

## 6. SAILING IN COMPANY

People played a vital role in Newman's spiritual life. He loved them, appreciated them and needed them. He needed human ties and the circle of friends. When the bond with the University and the Church was torn asunder, he retired to Littlemore in company with some of his friends. One of the major reasons for the heartaches he experienced at the collapse of the Oxford Movement was that great loss of his closest friends and companions in the Anglican Church. Hence his valedictory sermon to Oxford, to the Church of England and to his Anglican friends, is soaked in pathetic passion and in the pathetic tenderness of his 'fever-troubled' <sup>1</sup> heart. His longing to hold on to his old and valued friends, in spite of the theological differences, is clearly expressed even in the title of the sermon The Parting of Friends. The pensiveness of tone which pervades this sermon reveals the pain which the poet experiences at the loss of such human ties. In his solemn lament there resides an almost painful emotional tension. Such is the closing of the sermon:

And, O my brethren, O kind and affectionate hearts,  
O loving friends, should you know anyone whose lot it  
has been, by writing or by word of mouth, in some  
degree to help you thus to act; if he has ever told  
you what he knew about yourself, or what you did not  
know; has read to you your wants or feelings, and  
comforted you by the very reading; has made you feel  
that there was a higher life than this daily one,  
and a brighter world than that you see; or encouraged  
you, or sobered you, or opened a way to the  
inquiring, or soothed the perplexed; if what he has

said or done has ever made you take interest in him, and feel well inclined towards him; remember such a one in time to come, though you hear him not, and pray for him, that in all things, he may know God's will and at all times he may be ready to fulfil it.<sup>2,1</sup>

The style and sound of these words are slow, weary, faltering, sighing, rising only to fall again in weakness, doubt and blank despair. These melancholy phrases lay bare the inmost fibres of his loving heart. The mysterious stirrings of his heart because he had to part with his friends, his family, the Anglican Church and his beloved University; the keen emotion he felt and the strange yearnings he experienced as expressed in this mournful passage, he was never to overcome.

In fact the poem "My Birthday"<sup>3</sup> written in 1819 mirrors the importance of human ties in the poet's life: "No friend in view, and sadness o'er my mind / Throws her dark veil "(51-52).

There were many changes in his life. He changed from a young intellectual liberal to a serious Evangelical. Later he changed over from his Evangelical peculiarities. Newman's leaving the Anglican Communion was a long and painful 'death-bed'<sup>4</sup> experience. In this process the intellectual and the emotional factors mixed together, acted on each other. He went through immense psychological stress before the painful birth process in the Roman Catholic Church occurred. Thus this tender-hearted yet tough pilgrim, a lover of solitude, who still lived on the strengths of many and great friendships has described his leaving Littlemore as 'going on the open sea.'<sup>5</sup> At this time on his pilgrimage, Newman parted with all that his heart loved and turned his face towards a foreign land.

In the third stanza of the poem "Reverses"<sup>6</sup> the poet portrays friendship as the most precious and as the most fragile of earthly possessions in comparison to the might of nature and the splendour of civilizations. The lines are

tinged with the pain of parting from Hurrell Froude, one of his closest friends, whom he would lose very soon by the unrelenting hand of death:

And when thine eye surveys,  
 With fond adoring gaze,  
 And yearning heart, my friend—  
 Love to its grave doth tend. (13-16)

The lines mirror the tenderness and the evanescence of this fragile gift and hence the consequent melancholy inherent here. The poet considers true friendship a spiritual thing which is nourished by tender love and strong loyalty. To the poet, when a true friendship dies, something spiritual in man dies along with it which has a right to immortality. Hence in his opinion the separation of friends by death is far more desirable than other worse partings: "He lives to us who dies, he is but lost who lives."<sup>7</sup> A friend who dies, however, lives in human memories while a friendship lost or betrayed cannot be restored to its first tenderness and loyalty.

The poem "David and Jonathan"<sup>8</sup> depicts the theme of friendship. The well-known friendship in history between David and Jonathan was cut short by death. Both David and Newman are sharers in similar pangs of pain by the untimely death of their cherished friends. The last twelve lines of the poem "Separation of Friends"<sup>9</sup> are especially tinged with the by-gone beauty of friendship as they are written after the death of Hurrell Froude. The lines tremble with a certain wistfulness and pain. His 1829 essay Poetry with Reference to Aristotle's Poetics shows his attitude to friends: "Even our friends around are invested with unearthly brightness—no longer imperfect men, but beings taken into Divine favour, stamped with his seal, and in training for future happiness."<sup>10</sup> Hence it was perhaps that he felt the pain of parting from friends so keenly.

The poem "Thanksgiving"<sup>11</sup> which is a votive offering to the Lord gathers up in gratitude his prayer:

I praise Thee, . . . [for]  
 Blessings of friends, which to my door  
 Unask'd, unhop'd, have come;  
 And choicer still a countless store  
 Of eager smiles at home. (5, 13-16)

This poem reveals both his need for friendship and his need for home.

