

COVENTRY PATMORE, POET AND ARTIST.

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## INTRODUCTION

The term "Mysticism" is so variously applied in our day, that it has come to mean almost any vague freak the imagination sees fit to create. It is falsely applied to the lowest manifestations of occultism and quietism, to nature-worship and pantheism, as well as to the multitudinous forms that an over-wrought neurotic condition may produce in a mind susceptible to its influence. Neither must the term be confused with asceticism which considers the things of sense, the visible creation, as altogether valueless except in relation to the world of the spirit, the invisible creation. This would be to mistake the means for the end. The aim of true asceticism is, by self-denial in lawful things, to free man's mind from the impediments of the world, that he may be free and untrammelled for his spiritual flight towards eternal realities. It is false also, to conceive the mystic state as one of prayer and union with God accompanied by incidental and unusual favours, visions, ecstasies, and miracles. That such spiritual phenomena have been experienced in the lives of some great mystics does not make such manifestations essential to the state.

Mysticism has been defined as "an intimation of a consciousness wider and deeper than the normal." (1) Less vague is that which explains it as "a religious tendency and (1) "New Standard Dictionary". Noah Webster.

desire of the human soul towards an intimate union with the Divinity - or a system growing out of such a tendency. It is a union of the human soul with Divinity through contemplation and love. This contemplation is not based on a merely analogical knowledge of the Infinite, but on a direct and immediate intuition of the Infinite." (1) Again, a recent writer on mysticism has this to say: "Mysticism is a soul-experience of a human being, as yet a wayfarer on earth, actually tasting and seeing that God is sweet." (2) St. Peter thus exhorts the Christians of his day: "As new-born babes, desire the rational milk without guile, that thereby you may grow unto salvation", adding: "if so be you have tasted that the Lord is sweet". (1. Pet. 11, 2, 3.)

In the face of these thoughts it is evident that the smallest prayer, if sincerely heartfelt, is a mystical act, because it is an effort of the soul reaching out to God unseen. It is essential co-operation between the loving God and the loving soul. It is a participation in the interior, supernatural life, hidden from the eyes of men; hence the name, mystical, which means something hidden.

Within every human heart there is implanted a love for beauty and a yearning after perfection which leads to a desire for ultimate perfection - God Himself - a yearning that has guided rare and chosen souls into the mountain land of serene beauty, lighted from the effulgence of Divinity Itself. Here is the mystical key-note, - that love, and love

(1) "Catholic Encyclopedia". Vol. X.

(2) "Mystical Life". Dom S. Louismet, O.S.B. Preface, p. 13.

alone can unite the soul to God. But love can not exist without sacrifice and suffering, so that mystical union can be attained only by renunciation and self-sacrifice.

Mystical life, then, is a union between two, and these two, the loving God and the loving soul. It is a life with a partner, as in the married life, with the difference, that in human espousals the partner is another human being, whilst in the mystical life, the partner is God. There is another difference, that human union is principally a union according to the flesh: "They shall be two in one flesh", (Gen. 11.,24.) whilst mystical life is a union of spirits: "God is a spirit", (John,IV,24.) and "he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit". (1 Cor.VI.,17.) It is this desire for the divine embrace that creates in the heart of the mystic, a restlessness, such as drew from the lips of St. Augustine the wistful cry, "The heart of man is restless until it finds its rest in Thee," re-echoed in the words of Thomas à Kempis, "Forsake all and thou shalt find all".(1)

The quest of God by the soul of man has inspired many a writer to ecstatic song, as has also the converse of the theme, the soul pursued by Love Divine. An anonymous writer of the Middle Ages presents in "Quia Amore Languet" the former phase, the man turning to false loves and finding his quest vain, worn down by useless wanderings and submissive at last, finds in this extremity the real Object of his search. In our own day Francis Thompson has given the latter aspect, the Good Shepherd in search of His sheep, the quest

(1) "Imitation of Christ" By Thomas a Kempis. Book III.  
Chapter 32.



of the Creator for the creature who flees before the unhurrying chase and unperturbed pace" of the Divine Pursuer. Then from the depths of his triumphant defeat the Voice is round him "like a bursting sea":

"Strange, piteous, futile thing!  
Wherefore should any set thee love apart?  
Seeing none but I make much of naught?.....  
Whom wilt thou find to love ignoble thee,  
Save Me, save only Me?" (1)

And His love is so great, and so overpowering, and so exclusive, that It does make the poor soul fear Its isolating greatness, and the soul that feared, "lest having Him it might have naught beside", (2) realizing how little worthy it was of any love, human or divine, thrills to the humbling, loving reproach:

"Ah, fondest, blindest, weakest,  
I am He Whom thou seekest!  
Thou dravest love from thee, who dravest Me." (3)

Here we have in the "resplendently coloured art" of Francis Thompson, the mystic element expressed in sweetest verse. Not to everyone steeped in the lore of eternal verities and blessed with the power of luminous vision, is given the happy faculty of expressing himself in song. But when to the height and depth of his spiritual intuition is added the natural genius and poetical equipment, we have the mystic poet.

The theme of the Divine Pursuance of the soul of man runs through the history of the Hebrew race. Whether God led them towards the Promised Land by a pillar of cloud by day, or a pillar of light by night, it was His persistent Love which directed and guided, which stooped in infinite condescension and patience to their waywardness, because It would brook no

(1) "Hound of Heaven". Francis Thompson. "Poems".  
(2) Ibid.  
(3) "

refusal. This pursuit of the Jewish folk is but a larger manifestation of God's way with each individual soul.

The story of Saul on the way to Damascus is another rendering of the same idea, as is also the passage in Tennyson's "Idylls of the King", where, in "The Holy Grail", Sir Percivale tells the monk Ambrosius of his quest.

And so the mystic reaches out for God, reaches out with an insatiable desire for union with Him. There may be variations of this theme but this must be the dominant motive in the life and work of any one who can be truly called a mystic.

To many it may appear a madness of the mediaeval saints to turn their backs on the alluring world and immure themselves within the four walls of a monastic cell like a Saint Teresa or a Saint John of the Cross. But there was a reason, a method, a motive in their madness, a desire for union with the Beloved, and that is the key-note of all mysticism. That this immunity did not render them less practical or human let the history of their lives prove. The beauty of holiness requires balance, that paradoxical virtue which reconciles all other virtues. It is the answer of experience to the conflicting claims of life, that common sense which tempers the excessive ardor of the saints. "Humility, common sense, a sense of humor - they are all blood relations and are fundamentals in the work of sanctification". (1)

An illustration of that instinctive idealism and instinctive practicality, balance of soul and sense, of thought and action, characteristic of the great contemplatives, might be drawn from the writings of Cardinal Wiseman. Speaking of

(1) The Catholic World, Volume CXVIII. February, 1924.  
"The Humor of Saint Teresa" Hugh F. Blunt, LL.D.

Saint Teresa, as represented by an authentic portrait of that saint, he says: "While no mystical saint has been more idealized by artists, as living in a continual swoon, than Saint Teresa, her true portraits all represent her with strong, firmly-set, almost masculine features, with forms and lines that denote vigour, resolution, and strong sense. Her handwriting perfectly suggests the same conclusion. Still more does the successful activity of her life, in her many struggles under every possible disadvantage, and her final and complete triumph, strengthen this idea of her. And then her almost superhuman prudence by which she guided so many minds, and prosperously conducted so many complicated interests and affairs, and her wonderful influence over men of high education and position, and of great powers, are further evidences of her strong commanding nature, such as, in the world might have claimed an almost unexampled preeminence." (1)

The life of Saint John of the Cross, with its labours and its studies, shows that he was a man of an operative mind, always at work and ever in movement. These saints lived and laboured for others while sanctifying themselves. Selfishness had no part in their God-loving days of work and nights of prayers.

In spite of abundant evidence to the contrary, however, the contemplative life will continue to be looked upon as eminently unpractical, especially to the Englishman.

If the life of the contemplative will continue to be misunderstood, so will his language, for his spiritualized sense is often at a loss to find in words the necessary

(1) "Manual of Mystical Theology"...A.Devine, C.P...p.24.

equivalent for his elevated thought. This inner beauty of the mystic's vision is so alien to the standard of the ordinary reader, he fails to interpret aright the only medium of mystical-poetical expression - that of imagery. The reader must bring to his task of interpretation a sympathetic judgment if he would not go wrong in reducing such language to the plane of ordinary thought.

To try to reconcile mystical phraseology with national common sense is well-nigh impossible, but to those who would see, the mystical attitude is comprehensible. That one must become as a little child to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, to interpret the secrets hidden from the wise and worldly-prudent, is not a new revelation to anyone.

This difficulty of interpretation is true of most mystics whether they choose to clothe their thought in prose or in the inspired vehicle of elevated poetry. The tendency in most cases is towards the latter form of expression. Living as he does in a clime extraneous to the world, not wholly amid the dregs of earth nor wholly in the pure atmosphere of Heaven, the mystic uses the language of imagery in a spiritualized sense. He tries to make us see with his eyes and hear with his ears; to lead us to a magic world which otherwise we should not find on earth. He drives home a spiritual thought by some simple and familiar image. He would have us see in inanimate nature a mirror of some perfection of the Godhead, - in the flower His beauty; in the storm His Power:

"I see His face in every flower;  
The thunder and the singing bird  
Are but His Voice. And carven by His power  
Rocks are His mighty Words.

"All pathways by His Feet are worn;  
His strong Heart stirs the ever-beating sea." (1)

He would help us to understand the things of the spirit in terms of the things of sense; to interpret the supernatural in terms of the natural; to apprehend, by means of material symbols, those spiritual realities which transcend human experience; to lead us to the Infinite through the finite.

Poetic thoughts are always singing in the mystic's soul, and how better can he express them than in the rhythmic cadences of verse? Poetry is an emanation from the very heart of humanity. It deals with things inherent in nature and life. It is not the scientific, but the spiritual expression of the every-day beauty that surrounds us in sky, on land and sea. It appeals primarily to our spiritual nature, not to our reason. It is the translation into verse of those ecstatic experiences which cannot otherwise be expressed.

The song of the mystic comes to us adown the ages and always is it a song of praise and love Divine. In the early dawn of the Christian era comes the Pauline song - love's vibrant challenge to every conceivable power in time or eternity. With glorious faith-fired passion, the great heart, unable to restrain its emotion, breaks forth into a full-rushing tide of impetuous love: "Who then shall separate me from the love of Christ?.. I am sure that neither death nor life, nor height nor depth, can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord." (Rom. VIII, 35-39.)

What power and what love! It is the poet's power and above all, the mystic's power. The human heart will vibrate to its call

(1) "I see His Face in Every Flower." J.M. Plunkett.

as thrillingly to-day as two thousand years ago. "Oh! the depths of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" (Rom.XI,33.)

Here we have the power of Divine Love. But Saint Paul knew human love as well, and through it he would reach forward and draw to himself all men in the tender embrace of charity that he might lead them to Divinity Itself. "My dearly beloved and most desired" - he cries to all souls down the centuries, - "my joy and my crown!" (Phil.IV,1.)

If our ear is tuned to these lofty cadences, our hearts will catch the symphonies of love of a John of the Cross or a Teresa, which are the treasureable things in Spanish literature. Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, the Victorines, and Saint Francis of Sales lifted the gift of contemplative prayer into the region of song, and in impassioned language left us a "De Amore Dei", a "Devout Life", etc. Then "the Seraph of Assisi", Chesterton's "Glad Man of Christendom", gave us the "The Canticle of the Sun", composed in the convent garden of San Damiano, a song of the kinship of all God' creatures and of God's Fatherhood for them all.

If we content ourselves now with the realm of England's literature, the echoes of the mystic's lyre are wafted to us from monastic cells or from the deep silences of the secluded abodes of a few secular poets.

In the seventeenth century Crashaw, with the human and lover-like tenderness of his sacred poems differentiating them from the conventional style of English sacred poetry, is a forerunner of Francis Thompson and Coventry Patmore. He might be said to have drawn his inspiration from other English

sources, and traces of the writings which influenced him are plainly discernible in "The Hound of Heaven" and "The Unknown Eros". Others of Crashaw's period, Herbert, Donne, Traherne, and Vaughan though not so truly mystic, were yet endowed with that power of luminous vision, that exaltation of the senses which characterize their century.

William Blake carries into the eighteenth century the mystic tendency of the seventeenth. The following lines from "Auguries of Innocence", sum up his attitude towards life:

"To see the world in a grain of sand,  
And a Heaven in a wild flower:  
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,  
And Eternity in an hour." (1)

The Romantic age gives us Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelley. Wordsworth, a man of deep spiritual perceptions, is the great high-priest of nature, and to spiritualize the mystic sense of his rare genius was the loving, but not altogether successful task of his friend, Coleridge. The root of Wordsworth's theory is the sense of divine immanence which is closely akin to pantheism. But Nature was his medium and delight, his guide and friend, and to use his own words,

"Nature never did betray  
The heart that loved her." (2)

How easily he could transform this world of ours into "an unsubstantial faery place," and glorify the commonest things in nature with,

"The light that never was, on sea or land,  
The consecration and the poet's dream"!(3)

- (1) "Auguries of Innocence". Wm. Blake.
- (2) "Tintern Abbey". Wordsworth.
- (3) "Elegiac Stanzas".

The attitude of Shelley to whom the universe was as a box of toys, is only another phase of the Wordsworthian. He strove in his own way to come face to face with the light of Divinity without the intervention of material things, and found that

"Life like a dome of many-coloured glass,  
Stains the white radiance of Eternity." (1)

The Romantic revival furnished him many an opportunity for the exercise of this bent of his mind. The prevailing spirit of that revival is its joy in the recovery of the sense of mystery and hidden beauty in nature, expressed in these lines of Coleridge:

"Joy, Lady, is the spirit and the power,  
Which, wedding Nature to us, gives in dower  
A new Earth and a new Heaven,  
Undreamt of by the sensual and the proud." (2)

But the origin of this gift is delight in the things of the earth, and its task is to transform them into the mystery-land of the imagination. The Romantics' use of a language of symbolism and imagery is to be distinguished from the more spiritual meaning conveyed through it by a later group of poets, among whom stands a truer type of mystic, Francis Thompson, to whom it was given to see:

"Christ walking on the water  
Not of Gennesareth, but Thames!" (3)

Chesterton says, "The shortest definition of the nineteenth century is that Francis Thompson stands outside it". (4) Its materialism and emptiness repelled him, for he was in quest of reality and the higher things of the spirit, and these he found in the purpling darkness of a storm-tossed life.

- (1) "Adonais". Shelley. (3) "The Kingdom of God".  
(2) "Dejection". Coleridge. Francis Thompson.  
(4) "The Victorian Age in Literature". G.K. Chesterton...p.203.



He too, like Wordsworth, Shelley and others, sought comfort in the arms of Nature, but found it not. "To be the poet of the return to Nature", he writes, "is somewhat, but I would be the poet of the return to God." (1)

Newman's mysticism reveals the deeper side of the nature of one who realized the presence of a personal, All-seeing, All-judging Being, to Whom he surrendered his mind and heart: one to whom the invisible world is far more real than the visible in which we live. "Lead kindly Light" and his "Dream of Gerontius" are spiritual masterpieces. A copy of the latter, pencil-scored and worn was found in Gordon's possession when he was in Khartoum prison awaiting death.

Tennyson, Browning and the Rossettis have a place in the history of English literature which they will never lose; but it is not with these major poets of the Victorian age that this treatise would deal, but with one who, in the words of a writer of to-day, is called "a minor poet of major importance", (2) "the crested and prevailing name" of Coventry Patmore. (3)

(1) "Life of Francis Thompson"....Everard Meynell...p.205.

(2) "The Victorian Age in Literature" G.K. Chesterton....p.201.

(3) Dedication of "New Poems". Francis Thompson.

## Chapter 1.

### LIFE: FIRST PERIOD. (1823-1862).

During the early part of the Nineteenth Century in England, when the stronghold of the home was being gravely threatened by the invading hosts of Divorce, there came into being one who was to re-light a hidden and well-nigh forgotten torch, - a glowing torch of truth, - a torch to pass on undimmed to future generations, - a torch whose effulgence might guide the faltering foot-steps of those who cared to see, and which would set aglow once more the sacred fire on the hearthstone of English family life.

This apostle of perceptive reason, born July 23, 1823, at Woodford, Essex, was Coventry Kersey Dighton Patmore, poet, mystic, prose-essayist, who was to expound a philosophy seemingly new, but old as man is old, - the fullness of love in marriage. But, as is the way with prophets, Patmore was fated to be scorned, scoffed at, and berated by the masses to whom he brought tidings of great joy, and was finally doomed to that greatest of ignominies, - obscurity.

Through childhood and youth, Patmore was greatly aided in literary pursuits by his father, Peter George Patmore, himself a man of letters, who recognized the dormant genius in his son. An unfortunate incident which brought severely

adverse criticism upon Peter George, and cut short what might have proved to be a successful literary future, also made itself felt in the young Patmore during the launching of his early poetic efforts.

The power of selection which he held through life and which enabled him to sift the chaff from the wheat in literary works, was due to the tutorship and censorship which the elder Patmore maintained over his son's reading, even to choosing books and marking passages of greatest import for the boy. Coventry, however, used frequently to absorb the annotated, designated portions, skipping the greater content with the generous youthful assumption that if it were not worthy his father's notation it was unworthy of his perusal.

Patmore's grandfather, Peter Patmore, was a silversmith and jeweller, and it is presumed that Coventry's later penchant for jewels may have been an hereditary trait, though it may have been a mere coincidence. His grandmother, Mary Clarissa, a woman of vital character and extraordinary intelligence, with whom a great part of his childhood was spent, was a marked influence in his life. To her is attributed the love of romance in the boy. A clever raconteur, she would regale him for hours with highly romantic tales dear to the small boy's heart. She showed unusual devotion to him, her eldest grandchild, and throughout her life his respect for, and devotion to her were unique.

The artistic strain which showed later in his efforts in art and appreciation of worthwhile works, may be traced to a

great-uncle who, in his day, had attained a modicum of success. His appreciation of nature and keen powers of observation which later manifested themselves in a clever faculty for description, were the result of close companionship in early childhood with this great-uncle, Robert Stevens, a naturalist and traveler, - in the famous Epping Forest in Woodford Green. This uncle was most painstakingly instructive, and Patmore's bent for science may have been the response to urgings instilled at that period of his life.

Of Patmore's mother, little can be said. She was a woman of strong determination and force of character, - cold and unsympathetic. With no appreciation for literature, she had little sympathy with her husband's desire to further Coventry's talents, and little or no interest in the boy's efforts. She resented the devotion of father and son and the affection bestowed upon him by his grandmother and uncle. Her will was law to Coventry and her other children. Coventry feared and respected her but there is no record of the usual affection between mother and son. There is no doubt that from her he had his indomitable will, strength of character, unvarying consistency, and deep religious fervor. She was a staunch Presbyterian, and although her husband's agnosticism prohibited her influencing her children, she saw to it that they came into contact a good deal with her own relatives over whose efforts in that direction the father had no jurisdiction.

Thus the background whence arises Coventry Patmore, the "Eli of the Hearth". For Patmore had a message for England and the world. A Messiah came again and the world received him not.

He came to sing, not a new theme-song, but an old, old saga, tested as only time can test a truth. The music and the rhythm only were new. Patmore arrogated unto himself a mission - to preach the gospel of the permanency of married love.

