

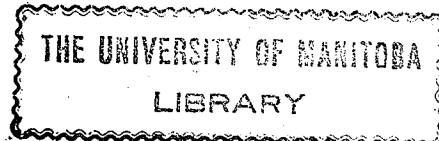
ALICE MEYNELL:

A Study of her relation
to the Literary and Religious movements
of the Later Nineteenth Century.

A dissertation:

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by

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AD MAJOREM DEI GLORIAM

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F O R E W O R D

Alice Meynell was a poet, an essayist, and a critic. In this study of her work, her poetry and her "occasional" essays are given detailed attention: her literary criticism is used for illustration and corroboration only. I am far from suggesting by this subordination that Alice Meynell's critical work is not, of its kind, comparable in merit with her "occasional" essays and her poems. I believe, however, that this criticism, in view of the precise purposes of this study, does not require separate and minute examination.

Alice Meynell, Alice Thompson before marriage, was born in 1847 and she died in 1922. She enters the history of English literature in 1875 with the appearance of her first volume of poetry; and she did not put down her pen, either for prose or for poetry, till the day she died. The period to which this long life of writing especially belongs, the period when, in the full maturity of her powers, Alice Meynell achieved her greatest reputation among men of letters, was the last fifteen years of the Nineteenth Century. The immediate field of this essay, and the period designated as the "later Nineteenth Century," extends therefore from the year 1865, when the first of her published poems was written, to the year 1900, and includes roughly the last thirty years of the Nineteenth Century.

CHAPTER ONE: PRELUDES 1875

1. "Grey Time"

In the year 1875, Alice Christiana Thompson, a young woman of twenty-eight, published a small book of verse. The book had been given the title of Preludes; and, though the actual achievement was impressive enough, the title suggested the greater importance of the book, as a promise for the future. "There is here," wrote Geoffrey Bliss, years later, of the Preludes, "an assured technique, a mellowness that could easily be taken for a maturity of thought, and therewith, a curious, eager interest in what the future, even the distant future, may hold in store, that is perhaps characteristic of youth, but which has never before or since found so pathetic and beautiful expression."⁽¹⁾ Nothing was more characteristic of this first edition of Alice Maynell's poetry than her preoccupation with the vocation of the poet, and her modest but firm assurance of her own share in that vocation. Of the thirty-seven poems of the Preludes, in the 1940 edition of her complete works, no less than twelve are concerned with the Poet, his inspiration, his influence, his joy and his sorrow, his communion with Nature and the minds of others, his childhood and his grave. Of the five poems, published for the first time in the 1940 edition, which belong to the period, 1868 to 1870, two also deal with this same theme.

In the first poem of this little volume, also appropriately entitled, In Early Spring, the poet has, too modestly as we shall see, confessed the lack of maturity of

Preludes, and, in the next line, declared her confidence that the future holds "a world inspired" for her ear, mature in silence.

But not a flower a song I ponder is
My own, but memory's.
I shall be silent in those days desired
Before a world inspired. (2)

Under the figure of The Spring to the Summer, this young poet has bravely placed herself in the living tradition of poetry. Here was a mature thought, a promising audacity.

O poet of the time to be,
My conqueror, I began for thee.
Enter into thy poet's pain,
And take the riches of the rain,
And make the perfect year for me. (3)

She is to be greater than she is, in the summer. But even in the spring time, she is guiding and directing that "poet of the time to be."

And I have set thy paths, I guide
Thy blossoms on the wild hillside
And I, thy bygone poet, share
The flowers that throng thy feet where'er
I led thy feet before I died. (4)

Preludes vibrates with the promise of the spring. Never has the sense of expectancy been so sensitively expressed before.

I wander in a grey time that encloses
June and the wild hedge-roses. (5)

"Grey" is the colour of early morning:

O fainting traveller, morn is grey in heaven. (6)

And "a poet's face" is "asleep in this grey morn." (7) "Grey" is also the colour of youth. In Early Spring, the poet watches a while the face of her poet.

There was the secret, fled from earth and skies,
Hid in his grey young eyes. (8)

"Grey" is always the colour of spring; and in this "grey time", the days of youth, the hours of spring, the moment before the dawn, this new poet dedicates herself to her vocation of poet.

I dedicate my fields, when Spring is grey. (9)

It was, with this line, in the sonnet The Young Neophyte, that Alice Thompson dedicated herself to the Catholic Church; and, in this poem of consecration and dedication, she has intimately associated the art of the poet and the life of the woman, her "folded art" and her "hands trembling with what toils?"

The poetic flame had leaped early in the mind of Alice Thompson. "I began to write when I was about nine; it had no kind of promise in it, nothing noticeable or even excusable, except a good ear for prosody." (10) This childhood verse, not preserved, sang of the arms and the loves of knights and ladies. (11) This verse had at least the stimulation of a poetic environment; for Alice's sister, Elizabeth, was composing, at the age of seven, such lines as,

In the north of Asia I sat,
Not knowing what to do
And thinking of great Caesar,
But his time is past.
O Brutus and Cassius, why did you
kill great Caesar? (12)

The earliest written of the published poems, In Autumn, was composed in 1865, when Alice Thompson was eighteen. "I kept all my writings secret from shyness until I was nearly twenty," the poet is reported to have said, "when I showed them to a dear friend, an American, and he read them to my father. From

that day I had all the sympathy and interest of my father and mother: I had also the invaluable advice of a priest, a Jesuit, who expected great things of me and urged me to write prose also."⁽¹³⁾ In 1875, with the encouragement of Tennyson, Coventry Patmore, Aubrey de Vere, and Sir Henry Taylor, Alice Thompson published this work of ten years doing.⁽¹⁴⁾ But not quite all. The Oxford University Press published in 1940, a group of five poems that belong to the years between 1869 and 1870. This group, deliberately suppressed by the poet, has been printed for the first time from a manuscript in the hands of Father Geoffrey Bliss.⁽¹⁵⁾

The themes of this early poetry, as the Athenaeum pointed out upon the reappearance of Preludes in 1893,⁽¹⁶⁾ are three: love, nature, poetry. More precisely, it may be said that the three themes of Preludes are tears, wildness, and silence. In these three words, in their implications and associations, is contained the poetic sensibility of Alice Thompson, the poet of the Preludes.

Ruskin, when shown some of this poetry before publication, spoke a word of approval, but remonstrated with the poet - was she always going to write so sadly?⁽¹⁷⁾ Tears, indeed, are frequently falling in the pages of Preludes. The earliest written is the most liberally drenched. In the tender, rich-vowelled, melody of Tennyson, In Autumn grieves.

The low winds moan for dead sweet years;
The birds sing all for pain,
Of a common thing, to weary ears,-
Only a summer's fate of rain,
And a woman's fate of tears.

(18)

In A Letter from a Girl to her own Old Age, the tears fall freely.

Oh hush, O hush! Thy tears my words are steeping.
Oh hush, hush, hush! So full, the fount of weeping?
Poor eyes, so quickly moved, so near to sleeping? (19)

There are the "diamond showers" of her nature poetry, and the "crying skies", and "the great rains" of "her passionate eyes." There are "dews to wet thy quiet eyes" and, at the memory of a lover lost, "sweet decorous tears" will fall, mingled with "diamond dew and emerald showers." With "tear on tear", the lamented dead, "too sweet, too dear", are wept for. And San Lorenzo's mother cannot recognize her son, for her "eyes were veiled by mists of tears." Of this mood, evidently the not uncommon youthful melancholy that Romantic poetry has expressed and, in its younger readers, induced, there is a parallel in the diary of Alice Thompson. At the age of seventeen, one year before the composition of In Autumn, the poet was writing to herself:

Today I have shed more tears I think than I have before in all my life. I went round the garden and into every nook, and watered the grass with my tears. Tears to me are most poignant agony, a mark of the utmost extremity of pain. They do not come in torrents, but by twos and threes, and each one seems to break my heart.

(20)

A little later, in the same diary:

Downpour of rain all day, only in the evening it stopt and we went out in the melancholy damp twilight. Oh these overcast spring evenings in the country are very awful. If I look inward I find tears; if outward, rain. My nature life should needs be sunny to compensate for such a youth of sorrow.

(21)

I quote the diary merely to emphasize the point, that this youthful melancholy, while it may suffocate the melody, the rhythm, and the thought, of some few pieces in her early work, was due to nothing else than a too-sensitive and somewhat lonely disposition. As Alice Thompson herself confesses, in the diary, the real reason for her tears was that she had nothing to do.⁽²²⁾ She proposes to "cultivate that rhyming faculty which I used to have, if it is not quite gone from me." The afterthought to this, - "But whatever I write will be melancholy and self-conscious, as are all women's poems"⁽²³⁾ - was not to be true, even of the Preludes. For, other qualities of her work aside, Alice Thompson's treatment of "tears" is progressively strengthened in her early poetry, and soon the word itself has no suggestion of the sentimental or the youthful.

Familiar words, such as "tears", together with their imaginative cognates, "rain" and "showers" and "dew", became very quickly symbols, in this case - of "pain", rather than expressions of actual experience; and this tendency is discernible in Preludes. For example, the association of rain and tears and pain in Parted improves only a little, the mood of In Autumn.

I shall not hear his voice complain,
But who shall stop the patient rain?
His tears must not disturb my heart,
But who shall change the years, and part
The world from every thought of pain? (24)

But in The Spring to the Summer, the word "rain" has become

more closely associated with "pain", and indeed is identified with it.

Enter into thy poet's pain,
And take the riches of the rain,
And make the perfect year for me. (25)

The association of "pain" and "rain" in experience is indicated in such a line as this, from The Love of Narcissus,

His weary tears that touch him with the rain, (26)
and will need no explanation: But the use of such a phrase as "the riches of the rain" displays a tendency towards abstraction, or the mental, rather than the imaginative, representation of the similarity between "pain" and "rain". In other words, "rain" is used as the symbol of "pain" rather than as a metaphor for it. I will conclude nothing from a single example; but this disposition in the poet to handle the impressions of experience, as "ideas", and thus able to enter into relations with other ideas, (in our example, the word "riches"), which bear no relation at all or, at least, not the same relation to the experience as to the "idea", is a tendency not merely towards the use of symbols, but towards the use of a certain type of "conceit" - the ingeniously contrived and elaborately wrought-out comparison. I am not denying Alice Thompson, on the evidence of her increasingly intellectual use of the word "rain", imaginative power. She has given us a splendid example of this power in the last lines of A Study. This poem is 280 lines long and in blank verse. Its length and its blank verse were both experiments, and neither was successful. A Study did not reappear in the 1893 edition.

Tennyson was perhaps the model for this dramatic representation of a doleful story. But in the last twelve lines, the rhythm is controlled with mastery, the emotion is completely projected, and the language - except for that "move" in the seventh line - profoundly suggestive.

She therefore turned unto the Eastern hills,
Thrilled with a west wind sowing stars. She saw
Her lonely upward way climb to the verge
And ending of the day-time; and she knew
The downward way in presence of the night.
She heard the fitful sheep-bells in the glen
Move like a child's thoughts. There she felt
the earth
Lonely in space. And all things suddenly
Shook with her tears. She went with
shadowless feet,
Moving along the shadow of the world,
Faring alone to home and a long life,
Setting a twilight face to meet the stars. (27)

The adolescent malaise is, in these twelve lines, transmuted into a deeper and more objective emotion; and it was a good thing for her poetry that another note, closely related to this adolescent malaise, was to disappear utterly from her later work. The preoccupation of some of the Romantic poets with death, with easeful death, finds its way into the Preludes, and into the Unpublished Poems. (28) In Autumn strikes this note in the first three lines.

The leaves are many under my feet,
And drift one way.
Their scent of death is weary and sweet. (29)

A Cenotaph, one of the Unpublished Poems, is more imbued with the desire for easeful death. Parted from one she has loved, and left with nothing but the memories of those days of love, the poet desires to die amidst her memories.

- if I could but rest
And die the quiet queen of them all. (30)

Alice Thompson most probably learned that this was a "thought fit for poetry" from Keats; but it is also in Shelley and in Christina Rossetti and, despite Browning's abuse, even more frequent in Swinburne.

Alice Meynell, in her later years, has left a note upon the influences at work in the composition of the Preludes. "Influences" is perhaps a misleading word for work of such individuality; and the diversity of those influences will reveal how difficult it is to define the position of Alice Meynell with reference to the earlier tradition of Romanticism in England. "In quite early childhood I lived upon Wordsworth. I don't know that I particularly enjoyed him, but he was put into my hands, and to me Wordsworth's poetry was the normal poetry par excellence. When I was about twelve I fell in love with Tennyson, and cared for nothing else until, at fifteen, I discovered first Keats and then Shelley. With Keats I celebrated a kind of wedding. The influence of Shelley upon me belongs rather to my spiritual than my mental history." (31)

Tennyson's influence is distinct enough in the craftsmanship of her verse, though only in the descriptive and the more subjective pieces of the Preludes. Of the later Keats, and his imaginativeness, she has nothing: of the early Keats, there is an echo in the sentimental sadness, we have just discussed. And, in spite of her own qualification, the spirit of Shelley is felt more distinctly in Preludes than the spirit

of Wordsworth or Tennyson on Keats. "Most frequently," writes Anne Kimball Tuell, of Alice Thompson, "our young poet recalls another for whom, despite her recognition of his poetic divinity, she had little personal patience, the young Shelley, spirit beautiful and swift. Like the young Shelley, she too speeds her 'wild thoughts' along far 'thought-wildernesses'." (32) For Alice Meynell, herself, however, Tennyson was the "wild poet".

Tennyson, the clearest-headed of our poets, is our wild poet, wild, notwithstanding that little foppery we know of in him - that walking delicately, like Agag; wild, notwithstanding the work, the ease, the neatness, the finish; notwithstanding the assertion of manliness, which, in asserting, somewhat misses that mark; a wilder poet than the rough, than the sensual, than the defiant, than the accuser, than the denouncer. Wild flowers are his - great poet - wild winds, wild lights, wild heart, wild eyes! (33)

"Wildness" was her touchstone for great poetry; (34) and its meaning for her, insofar as it can be defined, may safely be left for a later place. That she should have spoken of Ulysses as one of Tennyson's "greater and wilder poems" (35) is a sufficient indication that the "wildness" of Preludes is not altogether the same thing.

Of the words, "tears", "wild", "silence", and their imaginative cognates, only the last recurs more frequently than "wild". The exact correlative of "wild" in the mind of Alice Thompson is the "west wind."

Like a west wind across the world I move,
Sweeping my harp of floods mine own wild ways. (36)

This is Shelley's "O Wild West Wind," that drives his thoughts

across the universe. And in Alice Thompson's Preludes, but particularly in two of the Unpublished Poems, the spirit "tameless and swift and proud", that ranges in "the wide thought-wildernesses",⁽³⁷⁾ can be felt omnipresent as a sense of "multitude" or tumult or abandonment, infrequently allowed complete freedom, usually just beyond the edge of quiet or sadness or careful control.

It was a place so dreamy and brown,
Pensive with sheep-bells under the down,
Scent-dreamy, wild, with a windy-crown. (38)

In such a place as this, tremulous between quietness and flurry, the poet awaits The Tryst that Failed.

And the wild, wild call my soul begot,
The long wild call, I knew not what,-
We met not then, for it reached you not... (39)

But her cry is in the wind and meets there the cry of the lover.

Your cry and mine speed on together
Above the Spring and the Summer weather. (40)

Shelley's Hymn to Intellectual Beauty has dwindled into Alice Thompson's To a Lost Melody. She has developed the figure,

Like memory of music fled, (41)

and its development,

The light alone - like mist o'er mountains
driven,
A music by the night-wind sent
Through strings of some still instrument,
Or moonlight on a midnight stream,
Cries grace and truth to life's unquiet dream,
(42)

into a poem of 50 lines.

Thou art not dead, O sweet lost melody.
Sung beyond memory,
When golden to the winds this world of ours

Waved wild with boundless flowers;
Sung in some past when wilderness were,-
Not dead, not dead, lost air! (43)

Shelley's "awful shadow of some unseen Power" floating
unseen - as Alice Thompson's Melody floats unheard - amidst
the world, visiting

This various world with an inconstant wing
As summer winds that creep from flower to flower,
(44)

is urged to forsake its "holy choir" and "endless dome
in A Lost Melody, for the sake of the poet and mankind.

Then wilt thou as the clouds of ages roll,
Thou migratory soul,
Amid a different, wilder, wilderness
- In crowds that throng and press,
Revive thy blessed cadences forgotten
In some soul new-begotten?
Oh, wilt thou ever tire of thy long rest
On nature's silent breast?
And wilt thou leave thy rainbow showers, to bear
A part in human care?
- Forsake thy boundless silence to make choice
Of some pathetic voice?
- Forsake thy stars, thy suns, thy moons, thy skies
For man's desiring sighs? (45)

In the imagery of stars and sun and moon and skies, in the
frequency of apostrophe and the "Second Person Singular", in
the sense of unheard melodies, in the desire for a vaguely
defined Beauty or Truth, in the eagerness and the wild sad-
ness of "beating heart and streaming eyes", in the associ-
ation of "wild" and "wind" and "thoughts", in the spirit of
flight, of abandonment, of tumult, of "multitude", the spirit
of Shelley is distinct in this early poetry of Alice Meynell.
Distinct but superficial: the similarities reducing themselves
on the one hand, to verbal borrowings; and, on the other, to

a vague spirit of abandonment. Her debt to Shelley may perhaps be best described as the reaction of a young woman, with some eagerness for liberty, but without sympathy with, or perhaps without understanding of, Shelley's Platonism, to such poems as the Ode to the West Wind and the Hymn to Intellectual Beauty. This is by no means the only strain in that poetry; but it is the strain most at variance with her later work. It is full of a promise that was never fulfilled. How difficult it is to recognize the Alice Meynell of The Shepherdess in such lines as these, from one of the Unpublished Poems.

I alone shudder and moan to thy great things,
O wildly loved! and clasp thy sufferings
With arms of music cast about thy wings.

Thro' all thy meanings, all, come draw me higher.
Up to thy summit music I aspire.
Draw me. Lo, I would break, for thy desire. (46)

The mood of the Ode to the West Wind sweeps through the "wildest" of these early poems, the Unpublished Poem Wind-Song to the Hill, written in March, 1869. This poem is sub-titled, "The Poet Sings to a Maiden." In the "divine quiet" Nature "draws breath" before the coming of the Hill's lover.

Say, shall I come with wings from plains of flowers
Where poets' thoughts make a rain-bow wilderness?
Shall I bring songs from where the diamond showers
And grey skies mix the sun with tenderness?
And shall the souls of many larks be ours?

Or shall I tell thee of the midmost wailing
Of an indignant and unpitied sea?
Wet thee with what did wet me of the unfailing
Long wave-despairs that fare forsakenly,
Passion with pain that follows unavailing?

Shall I rend clouds for garments to enfold thee,
Bind round thy brows the bent and crying skies?
Darkened with my dark hours shall I behold thee

Through all the great rains of my passionate eyes?
With arms of pain and tempest shall I hold thee?

(47)

.

Shall I storm, love-strong, thy small wildernesses,
Thy humble heights, bare to all suns and showers?
Sport with thy timorous thoughts and poet-guesses,
Shaking thy shortest grass and little flowers,
Rioting in thy dreamiest lovelinesses?

.

- Oh, with a paeon of sound I will renown thee,
With waves of lights and shadows I will drown thee.
And like a wind, a wild wind I will crown thee.

(48)

This is a poem that suggests that the poles of Alice Thompson's sensibility were "tears" and "wildness"; that between these two, without restraint, the poetic imagination alternately drifts and rushes. This is "the tremor of a too unquiet sensibility," Anne Tuell speaks of, in the Atlantic Monthly.⁽⁴⁹⁾ And in the sonnet, A Poet of One Mood, the poet herself describes the spirit of Preludes as a mingling of the "west wind" and a "cloud full of rain."

A poet of one mood in all my lays,
Ranging all life to sing one only love,
Like a west wind across the world I move,
Sweeping my harp of floods mine own wild ways.
The countries change, but not the west-wind days
Which are my songs. My soft skies shine above,
And on all seas the colours of a dove,
And on all fields a flash of silver greys.

I make the whole world answer to my art
And sweet monotonous meanings. In your ears
I change not ever, bearing, for my part,
One thought that is the treasure of my years -
A small cloud full of rain upon my heart
And in mine arms, clasped, like a child in tears.

(50)

But Preludes is witness that the tears and the wildness are gradually mastered. In the famous Letter From a Girl, the

poet foresees the probable peace of her "wildness".

What part of this wild heart of mine I know not
Will follow with thee where the great winds
blow not. (51)

For though some of the early poems seem to oscillate between sentimental sorrow and sentimental rapture, sometimes nearer the pain and sometimes nearer the ecstasy of flight, the maturer mood of Preludes and the dominant mood is best represented, not by the sonnet just quoted, but by another, The Garden.

My heart shall be thy garden. Come, my own,
Into thy garden; thine be happy hours
Among my fairest thoughts, my tallest flowers,
From root to crowning petal thine alone.
Thine is the place from where the seeds are sown
Up to the sky enclosed, with all its showers.
But ah, the birds, the birds! Who shall
build bowers
To keep these thine? O friend, the birds have
flown.

For as these come and go, and quit our pine
To follow the sweet season, or, new-comers,
Sing one song only from our alder-trees,
My heart has thoughts, which, though thine eyes
hold mine,
Flit to the silent world and other summers,
With wings that dip beyond the silver seas.

(52)

The poet's heart is at once "a garden", enclosed, protected, and yet free to wander wildly on the wings of thought.

A Garden is the portrait of Wordsworth's girl in Three Years
She Grew.

"She shall be sportive as the fawn
That wild with glee across the lawn
Or up the mountain springs;
And hers shall be the breathing balm,
And hers the silence and the calm
Of mute insensate things.

(53)

I am suggesting that, in these two words "wildness" and "silence", are expressed the essential qualities of Alice Meynell's finest poetry. "Wildness" and "silence" may be taken as poles, within which the conflict or tension is set up that creates poetry for her.

Alice Meynell, in her criticism of the work of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, has written:

She had an original genius, a fervent heart, and an intellect that was, if not great, exceedingly active. She seldom has composure or repose, but it is not true that her poetry is purely emotional. It is full of abundant, and even over-abundant, thoughts. It is intellectually restless. The impassioned peace of the greatest poetry, such as Wordsworth's, is not hers. (54)

Alice Meynell knew that much of her early poetry was, not intellectually restless, but temperamentally restless; but Preludes shows clearly the movement towards "composure and repose", towards that "impassioned peace", which was just such a paradox as Alice Meynell loved, to express the tension between "wildness" and "silence". Silence, composure, aloofness, solitude, loneliness, mystery - all these words were closely associated in Alice Meynell's mind.

The influence of her father was strongly marked in life and art. She has written one poem, A Father of Women, published in 1917, that celebrates this influence. Written when she was seventy years of age, it represents, to say the least, a mature and careful acknowledgment of her debt to this father.

Therefore on him I cry
To arm me: 'For my delicate mind a casque
A breastplate for my heart, courage to die,
Of thee, captain, I ask.

'Nor strengthen only; press
A finger on this violent blood and pale,
Over this rash will let thy tenderness
A while pause, and prevail.

'And shepherd-father, thou
Whose staff folded my thoughts before my birth,
Control them now I am of earth, and now
Thou art no more of earth. (55)

The poet felt the control inherited from this father;
and that control had its origins in "silence". Alice Meynell
has left a single, brief testimony of this silence of her
father, a man "whose silence seems better worth interpreting
than the speech of many another." (56)

The delicate, the abstinent, the reticent graces
were his in the heroic degree... The reserve was
life-long... He was not inarticulate, he was only
silent... The things he abstained from were all
exquisite... It was by holding session among so
many implicit safeguards that he taught, rather
than by precepts. Few were these in his speech,
but his personality made laws for me. It was a
subtle education, for it persuaded insensibility
to a conception of my own. How if he would not
define, could I know what things were and what
were not worthy of his gentle and implacable judg-
ment? I must needs judge them for myself, yet he
constrained me in the judging. Within that con-
straint and under that stimulus, which seemed to
touch the ultimate springs of thoughts before they
sprang, I began to discern all things in literature
and in life - in the chastity of letters and in
the honour of life - that I was bound to love. (57)

If this is an accurate description of Thomas James Thompson,
the friend of Charles Dickens, then father and daughter were
almost incredibly alike. Alice Meynell's reticence and
reserve in literature, as in life, were outstanding

characteristics. The Athenaeum reviewer of the Later Poems, published in 1902, wrote that "Mrs. Meynell has not a great deal that she cares to say, and she is always careful to keep back all but the very heart of the message. Every poem is like the hinting of a secret."⁽⁵⁸⁾ Francis Thompson had already written of the 1893 edition of her work, substantially the Preludes, that "the footfalls of her muse waken not sounds, but silences. We lift a feather from the marsh and say: 'This way went a heron'."⁽⁵⁹⁾ Silence, understood in the plenitude of Alice Meynell's sense of the word, is to be the increasingly operative element in the union and conflict with "wildness".

In her Last Poems, published in 1923, To Silence gives her final understanding of the part of silence in poetry. The sub-title informs us that as Space is the boundary of a solid, so Silence is the form of a melody.

Man's lovely definite melody-shapes are thine,
Outlined, controlled, compressed, complete, divine.
Also thy fine intrusions do I trace,
Thy afterthoughts, thy wandering, thy grace,
Within the poet's line.

Thy secret is the song that is to be.
Music had never stature but for thee,
Sculptor! strong as the sculptor Space whose hand
Urged the Discobolus and bade him stand. (60)

Silence and control, whether in life or in art, are synonymous. And this conviction was already clearly expressed in Preludes. The last stanza of To the Beloved, a poem in which the Beloved is compared to Silence, verbally anticipates the poem of fifty years later.

O pause between the sobs of cares;
O thought within all thought that is;
Trance between laughters unawares:
Thou art the shape of melodies,
And thou the ecstasy of prayers! (61)

2 Now this is a profoundly original thought; and the five lines, just quoted, are a perfect example of the application of that original thought to poetry. Each of these five lines is a remarkably careful precision; and because of that precision, exciting and indefinitely suggestive. It is certainly not description, and it may be a dangerous "conceit", to call the Beloved "the shape of melodies" and "the ecstasy of prayers"; and it may be absolutely impossible to give any clear translation of the "conceits" - the poet's meaning may end ultimately in silence: yet it is felt that the poet has set a bridge between "Beloved" and "the shape of a melody", and the experience of crossing has been valid and important. This is a precarious art; and there is no middle distance between success and bathos.

Such "conceits" are frequent in Alice Meynell's work. In the later work, there is The Shepherdess, where the figure of the "fold" is itself almost a figure of Silence. There is The Courts, where the poet's approach to the "ultimate" poetry is compared to the Adoration of the Three Kings. In every example, the use of the figure is towards utter precision, utter delineation, of an elusive "poetic thought" or experience. The figure is not the Elizabethan "conceit", where the figure - a ship, perhaps, or a garden - is elaborated for its own sake, for the sake of a decorative beauty, and not

solely in order to develop the meaning of the subject thus figured forth. In these "conceits" of Alice Meynell, there is a constant, tense, reference between the figure and the thought. The figure is the outline - the Silence that bounds - the thought. To the Beloved and The Garden have already been quoted. More perfect examples than these are The Visiting Sea and Regrets, both in Preludes. They are companion poems, and deal with the problem of the union and communion of personality: The Visiting Sea with the approach, Regrets with the withdrawal. In both poems, the figure made use of is the tide. I shall quote only The Visiting Sea.

As the inhastening tide doth roll,
Home from the deep, along the whole
Wide shining strand, and floods the caves,
- Your love comes filling with happy waves
The open sea-shore of my soul.

But inland from the seaward spaces,
None knows, not even you, the places
Brimmed, at your coming, out of sight,
- The little solitudes of delight
This tide constrains in dim embraces.

You see the happy shore, wave-rimmed,
But know not of the quiet dimmed
Rivers your coming floods and fills,
The little pools 'mid happier hills,
My silent rivulets, over-brimmed.

What! I have secrets from you? Yes.
But, visiting Sea, your love doth press
And reach in further than you know,
And fills all these, and, when you go,
There's loneliness in loneliness. (62)

A tension therefore between "wildness" and "silence" - or, more generally, between "multitude" and "composure" - is the characteristic note of Preludes, and, as shall later appear, the characteristic note of Alice Meynell's work,

whether poetry or prose. Her characteristic control or restraint must be interpreted as a pressure, like a finger upon the pulse, that does not still the beat of the heart, but feels it the more vehement. And thus such a "conceit" as we have seen in The Visiting Sea may likewise be interpreted as a form or framework within which the sensibility of Alice Meynell, feeling the sense of outline, feels therefore the tension and the "wildness" of thought and emotion. There can be no doubt that the "laws of verse", that the metre itself, the rhythm, the precision of the right word, were understood by Alice Meynell to be a control necessary - not to stifle and subdue, but - to evoke the tension of thought and feeling. In her Last Poems (1923), published after her death, she expresses this quite clearly in The Laws of Verse.

Dear laws, come to my breast!
Take all my frame, and make your close arms meet
Around me; and so ruled, so warmed, so pressed,
I breathe, aware; I feel my wild heart beat. (63)

From this discussion of sensibility, I wish now to turn to the matter of communication or language. With the exception of two poems, the Preludes make use of the language of Nature; Alice Meynell's "poetic thought" finding its expression through the medium of imagery drawn from the observation of landscape, the flight of birds, the movement of wind and water.

Alice Meynell's treatment of Nature in the Preludes is somewhat uncertain. In Autumn, the earliest of the poems of this volume, displays an unrealistic attitude towards

Nature completely at variance with her mature poetry.

Nature in this poem, sympathetically adjusts herself to the moods of the poet.

The low winds moan for dead sweet years;
The birds sing all for pain,
Of a common thing, to weary ears,-
Only a summer's fate of rain,
And a woman's fate of tears. (64)

The sonnet, The Love of Narcissus, proposes the thought that Nature is the mirror of the poet's joy and sorrow.

Like him who met his own eyes in the river,
The poet trembles at his own long gaze
That meets him through the changing nights
and days
From our great Nature;....

He knows again his mirth in mountain rills,
His weary tears that touch him with the rain. (65)

An even more unrealistic treatment of Nature, and the reverse of that expressed in The Love of Narcissus, is the identification of self with the moods of Nature. This, we have already seen, in the Unpublished Poems especially, as an echo of Shelley. We have then a suggestion of Wordsworth and an echo of Shelley to confuse the dominant, and, as we shall see by comparison with the Later Poems, the life-long view of Alice Meynell towards Nature. One might even discover another hint of Wordsworth and the Eighteenth Century idea of Providence and the natural order of the universe in such lines as these from Advent Meditation:

The happy Springs renewed again
His daily bread, the growing grain,
The food and raiment of the Child. (66)

Alice Meynell was a Nature poet. But, despite some

uncertainty in the Preludes, she is completely realistic in her attitude towards Nature. In the greater part of the Preludes, throughout the Essays and the Later Poems, there is no attempt to infuse self or personal emotion into Nature; nor to feel Nature either as sympathetic to the poet or conducive to reflectiveness and spiritual growth. Alice Meynell commended John Ruskin, in 1900; for a passage in his Modern Painters.

And happy in thought is a passage on the modern who accepts sympathy from nature that he does not believe in, and gives her sympathy that he does not believe in (but should this part of the phrase be so positive as the other?), whereas the Greek had no sympathy at all with "actual wave and woody fibre." (67)

The qualification she implies in that parenthetical question is something to be explained later. Alice Meynell's starting-point was careful and accurate description of nature: utter fidelity to the natural fact.

I know the secrets of the seeds of flowers
Hidden and warm with showers,
And how, in kindling Spring, the cuckoo shall
Alter his interval. (68)

Every period of her life and of her art reveals a minute attention to the detail of natural beauty. There is exquisite descriptive power revealed in the sonnet, Spring on the Alban Hills, where, surveying the Campagna, she beholds:

Rome in the ages, dimmed with all her towers,
Floats in the midst, a little cloud at tether. (69)

In the Occasional Essays, impressionistic description, thoroughly objective and exquisitely sensitive, without

suggestion of anything more profound in nature than light and colour and line and movement, produces such essays as The Horizon, Cloud, Shadows, Tethered Constellations, and a number of others. Among the poems published in 1902, there is such purely descriptive work as this:

But when the gold and silver lamps
 Colour the London dew,
And, misted by the winter damps,
 The shops shine bright anew -
Blue comes to earth, it walks the street,
 It dyes the wide air through;
A mimic sky about their feet,
 The throng go crowned with blue. (70)

From the poems published in 1913, The Rainy Summer is proof that Alice Meynell's powers of observation were not failing. Such poems of pure description were, by this time, quite rare in her work.

No scents may pause within the garden-fold;
 The rifled flowers are cold as ocean-shells;
Bees humming in the storm, carry their cold
 Wild honey to cold cells. (71)

In the Last Poems, published in 1923, the essay The Horizon has been compressed into the sixteen lines of the poem Winter Trees on the Horizon. In her criticism, Alice Meynell never hesitated to point out any lack of fidelity to natural fact. Mere description, she would not have held to be poetry; but no more would she allow fancy or philosophic assumptions to tamper with Nature. "Even as late as Keats," she wrote in the essay That Pretty Person, "a poet would not have patience with the process of the seasons, but boasted of untimely flowers. The 'musk-rose' is never in fact the child of mid-May, as he has it." (72) She takes issue with

Ruskin "as to the seasons of the sea."

Did even he, who knew better than to follow the fashion, and who went to the Alps when the gentians were blue - did even he not know the May that kindles the Adriatic and is not perpetual, or it would not be May? (73)

Shakespeare alone she has found beyond criticism.

Shakespeare alone is quite explicit, Shakespeare alone has the natural fact at heart and identifies natural fact with divine poetry. Spenser's 'untimely tempest' and Milton's 'forsaken' are both false, for tempest is not untimely but timely during the primrose's life; and the primrose is not forsaken any more than a young virgin is forsaken. (74)

In this fidelity to nature, Alice Meynell, as a nature-poet, has closely followed Tennyson. "Tennyson", writes Joseph Warren Beach, in The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth Century English Poetry, "is anything but a nature-poet in the sense in which this term applies to the romantic poets, Wordsworth and Shelley and Goethe. He is no notable landscape painter. The rich and cultivated English countryside appears in his poems in the form of deliberate pictorial compositions combining in unique fashion melting grace of line with a certain hard objective precision of detail... Tennyson is the most clear-headed of poets. He indulges very little in unconscious pathetic fallacy. He never confuses the beauty of landscape with a conviction of the benevolence of nature." (75) In Alice Meynell's work, that landscape was as often the Italian landscape, where much of her childhood was spent and which she revisited several times in later life. No more than

Tennyson, would she have accepted the lines of Tintern Abbey.

