

1. THE CURTAIN RISES

1. 1. Newman in the religio-literary scene

John Henry Newman, born in 1801, lived until 1890 was implanted in nineteenth century England even as the universal Shakespeare was deeply rooted in Elizabethan England. No writer ever completely transcends his time. So a study of the milieu in which Newman lived is essential to an understanding of him and his literary works.

It was an age of great progress. The advances made by science and technology affected the life of the society as a whole. The sensation caused by Geology, Physics and Biology brought into question the long established authority of the Bible and Christianity. Foremost among the ideas were the moulding and modifying of the living species propounded by such men as Darwin, Lamarck, Thomas H. Huxley and others. These notions reaching the average reading public, their simple, conventional faith and traditional beliefs were shattered. Even though the 'historicity' of the Bible was not really affected, the trouble lay in the traditional interpretation of it. Matthew Arnold wrote of this age of interrogation and doubt: "There is not a creed which is not shaken, not an accredited dogma which is not shown to be questionable, not a received tradition which does not threaten to dissolve."¹

Industrial development increased the comforts of life. But men of greater vision such as Carlyle, Ruskin, Newman and Arnold discerned beneath the apparent prosperity the selfishness of industrialists and blindness to the meaning of life. Hence they raised their voices against the spirit of

their time and urged men to be honourable and truthful. Carlyle's Sartor Resartus portrays the spiritual travail of the times. Ruskin's Unto This Last and Matthew Arnold's Culture and Anarchy are examples of spiritually noble literature. Newman's Apologia pro Vita Sua raises the moral pulse of its readers and is one of the great spiritual classics of all time. Novelists such as Thackeray, Anthony Trollope, and Charles Dickens in his later works depicted the anxieties, snobbery and related psychological diseases which sprang from the ambiguities of rank and wealth in a time of social flux. The numerous pamphlets of the time are contemporary testaments to the social conflicts.

The introduction of free education and the establishment of new universities increased the number of writers as well as that of the reading public. It was also an era when the least educated read poetry and considered it a serious subject of study in the same category as history, philosophy and sermons.² Hence poems were used as effective 'engines' even if 'quasi-political,' by Newman and his colleagues of the Oxford Movement. In his poems Newman lamented the contemporary situation and offered the 'Kindly Light' to men embroiled in a maze of religious doubt and baffling philosophy. The withering of faith and encroaching materialism cast their shadows on the poetry of the time.

The old order was overthrown by the endless process of technical inventions. The age of chivalry disappeared giving way to political virtues and canons of Reason which were moulding human society. Newman rejoiced at the progress civilization brought about and fought only against the evils that went with the changes. He considered it good fortune to have been born an Englishman: "His hermit spirit dwells in his own age."³ But science and wealth were not the new idols for him. In his opinion the absolutely vital key issue was: is

England going to remain true to its Christian vocation or abandon it? This led Newman to work out a view of Christianity and culture which fostered what was best in the intellectual, imaginative and artistic world without giving in to the spirit of the age. He believed that culture had to be completed and enhanced by religion if it were to accomplish anything of lasting value. This vision of humanity made his contribution unique and is of the highest importance.

The mystic sense of the Unseen which Newman possessed co-mingled with force of will, keenness of intellect, an understanding heart and an inborn ability to move and to lead. Along with these traits there was in him an aristocratic refinement, delicacy and charm. These qualities fashioned him into a unique religious and literary leader. From childhood Newman who lived under the influence of poetical and religious experience and preferred holiness to every other concern, came forward as a champion of the Church in a power seeking world. This explains the reason why Newman in his day used art for the sake of religion and not for art's sake. He became a beacon light in a perplexed and complex time. Newman had passed on from a static to a dynamic view of the universe before the doctrine of biological evolution convulsed his contemporaries. From his study of early Christian history Newman had worked out a theory of the development of ideas which antedated the theory of the biological development of mankind. His mind had already made the transition from the static to the dynamic view of the world which his contemporaries found so hard to believe. His days were devoted to presenting evolution of religious beliefs to men who were increasingly being attracted by scientific thinking. The most noted of these works is Development of Christian Doctrine.⁴ Newman's development theory fits in well with the pilgrim's poetic approach. His life was a journey into a deeper understanding of Truth. For Newman the ultimate

reality was that Life is a pilgrimage leading to the Beatific Vision and Eternal Union with God.

Liberalism in religion was the doctrine that one creed is as good as another and as a consequence no religion holds the whole truth. It taught that all were to be tolerant for all were matters of opinion. Revealed religion was also not a truth according to liberal philosophy but a sentiment and taste. Hence the liberals tried to adapt the Church to the spirit of the age. Newman's writings contain valuable lessons in religion and in education. He staunchly endeavoured to meet the corrosive influence of liberalism on its own grounds and wrote uncompromisingly in the poem "Science:"⁵

And so is cast upon the face of things
A many webs to fetter down the Truth;
While the vexed Church, which gave in her fair youth
Prime pattern of the might which order brings,
But dimly signals to her distant seed,

There strongest found, where darkest in her creed. (7-12)
He found it a 'self-flattering age' (17) which was interested only in "learned search and curious seeming art" (14) which considered a herald of religious faith 'the preacher of a dream' (18). He had a large measure of the logician combined with the creative imagination of a poet and the deeply thinking spirit of a philosopher. These qualities made him an artist, a prophet, a philosopher and a critic.