Newman disclosed his personality in his words. Such was his use of the word 'home.' The pilgrim poet thanks God in this poem "Thanksgiving" for "a countless store / Of eager smiles at home" (15-16). His home-loving feature is another trait of his need for human bonds. The sonnet entitled "Home"<sup>12</sup> was written after the poet had experienced the affectionate ties which enveloped the family of Frederick Rogers at Blackheath. Even after a period of fifty-seven years, Newman wrote to Rogers: "I ever loved and felt attached to your home and family . . . ." <sup>13</sup> To Newman the pilgrim who soon departed for his Mediterranean tour, the experience was:

Where'er I roam in this fair English land,  
 The vision of a Temple meets my eyes:  
 . . . . .  
 The same, and not the same, go where I will,  
 The vision beams! ten thousand shrines all in one.  
 . . . . .  
 . . . ? And I through distant climes may run  
 My weary round, yet miss thy likeness still.

(1-2, 10-11, 13-14)

Newman who was proud of being an English man, breathing an English air, expresses his affection both for his home and for England in the poem "Memory."<sup>14</sup> Thus he writes:

My home is now a thousand miles away;

Yet in my thoughts its every image fair  
 Rises as keen, as I still linger'd there,  
 And, turning me, could all I loved survey. (1-4)

The pilgrim expresses nostalgia for his home and his home-land, England. Incidentally, Robert Browning's poem "Home Thoughts from the Sea" written while the poet was at Sicily expresses similar feelings.

His affectionate memories of his own home provided a warm and cherishable background for his home in a religious context. His sermon "The Church a Home for the Lonely,"<sup>15</sup> illustrates home as 'inner world' opposed to the 'outer world.' Man wants a shelter or a sanctuary from the outer world. He wants a home in which to place his thoughts and affections, a secret dwelling which may soothe him amidst the troubles of this world. To Newman the pilgrim, the Church was a 'heavenly home in the midst of this turbulent world,'<sup>16</sup> where God dwells with his angels and saints and where we can take shelter and draw strength. Hence the Fathers of the Church, saints and angels were all part of the eternal home for Newman. Outside Church history these men, and angels have no importance but they were heroes to this pilgrim. For Newman great men were only those who did great things for God. Hence he wrote poems on Biblical prophets and apostles, saints and Fathers of the Church.

This pilgrim poet loved solitude only to commune with heavenly powers "and to fix the soul on heaven,"<sup>17</sup> to hear 'angelic choirs,' and to experience 'the bliss' that attends a pilgrim life on its way to its spiritual fulfilment. Although Newman was not a solitary man, he experienced angels to be his most important, constant, life-long companions. In the poem "Guardian Angel,"<sup>18</sup> he addresses it:

My oldest friend, mine from the hour  
 When first I drew my breath;  
 My faithful friend, that shall be mine,

Unfailing, till my death. (1-4)

He considered St. Michael 'champion high' and 'guard secure,' a 'ready guide' <sup>19</sup> of the Church in her war and also of each individual soul who struggles with evil power. He believed the Church's teaching about Michael, the Archangel and writes in the same poem "St. Michael:"

And thou, at last,  
When Time itself must die,  
Shalt sound that dread and piercing blast,  
To wake the dead, and rend the vaulted sky,  
And summon all to meet the Omniscient Judge on high.

(16-20)

In the "Relics of Saints," <sup>20</sup> the poet writes:

"The Fathers are in dust, yet live to God."--  
So says the Truth; . . . . .  
Sophist may urge his cunning tests, and deem  
That they are earth; --but they are heavenly  
shrines. (1-2, 7-8)

The poet believes that he would be united once again with his dear departed in eternity as he writes of his sister in the poem "A Picture:" <sup>21</sup>

When in due lines her saviour dear  
His scatter'd saints shall range,  
And knit in love souls parted here,  
Where cloud is none, nor change. (61-64)

So the poet waits for his loved ones and his 'first friends on earth' <sup>22</sup> for a time patiently: "a little doubt below, / All will soon be plain."<sup>23</sup> The poet waits to join them as he writes in the poem "To Edward Caswall:"<sup>24</sup>

The happy infants of the second birth :--  
. . . . .  
Thoughts from above, and visions that are sure,  
And providences past, and memories dear,

. . . . .  
 And recognize each other's faces there.