Nature never did betray
The heart that loved her. (76)

And upon just this point, she has opposed Tennyson to Wordsworth. In Hearts of Controversy (1917), a volume of essays in literary criticism, she defends the intellectual quality of Tennyson's work by indicating the "blunders of thought" in Coleridge and Wordsworth. The criticism of Wordsworth is directed against Heartleap Well.

As for Wordsworth, the most beautiful stanzas of "Heartleap Well" are fatally rebuked by the truths of Nature. He shows us the ruins of an aspen wood, a blighted hollow, a dreary place, forlorn because an innocent stag, hunted, had there broken his heart in a leap from the rocks above; grass would not grow there.

This beast not unobserved by Nature fell,
His death was mourned by sympathy divine.

And the signs of that sympathy are cruelly asserted by the poet to be these woodland ruins - cruelly, because the daily sight of the world blossoming over the agonies of beast and bird is made less tolerable to us by such a fiction.

The Being that is in the clouds and air

.

Maintains a deep and reverential care
For the unoffending creature whom He loves.

The poet offers us as a proof of that "reverential care," the visible alteration of Nature at the scene of suffering - an alteration we have to dispense with every day we pass in the woods. We are tempted to ask whether Wordsworth himself believed in a sympathy he asks us - on such grounds! - to believe in? Did he think his faith to be worthy of no more than a fictitious sign and a false proof?

Nowhere in the whole of Tennyson's thought is there such an attack upon our reason and heart. He is more serious than the solemn Wordsworth. (77)

From Preludes to the Last Poems (1923), Alice Meynell maintained the Tennysonian attitude towards Nature. And particularly in the invincible mystery that lies within nature. In John Ruskin, she wrote:

The world - nature - is full of unanswerable questions. (78)

And this thought is the burden of all her work. In Preludes, the poem To Any Poet warns all poets of the secrecy of nature's "wild creatures": "There is something they deny thee."

Though thou tame a bird to love thee,
Press thy face to grass and flowers,
All these things reserve above thee
Secrets in the bowers,
Secrets in the sun and showers.

Sing thy sorrow, sing thy gladness,
In thy songs must wind and tree
Bear the fictions of thy sadness,
Thy humanity.
For their truth is not for thee. (79)

With death only will come knowledge and understanding; and Alice Meynell imagines this new, truer knowledge - nature-philosophy itself, she seems to suggest, is but "fair fancies" and an art to be resigned - as blossoming into flowers above the grave of the dead poet.

Earth, set free from thy fair fancies
And the art thou shall resign,
Will bring forth her rue and pansies
Unto more divine
Thoughts than any thoughts of thine. (80)

Tennyson's The Higher Pantheism had expressed the same fundamental thought about the mystery of "the sun, the moon, the stars, the seas, the hills and the plains." In To a Daisy, Alice Meynell has added in Preludes a sharper edge to the

'Flower in the crannied wall.' Tennyson had written:

Little flower - but if I could understand
What you are, root and all, and all in all,
I should know what God and man is. (81)

This trivial thought, which nevertheless merited to be included in The Oxford Book of English Mystical Verse, receives in the word "barrier" of Alice Meynell's sonnet, precision and clarity.

Slight as thou art, thou art enough to hide
Like all created things, secrets from me,
And stand a barrier to eternity.
And I, how can I praise thee well and wide
From where I dwell - upon the hither side? (82)

Again, the poet declares that, on this side of the grave, there is no understanding of God to be gained from an imaginative contemplation of Nature. Francis Thompson was to write:

The angels keep their ancient places;-
Turn but a stone, and start a wing!
'Tis ye, 'tis your estranged faces,
That miss the many-splendoured thing. (83)

Alice Meynell belonged among the "estranged faces." She was not a mystic of Nature. We may suppose she turned many a stone: she started no wings.

Thus far, I have been quoting Preludes. But in Later Poems, the poet still speaks of "this ambiguous earth"(84); and in the Last Poems (1923), in a poem addressed To the Mother of Christ the Son of Man, that epithet is repeated.

We must affirm our Son
From the ambiguous Nature's difficult speech,
Gather in darkness that resplendent One,
Close as our grasp can reach. (85)

In Christmas Night, a poem written in December 1921, a year before her death, her attitude towards Nature is unchanged. God is not to be discovered in Nature: He can be known only through faith.

We do not find Him on the difficult earth,
In surging humankind,
In wayside death or accidental birth,
Or in the 'march of mind'.

Nature, her nests, her prey, the fed, the caught,
Hide Him so well, so well,
His steadfast secret there seems to our thought
Life's saddest miracle.

He's but conjectured in man's happiness,
Suspected in man's tears,
Or lurks beyond the long, discouraged guess,
Grown fainter through the years.

.

But absent, absent now? Ah, what is this,
Near as in child-birth bed,
Laid on our sorrowful hearts, close to a kiss?
A homeless childish head. (86)

The first part of this poem recalls the lines from In Memoriam:

I found Him not in world or sun,
Or eagle's wing, or insect's eye;
Nor thro' the questions men may try,
The petty cobwebs we have spun. (87)

Of the more sombre note,

Nature, red in tooth and claw
With ravin, shrieked against his creed - (88)

by which Tennyson anticipates Hardy, there is no echo in Alice Meynell. She is determined to keep the mystery safe. The silence of Nature is too complete to allow any positive inference from the evident destructiveness of her ways. There is at least compensation. If there is "prey," there are also "nests": if there are the "caught", there are also

the "fed". From such a balance of contraries, no conclusion can be drawn. We have already noticed that Alice Meynell had queried the thought of Ruskin that the "modern" poet had given to Nature, "sympathy that he does not believe in."⁽⁸⁸⁾ How could Ruskin be so positive about that? In 1896, Alice Meynell published, with others, the essay A Point of Biography. This essay was a protest against the habit of biographers who made capital of the last painful moments of their subject's life. She found an interesting contrast in the way in which Nature conceals rather than publishes the agonies and deaths of birds and animals. Alice Meynell makes use of her discovery to gain a point against the contemporary view of Nature.

There are few writers now - of the third class extremely few - who have not something sharp and sad to say about the cruelty of Nature; few who are able to attempt May in the woods without a modern reference to the manifold death and destruction with which the air, the branches, the mosses are said to be filled.

But no one has paused in the course of these phrases to take notice of the curious and conspicuous fact of the suppression of death and of the dead throughout this landscape of manifest life. Where are they - all the dying, all the dead, of the populous woods?there is nothing visible of the havoc and the prey and the plunder.

Though she seriously questions the extent of Nature's cruelty, Alice Meynell admits that violent death there is in the woods - but not without a sharp retort.

The woodland is guarded and kept by a rule. There is no display of the battlefield in the fields... The hunting goes on, but with strange decorum. You may pass a fine season under the trees, and see nothing dead except here and there where a boy has been by, or a man with a trap,

or a man with a gun.

(89)

Alice Meynell has therefore, as the follower of Tennyson in all but this last point, no "mystical" philosophy of Nature to teach and no special pessimism - such as Hardy's - having its source in the evolutionary hypothesis. For her, Nature is an impenetrable mystery: to be revealed fully only after death, revealed in life to some extent by faith only. She can therefore be considered a nature-poet only in the sense that she is much concerned with accurate, completely accurate, description of nature, and in the sense that she makes use of nature as a language, a medium of communication of ideas that have nothing to do with nature, a source of simile and metaphor. When we consider that Wordsworth and Shelley attempted to replace Religion by Nature, Alice Meynell's attitude towards Nature must seem unimportant by comparison. It was nevertheless important for her art; for it will be found, I believe, that when her thought seeks expression except in this language of nature, it is in danger of losing its poetic vitality altogether.

2. "The Young Neophyte"

This was the hour of conversion. Beneath the surface serenity of Trollope and the deeper serenity of the humorists, Gilbert and Lewis Carroll and Lear, there was this note of alarm, that men were leaving the world deliberately, or deliberately entering it with a new vehemence. It was therefore the hour of the prophets and the proselytizers. Carlyle, Ruskin, Arnold, Huxley, and Morris were preaching in the secular pulpits. Ibsen and Shaw were still in the future; Marx was yet an unheard thunder: but they were being prepared for. The movement towards Rome, as it was called, was spreading with an ever wider current across the nation, and particularly, for that is what concerns us, through the ranks of men of letters. And this movement was only one symptom, not the most striking, of that subterranean disturbance. Men, one here and there only, but still the wisest and the best of men, took one long look at the Victorian scene and, with the early Morris, fled away into a happier world, or, with the later Morris, descended into the arena to work with their hands.

Alice Thompson was received into the Catholic Church in the year 1867, at the age of twenty.⁽¹⁾ Some years earlier, her mother had become a Catholic and recorded the event in her journal. The words are particularly significant of many conversions to Catholicism during this period: "Returned home and told no one." This might be

compared with the conversion of Percy Lucas, younger brother of E.V. Lucas, Percy Lucas had married Madeline, the second daughter of Alice Meynell; and when he died of wounds in France in 1916, Everard Meynell wrote of him: "Of his affairs he said not a word to me. When he became a Catholic he told his Catholic friends no more about it than he would if he had been joining a faith alien to them. He never sought help nor sought to give it."⁽²⁾ This is an attitude that has its importance in any understanding of the writing of Catholics in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Alice Thompson was received into the Church by the Jesuit, to whom she had first shown her unpublished Preludes. This priest, whose name has never been made known to the world, encouraged her to continue her writing, urged it upon her as a duty, and later instructed her in religious doctrine.⁽³⁾ Agnes de la Force, commenting upon this conversion, writes that "this young woman longed for truth more than she desired happiness."⁽⁴⁾ But such a comment upon Alice Thompson's conversion must be understood rightly.

Was her longing for truth in any considerable sense similar to the aspirations of the men of the Oxford movement? Newman's Apologia had been published only three years before Alice Thompson's conversion and there is not a book in English so utterly revealing of the progress of a soul towards belief and towards Catholicism. There is, however, little resemblance between the conversion of Alice Thompson and the conversion of John Henry Newman. G.K. Chesterton, in The Victorian Age in Literature, has carefully defined

the significance of the Oxford Movement. "It was certainly not aesthetic ritualism; scarcely one of the Oxford High Churchmen was what we should call a Ritualist. It was certainly not a conscious reaching out towards Rome: except on a Roman Catholic theory which might explain all our unrests by that dim desire. It knew little of Europe, it knew nothing of Ireland, to which any merely Roman Catholic revulsion would obviously have turned. In the first instance, I think, the more it is studied, the more it would appear that it was a movement of mere religion as such. It was not so much a taste for Catholic dogma, but simply a hunger for dogma. For dogma means the serious satisfaction of the mind."⁽⁵⁾ Now, of hunger for dogma, in this sense, of the painful progress of a mind, inching its way towards conviction, the conversion of Alice Thompson gives no evidence. "I have been reading Father Newman's reply (to Gladstone's 'Vaticanism') very carefully," she wrote in 1875 to the priest who received her into the Church. "I am very much interested by the little he says of the principle of evolution in the teaching of the Church. It seems to me to explain all difficulties with respect to 'novelties'. I had some idea of this in becoming a Catholic. I received the Church so that whatever she could unfold with time she would unfold it there where I had enclosed her, in my heart."⁽⁶⁾ She was, evidently, easily satisfied. Where Newman had wrestled mightily, she glides without a tremor. Much later, she admits, in a letter to her

husband, that she does not understand Newman. "(Everard) has verified all my many queries in your Newman proofs - a work of hours. It is certainly a delightful little book, and I have only a kind of insensibility of my own to blame for my lack of interest in its subject. I do not love the character at all; the 'beautiful' passage about Ambrose St. John is to my mind a curious inversion of parody. It is a solemn parody of the comic pages of 'The Egoist'. And I don't admire the mere literature. I disagree with George Eliot and Coventry Patmore, and you, and everybody. So the deuce is in it."⁽⁷⁾ Of the large comprehensive mind of the philosopher that resolutely pursues through a volume the intricacies and the skirmishes of a problem, she seemed scarcely to have an idea. Her failure to grasp the thought of John Ruskin, in this larger sense, is amply demonstrated by her treatment of that writer in a book commissioned for the "Modern English Writers" series. Mr. Hare ought not to have tried to explain Relativity to her. In 1920 - she was then seventy-three - she writes to Wilfrid Meynell that "Mr. Hare tried to make me understand Relativity. But as you want, for that, metaphysics and mathematics, and I am incapable of both, it was rather a monologue."⁽⁸⁾ Not by mathematics, nor by metaphysics, nor by theology, was religious conviction to come to Alice Thompson.

As a matter of fact, the iron-bound consistency of the Catholic formulations of the deposit of faith was as often a reason for dismay on the part of non-Catholics, as

a reason for conversion. The truth, they felt, must be consistent; but consistency was not necessarily truth. The sympathy of so many Anglicans during the Victorian Age with the Church of Rome is more frequently explained by other factors; and especially by the aesthetic appeal of the ancient ritual and liturgy, by the perennial attractiveness of the early centuries of Christianity, and by the new emphasis on medievalism which became one of most characteristic marks of the middle period of Victorian art and literature.

As with every conversion of this period, it will be necessary to determine precisely, in the sensibility of Alice Thompson, the influence of these three factors, and, to do so, I will allow myself the liberty of pressing into service at this point the whole body of her work.

Pater and Newman may be taken as two terms of comparison. Both were unquestionably much attracted by the ritual of the Church, the first days of Christianity, and the Church of the Middle Ages; and yet, there is between them a considerable difference.

In Marius the Epicurean, Pater combines all three in the spirit of a pervasive "esthetic charm."

The esthetic charm of the Catholic Church, her evocative power over all that is eloquent and expressive in the better mind of man, her outward comeliness, her dignifying convictions about human nature:- all this, as abundantly realized centuries later by Dante and Giotto, by the great medieval church-builders, by the great ritualists like St. Gregory, and the masters of sacred music in the middle age - we may see already, in dim anticipation in those charmed moments towards the end of the second century.

The wonderful liturgical spirit of the church, her wholly unparalleled genius for worship, being thus awake, she was rapidly reorganizing both pagan and Jewish elements of ritual, for the expanding therein of her own new devotion. Like the institutions of monasticism, like the Gothic style of architecture, the ritual system of the church, as we see it in historic retrospect, ranks as one of the great, conjoint, and (so to term them) necessary, products of human mind. (10)

On the other hand, there is Newman, who everywhere displays genuine delight in the liturgical spirit of the Church, who evokes, in a religious novel, Callista, A Tale of the Third Century, the spirit of early Christianity, and in a sermon, The Second Spring, the English Church of the Middle Ages: but with what a difference of emphasis, or rather with what an essentially different point of view, from that of Pater. In Loss and Gain, another religious novel, Newman has a Catholic priest say:

Englishmen have many gifts, faith they have not. Other nations, inferior to them in many things, still have faith. Nothing will stand in place of it; not a sense of the beauty of Catholicism, or of its awfulness, or of its antiquity, not an appreciation of the sympathy which it shows towards sinners, not an admiration of the Martyrs and early Fathers, and a delight in their writings. (11)

Loss and Gain was published in 1848, three years after Newman's conversion: Marius the Epicurean was published in 1885, when "after a period of flagrant antagonism to the Church he returned to the fold." (12) "You seem to think, Mr. Pater," Jowett said to him, "that religion is all ritual." (13) And, if we compare two splendid passages upon the celebration of the Mass, one from Newman and the other from Pater, it

must appear that Jowett was right. Willis, in Loss and Gain, explains the Mass to Anglican friends:

I declare, to me, nothing is so consoling, so piercing, so thrilling, so overcoming, as the Mass, said as it is among us... It is not a mere form of words - it is a great action, the greatest action that can be on earth. It is, not the invocation merely, but, if I dare use the word, the evocation of the Eternal. He becomes present on the altar in flesh and blood, before whom angels bow and devils tremble. This is that awful event which is the end, and is the interpretation, of every part of the solemnity. Words are necessary, but as means, not as ends; they are not mere addresses to the throne of grace, they are instruments of what is far higher, of consecration, of sacrifice. They hurry on as if impatient to fulfil their mission. Quickly they go, the whole is quick; for they are all parts of one integral action. Quickly they go; for they are awful words of sacrifice, they are a work too great to delay upon; as when it was said in the beginning, 'What thou doest, do quickly! Quickly they pass; for the Lord Jesus goes with them, as He passed along the lake in the days of His flesh, quickly calling first one and then another... Quickly they pass, for they are as the words of Moses, when the Lord came down in the cloud, calling on the Name of the Lord as He passed by, 'The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.' And as Moses at the mountain, so we too 'make haste and bow our heads to the earth, and adore'. So we, all around, each in his place, look out for the great Advent, 'waiting for the moving of the water'. Each in his place, with his own heart, with his own wants, with his own thoughts, with his own intention, with his own prayers, separate but concordant, watching what is going on, watching its progress, uniting in its consummation;- not painfully and hopelessly following a hard form of prayer from beginning to end, but like a concert of musical instruments, each different, but concurring in a sweet harmony, we take our part with God's priest, supporting him, yet guided by him. (14)

It will be seen that, in this passage, there is obviously ritual, but not a trace of ritualism, or of delight in word or gesture or sound or instrument for its own sake. Far

otherwise, is the description of the Mass according to Pater. For Newman, the words go quickly: for Pater, they can scarcely go slowly enough.

It was not in an image, or series of images, yet still in a sort of dramatic action, and with the unity of a single appeal to eye and ear, that Marius about this time found all his new impressions set forth, regarding what he had already recognized, intellectually, as for him at least the most beautiful thing in the world...

The little open door, through which he passed from the court-yard, admitted him into what was plainly the vast Lararium, or domestic sanctuary, of the Cecilian family, transformed in many particulars, but still richly decorated, and retaining much of its ancient furniture in metal-work and costly stone...

And last of all came a narrative which, with a thousand tender memories, every one appeared to know by heart, displaying, in all the vividness of a picture for the eye, the mournful figure of him towards whom this whole act of worship still consistently turned - a figure which seemed to have absorbed, like some rich tincture in his garment, all that was deep-felt and impassioned in the experiences of the past....

.... The entire office, indeed, with its interchange of lessons, hymns, prayer, silence, was itself like a single piece of highly composite, dramatic music; a "song of degrees," rising steadily to a climax. Notwithstanding the absence of any central image visible to the eye, the entire ceremonial process, like the place in which it was enacted, was weighty with symbolic significance, seemed to express a single leading motive. The mystery, if such in fact it was, centered indeed in the actions of one visible person, distinguished among the assistants, who stood ranged in semi-circle around him, by the extreme fineness of his white vestments, and the pointed cap with the gold ornaments upon his head....

.... Men and women came to the altar successively, in perfect order, and deposited below the lattice-work of pierced white marble, their baskets of wheat and grapes, incense, oil for the sanctuary lamps;

bread and wine especially - pure wheaten bread,
the pure white wine of the Tusculan vineyards....
... As for Marius himself,- the natural soul of
worship in him had at last been satisfied as never
before. (15)

In Lionel Johnson, we have an example of a convert
to the Catholic Church, who was deeply influenced by both
Newman and Pater. In the poem to Oxford, Johnson gives
Newman the place of honour:

And there, O memory more sweet than all!
Lived he, whose eyes keep yet our passing light;
Whose crystal lips Athenian speech recall;
Who wears Rome's purple with least pride,
most right. (16)

But Pater likewise had a tremendous influence in his conversion;
for in the Weekly Register, Johnson wrote that "Mr. Pater,
anima naturaliter Catholica, by his Marius the Epicurean, did
more in a few pages to draw my mind towards the ultimate
conviction, than all the stately volumes of Gibbon." (17) And
Mr. Arthur Patrick, in his Lionel Johnson, Poète et Critique,
quotes, from a letter to Miss Guiney, the result of Pater's
influence.

It was at Wareham, after Mass there, that
I wrote the lines in my book, called, To a
Passionist. The celebrant had a face of beautiful
austerity, and was vested in a wondrous white
chasuble brodered with purple passion-flowers. (18)

And yet, aesthetic ritualism, however strong in Johnson, was
not the motive of his conversion. Mr. Patrick will permit
no mistake about that.

Il faut donc admettre dans le cas de Johnson,
une vie spirituelle ayant sa source en une
conviction profonde et sincère. En dépit des
apparences, le catholicisme dit "décadent" n'était
point son fait. (19)

The influence of Pater was sufficient in Johnson to rank him with the neo-Catholics. I am here making use of Mr. Patrick's terminology and his definition.

... Johnson est néo-catholique, en ce sens qu'il accepte le catholicisme comme une belle expression de la tradition des siècles, comme le dernier refuge dans un monde que la science semble avoir enlaidi et auquel elle a retiré toute signification. Pour ces néo-catholiques, l'Eglise donne à la vie cette unité dont ils éprouvaient la nostalgie et qu'ils cherchaient ailleurs en vain, ceux qui adoptaient cette attitude ne trouvaient dans les rites et les cérémonies que la beauté de la forme, une satisfaction des sens. (20)

It is not to my purpose to investigate whether the number of neo-Catholics in the later Nineteenth Century were many, or few, or none at all; but I must rather discover whether Alice Meynell was a neo-Catholic, in Mr. Patrick's sense of the word; that is to say, what relation her attitude bears to that of Newman, to that of Pater, to that of Johnson, who may be taken as an example of a position midway between Newman and Pater.

In the early work of Alice Meynell there is scarcely a trace of ritual and nothing of ritualism. The themes of her poetry were, as we have seen, love, nature, and poetry itself. Nor is nature treated at any time in the liturgical manner of Francis Thompson, in such lines, for example, as these:

Lo, in the sanctuaried East,
Day, a dedicated priest
In all his robes pontifical exprest,
Lifteth slowly, lifteth sweetly,
From out its Orient tabernacle drawn,
Yon orbèd sacrament confest
Which sprinkles benediction through the dawn;

And when the grave procession's ceased,
The earth with due illustrious rite
Blessed,- ere the frail fingers featly
Of twilight, violet-cassocked acolyte,
His sacerdotal stoles unvest -
Sets, for high close of the mysterious feast,
The sun in august exposition meetly
Within the flaming monstrance of the West. (21)

Alice Meynell's treatment of nature in her early work was, as has been noted, in the manner of Tennyson. What is especially noticeable is that the religious verse in Preludes, particularly such a poem as Advent Meditation, which has its suggestion from the Divine Office, is set in a background of Nature, and is without a hint of liturgy. Advent Meditation, a poem upon the Nativity, ends with the stanza:

Sweet summer and the winter wild,
These brought him forth, the Undefined.
The happy Springs renewed again
His daily bread, the growing grain,
The food and raiment of the child. (22)

In one poem, and only in one, of the Preludes is there a clear and distinct use of ritual. This is The Young Neophyte, the poem which belongs properly to this matter of conversion; and the only poem wherein this strangely reserved poet speaks of this important change in her life.

Who knows what days I answer for today?
Giving the bud I give the flower. I bow
This yet unfaded and a faded brow;
Bending these knees and feeble knees, I pray.
Thoughts yet unripe in me I bend one way,
Give one repose to pain I know not now,
One check to joy that comes, I guess not how.
I dedicate my fields when Spring is grey.

O rash! (I smile) to pledge my hidden wheat.
I fold to-day at altars far apart
Hands trembling with what toils? In their retreat
I seal my love to-be, my folded art.

I light the tapers at my head and feet,
And lay the crucifix on this silent heart. (23)

The altar, the taper, the crucifix - here is the use of ritual; but not used in the spirit of one who finds nothing "dans les rites et les cérémonies que la beauté de la forme, une satisfaction des sens"; nor used, as Pater uses it, to satisfy "the natural soul of worship"; nor used, as Johnson might have used it, as accessories to that "wondrous white chasuble broidered with purple passion-flowers." Here rather in The Young Neophyte is the sacramental, not the aesthetic, use of ritual imagery. Newman wrote, in lines already quoted, that "words are necessary, but as means, not as ends; they are not mere addresses to the throne of grace, they are instruments of what is far higher, of consecration, of sacrifice." To consecrate and to sacrifice, this is the essential value of the rites of the Mass: to please the eye and ear are incidental values; and in this poem of self-consecration that looks forward to self-sacrifice, Alice Thompson has caught the profound sense of the Church, accurately and firmly. The resemblance to Newman, however, may be misleading. At the time of her conversion, Alice Thompson seems to have been scarcely aware of ritual; whereas Newman, as might be expected of one in orders, is very much aware of its beauty and its meaning. Except for this simple poem, The Young Neophyte, Alice Thompson's early poetry yields practically nothing to our purpose. An "Amen" may be found in two poems, the word "sanctuary" in another: nothing else. In the prose, much

later than Preludes, search as you will, you will find nothing more than an infrequent metaphor, such as this:

It is like the scene in the Vatican when a
Cardinal, with his dramatic Italian hands,
bids the kneeling groups to arise. (24)

There is a remarkable group of four poems, written between 1910 and 1913, The Unknown God, A General Communion, The Fugitive, and In Portugal, 1912, all four of which have their origins in the ritual of the Mass. They only serve, however, to set Alice Meynell further from Pater than ever. In The Young Neophyte, as in Francis Thompson's Orient Ode, the ritual is used as an imaginative language or framework, by means of which a state of mind, as in Alice Thompson's poem, or an aspect of nature, as in Francis Thompson's Ode, is expressed. Such a use of ritual argues at least for the perception, in the poet, of an aesthetic fitness, even beauty, in the ritual itself. But, in the later group, Alice Meynell makes no such use of the rites of the Mass. She is concerned with the rite itself: she is intent only upon penetrating its supernatural significance. Let me quote the first lines of The Unknown God.

One of the crowd went up,
And knelt before the Paten and the Cup,
Received the Lord, returned in peace, and prayed
Close by my side. Then in my heart I said:

'O Christ, in this man's life -
This stranger who is Thine - in all his strife,
All his felicity, his good and ill,
In the assaulted stronghold of his will,

'I do confess Thee here,.... (25)

This kind of poetry, which, for want perhaps of a more exact term, has been called "mystical", is distinctly the product

of Alice Meynell's maturity, and can, in no sense, be used to explain the event of her conversion at the age of twenty. The difference may be made clear by supposing that Mr. T.S. Eliot, instead of making use of the Fisher King myth as an imaginative correlative for the condition of modern civilization in The Waste Land, had turned his attention to the myth itself or to some part of it and penetrated within it to some esoteric meaning, properly its own. Then Mr. Eliot, for so loosely is the term used, might also have deserved to be called a "mystic" poet. The examination of Alice Meynell's "mystical" poetry must be put off till later: for the present, it is only necessary to say that, while the interest of the late Nineteenth Century in ritual and liturgy does find a responsive and important note in her work, that note, at the time of her conversion to the Catholic Church, was very faint indeed.

It would seem, at once, when we turn to the element of medievalism in the early verse of Alice Meynell, and remember how strong a current of medievalism flowed through the later Nineteenth Century, that here we have evidence towards an explanation of her conversion. The effect of this new emphasis upon medievalism after Tennyson and others upon English literature can hardly be exaggerated, though, apparently, it can be deprecated.

At the present day one is not easy in reading Idylls of the King, though here and there are some delightful passages: they, and his by no means unreadable plays, suffer from a certain archaism of language, that sham antiquarianism,

the "escape" looking-back to the Middle Ages, which did so much harm throughout the century. (26)

Pater conceived this "looking-back to the Middle Ages" as something at the heart of Romanticism and, in his intense desire to gather up the experiences of all ages into a single moment of imaginative understanding, placed in the mind of Duke Carl of Rosenmold, as he stands on the threshold of the new era, a vision of the new spirit in art, wherein "distant times, the most alien thoughts, would come near together, as elements in a great historic symphony"(27), and in the moulding of which, The Age of Pericles, the Italian Renaissance, the Middle Age, and the new national awakening, would, each in its own degree, have a share.(28) If the beginning of Nineteenth Century medievalism is contemporaneous with the beginning of Romanticism, it can safely be said that the end of the medievalism is not yet. Mr. H.J.C. Grierson traces its course through the Nineteenth Century to the moment when Alice Thompson is writing Preludes.

The century was not done with the Middle Ages. The mediaevalism of the early Romantic Revival had not in this country rehabilitated the Catholic Church. From the Wartons to Sir Walter Scott the Romantics had remained, when not sceptics, firm in the conviction that the Bible Protestantism of the Reformation was pure Christianity and that the Church of Rome, if not actually Antichrist, was "a mean and depraving institution", that the designs of her defenders in the sixteenth century "would have riveted on Scotland" (and England) "the chains of antiquated superstition and spiritual tyranny." But Scott had influenced, if Newman be right, those who were beginning to think otherwise. The frost of Protestant prejudice was relaxing. The growth of "liberalism" was beginning to alarm those for whom the authority of the Church had still a meaning, and who, even before the new criticism of the

Bible had begun to undermine the foundation of historical Protestantism, felt that, without the sanction of such authority, their faith was in danger. Hurrell Froude's Remains appeared in 1838 and the Tracts for the Times began in 1841... Now within the Church of England itself began a Catholic awakening which has produced many results besides those which concern my theme. For not all of those who felt the charm of the Middle Ages, and studied them more deeply than the earlier Romantics had done, were drawn to Rome or even remained definitely Christian - Ruskin, the Carlyle of Past and Present, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Morris; nor was Catholicism the only aspect of mediaeval literature which attracted and delighted them. The chivalrous and the supernatural in ballad and romance made appeal to this as to an earlier generation, to Rossetti and to Morris as to Coleridge and Scott, and Rossetti and Morris and Swinburne were to discover and revive that rival in the Middle Ages of Christian devotion, the devotion to woman, the cult not of the Virgin but of Lilith, and to bring back into love-poetry an intensity of devotion, sensuous and spiritual, which it had not known since Shakespeare and Donne, if it was ever quite acclimatised in England. It is rather to Dante and the Italians that Rossetti, this English poet of Italian blood, goes back. (29)

In the latter half of the Nineteenth Century, the cult of the Middle Ages took several distinctly different forms. From Tennyson in the Fifties to Ernest Dowson in the Nineties, medievalism flowed continuously and variously. The most important legacy from the early Romantic poets was probably La Belle Dame sans Merci: the most important addition in the middle of the century was probably Ruskin's enthusiasm for Gothic architecture.

Ruskin's use of the Middle Ages was to belabour the art of the Renaissance and the ugliness of Victorian civilization. His hatred of both was deeply moral. We shall not find Alice Meynell in accord with his attitude towards the

Renaissance; but she went some distance with Ruskin in his contrast of Gothic and modern building. In a letter to Wilfrid Meynell, from Rome, in 1908, she writes:

The great monastery, on a mountain ledge, has a lovely cloister. So has the lower monastery, on another ledge, but still high above the ravine and the torrent. All the oldest parts Gothic, you must understand of the most exquisite kind. Half the hill-tops have strange little dark cities and villages sitting on them... When they have spoilt and vulgarized Rome, it will take them some centuries to spoil and vulgarize these. Will you believe that in these almost inaccessible places they have renamed the climbing streets - Garibaldi, Cavour, Mazzini, and the rest of it!

(30)

But if the contrast between modern civilization and the Middle Ages appeared important to both Ruskin and Alice Meynell, and if they did conceive that difference to be a difference between beauty and ugliness, they were nevertheless not in agreement upon the medieval ideal to which the sordid reality was opposed. For Ruskin, that ideal was altogether a natural one, though of the highest kind. For Alice Meynell, that ideal was altogether supernatural. Ruskin, for example, in the Stones of Venice, declares that the furnishings of an English room are "signs of a slavery in our England a thousand times more bitter and more degrading than that of the scourged African, or helot Greek;"(31) whereas the gargoyles and statues upon a Gothic cathedral front are "signs of the life and liberty of every workman who struck the stone; a freedom of thought, and rank in scale of being, such as no laws, no charters, no charities can secure; but which it must be the

first aim of all Europe at this day to regain for her children." (32) Ruskin has stated the contrast in terms of "freedom of thought": Alice Meynell, in The Lady Poverty, a poem published in 1896, states the contrast in terms of "poverty".

The Lady Poverty was fair:
But she has lost her looks of late,
With change of times and change of air.
Ah slattern! she neglects her hair,
Her gown, her shoes; she keeps no state
As once when her pure feet were bare.

Or - almost worse, if worse can be -
She scolds in parlours, dusts and trims,
Watches and counts. O is this she
Whom Francis met, whose step was free,
Who with Obedience carolled hymns,
In Umbria walked with Chastity?

Where is her ladyhood? Not here,
Not among modern kinds of men;
But in the stony fields, where clear
Through the thin trees the skies appear,
In delicate spare soil and fen,
And slender landscape and austere. (33)

In both Ruskin and Alice Meynell, modern life had lost an important freedom. It was strange indeed that John Ruskin, so sensitive to the moral qualities of architecture, should have defined the character of Gothic as a freedom of thought rather than a freedom of spirit, a phrase with which poverty of spirit is precisely synonymous, the poverty Alice Meynell speaks of,

Whose step was free,
Who with Obedience carolled hymns,
In Umbria walked with Chastity.

Ruskin, as Chesterton has said, "seemed to want all parts of the Cathedral except the altar." (34) Alice Meynell accounted

for this incongruity in the sensibility of John Ruskin by suggesting that he "permitted himself to use other men's habits of phrase."⁽³⁵⁾ In The Lady Poverty, whatever of "medievalism" there may be in it, we have the authentic note of the mature poet's attitude towards the Middle Ages. This note is struck again in Saint Catherine of Siena:

And will the man of modern years
- Stern on the Vote - withhold from thee,
Thou prop, thou cross, erect, in tears,
Catherine, the service of his knee? (36)

In the same manner, Alice Meynell opposes the medieval ideal to the modern reality in the essay, At Monastery Gates.

