

8. JOYS OF THE PILGRIM

Newman's spiritual maturity coincided with his maturity in years and his conversion to the Roman Catholic Church. An ardent love which embraces God and all creation and a gentleness which softens the energetic zeal of his earlier stage are aspects of his maturity. His poetry, which is a history of the development of his spirituality on his pilgrim journey, radiates new warmth and joy. This changed tone is reflected both in his sermons and in his poetry. His faith is mellowed and softened by this time. The pilgrim has come to realize more fully the evanescent and fragile nature of spiritual treasures and he has become more tranquil. The following passage is evidence of this changed mood:

The physical nature lies before us, patent to the sight, ready to the touch, appealing to the senses in so unequivocal a way that the science which is founded upon it is as real to us as the fact of our personal existence. But the phenomena, which are the basis of morals and religion, have nothing of this luminous evidence. Instead of being obtruded upon our notice, so that we cannot possibly overlook them, they are the dictates either of Conscience or of Faith. They are faint shadows and tracings, certain indeed, but delicate, fragile, and almost evanescent, which the mind recognizes at one time, not at another,—discerns when it is calm, loses when it is in agitation. The reflection of sky and mountains in the lake is a proof that sky and mountains are around it, but the twilight, or the mist, or the sudden storm hurries away the beautiful image, which leaves behind it no memorial of what it was. ¹

A pilgrim of rare spiritual insight and seer into the nature of the world and its human hearts and minds that the poet was, he reached a realm of divine serenity at this stage in his journey.

As a result the shrill, controversial and militant tone of the Lyra Apostolica was replaced by a cooling calm. The poem "Candlemas"² written in 1849 reflects this inner calm:

The Angel-lights of Christmas morn,
Which shot across the sky,
Away they pass at Candlemas,
They sparkle and they die. (1-4)

Candlemas is the feast of the presentation of the Lord in the temple of Jerusalem to fulfill the law of Moses.³ It marks the close of the Christmas festival of light. Candles are blessed in the churches and lighted as a symbol of welcoming Christ the light, to enlighten the Gentiles and the glory of his people. The next stanza refers to the promise made by the Holy Spirit to Simeon the righteous and devout old man that he would not die before he had seen Christ.⁴

Comfort of earth is brief at best,
Although it be divine;
Like funeral lights for Christmas gone
Old Simeon's tapers shine. (5-8)

The next reference is to the season of Lent which is a time of penance and abstinence in preparation to the great feast of Easter:

And then for eight long weeks and more,
We wait in twilight grey,
Till the high candle sheds a beam
On Holy Saturday.
We wait along the penance-tide
Of solemn fast and prayer;
While song is hush'd, and lights grow dim

In the sin-laden air. (9-16)

Then follows the reference to Simeon's prophecy of a sword piercing Mary's soul.⁵ It is a reference to the passion and crucifixion of Christ which would be the sword in his mother's soul:

And while the sword in Mary's soul
Is driven home, we hide
In our own hearts, and count the wounds
Of passion and of pride. (17-20)

Time passes away, so too the liturgical year passes away. Thus Christmas, Candlemas and Easter pass on. The last stanza also gives evidence to the devotion the pilgrim poet felt for the Blessed Virgin Mary. Her motherly protection he experienced in the difficult days of his adaptation to the Catholic Church on his pilgrimage towards the Celestial City:

And still, though candlemas be spent
And alleluias o'er,
Mary is music in our need,
And Jesus light in store. (21-24)

The last line once again portrays another of his favourite images. Jesus is the light that lightens up his pilgrim path and leads him on, towards his goal. The poem is rich in symbol, imagery, in gentle and delicate feelings.