(24, 26-27, 29)

The pilgrim poet does not want a solitary life even in heaven and looks forward to : "the morn those angel faces smile / Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile."<sup>25</sup>

Though the poet valued ancient Greece and the great classical herpes, he passes on from the heroes of the classical antiquity to the saints of Christianity and from the sages of Greece and Rome to the Fathers of the Church as is seen in the Poem "The Greek Fathers: "<sup>26</sup> He models his life on their saintly lives:

Let heathen sing thy heathen praise,  
 Fall'n Greece! the thought of holier days,  
 In my sad heart abides;  
 For sons of thine in Truth's first hour  
 Were tongues and weapons of His power,  
 Born of the Spirit's fiery shower,  
 Our fathers and our guides.  
 All thine is Clement's varied page;  
 And Dionysius, ruler sage,  
 In days of doubt and pain;  
 And Origen with eagle eye;  
 And saintly Basil's purpose high  
 To smite imperial heresy,  
 And cleanse the Altar's stain.  
 From thee the glorious preacher came,  
 With soul of zeal and lips of flame,  
 A court's stern martyr-guest;  
 And thine, O inexhaustive race!  
 Was Nazianzen's heaven-taught grace;  
 And royal-hearted Athanase,  
 With Paul's own mantle blest. (1-21)

Newman does not rest content with the happiness of the creature state but he wants its completion and fullness. For him our lasting and real home is heaven and God Himself. He considered every good below only as footprints or at most the image of what is in fullness and perfection in eternity. Even musical sounds are said to have escaped from some higher sphere: "they are echoes from our Home; they are the voice of Angels, or the magnificat of Saints."<sup>27</sup> Yet the poet reminds in the poem "The Elements"<sup>28</sup> it is God: "Who holds for us the keys of either home, / Earth and the World to come" (34-35). Though God is the only shelter of man, the poet always makes it clear that our duties lie in this world.<sup>29</sup>

Newman's vocation to the Oratory as a Catholic priest is another example of his need for people. The poem "The Greek Fathers" with the names of his historical friends in the faith is very like his last tribute to his friends in the Oratory in the Apologia. This moving defence of his religious life he concludes with a prayerful lyric revealing his tender gratitude for their friendship. His gentle lyrical tribute to the friendship of Ambrose St. John which shadows his loneliness is tender and affectionate. In this closing prayer, he envisions a time when they would all be brought together at the end of their pilgrimage in the Celestial City:

I have closed this history of myself with St. Philip's name upon St. Philip's feast-day; and having done so, to whom can I more suitably offer it, as a memorial of affection and gratitude, than to St. Philip's sons, my dearest brothers of this House, the Priests of the Birmingham Oratory, AMBROSE ST. JOHN, HENRY AUSTIN MILLS, HENRY BITTLESTON, EDWARD CASWALL, WILLIAM PAINE NEVILLE, and HENRY INGATIUS DUDLEY RYDER? who have been so faithful to me; who have been so sensitive of my needs; who have been so indulgent



to my failings; who have carried me through so many trials; who have grudged no sacrifice, if I asked for it; who have been so cheerful under discouragements of my causing; who have done so many good works, and let me have the credit of them;-- with whom I have lived so long, with whom I hope to die.

And to you especially, dear AMBROSE ST. JOHN; whom God gave me, when He took every one else away; who are the link between my old life and my new; who have now for twenty-one years been so devoted to me, so patient, so zealous, so tender; who have let me lean so hard upon you; who have watched me so narrowly; who have never thought of yourself, if I was in question.

And in you I gather up and bear in memory those familiar affectionate companions and counsellors, who in Oxford were given to me, one after another, to be my daily solace and relief; and all those others, of great name and high example, who were my thorough friends, and showed me true attachment in times long past; and also those many younger men, whether I knew them or not, who have never been disloyal to me by word or deed; and of all these, thus various in their relations to me, those more especially who have since joined the Catholic Church.

And I earnestly pray for this whole company, with a hope against hope, that all of us, who once were so united, and so happy in our union, may even now be brought at length, by the Power of the Divine Will, into One Fold and under One Shepherd.<sup>30</sup>

## Notes

- 1 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 95-96.
- 2 John Henry Newman, "The Parting of Friends," Sermons on Subjects of the Day (London: Longmans, 1898) 409.
- 3 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 6-7.
- 4 Maisie Ward, ed. Apologia pro Vita Sua 99.
- 5 Maisie Ward, ed. Apologia pro Vita Sua 99.
- 6 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 121-122.
- 7 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 110-111.
- 8 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 110-111.
- 9 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 179-180.
- 10 John Henry Newman, Essays Critical and Historical  
Vol. 1. 23.
- 11 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 45-46.
- 12 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 56-57.
- 13 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 279.
- 14 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 81-82.
- 15 John Henry Newman, Parochial and Plain Sermons.  
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- 16 John Henry Newman, Parochial and Plain Sermons.  
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- 17 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 254.
- 18 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 198-199.
- 19 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 209-210.
- 20 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 135.
- 21 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 34-37.
- 22 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 179-180.
- 23 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 179-180.
- 24 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 207-208.
- 25 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 152.
- 26 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 99-100.
- 27 John Henry Newman, "The Theory of Developments in Religious Doctrine," Oxford University Sermons (London:

Rivingtons, 1890) 346-347.

28 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 175-176.

29 John Henry Newman, Parochial and Plain Sermons. Vol. 4.

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30 Maisie Ward, ed. Apologia pro Vita Sua 190.