So much elect intellect and strength of heart withdrawn from the traffic of the world! True, the friars are not doing the task which Carlyle set mankind as a refuge from despair. These "bearded counsellors of God" keep their cells, read, study, suffer, sing, hold silence; whereas they might be "operating" - beautiful word! - upon the Stock Exchange, or painting Academy pictures, or making speeches, or reluctantly jostling other men for places. They might be among the involuntary busybodies who are living by futile tasks the need whereof is a discouraged fiction. There is absolutely no limit to the superfluous activities, to the art, to the literature, implicitly renounced by the dwellers within such walls as these. The output - again a beautiful word - of the age is lessened by this abstention. Nonetheless hopes the stranger and pilgrim to pause and knock once again upon those monastery gates. (37)

Here, of course, there is, especially in the last sentence, a sense of nostalgia that is closer to The Lady Poverty, whose "ladyhood" is not to be found "among modern kinds of men,"

But in the stony fields, where clear
Through the thin trees the skies appear,
In delicate spare soil and fen,
And slender landscape and austere;

than to Saint Catherine of Siena, where the medieval example of womanhood challenges the modern error and demands insistently a modern recognition. The Lady Poverty and At Monastery Gates were published in 1896: Saint Catherine of Siena in 1913. But what is particularly pleasing in all three, and particularly important, is the brisk, bright air about them. There has been no attempt to create the illusion of a past age: there is no attempt at "medievalism": there is no continuation of the tradition of the Fifties, of Tennyson, of Rossetti, of Morris. Alice Meynell speaks of the monastery as a world apart; but, for her, the monastery was no "shadowy isle of bliss", and the mood of Morris's Prologue to The Earthly Paradise never escapes into her mature verse or prose. In each of the three pieces quoted there is explicit contact with a modern reality; with a modern "poverty" that "dusts and trims, watches and counts", with the modern "output" of "superfluous activities" and "futile tasks", with the modern Strephon, "who said that a woman must lean, or she should not have his chivalry." (28)

Alice Meynell was by no means an indiscriminating admirer of the Middle Ages. The realistic attitude she has applied to modern civilization is not in abeyance, either from praise or from blame, when her attention is upon the life of the Middle Ages. She has severely criticized Ruskin for his "brief historic judgments."

Here is one: "Before the twelfth century the nations were too savage to be Christian, and after the fifteenth too carnal." To the glory

of these four hundred years, then, he sacrifices at a blow the Thebaid, Chrysostom and Naziansen, Augustine and Gregory, and the multitude of Bishops of North Africa, and the great Christian peasant populations of the sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, who have laboured in patience upon Breton, Provençal, Lombard, Tuscan, Irish earth. It is of nations, not of States, that Ruskin speaks; otherwise, we should have granted him that States have not been Christian; the historian can hardly venture to claim that name for the German Empire or the French Monarchy, or the temporal power of the Papacy. Ruskin further explains his four hundred years.

"The delicacy of sensation and refinements of imagination necessary to understand Christianity belong to the mid period when men, risen from a life of brutal hardship, are not yet fallen to one of brutal luxury."

Whether brutal luxury is a name fit for the softer arts of life - to use the usual word, the "comforts" - learnt by mankind since the fifteenth century, I know not; it is at any rate a tenable opinion that the most brutal thing about them is that they belong to a minority. But granting this, there are yet perpetual generations of men living in precisely this condition, - "risen from a life of brutal hardship and not yet fallen to one of brutal luxury." Assuredly that condition was not confined to a few violent and unhappy centuries, centuries when for a superstition little children were dashed against the stones of their poor villages, Imperial or Papal, when, for a calumny, the young devout Templars, flowers of masculine innocence, self-sacrifice, and good faith, were burnt alive, a score at one time; when, for a jealousy of trade, one furious city lay in wait for the destruction of another; when the revenge upon a political enemy was to hew his son's head off before his eyes, so as to make a last spectacle for those eyes before they were put out, and ten years in a dungeon without a page to read or a tree to look at was a common prelude to penal death. Not then only did a people obscure, unnamed, innumerable, live somewhere between savagery and luxury, but century by century ever since then. All the centuries have brought this life to pass, and the race has followed this narrow way by a multitude that no man can number. (39)

This is a passage that must throw light upon Alice Meynell's

conversion; at least to this extent, that, in her, conversion was in no sense a conscious reversion. For her, the ideal was not in the past, the actuality in the present: the ideal and the actual are two distinct levels discernible in every century, in every civilization. This is a distinction that applies equally to The Lady Poverty, At a Monastery Gate, and Saint Catherine of Siena. And there is no other "medievalism", in her later work, than this. In A Thrush before Dawn, published in 1915, we are given, in the song of the bird, a symbol of this ideal, this "graver still divinity" that hovers above the world, operative in, but independent of, the passing ages.

Darkling, deliberate, what sings
This wonderful one, alone, at peace?
What wilder things than song, what things
Sweeter than youth, clearer than Greece,
Dearer than Italy, untold
Delight, and freshness centuries old?

What Middle Ages passionate,
O passionless voice! What distant bells
Lodged in the hills, what palace state
Illyrian! For it speaks, it tells,
Without desire, without dismay,
Some morrow and some yesterday. (40)

Whether Alice Meynell is making use of the imagery of ritual or of some ideal or institution connected, in the general mind, with the Middle Ages, there is no sense of a beauty gone forever, but rather of a "freshness centuries old." And thus, search as we may, we shall find no evocation in her work of the early centuries of Christianity, no attempt to isolate there, within that period of youthfulness, a simplicity and purity of religion, now regretfully remembered.

It is evident that, to answer the question - why Alice Thompson left the Anglican Church for the Catholic Church, I can hardly make use of poems, such as A Thrush before Dawn, written forty-six years after her conversion. It was necessary, however, to take this general view, first: the medievalism in Preludes might otherwise be disconcerting.

In Preludes, of the thirty-eight lyrics, two only may be considered "medieval": San Lorenzo's Mother and 'Soeur Monique'. Agnes Repplier, in the Catholic World, has written that, in San Lorenzo's Mother, Alice Thompson has reproduced, "with absolute fidelity, the medieval note." (41) This poem represents the supreme renunciation of a mother: the surrender of a young son to the cloister.

I had not seen my son's dear face
(He chose the cloister by God's grace)
 Since it had come to full flower-time.
 I hardly guessed at its perfect prime,
That folded flower of his dear face.

Alone, isolated by her tears, the mother waits. And, if it is asked what is she waiting for, the only answer seems to be, she is waiting for death, for the end of grief. An interruption sharpens the sense of isolation and the sense of renunciation.

Mine eyes were veiled by mists of tears
When on a day in many years
 One of his Order came. I thrilled,
 Facing, I thought, that face fulfilled.
I doubted, for my mists of tears.

And then, in the last three lines of the next stanza, the poem has a magnificent moment.

His blessing be with me for ever!
My hope and doubt were hard to sever.
- That altered face, those holy weeds.
I filled his wallet and kissed his beads,
And lost his echoing feet for ever.

In these lines, the medieval note is distinct in the romantic sense of the mystical, the mysterious, the remote. The presence, just beyond hearing, of echoing feet whose sound is lost forever seems to have haunted the romantic imagination. And the precision of that portrait - the altered face, the weeds, the wallet, the beads - is, in tone and in detail, a Pre-Raphaelite painting. The grief of the mother, now perfect in her inability to recognize her own son, now climaxed in this last utter renunciation, turns for comfort to faith.

If to my son my alms were given
I know not, and I wait for Heaven.
He did not plead for child of mine,
But for another Child divine,
And unto Him it was surely given.

There is a peculiar uncertainty about these lines. It is impossible to decide whether they are intended to suggest that the mother receives comfort from her faith or sinks into a half-trusting state of dull patience. The poet does not seem to have understood the precise quality of the strength of faith as well as she has understood the quality of maternal grief. I am judging this by the last stanza.

There is One alone who cannot change;
Dreams are we, shadows, visions strange;
And all I give is given to One.
I might mistake my dearest son,
But never the Son who cannot change.

Ruskin is said to have approved this poem in every line.⁽⁴³⁾ And yet it seems to me that the poem is more perfect without this last stanza. The last stanza brings it nearer to Alice Thompson's view of the problem, of the conflict between maternal grief and resignation to the Will of God, but it exceeds her experience of the problem. She was not yet an unerring religious poet. The mother loses her love for her own child, become a dream to her, in the unconvincing line,

Dreams are we, shadows, visions strange;
by transfiguring that love with the love of the Child divine,
who does not change. But when this divine Child is referred
to as,

There is One alone who cannot change;
and

And all I give is given to One;
that transfiguration of maternal love is not even intelligible.
We are left then with the really authentic note of the poem,
definable as the grief of a not-well-understood renunciation.
In the sonnet, The Young Neophyte, Alice Thompson, with the
same theme, has succeeded as remarkably as she has failed
here.

Thoughts yet unripe in me I bend one way,
Give one repose to pain I know not now,
One check to joy that comes, I guess not how.
I dedicate my fields when Spring is grey. (44)

The sentimental attitude towards the Middle Ages, in San Lorenzo's Mother, is not the attitude of the later poetry.
Such lines as,

That folded flower of his dear face,
and

- That altered face, those holy weeds,
might be compared with the friars in the essay, At Monastery
Gates.

The great hood of the friars, which is drawn over the head in Zurbaran's ecstatic picture, is turned to use when the friars are busy. As a pocket it relieves the over-burdened hands.... The friars tell how a brother resolved, at Shrovetide, to make pancakes, and not only to make, but also to toss them. Those who chanced to be in the room stood prudently aside, and the brother tossed boldly. But that was the last that was seen of his handiwork.... It was clean gone, and there was an end of it. Nor could any explanation of this ceasing of a pancake from the midst of the visible world be so much as divined by the spectators. It was only when the brother, in church, knelt down to meditate and drew his cowl about his head that the accident was explained.

(45)

This is clearer, healthier, air than San Lorenzo breathes in Alice Thompson's poem; clearer, healthier, air than the Beadsman, "meagre, barefoot, wan", breathes among his "purgatorial rails", upon the Eve of St. Agnes. 'Soeur Monique' is a valuable comment upon the sadness of San Lorenzo's Mother. For, of the sadness "that the passing ages sing", there is in 'Soeur Monique', a discriminating denial.

No, not sad; we are beguiled,
Sad with living as we are;
Ours the sorrow, outpouring
Sad self on a selfless thing.

(46)

This is recognition of Ruskin's declaration in the third volume of Modern Painters, (this volume was published in

1855), that "on the whole, these are much sadder ages than the early ones; not sadder in a noble or deep way, but in a dim wearied way,- the way of ennui, and jaded intellect, and uncomfortableness of soul and body."⁽⁴⁷⁾ Alice Thompson, in her vision of this "quiet form of silent nun," has overcome the difficulties of the unquiet mother of San Lorenzo and achieved a portrait in the spirit of The Shepherdess, one of the 1896 group.

And I see you where you stand
With your life held in your hand
As a rosary of days.
And your thoughts in calm arrays,
And your innocent prayers are told
On your rosary of days.
And the young days and the old
With their quiet prayers did meet
When the chaplet was complete. (48)

Here again, as in The Lady Poverty and Saint Catherine of Siena, upon a theme heard

In the throngs of centuries
That mine ears do listen through, (49)

Alice Thompson has avoided "medievalism". Where the philosophical language of the conclusion to San Lorenzo's Mother has failed, in 'Soeur Monique' the image of the rosary succeeds; as, later, in The Shepherdess, the pastoral imagery was to succeed.

She holds her little thoughts in sight,
Though gay they run and leap.
She is so circumspect and right;
She has her soul to keep.
She walks - the lady of my delight -
A shepherdess of sheep. (50)

It is as Agnes Repplier has said, thinking, especially

perhaps, of Rossetti and Morris, that "Mrs. Meynell was too essentially modern for such vain retrospects. She could reproduce with absolute fidelity the medieval note, as in 'San Lorenzo Giustianiani's Mother', but left to her own imaginings, she brought every subject up to date."⁽⁵¹⁾ And, in 'Soeur Monique', that is, already in the Preludes, the medieval subject is brought up to date.

Soeur Monique, remember me.
'Tis not in the past alone
I am picturing you to be;
But my little friend, my own,
In my moment, pray for me.
For another dream is mine,
And another dream is true,
Sweeter even,
Of the little ones that shine
Lost within the light divine,-
Of some meekest flower, or you,
In the fields of heaven. (52)

There is more than a hint in this concluding stanza, that 'Soeur Monique', so far from being a poem of conversion, is rather a poem of vocation. There can be no doubt that Alice Thompson was strongly attracted to the religious life; and 'Soeur Monique' may represent a definite decision. It does, at any rate, by its resemblance to The Shepherdess, reveal how closely the spirit of religious life was, in the poet's mind, united with her ideal of married life. This absence of "medievalism" in her appreciation of the religious life separates Alice Meynell sharply from the extraordinary school of Huysmans. Joris-Karl Huysmans is the example we must seek for in vain in English literature - a writer who enters the Catholic Church under the influence of "medievalism."

Huysmans, indeed, as much under the influence of architectural beauty as Ruskin, took the step further that Ruskin did not take. Ruskin, if we regard the last phase only of Huysmans, was really a Huysmans manqué.

Avant de voir Notre-Dame en ses parties - ne faut-il pas l'embrasser en son ensemble, se pénétrer de son sens général avant que d'en feuilleter les détails? Tout est dans cet édifice, reprit-il - c'est l'abbé Plomb qui parle à Durtal - en enveloppant d'un geste l'église, les Ecritures, la théologie, l'histoire du genre humain résumée dans ses grandes lignes; grâce à la science du symbolisme, on a pu faire d'un monceau de pierres un macrocosme. (53)

Ruskin, said Chesterton, in a comment already quoted, "seemed to want all parts of the Cathedral except the altar." (54) More accurately, Ruskin seemed to want all "ses parties" without "son ensemble." Thus Huysmans moves through medievalism into the Catholic Church. Whatever there is, that is medieval in Alice Meynell, seems to have come to her after, and not before, her conversion. She nowhere displays the purely aesthetic appreciation of religion in the Middle Ages that, whether we think of the Blessed Damozel or Sister Helen, possessed the soul of Dante Gabriel Rossetti. And San Lorenzo's Mother, it seems to me, in that last and unsuccessful stanza, is an example of the imposition of religious categories, in no sense typically medieval, upon just such a medieval vignette as Rossetti himself might have written. Rossettianism is in conflict with her religious sensibility. Huysmanism simply did not touch her.

Delicate, tender portraiture, and haunting in

cadence and echo, as 'Soeur Monique' is, we yet feel in those "calm arrays" the strength and vigilance of The Shepherdess, and thus Alice Thompson's "silent nun" is saved from the equally delicate, but de-vitalized, portraiture of Ernest Dowson's Nuns of the Perpetual Adoration.

Calm, sad, secure; with faces worn and mild:
Surely their choice of vigil is the best?
Yea! for our roses fade, the world is wild;
But there, beside the altar, there is rest.
(55)

The difference between Alice Thompson's conception of the nun and Ernest Dowson's is, at once, felt to be a moral difference. This is a significant difference in character. Alice Thompson would not have used that word "rest". If we accept her own reserved account of her conversion, we shall see at once that she sought in the Catholic Church something quite opposed to "rest". In a letter to her daughter, Olivia, Alice Meynell wrote in 1922, the year of her death:

As far as I know Bolshevism, it is heretical in the practice of right and wrong. I don't at all allow that we have "liberty" to think what we happen to choose as to right and wrong. I saw, when I was very young, that a guide in morals was even more necessary than a guide in faith. It was for this I joined the Church. Other Christian societies may legislate, but the Church administers legislation. Thus she is practically indispensable. I may say that I hold the administration of morals to be of such vital importance that for its sake I accepted, and now accept, dogma in matters of faith - to the last letter. To make my preachment clearer: Right and wrong (morals) are the most important, or the only important, things men know or can know. Everything depends on them. Christian morality is infinitely the greatest of moralities. This we know by our own sense and intellect, without other guidance. The Church administers that morality, as no other sect does or can do, by

means of moral theology. The world is far from living up to that ideal, but it is the only ideal worth living up to... As to the 'divine' teachings of the Genesis allegory, I cannot withdraw that word. I have to remember that all the morality worth having - the morality that led on to Christianity - had its origin in that parable. (56)

In another place, Alice Meynell wrote:

It was by no sudden counter-revolution, but slowly and gradually that I returned to the hard old common path of submission and self-discipline which soon brought me to the gates of the Catholic Church. (57)

Her daughter, Viola, has confirmed this in her Memoir.

Already ardently a Christian, in Catholicism she saw the logical administration of the Christian moral law; and as that she adopted it with a deliberate rational choice... (58)

After failing then to bring Alice Meynell into close relation with such movements towards Catholicism as the theological disputes of the Oxford Movement, the revival of interest in primitive Christianity, the Anglican renewal of liturgy and ritual, the new emphasis upon medieval art and culture, we must, it now appears, relate her to the wider, more pervasive, more fundamental, problem of the latter half of the Nineteenth Century, the preoccupation of that time with the question of morality. "What binds the period into a whole is the moral sense, the social conscience, which animated the middle class: the need for self-justification, the strain of puritanism, ran through everything." (59) There was no adventure in science or in war, in art or in house-keeping that did not need its justification upon moral grounds. In science, for example, there was a "chronological movement

through the physical sciences and geology to biology and so to anthropology and eugenics;"⁽⁶⁰⁾ and it is not fantastic to suppose that each of these in order attempted to formulate out of its newly-discovered data, a code of morals. As early as 1855, political economy, in the person of Nassau Senior, proclaimed "quite categorically that the increase of wealth is the chief means towards the moral improvement of mankind."⁽⁶¹⁾ In 1866, the natural sciences entered the field with Thomas Huxley in the Chair of Moral Theology.

... the improvement of natural knowledge, whatever direction it has taken, and however low the aims of those who may have commenced it - has not only conferred practical benefits on men, but, in so doing, has effected a revolution in their conceptions of the universe and of themselves, and has profoundly altered their modes of thinking and their views of right and wrong. I say that natural knowledge, seeking to satisfy natural wants, has found the ideas which can alone still spiritual cravings. I say that natural knowledge, in desiring to ascertain the laws of comfort, has been driven to discover those of conduct, and to lay the foundations of a new morality. ⁽⁶²⁾

It must be noticed that Huxley was speaking of the "foundations of a new morality." Both Nassau Senior and Thomas Huxley were Victorians. They did not seek to disturb the actual practice of the conventional Victorian morality. They were seeking a new basis, a new foundation for morality. Huxley, in the lecture from which I have just quoted, is more specific in the concluding paragraphs.

... the moral convictions most fondly held by barbarous and semi-barbarous people... are the convictions that authority is the soundest basis of belief, that merit attaches to a readiness to believe; that the doubting disposition is a bad one, and scepticism a sin; that when good

authority has pronounced what is to be believed, and faith has accepted it, reason has no further duty. There are many excellent persons who yet hold by these principles, and it is not my present business, or intention, to discuss their views. All I wish to bring clearly before your minds is the unquestionable fact, that the improvement of natural knowledge is effected by methods which directly give the lie to all these convictions, and assume the exact reverse of each to be true.

The improver of natural knowledge absolutely refuses to acknowledge authority, as such. For him, scepticism is the highest of duties; blind faith the one unpardonable sin.... The man of science has learned to believe in justification, not by faith, but by verification. (63)

This was the central Victorian inconsistency: the acceptance of Puritan ethics without the Puritan theology. John Stuart Mill, disciple of Bentham, is the representative philosopher of the period. His Utilitarianism appeared in 1863. In the principle of utility, he finds a substitute for dogma as the basis of morality. In 1866, the publication of Poems and Ballads was one natural resolution of this inconsistency. In 1867, Alice Thompson was converted to the Catholic Church; and her conversion was the other natural resolution of the Victorian compromise.

The Church administers that morality, as no other sect does or can do, by means of moral theology. (64)

In her handbook on John Ruskin, Alice Meynell has throughout managed to give us the fundamental principles that guided her in resolving the Victorian inconsistency. Indeed, the failure of that book as a revelation of Ruskin may well be accounted for by its success as a revelation of Alice Meynell. In its first chapter, when she is commenting

upon the law of change that affects all works of art, she suddenly pauses to make a distinction.

... but how shall we dare to call that a law whereof we know not the cause, the end, or the sanctions? Let us rather, ignorant yet vigilant, call it the custom - of the universe. (65)

The distinction between law, which involves the concept of sanction, and custom, obscurely unaware of cause or end or sanction, is the distinction between what Alice Meynell sought in the Church and what she left behind in Victorian England. In her examination of the lecture, The Political Economy of Art, Alice Meynell decides that "what Ruskin teaches in the political part of this lecture is the necessity of authority and - once the arbitrary tyrannies of primitive society are done away, which is early in all civilizations - the nullity of the 'liberty' that men have died for with alacrity age by age." (66) We have to wait till the examination of The Two Paths for Mrs. Meynell's comment upon authority and liberty.

The warning against the foolish use of the word "freedom", and against the foolish enthusiasm for the vague idea, repeats what Ruskin has said often: "No human being, however great or powerful, was so free as a fish. There is always something that he must, or must not, do."

"In these and all matters, you never can reason finally from the abstraction, for both liberty and restraint are good when they are nobly chosen, ... but of the two... it is restraint which characterizes the higher creature, and betters the lower creature; and, from the ministering of the archangel to the labour of the insect, - from the poisoning of the planets to the gravitation of a grain of dust, - the power and glory of all creatures, and all matter, consist in their obedience, not in their freedom." (67)

With Ruskin, Alice Meynell assumes the validity of morality as a self-evident truth of human nature. Newman has carefully analysed in A Grammar of Assent the origin of this assumption and the extent of its implications.⁽⁶⁸⁾ With Ruskin, Alice Meynell assumes also the primacy of morality in life. But she has another important distinction to make. Already, she has distinguished law and custom; already, she has accepted Ruskin's distinction of authority and liberty; now she disagrees with Ruskin to enforce the distinction between the fact of morality and a code of morality. Ruskin had, in the lecture Traffic, committed himself to the statement that "taste is not only a part of an index of morality; - it is the ONLY morality."⁽⁶⁹⁾ In the lecture on The Relation of Art to Morals, Ruskin said that "no art-teaching could be of use to you, but would rather be harmful, unless it was grafted on something deeper than all art."⁽⁷⁰⁾ Alice Meynell is quick to point out the incompleteness of both.

Whichever of these two answers for the other - whether morality for such art as it is able to teach, or art for such morality as it is able to teach, - by neither, nor by both, in those elementary measures, are men led many paces on the way they must walk. The fact of morality may be established by art, but the code of morality whereby we have to control our actions and to constrain ourselves has that fact as its starting point, and does its effectual work further on. Ruskin, however, seems to hold that a working morality is to be found in the decisions of art. (71)

A working morality! - for that, Alice Meynell wanted definite direction, definite administration, definite knowledge of "cause, end, and sanction." For that, she declares, she entered the Catholic Church. In the poem, 'I am the Way' she makes a "working morality", the condition of her

acceptance of Christ.

Thou art the Way.
Hadst Thou been nothing but the goal,
I cannot say
If Thou hadst ever met my soul. (72)

In the second stanza, Alice Meynell confesses that she could not have found her way, without faith, to knowledge of the divine purposes.

I cannot see -
I, child of process - if there lies
An end for me,
Full of repose, full of replies.

No more could Tennyson see that end, "full of replies."

Behold, we know not anything;
I can but trust that good shall fall
At last - far off - at last, to all,
And every winter change to spring.

So runs my dream: but what am I?
An infant crying in the night;
An infant crying for the light;
And with no language but a cry. (73)

Tennyson, therefore, replaces the lost theology with a not entirely convincing trust in

... one far-off divine event
To which the whole creation moves. (74)

This was just the goal which Alice Meynell could not see and would not have confessed upon a vague, however intense, trust. And therefore where Tennyson has substituted trust, Alice Meynell has sought and found law, defined and administered. While Carlyle was busy replacing morality with heroism, Ruskin with art, Arnold with culture, Pater with hedonism, Swinburne in the Sixties, with nothing, Alice Meynell never sought to replace morality, but to find

a satisfactory basis for it. And yet, all these men, Swinburne alone excepted, treated life in the spirit of the moralist. But the disappearance of the Protestant theology under the hammer of the rationalist had made it apparently impossible for the moralist to recover the law that must be at the basis of morality.

Alice Meynell's choice of law was not merely a reasoned conclusion. It was evidently a deeply-felt need and, as she believed, the deeply-felt need of every human being. And it was in defence of this deeply-felt need that she has dealt Matthew Arnold a crushing rebuke. Arnold in the essay, The Study of Poetry, first published as an Introduction to Ward's English Poets in 1880, had written:

More and more mankind will discover that we
have to turn to poetry to interpret life for
us, to console us, to sustain us. (75)

Arnold had rejected religion, because "it has attached its emotion to the fact, and now the fact is failing it" (76), and had turned to poetry to fulfil the office of interpreting life for man, of consoling and sustaining them. Mrs. Meynell, with some spirit, replies.

Has it indeed come to this, that interpretation, sustentation and comfort are all the necessities of the human heart - interpretation because we are puzzled, sustentation because we are ill-tempered, and self-indulgent consolation because we are feeble pessimists? Not guidance, not discipline, not a rule of conduct, not laws, not punishment, not pardon? No commands in the face of good, no prohibition in the face of evil? (77)

And, in this spirit, Alice Meynell would not have the grief

of John Ruskin abated by one degree. In Fors Clavigera, Ruskin, in a passage remarkably self-revealing for a Victorian writer, had written of himself:

Bred in luxury, which I perceive to have been unjust to others, and destructive to myself; vacillating, foolish, and miserably failing in all my own conduct in life - and blown about hopelessly by storms of passion - I, a man clothed in soft raiment, - I, a reed shaken with the wind -!

(78)

The response of Alice Meynell to this distress must have startled Matthew Arnold, had he been alive to read it. Assuredly, it was not the "consolation" of religion that Alice Meynell offered; but the severer, more sublime, more essential reply of religion.

To this passion of grief how shall anyone desire that consolation had been brought? Not for passion, but for the lack of it, he reminds us, are men condemned - "because they had no pity." To wish him less mercy, to wish, with the vain wish of retrospection that Ruskin had found some solace in the midst of the martyrdom of his convictions, is forbidden us.

(79)

Katherine Tynan Hinkson, herself a poet and friend of Alice Meynell, sees her perfectly in Via, et Veritas, et Vita, a poem of four lines, published in 1896. This poem, together with 'I am the Way' and The Young Neophyte, may be taken as "conversion" poems. All three reflect the desire of a "Way" of life, a law, to be accepted with whatever pain that law may involve. Via, et Veritas, et Vita is the briefest formulation of Alice Meynell's demands of life and of religion.

'You never attained to Him?' 'If to attain
Be to abide, then that may be.'
'Endless the way, followed with how much pain!'

'The way was He.'

(81)

In The Young Neophyte, the poem of the Preludes, which, according to Alfred Noyes, "symbolizes her life, which fulfilled it",⁽⁸²⁾ Alice Meynell has dedicated her youth and her age to the law she was assuming.

O rash! (I smile) to pledge my hidden wheat.
I fold today at altars far apart
Hands trembling with what toils? In their retreat
I seal my love to-be, my folded art.
I light the tapers at my head and feet,
And lay the crucifix on this silent heart. (83)

Of the effect of this sensibility upon the poetry and prose of Alice Meynell, there will be time to speak later. For this place, it is sufficient that we have discovered the peculiar contemporaneity and the special originality of a mind, in its movement towards the Catholic Church.

3. Poems of Parting

The transition from the Conversion poems to the Poems of Parting is a natural one. Alice Thompson's acceptance of future pain in The Young Neophyte was soon, very soon, to have an opportunity to test its sincerity. Nothing more is known of this opportunity than the brief account of it in Viola Meynell's Memoir.

Back in England, Alice's verses were being shown to one friend, the priest who received her into the Church, who now not only encouraged her by his interest in her writing, but urged her to it as a duty. And even that was but part of this influence of his that helped to make her a poet. Their friendship had become precious to both of them; but in keeping with the strict precautionary rules of his priesthood it was considered best that this friendship should end, and that they should see each other no more. At her side he had encouraged her writing of poetry; in separation, the exceedingly great sacrifice of parting made that poetry inevitable. (1)

The poems that constitute this group are somewhat scattered throughout the editions of her work. The Cenotaph, certainly a Poem of Parting, and published for the first time in 1940, was found in a manuscript containing poems dated from December, 1868, to April, 1870.⁽²⁾ The latest date then for this separation is 1870, three years after Alice Thompson's conversion. In Preludes, published in 1875, there are two poems: Parted and Thoughts in Separation. In the edition of 1893, there are also two: Renouncement and After a Parting. Renouncement was first printed in Hall Caine's Sonnets of Three Centuries, in 1882. "This was

an early poem which might have appeared in Preludes, but which was held over for future publication."⁽³⁾ After a Parting was first published in The Scots Observer, May 31, 1890, bearing the date, 1877. We have then to consider a group of five poems, written in the nine years between December, 1868, and 1877; having their origin, if we may judge from interior evidence alone, in the single experience of separation already described.

It is not difficult to conjecture a reason for the suppression of A Cenotaph. This poem is, of the five, the least informed with the spirit of The Young Neophyte. The opening lines give us at once the mood of this first poem of the series.

Thy life is lonely utterly
O one I know of emptied days!
A place of wakeful pain for me,
Remote my consecrated ways,-
If I could only die in thee. (4)

The poet desires death, not acceptance of pain. In the next stanza, the poet clings in memory to the past, and, far from using the knife herself, pleads for release.

We are apart, whose hands clung so.
We might have lived - I mourn with thee.
Sweet life was not for us to know.
We cannot die till death shall be.
Lament thy love, and let me go.

Her memory holds the hours of love in the image of a funeral procession.

Thy white hours clad as mourners all
With faces to the ground go by.
And sweet decorous tears do fall
Since we were parted, thou and I,
In one long feast of funeral.

In this poem, the poet, it seems, can find no resolution of her distress, except death, a decorous, peaceful, death.

Sweet are the thoughts, O loneliest
Thou glorifiest me withal,-
My subjects - if I could but rest
And die the quiet queen of them all.

This is not precisely the adolescent malaise of In Autumn.
A Cenotaph has its origin in acute and genuine experience;
but in both, there is the same unquiet sensibility, as of a
heart not well stayed, not mature enough to meet a real dis-
tress with the grace and vigour of The Young Neophyte.

In Renouncement, Alice Thompson leaves memory and
describes the present experience. The excellence of this
sonnet consists just in this: that the poet neither accepts
nor rejects the conflict of utter separation, even in thought;
that she neither grieves over the past or sadly contemplates
the future; but is concerned with the single present
experience of that conflict and its careful representation.

I must not think of thee; and, tired yet strong,
I shun the thought that lurks in all delight -
The thought of thee - and in the blue
Heaven's height,
And in the sweetest passage of a song.
O just beyond the fairest thoughts that throng
This breast, the thought of thee waits
hidden yet bright;
But it must never, never come in sight;
I must stop short of thee the whole day long.

But when sleep comes to close each difficult day,
When night gives pause to the long watch I
keep,
And all my bonds I needs must loose apart,
Must doff my will as raiment laid away,-
With the first dream that comes with the
first sleep
I run, I run, I am gathered to thy heart.(5)

In this sonnet, there is the meeting of the two elements that seem to produce the best poetry of Alice Meynell: the sense of control that was the chief characteristic of her conversion, and the "wildness" of the unpublished poems. In the first eight lines, the sense of control is felt in the deliberate rhythm: in the last six lines, there is a sudden change to a swift, impetuous, rhythm. The sonnet, even verbally, may be taken as an expression of that conflict in sensibility, which has already been variously described. Control, austerity, solitude, are different manifestations of the same quality: multitude, "wildness", are manifestations of the contrary quality. In the first eight lines of this sonnet, despite the deliberate control, there is the tremulous sense of multitude in the "thoughts that throng", and the rhythm very nearly breaks free. Thronging thoughts and the "long watch", multitude and solitude, are the poles of Alice Meynell's poetic inspiration. Let her draw too near to either, and the result is either unrestrained sentiment or frigid speculation. Renouncement, concerned with one single experience of that conflict, has itself achieved a fine poise between the poles of the poet's sensibility.

A Cenotaph concluded that resolution of the conflict was impossible. Renouncement was concerned with the conflict itself, not its resolution. The last three poems of this group take up the problem of resolution and give, each, a different answer.

In Parted, the beloved is identified with nature.

There is still a deep sense of mourning in the "multitude".

Though I shall talk with him no more,
A low voice sounds upon the shore.
He must not watch my resting-place,
But who shall drive a mournful face
From the sad winds about my door? (6)

"His tears must not disturb my heart". And the poet finds
a counterpoise for pain in the presence of the beloved in
the sky, in the eyes of a child, in the flower.

Joy is not gone from summer skies,
Nor innocence from children's eyes,
And all these things are part of him.

The last lines of the poem,

I shall not have him at my feet,
And yet my feet are on the flowers.....,

carefully summarize the solution, this poem provides the
poet. A tense balance of pain and joy has been arranged.

In After a Parting, this metaphysics of nature is
replaced by a more spiritual metaphysics; and the beloved
is identified with supernatural goodness, becoming the
spiritual perfection towards which the poet is, at every
moment, striving.

Farewell has long been said; I have foregone thee;
I never name thee even.
But how shall I learn virtues and yet shun thee?
For thou art so near Heaven
That Heavenward meditations pause upon thee. (7)

The grieving of A Cenotaph and Parted has utterly disappeared.
The beloved is no longer "a mournful face" in the "sad winds"
or "a low voice" in the sound of the sea.

Thou dost beset the path to every shrine;
My trembling thoughts discern
Thy goodness in the good for which I pine;
And, if I turn from but one sin, I turn
Unto a smile of thine.

The pursuit of perfection has all the poignancy of the pursuit of the beloved. The poem ends on a note that betrays how little peace the poet has achieved in this sense of the "multitudinous" presence of the beloved in spiritual goodness.

How shall I thrust thee apart
Since all my growth tends to thee night and
day -
To thee faith, hope, and art?
Swift are the currents setting all one way;
They draw my life, my life, out of my heart.

A perfect resolution of this conflict is not reached till Thoughts in Separation. Neither the balance of joy and pain in Parted, nor the continual frustration of the quest of perfection, seem, to the poet, a satisfactory explanation of the fact of renunciation. There has been a deliberate attempt to achieve through pain, a peace that is beyond and above pain. And, in a startling image, Thoughts in Separation attains the paradox of union and separation. The sonnet opens with a quiet affirmative paradox.

