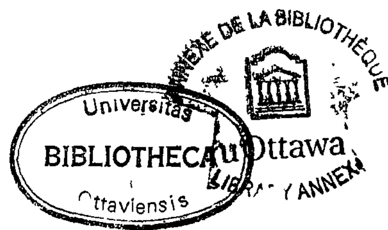
666

ALICE MEYNELL: HER PHILOSOPHY OF BEAUTY

by

Sister Mary of St. Audrey, c.s.c.

Thesis presented to the Faculty of Arts of the University of Ottawa as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.



Ottawa, Canada, 1957

UMI Number: EC55874

INFORMATION TO USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleed-through, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.
In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

UMI®

UMI Microform EC55874
Copyright 2011 by ProQuest LLC
All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

ProQuest LLC
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This thesis was prepared under the guidance of the Head of the English Department of the University of Ottawa, Dr. Emmett O'Grady. Gratitude is here expressed for his interest and co-operation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter		page
	INTRODUCTION	iv
I.-	PHILOSOPHY OF BEAUTY	1
II.-	BEAUTY IN HER LIFE	15
III.-	PHILOSOPHY OF BEAUTY IN HER POETRY	29
IV.-	PHILOSOPHY OF BEAUTY IN ALICE MEYNELL'S PROSE . .	48
V.-	PHILOSOPHY OF BEAUTY IN HER WORDS	70
VI.-	BEAUTY OF HER CONCEPTS	84
	SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	97
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	100

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is not meant to be a philosophical analysis of the concept of beauty prepared for the Department of Philosophy; it is meant to be a literary study of Alice Meynell based upon a few fundamental notions of beauty shared by such eminent thinkers as Plato, St. Thomas Aquinas, Jacques Maritain, and others. Beauty in the life and works of Alice Meynell is the goal; Thomistic notions of beauty as well as literary principles are the stepping stones to that goal. Due to limitations of library facilities, the works of Alice Meynell in book form only will provide material for this thesis, though she has written numerous other articles in English periodicals such as Merry England and the Pall Mall Gazette, Scots' Observer, and National Observer.

Mrs. A.K. Tuell has written Mrs. Meynell and her Literary Generation, a scholarly research on her life and writings. Her daughter, Viola Meynell, has written her biography: Alice Meynell: A Memoir. Many of the literary artists and critics of Mrs. Meynell's day and after, have written of her life and works. None has written solely from the viewpoint of her concepts of beauty for the achievement of literary excellence.

The following theses have been presented: Alice Meynell: Poet and Essayist, Toronto University, 1924: Mysticism of

<u>A. Meynell</u>, St. Louis, 1937,: <u>The Message of Alice Meynell</u>, Montreal University, 1940,: <u>Alice Meynell: A Study of her Relation to the Literary and Religious Movements of the Later Nineteenth Century</u>, University of Manitoba, 1944,; <u>Alice Meynell: Critique</u>, Queen's University, 1941,: <u>The Essays of A.M. in the Eighteen-Nineties</u>, University of Toronto, 1946.

Plato, Thomas Aquinas, Jacques Maritain, Coventry Patmore, Francis Thompson, and others who will be mentioned in this thesis agree on these fundamentals:

1. Unity is the form of all beauty.
2. Perfect proportion and effulgence are essential for beauty.
3. Beauty is governed by law and order.
4. Restraint is necessary.- The most can be gained by means of the least. Restraint makes for simplicity.
5. Originality is essential.
6. Silence makes possible the contemplation of the beautiful.
7. Art and Morality differ essentially.

It is the purpose of this thesis to prove the existence of these artistic qualities in Alice Meynell's life and work. The chapter which deals with Alice Meynell's character is meant merely to provide background for the assertions made in later chapters in discussing her written opinions of beauty as well as the existence of beauty in her own prose and poetry.

CHAPTER I

PHILOSOPHY OF BEAUTY

St. Thomas Aquinas defines beauty as that which gives pleasure on sight. Perfection, proportion, and clarity are essential to beauty. "In man", says Jacques Maritain, "only knowledge derived through the senses possesses fully the intuitivity necessary for the perception of the beautiful".

> So man can certainly enjoy purely intelligible beauty, but the beauty which is connatural to man is that which comes to delight the mind through the senses and their intuition. Such also is the peculiar beauty of our art, which works upon a sensible matter for the joy of the spirit. It would fain so persuade itself that paradise is not lost... So to say with the Schoolmen that beauty is the splendour of form shining on the proportioned parts of matter is to say that it is a lightning of mind on a matter intelligently arranged. The mind rejoices in the beautiful because in the beautiful it finds itself again: recognizes itself, and comes into contact with its very own light. This is so true that they especially perceive and particularly relish the beauty of things, who, like St. Francis of Assisi, for example, know that they emanate from a mind and refer them to their Author... The more highly developed a man's culture becomes, the more spiritual grows the brilliance of the form which ravishes him.[1]

Goodness then is the perfection at the root of beauty. St. Thomas holds that they are inseparable, being based on the same thing, namely form. "But they are distinguishable",

---

1 Jacques Maritain, Art and Scholasticism, London, Sheed, 1946, p. 19-21.

he claims, "since the good concerns desire"[2]. Perfection can be achieved in countless ways. So too with proportion; it differs with the end aimed at. "The slightest sketch of Leonardo's or even Rodin's is nearer to perfection", says Jacques Maritain, "than the most finished Bouguereau"[3]. Likewise, even the briefest poem fashioned by Keats or Shelley may be more perfect than any by Robert Southey in spite of the latter's rhetorical power and skilful craftsmanship.

Jacques Maritain attests to the fact that all the Ancients have declared clarity to be the essential character of beauty:

> This very brilliance of form, the essence of beauty shines on matter in an infinite variety of ways. At one time it is the sensible brilliance of colour or tone... a rhythm or a harmonious balance... or again the reflection upon things of some human or divine thought, but above all it is the profound splendour of the soul shining through ... Beauty is in a manner relative... However beautiful a created thing may be, it may appear beautiful to some and not to others, because it is beautiful only under certain aspects which some discover and others do not see...[4]

Max Jacob, in his Art Poetic, says, "In aesthetics there is never any fundamental innovation. The laws of beauty

---

2 E.F. Carritt, Philosophies of Beauty, New York, Oxford, 1931, p. 51.

3 Maritain, op. cit., p. 22.

4 Ibid., p. 23.

are eternal, the most violent innovations obey them unawares: they obey them in their own way and that is the point of interest"[5].

Novelty, Jacques Maritain considers fundamentally necessary in art. "The creator in art is he who discovers a new type analogy of the beautiful", he says, "a new way in which the brilliance of form can be made to shine upon matter"[6]. Marcus Tullius Cicero had thought thus:

> When Phedias was carving a Zeus or an Athene he did not study a model which he should imitate. Rather there was an exalted type of beauty residing in his own mind and fixing his whoe attention upon this, he used all his skill and dexterity to reproduce it.[7]

Plato's theory that beauty is not just truth nor edification is shared by all true artists. They are in agreement that religion, science, and politics are outside the realm of art. Plato would not identify beauty with usefulness unless it be useful for the highest purpose, and even at that, beauty must retain its own intrinsic charm.

---

5 Maritain, op. cit., p. 36.

6 Ibid., p. 36.

7 Carritt, op. cit., p. 36.

In his Symposium Plato maintains:

> Beautiful things point to Absolute beauty... This is the true discipline of loving or being loved - that a man begin with the beauties of this world and use them as stepping stones for an unceasing journey to that other beauty... going from beautiful creatures to beautiful lives, and from beautiful lives to beautiful truths, and from beautiful truths attaining finally to the true knowledge itself, and so know at last what beauty is.[8]

We know this Absolute Beauty to be God Himself.

The object of art is the creation of beauty. "The being of all things derives from the Divine Beauty", says St. Thomas. "Thus, the artist imitates God", Jacques Maritain concludes, "Who created the world by communicating to it a likeness of His beauty".

> On the other hand, to create a work of beauty is to create a work resplendent with the glitter or the brilliance, the mystery of a form, in the metaphysical sense of the word, a radiance of intelligibility and truth, an irradiation of the primal effulgence. And the artist no doubt perceives this form in the world of creation, whether interior or exterior: he does not discover it complete in the sole contemplation of his creative mind... It is his eye and his mind that have perceived and disengaged it and it must itself be alive within him, have assumed human life in him, live in his intelligence with an intellectual life and in his heart and flesh with a sensitive life, for him to be able to impart it to matter in the work he is doing. The work so bears the stamp of the artist; it is the offspring of his soul and mind.[9]

---

8 Carritt, op. cit., p. 16-17.

9 Maritain, op. cit., p. 96.

"Perfection", says Flaccus, "is something we do not expect in real life. In art it can be attained".

