An Analysis of the Poetry of Alice Meynell on the Basis of Her Personal Principles of Literature

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AN ANALYSIS OF THE POETRY OF ALICE MEYNELL ON THE BASIS OF
HER PERSONAL PRINCIPLES OF LITERATURE

By

Sister Gertrude Agnes Carter

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VITA

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CHAPTER I

LIFE OF ALICE MEYNE LL IN RESPECT TO HER TIME

The England into which Alice Meynell was born and in which she lived for three quarters of a century, was a changing England. The dogmatic "it-is-so" spirit of the Victorian age, dictated by scientific progress,

standardized, cheapened, and "uglified" the substantial things of life, and distributed them through society in a way undreamed of in earlier ages.¹

That which had been, at the beginning of the Victorian era, an agricultural country, became, in the course of a few decades, a highly organized, industrial nation. And the changes which followed in the wake of this revolution affected unmistakably the political, intellectual, and religious conditions—all potent factors in determining the spirit of nineteenth century literature.²

Generally speaking, Liberalism, which implied a partial or total emancipation of man from the supernatural, moral, and Divine order, was the accepted philosophy of the day. Unrestrained freedom of thought reflected


the earlier teachings of Rousseau, Kant, and Godwin, namely, that it is contrary to the natural right and dignity of man for him to subject himself to an authority, the sanction of which is not in himself. Specifically, this philosophical trend was demonstrated by Huxley as the interpreter of Darwin and science; by Herbert Spencer, the noted champion of the individual against the state, as an organizer of all knowledge into a philosophy of evolution; by John Stuart Mill, the utilitarian, as the exhibitor of a philosophical radicalism.

Eventually, the influences brought about by scientific speculation and materialistic philosophy were bound to have a most degenerating and deteriorating effect. This was witnessed in an unhappy skepticism which was bred in men who could neither cope with these tests of faith nor transcend them. Within the last quarter of the nineteenth century, consequently, we see the proud Victorian spirit lose its self-confidence, and an evident need of spiritual renovation force itself upon the national consciousness.³

Literature, in the first part of the century, appeared largely in keeping with the romantic tradition as exemplified in the writings of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats. With the last decades of the century, however, an intense intellectual activity was evidenced by a group of writers who were sophisticated, exquisite, and affected. They were in search of beauty, and were seized with a splendid devotion, not to the inner past, but to all the outer glory and brilliance in which it is enshrined. The doctrine of art for art's sake they had adopted from the French, and

sought to escape life and reality in an emotion, a mood, a picture, or perhaps a dream. Their representatives, like the sensuous Swinburne and the exotic Rossetti, glorified beauty, dwelt upon the morbid aspects of decay and death in nature, and placed the artists activity outside and above morals.

Aesthetes they were styled, with Walter Pater their recognized master. Of them G. M. Young wrote:

They form no school, their derivation is various, and their allegiance divided. But there is a spiritual bond between them in the sense of personal value. The Socratic search for the good had begun to replace ideals which were toppling as their religious foundations cracked....And crowding into the picture are pessimists and pagans, the strenuous and decadent, strong, silent men, and not so silent feminists, Celts and aesthetes, spiritualists and theosophists, Whistlers and Wildes and Beardsleys all the fads and fancies into which the compact and domestic philosophy of Victorian England dissolved. 4

Finally, the "fin de siecle," with its spirit of pessimism, intellectual anarchy, and an acknowledged feeling of decadence, was represented by a group of exotic writers and artists who attempted to destroy the old proprieties which they considered hostile to the spirit of their art. The writings of Oscar Wilde and Ernest Dowson, and the art of Aubrey Beardsley, to illustrate, demonstrated perfectly the artificiality, perversity, egoism, and curiosity so characteristic of this last decade of the nineteenth century. It was "a degeneration," wrote Holbrook Jackson, "arising not out

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of senility...but out of ease with which life was maintained and desires satisfied."5

Chesterton aptly labelled the era when he commented: "Victorian England was in a state which some called liberty and some call lockjaw."6 But in either case a neo-paganism engrossed the minds of men.

The loss of faith in all traditions, the lonely responsibility of each individual for his own opinion and ideas, the intellectual and spiritual chaos of these latter days have sent men groping in various directions for a foothold of reality.7

They lacked that strength and force of religion which makes directions sure and foothold secure. And the remedy was effected by a Catholic reaction which was admittedly "one of the great phenomena of nineteen century thought."8

Nowhere was the intellectual strength of England so concentrated and organized as in the Oxford Movement, which by definite and dogmatic bonds, directed back to God many of the most acute thinkers of the age. If the Church is a supernatural society, they reasoned, it should not be hampered by state politics. If God had revealed truths, He meant them to be believed in their entirety; they were not to be subjected to the method of

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choice and rejection which the Protestant reformers had initiated. Consequently, these men revolted against Victorian society's attempt to substitute naturalism for the revealed truths of Christianity. They made religion their prime preoccupation, and it, in turn, had its reflection in literature. The Catholic Literary Revival or Renaissance had begun, and through the spiritual and scholarly efforts of Newman, its great founder, thousands were drawn from the slavery of Victorian doubt and unbelief. His was a tremendous effort to reestablish the structure of spirituality as a world-force, measuring the notion of modern progress by the ancient immutable standards of Christianity.

If the mid-nineteenth century saw the flowering of Catholic literature in the splendid works of Newman, De Vere, Patmore, and Hopkins, with little or no recognition from non-Catholic sources, the 1890's gave promise and a degree of encouragement to those writers pledged to the cause of the Catholic Literary Revival. While the nineteenth century, therefore, did much to destroy or to discredit faith, it simultaneously harbored in its household men and women who not only believed in God but made it the business of their lives to tell of their personal love of Him.

Here, then, is the nineteenth century, a strange composite, mothered by smugness, fathered by revolt, himself the parent of atheistic evolution and Catholic revival, of pessimist and mystic. Tutored in the schools of nature, Greek culture, German philosophy, and English hero worship, blown about by the winds of French rationalism and materialism, he yet hears the call of a longer inheritance of holiness and faith. Torn between skepticism and sanctity, he hears a
host of voices singing of the one
Teacher he has questioned most.9

Militantly significant in this host of singing voices was the protest-
ing voice of Alice Meynell. "Decivilization" is her word for the contem-
porary tendencies which she so heartily deplored. And "withered traditions"
she styled Victorial degeneration, and explicitly condemned them in her
writings. More frequently, however, her protests were implicitly expressed—
indeed, so implicitly that her very reserve gave added force to her utter-
ances.

Alice Meynell, regarded by some as the feminine counterpart of the
great Newman, was born in London in 1847. From her mother's sweet, spontan-
eous nature she inherited a charm and tenderness, a sympathy and sensitivity;
from her cultivated, fastidious father, a scholarly love of precision and an
intellectual integrity. And her early life, we are told

was a nomadic one; they halted nowhere
for much longer than one would pitch a
tent. The father's choice took them
wandering about Italy; and the Mother's
attachments brought them back to vari-
ous impermanent homes in the neighbor-
hood of her family in England. The
little girls' education was the care
of their father, sometimes carried on
in the logia of an Italian villa, some-
times in English towns and villages, and
greatly in the journeys and halting-
places that lay between.10

9 Sister Madeleva, "The Religious Poetry of the Nineteenth Century,"
Chaucer's Nuns and Other Essays (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1927),
p. 139.

10 Viola Meynell, Alice Meynell: A Memoir (New York: Charles Scribner's
At a very early age, too Alice Meynell enjoyed associations with many literary celebrities. To be sure, they were her father's guests, but always they took special note of her. Among them was Charles Dickens who smiled upon her babyhood. Other enviable acquaintances of her quite youthful days included the names of George Eliot, Robert Browning, Rossetti, and John Ruskin, who lent valuable encouragement to her early literary efforts by his generous praise of her first volume of poetry. "I really think the last verse of that song and the whole of San Lorenzo and the end of the daisy sonnet the finest things I've seen or felt in modern verse."11 And Tennyson, the poet laureate, complimented her by expressing a wish to see her. She visited him at his Surrey Home and rapturously listened to him read "in a splendid voice, and with a great broad accent that I thought an affectation, but I know now was mere Lincolnshire."12

Conversion to Catholicism, too, came in her girlhood. With the influence of the Late Romantic Movement all about her, and a stuffy Victorianism which she loathed because it lacked the stability her soul craved, she turned elsewhere for inspiration and direction.

I became a Catholic when I was very young. My reason for joining the Church is my reason for remaining in it—its administration of morals. Other Christian churches or sects (I except the "Orthodox," Greek and Russian) have the legislation of

11 Ibid., p. 51.
12 Alice Meynell, (unpublished letter written to Anne Tuell. Now in the Library of Boston College.)
Christian morality but they do not enforce that law. The Catholic Church administers it by means of her Sacraments, that of the Confessional especially. If it is true that grace ennobles a personality, it is equally true that natural dispositions enhance the dignity and the beauty of a person's supernatural character. It was this interplay of nature and grace in the ascetic Alice Meynell that explains almost entirely the remarkable influence she exerted, her serene detachment among her worshippers, and comments such as the one Max Beerbohm is credited with: "In a few years Mrs. Maynell will have become a sort of substitute for the English Sabbath."