We never meet; yet we meet day by day
Upon those hills of life, dim and immense -
The good we love, and sleep, our innocence. (8)

Except for the difference in tone, this was the point already reached in After a Parting. In the next lines, however, the sonnet rises far above the pain and joy of Parted, and the quest of After a Parting, to spiritual love and spiritual peace.

O hills of life, high hills! And, higher than they,
Our guardian spirits meet at prayer and play.

Beyond pain, joy, and hope, and long suspense,
Above the summits of our souls, far hence,
An angel meets an angel on the way.

Here is, at last, the quiet exultation that indicates pain
triumphed over in the spirit of faith. The quest of the
beloved in spiritual perfection likewise finds peace in union.
In the permanency of their ideals of goodness, poet and beloved
have attained to an indissoluble union.

Beyond all good I ever believed of thee
Or thou of me, these always love and live.
And though I fail of thy ideal of me,
My angel falls not short. They greet each other.

And then, in a startling image, worthy of Donne, the poet
brings heaven and earth together.

Who knows, they may exchange the kiss we give,
Thou to thy crucifix, I to my mother.

In the contrast of crucifix and mother, the separation on
earth is final and absolute. Renunciation is complete. In
the kiss of angels, union "above the summits of our souls"
is complete and eternal. The poet has boldly identified the
love for Christ Crucified and her love for her mother with the
spiritual love of man and woman. In this way, has renunciation
fulfilled itself. Alfred Noyes, whose criticism of Alice
Meynell's poetry does more credit to his reverence of Alice
Meynell than to his own judgment of poetry, has now and then -
though never without the usual exorbitance - something of
value to say. Of this sonnet, he writes that it is "a vast
spiritual landscape," involving "love, passion, devotion,
grief, two life-histories", at once "world-embracing" and

"an exquisite celestial vision", expressed with "complete and apparently effortless lucidity in fourteen lines", which make of it "a poem without parallel in our language."⁽⁹⁾ The attempt to turn a sonnet into an epic need not be taken too seriously; but Mr. Noyes has seen the vast framework of thought and the multitude of desires that is here compressed into the sonnet form. Every word of the sonnet has its full meaning in some stage of the series we have been examining. It is however in "the brief presentment of an image"⁽¹⁰⁾ that Alice Meynell's lyric art succeeds; and, in Thoughts in Separation, the image of the three kisses, with its peculiar geometricity, catches swiftly and accurately the outlines of Mr. Noyes' epic. This sense of outline is the real conquest of "multitude". The conclusion to Parted,

I shall not have him at my feet,
And yet my feet are on the flowers....

is a similar example of the intellectual apprehension of imagery that is the predominant characteristic of Alice Meynell's later manner. In such examples as these, it is clear that the later manner is more than implicit in Preludes.

This group of poems has fared well in criticism. William Sharp, writing of Renouncement, said: "I know of no nobler or more beautiful sonnet; and I have so considered it ever since I first heard it, when Rossetti (who knew it by heart) repeating it to me, added that it was one of the three finest sonnets ever written by women."⁽¹¹⁾ Coventry Patmore denies Renouncement the ultimate excellence of the "classical"

standard. This sonnet, he wrote in the Fortnightly Review, is "true, beautiful, and, negatively, almost faultless; but it does not attain the classical and only sound standard.... Mrs. Meynell's thoughts and feelings seem to be half-suffocated by their own sweetness and pathos, so that, though they can speak with admirable delicacy, tenderness, and - that rarest of graces - unsuperfluousness, they cannot sing." (12)

It is difficult to see how these last words apply to Renouncement. In Preludes, as we have seen, and in the unpublished poems, there are examples sufficient of the suffocation of thought and feeling by sweetness and pathos; and in the Later Poems, there will be occasion to notice the suffocation of feeling by thought; but just why Patmore should apply such words as "sweetness and pathos", to lines such as,

With the first dream that comes with the first sleep

I run, I run, I am gathered to thy heart...., is something, I confess, that I cannot explain. Anne Kimball Tuell considered After a Parting, the "freer and perhaps more beautiful companion poem" of Renouncement, combining "all the guilelessness of the early work and the mature expressiveness of the graver work to come."⁽¹³⁾ Katherine Brégy, in the Catholic World, finds that After a Parting "beats with a music still more poignant" than Renouncement.⁽¹⁴⁾ Alfred Noyes considered both The Young Neophyte and Thoughts in Separation more perfect than Renouncement; though - to illustrate how his extravagance undermines our respect for his judgment - these three sonnets, he thought the "three greatest poems

ever written by a woman".⁽¹⁵⁾ Such nice discrimination may be left at this point. I wish to add this only, that The Young Neophyte is more typical than Renouncement of Alice Meynell's sensibility, and that Thoughts in Separation is more typical of her mature manner.

In the Later Poems, there is only one poem of renunciation that may be included in this group. It is impossible to say with certainty whether it refers to an actual experience. This poem, 'Why wilt thou Chide?', first appeared in The Pall Mall Gazette, early in 1896.

Why wilt thou chide,
Who hast attained to be denied?
O learn, above
All price is my refusal, Love.
My sacred Nay
Was never cheapened by the way.
Thy single sorrow crowns thee lord
Of an unpurchasable word.

O strong, O pure!
As yea makes happier loves secure,
I vow thee this
Unique rejection of a kiss.
I guard for thee
This jealous sad monopoly.
I seal this honour thine; none dare
Hope for a part in thy despair.

(16)

At first sight, this seems perverse arrogance. John Drinkwater wrote of this poem: "I, for one, who adore Alice Meynell's work and think of it as among the very fine flowers of the English genius, do not much care for the poet who wrote that poem - I somehow do not think that in strict terms of the imagination she really meant it."⁽¹⁷⁾ Upon a second reading, the astonishing originality of thought reveals itself. If

the poem is read, couplet by couplet - not line by line - it will be seen that each couplet expresses an idea that, if I may be allowed a generous rashness for emphasis, is expressed nowhere else in English literature. It must be admitted that the perversity, if this is perversity, is extraordinarily consistent; and it is always dangerous to call anything consistent, perverse. For example, each succeeding couplet is but a fresh precision of the initial paradox:

Why wilt thou chide,
Who hast attained to be denied?

Without being necessarily profound, the thought and expression can be extremely subtle. It requires careful consideration before any sense can be made of the lines:

My sacred Nay
Was never cheapened by the way.

Change the word "Nay" to "Yea", and the couplet is at once clear - and vapid. Alice Meynell, in this characteristic but unusually difficult example of her mature manner, has looked at the reverse side of an accepted idea and seen there, what seemed to her mind, the shadow of truth. John Drinkwater had already noticed in Alice Meynell, though he was unable to divine its employment here, "an amazing gift for capturing with a phrase the most elusive turns of thought, for arresting the cloud forms of emotions as they pass over the mind and giving them solid intellectual form." "This was a faculty, that", according to Mr. Drinkwater, "she shared with her beloved seventeenth-century lyrists, with Donne

and Crashaw and Vaughan, but in actual deftness of its exercise I think she excelled them all. Such poets as those, perhaps, burnt more fiercely than she, and were even more curious in spiritual skill, but none of them gave difficult thought so lucid a simplicity of statement."⁽¹⁸⁾ Katherine Brégy is the only critic, to my knowledge, who has discovered a meaning that seems to warrant the vigour and deliberate precision of 'Why wilt thou chide?' This critic writes that the cry of renunciation, heard in San Lorenzo's Mother and The Young Neophyte, "stings the soul in 'Why wilt thou Chide?' - a late and mystical lyric."⁽¹⁹⁾ This was a splendid intuition; but it is not explicit enough to resolve the apparent perversities of the poem, and, if I can judge from so slender a hint, it is perhaps not quite accurate. This poem is quite clearly a lover-beloved poem. There is intense love in the heart of the one, who renounces, as well as in the heart of the one, who pleads for the security of "happier loves". And this essential problem is not the problem of San Lorenzo's Mother, nor the problem of The Young Neophyte, but rather the problem of Thoughts in Separation. The poem, though not a "mystical" poem, does bear a relation to mysticism. The full meaning of the poem, and therefore its full intensity, can only be understood, if the reader has penetrated the significance - I do not say, the meaning - of a certain mystery of the New Testament, or of certain chapters in the works of the great mystical writers. The

passage from Holy Scripture occurs in Saint Matthew.

And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying: Eli, Eli, lamma sabacthani? that is: My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? (20)

It will be observed that God the Father and God the Son present to us the lover-beloved relation of the poem 'Why wilt thou Chide?' There is in this passage also the withdrawal of the lover, agonizing and incomprehensible to the beloved. We are dealing, it is also clear, with the elect soul. Christ had indeed "attained to be denied". The agony of such a withdrawal, such a denial, is possible only for the soul whose being, activity, desire, are directed exclusively to the lover. This is the "sacred Nay" that "was never cheapened by the way", but reserved for the soul that had deserved this climax of renunciation. And, in this incomprehensible withdrawal of the Father from His Divine Son, the value of such a rejection is assured. No other pain of the Passion, however terrible, had brought a cry from the lips of Christ. As the greatest agony in this deliberately painful plan of Redemption, this incomprehensible moment of Divine denial has necessarily its importance, its place, in that plan. Alice Meynell's poem may be frightening; it may appear strangely unfeeling and imperious as the withdrawal of the Father from the dying Son may appear to us; it may be mysterious; it is certainly neither meaningless nor perverse.

The mystics have verified, in their own experience, the withdrawal of God from the soul that has reached that

degree of perfection, wherein, completely detached from every earthly desire, it desires only to cling to God Himself. I quote, almost at random, from the Autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila.

By impetus I mean that desire which at times rushes into the soul, without being preceded by prayer, and this is most frequently the case; it is a sudden remembering that the soul is away from God, or of a word it has heard to that effect. This remembering is occasionally so strong and vehement that the soul in a moment becomes as if the reason were gone, just like a person who suddenly hears most painful tidings of which he knew not before, or is surprised; such a one seems deprived of the power of collecting his thoughts for his own comfort, and is as one lost. So is it in this state, except that the suffering arises from this, that there abides in the soul a conviction that it would be well worth dying in it. It seems that whatever the soul then perceives does but increase its suffering, and that our Lord will have its whole being find no comfort in anything, nor remember that it is His will that it should live: the soul seems to itself to be in great and indescribable loneliness, and abandoned of all, because the world, and all that is in it, gives it pain; and because it finds no companionship in any created thing, the soul seeks its Creator alone, and this it sees to be impossible unless it dies; and as it must not kill itself, it is dying to die, and there is really a risk of death, and it sees itself hanging between heaven and earth, not knowing what to do with itself. And from time to time God gives it a certain knowledge of Himself, that it may see what it loses, in a way so strange that no explanation of it is possible; and there is no pain in the world - at least I have felt none - that is equal or like unto this, for if it lasts but half an hour the whole body is out of joint, and the bones so racked, that I am not able to write with my hands: the pains I endure are most grievous. (21)

With therefore the sacred text in mind, and any such passages as this one from mystical writers, the poem 'Why wilt thou Chide?' becomes a lucid and extremely intense poem, in which

a difficult mystery is outlined with extraordinary subtlety and precision. I am not suggesting that this poem is a "mystical" poem; but it does seem to make use of a fundamental truth of mysticism. The poem carefully underlines the "uniqueness" of the experience. Such phrases as, "Thy single sorrow", "an unpurchasable word", "unique rejection of a kiss", "jealous sad monopoly", "I seal this honour thine", "none dare hope for a part in thy despair", impress us with the sense that we are dealing, exclusively, with the elect soul. The poem deserves its place at the end of the series of Parting poems; for the lines,

O learn, above
All price is my refusal, Love.....,

reveal that, for the first time in this series, is the fact of renunciation itself explored for its proper, essential value. And here the series must end; for it is impossible to conceive what further exploration of this theme is possible, after Thoughts in Separation, where renunciation finds its fulfilment in spiritual union, and after 'Why wilt thou Chide?', where renunciation finds, within itself, its proper mystical value.

In this preoccupation with the theme of renunciation, Alice Meynell demands comparison with that other woman poet of the Victorian Age, Christina Rossetti. The difference may be simply expressed as the difference between 21 Upper Phillimore Place and 30 Torrington Square. Their likeness may be expressed by saying that both were called

Saints by those who knew them, and yet both were women of charm and warmth. Theodore Watts, in the Nineteenth Century, describes his impression of Christina Rossetti.

..... while she seemed to breathe a sainthood that must needs express itself in poetry, all the charm of the mere woman remained in her - remained, and coloured her life with these riches of earth, without which woman may be worshipped, but never loved as Christina Rossetti was loved by us all. (22)

J.C. Squire has described his impression of Alice Meynell.

I, one of many who were honoured by her kindness and benefited by her wisdom, shall carry her gracious memory to the grave. There, in her London Flat or in the ample library room of her country cottage, she would sit in her corner: a woman with unwhitened hair, very upright and calm. She still gave an impression of youth and beauty... A saint and a sibyl smoking a cigarette. (23)

Katherine Tynan Hinkson shows the contrast between the two poets in her impression of their homes. Of the Kensington home of Alice Meynell, she has written:

I remember the sunlight in the drawing-room at 21 Upper Phillimore Place, Kensington, and daffodils, as well as peacock feathers, which were very much in vogue just then, the influence of the Aesthetic Movement being still in the air. (24)

And Christina Rossetti, Katherine Tynan saw:

... living with her mother and one or two old aunts in a house full of twilight, as it seemed to me - 30 Torrington Square. (25)

The contrast between sunlight and twilight expresses, with reasonable accuracy, the difference in sensibility between Parted or Thoughts in Separation and such lines of Christina Rossetti as these:

The irresponsible silence of the land,
The irresponsible sounding of the sea,
Speak both one message and one sense to me:-
Aloof, aloof, we stand aloof, so stand.

Thou too aloof, bound with the flawless band
Of inner solitude: we bind not thee
But who from thy self-chain shall set thee free?
What heart shall touch thy heart? What hand thy
hand? (26)

The renunciation of Christina Rossetti was definite, but not with a pervasive regretfulness. The poet frets within bars. She desires to be remembered. Her renunciation is not quite absolute.

Remember me when I am gone away,
Gone far away into the silent land;
When you can no more hold me by the hand,
Nor I half turn to go yet turning stay. (27)

Death is, in Christina Rossetti's mind, closely associated with the pain of renunciation. Indeed, so far is her spirit from the spirit of Thoughts in Separation and 'Why wilt thou Chide?', that renunciation seemed to her rather a frustration.

"Too late for love, too late for joy,
Too late, too late!
You loitered on the road too long,
You trifled at the gate:
The enchanted dove upon her branch
Died without a mate.
The enchanted princess in her tower
Slept, died, behind the grate;
Her heart was starving all this while
You made it wait. (28)

In the same poem, The Prince's Progress, Christina Rossetti has given us a brief contrast to mark the pathos that pervades the ever-present theme of renunciation.

Let be these poppies that we strew,
Your roses are too red. (29)

Despite the declaration of some that Christina Rossetti is

"the finest flower of the Oxford movement, to which she intellectually and emotionally belonged",⁽³⁰⁾ there is yet to be felt, in her melancholy, an overbalance of grief, a sense of fear, of lack of trust, that betrays a strain of Puritanism. William Rossetti, in his Introduction to Maud, agrees that this little novel reveals his sister as over-scrupulous in matters of conscience.⁽³¹⁾ There is something significant in the contrast of Christina Rossetti, expunging from her copy of Swinburne - "The supreme evil, God",⁽³²⁾ and of Alice Meynell, keeping carefully - "the lilies and languors of virtue and the roses and raptures of vice" - to knock Swinburne on the head with it, not for its morality, but for the cheapness of the verse.⁽³³⁾ Sister Madeleva, in Chaucer's Nuns and Other Essays, tells how Christina Rossetti would not step upon a scrap of paper in the street, lest it might have written upon it, the Holy Name: and then continues:

Her devotion to a single attitude becomes almost a disease, her homesickness for heaven is near to hypochondria, yet one cannot assail the patient sweetness of it. Hers is the most plaintive of all the music made by this group of spiritual singers. (34)

Puritanism is a very real danger for the soul that feels profoundly the need of renunciation. We are reminded of Milton deliberately, although reluctantly, stripping the pagan ornamentation of the ancient classics from his poetry, as he proceeds from the Paradise Lost, through Paradise Regained, to Samson Agonistes. But the series of Poems of Parting, we have been discussing, begin indeed with the

pain of renunciation; but they soon transcend the pain and enter into the glory of renunciation, where puritanism is impossible. This must be made clear, in view of the special nature of Alice Meynell's conversion. In that conversion, Alice Meynell was seeking a law and sanction for morality. Such a quest suggests, in Victorian England, a strain of puritanism. And indeed, her daughter writes that Alice Thompson, at the age of seventeen, had a too-sensitive conscience. "Her religious ideals, and perhaps her father's standards, also made her morbidly self-accusing."⁽³⁵⁾ Delicate of conscience, she was always; but she soon outgrew morbidity. Most convincing evidence of her lack of puritanism is the tone of the two Sin poems of her later work. It might be well to have in mind, Davidson's A Ballad of Heaven, published in 1894, as an extreme example of the sense of sin.

The slow adagio begins;
The winding-sheets are ravelled out
That swathe the minds of men, the sins
That wrap their rotting souls about. (36)

Mr. H.J.C. Grierson accounts for this morbidity in Davidson, as "a consequence of Scottish religious thought and feeling, the stress laid upon a personal sense of sin and sense of pardon";... "and the Evangelical movement of the later eighteenth and earlier nineteenth century had renewed and intensified the mood."⁽³⁷⁾ Alice Meynell has deprecated the Evangelical upbringing of John Ruskin⁽³⁸⁾; and, instead of the sin that wraps the rotting soul about, celebrates, that

is the word, the sin that is made white as snow.

Into the rescued world newcomer,
The newly-dead stepped up, and cried,
'O what is that, sweeter than summer
Was to my heart before I died?
Sir (to an angel), what is yonder
More bright than the remembered skies,
A lovelier sight, a softer splendour
Than when the moon was wont to rise?
Surely no sinner wears such seeming
Even the Rescued World within?'

'O the success of His redeeming!
O child, it is a rescued sin!'

(39)

This is the poem, Beyond Knowledge, published in The Saturday Review, in 1911. Among the ten poems, privately printed in 1915, the second Sin poem, Free Will, appeared. In this poem, it would seem that personal sin, so far from being matter for morbidity, is matter for encouragement.

But my best treasures are
Ignoble, undelightful, abject, cold;
Yet O! profounder hoards oracular
No reliquaries hold.

There lie my trespasses,
Abjured but not disowned...

Under my hand they lie,
My very own, my proved iniquities;
And though the glory of my life go by
I hold and garner these.

How else, how elsewhere,
How otherwise, shall I discern and grope
For lowliness? How hate, how love, how dare,
How weep, how hope?

(40)

This was the poem that Ralph Hodgson, on leave during the war, praised so highly in Everard Meynell's bookshop.⁽⁴¹⁾

And this is the poem that Anne Kimball Tuell, in the Atlantic Monthly, explained in the sense that "sin committed

is a special privilege, as the first stage of the rebirth of beauty."⁽⁴²⁾ Since the poem, startling though it is, in its triumph over the futility of sin, might quite as easily be interpreted in the sense of King David's "Miserere",

For I know my iniquity: and my sin is
always before me; (43)

Anne Kimball Tuell ought not to have convicted Alice Meynell of heresy. This is a poem upon "Free Will"; and, whereas John Davidson makes of sin, a monstrous load that crushes the soul, Alice Meynell deliberately uses sin as a tool that strikes off virtue from the soul. And perhaps the difference between Davidson, and indeed between Christina Rossetti, and Alice Meynell may be expressed best in this distinction of St. Evrémond.

The Protestant is always thinking of not
displeasing God, the Catholic is always
thinking of pleasing Him; fear being the ruling
motive in one, love in the other. (44)

One thinks at once of George Herbert; and the distinction shows itself as outrageously unfair. Had St. Evrémond used the word "Puritan" instead of "Protestant", I should have been content.

It can now be seen that The Young Neophyte must be interpreted in the spirit of the Poems of Parting. The meaning of The Young Neophyte is fulfilled, not merely in the acceptance of whatever pain may come, but in the spirit, and in the practice, of active renunciation. We have seen, in the last place, that this active renunciation, in Alice

Meynell, was utterly free from any mingling of puritanism. And it is in terms of this characteristic quality of Alice Meynell's sensibility that Alice Meynell's art, in poetry and prose, is revealed to us. In life, she had renounced a deep and valuable love: in her art, she will renounce more and more any effusiveness of the imagination, best illustrated by the Unpublished Poems, for the austerity and intellectuality of her Later Poems.

CHAPTER TWO: OCCASIONAL ESSAYS

In the autumn of 1877, Alice Thompson was married to Wilfrid Meynell. And with her marriage, Alice Meynell entered upon that unusual enterprise for a Victorian woman, a career. Journalism was to be the constant occupation of both husband and wife. During the days of their engagement, they had been preparing to project a new Review. But it was not till 1880, that the Review, The Pen, a Journal of Literature, appeared. After ten issues, The Pen died quietly in July. In 1881, The Weekly Register, a Catholic periodical, was begun; and this was in Wilfrid Meynell's hands for eighteen years. In 1883, Wilfrid Meynell launched Merry England. "The first number", writes Viola Meynell, "had a portrait of Disraeli for frontispiece, and all the ardour of the new magazine was in support of the social revolution of the Young England Movement, the revival of the peasantry, the abolition of the wrongs of the poor, the spread of art and literature."⁽¹⁾ Alice Meynell was therefore in vital contact with the issues of the late Victorian period. She was, besides this essential business, contributing to Henley's Scots Observer, later The National Observer, and to the Pall Mall Gazette. And during this time, the Eighties and the Nineties, Alice Meynell was devoting herself to the bringing up of her seven children.

It is not surprising that, under this pressure,

poetic inspiration vanished. After the publication of Preludes she wrote After a Parting in 1877, Unlinked in 1880, A Song of Derivations in 1885, and the Veni Creator in 1890. Four brief lyrics in a period of fifteen years! In the sonnet Unlinked, Alice Meynell had already noticed the silence of her poetic inspiration; but decides,

From me, my art, thou canst not pass away. (2)

In the essay, The Rhythm of Life, written in 1889, she instances poetic inspiration as an example of periodicity in life.

Like them [the saints] are the poets whom, three times or ten times in the course of a long life, the Muse has approached, touched, and forsaken. And yet hardly like them; not always so docile, nor so wholly prepared for the departure, the brevity, of the golden and irrevocable hour. Few poets have fully recognized the metrical absence of their Muse. For full recognition is expressed in one only way - silence. (3)

Alice Meynell's prose divides itself conveniently, and almost chronologically, into two kinds: the Occasional Essays and Literary Criticism. The Occasional Essays belong to the Eighties and Nineties. Her literary criticism begins in earnest after her visit to America in 1902, and continues till her death in 1922. The Occasional Essays include, as their most important work, five small volumes: The Rhythm of Life (1893), written chiefly for Henley and the National Observer; The Colour of Life, which reprinted, in 1896, the "Wares of Autolycus" columns in the Pall Mall Gazette; The Children (1897); The Spirit of Place (1899); and Ceres Runaway (1909).

The themes of these Essays were, as her daughter has said, entirely her own.⁽⁴⁾ In the volume of The Rhythm of Life, the title essay exposes the law of periodicity that governs the exchanges of joy and sorrow in life; the essay on Composure, in controversy with the contemporary bias for the Germanic element in language, declares the necessary office of the Latin element in the language of literature; the essays on The Flower and Decivilized reprove the dullness and artificiality of public taste. Her subjects are various, having their source usually in controversy or, as she gained reputation, in impressionistic description of nature.

To speak of these essays, as most have done, using the words "austere restraint"⁽⁵⁾, is to speak of only part of the sensibility revealed. The spirit of "multitude" is omnipresent in these essays; though the control, so evidently needed in the earlier poems of Preludes, is increasingly felt. The essay, The Rhythm of Life, is actually a poem in prose, treating a subject closely allied to the subject of the poem To the Beloved. The essay is a new version of the "multitude-composure" theme.

It seems fit that Shelley and the author of the "Imitation" should both have been keen and simple enough to perceive these flights, and to guess at the order of this periodicity. (6)

There is order; but there is flight.

Delight can be compelled beforehand, called, and constrained to our service - Ariel can be bound to a daily task; but such artificial violence throws life out of metre, and it is not the spirit that is thus compelled. That flits upon an orbit

elliptically or parabolically or hyperbolically curved, keeping no man knows what trysts with Time. (7)

The last sentence of the essay is wisdom: the wisdom, not profound, but not easily accepted, that men must have in the tide of their affairs.

Their joy is flying away from them on its way home; their life will wax and wane; and if they would be wise, they must wake and rest in its phases, knowing that they are ruled by the law that commands all things - a sun's revolutions and the rhythmic pangs of maternity. (8)

It is impossible not to suspect here a reply to Pater's Conclusion to Studies in the Renaissance; for, though that book had appeared in 1873, its influence belongs more properly to the Eighties and Nineties. Certainly, the contrast of Alice Meynell's "periodicity" of life and Pater's "perpetual flow" theory, derived from Heraclitus, indicates a similar approach to the problem.

In Composure, the "multitude-composure" theme is applied to language. The problem in language for literature, Alice Meynell says, is

... which school of words shall have the place of honour in the great and sensitive moments of an author's style: which school shall be used for conspicuousness, and which for multitudinous service. (9)

The quarrel is between the Teutonic school and the Latin school; and, with fine precision in an evanescent matter, the essayist finds in words such as "tribulation" and "immortality" and "multitude", a composure that controls their trouble.

Without the remoteness of the Latinity the thought would come too close and shake too cruelly. (10)

But the dual heritage is not to be cast aside.

Nay, one of the most charming things that a master of English can achieve is the repayment of the united teaching by linking their results so exquisitely in his own practice, that words of the two schools are made to meet each other with a surprise and delight that shall prove them at once gayer strangers, and sweeter companions, than the world knew they were. (11)

And then, Alice Meynell resolves the dispute in precisely the spirit in which she was solving the fundamental problems of Preludes, the problem of her conversion, and the problem of the Poems of Parting.

It is well, too, that we should not resist the rhythmic reaction bearing us now somewhat to the side of the Latin. Such a reaction is in some sort an ethical need of our day. We want to quell the exaggerated decision of monosyllables. We want the poise and the pause that imply vitality at times better than headstrong movement expresses it.

In The Flower, she applies her theme to the artificial ugliness, which repeats the conventional pattern of the flower on wall, floor, ceiling, and furniture.

A condition for using justly and gaily any decoration would seem to be a measure of reluctance. Ornament - strange as the doctrine sounds in a world decivilized - was in the beginning intended to be something jocund; and jocundity was never to be achieved by postponement, deference, and modesty. Nor can the prodigality of the meadows in May be quoted in dispute. For Nature has something even more severe than moderation; she has an innumerable singleness. Her buttercup meadows are not prodigal; they show multitude, but not multiplicity, and multiplicity is exactly the disgrace of decoration. (13)

In the essays, collected under the title, The Colour of Life, the "multitude-composure" theme is discernible throughout. The Point of Honour, an approval of Velasquez, explains the obligations of the Impressionist painter.

Because Impressionism with all its extreme - let us hope its ultimate - derivatives is so free, therefore it is doubly bound. Because there is none to arraign it, it is a thousand times responsible. To undertake this art for the sake of its privileges without confessing its obligations - or at least without confessing them up to the point of honour - is to take a vulgar freedom: to see immunities precisely where there are duties, and an advantage where there is a bond. (14)

In the essay, Symmetry and Incident, is the clearest statement of Alice Meynell's dominant theme. Discovered in life, it must be applied to art. This essay, perhaps the most splendid and most characteristic of Alice Meynell's Occasional Essays, is surely the best example of that precision of expression in dealing with thoughts that seem to lie just beyond the reach of expression. Expression could hardly be more precise: yet words could scarcely be more fruitful with suggestion than these clear, precise words.

But whatever may be the phases of the arts, there is an abiding principle of symmetry in the body of man, that goes Greek, like an upright soul. Its balance is equal. Exterior human symmetry is surely a curious physiological fact where there is no symmetry interiorly. For the centres of life and movement within the body are placed with Oriental inequality. Man is Greek without and Japanese within. But the absolute symmetry of the skeleton and of the beauty and life that cover it is accurately a principle. It controls, but not tyrannously, all the life of human action. Attitude and motion disturb perpetually, with

infinite incidents - inequalities of work, war, and pastime, inequalities of sleep - the symmetry of man... All human movement is a variation upon symmetry, and without symmetry it would not be variation; it would be lawless, fortuitous, and as dull and broadcast as lawless art. (15)

It is in such a passage as this that the quality of Alice Meynell's mind is best observed. It may be well to interrupt the examination of this essay, for a brief analysis of the quality of mind manifest in this passage. Meredith and Chesterton, among a number of critics, have paid tribute to the quality of thought that is compressed into these brief essays. In the Dublin Review, in 1923, Chesterton wrote that -

she never wrote a line, or even a word, without putting brains into it. (16)

George Meredith, in the National Review, reviewed Alice Meynell's essays in 1896.

I can fancy Matthew Arnold, lighting on such essays as "The Point of Honour", "A Point in Biography", "Symmetry and Incident", and others I have named, saying with refreshment, "She can write!" It does not seem to me too bold to imagine Carlyle listening, without the weariful gesture, to his wife's reading of the same, hearing them to the end, and giving his comment: "That woman thinks!" A woman who thinks and can write, who does not disdain the school of journalism, and who brings novelty and poetic beauty, the devout but open mind, to her practice of it, bears promise that she will one day rank as one of the great Englishwomen of Letters. (17)

But the thought of Alice Meynell is remarkably close to the perception of the senses. Our first impression of her mind is that it operates in a vacuum. I can recall no single sentence of hers that is drawn out of an accumulated store

of learning; nor one judgment of hers that seems to derive from abstract principles or the formulated laws of natural science. Her intellect, unencumbered by any predisposition, seems to dart at its object, swiftly express its catch, then dart to another point of alighting. Her thought is not continuous - that is, it is not reasoning - it is simply apprehensive. The judgment - All human movement is a variation upon symmetry; and without symmetry it would not be variation - from the passage already quoted, is the abstract expression of an intuitive perception of the human body. So much is clear from the passage itself. And it may be assumed that her concepts are not really abstract; but mingled with sense-perception. Take, for example, the phrase "Oriental inequality" in the sentence:

For the centres of life and movement within the body are placed with Oriental inequality.

"Oriental inequality" is simply not an abstract concept; and it would be dangerous to accept it as one. Like a proper name, it does not abstract the reality of its subject; it merely refers to, or indicates, a certain reality. And were Alice Meynell asked to say just what "Oriental inequality" indicated, she could only point to a previous page and some such "definition" as this:

Look at the curls and curves whereby this people [the Japanese] conventionally signify wave or cloud... they have an exquisite prankishness of variety, the place where the upward or downward scrolls curl off from the main wave is delicately unexpected every time, and - especially in gold embroideries - is sensitively fit for the material, catching and losing the

light, while the lengths of waving line are
such as the long gold threads take by mature. (18)

I believe that Patmore has given us the phrase for this quality of Alice Meynell's mind, when, in his Fortnightly Review criticism of her essays, he spoke of her "perceptive reason." Patmore clearly intends to oppose his phrase to the "discursive" reason; for he immediately speaks of her "ability to discern self-evident things as yet undiscerned." (19)

Patmore's phrase "perceptive reason" is certainly more satisfactory than Chesterton's "putting brains into it"; for Alice Meynell's thinking is, not a "putting", but a "perceiving": a reception, not an application. If this analysis is correct, it explains, I think, a number of things. Insofar as her thought is not abstract, not generalized, but close to perceptions of line and colour and space, her thought is still suggestive. In the words of Francis Thompson, spoken of her poems, she wakens "not sounds, but silences". (20) In the words of the Athenaeum reviewer, also of her poems, each piece is "like the hinting of a secret." (21) In the words of George Meredith, of her essays, they "leave a sense of stilled singing in the mind they fill." (22) Insofar as her reason is "perceptive", and not discursive, her work gives the sense of "austere restraint", (23) of "holding its reserve", (24) of constant originality. Indeed originality is one of the main delights of this prose. The subject is usually commonplace enough; but the point of view is perpetually refreshing. This "perceptive" reason accounts, too, for her delight in paradox.

It is the office of the philosopher to resolve paradox; it was the way with Alice Meynell's mind to stop with the perception of paradox. And we have therefore the explanation of what she herself has confessed, that neither by theology nor philosophy, did she enter the Catholic Church.

To return then to the "multitude-composure" theme in Symmetry and Incident. Having discovered her theme in life, Alice Meynell demands it in art; and, to enforce the demand quotes Coventry Patmore's Principle in Art.

The order of inflection that is not infraction has been explained in a most authoritative sentence of criticism of literature, a sentence that should save the world the trouble of some of its present futile, violent, and weak experiments: "Law, the rectitude of humanity," says Coventry Patmore, "should be the poet's only subject, as, from time immemorial, it has been the subject of true art, though many a true artist has done the Muse's will and knew it not. As all the music of verse arises, not from infraction but from inflection of the law of the set metre; so the greatest poets have been those the modulus of whose verse has been most variously and delicately inflected, in correspondence with feelings and passions which are the inflections of moral law in their theme. Law puts a strain upon feeling, and feeling responds with a strain upon law. Furthermore, Aristotle says that the quality of poetic language is a continual slight novelty. In the highest poetry, like that of Milton, these three modes of inflection, metrical, linguistical, and moral, all chime together in praise of the truer order of life."

(25)

The essay concludes with an important contrast and the reaffirmation of the dominant theme of Alice Meynell's work, whether in poetry or in prose.

The nimble art of Japan is unessential; it may come and go, may settle or be fanned away. It has life and it is not without law; it has an obvious life, and a less obvious law. But with Greece abides the obvious law and the less obvious life: symmetry as apparent as the symmetry of the form of man, and life occult like his unequal heart. And

this seems to be the nobler and the more
perdurable relation. (26)

In the essays, collected in the volume, entitled
The Children, and published in 1897, the titles themselves
suggest the presence of the theme: Fellow Travellers with a
Bird, The Child of Tumult, The Child of Subsiding Tumult,
The Unready, The Illusion of Historic Time. One essay in
this volume, the title of which does not suggest the theme
of "multitude-composure", is perhaps the most exciting example
of it. This essay, Under the Early Stars, opens with the
familiar chord and the new variation.