Coventry Patmore's great aptitude for poetry was aided and abetted by his father all through his early life. The affection between them was a thing of beauty. Even to the end of his life, the son kept the anniversary of his father's death by shutting himself off alone with his meditations.

There were no pecuniary disadvantages in his youth. He was given the best education under private tutors. He despised academic discipline and was allowed the freedom of his whims in different branches of the arts and sciences. He showed a marked tendency to poetry before the age of twelve. A leaning towards science succeeded this, and his father humored him to the extent of fitting up a laboratory for experimentation. He was painstakingly thorough, and for a boy, displayed a remarkably scientific mind while the novelty of it lasted. Then he took a turn at art and was herein fairly proficient. Recognition of his talent, at the age of fifteen, took the form of an award of the Silver Palette of the Society of Art.

Sent to Paris in 1839 to continue his education, he was fortunate in the acquisition of friends of worth. He disliked Paris, but the friendships he made had lasting effects. Here Mrs. Charles Gore, whose husband was famed in political and literary circles, more or less took him under her wing, and at her various salons he met many interesting and influential persons.

Early calf-love showed itself here when he became enamoured of Mrs. Gore's daughter, later Lady Edward Thyme. This early passion which bordered on worship, and which Champneys calls "Patmore's matriculation in the school of love", (1) initiated him into the mysteries of emotion and feeling and may be presumed to have inspired the first ideal of the poet's great work, "The Angel in the House". During his stay in Paris, he studied French, German, and fencing. His father's vigilance over him never ceased, and it is important to note with what interest he cautioned and directed Coventry in his letters, and the paternalism displayed in queries as to his friendships and occupations.

Patmore delved into mathematics, philosophy, and theology, and for a time was seriously considering the taking of orders in the English Church. This call was short-lived and may be considered but one more of his moods.

Between the ages of sixteen and seventeen he wrote rather good poems: "The River", "The Woodman's Daughter", "Sir Hubert". The poetry of Shakespeare, through which his father guided him well, intrigued him, and he grew to be a good Shakespearian student. His father instilled in him also a love for the drama.

Father and son were the greatest friends and concurred largely in tastes, though diametrically opposed on questions of religion. Coventry's transcendental yearnings were

(1) "Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore"  
By Basil Champneys, Vol. 1, p.24.

apparent early in youth, and in contradistinction to his father's agnosticism, stamped themselves upon his inner life and resolutely flourished into severe ardour, for truth will wax strong in the face of opposition. The sublimities of nature enthralled him, as is evidenced by his emotional rapture on first sight of the sea.

"As when, in childhood, turning a dim street,  
I first beheld the ocean." (1)

At the home of Mrs. Basil Montague and Bryan Waller Procter, (Barry Cornwall), he met many literary lights who became friends or influences in his poetic career. It was at the Procters' certainly, that he made the acquaintance of Moncton Milnes and probably also of Leigh Hunt and Tennyson. His friendship with Mr. and Mrs. Procter was deep and sincere. It was at the request of the latter that Patmore wrote the life of the poet which was published in 1877.

In 1844 through a reversal of the family fortunes, Patmore was obliged to seek remunerative occupation. Thackeray, through the editor of "Fraser", aided him in obtaining publication for a few of his works for which he received the extravagant sum of 25s. per week. He struggled along on this for fifteen months. It was a test of endurance and will-power and the strain told on his health.

Moncton Milnes, (Lord Houghton), then came to the rescue, and through him Patmore obtained a government position, that of assistant librarian in the British Museum, 1846. Linguistic paucity was here more or less of a handicap, but assiduity proved his worth, and he retained his stewardship for twenty years. Shortly after this appointment he married

(1) "Amelia". Poems by Coventry Patmore. p.363.

Emily Augusta Andrews of whom more will be said later. The friendship created by Milnes' kindly help was a lasting one, and Patmore made opportunity to show his appreciation. He assisted Milnes in his "Life and Letters of Keats", and dedicated to him "Tamerton Church-Tower". In a letter to Milnes he asked him to sponsor his eldest son and to allow him to name the boy for him that he might have a constant reminder of the debt he owed him - and, as Patmore claimed - but for whose kindness there might have been no little boy. In the Museum he was highly respected by his colleagues though his manner was always self-contained and aloof.

About this time there was organized in England the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, composed of aspiring artists and poets, - a company of ambitious youths who aimed to revolutionize artistic conventions, to return to the direct study of nature in all its smallest detail, and to enlarge the scope of artistic appeal. The founders of the Brotherhood, were three painters, William Holman Hunt, John Everett Millais and Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Later with these were associated, the sculptor, Thomas Woolner, the domestic painter, James Collinson, and the art critic, Frederick George Stephens, Michael William Rossetti, brother of Dante Gabriel, was appointed secretary of the fraternity.

Patmore's direct and astounding audaciousness made an appeal to their rebel hearts, and their appreciation of him and his works was akin to hero-worship. They sought and obtained introduction to Patmore and persuaded him to join them. He enjoyed the adulation they offered him and in time made with them lasting friendships. He acted frequently as



critic of both their poetry and art. They looked up to him as their intellectual superior whose maturity and knowledge they esteemed, and whose personal acquaintance with important personages, such as Tennyson and Ruskin, they envied. Rossetti submitted to Patmore his translations of "Early Italian Poets", and Woolner asked him to criticise and revise his later poems. Patmore also made favorable comment in the "Saturday Review", of a painting in "Oxford Union", by Rossetti and William Morris. The P.R.B. respected his judgment in painting and sought his advice on that and on poetical subjects. He introduced William Allingham into the Brotherhood. For years an intimacy existed between Patmore, Rossetti, Stephens, and Woolner, and from the time of the death of his wife in 1862, until 1875, Patmore in his seclusion, made exceptions in his social intercourse only in favour of these friends. Later Rossetti and Patmore drifted apart though there was no evident open break between them.

Patmore was a ruthless critic. In a discussion about Burns and Tennyson, he declared Burns the better poet, but Tennyson the greater man. Browning, he thought a man of the world. He showed disappointment of Rossetti, and criticized him in his essay, "Rossetti as a Poet". He thought all contemporary poets too self-conscious. His admiration for Poe was great. "Poets", he said, "are all nerves and no heart" (1). He viewed criticism as the curse of the day. Of religion he spoke with feeling and suggested adherence to natal faith. He admonished his listeners to shun iconoclasm

(1) "Pre-Raphaelite Diaries and Letters"

By W.M. Rossetti...p.232.

unless they could rear a better structure on the ruins of the old faith.

His admiration for Tennyson knew no bounds and he, more than any other, reawakened in the younger man poetic ambitions even to emulation of his own style. An early published poem, "The Seasons", elicited the comment that Coventry Patmore was a non-de-plume for Tennyson, - a flattering unctious, then, to Patmore's soul. At nineteen Patmore is said to have shown maturity in thought and form of work, a good example being his unique interpretative essay on "Macbeth", which he wrote for the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood's publication, "The Germ".

The influence of Coleridge is felt in his poems. He was also an ardent follower of Wordsworth, but the distinction between the two is noteworthy in that Wordsworth made nature the key to Divinity, whereas Patmore found that key in the fulfilled love of man and woman.

Much adverse criticism greeted his early publications, but, on the whole, public opinion was encouraging. Among friendly critics were Laman Blanchard, Bulwer-Lytton and Lady Blessington whose influence cannot be denied. Patmore took the early criticism well, and was, perhaps, his own severest critic in that he declared his first efforts trash and an object lesson to him.

Patmore married three times, but his first marriage was the true love-season of his life. Emily Augusta Andrews was in all respects the proper wife for him. She embodied all the charm and womanly qualities which are the theme of poetic song in every age. In this marriage he seems to have

reached the pinnacle of ecstatic bliss. Emily was the inspiration of "The Angel in the House", as the dedication to this poem suggests: "To the memory of her by whom and for whom I became a poet", (1) and the well-depicted details of Honoria's character in that poem were a sketch of herself. The commonplaces so sweetly related were undoubtedly the reflection of their own domestic routine. To the end the exquisite intimacy and dignity of their love served to initiate them into the mysteries of life. Emily Patmore's simplicity and stateliness,

" . . . . her Norman face,  
Her large brown eyes, clear lakes of love," (2)

her strange beauty perpetuated by Woolner, the sculptor of the Brotherhood, in a medallion, and by Millais in a painting of vivid colouring, finished like one of Holbein's small, brilliant portraits, - her unselfishness, her wit and practical wisdom come down to us upon the testimony of nearly all who were privileged to know her. And the gentle sway she exercised over the mind and heart of her husband was absolute until her death.

A pen-picture by Robert Browning which appeared twelve years later in "Dramatic Personae", as "A Face", presents another view of the same beautiful model:

"If one could have that little head of hers  
Painted upon a background of pale gold  
Such as the Tuscan's early art prefers!  
No shade encroaching on the matchless mould  
Of those two lips, that should be opening soft  
In the pure profile - not as when she laughs,  
For that spoils all - but rather as aloft  
Some hyacinth she loves so leaned its staff's

- (1) "Angel in the House". Dedication. Coventry Patmore. (1854).  
(2) "The Cathedral Close". Poems by Coventry Patmore..p.9

Burden of honey-coloured studs to kiss  
Or capture 'twixt the lips, apart for this.  
Then her lithe neck, three fingers might surround,  
How it should waver on the pale gold ground  
Up to the fruit-shaped perfect chin it lifts!" (1)

In 1860, shortly before his wife's death, Patmore wrote: "I have been thinking to-day of all your patient, persistent goodness, your absolutely flawless life, and all your aimiable innocent graces". (2) The following extract from Patmore's diary associates his wife with the idea which is the key-note of his subsequent writings: "The relation of the soul to Christ as His betrothed wife is the key to the feeling with which prayer and love and honour should be offered to Him. In this relation is a mine of undiscovered joy and power. She showed me what that relationship involves of heavenly submission and spotless, passionate loyalty". (3)

In 1862, in a house Patmore had rented at Hampstead, Emily Augusta Patmore died after a lingering illness; she who had been to him sweetheart, wife, helpmate, friend, adviser and inspiration, left an aching void in the poet's heart. He nursed his grief in loneliness and learned more poignantly the measure of her worth.

Basil Champneys in his "Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore", has this to say of Emily Patmore's influence on her husband's life and work: "To me it always seemed that Patmore had obtained a far deeper insight into the feminine soul than is given to any but a very few men; nor do I think that this is more largely due to his natural

(1) "Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore".

Basil Champneys. Vol.1., p.149

(2) "Coventry Patmore" By Edmund Gosse.....p.45

(3) "Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore".

Basil Champneys. Vol.1., p.146.

qualifications for his task than to the privilege of a specially close union, both of heart and mind, with a wife of unusual power and delicacy of feeling. It was, in fact, the combination of original interest and discernment with exceptional advantage of circumstance, that served to raise him above most of those masculine writers who have had similar aims. Scarcely ever can a poet have owed to his wife so large a debt." (1) That this influence did not cease with her death is evidenced by the following lines from the same work: "The years of sorrow which followed her death were the seed-time of his highest poetry; and if in her lifetime, his wife was so largely the inspirer of the earlier work, love for her, consecrated by death, is proved by these records to have germinated into his highest thought and loftiest verse. Indeed, it is not too much to assert that the great change which all students of Patmore's poems must recognize both in form and idea, between the earlier and the later verse, - between 'The Angel in the House', together with all that preceded it, and the 'Odes' - is due to his loss, and represents the transition from love in earthly fruition to love in the realm of spiritual aspiration, in which sphere it becomes more and more closely identified with that Divine Love which is the main and almost exclusive subject of his later work. The new ideal required and suggested a new form of poetic expression which it found in the free and lofty music of the 'Odes' ". (2)

(1) "Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore".

Basil Champneys. Vol.1, p...119.

(2) Ibid. Vol. 1, p...121.

## Chapter 11.

### LIFE: SECOND PERIOD. (1862 - 1896).

Coincident with Patmore's great bereavement was a strange indifference on the part of Tennyson whose friendship had meant so much to the poet for many years. The keen sense of loneliness and poignant sorrow which finds expression in some of the later odes, caused him to develop a certain austere aloofness hitherto unknown to him. More and more irresistibly he was drawn towards the things of the spirit, and the mystic and transcendental attracted him to heights until now undreamed of. He says himself: "For months after my wife's death, I found myself apparently elevated into a higher spiritual region, and the recipient of moral powers which I had always sought, but never before abidingly obtained. As far as I could see, God had suddenly conferred upon me that quiet, personal apprehension and love of Him and entire submission to His Will, which I had so long prayed for in vain; and the argument against my change of religion which I had before drawn from my wife's state, I now drew from my own; concluding that this faith could not be wrong which bore such good fruits. But I discovered, as the sense of her spiritual presence with me gradually faded, that I was mistaking the tree which was producing these fruits. It was not that of supernatural

grace in me, but the natural love of the beauty of supernatural grace as I recalled it in her; and, at the end of a year, I found myself greatly advanced, indeed, towards that inviolable fidelity to God which He requires, but still unmistakably short of its attainment." (1)

Shortly after Mrs. Patmore's death, the poet took rooms near the Museum where the family had already lived during the greater part of his wife's illness. The children attended school at Finchley where their father visited them almost daily. His efforts to be father and mother to them are pathetic indeed, but serve to reveal better than anything else the depth of tenderness in the poet's heart.

Of his six children, Emily Honoria, eldest daughter and third child, was undoubtedly her father's favorite. She displayed early in life, in relation to her brothers and sisters, a spirit of enterprise which was to characterize her later. Only nine years of age at the death of her mother, she quietly assumed a responsibility which attached the others to her, and even the two elder boys looked up to her with respect and applied to her in their needs.

When Patmore was separated from Emily he wrote to her constantly and she to him. These letters from the father, full of affection and solicitude, show how he entered into all the smallest interests of his children, and put himself to endless trouble to give them pleasure. The fact that the same

(1) "Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore".  
Basil Champneys, Vol. 11, p. 53.

hand that wrote the mystic odes penned the tender simplicities of these letters, serves but to enhance the value of both. The poet's relation to his children is well illustrated in the poem, "The Toys", treated in another chapter.

Emily Honoria was her father's companion and confidante. In 1869 she attended the convent of St. Leonards-on-Sea, directed by the Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus. A few years later she became a member of this same religious teaching body and assumed the name of Sister Mary Christina.

She was in deepest sympathy with her father's poetic work, especially with the "Odes" which he sent to her as he wrote. Her letters contain many references to these poems and give evidence of sound critical judgment and literary appreciation. In one place she writes: "Thank you very much for sending the 'Odes'. No one ever succeeded before in speaking of God truly in verse, and at the same time not 'screaming instead of singing'." (1)

The contemplative tendency which was so noticeable in her at an early age, was developed and deepened by her new life, and those who knew her best, remarked a constant increase of beauty corresponding to her spiritual growth. The "quiet, intelligent sweetness," (2) which Mr. Ruskin commented on in a letter to her father, drew from another admirer the remark that "at times her face shone with a splendour which can only be described by the words 'love visible'" (3) - words applied

(1) "A Daughter of Coventry Patmore". by A Religious of the H.C.J. Chap.10, p.136.

(2) "Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore"

(3) Ibid. By Basil Champneys, Vol.1, chap.XVlll, p.269



earlier by the poet to Emily's mother. As the latter was his ideal of conjugal love which he celebrated in "The Angel in the House", so his daughter corresponded to the central idea of the "Odes"; and we agree with Mr. Champneys that it is entirely consonant with Patmore's view that "Love Divine should be the offspring of Love Human." (1)

Throughout her short life she preserved a touching and exceptionally beautiful confidence in her father, and if she was an inspiration to him, she, in turn, displayed a rare gift of poetic art. He was with her when, after an illness of a few months, she passed away on a summer evening of 1882, her gaze fixed on the distant cliffs and the sea, her spirit eager for the eternal nuptials. "Her father kissed her forehead and closed her eyes. For a few minutes more he knelt and prayed in the silent room, over which brooded the peace of God. Then he rose and walked slowly homewards, silent and bowed beneath the darkening sky....."

Her sisters spoke in reverent tones of Him who had come that evening, glorious through the gathering dusk, and of the tender, beautiful and mysterious thing that is the whisper of God to a listening soul." (2)

Patmore went to Rome in 1864 to study, and it was during this visit that the religious tendencies which he hesitated to crystallize during the life of his wife, Emily, whose unalterable repugnance to the step had longed seemed a tenable argument against the momentous change, were seriously

(1) "Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore"...

By Basil Champneys, Vol.1, chap.XVIII, p.270

(2) "A Daughter of Coventry Patmore" by A Religious of the H.C.J. P.198.

considered, and he made his submission in May, 1864. Two months later he married Marianne Caroline Byles, the marriage being celebrated by Cardinal Manning at the Church of St. Mary of the Angels, Bayswater. The second Mrs. Patmore was a woman of deep spirituality and vivid personality. One with her husband in ideal, she encouraged him to greater literary effort, and as a result, his best work in verse and prose, as well as the complete finding of his own soul, were accomplished during his life with her.

In 1865 weakness of the lungs obliged him to give up his work in the Museum and seek retirement in the country. The following year he purchased two adjoining estates in Sussex. Heron's Ghyll, as he named his new home, enabled him to indulge his fancy for animals and birds which provided delight and interest for him and his children. A small book which he published in 1888, called, "How I Managed and Improved my Estate", justifies his claim to the business faculty as well as to the poetic and mystic.

When in the early seventies, agricultural depression set in, Heron's Ghyll became too expensive to keep up, and Patmore sold it at an advantageous price to the Duke of Norfolk. He then purchased Milford Mansion, at Hastings. This house with its beautiful magnolia, had attracted the boy Patmore's attention when, at the age of five or six, he viewed it on a first visit to Hastings. He then expressed his determination to live in that white-blossom-covered house when he was a man. His seventeen years of residence here, enlivened by visits from his friends, were among the

serenest of the poet's life.

First Heron's Ghyll, and now beautiful sea-girt Hastings, afforded Patmore time for intensive study as well as for quiet meditation so necessary for creative thought. Hours of these calm days were devoted to theology and mysticism, and St. Thomas' "Summa", St. Teresa's "Road to Perfection", the writings of St. Bernard and St. John of the Cross claimed a large share of his time and attention.

In addition to those seasons of quiet solitude which he enjoyed at home, Patmore, like many other devout thinkers, withdrew periodically to Pontypool or Pantasaph in the congenial atmosphere and prayerful seclusion of a Franciscan monastery, or to the Jesuit Fathers' residence at Manresa, Roehampton, and would devote several days to a spiritual retreat and the consideration of what is highest and best in the life of the human spirit. The habit of spiritual quiet, touched and sanctified by divine grace, became in him the gift of contemplative prayer, and fitted him for his sublime vocation as a poet of transcendent mysticism.

His life henceforth was comparatively uneventful, but his literary output during these years comprised much of his best work, especially his last "Odes" and his later prose writings. With his wife, Marianne Patmore, at Hastings, he collaborated in a translation of St. Bernard on "The Love of God", (1881). It was here, too, that he wrote the "Sponsa Dei". This prose treatment of the soul's spiritual union with the Divine Presence, was judged by some of the poet's friends to be too mystical, and the analogy between human

and divine love too daring to be safely given to the public. A Jesuit priest-friend, Father Gerard Hopkins, remarked on reading it, "That is telling secrets", (1) and it was on his advice that Patmore later destroyed the manuscript. The poet's biographers lament this as a distinct loss to the literary world.