A calm serenity, replacing his earlier strident judgements is also reflected in other poems. In "Valentine to a Little Girl,"⁶ the poet employs a gentle lyric tone as he explains the name comes from 'lineage high' (14):

And it tells of gentle blood,
Noble blood,--and nobler still
For its owner freely pour'd
Every drop there was to spill
In the quarrel of his Lord. (16-20)

Hence this pilgrim poet would have a certain affinity with this

martyr for he too lived a kind of martyrdom on his pilgrimage, giving up all he loved to embrace a way of life in which he was constantly misunderstood and frustrated. The poet continues:

Valentine! I know the name,
 Many martyrs bear the same;
 And they stand in glittering ring
 Round their warrior God and King,--
 Who before and for them bled,--
 With their robes of ruby red,
 And their swords of cherub flame. (21-27)

These men who died for Christ are Newman's standard-bearers. He places the name of Valentine among the army of other chivalrous martyrs such as St. Denys, St. George who are: "Knights without reproach or fear" (29) and who are of noble descent. They are now: "beneath the eternal sky, / And the beaticfic Sun, / In Jerusalem above" (35-37). Hence the pilgrim poet ends singing on his way: "Valentine is every one; / Choose from out that company / Whom to serve, and whom to love" (38-40).

An aroma of peace and contentment imbues the poems written at this time, for the pilgrim had reached a path of certitude on his journey. The poems on Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Philip Neri mirror sentiments of devotion. They have an indescribable brightness and a radiant cheerfulness. These hymns are set to music of the poet's own composing which has been compared to the music of Beethoven and Mozart.⁷

Unlike in any of the earlier poems, in later poems such as "The Pilgrim Queen" and "The Queen of Seasons," Newman assumes the role of a gentle medieval knight. The pilgrim is full of chivalry for his lady love, a Queen who is far above him in status. Like a courtly lover from the Middle Ages, he seeks no selfish or earthly gains, neither has he in mind any ambition to win the lady's hand in marital relationship. He

bears her a spiritual yet tender love and devotion. However simple language and diction, the poems have a deeply devotional quality.

"The Pilgrim Queen"⁸ begins with a description of the lady. The very word 'lady' suggests that she is no ordinary woman. She emanates radiance yet her humility is evident; she is described as sitting on the ground. Distinct from the mortal human race the 'Rays of the morning' (3) sun circles her round. The morning sun, with its bright beams has built for her a royal throne, fit for a unique Queen, without equal or rival. She is addressed in the usual medieval style: "Save thee, and hail to thee, / Gracious and fair" (5-6). By using the imagery of both morning and evening together: "Rays of the morning / circled her round" (3-4), "In the chill twilight" (7), the poet emphasizes the fact that his lady is above nature and the natural order of things. She is an immortal being. Neither 'chill' nor 'twilight' -- the effects of times and seasons -- can touch her in any way. In fact, she lives far above the decaying order of creation.

Having introduced this supernatural lady, the poet then describes her desolate state. He uses apt images to throw light on her isolated circumstances. The lady reveals her royal status which is immediately followed by the imagery of the 'rifled' (13) 'garden and store' (14). She being a Queen has an 'heir' but the 'foes' (15) have stolen him. The allusion here is to the Reformation, when the Protestants declared that the Bible and Christ are enough for salvation and banished Mary, the Queen from her place of honour. In reality, Mary, the mother of Christ, ought to be the Queen of England as King Richard II had dedicated the land to Mary during the Peasants' Revolt. She had been acknowledged its Queen until the Reformation diminished her role.

The poet then describes Protestant beliefs and practices.

References to the Old Testament of the Bible are made to trace the royal lineage of Christ (19-20). In spite of their avowed loyalty to Christ the King, the Protestants were cold-hearted in their attitudes towards Him, and built palaces 'of ice' (21). Here the reference is to the Protestant churches which were bare and cold with no colours, no flowers and no candles, only the Ten Commandments, sound grim and severe: "You shall not kill! , You shall not . . . , You shall not . . . , "9 were written on their walls, depicting the merciless and the judgemental aspect of God rather than His caring and redeeming love. As a result "when summer came, / it all melted away " (23-24).

In the eighteenth century, during the age of Enlightenment, 'summer' succeeded the Protestant winter. Men began to think that good and evil are relative and that man is the measure of his own good. They regarded the Bible like any other book and believed no more in its inspired character. Thus their previously professed faith in God's word in the Bible 'melted away.'

