

THE MYSTICISM OF GEORGE HERBERT AND HENRY VAUGHAN

by

Nenagh G. M. Richardson

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department

of

English

We accept this thesis as conforming to the  
standard required from candidates for the  
degree of MASTER OF ARTS

---

---

Members of the Department of

---

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

May, 1952.

## ABSTRACT

Mysticism is simply religious experience in its highest manifestations. In Christian mysticism, love is the distinguishing factor; its focal point is the Incarnation. The mystic worships God both in His Transcendence and in His Immanence, his emphasis usually being on one or other of these aspects of His nature.

In the seventeenth century, two main mystical traditions existed. One was the orthodox Catholic tradition; the other was more unorthodox in character, stemming from the philosophy of Hermes Trismegistes.

The mystic way consists of the five-fold path beginning in Awakening, followed by Purgation, Illumination, the Dark Night of the Soul, and climaxed by Union. The mystic life itself is not vague or escapist: it is a life deified in order that it may be dedicated. Contemplation and activity go hand in hand.

Mystical and poetical experience can be differentiated by the direction which each experience takes: the poet returns from his experience with his poem, whereas the mystic pushes on to the fuller vision of God.

Turning specifically to George Herbert, I believe he was never fully awakened in the mystical sense; hence, his subsequent experience cannot be considered truly mystical. Nevertheless, there are points of reference and similarities between Herbert and the mystics. His Purgation, however, lacked the fullness of the mystic's experience, for it lacked the most significant attribute

of the purgative state, the stimulation of the will. A sense of Illumination, moreover, is never sustained in Herbert. Rarely does he express joy at God's presence. Indeed, he was most like the mystic in his expression of despair. Thus the peace he came to exemplify in his life at Bemerton is truly remarkable in the light of the suffering revealed in his poems. The sense of harmony and peace he ultimately achieved came not through inner peace but through triumph over constant turmoil and despair.

Henry Vaughan, on the other hand, experienced, I believe, a true mystic Awakening, accepting the obligations implicit in it, and undergoing, as a consequence, a certain degree of Purgation. His deepest suffering was closely linked with the persecution of the church. His Illumination is best understood through his approach to nature. His treatment of light imagery in nature, however, tends to be misleading in an assessment of his mysticism. I believe that the poems which deal most successfully with light are really philosophical rather than mystical, and that his Illumination, or vision, was essentially that of the poet and not that of the mystic. The vision he captured is, nevertheless, one of the fullest and loveliest to be found in our English poetry.

Both Herbert and Vaughan sought to praise their Maker through the medium of their art. They were deeply spiritual poets though neither can be considered a mystic in the full sense of the word. Each was essentially mystical in his aspirations, nevertheless, and in their individual accomplishments each tells us something of the final and full accomplishment of the mystic: Vaughan through his illuminated vision of the world, Herbert through his exemplary life of holiness.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter I	Mysticism:	Page 1
	I Meaning	
	II Traditions	
	III Mystic Way	
Chapter II	Parallels and Contrasts between Mystical and Poetical Experience	Page 29
Chapter III	George Herbert	Page 39
Chapter IV	Henry Vaughan	Page 78
Chapter V	Contrasts and Similarities in the lives of Herbert and Vaughan; a Summary of the mystical element in their lives.	Page 121
Bibliography		Page 128



CHAPTER I

# I

The record of man's religious consciousness reveals a growing awareness of and belief in a sphere of existence other than the changing cosmos into which he is born. He gradually comes to perceive, however dimly, "a quality of life which lies beyond the mere fact of life."<sup>1</sup> The concept of harmony which he sees in the world of Time emerges as a certitude of a higher harmony in the measured order of the Timeless; he apprehends, however imperfectly, God, Absolute Being, co-existent with, yet transcendent to, his own world of Becoming. His religious insight gains in depth and in significance as he recognizes within himself, not only his spontaneous affinity with, but also his mysterious capacity for the Godhead. The resulting sense of his own incompleteness coupled with the challenge of his Divine potentiality produces within him an initial unrest which subsequently gives rise to an active hunger for Reality, a desire for participation in the Supernatural life of God. This yearning is expressed in prayer, the Godward movement of man's soul; it finds its response through grace, the manward movement of God's love.<sup>2</sup>

This twofold religious activity finds its fullest expression in mysticism, which is none other than the most highly specialized form we know of man's attempt to bring the entire resources of his heart, will and intellect into alignment with

---

1. A.N. Whitehead, Religion in the Making, Cambridge, University Press, 1926, p.80.

2 Evelyn Underhill, The Golden Sequence, London, Methuen, 1932, p.47.

God. It is not an opinion, neither is it a philosophy; fundamentally it is an experience: an organic life-process by which man establishes his conscious relation with the Absolute.<sup>1</sup>

In her book on mysticism, Miss Underhill says:

...Those who use the term "Mysticism" are bound in self-defence to explain what they mean by it. Broadly speaking, I understand it to be the expression of the innate tendency of the human spirit towards complete harmony with the transcendental order; whatever be the theological formula under which that order is understood. This tendency, in great mystics, gradually captures the whole field of consciousness; it dominates their life and, in the experience called "mystic union", attains its end. Whether that end be called the God of Christianity, the World Soul of Pantheism, the Absolute of Philosophy, the desire to attain it and the movement towards it- so long as this is a genuine life process and not an intellectual speculation- is the proper subject of mysticism. 2

In spite of recent research in mystical studies, the word "mysticism" is widely misunderstood and is frequently misused.<sup>3</sup>

One of the most abused words in the English language, it has been used in different and often mutually exclusive senses by religion, poetry and philosophy: has been claimed as an excuse for every kind of occultism, for dilute transcendentalism, vapid symbolism, religious or aesthetic sentimentality, and bad metaphysics. On the other hand, it has been freely employed as a term of contempt by those who have criticized these things. It is much to be hoped that it may be restored sooner or later to its old meaning, as the science or art of the spiritual life. 4

1 E. Underhill, Mysticism, London, Methuen, 1945, p.81.

2 Ibid., pp. xiv-xv.

3 cf Webster's Dictionary: Any type of theory asserting the possibility of attaining knowledge or power through faith or spiritual insight. Hence, vague speculation. (Italics mine.)

4 E. Underhill, op. cit., p.xiv.

Initial misunderstanding arises in some cases from a too literal association of the word 'mysticism' with its Greek derivation, the word for mysteries, pertaining to the Orphic and Dionysiac mystery cults of pagan Greece. As a consequence, mysticism is understood as synonymous with things obscure, mysterious and esoteric. Visions, trances, apparitions and similar phenomena are regarded as the criteria of mystical experience. In point of fact, the opposite is true. The greatest mystics have discouraged such manifestations and have placed little or no emphasis upon them. They have recognized them as belonging to the psychical rather than to the spiritual level of reality. According to St. John of the Cross, the higher a mystic attains, the fewer of these manifestations does he meet. For the vision of God is the culminating point, not of any single faculty, but of man's whole nature.

This vision is the reward of the few. All men possess in germ the capacity for this heightened spiritual perception but few possess it in the superlative degree to which it is found in the great contemplatives. The mystic is not common: he is rarer than the great poet, musician, or scientist.

"Religious truth," claims Professor Whitehead, "must be developed from knowledge when our ordinary senses and intellectual operations are at their highest pitch of discipline."<sup>1</sup> It is to the mystic, then, the spiritual genius, to whom we must go in order to learn this truth. In him we find this stringent control and cultivation of the human faculties. These alone,

---

1 Whitehead, Religion, p.123.

however, do not bring him to the vision of the Absolute. The gap between creature and Creator cannot be bridged even by a supreme effort of the intellect; only through what the author of The Cloud of Unknowing calls "the sharp dart of longing love" does the mystic achieve his goal. "Mysticism," declares Miss Underhill, "is essentially a movement of the heart, seeking to transcend the limitations of the individual standpoint and to surrender itself to ultimate Reality; for no personal gain, to satisfy no transcendental curiosity, to obtain no other-worldly joys, but purely from an instinct of love." 1

He may not be known by reason, He may not be gotten  
by thought, nor conditioned by understanding; but He  
may be loved and chosen with the true lovely will of  
thine heart.... 2

"O let me love, or not live." is the rapturous cry of Dame Gertrude More.

...Out of this true love between a soul and thee,  
there ariseth such a knowledge in the soul that it  
loatheth all that is an impediment to her further  
proceeding in the Love of thee....Nothing can Satisfy  
a reasonable soul, but only thou: and having of thee,  
who art indeed all, nothing could be said to be wanting  
of her....Blessed are the cleane of hart for they shall  
see God. O sight to be wished, desired, and longed for;  
because once to have seen thee is to have learnt all  
things. Nothing can bring us to this sight but love.  
But what love must it be? not a sensible love only,  
a childish love, a love which seeketh itself more than  
the beloved. No, no, but it must be an ardent love, a  
pure love, a courageous love, a love of charity, an  
humble love, and a constant love, not worn out with  
labours, not daunted with any difficulties....For that  
soul that hath set her whole love and desire on thee,  
can never find any true satisfaction, but only in thee. 3

---

1 Underhill, Mysticism, p.71.

2 From the Epistle of Descretion, quoted by Miss Underhill, Introduction to The Cloud of Unknowing, London, John M. Watkins, 1922, pp.14-15

3 Gertrude More, quoted by Underhill, Mysticism, pp.88-89.

Love, then, is the distinguishing mark of mysticism. It is, in the words of Miss Underhill, "the business and method of mysticism" and as such is to be distinguished from "the superficial affection or emotion often dignified by this name. Mystic Love is a total dedication of the will; the deep-seated desire and tendency of the soul towards its source. It is a condition of humble access, a life-movement of the soul...." <sup>1</sup>

"He that findeth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it." This paradox is made clear to us by the unconditional self-giving of the mystic. "Only with the annihilation of selfhood comes the fulfillment of love."<sup>2</sup> Single-minded, seeking no reward, the mystic obtains satisfaction simply because he does not seek it. He loves because he must. "I am not come to this meaning," writes Jacob Boehme, "or to this work and knowledge through my own reason or through my own will and purpose; neither have I sought this knowledge, nor so much as to know anything concerning it. I sought only for the heart of God, therein to hide myself."<sup>3</sup>

To the question "Why should God be loved?" St. Bernard of Clairvaux gives the reply: "Because he first loved us." <sup>4</sup> "God so loved the world that he gave His only Begotten Son...." Thus, to the Christian mystic, the Incarnation is the focal point of all experience. That "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among

1 Ibid., p.85.

2 Ibid., p.93.

3 Loc. cit.

4 Saint Bernard, On the Love Of God, translated by a Religious of C.S.M.V., London, A.R. Mowbray, 1950, p.14; cf. also I John 19: "We love him, because he first loved us".

us" is simply God's disclosure of Himself under the limitations of time and space, the "loving revelation of the Infinite in terms of the finite."<sup>1</sup> The Incarnate Christ is the supreme act of God's love: the willing and loving descent of God into man. He is, in the words of Nicolas of Cusa, "the word of God humanified."<sup>2</sup> This alone He could never be: God humanified, yes, but inseparably, by His very nature, "man deified." Thus, not only is He God; He is also the Way to God. The life of Christ is the supreme symbol of the mystic quest for the Absolute. The dramatization in time and space of the Incarnation establishes for the mystic the perpetual process by which the individual soul may and must ascend to God. The Incarnate Son is thus a double link: "the means of God's self consciousness, the means of man's consciousness of God."<sup>3</sup>

This twofold significance of the Divine Logos was revealed in a vision to St. Catherine of Sienna by the voice of God:

I also wish thee to look at the Bridge of My only-begotten Son, and see the greatness thereof, for it reaches from Heaven to earth; that is, that the earth of your humanity is joined to the greatness of the Deity thereby. I say, then, that this Bridge reaches from Heaven to earth, and constitutes the union which I have made with man... So the height of the Divinity, humbled to the earth, and joined with your humanity, made the Bridge and reformed the road. Why was this done? In order that man might come to his true happiness with the angels. And observe that it is not enough, in order that you should have life, that My Son should have made you this Bridge, unless you walk thereon. 4

---

1 Evelyn Underhill, Man and the Supernatural, London, Methuen and Company, 1927, p.117.

2 Quoted by Underhill in Mysticism, p.118.

3 Ibid., p.119.

4 Underhill, loc. cit.

Christ, then, is the link between the humanity of man and the Divinity of God. And because the life of the mystic is an Imitation of Christ, it provides a further link between the world of sense and the realm of spirit. No image expresses so perfectly the significance of both the Incarnation and the Mystic Way as does this of the Bridge. It catches in essence the journey of the mystic; it images also the metaphysical concepts upon which this journey is based. For, to the mystic, there persists a fundamental distinction, though not a separation, between the Natural and the Supernatural, between the world of Becoming and that of Pure Being, the sublime paradox of which is resolved by his own experience in his apprehension of the One in the Many, the Many in the One. God exists, the mystic maintains, on two levels of Reality, both in the world and beyond the world: God Immanent, He reveals Himself through the time series, in the changing and the successive; God Transcendent, He Is, Absolute, Unchanging and Abiding.

Thus the spiritual consciousness of the mystic develops along these two levels of reality: on the one hand, in his intensified apprehension of and participation in the world, the manifestation of God's Immanence, of which, by his very nature, he is an integral part; on the other, in his approach, at once humble and adoring, to the Transcendent Order of God's Being. To the mystic, life in this world possesses significance by virtue of its correspondence with that other world, the timeless Reality of God. Thus the religious character latent in man can come to maturity only by means of a twofold endeavour; the achievement of each being necessary to bring about the fruition



of the other. Where this necessary balance is lacking, a distortion results: the cultus that places an undue emphasis on God's Immanence tends toward a form of Pantheism; that which stresses the Transcendence of God to the exclusion of His Immanence tends toward extreme Absolutism, a form of religion leaving little or no room for the quality of Divine Love.

Love is the measure of all things. It is the means by which the mystic bridges the gap between himself, the creature, and God, his Creator. His life begins and ends in love. He does not seek to know God in order that he may love Him; rather he loves Him in order that he may come to know Him. His knowledge of God comes through his love of God, and, by nature of its revelation, leads to a still greater love of God.

## II

During the seventeenth century, two main currents of mysticism, distinctly contrasting by nature, were to be found throughout Europe.<sup>1</sup> One was orthodox in character, rising within the Catholic Church, in close touch with, and, in general, perpetuating the great traditions of Christian mysticism. The other was highly unorthodox, both in content and in expression. It stemmed, in the main, from the philosophy of Hermes Trismagistus, and was expressed by means of a difficult and obscure symbolism, adapted from the language of alchemy, and based on the idea of regeneration. Its greatest influence was felt outside the Catholic Church, particularly in Germany and in England. Vaughan and Traherne illustrate the influence of each of these currents of mysticism; Donne, Herbert and Crashaw fall in varying degrees within the Catholic tradition.

---

1 Underhill, Mysticism, Appendix, pp.453-473.

This tradition reached its fullest and highest expression in the medieval period. From the early Middle Ages, in lives such as those of Bernard of Clairvaux and the Victorines, to the later period, the Golden Age of mysticism, the period of Bonaventura and Aquinas, the names of the great mystics stand out, not singly, but in great clusters. Through their lives and in their works, mystical tradition took form. At the beginning of the medieval period, two distinctive streams of spiritual culture, the Benedictine and the Neoplatonic, co-existed. In varying degrees, these served to mould and to influence the Christian mystical traditions of the succeeding centuries. The Benedictine rule was moderate and practical. Originally, it arose among a group of contemplatives of the Egyptian desert and reached the Western world in two ways: through the writings of St. Augustine and through the fourth century Dialogues of John Cassian. These Dialogues, exemplifying order and sobriety, were adapted by St. Benedict as part of the spiritual reading for the members of his order. Through him, and later St. Gregory, they influenced succeeding generations of contemplatives.

In contrast with the moderation of the Benedictine tradition, Neoplatonic mysticism was at once more intense and more highly personal. Though the term Neoplatonic derives from that of the pagan philosophy, the two should not be identified with each other. It was the language of Neoplatonism rather than its substance which Plotinus adapted, in order to convey the essence of mystical experience. In using the language of the one to express the experience of the other, he emphasizes for us the fact that mysticism can never be simply a philosophic

account of Reality; <sup>inevitably</sup> inevitably, it is a kind of life, an experience of Reality.<sup>1</sup>

Through his impassioned, yet orderly, description of the Mystic Quest, Plotinus came to exert an influence, unparalleled in its extent, upon subsequent mysticism, both pagan and Christian. To-day, he is recognized by many of the foremost Greek scholars as one of the great figures in the history of thought. The German scholar, Eucken, goes so far, Dean Inge tells us, as to claim that his influence upon Christian theology has been greater than that of any other single thinker.<sup>2</sup> Certain it is, at any rate, that the impact of Plotinus upon Christian mysticism, both patristic and medieval, was profound. As a consequence, the writings of the early Christian mystics have come down to us couched in the language of Neoplatonism rather than in that of the New Testament; the writings of the Medieval Christian mystics echo and re-echo the same.

The influence of Plotinus upon the spiritual temper of the Middle Ages was perpetuated, not through his own writings, (few of his followers even in his own day had actually read the Enneads), but indirectly, through the impact he made upon other thinkers and writers. Two of these, only, need be mentioned to illustrate the magnitude of this impact: St. Augustine and Dionysius the Areopagite. It was chiefly through these giants of the early church that the mysticism of Plotinus reached the medieval world.

The sincere, intellectual, and eloquent qualities of

1 Ibid, p.455.

2 Mysticism in Religion, pp.106-7.

St. Augustine's writings combined to make them one of the great moulding forces upon subsequent Christian thought. Like Plotinus in the scope and power of his intellect and in his burning passion for the Absolute, St. Augustine came to exert an influence upon the formation of the medieval mystical tradition of the Middle Ages second only to that of the Bible itself.

With Dionysius, the paradoxical concepts of the via negativa enter the Catholic tradition. This way of negation, common to the religions of India and of Greece, is frequently expressed in Neoplatonism. "The flight of the alone to the Alone"<sup>1</sup> is how Plotinus describes the complete stripping away of self in order that the soul may enter into the Presence of the Absolute Godhead. However, it was Proclus, disciple of Plotinus and exponent of a later type of Neoplatonism, possessing strong affinities with the ideas of India, who exerted the greatest influence upon Dionysius. As a consequence, many expressions common to the religious speculations of the East are to be found in Dionysius. Dean Inge, strongly critical of the via negativa, accuses the Areopagite of attempting, within the framework of Christianity, to graft Indian nihilism upon the platonic Doctrine of Ideas.<sup>2</sup> Regardless of what Dionysius has done from a theological point of view, his adaptation of terms, despite their source, is valid in so far as it coincides with the facts of experience. The language of mysticism is not something arbitrarily imposed upon the experience of mysticism. The experience comes first;

---

1 Underhill, Mysticism, p.300.

2 W.R. Inge, Mysticism, London, Methuen and Co., 1933, p.106.

the subsequent attempt of the mystic to convey his experience forces him to resort to the most suitable medium he possesses: that of words. But the mystic chooses words, however inadequate, that express his experience.

Miss Underhill replies to the opponents of the via negativa in her usual sane and healthy fashion when she says:

It has become a commonplace with writers on mysticism to say that all subsequent contemplatives took from Dionysius this idea of "Divine Darkness," and entrance therein as the soul's highest privilege: took it, so to speak, ready-made and on faith, and incorporated it in their tradition. To argue thus is to forget that mystics are above all things practical people. They do not write for the purpose of handing on a philosophical scheme, but in order to describe something for humanity. If, therefore, they persist- and they do persist- in using this simile of "darkness" to describe their experience in contemplation, it can only be because it fits the facts. 1

The intense antipathy of Dean Inge, Rufus Jones and others towards the via negativa is, I believe, the result of a lack of understanding of two things: the difficulties innate in mystical expression, and the propensities of the religious toward God.

The task of the mystic is a tremendous one. He may or may not be a poet, possessed of a special ability to communicate experience. Nevertheless, poet or not, he feels impelled to tell others of his vision. The magnitude of his intent is emphasized when we realize that he seeks to communicate an experience that is Divine: an experience that has brought him into direct relationship with God Himself. Language fails in the face of the Inexpressible. To describe God is by necessity to limit Him. Hence the resort of so many

---

1 Underhill, Mysticism, pp.347-8.

mystics to what God is NOT in an attempt to convey what He IS. Rather than profane the Godhead by the application of terms totally inadequate, the mystic falls back upon the paradoxically suggestive powers of negation.<sup>1</sup>

To me, the image of the "Divine Dark," found first in Dionysius and echoed variously by Eckhart, Tauler, Ruysbroeck, St. John of the Cross and countless other mystics is perfectly valid: one need only attempt to look directly at the sun's light, so blinding in its brightness that it becomes a "luminous darkness," to realize how apt this image of the Divine Dark is when applied to the Light of God.

To see Him is to enter the Darkness, the "Cloud of Unknowing," and "know only that we know nought."<sup>2</sup> <sic>

In spite of the difficulty of communication with which the mystic is faced, the fact emerges that mystics of all ages have attained a startling unanimity of expression.

These descriptions, incoherent as they are, have a strange note of certainty, a strange note of passion, an odd realism of their own: which mean, wherever we meet them, that experience not tradition is their source. Driven of necessity to a negation of all that their surface-minds have ever known—with language, strained to the uttermost, failing them at every turn—these contemplatives are still able to communicate to us a definite somewhat; news as to a given and actual Reality, an unchanging Absolute, and a beatific union with it, most veritably attained. They agree in their accounts of it, in a way which makes it obvious that all these reporters have sojourned in the same land, and experienced the same spiritual state. <sup>3</sup>

The use of negative terminology arises, in part, from

1 Ibid., p.318.

2 Ibid., p.337.

3 Ibid., p.338.

the inadequacy implicit in language; fundamentally, however, the distinction is much deeper: it is a metaphysical one, involving what I have chosen to call the propensity of the individual soul toward God.

The form and the ultimate expression of the mystic's experience are dictated by the particular tendency of his approach: where the emphasis is on God's Immanence, the meeting with God and the expression thereof tends to be personal and intimate; where the Transcendental qualities of God are uppermost, there exists, inevitably, it seems, a sharp awareness in the mystic of the discrepancy between himself and the Absolute Godhead. The realization of his own lack of perfection, of the difference in kind between himself and his God produces within him a great spiritual humility. His consequent attempt to convey his experience quite naturally leads him to the language of negation: to describe the Godhead in terms of affirmation seems a profanation.