This strangely tender scholar, poet and mystic rose amid the rich chaos of Victorian literature, - "a minor poet of major importance", (2) - with Tennyson and the Brownings, Arnold, Carlyle, and Ruskin, Mill and Darwin. Many of these great exponents of the poetic art, as well as others of lesser note, were frequent visitors at his home which was ever the center of "plain living and high thinking". (3)

Patmore divided his friends into two classes of which one was Tennyson and the other, "the rest". He regarded his intimacy with Tennyson as one of the rare privileges of his life. In the early days of our poet's married life, in London, Tennyson lived in lodgings nearby, in Hampstead Road. The two became almost inseparable friends and during their long nocturnal walks together which were common routine to them, they entered deeply into literary discussions helpful to the novice, Patmore. Tennyson held Emily Patmore in high esteem, and she assisted in procuring for him material for his "Idylls of the King". Later when Tennyson married, the two women became fast friends, thereby strengthening the tie between the men. Tennyson encouraged, admired and

(1) "Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore"

By Basil Champneys, Vol.1, p.138.

(2) "The Victorian Age of Literature". G.K.Chesterton, p.201.

(3) "London, September, 1802".....By William Wordsworth.

criticized Patmore's work, and the latter's regard for his elder, both as man and as poet, was something akin to worship. Patmore wrote many critiques of Tennyson's work, though the latter was unaware of the identity of the writer. From these critiques it is evident that Tennyson was then his ideal of the true poet. As Patmore's mystic tendencies developed, he sought in vain for evidences of occultism in his idol's poems, especially in "The Princess" (1847) and "Maud" (1855).

Patmore placed his friendship for Tennyson on a plane far above that of any other, and the eventual "rift within the lute" was a source of deep grief to so sensitive a nature. This separation evolved through a misinterpretation on Patmore's part of Tennyson's well-meant effort to help his friend financially, following the death of Emily Patmore in 1862. A fund was started without Patmore's sanction, for the purpose of assisting the latter through the stress of circumstances consequent upon the prolonged illness of his wife. At the instigation of his friend, Woolner, Patmore made an effort to close the breach by writing Tennyson, but the reply lacked the necessary tender few words, and this, to the proud Patmore, seemed evidence of his friend's cooling affections. Tennyson regretted the loss of comradeship and till his death spoke of Patmore, and continued to hold him in high esteem.

Ruskin, too, regarded Patmore as a friend of sterling worth, and his letters to the latter covered a period of thirty years. In 1860 Ruskin took exception to a criticism

of one of Coventry Patmore's poems, which appeared in "The Critic", and wrote to the editor a letter of protest. A quotation from this is of interest: "Whatever on this head may be the final judgment of the public, I am bound, for my part, to express my obligations to Mr. Patmore as one of my severest models and tutors in the use of English, and my respect for him as one of the truest and tenderest thinkers who have ever illustrated the most important, because commonest, states of noble human life." (1)

Aubrey de Vere was another noted friend of Patmore. He with Dr. Richard Garnett, was of assistance in bringing about a revision of "The Angel in the House". Patmore respected the judgment of both and frequently consulted them. Many letters passed between de Vere and Patmore. An excerpt from one anent "The Angel in the House", is interesting and reveals the favor with which de Vere viewed the poem. "I do not flatter you in saying that it is (so far as I may venture to judge), one of the most beautiful of modern poems. It has four qualities which especially distinguish it, I think: its soundness and geniality, as well as elevation of sentiment; its descriptive power; its power of reasoning (I do not mean arguing) in verse; and its singular beauty both of diction and of metre." (2)

These friendships were a great source of comfort to the poet when, in the early eighties, one bereavement followed another and he was deprived of those members of

(1) "Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore".

Basil Champneys, Vol. 11, Chap. 16, p. 282.

(2) Ibid. Vol. 11, Chap. XLX, p. 331.

his own family with whom he had the greatest sympathy. Marianne Caroline Patmore died in 1880, Emily Honoria, (Sister Mary Christina), in 1882, and Henry, Patmore's third son and no mean writer of verse, in 1883. This decade is also marked by the poet's erection of a church in Old Hastings, as a memorial to his late wife, and the publication in "St. James' Gazette", between 1885 and 1891, of upwards of one hundred and twenty prose essays. These articles, characterized by the powerful, trenchant originality of Patmore, touched on art, literature, architecture, politics, economics, philosophy and religion. Classified and in book form, they appeared later as "Principle in Art", (1889), "Religio Poetae", (1893), and "Rod, Root and Flower", (1895).

In 1881, Patmore married Miss Harriet Robson, and of this marriage a son was born in 1883. The family left Hastings in 1891 and established themselves at "The Lodge", Lynton, Hampshire. Lynton days are treasured for their associations with Mrs. Meynell, a woman of rare genius and striking personality. This friendship was enhanced by a community of ideals, of literary tastes and spiritual aspirations. It was at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Meynell that our poet came into close touch with Francis Thompson, and helped him to achieve a literary reputation so justly his due. Their thoughts and poetic standards were strangely similar and they became fast friends. In a letter to Patmore, Thompson admits an unconscious plagiarism of the former in one of his (Thompson's) own poems; but, he says: "Finding I could not disengage it without injury to the passage in

which it is embedded, I have preferred to leave it, with this acknowledgment to a poet rich enough to lend it to the poor." (1)

Here at Lymington, after an illness of three or four years, attended with considerable physical suffering, November 26, 1896, Patmore passed away in his seventy-fourth year, giving evidence almost to his last hour of clearness of intellect and vigour of will. On the poet's death Thompson wrote in part to Mrs. Patmore: "There has passed away the greatest genius of the century and from me a friend whose like I shall not see again. The irrevocableness of such a grief is mocked by many words; these few words least wrong it. My friend is dead and I had but one such friend."(2)

Patmore's compelling personality, his vivid self-conscious manhood and spiritual penetration, made him a fit subject for Mr. John Sargent's choice for a model of the prophet Ezekiel, in the decorations for the Boston Library. Another portrait by the same artist hangs in the National Gallery in London. Certain physical characteristics, obscured in real life by Patmore's habit of contemplation, detract from the reflective, seer-like aspect peculiar to him, especially in his later year. Somewhat truer is the photograph by Barraud (1891), prefixed to Volume 1 of Basil Champneys' "Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore." It is considered by those who knew Patmore, as a good likeness of him as poet and fellow-creature. But probably the

(1) "Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore",  
By Basil Champneys, Vol. 11, Chap. XXIII, p. 404.

(2) Ibid. Vol. 11, Chap. XXIII, p. 405.



best reproduction of the poet is one drawn by John Brett when Patmore was about thirty years of age. All these portraits show a man of impetuous spirit and alert intellect. The gemlike eyes reflect a light that softens a countenance expressive of individuality and distinction. In intimate conversation they glowed with a look of friendly, sparkling, inquiring penetration. For Patmore, the strong lover and strong hater, was at his best in a tête-à-tête. Usually a good listener, he could be strangely silent and proudly aloof in a crowd, but was correspondingly confidential and fascinating in private conversation. Those who were privileged to be received into the inner circle of his friendship, were ever richer for the moral stimulation and spiritual exhilaration communicated by this "strong, sad soul of 'sovereign song'". (1). The following lines from Francis Thompson's poem, "A Captain of Song", were suggested by the Sargent portrait:

"Look on him. This is he whose works ye know:  
 Ye have adored, thanked, loved him, - no, not him!  
 But that of him which proud portentous woe  
 To its own grim  
 Presentment was not potent to subdue,  
 Nor all the reek of Erebus to dim.  
 This, and nothin, ye knew.  
 Look on him now. Love, worship if ye can,  
 The very man.  
 Ye may not. He has trod the ways afar,  
 The fatal ways of parting and farewell,  
 Where all the paths of painèd greatness are;

.....

You the stern pities of the gods debar  
 To drink where he has drunk

(1) "A Captain of Song". Francis Thompson. Poems, Vol. 11, p. 128.

The moonless mere of sighs,  
And pace the places infamous to tell,  
Where God wipes not the tears from any eyes,  
Where-through the ways of dreadful greatness are.

.....

If any be that shall with rites of reverent piety  
Approach this strong,  
Sad soul of sovereign song,  
Nor fail and falter with the intimidate throng;  
If such there be,  
These, these are only they  
Have trod the self-same way;  
The never-twice revolving portals heard  
Behind them clang infernal, and that word  
Abhorred sighed of kind mortality,  
As he -  
Ah, even as he!" (1)

(1) "A Captain of Song". Francis Thompson. Poems, Vol. 11, p. 128.

## Chapter III.

### HIS PHILOSOPHY OF LOVE.

Nuptial love is the centre of Patmore's philosophy. He strives to convey the idea that in marriage as the true concept of fulfillment, the Divine in the destiny of human relationship is fully attained. What the early Fathers of the Church predicated, he asserts exists in the mutual love of bride and bridegroom - that ideal relationship embodying the love of God for the human soul. Under the master-hand of love and religion he wends his way through life.

Other poets sing of love either metaphysical or physical, its freshness, liberties, deliriums, - in a mood of anticipation rather than of possession. Patmore is not a poet of love in the abstract. Love becomes a willing captive in the gilded shackles of marriage. The first transports of passion which evoke from others the ecstatic song of finale, to him manifest but the awakening of the soul. Romance begins where they would have it end.

"Idiots that take the prologue for the piece,  
And think that all is ended just where it begins."

(1)

(1) "Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore".  
Basil Champneys, Vol. II, Chap. V, p. 65.

His theme is Love - not caprice, not passion, - but that mellow, all-engulfing wonder which is love - the very core of life itself.

Woman he holds to be the pivotal point around which the universal well-being of man revolves. She is Youth's inspiration, the consolation of Age, and Maturity's contentment, fulfillment and security. He expatiates upon the ideal of nuptial love with the ardent zeal of the impassioned lover and the quaint unsullied-heartedness of the saint.

"Whate'er the up-looking soul admires,  
Whate'er the senses' banquet be,  
Fatigues at last with vain desires  
Or sickens by satiety;  
But truly my delight was more  
In her to whom I'm bound for aye,  
Yesterday than the day before,  
And more to-day than yesterday." (1)

There is a tender purity to his poems albeit they make a direct appeal to the very primitive emotions of the heart. There is inherent delicacy and a strain of consistent philosophy. "The Angel in the House" has been accredited, and undoubtedly is, "a true breviary for lovers." (2)

Patmore strikes a new chord in song, but one which superimposes itself upon ideas as old as truth itself. Plato and Dante wane in comparison because of the unsubstantiality of their theories. The Platonic idea is congenitally wrong. Its expounder omits the woman, thereby defunctionizing the body. Dante is ethereal but impracticable. Admitting the woman, he denies her natural function. His theory lacks stability. It fails to satisfy the

(1) "The Amaranth". Poems by Coventry Patmore, p.139.

(2) "The Idea of Coventry Patmore" by Osbert Burdett, p.11.

possessive and egoistical sense in man in failing to build up a monument of permanence. Illicit love is likely to follow from either of these theories. No firm structure can be built upon a defective foundation. "Plato chose the friend, Dante the unmarried woman, Patmore the wife. Patmore made married love the definition of love itself."(1) His philosophy has reality for its distinctive appeal.

"I saw three Cupids (so I dreamed),  
Who made three kites, on which were drawn,  
In letters that like roses gleam'd,  
'Plato', 'Anacreon, and 'Vaughan'.  
The boy who held by Plato tried  
His airy venture first; all sail,  
It heavenward rush'd till scarce descried,  
Then pitch'd and dropp'd for want of tail.  
Anacreon's Love, with shouts of mirth  
That pride of spirit thus should fall,  
To his kite link'd a lump of earth,  
And, lo, it would not soar at all.  
Last, my disciple freighted his  
With a long streamer made of flowers,  
The children of the sod, and this  
Rose in the sun and flew for hours." (2)

The basic attraction of man to woman is the desire for union, for fulfillment. This may not always be permanent but is its primary motivating force. On this conjugal love as the foundation, rests the perpetuity of mankind. To omit the wifehood in love, whence follows the family, is to destroy the entire fabric of civilization. Love then is but an empty theme. Woman is not, insists Patmore, a thing aside from love, but an integral part of it, and only in the fulness of her womanhood can she function with the whole, and effect the necessary sequence to

(1) "The Idea of Coventry Patmore", by Oscar Burdett.

Introduction, p.VIII.

(2) "The Kites". Poems, by Coventry Patmore, p.81.

truth in its entirety.

Patmore's philosophy sets a standard for the many. The adventurous life he scorned. The unmarried temptress has inspired song in every age and will continue to do so. But does not this theme carry in its wake the dire doom of fatality? Where is the sense of satisfaction? Its appeal is to the nomadic, unanchored, predatory instinct in man. The contemplative life he respected, but as its appeal must always be to the few, it could not be made the basis of a philosophy. To his own daughter he owed his keen insight into the excellencies of this state of consecrated virginity.

"Love, light for me  
Thy ruddiest blazing torch,  
That I, albeit a beggar by the porch  
Of the glad Palace of Virginity,  
May gaze therein and sing the pomp I see." (1)

From the ideal of married love he rose to the divine and stood trembling in the sight of the mysteries revealed by the latter. The beauties of the contemplative life, the sublime realities of the spiritual union between God and the individual soul, Patmore, in maturer life, made the subject of his "Odes". His treatment of this theme is given in Chapter VII, "The Unknown Eros." Book 11.

The philosophy that he made the basis of all his work is one which he deemed fit, not for the few, but for mankind in general. In simple masterly style, he struck deep down and revealed with delicate touch the very core - so patently obvious once exposed - the very truth of life

(1) "Deliciae Sapientiae de Amore". Poems by Coventry Patmore.  
p.330.



itself. Thus he says:

"I have the very well-head found  
Whence gushes the Pierian spring." (1)

Disclaiming any guilt for disbelief in love as others sang of it, he is amazed that any should think he would

"Count it, with the rest that sing  
Unworthy of a serious song." (2)

But though other phases of love have their value, they are, Patmore argues, but unattached fragments of passing moment, beautiful, yes, but fleeting, as are varicoloured flowers in a garden, or the sunset's changing tints glimpsed on a hill top. And though they have been inspirational to other bards, he insists they are not love. The revelation of that passion he expresses in the following lines:

"Love wakes men, once a lifetime each;  
They lift their heavy lids, and look;  
And, lo, what one sweet page can teach,  
They read with joy, then shut the book,  
And some give thanks, and some blaspheme,  
And most forget; but, either way,  
That and the Child's unheeded dream  
Is all the light of all their day." (3)

Then, warming to his theme, he asserts:

"The love of marriage claims, above  
All other kinds, the name of Love." (4)

The easy simplicity with which he glorifies the natural origin of love, relieves it of all sensuousness and impregnates it with symbolism. Most romances are stories of courtship, ending with marriage. Patmore makes courtship the

- (1) "The Angel in the House". Poems by Coventry Patmore, p.4.  
(2) "Love's Reality". Ibid. p. 6.  
(3) "The Revelation". " p. 47.  
(4) "Victories of Love". " p.253.

prelude to the great drama of life. With what felicity he broadens the scope of action, and swings wide the gates that the dress parade may move forward with practical ease, till, in beauteous splendor of pageantry, the climax of poignant realization is reached! This is the ultimate in love. This is marriage - the Sacrament. Where else is God in love? He carefully supplies the outward evidence of inward grace. Thus, then, he sings in "The Angel in the House",

"That hymn for which the whole world longs,  
A worthy hymn in woman's praise." (1)

He lifts the ordinary and neglected themes of everyday existence, those ever-present simplicities of life, out of their slighted and sequestered nooks, and gives to them symbolism. The veriest trivialities possess potential value. He covers them with stardust. He makes children's laughter sound like angel choirs. He puts beatific light in a woman's smile, and the flutter of dove-wings in the rustle of a gown. Each homely incident is a mile-stone, marked and commented upon, on the road to the great goal. One stops to marvel at the way in which he injects an element of wonder into the commonplace, and the finished art with which he accomplishes his aim of

"saying things  
Too simple and too sweet for words." (2)

With true appreciation of the enormous part played by love in the whole comity of man, he treats with reverent delicacy instincts that others would keep hushed in abashed

(1) "The Angel in the House". Poems by Coventry Patmore.p.12.  
(2) "The Impossibility". Obid. p.6.



silence, and lilts them forth in songs sweetly melodious. He has the boldness of a warder of the affections as opposed to the sleuth in the dark. The end of love is not satiety. It is, he says,

"Pure passions high prerogative  
To make, not follow, precedent." (1)  
. . . . .  
The nuptial contracts are the poles  
On which the heavenly spheres revolve." (2)

The unknowledge of the soul intrigues him with its mysticism which he holds is traceable only to a Divine source. He deals with the fusion of "souls" and makes the quest for knowledge of the soul, a sacred and beautiful thing.

Love, with consummation in marriage, is ritualistic and sacramental. This was ever with Patmore a fiercely instinctive urge and not a mere mood or convention. To be fit at all for contemplation, love must be legalized. Marshalling marriage forth in the full glare of daylight, he depicts it as the very apex of love, and with a certain occultism, traces delicately throughout his theme, - Divinity. Basically sexual, love takes on hues of the spiritual under his able hand. He waxes ecstatic in likening love on earth to that of the blessed in Heaven. The sensual and the sordid have no place in his theory. A cleanness permeates the whole and rushes sparkling as a mountain freshet undisturbed and unpolluted by adjacent murky waters, unbeguiled by ready sophistry on every hand.

(1) "The Poet's Confidence". Poems by Coventry Patmore, p.7.  
(2) "The Paragon". Ibid. p. 14.

He believes that he,

"Who truly knows the strength and bliss  
Which are in love, will own with me,  
No passion, but a virtue 'tis.  
. . . It soars above  
The subtlest senses of the swarm  
Of wretched things which know not love,  
Their Psyche still a wingless worm." (1)

The man and woman in their unknowing of each other are as mountain snows, crystal pure and dazzling in their whiteness, but glacial cold until touched by Spring's sunshine, and warmed into thought and responsiveness when the dream-life awakens them. Once, inert in seeming rocky fastnesses, they quicken into eager life under this new heat which breaks the frozen fetters. Answering each to each, they desire to rush forth hand in hand; to mingle and flow forward - one swift emotional tide; to broaden, to grow, to understand, to know the mysteries of life first glimpsed from their remote abode. There is a reaching outward, beyond, and to that something greater than themselves, but of which they are an elemental part.

"This little germ of nuptial love  
Which springs so simply from the sod,  
The root is, as my song shall prove,  
Of all our love to man and God." (2)

Patmore has an uncanny knack of lifting trivialities into a spiritual sphere. The simplest and most ordinary things have always a higher significance. The whims, the wiles, the little ways of woman are cleverly delineated, but always she retains the power of making man aspire to

(1) "Love a Virtue". Poems by Coventry Patmore, p.19.