> The beautiful is complete and all of a piece. The unity that it has is a living unity: a common life flows back and forth from part to part and glows with a warmth and glamour in every enhanced and enhancing part. Plotinus and certain medieval writers were aware of this; the smoothness and suavitas they pointed to in the beautiful were nothing but the result of this interflow.[10]

Restraint is necessary for truly beautiful art. Longinus said, "Sometimes a bare thought, not in so many words expressed is marvellous just for its greatness, as the silence of Ajax in The Wraiths, is inexpressibly great".

> In literature the thought and the diction generally modify each other's development... for in fact the beauty of language is the proper light of the mind.[11]

The literary artist who seeks beauty must follow the literary principle of seeking the least in order to attain the most.

---

10 Louis Flaccus, The Spirit and Substance of Art, New York, Crofts, 1931, p. 234.

11 Carritt, op. cit., p. 37-38.

Paul Speckbaugh establishes the quality of restraint on firm and convincing artistic bases:

> Anything is needless which either by its presence or its absence marks no change in the beauty of the finished work. Such elimination or denial touches the relations of all the parts to the whole thought, the whole emotion, the whole imagining of the poet... The great sculptors in bronze, stone, and marble, - a Michangelo, a Rodin, or a Manship, have realized in their creations the need for restraint. If we study closely the Pieta of Michangelo, we shall see quite clearly how the use of the extended left hand conveys all the grief, and beyond that, tears and sobbing are superfluous. Here, as in all great art, the least conveys the most; severe reserve does not destroy the note of richness.
>
> The poet, using restraint, is in the first place, the master of his own creative ability. His intellect and will governing his imagination and emotion, constitute an artistic sense which triumphs in its own cause... Never does an extraneous figure, a line of seeming great beauty but needless, an emotion which draws us from the chosen path - never will these temptations lure the true poet who makes the most of restraint.
>
> The purifying effect of this note in poetry will make itself felt perhaps most deeply and essentially in the domain of the intellect. According to the fundamental dictates of restraint, the underlying thought will be one that makes a real contribution, something original, poetic, in short, beautiful... The poetic idea which does add to the world of beauty has its proper form, and restraint working through the intellect, will choose the appropriate.[12]

Alice Meynell's works and even her entire life reveal her acceptance of the foregoing theories. Her quest of beauty from earliest childhood to old age led her along the path of

---

12 Paul Speckbaugh, "Restraint" in Spirit, issue of Sept. 1938, p. 119.

goodness and truth. Throughout her life she rejoiced in beauty as an emanation of the divine Mind, preserving to the end that sense of wonder, finding beauty everywhere. True art could touch only the beautiful, she thought. Truth and goodness were of the very essence of her thought. Beautiful art and morality were never confused in her mind; the means and ends for both were quite different.

Her work bears testimony to her amazing power for grasping in analogues the unity of all things in their multitudinous variety. "From her science of beauty", says Thomas Boyle O'Reilly, "comes, not the waxen bud, but the rose that sways in the wet dawn"[13].

Just as the beauties of creation are governed by law and order, so life and art are beautiful only in proportion to the observance of law and order. Alice Meynell was in complete accord with Coventry Patmore in accepting law as "the rectitude of humanity". To his assertion that three modes of inflection, metrical, linguistical, and moral, all chime together in praise of the true order of life, she adds:

---

13 Thomas B. O'Reilly, "Study of Mrs. Meynell's Poems" in The Catholic World, Vol. 73, July 1901, p. 521.

(She adds:)

> And like that order is the order of the figure of man, an order most beautiful and most secure when it is put to the proof. That perpetual proof by perpetual inflection is the very condition of life. Symmetry is a profound, if disregarded because perpetually inflected, condition of human life... With Greece abides the obvious law and the less obvious life; symmetry as apparent as the symmetry of the form of man, and life occult like his unequal heart.[14]

This she acknowledges to be the "noble and perdurable art". In The English Metres, she again gives proof of her love of law:

> The rooted liberty of flowers in breeze
> Is theirs, by national luck impulsive, terse,
> Tethered, uncaptured, rules obeyed 'at ease',
> Time-strengthened laws of verse.[15]

In Alice Meynell's prose and poetry we shall find abundant proof of the fact that she sees beauty in the observance of law. Hers is a marvellous intellectual power of precision. Hers too, like John Donne's, a great admiration for "A naked, thinking heart that makes no show"[16].

We shall find her clever use of metre, of rhythm, her care in using the "mot juste" attesting to her clear understanding of the control necessary to evoke the tension of thought and feeling. Though some had succeeded in achieving

---

14 Alice Meynell, Essays, London, Burns, 1914, p. 151.

15 --------, Poems, London, Hollis, 1947, p. 103.

16 Walter de la Mare, Private View, London, Faber, 1953, p. 160.

a work of beauty with ease, such was never her way. Her temperament, as well as her early training, inclined her to choose the austere and difficult way. An early poem, The Young Neophyte, reveals a dedicated spirit:

> I dedicate my fields when Spring is grey...
> Hands trembling with what toils? In their retreat
>
> I seal my love to-be, my folded art.
> I light the tapers at my head and feet,
> And lay the crucifix on this silent heart.[17]

Years later, in Via, et Veritas, et Vita, she expressed in four brief lines her sole demands of life and religion:

> 'You never attained to Him?' 'If to attain
> Be to abide, then that may be.'
> 'Endless the way, followed with how much pain!'
> 'The way was He.'[18]

Naturally her philosophy of life greatly influenced her philosophy of beauty. This we shall note in the study of her work in the following chapters.

Though in many ways, she admired Ruskin and his work, she opposed his theory that the artist should work in materials that would be permanent; this to her seemed to be a tyranny and a violence. Careful student of the law that lies behind the arts, she felt it was wrong to impose the tastes of the individual upon posterity. In an essay, Tithonus, she says, "Obviously to build at all is to impose

---

17 Meynell, Poems, p. 147.

18 Ibid., p. 23.

something upon an age that may be more than willing to build for itself. The day may soon come when no man will do even so much without some impulse of apology"[19]. In The Honours of Mortality, she proves that she considers these "honours" worth striving for:

> Art consents at last to work upon the tissue and the china that are doomed to the natural and necessary end... And the reward has been in the sigular and manifest increase of vitality in this work which is done for so short a life. Fittingly indeed does life reward the acceptance of death, inasmuch as to die is to have been alive. There is a real circulation of blood - quick use, brief beauty, abolition, recreation...[20]

Jacques Maritain quotes St. Thomas, who said shortly before his death, with reference to his unfinished Summa: "What rubbish it is! mihi videtur ut palea". And the Parthenon and Our Lady of Chartres, the Sistine Chapel, and the Mass in B minor are also rubbish, destined to be burned on the Last Day. "Created things have no savour"[21]. Alice Meynell then, might well plead with literary artists for the honours of mortality!

G. K. Chesterton considered her philosophy a kind of Christian Stoicism. Though much of her work has been

---

19 Meynell, Essays, p. 136.

20 Ibid., p. 48-49.

21 Maritain, op. cit., p. 29.

compared, for its classic frigidity, with the exquisite work of Sophocles and Joubert, Chesterton asserts:

> She was strong with deep roots where all the stoics were only stiff with despair; she was alive to an immortal beauty where all the pagans could only mix beauty with mortality.[22]

Restraint and vigilance are evident in all her work, especially in her more mature work. Potent in her reserves, she knew how to extract the quintessence of simplicity. The thought itself must be beautiful; never would she strive to adorn the "holy body of thought"[23] with unessentials. Austere in life as well as in art, she practised abstention especially in beauty. Art, she believed, should produce high delight, not mere pleasure or agreeable emotions.

St. Thomas declared, "Properly considered, all the activities of human life seem to be for the service of those engaged in the contemplation of truth"[24]. Contemplative by nature, Alice Meynell bent all her powers towards austere truth. Very different was her ideal of beauty from that of Walter Pater, whose aestheticism Jacques Maritain termed, "the stupidest and most mendacious caricature of contemplation"[25].

---

22 G.K. Chesterton, Autobiography, London, Burns, 1936, p. 286-287.

23 Mrs. A.K. Tuell, Mrs. Meynell and her Literary Generation, New York, Dutton, 1925, p. 181.

24 Maritain, op. cit. p. 63.

25 Ibid., p. 169.

Perfection, so essential to beauty, must be attained, even at great cost to self. Well did she understand the words of St. Thomas: "Perfection consists in being engaged in contemplation; indeed, the highest perfection of human life consists in this that the mind of man be occupied with God"[26].

She knew with Jacques Maritain that "Christianity does not make art easy".