For the Christian mystic, these dual aspects of God's nature are reconciled in the Doctrine of the Trinity wherein God exists Transcendent, the unknowable, undifferentiated One; Immanent, the supreme example of which is the Incarnation. The Christian mystic identifies himself with one or other of these attributes of God: with the love of God revealed through the personality of Christ or with the "otherness" of the Supreme Godhead. This latter leads inevitably to all we mean by the via negativa: to the joys, austere, but nonetheless real, of the "naughted soul"; to the subsequent attempts at description in the language of negation.

These two forms of mysticism, the Christocentric and

the Theistic, based as they are on the Immanence and Transcendence of God, are simply different approaches to God. In some mystics, these are united but most contemplatives lean in their approach toward one or the other. Consequently, in their imagery, they tend to reveal a single aspect: either what Eckhart has called "the unknowable totality of the Godhead" or the "knowable personality of God."<sup>1</sup> Seen in this light, as the predilection of certain mystics towards God in his Transcendence and the consequent use of terms of negation by them in order to express their experiences of Him, the via negativa presents no difficulty. It represents simply one approach to God.

Traditionally, the Mystic Way consists of the three-fold division Purgation, Illumination and Union. However, in her detailed analysis and study of the subject, Miss Underhill includes two additional stages: the initial Awakening and the penultimate Dark Night of the Soul. Certainly, for application to the metaphysical poets, this latter five-fold division possesses greater scope and consequently wider significance. It is recognized, however, that any attempt to present the Mystic Way as a gradation of definite stages is, of necessity, an arbitrary one: such an outline is merely diagrammatic. It is a composite picture compiled from the experiences of many mystics and hence fits no one mystic in toto.<sup>2</sup> For just as there is no typical poet, neither is there a typical mystic. Spiritual experience, since it conforms to human behaviour in general, does not flow

---

1 Ibid., p.344.

2 Ibid., p.167 ff.



into rigid patterns. Nevertheless, for purposes of analogy, the five-fold Mystic Way as developed by Miss Underhill presents an excellent starting point.

The necessary prelude to the reorganizing of the self upon higher planes of living is the stage known as Awakening. This varies with different mystics, its characteristics being dependent to some extent on individual temperament and environment. In some mystics, the awakening of the transcendental consciousness is a sudden, abrupt experience, marking off the period of discontent and growing awareness that precedes it from the heightened consciousness that comes with it. One of the most moving accounts we possess of this type of conversation is that of Pascal's, written in strange, broken phrases on a scrap of parchment, known subsequently as his Memorial or Amulet. It begins:

L'an de grace 1654  
lundi, 23 novembre, jour de Saint Clément, pape  
et martyr, et autres au martyrologe,  
veille de Saint Chrysogone, martyr et autres,  
depuis environs dix heures et demie du soir jusques  
environ minuit et demie,  
Feu,

and continues:

Dieu d'Abraham, Dieu d'Isaac, Dieu de Jacob,  
Non des philosophes et des savants.  
Certitude. Certitude. Sentiment. Joie. Paix.  
....Joie! joie joie! pleurs de joie! 1

In others, as in George Fox, Awakening takes the form of a gradual sense of enhancement. Be it sudden or gradual, this primary step in the Mystic Way differs, by the action implicit in it, from that of a state of mere awareness. Marked by the

---

1 Underhill, Mysticism, p.189.

emergence of a passion for the Absolute that is characteristic of the mystic, it is the beginning of a process of re-alignment wherein the entire being becomes possessed by the Spirit of God and is subsequently purged and progressively transformed.

Throughout, the five-fold path of the mystic is marked by alternate periods of joy and suffering: joy in the stages of Awakening, Illumination and Union; suffering in Pur-gation and the Dark Night of the Soul. Frequently, in this stage of Awakening, particularly where it is a gradual process, these oscillations are experienced by the mystic on a smaller scale. The happiness concomitant to initial conversion brings with it an acute realization of imperfection, a sense of the discrepancy between the self and God. The constant warring between man's worldliness and his spirituality, intensified in the mystic, re-asserts itself and the pilgrim is thrown from the heights of his new-found joy into the depths of self-reproach and recoil. "I was swept to Thee by Thy Beauty, and torn away from Thee by my own weight," says St. Augustine.<sup>1</sup>

Judging from the accounts of the majority of the mystics, the process of Awakening tends to be a single and abrupt experience, one in which the entire circumference of existence is suddenly enlarged. The mystic feels, in some indefinable way, that his own life is inseparable from that of all creation. The world takes on a new radiance and a sense of wonder: it is alive with God's divinity. This intense, piercing beauty, possesses a particular poignancy: the mystic is struck with the Divine

---

1 Confessions, quoted by Underhill, Mysticism, p.178.

sorrow at the heart of things.<sup>1</sup>

Some there are who, rather than look outward upon the manifestation of God's splendour, look inward and perceive the spirit of God dwelling within themselves: these receive the wound of Divine love.<sup>2</sup> Here the Awakening is to God's personal rather than to his cosmic significance. In each instance, the revelation of God, both in His Transcendence and in His Immanence, comes with a startling ecstasy. Out of the divine sorrow, the divine wound, a new consciousness is born: at this point, the life of the mystic truly begins.

This new consciousness imposes upon the self certain stringent demands for its complete re-organization. For the mystic, there is no hesitation, no drawing back, no uncertainty. He is filled with a thirst for perfection. It is this tremendous, insistent call which leads on to the higher life of the spirit. Many individuals of heightened consciousness have stood at the threshold of the door to the Divine Life and have never received this call to enter. They have stood at the point of intense awareness, unable, through their own will to go further, lacking the impetus, brought about through the grace of God, to impel them. This is one of the paradoxes of the spiritual life: "the wind bloweth where it listeth".

Those to whom this call has come are filled with a pervading sense of God's oneness, and a penetrating conviction of His nearness. The heart of the mystic is filled with a rush of love towards God. The brief, exhilarating sense of temporary

---

1 Underhill, Mysticism, p.178.

2 Ibid., p.196.

unselfing, the momentary sense of freedom from earthly trammels is replaced by a sharp stimulation of the will, a desire for re-adjustment in the light of the newly apprehended Reality. This demand of the Supernatural for a response upon the part of the individual is answered with humility and joy; the mystic sets out to decrease in self in order that he may increase in God. Here he enters into the Way of Purgation.

"The essence of purgation," says Richard of Victor, "is self-simplification."<sup>1</sup> It is the turning of the self from the unreal to the real life: the orientation of the whole self to reality. This is accomplished by a slow and arduous process in which the purification of the senses and the remoulding of the character is undertaken. This latter, the remoulding of the character, is the positive aspect of the purgative way: it is the building up and the cleansing of that which is to remain and is brought about by the practice of mortification, "the gymnastic of the soul."<sup>2</sup>

The negative aspect of the purgation consists of the stripping away of that which is to be done away with, of those things which nourish the selfhood. It is realized through detachment of the spirit. This detachment is the poverty of the mystic. It consists of a mental rather than of a material state for, to the mystic, it is not activity that is significant but rather the quality of activity: it is attitude, not act, that matters.<sup>3</sup>

1 Ibid., p.204, cf. also p.198 ff.

2 Ibid., p.205.

3 Ibid., p.211.

Poverty, chastity and obedience comprise the mystic detachment. Poverty consists of detachment from finite things; chastity, of the poverty of the senses and the cleansing of them from personal desire; obedience, of the poverty of the will, the abnegation of selfhood, the cultivation of holy indifference. The mystic comes to realize through the discipline of poverty the paradox implicit in it: that it is only in respect to things we neither possess nor desire that we obtain true liberty. The soul becomes more Godlike the further it advances under its discipline of poverty. "Detachment and purity go hand in hand for purity is but detachment of the heart."<sup>1</sup>

Like detachment, mortification is a means to an end: it is a process, an education by which the spirit is directed to higher ends. Through its practice, the spiritual resources of the mystic are directed towards a particular efficiency, a desired perfectedness. The process is not easy; it involves heart-ache and humiliation. But the mystic knows there is no quest to the heights of the spiritual life which does not first go through the valleys of suffering and renunciation. The way of the mystic is of necessity the way of the Cross: the Passion of Christ is proof of the "divine necessity of pain."<sup>2</sup>

The pain of the mystic during purgation is frequently interspersed with moments of intense joy, moments in which he obtains startling glimpses into the very heart of things. Gradually, as the self emerges from the trials of the Purgative Way,

1 loc.cit.

2 Ibid., p.222.

these glimpses become progressively common until eventually a new harmony is established between the self, itself new, and the world, the Divine attributes of which it has come to apprehend more clearly. The mystic eventually enters into an illuminated state of consciousness- "the first mystic life"<sup>1</sup> as it is commonly called by the mystics.

The intimations of a higher Reality first perceived in the preliminary period of Awakening and the consequent re-ordering of the self in line with this Reality in Purgation now have their fulfillment in this state of illumination. The spiritual life is a progressive one. Through difficulty, it leads ever onward and upward: the perception gained at this new level of consciousness is of a higher order than that perceived formerly during Awakening or in the glimpses achieved during Purgation. At this new stage, a conscious harmony is established between the self in two directions: with the World of Becoming, the expression of God Immanent, which the mystic now sees through his newly heightened perception with a greater clarity, a deeper joy; with the presence of the Absolute, more real, more holy. Here, at this stage, the mystic begins in earnest "the practice of the presence of God."<sup>2</sup>

This division of the Mystic Way is the most extensive and the most densely populated province of the mystics:<sup>3</sup> it is here that many of the poets most closely approximate the mystic.

1 Ibid., p.228.

2 Ibid., p.241.

3 Ibid., p.238.

The most significant attribute of the illuminated state is the intense joy co-existent with it. Here, in much of the mystical literature can be found the most lyrical outpourings of love and rapture in praise of the harmony implicit in all life. Blake has caught its essence when he says:

To see the world in a grain of sand,  
And a heaven in a wild flower;  
To hold infinity in the palm of your hand,  
And eternity in an hour.

The manifestation of God in nature gives rise to the commonest and simplest expression of mystic wonder. The effect of this apprehension upon the ego of the mystic is startling: there is a vitalizing expansion of consciousness, an exaltation of the personality. The energy of the self both in its intuitional and transcendental capacities is increased enormously. It is not self-loss that is achieved at this stage of Illumination but rather, through the careful self cultivation of the Purgative Way, a higher realization of the self.

Many mystics go no further than this first mystic life. They mistake their joyous apprehension of a God-pervaded universe as final and complete. Certainly, at this stage, a very real sense of God is achieved. However, the individuality of the self, the exalted I-hood that is experienced at this stage by the mystic, is evidence that he has not yet reached the place where God is all in all. In great seekers, there comes this awareness of having arrived short of the ultimate goal. Gradually, for them, the intensified joy of the illuminated state is replaced by intermittent periods of gloom, of spiritual fatigue and aridity. Moments of illuminated joy become progressively fewer and event-

ually disappear entirely: the Dark Night of the Soul sets in.

This is the period of disillusionment and suffering which separates the first mystic life, the stage of Illumination, from the second mystic life, the Unitive state. It is a time of moral and mental chaos, one in which the spiritual equilibrium established during Illumination is completely overthrown, but the divine harmony of ultimate Union is not yet achieved. It is midway between the breakup of the old and the establishment of the new. It exemplifies the reaction from the stress of the increased mystical activity enjoyed during the spiritual growth of Illumination.<sup>1</sup>

The Dark Night is directed towards the total abandonment of the self. Its whole function is to cure the self of the desire even for spiritual joys: it must not seek rest and happiness in the vision of Reality but must be Reality.

Those who oppose the via negativa in its earlier manifestations are equally vehement in their antagonism toward it in this stage of the Mystic Way. Whether we approve or disapprove of all that the Dark Night signifies is of little import: the details of experience exist and we can only present them as recorded by the mystics. The concept of "self naughting" may or may not be repugnant to us but the fact remains that the greatest mystics have undergone this mystic death and have described its sufferings in vivid and convincing terms. Out of this great negation has come the supreme affirmation.

During Purgation, the mystic undertakes the cleansing

---

1 Underhill, Mysticism, p.382; cf p.380 ff.



of the senses in order that he may view the nature of Reality with the veils of illusion swept away. He undergoes what St. John of the Cross has called the "Dark Night of the senses."<sup>1</sup> Now, at this advanced stage, the Upper School<sup>2</sup> of the spiritual life, the mystic is called upon not merely to apprehend Reality but to partake of it. He knows that only by being Godlike can he know God, that in order to know, he must be. This involves the cleansing of the will and the emotions, the complete surrender of the self to God, the entering into the "Dark Night of the spirit".<sup>3</sup>

The intense suffering endured by the mystic in this stage of the Mystic Way has its source in two things: in the piercing awareness of the discrepancy still existing between the self and God, and the feeling of deprivation the mystic undergoes in his acute sense of abandonment by God. The Vision of Reality apprehended in Illumination serves only to emphasize the disparity between the finite self and the Infinite Godhead. The mystic is filled with a sense of imperfection, a conviction of sin. Not only does God seem to have withdrawn, but the very spark of Divinity within himself, so carefully nourished through the former stages of his spiritual growth, now seems utterly extinguished. To one who in the stage of Illumination had joyously experienced the proximity of the Divine presence, the privation is all the more difficult to endure.

---

1 St. John of the Cross, The Dark Night of the Soul, London, Thomas Baker, 1916, 4th Ed., Revised.

2 Op cit. p.397.

3 Op cit.

This is the mystic death in all its starkness. There arises within the mystic a hopeless despair. He is beset with a numbing lassitude, a spiritual ennui. From this, the self seems unable to escape. Not only is the vision of Reality withdrawn, but the desire for the vision disappears. The will, the intellect and the emotions undergo a process of complete stagnation.

This is the Dark before the Dawn, the Entombment before the Resurrection.<sup>1</sup> The mystic is called upon to accept this discipline in the face of darkness and desolation. The entire travail of the mystic death is directed toward this necessary acceptance, this act of submission. Only when the individual will is surrendered to the Divine Will does the mystic pass out of the torment of the Dark Night. The Cross endured, the Crown is won. The surrendered self emerges purified, "one with the Absolute Life of God."<sup>2</sup>

Joy is the keynote of the new life but the extent and nature of this joy is beyond our comprehension. We see the cross clearly, but we can hardly guess the true nature of the resurrection life.<sup>3</sup> The accounts of the mystics themselves seem meagre and strangely anticlimactic after all that has gone before. However, it is their lives rather than their writings that provide us with the supreme witness to the Unitive Life. "What fruit dost thou bring back from this thy vision?" is the final question which Jacopone da Todi addresses to the mystic's soul.

1 Underhill, Mysticism, p.402.

2 Loc cit.

3 Underhill, Mysticism, p.412.

And the answer is: "An ordered life in every state."<sup>1</sup>

In their attempts to describe the great change wrought in this final stage of the Mystic Way, the mystics, like the poets, turn to language that is highly symbolic. Where the emphasis has been on the transcendent aspect of the Godhead, the transformation is described as a deification, a "transmutation of the self in God."<sup>2</sup> Where worship has been personal and intimate, this change is referred to as the spiritual marriage of the soul with God; the betrothal of the soul which came about in Illumination is consummated now in Union.

As we read the accounts of the mystics, as we study their lives, we are constantly made aware of the paradox in spiritual growth: that only through self surrender does the mystic come to know freedom: only in self abandonment does he find self realization. Thus it is that the transformation of the self achieved in the Unitive Life is as complete as the cleansing that has preceded it; the exaltation of the soul is proportionate to its previous humiliation.<sup>3</sup> Those who emerge victorious from this last purgation represent the final triumph of the spirit, the flower of mysticism, the top note of humanity.<sup>4</sup> In the enhancement, serenity and gladsomeness which their lives possess, they have an unquestionable verification of the authenticity of their experience. The radiance of the transformed

1 Evelyn Underhill, The Essentials of Mysticism, London, J.M. Dent, 1920, p.23.

2 Op. cit., p.415.

3 Benedict Zimmerman, "Introduction" to The Living Flame of Love, by St. John of the Cross, London, Thomas Baker, 1912, pp. xlvii-xlviii.

4 Op. cit., p.413.

life is simply the outward sign of its inner state.

This transformation is essentially purposive: it is not mere attainment for its own sake. The purged self arrives at the source of Divine Energy in order that it may return again to the world. The intense vigour of the mystic is a vitality creative in its essence: a new responsibility, a new sense of obligation, both to God and to humanity presents itself. The deified life is thus a dedicated life. It rests in God but it is active in the world; indeed, it is active by virtue of its Divine rest. "Give what Thou dost demand; and then demand what Thou wilt," is the prayer of St. Augustine.<sup>1</sup> The life of the mystic represents at this stage, as at no other, both the constant demand of the Eternal, and the perpetual response of the individual. The Unitive Life is an extension along two levels of reality: in the Eternal, through increasing adoration and capacity for God; in the temporal, through ceaseless activity in the world. The mystic becomes a channel for the Eternal in time.

In order to be healthy, the spiritual life demands this necessary balance between contemplation and action. Surrender and activity go hand in hand: a surrender marked by love and adoration; an activity marked by zest and cheerfulness. For the mystic, the fundamental distinction between the Supernatural and the natural is not overcome; rather it is resolved, - in a life balanced by worship and service.

---

1 Evelyn Underhill, "Spiritual Life", in Mixed Pastures, London, Methuen and Co., 1933, p.49.

The mystic exemplifies a beauty, a holiness, and a love, all of which stem from the Divine. His life is truly an Imitation of Christ: it re-enacts in part, however incompletely, the mystery of the Incarnation. "Not I, but Christ in me" is the secret of the mystic life. It is the Way, the Means, and the End.

CHAPTER II

The capacity for mystical experience of the highest order is rare. The application of the term mystic, however, is not reserved only for those who actually enter the Unitive Life: those who undergo the Purgative Way and achieve some degree of Illumination deserve to be recognized as mystics. Unfortunately, the term has been grossly misused outside the realm of the spiritual life entirely and perhaps nowhere is this more true than in its frequent reference to poetry.

In a sense, all poetry worthy of the name is "mystical" in that it imparts in greater or lesser degree a vision of Reality. It does not follow from this, however, that all poets are mystics. Art is the communication of apprehended Reality. Its purpose, said Blake, is to "cleanse the doors of perception so that everything may appear as it is - Infinite."<sup>1</sup> The mystic goes beyond this in his purpose: he seeks not only to apprehend Reality but also to unite himself to it.

When we come to study the mystic-poet, we are confronted with a difficulty that is twofold: we must attempt to understand him within two areas of experience- the poetical and the spiritual. In some instances, the borderline between the two is very vague. Nevertheless, spiritual and poetical experience are not one and the same thing as we are so often led to believe by the frequent and casual application of the term "mystic" to the poet. Indeed, the combination of spiritual and poetical genius in one person is a rare occurrence. As Mr. T.S. Eliot has shrewdly declared,

---

1 Itrat-Husain, The Mystical Element in the Metaphysical Poets of the Seventeenth Century, London, Oliver and Boyd, 1948, p.34.

"The capacity for writing poetry is rare; the capacity for religious emotion of the first intensity is rare; and it is to be expected that the existence of both capacities in the same individual should be rarer still."<sup>1</sup>

The confused association of mysticism with poetry<sup>2</sup> arises to some extent from the similarity between their media of expression. In order to convey their visions of Reality, both the poet and the mystic turn to words rich in imagery and symbolism. But the essential difference between the poet and the mystic at this point is the actual fact of expression. Without this, the poet is not a poet; he is merely a visionary. The mystic, on the other hand, whether or not he seeks to convey his vision, is still a mystic. The expression of his experience is simply a by-product of it, not its excuse for being. For the poet, however, the end of his vision is the poem: it is the essential and the defined consequence of his experience.<sup>3</sup> For the mystic, the Unitive Life is the consequence of his vision. Thus, out of their respective experiences, emerge the pattern, the value and the significance of the poet's poem, of the mystic's life.

The actual difference, and, paradoxically enough, the greatest similarity between the poet and the mystic lie in the essential experiences by which they partake of Reality. It is

1 T.S. Eliot, After Strange Gods, London, Faber & Faber, 1933, p.29.

2 From this point on I shall use the term mystic and its derivations in the strict sense as applying to spiritual experience only.

3 Helen Gardner White, The Metaphysical Poets, N.Y., Macmillan Co., 1936, pp.15-16.



here, as Abbé Brémond has pointed out in his book, Prayer and Poetry, that we come to understand the poet more completely through our understanding of the mystic, many mystics having written of their experiences in such a way that the process of mystic endeavour is comparatively clear to us, certainly relatively so in comparison with our knowledge of the poetic process.

The unfettering of the self and the exhilarating sense of freedom which accompany the artist's insight is very similar to the heightened consciousness enjoyed by the mystic in Illumination. The essential difference lies in the purpose and consequence of each experience. Nevertheless, the expansion of the self and the subsequent heightened vision which the mystic and the poet undergo are similar: the one is lost in the many; the self is diffused in the whole. Ultimately, in both poet and mystic, this expansion has its complementary contraction. For the poet, it is the necessary gathering and concentration of energy and intellect that enables initial poetic inspiration to become concrete in poetic form. The mystic's diffusiveness gathers itself together, too, but in an act of concentration that is a following through, a completion of the Illuminated experience; for him, the apprehension of the Reality of God realized in Illumination becomes a concentration upon this Reality and an ultimate absorption with it in Union. The essential difference, then, between the Illumination of the mystic and that of the poet lies in the sense of direction involved. It is as if a channel were set up between God and the mystic, between God and the poet. For the mystic, this channel is a two-way process along which the love of God may flow to him, and his own love and desire may reach to God.

For the poet, the channel operates on a single level. As Dom Auburg has declared, "Poetry is a sign; it indicates a higher faculty...capable of receiving God, though incapable of apprehending Him."<sup>1</sup> The intimations of Reality vouchsafed to the artist in his illuminated vision of the world stem from the Divine but they have their consequence, not in a returning effulgence of devotion and dedication but rather in an act of creation; for the poet, in his poem. The poet is sent to speak, rather than to be. Whereas the mystic attempts to re-order his life in line with his vision, the poet seeks merely to convey the wonder of it. "They are like half-saints," says Abbé Brémond of the poets, "they have the most exquisite spiritual sense and the most cowardly conscience. Their genius seems to confer on them a sort of sanctity independent of all virtue."<sup>2</sup>

Because of what he considers is essentially a drawing back on the part of the poet in order to write his poem, Abbé Brémond refers to the poet as "an evanescent mystic whose mysticism breaks down."<sup>3</sup> This description seems to me to be unjust in that it is a misinterpretation both of the purpose and of the method of the poet, however partial a grasp we may possess of the latter. The poet is a poet by virtue of his poetry, which, in turn, is the outcome of his illuminative experience. It follows that if we accuse him of not following through an experience that rightly belongs to another species of individual, we are denying

---

1 Quoted by Abbé Brémond, Prayer and Poetry, trans. by Alger Thorold, London, Burns Oates & Washbourne Ltd., 1927, p.87.

2 Ibid., p.194.

3 Ibid., p.189.

him the validity of his own experience. We cannot condemn the poet, as poet, because he is not a mystic.