(2) "Love Justified". Ibid. p.37

higher things. The personal element fades, and Patmore shows clearly that woman is not loved for herself but for that which she represents, the force of which calls out the best in man:

"Alone, she near, I felt as might  
A blind man sitting in the sun". (1)

"His merits in her presence grew  
To match the promise in her own." (2)

"I loved her in the Name of God  
And for the ray she was of Him." (3)

With remarkable clarity of perception, and clear-out analysis, he simplifies the seeming complexities of woman, not by destroying illusions - but simply by not having any. Woman proves no mystery. Impartially - almost condescendingly - he shows up her capriciousness! Then with the dexterity of the true artist, he achieves a rather neat synthesis. From the lofty heights of male discernment he looks and sees that she is good. It is only in her relationship to man that she has a place at all in the general scheme of things! Admittedly, he goes about, ever mindful that he seeks among women one who can subscribe to all that he expects in a mate worthy of him. Finally, his quest over, -

"He meets, by heavenly chance express,  
The destined maid," (4)

and thereupon, expanded with the glory of it all, he goes through all the variegated emotions of the lover, - the

- (1) "Sahara". Poems by Coventry Patmore, p.54.
- (2) "Lais and Lucretia". Ibid. p.88.
- (3) "Going to Church" " p.60.
- (4) "The Lover" " p.18.

joys, hopes, and pangs. The paradoxical male wants to woo her but he wants to be wooed. He expects to win her and yet he hopes to suffer by repulse. He will be somehow dissatisfied if she is easily captured, and heartbroken if she isn't.

"Next to the wish that she'll be won,  
His first hope is that she may not;  
He sues, yet deprecates consent;  
Would she be captured, she must fly;  
She looks too happy and content  
For whose least pleasure he would die." (1)

Shrewdly calculating, he measures her worth with the yard-stick of his expectations and needs. The exposé satisfactorily concluded, with priceless egoism and a sublime "beau geste", he declares himself:

"proud  
To take my passion into church". (2)

In saying woman was no mystery to man, I might better have said that he was satisfied he understood the "ends" of her wiles. Subconsciously he recognized the cleverness of her art in seeking what she wanted, and there is a more or less complacent acceptance that she should do so. There is nothing rational about her! She has not the patient plodding brain of her male counterpart. Sane, logical thinking is decidedly not woman's prerogative. Should she burst forth in statement significantly correct, this is concluded merely one of the unaccountable quirks of fate, - just a flash in the pan, as it were. She is expected to lapse back into her normal condition of mental inferiority - and

(1) "Love's Perversity". Poems by Coventry Patmore, p.108.  
(2) "Going to Church". Ibid. p. 60.

stay there!

"Or say she wants the patient brain  
To track shy truth, her facile wit  
At that which he hunts down with pain  
Flies straight, and does exactly hit". (1)

It is her very unreasonableness which attracts him. To his mechanical brain she may lack truth, but by her nimbleness she points the way to it for him. And with all the éclat of a true cavalier, he pays court to her greatest virtue - her capacity for love:

"Love is substance, truth the form;  
Truth without love were less than naught;  
But blindest love is sweet and warm  
And full of truth not shaped by thought." (2)

Patmore was always spiritually inclined. His life was untainted in anticipation of that crowning achievement - marriage. His worship of woman from early boyhood can be readily traced. She was the angel avatar of his ideal. To him sexual impurity held all the blackness of wooded forests and the horrors of an Inferno. Virginal purity was his lodestar. He did not lack freedom, but in his freedom lay restraint. He recognized in inward license a deadlier foe to freedom than all the chains of outward bondage. His liberty was in obedience to his own creed, and he was free not in spite of his loyalty to the Commandments, but because of it.

"They live by law, not like the fool,  
But like the bard, who freely sings  
In strictest bonds of rhyme and rule,  
And finds in them, not bonds, but wings." (3 )

- (1) "The Comparison". Poems by Coventry Patmore, p.30.  
(2) "Joyful Wisdom". Ibid. p.58.  
(3) "The Comparison". " p.30.

The effect of the glory of woman which filled his soul in the first transports of love, caused him to exclaim:

"Who is the happy husband? He  
Who, scanning his unwedded life,  
Thanks heaven with a conscience free,  
'Twas faithful to his future wife." (1)

Patmore held that marriage does not destroy the essence of virginity, but enhances it. So long as the partners in the consummation of love preserve the dignity of the Sacrament, it transcends the mundane;

"Virgins are they, before the Lord,  
Whose hearts are pure. 'The Vestal fire  
Is not', so runs the poet's word,  
'By marriage quenched, but flames the higher';  
Warm, living is the praise thereof,  
And wedded lives, which not belie  
The honorable heart of love,  
Are fountains of virginity." (2)

"The Angel in the House" would teach that, throughout courtship, woman is as leaping flames in the hearth-fire, - enticing, intriguing, alluring, - a matter of moods; the colour, height and duration of each flame dependent on the cause of the individual mood, giving transitory warmth and cheer. Later, maturity of mind and soul desires more - the surety of lasting warmth and sweetness. So the lover pursues his quest, satisfied that marriage is only the beginning of love.

"Why, having won her, do I woo?  
Because her spirit's vestal grace  
Provokes me always to pursue,  
But spirit-like, eludes embrace." (3)

With swift clarity of vision he perceives woman as no

- (1) "Prospective Faith". Poems by Coventry Patmore, p.32.
- (2) "Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore"  
Basil, Champneys, Vol.11, p.10.
- (3) "The Married Lover". Poems by Coventry Patmore, p.138.

longer woman, but an angel soaring prayer-like to lofty peaks of Elysium:

"Grant me the steady heat  
Of thought, wise, splendid, sweet,  
Urged by the great rejoicing wind that rings  
With draught of unseen wings,  
Making each phrase, for love and for delight,  
Twinkle like Sirius on a frosty night." (1)

Fidelity and loyalty in love form a highlight in the songs of Patmore. That happiness in love is accessible to all within their own circle, he avowedly maintains, and he scorns him who makes not the necessary effort to fulfil that which he undertook:

"Endow the fool with sun and moon,  
Being his, he holds them mean and low;  
But to the wise a little boon  
Is great, because the giver's so." (2)

He enjoins the lover to strive for excellence rather than to condone rising weaknesses which should be preventable. Lovers must be "fountains of morality". (4) By respecting the strictest conventions towards each other and never failing

"by courtesies to observe  
The space which makes attraction felt", (3)

love will be kept on the high plane of mutual admiration. And it is only in etherial spheres that an easy familiarity may be indulged, for the genus "homo" is incapable of it with impunity.

- (1) "The Child's Purchase". Poems by Coventry Patmore, p. 355.  
(2) "Fool and Wise". Ibid. p. 54.  
(3) "The Angel in the House" " p. 67.  
(4) "Aurea Dicta" " p. 65.

"Love's perfect blossom only blows  
Where noble manners veil defect.  
Angels may be familiar; those  
Who err, each other must respect." (1)

Reserve and dignity must be maintained if love and respect  
would be preserved.

"Keep your undrest, familiar style  
For strangers, but respect your friend,  
Her most, whose matrimonial smile  
Is and asks honour without end.  
'Tis found, and needs it must so be  
That life from love's allegiance flags  
When love forgets his majesty  
In sloth's unceremonious rags." (2)

Patmore carried his philosophy throughout his whole  
theme. To every smallest detail he attached symbolical  
significance. His Love is tantamount to Heaven itself.  
He sees in her all the attributes of Divinity. He burdens  
her, nevertheless, with the responsibility of keeping love  
aglow.

"Man must be pleased; but him to please  
Is woman's pleasure." (3)

He denies her the privilege of his errors. One of her  
most beautiful attributes is her fidelity to the duties love  
imposes. She rises nobly to the value man places upon her.

"The maiden will fulfil your hope  
Only as you fulfil your vow." (4)

Patmore is a firm believer in the eternal fitness of  
things. Ever, he maintains, man's destiny is in the all-  
wise hands of God. Hope has its fulfillment, as disappoint-

- (1) "Aurea Dicta". Poems by Coventry Patmore, p.65.  
(2) "Love Ceremonious". Ibid. p.93.  
(3) "The Angel in the House". Ibid. p.52.  
(4) "Love in Idleness". " p.100.



ment has its recompense, all in God's good time.

"Be not amazed at life; 'tis still  
The mode of God with His elect  
Their hopes exactly to fulfil  
In times and ways they least expect." (1)

He is full of aphorisms, platitudes and epigrams. Here and there the interpolation of these is used to emphasize his philosophy throughout the entire theme, that they may be guide-posts to lovers on the way to happiness.

Love is a fact and also a mystery. Patmore accepted the fact yet understood the futility of trying to explain it. He made it the basis of his whole philosophy. In his prose essay, "Love and Poetry", we hear him say:

"Love is rooted deeper in the earth than any other passion; and for that cause its head, like that of the tree, Igdrasil, soars higher into Heaven. The heights demand and justify the depths, as giving them substance and credibility. The whole of after-life depends very much upon how life's transient transfiguration in youth by love is subsequently regarded. The greatest perversion of the poet's function is to falsify the memory of that transfiguration of the senses, and to make light of its sacramental character . . . . If society is to survive its apparently impending dangers, it must be mainly by guarding and increasing the purity of the sources in which society begins. The world is finding out, as it has often done before, and more or less forgotten, that it cannot do without religion. Love is the first thing to wither under its loss. What love does in transfiguring life, that religion does in transfiguring

(1) "The Heart's Prophecies". Poems by Coventry Patmore.  
p.104.

love: as any one may see who compares one state or time with another. Love is sure to be something less than human if it is not something more." (1)

(1) "Love and Poetry". By Coventry Patmore in  
"Catholic Tradition in English Literature"  
George Carver.

## Chapter IV.

### " THE ANGEL IN THE HOUSE."

Can modern life offer a theme for an epic? Coventry Patmore has proved conclusively that, if the proper atmosphere is preserved, it can. And so from the heart of domestic love he has drawn forth treasures of varied beauty, and in frank sincerity has given to the world a masterpiece of song dealing with that sacred theme which many profess to admire, but inconsistently shrink from seeing in print, - happy married life.

It has been said that to describe what the mystic has done for civilization would be to outline the world's religions, literature and art. Love and religion belong to the transcendental world and are immortal centres of energy. After all, are not the destinies of man invariably guided by mental concepts rather than by concrete facts of the world of sense? Are not these sentiments, like patriotism, art and music, the most potent factors in the history of human life?

Coventry Patmore is preeminently the poet of love as well as the master of vision. Love and faith - that faith, which in its triumphant assurance is already vision - are the wings on which he soars heavenwards. But since faith

ultimately issues in love, love might be accounted the motivating force of Patmore's work.

The mystic poet usually draws his illustrations from nature, - "the flushed robin, in the evenings hoar, singing of love's day", (1), "the black-bird breaking the young day's heart" (2), "the heavenly-minded thrush" (3) warbling to himself in the twilight, - but while Nature's beauties can awaken powerful emotions, such fleeting phases of feeling are not satisfying food for an immortal soul. "No, not by that, by that is eased our human smart." (4) Patmore would tell us that it is the sheerest folly to try to ease that fundamental search for love save in the way that God will have it. There is a deep-seated need of human companionship in our nature, and once it has known pain and sorrow, this need of sympathetic understanding and competent comradeship becomes intensified.

So Patmore draws his similies from human life, - the love between man and woman as symbolic of the love of God for the soul. It is a mysticism of the heart. There are those who hold that truth may be without love, - but it cannot help without love. It is this which joins together the lover and the beloved. Symbolically presenting under

- (1) "Winter" ..... "Poems" by Coventry Patmore, p.277.
- (2) "Saint Valentine's Day" ... Ibid. p.273.
- (3) Ibid.
- (4) "The Hound of Heaven". The Works of Francis Thompson  
Vol.1, p.110.

the quaint homeliness and intimacy of married life, the union of the soul with God, Coventry Patmore shows us God working in and through His creatures, rather than God transcendent. Patmore, the apocalyptic, who dares to sing the nearness of God and a mystic philosophy of sex, so ancient that it seems new again, does so with an earnestness of purpose, a deep religious reverence, a conquering patience over technique, and masterly inspiration. His was a soul-story that set itself to song - the story of a life lived at the high pressure of idealism.

Nowhere is the clinging tenderness of the heart more beautifully displayed than in family life, where husband, wife, and children are bound together with the strong cords of affection. In the family has been cradled all that is best and fairest in human aspiration and achievement, and round it cluster the fragrant memories of what is purest and most sacred in each one's life. Mrs. Oliphant aptly commenting on the statement, "the happy have no history", in relation to Coventry Patmore, remarks: "Mr. Patmore has made the grand venture of ignoring this, and has woven all his beautiful garlands of roses alone." (1)

The theme of "The Angel in the House", is daring because of its very simplicity and universality, and because, according to the vulgar mind, it is so commonplace. It shows Patmore's insight into the elemental human consciousness which he treats realistically but with great sympathy

(1) "The Victorian Age of English Literature",  
Mrs. Oliphant, p.449.

and delicacy. In his chosen subject, which he feels to be

"Too simple and too sweet for words", (1)

he strikes the key-note of his philosophy regarding life and love:

"This little germ of nuptial love  
Which springs so simply from the sod,  
The root is, as my song shall prove,  
Of all our love to man and God." (2)

"The Angel in the House" deals with the story of a happy courtship and marriage, and though weakened by occasional hints of the banal, the poem is truly great in its philosophy. Precluded by "Tamerton Church-Tower", or "First Love", - "The Angel" leads through "Victories of Love", so full of deep poignancy, to the loftier idea of "The Unknown Eros", a choice collection of mystical odes.

As Patmore himself was led on from human to divine love through matrimony, he chooses to make the Sacrement symbolic of the union between God and the individual soul, and much of his best verse deals under allegorical forms and symbols with Divine Love. To Patmore everything in nature was "sacramental" in so far as it represented some hidden, mysterious thing beneath the outward form. "For the invisible things of Him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made". (Rom. 1,20). To him, the slight thing was the appalling thing, while matters men talked most about, were aside from the consideration of a poet who saw all creation as the

(1) "The Impossibility"....Poems by Coventry Patmore p.6.

(2) "Love justified". Ibid. p.37.

magnic mirror of Divinity.

"For, ah, who can express  
How full of bonds and simpleness  
Is God,  
How narrow is He,  
And how the wide, waste field of possibility  
Is only trod  
Straight to His homestead in the human heart."(1)

There are many charming phases of domestic love, but they are not necessarily matter for great poetry. If they become so it is by being lifted up into the region of the spirit. Is it not just that, that makes love momentous to any others than the lovers themselves? By these soul-strivings love's intensity grows and broadens out, touched into supernal beauty by the purifying flame of Divine contact. "The Angel in the House" is great, not on account of its narrative interest, nor for its slight plot, if plot at all it can be said to have, - but on account of the philosophy of life it sets forth.

"The progress of the soul, from the earthly symbol to its heavenly prototype, is shown in each of Patmore's longer poems and in his later religious prose. 'Love shall begin here, and so, but not here and so shall it end,' is the theme equally of 'Tamerton Church-Tower', of 'The Angel in the House', 'Victories of Love', of the 'Odes', and of the prose, 'Rod, Root, and Flower', and 'Religio Poetae'; but the emphasis falls differently in the different writings, for only so could the proposition be set forth in its fulness." (2) The necessary purification of desire

(1) "Legem Tuam Dilexi". Poems by Coventry Patmore, p.325.

(2) Catholic World... "Tamerton Church Tower"...July, 1912

is stressed in the first poem. "The Angel in the House" idealizes married love,-

"The first of themes sung last of all". (1)

"Victories of Love" further develops, continues and applies the idea that true happiness can be found in domestic love even when the conditions are not so favorable as in the former instance.

"Less than highest is good and may be high". (2)

"Victories of Love" is a link between "The Angel in the House" and the "Odes" where the poet wanders in the mystical region of Divine Love. The key to Patmore's philosophy is the idea of marriage, - marriage between man and woman in this life, as the type of the spiritual mystery which unites God and the human soul. Married love is truly the "Unknown Eros", for it has never before formed the central theme of a great poet's work. This is Patmore's contention which is well illustrated in a few lines of conversation between the poet and a friend, Aubrey de Vere, previous to the publication of the epic. "The Siren woman", Patmore pointed out with animation, "had often been sung by the pagan poets of old time, and the Fairy woman by the Troubadours of the Middle Ages. But that Love in which", as he affirmed, "all loves centre, and that Woman who is the rightful sustainer of them all, the Inspiration of Youth,

(1) "Prologue" to the "Angel in the House". Poems by  
Coventry Patmore, p.4.

(2) "Faint Yet Pursuing". Ibid. p.306.



and the Consolation of Age, that Love and that Woman," he asserted, "had seldom been sung sincerely and effectually." (1)

So he sings of sacred home love in the pleasant serenity of a deanery in the middle eighties. No hint of the feverish life of the world of nineteen-thirty ever enters into the peaceful scene, -

"With temple-like repose, an air  
Of life's kind purposes pursued  
With order'd freedom, sweet and fair.  
A tent pitch'd in a world not right." (2)

The whole epic is a beautiful tribute to womanhood.

"One of those lovely things she was  
In whose least motion there can be  
Nothing so transient but it has  
An air of immortality. (3)

We read in "Sesame and Lilies" the following lines in confirmation of Patmore's idealization of woman:

"You cannot think that the buckling on of the knight's armour by his lady's hand, was a mere caprice of romantic fashion in the days of chivalry. It is the type of an eternal truth - that the soul's armour is never well set to the heart unless a woman's hand has braced it; and it is only when she braces it loosely that the honour of manhood fails. Know you not these lovely lines of Coventry Patmore:

"Ah, wasteful woman! she who may  
On her sweet self set her own price,  
Knowing man cannot choose but pay -  
How has she cheapen'd paradise!  
How given for naught her priceless gift,

- (1) "The Idea of Coventry Patmore", by Osbert Burdett, p.3.  
(2) "The Cathedral Close". Poems by Coventry Patmore, p.11.  
(3) "The County Ball". Ibid. p.95.

How spoil'd the bread and spill'd the wine,  
Which, spent with due, respective thrift,  
Had made brutes men, and men divine!" (1)

. . . Thus much, then, respecting the relations of lovers I believe you will accept. But what we too often doubt is the fitness of the continuance of such a relation throughout the whole of human life . . . . Do you not feel that marriage - when it is marriage at all - is only the seal which marks the vowed transition of temporary into untiring service, and of fitful into eternal love?" (2)

The theme of illicit love, sung so often by poets, could not content Patmore; still the wonder grows that he could succeed in making so sedate a subject, as love between husband and wife, attain a height of loveliness surpassed by few love poets. The world of his day fancied verse-narratives, but even the most daring of imaginative writers hesitated before such a topic as wedded love. Where was the romance in it? Who would care to read domestic trivialities couched in verse? Patmore realized the tameness of his subject yet felt the wider scope it offered:

"To me though born so late,  
There does, beyond desert, befall  
(May my great fortune make me great!)  
The first of themes, sung last of all." (3)

It was not his way to compromise or to falter at thought of consequences, once he was convinced of the truth of his ideas. To him poetry was an action, a service,

(1) "Unthrif". Poems by Coventry Patmore, p.20.

(2) "Sesame and Lilies"....By John Ruskin....Collins p.114-116

(3) "Prologue: Angel in the House" Poems by Coventry Patmore,  
p.4.

a deed for truth.