> It deprives it of many facile means, it stops its progress in many directions but in order to raise its level. In the very creation of these salutary difficulties, it elevates art from within, brings to its knowledge a hidden beauty more delightful than light, gives it what the artist needs most, simplicity, the peace of reverent fear and love, such innocence as makes matter docile to men and fraternal.[27]

Because with her, restraint was sacrificial rather than negative, her very silences were vital, characteristic of her noble life as well as her art.

Francis Thompson praised her "austerely perfect work" in that she wrote the very quintessence of thoughts that she had pondered long and deeply. "High speech must be shod in silence"[28], he said.

---

26 Aquinas, Summa Contra Gentiles, III, 130.

27 Maritain, op. cit., p. 57.

28 Francis Thompson, Review of Mrs. Meynell's Poems, in The Tablet, Vol. 81, p. 90, 1893.

It is most significant that she thought of likening silence to the beloved:

> Darkness and solitude, shine for me.
> For life's fair outward part are rife.
> The silver noises; let them be.
> It is the very soul of life
> Listens for thee, listens for thee.[29]

Hers was a piercing perception of beauty; consequently, she found much to admire in Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, Shelley, Keats, the Mystical Lyrists of the seventeenth century, Coventry Patmore, and others of like calibre, but George Meredith paid tribute to the originality of her work when he wrote of her verse, "It has the swallow's wings and challenges none"[30]. In Innocence and Experience, she wrote:

> Therefore I bind Innocence and Experience in one, and take them as a sign of the necessary and noble isolation of man from man - of his uniqueness. But if I had a mind to forgo that manner of personal separateness, and to use the things of others, I think I would rather appropriate their future than their past. Let me put on their hopes, and the colours of their confidence, if I must borrow. Not that I would burden my prophetic soul with unjustified ambitions; but even this would be more tolerable than to load my memory with an unjustifiable history.[31]

---

29 Meynell, Poems, p. 120.

30 George Meredith, "Mrs. Meynell's Two Books of Essays, The Rhythm of Life, and The Colour of Life", in The Letters of George Meredith to Alice Meynell, London, Nonesuch, 1923, p. 85-94.

31 Meynell, Essays, p. 86.

In her work we shall find delicacy of craftsmanship, perfection of form, clarity, simplicity, calm and complete self-possession. Though her poetic theory changes with the years, translucent beauty remains.

In this chapter an attempt has been made to define beauty according to the tenets of St. Thomas and the Schoolmen and according to a few Platonic theories. We have seen briefly that Alice Meynell's criteria for beauty expressly followed these tenets as well as those of literary artists such as Coventry Patmore, Francis Thompson, and others. Our study of her own work in later chapters will reveal wherein she finds beauty. We shall search for evidence of truth, goodness, perfection, proportion, clarity, unity, order, novelty, silence, and restraint in her life and work in order to determine whether or not practice bore out her theory of beauty, and in what manner she applied that philosophy.

CHAPTER II

BEAUTY IN HER LIFE

Beauty belongs to the realm of the spirit and, as we have said, is essentially delightful. Plotinus averred:

> The soul is beautiful in virtue of intelligence, and other things are beautiful so far as the soul gives them form - all things that are beautiful in actions and ways of life. And it is the soul which gives even bodies the right to be called beautiful...[1]

Edgar Hallam Moorehouse expressed the thought of many concerning Alice Meynell's beauty when he said that "the clarity, the withdrawness of her mind, made her rather apart from the world..."

> The very look of her was not like other women, her deep, dark eyes, her
> "Vesper-like face, its shadows bright
> With meanings of sequestered light",
> her Italian colouring, her grace of movement, her silences so alive, with thought and feeling. Ruskin said that a look of wonder marks the genius and that look was hers.[2]

Francis Thompson paid glorious tribute to that beauty in many of his poems, especially in Her Portrait. Only "that

---

1 E.F. Carritt, Philosophies of Beauty, p. 46.

2 Edgar Hallam Moorehouse, "'The Flower of the Mind': Alice Meynell and Her Work", in The Fortnightly Review, Vol. 119, issue of Jan. 1923, p. 64.

speech which angels' tongues turn gold" could do justice to such ethereal beauty.

> Oh, but the heavenly grammar did I hold
> Of that high speech which angels' tongues turn gold!
> So should her deathless beauty take no wrong,
> Praised in her own great kindred's fit and cognate tongue.
>
> . . . .
> At the rich odours from her heart that rise,
> My soul remembers its lost Paradise.
>
> . . . .
> Thus do I know her; but for what men call
> Beauty - the loveliness corporeal,
> Its most just praise a thing unproper were
> To singer or to listener, me or her.
> She wears that body but as one indues
> A robe, half careless, for it is the use;
> God laid His fingers on the ivories
> Of her pure members as on smoothed keys
> And there outbreathed her spirit's harmonies.
>
> . . . .
> How should I gauge what beauty is her dole,
> Who cannot see her countenance for her soul.
> . . . .[3]

Hosts of discriminating men and women have praised this great and gracious lady for the qualities of beauty so evident in her life and work. All who were privileged to share her friendship considered her entire life as a symbol of the truth and beauty of her work. They were charmed, as was Francis Thompson, by her "high, reticent way"[4], the clarity of her noble mind, the originality of her thoughts.

---

3 Francis Thompson, Poems, London, Cape, 1948, p. 38, 40, 41, 42.

4 Ibid., p. 43.

Katherine Brégy asserted: "All the great and elemental things of life have claimed allegiance from her; her mind, like Raphael's, (is) a temple for all lovely things to flock to and inhabit"[5]. Katherine Tynan, an intimate friend, described Alice Meynell as "a slight, shadowy presence somewhere in the background, where she could not long remain". Her significant presence could not be overlooked... for she was "as high a woman ... as one finds this side of paradise"[6]. John Sargent's psychic portrait shows his recognition of the greatness of her mind for he painted her tall.

Coventry Patmore surpassed all others in his praise of "this sweet, noble, and singular personality".

> There is a sort of sanctity about such delicate genius as Mrs. Meynell's which makes one shrink to see the robe of her Muse brush against anything common. Let her respect her own graceful powers and personality, as every man of true delicacy and insight must respect them and she will become one of the fairest and steadiest lights of English literature though she may remain inconspicuous to "the crowd, incapable of perfectness".[7]

Alice Thompson (Meynell) was born in 1847 in Barnes, west of London, but the greater part of her youth was spent in Italy with frequent visits to Genoa, Venice, Switzerland, Germany, France, as well as to her native land. The ever-

---

5 Katherine Brégy, Poets' Chantry, London, Herbert, 1912, p. 159.

6 K. Tynan, "Alice Meynell", in The Catholic World, Vol. 129, Sept. 1929, p. 641-642 and 651.

7 Coventry Patmore, Principle in Art, London, Duckworth, 1889, p. 127-128.

changing scene, each with its distinctive charm, etched itself indelibly upon a memory early trained to store details with a truth and accuracy that was unique. Hers was indeed a girlhood lit with rare and radiant beauty. Memories of sunlit skies and noble landscapes may be traced throughout her prose and poetry as we shall see in our study of these. She revelled in the harmony of creation; her delight was not for mere surface beauty but for the spiritual beauty it suggested to her. In her youth she wrote, "I muse with cloud-wings furled against the sun"[8].

Hers was a twofold blessing; not only were her childhood joys enhanced by surroundings of serene loveliness but also they were shared with those who had the power to deepen her sense of beauty. Mr. Thompson, a gentleman of broad cultural interests, of rare talents, and of exquisite taste, had superb gifts to bequeath his daughters. Not less brilliant were their mother's gifts; her fine musicianship and talent in art were undoubtedly a fertile source of inspiration to Alice and to her artist sister.

Mr. Thompson devoted himself entirely to the education of his two daughters, inspiring them with a sense of inheritance, of oneness with the past, that only liberal scholarship

---

8 Alice Meynell, Poems, London, Hollis, 1947, p. 183.

can give. That his teaching remained an inspiration to her throughout life is proved by the fact that she wrote even when she was quite old:

> O liberal, constant, dear,
> Crush in my nature the ungenerous art
> Of the inferior; set me high...[9]

He taught them the value of silence that they might concern themselves with the deep and essential matters of life. Alice Meynell described her father as "a man whose silence seems better worth interpreting than the speech of another".