Neither do I understand how the poet's ultimate creative act constitutes, or necessitates, as Abbé Brémond insists, any willed drawing back from the apprehension of Reality. Like grace, surely the ecstasy of the vision, its presence, its departure, is something over which the artist has no control. Brémond maintains that in his haste to exploit and transmit the treasure of his vision, the poet handles it badly, in that he gets hold of it superficially.<sup>1</sup> This idea of Brémond's is contrary to the generally accepted theories of artistic creation. Poetic experience, or the state of illuminated vision granted to the poet, is not the same as poetic inspiration. Out of the original experience come the suggestions and symbols for the ultimate poem but the inspiration that immediately precedes the actual writing of the poem may not take place for a considerable period of time. The poet carries his vision with him in his heart till he is moved to share its secret in poetry. A lapse of time between the vision of Reality and the ultimate expression of it is characteristic of poetic endeavour.

Strangely enough, Abbé Brémond seems to contradict his own thesis when he outlines the essential difference between the mystic and the poet in these words:

It is very certain that we have to pass through God in order to reach effectively the smallest reality, but it is no less certain that we can only pass through God by means of God. Now to pass through the living and hidden God is to enter the mystical order; it is to accept detachment, the night of the

---

1 Ibid., p.190.

senses and of the understanding, the gratuitous initiative of the heavenly Father, the docile response to the grace of charity, the effective union of our will with the divine will. Without this initiative, without this superhuman and special infusion of light and love, and without the active response of Animus (the reason) to this God whom he has recognized and named, there may no doubt sometimes occur simple mimetisms, and also preliminary sketches, preparations, and hypothetical anticipations of the soul, but there is no mysticism in the proper and sacred sense of the word. 1

## II

The term "mystic-poet" has been frequently used in reference to the metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century. In approaching Herbert and Vaughan critically with the intent to validate or invalidate its application in the light of their own work and the criteria of the mystical life, one is confronted with the problem of weighing the extent to which they may be considered mystics in the strict sense of the word against that to which they are essentially and primarily poets, expressing experiences merely similar to those of the mystics. In some cases, the issue tends to be further clouded by the type of life led and the kind of poetry written, as in the case of Herbert, who entered Holy Orders. The religious life is by no means necessarily the mystic life; neither, however, is religious poetry necessarily that of a mystic. Much of our so-called religious verse testifies to this fact. It is not the substance of poetry that makes it mystical: it is the vision it entails. But it is not the vision alone which constitutes the criterion of the mystic; it is the life led in consequence of the vision. The life that is spiritual differs from that which is truly

---

1 Ibid., pp.195-6.

mystical, not in kind, but rather in degree. In their vicissitudes and in their joys they will resemble each other, for their pursuit is the same: the life of the mystic is simply ordered on a higher plane.

What I am attempting to do with two of the metaphysical poets is not simply to show the mystical element in their poetry but rather to distinguish, if possible, elements in their poetry which illustrate the extent to which these men may be considered mystics. As I have already suggested, the very fact that these men were poets precludes the inference that they are mystical in the sense of being visionary but it does not establish them as mystics. Aldous Huxley has caught the essential difference between the artist who is a visionary and the true mystic in these words:

The experience of beauty in art or nature may be qualitatively akin to the immediate, unitive experience of the divine Ground or Godhead; but it is not the same as that experience, and the particular beauty-fact experienced, though partaking in some sort of the divine nature, is at several removes from the Godhead. The poet, the nature lover, the aesthete are granted apprehensions of Reality analogous to those vouchsafed to the selfless contemplative; but because they have not troubled to make themselves perfectly selfless, they are incapable of knowing the divine Beauty in its fullness, as it is in itself. The poet is born with the capacity of arranging words in such a way that something of the quality of the graces and inspirations he has received can make itself felt between the lines of his verse. This is a great and precious gift; but if the poet remains content with his gift, if he persists in worshipping the beauty in art and nature without going on to make himself capable, through selflessness, of apprehending Beauty as it is in the Divine Ground, then he is only an idolator. True, his idolatry is among the highest of which human beings are capable; but an idolatry, none the less, it remains. 1

---

1 Aldous Huxley, Perennial Philosophy, N.Y., Harper and Brothers, 1945, pp.137-8.

The mark of the mystic is to be found in his sanctity: without the re-ordering of the inner life, the poet may not rightly be considered a mystic, regardless of the penetration of his insight. In the final analysis, one has to be a mystic; it is not enough merely to write about the life. Love and desire are the fundamental necessities and where these are absent, man, even though he be a visionary, cannot be called a mystic.<sup>1</sup>

The mystic-poet, then, is one who, by endowment is a poet, and through dedication and resolve has become a mystic. Such an individual is indeed uncommon. Helen White claims most justly that the great mystical poet will have to be a person of rare complexity and unity of consciousness.<sup>2</sup> I disagree, however, with the inherent conflict she implies when she says, "For the poet cannot rest until he has found the words and the music that will ease the pressure of his feeling, that with the presentment of a new creation will satisfy the craving of the imagination. On the other hand, the mystic is forever thrusting beyond the hungers and aching of experience to the place that is behind them all."<sup>3</sup> The creative activity of the poet is, I feel, something apart from and in no sense conflicting with his contemplative pursuits as a mystic. Whatever an individual may be in his vocation, there is no necessary conflict with his mystical activity. St. John of the Cross, by way of example, was both contemplative and doctor. In a sense, his life and his work cannot be separated,

---

1 Underhill, Mysticism, p.89.

2 White, Metaphysical Poets, p.26.

3 Loc. cit.

but again, his contemplative activity may be considered apart from the work he fulfilled as doctor, although certainly the latter was considerably influenced by his mysticism. The mystic-poet, similarly, when not involved in mystical contemplation, pursues his vocation as poet.

Mystical and poetical activities are frequently identified because both involve contemplation. However, there is a difference between mystical and poetical contemplation both in degree and in kind: the contemplation of the mystic involves complete identification with Reality; identification of the self with Reality in poetical activity is much less complete. The contemplative activities that result in the re-ordered life of the mystic on the one hand and in the poem of the poet on the other, even when found in the same individual, will likewise be different in kind. Here, there is a dichotomy insofar as the mystic-poet tends, as a mystic, towards concentration; as a poet, towards diffusion. These tendencies, however, may be considered single and separate manifestations of his capacities both as mystic and as poet.

The decision to be made in relation to two of the metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century, therefore, is whether these men reveal themselves as genuine mystics or simply as poets possessing deep spiritual insight and comprehensive vision. The likelihood of a conjunction of true mysticism both in their poetry and in their lives is suggested by Jacques Maritain in his essay on "Christian Art": if we substitute the word "mystic" for "Christian", we may say that the conjunction is not impossible,

Say rather that it is difficult, doubly difficult-difficulty squared, because it is difficult to be an artist and very difficult to be a (mystic), and because the whole difficulty is not merely the sum but the product of these two difficulties multiplied by one another, for it is a question of reconciling two absolutes. 1

The essence of the difficulty is caught for us in these words of Fra Angelico:

Art demands tranquility, and to paint the things of Christ, the artist must live with Christ. 2

---

1 Jacques Maritain, "Christian Art", in Art and Scholasticism With Other Essays, translated by J.F. Scanlan, London, Sheed and Ward, 1934, p.69.

2 Ibid., p.71.



C H A P T E R   I I I

G E O R G E   H E R B E R T

The 23rd Psalme

The God of love my shepherd is,  
And he that doth me feed:  
While he is mine, and I am his,  
What can I want or need?

He leads me to the tender grasse,  
Where I both feed and rest;  
Then to the streams that gently passe:  
In both I have the best.

Or if I stray, he doth convert  
And bring my minde in frame:  
And all this not for my desert,  
But for his holy name.

Yea, in deaths shadie black abode  
Well may I walk, not fear:  
For thou art with me; and thy rod  
To guide, thy staffe to bear.

Nay, thou dost make me sit and dine,  
Ev'n in my enemies sight:  
My head with oyl, my cup with wine  
Runnes over day and night.

Surely thy sweet and wondrous love  
Shall measure all my dayes;  
And as it never shall remove,  
So never shall my praise.

\_\_\_\_George Herbert.

Certainly of the metaphysical group, no poet is more frequently misunderstood and misinterpreted than is George Herbert. The dichotomy of Donne is accepted and explored; the appraisals of Vaughan, Crashaw and Traherne are singularly consistent with their works: in Herbert, alone, known variously as he is by such similar epithets as "the saint of Bemerton" and "holy Mr. Herbert", a strange and interesting contrast arises between the legend that has grown up around his name and the character that emerges from his own writings.

This contrast results partly from the fact that Herbert's works are seldom read in their entirety and from the fact also that an incomplete picture of Herbert tends to be most misleading. In the common anthologies of verse, we invariably find a selection of Herbert's poems to include the familiar and lovely "Virtue" as well as poems such as "The Pulley", "The Flower", "The Pearl", "The Collar" -- certainly all illustrative, penetratingly so, of the poetic convention to which Herbert so skilfully adhered and also of the spiritual travail which forms the substance of his poetry. But to appreciate Herbert's poetry to the full both in its form and its content, indeed, in its singularly adroit adaption of form to content, the complete works must be read. Only then does the character which was relentlessly subjected to the shaft of a piercing self analysis emerge from the work that is an intrinsic expression both of the artist and the man.

Another serious barrier towards preventing an honest appraisal of George Herbert is the misleading picture given to us by Izaak Walton in his Life of George Herbert. The portrait of

sweet reasonableness painted by the generous and kindly biographer is true enough in its broad outline but it is unfortunately misleading in its emphasis. The estimates of other contemporaries serve, it is true, to enforce certain aspects of the picture presented in Walton's Life. Herbert's own brother, Lord Herbert of Cherbury, said of him, "His life was most holy and exemplary; in-somuch that about Salisbury where he lived beneficed for many years, he was little less than sainted."<sup>1</sup> Again, Nicholas Ferrar, himself famed for the consecrated life he led in the religious community of Little Gidding, spoke in his preface to Herbert's poems of the Bemerton ministry, likening it to the life of the primitive saints. The letters of another contemporary, Arthur Woodnoth, likewise substantiate Herbert's saintliness. Nevertheless, it is Walton, indebted though we are to him for the picture he has painted with such ease and charm, who is responsible for many of the misconceptions commonly held about Herbert. Speaking of the "incredible sanctity" of Herbert's consecrated years, he refers to this part of Herbert's life as "one so full of charity, humility and Christian virtues that it deserves the eloquency of St. Chrysostym to declare it,"<sup>2</sup> concluding his biography, "Thus he lived, and thus he died, like a Saint, unspotted of the world, full of alms-deeds, full of humility, and all the examples of a virtuous life."<sup>3</sup> Even in the light of Herbert's exemplary years

---

1 F.E. Hutchinson, "George Herbert: a Tercentenary," The Nineteenth Century, March, 1933, p.359.

2 Izaak Walton, "Life of George Herbert," Walton's Lives and The Complete Angler, London, Macmillan and Co., 1906, p.395.

3 Ibid., pp.420-1.

at Bemerton this statement is only superficially true and in the perspective of his entire life and particularly in the light of his own poetry, it is a great over-simplification of the facts. "In painting a glorious picture," says George Herbert Palmer "an artist selects a point of view, and to what is visible from that point subordinates all else. So Walton works. He paints us the Saint of Bemerton. And while too honest to conceal discordant facts from him who will search his pages, he contrives to throw so strong a light on Herbert's three consecrated years that few readers notice how unlike these are to his vacillating thirty-six. Walton's portraiture has taken so firm a hold on the popular imagination that it may truly be said to constitute at present the most serious obstacle to a cool assessment of Herbert."<sup>1</sup>

An aura of solemn sweetness, disturbingly lacking in force and positiveness is all too frequently associated with Herbert's early life as well as with his years at Bemerton. Even the moderation and piety he exemplified as a parish priest has in some strange way become clothed with an element of benevolent rusticity, more suggestive of compromise than of the synthesis actually achieved in the face of constant turmoil and conflict.

The fact is he is a poet in whom poetic style is truly indicative of character. His poetry is not easy-going; the sweetness revealed therein is not mild. And it is illustrative both of the fibre of Herbert's spiritual life as well as the quality and energy of his mind that it was his wish and his accomplishment

---

<sup>1</sup> George Herbert Palmer, The Life and Works of George Herbert, Boston and New York, Houghton Mifflin and Co., 1915, Vol.I, pp.45-6.

that his rhymes should "engrave (his) love in steel."<sup>1</sup>

We know that "the Mark to aim at"<sup>2</sup> became for Herbert a reality; but the mark thus achieved -- "the profound humility", "the perfect patience," "the Christian fortitude,"<sup>3</sup> -- possesses its real significance only in the light of the complexities of Herbert's life.

From Walton we learn of Herbert's years at Cambridge and of his early leanings towards a life at court with all its promise of a political career. He was both scholar and gentleman, the epitome of the Renaissance ideal. "...He had acquired great learning," Walton tells us, "and was blessed with a high fancy, a civil and sharp wit; and with a natural elegance both in his behaviour, his tongue, and his pen."<sup>4</sup> Herbert, conscious of the nature of his own wit, spoke of it as being too thoughtful, "a wit like a penknife in too narrow a sheath, too sharp for his body."<sup>5</sup> From his early years at Cambridge where he first dedicated himself to the writing of sacred verse until his entering the church, Herbert was constantly torn between worldly ambitions and his avowed intention to enter the service of God. Echoes of this conflict are found throughout his poetry. In "Affliction (1)", he writes,

---

1 Hutchinson, Works, "Temper (1)", p.55. (In all the following references to Herbert's poetry, when using Hutchinson's edition, I shall indicate by the letter "H").

2 George Herbert, "The Authour to the Reader", Preface to A Priest to the Temple or The Country Parson, Works of George Herbert, ed., F.E. Hutchinson, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1941, p.224.

3 The Country Parson, p.238.

4 Walton, Life, p.380.

5 Ibid., p.384.

Whereas my birth and spirit rather took  
   The way that takes the town;  
 Thou didst betray me to a lingring book,  
   And wrap me in a gown.  
 I was entangled in the world of strife,  
 Before I had the power to change my life.    1

Herbert's conflict was not completely solved by his entering Holy Orders: his worldly ambitions died hard. The line in "Man's Medley" which speaks of man's twofold link between the life of sense and the world of the angels--

With th' one hand touching heav'n, with th' other earth  
 --is thus touchingly autobiographical. Herbert was never the calm saint; neither was he holy in the accepted and full sense of the word. There was always a noise of thoughts within his heart.<sup>2</sup> In one of his later poems he speaks of the outward glory of the world as

False glozing pleasures, casks of happinesse,  
 Foolish night-fires, womens and childrens wishes,  
 Chases in Arras, gilded emptinesse,  
 Shadows well mounted, dreams in a career,  
 Embroider'd lyes...,    3

and even in his earlier poems<sup>4</sup> he illustrates his awareness of the short-sightedness and the utter futility of the "painted pleasures of court life". In "Miserie" he cries

Oh foolish man! where are thine eyes?  
 How hast thou lost them in a croud of cares?  
       Thou pull'st the rug, and wilt not rise,  
 No, not to purchase the whole pack of starres:  
           There let them shine,  
       Thou must go sleep, or dine.    5

1 H., p.47.

2 Palmer, III, p.174.

3 "Dotage", H., p.167.

4 cf. Hutchinson, Works, pp.lxx-lxxvii. Canon Hutchinson assumes that the Williams MS. represents Herbert's earlier poems as well as several of the original drafts of later poems. Therefore poems found in the Williams MS. I have taken as earlier poems.

5 H., p.114.

In spite of his awareness of all its emptiness, many years passed before Herbert turned his back on a secular career. Whether his final decision came as a result of his dashed expectations after the death of two of his most influential friends, followed soon by the death of the King himself, or of the death of his mother whose wish it had always been for him to enter the ministry, we do not know. At any rate, subsequent to these events, Herbert resigned the Oratorship which he had held at Court for seven years and retired to the country. Shortly afterwards he announced his intention to enter Sacred Orders.

That he was eventually able to resolve his conflict and his indecision is demonstrated by the life he led at Bemerton. The outward synthesis of the inner turmoil is indicative of the degree of harmony which he achieved. We have, too, his own words spoken shortly before his death, in which he speaks "of the many spiritual conflicts that have passed betwixt God and my soul, before I could subject mine to the will of Jesus my Master: in whose service I have now found perfect freedom."<sup>1</sup>

Some readers of Herbert have taken this "perfect freedom" of which he speaks to mean the peace experienced by the mystics and have, in like vein, interpreted the joys and travails expressed in The Temple as illustrative of mystical experience.

I shall now examine the validity of this interpretation in the light both of the Mystic Way as I have outlined it and in the light of Herbert's own words in his poetry.

Such an undertaking cannot fail to be, to some extent,

---

1 Walton, Life, p.417.



artificial: the activity of the mystic does not adhere to fixed patterns; neither does the creative process of the poet. To apply standards that pertain to mystical activity to the activity of the artist is admittedly artificial, but is, I think, valid in an attempt to understand and evaluate the man behind the artist. Where the medium of the art form is words, as in poetry, the difficulty is still greater. Words are the commonest and most complete form of communication we possess and it is difficult, in approaching poetry, to determine the area of actual experience, differentiating it from that which is merely poetic in germ; particularly when we consider how the simple facts of experience may be altered and enhanced through the powers of the poet's imagination.

In devotional verse, this problem is intensified because of the added difficulty of distinguishing between what a poet really feels and what he would like to feel, between what is accomplishment and what is intention.<sup>1</sup> In the devotional verse of the metaphysical poets, the distinction between purely imaginative experience and experience that is actual and personal is further clouded by the traditions of the poetic convention within which these poets wrote. The artifice they sought and obtained is illustrative of two things: of artifice for its own sake, whereby they demonstrated their sheer delight and skill in the subtle play of the intellect, and artifice as a device to express in compact, concentrated form, experience that is at once passionate and intense. Herbert frequently illustrates one or both these types of artifice; the two are aptly demon-

---

<sup>1</sup> T.S. Eliot, "George Herbert", The Spectator, March 12, 1932, p.360.

strated in the telescoped imagery and diction of his metaphysical poetry. In "Jesu", we find a splendid example of poetic intensity that is illustrative both of compression of idea and of genuine religious feeling.

Jesu is in my heart, his sacred name  
Is deeply carved there: but th' other week  
A great affliction broke the little frame,  
Ev'n all to pieces: which I went to seek:  
And first I found the corner, where was J,  
After, where ES, and next where U was graved.  
When I had got these parcels, instantly  
I sat me down to spell them, and perceived  
That to my broken heart he was I ease you,  
And to my whole is JESU.<sup>1</sup>

The poetry of Herbert is particularly interesting because it represents a new genre in English literature: the religious love lyric, described by Palmer as "the cry of the individual soul to God,....a supreme lovesong, involving two persons and two only- the individual soul as the lover and its divine and incomparable Love."<sup>2</sup> In like vein, Hutchinson speaks of the lyrics as colloquies of the Soul with God or self-communings which sought to bring harmony into the complex personality that Herbert analyzed unsparingly.<sup>3</sup> They express the "slow, sometimes almost despairing and always agonizing toil of the proud and passionate man of the world towards spiritual life."<sup>4</sup>

The opinions regarding the mysticism in Herbert's

1 H., p.112.

2 G.H. Palmer, ed., The Life & Works of George Herbert, Boston and New York, Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1905, I, 94.

3 Hutchinson, Works, p. xxxvii.

4 Eliot, op.. cit., loc. cit.

poetry are many and varied. Perhaps we have an indication of Herbert's own attitude towards mysticism in his Notes on the Divine Considerations of Valdesso in which he voices his wariness of "private enthusiasmes and revelations."<sup>1</sup> In contrast with Valdesso who placed particular emphasis on personal rather than on corporate religion, Herbert's religious experience, although indeed highly personal, took shape within the context of the Anglican communion. The presence of mysticism is certainly not excluded on grounds of orthodoxy, however: the greatest mystics have lived and worked within the framework of orthodox belief.

Leishman claims that there is no trace of mysticism in Herbert's writings;<sup>2</sup> at the other extreme Osmond places Herbert among the mystics because he considers him a supreme exemplar of the science of divine love.<sup>3</sup> I do not agree with either of these critics; nor do I go so far as Gerald Bullett who, in acknowledging the exquisite temper and workmanship of Herbert's poems, claims there is nothing distinctively mystical about them.<sup>4</sup> Professor Itrat-Husain is nearer to the truth, I feel, when he says that Herbert's descriptions of the wooing of his soul by God and the experience of God's love are certainly mystical in essence.<sup>5</sup>

1 Palmer, I, p.370.

2 J.B. Leishman, The Metaphysical Poets, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1934, p.114.

3 Percy H. Osmond, Mystical Poets of the English Church, London, S.P.C.K., 1919, pp.401-410.

4 Gerald Bullett, The English Mystics, London, Michael Joseph, 1950, p.102. (*italics mine*).

5 Itrat-Husain, Mysticism of, p.158. (*italics mine*).

"Though he has not the intensity and passion of a great mystic, his poetry is rich in mystical content. He is the poet who has known God and has felt the peace and joy of His presence and also the pain and agony of His absence in a manner peculiar to the mystics, and he has communicated his experience to us with the complexity and richness characteristic of a sensitive and sincere artist."<sup>1</sup>

However, I disagree with Professor Husain when he becomes more specific in his considerations, claiming, for instance, that Herbert's early years are analagous to the period of the mystic's Awakening, that the development of his religious consciousness in the years of crisis belongs to the period of Pur-gation, and that the acute sense of alienation expressed in some of Herbert's later poems is indicative of the Dark Night of the Soul. The endeavour expressed in Herbert's poetry is genuinely and highly spiritual but I question whether it is illustrative of the Mystic Way in any one of its stages.

At this point, it is wise to heed Miss Underhill's warning regarding generalizations about mysticism, remembering that all mystics differ one from the other. We must remember, too, the danger of treating as separate states those which, in the living subject, are closely intertwined.<sup>2</sup>

...We should constantly remind ourselves that such a proceeding is artificial. The struggle of the self to disentangle itself from illusion and attain the Absolute is a life struggle. Hence it will and must exhibit the freedom and originality of life: will, as a process, obey artistic rather than scientific laws. It will sway

---

1 loc. cit.

