

10. CONCLUSION

The end of 1820s and the beginning of 1830s when Newman wrote most of his poems, were times when Keats, Shelley and Byron were dead and when there was a virtual silence on the part of Wordsworth and Coleridge. At this time poets such as Tennyson and Browning had not yet been recognized as great poets. Newman working along with the Tractarian poets such as John Keble, John Mason Neale and Stephen Hawker belonged to the group of devotional poets. Newman, the pilgrim did combat with interior struggles and with thoughts of his unworthiness to take up the pilgrim leadership. Hence his poems reflect the spiritual strain he went through. But there is nothing of the battering of God in his poetry, neither does it express any of the doubts of the metaphysical poets. Newman's poetry differs from that of Donne in which there is the fulness of mental strife and intense emotional reaction to the spirit of scepticism. Newman never questioned God nor sank into scepticism.

This pilgrim poet was the one who prepared the way and set in motion the spiritual renaissance of the England of his time and who summed up in himself the religious and literary splendour of it. He restored to religious life the vitality of its earlier days by making use of reforms which were more refined, intellectual, humane and benevolent. It was Newman the believer who helped the Catholic poets to be inspired by the dogmatic religion and to give vibrant expressions to it. The association of beauty with religious devotion which the Oxford Movement brought about helped in liberating art from the Benthamite philosophy of utility. It was mainly through its religious associations that sensuous beauty eventually gained a place in the scale of Victorian values more or less comparable to that which it had among the Romantics. The visible Church

with its mysticism and aura of transcendental sublimity stirred the soul to such responses as was found in the later devotional poets. The religious and the aesthetics were blended.

The Victorians in general accepted a Church speaking through liturgy and symbol. They considered poetry a mode of religious experience and believed in its power of guiding and attuning the mind to worship and prayer. Newman by his religious and devotional poetry helped the Catholic artist to understand the Church which recognized the primacy of the intellect as well as the claims of the heart. Penetrating the core of faith, Newman found answers to those agonizing questions raised by the crumbling of a society in transition on its pilgrimage towards God. He was clear about what the purpose of life was, the need to hold on to religious and moral values, the meaning of death, the question of life after death and so on. It was he who prepared the way for the other poets of the Catholic literary revival such as Hopkins, Hawker, De Vere, Patmore, Alice Meynell, Francis Thompson, Lionel Johnson and Dawson. Like him, they manifested a common concern with the deeper realities of life. Newman's poetry also prepared the way for poetry of high intensity. Christina Rossetti was deeply influenced by his beliefs and practices. Following the example of Newman, these poets gave to the nation religious poetry of unwavering faith in God. But their experience of faith found poetic expression based on personal aesthetics and religious reactions.

Our study of Newman, the pilgrim poet leads us to the conclusion that the divine spirit in Newman, his search for the Ultimate Truth, his spiritual endeavour to explain the significance of life and death, far transcended his urges to become merely a poetic poet.

Infact, Newman's poetry is an interior journey to the world of eternal values. To him poetry was a means of

communicating experiences of a spiritual and aesthetic nature from a higher level of consciousness. He believed that human spirit is capable of transcending the body. What modern poets lack is deeper aesthetic vision. More truth than poetry has always troubled the poets who believe in vision synthesized with poetic values. No doubt physical science has searched the cosmos and has not found the trace of soul-force anywhere. Though some poets manage to compromise, entertain or mystify, this is not what Newman meant to do. It is not less reality that he wanted to dive into but more of the Reality behind the reality.

He insisted that moral values are as real as any other and they must be regarded as actually integral in any sane scheme of human life. Poetic values must qualify, as he thought, for existence in a crude world. If it cannot be shown that there are real values in the world of struggling men, then they may be values of Archangels and not of men: some synthetic realism must be found out for us then--neither extreme idealism nor extreme neutralism serves our purpose. This is what Newman actually wanted to do, to synthesize idealism, or as a matter of fact spiritualism, with the unavoidable and the inevitable realities that surround men in the work-a-day and live world.

Further we find that art in Newman's poetic creations blends with ethics as in its origin and it is one with religion, which was again looked upon by Newman as an art form, intended as the medium of this same passionate desire for loss of self in the greater process of which we are all a part. The effect of the message thus delivered is always to set the universal above the particular, to emphasize the larger relations for matching the unity of the self in the universal whole.

Newman's poetry was indeed a creative as well as a divine dream which is the process of reconstructing the ordinary representation of the world in keeping with an expanded view of life which is actually a creative fusion of two views of the

world, each of which may seem to the other as a dream.

It is to be deplored that the world has passed through the path of the multitude and lost its real meaning. Thus a modern poet's task has been, from the Victorians to the present day to prettify, to ornament and distort with make-believe, and this is to be poetry and the creator is to be the poetic poet in the negative sense of the term. Departing from such a path Newman sought unfrequented yet fundamental arenas so that he does not become a mere poetic poet nor belong to a group of poetasters.