Play is not for every hour of the day, or for
any hour taken at random. There is a tide in
the affairs of children. (27)

The children are carefully drawn in their ordinary daily
routine.

They may have been in a pottering mood all day,
intent upon all kinds of close industries,
breathing hard over choppings and poundings.

And then the moment of transformation:

But when late twilight comes, there comes also
the punctual wildness.

The punctual wildness! A new phrase for the dominant theme.
And with the word "remembrances" a new invasion of tumult
is felt in the words immediately following.

The children will run and pursue, and laugh for
the mere movement - it does so jolt their spirits.

What remembrances does this imply of the
hunt, what of the predatory dark? The kitten
grows alert at the same hour, and hunts for moths
and crickets in the grass. It comes like an imp,
leaping on all fours. The children lie in ambush
and fall upon one another in the mimicry of hunt-
ing.

... It may be the impotent revolt of the ineffectual child, or the stroke of the conqueror; but something is done for freedom under the early stars.

And a moment later in this brief essay, there is a new variation:

The time of falling asleep is a child's immemorial and incalculable hour. It is full of traditions and beset by antique habits... Childhood is antiquity, and, with the sense of time and the sense of mystery is connected forever the hearing of a lullaby. (28)

And the essay ends with a last variation:

His closing eyes are filled with alien images. (29)

The theme can be traced through The Spirit of Place, the collection of essays published in 1899. The essayist is turning more to the presence of movement in nature for her subjects. In Wells, which begins with a disapproval of water-pipes, Alice Meynell sees in all "the waters of this planet... a multitude of waters multiplying suns."

Not a pool without this visitant, or without passages of stars. (30)

And, of the water brought to Rome in the great aqueducts:

None more splendid came bound to Rome, or graced captivity with a more invincible liberty of the heart. (31)

The effect of light upon colour and line in landscape, an influence shed upon Alice Meynell's prose through her delight and criticism of the Impressionists of the later Nineteenth Century, has now an important place in the essays of this volume and the later volume of Ceres Runaway. One might even suppose that such essays as In July, Rain, The Horizon,

Cloud, Shadows, in the collection The Spirit of Place; and, in Ceres Runaway, the Tethered Constellations, were written with the purpose of refining the painter's eye. Such a passage as this from the Cloud, will serve to illustrate her power.

The cloud, moreover, controls the sun, not merely by keeping the custody of his rays, but by becoming the counsellor of his temper. The cloud veils an angry sun, or, more terribly, lets fly an angry ray, suddenly bright upon tree and tower, with iron-gray storm for a background. Or when anger had but threatened, the cloud reveals him, gentle beyond hope. It is in the confidence of the winds, and wears their colours. There is a heavenly game, on south-west wind days, when the clouds are bowled by a breeze from behind the evening: They are round and brilliant, and come leaping up from the horizon for hours. This a frolic and haphazard sky. (32)

This description of nature, despite "the pathetic fallacy" introduced, is ultimately objective. No attempt is made to identify nature with the moods of the observer: nor is there any awareness of a Spirit moving in cloud or wind: nor is there in this impressionistic description, the intellect that discovers riddle and mystery in nature. This type of description in Alice Meynell's prose proceeds, although exquisitely, at a superficial level. It is rather the exercise of the visual eye than of the imagination. The essayist has given her style a generous freedom to display its virtuosity and has allowed her eye the liberty of extreme precision.

Wherever the "multitude-composure" theme has been profoundly touched in these essays, Alice Meynell is a creative artist; but in some of the essays, she is merely the moralist. Her indignation could be vehement enough, and is

especially aroused at a loss of dignity or a vulgarity of taste. She begins the essay, Have Patience, Little Saint, with the sentence:

Some considerable time must have gone by since any kind of courtesy ceased, in England, to be held necessary in the course of communication with a beggar. (33)

Alice Meynell's sense of humour was never stirred by a joke at the expense of married life. In the essay, Victorian Caricature, she denounces the humour of Douglas Jerrold, the drawings of Leech and Charles Keene. She realizes that "to make a serious comment on anything which others consider or have considered humorous is to put oneself at a disadvantage"; but she is more than ready to risk "the least tolerable of modern reproaches", that she lacks humour. She describes one of Keene's drawings for "Punch".

A drunken citizen, in the usual broadcloth, has gone to bed, fully dressed, with his boots on and his umbrella open, and the joke lies in the surprise awaiting, when she awakes, the wife asleep at his side in a night-cap... This obscene drawing is matched by many equally odious. Abject domesticity, ignominies of married life, of middle-age, of money-making; the old common jape against the mother-in-law... In all these things there is very little humour. (34)

In her essays, Alice Meynell has, following Ruskin, denounced the ugliness of public and private building; and, following Arnold, even Philistinism. Her most stinging words are spent upon the American, in the essay Decivilized.

The difficulty of dealing - in the course of any critical duty - with decivilized man lies in this: when you accuse him of vulgarity - sparing him no doubt the word - he defends himself against

the charge of barbarism. Especially from the new soil - remote, colonial - he faces you, bronzed, with a half conviction of savagery, partly persuaded of his own youthfulness of race.... He writes, and recites, poems about ranches and canyons; they are designed to betray the recklessness of his nature and to reveal the good that lurks in the lawless ways of a young society.... But his colonialism is only provincialism very articulate... He who played long this pattering part of youth, hastened to assure you with so self-denying a face he did not wear warpaint and feathers, that it became doubly difficult to communicate to him that you had suspected him of nothing wilder than a second-hand (figurative) dress-coat.

I have quoted these examples of her work to show rather what sort of moralist Alice Meynell was not. Her didacticism has its origin rather in aesthetic reprovals than in moral. Despite her own earnestness in the matter of moral law, strictly so-called, she does not denounce immorality either in her poetry or in her prose. Nor does she turn aside in her writing - except very infrequently and then very briefly - to indulge in religious controversy.

Since this avoidance of religious controversy or moral disapproval in her work finds its counterpart in the life of Alice Meynell, I am brought, for the first time, to mention the literary salon, over which she presided, and which may, one day, be considered Alice Meynell's most important contribution to English letters. Arthur Patrick, in his study of Lionel Johnson, has carefully summarized the character and the significance of these evening gatherings in the Meynell home.

Les Meynell représentaient un des aspects les plus intéressants de la vie littéraire des "Nineties". Constamment occupés de journalisme

et de poésie, ils menaient une vie simple et familiale qui a été le sujet de maintes études. Leur catholicisme était d'une fraîche simplicité sans aucune recherche ni aucun extrémisme. A partir de 1889, où ils bâtirent une maison à Palace Court, leur foyer, charitablement ouvert aux idées diverses, devint une sorte de salon littéraire. Chez eux, le dimanche après-midi, se retrouvaient des figures de toutes sortes, catholiques et autres. Des esprits aussi différents que Coventry Patmore et Oscar Wilde, ou que Francis Thompson et Aubrey Beardsley, s'y rencontraient. "Soyons du centre," disait Mrs. Meynell, "pas des provinces." (35)

Lionel Johnson, Willie Wilde, Oscar's brother, William Watson, Herbert Trench and William Butler Yeats were also Sunday visitors. (36) But what I wish particularly to emphasize at this point is that, in the words of Agnes de la Gorce, Alice Meynell "had no desire for the literary cricle that had gathered round her to assume the characteristics of a clique." (37) Mr. Patrick confirms this.

Le groupe catholique prédominait dans ces réunions. Les visites des poètes comme Patmore, Blunt, Thompson, Stephen Phillips et Katherine Hinkson y étaient fréquentes. Mais, à la vérité, il n'y avait là rien d'un cénacle; on n'avait point de programme; on ne publiait, ni ne voulait publier aucun manifeste. Certains critiques, comme George Saintsbury, ont voulu exagérer l'importance de ce groupe comme s'il avait été en quelque sorte une conjuration. Saintsbury, par exemple, qualifie les Sister Songs de Francis Thompson de "poésie d'une petite clique catholique." Pareillement, quand il écrit les derniers chapitres de la Cambridge History of English Literature, il fait allusion à "une puissante coterie" et à "une bande de journalistes catholiques." (38)

With the death of Patmore in 1896, of Beardsley in 1898, of Oscar Wilde in 1900, of Lionel Johnson in 1902, of Francis Thompson in 1907, the greater figures of the later Nineteenth Century dwindle from her drawing room; and with

the death of Henley in 1903 and of Meredith in 1909, a persistent admirer of her work and a great friend, mark, in this definite way, the close of Alice Meynell's greatest period, for prose and poetry, and her greatest prominence in the praise of contemporary men of letters. Her essays had won for her this prominence. And we may allow the very conservative Athenaeum reviewer, since he will not be suspected of belonging to "une puissante coterie", to speak for Alice Meynell's reputation in the Nineties. In 1896, the Athenaeum reviewed the Colour of Life.

The fact is that, since the golden age of the Spectators and Tatlers, the essay, strictly so called, has enjoyed, but a precarious and intermittent existence in England. Indeed, Charles Lamb and Robert Louis Stevenson are about the only two writers (if we disregard George Eliot, with her rather indigestible "Impressions of Theophrastus Such") who can be said to have signally distinguished themselves in this kind. One or two stars of the fourth or fifth magnitude, such as Mr. Le Gallienne and Mr. Max Beerbohm, are twinkling unsteadily in this region of the firmament of letters; but Mrs. Meynell, as an essayist, practically occupies the telescopic field at present all by herself. (39)

Both Henley and Harland sought her essays for their periodicals.

"If you've any more 'Rhythms of Life'", Henley wrote to her,

"I shall be proud indeed to take them on, one of the best things it has so far been my privilege to print." (40) Harland tried to induce Alice Meynell to write for The Yellow Book:

"I wish I could persuade you to become a contributor to The Yellow Book. I think I have heard that your feeling for that periodical is not one of unbounded enthusiasm - raison de plus why you should lend a hand to the bettering of it.

Won't you do us one of your exquisite essays?"⁽⁴¹⁾ And John Lane, publisher special to the Nineties, asked permission to print her National Observer articles; and did indeed publish her first volume of essays, The Rhythm of Life (1895).⁽⁴²⁾

In the Academy, in 1897, E.K. Chambers wrote of her: "In the realm of the more liberal essay, whose criticism is of life rather than of letters, Mrs. Meynell is admittedly queen."⁽⁴³⁾

But the praise that pleased her most, because she felt it came from a deeper understanding, was the praise of Patmore, and, - strangely enough, when we think of his own prose - George Meredith. Patmore expressed himself, unreservedly, in a letter to Wilfrid Meynell: "Your wife's prose is the finest that was ever written, and none but kindred genius can see how great it is. I am glad to see that all the few competent judges are gradually coming to confirm all that I have ever said in her praise."⁽⁴⁴⁾ In the Fortnightly Review, Patmore had already given the grounds for his praise.

At least one half of this little volume [The Rhythm of Life] is classical work, embodying, as it does, new thought of general and permanent significance in perfect language, and bearing, in every sentence, the hall-mark of genius, namely, the marriage of masculine force of insight with feminine grace and tact of expression... Gaiety of manner with gravity of matter, truth perceived clearly and expressed with ease and joy constitute the very highest and rarest of prose writing. (45)

George Meredith, in an article called "Mrs. Meynell's Two Books of Essays", wrote:

The essays have, in these days of the overflow, the merit of saying just enough on the subject, leaving the reader to think. They can be read repeatedly, because they are compact and suggestive, and at the

same time run with clearness... Her manner presents to me the image of one accustomed to walk in holy places and keep the eye of a fresh mind on our tangled world, happier in observing than in speaking; careful to speak but briefly to such an ear-beaten people. (46)

Mr. Max Beerbohm raised a good-humoured protest to this wave of enthusiasm for the prose of Alice Meynell. "In a few years Mrs. Meynell will have become a sort of substitute for the English sabbath." Her prose, he considered, "quite perfect in its sort"; but not "the one and only way in which fine English could possibly be written... She must know that there are they who can do quite as much with their flutes as she with her file... So sacred in the eyes of all London is Mrs. Meynell, that I know this article will be considered nothing less than a brutal and revolting crime". (47)

The close association of Alice Meynell's name, in these last paragraphs, with such names as Wilde, Beardsley, Johnson, Harland, Lane, and even, in spite of his qualified interest, with the name of Max Beerbohm, may suggest too much. As external evidence, the praise she has received from these men is sufficient to place her work definitely in the late Eighties and Nineties. As Anne Tuell has said: "Her prose came not alone to its repute, but actually to its fulfilment in the Nineties". (48) But such an observation must not be taken in any exclusive sense. The description of Alice Meynell's salon and the extraordinary variety in literary affiliations represented by the men and women received there and her own injunction to "be of the center, not of the

province" will have been warning enough that we must not identify Alice Meynell, in her prose, with any movement in the later Nineteenth Century. In A Song of Derivations, a lyric of 1885, Alice Meynell confesses the whole tradition of literature as her only ancestry.

I come from nothing; but from where
Come the undying thoughts I bear?
Down, through long links of death and birth,
From the past poets of the earth,
My immortality is there.

.

Before this life began to be,
The happy songs that wake in me
Woke long ago and far apart.
Heavily on this little heart
Presses this immortality. (49)

And yet, though it is impossible to identify Alice Meynell with any particular group in the later Nineteenth Century, it is nevertheless true that her essays reveal clearly the more general characteristics of the period. I have had occasion more than once to mention her concern, following Ruskin's, about the ugliness of contemporary building; her criticism of life, insofar as she cared to deal with it in her essays, having an aesthetic rather than a utilitarian bias. In the Colour of Life, for example:

As the bathing child shuffles off his garments -
they are few, and one brace suffices him - so
the land might always, in reasonable time,
shuffle off its yellow brick and purple slate,
and all the things that collect about railway
stations. A single night almost clears the
air of London. (50)

And, from Decivilized,

Nothing can look duller than this second-hand
and multiplying world. (51)

And if Alice Meynell was not impressed, at this time, with the utility and the value of all this material progress, she seemed not more observant of any lack of morality. We have already seen how deeply impressed she was from youth with the need of a moral law. Yet neither moral nor dogmatic didacticism appear in her essays. In Domus Augusta, we meet such a cry as this:

To be clever and sensitive and to hurt the foolish
and the stolid - "wouldst thou do such a deed for
all the world?" (52)

But the cry is not aimed. It is a cry of sympathy, not of reproach. Her indignation was reserved for the Victorian Caricature of married life and for the Decivilized. The creative work in these essays, a much larger proportion than the didactic, seem to have avoided scrupulously the themes of morality and of religious doctrine. And a number of essays deal with art-criticism, with the language and technique of literature, with literary personalities not well remembered. If then we consider only the essays of Alice Meynell, we must notice that in her mind there was a clear and distinct separation of art and morality. This separation will appear all the more extraordinary when we consider that, with her husband, she was chiefly occupied during these years with the editing of two Catholic papers, The Weekly Register, and Merry England; and when it is remembered that the social encyclicals of Leo XIII were being written through the years,

1878 to 1901; the most important one, Rerum Novarum, on the "Condition of the Working-classes", appearing in the year 1891. Art was one thing: the condition of the world, the state of morality were, in the mind of Alice Meynell, quite clearly another. By this separation, Alice Meynell is distinguished from Ruskin and Arnold and Pater: Ruskin whose theory of art was saturated with morality; Arnold who replaced religion with poetry by separating it from thought and who confounded morality with "culture";⁽⁵³⁾ Pater who made Arnold a little more intelligible by substituting art for morality. In Alice Meynell the categories are kept distinct. There was good authority for this, had she known it, in the Summa Theologica.

Unde videmus quod aliqua imago dicitur esse
pulchra si perfecte representat rem quamvis
turpem. (54)

Alice Meynell treats art, whether in creation or in criticism, in the spirit of the artist. Of Newman, she has said:

Newman can write verse unworthy of himself without
a pang because he is a poet fifthly, sixthly, or
seventhly, in the order of his high vocations.
It is far otherwise with me. (55)

She has therefore a place by the side of Patmore who surveyed his contemporaries and made the boast:

I am the only poet of this generation, except
Barnes, who has steadily maintained a literary
conscience. (56)

Before his own generation, and within the Nineteenth Century, Patmore need only have made two inclusions in that sweeping statement - the names of Keats and Landor. Within his own

generation, there were Rossetti and Morris and indeed the whole Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood that deserved mention among those single-mindedly devoted to Beauty. And Swinburne, touched by Gautier/^{and}Baudelaire, and Oscar Wilde in the Eighties, who, through Pater, was in touch with Flaubert, and Dowson in the Nineties, who knew Verlaine - all these, under the influence, more or less great, of the French idea, "Art for Art's sake", belong to the number of those who have separated art and morality. Mr. Max Beerbohm, writing an essay, entitled simply 1880, for the Yellow Book, indicates the English origins of the "cult of Beauty" movement.

But it must be remembered that long before this time [1880] there had been in the heart of Chelsea a kind of cult of Beauty. Certain artists had settled there, deliberately refusing to work in the ordinary official way, and "wrought", as they were wont to put it, "for the pleasure and sake of all that is fair". Swinburne, Morris, Rossetti, Whistler, Burne-Jones, were of this little community - all of them men of great industry and caring for little but their craft. Quietly and unbeknown they produced their poems or their pictures or their essays, read them or showed them to one another and worked on. In fact, Beauty had existed long before 1880. It was Mr. Oscar Wilde who first trotted her round. (57)

And Alice Meynell, writing her chief work in prose during the last fifteen years of the Nineteenth Century, belongs to this period, at least in the sense that she represents one form which the attempt to free art from morality, assumed. In some quarters this attempt seemed to mean that the poet was free to be immoral. In Alice Meynell, the separation of art and morality meant that a poem and an act of charity

were two different things, achieved by different means, dedicated to different ends. She knew that a good poet might be a bad man: she would not have said that, because he was a good poet, he might therefore be a bad man.

There were other ways, all related to this dedication of Alice Meynell to literature, in which she reflects the more general literary preoccupations of the later Nineteenth Century. These last fifteen years might almost be called the age of the Essay. "After Wilde, except possibly for Symonds, the line of writers who wrote large books to which the public paid attention died out, to be replaced by publicists who preferred to manoeuvre as essayists in the columns of the weeklies, which gradually ousted the quarterlies and monthlies as organs of opinion."⁽⁵⁸⁾ Albert Farmer notices that the formless three-volumed novel disappears in the Nineties, to be replaced by the carefully wrought shorter novel and the short-story itself.⁽⁵⁹⁾ The essays of this period, particularly the essays of Wilde and Beerbohm, gain another step in condensation by being deliberately "poetic"; and it is to this type of essay, in reality a poem in prose, that the best work of Alice Meynell belongs. Mr. Farmer has said that the intention of the so-called Decadent School of English writers was to "élever l'anecdote au niveau de l'art."⁽⁶⁰⁾ And Alice Meynell has also remarked upon this characteristic of the age, in her essay, The Age of Anecdote.

In Wagnerian music the "motive" as contrasted

with the melody is the very type of what we have called anecdote; for it is special, it is consecrated to the person and to the mood. It is expressive of fragmentary and transitory emotion and of passing thought in the very passage. It is a phrase and not a tune... The anecdotal phrase in music is quintessential, and all expressive. Schumann and Wagner had many aims in their schemes of music, besides that of propagating the anecdotal method, but this aim of theirs is important, and proves their work a sign and part of the artistic mood of the moment. (61)

Another characteristic, which brings Alice Meynell into sympathy with the later Nineteenth Century, was her predilection, in the choice of themes for her essays, of small and even insignificant things. E. Hallam Moorhouse, in the Fortnightly Review, says that "she penetrated to the poignancy, the beauty of those small things we are most of us too heavy-lidded to perceive." (62) For example, the essay on Wells begins:

The world at present is inclined to make some mysteries or unattractive secrets of the methods and supplies of the fresh and perennial means of life. A very dull secret is made of water, for example, and the plumber sets his seal upon the floods whereby we live. (63)

And this observation provides Alice Meynell with a valuable thought.

In all countries, and at all dates, extreme finish compassed by hidden means must needs, from the beginning, prepare the abolition of dignity. (64)

Nor does Alice Meynell speak of her little things in a trivial or apologetic or superior way. Of the water in the pipes, "lapped in lead", she writes that "King Pandion and his friends lie not under heavier seals". (65) Of the

grass that constantly thrusts its way up through pavement and, in Rome, can be discovered high upon the ledges of ancient ruins and the cornices of churches, she writes in Ceres Runaway.

If Venus had her runaway, after whom the Elizabethans raised hue and cry, this is Ceres! The municipal authorities, hot-foot, cannot catch it. And, worse than all, if they pause, dismayed, to mark the flight of the agile fugitive safe on the arc of a flying buttress, or taking the place of the fallen mosaics and coloured tiles of a twelfth-century tower, and in any case inaccessible, the grass grows under their discomfited feet.... - the weed does so prevail, is so small, and so dominant! ... No richer scents throng each other, close and warm, than these from a little hand-space of the grass one rests on, within the walls or on the plain, or in the Sabine or the Alban hills. (66)

And there is thought of some value caught in such a contrast as this:

Buckingham Palace has nothing whatever of the Vatican dignity, but one cannot well think of little cheerful cabbages sunning themselves on any parapet it may have round a corner.

And another thought of value in the closing sentences of this essay.

The most cultivated of all countries, the Italy of tillage, is yet not a garden, but something better, as her city is yet not a town but something better, and her wilderness something better than a desert. In all the three there is a trace of the little flying heels of the runaway.

William C. Hall has explained the effect of these essays upon the reader.

She [Alice Meynell] describes what without her demonstration he would not have apprehended, giving him a new view, indeed, a new object

of contemplation, until plain fact looks like
imagery, and imagery, in its turn, becomes truth.
(67)

Coventry Patmore has explained the difficulty of the manner
of these essays.

It is very easy to speak splendidly and profusely
about things which transcend speech, but... to
avoid with sedulous reverence the things which
are beyond the focus of the human eye, and to
direct attention effectively to those which are
well within it, though they have hitherto been
undiscerned through lack of attention or the
astounding imperfection of common vision for the
reality of common things, is a very different
attainment. (68)

G.K. Chesterton has considered this cult of the little and
the insignificant as the outstanding characteristic of all
modern literature, and, it seems, in all its phases. In his
study of Browning, he declares that The Ring and the Book,
in which the poet sets out to show "the relations of man to
heaven by telling you a story out of a dirty Italian book of
criminal trials" from which he selects "one of the meanest
and most completely forgotten", is the fountain and origin
of "this tide of the importance of small things ... flowing
so steadily around us upon every side today (1903)." (69)

I have no wish at this point to enter into controversy about
Browning, I wish merely to observe how perfectly the essays
of Alice Meynell answer Chesterton's general description of
the period from the publication of The Ring and The Book
(1868) to the turn of the century.

The characteristic of the modern movements par
excellence is the apotheosis of the insignificant.
Whether it be the school of poetry which sees
more in one cowslip or clover-top than in forests

and waterfalls, or the school of fiction which finds something indescribably significant in the pattern of a hearth-rug, or the tint of a man's tweed coat, the tendency is the same. Maeterlinck stricken still and wondering by a deal door half open, or the light shining out of a window at night; Zola filling note-books with the medical significance of the twitching of a man's toes, or the loss of his appetite; Whitman counting the grass and the heart-shaped leaves of the lilac; Mr. George Gissing lingering fondly over the third-class ticket and the dilapidated umbrella; George Meredith seeing a soul's tragedy in a phrase at the dinner-table; Mr. Bernard Shaw filling three pages with stage directions to describe a parlour; all these men, different in every other particular, are alike in this, that they have ceased to believe certain things to be important and the rest to be unimportant. Significance is to them a wild thing that may leap upon them from any hiding-place. They have all become terribly impressed with and a little bit alarmed at the mysterious powers of small things.

(70)

And, of Alice Meynell, Chesterton wrote in the Dublin Review that "she could have thrown a new mystical light over an umbrella-stand." (71)

More closely still is Alice Meynell in sympathy with the later Nineteenth Century in her exquisite use of words. This smallest unit of composition was almost the extent of her technical skill. She had not the structural power required to write a book; and her book, John Ruskin, is only a collection of separate commentaries. Her essays are very loosely constructed. She has nothing of Pater's power with the paragraph. Richard Le Gallienne, with justice, has said that her sentences lack rhythm. (72) But the Athenaeum reviewer had noticed, in 1893, that the "verse and prose of Mrs. Meynell - to use her own expression in regard

to another - 'enrich the present with the example of a scholarly, linguistic, verbal love of literature'." (73)

Her study of John Ruskin's work has throughout digressions of praise for his language and parenthetical quibbles over a misplaced verb or an ugly "which" or a futile "ever". In the essay, Composure, Alice Meynell had insisted upon the importance of the word of Latin derivation; and in her John Ruskin, she asks:

Had not Ruskin himself been able to think more remotely and more intellectually by means of the removed and immaterial Latin word of what he calls our "mongrel tongue". (74)

Alice Meynell has strewn her essays liberally with original thoughts upon the use and the meaning of words. She has written several essays entirely devoted to this theme:

Composure, The Little Language, A Counterchange, On Particles, Superfluous Kings, and The Second Person Singular. The opening sentence of The Little Language may be taken as an example of the preciousness of her vocabulary.

Dialect is the elf rather than the genius of place, and a dwarfish master of the magic of local things. (75)

But the quality that constantly saves her style from any narrow meaning of the word "preciousness", is the originality of the thought that is excited by even such a subject as "Dialect". Words, discovers Alice Meynell, may sharpen the edge of pain.

Not without words is mental pain, or even physical pain, to be undergone; but the words that have done no more than order the things of the narrow street are not words to put a

fine edge or a piercing point to any human pang. It may even well be that to die in dialect is easier than to die in the eloquence of Manfred, though that declaimed language, too, is doubtless a defence, if one of a different manner. (76)

Alice Meynell never lost her feeling for words. In the essay, Superfluous Kings, written in 1919 for the Atlantic Monthly, she describes the effect of the word "Egypt" in "Antony and Cleopatra".

If to him [Antony] are given the most surprising lines in any of the tragedies, it is only as the lover of a queen that he has the right to them. To him is assigned that startling word, the incomparable word of amorous and tender ceremony - Egypt.

I am dying, Egypt, dying.

That territorial name, murmured to his love in the hour of death, and in her arms - I know not in the records of all genius any other such august farewell. Lear's word is outdone here. Lear a king in every inch of his aged body, but Cleopatra a queen in every league of her ancient realm. Has not majesty spoken its one unexpected word in the mouth of such a lover? (77)

The prefix "un-", Alice Meynell discovers in her essay On Particles, produces a word that she describes as a "ruined archangel."

That "un" implies, encloses so much, point-blank, with a tragic irony that French, for example, can hardly compass... There are abysses, in these words, at our summons, deep calling to deep, dreadful or tender passion, the thing and its undoing locked together, grappled. (78)

Her essays are able to employ language that, apart from its context, seems strange out of poetic metres. In the Colour of Life, she describes a London boy taking an

evening swim in the Thames.

Clothed now with the sun, he is crowned
by-and-by with twelve stars as he goes to
bathe, and the reflection of an early moon
is under his feet. (79)

And, out of its context, a sentence may reflect the Decadent
devotion to colour; as in another view of this boy, naked
beside the river.

Old ivory and wild rose in the deepening
midsummer sun, he gives his colours to his
world again.

And yet, despite Alice Meynell's obvious relation to the
refinement of diction that is an outstanding mark of the
later Nineteenth Century, whether we think of Pater or Wilde
or Stevenson, she herself has declared that she was unaware
of the doctrine of the "right word".

The mot juste, which Max Beerbohm has called
the "Holy Grail of the nineties", was as
infrequently achieved as any grail, albeit most
energetically sought. Here, as always, Mrs.
Meynell was of her age and yet curiously
separate within it. She was, as she has said,
unaware of the religion of the word which had
its ritual in the London about her. She had
read for her edification no page of Flaubert,
was conscious indeed of no literary influence
upon her prose except, as Americans will be
glad to hear, the influence of Lowell. (80)

Alice Meynell's rapport with the literature of
the later Nineteenth Century was certainly closer than she
knew. In separating art from ethical purposes she was in
reaction against the great Mid-Victorians, and in separating
art from prophetic purposes she was in reaction against the
early Romantic poets. In the cultivation of the exquisite
and the little - "exquisite" and "delicate" are words that

may be found on every page of John Ruskin - in the refinement of diction and in her preference for the literary essay, Alice Meynell belongs distinctly to the late Eighties and the Nineties. There is also something significant in Oscar Wilde's faint praise of the mighty Niagara and Alice Meynell's criticism of the overwhelming Yosemite Valley.

"The Yosemite is on too large a scale for beauty", she is reported to have said. "It is grand, but not beautiful".⁽⁸¹⁾

There were evidently, for those who met her, certain qualities in appearance and personality that might have suggested the "aesthete". Chesterton notes that her "expression, demeanour, even her dress, had something sombre and almost Spanish about them".⁽⁸²⁾ Her patience too, he believes, and her fastidious taste may have seemed to some mal de siècle. Chesterton apparently thought the peril of identifying Alice Meynell with the much-advertised Decadent school, serious enough to require a champion for the lady, of whom Patmore had said: "There is a sort of sanctity about such delicate genius as Mrs. Meynell's which makes one shrink to see the robe of her Muse brush against anything common".⁽⁸³⁾

There had never, however, been any doubt about Alice Meynell's attitude towards the Decadent movement. She had refused Harland's invitation to write for The Yellow Book⁽⁸⁴⁾. In 1895, with Wilde on trial, William Watson, Mrs. Humphrey Ward, Alice Meynell, and others, sent Harland an ultimatum about Beardsley. Lane and Harland decided to

remove the Beardsley sketches from the forthcoming number - the fifth - of The Yellow Book; and Beardsley resigned. (85)

In John Ruskin (1900), Alice Meynell has separated herself from both Ruskin and the "art for art's sake" group.

In "The Relation of Art to Use", we read, "The entire vitality of art depends upon its being either full of truth or full of use". It is "either to state a true thing or to adorn a serviceable one. It must never exist alone - never for itself". The very commonplace of later, but not latest, opinion is to the contrary. I confess that "to state a true thing" is a definition of purpose against which there may be some rebellion even in a mind never subject to the fashion of a now departing day. Here, as before, such a mind may appeal, against Ruskin's phrase, to the separate art of music. (86)

And before beginning the examination of Ruskin's The Two Paths, Alice Meynell has a sharp word for Ruskin's critics.

It is possible that to this book was due much of the impatience and anger spent, the day before yesterday, upon Ruskin's art-theory. By the day before yesterday I mean the time of a flow that has already been succeeded by some ebbing movement, and, in this case, the time between the popularising in England of the "art for art" of the French, about 1880, and the day when the last journalist flagged in the last repetition thereof - and it took him nearly twenty years. In October 1899 a fugitive writer in a conspicuous art-review spoke of "the unutterable bosh written about art"; and the inferior clownishness of that reviewer is only the latest mimicking of the higher clownishness of criticism a little earlier written. (87)

Chesterton's defence of Alice Meynell reveals, by its contrast with the prose and poetry of the Decadents, the essential quality of her own work.

It was an accident that she found fame in the days of the decadents; and she could beat the decadents with their own weapons. She did seek, as they did, for what they called, le mot juste. But she found the just word; and it was morally just as well as artistically just. It was not only an impression but a judgment. The decadents were decorative; that is, they were flat; they were limited to two dimensions, while hers was the third one of height and depth... [She] was unconscionably classed with them as a punishment for doing perfectly what they did imperfectly.(88)

This criticism, insofar as it insists upon the intellectual quality of Alice Meynell's work, is searching enough. But it has its puzzling side. In the first place, it is difficult to say what Chesterton means by saying "that it was an accident that she found fame in the days of the decadents". Harland asked for her essays; and his request was an intelligible one. Again, is Chesterton quite fair to the "decadents" in saying they were merely decorative? Is The Portrait of Dorian Gray merely decorative? Wilde's novel is, throughout, a criticism of Victorian morality; and, in its conclusion, a self-criticism; and this surely is not "decoration". Albert Farmer gives a juster appreciation of this period, when he declares the most precious bequest of the "decadents" to be,

... la sensibilité plus complexe, plus riche, et qui s'identifie étroitement avec les préoccupations de l'art moderne. La culte du beau formel, l'analyse des émotions que suscite le miracle des lignes, des formes et des teintes harmonieusement fondues ont enfanté une vision plus précise, plus aigue.

Les curiosités multiples des décadents, leur
poursuite inlassable de la sensation rare ont
stimulé les facultés d'observation, développé
le sens des nuances. (89)

Alice Meynell has tried to capture in her exquisite lines the thought and the emotion just, as it would seem, beyond the edge of expression: the "decadents" seemed determined to catch the emotion just beyond the edge of experience. This was an utterly different point of view; but both points of view necessarily required an extreme sensitivity of style, and therefore enforced a superficial similarity. Alice Meynell wished to give the ordinary, even the commonplace emotion, careful expression: the "decadents" sought the rare, the exotic emotion. Whatever chastity of style there is in the "decadents" - and in the black-and-white art of Beardsley, there is much - is a discipline imposed by the object itself. But in Alice Meynell, the discipline of her style is not only enforced by the object but is almost the necessary expression of morality; as though in some way that which is rough and ready in style must also be lawless in the moral sense. In her as in no one else, austerity is almost the secret of art and life, as though her delicate chastity and her chaste delicacy were but aspects of the same thing. Never before was there seen in literature so clearly the perfect appropriateness of refinement and purity. Her performance has all the insistence of a law: it might forever afterwards be said that no one, not pure, could be altogether refined; nor anyone, without refinement, truly be chaste.

CHAPTER THREE: LATER POEMS

In 1893, Francis Thompson celebrated the return of Alice Meynell to poetry. She had, in that year, published the edition of her work, entitled Poems, which contained, besides the Preludes, but seven new pieces. One of these seven, the Veni Creator, which had appeared in The Scots Observer in 1890, was the poem, says Everard Meynell, "by which my mother broke silence".⁽¹⁾ Francis Thompson greets the renewal with his poem To a Poet Breaking Silence.

