

PREFACE

John Henry Cardinal Newman whose life spanned almost the whole of nineteenth century England, was one of its distinguished religious leaders, educationists and litterateurs. Yet in his zeal for a holy life and in his spiritual urge for divine illumination, he did not want to carve a niche in the temple of fame. From the very beginning of his life, this brilliant young Anglican felt an urge to become a spiritual pilgrim, to follow the will of God as it would guide him along the path to an eternal union with his Creator. The four last things of Christian theology: Death, Judgement, Heaven and Hell were always uppermost in Newman's mind.

Finding the Church of England in considerable turmoil along with other like-minded friends, Newman launched the Oxford Movement in the 1830s. He was its leader and worked to rediscover in the Church of England the early traditions of her Apostolic roots. Newman felt called upon to lead the fellow pilgrims back to the true faith which alone could bring them spiritual health and salvation. So he wrote and published poetry intended to stimulate discussion of many important religious issues. However opposition to his ideas grew and he and the other Tractarian writers were in serious conflict with the authorities of the Church of England. Eventually Newman reached the conclusion that the Apostolic Church founded by and upon Christ had only survived in the Roman Catholic Church. He

resigned his ministry in the Anglican Church, left Oxford, his University and with much inner conflict and regret, joined the Roman Church.

Newman's life as a Catholic was full of difficulties, neither was his pilgrimage to God easy. His poetry reflects this suffering, but it also reveals his steady passion for the Pilgrimage towards the Beatific Vision, that is, union with God in that Eternal Home.

In the Victorian age, so complex in its corpus of thought and feeling, not only the average man but also intellectuals suffered from a sense of personal perplexity which was partly moral, partly religious and partly worldly. Newman rose above the basic dilemma which disturbed the Victorians in general. Among the towering intellectuals of Victorian England, such as Thomas Carlyle, Charles Darwin, George Eliot, Herbert Spencer, John Stuart Mill, Matthew Arnold, it was only Newman who retained religious faith. While the other intellectuals succumbed to actual unbelief or to some form of agnosticism, Newman had the spiritual insight and inner strength to fight his way through the valley of scepticism, destructive liberalism and materialism.

Newman's life-long endeavour was to rebuild Christian values from the spiritual ruins of the century in which he lived. Yet he realized the importance of this visible world in leading men on their pilgrim journey towards the attainment of their spiritual quest. Hence he wished to perfect our understanding of this known world by revealing another dimension, that of the spirit. His poetry would be a revelation

of the fundamental truths of life.

Observing sensitively the strange intermingling of joys and sorrows, achievements and failures, life and death, birth and decay, his vision of human nature and the earthly predicament assumed greater significance each passing year. He discerned below the surface of this strange, deceptive world, the splendour of God that still remained under the ravages of sin and selfishness. Hence he sought to bring about a harmony between this world and Eternity. What he longed for in the nineteenth century was a true spiritual renaissance.

Hence Newman felt commissioned to revive the transcendental values of life. Discerning below the facade of gentlemanly virtues he was aware that society stood most in need of religion of inward heart and the pursuit of sanctity. Yet he was amazingly open to the problems that faced his contemporaries and could understand the hearts of both the intellectuals and the ordinary men of his day. Hence he could strike the right chord in each of these groups. A great pilgrim leader with a passion akin to Shelley's for reforming the world, concentrated on the interior movement of the soul in its progress towards God. Yet the visionary in him did not exclude the realist who recognized the value of scientific pursuits and their importance in the progress of human society. But he also apprehended that while knowledge forms the mind, it is contact with the Unseen which alone is capable of subduing moral evil, and fostering higher values. His spiritual vocation is closely allied to his poetic vocation.

Unlike most literary men who give to the world works of

pure literary power and intellectual brilliancy, Newman found life no arena upon which brilliant accomplishments are to be displayed. Hence Newman gave in his most spontaneous poetic expression his passion for religion with no regard to stylistics while other poets work and rework to bring their poems to a state of perfection which makes them exquisite poems. Yet many a talented and more laborious poet has achieved no more than Newman's immortal poem "The Pillar of the Cloud."

Newman's inner spiritual experiences which have been distilled in his poems form the very breath of his poetry. His was a persistent Spiritual Quest. His personal religious values and the humanistic views to which he was so passionately attached, had much to do with the philosophical and ethical connotations of his poetic compositions. This aspect of his poetic creation is not, of course, debatable but what raises debate is that his religious and moral zeal turned him into a poet apart from the popular image. Newman's sheer passion of Biblical, liturgical, theological and dogmatic adherence cuts him off from our own age. His poems have lost much of their power and appeal today because religious symbols and values have lost their meaning for most readers. As a result, that strong emotional impact they had on Newman's readers at the time, is lost on twentieth century readers. But in his day, Newman's poetry lighted the path of many who wandered in the 'encircling gloom' of religious doubt and worldly gain.