2 Underhill, Mysticism, p.229.

now to the light and now to the shade of experience: its oscillations will sometimes be great, sometimes small. Mood and environment, inspiration and information, will all play their part. 1

The Mystic Quest has for its ultimate aim the union of the human will with the holy will of God; a work, claims Father Benedict Zimmerman, the magnitude of which must be begun by God and accomplished by Him. Its beginning consists in the grace of vocation, its end in the beatific vision.<sup>2</sup> An attempt to ascertain the relationship, in Herbert, of vocation to grace throws considerable light on the degree to which his life may be considered mystical. The opening lines of his poem "Affliction"(1)

When first thou didst entice to thee my heart,  
I thought the service brave... 3

are often taken by those who consider him a mystic as indicative of mystical awakening. I believe these lines refer to Herbert's early dedication of his poetic powers to God. It is true that they are written in retrospect but, taking this into consideration, as well as the sense of decorum and restraint so basic to Herbert, they are lines singularly lacking in the joyous attributes commonly associated with the awakened consciousness. In "The Glance",<sup>4</sup> we get another reference by Herbert to his initial awareness of God's presence and demands:

When first thy sweet and gracious eye  
Vouchsaf'd ev'n in the midst of youth and night  
To look upon me, ....

---

1 loc. cit.

2 Father Benedict Zimmerman, "Introduction" to Dark Night of the Soul, by St. John of the Cross.

3 H., p.46.

4 H., p.171.

He continues, with exquisite expression, referring to the "sugred strange delight"

Passing all cordials made by any art  
Bedew, embalme, and overrunne my heart,  
And take it in.

We learn from Herbert how this "sweet original joy" worked within his soul, controlling and overcoming the "surging griefs" and the "bitter storms" to which he was constantly a prey.

If thy first glance so powerfull be  
A mirth but open'd and seal'd up again  
What wonders shall we feel, when we shall see  
Thy full-ev'd love! 1

Can these lines be accepted as an indication of mystical Awakening? I believe, rather, they are indicative of the youthful poet whose early resolve found later expression in this dedication:

Lord, my first fruits present themselves to thee;  
Yet not mine neither; for from thee they came,  
And must return. Accept of them and me,  
And make me strive, who shall sing best thy name. 2

Certainly, the transformation usually associated with the moment or process of Awakening is lacking in Herbert. The centre of interest is not shifted; neither are uncertainties and hesitations removed as they are in the awakened soul, the changes in whom, Miss Underhill tells us, are recognized to be central for life.<sup>3</sup> "Not for a moment does (the awakened soul) think of disobeying the imperative voice which speaks to him from a higher plane of reality and demands the sacrifice of a career."<sup>4</sup>

1 loc. cit.

2 H., p.5.

3 Underhill, Mysticism, p.181.

4 loc. cit.



Indeed many of his poems are simply a plea for the blessing of grace. In the poem entitled "Grace", he says, sadly and beautifully:

The dew doth ev'ry morning fall;  
And shall the dew out-strip thy Dove?  
The dew, for which grasse cannot call,  
Drop from above.

Death is still working like a mole,  
And digs my grave at each remove:  
Let grace work too, and on my soul  
Drop from above.

Sinne is still hammering my heart  
Unto a hardness, void of love:  
Let suppling grace, to crosse his art,  
Drop from above. <sup>1</sup>

And in "Affliction" (IV), he cries:

All my attendants are at strife,  
Quitting their place  
Unto my face:  
Nothing performs the task of life:  
The elements are let loose to fight,  
And while I live, trie out their right.

Oh help, my God! let not their plot  
Kill them and me,  
And also thee,  
Who art my life: dissolve the knot,  
As the sunne scatters by his light  
All the rebellions of the night. <sup>2</sup>

He was truly

A wonder tortur'd in the space  
Betwixt this world and ~~that~~ of grace. <sup>3</sup>

To proceed in a discussion of Herbert's spiritual experience from the viewpoint of its mystical content is, to some extent, artificial. The presence of any subsequent

<sup>1</sup> H., p.60.

<sup>2</sup> H., p.90.

<sup>3</sup> loc. cit.



mysticism certainly presupposes initial Awakening, and this, we judge from his poems, Herbert never fully experienced. The incompleteness of his subsequent experience is in line with the incompleteness of his Awakening. Nevertheless, I wish to discuss his experience in an attempt to discover which elements in it may be considered genuinely mystical. Doubtless there will be some: all spiritual experience, though not necessarily mystical, is mystical in essence. The difference, as I have already noted, is one of degree. Mystical experience simply lifts the life of the spirit to a higher plane.

Many of Herbert's poems illustrate the feelings he possessed of his own unworthiness and of his acute sense of sin. In "Miserie" he says:

As dirtie hands foul all they touch,  
And those things most, which are most pure and fine:  
So our clay hearts, ev'n when we crouch  
To sing thy praises, make them lesse divine....

But sinne hath fool'd him. Now he is  
A lump of flesh, without a foot or wing  
To raise him to a glimpse of blisse:  
A sick toss'd vessel, dashing on each thing;  
Nay, his own shelf:  
My God, I mean my self. 1

Entering Holy Orders served only to increase, rather than lessen, Herbert's sense of unworthiness. In "The Priesthood", he writes:

I am both foul and brittle; much unfit  
To deal in holy Writ. 2

and in "Aaron",

Profaneness in my head,  
Defects and darkness in my breast,  
A noise of passions ringing me for dead,

1 H., pp. 101, 102.

2 H., p. 160.

Unto a place where is no rest:  
 Poore priest thus am I drest. 1

The remainder of this poem illustrates a note of humility similar to that of the mystic. This feeling of humility comes when Herbert turns from the recognition of his own unworthiness and inability to a complete reliance upon Christ:

Only another head  
 I have, another heart and breast,  
 Another musick, making live not dead,  
 Without whome I could have no rest:  
 In him I am well drest.

Christ is my onely head,  
 My alone onely heart and breast,  
 My onely musick, striking me ev'n dead:  
 That to the old man I may rest,  
 And be in him new drest. 2

In the mystic, it is this consciousness of unworthiness that is instrumental in promoting a spirit of humility. Rarely, however, is this true of Herbert: generally, with him, the recognition of his own unworthiness proved to be a means of thwarting, rather than of furthering, God's purpose. Indeed, we find in Herbert a tendency to excuse his lack of will on the grounds of his unworthiness; a tendency illustrated for us in his poem "Dialogue":

Sweetest Saviour, if my soul  
 Were but worth the having,  
 Quickly should I then controll  
 Any thought of waving. 3

A sense of sin and a consciousness of imperfection are not in themselves indicative of the Purgative Way. It is the significant activity consequent to these feelings that constitutes Purgation. The discrepancy felt to exist between the

1 H., p. 174.

2 loc. cit.

3 H., p. 114.

individual and God carries with it demands for the necessary purification of the self. That Herbert experienced this sense of discrepancy is clear from the way in which he speaks of himself throughout his poems: drooping and dull, foul and brittle, a poor creature, a sillie worm, a feeble spirit. And that he was able to achieve a certain degree of purification we know from the reports of his consecrated years at Bemerton. Nevertheless, the most significant characteristics of Purgation are missing in Herbert: the single-mindedness, the mystic detachment, and above all, the stimulation of the will. We find a constant note of self-condemnation but in contrast with the determined activity of the mystic we discover a persistent tendency simply to deplore his ineffectualness and lack of will. From a recognition of his own lack of incentive he often turns to God in a plea for stimulation;

O cheer and tune my heartless breast,  
Deferre no time;  
That so thy favours granting my request,  
They and my mind may chime,  
And mend my ryme. 1

In "Dulnesse", he cries,

Why do I languish thus, drooping and dull,  
 As if I were all earth?  
 O give me quicknesse, that I may with mirth  
 Praise thee brim-full! 2

and in "Praise", he implores:

O raise me then! Poore bees, that work all day,  
Sting my delay,  
Who have a work, as well as they,  
And much, much more. 3

1 "Denial1", H.p. 80.

2 H., p.115.

3 Н., р. 61.

However, it is only fair to say that Herbert is very like the mystics in temperament. Speaking from the psychological point of view, Miss Underhill describes this temperament as that mobile or unstable type in which the artistic nature and the mystical consciousness each finds a place.<sup>1</sup>

It sways easily between the extremes of pleasure and pain in its gropings after transcendental reality. It often attains for a moment to heights in which it is not able to rest: is often flung from some rapturous vision of the Perfect to the deeps of contrition and despair. 2

Herbert is a good example of the oscillations and variations common to this temperament but he does not exemplify its extreme manifestations of joy and sorrow. Indeed, although he often refers to God's "immeasurable love", his poetry is generally lacking in that intense awareness of God's presence which, in the mystic, is found to alternate between contrition and torment. In Herbert, a state of struggle and unrest is almost continuous, interspersed only occasionally with flights of joy. Even then, the expression of joy at God's presence rarely compares either in intensity or in frequency with the expression of bleakness and despair at His absence.

For Herbert, almost inevitably, ultimate peace came through transformation of original pain. This is illustrated in "Man's Medley" when he says:

Yet ev'n the greatest griefs  
                                     May be reliefs,  
 Could he best take them right, and in their ways.  
       Happie is he, whose heart  
                                     Hath found the art  
 To turn his double pains to double praise. 3

1 Underhill, Mysticism, p.227.

2 loc. cit.

3 H., p.132.

Here is the secret of Herbert's synthesis and here, too, is its circumference: within the scope of the individual poem Herbert demonstrates a sense of acceptance and reconciliation. The struggle and difficulty of the poem's beginning resolves into a cessation of strife and an overcoming of difficulty in its close.

"Palmer has wisely observed," declares Hutchinson, "that in poetry Herbert 'probably found one of his few defences against pain': to make music of his suffering and disappointment was to gain relief and to fortify his faith."<sup>1</sup> Time and again we find the key to Herbert's character in his most dramatic poems: they begin in varying moods of frustration, torment and rebellion; they give way through the synthesis achieved in poetic expression to a note of calm submission. His rebellious nature achieves harmony and peace through the unifying powers of his own art. Nowhere is this demonstrated more fully than in his well known poem "The Collar" which, for purposes of illustration, I shall quote in full:

I struck the board, and cry'd, No more.  
   I will abroad.  
 What? shall I ever sigh and pine?  
 My lines and life are free; free as the roe,  
 Loose as the winde, as large as store.  
   Shall I be still in suit?  
 Have I no harvest but a thorn  
 To let me bloud, and not restore  
 What I have lost with cordiall fruit?  
   Sure there was wine  
 Before my sighs did drie it: there was corn  
   Before my tears did drown it.  
 Is the yeare onely lost to me?  
   Have I no bayes to crown it?  
 No flowers, no garlands gay? all blasted?  
   All wasted?

---

1 H., p.xxxviii.

Not so, my heart: but there is fruit,  
And thou hast hands.  
Recover all thy sigh-blown age  
On double pleasures: leave thy cold dispute  
Of what is fit, and not. Forsake thy cage,  
Thy rope of sands,  
Which petty thoughts have made, and made to thee

Good cable, to enforce and draw,  
And be thy law,  
While thou didst wink and wouldst not see.  
Away; take heed:  
I will abroad.  
Call in thy deaths head there: tie up thy fears.  
He that forbears  
To suit and serve his need,  
Deserves his load.  
But as I rav'd and grew more fierce and wilde  
At every word,  
Me thoughts I heard one calling, Child!  
And I reply'd My Lord. 1

The expression of joy in Herbert is thus generally combined with various other moods conflicting with it. Rarely does he maintain a note of joy or praise throughout a single poem. Of all his poems, approximately a dozen may be considered as possessing a sustained note of lyric joy. Of these, the best examples include his two Easter poems, one beginning joyously,

and the other, his much loved,

"Vertue", beginning,

Sweet day, so cool, so calm, so bright,  
The bridall of the earth and skie..., 1

and the beautiful "Prayer", less known, undeservedly so, reminding us in its imagery and rhythm of Gerard Manley Hopkins:

Prayer the Churches banquet, Angels age,  
Gods breath in man returning to his birth,  
The soul in paraphrase, heart in pilgrimage,  
The Christian plummet sounding heav'n and earth;  
Engine against the Almighty, sinners towre,  
Reversed thunder, Christ-side-piercing spear,  
The six-daies world transposing in an houre,  
A kinde of tune, which all things heare and fear;  
Softnesse, and peace, and joy, and love, and blisse,  
Exalted Manna, gladnesse of the best,  
Heaven in ordinairie, man well drest,  
The milkie way, the bird of Paradise,  
Church-bels beyond the starres heard, the souls bloud,  
The land of spices; something understood. 2

These poems can hardly be accepted, however, as an indication of the state of Illumination. It is impossible to say whether or not Herbert ever attained the Illuminative, or for that matter, the Unitive Stage, outside the framework of his poetry. We do not know when his poems were written and it is possible that a lapse of time may have occurred between the last of these and his death. Though possible, it is, however, most unlikely. Being the intensely autobiographical poet that he was, it is more likely that, if he had experienced the joys of Illumination and Union, he would have devoted the full measures of his poetic powers to the expression of them. Certainly, in his poetry, there is no indication of any experience that can be considered as either Illumination or Union.

Many of Herbert's shorter passages, nevertheless,

---

1 H., p.87.

2 H., p.51.

illustrate glimpses he caught of the Divine Presence. In "Whitsunday", for example, he writes:

Lord, though we change, thou art the same;  
The same sweet God of love and light.... 1

Whether these glimpses were obtained by virtue of his spiritual or of his poetic insight, however, it is difficult to say. All artists share to some degree in the Illuminated life.<sup>2</sup> In Herbert, artist and pilgrim truly meet.

His recognition of God's immanence is illustrated in the lines of his poem "Providence" in which he says:

Thou art in small things great, not small in any:  
Thy even praise can neither rise, nor fall.  
Thou art in all things one, in each thing many:  
For thou art infinite in one and all. 3

Generally speaking, however, the joyous apprehension of God, associated with the mystic in Illumination, is missing in Herbert. He lacks, too, the clarity of vision which the mystic is known to possess. Rarely, in Herbert, is there a note of the world "charged with the grandeur of God." His vision was directed inward rather than Godward. He was harnessed by the chains of self, conscious that he was a "crumme of dust (stretched) from heav'n to hell". Even God's omnipotence and omnipresence were inextricably wound up with his own limitations:

Whether I flie with angels, fall with dust,  
Thy hands made both, and I am there:  
Thy power and love, my love and trust  
Make one place everywhere. 4

1 H., p.60.

2 Underhill, Mysticism, p.236.

3 H., p.118.

4 "The Temper," H., p.55.





his suffering, that he is most like the mystics. Of all the steps of the Mystic Way, it is the Dark Night of the Soul that his own experience most nearly approximates.

I do not wish to suggest that Herbert's experience is comparable, either in depth or intensity, with those of the mystics who have undergone the terrible anguish of final purgation; only that there are several aspects in which Herbert's travail resembles that of the mystics. Particularly is this true of the feeling experienced so often by Herbert of his alienation from God and of his attitude consequent to it. Time and again he hurls, as it were, his own sense of doubt and estrangement in the face of God.<sup>1</sup> "That hurling," declares Miss White, "is perhaps one of the soundest things in Herbert, because there he faces the raggedness of human experience with something of the honesty and confidence of the mystics themselves."<sup>2</sup> In "The Search", for example, he asks:

Where is my God? what hidden place  
conceals thee still?  
What covert dare eclipse thy face  
Is it thy will?

....

O take these barres, these lengths away;  
Turn and restore me.  
Be not, Almighty, let me say,  
Against, but for me. 3

In "Home", he pleads:

Come Lord, my head doth burn, my heart is sick,  
While thou dost ever, ever stay:  
Thy long deferrings wound me to the quick,

1 Helen White, Metaphysical Poets, p.184.

2 loc. cit.

3 H., p.163.

My spirit gaspeth night and day.  
 O show thyself to me,  
 Or take me up to thee! 1

and in "Longing", we find one of Herbert's most despairing queries:

With sick and famisht eyes,  
 With doubling knees and weary bones,  
                                 To thee my cries,  
                                 To thee my grones,  
 To thee my sighs, my tears ascend:  
                                 No end? 2

Like the mystics, Herbert knew the pain of remorse, brought about in his own case mainly through his persistent tendency to procrastinate. But the momentum gained from his despair was able, upon occasion, to propel him nearer to God. He illustrates this in his poem "The Storm" in which he says:

A throbbing conscience spurred by remorse  
                                 Hath a strange force:  
 It quits the earth, and mounting more and more  
 Dares to assault thee, and beseige thy door. 3

Like the mystics, too, Herbert suffered from the feeling of his lack of spirituality, from the sense of God's indwelling spirit having been withdrawn from him. In "Home", he cries:

                                O my Redeemer deare,  
 After all this canst thou be strange?  
 So many yeares baptiz'd and not appeare? 4

Bleak misery is echoed in "A Parodie", one of his most mystical poems:

Souls joy, when thou art gone,  
                                 And I alone,  
                                 Which cannot be,

---

1 H., p.107.

2 H., p.148

3 H., p.132.

4 H., p.108.

Because thou dost abide with me,  
And I depend on thee;

Yet when thou dost suppress  
The cheerfulness  
Of thy abode,  
And in my powers not stirre abroad,  
But leave me to my load:

O what a damp and shade  
Doth me invade!  
No stormie night  
Can so afflict or so affright,  
As thy eclipsed light.... 1

In a sense, Herbert's poetry reveals an almost continual Dark Night, interspersed only occasionally with expressions of joy and calm. And it was mainly through the Church, in her festivals, her sacraments, and her music, that Herbert was able to achieve any degree of spiritual happiness. An example of this peace, rare and lovely, is found in the opening lines of his poem "Whitsunday", in which he writes, lovingly and beautifully,

Listen sweet Dove unto my song,  
And spread thy golden wings in me;  
Hatching my tender heart so long,  
Till it get wing, and flie away with thee. 2

This peace Herbert revealed all too seldom, the expression of it, therefore, we cherish all the more. Such lines, and indeed, occasional poems in their entirety, stand out like shining jewels, possessing singular radiance and beauty. Of such is Herbert's "Mattens", one of his most perfect poems:

I cannot ope mine eyes,  
But thou art ready there to catch  
My morning-soul and sacrifice:  
Then we must needs for that day make a match.

---

1 H., p.183.

2 H., p.59.

My God, what is a heart?  
 Silver, or gold, or precious stone,  
 Or starre, or rainbow, or a part  
 Of all these things, or all of them in one?

My God, what is a heart,  
 That thou shouldst it so eye, and woee,  
 Powring upon it all thy art,  
 As if that thou hadst nothing els to do?

Indeed mans whole estate  
 Amounts (and richly) to serve thee:  
 He did not heav'n and earth create,  
 Yet studies them, not him by whom they be.

Teach me thy love to know;  
 That this new light, which now I see,  
 May both the work and workman show:  
 Then by a sunne-beam I will climbe to thee. 1

Suffering is, however, a very real and necessary part of the Mystic Way. For it is only through suffering that the mystic eventually achieves his complete surrender to God. How complete Herbert's surrender was we cannot say but we get an indication of how he achieved it in the final words of his poem "The Crosse". When he turned from his own suffering to that of Christ he found the answer in Christ's own words: Thy will be done.

These contrarities crush me: these crosse actions  
 Doe winde a rope about, and cut my heart:  
 And yet since these thy contradictions  
 Are properly a crosse felt by thy Sonne,  
 With but foure words, my words, Thy will be done. 2

Having subjected his will to Jesus, Herbert tells us he then came to know perfect freedom in His service. Certainly in the light of his years at Bemerton, no one will question this statement. His life in the priesthood exemplified the highest ideals of Christian service. These years are remarkable in themselves

---

1 H., pp.62-63.

2 H., p.132.

but they are still more remarkable when they are considered in the light of the conflict revealed in Herbert's poetry. Then, and only then, can we appreciate the quality of the life Herbert lived. That he knew peace we do not question, but it was not the peace of the mystic. For nowhere in Herbert do we find even an approximation of the vision and serenity exemplified here, for example, by St. John of the Cross:

Rapt in oblivion, the soul  
Doth, in a single moment, learn  
More than the busy brain and sense,  
With all their toil, could ever earn.

Mirrored within its God, it views  
To-day, to-morrow, and the past,  
And faith sees here, in time, the things  
That through eternity shall last. 1

It is doubtful whether Herbert ever came to know the joys of the "peace which passeth all understanding". The peace which seems to have been granted to him was momentary by nature: it consisted of pauses, not resting-places, in his turbulent career. Impermanence of this nature is found in his poem "The Familie":

Joyes oft are there, and griefs as oft as joyes;  
But griefs without a noise:  
Yet speak they louder than distemper'd fears.  
What is so shrill as silent tears?

This is thy house, with these it doth abound:  
And where these are not found,  
Perhaps thou com'st sometimes, and for a day;  
But not to make a constant stay. 2

Herbert's moments of peace were brief periods of windless calm between the storms which preceded and those which were yet to come.<sup>3</sup>

1 The Living Flame, p.309.

2 H., p.137.

3 Leishman, The Metaphysical Poets, p.132.

It is quite possible that his statement regarding the perfect freedom he found was spoken during one of these pauses from strife. There is nothing in his poetry, at any rate, to indicate that he was able to grasp and maintain a sense of peace; rather is the opposite true. His inability to achieve any lasting peace is illustrated in the opening verse of his poem "The Bunch of Grapes":

Joy, I did lock thee up: but some bad man  
                                 Hath let thee out again:  
 And now, me thinks, I am where I began  
                                 Sev'n yeares ago: one vogue and vein,  
                                 One aire of thoughts usurps my brain.  
 I did towards Canaan draw; but now I am  
 Brought back to the Red Sea, the sea of shame.     1

I think the single work which best traces the vacillations, the lights and shadows, the joys and sorrows of Herbert's life is his lovely, and yet tragic poem, "The Flower". It may be said of many of Herbert's poems that his whole experience is implicit in each; nowhere is this statement more true than in this poem:

How fresh, O Lord, how sweet and clean  
   Are thy returns! ev'n as the flowers in spring;  
   To which, besides their own demean,  
 The late-past frosts tributes of pleasure bring.  
                                 Grief melts away  
                                 Like snow in May,  
 As if there were no such cold thing.

Who would have thought my shrivel'd heart  
 Could have recover'd greennesse? It was gone  
   Quite under ground; as flowers depart  
 To see their mother-root, when they have blown;  
                                 Where they together  
                                 All the hard weather,  
 Dead to the world, keep house unknown.

These are thy wonders, Lord of power,  
 Killing and quickning, bringing down to hell  
 And up to heaven in an houre;  
 Making a chiming of a passing-bell.

We say amisse,  
 This or that is:  
 Thy word is all, if we could spell.

O that I once past changing were,  
 Fast in they Paradise, where no flower can wither!  
 Many a spring I shoot up fair,  
 Offring at heav'n, growing and groning thither:  
 Nor doth my flower  
 Want a spring-showre,  
 My sinnes and I joining together.