Too wearily had we and song
Been left to look and left to long,
Yea, song and we to long and look,
Since thine acquainted feet forsook
The mountains where the Muses hymn
For Sinai and the Seraphim.
Now in both the mountains' shine
Dress thy countenance, twice divine!
From Moses and thy Muses draw
The Tables of thy double Law!
His rod-born fount and Castaly
Let the one rock bring forth to thee,
Renewing so from either spring
The songs which both thy countries sing:
Or we shall fear lest, heavened thus long,
Thou should'st forget thy native song,
And mar thy mortal melodies
With broken stammer of the skies. (2)

The poem, thus celebrated, foretold the new emphasis that the religious theme was to find in the poetry of Alice Meynell, and it also anticipates one prominent characteristic of her later style - the paradox.

Lord of Heaven,
Come to our ignorant hearts and be forgiven. (3)

The period of the Later Poems begins therefore in 1890 and may be said to come to an end in 1916. This is the most

productive period of Alice Meynell's poetic career; and, since the work of these years is contained within 83 pages, even this period cannot be called abundant. In 1923, her Last Poems adds another 28 pages, the work of the years 1920 to 1922. Francis Thompson was perhaps a little premature in celebrating the end of Alice Meynell's "silent time for verse" in 1890; for it is not till 1895, that any considerable number of poems appear together. With the twenty years therefore, 1895 to 1916, we are now mainly concerned.

1. The "Multitude-Composure" Theme

There has been a tendency among critics of Alice Meynell's poetry to exaggerate the difference between the Early Poems and the Later. Geoffrey Bliss has brought this tendency to its extreme form. "At the risk of being taken for a wilful dealer in paradox I begin with the suggestion that in Mrs. Meynell a poet died young. It is true that in her a poet, also, survived, and grew in power with the advancing years. But it was not the same poet".⁽⁴⁾ This critic makes the difference between Preludes and the Later Poems to consist, roughly speaking, in the difference between emotion and thought. I do not intend to discard this distinction altogether; but I cannot accept the view that the poet of 1875 and the poet of 1895 were "not the same poet". There is a profound continuity, transmitted through the Essays, from the Early poetry of Alice Meynell to the Later, and even unto the Last, the poems published in 1923. Opinions have been various indeed concerning the relative value of the relation in sensibility of these three divisions of Alice Meynell's work - the Early Poems, the Occasional Essays, and the Later Poems. I do not intend to enter into all the corners of this controversy; nor do I pretend to be the first to discover in the work of Alice Meynell a thread of continuity; but I do believe that, in suggesting that the "multitude-composure" theme is at once

the touchstone of artistic value and the permanent and dominant quality of her artistic sensibility, I am presenting what amounts to a new reading of Alice Meynell's poetry and prose.

Francis Thompson in his poem, Her Portrait, also inspired by Alice Meynell, has recognized this quality. There is the picture of George Meredith, in his garden at Box Hill, in the summer of 1896, reciting to Francis Thompson these lines from Her Portrait, written of the lady who walks between them.

And on this lady's heart, looked you so deep,
Poor Poetry has rocked himself to sleep;
Upon the heavy blossom of her lips
Hangs the bee Musing; nigh her lids eclipse
Each half-occulted star beneath that lies;
And in the contemplation of those eyes,
Passionless passion, wild tranquillities. (5)

"Wild tranquillities" is another phrase to add to the number gathered from Preludes and from the Essays. The Later Poems of Alice Meynell carry the theme forward, with the old and with new variations.

In the mid-year of her silence, 1885, Alice Meynell had written the lyric A Song of Derivations, wherein "multitude" is represented as the songs and thoughts of the poets of all ages that throng through her mind.

Heavily on this little heart
Presses this immortality. (6)

This pressure of antiquity, as we have already seen, takes, in the essay Under the Early Stars, the form of the "prehistoric" habits of children on the point of falling to

sleep.

The time of falling asleep is a child's
immemorial and incalculable hour. It is full
of traditions, and beset by antique habits...
Childhood is antiquity, and with the sense of
time and the sense of mystery is connected for
ever the hearing of a lullaby. (7)

Under the figure of a shepherdess, Alice Meynell in 1895,
presents the ideal woman carefully guarding the "multitude"
of her thoughts.

She holds her little thoughts in sight,
Though gay they run and leap. (8)

In this poem, the control and restraint of the poet's sensi-
bility is felt clearly. In a poem of the same year, The
Fold, there is more freedom, a sense of greater "multitude".

Behold!
The time is now! Bring back, bring back
Thy flocks of fancies, wild of whim.
O lead them from the mountain track,
Thy frolic thoughts untold.
O bring them in - the fields grow dim -
And let me be the fold! (9)

And in The Poet and his Book, written in April 1922, the
poet's thoughts are more closely shepherded.

Here are my thoughts, alive within this fold,
My simple sheep. Their shepherd, I grow wise
As dearly, gravely, deeply I behold
Their different eyes. (10)

The winds and the birds are also with Alice Meynell,
symbols of "multitude"; though, of course, they symbolize a
far freer wildness than the pastoral symbols. The Roaring
Frost belongs to year 1895.

A flock of winds came winging from the North,
Strong birds with fighting pinions driving forth
With a resounding call:-

Where will they close their wings and cease their
cries -
Between what warming seas and conquering skies -
And fold, and fall? (11)

In another slight but exquisitely perfect song,
the sound of bells becomes the symbol of "multitude". The
wind, the cloud, the birds, the rhythm and melody of verse,
the ships - these brief, flying, favourite, figures are
mingled and swept along with the bells.

Brief, on a flying night,
From the shaken tower
A flock of bells take flight,
And go with the hour.

Like birds from the cote to the gales,
Abrupt - O hark!
A fleet of bells set sails,
And go to the dark.

Sudden the cold airs swing.
Alone, aloud,
A verse of bells takes wing
And flies with the cloud. (12)

The Athenaeum reviewer noticed that "once in 'Chimes', a
strange kind of singing breaks out of these checked
rhythms". (13) And indeed pure song such as this is rare
in the poetry of Alice Meynell. Chimes has its origin in
the essays, springing straight out of that "poetic" prose,
as many other themes were to do, into the Later poetry.

The Spirit of Place is the essay that sings in Chimes.

The clock is an inexorable but less arbitrary
player than the bellringer, and the chimes
await their appointed time to fly - wild
prisoners - by twos or threes, or in greater
companies. Fugitives - one or twelve taking
wing - they are sudden, they are brief, they
are gone; they are delivered from the close

hands of this actual present. Nor in vain is
the sudden upper door opened against the sky;
they are away, hours of the past. (14)

In "wild prisoners" - a new phrase for the theme - we have
the key to which the song is pitched. But the theme is more
complex in the essay; for not only are the bells "the hours
of the past ... delivered from the close hands of this actual
present"; but the tones of the bells are filled with the
spirit of place.

The spirit of place, which is to be seen in the
shapes of the fields and the manner of the crops,
to be felt in a prevalent wind, breathed in the
breath of the earth, overheard in a far street-
cry or in the tinkle of some blacksmith, calls
out and peals in the cathedral bells. (15)

In the sound of these bells - the sense of time, the spirit
of place - we have a moment's glimpse into the world of
Alice Meynell's imagination. In the throbbing and thronging
of the bells, the flight of wings, the pressure and with-
drawal of time and place, of thought and feeling, there is
felt a spirit that is not quite expressed by "austere
restraint" - the usual phrase of criticism. About the edges
of the closely-checked rhythms of the Later poems plays the
spirit set free in Chimes; and the promise of this spirit
was already distinct in Preludes and clamorous in the
Unpublished Poems. It is perhaps not strange that so many
have missed, in the deliberate control of Alice Meynell's
poetry, the murmur and the whisper of this indefinitely
varied theme; and yet to miss it, is to miss, it seems to me,
the essential tension of her work. Nor can the Chimes be

permitted to pass without mention of that image not found in the parent essay:

A fleet of bells set sails,
And go to the dark.

The only ships that will do, for this vision of blended sails and wings, are the ships of the ancient Northern adventurers: the "foamy-throated" Viking ship whose curving prow is crowned with the carved head of a bird. Grace, swiftness, flight, this is the spirit not to be lost sight of in any estimation of the quality of Alice Meynell's poetry.

"Multitude" becomes in A Dead Harvest, the sense of life speeding away, on the edge of solitude. Life and death are contrasted in each of the first stanzas.

Along the graceless grass of town
They rake the rows of red and brown -
Dead leaves, unlike the rows of hay
Delicate, touched with gold and grey,
Raked long ago and far away.

A narrow silence in the park,
Between the lights a narrow dark.
One street rolls on the north; and one,
Muffled, upon the south doth run;
Amid the mist the work is done.

And, within this narrow silence, is multitudinous death.

A futile crop! - for it the fire
Smoulders, and, for a stack, a pyre.
So go the town's lives on the breeze,
Even as the sheddings of the trees;
Bosom nor barn is filled with these. (16)

It would be difficult to imagine greater reticence than that single word "bosom". What a "multitude" is there refrained expression! Solitude is not, of course, an

unfamiliar version of the "multitude-composure" theme. In Preludes, the poet discovers "wild winds seeking solitude for their torn and wounded souls".⁽¹⁷⁾ In the essay, The Tow Path, one may hear on a still day "the soliloquy of the solitary places swept by wings"⁽¹⁸⁾; and in the essay, Solitude, Alice Meynell decides that "nothing but a lifelong, habitual, and wild solitariness would be quite proportionate to a park of any magnitude".⁽¹⁹⁾

In the poem, At Night, dedicated to Wilfrid Meynell, the memories of the day throng the moment of sleep.

Home, home from the horizon far and clear,
Hither the soft wings sweep;
Flocks of the memories of the day draw near
The dovecote doors of sleep.

Then, just as in the sestet of Renouncement, the rhythm of the second part increases in tempo under the urging of intense love.

Oh, which are they that come through sweetest
light
Of all these homing birds?
Which with the straightest and the swiftest flight?
Your words to me, your words! (20)

The similarity of this poem with the sonnet, Renouncement, written twenty years earlier, is not to be denied its importance. In both poems, the moment chosen is the moment of falling asleep. In Renouncement, the "multitude" theme is represented by the flight of the beloved's thoughts to the lover; in At Night, by the flight of the lover's words to the beloved. The correspondence of men and women of letters provides Alice Meynell with examples of this inter-

change of thoughts between lovers. When one side of the correspondence is lacking - Swift, for example, destroyed the letters of Stella and Mrs. Dingley: whereas his letters to them were carefully kept - Alice Meynell is quick to notice how the silence is filled with hints and gesture as Swift plays with the phrases caught at random from the letters of the two women.

In Swift's case the silence is full of echoes; that is to say, his letters repeat the phrases of Stella's and Dingley's, to play with them, flout them, and toss them back against the two silenced voices. He never lets the word of these two women fall to the ground; and when they have but blundered with it, and aimed it wide, and sent it weakly, he will catch it, and play you twenty delicate and expert juggling pranks with it as he sends it back into their innocent faces. (21)

This subject of the interchange between lovers, of which Renouncement, At Night, and this passage from the essay Prue, are but three examples among a number, finds its final expression in Reflexions, a poem written in July, 1920; The sub-title of the second part is "In Othello".

A mirror faced a mirror: in sweet pain
His dangers with her pity did she track,
Received her pity with his love again,
And these she wafted back.

That masculine passion in her little breast
She bandied with him; her compassion he
Bandied with her. What tender sport! No rest
Had love's infinity. (22)

Of Reflexions, Alice Meynell wrote in a letter to a daughter, "If no one ever cares for 'Reflexions', it is written. And it has succeeded in singing the highest thought of intellectual passion and emotion of which I am capable". (23)

There can at least be no doubt that Reflexions is a final expression of the subject - the communion and the separation of personality - that preoccupied Alice Meynell from youth. The Visiting Sea, Regrets, the Poems of Parting, At Night, are deeply emotional records of Alice Meynell's experience of this subject. After reading these poems, it is not difficult to feel the "In Othello" part of Reflexions charged with their weight; and yet this final expression of the subject, though it contains, does not communicate, indeed is not concerned with communicating, the conflicting emotions of the earlier poems. "In Othello" truly represents the limit and the reach of Alice Meynell's abstractive powers upon this subject. It states the problem in symbol: "A mirror faced a mirror". It concludes with the abstract statement: "No rest had love's infinity". And between this beginning and this conclusion, the poet intends to describe, to delineate, the outline of the emotions of the lovers, not the height or depth of those emotions. I have used the word "geometric" before; and I must recur to it here. As geometry is the study of abstract quantity, the study of the configurations of matter, and not the study of the kinds or qualities of material or quantified things; so in such a poem as "In Othello", Alice Meynell is not concerned with communicating the quality or degree of emotion - these are stated in the ordinary abstract way, as "pity" and "love", even "masculine passion" - but she is concerned with

determining the outline of the conflict before her. She abstracts the movements of the emotions, gives - if I may dare go so far - the vector diagram of emotion. There might be a danger in calling such poetry "intellectual", without making a distinction. "In Othello" is not a poem of speculation, that is, it is not strictly speaking - philosophical. The abstractions, made use of, are not arranged in a logical order, according to the content or meaning of the terms: they are arranged upon an orbit, which is perceived in its concrete reality. In virtue of this actual relation to perception, "In Othello" belongs to art and is poetry. Nonetheless, because of the degree of abstraction the poem is working in, it is not primarily a perception and expression of emotional states. The concepts it employs are empty of emotional tension. Yet poetry itself will allow this slackness. There is the poem which is the expression of emotion and there is another poem, and perhaps of a higher kind, which is the emotional expression of thought. Herbert Read, who defines metaphysical poetry as "the emotional apprehension of thought" declares that "a degree of economy is implied in the word 'apprehension' - that economy of thought, in fact, breeds its corresponding intensity, which is to be identified with the poetry itself".⁽²⁴⁾ In this sentence, Mr. Read seems to be using the word "apprehension" in its strict philosophical sense, as denoting intellectual intuition, an operation of the mind clearly distinct from the process of reasoning. "In Othello" belongs clearly to the poetry of

intellectual "apprehension". As Mr. Read continues, however, the lucidity of his definition begins to wane. "Metaphysical poetry is determined logically: its emotion is a joy that comes with the triumph of the reason, and is not a simple instinctive ecstasy". Surely, "logically" and "reason" are not the words Mr. Read wanted at that moment: what have they to do with the "apprehension of thought?" "In Othello" manifests a perceived, an experienced order: not a logical order: it is the work of the "perceptive intellect" - to use Patmore's phrase - and not the work of reason. Mr. Read has, however, in the next sentence of his essay, a definition better than either of the foregoing: metaphysical poetry "is, finally, but the precise statement of such abstractions as the poet derives from his experience". This is not a definition that will distinguish a poet from a philosopher; but it will, I think, sufficiently distinguish the quality of Reflexions from the quality of At Night or of Renouncement. In Reflexions, the "multitude-composure" theme receives its most abstract expression.

Just how abstract a poem may become and remain communicative in a plenary sense is a problem that not even my audacity will undertake. It is nevertheless important for my purposes to compare Alice Meynell's treatment of this dominant theme at different levels of abstraction and to decide at what level she is most successful in communicating the richness of her theme. In the third part of

Reflexions, Alice Meynell concentrates, as in the second part, a series of earlier variations upon the same subject. In this third part, "In Two Poets", she has given the final version of her experience of poetic interchange.

A mirror faced a mirror: O thy word,
Thou lord of images, did lodge in me,
Locked to my heart, homing from home, a bird,
A carrier, bound for thee.

Thy migratory greatness, greater far
For that return, returns; now grow divine
By endlessness my visiting thoughts, that are
Those visiting thoughts of thine. (25)

In these two stanzas there are two distinct levels of abstraction. The last four lines are without imagery of any sort; and yet it cannot be doubted that it was just for these four lines that Alice Meynell so highly prized the poem. This is that "ultimate poetry" that is "beyond imagery", so wonderfully celebrated in the poem of 1913, The Courts.

The poet's imageries are noble ways,
Approaches to a plot, an open shrine,
Their splendours, colours, avenues, arrays,
Their courts that run with wine;

Beautiful similes, 'fair and flagrant things',
Enriched, enamouring, - raptures, metaphors
Enhancing life, are paths for pilgrim kings
Made free of golden doors.

And yet the open heavenward plot, with dew,
Ultimate poetry, enclosed, enskied,
(Albeit such ceremonies lead thereto)
Standson the yonder side.

Plain, behind oracles, it is; and past
All symbols, simple; perfect, heavenly-wild,
The song some loaded poets reach at last -
The kings that found a Child. (26)

Viola Meynell has recorded her mother's criticism of the poetry of Francis Thompson. "Though she found him a great

poet, he did not raise the very status of contemporary poetry, as he did to my father. She withheld no praise from his imagery - 'imagery so beautiful as almost to persuade us that imagery is the end and goal of poetry... But Francis Thompson himself', she wrote later, looking back on his poetry, 'was soon to learn that these ceremonies of the imagination are chiefly ways of approach, and that there are barer realities beyond, and nearer to the centre of poetry itself.'"(27) It was under the influence of Patmore that this change took place in the poetry of Francis Thompson; and Patmore's poetry was to Alice Meynell, "the greatest thing in the world, the most harrowing and the sweetest."(28) "That the greatest poetry has a simplicity beyond imagery," writes Viola Meynell, "she had discovered by means of him."(29) And from Coventry Patmore's odes, wrote Alice Meynell in The Second Person Singular, we gather lines of this quality "with both hands, exalted, subdued, and greatly moved by our riches."(30) Alice Meynell's insistence that, in Reflexions, she had "succeeded in singing the highest thought of intellectual passion and emotion" of which she was capable, is therefore perfectly intelligible. Not everyone, however, will agree with her that Reflexions has a greater poetic value than The Two Poets, written in 1896, twenty-four years earlier.

Whose is the speech
That moves the voices of this lonely beech?
Out of the long west did this wild wind come -
O strong and silent! And the tree was dumb,
Ready and dumb, until
The dumb gale struck it on the darkened hill.

Two memories,
Two powers, two promises, two silences
Closed in this cry, closed in these thousand leaves
Articulate. This sudden hour retrieves
The purpose of the past,
Separate, apart - embraced, embraced at last.

'Whose is the word?
Is it I that spake? Is it thou? Is it I that heard?'
'Thine earth was solitary, yet I found thee!'
'Thy sky was pathless, but I caught, I bound thee,
Thou visitant divine.'
'O thou my Voice, the word was thine.' 'Was thine.'
(31)

Had this poem concluded with the second stanza, there would be little to choose between the two poems we are comparing. But the last stanza, with its rhythm, its dramatic dialogue and echo, seems to me to communicate more perfectly this particular variation of the "multitude-composure" theme than the more abstract Reflexions.

I have not yet given an adequate impression of the extent of the "multitude-composure" theme. Alice Meynell finds the difference between youth and age, represented by her theme. In 'Rivers Unknown to Song', one of the 1923 poems, the "waters wild" of the rivers are conceived as "travellers swift from secrets to oblivion;"⁽³²⁾ that is, as "wildness" or "multitude" moving from one silence to another. And, as the "wildness" of the poet's sensibility is controlled and intensified by metre, as pain is given a new edge by the word that perfectly expresses it, so the "youth" of the waters is contained, controlled, and enforced by the "age" of the river-bank.

... all the streams from all the water sheds -
Peneus, Danube, Nile - are the unknown
Young in their ancient beds.

The same theme, the same figure of rivers, express the difference between the North and the South. The Water Shed (1913) was written between Munich and Verona.

I seemed to breast the streams that day;
I met, opposed, withstood
The northward rivers on their way,
My heart against the flood - (33)

And then, as in Renouncement, to mention an example different in subject, the bonds are broken, the "multitude" set free.

But O the unfolding South! the burst
Of summer! O to see
Of all the southward brooks the first!
The travelling heart went free
With endless streams; that strife was stopped;
And down a thousand vales I dropped,
I flowed to Italy.

Or the theme may express the difference between the Country and the City. The poem A Dead Harvest, already quoted, is a more complex treatment of this simple distinction, explicit in the essay Marceline Valmore.

Even when the stroller's life took her away to the towns she did not hate, but loved, she was taken away from the country of her verse. The fields and village had been dear to her, and her poems no longer trail and droop, but take wing, when they come among the winds, birds, bells and waves. They fly with the whole volley of a summer morning. (34)

The range of this theme seems to be limitless. It seems to move everywhere, surprising reality in its moments of conflict, bestowing an original light wherever it rests. "Multitude-composure" is the very definition - if I may use such a term - of Alice Meynell: it is the most inward quality of her life and art. Many have selected The Shepherdess as

the adequate expression of Alice Meynell's sensibility.

She holds her little thoughts in sight,
Though gay they run and leap.
She is so circumspect and right;
She has her soul to keep.
She walks - the lady of my delight -
A shepherdess of sheep. (35)

And those who believe that here, in these lines, we have the actual Alice Meynell, completely revealed to us, will be able to point to a passage in her essay on Swinburne, as the proof that, in art as in life, her ideal was the same. This essay appears in the volume of criticism, Hearts of Controversy; and this is the passage:

It is for the reader who has preserved rectitude of intellect, sincerity of heart, dignity of nerves, unhurried thoughts, an unexcited heart, and an ardour for poetry, to judge between such poems and an authentic passion, between such poems and truth, I will add between such poems and beauty. (36)

Another emphasis, and the emphasis, as I believe, demanded by a complete study of the "multitude-composure" theme in Alice Meynell's poetry and prose, insists more upon "multitude" and not less upon "composure" than does The Shepherdess. The First Snow (1913) may be used to illustrate this new emphasis. The poet observes a contrast between the peaks of the Apennines and the towns in the valleys and beside the sea. The winter has not yet come to the "soft floor" of earth.

Not yet to breathing man, not to his song,
Not to his comforted heart; not to his long
Close-cultivated lands beneath the hill.
Summer was gently with them still.

But on the Apennine mustered the cloud;
The grappling storm shut down. Aloft, aloud,
Ruled secret tempest one long day and night,
Until another morning's light.

It is in the last stanzas of this poem that Alice Meynell's understanding of the poet's "impassioned peace" is expressed.

O tender mountain-tops and delicate,
Where summer-long the westering sunlight sate!
Within that fastness darkened from the sun,
What solitary things were done?

The clouds let go, they rose, they winged away;
Snow-white the altered mountains faced the day,
As saints who keep their counsel sealed and fast,
Their anguish over-past. (37)

"Tender" and "delicate" and "snow-white" - these are epithets that become the Shepherdess; but what of "fastness darkened from the sun", those "solitary things", the "altered" face, that "anguish over-past"? In these words and phrases, the inward depths of the life and art of Alice Meynell are exposed: depths suggested and guarded by the incredible reserve of her expression. How oblique, for example, is such an appeal to her father in the poem, A Father of Women (1917):

For my delicate mind a casque. (38)

How laconic is the acceptance of Via, et Veritas, et Vita (1894).

'You never attained to Him?' 'If to attain
Be to abide, then that may be.'
'Endless the way, followed with how much pain!'
'The way was He.' (39)

One recalls how a great scientist and woman, Marie Curie, received news of the death of her husband, Pierre Curie, and remained for days, averted, rigid, unmoving; and how after-

wards, from this silent woman, strange passionate words escaped each night into a journal addressed to him, dead now for some time.

My little Pierre, I want to tell you that
the laburnum is in flower, the wistaria,
the hawthorn and the iris are beginning - (40)

It is impossible to read this journal without a tremor: grief given a terrible sharpness by restraint, passion exerting its multitudinous strength in solitude, in the dark, in silence. And then one remembers how Alice Meynell received news of the death of Coventry Patmore. Viola, the daughter, ends a chapter with the memory.

One night when we were all in the library,
a telegram came to say that he was dead.
My mother left us and went into the drawing-
room. I can remember having no proper
realization of what had happened, - only
horror that my mother should go into a dark
room alone and remain there. (41)

Silence of this sort, restraint and reticence such as this, cannot be confused with, let us say, the careful moderation of Eighteenth Century poetry. This sort of silence is itself expressive: expressive of the "multitude" it keeps at bay, expressive in the rigour and the tension of its denial. The function of language, of imagery, of metre, was, in Alice Meynell's critical theory, to produce this double effect of control and of oblique or indirect expressiveness. Imagery is used in a poem, she writes in her essay Charlotte and Emily Brontë, because "without it, the poem "would be insupportably close to spiritual facts." (42) In the essay

Composure, she had written that "without the remoteness of the Latinity the thought would come too close and shake too cruelly."⁽⁴³⁾ But in the Latin word also is "the poise and the pause that imply vitality at times better than headstrong movement expresses it."⁽⁴⁴⁾ And in the essay The Little Language, words may "put a fine edge or a piercing point to any human pang."⁽⁴⁵⁾ And in the Last Poems, the poem The Laws of Verse is an example how the need of law that characterized Alice Meynell's religious conversion, and the full acceptance of renunciation that terminated the conflict of the Poems of Parting, find their correlative in the demands of versification.

Dear laws, come to my breast!
Take all my frame, and make your close arms meet
Around me, and so ruled, so warmed, so pressed,
I breathe, aware; I feel my wild heart beat. (46)

The "multitude-composure" theme likewise finds its usefulness in the field of literary criticism. Alice Meynell did not hesitate in face of the temper of Henley to be severe with his poetry.

I think Piccadilly is not quite sincere. You have intended it de parti pris - very wilfully in fact - and it is out of proportion and exaggerated. And to my mind the slightest touch of exaggeration should be got rid of once and for ever from literature. What a literature there might be without it! The world has never had it yet. Men have never penetrated, or seldom, into a certain secret place quite in the centre of the heart. It is the eye of the whirlwind, where there is a calm set about by tumult. You are in the tumult... After reading your poem I went at once to Coventry Patmore's 'February'. He refuses, against his heart - no, he accepts, against his will (who shall define that lovely postponement?) that which you leap at. (47)

And this too has been her quarrel with the Eighteenth Century. "The measure and moderation and shapeliness of the Augustan Age" were great reasons for admiration; "but the eighteenth century was not content with its sure and certain genius. Suddenly and repeatedly it aspired to a 'noble rage.'"(48) Walt Whitman was "the poet who offends not by excess but by defect" - "the poet of mediocrity, the poet who was clamorous, not thunderous; who was less than he seemed; who professed what he could not perform, and yet thought he performed fully."(49) Alice Meynell has confessed a dislike for the easy slipping of anapests. Of the choruses from Atalanta in Calydon, she admitted that "there is something too obvious, insistent, emphatic, too dapper, to give me more than a slight pleasure."(50) But she has praise for Swinburne's blank verse and high praise for Milton's. "His blank verse", she is speaking of Milton, "marches, pauses, lingers, and charges. It feels the strain, it yields, it resists; it is all-expressive."(51) The song Phoebus Arise! of William Drummond "is great, having that fusion of spirit and word which is the condition of greatness. He must have known, for the creation of that poem, some more impassioned and less restless hour."(52) "The extravagance of Crashaw is a far more lawful thing than the extravagance of Addison, whom some critics believe to have committed none."(53) Sidney Dobell's war sonnets are "poems of emotional unrest, but among poems of emotional unrest they

are singularly fine and true, and something at least of the fusing work of passion is done upon their beautiful diction... They are not, perhaps, in the full sense, great poems; they have not that peace that seems, beyond all our understanding, to make an eternal quality of poetry of the tumult of Lear."⁽⁵⁴⁾ Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poetry has "more semblance of life than force of life."⁽⁵⁵⁾ "She seldom has composure or repose... [Her poetry] is intellectually restless. The impassioned peace of the greatest poetry, such as Wordsworth's, is not hers."⁽⁵⁶⁾ In the poetry of Coventry Patmore, Alice Meynell found all her demands for poetry met and repaid in abundance. "The Unknown Eros, although we may attempt images of sidereal distance to express its profound flight, has the more dreadful solitude of an experience, and goes far in an inverse flight, through the essentially single human heart - intimately into time and space, remotely into the heart of hearts."⁽⁵⁷⁾ In the critical essay, Charlotte and Emily Brontë, Alice Meynell has distinguished between the poetry of imagery which "is for the time when... the shock of feeling, (which must needs pass, as the heart beats and pauses) is gone by"; and the poetry beyond imagery, the greater poetry, when the poet is "suddenly close to his mystery" and has unlocked the "inner plain door of spiritual realities."⁽⁵⁸⁾ Of Coventry Patmore's odes, she wrote that "some have that poetry of imagery - so enkindling, so exalting that we say of imagery that it is poetry itself, until we find the poetry of the yonder side, for some again are of

the simplicity, the further simplicity, that is beyond imagery."⁽⁵⁹⁾ Again, writing of The Angel in the House, she remembers "mere intervals in poetry so profound and penetrating as, in a hundred passages, shakes the metre with a hand of control."⁽⁶⁰⁾ And then recalling the figure of the garden, that had served her in Preludes, in the sonnet The Garden, to illustrate the union and the inward freedom of lovers, Alice Meynell applies the figure to the mind of Coventry Patmore. This garden she speaks of is "not a wilderness, but having an enclosed wildness, a directed liberty, a designed magnificence and excess;" and "comparable to such a garden is Coventry Patmore's mind, obedient to an ancient law, but wildly natural under an inspiration of visiting winds and a splendid sun of genius."⁽⁶¹⁾ And so, in literary criticism, as in her occasional essays and her poetry, from 1875 to 1922, the "multitude-composure" theme is dominant, the thread of continuity in all this work, the phrase that seems best to express the quality of Alice Meynell's sensibility.

2. Continuity and Diversity

But the theme, we have just examined, is not the only evidence of continuity in the work of Alice Meynell. The subjects, particularly the problem of the withdrawal of personality and the nature of poetic inspiration, which constituted so large a proportion of the Preludes, appear again and again in the Later Poems. The subject of The Garden, Visiting Sea, and Regrets, poems of Preludes, appears again in A Poet's Wife, and receives religious significance in Unknown God and General Communion. Alice Meynell's treatment of Nature, after some initial uncertainty, remains, as we have seen, with some qualification, Tennysonian from first to last, and achieves explicit statement in the Last Poems (1923), in the second part of the poem 'The Return to Nature'. This part is sub-titled, "Thetis".

In her bright title poets dare
What the wild eye of fancy sees -
Similitude - the clear, the fair
Light mystery of images.

Round the blue sea I love the best
The argent foam played, slender, fleet;
I saw - past Wordsworth and the rest -
Her natural, Greek, and silver feet. (1)

The use of what I have called the "conceit" is continued in the Later Poems. In Preludes, the figures of the garden and the sea had been elaborated to explain the inner embrace and the inner separation of two personalities. In the Later Poems, similar examples may be found in The Launch (1913),

where, under the image of a ship, the dead are launched into eternity; or in To the Body, where the body and its senses are compared to a council-chamber with judges sitting; or in The Courts, where approach to the "ultimate poetry" becomes the search of the Three Kings for the Child. More frequent in the Later Poems than this elaborate figure is the clear separation of figure and subject, as in the poem A Poet's Wife. The image drawn from nature is first described; and then the application is made.

I saw a tract of ocean locked inland,
 Within a field's embrace -
The very sea! Afar it fled the strand,
 And gave the seasons chase,
And met the night alone, the tempest spanned,
 Saw sunrise face to face.

O poet, more than ocean, lonelier!
 An inaccessible rest
And storm remote, thou, sea of thoughts, dost stir
 Scattered through east to west,-
Now, while thou closest with the kiss of her
 Who locks thee to her breast. (2)

Another poem in which the figure and the subject are kept distinct is In Manchester Square. It will be noticed that four lines are first given to the subject: then four to the figure: then two to the figure: and finally two to the subject.

The paralytic man has dropped in death
 The crossing-sweeper's brush to which he clung,
One-handed, twisted, dwarfed, scanted of breath,
 Although his hair was young.

I saw this year the winter vines of France,
 Dwarfed, twisted, goblins in the frosty drouth-
Gnarled, crippled, blackened little stems askance
 On long hills to the South.

Great green and golden hands of leaves ere long
Shall proffer clusters in that vineyard wide.
And O his might, his sweet, his wine, his song,
His stature, since he died! (3)

This is a poem that tells much about Alice Meynell's poetic conception. In Manchester Square has no "imaginativeness": it is the result of ingenuity and a remarkable power of observation or description. This is certainly not the plane in which the greatest poets have created; but it is the plane in which Alice Meynell's "perceptive reason" has sought expression. Let me explain this further by suggesting simple distinctions of metaphor, simile, and symbol. Metaphor may be considered as an image, which is not conceived as an image or resemblance, but is felt simply as a unity in which image and reference are conceived together and, not even in consciousness, dissociated. There will be no need to quote Shakespeare or Keats. Francis Thompson, protégé of the Meynells, affords examples on every page.

I had endured through watches of the dark
The abashless inquisition of each star,
Yea, was the outcast mark
Of all these heavenly passers' scrutiny;
Stood bound and helplessly
For time to shoot his barbed minutes at me;
Suffered the trampling hoof of every hour
In night's slow-wheeled car. (4)

In the simile however, the image is felt as an image or resemblance: there are two things clearly before the mind. The symbol may be taken as an image which has lost all image-quality and has been completely replaced in the mind by the reference or meaning: a snake, for example, may become a symbol of low cunning, and may be used simply as a

substitute for that idea. To simplify these distinctions, it may be said, that, in the metaphor, the poet is aware of the image only: in the simile, he is aware of both image and reference: in the symbol, he is aware of reference only. And when we apply these distinctions to Alice Meynell's imagery, her poetry will appear to us to be the art of simile rather than the art of metaphor; and therefore, since I understand metaphor alone to be truly "imaginative", Alice Meynell's poetry is not truly "imaginative". And since this clear separation in her own mind between imagery and the thought to be expressed is the habit of her Later poetry rather than the early poetry, it indicates the growing predominance of intellect over the "imaginative" faculty.

But this growing predominance of the intellect may be seen in another curious habit, not to be found in Preludes, but after 1895, growing with the years. Nouns, verbs, or adjectives, appear in series; as though the poet were dividing a thought or itemizing an experience. Thus The Modern Mother is the "giver of life, death, peace, distress".⁽⁵⁾ Such lists are most frequently without connectives of any sort. In Veneration of Images, the "wide arms" of the Cross "entreat, gather, clasp, welcome, bind, lack or remember".⁽⁶⁾ Christ is The Fugitive; but "He will never escape.

The flesh, the blood, the sheaf, the grape,
That feed His man - the bread, the wine. ⁽⁷⁾

She speaks in The Courts of the "splendours, colours, avenues, arrays",⁽⁸⁾ of the "poet's imageries". In The

Launch, the Dying is "kissed, cherished, exhorted, shriven, dismissed".⁽⁹⁾ In the address To the Body, the high senses "sign, approve, accept, conceive, create".⁽¹⁰⁾ In The Unexpected Peril, the poet decides that "terror, the doubt, the lash, the task", are not enemies.⁽¹¹⁾ In Christ in the Universe, the cataloguing of adjectives is for once vindicated poetically.