The next reference in the fourth stanza is to the nineteenth century at the beginning of which there took place the French Revolution followed by anarchy and the defeat of religion. Later came the era of colonialism and along with that came a sort of restoration of religion. But the first and foremost interest of men in the days of colonial expansion was commercial gain and benefit. They used religion to gain access to new territory. They conquered lands and carried on trade to amass wealth for themselves. In the name of religion they traded God for gold. They did 'barter' God who is beyond all price: "For the spice of the desert, / and gold of the stream" (27-28). The trading of God for gold is a reminder of the betrayal of Judas who sold Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. ¹⁰ Mary the Queen, was neglected by the Protestants in their preaching of Christ in foreign lands.

The following stanza is almost a love passage:

I look'd on that Lady,
 and out from her eyes
 Came the deep glowing blue
 of Italy's skies;
 And she raised up her head
 and she smiled, as a Queen
 On the day of her crowning,
 so bland and serene. (33-40)

Here Newman is the typical medieval knight who loves his lady with a pure and passionate love. As his lady is a Queen of both the visible and the Invisible World, his knightly love for her is a spiritual love.

The last reference in the poem is to 'the second spring' when Catholicism would make its revival in England. 'The giants' 'falling' (43) is a prophecy about the decline of the mighty Protestant Establishment. At the time of the Catholic revival, the veneration of the saints would be renewed and Mary would 'rescue' her home England, and re-establish her Queenship over it. The pilgrim's devotion to the Blessed Virgin and to the saints, particularly to Peter and Philip Neri, founder of the Oratory is reflected here in the words of Mary:

I am coming to rescue
 my home and my reign,
 And Peter and Philip
 are close in my train. (45-48)

Mary the Queen would be followed by Peter, Philip and the saints when she comes to re-establish her reign in her kingdom. Here there are echoes of Newman's sermon, The Second Spring delivered to the Bishop's of England in 1852. The poem is a sweet and gentle hymn in praise of Mary. The setting of line metre and rhythm are so arranged that it may be set to music.

"The Queen of Seasons"¹¹ is another outpouring of the tender love and devotion the pilgrim had for Mary the Queen of time and season. Once again, the poet in the role of the medieval knight sings the praises of his heavenly Queen. The devotion to Mary, the mother of Christ is a special feature in Catholic celibacy. Like the previous one this poem comes under love-poetry. The poem is compact with meaning. It begins with a reference to the creation and to the Incarnation of Christ, followed by personifications of the universe. The reason for the 'innocent' (12) smile of the universe and its 'rich bloom' (13) at its creation and for the delight that God took in His creation was because man had not yet committed sin. The poet speaks of man's inability to fathom the inexhaustible resources of God to create a still better and a still more beautiful world. The poet speaks of a creation of God that would always stand out special and singular, making the reader curious about such an incomparable creation.

It is only in the fifth stanza that he mentions his 'glorious Queen' (40), to whom the seasons with their riches and beauties are no comparisons. The poet's Queen has: "The freshness of May, / and the sweetness of June " (33-34), harmoniously blended together with the glowing warmth of July and the magnanimity of August, the month that brings in the harvest endowing men with its plenteous gifts: "And the fire of July / in its passionate noon, / Munificent August" (35-37). After the harvest September is serene, warm and glowing with no troublesome winds, yet it cannot be compared to the beauty of the Queen he portrays. While she contains in herself the bounties and beauties of these months, she is untouched by any of the troublesome aspects of these seasons.

The poem concludes by giving the reason why the Church dedicates the month of May to Mary:

O Mary, all months,

and all days are thine own,
 In thee lasts their joyousness,
 when they are gone;
 And we give to thee May,
 not because it is best,
 But because it comes first,
 and is pledge of the rest. (41-48)

The word 'pledge' points to a promise of good times during the seasons and also to a time of regeneration of the Catholic faith in the poet's native land.

These poems are good examples of what Newman believed poetry should be:

. . . it is the fire within the author's breast which
 overflows in the torrent of his burning,
 irresistible eloquence; it is the poetry of his
 inner soul, . . . and his mental attitude and
 bearing, the beauty of his moral countenance, the
 force and keenness of his logic, are imaged in the
 tenderness, or energy or richness of his language.
 . . . They [the poems] are born, not framed; they
 are a strain rather than a composition; and their
 perfection is the monument, not so much of his skill
 as of his power. 12

In poems such as these, Newman gives unrestrained expression to his romantic, religious sensibilities. It shows us how far he had travelled between when he wrote his 1829 Essay on Poetry and when he wrote these poems. These poems are the lyrical expressions of a more intense and emotional personality than that expressed in his early pre-conversion writings. He seems to find more joy now in his pilgrimage.