But while I grow in a straight line,  
 Still upwards bent, as if heav'n were mine own,  
 Thy anger comes, and I decline:  
 What frost to that? what pole is not the zone,  
 Where all things burn,  
 When thou dost turn,  
 And the least frown of thine is shown?

And now in age I bud again,  
 After so many deaths I live and write;  
 I once more smell the dew and rain,  
 And relish versing: O my onely light,  
 It cannot be  
 That I am he  
 On whom thy tempests fell at night.

These are thy wonders, Lord of love,  
 To make us see we are but flowers that glide:  
 Which when we once can finde and prove,  
 Thou hast a garden for us, where to bide.  
 Who would be more,  
 Swelling through store,  
 Forfeit their Paradise by their pride. 1

We see from this poem how precariously Herbert's life hung between the extremes of joy and grief. His spiritual growth was not a steady advance containing, as the life of the spirit generally does, periodic setbacks. Herbert's life consisted of sudden and continual change. He was forever being "brought down to hell and up to heaven in an houre"; unhappily, he knew more of anguish than of joy. He was truly a passing bell but one of whom God



made only occasional chime. "O that I once past changing were" was Herbert's perpetual cry and it is this cry which gives us the clue to his spiritual life for it reveals his lack of constancy: it is this, the tragic flaw in his nature, that denied him any lasting peace. Mr. Aldous Huxley has caught the essence of Herbert's temperament when he says, "The climate of the mind is positively English in its variableness and instability. Frost, sunshine, hopeless drought and refreshing rains succeed one another with bewildering rapidity. Herbert is the poet of this inner weather."<sup>1</sup>

The attributes commonly linked with Herbert's name become, as a consequence of his variableness, only more significant. For Bush is right when he says, "...It is to Herbert's writings and life that we owe much of our picture of the order, strength and beauty of seventeenth century Anglicanism at its best."<sup>2</sup> But it is only through the combination of Herbert's writings, -- and here I refer specifically to the poems of The Temple and to his prose work, The Country Parson, -- and of his life at Bemerton, that we arrive at a complete picture of this order, strength and beauty: through the actual struggle revealed in the poems, the ideal mark in The Country Parson, and the synthesis of the two in the life lived. Indeed, we may draw an interesting analogy between Herbert's poetry and his life. In each he achieved harmony: in the one, poetic; in the other, spiritual. In his poetry, the turbulence of its matter attained harmony of expression through

---

1 Aldous Huxley, Texts and Pretexts, London, Chatto and Windus, 1949, p.12.

2 Douglas Bush, English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1945, p.138.

an exacting form. In his life, his inner conflict achieved outer harmony through the disciplined ideal set forth in The Country Parson. The precision and the clarity of his verse were matched by the control and the dignity of his life.

In reality, few of Herbert's poems are specifically Anglican in their content: those which may be considered specifically so include his long preliminary poem, "The Church Porch" and, of course, his shorter, better known, "The British Church", in which he illustrates the sense of decorum basic to his nature:

I Joy, deare Mother, when I view  
Thy perfect lineaments and hue  
Both sweet and bright....

A fine aspect in fit array,  
Neither too mean, nor yet too gay.... 1

Herbert exemplifies Anglicanism, it is true, in the moderation and restraint of his life at Bemerton. The via media of the Anglican Church provided him with a mode of worship and a rule of life which fulfilled both his love of beauty and his feeling for reverent order. Frequently, in The Country Parson, he reiterates the necessity of letting "all things be done decently and in order".<sup>2</sup> The Mark at which Herbert aimed, and subsequently achieved, is illustrated in the words which describe the Parson as being "exceeding exact in his Life, being holy, just, prudent, temperate, bold, grave in all his wayes."<sup>3</sup> Through the devotions and the rule of the Church, Herbert sought no "larger measure" but found in its via media the scope and the challenge for his

1 H., p.109.

2 The Country Parson, H; p.236.

3 Ibid., p.227.

own "strict, yet welcome size."<sup>1</sup> He has been cited by some critics as being specifically ritualist, by others, sacramentalist. That he was both these, I agree, but neither predominantly so. His religion was first and foremost intensely personal and individual. It took shape and found expression within the framework of the Anglican Church, achieving its fullest and richest harmonies through her sacraments and in the celebration of her festivals. I agree with Palmer when he says Herbert was a ritualist in the sense that his ritualism was based, not on conformity, but on the grounds of beauty and serviceability whose appeal to him was in answer to an internal need.<sup>2</sup> Beauty of expression combines with beauty of devotion in the poems which deal with the daily office of the Church. Particularly is this true of "Mattens" and of its complementary tone-poem, the lovely "Even-Song". These show the reverence that Herbert brought to his worship, the harmony that he received from it:

Thus in thy ebony box  
 Thou dost enclose us, till the day  
 Put our amendment in our way,  
 And give new wheels to our disorder'd clocks.     3

The poems which deal with the festivals of the Church show Herbert's deep love for each landmark of the Christian year. "Easter" and "Whitsunday", already noted, are two examples; others include "Christmas" in which his feeling of awe and his longing to serve are illustrated:

---

1 "The Rose," H. p. 173.

2 Palmer, I, pp. 82-3.

3 H., p. 64.

The shepherds sing; and shall I silent be?  
 My God, no hymne for thee?  
 My soul's a shepherd too; a flock it feeds  
 Of thoughts, and words, and deeds.  
 The pasture is the word: the streams, thy grace  
 Enriching all the place.  
 Shepherd and flock shall sing, and all my powers  
 Out-sing the day-light houres.... 1

and "Lent", showing how necessary restraint and self-denial are to those who would go "in the way which Christ hath gone." Here, we see how Herbert's cognizance of his "strict, yet welcome size" finds positive application within the holy customs of this single festival. "It's true," he wrote,

we cannot reach Christ's forti'th day;  
 Yet to go part of that religious way,  
 Is better then to rest:  
 We cannot reach our Saviours puritie;  
 Yet are we bid, Be holy ev'n as he.  
 In both let's do our best. 2

Herbert found in the sacraments of the Church a means of overcoming his own sin and of coming closer to the Divine Love he sought unceasingly.

Love is that liquor sweet and most divine  
 Which my God feels as bloud, but I, as wine. 3

Selflessness was, however, difficult for him: sometimes the sacred elements of Bread and Wine seemed capable only of checking the unruliness and rebellion of his soul:

Yet can these not get over to my soul,  
 Leaping the wall that parts  
 Our souls and fleshy hearts;  
 But as th'outworks, they may controll  
 My rebel-flesh, and carrying thy name,  
 Affright both sinne and shame. 4

1 H., p.81.

2 H., p.87.

3 "The Agonie", H., p.37.

4 "The H. Communion", H., p.52.



a matter between God and himself. It would have been contrary to his concept of propriety to allow the vicissitudes of his inner life to disrupt in any way the performance of his priestly duties. The decorum with which he carried out his daily round of activities had a double heritage: it was the expression, on the one hand, of the via media of the Anglican temperament; at the same time, it was the expression of the innate reserve, refinement, and delicacy which Herbert, the Renaissance gentleman, brought to his role as cleric. For even when Herbert turned his back on a life at court, he still retained the qualities of the exquisite courtier. Many of the passages in The Country Parson, for instance, bespeak the perfect well-bred gentleman rather than the Anglican divine. His fastidious attention to detail throughout is essentially aristocratic. Schooled in the tradition of the Renaissance, he brought with him, too, the standards of excellence these traditions embodied. We feel that whatever Herbert undertook to do, he undertook to do well. He remained worldly but worldly in the best sense of the word: he sought not to conform to the world but to transform his every action in the world in such a way that each would be performed to the greater glory of God. This is the substance of The Country Parson; its poetic counterpart is to be found in the little poem "The Elixir". In these few lines, Herbert catches the essence of the ideal he sought and accomplished:

Teach me, my God and King,  
In all things thee to see,  
And what I do in any thing,  
To do it as for thee:

Not rudely as a beast,  
 To runne into an action;  
 But still to make thee prepossest,  
 And give it his perfection....

All may of thee partake:  
 Nothing can be so mean,  
 Which with his tincture (for thy sake)  
 Will not grow bright and clean.

A servant with this clause  
 Makes drudgerie divine:  
 Who sweeps a room, as for thy laws,  
 Makes that and th'action fine.

This is the famous stone  
 That turneth all to gold:  
 For that which God doth touch and own  
 Cannot for lesse be told. 1

It was in the divine here and now, in the performance of the daily task, that Herbert sought to extol and to serve God. The spirit of his devotion is caught by Miss White in these words:

It is along the roads of this earth that  
 he goes to meet that immortal Easter, and  
 the dust and the chambers of this world from  
 which he wrings the secret of the peace of God. 2

There was little in Herbert's religion that was mystical; but his aspirations were essentially those of the mystic. For his quest was one whose boundaries and whose prize lay in love: in his deep hunger for God's love and in his constant offering of his own love to God. Many of his poems of love are, in reality, simply love lyrics. Their just parallel, claims Professor Grierson, is to be found in a sonnet sequence such as that of Petrarch's Laura.<sup>3</sup> They are "the record of God's wooing of the soul of

---

1 H., p.184.

2 White, The Metaphysical Poets, p.405.

3 H.J.C. Grierson, Cross Currents in English Literature of the Seventeenth Century, London, Chatto and Windus, 1929, p.216.

Herbert recorded in the Christian story and the seasons and symbols of the Church, and Herbert's wooing of God, a record of conflicts and fluctuating mood and expostulation with God himself..."<sup>1</sup> He was truly God's troubadour. His exquisite little lyric "Bitter-Sweet" illustrates how aptly he appropriated the methods of the sonneteers: the substance is that of sacred love but the language is that of profane love.

Ah my deare angrie Lord,  
 Since thou dost love, yet strike,  
 Cast down, yet help afford;  
 Sure I will do the like.

I will complain, yet praise;  
 I will bewail, approve:  
 And all my sowre-sweet dayes  
 I will lament and love. 2

In these few lines, Herbert strikes his most characteristic note of change, revealing his inability to strike a steady note in his devotions. The life of the spirit never runs along an even plane; particularly is this true in Herbert. His early years of hesitation and indirection left their mark and took their toll in his subsequent feelings of instability and fruitlessness. The God whom he knew he would one day serve was not easily found when he eventually turned to Him. His reticence to give to God the full homage of his heart had its result in his frequent inability to overcome the distance he had placed, through time, between God and himself.

There is no question of the quality of the life Herbert lived at Bemerton. It was indeed holy. We know from Herbert's poems, however, that his saintliness was achieved in the face of,

---

1 loc. cit.

2 H., p.171.



indeed, in spite of, his persistent inner struggle for peace. The simplicity and devotion of the priest of Bemerton was the triumph of a singularly complex and difficult nature, one to whom the life of the spirit offered little rest and perpetual challenge.

C H A P T E R   I V

HENRY VAUGHAN

Peace.

My Soul, there is a Countrie  
Far beyond the stars,  
Where stands a winged Centrie  
All skilfull in the wars,  
There above noise, and danger  
Sweet peace sits crown'd with smiles,  
And one born in a Manger  
Commands the Beauteous files,  
He is thy gracious friend  
And (O my Soul awake!)  
Did in pure love descend  
To die here for thy sake,  
If thou canst get but thither,  
There growes the flowre of peace,  
The Rose that cannot wither,  
Thy fortresse, and thy ease;  
Leave then thy foolish ranges;  
For none can thee secure,  
But one, who never changes,  
Thy God, thy life, thy Cure.

We turn now to Henry Vaughan who is known variously as poet of light, nature-poet, mystic, and most commonly of all, perhaps, as nature-mystic. Poet of light he certainly is, the very title of his most significant collection of poems contains the word scintillans, and even a cursory reading of his poems reveals his fondness for light imagery. A quality of celestial brightness permeates his poetry, a quality illustrated with beauty and clarity in what justly may be considered his best known lines: "I saw Eternity the other night like a great Ring of pure and endless light"<sup>1</sup> and "They are all gone into the world of light".<sup>2</sup> Vaughan's imagery is, however, simply part of his whole approach to nature and it is through an analysis of his treatment of nature that we come to understand him both as poet and as pilgrim, and arrive, as a consequence, at a conception of the mystical element in his poetry.

Vaughan's best poems are to be found in his collection of "Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations" known as Silex Scintillans, published first in 1650, a second edition, altered and enlarged, appearing five years later. These poems are particularly significant in revealing the influence of George Herbert upon Vaughan. Between the printing of Vaughan's first poems, a collection of secular poetry, and Silex Scintillans, a very definite change took place in his life. He underwent a

---

1 "The World", Vaughan's Works, edited by L.C. Martin, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1914, Vo. II, p.466. (All excerpts from Vaughan's works are taken from Martin's edition: from now on, reference will be made simply by the letter "M" with the volume number in brackets).

2 Ibid., p.483.

serious illness that affected him considerably but it was the reading of The Temple, more than any other single event, that most profoundly influenced him. Vaughan speaks both in his prose writings and in his verse of the change this book wrought in him. "The first, that with any effectual success attempted a diversion of this foul and overflowing stream," he writes in his preface to Silex Scintillans, alluding to his secular verse, "was the blessed man, Mr. George Herbert, whose holy life and verse gained many pious Converts, (of whom I am the least)...."<sup>1</sup> Although his second volume of verse was ready for the press when he came under Herbert's influence, Vaughan may truly be considered, until this contact, a poet in search of a subject. The reading of The Temple seems to have provided the stimulus to the channeling of his poetic inspiration. Whereas formerly his Muse had been secular, henceforth, with few exceptions, she became divine.

There are many examples of Herbert's direct influence upon Vaughan's poetry. Indeed, Vaughan has been criticised for his frequent and flagrant borrowing from Herbert. In poem after poem, in title, theme, phrase, and occasionally in a poem in its entirety, Vaughan echoes his predecessor. Hutchinson claims there is no other example in English literature of one poet borrowing so extensively from another.<sup>2</sup> In some cases, it is not only the extent of the borrowing that surprises us but also the manner of it. Frequently, the variation from the original is very slight, as, for example, when Herbert's exquisite "Easter",

---

1 M (II), p.391.

2 F.E. Hutchinson, Henry Vaughan, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1947, pp.102-103.

I got me flowers to straw the way;  
 I got me boughs off many a tree:  
 But thou wast up by break of day  
 And brought'st thy sweets along with thee.<sup>1</sup>

becomes, in Vaughan's "Palm-Sunday":

I'll get me up before the Sun,  
 I'll cut me boughs off many a tree,  
 And all alone full early run  
 To gather flowers to welcome thee. 2

According to Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch,<sup>3</sup> the art of pilfering and spoiling could scarcely be better illustrated than by the two poems, "The Agonie", by Herbert, and "The Passion", by Vaughan.

Herbert's

Love is that liquor sweet and most divine  
 Which my God feels as blood: but I as wine. 4

is echoed weakly by Vaughan:

Most blessed Vine!  
 Whose juice so good  
 I feel as Wine,  
 But thy faire branches felt as blood.... 5

From Herbert's "Aaron", these lines;

Profaneness in my head,  
 Defects and darknesse in my breast. 6

becomes in Vaughan's "Repentance":

Profaneness on my tongue doth rest,  
 Defects, and darknes in my brest. 7

In spite of evidence such as this, some readers of Vaughan continue to insist that his borrowing from Herbert was negligible.

1 H., p.42.

2 M (II), p.502.

3 A. Quiller-Couch, Studies in Literature, Cambridge, University Press, p. 1920, p.140.

4 H., p.37.

5 M (II), p.431.

6 H., p.174.

7 M (II), p.449.

The facts, however, prove otherwise. Professor Martin in his edition of Vaughan's Works, shows how considerable his borrowing was. Even though the seventeenth century attitude toward plagiarism differed greatly from what ours is to-day, it is difficult, nevertheless, for the modern reader to remain unaffected by the flagrancy of Vaughan's borrowings. In his poem "Praise", for instance, Herbert's poem of the same name becomes a mere intellectual exercise, losing the peculiar quality of restraint and religious intensity characteristic of the original. It was not within Vaughan's capacity to say:

Wherefore with my utmost art  
                                 I will sing thee,  
 And the cream of all my heart  
                                 I will bring thee. 1

This particular genius of expression belongs to the exquisite refinement and delicacy of Herbert's devotion.

It is not a derogatory criticism by any means, however, to say that Vaughan's devotion and his subsequent expression of it simply sought channels differing from those of Herbert. T.S. Eliot, writing of the two poets, says of Herbert's emotion that it is clear, definite and sustained.<sup>2</sup> Certainly, the majority of the poems in The Temple will validate this judgment. Mr. Eliot's claim, however, that the emotion of Vaughan is vague, adolescent, fitful and retrogressive<sup>3</sup> is, I feel, unnecessarily harsh and unsympathetic. It is true that Vaughan, for the

1 H., p.146.

2 T.S. Eliot, "The Silurist," The Dial, LXXXIII, (September, 1927, p.263.

3 loc. cit.

most part, was unable to sustain a poetic mood in the superb manner of Herbert. His most beautiful poetry consists of single stanzas, lines, and even phrases. Nevertheless, there are poems, which, taken in their entirety, possess artistic unity and a sustained level of feeling. Of these, the poem "Peace" which prefaces this essay is one of the most felicitous examples.

Quite apart from Vaughan's obvious imitations, the influence of Herbert upon Vaughan is felt in the direction which Vaughan's poetry took. Miss White claims that it is as inspiration, in helping Vaughan to find himself, that the influence of Herbert really counts.<sup>1</sup> "It must never be forgotten that had not Vaughan tried to do what Herbert had done and he could not do, he might never have found what he could do, as could no other poet of his time in his own limited genre."<sup>2</sup> It was through Herbert's influence that Vaughan turned from the trivia of light amatory verse and dedicatory epistles to more profound themes, about which he came to feel most deeply: those dealing with eternity and time and man's relationship with each. It is here that Vaughan realized himself both spiritually and poetically.

The difference that exists both poetically and spiritually between Vaughan and Herbert is illustrated simply and clearly by the manner in which each turns to Jesus. Herbert addresses Him as "My Master"; to Vaughan, He is "My dear, bright Lord, my Morning Star."<sup>3</sup> Herbert worships at the shrine of the

1 Metaphysical Poets, p.267.

2 Ibid., p.284.

3 Osmond, The English Church, p.154.





. . . Transplanted Paradise; Gods walking houre;  
 . . . A Glean of glory, after six-days showres. 1

Night is "Christ's progress, and his prayertime; The hour to which Heaven doth chime."<sup>2</sup> In Herbert there is nothing that surpasses lines such as these:

But, as in nature, when the day  
 Breaks, night adjourns,  
 Stars shut up shop, mists pack away,  
 And the Moon mourns. 3

Herbert's influence upon Vaughan was twofold; not only was it literary, it was also spiritual. Under his influence, he became not only a poet, but a religious poet. In his poems, Vaughan frequently acknowledges this twofold debt to Herbert. In "To After Ages", he speaks of Herbert as

. . . the pride of our Latinity  
 Six years with double gifts he guided me. 4

and in "The Match" he addresses Herbert as

Dear Friend! whose holy, ever-living lines  
 Have done much good  
 To many, and have checkt my blood.... 5

It was the content of Herbert's verse, however, rather than its method, that had the greatest effect upon Vaughan. It provided the signpost to Vaughan's latent powers, both poetic and spiritual, directing him to his true self.

Apart from his reading of The Temple, Vaughan's years of illness left a decided mark upon him. So too, did his reading

1 M (II), p.447.

2 M (II), p.522.

3 M (II), p.451.

4 Translated by Edmund Blunden, On the Poems of Henry Vaughan, London, Richard Cobden-Sanderson, 1927, p.9.

5 M (II), p.434.

of Holy Scripture. "Thou wert the first put in my hand," he writes speaking of the initial influence he received from the Scriptures as "that first light gained from thee." In his poem "To the Holy Bible," he tells us:

By this milde art of love at length  
 Thou overcamst my sinful strength,  
 And having brought me home, didst there  
 Show me that pearl I sought elsewhere. 1

Lines such as these leave little doubt as to the Awakening experienced by Vaughan. Judging from his poetry, it was no gradual conversion; there is evidence, rather, of some profound experience that brought a changed outlook, and a concentrated resolve. "For between 1647 and 1650," says Miss White, "Vaughan took a new path, experienced something that resulted in an awakening of powers hitherto not apparent, and the release of a store of energy that in a few years found an expression quite unparalleled in all the remaining years of his life."<sup>2</sup> Vaughan's description of the Awakening of his inner self is found in these lovely lines from his poem "Mount of Olives":

When first I saw true beauty, and thy Joys  
 Active as light, and calm without all noise  
 Shin'd on my soul, I felt through all my powr's  
 Such a rich air of sweets, as Evening shows  
 Fand by a gentle gale Convey and breath  
 On some parch'd bank, crown'd with a flowrie wreath;  
 Odors, and Myrrh, and balm in one rich floud  
 O'r-ran my heart, and spirited my bloud,  
 My thoughts did swim in Comforts, and mine eie  
 Confest, The world did only paint and lie. 3

As a consequence of his Enlightenment, Vaughan came to look upon

1 M (II), p.541.

2 White, Metaphysical Poets, p.272.

3 M (II), p.476.

the world as "glorious deceptions, gilded mists, false joys, phantastic flights."<sup>1</sup> And he looked away from the false glamour of the world to the glory of a world that does not fade:

Flowres gather'd in this world, die here; if thou  
Wouldst have a wreath that fades not, let them grow,  
And grow for thee; who spares them here, shall find  
A Garland, where comes neither rain, now wind. 2

Vaughan's Awakening, may, I believe, be considered a truly mystic Awakening; it was a very real event, one of which he was fully aware, one that altered his outlook and changed his life. God reached out of Eternity and spoke to him in time. "For I till drawn came not to thee,"<sup>3</sup> he writes in his poem, "The Agreement," acknowledging that the wind of God's grace which bloweth where it listeth, had begun its work in him.

Lord, since thou didst in this vile Clay  
                                     That sacred Ray  
 Thy spirit plant, quickning the whole.... 4

he writes in "Repentance", and in similar vein, in his Dedication to his poems, he says:

Some drops of thy all-quickning blood  
 Fell on my heart.... 5

"The Garland" contains a dramatic allusion to his awakening from a "false life, a foil and no more" to a life that was a "fix'd discerning light": 6

1 M(II), p.492.

2 "The Garland", M(II), p.493.