A call for rationality in all spheres of life was the keynote of this era. Rationalism acquired immense practical influence under the Benthamites and became the 'supreme tribunal' of the nineteenth century. This led the Victorians to downgrade imaginative and aesthetic experience. The utilitarians considered Keats's kind of truth which could be tested on one's pulse unadulterated nonsense.⁶ According to John Stuart Mill:

A poet in our times is a semi-barbarian in a civil community. He lives in the days that are past. His ideas, thoughts, feelings, associations, are all with barbarous manners, obsolete customs and exploded superstitions. The march of his intellect is like that of a crab, backward. The brighter the light diffused around him by the progress of reason, the thicker is the darkness of antiquated barbarism, in which he buries himself like a mole, . . .⁷

For many, poetic truth and religious truth were replaced by scientific and commercial truth. Carlyle thought that such an unquiet and chaotic time required clear speech and words of command. Such views led Newman to contribute severe poems to the British Magazine endeavouring to give an insight into the right values for men in a time of perplexity and confusion. With that unique synthesis of a rationalistic, an artistic and a religious sensibility, Newman rose above the sceptical climate of the time.

On the whole, the Victorian poets were keenly aware of their responsibilities. Their poetry testifies to the effort to attain a philosophical synthesis of the many conflicting aspects of the time. This explains the seriousness of the Victorian concept of poetry. The temper that prevailed in the nineteenth century was similar to that of the seventeenth century which was one of scepticism. But unlike the seventeenth century devotional poets, who did have a fixed central authority, nineteenth century poets were overtaken by a certain insecurity and a lack of authority in poetry of speculative thought and religion. Yet the poetry of Newman depicts his total grasp of the social, scientific, psychological and religious pulse of the time. Rooted and grounded in eternal verities, he was an authority on the baffling issues of the time and thus as a poet he cannot be ignored.

Though the early Victorians were heirs to the Romantics in many respects, the intellectual outlook of the Age of Reason still

prevailed. Thus the dislike of the Victorians for emotional outpourings placed certain restrictions on the poets of the time. They sought worthy themes and the honest agitators among them displayed passionate zeal for several causes. Here one finds Newman with his insatiable quest for right living. The poets believed that they had a mission to fulfil and the readers of poetry looked for a doctrine and a revelation. Even though the very ethos of the age seemed opposed to poetry, the poetic output during the age was considerable. Thinking characterized much of the best poetry of the century, as Geoffrey Tillotson has remarked.⁸ The poems also convey the quality of movement. But the poets never aimed at Miltonic perfection and had little technical interest in their poetry. Poetry as a whole conformed itself to traditional diction and metrical form. Poets such as Browning broke away from the traditional lyric form and Matthew Arnold experimented with free verse. The Victorians did not strive after literary fame and followed spiritual pursuits in the midst of a non-believing mass. Thus though the age was extremely confused in many ways, it still was an age in which there was both faith and reason in the life of the nation.

The quality of movement in the poems might imply that the Victorian poets while not antithetical to new learning per se, were urging readers to hold on to eternal verities, to avoid casting aside the strengths of transcendental beliefs as new scientific insights were being gained. Such for certain was the case with Newman. His refrain: 'Lead Thou me on!'⁹ was in fact a pilgrim prayer, to guide him on from the known scientific phenomenon to the Unseen Power which defies all proof.

The early Victorian poetry gave no evidence of unconquered scepticism other than in the cases of Arthur H. Clough and Thomas Cooper. In Memoriam is both religious and secular and in its way is a sample of what Newman meant by liberalism. The vision of a world where man progressed towards the fuller

expression of the divine within him was clearly visible in the poets of this period. As the century marched ahead, the sea of faith ebbed. Many of the imaginative writers and distinguished intellectuals seemed to have abandoned religious belief. Tennyson and Arnold shared the wistfulness of being half believers. Harriet Martineau and George Eliot expressed the aching void left in human hearts by the loss of faith. Such was the case with Darwin, Thomas Huxley, Carlyle, Herbert Spencer, Arthur Clough and many others. Clough lost his faith and his "Easter Day" mirrors the intellectual and religious struggle in his soul. James Thomson's "City of Dreadful Night" is a powerful and sincere expression of a despairing creed. But Browning remained robustly optimistic. The world which had passed out of existence and the uncertainties of the one not yet formed worked together in creating a strain of pessimism in the works of Matthew Arnold. All these currents of thought coloured the last years of the century.

Newman belonged to the group of the religious poets of the earlier years of the nineteenth century even though he continued to write poems throughout his life. Along with John Keble, John Mason Neale and Robert Stephen Hawker he played a major role in the reawakening of the Church of England. Newman stands out among these poets for his great imaginative power and speculative thought. Hence he could have taken the place of Keble as the poet of Neo-Catholicism but he chose a more spiritual role.