In almost all of the writings of the convert poets we find that their adherence to Catholic beliefs does bring about a serenity which they lacked in their earlier writings.

Catholicism seems to impart a sort of liberation to them, freeing them to express their sentiments of love and devotion. Such were the cases with Lionel Johnson, Coventry Patmore and others who glow with warm blooded enthusiasm in their poems of the Catholic days, in comparison with the severity of the Anglican days.

As he progressed on his pilgrim journey, Newman seemed to have attained a holy indifference which is considered a higher spiritual state. In his Anglican days Newman seemed to be somewhat negative and pessimistic which contrast with the calm sober joy which radiates in his Catholic poems. The poem "A Martyr Convert"¹³ makes it clear that he seemed to be more and more aware of the fact that:

This mystery of life;
Where good and ill, together blent,
Wage an undying strife.
For rivers twain are gushing still,
And pour a mingled flood;
Good in the very depths of ill,
Ill in the heart of good. (6-12)

The pilgrim poet also seemed to have accepted this paradox of religion. In the freshness of his love for God he preached both by word and deed. "The mysteries of the world above" (31). He turned his gaze more steadily to the end of the quest when this earthly sojourn would finish and to the time when he would receive his eternal reward: an inseparable union with Christ, the Lord of his heart.

The pilgrim rejoices not only before the shrine of Mary, mother of Christ but also before the shrine of Philip Neri, founder of the Oratory. He sings in the hymn "St. Philip Neri in His Mission: "¹⁴ "Still are we Philip's children dear, / And Peter's soldiers true" (3-4) and writes how the saint lured "the noble and the young / From Babel's pomp and pride" (23-

24). Walking in the footsteps of the saint, the pilgrim too unveils the bright lustre of his God to the pilgrims around him on the pilgrimage. The happier side of the pilgrim reveals that this prayer in the hymn "St. Philip in His God,"¹⁵ is answered at this stage:

Jesu, to Philip's sons reveal
That gentlest wisdom from above,
To spread compassion o'er their zeal,
And mingle patience with their love. (29-32)

Again in "St. Philip in His School,"¹⁶ Newman salutes his patron:

This is the Saint, who, when the world allures us,
Cries her false wares, and opes her magic coffers,
Points to a better city, and secures us
With richer offers. (5-8)

Such was the mission the pilgrim poet embraced for the sake of his God. He laboured to make the men of his time aware of the vanities that surround man in this beguiling world:

Thus he conducts by holy paths and pleasant,
Innocent souls, and sinful souls forgiven,
Towards the bright palace where our God is present,
Throned in high heaven. (17-20)

As Newman grew older, and closer to the end of his pilgrimage, he once again gives evidence of his constant loyalty to his quest, although he travels the narrow and less trodden paths of life. He writes in the hymn "St. Philip in his Disciples:"¹⁷

I ask not for fortune, for silken attire,
For servants to throng me, and crowds to admire;
I ask not for power, or for name or success,
These do not content me, these never can bless.
Let the world flaunt her glories ! each glittering prize
Though tempting to others, is nought in my eyes. (1-6)

This tireless and unfailing pilgrim laboured to guide his

fellow pilgrims safely through this world of divided aims and despairing creeds on to the threshold of the Eternal City.

The poet also approaches the Lord in humble confession as he feels that he has not always achieved that perfection for which he has ever striven:

I'm ashamed of myself, of my tears and my tongue,
 So easily fretted, so often unstrung;
 Mad at trifles, to which a chance moment gives birth,
 Complaining of heaven, and complaining of earth.

(25-28)

Yet he revives his confidence at the shrine that Philip, his patron would extend his saintly protection over him. As a result he would succeed in following St. Philip's spiritual path:

So now, with his help, no cross will I fear,
 But will linger resign'd through my pilgrimage here.
 A child of St. Philip, my master and guide,
 I will live as he lived, and will die as he died.

(29-32)

He does not give up his quest but renews his resolve despite the impediments that lie along his way.