3 M(II), p.530.

4 M(II), p.448.

5 M(II), p.394.

6 M(II), p.538.

...At the height of this Careire  
I met with a dead man.... 1

There is much speculation as to the identity of this "dead man"; many critics believe the reference is to Christ. At any rate, we know that as a consequence of this meeting, Vaughan turned towards Christ. In his Preface to Silex Scintillans, he illustrates his awareness of the obligations implicit in his awakening, of the necessity of putting off the old man and of putting on the new:

It is true indeed, that to give up our thoughts to pious Themes and Contemplations...is a great step towards perfection; because it will refine, and dispose to devotion and sanctity. And further, it will procure for us (so easily communicable is that loving spirit) some small prelibation of those heavenly refreshments, which descend but seldom, and then very sparingly, upon men of an ordinary or indifferent holyness; but he that desires to excel in this kinde of Hagiography, or holy writing, must strive (by all means) for perfection and true holyness, that a door may be opened to him in heaven.... and then he will be able to write (with...holy Herbert) a true Hymn. 2

Not only did Vaughan seek to compose a holy hymn, he sought also to re-order his life: we find in him the authentic thirst of the mystic for the perfecting of the self in order that he might seek and find God:

Sweet Jesu! will then; Let no more  
This Leper haunt, and soyl thy door,  
Cure him, Ease him  
O release him!  
And let once more by mystick birth  
The Lord of life be borne in Earth. 3

His prayer is that God will be unto him the bread of life to

1 M(II), p.493.

2 M(II), pp.391-392.

3 "Christ's Nativity", M(II), p.442.

strengthen him in his pilgrimage towards heaven.<sup>1</sup> "Make my soul to thirst for thee, and my flesh to long after thee. At what time soever thou shalt awake me from this bodily sleep; awake also my soul in me, make thy morning-star to arise in my heart, and let thy spirit blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out."<sup>2</sup>

In order to come to God, the self must be made whole. A steady heart, holiness and purity of life must be realized for, says Vaughan in the "Mount of Olives," "without holiness no man shall see the face of God."<sup>3</sup>

Souls sojourn here, but not rest;  
Who will ascend, must be undrest. 4

With the awakening of the self comes acute awareness of sin, and a sense of remorse over time and energy wasted. Vaughan turns upon his former "Idle Verse" addressing it disdainfully:

Go, go, quaint folies, sugred sin,  
Shadow no more my door;  
I will no longer Cobwebs spin,  
I'm too much on the score. 5

The veil of his own sin separates him from the presence of God. "Onely this veyle which thou hast broke," he says to Christ,

And must be broken yet in me,  
This veyle, I say, is all the cloke  
And cloud which shadows thee from me. 6

1 "Mount of Olives," M(I), p.163.

2 Ibid., p.153.

3 Ibid., p.159.

4 M(II), p.482.

5 M(II), p.446.

6 "Cock Crowing," M(II), p.489.

Even in his joyous poem "Christ's Nativity", his initial praise of the Saviour's glory turns to thoughts of his own worthlessness;

I would I had in my best part  
Fit Roomes for thee! or that my heart  
Were so clean as  
Thy manger was!  
But I am all filth, and obscene,  
Yet, if thou wilt, thou canst make clean.      1

These thoughts are echoed in this humble and beautiful prayer from the "Mount of Olives":

O Jesus Christ, the lover and the redeemer  
of all humble and penitent souls! Thou that  
feedest among the Lilies untill the day breaks  
and the shadows flee, what is there in my heart  
where only tares and thistles grow, that thou  
canst feed upon?

He condemns himself for his inconstancy and his lack of devotion:  
"sadly loose, and stray, a giddy blast each way"<sup>3</sup> he is. In  
"Lovesick", he pleads:

...at thy presence make these mountains flow,  
These mountains of cold Ice in me!      4

In "Miserie", he petitions:

Open my rockie heart, and fil  
It with obedience to thy wil,  
Then seal it up, that as none see,  
So none may enter there but thee.      5

He sees clearly the extent of his own sin and worthlessness but he turns from it to the saving grace of Christ.

But as shades set off light, so tears and grief  
(Though of themselves but a sad blubber'd story)

1 M(II), p.442.

2 M(I), p.161.

3 M(II), 432.

4 M(II), p.493.

5 M(II), p.474.

By showing the sin great, shew the relief  
Far greater, and so speak my Saviour's glory. 1

and he prays:

O my dear God! my life, my love!  
Most blessed Lamb! and mildest dove!  
Forgive your penitent Offender,  
And no more his sins remember,  
Scatter these shades of death and give  
Light to my soul, that it may live;  
Cut me not off for my transgressions,  
Wilful rebellions, and suppressions,  
But give them in those streams a part  
Whose spring is in my Saviours heart. 2

The poignancy and bitterness of Herbert's self analysis is missing in Vaughan. But although his consciousness of spiritual failure is not so penetrating and personal as Herbert's, it is nevertheless real and intense for he was a poet who strove in earnest for a "true practick piety" in order that a door might be opened to him in heaven. Vaughan differs from Herbert in the attitude he adopts toward his suffering, however: whereas Herbert sought to escape from his agony, Vaughan shows acceptance of it, recognizing within it a means of purification.

Give me, O give me Crosses here,  
Still more afflictions lend,  
That pill, though bitter, is most deare  
That brings health in the end.... 3

Vaughan strikes this note of acceptance time and again throughout his poetry. "Prepare, prepare me then, O God!" he begs,

And let me now begin  
To feele my loving fathers Rod  
Killing the man of sinne! 4

---

1 M (II), p.498.

2 M (II), p.449.

3 M (II), p.403.

4 "Day of Judgement", M(II), p.403.



Very often, in the accounts of the mystics, we find illness and physical suffering associated with purgation and self cleansing. Vaughan frequently reiterates this idea in his prose and in his verse:

Sickness is wholesome, and Crosses are but curbs  
To check the mule, unruly man.... 1

In the "Mount of Olives", he writes:

Thou gavest me health, and I took no notice  
of thy gift....For what end soever thou hast sent  
this present sicknesse, whether for my dissolution,  
or for a temporal correction of my sinful life, grant  
I beseech thee, that both may be for thy glory, and  
the salvation of my poore soule.

He recognizes that only through suffering and sorrow does the soul learn its necessary discipline and he thanks God:

Blest be thy Dew, and blest thy frost,  
And happy I to be so crost,  
And cur'd by Crosses at thy cost. 3

He realizes how necessary to the soul's growth affliction is:

Were all the year one constant Sun-shine, wee  
Should have no flowres,  
All would be drought, and leanness; not a tree  
Would make us bowres....  
Thus doth God Key disorder'd man  
(Which none else can,) Turning  
Turning his brest to rise, or fall;  
And by a sacred, needfull art  
Like strings, stretch evr'y part  
Making the whole most Musically. 4

God's rod serves through "change of frosts and showres"<sup>5</sup> to cherish and to bind the powers of the individual soul. In his

1 "Affliction," M(II), p.459.

2 M (I), pp.188-189.

3 "Love, and Discipline," M(II), p.464.

4 "Affliction," M(II), p.460.

5 M (II), p.459.

acceptance of affliction and in his acknowledgement of its purpose, Vaughan illustrates the positive and healthy attitude of the mystic. "If the mule man despise the day," he writes in his poem "Discipline",

Put chains of darkness in his way,  
Teach him how deep, how various are  
The Councils of thy love and care. 1

With a spirit of calm and acceptance, he writes in "Affliction,"

Peace, peace, it is not so. Thou dost miscall  
Thy physick; Pils that change  
Thy sick Accessions into settled health,  
This is the great Elixir that turns gall  
To wine, and sweetness; Poverty to wealth,  
And brings man home, when he doth range. 2

But God's love is inseparable from his chastisement. This is shown in "The Agreement," when he writes:

And this I hourly finde; for thou  
Dost still renew, and purge and heal:  
Thy care and love, which joyntly flow  
New Cordials, new Cathartics deal. 3

Like St. John of the Cross, who writes:

O burn that burns to heal,  
O more than pleasant wound!  
And O soft hand, touch most delicate  
That dost new life reveal  
That dost in grace abound  
And slaying doth form death to life translate. 4

Vaughan sees in the fire of affliction the "Refiner's fire."<sup>5</sup> It is only through God that man can be transformed:

1 M (II), p.641.

2 M (II), p.459.

3 M (II), p.530.

4 The Living Flame, quoted by Itrat-Husain, The Metaphysical Poets, p.217.

5 "Ascension-Hymn," M(II), p.483.

Hee alone  
 And none else can  
 Bring bone to bone  
 And rebuild man,  
 And by his all subduing might  
 Make clay ascend more quick then light. 1

Like Herbert, Vaughan finds in the sacraments of the Church the means of purification and self simplification. The blessings they offer are twofold: they show man the Way to God while at the same time they are the Divine Food which sustains him in his quest. The mystery and the miracle of the Eucharist cause him to exclaim:

O rose of Sharon! O the Lilly  
 Of the valley!  
 How art thou now, thy flock to keep,  
 Become both food, and Shepherd to thy sheep. 2

They show to him his own wounds,

How dost thou flye  
 And search and pry  
 Through all my parts, and like a quick  
 And knowing lamp  
 Hunt out each damp,  
 Whose shadow makes me sad or sick? 3

providing him, at the same time, with the salve that heals:

...sweet, and sacred feast...  
 Dead I was, and deep in trouble;  
 But grace, and blessings came with thee so rife... 4

One of Vaughan's loveliest expressions of the healing powers of the Sacraments is to be found in his poem "Dressing," where he addresses the Presence of the Saviour in the Sacraments:

thou  
 O that lovest a pure, and whitend soul!  
 That feedest among the Lillies, 'till the day

1 Loc. cit.

2 "The Holy Communion," M (II), p.458.

3 "The Feast," M (II), p.535.

4 "The Holy Communion," M (II), p.457.

Break, and the shadows flee; touch with one Coal  
My frozen heart; and with thy secret key

Open my desolate rooms, my gloomie Brest  
With thy cleer fire refine, burning to dust  
These dark Confusions, that within me nest,  
And soyl thy Temple with a sinful rust....

Give to thy wretched one  
Thy mysticall Communion,  
That, absent, he may see,  
Live, die, and rise with thee.... 1

"Get then this sap, and get good store of it"<sup>2</sup>, is his cry, but  
the vessel that receives it must be pure. To receive God's  
"powerful, rare dew",

Which only grief and love extract;  
...Be sure, and never miss,  
To wash your vessel wel: Then humbly take  
This balm for souls that ake,  
And one who drank it thus, assures that you  
Shal find a Joy so true.... 3

The taking of the Sacraments requires a most exquisite and sin-  
cere preparation:<sup>4</sup>

The soul must be sick of love, she must long for the  
banqueting house, nothing now must appear but flowers,  
nothing must be heard but the singing of birds and the  
voice of the Turtle. 5

As in Herbert, there is in Vaughan a deep sense of sin  
and a deep consciousness of imperfection. It is difficult,  
nevertheless, in spite of the presence of these feelings, to tell  
how complete Vaughan's purgation was. Although his poetry may be  
considered, for the most part, a record of his spiritual growth,

1 M (II), p.455.

2 "The Sap," M (II), p.475.

3 Ibid., p.476.

4 "Mount of Olives", M (I), p.155.

5 "Mount of Olives", M (I), p.156.

it is not so revealing as Herbert's for generally, it is not so autobiographical. Vaughan was a wide reader, an avid searcher after truth, seeking it in many and varied channels. His translations alone reveal how diversified his interests were. He was truly the devout humanist, with a love of learning which took him to the writings of the Church Fathers, the early Latin writers, the Hermetists, the Platonists, and various other sources of learning. His poetry reflects all these. There is in Vaughan, nevertheless, a singlemindedness of effort that is missing in Herbert: judging from his poetry, there seems to be a steadier growth of the spirit and a more definite sense of progression. The quality of Vaughan's experience, however, is another thing: I feel that though Herbert did not progress so far in achieving a sense of harmony in his poetry and in his life, the quality of his spiritual life was richer. There is an indefinable fibre in Herbert's spiritual constitution that commands our respect and admiration. Such a conclusion is, however, necessarily arbitrary; in the final analysis, it is the life, not merely the work of the poet that is significant from the viewpoint of mysticism. The poet's work, at best, can only be a signpost, although, as we already know from Herbert's case, it can prove invaluable in enabling us to form a picture of the poet. Unfortunately we know little about Vaughan's life: there is no biography such as Walton's to attest or to deny his sanctity. Miss Ashton's biography, The Swan of Usk, delightful as it is, is highly romanticised and unfortunately not reliable: it is not always easy to distinguish between fact and fabrication. We know, however, that Vaughan's later years were not particularly happy ones from the

viewpoint of his domestic relations; he was embroiled in distasteful and unfortunate lawsuits with his eldest son and daughter, lawsuits which caused him great grief.

Vaughan himself, however, has spoken of the "joy so true"<sup>1</sup> to be found in God after the self has become purified. Indeed, many of his poems record such transports of joy but I think that a guide to the extent of Vaughan's purgation is to be found in the extent of the illuminated vision he enjoyed. For the transformation of the self and its illuminated insight is as complete as the cleansing of the self that has preceded it: "the exaltation of the soul is proportionate to its previous humiliations."<sup>2</sup> That Vaughan's purgation was not complete, in the full mystical sense, is shown, I believe, by the incompleteness, indeed, the very nature of his Illumination. It is not always possible, moreover, to say whether Vaughan's moments of intense joy belong to the period of Illumination or to that of Purgation, for the period of purgation may frequently be interspersed with moments of intense joy. The poem which introduces Silex Scintillans is certainly mystical in essence and suggests either that Vaughan emerged from his suffering or at least that out of his suffering he came to know the wonder of God:

Vain Wits and eyes  
 Leave, and be wise:  
 Abuse not, shun not holy fire,  
 But with true tears wash off your mire.  
 Tears and these flames will soon grow kinde,  
 And mix an eye-salve for the blinde.  
 Tears cleanse and supple without fail,  
 And fire will purge your callous veyl.  
 Then comes the light! which when you spy,

---

1 supra, p.94.

2 Zimmerman, supra, Chap.I, p.26.

And see your nakedness thereby,  
 Praise him, who dealt his gifts so free  
 In tears to you, in fire to me. 1.

This poem is one of Vaughan's most restrained from the viewpoint of the experience it conveys: but there is a very real intensity of feeling behind the restraint. How autobiographical the poem is, we cannot say, but it certainly suggests that Vaughan had known "holy fire" and had come through it to apprehend the light of God.

There is little in Vaughan, however, much less than there is in Herbert, to suggest the experience of the Dark Night of the Soul. We find despair at God's absence but this experience is, of course, one that is in no way confined to the mystic: all who seek to live, however falteringly, the life of the spirit, know moments of bleakness and despair in the face of God's seeming absence. In "The Seed growing secretly", Vaughan expresses his loss beautifully and endearingly: "My dew, my dew," he addresses God, "my early love, My soul's bright food, thy absence kills,"<sup>2</sup> and in "Begging," he implores:

Dear Lord! restore thy ancient peace,  
 Thy quickning friendship, mans bright wealth!  
 And if thou wilt not give me ease  
 From sickness, give my spirit health! 3

Much of Vaughan's despair is linked with the persecution of the Church under the Puritan regime. For in spite of his research in the realm of the occult, Vaughan was a true Anglican and he suffered greatly under the confining yoke of the Puritans. Consequently, his own darkness was often closely allied with that of the Church.

1 M (II), p.396.

2 M (II), p.510.

3 M (II), p.501.

He asks God to resume His spirit from "this world of thrall into true liberty."<sup>1</sup> In "The Bee," God is absent because his true Church is oppressed:

Then since corrupt man hath driv'n hence  
Thy kind and saving Influence,  
And Balm is no more to be had  
In all the Coasts of Gilead.... 2

In "The Bird," he writes:

The Turtle then in Palm-trees mourns,  
While Owls and Satyrs howl;  
The pleasant Land to brimstone turns  
And all her streams grow foul. 3

He cries to God for deliverance from the darkness into which his Church and country have been plunged:

Lord! grant some Light to us, that we  
May with them find the way to thee.  
Behold what mists eclipse the day:  
How dark it is! shed down one Ray  
To guide us out of this sad night,  
And say once more, Let there be Light. 4

Vaughan's own darkness generally embraces the emotions of doubt and despair, feelings which are common to all those who seek to follow Christ:

O tell me whence that joy doth spring  
Whose diet is divine and fair,  
Which wears heaven, like a bridal ring,  
And tramples on doubts and despair? 5

One of his most poetic renderings of his despair at God's absence and his subsequent joy at His presence is this from his "Mount of Olives":

1 "They are all gone into the world of light," M (II), p.484.

2 M (II), p.654.

3 M (II), p.497.

4 "The Nativity," M(II), p.646.

5 "The Queer," M (II), p.539.



As long as thou art present with me, I am in the light, but when thou art gone, I am in the shadows of death, and amongst the stones of emptiness. When thou art present, all is brightness, all is sweetness, I am in my God's bosom, I discourse with him, watch with him, live with him, and lie down with him. All these most dear and unmeasurable blessings I have with thee, and want them without thee. Abide then with me, O thou whom my soul loveth! Thou Sun of righteousness with healing under thy wings arise in my heart; refine, quicken, and cherish it; make thy light there to shine in darkness, and a perfect day in the dead of night. 1

Vaughan emerges from his suffering with a singular peacefulness and a note of radiance. But just as his suffering is not the acute experience of the mystic, neither does his subsequent experience match it. St. John of the Cross has expressed in exquisite poetry the feelings of the soul which has endured the deep anguish of the Dark Night and then comes to know God's love in all its fullness:

All things I then forgot,  
My cheek on Him who for my coming came,  
All ceased, and I was not,  
Leaving my cares and shame  
Among the lilies, and forgetting them. 2

As Professor Husain has pointed out in his book on the metaphysical poets, it is not within Vaughan's own experience to say "all ceased and I was not."<sup>3</sup> Although Vaughan describes the state of the soul in the bliss of Union, he does not suggest that the experience was his own: it is Dionysius he echoes in his poem "The Night";

There is in God (some say)  
A deep, but dazzling darkness; As men here  
Say it is late and dusky, because they  
See not all clear....

1 M (I), p.151.

2 "The Dark Night of the Soul," p.182.

3 The Metaphysical Poets, p.231.

Not only do his two words in parenthesis indicate that he himself did not experience the dazzling dark, but these lines which follow:

O for that night! where I in him  
Might live invisible and dim. 1

likewise indicate this. In "Regeneration," the first poem in Silex Scintillans, and one which signifies to many readers a symbolic representation of Vaughan's journey on the Mystic Way, Vaughan concludes:

Lord, ... On me one breath,  
And let me dye before my death! 2

signifying the aspiration if not the accomplishment of the mystic.

There is frequent evidence, however, that Vaughan knew during his lifetime, a very real and deep peace, a peace of which he spoke:

O supreme Bliss!  
The Circle, Center and Abyss  
Of blessings.... 3

One of his loveliest poems is "The Revival". Here, we come near, I believe, to the peace and joy of the mystic in Illumination. It is difficult to say with any degree of finality to what stage Vaughan's life of the spirit had progressed. But the note that he strikes in this poem assures us that he knew deep spiritual happiness:

Unfold, unfold! take in his light,  
Who makes thy Cares more short than night.  
The Joys, which with his Day-star rise,

1 M (II), p.523.

2 M (II), p.399.

3 "The World," p.651.

He deals to all, but drowsy Eyes:  
 And what the men of this world miss,  
 Some drops and dews of future bliss.  
     Hark! how his winds have chang'd their note,  
 And with warm whispers call thee out.  
 The frosts are past, the storms are gone:  
 And backward life at last comes on.  
 The lofty groves in express Joyes  
 Reply unto the Turtles voice,  
 And here in dust and dirt, O here  
 The Lilies of his love appear!     1

It is here, and in poems like this, that we find the clearest picture of Vaughan's spiritual achievement. I do not believe it is the full, rich experience that we associate with the mystic in Illumination. But, nevertheless, the mood struck by this poem, the sense of joyous calm and serenity, is in itself no mean achievement. It is in poems like this that Vaughan comes closest to the mystics; not in those poems which are generally accepted as mystical, such, for instance as his poem "The World," which begins magnificently: "I saw Eternity the other night like a great Ring of pure and endless light...." This statement, and others like it, are more fully understood by studying two things in Vaughan's poetry: the presence of nature and the imagery he uses. To study these two things, it will be necessary to deal with the various elements in his life and learning that elucidate his treatment of nature and reveal the source of his imagery. Then we may judge in what light this statement and others like it may be considered.

Vaughan was born at Newton-on-Usk in the county of Breconshire in Southern Wales, a region noted for its fertile valleys and its high, picturesque mountains. Except for the years he spent at Oxford and those spent in the army during the

Civil War, Vaughan lived always in Breconshire. He was happiest amid the pleasures and beauties of rural life; the influence of Herbert and the impact of the Civil War had served only to heighten his love of retirement. His religious ideas may be said to have come to fruition as a result of his constant and close association with the sights and sounds of nature, which held for him a profound spiritual message.

Several influences combine to give us a complete picture of Vaughan's attitude to nature, however, and not the least of these was the influence of his brother Thomas. Although we know comparatively little of Henry's life at Oxford, we learn from the information he imparted to Anthony à Wood for his compilation of Athenae Oxonienses that he himself first undertook the study of law, turning at some later date to medicine. Although there is no record of his having obtained a degree in either of these studies, he practised medicine for the greater part of his life in and around the countryside where he was born. In a letter to Aubrey, he wrote, "My profession allso is physic, which I have practised now for many years with good successe (I thank God!) and a repute big enough for a person of greater parts than my selfe."<sup>1</sup> Henry's brother, Thomas, remained at Oxford, and from Henry's vague account to Wood, we learn that he may have obtained his Master's Degree there. Thomas studied divinity, remaining in the Church until he was ousted from his benefice by the Puritans in 1650. The lack of certainty in Henry's account of Thomas suggested that the brothers drifted apart in their later years. Their early life, however, was spent in close companionship.