Her reputation as a lady of letters, though established, was greatly augmented, when, in 1877 she met and later married Wilfrid Meynell, an author and journalist whose attention had been first drawn to her through one of her published sonnets, "The Garden." He had read into the lines

My heart shall be thy garden. Come, my own,
Into thy garden; thine be happy hours
Among my fairest thoughts, my tallest flowers,
From root to crowning petal thine alone.

a quaint invitation to seek her friendship, and eventually, to win her heart. Their literary tastes had drawn them together; their deep love, which ensued, provided them with what Mr. Meynell described as forty-five years of heaven on earth. It was a devotion which became more ardent with the years.

13 Viola Meynell, op. cit., p. 42. (The direct quotation is taken from an unpublished letter of Alice Meynell to Anne K. Tuell. It is now at the Library of Boston College.)

and drew from him the comment: "I loved my dear Alicia more intensely the day she died than I did the day I married her."\textsuperscript{15}

With her marriage to Wilfrid Meynell began a journalistic career which lasted eighteen years. Jointly they edited "Merry England," a monthly magazine in support of the social revolution of the Young England Movement, the revival of the peasantry, the abolition of the wrongs of the poor, the spread of art and literature.\textsuperscript{16}

Their expressed views significantly molded much of the thought and the literary output of the period. And Mrs. Meynell, particularly, as a contributor to English newspapers and periodicals, gained literary prominence; received every homage due her abilities as poet, essayist, and friend. Preludes had entered English literature, and she herself became the idolized hostess of 47 Palace Court, the center of an interesting coterie of English notables, and for years this London home was the scene of a gracious intimacy where literary meetings and discussions were carried on.

Young writers found the Meynell circle a source of encouragement and stimulation to literary endeavor. But most interesting was the group of celebrities who frequented Palace Court. Among them we find W. E. Henley, called by Francis Thompson the Viking Chief of Letters, who received with great enthusiasm Alice Meynell's first contribution to The Scots Observer;


\textsuperscript{16} Viola Meynell, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 67.
Henry Harland, who asked in vain for contributions to The Yellow Book; John Sargent, who had recourse to her for advice on religious phrases and quotations when he was preparing his adornment for the Boston Public Library; and a host of others including her very intimate friends, Coventry Patmore, George Meredith, and Francis Thompson.

Not all of these visitors to the home of Mrs. Meynell, however, shared her opinions and her beliefs, for there were non-Catholics among them and others who lacked utterly an appreciation of traditional standards, both religious and literary. Somewhat incongruous, therefore, were such visitors as Oscar Wilde and the unhappy Dowson. Fearlessly she protested the fagged tastes and decadence manifested in their art and literature, and in the flippant sophistication of such periodicals as The Yellow Book and The Savoy. Vigorously she condemned those things of life, which, to use her expression, were "mentally inexpensive"—vulgarities which were the result, not of being uncivilized, but of being de-civilized. Intelligently aware of the decadents' trend, she used their own techniques with a perfection that they themselves could never hope to effect. They, for instance, adored innocence, and symbolically used the idea of whiteness—even though love of white, as Holbrook Jackson remarked, "had a dash of the debauchee's love of virginity."17 But Alice Meynell expressed the mystery of white innocence immaculately when she wrote:

17 Holbrook Jackson, op. cit., p. 140.
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.
And folds them in for sleep.18

It is true that occasionally the grandeur of Catholicism broke on one or other of these aesthetes and a conversion would take place, but for the most part they and their art revealed the corruption of a decadent society.

There were, nevertheless, within that large circle of frequenters at Palace Court, a smaller group comprising writers who rightfully claimed a more intimate association with Mrs. Meynell. They were the men and women who had reacted against pessimism and pagan exaltation and the merely materialistic love of nature. And in accord with their high ideals, they not only sensed the task of returning the Catholic spirit to English literature, but also recognized the great opportunity at hand for accomplishing this ambition.19 They were enthusiastically aware of the prestige the Church was regaining as National Protestantism gave signs of breaking down. They were reaping the fruits of Newman's intrepid efforts to effect a Catholic revival. At this time numerous converts were coming into the Church, and among them were writers of literary genius who "felt on fire, not only to be Catholic, but to write Catholic."20 The neo-pagan movement, consequently,

18 Alice Meynell, op. cit., p. 51


to which we have already referred, was definitely checked by a Catholic re-
action which produced the greatest group of Christian poets since the seven-
teenth century. Next to Newman, no one was more responsible for this ac-
complishment than Alice Meynell. Both her influence and her insistence on
the doctrine of traditional dignity and disciplined workmanship brought it
about.

The opening lines of her essay, "The Horizon," illustrate her uplift-
ing message:

To mount a hill is to lift with you
something lighter and brighter than
yourself or than any meaner burden.
You lift the world, you raise the
horizon; you give the distance a sig-
nal to stand up....

We may justly interpret this passage as an indication of what her pen did for
the literary tendencies of her age. It lifted them up; it raised the horizon
to greater heights of appreciation for culture.

Upon her followers, Alice Meynell exerted an influence both spiritual
and literary. The graces of noble womanhood, added to her quite natural
feminine charm, lured these enthusiasts close to Catholic art and truth.
Just how charming and beautifully expressive her personality was may be
gathered from remarks such as George Meredith made: "Her manner presents to
me the image of one accustomed to walk in holy places and keep the eye of a
fresh mind on our tangled world." Into these "holy places" she led her

21 Alice Meynell, "The Horizon," Essays (London: Burns Oates and

22 George Meredith, "Mrs. Meynell's Two Books of Essays," The National
followers, urging them the while to let their writings strike roots deep into the eternal verities; to make their prose and poetry move men to see and love the Truth and Beauty that is God. This was the sublime mission that she designated as the work of the Catholic revivalists, namely, to revive the great Catholic tradition of letters.

This was the thrilling challenge that came from her own most resonant inner life, and it acted like a Pentecostal fire in the hearts of her disciples. Alice Meynell had mothered the Catholic Literary Revival until it had finally taken on the form of a movement; she had recruited and deepened it by her influence. Truly she had shared, with minds attuned to her own, the culture, learning, and experiences that were hers. But the real power of her appeal lay in the deep-seated faith that had its stamp on all her work. She stood for whatever was fine and ennobling. Never, therefore, did she succumb to the moods and tastes of her contemporaries who favored novelty and reaction. In refusing to subscribe to their principles she held fast to her own more worthy convictions that were founded on the moral law and the Church's teachings.

With Catholic truth the warp and woof of her own thought, Alice Meynell envisaged and strove for a return of it in the lives and writings of those about her. Of this ambition she continually reminded her inner circle of literary friends, and with them worked for the full realization of a Catholic literary renaissance in England. With this objective of her life, Alice Meynell could truly be identified with her own "Shepherdess," for the burden in her heart seemed ever the eager shepherding of the multitude into the safe and secure fold of Catholic thought and practice.
CHAPTER II

CHARACTERISTICS OF MRS. MEYNELL'S POETRY

The unusual popularity afforded Mrs. Meynell during her lifetime was due, observers thought, to her inspiring and irresistible charm. Both Meredith and Patmore had set their seals of approval on her works, and Max Beerbohm, in a less serious way, gives us a revealing proof of her eminence during the nineties, when he wrote "Mrs. Meynell's Cowslip Wine." In this fanciful skit, the author compared the acclaim over Alice Meynell to the ovation of a crowd as they thrill at the sight of their approaching queen. Obviously, the crowd is the reading public, and the guardsmen in question are the literary critics. But that she still excites interest and continues to give pleasure to her readers twenty-five years after her death, must be explained otherwise. It is in an analysis of her writings that we discover those fascinating qualities which, completely in accord with her own character, account for the lasting influence of

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her own life and the permanency of her literary works.

To read Mrs. Meynell is to sojourn among the Delectable Mountains where the atmosphere is clear and as stimulating as wine. The sun is radiant but does not burn or blind. Flowers are all about, not brilliant in color but exquisitely fashioned and delicately tinted, alive in fiber and petal as those should be that blossom bravely in high altitudes.²

Feminist though she was, with all the traits of a sensitively cultured woman, Alice Meynell wrote poetry characterized, for the most part, by an intellectual intensity and a marked virility which may well be called masculine. Repeatedly, she demonstrated her ability to capture with a phrase the most elusive turns of thought. Hers was the amazing gift of being able to seize upon the shadowy emotions as they flitted across the mind, and to give them solid intellectual form. This was the faculty she shared with her beloved seventeenth century lyricists, but in actual deftness of its exercise, she excelled them all. Neither Crashaw nor Donne nor Vaughan gave difficult thought so lucid a simplicity of statement.³

The critics of her day had much to say in praise of the intellectual vigor of Alice Meynell's writings, but none of them summed


up the effect quite so adequately as Chesterton when he said:

She never wrote a line, or even a
word, that does not stand like a
rib of a strong intellectual struc-
ture; a thing with the bones of
thought in it. 4

This forceful quality of her verse is illustrated in her "Summer in
England, 1914," 5 when the bitterness of war weighed heavily upon her.

Touching upon the human wreckage wrought by World War I, she wrote:

The armies died convulsed. And when
This chaste young silver sun went up
Softly, a thousand shattered men,
One wet corruption, heaped the plain,
After a league-long throb of pain.