"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,  
That doth in each calm note  
Both joy and grieve;  
Notes few and strong and fine,  
Gilt with sweet day's decline,  
And sad with promise of a different sun." (1)

Tennyson's "Princess" appeared in 1847, about ten years before the publication of "The Angel in the House". One is tempted to ask whether in spite of its great popularity at the time of its appearance, it is as intrinsically interesting as "The Angel". More of the romantic element, to be sure, abounds in the former, but how much psychological profundity adorns the latter, and what a life-picture it offers us of Victorian England. That was the day of "Maud", of "Aurora Leigh", and the novels of Trollope, Thackeray, Charles Reade and Lytton. The sentimental tide which bore these up, helped "The Angel in the House" to a pronounced degree of popularity which lasted only till ebb-tide of that period, but promises to return again, with more permanent effect upon the few who will take the trouble to search for worth-while treasure beneath the dross of the monotonous metre and the triviality of some of the narrative portions which hide much of its beauty. Edmund Gosse, friend and biographer of Patmore, tells us that over one quarter of a million copies were sold when, in 1867, "The Angel in the House"

(1) "Poem" to "The Unknown Eros." Poems by Coventry Patmore.  
p. 271.

was issued, at 3 d. Tennyson remarks on its popularity to Aubrey de Vere; "When finished it will add one more to the small list of great poems"; and to Patmore: "You have begun an immortal poem and if I am no false prophet, it will not be long in winning its way into the hearts of the people."<sup>(1)</sup>

Nathaniel Hawthorne, in a letter to his wife, dated January 3d, 1858, has this to say of "The Angel in the House": "It is a most beautiful and original poem - a poem for happy married people to read together, and to understand by the light of their own past and present life; but I doubt whether the generality of English people are capable of appreciating it." (2) Mrs. Hawthorne who refers to Patmore as "the sacred poet of perfect married life", (3) writes in a letter to the poet: "Upon my return to England after a dreary absence in Portugal, when I arrived in Liverpool and expressed my excessive fatigue and exasperation at such a long separation, my husband put "The Angel in the House" into my hand, saying that I should be refreshed and enchanted, and forget all my vexations by reading it. It seemed to me like a beautiful Grecian temple lighted up by the gods and goddesses, a pure, white, heavenly splendour pervading everywhere, and the repose of a better life brought down to this. The Preludes seem like lovely porticoes of fair columns of perfect grace . . . But it is of no use for me to go on.

(1) "Coventry Patmore", by Edmund Gosse, p.64.

(2) "Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore".

Basil Champneys, Vol.1, p.99.

(3) Ibid.

p.98.

I had found something new, fresh, and of a statuesque beauty tinted with living colour, too. I exclaimed, 'Who and where is this true poet?' " (1)

Carlyle's and Ruskin's tributes to Patmore are many and sincere. The latter, who often made one of a small but select gathering at the poet's home - was a faithful admirer of his work and an able defender when shafts of criticism were aimed at the poet. In the appendix to "Elements of Drawing", he writes: "Coventry Patmore's 'Angel in the House' is a most finished piece of writing, and the sweetest analysis we possess of quiet, moderate domestic feeling". (2) In "Sesame and Lilies" he quotes a long passage from "The Angel in the House", and adds, "You cannot read him too often or too carefully; as far as I know he is the only living poet who always strengthens and purifies; the others sometimes darken, and nearly always depress and discourage, - the imagination they deeply seize." (3)

Patmore shows that normal love can be wonderful and that it can be spiritualized.

"How long shall man deny the flower  
Because its roots are in the earth?" (4)

The everyday delights, the common life, he would tell us, feed the flame of love that glows from the hearth-stone of

(1) "Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore".  
Basil Champneys, Vol. 1, p. 97.

(2) Ibid. Vol. 1, p. 168.

(3) Ibid.

(4) "Heaven and Earth". Poems by Coventry Patmore. p. 42.

the mutual affection of husband and wife, and tends to transform the earthly into heavenly joy.

The mystic element so pronounced in the "Odes" is merely suggested in this first part of Patmore's great work, and with consummate skill he leads us on from the glittering peace of "The Angel in the House", through the poignant sweetness and tender pathos of "Victories of Love", into the etherialized loveliness that glorifies human affection spiritualized by the Divine Touch in the "Unknown Eros."

There are those who seek for union with God directly through an absolute self-denial of even that which is lawful, - on the high, sheer, narrow path of the evangelical life. But, though many, they form but a small minority of earnest men and women. That Coventry Patmore has seen fit to idealize the broad highway of the married state, and to touch his theme to beauty by the poetic ardour of his own mystic soul, is but another instance of an individuality and independence of thought so characteristic of his life and conduct.

## Chapter V.

### THE GENESIS OF THE ODES.

Many events of importance in the life of Coventry Patmore happened between the publication of "The Angel in the House" and the "Unknown Eros". His first wife, Emily Augusta, died, his conversion to the Catholic Church and his second marriage followed a little later. A series of nine odes was given private circulation in 1868, but it was not until 1877 that "The Unknown Eros" was published. How intensely the poet lived in these years of apparent idleness! Light and shadow are strangely intermingled in the lives of most men, but few have felt the pangs of grief and the ecstasy of joy so keenly as Coventry Patmore.

These were years of preparation for the poet's mission, - years of quiet, of apparent idleness, of soul-satisfying realization of life's great purpose, of intellectual growth and spiritual awakening. A period of forced rest is often the prelude to the noblest work of genius. "There is no music in a rest", Ruskin says, narrowing the term to its musical meaning - "but there is the making of music in it". Then broadening the application, he continues: "In our whole life-melody the music is broken off here

and there by 'rests', and we foolishly think we have come to the end of time. God sends a period of forced leisure - sickness, disappointed plans, frustrated efforts - and we lament that our part must be missing in the music which ever goes up to the ear of the Creator.

How does the musician read the 'rest'? See him beat time with unwearying count and catch up the next note true and steady as if no breaking-place had come in between. If we look up, God Himself will beat the time for us. With the eye on Him, we shall strike the next note full and clear."

True, indeed, this was of Patmore, How wisely and how well he took his literary repose his "Odes" will tell. Letters written by him between 1873 and 1878 to an intimate and sympathetic friend, give us an insight into the inner life of Patmore during these years, and reveal something of the seriousness of his aim in the work he had but begun, his carefulness of preparation, and the circumstances under which those great poems were written.

He tells us: "I believe that no amount of idleness is wrong in a poet. Idleness is the growing time of his harvest, and the outcome of a year can be reaped in one fine day." (1) And later: "I work steadily about eight hours a day in preparation for the still unknown 'Eros' ". (2)

"I have hit upon the finest metre that was ever invented and the finest mine of unworked material that ever fell to

(1) "Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore".

Basil Champneys, Vol. 1, p. 250.

(2) Ibid. Vol. 1, p. 251.



the lot of an English poet", (1) he wrote exultingly when the "Odes were in progress. That great mine was the mystic idea of the nuptial relation of the soul to God, especially manifested in the doctrine of the Incarnation. The problem that perplexed his mind was how to bring the idea down to the level of the multitude; how to present it "without breaking in upon the Divine Silence which hangs like a speckless sky over a landscape"; how to condense that "blaze of mystic doctrine into human words of 'honed peace' and beauty." (2)

The theme of "The Angel in the House" and other earlier poems was to be etherealized, spiritualized, and used as a sign-language for the mystic ideas he would impart. But before he could succeed, his own soul must experience the reality of the truths to be conveyed. He must submit to the process of poet-fashioning. "The poet", according to A.C. Benson, "is, after all, the seer of truth. He must enjoy leisure, seclude himself from the world, keep his eye clear to see the works of God, and to discern God behind them working silently and walking in the garden in the cool of the day. The poet is the inspirer of earnest effort. He is to add to the humble toil of daily life the thrill, the glory that touches and consecrates all honest labour doggedly done, that beats the laborious ploughshare into the sword of the spirit." (3)

So Patmore made untiring efforts to prepare himself

- (1) "Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore".  
Basil Champneys, Vol. 1, p.251.
- (2) Ibid.
- (3) "Tennyson", by A. C. Benson. p. 205.

for his noble task by hours of close application to theological and philosophical works, by prayerful thought and contemplation of eternal verities, and by intensive study of the great mystic writers. Close intimacy with these elevated his thought and purged it of its earthliness.

But of greater import still in the fashioning of this soul of sublime yearnings were the incidents already referred to in the poet's life, - the joys and sorrows and spiritual phenomena that, unconsciously to himself, - were "making a poet out of the man" (1) - a mystic poet. His "Odes", he dared hope, would be an answer to St. Augustine's question in "The Confessions": "What do I love when I love Thee"? and a commentary on his wistful cry of heart-hunger for God: "Our hearts were made for Thee, O Lord, and they cannot be satisfied until they rest in Thee."

In passing from "The Angel in the House" to the "Odes" the transition is from human to divine love. Patmore asserts the sacramental nature of marriage and speaks also of Christ's marriage with the Church, which is, he says, more than a metaphor. The idea suggests St. Paul's words to the Ephesians: "Husbands, love your wives even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it . . . and the wife see that she reverence her husband." (Eph. V, 25) In his later odes he touches delicately, almost fearfully, the doctrine of virginity.

The root idea of his philosophy of love, as seen in

(1) "A Musical Instrument" Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

the "Odes", - that "passion and purity are in direct ratio one to the other," (1) - is essentially the same as in "The Angel in the House"; but a comparison of the two poems shows unmistakable evidence of development and maturity of thought in "The Unknown Eros". The spiritual assumes greater and greater ascendancy over the human, until the latter becomes merely the symbol of Divine Love in its relation to the soul of man.

"The whole of life is womanhood to thee,  
Momentarily wedded with enormous bliss, (2)

he makes Psyche cry to her immortal Eros; and Patmore conceived of God as of One

"Who woos man's will  
To wedlock with his Own, and does distill  
To that drop's span  
The attar of all rose fields of all love." (3)

Patmore predicated of human love something beyond itself. To him it was the mysterious ladder of Jacob's dream, swung between earth and Heaven. Human love transcendent, divinized, - the created soul reaching out and up to Love Divine, - what is it all, but the old, old idea indistinctly discerned by the human mind in pre-Christian days, and realized in the fact of the Incarnation? It is no new conception but one familiar in the old Greek form as the myth of Eros and Psyche, and familiar also, and indeed, in its appeal to the experience of every soul that has loved and suffered! Prefiguring so well Patmore's central teaching, it was adopted by him and made to answer his purpose

(1) "Poems by Coventry Patmore"...Introduction by Basil Champneys, p.32.

(2) "Eros and Psyche". Poems by Coventry Patmore, p.342.

(3) "Legem Tuam Dilexi". Ibid. p.325.

in a series of mystic odes.

"The much-abused earth and not the inscrutable heavens," he once wrote, "is the main region of the poet, though, unless his eye be habitually turned to these heavens, the earth itself remains as unscrutable as themselves;" (1) and Patmore visions the eternal through the material, the divine through the human.

"The Unknown Eros" consists of a Proem and two Books. In Book 1 are twenty-four odes dealing with a variety of subjects, personal, political, etc., but not mystical; these he reserved for Book 11, in which he goes to the heart of the matter and touches his theme to surpassing beauty and tenderness at the highest point of perfection in the fifth ode, the "Sponsa Dei". A final section of his poetry, called "Amelia, etcetera", contains the title poem and two odes, "Regina Coeli" and "The Open Secret", which are also mystical in character. All the poems, bound each to each as they are by the metre, express some new phase or shade of meaning of Patmore's central theme. A study thereof in its various adaptations will reveal some of the treasure-trove of "the mine of undiscovered joy and power" (2) of the Patmorean philosophy.

(1) "Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore".

Basil Champneys, Vol. 1, p.258.

(2) Ibid.

Vol. 1, p.251.

## Chapter VI.

### "THE UNKNOWN EROS."

#### BOOK 1.

The first odes of Book 1 deal chiefly with the divine institution of marriage while praising virginity in those capable of this grace. In "St. Valentine's Day" Patmore speaks of the difficult idealism of "the rash oath of virginity" which is

"First love's first cry", (1)

and the danger of its being relinquished when the full life of the senses stirs the soul to warmer passion, just as the snowdrop of "vestal February" yields place to the queenly rose of "amorous May".

But Patmore passed through the career of the spiritual life not like a St. John of the Cross or a St. Teresa, by the way of renunciation or asceticism, - the sublime, secluded way of the precepts with their simple appeal:

"Leave all and you shall find all", (2) - but by the great highway of the married state, dignified and sanctified by its sacramental character. Therefore in "Wind and Wave",

(1) "Saint Valentine's Day". Poems by Coventry Patmore, p. 273.

(2) "Imitation of Christ". By Thomas à Kempis, Book III, Chapter XXXII.

he writes with more assurance, because from personal experience, of the object of marriage- love:

"She, like a little breeze  
Following still Night,  
Ripples the spirit's cold, deep seas  
Into delight." (1)

Three more odes continue the praise of love's first rapture. These we believe to be autobiographical as are the next six, which are treated in a separate chapter, "The Psychology of Grief". Their piercing poignancy is equalled only by the sweetness of the lines and the charm of their technique.

Curiously blending in with these domestic poems, are four dealing with political matters. Denunciatory in tone, opposed to the extended suffrage resulting from the legislature of 1867, they express Patmore's view, which was that of the English aristocrat of the era of the Reform Bills. "1867" he calls

"The year of the great crime,  
When the false English nobles and their Jew,  
By God demented, slew  
The trust they stood twice pledged to keep  
from wrong." (2)

The very rapture of indignation is in the lines he penned against what to him seemed worthy of hatred.

He applied his idea of inequality in the relation of love, to society and to politics as well as to art and literary criticism. "Inequality is the source of all delight," (3)

(1) "Wind and Wave". Poems by Coventry Patmore, p.375.

(2) "1867". Ibid. p.291.

(3) A remark attributed by Patmore to Dr. Johnson. See "Idea of Coventry Patmore" by Osbert Burdett, p.173.

is one of his favorite maxims. The masculine element in society he sees represented by those whose birth and education fit them to govern; the feminine element, by the great mass of those who are guided by their emotions and appetites. He was ruthless in his analysis of the political situation of his day, and he looked askance at the noble Ship of State,

" . . helmless on the swelling tide  
Of that presumptuous sea,  
Unlit by sun or moon, yet only bright  
With lights innumerable that give no light,  
Flames of corrupted will and scorn of right,  
Rejoicing to be free." (1)

But in spite of his dark prophecies he would not have us despair of England's ultimate greatness, and so he continues:

"And, now, because the dark comes on apace  
When none can work for fear,  
And liberty in every land lies slain, -  
. . . . .  
Breathless be song;  
And let Christ's own look through  
The darkness suddenly increased,  
To the gray secret lingering in the East." (2)

The remaining odes of this book are a plea for mutual charity and a warning against the harsh judging of others, for

"Grace will sometimes lurk where who could guess?" (3)  
That all-embracing and self-revealing virtue, he argues, will help one to accept even unjust blame as "missing only the right blot". (4)

"Faint yet pursuing" towards the high goal of the spiritual relation between God and the soul, which he set

(1) "1867" Poems by Coventry Patmore, p.293.  
(2) Ibid.  
(3) "Let Be!" Ibid. p.305.  
(4) Ibid.

for himself, and conscious of the truth of his own poetic words that

"What we have to gain  
Is, not one battle, but a weary life's campaign,"(1)

Patmore mounts upward to the rarer atmosphere of the mystic odes, unperturbed by the non-understanding, doubting clamouring of the insensate throng.

"Constantly his soul  
Points to its pole  
Ev'n as the needle points and knows not why." (2)

Soaring ever heavenwards, he would draw others, though few, with him. That Mr. Gosse was conscious of this peculiar power of our poet, is evidenced in the lines in which he tells us now in intimate association with the latter, he was initiated into the ardent and sublime mysticism which filled Patmore's imagination:

"We ascended high indeed," he tells us, "the wren mounting with giddy rapture on the wing of the eagle. I have rarely touched such pure intellectual enjoyment. To listen to Patmore in those days, days of his spiritual ecstasy, was to assist at a solemn mounting music." (3)

The last ode of Book 1, "Vesica Piscis", hints at the difficulty Patmore knew he would meet with in launching forth on the wide seas of his mystic philosophy. Up to this point he had kept near the shore-line of the human. But

- (1) "Faint Yet Pursuing". Poems by Coventry Patmore, p.307.  
(2) "Remembered Grace". Ibid. p.310.  
(3) "Life of Coventry Patmore", by Edmund Gosse, p.158.



now, from the natural to the supernatural, he would progress. Wherefore, he tells us:

"In strenuous hope I wrought,  
And hope seem'd still betray'd;  
Lastly I said,  
'I have labor'd through the night, nor yet  
Have taken aught;  
But at Thy word, I will again cast forth the net!'  
And, lo, I caught, . . .  
Not the quick, shining harvest of the sea,  
For food, my wish,  
But Thee! " (1)

Then under the divine urge which bids him

"Be dumb,  
Or speak but of forgotten things to far-off time  
to come," (2)

he essays in songs of ecstatic beauty, which form the subject matter of Book 11, to sound the deeps of the Beatific Vision mystically apprehended.

(1) "Vesica Piscis". Poems by Coventry Patmore, p.311.

(2) Ibid.

Chapter VII.

"THE UNKNOWN EROS."

BOOK II.

The odes of the second part of "The Unknown Eros" were written when the poet was in the middle fifties, an age which, with most writers, precludes the decline of poetic powers. Not so with Patmore. "On the contrary", writes Gosse, "at this advanced age of middle life, a great wave of passion broke over Patmore's spirit, and bore him along with it. His imagination, his mystical and religious vitalities were simultaneously quickened, and he walked along the sea by Hastings, or over its gorse-clad downs, muttering as a young man mutters, with joy uplifting his pulses and song breaking from his lips." (1)

Patmore, the poet of wedded love, now when maturity had touched his intellectual powers and skill marked his handling of poetic technique, would transcend the natural in his chosen theme, and present the sublimer aspect thereof, - the soul as the bride-elect of God. Love, he interpreted as "the mystic craving of the great to become the love-captive of the

(1) "Life of Coventry Patmore", by Edmund Gosse, p.141.

small, while the small has a corresponding thirst for the enthrallment of the great." (1) He represented the Deity as masculine and active, and the human soul as feminine and passive. The manifestations of human love, he argued, are what they are because they realize in little the Divine relation. So he began by the human to make clear the inference he desired to build upon it.

Patmore opened "The Angel in the House" with the invocation:

"Thou Primal Love, who grantest wings  
And voices to the woodland birds,  
Grant me the power of saying things  
Too simple and too sweet for words!" (2)

Now, he cries in the "Proem" to the "Odes":

"Uranian Clearness, come!  
Give me to breathe in peace and in surprise  
The light-thrill'd ether of your rarest skies!...  
Winnow with sighs  
And wash away  
With tears, the dust and stain of clay,  
Till all the song be Thine, as beautiful as morn,  
Bedeck'd with clouds of scorn;  
And Thou, Inspirer, deign to brood  
O'er the delighted words, and call them very good.  
This grant, Clear Spirit, and grant that I remain  
Content to ask unlikely gifts in vain!" (3)

In the first ode, which bears the title, "To the Unknown Eros", - unknown because his "heavens are these which not a poet sings, " (4) he asks the god to reveal himself:

"What is this breeze  
Of sudden wings  
Through delicatest ether feathering soft their  
solitary beat?  
.....

- (1) "Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore".  
Basil Champneys, Vol. 11, p.8.
- (2) "The Impossibility". Poems by Coventry Patmore, p.6.
- (3) "Proem" to "The Unknown Eros". Ibid. p.271.
- (4) "To the Unknown Eros", " " p.312.