---

1 M (II), p.668.

That they shared interests and ideas is evident from the parallels to be found in their respective writings. In each, to name only a few of their common sources, there are echoes of Dionysius, Hermes Trismegistus, the Kabbala, Plato and the Neo-Platonists. Their greatest common interest, however, was Hermetic philosophy. We do not know when Thomas first turned to this branch of study but it became his ruling interest after his eviction from his living. Although Henry in "The Vanity of Spirit" writes:

I summon'd nature: pierc'd through all her store,  
Broke up some seales, which none had touch'd before.... 1

it is doubtful whether his study in Hermetic science was so extensive as that of Thomas who spent many years in his search for the philosopher's stone. Henry's interest in Hermetic medicine is evidenced by his translation of Nollius' treatise on "Hermetical Physick." And his general knowledge of Hermetics is shown in his frequent use of Hermetic terminology and imagery in his poetry, among which we find such alchemical and astrological terms as signature, influence, attraction, magnetism, vital, element, ray, stone, elixir, and tincture. Especially where these words are capitalized or italicized in his poetry do they have Hermetic significance. The influence of Thomas' writings upon Henry's poetry is seen, too, in some of the poetic renderings he gives to certain passages from Thomas' works, as in his poem "Cock-Crowing", beginning,

Father of lights! what Sunnie seed,  
What glance of day hast thou confin'd  
Into this bird? To all the breed  
This busie Ray thou has assign'd;  
                    Their magnetisme works all night,  
                    And dreams of Paradise and light....

continuing in the third verse:

If such a tincture, such a touch,  
So firm a longing can impowre  
Shall thy own image think it much  
To watch for thy appearing hour...? 1

The entire poem parallels the thought to be found in one of Thomas' works which begins:

The Soule, though in some sense active, yet is  
not so essentially, but a mere instrumentall agent,  
for she is guided in her operations by a Spirituall  
Metaphysicall Graine, a Seed or Glance of Light, simple  
and without any mixture, descending from the first  
Father of Lights.... 2

In spite of their interest in Hermetic science, both Henry and Thomas acknowledge their primary debt to God. They were devout Christians and each considered himself a loyal adherent of the Church of England. The greatest single influence to be found in Henry Vaughan's poetry is that of the Authorized Version. Thomas, on the other hand, claims that his next debt is to Cornelius Agrippa, sixteenth century Hermetic philosopher. The influence of the devout humanism of the Counter-Reformation is seen in the writings of both men, all of which show a predeliction for the more abstruse portions of religious literature. In Henry Vaughan's poetry, for example, we find many echoes of the imagery of the Song of Solomon and of the Book of Revelations. The influence of the first of these is, of course, common to much mystical literature; the Book of Revelations was, on the other hand, much studied by the Hermetists. Several of Henry Vaughan's poems show how he assimilated Hermetic ideas in such a way that they har-

---

1 M (II), p.488.

2 Quoted by Wilson O. Clough, "Henry Vaughan and the Hermetic Philosophy," PMLA, XLVIII, (December, 1933), p.1117.

monized with his basic Christian beliefs. A verse from Revelations (Chap. 2:17):

To him that overcometh wil I give to eate  
of the hidden Manna, and I wil give him a  
white stone, and in the stone a new name  
written, which no man knoweth, saving he  
that receiveth it. 1

is echoed in his poem "H. Scripture,"

In thee the hidden stone, the Manna lies,  
Thou art the great Elixir, rare, and Choice;  
The Key that opens to all Mysteries,  
The Word in Characters, God in the Voice. 2

Christ is frequently likened to the philosopher's stone: He is the means by which the baser metal of man's lower self is transmuted to the pure gold of his higher self. The stone signified to Vaughan the earthly image of the heavenly Christ. It is true that Hermetic science possessed its more bizarre aspects in its activities dealing with occult experimentation but within it, too, there was a very deep core of spirituality. I think Evelyn Underhill has expressed, with her usual penetration, the essential difference between the paths Henry and Thomas Vaughan took when she says:

The starting point of all magic, and of all magical religion - the best and purest of occult activities - is, as in mysticism, man's inextinguishable conviction that there are other planes of being than those which his senses report to him; and its proceedings represent the intellectual and individualistic results of this conviction - his craving for the hidden knowledge. 3

Miss Ashton's portrayal of Thomas Vaughan in The Swan of Usk as "very wild in his speech, always angry, always dissatisfied",<sup>4</sup>

1 M (II), p.469.

2 M (II), p.441.

3 Underhill, Mysticism, p.151.

4 Helen Ashton, The Swan of Usk, New York, Macmillan Co., p.290.

a man whose alchemical ventures were completely divorced from the spiritual, is, I believe, quite incorrect. His own writings reveal a deep spirituality and a sense of wonder and humility in the face of God's omniscience. His works are not simply the output of an inquiring mind, as Miss Ashton would have us believe, but are the works of a man who, although he sought truths along obscure and devious paths, possessed a profoundly religious nature.

In the final analysis, magic and mysticism illustrate two different but abiding passions of the self, the desire to love and the desire to know.<sup>1</sup> The limitations of occultism are implicit in this statement when we remember:

He may not be known by reason, He may not be  
gotten by thought, nor conditioned by understanding;  
but He may be loved and chosen with the true lovely  
will of thine heart.... 2

Henry Vaughan's eventual awareness of the limitations of occultism is seen in his poem "The Search" when he says, "Leave, leave, thy gadding thoughts,...."

To rack old Elements  
Or Dust  
and say  
Sure here he must  
needs stay  
Is not the way,  
nor just.  
Search well another world; who studies this,  
Travels in Clouds, seeks Manna, where none is. 3

and in "Vanity of Spirit," he faces these limitations again by declaring;

---

1 Itrat-Husain, The Metaphysical Poets, p.244.

2 supra, Chap.I, p.4.

3 M (II), p.407.



Since in these veyls my Ecclips'd Eye  
May not approach thee, (for at night  
Who can have commerce with the light?)  
I'll disapparell, and to buy  
But one half glaunce, most gladly dye. 1

In "The Ass," with true humility, he turns to God with the petition:

Let me thy Ass be onely wise  
 To carry, not search mysteries;  
 Who carries thee, is by thee lead,  
 Who argues, follows his own head. 2

Vaughan knew the bond between the visible and the invisible world was attained through holiness and was found in love:

Sure holyness the Magnet is,  
 And Love the Lure, that woos thee down. 3

and he asks:

Teach both mine eyes and feet to move  
 Within these bounds set by thy love.... 4

It has been maintained that Vaughan's best poetry is that which is entirely free from Hermetic influence. This statement, is true, in its narrow sense, if we take it to refer to obvious influences such as terminology and, in some cases, imagery. It is incorrect, I feel, however, in its wider implications. Vaughan's greatest poems are those that possess a certain fusion of the celestial with the terrestrial: a fusion which illustrates in subtle, deeper fashion, the more abiding and significant influence of Hermetic thought, poems which capture what Thomas Vaughan spoke of as "the mysterious kiss of God in Nature." 5

1 M (II), p.419.

2 M (II), p.518.

3 "The Queer," M (II), p.539.

4 op. cit., loc. cit.

5 M.M. Mahood, Poetry and Humanism, London, Cape, 1950, p.283.

For Vaughan's interest in Hermetics is shown very strongly in his interpretation of nature. His belief, for instance, that a definite commerce existed between the things of heaven and the things of earth, stems from Paracelsus' theory of correspondence which maintained that everything in the terrestrial world had its parallel in the celestial and the intellectual worlds.<sup>1</sup> Thus follows his idea that man could apprehend things heavenly by contemplating the creatures of this earth. There is no suggestion in Vaughan of a progression from earth to heaven in the Platonic sense; rather, like the Hermetists, Vaughan saw the influence of the heavens descending upon the earth and the earth joyously acknowledging their power.<sup>2</sup> He found in nature an essential unifying spirit, a manifestation of one mighty divine law; a concept illustrated in his poem "The Morning-Watch,"

In what Rings,  
 And Hymning Circulations the quick world  
     Awakes, and sings;  
     The rising winds,  
     And falling springs,  
     Birds, beast, all things  
 Adore him in their kinds.  
     Thus all is hurl'd  
 In sacred Hymnes, and Order, The great Chime  
 And Symphony of nature.                     3

Vaughan believed that each created thing possessed a tincture or spark of divinity; not only man but all created things strove for perfection and sought union with the divine. In the sense of

---

1 R.H. Walters, "Henry Vaughan and the Alchemists," Review of English Studies, XXIII, (April, 1947), p.118.

2 White, Metaphysical Poets, p.291.

3 M (II), p.424.



His presence. Contemplating a rainbow, Vaughan says:

When I behold thee, though my light be dim,  
Distant and low, I can in thine see him,  
Who looks upon thee from his throne,  
And minds the covenant twixt All and One. 1

showing how he was able to spy in the "weaker glories" of nature "some shadows of eternity."<sup>2</sup> He apprehended God Immanent through His Holy Spirit which dwells in all things; God Transcendent existed apart as the Divine Source of all things. In the opening lines of his poem "Retirement," he recognizes both aspects of God's nature, in the magnificence of His Transcendence and in the beauty of His Immanence:

Who on yon throne of Azure sits,  
Keeping close house  
Above the morning-starre,  
Whose meaner showes,  
And outward utensils these glories are  
That shine and share  
Part of his mansion.... 3

Though Vaughan felt the presence of the Divine Spirit in nature, he knew that the complete vision of God was not to be apprehended in the glories of creation. In his poem, "The Waterfall," he writes:

What sublime truths, and wholesome themes,  
Lodge in thy mystical, deep streams!  
Such as dull man can never finde  
Unless that Spirit lead his minde,  
Which first upon thy face did move,  
And hatch'd all with his quickning love,  
As this loud brooks incessant fall  
In streaming rings restagnates all,  
Which reach by course the bank, and then  
Are no more seen, just so pass men.  
O my invisible estate,

---

1 "The Rainbow," M (II), p. 510.

2 "The Retreate," M(II), p. 519.

3 M (II), p. 462.

My glorious liberty, still late!  
 Thou art the Channel my soul seeks,  
 Not this with Cataracts and Creeks. 1

There is no suggestion of basking in the joys and beauties of creation. Vaughan recognized clearly the

...little gate  
 And narrow way, by which to thee,  
 The Passage is. 2

and formulates his prayer:

O feed me then! and since I may  
 Have yet more days, more nights to Count,  
 So strengthen me, Lord, all the way,  
 That I may travel to thy Mount. 3

In the final analysis, it was the orthodox way of the Church that gave Vaughan his greatest devotional and spiritual stimulus but we associate his religion with nature because he so frequently used nature to illustrate ideas essentially religious. This reliance on nature imagery is illustrated in "The Feast", in which the mysteries of the Sacraments cause Vaughan to exclaim:

O what high joys  
 The Turtles voice  
     And songs I hear! O quickning showers  
 Of my Lords blood  
 You make rocks bud  
     And crown dry hills with wells & flowers! 4

and in "The Incarnation and Passion," in which Vaughan expresses his awe at the magnitude of these two events:

To put on Clouds instead of light,  
 And cloath the morning -starre with dust,  
 Was a translation of such height  
 As, but in thee, was ne'r exprest.... 5

1 M (II), p.538.

2 "Repentance," M (II), p.448.

3 "The Pilgrimage," M (II), p.465.

4 M (II), p.535.

5 M (II), p.415.

His most felicitous example is that of his very lovely and deeply spiritual poem, "The Dawning," in which Christ's second coming is depicted in the imagery of Creation:

Ah! what time wilt thou come? when shall that crie  
The Bridegroome's Comming! fill the sky?  
 Shall it in the Evening run  
 When our words and works are done?  
 Or wil thy all-surprizing light  
     Break at midnight?  
 When either **sleep**, or some dark pleasure  
 Possesseth mad man without measure;  
 Or shal these early, fragrant hours  
     Unlock thy bowres?  
 And with their blush of light descry  
 Thy locks crown'd with eternitie;  
 Indeed, it is the only time  
 That with thy glory doth best chime,  
 All now are stirring, ev'ry field  
     Ful hymns doth yield,  
 The whole Creation shakes off night,  
 And for thy shadow looks the light,  
 Stars now vanish without number,  
 Sleepie Planets set, and slumber,  
 The pursie Clouds disband, and scatter,  
 All expect some sudden matter,  
 Not one beam triumphs, but from far  
     That morning-star.... 1

Rarely in Vaughan do we find minute details of nature; it was the vaster aspects of creation that engaged him: the spaciousness of the firmament and the mystery of its measured round.

The role played by nature in his poetry is really two-fold, stretching out in two distinct directions. The contemplation of nature frequently gives rise to some of his profoundest thoughts, such, for instance, as those in the poem which begins with the lovely image: "They have all gone into the world of light and I alone sit lingering here." The second direction which nature took in his poetry is illustrated by the language of this poem, through his use of nature imagery. Ideas that are in no way

related to nature are clothed in the imagery of nature in such a way that the substance of the idea is brought home with a particular clarity. Such is the case when he likens Sundays to "The milky way Chalkt out with Suns."<sup>1</sup> In another poem he describes his brooding contemplation:

It glows and glitters in my cloudy brest,  
     Like stars upon some gloomy grove,  
 Or those faint beams in which this hill is drest,  
     After the Sun's remove.                      2

Vaughan's attitude to nature may be considered as the sum of all his beliefs while at the same time it provided the framework by which all his beliefs became unified. This is illustrated in his themes that deal with childhood. To Vaughan, childhood was the symbol of innocence and purity, the "age of mysteries" which he thought of nostalgically as:

Dear harmless age!  
 ...Where love without lust dwells, and bends  
 What way we please, without self-ends.                      3

He believed man's celestial nature was closest to God in his days of "angell-infancy." Thus for Vaughan childhood becomes the symbol of all things pure: of mankind in his innocence before the Fall; of the Church in the days of the primitive Christians. All his ideas concerning childhood are telescoped into this image when he likens mornings to:

Mysteries, the first world's Youth  
 Mans Resurrection....                      4

Ideas that are essentially orthodox link with themes of childhood

---

1 "Son-Dayes," M (II), p.448.

2 "They are all gone into the world of light," M(II), p.484.

3 "Childe-hood," M (II), p.521.

4 "Rules and Lessons," M (II), p.436.

that are Hermetic and Platonic in origin. This excerpt from one of the Hermetical writings indicates one source of his ideas on childhood:

Look at the soul of a child,...a soul  
that has not yet come to accept its separation  
from its source; for its body is still small,  
and has not yet grown to its full bulk. How  
beautiful throughout is such a soul as that!  
It is not yet fould by the bodily passions; it  
is still hardly detached from the soul of the  
Kosmos. 1

Frequently Vaughan expresses in his poetry a sense of regret over the loss of the innocence and purity of his childhood state. In his poem, "Childe-hood," he says:

I cannot reach it; and my striving eye  
Dazles at it, as at eternity. 2

His spiritual aspirations are closely linked with his whole concept of childhood: he desires to be born again, to regain the simplicity of his childhood, in order that he may be near to God once more as he was in his childhood days. For he knows that he:

Must live twice, that would Gods face see....3

His fullest and most felicitous expression of nostalgia for the joys of childhood is to be found in his poem "The Retreat." The poem is short and bears reprinting in its entirety not only for its expression of this nostalgia but also because it illustrates much of what is essentially Vaughan both as poet and as man:

Happy those early dayes! when I  
Shin'd in my Angell-infancy.  
Before I understood this place

---

1 Libellus X, Hermetica, quoted by R.H. Walters, "Henry Vaughan and the Alchemists," Review of English Studies, XXIII (April, 1947), p.116.

2 M (II), p.520.

3 M (II), p.521.



Appointed for my second race,  
 Or taught my soul to fancy ought  
 But a white, Celestiall thought,  
 When yet I had not walkt above  
 A mile, or two, from my first love,  
 And looking back (at that short space,)  
 Could see a glimpse of his bright-face;  
 When on some gilded Cloud, or flowre  
 My gazing soul would dwell an houre,  
 And in those weaker glories spy  
 Some shadows of eternity;  
 Before I taught my tongue to wound  
 My Conscience with a sinfull sound,  
 Or had the black art to dispence  
 A sev'rall sinne to ev'ry sence,  
 But felt through all this fleshly dresse  
 Bright shootes of everlastingnesse.  
 O how I long to travell back  
 And tread again that ancient track!  
 That I might once more reach that plaine,  
 Where first I left my glorious traine,  
 From whence th' Inlightned spirit sees  
 That shady City of Palme trees;  
 But (ah!) my soul with too much stay  
 Is drunk, and staggers in the way.  
 Some men a forward motion love,  
 But I by backward steps would move,  
 And when this dust falls to the urn  
 In that state I came return. 1

The theme of this poem is simple but Vaughan's utterance of it lifts it into realms almost magical in their power of suggestion; through phrases such as "white celestial thought," "gilded cloud," "shadows of eternity", and "bright shootes of everlastingnesse."

There is a translucent quality in Vaughan's imagery that lends to his poetry an other-world quality and it is obtained, to a great extent, through his treatment of light within the framework of his nature imagery. This quality is illustrated superbly in his poem "Disorder and Frailty" when he petitions:

... give wings to my fire,  
 And hatch my soul, until it fly  
 Up where thou art, amongst thy tire  
 Of Stars, above Infirmitie.... 2

---

1 M. (II), pp. 418-9.

2 M. (II), p.446.

The symbolism of light is common to most mystical literature; indeed, it is generally accepted as the classical description of Illumination. Vaughan was very likely familiar with some of its most famous examples: that of Dante in the final canto of the Paradiso; and that of St. Augustine in his Confessions. It is possible, too, that he had read Boehme's vivid description of Illumination in the language of light. The poems in which Vaughan uses light imagery most successfully, however, are not those based on spiritual experience. Generally they arise out of philosophic contemplations. The two outstanding examples are "The World," beginning "I saw Eternity the other night...." and the poem beginning "They are all gone into the world of light," each of which opens beautifully. In the latter poem, light forms the core of a metaphysical conceit as in the lines:

If a star were confin'd into a Tomb  
 Her captive flames must needs burn there;  
 But when the hand that lockt her up, gives room,  
 She'll shine through all the sphaere.     1

and illustrates the Hermetic influence in Vaughan's use of light imagery. The Hermetic philosophers looked upon light as the source of life and as a consequence its imagery is found frequently in their writings. The phrase "Bright shootes of everlastingnesse" from Vaughan's poem "The Retreate" is distinctly Hermetic in origin: the second word, shootes, being common to their literature. Other Hermetic terms which Vaughan uses frequently are white, ray and beam. The word white possesses particular significance because of its rich connotations in Vaughan's native Welsh: its Welsh form gwyn signifies not only white but

also fair, happy, holy, blessed and innocent. Its meaning in some of Vaughan's loveliest and most arresting phrases becomes greatly enhanced as a consequence of its Welsh connotations: as in the phrases "white celestial thought," the "white days of primeval innocence", and the "white winged reapers."

It is not imagery in itself, however, that determines whether or not a poet is mystical but the experience behind the imagery. Those of Vaughan's poems that are generally considered mystical are, in reality, not mystical at all but are visionary. Their source and their inspiration stem from Vaughan's illuminated vision of the world, a vision obtained through intermittent gleams of perception by means of which he pierced to the heart of things:

And yet, as Angels in some brighter dreams  
                     Call to the soul, when man doth sleep:  
 So some strange thoughts transcend our wonted theams,  
                     And into glory peep.       1

These lines, and others like them illustrate what Professor Dowden has described as "the incalculable beams and irradiations of the soul."<sup>2</sup> They leave us little doubt regarding the actual fact of illumination experienced by Vaughan. But the nature of his illumination is another thing. It was the consequence, not of his mystical growth but of his poetic vision: his insight was intuitive; it was not the flowering of a mystical spirit. This conclusion is, I believe, born out by the contexts in which his visionary perceptions occur. Once again, by way of example, I refer to the

1 M. (II), p.484.

2 Dowden, Puritan and Anglican, p.121.

two poems listed above<sup>1</sup> both of which begin with rare flashes of insight. What follows the opening "They are all gone into the world of light" forms one of the most poetic musings on the mysteries of death to be found in our literature but in no sense does it convey experience that may be considered mystical. "The World" which opens:

I saw Eternity the other night  
Like a great ring of pure endless light,  
All calm as it was bright;  
And round beneath it, Time in hours, days, years,  
Driven by the spheres,  
Like a vast shadow moved, in which the world  
And all her train were hurled.... 2

is "for the most part a melancholy picture of earth bound, deluded man."<sup>3</sup> Except for the ending which embraces both the symbolism and the substance of mystical experience,

(This Ring the Bride-groome did for none provide  
But for the bride.)

the lines that follow the opening lines of mystery and wonder are, by contrast, singularly prosaic and uninspired. In spite of the vision embraced in the opening lines of the poem, the substance of the poem is not mystical.

Vaughan has been described as a "beautiful but uneven poet,"<sup>4</sup> and what is true of him poetically is true, I believe, of him spiritually; for in neither realm of experience does he illustrate the culmination of his potentialities. The limitations that are found in his verse reflect the limitations that are found in his spiritual life. The potentiality is there, it is true,

1 "The World" and "They are all gone into the world of light."

2 "The World", M. (II), p.466.

3 Bush, Seventeenth Century, p.147.

4 A.E. Waite, The Works of Thomas Vaughan, London, Theosophical Publishing House, 1919, p.viii.

but somehow it is not fully realized. Somewhere in its development, it loses its sense of direction. For he was content, claims Miss White, to walk the ways of this world in wonder rather than forsake all in the passion of the mystic and to concentrate on the spiritual labours of the Mystic Way.<sup>1</sup> The illumination of the poet asserts itself: the slow and painful process by which the mystic achieves his vision of the divine gives way to the poet who rests satisfied with a divinely illuminated world of self; he does not press on to the vision of God.<sup>2</sup> In Vaughan's illuminated vision of the universe, nevertheless, he frequently apprehended the Divine even although he did not comprehend as the mystic does. He pierced, on occasion, as poets have rarely done before or since, the very secret of the universe, intercepting stray messages between the outer mystery of the universe and the inner mystery of the individual soul,<sup>3</sup> but he conducted these messages through the medium of his poetry, rather than, as the mystic does, through the medium of his life. Although his aspirations in the realm of the spirit were essentially mystical, it is not for his spiritual endeavour that he is remembered to-day; rather he is remembered for the vision of the universe he has captured with such sublimity in his poetry. And for the beauty of his vision we can offer no more fitting tribute than this of Siegfried Sassoon's:

---

1 White, Metaphysical Poets, p.306.

2 E.N.S. Thompson, "Mysticism in Seventeenth-Century English Literature," Studies in Philology, XVIII, 1921, p.212.

3 Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, Studies in Literature, Cambridge, University Press, 1920, p.126.

At the Grave of Henry Vaughan.

Above the voiceful windings of a river  
An old green slab of simply graven stone  
Shuns notice, overshadowed by a yew.  
Here Vaughan lies dead, whose name flows on for ever  
Through pastures of the spirit washed with dew  
And starlit with eternities unknown.  
Here sleeps the Silurist; the loved physician;  
The face that left no portraiture behind;  
The skull that housed white angels and had vision  
Of daybreak through the gateways of the mind.  
Here faith and mercy, wisdom and humility  
(Whose influence shall prevail for evermore)  
Shine. And this lowly grave tells Heaven's tranquillity  
And here stand I, a suppliant at the door. 1

---

1 Siegfried Sassoon, "At the Grave of Henry Vaughan," from  
The Heart's Journey, quoted by Hutchinson, Henry Vaughan, p.242.