Newman's lyrical effusions reveal the loves and the fears of his soul which for a time 'loved the garish day,' yet was gifted with glimpses of the Eternal. His poetry which is of the nature of an autobiography deals with an examination of the state of his own soul

on his earthly pilgrimage. In his poems Newman unveils the hidden springs of his spiritual life and personal holiness. Here we encounter a powerful mind with problems, personal or public which lead to the treatment of reality and God arising fresh out of actual incidents in his day to day life. His poems enable us to trace the dream-work of his imagination upon the contents of his thought. They unveil his doubts and struggles along the pilgrimage, the delights of light and the oppressions of darkness, which both cheered and saddened his pilgrimage. The poems reveal his earnest search for Truth. They are investigations of sense and outward things by the pilgrim who lived in a world of uncertainties and unrealities.

The rapture of the poet's heart at the touch of the Divine along his pilgrim journey is expressed in the powerful, only cultivated imagery and diction which befitted the most 'urbane' of Victorian gentleman and adherent of the Victorian reserve. His superiority of mind, his concern for what is genuine, his rejection of anything tawdry produced a distinguished poetic language, transparent, austere, reticent and gravely beautiful. But in today's world of jazz and rock music, the delicate sensibility revealed in Newman's noble yet gentle expression, is unrecognized. Nevertheless, his poetry would sound the deepest chords in every virtuous soul that believes in a Life Force regardless of the barriers of time and space. Such for example was the case with Mahatma Gandhi. Thus Newman would always stand as a rare example of the religious consciousness that resides at the core of every human being and would continue to guide men of every age in their hour of religious confusion and distress.

The pilgrim's poems which are the fruits of his inborn yearning

for a union with the Divine are starkly real and bear an aura of the spiritual. Newman belongs to that group of literary men whose creations rank them among prophets rather than authors. The spiritual essence in his poetry raises him above poets who are just singers and no more. He resembles the Psalmists of old in his devotedness to an ideal. Like the Hebrew poet, Newman paid attention to the content. If the Psalm poetry is unique in its God-intoxicated expression, Newman's poetry is reminiscent of the Psalm poetry in its single-hearted concentration on God. He is also akin to the Eastern rishis who consider the world 'Maya' or unreality.

In order to restore the equilibrium of a dynamic pilgrim humanity gone astray in its progress towards God, Newman tried to awaken its religious consciousness. His literary works are large, full of spiritual vigour, poetic vision and far-sighted spirituality. He believed in his call to lead others along the path of Christ to whom he himself was committed. He saw himself as a leader of the pilgrimage.

The image of life as a pilgrimage is pervasive throughout much of his work in both prose and poetry. However while Newman's prose is well-known and highly regarded, his poetry, with only a few exceptions is less accessible today. Tastes in poetry have changed radically and what Victorians found appropriate in style and subject matter finds a reduced audience in the late twentieth century.

However, Newman's poetry deserves an audience and perhaps particularly today. We are in a vortex in the twentieth century. Life has become more complex and materialistic. Society is in the melting pot and the values Newman upheld and vindicated are being

accepted by people today with a sceptical lifting of the eyebrows and an ironical grin. But he is growing in stature and importance with the passage of time in a world of psychological unrest and spiritual bankruptcy for his moral excellence and spiritual vision. In his own day if sceptics came to scoff and remained to pray listening to his sermons, in our day, studying his poetry they would be spiritually invigorated.

Over and above, a study of Newman's poetry gives us a deeper understanding of a great and brilliant man who was so very influential in his time. Part of his great influence on people of his day rested on his poetry. A study of this poet's pilgrim quest, as revealed in his hymns, lyrics and especially in his poetic masterpiece The Dream of Gerontius makes an interesting and enlightening study, spiritually, psychologically as well as theologically. His life long dedication to a Heavenly Pilgrimage, and his ideas about the progress of the journey make a study of his poetry of great interest even today.

The ensuing dissertation is divided into ten chapters. The chapter titled "The Curtain Rises" presents Newman against the religio-literary scene and examines the hidden springs of his pilgrim vocation. The chapter titled "The Shaping of the Pilgrim Muse" traces the influence on the poet of the prevailing poetic theories of the early nineteenth century and the evolution of Newman's own poetic theories. "Traits of a Poet in the Pilgrim" throws light on the ingrained poetic qualities of the man and the hidden poet in prose. "The Pilgrim Prayer" explores the poet's examination of his mental

attitudes, spiritual failings and his need for Divine guidance. "The Pilgrim Leader" presents the poet commissioned to be a leader of the pilgrims. "Sailing in Company" highlights the poet's need for friends and human-ties on his earthly sojourn. "Sign Posts on the Pilgrimage" studies the guiding ideas of the poems leading the poet to his goal. "Joys of the Pilgrim" elucidates the poet's experience of spiritual consolation. "A Glimpse of the Beatific Vision" concentrates on the end of the spiritual quest: an intimation of the Supernatural Union. The conclusion sums up the findings of the study.