"What god unhonour'd hitherto in songs  
Or which, that now  
Forgettest the disguise  
That gods must wear who visit human eyes,  
Art thou?" (1)

"The Contract" tells of the espousals of the first man and woman and closes with a reference to

". . sick-at-heart mankind,  
Whom nothing succour can  
Until a heaven-caress'd and happier Eve  
Be joined with some glad Saint  
In like espousals, blest upon earth,  
And she her Fruit forthbring;  
No numb chill-hearted, shaken-witted thing,  
'Plaining His little span,  
But of proud virgin joy the appropriate birth,  
The Son of God and Man." (2)

In "Sponsa Dei", the crucial ode of this mystic group, Patmore celebrates what, in a prose essay, "Dieu et ma Dame", he contended the manifestations of love to be, viz; symbols of the Divine.

"What is this maiden fair  
The laughing of whose eye  
Is in man's heart renew'd virginity?  
. . . . .  
Who is this only happy She  
Whom, by a frantic flight of courtesy,  
Born of despair  
Of better lodging for his spirit fair,  
He adores as Margaret, Maude or Cicily?  
And what this sigh?  
. . . . .  
Are all men mad or is it prophecy?" (3)

He answers:

"What if this lady be thy soul, and He  
Who claims to enjoy her sacred beauty be,  
Not thou, but God; and thy sick fire  
A female vanity,  
. . . . .  
A reflex heat  
Flashed on thy cheek from His immense desire,

- (1) "To the Unknown Eros", Poems by Coventry Patmore, p.312.
- (2) "The Contract", Ibid. p.317.
- (3) "Sponsa Dei", " p.322.

"Which waits to crown, beyond thy brain's conceit,  
Thy nameless, secret, hopeless longing sweet,  
Not by and by, but now,  
Unless deny Him thou!" (1)

This, he would tell us, is why human love falls so far short of what it promises. The true home of its rest is not here on earth. The heart of man, seeking in vain for satisfaction in that which seems to offer fulfillment, comes eventually to realize that the directing force within him is the eternal thirst for the "Infinite", - "word horrible, at feud with life", he says, in "Legem Tuam Dilexi", -

"Whose Name on popular altars was 'The Unknown',  
Because, or ere it was revealed as One  
Confined in Three,  
The people fear'd that it might prove  
Infinity." (2)

He says elsewhere that all delights of earthly love are but "shadows" of the heavens, and in "Rod, Root and Flower":

"Plato's cave of shadows is the most profound and simple statement of the relation of the natural to the spiritual life ever made. Men stand with their backs to the sun, and they take the shadows cast by it upon the walls of their cavern for reality . . . If we want fruition we must turn our backs on the shadows and gaze on their realities in God." (3)

Again, in both prose and verse he repeats that all love springs from God and must return to Him. "In Godhead rise, thither flow back all loves." (4) Evil and good are

(1) "Sponsa Dei", Poems by Coventry Patmore, p.322.

(2) "Legem Tuam Dilexi". Ibid. p.324.

(3) "The Idea of Coventry Patmore", by Osbert Burdett, p.103.

(4) "The Wedding Sermon", Poems by Coventry Patmore, p.252.

not separate entities, but one power. Uncontrolled passion is vice; properly directed, it is virtue. The pleasures of love "take their vigour from control", (1) as do also even the inanimate and lowest forms of animate nature. "The control produces the vigour by the imposition of the form. The hardness of the stone, the softness of the rose petal, the pliancy of the worm, are the qualities appropriate to the form with which their severally 'rebellious' energies have been limited." (2)

He calls the "just man" him who imposes limits on himself, which limits are the measure of his freedom, making man "His semblance".

"For, ah, who can express  
How full of bonds and simpleness  
Is God,  
How narrow is He,  
And how the wide, waste field of possibility  
Is only trod  
Straight to His homestead in the human heart!" (3)

Continuing this thought, the poet shows the "raison d'être" of the religious life with its self-imposed restraints. "The soul select assumes the stress of bonds unbid," "the fetters of the three-fold golden chain", (4) The vow of poverty frees him from mercenary anxieties. "It is to have all things without care or thought". (5) The vow of chastity he compares to a river

(1) "The Idea of Coventry Patmore". By Osbert Burdett, p.142.

(2) Ibid.

(3) "Legem Tuam Dilexi". Poems by Coventry Patmore, p.325.

(4) Ibid.

(5) "

"Whose wide, self-dissipating wave,  
Prisoned in artful dykes,  
Trembling returns and strikes  
Thence to its source again," (1)

bringing more fertility to the soil it irrigates than would its unhampered flow. The control which it exercises over the sensual nature of man, quickens his whole being, purifying the natural desire, and elevating it to the plane of the spiritual. In the vow of obedience, the religious,

"Surrendering, abject, to his equal's rule,  
As though he were a fool, the free wings of his will,"  
(2)

experiences the truest freedom. This vow is the crown and perfection of the evangelical life. Does not this ordering of passion, which the vows effect, account for the serenity generally observed in the cloister? A right life is known by its gladness.

All this, however, is not accomplished without pain, a subject the poet treats most skilfully, with knowledge and experience, in the ode which bears that title. This and the poem, "To the Body", are closely connected. The uses of suffering are to prepare for "arduous peace" (3) the body which Patmore calls, "Creation's and Creator's crowning good." (4) The "pangful purging fire" (5) burns away life's corruption, leaving man more godlike by bringing the passions, - not atrophied or weakened, but chastened and strengthened, - into the service of the Divine Bridegroom.

- |                          |                            |        |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|--------|
| (1) "Legem Tuam Dilexi". | Poems by Coventry Patmore, | p.325. |
| (2) Ibid.                |                            | p.326. |
| (3) "Pain                | Ibid.                      | p.351. |
| (4) "To the Body".       | "                          | p.327. |
| (5) "Pain                | "                          | p.351. |

The whole superstructure of Patmore's work rests undoubtedly on the foundation of conjugal felicity, but the reverence and awe he felt for virginal chastity is nowhere better expressed than in the ninth ode, "Deliciae Sapientiae de Amore", which stands as the vindication of this virtue, the flowering of Love Divine in the human soul. This, like some of Patmore's other odes, transcends while it interprets his personal experience, and has a certain mystical appeal characteristic of our poet. His daughter, Sister Mary Christina, had by this time surpassed her father in the experimental knowledge of the sublime truths he was trying to express. Her choice of the religious life did much to turn his thoughts more and more to the subject of Divine Love and the mystic espousals of the soul with God. She was in deep sympathy with her father's later poetry, and her criticism was appreciative and sound. In one of her letters she writes: "That you should know what you want to show others, viz; the perfection of the state of marriage, is not so strange as that you understand perfectly what makes the real happiness of religious life (and it is real), however unromantic and common the exterior may look." (1)

In another place she says: "I think the 'Odes' are very like Holy Scripture in being so simple that anyone might imagine he understood all there is, and so profound that very few will do so. They are also like Holy Scripture in the way Shakespeare is, viz; in being intensely human, and in not saying the words allowed to express the thing, but the

(1) "A Daughter of Coventry Patmore" by a Religious of the H.C.J. p.136.



thing itself." (1)

Again: "I must have the pleasure of telling you again how often your words come to my mind and answer my thoughts. I was wondering one day if it were pleasing to God to hear us say the same psalms over and over again, and I remembered your words in 'Legem Tuam Dilexi' :

'And all His art  
Is as the babe's that wins his mother to repeat  
Her little song so sweet.' " (2)

In the ode we are considering, the poet calls to the glad Palace of Virginitv those

"Who have kept,  
Or losing, never slept  
Till they reconquer'd had in mortal fight  
The standard white;" (3)

and all those "to whom generous love by any name is dear;"(4)  
who seek

"nothing but God  
Or mediate or direct." (5)

The impassioned lines run on, echoing the celestial harmony of the nuptial song heard first in Nazareth and still heard

"In many a cell where brides of Christ  
Lie hid, emparadised." (6)

The mystic nuptials between God and the soul are treated in parable form in three or four odes. Psyche sings to her immortal Eros,

- (1) "A Daughter of Coventry Patmore" by a Religious of the H.C.J. p.144.  
(2) Ibid. p.145.  
(3) "Deliciae Sapientiae de Amore", Poems by Coventry Patmore p.332.  
(4) Ibid. p.334.  
(5) Ibid. p.334.  
(6) Ibid. p.333.

"The whole of life is womanhood to thee"; (1)  
and while claiming her nothingness as her chief boast, she  
realizes, nevertheless,

"'Tis all to know there's naught in air or land  
Another for thy darling quite like me!" (2)

The identity between the human and the divine relation  
stressed in these poems, is what Patmore longed to emphasize.  
If it repels at times by a too close paralleling of human es-  
pousals, we need look no farther than the "Canticle of Can-  
ticles" and treatises of a similar nature by some of the  
more ardent mystic writers, for vindication of his idea.

Patmore's was the mystic heart that sang because he  
would reveal the unseen. He had something to say and be-  
cause of its very truth he would utter the secret, but be-  
cause of its sacredness and profundity he would permit him-  
self but few words. He startles us at times by his brevity  
on a theme that transcends human speech. In the "Odes" he  
scales the Alps of allusion to the Divinity in human love.  
Breathless and awed by the grandeur of what he beholds, and  
even more so by what is still unseen, he lets the bold,  
glad, confident song of the earlier poems sink slowly off  
into silence.

"Views of the unveil'd heavens alone forthbring  
Prophets who cannot sing  
Praise that in chiming numbers will not run;  
At least, from David unto Dante, none,  
And none since him." (3)

One wonders that he omits Crashaw's name, but the

- (1) "Eros and Psyche", Poems by Coventry Patmore, p.342.  
(2) Ibid.  
(3) "Prophets Who Cannot Sing". Ibid. p.353.

truth, according to his biographers, would seem to be that in spite of a similarity in thought and style between the seventeenth century mystic and Patmore, the latter became acquainted with the works of the earlier seraphic writer only after the completion of his own. Gosse tells us he was surprised to find in 1881 that Patmore did not know the poems of Crashaw and that he had the pleasure of sending them to the poet. "Yet", he adds, "he knew the originals at which the torch of Crashaw had been lighted." (1)

One more ode, "The Child's Purchase", which the poet called "his great subject", (2) remains to be treated.

We saw in "The Angel in the House" how noble was Patmore's conception of woman. She was to him as to Dante, the symbol of religion and the "way" or the guide of man into the serene light of paradise; the embodiment of all that is pure and good and wholesome. His reverence for womanhood was second to no one's. It was but natural then, that, with the deepening of his religious thought and the maturing of his intellectual faculties and literary skill, he should lift his song, begun in her praise in his first poem, to the region of the purely spiritual in the "Odes". It was natural too, that he should have conceived a high respect and chivalrous loyalty towards the Woman of women, "our tainted nature's solitary boast". (3) A few years later he would dedicate to her under the title of "Our Lady Star of the Sea", a

(1) "Life of Coventry Patmore", by Edmund Gosse, p.159.

(2) "Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore",

Basil Champneys, Vol.1, chapter XVII, p.254.

(3) "The Virgin" Poems by William Wordsworth...Burt, New-York. p.617.

beautiful church of his own designing, opposite his home at Hastings. But like many another sweet singer, Patmore wished to give expression to his religious reverence in a poem. This was "the great Ode" (1), so often mentioned in his letters. In the Blessed Virgin he saw the perfection and completion of his philosophy, "the extreme of God's creative energy" (2), "our only saviour from an abstract Christ". (3)

"Ah, Lady elect,"  
he cries in this ode,

"Whom the time's scorn has saved from its respect,  
Would I had art  
For uttering this which sings within my heart!  
But, lo,  
Thee to admire is all the art I know.  
My Mother and God's!" (4)

The difficulty that delayed the accomplishment of his desire, was a certain dissatisfaction he felt regarding his devotion to the Blessed Virgin. As a sort of business venture, therefore, he determined to visit her favorite shrine at Lourdes. "I knelt at the shrine by the river Gave", he writes, "and rose without any emotion or enthusiasm, . . . but with a tranquil sense that the prayer of thirty-five years had been granted." (5)

"The Child's Purchase" is, therefore, the fruit of these quiet years of carefully and prayerfully matured thought. Looking far back into the past, to the mystic aspirations of

- (1) "Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore",  
Basil Champneys, Vol.1, Chapter XVII, p.254.
- (2) "The Child's Purchase" Poems by Coventry Patmore, p.357.
- (3) Ibid.
- (4) Ibid. p.355.
- (5) "Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore".  
Basil Champneys, Vol.11, p.56.

his young life, when he sought for "reality" for his ideas of the perfect woman, the true Psyche, the bride-elect of the Divine Eros, he realized but vaguely that it was she whom he sought.

"When clear my songs of lady's graces rang  
Little guess'd I 'twas of thee I sang!" (1)

The conviction was borne in upon him that the marriage of the Blessed Virgin, of which every woman's marriage was the symbol and counterpart, was "the one absolutely lovely and perfect subject for poetry." (2) His desire to write a great epic on this theme was never realized, but on his return journey from the Pyrenean shrine, the Ode, which formed the nucleus of the proposed epic, took shape in his mind.

In the joy of realization, and with an appealing earnestness and childlike simplicity dear to the heart of God and characteristic of the truly great mind, the poet offered his "Lady elect" his song as a child might return in giftwise to his mother, the coin she had given him for play. So his lines flow on, glowing with the light of

" . . . . . the steady heat  
Of thought wise, splendid, sweet,  
Urged by the great, rejoicing wind that rings  
With draught of unseen wings,  
Making each phrase, for love and for delight,  
Twinkle like Sirius on a frosty night." (3)

Instinctive tenderness and chivalrous love enrich with an atmosphere of reverent devotion a poem whose ecstasy

(1) "The Child's Purchase". Poems by Coventry Patmore, p.359.

(2) "Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore".  
Basil Champneys, Vol.1, p.255.

(3) "The Child's Purchase". Poems by Coventry Patmore, p.355.

of praise is interrupted litany-like, again and again, by the appealing "Ora pro me"!

Awed by the mysteries of Nazareth he exclaims:

"Ah, what silence that  
Which had for prologue thy 'Magnificat'!  
O Silence, full of wonders, . . .  
That crowns unnoted, like the voiceless blue,  
The loud world's varying view,  
And in its holy heart the sense of all things  
ponders!" (1)

The poet shows that if great were the privileges Our Lady enjoyed, her courage in suffering as co-redemptrix was not disproportioned thereto:

"In season due, on His sweet-fearful bed,  
Rock'd by an earthquake, curtain'd with eclipse,  
Thou shar'd'st the rapture of the sharp spear's  
head,  
And thy bliss pale  
Wrought for our boon what Eve's did for our bale."  
(2)

This ode in praise of her, the "Desire of Him whom all things else desire", (3) is one of the most ambitious of Patmore's collection and an admirable tribute to the Flower of Womanhood.

- (1) "The Child's Purchase". Poems by Coventry Patmore, p.355.  
(2) Ibid. p.358.  
(3) Ibid.

## Chapter VIII.

### HIS PSYCHOLOGY OF GRIEF.

"Men shall learn wisdom by affliction schooled." Aeschylus.

Patmore's psychology of grief is striking in the subtle delicacy and truth with which it depicts experiences familiar to all of us. He was trained in the School of Sorrow in the years which followed the death of Emily Augusta Patmore, - years which were truly the brooding time of his best work. Bereavement wrought its quiet transformation in his soul, refining and consecrating the love which had been his inspiration and delight in the days that were no more. The poet learned that freedom and light, which elevate the spirit of man above the sordid and mundane, enabling him to adjust properly the issues of time and eternity, are the noble fruition of a great sorrow. But what he scarcely understood then, though in later years he came to realize it, - was the necessity of such an apprenticeship for the work to which he had dedicated himself. And well might he have asked with his younger contemporary mystic, Francis Thompson:

"Designer Infinite,  
Ah, must Thou char the wood ere Thou canst limn  
with it?" (1)

Joyce Kilmer has given expression to a similar thought in a quatrain:

"Light songs we sing that perish with our breath,  
Out of our lips that have not kissed the rod,  
They shall not live who have not tasted death;  
They only sing who are struck dumb by God." (2)

We can easily account, therefore, for the note of poignancy which vibrates at times in his early work, and which is sounded again and again in the "Odes". Book I contains a series of five or six poems wherein is found a blending of sweetness and piercing pathos that would be intolerable to us were it not for lines of rare beauty and verdant hopefulness that mitigate the pain of sorrow. I shall touch briefly on these Odes which show how truly Patmore was able to appreciate the discipline of suffering while abhorring melancholy and sentimentality.

"Tristitia" opens with a description of the most perfect happiness of wedded life, over which steals an indefinable fear in the heart of the poet, of a possible separation between him and his wife, when, - the bourne of death crossed, - he might find he had "Love's last goal missed" (3) because he had

"Loved too laxly sweetness and heart's ease,  
And strove the creature more than God to please". (4)

- (1) "The Hound of Heaven". Works of Francis Thompson,  
Vol.1, p.111.  
(2) Joyce Kilmer: Memoir and Poems, Vol.1, p.211.  
(3) "Tristitia". Poems by Coventry Patmore, p.281.  
(4) Ibid.



This note of causeless, foreboding grief is throbbingly persistent in "Victories of Love" and reminds one of Wordsworth's "Strange Fits of Passion Have I Known".

In "Departure" we have the skilful analysis of a lesser grief in a conscious effort to conceal a greater one. The incident is suggested in the following lines of tender reproach, which betray love's sensitiveness:

"But all at once to leave me at the last,  
More at the wonder than the loss aghast,. . .  
And go your journey of all days  
With not one kiss or a good-bye,  
And the only loveless look the look with which you  
pass'd.  
'Twas all unlike your great and gracious ways." (1)

The touch of mystic strangeness is in this poem which illustrates also Patmore's masterly skill in the technique of verse.

"The Azalea" has power to awaken memories that sear the soul even while working unto its healing. From the depths of a dream of his wife's death, the poet awakens with the delicious thankfulness that sleep had produced the dreadful illusion, only to realize in the delicate perfume of the azalea's saffron bloom that indeed she is dead.

"And I had fall'n asleep with to my breast  
A chance-found letter press'd  
In which she said:  
'So, till to-morrow eve, my own, adieu!  
Parting's well paid with soon again to meet,  
Soon in your arms to feel so small and sweet,  
Sweet to myself who am so sweet to you!' " (2)

Life had taken from Patmore that which he held dearest; yet unforgetting, still cherishing her who had been more to him than life, he delicately essays in "Tired Memory" to re-

(1) "Departure". Poems by Coventry Patmore, p.284.  
(2) "The Azalea". Ibid. p.283.

concile the new love with the other. We must not forget that it was his first wife's wish that he should marry again for the sake of the children. She had even left her wedding ring to her unknown successor. That numbness of heart, therefore, which is sometimes so much worse than acute pain, seeks expression for its pent-up grief:

"Then look'd I miserably round  
If aught of duteous love were left undone;  
And nothing found . . . .  
My heart was dead -  
Dead of devotion and tired memory." (1)

The agony of loss echoes again in lines that I shall let speak for themselves:

" 'If I were dead you'd sometimes say, poor child!'  
The dear lips quivered as they spake,  
And the tears brake  
From eyes which, not to grieve me, brightly smil'd.  
Poor child! Poor child!  
I seem to hear your laugh, your talk, your song,  
It is not true that love will do no wrong.  
Poor child!  
And did you think when you so cried and smiled,  
How I, in lonely nights, should lie awake  
And of those words your full avengers make?  
Poor child! Poor child!  
And now, unless it be  
That sweet amends, thrice told, are come to thee,  
O God, have Thou no mercy upon me!  
Poor child!" (2)

The self-analysis revealed in "Pain" is mercilessly sincere. It would seem that suffering is as necessary for genius as for sanctity. Endured without bitterness, the darkness it casts upon the soul is like unto the night that closes in upon the day, meant for rest, not for restlessness, - the forerunner of the dawn. "For God who commanded the light

(1) "Tired Memory". Poems by Coventry Patmore, p.289.