Newman, the pilgrim poet as he approaches his spiritual home, reminds his companions of the unprofitableness of earthly advancements and achievements when weighed against a heavenly recompense. The sermon "Worship, A Preparation For Christ's coming," throbs with hidden and deep meaning. This sermon foreshadows in a way the rejections the pilgrim would experience on his journey. Yet it also points to that anchor on which his earthly life rested in holy resignation. The fleeting years and the recurring liturgical seasons alike speak of a new heaven and a new earth for the elect of the Eternal Kingdom. For the pilgrim it is only faith in Christ which unlocks the gates of the Celestial City:

Year after year, as it passes, brings us the same warnings again and again, and none perhaps more impressive than those with which it comes to us at this season. The very frost and cold, rain and gloom, which befall us forebode the last dreary days of the world, and in religious hearts raise the thought of them. The year is worn out; Spring, Summer, Autumn, each in turn, have brought their gifts and done their utmost; but they are over, and the end is come. All is past and gone, all has failed, all has sated; we are tired of the past; we would not have the seasons longer; and the austere weather which succeeds, though ungrateful to the body, is in tone with our feelings, and acceptable. Such is the frame of mind which befits the end of the year; and such the frame of mind which comes alike on good and bad at the end of life. The days have come in which they have no pleasure; yet they would hardly be young again, could they be so by wishing it. Life is well enough in its way; but it does not satisfy. Thus the soul is cast forward upon the future, and in proportion as its conscience is clear and its perception keen and true, does it rejoice solemnly that "the night is far spent, the day is at hand," that there are "new heavens and a new earth" to come, though the former are failing; nay, rather that, because they are failing, it will "soon see the King in His beauty," and "behold the land which is very far off." These are feelings for holy men in winter and in age, waiting, in some dejection perhaps, but with comfort on the whole, and calmly though earnestly, for the Advent of Christ. . . . And such, too, are the feelings with which we now come

before Him in prayer day by day. The season is chill and dark, and the breath of the morning is damp, and worshippers are few, but all this befits those who are by profession penitents and mourners, watchers and pilgrims. More dear to them that loneliness, more cheerful that severity, and more bright that gloom, than all those aids and appliances of luxury by which men nowadays attempt to make prayer less disagreeable to them. True faith does not covet comforts. ¹⁸

"True faith does not covet comforts." Such are the examples set before the pilgrim by his heroes, the saints and the great men of God on their earthly pilgrimage.

This pilgrim who sought only the Fairest and dedicated his heart without reserve to the Ideal, sang of the Perfect City. His poems, those canticles of faith, righteous living, holiness and love for the Ultimate soar beyond earth, beyond the verge of time and space. His call was a homesickness for heaven that harmonized his thoughts so perfectly with angels, saints, and joys known only to the lovers of the Light. It set him apart as singer of the Ultimate and the Perfect City. That Spiritual City in which the prophets and philosophers, the scholar saints, martyrs, the followers and crusaders of the Light live in praise of their Master, was constantly before our pilgrim. Hence he pressed forward to find in God, a final resting place as he tried to mould men's consciences. He taught those who erred that God pardons the dark sins of human hearts and told them that belief in God is the prerequisite for salvation. Like Plato before him, Newman, the pilgrim strained to pass from the shadows of this world to the immortal substance which is God Himself.

Notes

- 1 John Henry Cardinal Newman, The Idea of a University
(London: Longmans, 1929) 514.
- 2 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 183-184.
- 3 Bible, Luke 2: 22-40.
- 4 Bible, Luke 2: 25-35.
- 5 Bible, Luke 2: 34-35.
- 6 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 189-191.
- 7 Edward Bellasis, "Cardinal Newman as a Musician," The Month
173.327 (Sept.1891) : 1-23.
- 8 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 185-186.
- 9 Bible, Exodus 20: 13-15.
- 10 Bible, Matthew 26: 14-15.
- 11 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 188-189.
- 12 Martin J. Svaglic, ed. The Idea of a University 210.
- 13 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 202-203.
- 14 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 191-193.
- 15 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 195-196.
- 16 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 204-205.
- 17 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 205-206.
- 18 John Henry Newman, "Worship, A Preparation for Christ's Coming,"
Parochial and Plain sermons (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987)
951-958.