Along with the rationalistic-scientific movement, the century also witnessed the rebirth of a new kind of idealism. The doctrine of Carlyle, the sentimental art of Dickens, the religious renewal at Oxford, the aesthetic and social crusade of Ruskin found psychological affinity with the most profound spiritual trends which produced the works of Wordsworth and

Shelley. In fact the Oxford Movement was a continuation of the Romantic revival which was a reaction against the superficial character of the religious teachings and the literature of the time. The Movement worked to revive those truths of Christian revelation which alone were able to satisfy the 'spiritual wants' ¹⁰ which lay beneath Romantic restlessness. These thoughts expressed clearly that new approaches to the idea of society, religion and God were the demands of the time.

Many of the views which Newman propagated became a permanent part of the nineteenth century poetic experience and a living tradition for the rest of the age. His poetry illustrates the religio-literary culture of the age which moved in tandem with the better known social and psychological trends. Thus his poetry makes clear what the nineteenth century experience was when religion was not a separate department of life as it is today. His poetry expresses the concerns of the age and their genius loci. He was the philosopher and the interpreter of the Christian renaissance. Men like Newman and Coventry Patmore who might have been mystics in another age were driven to being staunch religious champions in the midst of a society which struggled between the religious and the new rationalistic theories.

No ecclesiastical figures of the last century engage the interest of discerning twentieth century scholars as Newman does. An unusually gifted individual, he held several distinguished offices. He was elected a Fellow of Oriel College, Oxford, in 1822 and was ordained priest in 1824. In 1826 he became Tutor of Oriel College, the most intellectually distinguished College in the Oxford of his day. He was appointed Vicar of St. Mary's, the University Church, in 1828 and had the honour of being one of the select University preachers. He was an instructor, a counsellor and head of the newly-founded University of Dublin. He wrote poems,

histories, biographies, autobiographies, treatises, tracts, controversial papers and other volumes. He wrote over 20,000 letters, hundreds of sermons, many theological and literary works and a poetic masterpiece The Dream of Gerontius. His Apologia pro Vita Sua is placed side by side with the Confessions of St. Augustine. He was master of not just a single literary genre, for he was as versatile in the modes of expression as he was in the range of thought. Critics of his day pointed out the spiritual significance of his poetry and the imaginative appeal of his prose. He considered the world well lost in exchange for the possession of religious Truth. His old College Trinity, made him its honorary Fellow in 1877 and in 1879 the Catholic Church honoured him by bestowing on him the status of a Cardinal. Newman died on 11 August 1890.

Newman would always be regarded as a great religious writer. Like Wordsworth or Hardy he was alert to the simple things in life while, like Matthew Arnold, he was deeply involved in the urgent public matters of the day.¹¹ He had an eye for detail, and was able to read the motives of human behaviour like a Jane Austen or a Sherlock Holmes. He had the gift of portraying characters and situations with wit and sustained irony. Newman's religious and educational interests provide the central pattern of his entire life. Nothing was ever too large for him or too trivial if it shed light on the central question of what man and his destiny really are. For Newman destiny was the attainment of the Beatific Vision when Life's pilgrimage was over.

Newman influenced the whole of the nineteenth century, an influence which no English man of any consequence or education could wholly escape. The economist Walter Bagehot and Matthew Arnold the poet, both of whose views differed from his, yet felt the glamour which Newman exercised over so many who belonged to camps utterly distinct from his own. Matthew Arnold

regarded him as a living embodiment of the 'Christian gentleman' and almost a miracle of the mid-nineteenth century England. His gentlemanliness was evident in his intellectual delicacy and urbanity of style. Dean Stanley of Westminster and Gladstone himself were among those who were touched by the rare magnetism of his personality.

Newman's penetrating insight into human nature enabled him to understand well his own age and its tendencies. Pater said of Newman that he had "dealt with all the perturbing influences of our century in a manner as classical, as idiomatic, as earnest and elegant as Steele's !" ¹² Both as a literary master and as a religious genius he holds a permanent rank as a neo-classicist. In restoring to religious life the vitality of its earlier days, Newman proposed reforms which were more refined, intellectual, academic and humane. Newman, as a pilgrim, tried to find his way to God in whom he so firmly believed. He tried to guide men to the same goal. Hence he gave a humane touch to the technicalities of religious problems and made them more accessible to all.

His image has gathered stature with the years. Newman is widely read and studied for his spiritual and intellectual gifts in this age of psychological unrest and spiritual bankruptcy. The frequent lectures, seminars, conferences held on Newman in various places, the published work of scholars in many lands give ample testimony to the international interest in Newman. The poet had written in the poem "The Age to Come," ¹³ about his own situation:

When I would search the truths that in me burn,
And mould them into rule and argument,
A hundred reasoners cried,--"Hast thou to learn
Those dreams are scatter'd now, those fires are spent ?

(1-4)

He had also foreseen the future as this poem illustrates: "But

now, I see that men are mad awhile, / And joy the Age to come
will think with me:--" (9-10).

