmas Night," 139.

There is some criticism of Mrs. Meynell's work that seems to be the result of a similar observation of this discipline. Father Geoffrey Bliss, S.J., for instance, is somewhat typical in his criticism:

...emotion is there, too, strong and resurgent; but it is not at home there; it is mistrusted, repressed, rapped over the head as something dangerous or hysterical. 8

Though we silently note the criticism, we do, nevertheless, find in it an acknowledgement of restraint and self-control, and that quite vigorously expressed.

Such a spirit of self-renunciation should be no cause of wonder. It is truly the spirit of Catholic tradition, and Catholic tradition has never been put beyond the practical life. Rather it has been a superior integrating force by which life is pointed towards a goal, hence giving meaning to life, and supplying life with adequate means for

obtaining that goal. Father Calvert Alexander, S.J., makes this observation on the spirit Mrs. Meynell inculcated into the group of Catholic writers who spear-headed the Catholic Literary Revival of the late eighteen-hundreds:

In her vision the Catholic tradition stood not apart, but in the center of things, in intimate contact with the glories of the European past and the really valuable tendencies in the present, engaged in the work of carrying forward the main stream of English letters. This mark of hers may be seen in the revival today.9

It is no exaggeration to say that within the Catholic tradition self-abnegation has always been a highly praised means for attaining to Christian charity and perfection.

The good sense of Mrs. Meynell has enabled her to obtain a solid knowledge of mortification, and, therefore, she forestalls any accusation of fanaticism. The quiet serenity and the flight of passion found in her poems is always either that of a peaceful soul, or that of a human being who feels intensely; whatever the mood of her poem, however, there is always that injection of an appreciation for the profundity of the depth from which human passion flows and the consequent harmony of all passion within the

human person. The disorganization and irresponsibility of inconsequential action was always repugnant to her; the passion of a poem on nature very rarely has its origin in the beauty of nature itself, rather the passion is called up by a realization of God's necessary beauty from the shadowy reflection it gets from one of His creatures. In a like manner, she does not speak of self-denial without speaking of it in reference to God. There is, then, no preoccupation with mortification alone; the guidance of the goal itself for which she was striving served to subordinate mortification to its proper place within her scheme for attaining to that goal. Thus at the close of "The Young Neophyte," when she has "pledged her hidden wheat," she says:

In their retreat
I seal my love to-be, my folded art
I light the tapers at my head and feet
And lay the crucifix on this silent heart.

Equipped, then, with her goal and the means to attain to it, she makes her little, graceful concessions to human nature and thus softens the illogical and rigid application of a theoretical mortification. Principle and practice are blended; human nature, with due consideration being given it, is allied to the supernatural and there results a
properly balanced character which does all that is humanly possible to reach heaven.

I must not think of thee; and, tired yet strong,
I shun the thought that lurks in all delight--
The thought of thee-- and in the blue Heaven's height,
And in the sweetest passage of a song.

O just beyond the fairest thoughts that throng
This breast, the thought of thee waits, hidden yet bright;
But it must never, never come in sight;
I must stop short of thee the whole day long.

But when sleep comes to close each difficult day,
When night gives pause to the long watch I keep,
And all my bonds I needs must loose apart,

Must doff my will as raiment laid away,--
With the first dream that comes with the first sleep
I run, I run, I am gathered to thy heart. 10

Unashamedly she admits that her dreams while she is asleep unite her again to one who during her waking hours had to be renounced totally. To dream is outside our direct control since it is beyond the conscious state. She does not fret and scruple, therefore, because she dreams of someone she renounces in her waking hours; she accepts

it as part of her human nature.

One of the last poems of her collection is this poem comparing the bird's song and the song of the poet. It is a profession of human limitation in thought and poetizing. It does contain, though, the hope of escaping such limitation and arriving at the peace of God and Heaven.

You bid me hold my peace,  
Or so I think, you birds; you'll not forgive  
My kill-joy song that makes the wild song  
cease,  
Silent or fugitive.

Yon thrush stopt in mid-phrase  
At my mere footfall; and a longer note  
Took wing and fled afield, and went its ways  
Within the blackbird's threat.

Hereditary song,  
Illyrian lark and Paduan nightingale,  
Unlike, and thus like all my race, am I,  
Is yours, unchangeable the ages long;  
Assyria heard your tale;

Therefore you do not die.  
But single, local, lonely, mortal, new,  
Unlike, and thus like all my race, am I,  
Preluding my adieu.