> He was not inarticulate, he was only silent. He had an exquisite style from which to refrain. The things he abstained from were all exquisite... Things ignoble never approached near enough for his refusal; they had not with him so much as that negative connection. If I had to equip an author I should ask no better than to arm him and invest him with precisely the riches that were renounced by the man whose intellect, by integrity, had become a presence-chamber... his personality made laws for me... I began to discern all things in literature and in life - in the chastity of letters and in the honour of life - that I was bound to love. Not the things of one character only, but excellent things of every character...[10]

Thus it was that surrounded by natural beauty from early childhood, given every opportunity that high-minded parents and friends of leisure and of fastidious taste could provide, Alice Thompson formed high ideals, thought nobly,

---

9 Alice Meynell, Poems, London, Hollis, 1947, p. 78.

10 --------, Prose and Poetry, London, Cape, 1947, p. 226-227.

lived sublimely. Intimate friends attest that she wrote out her very life and thought; that her exquisite work reveals her exquisite self. Katherine Tynan compared her to a daffodil - "so flamelike, drawn upwards... her face towards the Spring although she was outwardly pensive as Autumn or the moon"[11]. Ernest Dimnet, from his first meeting with her, considered her the most interior woman he had ever met. "Every word she said", he declared, "seemed to come from the deepest of her soul"[12].

Theodore Maynard described her as "ethereal and august" - one of the few writers he had ever known "who was in herself exactly what her work would indicate". In The World I Saw he speaks of the first time he saw her:

> Alice Meynell was indeed a very grand personage but not the overpowering one I had expected. Though nearly seventy and in delicate health, there was something about her that suggested a slender highly-tempered sword, something too, of a tongue of fire. Her carriage was gallant... If she was exquisite, her mind was august and she used to say that had she been born a man and broad, she would have been like Chesterton. It was always a keen pleasure to me to look at her sitting in her chair, serene, attentive even to banal conversation - though visibly impatient of it - and never speaking without distinction.[13]

---

11 Katherine Tynan, "Alice Meynell" in The Catholic World, Vol. 129, issue of Sept. 1929, p. 641.

12 Ernest Dimnet, My Old World, London, Cape, 1939, p. 291.

13 Theodore Maynard, The World I Saw, Milwaukee, Bruce, 1939, p. 195-197.

Alfred Noyes, John Squire, J. Drinkwater, Charles L. Hind, Robert Wilberforce, and many others expressed much the same opinion. In old age, her personality had lost nothing of the beauty so remarkable in youth.

Mrs. Tuell, who made a detailed and critical study of Mrs. Meynell's complete works, writes of her:

> To see her was to recall the admonitions of her essays, her commendations for "the courteous game of pretending to be amused", her call for the immediate business of all souls "to live in loveliness and pleasantness with one another"... For Mrs. Meynell herself one can remember the phrase in reverence.
>
> But the presence, graciously a member of its company, seemed in some elusive way graciously withdrawn. Hers was a guardian spirit, aware of its time and place, mindful of its neighbour's ease, candid, kindling to sympathy, but dwelling the while, as one knew, in a superior place apart.
>
> And for her thought the loneliness of the human spirit was at once its mysterious doom and its august privilege.[14]

Viola Meynell, in A Memoir, tells of her mother's conversion to the Catholic faith at the age of twenty when she chose freely "the hard old common path of submission and self-discipline"[15]. Commenting on that choice, her daughter says: "And never surely was so rational a choice as hers more absolutely embraced in its farthest implications. No single

---

14 Mrs. A.K. Tuell, Mrs. Meynell and Her Literary Generation, New York, Dutton, 1925, p. 3-4.

15 Viola Meynell, A Memoir, London, Cape, 1929, p. 42.

act of hers in life or in literature was not pledged and bound by her when she chose that law"[16]. The dedication of her life and art finds beautiful expression in The Young Neophyte:

> Who knows what days I answer for today?
> Giving the bud, I give the flower. I bow
> This yet unfaded and a faded brow...[17]

But for the most part she was silent about her conversion, silent with wonder at the greatness and the beauty of it all.

Wilfrid Meynell first knew his future wife through a poem of hers in the Pall Mall Gazette, My Heart Shall Be Thy Garden:

> My heart shall be thy garden. Come, my own,
> Into thy garden; thine be happy hours
> Among my fairest thoughts, my tallest flowers,
> From root to crowning petals thine alone.
>
> . . . .
> My heart has thoughts, which, though thine eyes hold mine,
> Flit to the silent world and other summers,
> With wings that dip beyond the silver seas.[18]

He expressed the desire to meet the author of such a poem, for hers must be a most exquisite mind and heart, he thought. Each recognized in the other a kindred spirit, a lofty soul. They were married in 1877 and planned eagerly to share their world of beauty, which was ultimately Eternal Beauty, with countless others.

---

16 Meynell, op. cit., p. 43.

17 Meynell, Poems, p. 147.

18 Ibid., p. 138.

There followed many happy, and very busy years, during which Mrs. Meynell wrote steadily and untiringly for The Weekly Register and Merry England when her husband was editor of these, and also for the best literary periodicals of Victorian England.

Her devotion to her family was an inspiration to many. After her death Wilfrid Meynell loved to recall the forty-five years of heaven on earth that she had afforded him. Mother of eight children, she had never ceased to glory in the wonder and the greatness of motherhood. Indeed her sense of wonderment about things great and small remained with her throughout her long life and was the secret of her art and of her personal charm.

The leading literary lights of her day met frequently at her home; many were the animated literary discussions carried on in her drawing room at Palace Court. Robert Browning, Tennyson, Ruskin, Rosetti, Meredith, Patmore were frequent visitors in the early years. Later came Chesterton, Belloc, L. Johnson, Noyes, and many others. Lewis Hind declared: "I may say that calling at that house meant arriving at about half-past three, staying till midnight and meeting in the course of the year most of the literary folk worth knowing"[19]. Father Thornton said: "If she brought the

---

19 Charles Lewis Hind, Authors and I, London, Lane, 1920, p. 143.

revival (of Catholic Tradition) into the drawing room, she also took it into the empyrean of pure literature... She was a great spirit. Behind the disciplined wall of her words burned intense emotional fires"...[20]

Richard Le Gallienne also recalls delightful hours spent in the literary salon at Palace Court. "I have", he says, "no other such picture of a full and harmonious home life to set by its side". Of Mrs. Meynell he wrote:

> Never surely was a lady who carried her learning and wore the flower of her gentle, humane sanctity with such quiet grace, with so gentle and understanding a smile. The touch of exquisite asceticism about her seemed to accent the sympathy of her manner, the manner of one quite humanly and simply in this world with all its varied interests, and yet not of it. There was the charm of a beautiful abbess about her with the added esprit of intellectual sophistication. However quietly she sat in her drawing room of an evening, her presence radiated a peculiarly lovely serenity, like a twilight gay with stars. But there was nothing austere or withdrawn about her. In that very lively household of young people she was one with the general fun...[21]

Alice Meynell travelled a great deal both through Europe and the United States. Her frequent letters to her husband and sons and daughters during these times reveal a singular love for the simplicities of nature in preference to

---

20 Father Thornton, Return to Tradition, Milwaukee, Bruce, 1948, p. xiii.

21 Richard Le Gallienne, The Romantic Nineties, London, Doubleday, 1925, p. 271.

its glories. We find this preference stated very definitely in her essay Waterfalls[22], which we shall quote in Chapter IV.

Mere ornateness or exaggeration of any kind displeased her. In 1913 she wrote from Rome, "There is a kind of excess in the luxury of society here - the canopies of flowers, the regiments of tall servants, gold and silver plate, which I don't and never shall enjoy in such a world of want"[23]. But of the beauties of nature she had written earlier:

> Rome is too beautiful. It is almost a relief to look at the gasworks and the palms when one almost aches with love of the pines and belfries ... Everything here is at the summit of perfection and nothing exaggerated.[24]

Her greatest admiration was for "the little less (that) makes so undesignedly, and as it were, so inevitably, for beauty".