1.2. The blooming spirituality

Newman's poetry is in the nature of an autobiography. It gives us insight into the mind and heart of the man who was a pilgrim, prophet and saint first and foremost. He considered this his one mission as the poem "The Priestly Office"¹⁴ portrays:

In service o'er the Mystic Feast I stand;
I cleanse Thy victim-flock, and bring them near
In holiest wise, and by a bloodless rite.
O Fire of Love! O gushing Fount of Light!
Dread office this, bemired souls to clear
Of their defilement, and again make bright. (1-6)

The priest in him realized the awe-inspiring nature of his vocation. Yet as he treasured this office, he placed at the service of his God his intellectual and literary gifts to interpret for the world spiritual truths according to the requirements of the age. The poem "Morning"¹⁵ depicts how in adoration he sets out on his pilgrimage: "I RISE and raise my clasped hands to Thee!" (1), "Thus I set out;--Lord! lead me on my way !" (9). Thus he chose a path of true religious adherence which acted like a beacon and led many in the same pilgrim path.

A study of Newman, the pilgrim poet, reveals that four volumes of his poetry were published during his lifetime. They show the spiritual growth of the poet's soul as well as his endeavour to establish a right relationship between the human soul and the Supreme Power which is behind the material phenomena. Since the spirit and the temper of his epoch was against the religious aspirations of the human soul, there

arose a tension in him from which his poetry is born. The four volumes of poetry are Memorials of the Past, Verses on Religious Subjects, The Dream of Gerontius and Verses on Various Occasions. Besides these he was a major contributor to three other volumes -- St. Bartholomew's Eve, Lyra Apostolica and Hymns for the Use of the Birmingham Oratory, 1854. He also had some share in the following three volumes--Hymns for the Use of the Birmingham Oratory, 1857, Hymn Tunes of the Oratory, 1860, and Verses for Penitents, 1806. ¹⁶

The poems belong to three stages in Newman's life. A study of them reveals that each stage possesses quite different characteristics but, despite the differences, there emerges a clear pattern of unity in the spiritual and artistic development of the man. Even though he expressed a keen sense of his artistic potential in the two earlier stages, the culmination of a lifetime of poetic activity took place only in the third stage. Here the poet fused creatively the roles of the pilgrim and the poet.

The fount from which Newman drew spiritual strength for his divine mission was his single-hearted devotion to God. Even at the first stage in the pilgrim poet's journey, the poems reveal his natural absorption in God and his concern in championing God's cause. The first volume of poetry which appeared in print was St. Bartholomew's Eve. ¹⁷ Newman had written it in 1818, when he was seventeen years of age in collaboration with his class mate John William Bowden. This poem is a manifestation of Newman's natural poetic sensibilities and his spiritual yearning. Its 'sacred notes' (25) are strung: "Till the rapt soul on bolder pinions soars" (26) to "breathe seraphic fire" (28). The mystic soul of the pilgrim was vividly conscious of the angel guardians who would lead him through to the end of his pilgrimage and on to the

Beatific Vision:

Angelic guardians, natives of the sky,
 Who, seeming distant, hover ever nigh,
 To aid the virtuous, cheer the sad, delight,--
 Too blest to feel our woes, too good to slight,
 With holy anger . . . (373-377)

While Bowden wrote the historical parts, it was Newman who chose to write the theological side of the romance on the massacre of St. Bartholomew. Those parts of the poem contributed by Newman far exceed in beauty and poetic feeling than the sections written by Bowden. This long poem published privately sold fifty copies in twenty four hours. In 1890, The Times obituary on Newman included the comment: "The Cardinal was always proud of that work, perhaps as his first born." ¹⁸

The second volume published privately in 1832 was Memorials of the Past. This volume was meant only for the immediate circle and is addressed to the members of his family. The title page of the volume has these far seeing lines: "Strains, framed in youth, in our life's history / Stand as antiquities, and so we love them -- / Each has its own legend, and so bespeaks its times."¹⁹ The 'Strains, framed in youth,' in the pilgrim poet's life story were the reality and the permanence of the spiritual world contrasted with the impermanence and the insubstantiality of the world about him, and his single hearted quest after Truth. They also include the themes of angels, dreams, death, the tension within the framework of faith and his early sense of a spiritual vocation. Hence Newman moved away from the sensuous aspects of earthly beauty to the eternal beauty of God. He considered imagination to be a spiritual energy through which he could glance beyond the visible phenomenon into the Invisible. As a result, his ecstasy of faith in God and the revelation he

expressed in poems, are essentially spontaneous and intensely spiritual.

The poem "Solitude"²⁰ expresses the poet's preoccupation from his earliest years with the inner life and his communion with spiritual powers. He experiences in 'stillness' 'a magic power' (1) which kindles in his soul "Diviner feelings, kindred with the skies" (4). In solitude the poet purifies his heart and raises it to heaven and experiences heavenly love. Already in this poem, "Solitude" written at the age of seventeen, the pilgrim theme is brought out. The image of the desert wandering Arab looking to the skies (5-6) in the poem suggests the direction of the pilgrimage. The pilgrim here is a hermit who fixes his heart on heaven. The movement of this Newman pilgrimage is upward away from the earthly din towards the goal of heaven.