Her voice, though gentle, is strong; her sympathy is humane, but
not sentimental. But when she continued with

Flower following tender flower; and birds,
And berries; and benignant skies
Made thrive the serried flocks and herds.—
Yonder are men shot through the eyes
Love, hide thy face
From man's unpardonable race.

she did so with an intellectual strength that is not usually attribu-
ted to women writers.

The poem, "A Father of Women," 6 was written in much the same
vein. With its gift-of-fortitude theme it strikes another verile

4 G. K. Chesterton, "Alice Meynell," Dublin Review, January,
1923, p. 2.

5 Alice Meynell, op. cit., p. 100.

6 Ibid., p. 95
note. This poetic commentary on the fact that their father had two daughters but no sons, was addressed to her sister, Lady Butler. With a directness and with an economy of words she wrote:

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.

But that her father "left no son," expresses not so much regret as a challenge, and so she prays for strength of mind and heart, and for endurance:

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.

The stanza contains a quiet valor, but further demonstrates the poet's tact of expression, masculine force of insight, and a feminine grace all combined. And while she petitions Heaven "for a transfusion of her father's blood, strength for compassion, quiet for the rash will, and the tenderness which can 'pause and prevail,'" she expressly reminds us of the survival of womanhood.

Whatever the theme of her poem, it is expressed with an intellectual vigor that invariably conveys the effect of masculinity. There is no doubt as to this virility when we read, for instance,

"The Watershed." Forcefully we are impressed with the fact that although one travels from country to country, he is still of the whole human race. The second stanza of this poem is especially remarkable:

I seemed to breast the streams that day;
I met, opposed, withstood
The northward rivers on their way,
   My heart against the flood—
   My heart that pressed to rise and reach,
   And felt the love of altering speech,
   Of frontiers, in its blood.

And remembering that the rivers in Italy flow north to a certain point, then change their course and flow south, the poet concludes:

But o the unfolding South! The burst
   Of summer! O to see
   Of all the southward brooks the first!
   The traveling heart went free
   With endless streams; that strife was stopped;
   And down a thousand vales I dropped,
   I flowed to Italy.

In her poetry, Alice Meynell repeatedly demonstrated her creative genius, but nowhere is it more strikingly evidenced than in "The Marriage of True Minds" (In the Bach-Gounod "Ave Maria"). Our sentimental interpretation would give credit to Gounod. Alice Meynell tells us that the glory is Bach's since his Prelude inspired Gounod to add the "Ave Maria." It is a superimposition of Gounod's

8 Alice Meynell, op. cit., p. 56.
9 Alice Meynell, op. cit., p. 122.
meditation on Bach's Prelude.

That seeking Prelude found its unforetold
Unguessed intention, trend;
Though needing no fulfilment, did enfold
This exquisite end.

... ...

Bach was Precursor. But no Baptist's cry
Was his; he who began
For one who was an end, did prophesy,
By Nature's generous act, the lesser man.

Again, Mrs. Meynell's profoundest thought is often times expressed with surprising suddenness and unusual brevity.

O rash! (I smile) to pledge my hidden wheat.10

Here in "The Young Neophyte," for instance, the parenthesis contains the all-important note, for without it the poem would have remained upon the plane of the natural. By means of this parenthetic touch, the element of faith has been added; the thought becomes transfigured; and the effect, which seems almost effortless, is overwhelming.

To associate any poet's verse with that of Shakespeare is high praise, indeed. Alice Meynell, if for no other poem, may well deserve that distinction for the unusual and virile quality of "To Sleep":11

10 Ibid., p. 24.
11 Ibid., p. 121.
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!

This is a splendid way in which to address sleep, for it is such a
trickster. One never knows what it is going to do, or when it is
going to come. Nevertheless, the poet makes her request:

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

This virile power of intellect, however, does not singly
characterize the poetry of Alice Meynell. In real life she had no
claim to masculinity. Rather, she thought that woman's function in
life was inferior to man's, and never moved out of her own sphere.
Man, she believed, is responsible for the driving and the doing; wo-
man should be his inspiration. There were certain themes peculiar
to political and social strife, consequently, that she never attempted
because they were, in her opinion, outside her field. Her subjects,
which were of her own choosing, are, in treatment, reflections of
deep affection for all God's creatures — a very feminine trait of
the woman herself, and a typical Saint Francis of Asissi one.

The Italy of her romantic childhood she loved. Little wonder,
then, that she clung to an affectionate remembrance of it, and per-
mitted the soft, clear blue Italian skies to shine over all her
works:
It was the south: mid-everything,  
Mid-land, midsummer, noon;  
And deep within a limpid spring  
The mirrored sun of June.  

Affectionately Mrs. Meynell wrote of the Alpine stream toppling into space. How she loved its mood, its movement, its music, and its hidden meaning as she heard it sing:

And down a thousand vales I dropped  
I flowed to Italy.  

And when a "miracle wind" blew across England, she rejoiced that, for a brief interval at least, the smoke of English town and factory had disappeared, and

Unsmirched incredibly and clean,  
Between the towns and factories,  
Avoiding, has his long flight been  
Bringing a sky like Sicily's.  

Caressingly tender, too, are Alice Meynell's references to those small growing things, which most of us are too heavy-lidded to perceive. The poem, "In Early Spring," for instance, contains such lovely delicate observations as the "leaf-folded violet," the "wild hedge-roses," and the simple "familiar daisy." Nor did our poet neglect a kindly interest in the dear feathered folk, for we

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12 Ibid., p. 131.  
13 Ibid., p. 56.  
14 Ibid., p. 107.
come upon lovely poetic lines addressed to them. Their call was so familiar, and inspired such comments — none more delightfully charming than "The cuckoo's fitful bell." Again, in the springtime of the year, we discover Alice Meynell eagerly inviting these songsters to begin anew their happy caroling: "O all brown birds, compose your old songphrases." And because she loved and closely observed these dear musical striplings, she could write:

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

She smiled forgiveness upon the redbreast as he sang his carefree song, and compared him to a boy too happy to feel responsibility — "This singing bird's a lad, a lad."

But the love with which Alice Meynell wrote of her "darling young" was far more intense. Of them she could write tenderly and affectionately because she was so deeply interested. And her knowledge and maternal love of them enabled her to write exquisitely of children in some of the loveliest of her poems. Breathingly and breathlessly they come before us, when, in such a poem as "The Modern

15 Ibid., p. 3.
16 Ibid., p. 3.
17 Ibid., p. 143.
18 Ibid., p. 140.
Mother,"19 she wrote of a child's eyes:

0 filial light
Strong in these childish eyes, these new, these bright
Intelligible stars! Their rays
Are near the constant earth, guides in the maze,
Natural, true, keen in this dusk of days.

Or again, in "To O—, of Her Dark Eyes":20

Across what calm of tropic seas,
'Neath alien clusters of the nights,
Looked, in the past, such eyes as these!
Long-quenched, re-lumed, ancestral lights!

Hereditary eyes! But this
Is single, singular, apart:
New-made thy love, new-made thy kiss,
New-made thy errand to my heart.

we are made aware of her passionate love for a child. Glimpses into
her family correspondence reveal a heart overflowing with a tender
devotion for little children. There is, for instance, the message
to the three little daughters of Madeline: "My love to the three
angels, but a special cherishing love to my own adored Sylvia."21 It
was for this precious two-year old that she wrote:

Long life to thee, long virtue, long delight,
A flowering early and late!
Long beauty, grave to thought and gay to sight,
A distant date!

19 Ibid., p. 67.
20 Ibid., p. 105.
21 Viola Meynell, op. cit., p. 292.
Yet, as so many poets love to sing
(When young the child will die),
"No autumn will destroy this lovely spring,"
So, Sylvia, I.

I'll write thee dapper verse and touching rhyme;
"Our eyes shall not behold—"
The commonplace shall serve for thee this time:
"Never grow old."

For there's another way to stop thy clock
Within my cherishing heart,
To carry thee unalterable, and lock
Thy youth apart:

Thy flower for me shall evermore be hid
In this close bud of thine,
Not, Sylvia, by thy death—0 God forbid!
Merely by mine.

A passionate love prompted Mrs. Meynell to lock this child in her
own maternal heart, as she was at the age of two years. There she
would have this child remain, not until its death, but rather, until
life itself ceased for her.

But the kind heart of Alice Meynell could not confine its
charity and solicitude to the members of her own family. The poor,
the wretched, the underprivileged were also objects of her sympathy
and affection. She reproached the bourgeois minds who grew rich at
the expense of the poor, and in so doing revealed a tender interest
in the unfortunate:

Thou wouldst not part thy spoil
Gained from the beggar's want, the weakling's toil,
Nor spare a jot of sumptuousness or state
For Lazarus at the gate. 22

Especially dear to Mrs. Meynell, among God's poor, was a
crossing-sweeper in Manchester Square. On one occasion she had written
to him: "I shall not be passing your corner for some few more Sun-
days, and I don't like to think you will forget me, nor do I like you
to think I have forgotten you." 23 It is a message that breathes of
a gentle compassion and is indicative of a Christ-like charity in
the heart of the sender. Commemorative of this friendship is the
poem, "In Manchester Square," 24 written by Mrs. Meynell after the
street-cleaner's death.