CHAPTER V

What is true of the metaphysical poets as a group is true of Herbert and Vaughan: in spite of the points of reference that indisputably link them together, they possess differences and divergences from these points of reference that serve only to increase our appreciation of them both as poets and as men. In no other period of English literature do we find a group which comprises such a distinct unit: not only are they linked together by an adherence, however diversified in its manifestations, to an artistic convention, but they are linked together also by a deep devotion to a religious ideal. Within these two areas of experience, the artistic and the spiritual, we have, in spite of a predominating acceptance of Anglo-Catholic traditions in the latter, a range of endeavour that closely reflects the varying trends of the century. If I were to choose any single figure of the group as representative of the century as a whole, my choice, would of course be John Donne, who, in spite of the fact that he appears earliest in the century, epitomizes through his Janus-like characteristics, the upheaval of ideas which we associate with the seventeenth century. On the one hand, he looks back to the Renaissance with its deep roots in classical learning and in medieval tradition; on the other, he heralds the approaching age of reason with its emphasis on rationalism and experimentation. It is only right to say, however, that to a greater or lesser degree, all the metaphysical poets reflect the developments of the period; this, in spite of the fact that they are religious poets. For although the life of the spirit is essentially the same regardless of the point in time at which it occurs, never-



theless, art which deals with the spiritual life cannot fail to carry, as all art does, the mark of the age in which the artist lives. This fact is illustrated for us by the work both of Herbert and of Vaughan, particularly by the work of the latter, whose poetry frequently illustrates the eclecticism of his learning.

Certain cosmological concepts which first came into prominence during the period of the Renaissance are echoed time and again in the works of the metaphysical poets. One such concept is that of the "great chain of being" which embraced the idea of an hierarchal order descending from God through the angels to mankind, thence extending to life in all its manifestations, even to each plant and stone. All levels of existence were seen to exemplify one great harmony, a concept which receives repeated expression in the poetry of Vaughan. His whole approach to nature was deeply influenced by his belief in a concept of order throughout creation. In Herbert, this concept of order is not so explicit as it is in Vaughan but, nevertheless, a sense of order was implicit in everything he wrote and in everything he did, for order was the keynote of his life both as artist and as Anglican divine.

Turning more specifically to both the lives and the works of Herbert and Vaughan, we find many interesting and significant contrasts and comparisons. Each exhibited the characteristics of his Welsh heritage in a certain fierceness of temperament and intensity of pride. They are linked most strongly together, however, by the dedication of themselves in the realm of art and in the realm of the spirit to the greater glory of God: each attempted not only to bring his life into harmony with God but

each sought also to record his attempt through the medium of his art. For each poet, the channel through which his spiritual aspirations sought and found expression was that of the orthodox Church. In neither man was there ever any question as to the rightness of the position of the Church to which he belonged. Although it is true that Vaughan criticised bitterly the Puritan regime, like Herbert, he did not enter into theological disputes involving the doctrines of the Church. These both Herbert and Vaughan accepted without question or qualification.

Against this common background of the Church, however, their worship sought separate channels of expression. Herbert's religion found full expression within the Church. The needed discipline for his unruly, vacillating nature was supplied for him through her devotions. Similarly, in his writings, the discipline that enabled his artistic powers to achieve their fullest expression came through a strict adherence to form. This is the paradox of Herbert both spiritually and artistically: only through the seeming restrictions of form did he come to know his fullest freedom of self expression and of self realization. The life lived and the poetry written are remarkable because of Herbert's singular ability to encompass great intensity of feeling within rigid limitations of form, both poetic and devotional. Vaughan differs considerably from Herbert. Like Herbert, he satisfies the demands of the spirit by a life of retirement. Herbert's retirement, however, meant the taking of Holy Orders and as a consequence brought his life much closer to the Church than it had formerly been. The Church, in fact, became his life. This is not true to the same extent of Vaughan. He always remained

devoted to the Church he loyally supported through the dark days of the Puritan regime and there is little doubt that subsequent to his retirement his rule of life became much stricter. But the Church did not play the central role in his worship that it did for **Herbert**. Vaughan's retirement meant a closer and dearer contact with nature, a contact by means of which the beliefs of the Church became deepened and sanctified. The scope of Herbert's religious struggle involved only himself; but because he is the artist he is, he has captured in his own particular experience the substance of universal experience. As a consequence, his poems have been read devotedly by those who, like him, have sought to bring their own lives into a closer communion with God. Vaughan's religious experience is not so explicit as Herbert's and it is never so intensely personal; where Herbert agonizes, Vaughan contemplates.

The supreme mystery of religion was symbolized for Herbert by the altar: it represented to him through the miracle of the Eucharist the perpetual entrance of God Incarnate into time and space. It was God Immanent, God revealed in the little homely details of the daily round Whom Herbert knew and loved. But it was in the spaciousness of the firmament rather than at the steps of the altar that Vaughan's worship found its fullest expression. It was God Transcendent, revealed in the measured round of the universe, Whom Vaughan apprehended, however fleetingly. But his vision of the universe remained only a vision; he came no closer to Reality. And as Miss Underhill has written,

...we do not call every one who has these partial and artistic intuitions of reality a mystic, any more than we call every one a musician who has learnt to play the piano. The true

mystic is the person in whom such powers transcendent the merely artistic and visionary stage, and are exalted to the point of genius: in whom the transcendental consciousness can dominate the normal consciousness, and who has definitely surrendered himself to the embrace of Reality. As artists stand in a peculiar relation to the phenomenal world, receiving rhythms and discovering truths and beauties which are hidden from other men, so this true mystic stands in a peculiar relation to the transcendental world.... His mysticism is no isolated vision, no fugitive glimpse of reality, but a complete system of life carrying its own guarantees and obligations. 1

We cannot assess the spirituality of Vaughan's life to the extent that we can Herbert's because we possess no biography such as that of Walton's; neither do we possess first hand reports of him as we do of Herbert. The mark at which he aimed is clear from his own writings, nevertheless, particularly from his prose work, The Mount of Olives. Vaughan was not a prominent figure in his own day, it is true, but he was not insignificant and I cannot help feeling that if he had achieved a high degree of sanctity such as Herbert had, we should have heard of his achievement. This, I realize, is sheer conjecture on my part, but I think that, under the circumstances, it is sound. On the other hand, I do not doubt for an instant that Vaughan was a good and holy man in the full sense of these words. No man could have written The Mount of Olives who was not holy. But the degree of holiness which he achieved was not so great as that of Herbert. I do not however, wish to compare Herbert and Vaughan because I feel that any attempt to do so is unrealistic and quite futile. So much depends on the contexts of individual circumstance and temperament, which colour the life of the spirit. To lift instances from their contexts and to seek to compare them involves so many qualifications that

---

1 Underhill, Mysticism, pp.75-76.

any such comparison loses meaning.

I do not consider, however, that either Herbert or Vaughan can be considered mystics, in the full sense of the term as I have outlined it. My reasons for this conclusion are, of course, embodied within the separate chapters on these two poets. I feel, nevertheless, that their aspirations were essentially mystical in that they sought to follow Christ. I do not think for a moment that either of them ever set out consciously to be mystics: such an attitude seems lacking in spiritual humility. One cannot will to achieve the summits of the spiritual life; one begins simply by loving. The element of the will is, of course, of supreme importance to the development of the life of the spirit but so, too, is that of grace over which the individual has no control. Nevertheless, in their fervent desire to bring their lives into harmony with God and in their constant search for His Presence, Herbert and Vaughan resemble the mystics. That their quest did not reach the fulfillment that it does in the mystic does not detract in any way from the beauty and nobility of their aim. Their separate achievements provide us with signposts that point to the fully developed life of the mystic. In the life of consecration found in Herbert and in the illuminated vision of the world given to us by Vaughan, we are confronted with complementary aspects of the mystic life as a whole. The substance of their spiritual aspiration is implicit in these words of Jaques Maritain: "No one comes so near the invisible world as the sage and the poet, unless it be the saint -- who is but one spirit with God, and so infinitely closer to Him than anyone."<sup>1</sup> The magnitude

---

<sup>1</sup> Jacques Maritain, quoted by Oscar Williams, ed., Introduction to A Little Treasury of Modern Poetry, New York, Scribner's Sons, 1946, p.41.

of their contribution as poets is likewise caught by him when he says, "Though in themselves of no help to the attainment of eternal life, art and poetry are more necessary than bread to the human race. They fit it for the life of the spirit."<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p.42.

# BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adams, Henry, Saint Mont. Michel and Chartres, Boston, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1933.
- Ashton, Helen, The Swan of Usk, New York, Macmillan Co., 1940.
- Aubrey, John, Brief Lives, Oxford, Andrew Clark, 1898.
- Baugh, A.C., ed., A Literary History of England, New York, Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1948.
- Bell, H.I., ed., Traherne's Poems of Felicity, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1910.
- Bennett, Joan, Four Metaphysical Poets, Cambridge, University Press, 1934.
- Beresford, John, "Holy Mr. Herbert," Gossips of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries, Duckworth, 3 Henrietta Street, London, pp.195-208.
- Bernard of Clairvaux, Saint, On the Love of God, newly translated by a Religious of C.S.M.V., London and Oxford, A.R. Mowbray and Co., 1950.
- Blackstone, B., ed., The Ferrar Papers, Cambridge, University Press, 1938.
- Blunden, Edmund, On the Poems of Henry Vaughan, London, Richard Cobden, 1927.
- Bredvold, Louis I., The Intellectual Milieu of John Dryden, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1934.
- Brémond, Henri, Prayer and Poetry, trans. by Alger Thorold, London, Burns Oates & Washbourne Ltd., 1927.
- Bullen, A.H., "Bertram Dobell," The Nation, (February 11, 1915), pp. 165-166.
- Bullett, Gerald, The English Mystics, London, Michall Joseph, 1950.
- Bush, Douglas, English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century, 1600-1660, Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1945.
- Clark, G.N., The Seventeenth Century, London, Clarendon Press, 1947.
- Claudel, Paul, Ways and Crossways, London, Sheed and Ward, 1933.

- Clough, W.O., "Henry Vaughan and the Hermetic Philosophy," PMLA, XLVIII, (December, 1933), 1108-1130.
- Childe, Wilfred Rowland, "Henry Vaughan," Essays by Divers Hands, XXII, 1945, 131-160.
- Coleridge, S.T., Biographia Literaria, London, J.M. Dent, 1930, Chapters XIX, XX.
- Collins, Joseph Burns, Christian Mysticism in the Elizabethan Age, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Press, 1940.
- Craig, Hardin, The Enchanted Glass, New York, Oxford University Press, 1936.
- Dante, A., The Divine Comedy, London, J.M. Dent & Sons, 1941, 3 vols.
- Dawson, M.L., "Thomas Traherne," letter, Times Literary Supplement, London, 29 September, 1927, p.667.
- Dobell, Bertram, "An Unknown Seventeenth Century Poet," Athenaeum, (7 April), 1900, pp.433-435; (14 April), 1900, p.466.
- Dowden, Edward, Puritan and Anglican, London, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, and Co., 1901.
- Eliot, T.S., After Strange Gods, London, Faber and Faber, 1933.
- \_\_\_\_\_, "George Herbert", The Spectator, 12 March, 1932, pp.360-361.
- \_\_\_\_\_, "The Silurist," The Dial, LXXXIII, (September, 1927), 259-263.
- "From Court to Sanctuary, George Herbert's Songs, An Emancipated Spirit," Times Literary Supplement, London, 12 July, 1941, pp.334 and 337.
- Garnett, Richard, "Henry Vaughan," Dictionary of National Biography, 1909, XX, 164-166.
- "George Herbert," Encyclopaedia Britannica, 11th Ed., 1910, XIII, pp.339-40.
- \_\_\_\_\_, Times Literary Supplement, London, 2 March, 1933, pp.133-134.
- \_\_\_\_\_, Times Literary Supplement, London, 1 April, 1920, pp.205-206.



Gosse, Edmund, The Jacobean Poets, New York, Scribner's Sons, 1894.

\_\_\_\_\_, Seventeenth-Century Studies, London, 1883.

Grierson, H.J.C., Cross Currents in English Literature of the Seventeenth Century, London, Chatto and Windus, 1929.

\_\_\_\_\_, The First Half of the Seventeenth Century, Wm. Blackwood and Sons, Edinburgh and London, 1906.

Guiney, Louise Imogen, "Henry Vaughan the Silurist," Atlantic Monthly, LXXIII, (May, 1894), 681-692.

"Henry Vaughan," Encyclopaedia Britannica, 11th ed., 1910, XXVII, 955.

\_\_\_\_\_, Times Literary Supplement, London, 20 April, 1922, pp 249-250.

Herbert, George, The Temple and A Priest to the Temple, London, J.M. Dent and Sons, 1908.

"Hermes Trismegistus," Encyclopaedia Britannica, 11th Ed., 1910, XIII, p.370.

Hobhouse, Stephen, "A Poet's Resurrection," Spectator, CLVII, (6 November, 1936), 804.

Hopkinson, Arthur W., letter Times Literary Supplement, London, 6 October, 1927, p.694.

Hugel, Baron F. von, Essays and Addresses on the Philosophy of Religion, Series II, London, 1926.

Hutchinson, F.E., "George Herbert: a Tercentenary," The Nineteenth Century, March, 1933, pp.358-368.

\_\_\_\_\_, Henry Vaughan, A Life and Interpretation, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1947.

\_\_\_\_\_, "The Sacred Poets," in Ward, A.W., and Waller, A.R., ed., Cambridge History of English Literature, Cambridge University Press, 1911, VII, 30-54.

Hutton, Rev. W.H., "Caroline Divines," in Ward, A.W., and Waller, A.R., ed., CHEL, Cambridge University Press, 1911, II, Cap.VI, 162-165.

Huxley, Aldous, The Perennial Philosophy, N.Y. & London, Harper Bros., 1945.

\_\_\_\_\_, Texts and Pretexts, London, Chatto and Windus, 1949.

Inge, W.R., Christian Mysticism, London, Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1933.

\_\_\_\_\_, Mysticism in Religion, Hutchinson's, London, 1948.

\_\_\_\_\_, The Platonic Tradition in English Religious Thought, London, Longman's, Green & Co., 1926.

Itrat-Husain: The Mystical Element in the Metaphysical Poets of the Seventeenth Century, London, Oliver and Boyd, 1948.

Jones, Rufus, The Luminous Trail, New York, The Macmillan Co., 1947.

\_\_\_\_\_, New Studies in Mystical Religion, New York, Macmillan Company, 1928.

\_\_\_\_\_, Pathways to the Reality of God, New York, Macmillan Company, 1931.

\_\_\_\_\_, The Radiant Life, New York, Macmillan Co., 1944.

\_\_\_\_\_, Testimony of the Soul, New York, Macmillan Co., 1936.

Lewis-Jones, W., "Thomas Traherne and the Religious Poets of the Seventeenth Century," Quarterly Review, CC, (October, 1904), 437-464.

Judson, A.C., "Cornelius Agrippa and Henry Vaughan," Modern Language Notes, XLI, (March, 1926), 178-181.

\_\_\_\_\_, "Henry Vaughan as a Nature Poet," PMLA, XLII, (1927), 146-156.

\_\_\_\_\_, "The Source of Henry Vaughan's Ideas Concerning God in Nature," Studies in Philology, XXIV, (1927), 592-606.

Law, William, Works, London, Privately reprinted for G. Moreton, 1892-93, 9 vols.

Leishman, J.B., The Metaphysical Poets, Oxford, 1934.

Lovejoy, Arthur O., The Great Chain of Being, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1942.

Mahood, M.M., Poetry and Humanism, London, Cape, 1950.

Maritain, Jacques, Art and Scholasticism, trans. J.F. Scanlan, London, Sheed and Ward, 1930.

Massingham, Harold, "A Note on Thomas Traherne," New Statesman and Nation, IV, (19 December, 1914), 271-272.

Maycock, A.L., Nicholas Ferrar of Little Gidding, London, Society for promoting Christian Knowledge, New York, The Macmillan Company, 1938.

- McMaster, Helen N., "Vaughan and Wordsworth," Review of English Studies, XI, (July, 1935), 3.3-325.
- Mims, Edwin, The Christ of the Poets, New York, Abingdon, Cokesbury, 1948.
- More, Paul Elmer, "Thomas Traherne", The Nation, XXXVIII, (February, 1909), 160-162.
- Murry, Middleton, To the Unknown God, London, J.Cape, 1924.
- Nicholson, D.H.S., and Lee, A.H.E., Oxford Book of English Mystical Verse, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1917.
- Osmond, Percy H., Mystical Poets of the English Church, London, S.P.C.K., 1919.
- Peers, E. Allison, Mother of Carmel, A Portrait of St. Teresa of Jesus, London, S.C.M. Press, 1946.
- "Poetical Works of Thomas Traherne, B.D., The," ed., B. Dobell, Reviewed The Athenaeum, London, 29 August, 1903, p.276.
- "Plotinus," Encyclopaedia Britannica, 11th ed., 1910, XXI, 849-850.
- Price, C., "Thomas Traherne," letter, Times Literary Supplement, London, 27 October, 1927, p.767.
- Quiller-Couch, Sir Arthur, Studies in Literature, Cambridge, University Press, 1920.
- Radhakrishnan, The Hindu View of Life, London, Geo. Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1927.
- Rubio, David, O.S.A., The Mystic Soul of Spain, New York, Cosmopolitan Science & Art Service Co. Ltd., 1946.
- St. John of the Cross, Ascent of Mount Carmel, translated by David Lewis, London, Thomas Baker, 1906.
- \_\_\_\_\_, Dark Night of the Soul, London, Thos. Baker, 4h ed., Revised, 1916.
- \_\_\_\_\_, The Flame of Living Love, Translated by D. Lewis, London, 1912.

- St. John of the Cross, A Spiritual Canticle of the Soul, translated David Lewis, London, Thomas Baker, 1919.
- Santayana, George, Platonism and the Spiritual Life, London, Constable & Co., 1927.
- Scott, Rev. W.M., Aspects of Christian Mysticism, London, John Murray, 1907.
- Sherer, Gertrude Roberts, "More and Traherne," Modern Language Notes, (1919), 19-50.
- Sitwell, Edith, A Poet's Notebook, London, Macmillan and Co., 1943.
- Spurgeon, Caroline F.E., Mysticism in English Literature, Cambridge, University Press, 1913.
- \_\_\_\_\_, "William Law and the Mystics," in Ward, A.W., and Waller, A.R., ed., Cambridge History of English Literature, Cambridge University Press, 1912, IX, 305-328.
- Taylor, Henry Osborne, Thought and expression in the Sixteenth Century, Second Ed., Revised, New York, Macmillan Co., 1930, 2 vols.
- THEOLOGIA GERMANICA, trans. by S. Winkworth, London, 1907.
- Thomas à Kempis, Imitation of Christ, London, J.M. Dent & Sons, 1928.
- "Thomas Traherne," Contemporary Review, CXLII (September, 1932), 386-388.
- \_\_\_\_\_, Encyclopaedia Britannica, 11th ed., 1910, XI, 155.
- Thompson, A.H., "The Mystical Element in English Poetry," in Essays and Studies, VIII, 1922, 90-108.
- Thompson, E.N.S., "Mysticism in Seventeenth Century English Literature," Studies in Philology, XVIII, (1921), 170-231.
- \_\_\_\_\_, "The Philosophy of Thomas Traherne," Philological Quarterly, VIII, (April, 1929), 97-112.
- Towers, F., "Thomas Traherne," His outlook on Life," Nineteenth Century, LXXXVII, (June, 1920), 1024-1030.
- Traherne, Thomas, Centuries of Meditations, ed., B. Dobell, printed from the author's manuscript, London, Dobell, 1908.
- \_\_\_\_\_, The Poetical Works of, ed., B. Dobell, London, published by the Editor, 1906.

Traherne, Thomas, A Serious and Pathetical Contemplation of the Mercies of God, in Several most Devout and Sublime Thanksgivings for the same, ed., R. Daniells, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1941.

Underhill, Evelyn, ed., The Cloud of Unknowing, London, John M. Watkins, 1922.

\_\_\_\_\_, The Essentials of Mysticism, London, J.M. Dent, 1920.

\_\_\_\_\_, The Golden Sequence, London, Methuen, 1932.

\_\_\_\_\_, Man and the Supernatural, London, Methuen and Co., 1927.

\_\_\_\_\_, Mysticism, London, Methuen, 1945.

Upham, A.H., The French Influence in English Literature, New York, Columbia University Press, 1911.

Vaughan, Henry, Works, ed., L.C. Martin, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1914, 2 vols.

Vaughan, J., "Henry Vaughan, Silurest," The Nineteenth Century, LXVII, (March, 1910), 492-504.

Wade, Gladys I., "Mrs. Susanna Hopton," The English Review, LXII, (January, 1936), 41-47.

\_\_\_\_\_, "The Manuscripts of the Poems of Thomas Traherne," Modern Language Review, 1931, pp.401-407.

\_\_\_\_\_, "The Poetical Works of Thomas Traherne," Reviewed Times Literary Supplement, London, 7 July, 1932, p.495.

\_\_\_\_\_, "Thomas Traherne as 'Divine Philosopher,'" The Hebbert Journal, XXXII (July, 1934), 400-408.

Waite, A.E., ed., "Introduction," The Works of Thomas Vaughan, London, Theosophical Publishing House, 1919.

Walley, Harold R., "The Strange Case of Olor Iscanus," Review of English Studies, XVIII, (January, 1942), 27-37.

Walters, Richard H., "Henry Vaughan and the Alchemists," Review of English Studies, XXIII, (April, 1947), 107-122.

Walton, Izaac, Lives, London, Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1940.

\_\_\_\_\_, The Compleat Angler and The Lives of Donne, Walton, Hooker, Herbert and Sanderson, London, Macmillan, 1906.

- Wardle, Ralph M., "Thomas Vaughan's Influence upon the Poetry of Henry Vaughan," PMLA, LI (December, 1936), 936-952.
- Watkins, A., "Thomas Traherne," letter, Times Literary Supplement, London, 20 October, 1927, p.742.
- White, Helen Constance, The Metaphysical Poets, New York, Macmillan Company, 1936.
- Whitehead, A.N., Religion in the Making, Cambridge, 1926.
- Wiley, Margaret L., "John Donne and the Poetry of Scepticism," The Hebbert Journal, XLVIII, (January, 1950), 163-172.
- Willcox, Louise Collier, "A Joyous Mystic," The North American Review, CXCI, (June, 1911), pp.893-904.
- Willett, Gladys, Traherne, Cambridge, H. Heffer and Sons, 1919.
- Willey, Basil, The Seventeenth Century Background, London, Chatto and Windus, 1942.
- Williamson, George, The Donne Tradition, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1930.
- Wood, Anthony a, Athenae Oxonienses, London, Thos. Bennett, 1692, Vol. II.