The poet paints a paradise with Angel choirs and their melodious hymns which bears no parallel to any earthly pleasure:

There is a spirit singing aye in air,
That lifts us high above all mortal care.
No mortal measure swells that mystic sound,
No mortal minstrel breathes such tones around,—
The Angel's hymn, — the sovereign harmony
That guides the rolling orbs along the sky,— (11-16)

The poet is also an artist in word painting. With a few strokes of his brush he dabs a vivid picture of the world beyond. He grieves over man who "knows not of the bliss, / The heaven that brightens such a life as this" (21-22).

Themes of angels and images of heavenly harmony are already set to tune: the poet-devotee composes his devotional songs as he advances on his pilgrimage. Newman had strong belief in angels from his childhood.²¹ It was a reality for him as real as the visible phenomena, as it still is for

millions of Catholics even today. He makes references to Angels in many of his poems. In the poem "Guardian Angel"²² Newman addresses:

My oldest friend, mine from the hour
When I first drew my breath;
My faithful friend, that shall be mine,
Unfailing till my death. (1-4)

He believes: "When life is ebbing low" (34); and even at the Last Judgement: "Mine, when I stand before the Judge" (37) and: "Thy gentle arms shall lift me then, / Thy wings shall waft me home" (43-44).

Another of Newman's strong belief was in the Church as Christ's 'purchase dear,'²³ and as the way to salvation. For him the Church was a mother who nourishes her children on their pilgrimage. The Church was to Newman 'mother of Saints,' 'school of the wise, nurse of the heroic' and most of all his 'mother.'²⁴ He loved it and took pride in its universal character and heavenly union as is reflected in the poem "The Holy Trinity:"²⁵

The Church of God, the world-wide name,
Found in all lands, yet everywhere the same;
Love with its thrilling unison
Knows how to knit ten thousand hearts in one.
.....
A golden chain unites the earth and sky;
Angels, the Church below, the Church on high,
O triply blest, to us are nigh. (9-12, 22-24)

As far as Newman was concerned, he believed that Church was the only way to God, although he respected other religious beliefs.

For Newman, dogma was spiritual truth revealed by God. He had a sturdy faith not only in Christ who is God, but also in the dogmas of religion. He believed faith to be the means by which mankind received supernatural graces and powers. In the

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poem "Flowers without Fruit,"²⁶ he writes:

Faith's meanest deed more favour bears,
Where hearts and wills are weigh'd,
Than brightest transports, choicest prayers,
Which bloom their hour and fade. (9-12)

Newman's early choice of a celibate life speaks for the 'one' desire of this pilgrim. In the poem "The Married and the Single,"²⁷ he portrays the life of celibates 'glorious' (15): "Aiming as emblems of their God to shine" (23), and "Loving their God" (26) in single hearted devotion. He concludes the poem thus:

Let others seek earth's honours; be it mine
One law to cherish, and to track one line,
Straight towards heaven to press with single bent,
To know and love my God, and then to die content.

(112-115)

But he was not a grim celibate and did not undervalue the beauty and truth to be found in women. In the same poem he writes of them:

But, when the Christ came by a Virgin-birth,—
His radiant passage from high heaven to earth,—
And, spurning father for His mortal state,
Did Eve and all her daughters consecrate. (9-12)

The poem "My Lady Nature and Her Daughters"²⁸ describes the delight ladies take in dress, dances, their eagerness 'to join the festive ring' (57), and about their mirth: "Not a sight so fair on earth, / As a lady's graceful mirth" (59-60). The poet ends the poem drawing the reader's attention to the noble mission of ladies. In this 'rude,' 'unkind' (84) world it is only ladies who would befriend 'work-day souls' (82), and so: "Seek we lady-lighted home. / Nature 'mid the spheres bears sway, / Ladies rule where hearts obey." (88-90) Though Lady Nature bears her sway amidst the spheres, it is the earth-bound

ladies who rule over hearts.

The distinctive features of Newman's language may be noted as follows. He chose a style rich in Biblical aroma and allusions as the Victorians were familiar with Biblical language. Rhetoric and rhythms drawn from Scriptures enabled him to communicate in readily understandable and persuasive terms with a susceptible audience. His use of dense Biblical allusions aimed at maximum effect. The ordinary Victorian was brought up in a culture circumscribed by Christian teaching. This had influenced his outlook upon life and the foundations of his morality. Now when his Christian culture came under question the Victorians found solace in the language of Newman. Unlike Milton's writing which was unintelligible to many readers, overloaded as it was with classical allusions, Newman's writing, was more accessible. He made effective use of such features as liturgy, Church traditions and history, theology, dogma, the lives of saints, in his poetry. It did speak powerfully to the men of his time though it has lost much of its influence on men today since few people now share his religious beliefs.