(2) "If I Were Dead". Ibid. p.294.

to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus." (2 Cor.1V,6).

Patmore writes in this ode:

"My lips, thy live-coal touching, speak thee true.  
Thou searest my flesh, O Pain,  
But brand'st for arduous peace my languid brain,  
And bright' nest my dull view,  
Till I for blessing, blessing give again." (1)

In another ode the poet defines pain as "the exceedingly keen edge of bliss." (2) Here he apostrophizes it as

"Love's mystery,  
Close next of kin  
To joy and heart's delight,  
Low pleasure's opposite,  
Choice food of sanctity  
And medicine of sin." (3)

It is a magic power

".. leaving the man so dark erewhile,  
The mirror merely of God's smile." (4)

Then he asks why, if Pain, like Love, is a good, it should be feared; and further:

"What mockery of a man am I express'd  
That I should wait for thee (Pain)  
To woo! .. ..  
When thou lov'st I am at first afraid  
Of thy fierce kiss,  
Like a young maid;  
And only trust thy charms  
And get my courage in thy throbbing arms." (5)

"A Farewell" breathes all the tender pathos and resignation of love's leave-taking:

- (1) "Pain" Poems by Coventry Patmore, p.351.
- (2) "De Natura Deorum". Ibid. p.345.
- (3) "Pain". " p.351.
- (4) Ibid.
- (5) Ibid.

"With all my will, but much against my heart,  
We two now part." (1)

But the sorrow is made endurable by the hope of reunion when

"The nursling, Grief,  
Is dead,  
And no dews blur our eyes  
To see the peach-bloom come in evening skies, - . . .  
The bitter journey to the bourne so sweet  
Seasoning the termless feast of our content  
With tears of recognition never dry." (2)

Closely associated with the above odes is one more familiar, perhaps, to readers than any other of Patmore's poems. "The Toys" also beautifully illustrates his attitude to childhood and is another application of his theme, showing concretely Divine Love in its relation to the soul of man. A wise firmness, characteristic of the poet's dealings with his children, combined with a ready tenderness, bound them to their father by links of lasting affection and trustful confidence. Like Blake, he was a child with children; like Wordsworth, he saw in their innocence and candour a reflex of the Divinity; and like Francis Thompson, his disciple and admirer, he understood and revered them. He could joy in their joy and sorrow in their sadness. He never could forget, nor let us forget, the intimate visions of childhood which lend an atmosphere of reverent wonder and wistful tenderness to the writings of those whose God-given mission it is to lure us heavenward by the appeal of child-like simplicity and innocence.

"Know you what it is to be a child?" asks Francis Thompson in his essay on "Shelley". It is to be something

(1) "A Farewell" Poems by Coventry Patmore, p.298.

(2) Ibid.

very different from the man of to-day. It is to have a spirit yet streaming from the waters of baptism; it is to believe in love, to believe in loveliness, to believe in belief; it is to be so little that the elves can reach to whisper in your ears; it is to turn pumpkins into coaches, and mice into horses, lowness into loftiness, and nothing into everything; for each child has its fairy godmother in its own soul; it is to live in a nutshell and to count yourself king of infinite space." (1)

The poem, though familiar, can bear quotation:

"My little son, who look'd from thoughtful eyes  
And moved and spoke in quiet grown-up wise,  
Having my law the seventh time disobey'd,  
I struck him, and dismiss'd  
With hard words and unkiss'd, -  
His mother, who was patient, being dead.  
Then, fearing lest his grief should hinder sleep,  
I visited his bed,  
But found him slumbering deep,  
With darken'd eyelids, and their lashes yet  
From his late sobbing wet.  
And I, with moan,  
Kissing away his tears, left others of my own;  
For, on a table drawn beside his head,  
He had put, within his reach,  
A box of counters and a red-veined stone,  
A piece of glass abraded by the beach,  
And six or seven shells,  
A bottle with bluebells,  
And two French copper coins, ranged there with  
careful art,  
To comfort his sad heart." (2)

The pathos in these lines depends less on the incident recounted than on the power of self-revelation they contain; for are we not all, in some respects, but "children of a larger growth", (3) letting the tinsel of temporalities blind us to the truer beauties of eternal realities? The

(1) "Works of Francis Thompson". Vol.3, p.7.

(2) "The Toys". Poems by Coventry Patmore, p.287.

(3) "All for Love" Act IV, Sc.1 ..... by John Dryden.

above-quoted essay would bear out this statement:

"Man is still at play, save only that his play is such as manhood stops to watch, and his playthings are those which the gods give their children. The universe is his box of toys. He dabbles his fingers in the day-fall. He is gold-dusty with tumbling amidst the stars." (1)

Few poems in the language have the piercing poignancy of the closing lines of this ode:

"So when that night I pray'd  
To God, I wept and said:  
Ah, when at last we lie with tranced breath,  
Not vexing Thee in death,  
And Thou rememberest of what toys  
We made our joys,  
How weakly understood,  
Thy great commanded good,-  
Then, fatherly not less  
Than I whom Thou hast moulded from the clay,  
Thou'lt leave Thy wrath, and say,  
'I will be sorry for their childishness.' " (2)

The thought is as old as history itself. Down the years, from Israel's royal lutanist comes the consoling assurance:

"As a father hath compassion on his children, so hath the Lord compassion on them that fear Him, for He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust." (Ps. 113, 13), The chastisement meted out to us in life is, we know, but "shade of His hand outstretched caressingly"; (3) and would the soul in desolation but listen, it, too, would hear with Patmore and his brother-poet, Francis Thompson, the throbbing tenderness of a Father's heart, and catch the tones of Its yearning for the wilful child, so aptly expressed in "The

(1) "Works of Francis Thompson". Vol. 111, p. 18.

(2) "The Toys". Poems by Coventry Patmore, p. 288.

(3) "The Hound of Heaven". Works of Francis Thompson, Vol. 1, p. 111

Hound of Heaven":

"All which I took from thee, I did but take,  
Not for thy harms,  
But just that thou might'st seek it in My arms.  
All which thy child's mistake  
Fancies as lost, I have stored for thee at home.  
Rise, clasp My hand, and come." (1)

No blame here for the contrite straying one, only ineffable  
tenderness and a great welcome, - Eros and Psyche, - the  
Loving God and the loving soul in eternal re-union.

(1) "The Hound of Heaven". Works of Francis Thompson, Vol.1,  
p.111

## Chapter IX.

### THE METRICAL TECHNIQUE OF COVENTRY PATMORE.

If Coventry Patmore attains the height of his power in the mystic quality of his beautiful "Odes", it is here also that he excels as a master of poetic technique. The Teresian depth of spiritual vision, the subtle quality and pervading essence of other-worldliness which they incorporate, find adequate expression only in the vagaries of the irregular ode form.

In the earlier poems Patmore, of definite purpose, made use of rhyme and the caesura; - in the "Odes" these are used very irregularly but spontaneously, - the pause depending upon feeling, and the rhyme on the emphasis of accent. Let the timid and the beginner keep to the shallow waters of regular rhyme; it is for the well-equipped, experienced master to launch out into the deep of freer verse.

The octosyllabic quatrains of "The Angel in the House", and the couplets of "Victories of Love", have their admirers in spite of the opposing school of critics who scorn the "domestic" poetry of these Victorian verse-narratives. As an attempt to describe the finer



emotions of Nineteenth Century society, these poems occupy a place of distinction in the class to which they belong. These quatrains enjoyed their tide of popularity, and in a world where either debased passion or an ultra-romantic unreality were the forms in which love masqueraded, Patmore's praise of wedded life came with the refreshing vigour of stimulating wholesomeness. If such poetry tended to weary by monotony, much of it was exquisitely musical. Take for example, the poem, "Night and Sleep":

"How strange at night to wake,  
And watch while others sleep,  
Till sight and hearing ache  
For objects that may keep  
The awful inner sense  
Unroused, lest it should mark  
The life that haunts the emptiness,  
The horror of the dark!

\* \* \* \* \*  
How strange and wild to hear  
The old and crumbling tower  
Amid the darkness suddenly  
Take tongue and speak the hour?" (1)

Rhyme here is decidedly a gain, for the form appeals to the ear.

Patmore in his essay, "English Metrical Law", says of this form: "We have only to fill up the measure in every line as well as in the seventh in order to change the verse from the slowest and most mournful to the most rapid and most high-spirited of all English forms, the common eight-syllable quatrain, a measure particularly recommended by the early critics, and continually chosen by poets in all times (1) "Night and Sleep". Poems by Coventry Patmore, p.423.

for erotic poetry, on account of its joyful air." (1)

The important factors in verse are time and rhythm. Commenting on this, Dr. Maurice Francis Egan says:

"It is in the management of the pauses, - in the recognition of time-beats, - that Coventry Patmore's supremacy in the ode form, lies. In his 'domestic verses' he uses it in places where Tennyson would not have dreamed of it, - recklessly, audaciously, - but in his highest moods, when his imagination is at its whitest heat, he treats rhyme as an echo." (2)

This is not to belittle rhyme which has its well-established place in the art of versification; but, though it be not necessary for the melody, it is helpful to expression, especially in moods of gayety and spontaneity and in lyric and song-verse. Note the style of the following passage in which the high-spirited lover in "The Angel in the House", expresses the glow and ardour of youth:

"Whene'er I come where ladies are,  
How sad soever I was before,  
Though like a ship frost-bound and far  
Withheld in ice from the ocean's roar,  
Third-winter'd in that dreadful dock,  
And stiffen'd cordage, sails decay'd,  
And crew that care for calm and shock  
Alike, too dull to be dismay'd,--  
Yet, if I come where ladies are,  
How sad soever I was before,  
Then is my sadness banished far,  
And I am like that ship no more;  
Or like that ship if the ice-field splits,  
Burst by the sudden polar Spring,  
And all thank God with their warming wits,

(1) "Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore".

Basil Champneys, Vol.1, p.112.

(2) "Studies in Literature", by Maurice Francis Egan, p.91.

"And kiss each other and dance and sing,  
And hoist fresh sails, that make the breeze  
Blow them along the liquid sea,  
Out of the North, where life did freeze,  
Into the haven where they would be." (1)

Certain other lines cannot fail to appeal to the ear by the fine music of their measured beat. Of such a kind is the following passage:

"Through delicatest ether feathering soft their  
solitary beat"; (2)

or this from "Wind and Wave":

"She as a little breeze  
Following still Night,  
Ripples the spirit's cold, deep seas  
Into delight". (3)

The opening line of this same ode best describes this power of expression characteristic of Patmore,

"Wedded light and heat." (4)

We realize what Coventry Patmore has done for English metrical art, - he who consciously and deliberately chose the rhyme form of the quatrain as his mode of expression for his domestic epic, - when we turn to the series of odes he has left us, embodied in work of transcendental profundity and technical loveliness, - the "Unknown Eros". These odes show a finish which is the result of a life-long study of the laws of poetic art.

Unlike the exotic sonnet, transplanted from the rich Italian garden of thought, and drawing naturally from southern melody its essential rhyme, - the ode is of natural

- (1) "Love at Large". Poems by Coventry Patmore, p.14.  
(2) "To the Unknown Eros". Ibid. p.312.  
(3) "Wind and Wave". " p.275.  
(4) Ibid.

growth, adaptable to the expression of fine feeling, ecstatic emotion, and sublime thought.

The English language is rich in odes of varying form and spirit ranging from the "Epithalamium" of Spenser and "Lycidas" of Milton, to Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind", Wordsworth's "Intimations of Immortality", Tennyson's "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington", and down to Francis Thompson's "Orient Ode" of singular beauty. In this charmed circle of metrical masters and ode-fashioners, is enshrined the name of Coventry Patmore. To quote Maurice Francis Egan again:

"Crashaw had his gleams of great light, He came near to the nimbus of St. Teresa and the halo of St. John the Divine; but Patmore is nearer. It was reserved for him, too, to atone for the tinkling of 'The Angel in the House' and 'the Rosy Bosom'd Hours', by boldly restoring to English verse its heritage of music. Patmore does not disregard rhyme in his 'Odes', but it becomes an echo; he uses it as the servant of his thoughts; with him it is not like the genius of the Arabian tales, escaped from its vase and tyrannous. He begins the work of emancipation by 'rhyming at indefinite intervals'." (1)

"This is a license," Patmore says, "which is counterbalanced in the writings of all the poets who have employed this metre (catalectic verse) successfully by unusual frequency in the recurrence of the same line." (2) Elsewhere he sets

(1) "Literary Studies", by Dr. Maurice Francis Egan, p.100.

(2) Ibid.

down a standard by which this form of the lyric may be judged: "In its highest order, the lyric or 'ode', "he says, "is a tetrameter, the line having the time of eight iambs. When it descends to narrative or the expression of a less exalted strain of thought, it becomes a dimeter with the time of four." (1) He insists that time and rhythm are essential to verse-music and would not have it said that rhyme and alliteration - "head-rhyme", - are mere ornaments. "While the former marks essential metrical pauses, the latter," he says, "is a very effective mode of conferring emphasis on the accent which is the primary foundation of metre." (2)

Freedom and complexity he gave to the iambic verse, by varying the length of the line and rhyming at irregular intervals. Mr. Patmore's theories are well exemplified in the ode "To the Body", only a few lines of which can be given here:

"Creation's and Creator's crowning good;  
Wall of infinitude;  
Foundation of the sky,  
In Heaven forecast  
And long'd for from eternity,  
Though laid the last;  
Reverberating dome  
Of music cunningly built home  
Against the void and indolent disgrace  
Of unresponsive space;  
Little sequester'd pleasure-house  
For God and for His spouse." (3)

The full free movement of the opening lines runs on unhampered to the close. Dignified, solemn and harmonious, it appeals to the ear like the lovely cadences of musical

(1) "Literary Studies"., by Dr. Maurice Francis Egan, p.100.

(2) "Memoirs and Correspondence of Patmore". Basil Champneys,  
Vol.1, p.112.

(3) "To the Body". Poems by Coventry Patmore, p.327.

phrases. One more quotation from "Wind and Wave", will suffice to illustrate Patmore's skill in the poetic art, especially his power of adapting sound to sense:

"But, in a while,  
The immeasurable smile  
Is broke by fresher airs to flashes blent  
With darkling discontent;  
And all the subtle zephyr hurries gay,  
And all the heaving ocean heaves one way,  
T'ward the void sky-line and an unguess'd weal;  
Until the vanward billows feel  
The agitating shallows, and divine the goal,  
And to foam roll,  
And spread and stray  
And traverse wildly, like delighted hands,  
The fair and fleckless sands;  
And so the whole  
Unfathomable and immense,  
Triumphing tide comes at last to reach  
And burst in wind-kiss'd splendours on the deaf'ning  
beach,  
Where forms of children in first innocence  
Laugh and fling pebbles on the rainbow'd crest  
Of its untired unrest." (1)

The gradual gathering of the waves as they approach the shore and the splendid climax visioned as they

"... burst in wind-kiss'd splendour on the deaf'ning beach", and then subside in quiet wise over the peaceful sands, cannot fail to produce an impression of melodious phrasing and clever verbal technique.

(1) "Wind and Wave". Poems by Coventry Patmore, p.275.

## Chapter X.

### HIS TREATMENT OF NATURE.

Love of Nature has always been a part of the artist soul in every age and clime, but especially so in English poetry of the last one hundred years. Wordsworth raised this love of Nature into worship and it passed on, losing none of its ritual, to Scott, Byron, Shelley, Keats, Swinburne and a host of other poets, to whom Nature became a living, throbbing reality, which, under the name of "Beauty" or "Love", was to them the very Divinity. Each had his own special way of clothing in words the expression of his creed, but the adoring love underlying the doctrine was common to all.

Patmore, while keenly sensitive to the beautiful in Nature, did not, as did Byron, hold

" converse with Nature's charms  
And view her stores unroll'd." (1)

He describes the natural world as a reflection of man, used to illustrate man's mode of action, or to elevate his feeling, or, endeared by reminiscence of human events, to portray a background for the acting of these events. He describes nature as she appears to the senses- the material world in all

(1) "Childs Harold". Canto V. Byron.

its variety, beauty and sublimity - as it is on the outside, with great accuracy and finish of words.

His nature-poetry was materialized; it never suggests a life in Nature. Coleridge, to whom the critics of the day likened Patmore, held that nature was a part of ourselves. The visible world was but the incarnation of our own thoughts - and this was a proof of the life of the great Spirit. We and the universe were both alive in him. We give life to the objective world; it answers us with life which is really our own, and when we are dead of heart we get no response.

"O Lady! we receive but what we give  
And in our life alone does Nature live. . . .  
Ours is her wedding-garment, ours her shroud". (1)

In nowise does Patmore consider nature a part of ourselves, but as existing entirely independent of us. She suggests to us what we may become, and awakens vague longing and desires, and, by dimly showing forth the knowledge, love and power of God, urges us forward in pursuit of the infinite. Nature showed him her glory, not to keep him to herself, but to send him on to Him of Whom the universe is but the outer garment.

After the work of each of the days of Creation, God joys in His handiwork, and each day's work, built on that of the preceding day, surpasses it utterly in beauty and in grandeur, as if striving to satisfy the creative joy and form a worthy home, transient though it be, for the masterpiece, man. To Patmore, Nature, the handiwork of God,

(1) "Dejection - an Ode". Coleridge.



mirrors His perfections in some slight degree and manifests to man the stupendous power of the Creator who made man for Himself alone. Bewitched by her sublimity or her beauty, other poets have mistaken the shadow for the substance and have made of nature an end and not a means.

Not so Patmore. To him, Nature was a broad highway leading directly to her Maker. Her beauties were but the faint reflex of His eternal Beauty - her grandeur, but an echo of His eternal Perfections. Beauty of form, beauty of sound, beauty of colour, which vie with one another to make man

"Forget the glories he hath known  
And that imperial palace whence he came," (1)

were but visible manifestations to Patmore of "the Imperial Palace" and its builder and maker, God.

As his friends, the Pre-Raphaelite painters, fixed upon their canvas the mellow beauty of English scenes, so Patmore, using pen instead of brush, enshrined in his poems the beautiful, cultivated landscape of his home-land. Many of his descriptions are as vivid as pictures by Millais.

This for instance out of many:

"The clouds, the intermediate blue,  
The air that rings with larks, the grave  
And distant rumour of the wave,  
The solitary sailing skiff,  
The gusty corn-field on the cliff,  
The corn-flower by the crumbling ledge,  
And, far-down at the shingle's edge  
The sighing sea's recurrent crest  
Breaking, resign'd to its unrest." (2)

(1) "Ode on Intimations of Immortality". Wordsworth.

(2) "Victories of Love." Poems by Coventry Patmore, p.198.