The paralytic man has dropped in death.
The crossing-sweeper's brush to which he clung,
One-handed, twisted, dwarfed, scant of breath,
Although his hair was young.

I saw this year the winter vines of France,
Dwarfed, twisted goblins in the frosty drouth—
Gnarled, crippled, blackened little stems askance
On long hills to the South.

Great green and golden hands of leaves ere long
Shall proffer clusters in that vineyard wide.
And 0 his might, his sweet, his wine, his song,
His stature, since he died.

These sentiments are an expression of a sympathetic plea for the

22 Alice Meynell, op. cit., p. 141.
24 Alice Meynell, op. cit., p. 84.
suffering poor. They not only leave no doubt as to Mrs. Meynell's respect and affection for the paralytic man, but they tell us also of her profound admiration for the spiritual greatness of this lowly one. His physical deformities were but a corporeal thing, a thin veil that shrouded the beauty of his soul, and she recognized in him a member of the Mystical Body of a suffering Christ.

Together with this quality of an all-embracing charity, there appears in Alice Meynell's poetry an added characteristic which Alfred Noyes calls a "sacrificial restraint." If intellectual virility, which we discussed earlier in this chapter, gave an epigrammatic touch to much of what she wrote, her artistic restraint created vital silences, and also gave her poetry form and strength. Verily, she was a true daughter of him of whom she wrote:

The delicate, the abstinent, the reticent graces were his to the heroic degree...He was not inarticulate, he was only silent. He had an exquisite style from which to refrain.25

Her own self-expression was reticent and reserved, though deliberate; reasoned and wholly under control. She has told us herself in "The Unexpected Peril" that hers was not

25 Viola Meynell, op. cit., p. 31
Youth of abounding blood,
In love with the sufficient day,
And gay in growth, and strong in bud.26

"At Night," a poem written to Mr. Meynell, again illustrates, in a few small words, that invulnerable, self-disciplined control.

It is the beautiful restraint of a wife writing to her husband:

Home, from the horizon far and clear,
Hither the soft wings sweep;
Flocks of the memories of the day draw near
The dovecote doors of sleep.

Oh, which are they that come through sweetest light
Of all these homing birds?
Which with the straightest and the swiftest flight?
Your words to me, your words!27

How much more effective is: "Your words to me, your words," than if she had written "your love." There is nothing extravagant here in her manner of expression; neither is the poem lifeless. On the contrary, it is aglow with the fire of love, but with a carefully tended fire of controlled passion.

It was this same almost superhuman restraint, so characteristic of Alice Meynell's poetry, that kept her from ever advertising the fact that she was a poet who had eight children. Although she never used mother themes — poems to her children-- her writings possess an exquisite motherly quality. "To Antiquity," is an example of such a

26 Alice Meynell, op. cit., p. 90.
27 Ibid., p. 114.
poem. Here we discover her mothering a young poet who had written something she liked:

O Youngling! how is this?
Your poems are not wearied yet, not dead,
Must I bow low? or with an envious kiss,
Put you to bed? 28

Only a mother, we are certain, could have written such lines, even though they were for one whose name, even, the author did not know.

Possessed, as she was, of a keen imagination, Alice Meynell never allowed that gift to lead her into ways of extravagant fancies and blatant expansiveness. As we have remarked previously, she loved nature in all its varied aspects. However, at the thought of its wonders and beauties unfolding as the springtime of the year approached, she preferred silence to words:

I shall be silent in those days desired
Before a world inspired. 29

In this poise of reserve, so marked in all Alice Meynell's poetry, we are aware of a magnificent tranquility, a Christian stoicism which is the result of a remarkable self-discipline. To mention still another example, her poem, "Renouncement," 30 impressively

28 Ibid., p. 138.
29 Ibid., p. 3.
30 Ibid., p. 38.
demonstrates this quality, for it presents the effect of a marble figure with the heart-beat in the eyes alone. And so carefully repressed are her emotions that when we read in a poem like "Maternity" the lines:

Ten years ago was born in pain,
A child not now forlorn.
But, oh, ten years ago, in vain,
A mother, a mother was born.

we sense the poignant cry that is never uttered except in a gaze, and we recognize that equanimity and self-control which dominate our poet's art.

But although the excellence of her intellect prompted this restraint, for the most part, it does not follow that Alice Meynell was incapable of exercising liberty of spirit or of writing in a more emotional strain. Occasionally, we come upon little releases and delightful impetuosities in her poetry that indicate the ability to get away from her austere, classic style. "Chimes" is one such example, for it reveals great lyric abandon and liberty of spirit, and we have a sound added to English letters that resembles the chiming of her own bells:

31 Ibid., p. 85.


33 Alice Meynell, op. cit., p. 75.
Brief, on a flying night,
   From the shaken tower,
A flock of bells take flight
   And go with the hour.

Like birds from the cote to the gales,
   Abrupt—0 hark:
A fleet of bells set sail,
   And go to the dark.

Sudden the cool airs swing,
   Alone, aloud,
A verse of bells takes wing
   And flies with the cloud.

Whether, therefore, it is in silences and generous exclusions, or in seemingly effortless felicities of pure song, Alice Meynell has given us great lyric poetry. The former type, however, she more generally and characteristically preferred, for in her personal life there was apparent something of her own saying:

   Thou art like silence unperplexed,
       A secret and a mystery,
   Between one footfall and the next.34

This chapter would not be complete unless we investigated beyond these qualities of intellectual virility, deep affection, and sacrificial restraint to arrive at that steadfast strength and crystalline sweetness which religion alone can give. In her lifetime Alice Meynell walked close to God, and she wrote so that men might come nearer to the Divine. Her fervent thoughts, consequently, are

34 Ibid., p. 5.
clothed in language of austere purity and are permeated with a
genuine, though an elusive, spiritual charm.

Beautifully illustrated in "Length of Days" is the poet's
spiritual interpretation of youth fallen in battle. Writing on this
subject, many poets have emphasized the pathetic and tragic fact of
the frustration of life. Mrs. Meynell rose above the obvious and
facile theme of her day and measured life, as it should be evaluated,
by spiritual achievement and sacrifice.

Therefore, be satisfied;
Long life is in your treasury ere you fall;
Yes, and first love, like Dante's. O a bride
For ever mystical!

Irrevocable good,—
You dead, and now about, so young, to die—
Your childhood was; there Space, there Multitude,
There dwelt Antiquity.

In other words, these youthful dead had attained great length of
days. Theirs was a joyous satisfaction, for they had given their
lives for a noble cause.

Awed by the wonder of God, which she sensed in the hidden
and great parts of the universe, Mrs. Meynell frequently indicated
man's limitations and his inability to penetrate the Infinite. Of
the simple daisy she wrote:

Slight as thou art, thou art enough to hide
Like all created things, secrets from me,
And stand a barrier to eternity.

... ... ...

O daisy mine, what will it be to look
From God's side even of such a simple thing? 36

Tennyson had looked to the "Flower in the crannied wall" 37 for an understanding of God and man —

— but if I could understand
What you are, root and all, and all in all,
I should know what God and man is.

Alice Meynell looked to God for an understanding of the daisy and man. Tennyson's treatment of this theme is more secular in tone; hers, more religious, and is a lasting inspiration to interpret life in the light of God.

Quoting from another of the poet's works, "To the Body," 38 we are again aware of her spiritual touch:

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.

Here is the spiritual quality that makes for beauty in all poetry,

36 Ibid., p. 29


38 Alice Meynell, op. cit., p. 89.
and whether we cite one or many of Mrs. Meynell's poems, we will find it ever present. It was this sense of nearness to God, this intimacy with all that was spiritual that found expression in everything she wrote.

Sometimes, however, this familiarity with the Divine could easily be mistaken for irreverence. In the "Veni Creator,"39 for instance, she reminds God that He never knew what it was to be forgiven by anyone because He never sinned.

So humble things Thou hast borne 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.

Since God could not need pardon, there is one little phase of human nature He has not experienced. Mrs. Meynell is going to forgive Him for that:

...Come, then,
Endure undreamed humility: Lord of Heaven,
Come to our ignorant hearts and be forgiven.

It was this spiritual quality of her verse to which many have been attracted and to which Chesterton referred when he wrote of

39 Ibid., p. 69.
Alice Meynell: "She was alive to an immortal beauty where all the Pagans could only mix beauty with mortality.... She was a message from the Sun." 40

40 Chesterton, op. cit., p. 296.
CHAPTER III

A POET OF ONE MOOD

A Poet of one mood in all my lays,
Ranging one life to sing one only love,
Like a west wind across the world I move,
Sweeping my harp of floods mine own wild ways.

The countries change, but not the west-wind days
Which are my songs. My soft skies shine above,
And on all seas the colour of a dove,
And on all fields a flash of silver greys.

I make the whole world answer to my art
And sweet monotonous meanings. In your ears
I change not ever, bearing for my part,
One thought that is the treasure of my years
A small cloud full of rain upon my heart
And in my arms, clasped, like a child in tears.\(^1\)

The suggestion of symbolism in the above lyric is interesting,
since it reminds us that its author lived in the age of the decadents
— a time when unreality triumphed — and that symbolism was a popu-
lar form of expression among them. But Mrs. Meynell was classed with
them, Chesterton said, as a punishment for doing so perfectly what
the decadents did so imperfectly.\(^2\) Where their exact word, more

\(^1\) Alice Meynell, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 44

January, 1923, p. 2.