Of His earth-visiting feet
None knows the secret, cherished, perilous,
The terrible, shamefast, frightened, whispered,
 sweet,
Heart-shattering secret of His way with us. (12)

The poem Free Will concludes with the multiple question:

... How hate, how love, how dare,
How weep, how hope? (13)

Somewhat indigestible for the lyric is the roll-call of The Voice of a Bird: "Dante, Keats, Shakespeare, Milton, Shelley".⁽¹⁴⁾ In 'Rivers Unknown to Song', the poet hails the "Rhine, Avon, Arno", as

Ignorant, innocent, instantaneous, free,
Unwelcomed, unrenowned. (15)

And, in the last poem of the 1923 edition, the poet declares her singing voice to be "single, local, lonely, mortal, new".⁽¹⁶⁾ Such lines are essentially intellectual: being, in the first place, the product of that intellectual power of precision by means of division, or, as the French phrase has it, "distinguer pour savoir"; and because of the use of poetry, not necessarily beyond, but certainly without imagery, the great preference in these lists being for the abstract word. But to this deliberate closeness of thought

has been sacrificed the fluent rhythm and the vowelled melodies of Preludes. Before these abstract words, the images drawn from Nature retire into unimportance: although Preludes and Occasional Essays alike were witness of Alice Meynell's power of natural observation and description; and not a few of the Later Poems, the slight Rainy Summer for example, are witness that this power remained with her, absolutely undiminished. Nor is the poet any longer concerned with communicating her own emotions; but rather with the expression of her thought. There is therefore diversity as well as continuity in the Later Poems. The "multitude-composure" theme, the great thread of continuity, tends to become more abstract, more intellectual, in its later expression. The "art of simile", a phrase that seems to explain best the quality of Alice Meynell's imagery, is the result of close observation and mental ingenuity; and therefore allows the intellect considerable scope in this department of expression. The "conceit" was already in Preludes; but the more frequent use of the curiously divided simile, in which figure and subject are given distinct and independent development, is witness that the "art of simile" was increasing in power, rather than diminishing, with the years. Finally, those extraordinary lists of words, chiefly of "abstract" words, display the tendency of the poet to turn from imagery of any kind altogether and to seek purely intellectual statement.

The "art of simile" is therefore a principle of both continuity and diversity: the listing of abstract nouns, verbs, adjectives, is a sign of diversity only, in the Later Poems. The most important proof of diversity in the later work is the frequency of the "paradox", a figure in which the intellectual tendencies of Alice Meynell's poetry and her powers of religious contemplation seem to achieve their final form. But I shall reserve the discussion of "paradox" for the next part of this chapter. There is something to be done first in preparation. The Later Poems do not give a complete impression of Alice Meynell. There is continuity and diversity in life as in art. Already we have seen in the study of her essays, that her art was free from deliberately prophetic or moral or social purposes, that it seems to retire from the world into an exquisite retreat. This purely contemplative spirit continues throughout the Later Poems; and indeed was, according to Coventry Patmore, the outstanding characteristic of her mind.⁽¹⁷⁾ There was however diversity in her life. She seemed to live at two levels: to be, at once, the aloof contemplative and the modern woman, actively interested in the affairs of the world. I wish now to discuss more in detail this "modern woman", before taking up the matter of her religious poetry which will, in general, stand distinctly in contrast.

Alice Meynell's Later Poems have very little of the local thought, of the urgency of contemporary problems and controversies. In The Lady Poverty, she briefly deplores

Victorian materialism. In the last chapter, we discovered this criticism also in the essays. In the poem St. Catherine of Siena, however, Alice Meynell sturdily attacks an idea that was, throughout her life, a motive for dispute and active zeal. This was the Victorian idea that women are weak and somewhat ineffectual in a man's world. "It is doubtful", she wrote in John Ruskin, "whether we may name any weak thing as typically spiritual".⁽¹⁸⁾ Gertrude Ford, in the Living Age, considered that Mrs. Meynell shared "the reformer's zeal for justice and freedom, especially in regard to the political emancipation of her own sex"; and that The Shepherdess was "the first adequate poetic utterance of that new love of woman for woman".⁽¹⁹⁾ This zeal for women begins early in the life of Alice Meynell. The diary of the girl of seventeen placed under the championship of Shelley this "golden" cause:

Of all the crying evils in this depraved earth, ay, of all the sins of which the cry must surely come to Heaven, the greatest, judged by all the laws of God and humanity, is the miserable selfishness of men that keeps women from work - work, the salvation of the world, the winner of the dreamless sleep, and the dreamless thought too, the strengthener of mind and body... By work I mean work of the mind as well as of the body. (20)

In the Essays, the defence of women was carried forward. In The Colour of Life (1896), she invites the reader to "see the curious history of the political rights of woman under the Revolution."

On the scaffold she enjoyed an ungrudged share in the fortunes of party. Political life might be denied her, but that seems a trifle when you consider how generously she was permitted political death. (21)

In her Introduction to an edition of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poems, Alice Meynell remembers the plight of the "mid-century woman".

A mid-century woman could hardly help practise the deplorable humility of "not aspiring to be fair", or certainly of not aspiring to be pictorial. Her house, her dress, her street, separated her from simplicity and splendour of living; and, if she was a writer, she wrote of fortunate ladies who were more free and more splendid. A very banal literature of romance - prose and verse - was the consequence. Mrs. Browning's fancy was inevitably caught, like that of others, by the helm and the hall, the tower and the vesper bell, the abbess in black and the chatelaine in jewels. (22)

"As president and vice-president of suffrage societies, as a writer for the suffrage papers, and a marcher in the processions, (Alice Meynell) contributed to the work of the devoted women she admired, such as Mrs. Despard and Miss Abadam". (23) This was in 1914. In this year, in a reply to Sir Almroth Wright's letter to the Times on "Medical Women", she had sharp words of rebuke.

Fastidiousness as to the modesty of a lady is not respect for purity, but respect for caste. ... It is a fact of human life that 'sex' troubles man at least as much as it troubles woman, but it does not disfranchise man. (24)

This is not the portrait of a shy, secluded, introspective poet. There was a vigour and awareness - vigilance is the word - in Alice Meynell that some impressions of her person and her poetry do not seem to convey. It is amusing to read that a certain major wrote in his More Reminiscences of an Old Bohemian that "she had the face of an angel and alas!

a far too frail physique"; and then to remember that, at the age of fifty-four, she spent six hours in the saddle, climbing mountains in California.⁽²⁵⁾ Yet scarcely more than a poem or two of the Later Poems is disturbed by the reformer's zeal; nor is their grave reflectiveness often interrupted by controversy. The woman could hardly have been more modern: yet her poetry deals only with eternal problems - life and death, joy and pain. The Later Poems are distinctly the work, not of a philosopher, nor a polemist, nor a social reformer, but, as Patmore thought, the work of a contemplative.

3. Contrast and Paradox

By this time, it will have been inferred that Alice Meynell's poetry is pre-eminently an art of contrast. The "multitude-composure" theme is fundamentally the perception of contrast. The conclusion in the last part of this chapter, that Alice Meynell's imagery may be defined as the "art of simile" implies the same idea of contrast; for the fundamental difference between metaphor and simile is that metaphor implicitly affirms an identity, whereas the simile, explicitly affirming similarity, implicitly affirms a diversity. In the poem, Summer in England, 1914, there is an example of contrast that is neither a variation of the "multitude-composure" theme nor an exercise of the "art of simile".

And while this rose made round her cup,
The armies died convulsed. And when
This chaste young silver sun went up
Softly, a thousand shattered men,
One wet corruption, heaped the plain,
After a league-long throb of pain.

Flower following tender flower; and birds,
And berries; and benignant skies
Made thrive the serried flocks and herds.-
Yonder are men shot through the eyes. (1)

In the poem Messina, 1908, the poet solves, by vigorous contrast and in the spirit of faith, the Problem of Evil.

Lord, Thou hast crushed Thy tender ones,
o'er-thrown
Thy strong, Thy fair; Thy man thou hast
unmanned,
Thy elaborate works unwrought, Thy deeds undone,
Thy lovely sentient human plan unplanned;
Destroyer, we have cowered beneath Thine own
Immediate, unintelligible hand.

Lord, Thou hast hastened to retrieve, to heal,
To feed, to bind, to clothe, to quench the
brand,
To prop the ruin, to bless, and to anneal;
Hast sped Thy ships by sea, Thy trains by
land,
Shed pity and tears:- our shattered fingers feel
Thy mediate and intelligible hand. (2)

A difference will be noticed between these two "war" poems. Both are indeed founded upon a contrast that is observed in the world: the serenity and beauty of Nature is, in the first, contrasted with the ugliness and the suffering of men; in the second, the destructiveness of war is contrasted with, what we would now call, the merciful work of the Red Cross. But in the second poem, there is something new. By referring both elements of the contrast to one cause, a paradox is created. God is at once Destroyer and Healer.

- our shattered fingers feel
Thy mediate and intelligible hand.

Paradox is the distinctive characteristic of Alice Meynell's religious poetry. The poem Veni Creator, with which she broke the silence of fifteen years, ushered in the Later Poems with a paradox. In that poem, Christ was conceived as both Absolver and Penitent. The paradox is the most distinctively "intellectual" or "metaphysical" element in Alice Meynell's work. In Messina, 1908, it is only by means of ideas drawn from religious doctrine that the paradox is possible. The doctrine of God's "permissive will" allows the poet to call Him, the Destroyer: the doctrine of God's Providence allows her to call Him, the Healer.

Since the difference between the poetry that

expresses the contrast of the "multitude-composure" theme and the poetry that makes use of the contrast of paradox seems to me to be largely the difference between Alice Meynell's finest poetry and that other poetry which, even at its worst, must yet be called thoughtful and splendid verse; I must explain in more detail the difference between these two types of contrast, which together include the greatest proportion of her work, and more particularly but somewhat less accurately, constitute the difference between her non-religious and her religious poetry.

The precise quality of the "multitude-composure" contrast that I wish to emphasize here is that both elements of the contrast are the objects of experience. For example, in such a line as this from the *Essays*,

Not a pool ... without passages of stars; (3)
both the "composure" of the pool and the "multitude" of the passing stars have been seen with the eyes. Similarly, in The Laws of Verse, when the poet writes that,

... so ruled, so warmed, so pressed,
I breathe, aware; I feel my wild heart beat; (4)

we understand that she has actually experienced the friction of metre producing the sense of "wildness". The Poet's Wife is a more complex example.

O poet, more than ocean, lonelier!
In inaccessible rest
And storm remote, thou, sea of thoughts, dost stir
Scattered through east and west,-
Now, while thou closest with the kiss of her
Who locks thee to her breast. (5)

There is here contrast within contrast. The first contrast is between the loneliness of the poet and the embrace of poet and wife; and then, within the loneliness of the poet, there is rest and there is storm. And yet, notwithstanding this complexity, the contrasts of the poem are completely the objects of an experience. Storm, rest, loneliness, embrace, union and withdrawal, are, like the "Odi et amo" of Catullus, elements clearly perceived, though inextricably involved together, in the internal consciousness of the poet.

When we turn to Alice Meynell's paradoxes, a remarkable difference is noted. In a non-religious poem, Parentage, the poet protests that Augustus Caesar was wrong when he declared that "unmarried citizens" were "slayers of the people;" and in the second stanza, she attempts to prove the contrary.

But those who slay
Are fathers. Theirs are armies. Death is theirs -
The death of innocences and despairs;
The dying of the golden and the grey.
The sentence, when these speak it, has no Nay.
And she who slays is she who bears, who bears. (6)

A strange paradox is here proposed for our attention: the Mother is the Murderer of her child, "she who slays is she who bears." Unlike the contrast based upon the "multitude-composure" theme, only one element of this paradox is the object of experience - she who bears; the other element - she who slays - is not, of course, a matter of experience, but of inference. The poet proposes as a truth, as a unity, the thought that a mother both bears and slays her child.

Notice the grounds for the inference: the mother bears a son: the son is killed in war (we may suppose, not merely for the sake of argument, that war is inevitable in the lifetime of any son): therefore, the poet concludes, because she has borne the son, the mother has killed him herself. The thought is not difficult or abstruse; it is merely wrong. The paradox disintegrates into a sophism. The paradox does not remain in tension. And the emotion of the line is the emotion of rhetoric, that is, of persuasion; and not the emotion of the poetry of contemplation. The poem has genuine grief; but it is not imaginatively sincere. The grief does not rise out of this thought: it rises out of the sense of loss and, through perversity or some desire of self-immolation, is expressed in this extravagant way.

Few indeed of Alice Meynell's paradoxes break down; but from those that do, we can learn the danger of this figure of thought. The contrast of the "multitude-composure" type, since both elements are found in experience, cannot disintegrate in this way. It is true, as we have seen, in the comparison of Two Poets and the third part of Reflexions, that the underlying experience of a "multitude-composure" contrast can be "abstracted" to such a level "beyond imagery" that the theme is no longer capable of rich and satisfying communication. Intellectual "abstraction" constitutes a danger for the "multitude-composure" theme.

But in the transfer from this type of contrast to the paradox, Alice Meynell is running the far graver danger, of constructing a poem upon a basis of thought, that tends to explode under analysis.

In The Two Questions, Alice Maynell protests against the idea that the suffering of the good is unintelligible.

Not the clean heart transpierced; nor tears that
 For a child's agony; nor a martyr's woe;
 Not these, not these appal. (7)

And this is to be explained by a paradox:

Submissive we shall find
A splendour in that dust.

This is the religious paradox. The poet proposes as a thought, as a unity, that the suffering of the innocent is just, because through it only, the innocent will achieve "splendour." She confesses the suffering of the innocent on experience: she confesses on faith the "splendour" that will be found in suffering. This paradox is no sophism: the poet has simply to point to the Cross of Christ in proof of her faith: the two elements, though one is not derived from experience, stand, strangely but firmly, side by side. And yet, despite the precision of the vocabulary, the vigour of the phrasing, The Two Questions seems to be argument rather than an experience of a great and mysterious truth. It seems to me inescapable that whereas Alice Meynell's sensibility responded and vibrated instantly and fully to "multitude-composure" contrasts in Nature, in the affairs

of life, and particularly in the obscure depths of personality; that sensibility is not stirred in the same measure by the paradoxes of faith. The mere discovery of a paradox such as the one quoted from The Two Questions is no great or difficult matter. Anyone who has learned his catechism faithfully can compose paradoxes with ease. The Incarnation - a mystery in which Finite meets Infinite; the Holy Eucharist - a mystery wherein the categories of Space and Quantity seem, to the casual observer, to be strangely overturned and the One suffers multiplication without division: these mysteries provide endless paradoxes. But unless these paradoxes are explored by the sensibility of the poet, it is difficult to see what poetry can be made out of them. Such a poem as Beyond Knowledge, where the sin, white as snow, is seen in a vision, and such a poem as Free Will, where the poet declares that her "best treasures are ignoble, undelightful, abject, cold" - she is speaking of past sin - were surely paradoxes capable of splendid poetic treatment: yet they are little more than intellectual exercises. It is only when the "multitude-composure" theme is expressed in the language, and felt in the mysteries, of faith that Alice Meynell's religious poetry takes wing. Two brief lines of Unto Us a Son is Given redeem the poem; which immediately lapses beyond poetic redemption.

Sudden as sweet
Come the expected feet.
All joy is young, and new all art,
And He, too, whom we have by heart.

The Unknown God is not a poem written to enforce a paradox, but a religious expression of the mystery of personality.

'Christ in his unknown heart,
His intellect unknown - this love, this art,
This battle and this peace, this destiny
That I shall never know, look upon me!

'Christ in his numbered breath,
Christ in his beating heart and in his death,
Christ in his mystery! From that secret place
And from that separate dwelling, give me grace. (9)

Despite the fine thoughtful texture of Alice Meynell's religious poetry, it must not be considered, on the whole, great religious poetry. It is therefore surprising that critics have here and there sought to bestow upon Alice Meynell the high honour of "mystic" poet. No word has been the victim of more jugglery than the word "mysticism" as applied to poetry; and it is not surprising that Alice Meynell does fulfil the qualifications of some definitions of this word. D.H.S. Nicholson and A.H.E. Lee, in their Introduction to The Oxford Book of English Mystical Verse, resolutely refuse to define "mysticism", but "as a ground of comprehension" confess that they were governed by a desire "to include only such poems and extracts from poems as contain intimations of a consciousness wider and deeper than the normal." (10) In this sense, Alice Meynell's poetry is evidently "mystical": it is difficult to say what poetry of any value would not be. Mr. Arthur Patrick, in his study of Lionel Johnson, is clearer in his approach to definitions. He asks if Lionel Johnson is to be considered a "mystic poet".

Si l'on entend par là, à l'exclusion de tout autre intérêt, une préoccupation de l'union de l'âme à la Divinité, il faut répondre que non. Mais il est mystique dans le mesure où il considère habituellement la vie humaine en son rapport avec un ordre surnaturel. Le monde invisible existe pour lui... Sa poésie religieuse se dirige plus vers le ciel que vers les choses mortelles, et les visions qu'il en a sont fréquentes. (11)

Nor does Alice Meynell's poetry indicate that she is a "mystic" in the first sense. She was not preoccupied with the desire for union with God. And she certainly belongs with Lionel Johnson in the class of those who have steadfastly contemplated the world of supernatural reality. In The Crucifixion, she sees Christ descending into the abyss of Infinite sorrow.

But over the abyss
Of God's capacity for woe He stayed
One hesitating hour; what gulf was this?
Forsaken He went down, and was afraid. (12)

These lines indeed are a degree more profound in their contemplation of the "monde invisible" than any lines of Lionel Johnson. It is yet difficult to see, in Mr. Patrick's definition, any distinction made within religious poetry. All religious poetry is concerned with the relation of the supernatural to the order of nature. The "invisible world" exists for all religious poets; and to say that Alice Meynell contemplates Heaven rather than earth is surely only another way of saying she is a religious poet. But when Anne Kimball Tuell, after a clearer definition than any of these of the nature of "mystical" experience, goes on to place Alice

Meynell among the "mystics", then there is cause for surprise.

All the more for its characteristic calm of meditation, the poetry of Mrs. Meynell becomes at its finest the poetry in whose name critical crimes are most easily committed, the poetry of mysticism... Common parlance ignorantly holds the word synonymous with emotional religion, and dubs as "mystic" the lyric of most ardent palpitations... A truer psychology however recognizes as well in the experience, the supreme act of a unique concentration. And this phase of the mystic consciousness must be silent. In absoluteness, one would suppose, it must be altogether silent, becoming articulate only in incompleteness... There is a singular value then in a poetry which abjures, not in ignorance, direct expression of mysteries, and presents them from without in a reverent and unhasting contemplation. (13)

Anne Tuell, after she has in this passage come perilously close to saying that "mystical" poetry is impossible, gives somewhat later her reason for calling Alice Meynell, a "mystic" poet.

Mrs. Meynell reaches most surely her fulfilment in religious verse, since the paradox, the natural shape of her thought, is the most daring expression of the mystic consciousness. It has been articulate in symbols - the flame, the light, the voice, the pilgrimage - witness perhaps in their perpetual return to the oneness of their truth. But by and beyond the combination of symbols, there remains for religious expression, the paradox, a more gallant utterance since it seeks, unlike the symbol, not alone to suggest but directly to affirm; honest in defeat, since it confesses failure by its essential contradiction. (14)

That the paradox of itself, whatever its relation to "mystical" experience, should be considered an adequate medium of communication for poetry is somewhat astonishing.

Such a paradox as this, for example, from the Lauda Sion

Seventeenth Century. There can be no question of direct influence. As Anne Tuell has pointed out: the proclivities of her verse which bend toward the Seventeenth Century appear at least as early as 1890, seven years before her critical absorption in that age of sense and spirit."⁽¹⁷⁾ Anne Tuell wrote this in 1925. Criticism before 1925 had not hesitated to place Alice Meynell more or less definitely with the "metaphysical" poets of the Seventeenth Century. In 1923, J.L. Garvin wrote in The Living Age, that Alice Meynell's "spiritual imagination was kindled and made daring by the more flagrant spirits of the metaphysical school."⁽¹⁸⁾ Gertrude Ford, also writing for The Living Age, in 1916, decided that Alice Meynell was "the true descendant of Crashaw and Herbert and Herrick, and of Vaughan in the Retreat and Early Hours."⁽¹⁹⁾ When Alice Meynell was elected in 1914 to the Academic Committee of the Royal Society of Literature, Sir Henry Newbolt delivered an address to her in which he spoke of "a union of wit and religious emotion, as rare now as it was characteristic of the Seventeenth Century in England."⁽²⁰⁾ This was a trait, he said, inherited from the past. "The contemporaries of Herbert and of Vaughan would have revelled in her use of images."

It must, in the first place, be pointed out that, in the religious poetry of Alice Meynell, imagery is conspicuous by its absence. Nor is her use of imagery in the Later Poems likely to stir memories of Herbert or Vaughan or Crashaw or "the more flagrant spirits of the metaphysical

school." It is true that such "conceits" as the figure of the tide in The Visiting Sea, a poem of the Preludes, or the figure of the ship in the Later Poem The Launch reveal an ingenuity that might have delighted the "metaphysical" poets. But a "tide" and a "ship" and the manner in which Alice Meynell has developed them are far different from the ingenuity and curious conception of such an image as this of John Donne.

On a round ball
A workman that hath copies by, can lay
An Europe, Afrique, and an Asia,
And quickly make that, which was nothing, All,
So doth eache teare,
Which thee doth weare,
A globe, yea world by that impression grow,
Till thy teares mixt with mine doe overflow
This world, by waters sent from thee, my
heaven dissolved so. (21)

In Advent Meditation, in Preludes, we have a representative example of Alice Meynell's use of Nature in her religious poetry.

Sweet summer and the winter wild,
These brought him forth, the Undefined.
The happy Springs renewed again
His daily bread, the growing grain,
The food and raiment of the Child. (22)

There is not much in those lines to remind us of Crashaw's Hymn of the Nativity, nor of the use of Nature there.

I saw the curl'd drops, soft and slow,
Come hovering o'er the place's head;
Offering their whitest sheets of snow
To furnish the fair Infant's bed:
Forbear, said I; be not too bold.
Your fleece is white, But 'tis too cold. (23)

The use of paradox is a hint of Crashaw; but Alice Meynell

lacks the rapture that alone seems capable of charging his paradoxes with poetry. Two poets could scarcely be more different than Alice Meynell and Francis Thompson; and it is Francis Thompson who recalls the Crashaw of A Hymn To the Name above every Name.

Mr. H.J.C. Grierson, in The Background of English Literature, applies the word "metaphysical" to "Donne and his followers to Cowley", because "it lays stress on the right things - the survival, one might say the reaccentuation, of the metaphysical strain, the concetti metafisici ed ideali (as Testi calls them in contrast to the simpler imagery of classical poetry), of medieval Italian poetry; the more intellectual, less verbal, character of their wit compared with the conceits of the Elizabethans; the finer psychology of which their conceits are often the expression; their learned imagery; the argumentative, subtle evolution of their lyrics; above all, the peculiar blend of passion and thought, feeling and ratiocination which is their greatest achievement."⁽²⁴⁾ Though Alice Meynell differs from the Seventeenth Century poets on each of these points far more than she resembles them, she differs from them most of all on the last and the fundamental point. "The distinctive note of 'metaphysical' poetry'," says Mr. Grierson, continuing, "is the blend of passionate feeling and paradoxical ratiocination."⁽²⁵⁾ The intense personal conflict of Donne, the passionate rapture of Crashaw, the "fountain-joys", the

dazzling light of Henry Vaughan, the child-like ecstasy of Thomas Traherne: these ardent spirits have nothing to do with the reticence of Alice Meynell's religious poetry. Nor will her contemplative serenity more than negatively remind us of the gentle temperament of George Herbert. It seems to me that it is the sense of spiritual conflict in Herbert that creates his special intimacy with his "deare God."

But as I rav'd and grew more fierce and wilde
At every word,
Me thought I heard one calling, Childe:
And I reply'd, My Lord. (26)

As the sense of contrition in a passionate temperament, such as that of Mary Magdalen, expresses itself in passionate love; so, I believe, the sense of contrition and conflict, in the gentle soul of George Herbert, has expressed itself in tenderness and intimacy. Yet neither the one nor the other, the sense of personal conflict nor tender intimacy, is characteristic of Alice Meynell's religious poetry.

In order to illustrate more concretely my criticism of Alice Meynell's poetry in this last part of the essay, I shall propose a comparison of Alice Meynell's To the Body, written in 1906, Coventry Patmore's To the Body, and Thomas Traherne's The Salutation. This is Alice Meynell's poem in its entirety.

Thou inmost, ultimate
Council of judgement, palace of decrees,
Where the high senses hold their spiritual state,
Sued by earth's embassies,
And sign, approve, accept, conceive, create:

Create - thy senses close
With the world's pleas. The random odours reach

Their sweetness in the place of thy repose,
Upon thy tongue the peach,
And in thy nostrils breathes the breathing rose.

To thee, secluded one,
The dark vibrations of the sightless skies,
The lovely inexplicit colours, run;
The light gropes for those eyes.
O thou august! thou dost command the sun.

Music, all dumb, hath trod
Into thine ear her one effectual way;
And fire and cold approach to gain thy nod,
Where thou call'st up the day,
Where thou awaitest the appeal of God. (27)

Now this poem, though by no means the finest of the Later Poems, and although a poem not built upon a paradox, is nevertheless representative of the closely-thought-out, abstract manner in the Later Poems. The greatest moment of the poem is in the third stanza where the "multitude-composure" theme is distinctly felt. An infrequent and curious note of this third stanza is the employment of modern science - the physics of light and colour. More of this in Alice Meynell would have given her a closer reference with the Seventeenth Century. This stanza seems to promise a climax which the final stanza meets with cold precision.

Patmore's poem To the Body has lines very similar in meaning to this third stanza.

Reverberating dome,
Of music cunningly built home
Against the void and indolent disgrace
Of unresponsive space;... (28)

Patmore immediately makes use of mystical symbolism to flood his subject with vibrant life.

Little, sequestered pleasure-house
For God and for His Spouse;...

He introduces into his poem a dramatic distress.

Alas, so true
To all thy friendships that no grace
Thee from thy sin can wholly disembrace;...

For which false fealty
Thou needs must, for a season, lie
In the grave's arms, foul and unshriven,
Albeit, in Heaven,
Thy crimson-throbbing blow
Into its old abode aye pants to go....

And in the last seven lines of his poem, Patmore has introduced personal remorse and the unutterable envy of all who have sinned for the innocence of the utterly sinless.

O, if the pleasures I have known in thee
But my poor faith's poor first-fruits be,
What quintessential, keen, ethereal bliss
Then shall be his
Who has thy birth-time's consecrating dew
For death's sweet chrism retain'd,
Quick, tender, virginal, and unprofaned!

Into the same subject, Patmore has infused a range of feeling that is simply nowhere to be found in the religious poetry of Alice Meynell.

When we turn to Thomas Traherne's Salutation to his body, a similar difference meets us. How shall Alice Meynell's poem compare with the rapture of curiosity in the first lines of Traherne's poem?

These little limbs,
These Eyes and Hands which here I find,
This panting Heart wherewith my Life begins;
Where have ye been? Behind
What curtain were ye from me hid so long?
Where was, in what Abyss, my new-made Tongue? (29)

Or with the child-like wonder of the lines?

Such Sounds to hear, such Hands to feel, such Feet,
Such Eyes and Objects, on the Ground to meet.

Or with the audacity of the fifth stanza?

From Dust I rise
And out of Nothing now awake;
These brighter Regions which salute mine Eyes
A Gift from God I take:
The Earth, the Seas, the Light, the lofty Skies,
The Sun and Stars are mine; if these I prize.

Or with the wonder of thanksgiving in the last lines?

But that they mine should be who Nothing was,
That Strangest is of all; yet brought to pass.

Traherne and Patmore, in these poems, seem to me to represent the successful ways of creating religious poetry of contemplation. The poet may eddy about a mystery or truth of faith, in curiosity and wonder; or he may strive to penetrate the mystery by illuminating the revealed truths with his own experience and most successfully perhaps, using the symbolism of those who have sought to express genuine "mystical" experience. Traherne and Patmore are very close to their thought: Traherne just outside it, rhapsodizing; Patmore well within it, exploring it with his own sensibility. Alice Meynell seems to have held religious thought and mystery at arm's length, studying it carefully, content to state one or two important aspects of the mystery, and, generally speaking, to let it go at that.

There is therefore a division to be made in the Later Poems of Alice Meynell, which would, very roughly it is true, correspond to a division of her poetry into the poems based upon the "Multitude-Composure" theme, in which the contrast involved is altogether a matter of experience, and the poems based upon paradox, in which

the contrast is only on one side the object of experience. Such a division would very nearly correspond to a division of her poetry into religious and non-religious work. It must be pointed out, however, that poems distinctly based upon the "Multitude-Composure" theme were sometimes, as we have seen, raised to a level of abstraction that diminished their poetic value; whereas, on the other hand, some of the religious poems, the finest of them, have been immeasurably improved by the introduction of the "Multitude-Composure" theme. It seems that the conclusion to be made is that, whereas Alice Meynell was able to perceive in Nature, in the ebb and flow of personal joy and grief, in human life, the presence of "multitude" and "composure", she was not able, at least not more than infrequently, to perceive this theme in the dogmas of faith. Paradox, finally, and the tendency towards abstraction, which in other poets seems to have produced or permitted great poetry, must in her work, be considered factors that tend to suppress her finer and more characteristic qualities.

CONCLUSION

In this conclusion, I do not wish to gather together what has already been done, but rather to indicate how the poetry and the prose we have been examining belongs to the later Nineteenth Century in virtue of certain fundamental qualities. These fundamental qualities will, in fact, be reduced to two: the tendency towards a more intellectual poetry, the examination of which was the burden of the chapter on Alice Meynell's Later Poems; and the freedom of her work from moral or social purpose, a quality discovered in the chapter on her Occasional Essays and seen again in her Later Poems. Coventry Patmore, despite the great difference between his own poetry and the poetry of Alice Meynell, indicated in the last chapter, is, I suggest, at the very general level of these two fundamental qualities, an important factor in determining Alice Meynell's position in the later Nineteenth Century. He seems to have had a share in accelerating the tendency of Alice Meynell towards a more intellectual poetry: he was certainly in accord with the desire that freed poetry from social preoccupations. In virtue of their agreement upon this second point, the religious poetry of Patmore and Alice Meynell occupies a distinct phase in the Catholic tradition of English literature. In order that I may not involve myself, in a conclusion, with a detailed discussion of Catholic writers after Alice Meynell, I must be content with suggesting, rather than demonstrating, the difference between her work and the work of men such as, for example, Gilbert Keith

Chesterton. And with that suggestion, the conclusion may conclude.

The last chapter concluded with recognition of a conflict in the poetry of Alice Meynell between the "multitude-composure" theme, definite witness of the Romantic sensibility, and the tendency towards more intellectual expression, brought to an extreme in the frequent "paradox". The "multitude-composure" poems succeed: the stricter, more reticent, more abstract, poetry fails. In such a conflict, Alice Meynell reflects the "suppressed Romanticism", which Mr. Ifor Evans has considered one of the characteristics of the later Nineteenth Century.⁽¹⁾ Mr. Evans cites Matthew Arnold as an example of the poet who deliberately endeavours to subdue a Romantic sensibility to classic forms. The movement from The Scholar Gipsy to Merope will find no correspondence in the movement from Preludes to the Later Poems of Alice Meynell; but, in the sense, that both Arnold and Alice Meynell were ever moving towards a more simple, more thoughtful style, they do represent a tendency characteristic of the period. Mr. E. K. Brown, in the Introduction to his Victorian Poetry, declares that "a dissatisfaction with subjectivism is a fundamental quality in Victorian poetry."⁽²⁾ And there can be no doubt that Alice Meynell deliberately sought to move away from the subjectivism of her early poetry. Coventry Patmore, writing of Preludes, says that "Mrs. Meynell's thoughts and feelings seem to be half-suffocated

by their own sweetness and pathos", and then continues:

With extraordinary power of self-judgment, she discovered this fact while she was as yet a mere girl, and, disdaining to do anything she could not do, not only well, but best, and notwithstanding the encouragement to persevere in poetry which she received from a large and high class of critics, she gave up the attempt, and has hardly since written a line. (3)

There was actually evidence and promise of the Later Poems in Preludes; and the stream of "suppressed Romanticism" flows from first to last; but the extraordinary development of paradox and abstract statement, together with the loss of melody and rhythm and, in a large measure, the loss of nature-imagery, in a considerable portion of the mature poetry, seems to require some further explanation. The influence of the Seventeenth Century does not account for this development. But it does seem probable that Coventry Patmore himself, with criticism of the kind just quoted, accelerated in no small degree the development of greater restraint and closer thought.

The poetry of Coventry Patmore and the poetry of Alice Meynell are remarkably different. But their poetic theory was very similar. In the essay The Point of Rest in Art, Patmore speaks of "a vital centre, which, like that of a great wheel, has little motion in itself, but which at once transmits and controls the fierce revolution of the circumference." (4) In the essay, Emotional Art, Patmore displays a point of view that Alice Meynell very evidently adopted in the writing of her mature poetry; "art,

universally acknowledged to be of the very highest kind, sometimes almost entirely dispenses with 'emotion', and trusts for its effect to an almost purely intellectual expression of form or order - in other words, of truth."⁽⁵⁾ Similarities of this kind between the critical writings of Patmore and those of Alice Meynell might be multiplied indefinitely; and, since the great period of Alice Meynell's friendship with Coventry Patmore coincides with the years immediately preceding Alice Meynell's second period of poetry, 1891-1895,⁽⁶⁾ and since both poets were greatly concerned with correct theory and technique, this similarity in their view of poetry suggests that Alice Meynell owes much to Coventry Patmore. Edmund Gosse speaks of "genius singularly cognate."