This contemplative apostle had a striking awareness of the transience of life even at an early stage. It is conveyed in the poem "My Birthday"²⁹ written at the age of eighteen. Though it is his birthday, thoughts of celebratory 'riots' (12) and 'greetings loud' (12) are rejected by the young man ascetically: "What! joy because the fulness of the year / Marks thee for greedy death a riper prey? / Is not the silence of the grave too near?" (15-17). What the poet awaits is:

This feeble spirit to the sky aspire,--
As some long-prisoned dove towards her nest—
There to receive the gracious full-toned lyre,
Bowed low before the Throne 'mid the bright seraph
choir. (60-63)

These lines reflect the poet's deepest desire for that ultimate union with God in heaven. This poem written in beautiful Spensarian

stanzas conveys clearly that Newman could have acquired a poetic fame approaching that of Spenser or Milton but he preferred divine illumination to poetic fame. "The Trance of Time"³⁰ too conveys the idea that Newman's heart is fixed on the Unchangeable. Hence the changes of nature and the discriminations of seasons do not affect him for he can antedate: "Heaven's Age of fearless rest" (32). This poem is close to the philosophical cheerfulness of the firm-purposed man in Horace. The lines in which Virgil describes the triumph of philosophy over superstition Newman takes as his motto.³¹ The poem also expresses the transience of life, every thing passes out of sight in a brief time. 'The season-measured year' (2) with its 'short-lived four' (9) Spring, with its songs, Summer with its flowers (5), Autumn with its 'bowers' (7) and Winter with its 'social rings' (18) remind him of the four stages in the life of an individual which also has only a transitory existence: "Long days are fire-side nights, / Brown autumn is fresh spring" (19-20). Hence the poet queries:

Then what this world to thee, my heart ?
 Its gifts nor feed thee nor can bless.
 Thou hast no owner's part
 In all its fleetingness. (21-24)

The publication of Memorials of the Past pointed out clearly Newman's sense of artistic identity and spiritual vocation. He wrote of himself:

I am a harp of many strings, and each
 Strung by a separate hand; most musical
 My notes, discoursing with the mental sense
 Not the outward ear.³²

The pilgrim poet gives here a clear identification of self and allots to himself a serving role. He is to be 'Strung' (2) by the Almighty. The poet places his varied talents at the disposal of heaven.

"A Birthday Offering"³³ depicts the poet as an active

apostle. He feels summoned to be the champion of the Lord to serve as a messenger of heaven. He treasures his pilgrim vocation:

I change it not away
For patriot-warrior's hour of pride,
Or statesman's tranquil sway;

For poet's fire, or pleader's skill. (68-71)

This he would do with "Prayer-purchased blessings on our [his] head" (36), "To brace thy [his] arm, and nerve thy [his] heart, / For maintenance of a noble part" (5-6) in his role as an ambassador of the Lord, he may stand at the end of his pilgrimage: "As victor(s) in a deathless land" (78). As is foreseen in this poem, the present day followers around the globe are a proof of his influence even today. Thus he is granted more than his sole desire for a place in eternity for he is also granted fellow pilgrims to spread his noble ideas and vision.

The poet being a mystic has gained insight into the nature of God and writes in the poem. "The Hidden Ones:"³⁴ "Christ rears His throne within the secret heart, / From the haughty world apart" (7-8). The pilgrim feels marked off from the world, living a secret life shut away from the noise of history and worldly achievements. This sense of separateness of the individual soul owes something to Newman's early Calvinistic training, but it is a feature which remains part of him. Hence he sets himself apart and is not ruled by "reason's might / Forcing its learned way" (13-14). He considers those who trust only in scientific and rational conclusions: "Blind characters! these aid us not to trace / Christ and His princely race" (15-16). The saints of God are controlled by: "Meekness, love, patience, faith's serene repose" (21). Thus in this mystery of the elect the hidden saints of God belong to a chosen band and the poet himself is: "The remnant fruit of largely-

scatter'd grace" (26). It is the paradox of religion:

God sows in waste, to reap whom He foreknew
Of man's cold race;

.
He waits, by scant return for treasures given,
To fill the thrones of heaven (27-28, 31-32).

Realizing the ways of heaven he prays: "Oh! lest our frail hearts in the annealing break, / Help for Thy mercy's sake !" (39-40)

In the poem "A Thanksgiving"³⁵ the pilgrim poet dedicates himself to be completely God's: "I am all Thine,—Thy care and choice / My very praise is Thine" (3-4). Then he offers his praise and adoration to God for the bright dreams, the faculty of imagination, the strong convictions he gained through the power of reason, for the love received at home and from friends. These blessings are to him but faint shadows compared to the personal experiences he has of the Lord and His presence. Then he professes to follow the Lord without counting the cost and welcomes heroically any 'heart-pang' (22) or affliction:

Yes! let the fragrant scars abide,
Love-tokens in Thy stead,
Faint shadows of the spear-pierced side
And thorn-encompass'd head. (25-28)

The poet longs for the Lord's supreme sway in his life:

And such Thy tender force be still,
When self would swerve or stray,
Shaping to truth the forward will
Along Thy narrow way. (29-32)

The poet hands over his life to the Lord, his mystic prayer is: "Deny me wealth; far, far remove / The lure of power or name" (33-34); for he knows: "Hope thrives in straits, in weakness love, / And faith in this world's shame" (35-36).