35.
often than not, was a term of indefiniteness and vagueness, hers was the just word — morally just as well as artistically so. She demonstrated a refined impressionism, and her use of symbolism, that is, the art of investing outward things with an inner meaning, was effective precisely because it was sufficiently natural and simple as to appeal to the intelligence of her interested and understanding readers.

Possibly it was Alice Meynell's great admiration for Shelley that explains her symbolic use of the west wind. He, of course, sought a west wind of wilder mood when he made the application to his own disturbed and frustrated life. But when in season, that same wind brought with it a misty haze and cloudy sky, she saw much of her own life pictured. Metaphorically, therefore, she used this west wind of her homeland to represent her song. The theme of "A Poet of One Mood" is love, but a sublimated love that had its longings in the Infinite. And because attainment in this life could never be complete, it was, of necessity, a love vested in sorrow. Might not her west-wind days, then, which she said were her songs, be of those longings and strivings for the joys that were to be? And the mist or the haze, that the artist calls atmospheric perspective, and that he uses in his art as a means of suggesting distances — might it not symbolize that distance which separated
her from the contemplated joys of eternity?  

Color also played an important role in Alice Meynell's use of symbolism. Association with her sister, Elizabeth, who was an artist, and her admiration for Ruskin who had written treatises on painting and painters, probably explain the fascination that color held for her in its relation to spiritual concepts. It is evident from her essay, "The Color of Life," as well as from her use of color in many of her poems, that she was especially interested in conveying her thoughts through the medium of color. And it is of particular interest to note how very frequently throughout her writings she used various tones of grey to symbolize her thoughts.

To digress momentarily, we might recall that the artists' use of greys holds an almost supreme position in painting, not as a color to be arranged with other colors, but with pretensions to individual beauty. "Grey tones" they are called, and because of their effective use by certain painters, they become known as the luminous grey of Titian, the blond grey of Manet, the severe Spanish grey of Ribera, the aristocratic grey of Velasquez, etc.

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We know, too, that for the purpose of modification and for the effect of heightening, landscape painters like Corot, diluted the original hues of nature with grey, and it was called Corot-esque grey.

The poetry of Alice Meynell indicates that she, too, in her word pictures, significantly made use of greys. There is much evidence in her writings to prove that she was aware of the artist's value scale in tone, from white, through grey, to black. There is, in the lyric under discussion, something akin to a spiritual landscape, wherein are deftly painted love, passion, devotion, and grief. The scintillating light of love, which seemed ever present in her life, is suggested by: "My soft skies shine above," and the highlights, the joys that were distributed through her life are apparent in the picture also.

But the picture is not complete until the dove and silver greys have been added. There are those for whom life's fields have a golden glow, and their radiant joys are symbolized by a multiplicity of color. But our poet chose the gently glistening silver to symbolize her life, for never could she admit complete joy. The pain and strife of the restraint, of the sublimation, of the denial that she exercised in order to hold fast her exacting ideals had a tempering effect on life's experiences. The
poet, therefore, linked the brighter aspects with the deeper shadows when she wrote:

And on all seas the colours of a dove,
And on all fields a flash of silver greys.

The effect produced is one of ultimate submission and contentment. On canvas there can be no conflict when the bright and the dark are brought into harmony by a neutral grey. In reality, Alice Meynell saw beyond the greys, the imperfect joys of this life, and found an inward peace as she contemplated love in the white light of the eternal.

The one mood, therefore, of this poem and of the greater number of her writings was created by an exquisite winnowing of joy from pain, prompted by a Christian optimism brought close to the human understanding. In other words, Alice Meynell did not attempt an escape from the greyer side of life; neither was she forced to despair by it. Her poetry, particularly, breathes a note of sane hope, not blindly optimistic, but carefully reasoned and prompted by the faith that was hers.

An understanding, therefore, of the "one mood" which persists, and which contains the unifying theme of Alice Meynell's poetry, can be found only in an investigation of the personality which conceived and reflected it. From her earliest years she seems to have indulged in moments of sadness and melancholy, as a
glimpse into the revealing diary of her girlhood will show.

Twilight and the dusk, journeys and partings invariably made her pensive and sad. Lack of occupation, about which she complained, might have been partially responsible for this state of mind, but there was also that nomadic existence which she shared with her family, plus the cultivation of the art to which she leaned, that left little or no opportunity for the formation of friendships which could have led to more interesting activities outside herself.6

Finally, there were those considerations, of a far more serious nature, which concerned her religious ideals, and which contributed greatly to her meditative and introspective tendencies.

In consequence of such vicissitudes, Alice Meynell at eighteen, was writing verse, not as one of those blithe spirits who sing for the very joy of living, but as one who was convinced that woman's poetry should be melancholy and self-conscious. One of her earliest poems, appropriately enough, is "In Autumn."7 Musing on the death of nature, she made application to her own fleeting years, and was sad. And with her favorite symbolism of a grey setting she wrote:

6 Viola Meynell, op. cit., p. 38.

7 Alice Meynell, op. cit., p. 8.
The leaves are many under my feet,
    And drift one way.
Their scent of death is weary and sweet.
    A flight of them is in the grey
Where sky and forest meet.

The wind's low moan furnished the accompaniment for the bird's song. And she knew that it was not for joy, but "all for pain," because the summer was dead. Plaintively she addressed the dying leaves:

O tell me, tell me ere you die,
    Is it worth the pain?
You bloomed so fair, you waved so high;
    Now that the sad days wane,
Are you repenting where you lie?

The thought that those leaves, which were so fair, would never see another spring, filled her with sadness. And in anticipation of the coming summer with all its beauty and loveliness, she wrote regretfully:

I pass across your death
    To a golden summer you shall not see.

But she experienced a deeper feeling, which was one of joy, when she pondered the answer that her question "Is it worth the pain?" implied. It came like a beam of summer sunshine breaking through the autumn grey, for she must have recalled the words of Our Lord about the seeds falling into the ground and dying that new life might be had.
But probably one of the saddest poems in all literature is her most utterly original poetic composition, "A Letter From a Young Girl to Her Old Age." The mystery of Time occupied much of her meditations, and so in this poem she foresaw a time-worn woman touching the faded verses with thin fingers, and asked forgiveness of her:

Pardon the girl; such strange desires beset her.
Poor woman, lay aside the mournful letter
That breaks thy heart; the one who wrote, forget her;

The one who now thy faded features guesses,
With filial fingers thy grey hair caresses,
With morning tears thy mournful twilight blesses.

Other poets have shown us the pathos of the aged, recalling vanquished youth, and wistfully addressing the self of old days with emotions of envy and admiration. In the poem quoted above, the situation is the reverse. Youth addresses with pitiful affection the more than pathetic figure that in days to come will be itself. Curiously enough, Alice Meynell lived to read this poem from the other end of the passage. In her own old age she was able to muse on the strange truth of the girl who had envisaged her young self in relation to her older self.

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Ibid., p. 34.
But it is with the mood of this poem that we are especially concerned. Again we come upon an all-pervading spirit of sadness emphasised by such descriptive expressions as "fainting traveller," "the mournful plain," "silent pining," and "sudden hour of desolation." Life is coming to a close; it is far spent. As with the day, its shadows lengthen. And old age is a tragic figure, wandering in a "grey and silent world." There is a sound of weeping audible through the dirge-like metre of the poem. Then from out the gloom comes the vision of "the misty mountains of the morning," glad memories of youth. The weeping has ceased, and again, through the misty grey comes a gleam of light. It is the retrospective joy that comes from the contemplation of the visions of youth.

These poems, however, although suggesting originality of thought and treatment of thought, are not considered great. They but gave promise of a coming power. It was not until the higher contemplative qualities of Mrs. Meynell's verse became more apparent that her real artistry was evidenced. Nevertheless, from the beginning to the end of her literary career she remained always "a poet of one mood."

And so from an analysis of her very early writings, we pass to an

examination of the poems of her maturing and adult years.

True Christian principles and eternal values were of primary importance to Alice Meynell. Her desire for truth was far stronger than her longing for happiness. It was not surprising, then, that the skepticism and disbelief which saturated English thought, distressed her greatly. Being gravely spiritual by nature, she gave serious consideration to a choice of spiritual and moral guidance, and found it in the Catholic Church. Although she rarely spoke of her conversion, her sonnet, "The Young Neophyte,"¹⁰ written shortly after she had entered the Church illustrates the vital force that faith exerted upon her. Pensively she asked the question:

Who knows what days I answer for to-day?

And humbly she made the offering of her life, not only for that day, but for all her days:

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

Timidly she mused over the years ahead; wistfully wondered concerning the sufferings that this new life and new loyalty would entail;

joyfully promised faithfulness, though pain was in the offering:

I dedicate my fields when Spring is grey.

O rash! (I smile) to pledge my 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.

The mood remains ever the same: An undertone of plaintive sadness pervading all her earthly joys, but with a Christian optimism that was nurtured by faith and hope and love. This dedication of her life, irrevocably made, meant pain and sacrifice, submission and self-discipline, but hopefully she looked above and beyond where a heavenly and lasting reward loomed bright.