My human song must be  
My human thought. Be patient till 'tis done.  
I shall not hold my peace; for me  
There is no peace but one.11

Since "My human song must be my human thought," there will never be any attempt to excell the "human" element as long

11 Ibid., "The Poet to the Birds," 143.
as it is part of the whole person. In a word she is saying that whatever she does, it will be done by a person who is limited by nature but who achieves her best effect by harmonizing her power and her limitation. This is the prudence of an intelligent person. It allows for the fluctuation of "humanness" while adhering to the strict code of principles she espoused. To Mrs. Meynell must be granted a delicate skill in balancing the natural and supernatural in her person and in her work.
CHAPTER FIVE
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The preceding chapters of this paper have shown the understanding Mrs. Meynell had of the Purgative Way of asceticism. Purification, penance, and mortification, all are themes in her poetry. The exquisite melody of her songs carries these inescapable truths of the spiritual life over the high barriers of physical repugnance; the keen perception and the precise diction penetrate the wall of intellectual deficiency so that the rigors of discipline and abnegation are presented in their glorious eventuality.

Alice Meynell's poetical preoccupation with the individual, the particular thing, makes for a fine commentary on the abstract universality of the teaching of spiritual writers. There is little which Archbishop Goodier or Father Tanquerey teach in their treatises on mortification that has not found in some way an application by Mrs. Meynell. The cleanness of heart and proper motivation considered essential by these men are the themes of the "renunciation" poems. Justice and its numberless recipients bring forth in her an expression of penance and demonstrate the penitential spirit clearly and concisely.
Finally, that great element of purgation, mortification, is gracefully ennobled by her delightful numbers.

What Mrs. Meynell has had to say, she has said competently. The concept of purgation is not a dominating theme; it is not a thought that is uppermost in all her poetry. Its appreciation is too subtle for such a distortion. It is better to say that it is a strong undercurrent steadying her passionate consideration of life, art, and nature.

All this presupposes the guidance of a philosophy of life. The philosophy Mrs. Meynell espoused was that of Christianity. She had a profound understanding of what sorrow, pain, and grief meant and, because of her deep insight, she penetrated beyond the surface of flesh and blood to the abysmal meaning of life.

She viewed man as a totality, with a body and soul; she defined the higher and lower elements of the human person; she saw and appreciated the individual purpose of every man. The inevitable result was that she understood that the soul was meant to love and was to find an aid for that love in the body. From this appreciation of man, she learned that this ancillary position of the body could
only be maintained by complete mastery of the body. Refusal was the best means to such mastery. This refusal, however, grew out of love,--a love in which she acknowledged the body for its true worth in the composite man. To this body she bent her knee in respect and reverence while, at the same time, looking upon it as a cross. "O flesh, O grief, thou too shall have our knee, thou rood of every day."

Such is the philosophy of life that can be gleaned from her poetry. It is a philosophy that she carried into every activity of her life. She gave of her own leisure so that other people might share it with her. Very literally, she suffered fools gladly. She endured bores and dullards whose work she made fit by her emendations because she had from her religion the courage and good sense to be humble. Her open hand of hospitality was always extended to everyone. But with all, the spirit of austerity was very real in her and she frequently turned away from those comfortable and soft things women more robust than she seek after. All her friends were anxious to give her the things of luxury but they knew she would have spurned them.
The greatness of this philosophy Mrs. Meynell has enhanced by her literary work. In her poetry there is an evanescent quality which adds a peculiar beauty to every verse; it is a quality with which she paints the seemingly impossible to paint; it is a quality by which she makes the faint suggestion trembling emotion. This feeling is wedded to profoundly imaginative thought and heightens the completeness of her artistry. She is strict and strong in thought but sweet and tender in feeling. Every word carries the double burden of feeling and thought; every phase synchronizes each word with the burden of the poem.

Mrs. Meynell's is poetry the spiritual voice of which will become audible when 'high noises' of today have followed the feet that have made them. To have done worthy work, and to know this; to rest content, even in a little ignorance of how far one's work is worthy; to discern that not the spade is fashioned for honour, but the garden it tilled, and the gardener who tilled it-- this is to be more than a poet, more yet than one's poetry; this is to have compassed greatness, being oneself greater than greatness. Foremost singer of a sex which is at last breaking the silence that followed Mary's "Magnificat," she will leave to her successors a serener tradition than masculine poets bequeathed to men. She has reared for them an unpriced precedent, and she has given them the law of silence. That high speech must be shod with silence, that high work must be set forth with silence, that high destiny must be waited on with silence-- was a lesson the age lacked
much. Our own sex has heard the nobly
tacit message of Mrs. Coventry Patmore.1

In pointing out the Way of Purgation in Mrs. Meynell's
work it has been our aim to complete the appreciation of
the thoroughly Christian soul Francis Thompson, Coventry
Patmore, and George Meredith loved so much.

1 T. Connolly, S.J., Literary Criticisms By Francis
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The thesis submitted by Richard F. Rocklage, S.J. 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.

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John B. Conrath, S.J.