The poet finds the lowly snapdragon, in the poem with the same title ³⁶ a symbol of himself. While the other favoured and prized flowers such as rose, lily and dahlia adorn an earthly paradise, the humble snapdragon is content:

Mine, the Unseen to display
In the crowded public way,
Where life's busy arts combine
To shut out the Hand Divine. (47-50)

As soon as the flower realizes its duty, there comes a transformation in its very being and the poet himself gets confirmed in his pilgrim-mission:

Ah! no more a scentless flower,
By approving Heaven's high power,
Suddenly my leaves exhale
Fragrance of the Syrian gale
Ah! 'tis timely comfort given
By the answering breath of Heaven!
May it be! then well might I

In college cloister live and die. (51-58)

Living his priestly vocation most effectively till his death, is what the poet desires most here.

Poems such as "Epiphany-Eve" and "The Sign of the Cross" are tender, devotional lyrics and illustrate the fact that the poet was a deep contemplative as well. In "Epiphany-Eve"³⁷ the poet's heart is over-powered by tender emotions and deep devotion to Christ. His contemplative heart addresses Christ: "Dearest, gentlest, purest, best!" (22), "Loveliest, meekest, blithest, kindest!" (52). The poet longs: "To kiss the dear prints of thy [Christ's] feet, / Tracing thus the narrow road / All must tread, and Christ has trod" (49-51). This is just what St. Ignatius of Loyola, another mystic did in Holy Land: going there a second time, he carefully noted on Mount Olivet the precise direction of the foot prints of Christ found

there.³⁸ It is interesting that Newman uses the same gesture as Ignatius to stir up devotion.

His meditations reveal to the poet that any true follower of Christ has to 'trace' the narrow path and prays humbly: "Lead! we seek the home thou findest!" (53) for to the poet the true home is heaven. The favourite home imagery is used here. He is persistent in his prayer for he experiences deeply the need of the Lord not only in his earthly pilgrimage but also in that of the other pilgrims:

Lead, a guiding beacon bright
To travellers on the Eve of Light.
Welcome aye thy Star before us,
Bring it grief or gladness o'er us; —
Keen regret and tearful yearning, (56-60)

Here there is a foreshadowing of the poem to come "Lead, Kindly Light," and it is clear that Christ is the 'Kindly Light.' The pilgrim then prays:

Or, when day-light blessings fail,
Transport fresh as spice-fraught gale,
Sparks from thee, which oft have lighted
Weary heart and hope benighted. (64-67)

On his pilgrim way, the poet decides:

I this monument would raise,
Distant from the public gaze,
Few will see it; — few e'er knew thee;
But their beating hearts pursue thee, — (68-71)

The poet's pilgrim offering—all the gifts he possesses of heart and mind with which he would prepare himself and his fellow pilgrims—would be the 'monument' he would erect. The path to the cairn he would raise on his pilgrim way would be a narrow one. Hence only those of noble vision: "These will read, and these will prize it" (75). The poet knew he would not have complete following in the path of Lord.

The poem "The Sign of the Cross"³⁹ is another expression of his piety as a man and as a priest. Though the poem is simple, full of faith and fervour yet concrete. The virtuous soul of the poet experiences the spiritual blessings inherent in holy gestures:

Whene'er across this sinful flesh of mine
I draw this holy Sign,
All good thoughts stir within me, and renew
Their slumbering strength divine;
Till there springs up a courage high and true
To suffer and to die. (1-6)

It portrays a quality of Newman at its best when he is often reminiscent of George Herbert. Here again in the poem, like St. Ignatius, Newman makes use of gestures to stir up devotions.

One of the reasons why Newman embraced his pilgrim vocation with an uncompromising fervour was because he understood the reality of religious scepticism with regard to his age. As a result the poetic vocabulary begins to include references to the 'veil,'⁴⁰ at the heart of the religious experience. Thus at the beginning of the poem "My Birthday,"⁴¹ after setting an external Nature scene, the poet unexpectedly refers to his own 'misty sight' (9). Thus a need for God to make Himself felt is found even though the poet was totally committed to his Christian faith. The implicit tension between faith and uncertainty depicts the poet's contemporary religious attitudes. The poem "My Birthday" portrays that faith is not easy: "I fain would try / Albeit in rude, in heartfelt strains to praise / My God" (5-7). The verb 'try' implies effort and there is a lack of ease in this faith.

Again in "Paraphrase of Isaiah LXIV,"⁴² the poet prays to God: "O That Thou wouldst rend the breadth of sky, / That veils Thy presence from the sons of men !" (1-2) The poet longs

for a direct visual proof of the Lord to carry out his spiritual vocation and such a proof would, the poet tells the Lord: "Appal Thy foes; and, kings, who spurn Thy rule" (9). The pilgrim poet's prayer is for each pilgrim: "A God of love, guiding with gracious ray / Each meek rejoicing pilgrim on his way" (17-18). The poet continues pleading for the pilgrims:

Yea, though we err, and Thine averted face
 Rebukes the folly in Thine Israel done,
 Will not that hour of chastisement give place
 To beams, the pledge of an eternal sun ?
 Yes! for His counsels to the end endure;

We shall be saved, our rest abideth sure. (19-24)

Even when the poet is assured in his heart of the Lord's mercy on the sinful race, sins of mankind make him cry out in intense sorrow:

Lord, Lord! our sins ... our sins ... unclean are we,
 Gross and corrupt; our seeming-virtuous deeds
 Are but abominate; all, dead to Thee,
 Shrivell, like leaves when summer's green recedes;
 While, like the autumn blast, our lusts arise,
 And sweep their prey where the fell serpent lies.