This is the landscape seen day after day near his home. His senses, steeped in its sounds, its colours, its lights and shades, etched the contours so deep within his soul that he could portray it in words with the refined finish of the master artist. And he knows he has the great gift, the magic touch which arrests Nature when she means most - so that she shall remain with us, most beautiful, most significant.

"When I behold the skies aloft  
Passing the pageantry of dreams,  
The cloud whose bosom, cygnet-soft,  
A couch for nuptial June seems,  
The ocean broad, the meadows bright,  
The shadowy vales with feeding herds,  
I from my lyre the music smite,  
Nor want for justly matching words.  
All forces of the sea and air,  
All interests of hill and plain,  
I so can sing, in seasons fair,  
That who hath felt may feel again." (1)

Dawn and sunset, night and day, storm and sunshine, land and shore are spread before us with the radiant skill of perfection. His landscape painting gives wonderful unity to his poems, especially to "The Angel in the House" and "The Victories of Love". He selects from a bewildering array of impressions that single thing which will endow the landscape with sentiment to our eyes. He sings of

"Skies bluer than the sparrow's egg  
And clearer than the cuckoo's call." (2)

With him we see a beautiful tree, as

"The leaves all stirring mimick'd well  
A neighboring rush of rivers cold;  
And as the sun or shadow fell  
So these were green and those were gold." (3)

- (1) "The Paragon". Poems by Coventry Patmore, p.12.  
(2) "Victories of Love". Ibid. p.233.  
(3) "The Revulsion". " p.115.

In "Amelia", a beautiful word-picture of a walk in springtime runs thus:

" . and so we went alone  
By walls o'er which the lilac's numerous plume  
Shook down perfume;  
Trim plots close blown  
With daisies, in conspicuous myriads seen,  
Engrossed each one  
With single ardour for her spouse, the sun;  
Meadows of fervid green,  
With sometime sudden prospect of untold  
Cocksblips, like chance-found gold;  
And broadcast buttercups at joyful gaze,  
Rending the air with praise,  
Like the six-hundred-thousand-voicèd shout  
Of Jacob camped in Midian put to rout;  
Then through the park  
Where Spring in livelier gloom  
Quickened the cedars dark,  
And 'gainst the clear sky cold,  
Which shone afar  
Crowded with sunny Alps oracular,  
Great chestnuts raised themselves abroad like  
cliffs of bloom." (1)

By nature a very domestic person, Patmore evidenced this home-loving propensity with special force in the recurrent delineation of certain scenes. He seems to have an especial love for the majestic chestnut trees that embower so many English homes. The last lines quoted give us one of several views. Another is:

" . . . . quiet stood  
The chestnut with its thousand lamps." (2)

Again in the coming of a storm, the herald wind

"Swayed the chestnut's thousand cones." (3)

The mystery of the waking earth is felt in these lines:

- (1) "Amelia". Poems by Coventry Patmore, p.364.
- (2) "Going to Church". Ibid. p.61.
- (3) "The Cathedral Close." Ibid. p. 8.

" . . . . . The air  
Was dark and sharp, the roosted birds  
Cheep'd 'Here am I, Sweet; are you there?'  
On Avon's misty flats the herds  
Expected, comfortless, the day,  
Which slowly fired the clouds above;  
In sleep the matrimonial dove  
Was crooning; no wind waked the wood,  
Nor moved the midnight river damps,  
Nor thrill'd the poplar." (1)

This last line, better than any other, tells of that hush in nature which places near the sea experience as the tide turns before the dawn. This dead calm is not felt elsewhere as there. It seems as if nature were holding her breath and listening to the secret orders of her Creator for the coming day. He proceeds:

"The moon shone yet, but weak and drear,  
And seem'd to watch with bated breath,  
The landscape all made sharp and clear  
By stillness, as a face by death." (2)

If Patmore is the poet of high mysticism he is also the poet of lowly every-day events. Who has not lain awake and listened as

"All night the gust-blown torrent drench'd  
The gloomy window-pane"? (3)

or felt keen disappointment as

"The gaps of blue shrank fast in span", (4)

when one was hoping for a sunny afternoon to fulfil some pleasant project?

He has a special gift to picture Nature in the time of stress. This is one out of several of his storm pictures and might be entitled, "A Summer Shower":

- (1) "The Cathedral Close". Poems by Coventry Patmore, p.60.
- (2) "Going to Church". Ibid. p.61.
- (3) "Tamerton Church-Tower". " p.385.
- (4) Ibid. p.374.

"A blast made all the woodland bow;  
Against the whirl of leaves and dust  
Kine dropp'd their heads; the tortured gust  
Jagged and convulsed the ascending smoke  
To mockery of the lightning's stroke.  
The blood prick'd and a blinding flash  
And close coinstantaneous crash  
Humbled the soul; and rain all round  
Resilient, dimm'd the whistling ground,  
Nor flagg'd in force from first to last,  
Till, sudden as it came, 'twas past,  
Leaving a trouble in the copse  
Of brawling birds and twinkling drops." (1)

There is no need for him to tell us the sun shone again, -  
we have it in "twinkling". The storm moves on, and

" . . . . Far thunder faint  
Mutter'd its vast and vain complaint,  
And gaps and fractures, fring'd with light,  
Show'd the sweet skies, with squadrons bright  
Of cloudlets, glittering calm and fair  
Through gulfs of calm and glittering air." (2)

Patmore always enjoyed tempestuous days. The wild unrest  
of his nature joyed in the fierceness and the keenness of  
the clash of the elements; but, the storm over, he too,  
seems to delight in the ensuing calm, and

"A wholesome smell of rainy earth" (3)

breathes from his lines.

His descriptions of places were so true to nature that  
Gosse, after reading "Amelia", writes: "To speak first of the  
locality, though no place is mentioned, we identify at once

'The little, bright, surf-breathing town'

that

'Gathers its skirts against the gorse-lit down  
And scatters gardens o'er the southern lea;'

as unquestionably Hastings, and every slight epithet that

(1) "Victories of Love". Poems by Coventry Patmore, p.204.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Ibid.

follows confirms the impression. The landscape is so clearly individual." (1)

Bird song has sounded in the lines of our poets since the cuckoo call from Chaucer, all down through the centuries. Each poet seems to have one favorite bird and Patmore is the bard of the blackbird. Its clear, plaintive, whistled melody seems to appeal as does none other to its eulogist.

"Nay, that's the blackbird's note, the sweet night's knell." (2) The poetry needed to enshrine his theme demands such skill that in this line he is truly Shakespearian.

"At dusk of dawn on his dark spray apart  
With it the blackbird breaks the young day's heart.  
In evening's hush  
About it talks the heavenly-minded thrush," (3)

and the subject of both birds is "Love". In this passage, Patmore is as adept in handling words as is Tennyson.

He had listened as

". . . . . The blackbird in the wood  
Talked by himself," (4)

so when the blight of unpopularity and misunderstanding fell on him he compares himself to

". . . . . a bird  
Sole warbling in a wintry wood." (5)

In another place, he alludes to his poems as

"A hymn bright-noted like a bird  
Arousing these song-sleepy times." (6)

"Song-sleepy" is a fitting epithet for the materialistic day in which he wrote.

- (1) "Life of Coventry Patmore", by Edmund Gosse, p.223.
- (2) "Eros and Psyche". Poems by Coventry Patmore, p.342.
- (3) "Saint Valentine's Day". Ibid. p.273.
- (4) "Sahara". " p. 63.
- (5) "Going to Church", " p. 12.
- (6) "Victories of Love", p. 57.

As a boy, he had gone bird-nesting in the woods

"Where quiet ocean on the South  
Kiss'd Edgecumb's ruddy crags", (1)

and had found

"The blackbird's warm and wooly brood,  
Five golden beaks agape for food". (2)

These two compact lines furnish a complete description of the nestlings. Other birds, too, sing from his poems, for

"Across a fleeting eastern cloud  
The splendid rainbow sprang,  
And larks invisible and loud  
Within its zenith sang." (3)

In his intensely beautiful ode, "Winter",

"The flushed robin in the evening hoar  
Does of Love's day, as if he saw it, sing." (4)

Birds, flitting through his pictures, impart motion, colour and song, and impress us with Patmore's love of nature; but his trained powers of observation enable him to portray insect life as well. Now he shows us the "gadding butterfly", (5) "the spider in his rainy mesh", (6) or

"The chafers boom; the white moths rise  
Like spirits from the ground;  
The gray-flies sing their weary tune  
A distant dream-like sound." (7)

Another rich vein of imagery, closed to many poets, was Patmore's special inheritance. His grandfather was a lapidary of no mean skill, and to his favorite grandson he

- (1) "Tamerton Church-Tower". Poems by Coventry Patmore, p.378.
- (2) "Victories of Love". Ibid. p.202.
- (3) "Tamerton Church-Tower". " p.389.
- (4) "Winter". " p.277.
- (5) "Tamerton Church-Tower". " p.384.
- (6) Ibid. p.386.
- (7) "The River". " p.402.

strove to impart that keen delight the artist feels in the finished product of his creative fingers. Every art makes use of nature in such a way as to reveal the significance of the material, whether mass, colour, or sound, in which it works, as

" . . . from the matrix by God's grinding wrought  
The brilliant shall be brought." (1)

The time he spent in watching the goldsmith's work was not wasted. Years after it produced lines like this:

"It is the mould  
Wherein to beauty runs the gold", (2)

and

"Stings like an agile bead of boiling gold." (3)

Later in life Patmore became a collector of jewels, and in one of his prose essays, "Rod, Root and Flower", he tells us that the jewel-like brilliancy of ripe, red currants in the evening sunlight, seen in childhood's days, seemed to foreshadow his later passion for rubies.

One of the old Greek writers says an epigram (of which Patmore is a past-master), must be like a bee, - small in size, distilling sweets, yet possessing a sting. - See how well Patmore conforms to the rules: -

"Maidens shine  
As diamonds do,  
Which, though most clear,  
Are not to be seen through." (4)

How perfectly is Love's surrender shown in this one line from "The Contract":

- (1) "The Standards". Poems by Coventry Patmore, p.321.
- (2) "The Wedding Sermon." Ibid. p.259.
- (3) "De Natura Deorum". " p.343.
- (4) "Amelia". " p.366.



"... .. and I as now  
Melt like a golden ingot to your kiss", (1)

and the selflessness of generous love which is

"Pure as the permeating fires  
That smoulder in the opal's veins." (2)

Colour always appealed to him and riots gorgeously in  
many of his poems. Take the following, for instance:

"The far-fetched diamond finds its home  
Flashing and smouldering in her hair;  
For her the seas their pearls reveal;  
Art and strange lands her pomp supply  
With purple, chrome and cochineal,  
Ochre and lapis lazuli"; - - (3)

or

"Love's three-stranded ray -  
Red wrath; compassion golden; lazuline delight;" (4)

and again,

"At April's touch, the crudest bark  
Discovers gems of green." (5)

To the mystic, all things are symbolical, for only  
through the tangible can he hope to lead his reader into  
that mystic land which

"Lieth afar between mountains  
And God and His angels are there;  
And one is the dark mount of Sorrow,  
And one the bright mountain of Prayer." (6)

- (1) "The Contract". Poems by Coventry Patmore, p.314.
- (2) "The Tribute". Ibid. p. 97.
- (3) "The Country Ball". Ibid. p. 26.
- (4) "Proem" to "The Unknown Eros". Ibid. p.269.
- (5) "The Year". " p.428.
- (6) "The Song of the Mystic". Abram J. Ryan.

## CONCLUSION.

Besides the poems dealt with in the preceding chapters, Patmore wrote many others which cannot be treated in this essay. Among these is one which the poet himself preferred, - "Amelia", - an idyll or narrative love-poem. Though handled with Patmore's consummate power and literary tact, it is scarcely comparable to the exquisite "Odes". It is written in the metre of "The Unknown Eros" and links the latter with "The Angel in the House".

After the publication of the "Odes" Patmore devoted himself to prose. His essays were gathered into volumes and published at intervals between 1884 and 1895.

Though the quantity of his work was not great, it was nearly all of a high quality, and through it all can be read his conscientious endeavor to give nothing but his best; a scornful disregard of popularity which might entail the sacrifice of high aims; and a lofty ideal and sincerity of purpose.

Love was the keynote of all his work, and it was always love sanctioned by law. Were Patmore remembered for nothing more than for his noble attempts to stem the tide of revolt against marriage, his name could not suffer oblivion among those to whom the sanctity of the home is

dear. He strove to accomplish his aim by opening up vistas of thought on the divine mystery of love in marriage. Laws, he argued, conditioned its delights. Destroy these laws, make easy divorce possible, and what will result? The deadliest foe of freedom is not outward bondage but inward license. Man is free not in spite of loyalty to the Commandments, but because of it. He is led to higher things by love alone. Perfect nuptial love, he says, creates a nostalgia in the soul for God.

It is because of its shadowing forth of the Divine that marriage promises so much, and for this very reason also, does it fall short of fulfillment. Patmore insists again and again that it is not the goal of love but rather the starting-point for man and woman in their pursuit of happiness. With the pagan, marriage was the goal of love, as perishable as the body itself. But if, according to the Christian concept, love is desire of soul for soul, how can earthly nuptials give satisfaction?

"Love in the world is a pilgrim and a wanderer journeying to the New Jerusalem," writes Francis Thompson, "Not here is the consummation of his yearnings, in that mere knocking at the gates of union which we christen marriage, but beyond the pillars of earth and the corridors of the grave, in the union of spirit with spirit within the containing Spirit of God." (1) In perfect accord with Patmore's idea, he continues: "In Cana of Galilee love was consecrated and

(1) "Paganism Old and New". Works of Francis Thompson, Vol.111,p.48.

declared the child of Jehovah, not of Jove; there virtually was inaugurated the whole successive order of love-poets who have shown the world that passion in putting on chastity, put on also tenfold beauty. For purity is the sum of all loveliness as whiteness is the sum of all colours." (1)

A right idea of the dignity of the marriage state enhances the spirit of reverence between husband and wife, which, when disregarded, allows commonplaceness to creep in and mar their relationship, and the delicate balance between the physical and the spiritual suffers in consequence. Patmore protested against the existing low standards which were making marriage a mockery in his day. In a later century we witness still greater havoc in the family, due not so much to low attainment, as to a low ideal of marital duty and responsibility, - to an egoistic as opposed to an altruistic conception of love.

Were the divine purpose in matrimony more clearly perceived, conjugal felicity would gain much by an enlightened mutual forbearance with the shortcomings which reveal themselves in the intimacy of married life. The flame of love cannot always burn at white heat. One whose high ideal of marriage made her home a haven of comfort not only to her own family but to a large circle of intimate friends, has beautifully written of these fluctuations of human affections: "Love itself has tidal moments, lapses and flows due

(1) "Paganism Old and New". Works of Francis Thompson, Vol.111, p.48.

to the metrical rule of the interior heart." (1)

How much the future happiness of the young married couple depends on the tact with which these crucial moments are met, Patmore demonstrates in "The Angel in the House", and especially in "The Wedding Sermon" which is the fullest expression of his idea.

"The truths of love are like the sea  
For clearness and for mystery." (2)

"The Angel in the House" shows how strictly in accord with the teachings of the Church were the poet's sentiments even before his reception in 1864. Not a line needed to be altered to bring it into conformity with the strict, yet common sense exactions of authority.

Patmore's poems show accurate knowledge as well as poetic imagination. To predict popularity for him would be to over-look the fact that the idea he propounds in his domestic epic, is not one generally held, or likely to be accepted in an age when the civil laws governing the state of matrimony, have ceased to be of a permanently binding character, except in the minds of the few; while the spiritual application of the theme in the "Odes" will appeal to a much more limited number of earnest readers, although it was upon the foundation of Christian teaching, the truth of which Patmore's own experience taught him, that the mystic super-structure was raised.

The "Odes" constitute his noblest contribution to

(1) "The Rhythm of Life". Alice Meynell.

(2) "The Wedding Sermon". Poems by Coventry Patmore, p.251.

English literature and will repay with delight those who read them either for the idea they embody or for the beauty of their poetic form. Their purity, chivalry and ideality in the treatment of love appeal to the spiritual sense, to the aesthetic mind, to the uncorrupted heart. But as Basil Champneys remarks in his biography of Patmore: "The higher and purer the strain, the smaller will be the number of those who have ears for it." (1) That no one realized this fact better than the poet himself, we learn when, in answer to an imaginary mentor who upbraids him for clothing these mystic thoughts in the vernacular rather than in Imperial Latin, Patmore lets the lines of his last ode die away, as it were, in the sigh:

"Alas, and is not mine a language dead?" (2)

We cannot read these poems without visioning the beautiful prospect revealed to our imagination, the supernal light that transfigures the most familiar events of everyday life, the divine reflections mirrored in the soft radiance that casts a tender glow over the family hearth and the sacrificial altar of the cloister.

He could afford to disregard the opinions of the general mass of readers of his own day. He was almost too sure of himself and his mission, to suffer from neglect and misunderstanding. We see him in the later years of his life,

(1) "Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore".

Basil Champneys, Vol.1, p.248.

(2) "Dead Language". Poems by Coventry Patmore, p.359.

grown weary of the world with its tumult, confusion and unrest, turn his back upon it, and steep his mystic soul in the divine orderliness, serenity and beauty of Eternal Love.

"That the general purpose of the poems is obscure is inevitable", writes Mrs. Meynell. "It has the obscurity of profound clear waters. What the poet chiefly secures to us is the understanding that love and its bonds, its bestowal and reception, do but rehearse the action of the union of God with humanity - that there is no essential man save Christ, and no essential woman except the soul of mankind. When the singer of a Song of Songs seems to borrow the phrase of human love, it is rather that human love had first borrowed the truths of the love of God". (1)

There is a Meredithian flavor in his poetry as there is also a Shakespearian. Through the medium of his novels and verse, Meredith unfolds to us the mysteries of the spirit of the earth and brings us into intimate communion with her. Shakespeare has us walk with him across the stage of life and reveals to us through the experience of creatures of his fancy, mysteries of humanity and our own complex characters. Patmore, in his poetry and prose, leads us by analogy from man to God. By means of the natural and human he helps us to understand our relations to the Divine.

"There is in every line of 'The Unknown Eros' that continual slight novelty which makes classical poetry, certainly,

(1) "Alice Meynell: A Memoir", By Viola Meynell.....p.110.  
New-York, Charles Scribner's & Sons.

classical", (1) says Arthur Symons in an essay on Patmore. He speaks also of the "glittering peace" which illumines the "Odes" and the technical skill and depth of vision with which from earthly nuptials Patmore leads us upwards to those sublime heights where mortal love passes into that intense, self-abnegating, all-absorbing passion called the love of God.

His mind is imaginative, poetical, tender and gentle. His writing is the product of long years of thought, of varied experience and of a vivid and sincere personality. He who considered domestic life a worthy subject for an epic, deserves the appellation accorded him in the words of a discerning and sympathetic critic: - "The poet of England, of home, and of beauty." (2) Patmore's own words are a testimony to his sincerity of purpose and conscientious work:

"I do not know how good my best may be, but I have left to the world nothing but my best. . . . I have respected posterity, and should there be a posterity which cares for letters, I dare to hope that it will respect me."  
(3)

- (1) "Coventry Patmore"....By Arthur Symons in North American Review, February, 1920.  
(2) "The Idea of Coventry Patmore"...By Osbert Burdett, p. 96.  
(3) Preface to "Poems" By Coventry Patmore p. 5.



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