During the last four years of considerable bodily suffering, borne with great resolution, the central fact in his (Patmore's) life was certainly the devoted affection of a friend, of genius singularly cognate with his own. ⁽⁷⁾

But the linking of the name of Coventry Patmore with that of Alice Meynell has an importance far greater than its implication of direct poetic influence. Through Arnold, Mr. Ifor Evans declares, "we learn something of that bleak isolation of the artist in a world otherwise occupied, which appears and reappears in later Nineteenth Century poetry."⁽⁸⁾ In Coventry Patmore and in Alice Meynell, the deliberately accepted dogma of the poet's isolation from the world is connected, as it was not in Francis Thompson

nor in Rossetti, for example, with an aristocratic temper of mind and manner. "The central impression," writes Gosse of Patmore, "was that here was an example - possibly the most remarkable example in England at that time, - of the intellectual and moral aristocrat."⁽⁹⁾ Patmore was proudly aware of this.

Therefore no 'plaint be mine
Of listeners none,
No hope of rendered use or proud reward,
In hasty times and hard;
But chants as of a lonely thrush's throat
At latest eve,...

'Mid the loud concert harsh
Of this fog-folded marsh,
To me, else dumb,
Uranian clearness, come!
Give me to breathe in peace and in surprise
The light-thrill'd ether of your rarest skies. ⁽¹⁰⁾

Alice Meynell's aristocratic temperament had not the harsh and forbidding quality of Patmore's: it is nevertheless distinct in every impression recorded of her. Thus we have the strange account of her sister, Lady Butler, placing a wreath of flowers upon Alice Meynell's grave; and the words of dedication were "with profoundest veneration."⁽¹¹⁾ The portrait of her by Richard Le Gallienne in The Romantic Nineties is the portrait of a woman in the world, but not of it.

Never surely was a lady who carried her learning and wore the flower of her gentle humane sanctity with such quiet grace, with so gentle and understanding a smile. The touch of exquisite asceticism about her seemed but to accent the sensitive sympathy of her manner, the manner of one quite humanly and simply in this world, with all its varied

interests, and yet not of it. There was the charm of a beautiful abbess about her, with the added esprit of intellectual sophistication. However quietly she sat in her drawing-room of an evening with her family and friends about her, her presence radiated a peculiarly lovely serenity, like a twilight gay with stars. (12)

Aristocracy and austerity were essential qualities of Patmore's art as well as of the art of Alice Meynell.

"Patmore", says Gosse, "will be preserved by his intensity, and by the sincerity and economy with which he employed his art. Like Gray, like Alfred de Vigny, like Leopardi - he knew the confines of his strength; he strove not to be copious but to be uniformly exquisite." (13) Lionel Johnson, according to Mr. Patrick, belongs with Patmore and Alice Meynell in this "curieux mariage de pensée complexe et d'expression simple à l'extrême." (14)

The sense of isolation of these poets was evidently deepened by the fact that they were all converts to the Catholic Church. I have mentioned in an earlier place that conversions at this period, at least in this quarter of English society, were profoundly private and personal. The convert felt neither desire nor obligation to spread broadcast the deep secret of his soul. Gosse sees Patmore as "the type, in recent English literature of a high order, almost the solitary type, of absolute faith. He was no propagandist; he made no efforts of any conspicuous kind to communicate his belief to others." (15) Patmore was not "almost the solitary type" of the pure artist who was at once the pure contemplative. This two-fold characteristic

was the distinguishing mark of a group of Catholic poets in the later Nineteenth Century, of which the names of Coventry Patmore, Alice Meynell, Francis Thompson, and Lionel Johnson, are only the greatest.

In the poetry of Patmore, Alice Meynell, and Francis Thompson, certain critics have found affinities. John Drinkwater, for example, finds a common point of reference in their debt to the Seventeenth Century. I have pointed out that any debt of Alice Meynell to that century must be reduced to the most general characteristics: yet what still remains of her affinity to the Seventeenth Century poets is sufficient to group her with Patmore and Thompson and to distinguish this group from other groups in the later Nineteenth Century. John Drinkwater's criticism is, I think, quite sufficiently qualified to be acceptable as it is.

One of the most remarkable poetic affinities of recent times is to be found between the genius of Francis Thompson and that of Alice Meynell. However much these two poets may have resembled each other in spiritual temperament no two could differ more decidedly in poetic method... Alice Meynell... with her diction so chaste and disciplined and exact, her imagery so frugal and unadorned, is a rarefied incarnation of... the Seventeenth Century, a century which in so far as it worked upon Thompson did so rather in its florid ecstasy. ... the poet from whom both Thompson and Alice Meynell derived more clearly than any other among the Victorians was Patmore, and it was no doubt a consciousness that they inherited widely divergent strains from a common parentage that accounted in some measure at least, for their responsiveness to each other, not merely in sympathetic appreciation, but in their essential poetic natures. (16)

Each of these three was distinctly original. They cannot be placed together in any clearly-defined literary movement; and yet together they constitute a group that represents an important phase in the literature of the later Nineteenth Century as a whole and, more particularly, in the tradition of Catholic literature that began again with the conversion of John Henry Cardinal Newman and has not yet ceased to grow and expand.

Coventry Patmore in the essay The Poetry of Negation clearly and definitely determines the outlines of this group of Catholic writers, of which he must indeed be considered the founder and the captain.

The heart of the modern poet is, as a rule, always vibrating between the extremes of despondent grumbling at the present conditions and hasty and unreasonable aspirations for the improvement of his kind;... and he whose true function is to stand aside as the tranquil seer too often now becomes the excited agent in matters which concern him least of all men, because of all men he is the least fitted to meddle with them...

The statesman, the social reformer, the political economist; the natural philosopher, the alms-giver, the hospital visitor, the preacher, even the cynical humorist, has each his function, and each is rightly more or less negative; but the function of the poet is clearly distinguished from all these, and is higher though less obtrusive than any. It is simply affirmative of things which it greatly concerns men to know, but which they have either not discovered or have allowed to lapse into the death of commonplace. (17)

Writing under the banner of such an ideal as this, Patmore, Alice Meynell, Francis Thompson, and Lionel Johnson, occupy a distinct place in the later Nineteenth Century; a place

defined by Ifor Evans.

After 1860 controversy and discussion in poetry ceases: some poets remove from argument into an aesthetic world of their own creation; others adhere to a tradition of Catholic Christianity which renders argument unnecessary and releases poetry for the exploration of mysticism; a few attempt out of their recognition of new knowledge to construct a new synthesis of belief. (18)

I shall not now, in the moment of conclusion, renew my quarrel with the word "mysticism". Had Mr. Evans written instead "for the exploration of the fundamental truths of faith," he would have said no less than he intended to say; and those, who consider the term "mysticism" not yet sufficiently clearly defined to be of use in the criticism of literature, would not have been teased by ambiguity.

In the Catholic tradition of English literature, Alice Meynell, in virtue of this association with Patmore and Francis Thompson, occupies a more prominent place. The difference we have observed in the conversions of Cardinal Newman and Alice Meynell explains the difference between the Catholic writers of the Oxford Movement period and the Catholic writers that gathered in the drawing-room on Palace Court. Newman, Wiseman, Manning, Wilfrid Ward, Frederick Faber, are names that belong more properly to the literature of theological speculation and controversy than to the literature of purely artistic purpose. With Patmore's strict rejection of this "negative" art and single-hearted devotion to the "affirmative" way of the poet, Catholic literature enters a new phase. Patmore began; but it was the drawing-

room of Alice Meynell, the Catholic periodicals of Alice and Wilfrid Meynell, that gathered together, stimulated and offered new opportunities of expression to, the Catholic writers of the later Nineteenth Century. Calvert Alexander in his Catholic Literary Revival does not give undue prominence to the place of Alice Meynell.

Under the direction of Alice Meynell it was that the Catholic Literary Revival first took on the form of a movement. Previous to her advent it had been scarcely more than a number of convert litterateurs, of considerable importance, it is true, but more or less isolated one from the other, or at least without a sense of solidarity and community of purpose, except that given to them by their common faith. Newman might have brought these figures together had he not had many other things of greater importance to do. Alice Meynell actually did bring them together, and this at a time when new forces and new personalities were beginning to appear, and the old ones had not yet passed away. To her as to a centre came the surviving representatives of the first generation such as Aubrey de Vere and Coventry Patmore; to her also came the artists of the new generation, such as Francis Thompson and Lionel Johnson; the Celtic Revival had its representative there in Katherine Tynan, a life-long friend of Mrs. Meynell's; from America came the poetess, Agnes Tobin. (19)

I have called this group of poets, a "phase" in the later Nineteenth Century. This critic has called them, a "movement". Yet, as we have seen, nothing was further from the desires of Alice Meynell than that the poets gathered about her should form a "movement"; and indeed a critic would be at his wit's end to force the poetry of Alice Meynell and the poetry of Francis Thompson into the same "movement". Again the suggestion that "Newman might have brought these

figures together" is puzzling. These figures constitute a "phase" in the Catholic tradition of Nineteenth Century English Literature precisely because they differ from Newman. Finally, due emphasis has not been given in this brief survey to the importance of Coventry Patmore and his relation to this group of Catholic writers. This passage is otherwise acceptable and valuable.

When we turn to the Catholic writers that followed Alice Meynell and belong properly to the Twentieth Century, it is well to have in mind two sentences of Christopher Dawson from The Modern Dilemma. He is speaking of Christianity in general.

The religious individualism of the last age, with its self-centred absorption in the question of personal salvation and private religious emotion, will not help us. The Christianity of the future must be a social Christianity that is embodied in a real society, not an imaginary or invisible one. (20)

This general distinction between the Christianity of the Nineteenth Century and the Christianity of the Twentieth is reflected in the Catholic writers of the two periods. Alice Meynell, with Patmore and Thompson and Lionel Johnson, was not concerned with applying the truths of faith to the exigencies of contemporary distress; and with the laughter of Gilbert Keith Chesterton and the defiance of Hilaire Belloc, the new phase of Catholic literature is ushered in. One might say, with Dawson in mind, that in these two phases we have represented, the Catholic of the later Nineteenth Century and the Catholic of the Twentieth Century. The

Catholic of the Twentieth Century in English literature was to begin his course in a spirit of belligerency. He was to move swiftly and range widely, till no literary form had not felt the touch of his hand; and no science had not been searched to yield him argument for his polemic. Alice Meynell took delight, but no share, in this work that, even before her death, had assumed considerable proportions. She belonged to an earlier period. Men such as Newman were before her: men such as Chesterton came after. Newman gives us the impression of a man who has come from a great distance: Chesterton, of a man going somewhere in a great hurry. Between these two men, between these two periods, Alice Meynell represents a point of rest, a pause, a moment of meditation. Newman represents the thinker, the theologian, in this Catholic tradition: Chesterton represents the apologist and the champion, ready to fight upon any ground. Alice Meynell represents the contemplative and the artist. And thus did the position of Alice Meynell in the literature of the Later Nineteenth Century in England also determine her position in the Catholic tradition within that literature: so that her poetry and her prose, despite their extraordinary originality, represent to us a distinct phase in the literary and religious movements of the later Nineteenth Century.

NOTES

(In these Notes, the works of Alice Meynell are not preceded by the author's name. Similarly, the frequently quoted Alice Meynell: a Memoir, written by Viola Meynell, is, in the Notes, indicated simply as Memoir.)

CHAPTER ONE: PRELUDES 1875

1. "Grey Time"

1. Bliss, "The Poetry of Alice Meynell." Month, April 1923, p. 320.
2. Poems, p. 3.
3. ibid., p. 8.
4. ibid., loc. cit.
5. ibid., p. 3.
6. ibid., p. 17.
7. ibid., p. 38.
8. ibid., p. 4.
9. ibid., p. 53.
10. cf. Tuell, Mrs. Meynell and her Literary Generation, p. 18.
11. Memoir, p. 22.
12. ibid., loc. cit.
13. Tuell, op. cit., loc. cit.
14. Memoir., pp. 48-49.
15. I quote from Poems, p. 198, Father Bliss's description of this manuscript. "This MS. contains twenty poems in the handwriting of Alice Meynell. All but one are dated, and the dates run from December 1868 to April 1870. The MS. is a theme book in a mottle-purple cover of limp board. There are two blank fly-leaves, and twenty-five ruled leaves with the edges of seven others that have been cut out. The poems occupy 49 of these 50 pages. This MS. is contemporary with the dates in it, and for seventy years has been in the possession of the English 'Messenger of the Sacred Heart'.

Of the twenty poems, two, 'Builders of Ruin' and 'To the Beloved', were printed in Preludes,

somewhat altered and shortened. Five more correspond with some item in the printed works, but in these the shortening and the changes are such as to produce a new poem: sometimes only the subject and a few phrases are retained, with a new title. The 248 lines of these seven poems become 154 in the printed versions. Another piece in the MS., 'The Poet to his own Childhood', 48 ll., is a sort of mirror poem to the famous 'Letter of a Girl to her own Old Age'.

There remain twelve poems which are altogether 'new' and have no echo in the editions: but two of them exist, in whole or in part, in another autograph MS. of 1870. From among these the poems now printed have been chosen by the Editor of the present volume.

The manuscript forms a body of juvenilia to which, for freshness of poetic power, it would be difficult to find a parallel in English literature".

16. Athenaeum, April 22, 1893.
17. Memoir, p. 49.
18. Poems, p. 15
19. ibid., p. 18.
20. Memoir, p. 36.
21. ibid., p. 37.
22. ibid., loc. cit.
23. ibid., loc. cit.
24. Poems, p. 5.
25. ibid., p. 8
26. ibid., p. 43.
27. ibid., p. 66.
28. By "Unpublished Poems", I mean to indicate in this dissertation, the group of five poems, already referred to, that were published for the first time in the Oxford University Press edition of Alice Meynell's poetry in 1940, from the manuscript described in note 14.

29. Poems, p. 15.
30. ibid., p. 204.
31. Memoir, p. 41.
32. Tuell, op. cit., p. 22.
33. Hearts of Controversy, pp. 21-22.
34. Memoir, p. 204.
35. cf. Tuell, op. cit., p. 21
36. Poems, p. 51.
37. ibid., p. 30.
38. ibid., p. 33.
39. ibid., loc. cit.
40. ibid., p. 34
41. Shelley, Complete Poetical Works, p. 526
42. ibid., p. 527
43. Poems, p. 44.
44. Shelley, op. cit., p. 526.
45. Poems, p. 45.
46. ibid., p. 199.
47. ibid., p. 200.
48. ibid., p. 201.
49. Tuell, "Mrs. Meynell: A Study". Atlantic Monthly,
February 1923, p. 236.
50. Poems, p. 51.
51. ibid., p. 17.
52. ibid., p. 32.
53. Wordsworth, Poetical Works, p. 187.
54. "Elizabeth Barrett Browning". The Encyclopaedia
Britannica, Eleventh Edition, vol IV, p. 670.

55. Poems, p. 147.
56. Memoir, p. 30.
57. ibid., pp. 31-32.
58. Athenaeum, 15 February, 1902.
59. Poems, p. 211.
60. ibid., p. 176.
61. ibid., p. 10.
62. ibid., p. 20.
63. Poems, p. 173.
64. Poems, p. 15.
65. ibid., p. 43.
66. ibid., p. 11.
67. John Ruskin, p. 54.
68. Poems, p. 3.
69. ibid., p. 54.
70. ibid., p. 93.
71. ibid., p. 109.
72. Essays, p. 257.
73. John Ruskin, p. 69.
74. cf. Memoir, pp. 201-202.
75. Beach, The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth Century English Poetry, p. 406.
76. Wordsworth, op. cit., p. 207.
77. Hearts of Controversy, pp. 17-18.
78. John Ruskin, pp. 140-141.
79. Poems, p. 6.
80. ibid., p. 7.

81. Tennyson, Works, "Poems": Vol. II; p. 293.
82. Poems, p. 56
83. Thompson, Francis, Collected Poems, p. 349.
84. Poems, p. 126.
85. ibid., p. 179.
86. ibid., p. 183.
87. Tennyson, Poems: 1829-1868, p. 395.
88. ibid., p. 349.
89. vide supra, note 67.
90. Essays, pp. 43-45.

2. "The Young Neophyte"

1. Memoir, p. 41.
2. ibid., p. 310.
3. ibid., p. 45. Also Tuell, Mrs. Meynell and her Literary Generation, p. 18; De la Gorce, Francis Thompson, p. 73.
4. De la Gorce, op. cit., p. 72.
5. Chesterton, The Victorian Age in Literature, pp. 42-43.
6. Memoir, p. 42.
7. ibid., p. 215.
8. ibid., p. 321.
9. Pater, Marius the Epicurean, vol. II, p. 123.
10. ibid., pp. 123-124.
11. Newman, Loss and Gain, p. 298.
12. Batho & Dobrée. The Victorians and After, p. 116.
13. ibid., loc. cit.
14. Newman, op. cit., pp. 252-253.
15. Pater, op. cit., pp. 128, 130, 134, 135, 137, 140, respectively.
16. Johnson, Lionel, Poetical Works, p. 173.
17. Patrick, Lionel Johnson, p. 39.
18. ibid., pp. 49-50.
19. ibid., p. 52.
20. ibid., p. 49.
21. Thompson, Francis, Collected Poems, pp. 195-196.
22. Poems, p. 11.
23. ibid., p. 53.

24. Essays, p. 176.
25. Poems, p. 112.
26. Batho & Dobree, op. cit., p. 47.
27. Pater, Imaginary Portraits, p. 144.
28. ibid., pp. 143-144.
29. Grierson, Lyrical Poetry from Blake to Hardy, pp. 88-90.
30. Memoir, pp. 240-241.
31. Ruskin, Complete Works, vol. VII, p. 163.
32. ibid., p. 224.
33. Poems, p. 83.
34. Chesterton, The Victorian Age in Literature, p. 65.
35. John Ruskin, p. 223.
36. Poems, p. 105.
37. Essays, p. 124-125.
38. Poems, p. 104.
39. John Ruskin, pp. 229-230.
40. Poems, p. 131.
41. Repplier, Catholic World, "Alice Meynell", March
1923, p. 723.
42. Poems, p. 39.
43. Memoir, p. 51.
44. Poems, p. 53.
45. Essays, p. 123.
46. Poems, p. 28.
47. Ruskin, op. cit., col. II, p. 276.
48. Poems, p. 29.
49. ibid., p. 28.

50. ibid., p. 79.
51. Repplier, op. cit., loc. cit.
52. Poems, p. 31.
53. Huysmans, La cathédrale, pp. 91-92.
54. vide supra, note 34.
55. Dowson, Poetical Works, p. 7.
56. Memoir, pp. 332-333. The italics not mine.
57. ibid., p. 41.
58. ibid., p. 42.
59. Batho & Dobrée, The Victorians and After, p. 33.
60. ibid., p. 178.
61. Woodruff, "On Newman, Chesterton, and Exorbitance".
For Hilaire Belloc, p. 40.
62. Huxley, Method and Results, p. 31.
63. ibid., pp. 40-41.
64. vide supra, note 56.
65. John Ruskin, p. 4.
66. ibid., p. 132.
67. ibid., pp. 143-144.
68. Newman, Grammar of Assent, pp. 107-110. "Conscience does not repose on itself, but vaguely reaches forward to something beyond self, and dimly discerns a sanction higher than self for its decisions, as is evidenced in that keen sense of obligation and responsibility which informs them. And hence it is that we are accustomed to speak of conscience as a voice,... and moreover a voice,... or the echo of a voice, imperative and constraining, like no other dictate in the whole of our experience...

If a man has been betrayed into any kind of immorality, he has a lively sense of responsibility and guilt, though the act be no offence

against society,--of distress and apprehension, even though it may be of present service to him,--of compunction and regret, though in itself it be more pleasurable,--of confusion of face, though it may have no witnesses...

If, as is the case, we feel responsibility, are ashamed, are frightened, at transgressing the voice of conscience, this implies that there is One to whom we are responsible, before whom we are ashamed, whose claims upon us we fear... These feelings in us are such as require for their exciting cause an intelligent being: we are not affectionate towards a stone, nor do we feel shame before a horse or dog; we have no remorse or compunction on breaking mere human law: yet, so it is, conscience excites all these painful emotions, confusion, foreboding, self-condemnation; and on the other hand it sheds upon us a deep peace, a sense of security, a resignation, and a hope, which there is no sensible, no earthly object to elicit. "The wicked flees, when no one pursueth;" then why does he flee? whence his terror? Who is it that he sees in solitude, in darkness, in the hidden chambers of his heart? If the cause of these emotions does not belong to this visible world, the Object to which his perception is directed must be Supernatural and Divine; and thus the phenomena of Conscience, as a dictate, avail to impress the imagination with the picture of a Supreme Governor, a Judge, holy, just, powerful, all-seeing, retributive, and the creative principle of religion..."

69. Ruskin, Complete Works, vol. XIII, p. 41.
70. ibid., p. 47.
71. John Ruskin, p. 189.
72. Poems, p. 80. (published in 1896).
73. Tennyson, Works. "Enoch Arden & In Memoriam": pp. 90-91.
74. ibid., p. 184.
75. Arnold, Essays in Criticism. Second Series, p. 1.
76. ibid., loc. cit.
77. Quoted from Tuell, Mrs. Meynell and Her Literary Generation, p. 229.

78. John Ruskin, p. 263.
79. ibid., pp. 263-264.
80. Tynan-Hinkson, "Alice Meynell". Catholic World,
Sept. 1929, p. 651.
81. Poems, p. 81.
82. Noyes, "Alice Meynell". Bookman, Jan. 1923, p. 193.
83. Poems, p. 53.

3. Poems of Parting

1. Memoir, p. 45.
2. Poems, p. 198.
3. ibid., p. 211.
4. ibid., p. 203.
5. ibid., p. 69.
6. ibid., p. 5.
7. ibid., p. 75.
8. ibid., p. 35.
9. Noyes, "Alice Meynell". Bookman, January 1923, p. 192.
10. Athenaeum, Feb. 15, 1902.
11. Poems, p. 211, note 69.
12. Patmore, "Mrs. Meynell: Poet and Essayist". Fortnightly Review, December, 1892, p. 764.
13. Tuell, Mrs. Meynell and her Literary Generation, p. 26.
14. Brégy, "Mrs. Meynell: An Appreciation". Catholic World, January, 1911, p. 495.
15. Noyes, op. cit., loc. cit.
16. Poems, p. 82.
17. Drinkwater, The Muse in Council, p. 240.
18. ibid., p. 229.
19. Brégy, op. cit., p. 497.
20. Matthew, XXVII, 46. (Donay, 1609.)
21. Teresa of Jesus, Saint. Life, pp. 483-484.
22. Watts, "Reminiscences of Christina Rossetti". Nineteenth Century, February, 1895, p. 355.
23. Memoir, p. 319.

24. Tynan-Hinkson, "Alice Meynell". Catholic World:
September, 1929, p. 641.
25. ibid., p. 643.
26. Rossetti, Christina. Poems, p. 385.
27. ibid., p. 105.
28. ibid., p. 39.
29. ibid., p. 41.
30. Batho & Dobrée, The Victorians and After, p. 63.
31. Rossetti, Christina. Maud, p.
32. ibid., loc. cit.
33. Hearts of Controversy, p. 70.
34. Madeleva, Chaucer's Nuns and Other Essays, p. 125.
In "this group of spiritual singers", Sister
Madeleva has gathered Aubrey de Vere, Coventry
Patmore, the Rossettis, Lionel Johnson,
Francis Thompson, and Alice Meynell.
35. Memoir, p. 38.
36. Caldwell, Golden Book of Modern English Poetry, p. 79.
37. Grierson, Lyrical Poetry from Blake to Hardy, p. 138.
38. John Ruskin, p. 271.
39. Poems, p. 128.
40. ibid., p. 139.
41. Memoir, p. 313
42. Tuell, "Mrs. Meynell: A Study". Atlantic Monthly,
February 1923, p. 238.
43. Psalms, L, 5. (Donay, 1609.)
44. Champneys, Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry
Patmore, vol. II, p. 90.

CHAPTER TWO: OCCASIONAL ESSAYS

1. Memoir, p. 67.
2. Poems, p. 73.
3. Essays, p. 80.
4. Memoir, p. 74.
5. Batho & Dobree, The Victorians and After, p. 244
6. Essays, p. 79.
7. ibid, loc. cit.
8. ibid., p. 81
9. ibid., p. 52.
10. ibid., p. 50.
11. ibid., p. 51.
12. ibid., p. 53.
13. ibid., p. 157.
14. ibid., p. 166.
15. ibid., p. 150.
16. Chesterton, "Alice Meynell". The Dublin Review,
January 1923, p. 3.
17. Memoir, p. 133.
18. Essays, p. 148.
19. Patmore, "Mrs. Meynell: Poet and Essayist".
Fortnightly Review, December, 1892, p. 764.
20. cf. Poems, p. 211, note 69-76.
21. Athenaeum, 15 February, 1902.
22. Meredith, op. cit., loc. cit.
23. vide supra, not 5.
24. Tuell, Mrs. Meynell and her Literary Generation, p. 219.

25. Essays, p. 151.
26. ibid., loc. cit.
27. ibid., p. 259.
28. ibid., p. 260.
29. ibid., p. 261.
30. ibid., p. 9.
31. ibid., p. 10.
32. ibid., pp. 186-187.
33. ibid., p. 114.
34. ibid., p. 163.
35. Patrick, Lionel Johnson: Poète et Critique, p. 43.
36. Memoir, p. 144.
37. De la Gorce, Francis Thompson, p. 75.
38. Patrick, op. cit., loc. cit.
39. Athenaeum, 3 October, 1896.
40. Memoir, p. 72.
41. ibid., pp. 72-73.
42. ibid., pp. 73-74.
43. Tuell, op. cit., p. 40.
44. Memoir, p. 119.
45. Patmore, op. cit., loc. cit.
46. Barry, "Dearest Portia: the friendship of George Meredith and Alice Meynell - told from Meredith's Unpublished Letters".
Scribners, May 1923; p. 516.
47. Memoir, p. 127.
48. Tuell, op. cit., p. 42.
49. Poems, p. 74.

50. Essays, p. 173.
51. ibid., p. 101.
52. ibid., p. 85.
53. cf. Eliot, "The Place of Pater", The Eighteen Eighties, p. 97.
54. Aquinas, Summa Theologica, I. q. 39, a. 8. "Hence we see that a certain picture may be said to be beautiful, even if the object represented be foul."
55. Memoir, pp. 43-44.
56. Champneys, Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore, vol. I, p. 261.
57. Beerbohm, "1880". The Yellow Book, vol. IV. January 1895, p. 278.
58. Batho & Dobrée, The Victorians and After, p. 117.
59. Farmer, Le Mouvement esthétique et "décadent" en Angleterre (1873-1900), p. 384.
60. ibid., loc. cit.
61. Delaney, Alice Meynell as a Critic of English Literature, p. 10.
62. Moorhouse, "Flower of the Mind". Fortnightly Review, January 1923, p. 68.
63. Essays, p. 7.
64. ibid., p. 9.
65. ibid., p. 6.
66. ibid., p. 2.
67. Hall, "Alice Meynell". Papers of the Manchester Literary Club, vol. LVI, p. 11.
68. Patmore, Principle in Art: Religio Poetae, p. 152.
69. Chesterton, Robert Browning, pp. 164-165.
70. ibid., loc. cit.

71. Chesterton, "Alice Meynell". Dublin Review, January 1923, p. 7.
72. cf. Tuell, op. cit., p. 57.
73. Athenaeum, 22 April 1893.
74. John Ruskin, p. 161.
75. Essays, p. 55.
76. ibid., p. 57.
77. Second Person Singular, p. 9.
78. "On Particles", Living Age, 27 December 1919, p. 787.
79. Essays, p. 172.
80. Tuell, "Mrs. Meynell: A Study". Atlantic Monthly, February 1923, p. 230.
81. Repplier, "Alice Meynell". Catholic World, March 1923, p. 728.
82. Chesterton, "Alice Meynell". Dublin Review, January 1923, p. 7.
83. Patmore, "Mrs. Meynell: Poet and Essayist". Fortnightly Review, 2 December 1892, p. 766.
84. Memoir, p. 72.
85. Farmer, op. cit., p. 332.
86. John Ruskin, p. 190.
87. ibid., p. 133.
88. Chesterton, "Alice Meynell". Dublin Review, January 1923, p. 5.
89. Farmer, op. cit., p. 384.

CHAPTER THREE: LATER POEMS

1. Meynell, Everard. The Life of Francis Thompson,
p. 133, note 1.
2. Thompson, Collected Poems, pp. 67-68.
3. Poems, p. 76.

1. The "Multitude-Composure" Theme.

4. Bliss, "The Poetry of Alice Meynell". The Month, April 1923, p. 315.
5. Meynell, Everard, op. cit., pp. 245-246.
6. Poems, p. 74.
7. Essays, p. 260.
8. Poems, p. 79.
9. ibid., p. 85.
10. ibid., p. 159.
11. ibid., p. 87.
12. ibid., p. 94.
13. Athenaeum, 15 February 1902.
14. Essays, pp. 105-106.
15. ibid., p. 106.
16. Poems, p. 96.
17. ibid., p. 41.
18. Essays, p. 17.
19. ibid., p. 97.
20. ibid., p. 88.
21. Essays, p. 207.
22. Poems, p. 169.
23. Memoir, p. 320.
24. Read, Collected Essays, p. 86.
25. Poems, p. 170.
26. ibid., p. 121.
27. Memoir, pp. 69-70.

28. ibid., p. 110.
29. ibid., p. 111.
30. Second Person Singular, p. 101.
31. Poems, p. 97.
32. ibid., p. 178.
33. ibid., p. 106.
34. cf. Delaney, Alice Meynell as a Critic of English Literature, p. 21.
35. Poems, p. 79.
36. Hearts of Controversy, p. 71.
37. Poems, p. 120.
38. ibid., p. 147.
39. ibid., p. 81.
40. Curie, Eve, Madame Curie, p. 249.
41. Memoir, p. 122.
42. Hearts of Controversy, p. 92.
43. Essays, p. 50.
44. ibid., p. 53.
45. ibid., p. 57.
46. Poems., p. 173.
47. Memoir, pp. 112-113.
48. Hearts of Controversy, p. 109.
49. "Father Tabb". Catholic World. February, 1910;
pp. 577-578.
50. Hearts of Controversy, p. 60.
51. ibid., pp. 62-63.

52. cf. Delaney, op. cit., p. 37.
53. ibid., p. 47.
54. Hearts of Controversy, p. 90.
55. Browning, E.B. Prometheus Bound: and Other Poems, p. ix.
56. The Encyclopaedia Britannica, vol. IV, Eleventh Edition, p. 670.
57. Second Person Singular, p. 95.
58. Hearts of Controversy, pp. 90-92.
59. Second Person Singular, p. 101.
60. ibid., p. 104.
61. ibid., p. 107.

2. Continuity and Diversity

1. Poems, p. 175.
2. ibid., p. 110.
3. ibid., p. 118.
4. Thompson, Francis. Collected Poems, p. 30.
5. Poems, p. 91.
6. ibid., p. 98.
7. ibid., p. 114.
9. ibid., p. 122.
10. ibid., p. 123.
11. ibid., p. 125.
12. ibid., p. 126.
13. ibid., p. 139.
14. ibid., p. 172.
15. ibid., p. 178.
16. ibid., p. 187.
17. Memoir, p. 119.
18. John Ruskin, p. 74.
19. Ford, "Mrs. Meynell". Living Age, 19 February, 1916,
pp. 483, 485.
20. Memoir, p. 37.
21. Essays, p. 174.
22. Browning, E.B. Prometheus Bound: and Other Poems,
pp. vi-vii.
23. Memoir, p. 267.
24. ibid., p. 269.
25. Ibid., p. 180.

3. Contrast and Paradox

1. Poems, p. 135.
2. ibid., p. 111.
3. Essays, p. 9.
4. Poems, p. 173.
5. ibid., p. 110.
6. ibid., p. 84.
7. ibid., p. 154.
8. ibid., p. 95.
9. ibid., p. 112.
10. Nicholson and Lee. The Oxford Book of English Mystical Verse, p. vii.
11. Patrick, Lionel Johnson: Poète et Critique, p. 196.
12. Poems, p. 116.
13. Tuell, Mrs. Meynell and her Literary Generation, p. 235.
14. ibid., p. 248.
15. Brittain, F., The Medieval Latin and Romance Lyric, p. 223. "When at last the host is broken, do not hesitate, but remember, that each fragment contains as much as did the whole."
16. Madeleva, Chaucer's Nuns and Other Essays, p. 136.
17. Tuell, op. cit., p. 214.
18. Garvin, "Alice Meynell." The Living Age, 13 January 1923, p. 105.
19. Ford, "Mrs. Meynell." The Living Age, 19 February 1916, p. 485.
20. Newbolt, Studies Green and Gray, p. 270.
21. Donne, Poems, vol. I, p. 38.
22. Poems, p. 11.

23. Crashaw, Poems, English, Latin, and Greek, p. 249.
24. Grierson, The Background of English Literature, p. 118.
25. ibid., loc. cit.
26. Herbert, Works, pp. 153-154.
27. Poems, p. 123.
28. Patmore, Poems, p. 327.
29. Traherne, Poetical Works, p.

CONCLUSION

1. Evans, English Poetry in the Later Nineteenth Century, p. xix.
2. Brown, Victorian Poetry, p. xv.
3. Patmore, Principle in Art: Religio Poetae, p. 122.
4. ibid., p. 13.
5. ibid., p. 21.
6. Memoir, p. 78.
7. Gosse, Coventry Patmore, p. 174.
8. Evans, op. cit., p. xvii.
9. Gosse, op. cit., p. 177.
10. Patmore, Poems, p. 271.
11. Tynan-Hinkson, "Alice Meynell". Bookman, November 1929, p. 111.
12. Memoir, p. 142.
13. Gosse, op. cit., p. 251.
14. Patrick, Lionel Johnson: Poète et Critique, pp. 228-229.
15. Gosse, op. cit., p. 246.
16. Drinkwater, Victorian Poetry, pp. 120-121.
17. Patmore, Principle in Art: Religio Poetae, p. 41; pp. 42-43.
18. Evans, op. cit., p. xvii.
19. Alexander, The Catholic Literary Revival, p. 115.
20. Dawson, The Modern Dilemma, p. 110.

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[Editor's NOTE, p. vii. "By permission, and with the kind co-operation, of Mr. Wilfrid Meynell, the Poems of Alice Meynell are in this edition printed in the order of their appearance in her successive books, followed by four poems now first collected from periodicals, and these in turn followed by five poems now (by the kindness of the Rev. Geoffrey Bliss, S.J.) printed for the first time. For the editorial work Mr. Frederick Page is responsible. The typographical arrangement is by Mr. Francis Meynell."]

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