A real artist is one whose habit is to view the world from the vantage point of different states of human soul, more or less removed from the standardized state of ordinary living, and who has a special technique for representing the wider experience by fusion with the narrower, to the aim that his vision may be shared.

Infact, the revealing mood in Newman displays the saint of the man in him. But that saint was also a Quester--the quest was for the Ideal, the Eternal. Newman's Quest Eternal on his pilgrimage, as revealed in his poems occupies its place as an outstanding Sign Post of the complex age. Admittedly, a poem is not written with ideas only as modern critics say, but they are not written only with words either. Unless there is a happy coalescence of poetic passion with a wider vision, it comes to nothing. Also, it must grow from within and have the essential unity of evolutionary growth. In his wholehearted quest for the Eternal, Newman's poems display a unique depth.

We cannot, therefore, relegate Newman's poetry to oblivion by contemporary poetics or fashions in poetic criticism, but in terms of that higher adequacy which modern critics miss, the adequacy of poetic vision. From his pilgrim watch-tower Newman had thought and felt deeply about the human situation like the great Romantics, worked, unlike them. He

also saw and spoke as an acute thinker and searcher for Truth than as a mere poet. The monumental sublimity of his ideas created an intensity of vision that can only be compared with that of Plato and the spiritual writers.

Hence in order to have a better understanding of Newman who remains a pilgrim poet, we have tried to explore his vision of the world, of man, of life and of the purpose of life.

The governing principal of Newman's life was that he was placed on earth to save his soul and to be a guide to others to lead them to that Ultimate Union with the Divine. He saw Life as a Pilgrimage towards the Divine, or the Beatific Vision and Union with the Almighty.

While Newman's extensive prose works develop and expand his beliefs on the pilgrimage to God, it is in his relatively small output of poetry that he expresses the passion he felt about his spiritual journey. It is also through poetry that he tries to extend spiritual guidance to souls that are heavenward bound. Through his poetry he beckons the doubting and the faltering across the dark frontiers of this world into the light and warmth of the Blessed Vision of Peace.

Most of his poetry is out of fashion because contemporary poets reject the idea that good poetry must be didactic and carry a message or lesson. For Victorian poets like Newman and also for its readers poetry must combine beauty of expression with depth of insight and worthy content. For this pilgrim poet, the poetry of the Scripture and the Invisible Sea of Eternity are his and to these he gives expressions in some of his imperishable lines. Indeed some of his poems are little gems, rough diamonds even if not polished and great.

Newman's belief that it is the Church herself which makes her children poetical exemplifies the aesthetic position he holds as a pilgrim poet. His lifelong preoccupation with the reality of the Supernatural and the beauty of the life to come

which awaits the pilgrim humanity finds its superb expression in The Dream of Gerontius . In this his crowning poetic achievement the pilgrim devotee and artist are one and the poem completes a pattern of pilgrim poetic unity. The pilgrim who sets out on his journey with this prayer: "I RISE and raise my clasped hands to Thee !" and invokes Heavenly guidance on his pilgrimage: "Thus I set out;- Lord ! lead me on my way!" attains an assurance of the triumph of his spiritual quest: the Beatific Vision, in this poem.

As Newman examines his own intellectual awareness in the Apologia, so he investigates his perception of the soul's spiritual identity in his poetry. He reaches the climax of his spiritual search in his poetic-drama, The Dream of Gerontius . His journey towards the Divine through poetry culminates in this poem in which he offers that revelation of the sacred which poets seldom attain in a lifetime. A poet with an out of the common run of his peers he touches the centre of Dantean approach to poetry and unravels the mysteries that lie beyond death.

"The Pillar of the Cloud" and The Dream of Gerontius are first class poetry deserving of a lasting place in English literature. Taken as a whole, the poetry of Newman is primarily of interest as a fascinating study of a man's spiritual tenacity during a long life. The spiritual and the psychological facets found in this poetry are of great interest, revealing as they do the soul of a saintly man. The enduring value of his poetry is in its having the power to awaken in us just that 'poetical view of things' which he reckoned to be no more than one's duty as a Christian. Newman's poetry has influenced many readers regardless of caste and creed differences, who set high value on spiritual guidance, for example, Mahatma Gandhi.

There is at any rate no doubt that the heroic refusal of

Newman to fall in line with the more accepted fellow poets of the Victorian age at the cost of his Christian pilgrimage vision, will definitely place him at par with the uncompromising spiritual literary geniuses of all times and of all countries. This pilgrim poet will ever remain as an image of a noble soul clothed in moral grandeur and as a symbol of the triumph of soul over materialistic, hedonistic and fleshly urges of human life on its journey towards the Divine. From this point of view, Newman, the pilgrim poet and the man has a relevance in this age of collapsed values.