Love is the theme of many of Alice Meynell's poems; but, for the most part, they are permeated with sweet sorrow. The spirit of total renunciation by the lover and by the one loved that both might be truer to the disciplining demands of the Divine, brought with it a sadness inevitable to the human heart. This exacting compliance is especially reflected in "Why Wilt Thou Chide?" written to Coventry Patmore. And the same theme of abnegation is thoughtfully continued in the poems, "Renouncement,"11 "After A Parting,"12

11 Ibid., p. 28.
12 Ibid., p. 17.
"Parted," "To The Beloved." In each of these works there is recounted a touching affection for the dear friend whom she was forced to give up. But characteristically enough, in each there is a compensating thought. While the day lasted, she was faithful to the moral law and to her religious ideals; she did not permit even a thought of the beloved. But in her dreams at day's end, that presence came to give her joy:

With the first dream that comes with the first sleep
I run, I run, I am gathered to thy heart.

The companion poem to the one quoted above, "After A Parting," strikes an even more poignant note. Here, too, renunciation is complete, but in each of her virtuous strivings and heavenly meditations, she encountered the sacrificed one, since he, too, frequented heavenward paths, and his name was synonymous with virtue and sanctity:

My trembling thoughts discern
Thy goodness in the good for which I pine.

In her dejection, the poet at times, sought and found her consolation in nature. In "Parted" the sad winds mournfully reminded her of an absent one. The patient rain recalled his tears.

13 Ibid., p. 10.
14 Ibid., p. 5.
But with the return of summer skies, she was convinced that

Joy is not gone from summer skies,
Nor innocence from children's eyes,
And all these things are part of him.

And in the midst of her sad musings, she reached the surprisingly lovely climax:

I shall not have him at my feet,
And yet my feet are on the flowers.

In other words, nature served as a mirror, wherein she might enjoy the reflected image of the separated one.

Still another of these poems of separation, "To The Beloved," repeats the theme of sacrificial rejection of the lower for the higher good; consequently, it, too, possesses a mood of wistful loneliness and sadness. A sense of insufficiency and desolation, because of the absence of the loved one, is here apparent, and love, of necessity, is at once a joy and a pain:

Darkness and solitude shine, for me.
For life's fair outward part are rife
The silver noises; let them be.
It is the very soul of life
Listens for thee, listens for thee.

When she wrote of the sea, Alice Meynell used some of her most thoughtful symbolism, but the mood did not change. Here her very reasonable melancholy, combined with a spiritual optimism, left nothing to be desired. In her charity she was able to see
good where others saw only evil. What if the sea seemed cruel and tempestuous? Wouldn't the storm be followed by a calm? If the tide went out, taking with it one's joys and loves, wouldn't it later come in? She would have us think hopefully of that incoming surge bearing with it joy and love to the waiting and the trustful.

As the inhaastening tide doth roll,
Home from the deep, along the whole
Wide shining strand, and floods the caves,
---Your love comes filling with happy waves
The open sea-shore of my soul.15

As has been noted, the mystery of Time, which occupied much of her meditation, prompted many of Alice Meynell's most poignant lines. In this connection, "The Fold"16 seems to have within its stanzas a meaning far deeper than one would sense upon a first reading:

Behold,
The time is now! Bring back, bring
Thy flocks of fancies, wild of whim.
0 lead them from the mountain-track
Thy frolic thoughts untold,
0 bring them in -- the fields grow dim --
And let me be the fold!

15 Ibid., p. 16.
16 Ibid., p. 61.
"Fold" is a word occurring repeatedly in Alice Meynell's poems. It is used symbolically with reference to the mind. The most familiar example is to be found in "The Shepherdess." But in the poem referred to above, she specifically designated her own mind as the sheltering fold for the thoughts and fancies of another. These lines may have been addressed to her own husband. In any event, they are found among her later poems, and they infer that time had banished his gay and frolic-some thoughts, and she was sad at the prospects of relinquishing them. There is a reminiscent spirit implied in the verse, and there is a suggestion that, because of the pleasure she had experienced in those earlier days when jointly they worked at journalism, and shared so intimately each others thoughts, she had come to regret these latter days. Had Wilfrid Meynell's increased importance with the public and its demand for his opinions taken too much time from his dear Alicia? At any rate, "The Fold" seems to be a passionate plea, now that "the fields grow dim," for a continuation in their advancing years, of the gay and happy thoughts he had expressed, in days gone by, solely for her delight.

Behold,
The time is now! Call in, O call
Thy pasturing kisses gone astray
For scattered sweets; gather them all
To shelter from the cold.
Throng them together, close and gay,
And let me by the fold!
This mood of Alice Meynell continues on in her poetry to the very end. In the beautiful little quartrain, "Via, Et Veritas, Et Vita," there is pictured the weary traveler on the road of life. The spirit is one of quiet obedience to the withholding of the Vision from man. The burning desire, however, to behold the One to whom she had dedicated her life, caused pain; the striving seemed so futile and unattainable. But with the realization that God was with her in every part of the way, came that spiritual joy which dispelled the sadness all about her.

"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."

She was ever sadly mindful of the "multitude," too, and so it is not surprising to find among her poems sentiments of concern for suffering humanity. In the first stanza of the short lyric, "Messina, 1908," she pictures the all-powerful God as a destroyer, bruiser, and punisher:

Lord, Thou hast crushed Thy tender ones, o'erthrown Thy strong, Thy fair; Thy man thou hast unmanned, Thy elaborate works unwrought, Thy deeds undone, Thy lovely sentient human plan unplanned; Destroyer, we have cowered beneath Thine own Immediate, unintelligible hand.

17 Ibid., p. 65.
18 Ibid., p. 77.
But immediately her characteristic spirit of faith and hope come to the fore, and she hastens to portray the God of march and of kindly ministrations:

Lord, Thou hast hastened to retrieve, to heal,
To feed, to bind, to clothe, to quench the brand,
To prop the ruin, to bless, and to anneal;
Hast sped Thy ships by sea, Thy trains by land,
Shed pity and tears:—our shattered fingers feel
Thy mediate and intelligible hand.

Although, specifically, this poem is a commentary on the Messina earthquake, it makes a definite point of life's sorrows and trials meted out to all classes of humanity by that same God who holds the key to all our happiness.

Writing further on the afflictions of life, Alice Meynell includes the Son of God, Himself. Only once in the entire volume of her verse does she explore the deepest depths of suffering, and the God-Man is the sufferer. It is in "The Crucifixion" that the shadows thicken and a tone darker than the usual greys of her poems is needed to express her mood:

One only has explored
The deepmost; but He did not die of it.
Not yet, not yet He died. Man human Lord
Touched the extreme; it is not infinite.

But over the abyss
Of God's capacity for woe He stayed
One hesitating hour; what gulf was this?
Forsaken He went down, and was afraid.19

19 Ibid., p. 82
But the sorrow and sadness of Good Friday was followed by the joy and gladness of "Easter Night":

Public was Death; but Power, but Might,
But Life again, but Victory,
Were hushed within the dead of night,
The shutter'd dark, the secrecy.
And all alone, alone, alone
He rose again behind the stone.20

And hope, that ever present quality of Mrs. Meynell's poetry, leads her readers upward and onward,—straight to the God she loved.

In conclusion, we repeat, the note of sweet sorrow that we have traced through Alice Meynell's poetry may be considered the unifying theme of her writing. It is the fine thread that delicately binds the slender sheaf of her verse. She herself referred to it as "sweet monotonous meanings," but only the fickle or thoughtless mind could regard as monotonous the poetry of Alice Meynell. To those who have caught the real meaning and spirit of her verse, it is a continuous repetition of her ideals and an indication of her own admirable constancy of character. She had grown spiritually through the years, and with the acquisition of an intimate knowledge and love of God came a lessening of dependence on material things for happiness, and an actual sadness because of her forced separation from her God. For her, consequently, the joys of earth

20 Ibid., p. 94.
were half-joys — the grey, incomplete experiences of life. And implicitly, if not explicitly, her poems expressed her longings for heavenly things. They were identical with the sentiments of the great Saint Augustine: "Thou hast created us for Thyself, and our heart knows no rest until it repose in Thee."21

The ideal of Alice Meynell's poetic vocation may be found definitely expressed in three of her loveliest poems. In "A Song of Derivations,"\(^1\) the revealing acknowledgment

\[
\begin{align*}
I & \text{ come from nothing; but from where} \\
& \text{Come the undying thoughts I bear?} \\
& \text{Down through long links of death and birth,} \\
& \text{My immortality is there.}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\ldots \ldots \ldots
\]

Voices, I have not heard, possessed
My own fresh songs; my thoughts are blessed
With the relics of the far unknown.
And mixed with memories not my own
The sweet streams throng into my breast.

makes it clear that, in a literary way, she was absolutely dependent upon inspiration — inspiration born of spiritual intensity and enriching faith. Her search for some hidden grandeur and subtlety of life, once discovered, was communicated, in a true poet fashion, to others. Each of her poems, consequently, was the music of a thought —

\(^1\) Alice Meynell, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 144
the fruit of a perception, with her own personality distinctly visible. "You would know her with your eyes blindfolded, by her step — dainty, precise, and firm."²

To inspiration, there was added that element of sacrifice which Mrs. Meynell believed essential to her art. And it was to this principle she referred when she said that writers should be wedded to holy poverty, meaning, of course, that there was no place in fine literature for the extravagant and exaggerated use of language. It is not surprising, then, to find in a second poem, "Unlinked,"³ this definite pronouncement:

If I should quit thee, sacrifice, forswear,
To what, my art, shall I give thee in keeping?