> The country that is formed for use and purpose only is immeasurably the loveliest. What a lesson in literature! How feelingly it persuades us that all except a very little of the ornament of letters and of life makes the dullness of the world. The tenderness of colour, the beauty of series and perspective, and the variety of surface, produced by the small culture of vegetables, are among the charms that come unsought, and that are not to be found by seeking - are never to be achieved if they are sought for their own sake.[25]

---

22 Alice Meynel, op. cit., p. 264.

23 Viola Meynell, Memoir, p. 278.

24 Ibid., p. 236.

25 Alice Meynell, op. cit., p. 268.

Restraint, renunciation, composure, these qualities she possessed to a marked degree. Essentially solitary in nature, she practised silence as a source of new strength, as an aid to the contemplation of truth and beauty. Father Terence Connolly wrote at the time of her Centenary Celebration:

> There was a high and noble precedent for Mrs. Meynell's love of silence set by the woman who spoke no recorded word from the moment of her acceptance of her awful destiny of Mother of God Incarnate until she greeted her aged cousin Elizabeth with the opening words of the Magnificat.
>
> Ah, what silence
> Which had for prologue thy Magnificat!
>
> ... If as Patmore was fond of saying, the Incarnation is repeated in everyone who receives the messages of His angel with somewhat of Mary's faith, there is little wonder that in Mrs. Meynell's poetry intimations of God Incarnate are so frequent...[26]

Goethe's dictum - "To be able to do something, you must be something"[27], was also Alice Meynell's. At her death in 1922, "the finest praise from the finest minds" bore eloquent testimony to this:

> Hers is the grace to add to the richness and content of life. But not literary gifts alone can do this; it is vision and she had this in the supreme degree. She penetrated to the poignancy, the beauty of those small things we are most of us too heavy-lidded to perceive.[28]

---

26 Terence Connolly, "Alice Meynell's Centenary", in America, Vol. 78, issue of October 18, 1947, p. 73.

27 Maritain, Art and Scholasticism, London, Sheed, 1946, p. 162.

28 Edgar Hallam Moorehouse, op. cit., p. 67-68.

J. L. Garvin claimed that "nothing she had ever written was without some word of permanent significance for life"... and that, in spite of her death, there still remained "one of those immortal presences which inhabit our minds changelessly when fickle substance is fled away. He wrote:

> For the ordeal of life or criticism she had all the fortitudes. Her controlling intellect stilled the hypersensitive nerves. She was sufficiently tested by hostile, misunderstanding comments - but on the whole, no woman of any time was given more reason for plenitude of praise to deepen her soul's humility. Neither Beatrice nor Laura had that marshalled testimony of many men of genius for a woman whose achievement in their own sphere was more slender but of a security as absolute. Distinction.- Coventry Patmore first said it. George Meredith confirmed it though his critical scrutiny could penetrate the bone and marrow of false pretensions... He recognized her veritable intellect, keen, puissant.[29]

Robert Wilberforce was with her when the end came. After the heart attack, he assisted her back to the house and he remarked later, "I admired her silent heroism, a part of her self-discipline"[30].

The sublime thought in one of her last poems, To the Mother of Christ the Son of Man[31], synthesizes her lovely

---

29 J.L. Garvin, "Alice Meynell" in The Living Age, Vol. 29, 1923, p. 103.

30 R. Wilberforce "Alice Meynell Personal Tribute" in T. Connolly Centenary Tribute, Boston, Humphries, 1947, p. 12.

31 Alice Meynell, Poems, p. 105.

life. She who had scarcely noticed the travail of motherhood for the very glory of co-operating with God in the creation of a human soul, understood clearly the privilege of that earthly travail necessary in order to bring Christ into our hearts whence He would radiate His glory. She knew that the seed of Truth was "locked" in her and that her "passion" must be that striving to agony to express it as fittingly as is possible to finite powers, in order to do the good that was required of her. She who possessed "unutterable, even unthinkable truth"[32] asserted that we must be untiring in our efforts to bring into our "grasp", into our heart, the resplendent One "lingering in the breast of our humanity".

We too (one cried), we too,
We the unready, the perplexed, the cold,
Must shape the Eternal in our thoughts anew,
Cherish, possess, enfold.

Thou sweetly, we in strife.
It is our passion to conceive Him thus
In mind, in sense, within our house of life;
That seed is locked in us.

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

Nor shall we ever rest
From this our task. An hour sufficed for thee,
Thou innocent! He lingers in the breast
Of our humanity.[33]

---

32 C.C. Martindale, "Alice Meynell" in The Catholic World, Vol. 166, 1947-48, p. 176.

33 Meynell, op. cit., p. 105.

CHAPTER III

PHILOSOPHY OF BEAUTY IN HER POETRY

In _Poetry and Beauty_, Jacques Maritain bases his theories upon the speculations of the Ancients and especially is he in accord with St. Thomas Aquinas when he declares:

> Aesthetic beauty,... the beauty most naturally proportioned to the human mind, is a particular determination of transcendental beauty: it is transcendental beauty as confronting not simply the intellect, but the intellect and the sense acting together as one single act... Art struggles to surmount beauty and to absorb aesthetic beauty in transcendental beauty.
>
> This is a token both of its own spirituality, and of the indestructible relationship of beauty, even aesthetic beauty, to the kingdom of intelligence, to which it belongs and in which it is rooted... Hence it is that beauty that keeps its transcendental essence as well as its essentially analogous character even when encompassed within the limits of aesthetic beauty. This... character even appears to man in the most striking manner in artistic beauty because, there, beauty, in order to exist in a thing, was previously conceived and nurtured in a human intellect... And it is by virtue of this transcendental nature of beauty, even aesthetic beauty, that all great poetry awakes in us, one way or another, the sense of our mysterious identity, and draws us toward the sources of being.
>
> ...Poetry transcends art while being committed to it.[1]

Alice Meynell's poetry bears witness to the fact that all earthly beauty is an emanation from the Divine Intellect. She regarded the poet as an associate of God in fashioning words to beauty.

---

1 Jacques Maritain, _Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry_, New York, Pantheon, 1953, p. 164-166 and 172.

In her earliest poems as well as in later ones we find proof that she dedicated herself to her art. Her Wind Song to the Hill, never printed by herself, is very revealing:

> Over the round hill-tops shall I come to thee,
> High-hearted, with light feet upon the thyme,
> A child, an impulse sprung from spring to woo thee,
> Young with all youth, O hill that I would climb,
> With morning thoughts from Morning throned to sue thee?[2]

Throughout this poem she asks what choice she ought to make of all the loveliness she may use for her art. Finally she concludes that joy, grief, love, all natural beauties may sing the glory of God, though to name Him seems to her a redundancy.

Of her earliest poems, Francis Thompson has written:

> Her imagination is wholly of the etherealized quality; you must not look in it for ardour. Her power becomes visible from a bare two lines like these:
> I touch not this day's secret, not the thing,
> That in the silence makes thy sweet eyes wild.
> They ache with their own exquisiteness and grieve the heart with the bodilessness of the beauty which troubles them.
> It would be false, nevertheless, to suppose her only an emotional poet. On the contrary she is penetratingly thoughtful. But feeling is the essence of her verse; it is feeling oozed through the pores of thought. And profoundly imaginative her poetry always is, even when its emotion is too instant for thought... Mrs. Meynell's thought is as indissolubly wedded to imagination as light to colour... divorce her thought from its imaginative expression and it might exist in her mind, but it would become invisible, that is incommunicable.[3]

---

2 Alice Meynell, Poems, 1947, p. 183.

3 Francis Thompson, "Mrs. Meynell's Poems", in Literary Criticism, New York, Dutton, 1948, p. 188.

She held "difficult thoughts" to be the very heart of poetry. "Beauty of manner", she wrote, "must be secondary in modern poetry to the importance of thought; and no true thinking is altogether easy"[4]. In Our Best Poets, Theodore Maynard claims that Alice Meynell's "tyrannic intellectualism ... has prevented the world from realizing the fiery passion that glows in her work"[5].

One is surprised to note that wildness seems to be her touchstone for beauty - surprised until one has her own explanation of the word, found so frequently in her prose as well as in her poetry:

> Emerson knew that the poet speaks adequately then only when he speaks "a little wildly, or with the flower of the mind". Tennyson, the clearest-headed of poets, is our wild poet; wild, notwithstanding that little foppery we know of in him - that walking delicately, like Agag; wild, notwithstanding the work, the ease, the neatness, the finish; notwithstanding the assertion of manliness which, in asserting, somewhat misses the mark; a wilder poet than the rough, than the sensual, than the defiant, than the accuser, than the denouncer. Wild flowers are his - great poet - wild winds, wild lights, wild heart, wild eyes![6]

---

4 Alice Meynell, Prose and Poetry, p. 94.

5 Theodore Maynard, Our Best Poets, London, Brentano's, 1924, p. 17.

6 Alice Meynell, op. cit., p. 89.

Coventry Patmore's "wildness" as a poet she praised splendidly:

> The most beautiful of all gardens is assuredly not that which is rather forest or field than garden, the 'landscape garden' of a false taste; nor, on the other hand, the shaven and trimmed and weeded parterre with an unstarred lawn; but rather the garden long ago strictly planned, rigidly ordered, architecturally piled, smooth and definite, but later set free, given over to time and the sun; not a wilderness, but having an enclosed wildness, a directed liberty, a designed magnificence and excess. Comparable to such a garden is Coventry Patmore's mind, obedient to an ancient law, but wildly natural under an inspiration of visiting winds and a splendid sun of genius.[7]

Thus may we judge from her own words the quality of wildness she loved. Searching her own poems with this in mind, we find the very quality of wildness she so admired in Coventry Patmore.

In Singers to Come, contemplating the beauties of nature, she conceives these as a dumb lyre awaiting the touch of unborn artists, poets, singers to come, whose "thoughts will start to song".

> Who knows what musical flocks of words
> Upon these pine-tree tops will light,
> And crown these towers in circling flight.[8]
> . . . .