(25-30)

Such is the condition of the pilgrims. The imagery in the lines depict the corrupt, deteriorating moral plight of men and their actions. The poet finds "none to plead with God in prayer" (31), and takes up their cause on his way:

But now, O Lord, our Father! we are Thine,
 Design and fashion; senseless while we lay,
 Thou, as the potter, with a Hand Divine,
 Didst mould Thy vessels of the sluggish clay.
 Mark not our guilt, Thy work of wrath recall,
 Lo, we are Thine by price, Thy people all! (37-42)

The poet prays in persuasive terms, throwing his focus

on the Lord's own creation of man and on the weakness of human nature. He further points out to the Lord that these are His own chosen people but: "Low lies our pride; -- and wilt Thou self-deny / Thy rescuing arm unvex'd amid thine Israel's cry?" (47-48). Hence the pilgrim poet made it his mission to take up the cause of his fellow pilgrims in the Anglican Church and thus to restore to them the ancient glory of the early Church which held on to its Apostolicity and fellowship in that faith.

The lyrics of Newman written at the first stage of his journey are touching, devotional lyrics. They are lucid and wistful and have a unique beauty of their own. Even Swinburne recognized "the force, the fervour, the terse energy of Cardinal Newman's verse at its best."⁴³ His early poetry conveys something of that freshness which belongs to ancient Chinese poetry.⁴⁴ These lyrics have the qualities of several of the Lyrical Ballads: simplicity of thought and direct appeal to the individual humanity. Some times they reveal the suavity of Herbert and at other times the depth of Donne.

If we compare Milton and Newman as religious poets we find that Milton blends asceticism with passion which Newman never does. Newman with his secure faith charts the course of his life towards the permanent Truth. Unlike Milton, Newman puts aside his classical learnings for he loves his faith more and hence concentrates on the Christian view of earthly splendours and of life eternal. His poems are intensely personal. Rightly has Robert Bridges passed the comment that every poem is an intimate echo of the poet's life. Newman's early poems are also the results of the meditations of an over-earnest young pilgrim. They display the poet's love to weave telling, genuine, spiritual images of beauty and realism.

Notes

- ¹ Matthew Arnold, "The Study of Poetry," English Critical Texts ed. D. J. Enright and Ernst Chickera (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1975) 260.
- ² E. Batho and B. Dorbee, The Victorians and After (London: The Cresset Press, 1938) 76.
- ³ J. M. Cameron, "Newman and Liberalism," Cross Currents 30. 1 (1980): 154.
- ⁴ John Henry Newman, Development of Christian Doctrine (London: Longmans, 1845).
- ⁵ Elisabeth Ann Noel, An Edition of Poems of John Henry Cardinal Newman (Diss. University of Illinois, 1956, U.M.I, 1989) 143-144.
- ⁶ Richard D. A. Hick, Victorian People and Ideas (New York: W. W. Norton and Co, 1973) 269.
- ⁷ Richard D. A. Hick 269-270.
- ⁸ Geoffrey Tillotson, "English Poetry in the Nineteenth Century," An Inaugural Lecture Delivered at the University of London (1945): 1-17.
- ⁹ Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 152.
- ¹⁰ John Henry Newman, "Prospects of the Anglican Church," Essays Critical and Historical. Vol. 1 (London: Basil Montagu Pickering, 1871) 272.
- ¹¹ Geoffrey Tillotson, Newman (London: Rupert Hart Davis, 1957) 18.
- ¹² Geoffrey Tillotson, A View of Victorian Literature (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978) 54.
- ¹³ Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 144-145.
- ¹⁴ John Henry Cardinal Newman, Verses on Various Occasions (New York: Longmans, 1900) 197.
- ¹⁵ John Henry Cardinal Newman, Verses 198.
- ¹⁶ Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. xviii.
- ¹⁷ Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 244-261.

- 18 The Times 12 August 1890: 7.
- 19 John Henry Newman, Memorials of the Past (Oxford: 1832) title page.
- 20 John Henry Cardinal Newman, Verses 3-4.
- 21 John Henry Newman, Apologia pro Vita Sua, ed. Maisie Ward (London: Sheed and Ward, 1989) 1.
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- 23 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 90-91.
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- 25 Elizabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 197.
- 26 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 160.
- 27 John Henry Cardinal Newman, Verses 202-207.
- 28 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 39-41.
- 29 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 6-7.
- 30 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 30-31.
- 31 A free Adaptation of Iliad. xviii. 125.
- 32 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 27.
- 33 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 22-24.
- 34 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 43-44.
- 35 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 45-46.
- 36 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 28-29.
- 37 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 49-52.
- 38 Cándido de Dalmases, Ignatius of Loyola, trans. Jerome Aixalá (Gujarat Sahitya Prakash Anand, 1985) 80.
- 39 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 66-67
- 40 John Henry Cardinal Newman, Verses 9-11.
- 41 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 6-7
- 42 John Henry Cardinal Newman, Verses 9-11.
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