........

Or shall the mountain streams my lost joys bear,
My past poetic in rain be weeping?
No, I shall live a poet waking, sleeping,
And I shall die a poet unaware.

Or again, in that unusual apostrophe, "The Poet to His Childhood,"⁴ she declared:

If it prove a life of pain, greater have I judged the gain,

---

² Henry Van Dyke, "The Spirit of the Place," The Book Buyer, 18: 206.

³ Alice Meynell, op. cit., p. 47.

With a singing soul for music's sake I climb
and meet the rain.
And I choose, whilst I am calm, my thought
and laboring be
Unconsoled by sympathy.

Purposefully she restricted her expressions, however potent,
that silences, far more compelling, might be produced; and invariably,
a style, with the stamp of the classic upon it, emerged. As an
advocate of such restraint, she followed closely, in her art, the
laws specified in her poem, "The English Metres":

The rooted liberty of flowers in breeze
Is theirs, by national luck impulsive, terse,
Tethered, uncaptured, rules obeyed "at ease,"
Time-strengthened laws of verse.

With a literary code containing this two-fold guide, namely,
dependence upon inspiration and the use of a sacrificial restraint,
Alice Meynell proceeded with her art. And whether her theme was
of the world and nature, or of separation and renunciation, or of
reflections and reactions to life, or of profoundly spiritual
meditations, these personal principles of literature persisted.

In her nature poems, Mrs. Meynell gave every evidence that
her writing was the result of inspiration. She wrote of the common-
place things in daily living, it is true, but she shed about them
beauty and attractiveness. In addition to this achievement, she

5 Alice Meynell, op. cit., p. 133.
displayed a dramatic imagination, and conversed with the intimate heart of nature. One especially typical illustration is her "Song of the Night at Daybreak." Unlike the majority of people who regret the passing of day, she, quaintly enough, was in sympathy with the night, since it must die as each new day is born. In some imaginative way, she discovered, while the day was in power, the night's secrets and worries, and heard the complaint:

All my stars forsake me,
And the dawn-winds shake me
Where shall I betake me?

Whither shall I run
Till the set of sun,
Till the day be done?

To the mountain-mine,
To the boughs o' the pine,
To the blind man's eyne,

To the brow that is
Bowed upon the knees,
Sick with memories?

In this abidingly original little poem, as well as "In Early Spring," "Love of Narcissus," and "In February," external nature is depicted in a natural way; for Alice Meynell, unlike Wordsworth,

6 Ibid., p. 33.
7
did not look upon nature as all-sufficing. In these poems she expressed simply a natural love. Significantly, she drew a distinction between Wordsworth's pantheistic note in dealing with nature and the Catholic spirit, when in "Two Boyhoods" she explained:

Luminous passions reign
High in the soul of man; and they are twain.
Of these he hath made the poetry of earth —
Hath made his nobler tears, his magic mirth.

Fair Love is one of these,
The visiting vision of seven countries;
And one is love of Nature — love to tears —
The modern passion of this hundred years.

Moreover, Alice Meynell's Catholic insight enabled her to bring out the spiritual significance of the externals in nature, and her keen perception, consequently, detected the hidden relation between the physical and spiritual laws. She could hear, for instance, in the sighing winds of autumn the death-knell of flowers and trees, but more profoundly did she consider the mutability of all material things, as well as her own death, when she experienced the withered leaves under her feet.

And I will grow upon my bough
If only for a Spring,
And fall when the rain is on my brow.11

10 Ibid., p. 70.
11 Ibid., p. 8.
The glorious song of the thrush, heard, before daybreak, through an open window, supplied the inspiration for another of Alice Meynell's typical nature lyrics, "A Thrush before Dawn." The dark sky was still star-lit, and the bird's crystal melody, "a phrase of notes resembling stars," caught its listener's fancy. She wrote the song, not only for its own worth, but also for what it suggested of a vision beyond this earthly realm:

All-natural things: But more -- Whence come
This yet remoter mystery?
How do these starry notes proclaim
A graver still divinity?
This hope, this sanctity of fear?
O innocent threat! O human ear!

Each detail of natural loveliness she notes, and we are impressed by her spirit of vigilance and her power of observing the commonplace. She could not, however, be satisfied with the mere external quality of beauty; her Catholic insight enabled her to see in nature a manifestation of God. And in a truly poetical kind of description of nature, which somehow went behind the outward form and colors, she seized their secret for us. While she, therefore, missed nothing of the power of the senses, she passed from the sense-world to the

12 Ibid., p. 103.
spiritual. As a result, she took a sacramental view of nature, and used visible things to effect an awareness of the invisible. This constituted her poetic genius.

But Alice Meynell did not restrict herself merely to the writing of nature-inspired poems. Life's more serious experiences offered inspirational material of an altogether different kind. The sacrifices and renouncements, for conscience's sake, of what promised to be the dear and pleasurable things of life, prompted some of her noblest verse. In the first place there had been that "fatal interview," her friendship for the priest who had received her into the Church, and who had encouraged her to develop the talent for writing which she possessed. She had come from Anglicanism where the clergy seemed less in a class apart. In all probability, consequently, at this early stage of her conversion, she had not yet become aware of the strict proprieties and reserve demanded in dealing with Catholic priests. Acting upon the recommendation, however, that this friendship end, she made her renunciation. In exactly fourteen lines of a flawless sonnet, she wrote all that, in the hands of another less restrained, might have filled the pages of a book. The excellence of her intellect controlled her expression, but each line, each phrase, each word was charged and weighted with the burden of her song:
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.  

Although her "Shepherdess" has no reference to its author or to her poetical ideals, yet the stanza beginning: "She holds her little thoughts in sight," might well be considered as expressing them.

A further, and even more popular expression of these same ideals is "Renouncement."  

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.

13 Ibid., p. 21
14 Ibid., p. 51
15 Ibid., p. 28.
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.

Thought, upon a fine and worthy object, it is evident from the poems quoted above, worked in her woul and passed into the language of her poetry, delicately restrained, to mould and dominate it.

Later, when the great friendship with Coventry Patmore, which began and remained on an intellectual level for so long, suddenly threatened to become a purely physical love, Alice Meynell, frightened and disappointed, "withdrew into the crystal fortress of her intellect."¹⁶ But from her pen came that jewel-like piece of artistry addressed to Patmore:

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.
I seal this honor thine; none dare
Hope for a part in thy despair.¹⁷

The reticence and self-control which she practiced in a high degree in her art, as she practiced it in her life, find in this poem no exception. Her thoughts are clearly expressed, but with an economy of words that suggest the poet's distrust of impulse. Never, therefore, do we discover Mrs. Meynell succumbing to a purely emotional indulgence, for she preferred abstinence to satiety; silence to acclaim.

This inspirational element in her poetry, combined with true Meynellian restraint in the expression of it, can be further observed, and to a more marked degree, in our poet's writings of a strictly religious nature. Noticeable from early years are her deeply religious tendencies, and so her intimacy with things spiritual is everywhere apparent. She saw, for instance, in the words of Our Lord "I am the way," a comforting practical thought: Christ was not the goal of life, merely, but our help and inspiration on the way. It is this nearness, then, of her soul to God that she suggested when she wrote:

¹⁷ Alice Meynell, op. cit., p. 62
Thou art the Way.
Hadst Thou been nothing but the goal,
I cannot say
If Thou hadst ever met my soul.\textsuperscript{18}

But one of Alice Meynell's most original, religious thoughts
is expressed in "Christ in the Universe."\textsuperscript{19} Here in direct opposition
to the materialistic tendencies of the late nineteenth century,
she portrays mankind and our planet as citizens and a city in the
Kingdom of the Universe. She thought of the Redeemer carrying on
His mission through the host of popular stars. Of particular
interest is stanza three since it expresses an attitude which ap­
proaches mystical experience in the Catholic sense. This poetic
expression is refreshing today when vagueness is frequently identified
with mystery:

Of His earth-visited feet
None knows the secret, cherished, perilous,
The terrible, shamefast, frightened, whispered, sweet,
Heart-shattering secret of His way with us.

The reign of God, she knew, was accomplished in the secret corners
of each personality, as in the heart of each of those planets which
go their way and do not know:

No planet knows that this
Our wayside planet, carrying land and wave,
Love and life multiplied, and pain and bliss,
Bears, as chief treasure, one forsaken grave.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., p. 64.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., p. 92.
It is an altogether new conception, the thought of this poem, as she reminds us that we understand Christ's dealings with "the ambiguous earth," but of the other stars, none have heard of His deeds for us:

Nor in our little day,
May his devices with the heavens be guessed,
His pilgrimage to thread the Milky Way,
Or His bestowals there be manifest.