---

7 Meynell, op. cit., p. 135-136.

8 Meynell, Poems, p. 14.

Perhaps her quality of wildness is best shown in Chimes. Here, the melody of the verse, the checked rhythms, suggest the throbbing and thronging of bells, the stirring of birds' wings, the drifting of a cloud with the wind:

> A fleet of bells set sails
> And go to the dark.
>
> Sudden the cold airs swing.
> Alone, aloud,
> A verse of bells takes wing
> And flies with the cloud.[9]

Like Shelley, she gloried in the West Wind:

> West Wind! I would not miss
> His sudden tryst; the long, the new
> Surprises of his kiss.[10]

But she did not call the west wind, "Spirit fierce"[11]; there was nothing of rebelliousness in Alice Meynell.

> Vigilant, I make haste to close
> With him...
>
> The gentler light is his; the dark,
> The grey - he turns it sweet,
>
> So too, so too do I confess
> My poet when he sings,
> He rushes on my mortal guess
> With his immortal things.
> I feel, I know him. On I press -
> He finds me 'twixt his wings.[12]

---

9 Meynell, Poems, p. 34.

10 Ibid., p. 32.

11 P.B. Shelley, Complete Poems, London, Oxford, 1917, p. 574.

12 Meynell, op. cit., p. 32.

Shelley's spirit she had always admired for wildness lent wings to his words. But though she was inspired by his spirit, she was far indeed from sharing his philosophy of beauty.

Hers was never the error of those who consider the beauty of art as their supreme end. Even when praised in superlatives by Ruskin, Rossetti, Tennyson, and many other luminaries of the literary world, she still remained humble. Praise was always as powerless to spoil her as was adverse criticism to daunt her, for like the artisans of the Middle Ages, she strove not so much to turn out a work of beauty as to turn out the best work she was capable of. "I only wrote and thought my best", she declared in Pygmalion[13].

Never would she deliberately use her poetic faculty to reveal God's truth; nevertheless, this it could not fail to do, for intuitive truth is in all she wrote. Gloriously did Chesterton praise her austerely truthful mind when he wrote of "the everlasting energies in which Alice Meynell's genius renewed its youth like the eagle's, transcendental truths that throng the firmament like a beatific tempest"[14].

---

13 Meynell, Poems, p. 154.

14 G.K. Chesterton, "Alice Meynell" in the Dublin Review, Vol. 172, No. 344, issue of January 1923, p. 12.

Alice Meynell clearly felt the need of a rule of life. In Laws of Verse, she proves that the constraint of bonds is just as essential for her art.

> Dear laws, come to my breast!
> Take all my frame, and make your close arms meet
> Around me; and so ruled, so warmed, so pressed,
> I breathe, aware; I feel my wild heart beat.
>
> Dear laws, be wings to me!
> The feather merely floats. Oh, be it heard
> Through weight of life - the skylark's gravity -
> That I am not a feather but a bird.[15]

Not a feather but a bird because it is a living thing - "God's message from the sun"[16].

A unique viewpoint is presented in her essay, The Foot. She thinks of feet "beautiful on the mountains, the toil... the price of all communication".

> But we shall not praise the "simple, sweet", and earth-confiding feet enough without thanks for the rules of verse and for the time of song. If poetry was first divided by the march, and next varied by the dance, then to the rule of the foot are to be ascribed the thought, the instruction and the dream that could not speak by prose. Out of that little physical law then, grew a spiritual law which is one of the greatest things we know; and from the test of the foot came the ultimate test of the thinker: "Is it accepted of song"?... and within the gates of these laws... infinite virtues and greatness are compelled to the measure of poetry... It is no wonder that every poet worthy of the name had a passion for metre, for the very verse. To him the difficult fetter is the condition of an interior range immeasurable.[17]

---

15 Meynell, Poems, p. 99.

16 --------, Wayfaring, London, Cape, 1929, p. 47.

17 --------, Spirit of Place, London, Cape, 1898, p. 47.

She wrote her thoughts about the superiority of our laws of verse over those of France and Italy in The English Metres:

> ...they are like our seasons that admit
> Inflection, not infraction: Autumn hoar,
> Winter more tender than our thoughts of it,
> But a year's steadfast four;
>
> Redundant syllables of Summer rain,
> And displaced accents of authentic Spring;
> Spondaic clouds above a gusty plain
> With dactyls on the wing.[18]

She believed that the English language, because of its dual derivation, lent itself to greater flexibility. "Redundant syllables, displaced accents", all that makes our language what she terms, "difficult" enables the poet to achieve charming variety of movement.

> Not Common Law, but Equity, is theirs -
> Our metres; play and agile foot askance,
> And distant, beckoning, blythly rhyming pairs,
> Unknown to classic France
>
> Unknown to Italy . . . .[19]

Francis Thompson, who delighted in her poetry so different in mode and technique from his own, praised her diction "rarified to the vanishing point".

> She has a power quite extraordinary of uttering the many unspoken things through the one spoken thing, of stirring in the reader's mind many circles with the one pebble... Mrs. Meynell's metre echoes her diction shunning elaborate form but full of

---

18 Meynell, Poems, p. 103.

19 Meynell, Ibid., p. 103.

> noiseless magic. Her hatred for the suspicion of insistence keeps the versification delicately numerous in an age whose metre tends to strong tuniness... Whatever her metre, her numbers are truly numbers.[20]

The metrical pattern of her poems varies with the mood or idea she unfolds. Her cleverly-controlled sequences of long and short, accented or unaccented syllables, her pauses and rhythmic onsets, her phrase-units and even her rhymes help in the achievement of this variety. Yet she maintains a unity of form and unity of meaning. Even in her slightest poems - and most of them are slight in form though weighty in meaning - there is usually fusion of matter and method. In A Letter from a Girl to her Old Age, A Poet to the Birds, Christmas Night, Soeur Monique, and A Thrush before Dawn, -to mention but a few - we have proof of that unity in variety which makes for memorable beauty.

The material element of beauty received her most diligent attention simply because it could best embody her imiginative thought. Perfect craftswoman though she was, she would not rely solely upon sensible symbols for the beauty of her poems. Rhythm, sound, line, colour, form, words, metre, rhyme, and, especially in her earlier work, image, all received the thoughtful and loving labour of a perfectionist,

---

20 Francis Thompson, op. cit., p. 188, 190, 191.

but only because, through these means, she could give lucid expression to profoundly imaginative thought.

> Thou art to live; I am watching thee.
>
> . . . .
> I claim the unguessed mysteries
> Which make this cold, white figure warm.
> My life! Child, did I not devise
> In dreams, thy dreams, carving thy form
> Thy secrets when I made thine eyes?
>
> God knows. I chiselled each cold limb
> With loyal pain. He has given my mind
> Less light than my true hand; but dim
> Is life. I wait all I shall find,
> And all that I shall know in Him.[21]

Her poetic style images her mind. The words of her choice are usually the simple and familiar ones as being the natural and perfect expression of her thought, but they glow with life because her mind and spirit burns through them. A Letter from a Girl to her Own Old Age gives evidence of this:

> Oh, Nature brings my straying heart to thee.
> Her winds will join us, with their constant kisses
> Upon the evening as the morning tresses,
> Her summers breathe the same unchanging blisses.[22]

---

21 Alice Meynell, Poems, p. 154-155.

22 --------, Idem, p. 126.

Many of her poems are intricate with allusion but never does she sacrifice delicacy for a splendour. With her own Lady Poverty, she sought

> ... the stony fields, where clear
> Through the thin trees the skies appear,
> In delicate spare soil and fen
> And slender landscape and austere.[23]

Search as we will, we find no effort on her part to ornament a thought. Over-exuberance she abhorred. The thought must be beautiful, then the expression of it could not fail to be so. Swinburne's excesses - "immoderate expressiveness, immodest sweetness, jugglery, prestidigitation, conjuring of words, transformations, and transmutations of sound"[24], she deplored. She claimed that in Keats, a great poet of imagination and impassioned intellect had been lost to the world because, "his senses were not rich but sickly"[25]. Deeply impressed by the spiritual beauty of Francis Thompson's poetry, she yet urged him to avoid the use of such lavish imagery. In her mature years when Coventry Patmore's influence caused her to abandon the poetic theory of her youthful art, we find her creed of rejection yet more marked. "Some have that poetry of imagery", she wrote, "so enkindling, so exalting, that we say of imagery that it is poetry itself,

---

23 Alice Meynell, Poems, p. 25.

24 --------, Prose and Poetry, p. 154.

25 --------, Children of the Old Masters, London, Duckworth, 1903, p. 82.

until we find the poetry of the yonder side . . . the further simplicity that is beyond imagery"[26]. This she illustrated as well as praised in The Courts:

> The poet's imageries are noble ways,
> Approaches to a plot, an open shrine,
> Their splendours, colours, avenues, arrays,
> Their courts that run with wine;
>
> Beautiful similes, "fair and flagrant things",
> Enriched, enamouring, - raptures, metaphors
> Enhancing life, are paths for pilgrim kings
> Made free of golden doors.
>
> And yet the open heavenward plot, with dew,
> Ultimate poetry, enclosed, enskied,
> (Albeit such ceremonies lead thereto)
> Stands on the yonder side.
>
> Plain beyond oracles, it is; and past
> All symbols, simple; perfect, heavenly-wild,
> The song some (poets) loaded poets reach at last -
> The kings that found a Child.[27]

In this poem we find striking proof that economy makes for simplicity. Rich and beautiful imagery she considers superfluous unless it is necessary for the clarity of thought. Striving for effect by using beautiful words and phrases that merely cloak the absence of real thought meets with her strongest disapproval. Walter de la Mare praises the intellectuality of her own thought as being "as near to feeling without peril of sensibility as it is near to life

---

26 Alice Meynell, Prose and Poetry, p. 131.

27 --------, Poems, p. 374.

without being noisy and boisterous. It comes from a quiet vigilant mind, at ease with a hospitable but discriminating heart"[28].

Sister Madeleva has words of highest praise for the exquisitely beautiful poem, A Thrush Before Dawn[29]:

> Here, I think, one finds the essential Alice Meynell, the poet of the exact and the exquisite word, of the elate and classical mood, of the metaphysics of beauty, of the restrained intensities of her every essential gift. The promise of her early poems finds fulfilment here. The uniqueness implicit in the best of her late work sings, like the thrush itself, "single and spiritual notes of light..."
>
> Here are all the qualities for which Alice Meynell is unique and of which she is the master; the brief succinct statement, the sudden surprising and perfect metaphor, the richness of classical allusion, the yearning beauties of a beauty-laden past, the innocence, the chastity, the white poignance of love suffered and renounced. All the economies of lyric perfection are here, inevitable as the economy of a flower. The casual music moves with the artlessness of a bird's song. Suddenly one knows that this is, in a sense, Alice Meynell. Thirty years ago when she wrote:
>
> "A voice peals in this end of night
> A phrase of notes resembling stars,
> Single and spiritual notes of light".
>
> she spoke more of herself than of the English thrush.

High praise indeed! Little wonder she called her The Poet of My Delight[30]!

---

28 Walter de la Mare, "Without Misgiving" in Private View, p. 232.

29 Alice Meynell, Poems, p. 66-67.

30 Sister Madeleva, "The Poet of My Delight", in Centenary Tribute by Terence Connolly, p. 34.

All who knew her praised Alice Meynell for her powers of contemplation, her love of silence. The word silence is used frequently in her poems though none but she would have thought of likening silence to the beloved. In To the Beloved she says:

> My silence, life returns to thee
> In all the pauses of her breath.
> . . . .
>
> Darkness and solitude shine, for me.
>   For life's fair outward part are rife
> The silver noises; let them be.
>   It is the very soul of life
> Listens for thee, listens for thee.
>
> O pause between the sobs of cares;
>   O thought within all thought that is;
> Trance between laughter unawares:
>   Thou art the shape of melodies,
> And thou the ecstasy of prayers.[31]

Silence is precious to her only because it enables her to sound the very depths of thought. In silence the musician may transmute an idea into pure music; in silence too, the poet may grasp with clarity the profound and beautiful thought that has hitherto eluded adequate expression, thus may he fashion a poem that fittingly interprets spiritual beauty. Silence then must not be idle; it must be a means to contemplation without which there can be no poetic achievement:

---

31 Alice Meynell, Poems, p. 120.

Not, Silence, for thine idleness I raise
My silence-bounded singing in thy praise,
But for thy molding of my Mozart's tune.
Thy hold upon the bird that sings the moon,
    Thy magisterial ways.

Man's lovely definite melody-shapes are thine
Outlined, controlled, compressed, complete, divine.
Also thy fine intrusions do I trace,
Thy afterthoughts, thy wandering, thy grace,
    In the poet's line.[32]

Trained from early youth to practise restraint in the things of the mind, she made little show of her treasures of knowledge. In Free Will she writes:

Dear are some hidden things
My soul has sealed in silence...[33]

Addressing a poem To Any Poet, she declares that strive as he might, the poet cannot adequately express truth:

Sing thy sorrow, sing thy gladness,
In thy songs must wind and tree
Bear the fictions of thy sadness,
    Thy humanity.
For their truth is not in thee.[34]

Only when silenced in death does the poet become, like Soeur Monique of her exquisite rondeau, "silenced conqueror":

---

32 Alice Meynell, Poems, p. 102.

33 --------, Ibid., p. 73.

34 --------, Ibid., p. 117.

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

. . . .
Then the truth all creatures tell,
And His will Whom thou entreatest
Shall absorb thee; there shall dwell
  Silence, the completest
Of thy poems, last, and sweetest.[35]

It has been claimed frequently that Alice Meynell's work is obscure. Her defence may be given in her own words about Coventry Patmore's work:

> The beauty was there but it was to them an uncertain magnificence, a glow from a doubtful fire, a pealing call of an uncertain word, remote as thunder, the heart-piercing utterance of an obscure grief - obscure as waters are obscure because they are profound, not because they are turbid.[36]

She is at one and the same time subtle yet simple. In the poem, Unto Us a Son is Given, she opens up vistas of spiritual beauty with the simple lines:

Sudden as sweet
Come the expected feet.
All joy is young, and new all art,
And He, too, Whom we have by heart.[37]

---

35 Alice Meynell, Poems, p. 118

36 --------, Prose and Poetry, p. 132.

37 --------, Poems, p. 35.

Again in Why Wilt Thou Chide? she startles us with the very simplicity of her expression of a profound truth found in the Sacred Writings:

> O strong, O pure!
> As ye make happier loves secure,
> I vow thee this
> Unique rejection of a kiss.[38]

Profound too, and equally simple are her lines in the poem, To a Daisy.

> Slight as thou art, thou art enough to hide
> Like all created things, secrets from me,
> And stand a barrier to eternity.
> And I, how can I praise thee well and wide
>
> From where I dwell - upon the hither side?
> Thou little veil for so great mystery...[39]

Thus, treasuring all that leads to beauty, Alice Meynell dares to place herself in the living tradition of poetry:

> My thoughts are blessed
> With relics of the far unknown.
>
> Before this life began to be
> The happy songs that wake in me
> Woke long ago and far apart.
> Heavily on this little heart
> Presses their immortality.[40]

---

38 Alice Meynell, Poems, p. 24.

39 --------, Ibid., p. 150.

40 --------, Ibid., p. 18.

Yet she knows only too well that we are but <u>Builders of Ruins</u>:

> We build with strength the deep tower wall
> That shall be shattered thus and thus
> . . . .
> and we aspire
> To make a law (and know it not)
> Unto the life of a wild briar.
> . . . .
> O years that certainly will bless
> . . . .
> With ruin all our perfectness.[41]

Alice Meynell's conception of beauty, as we may trace it in her poetry, differs from that of so many poets she admired. Search as we will, we find none of the opulent language and sensuous imagery, none of the decorative patterning that delighted Keats and Shelley and Francis Thompson. Rapture and vision crown and complete the meaning of poetry for her as for all truly great poets; the intensity of her passion is curbed only bh the severest discipline, the restraint her art demands. Many critics deny her greatness simply because of her lack of abandonment, but few question the impeccable beauty of her poems. This sensitive and creative artist thought deeply. To her mind a poetic thought must be beautiful, striking in its originality, but restrained in its utterance. Her choice of words was frequently exquisite, her versification as complex and subtle as her complex thought demanded.

---

41 Alice Meynell, <u>Poems</u>, p. 129-131.

In this chapter we have found that beauty of art was not the end she had in view, rather was it her desire to express as fittingly as possible her "undying thoughts".

> I come from nothing; but from where
> Come the undying thoughts I bear?
>
> . . . .
> Voices I have not heard, possessed
> My own fresh songs; my thoughts are blessed
>   With relics of the far unknown.
>   And mixed with memories not my own
> The sweet streams throng into my breast.[42]

Unfailingly her poetic style mirrors a mind that takes serene delight in austere and delicate beauty. In <u>The Moon to the Sun</u>, she crystallizes her idea of beauty:

> Shine, Earth loves thee! And then shine
> And be loved through thoughts of mine.
>
> . . . .
> I make pensive thy delight,
> And thy strong gold silver-white.
> Though all beauty of mine thou makest,
> Yet to earth which thou forsakest
> I have made thee fair all night,
>   Day all night.[43]

---

42 Alice Meynell, <u>Poems</u>, p. 18.

43 <u>Ibid</u>., p. 16.