Poetry such as this, Alfred Noyes says, is proof enough that in intellectual and spiritual stature, Alice Meynell towered over the deniers of the hour. 20

In Mrs. Meynell's day, the Church saw the necessity of stressing, with renewed vigor, the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ. That all men might be one in Christ through a participation in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and the Eucharist, impressed her deeply, and she became the poet of the Holy Eucharist. In "A General Communion" 21 she described devout people "Fed at the one holy board," separated yet united:

  O struck apart! not side from human side
    But soul from human soul,
    As each absorbed the multiplied,
    The ever unparted whole.

In this throng approaching the Holy Table, she saw, symbolically, a


21 Alice Meynell, op. cit., p. 79.
field of flowers, but each radiating an individualism because of the tremendous energy imparted by the Creator:

I saw this people as a field of flowers,
Each grown at such a price
The sum of unimaginable powers
Did no more than suffice.

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

There is realism here, but it is realism of the supernatural. Graphically she depicts the close atmosphere, the thronging crowds — even the gestures of the priest — so that the incident of the poem comes before us with the vividness of a painting.

In another poem of analogous inspiration, "The Unknown God," one of the loveliest characteristics of the poet herself is brought out. It is her realization of the dignity and the preciousness of a human being. With profound wonderment she contemplated one stupendous aspect of the Mystical Body of Christ when she wrote:

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.

22 Ibid., p. 78.
Her belief in the brotherhood of man under the Fatherhood of God is here most effectively voiced, yet she herself knew so well that the first and greatest poetry is the poetry that is lived. She was able to write with this ringing sincerity of the Mystical Body of Christ when that aspect of Catholicism was less emphasized than it is today; for her deep and abiding faith enabled her to recognize, so completely, Its members. Had she not received into her own home the forlorn and desperate Francis Thompson? We might even suggest that he was that "one of the crowd" who went up and knelt before "the Paten and the Cup." Be that as it may, for Alice Meynell the Holy Mystery of the Altar, with the devout participation of the faithful, was a tremendous proof of God's love of His creatures, and a powerful reason for accepting and respecting a neighbor, a companion, or a fellow traveller on the road of life. In each she saw

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!

And to this God of All she ends her petition:

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 peace!

To still another classification of Mrs. Meynell's poetry might we point for interesting themes in the fulfillment of her poetic art.
There are those selections which are devoted to the reflections on her reactions to the life about her. Here we find her verse thought-laden; her style, as always, precise and beautiful. Whatever the theme or the thought under discussion, she possessed her soul and her imagination in a tranquil and saintly mood. Never was she given to effusiveness.

In "San Lorenzo's Mother," charity is the keynote, but this poem presents a psychological study of a Catholic mother whose son has become a monk. The author reproduced this story serenely and without affectation. The sacrifice of natural affection for her child, has lifted this mother's will above maternal jurisdiction; she has found comfort in her offering for she received in exchange the Son who cannot change:

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 dearest son,  
But never the Son who cannot change.

Throughout the poem there is a noticeable protest against the period's decivilizing tone. Modern sentiment, particularly during World War I, in many ways, had trampled the idea of maternity in the dust. In both her prose and her poetry Mrs. Meynell endeavored to elevate motherhood. It is worthy of note, therefore, that although she repro-

23 Ibid., p. 79
duced with absolute fidelity the medieval note in "San Lorenzo's Mother," left to her own imaginings, she brought her subject up to date.

The touch of the modern may be observed, too, in "Saint Catherine of Sienna." Mrs. Meynell took a burning interest in the Woman's Suffrage Movement of her day. No political question had ever before drawn her into public action. But for this cause, she spoke publicly, and even paraded the London streets along with other women. She seemed anxious and prompt to uphold woman's rights, but above all, she was impatient when distinction between the sexes was made.

Little wonder, then, that for Strephon, who said woman must lean, or she should not have his chivalry, she produced that poem based on the beautiful story of Saint Catherine's triumphant struggle for the soul of the young patrician condemned to death.

She prayed, she preached him innocent;
She gave him to the Sacrificed;
On her courageous breast he leant,
The breast where beat the heart of Christ.

He left it for the block, with cries
Of victory on his severed breath.
That crimson head she clasped, her eyes
Blind with the splendor of his death.

24 Ibid., p. 73.
25 Viola Meynell, op. cit., p. 266.
This ancient legend she used in her argument for woman's suffrage.
And in the last stanza of the poem she flings, almost defiantly the question:

And will the man of modern years
— Stern on the Vote — withhold from thee,
Thou prop, thou cross, erect, in tears,
Catherine, the service of his knee?

Mrs. Meynell was also led to comment on the poverty of her day. Quite in keeping with the materialistic spirit prevalent, it, too, had lost its dignity; had fallen into evil ways; had tasted of disgrace:

The Lady Poverty was fair:
But she has lost her looks of late,
With change of times and change of air.
Ah slattern! she neglects her hair,
Her gown, her shoes; she keeps no state
As once when her pure feet were bare. 26

As the poet saw her, Lady Poverty had become modern, and had embraced a sordid, worldly poverty. Man, in his attempt to acquire riches, had lost all, and would continue to lose all so long as money was worshipped and Holy Poverty was left by the wayside; so long as real values were lost and false idols set up; so long as the world looked upon poverty as a hateful, rather than a holy thing.

In her declining years, the War distressed Alice Meynell no end, and her last days were saddened considerably by its cruelties.

26 Alice Meynell, op. cit., p. 53.
"Summer in England, 1914"\(^\text{27}\) reflects her resentment, protest, and ultimate resignation. Beauty and exquisite loveliness were everywhere about her in England, but the reality of war horrified her.

> Flower following tender flower; and birds,
> And berries; and benignant skies
> Made thrive the serried flocks and herds.—
> Yonder are men shot through the eyes.
> Love, hide thy face
> From man's unpardonable race.

Strong denunciation is here apparent, but it is followed by sentiments of resignation to the plans of a far-seeing God:

> Who said "No man hath greater love than this,
> To die to serve his friend"?
> So these have loved us all unto the end.
> Chide thou no more, O thou unsacrificed!
> The soldier dying, dies upon a kiss,
> The very kiss of Christ.

Her convictions ring true. She does believe that all is for a purpose, a plan; she knows all is in God's hands, and so even while she accuses, she is seeking a reason for excuse.

"The Two Questions"\(^\text{28}\) is another of Alice Meynell's war-time commentaries, and again her thoughts are startlingly contrary to ordinary observation:

> Not the clean heart transpierced; not tears that fall
> For a child's agony; nor a martyr's woe;
> Not these, not these appal.

\(^{27}\) Ibid., p. 100.
\(^{28}\) Ibid., p. 111.
But it is the striking of the unjust, the punishing of the guilty
that disturbed her serenity, for in judgment she was cowardly,
even though she knew that justice should be meted out.

But the unjust stricken; but the hands that kill
Lopped; but the merited scourge;

The sensualist at fast;
The merciless felled; the liar in his snares.
The cowardice of my judgment sees, aghast,
The flail, the chaff, the tares.

These decisive conflicts, these campaigns that went forward in
Alice Meynell's poetry, were probably never sensed or listened to
by society in general, for

she had no illusions about the
narrowness of her direct appeal.
She was writing with all the veracity
Of which she was capable, and using,
consequently, all the education she
possessed and every response she felt.29

To those who would have worldliness or nothing, her verses could have
no meaning. Nevertheless, the more thoughtful have caught her
militant spirit and have pondered the wisdom of her message.

For the most part, Alice Meynell wrote subtly, and she gave
to her poetry a touch both of the mystic and the ascetic. She was
able to bring home to earthbound minds supernatural truths, and was
certain to point to the material world as valueless and meaningless

29 J. C. Squire, "Alice Meynell," London Mercury, January,
1923, p. 286.
unless regarded in the light of higher things. Inspiration, as we have said, supplied the thought for all her poems; restraint guided the expression of that thought, for she chose always to speak in a cloistral poetry.

We have seen, too, that Alice Meynell made use of the emotional element, but with an aloofness that strongly suggests a mistrust. Barely ever sensuous, she sought her imagery from intellectual vision. The result is poetry "beautiful in idea as in grace of touch...born modest." It is both luminous and inspiring; capable of exciting and expanding our imagination by showing us something that we have not seen before. Lastly, it is to be noted that Alice Meynell's character and convictions and dynamic personality are evident in every detail of her work. With a quietness and a moderation she captured and represented life; she seized upon and reproduced beauty, and thus fulfilled her poetic vocation. In this sense she may justly claim the title, "poet."

The judgment stated above, and arrived at as a result of a careful analysis of the themes of Alice Meynell's poetry in relation to her personality, is the conclusion of this thesis. Having reviewed the spirit of the times in which she lived, which was reflected in

the literary output of her day, we have observed Alice Meynell's protesting attitudes toward those contemporaries whose writings were unchristian in tone, and her enthusiastic efforts to bring about a Catholic Literary Revival. Such a renaissance, we noted, was effected and made possible, in a great measure, by the spiritual and literary influence she exerted.

One cannot read far into the life-story of Alice Meynell or examine very many of her poems without becoming aware of her integrity of purpose and of the deep spirituality which governed her every thought and act. Dominating her own personality, there are discernable a fine mental poise and an elusive spiritual charm which not only attracted disciples to her cause, and permeated her own literary offerings, but also merited for her a place of distinction among modern English poets.
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The thesis submitted by Sister Gertrude Agnes Carter has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English.

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

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

Date 5/1949

Signature of Advisor