CHAPTER IV

PHILOSOPHY OF BEAUTY IN ALICE MEYNELL'S PROSE

Dixon-Scott, whose wide, synthetic sweep of mind and exquisite subtlety in analysis Max Beerbohn so warmly praised, found a treasure of beauty in Alice Meynell's prose "which presents a surface so free from the faintest falsity or blur and that clings with so exquisite a closeness and transparency to the rippling body of the swiftly moving thought". He notes her choice of subjects, simple subjects of the earth and the people about us:

> ... and it is among these things, undisdainfully, delightfully alive, that her phrases keep their footing so fastidiously, seeing and showing us only beauty yet blinding us to nothing... always maintaining a poise, a place, a pure composure and always preserving the spirit of prose from any wrong.[1]

George Meredith, who praised her "princely journalism" had this to say of her:

> The essays have... the merit of saying just enough leaving the reader to think... The surprise coming to us from their combined grace of manner and sanity of thought is like one's dream of what the recognition of a new truth would be. Conceivably the writer was fastidious to the extreme degree during the term of scholarship, but that is only now shown in a style having "the walk of a Goddess..."[2]

---

1 Dixon-Scott, "The Art of Mrs. Meynell", in <u>English Men of Letters</u>, London & Stoughton, 1923, p. 215.

2 George Meredith, "Mrs. Meynell's Two Books of Essays" in <u>Letters of George Meredith to Alice Meynell</u>, London, Nonsuch, 1923, p. 85.

Coventry Patmore's praise meant a great deal to Alice Meynell, for his work she considered the very quintessence of beauty. He recognized her prose as classical (a term he denied her poetry), for he claimed that it embodied "new thought of general and permanent significance in perfect language" and bore "the hall-mark of genius". He thought that each essay in The Rhythm of Life, resembled the other, only in "the charm of fulness, brevity, originality, insight, graceful learning, and unique beauty of style".

> It is easy to speak splendidly and profusely about things which transcend speech; but to write beautifully, profitably, and originally about truths that come home to everybody and which everyone can test by common sense; to avoid with sedulous reverence the things which are beyond the focus of the human eye, and to direct attention effectively to those which are well within it, though they have hitherto been undiscerned through lack of attention, or the astounding imperfection of common vision for the reality of common things, is a different thing.[3]

Alice Meynell has frequently been termed Poet in Prose, and nowhere is the rhythm of her lovely lines more evident than in Rhythm of Life. Here too, we note the close tissue of her work:

> If life is not always poetical, it is at least metrical ...-Ariel can be found to a daily task; but such artificial violence throws life out of metre, and it is not the spirit that is thus compelled. That flits upon an orbit elliptically or parabolically or hyperbolically curved, keeping no man knows what tryst with time... It seems fit

---

3 Coventry Patmore, "Mrs. Meynell", in Principle in Art, London, Duckworth, 1889, p. 122, 3, 7.

> that Shelley and the author of the "Imitation" should both have been keen and simple enough to perceive these flights, and to guess at the order of this periodicity. Both souls were in close touch with the spirits of their several worlds, and no deliberate human rules, no infractions of the liberty and law of the universal movement, kept from them the knowledge of recurrences. ... (Men) are ruled by the law that commands all things - a sun's revolutions and the rhythmic pangs of maternity.[4]

St. Augustine says "unity is the form of all beauty[5]" and the perfection of unity in essays such as the above cannot be gauged from extracts; nevertheless they afford a glimpse of the beauty of her thought-world.

In her essay The Horizon, she expresses her creed of unity:

> On the horizon, moreover, closes the long perspective of the sky. There you perceive that an ordinary sky of clouds - not a thunder sky - is not a wall but the underside of a floor. You see the clouds that repeat each other, grow smaller by distance; and you find a new unity in the sky and earth that gather alike the great lines of their designs to the same distant close. There is no longer an alien sky, tossed up in unintelligible heights above a world that is subject to intelligible perspective.[6]

This entire essay shows remarkable unity and balance; which, in spite of apparent ease, could have been achieved only after much difficult thought. From her memories of a

---

4 Alice Meynell, Prose and Poetry, London, Cape, 1947, p. 218-219.

5 Jacques Maritain, Art and Scholasticism, London, Sheed, 1946, p. 20.

6 Alice Meynell, Spirit of Place, London, Lane, 1899, p. 95.

Vatican scene her thoughts flash to the horizon. Just as the Cardinal bids a kneeling group rise, so, she muses, "you lift the world, you raise the horizon".

> You summon the sea, you bring the mountains, the distances unfold unlooked-for wings and take an even flight ... the circle of the world goes up to meet you... Round the plain the horizon lies with folded wings. It keeps them so perpetually for man, and opens them only for the bird, replying to flight with flight.[7]

The descent she describes as equally steady and swift. "The further sea lies away, hills fold down behind hill. The whole upstanding world gathers down and pauses". Just as a flock of birds would wheel to earth so does the landscape seem to. Just so does the Cardinal bring the group of people to their knees, by a motion of his hands[8].

Alice Meynell is keenly intuitive in her power of observation; she notes "the inimitable unity" of Italy. From her reflections upon the absence of shade in an Italian garden, and the presence of delicate shadow "its thin pencil for drawing the hand of the fig-tree or the vine, and the feather of maize". To her penetrative mind "the whole land is interwoven all day by lights and by tendrils, all night by fireflies"[9].

---

7 Alice Meynell, op. cit., p. 92, 97.

8 --------, Ibid., p. 97.

9 --------, Wayfaring, London, Cape, 1929, p. 71.

Again, in The Flower, after deploring the fact that, "in literature as in all else, man merits his subjection to trivialities by his economical greed, she goes on to show that the "prodigality of the meadows in May", is quite different.

> For Nature has something even more severe than moderation; she has an innumerable singleness. Her buttercup meadows are not prodigal; they show multitude but not multiplicity, and multiplicity is exactly the disgrace of decoration.[10]

Alice Meynell's work bears evidence that, for her, the highest beauty is Multitude in Simplicity. Tolstoi receives her praise for seeing "everything that is within sight. That he sees this multitude of things with invincible simplicity is what proves him an artist". Well does she understand though, that "for such perception... there is no peace"[11]. Hers was a like perception.

Her choice of beauty is always for what is useful - not what is merely decorative.

> The excellent taste of children is offended by ornamental trees; it knows how dull are shrubberies, and has no delight in that pointed conifer of which the lower symmetries sweep a rigid lawn. The child loves the appropriate trees; in England, trees that have their foliage sprinkled on the tender sky, letting the light through...[12]

---

10 Alice Meynell, Essays, Burns, London, 1914, p. 157.

11 --------, Spirit of Place, p. 99.

12 --------, Wayfaring, p. 134-135.

In the same essay, Trees, she describes the eucalyptus as exquisite on the Riviera, " its new home at the noble north of this noble sea". It has the virtue of use; therefore, a claim to beauty. But the palm! This she describes as "stumpy and corpulent in its hundreds,... nothing but a boast and brag, an advertisement, a proclamation, a decoration, and a touting"[13].

Alice Meynell had no love for the English landscape - that "little more" she found as detrimental in nature as in literature. She complained: "A little more is added to the greenness and softness of the forest glade, and for increase of ornament the fat land is devoted to idleness".

> Seek to have less rather than more... is the secret of all that is virile and classic in the art of man and of all in nature that is most harmonious with that art... This is the secret of Italy... slim and all articulate... But... it is in agricultural Italy that the "little less" makes so undesignedly, and as it were so inevitably, for beauty. The country that is formed for use and purpose only is immeasurably the loveliest. What a lesson in literature! How feelingly it persuades us that all except a very little of the ornament of letters and of life makes the dullness of the world.[14]

A visit to Rome in 1906 held disappointment for her for she found it "spoiled and vulgarized" by the innovations

---

13 Alice Meynell, op. cit., p. 135, 137.

14 --------, Prose and Poetry, p. 266, 267, 268.

of man, by his attempt to "beautify" in an artificial way[15]. Still she proves in Ceres Runaway that much loveliness remains:

> One can hardly be dull possessing the pleasant imaginary picture of a Municipality hot in chase of a wild crop - at least while the charming quarry escapes, as it does in Rome. The Municipality does not exist that would be nimble enough to overtake the Roman growth of green in the high places of the city...[16]

Speaking of Tennyson's "Italian garden" she said, "Genius makes his garden noble and magical; but Italy made mine"[17].

Hers was a love of simple and wide effects: the beautiful sea wall on the weak littoral and the imperilled levels of a northern beach, the pencilled figures of forests, black and luminous against the horizon, the clouds marshalling the earthly mountains, the birds tracing wild and innumerable paths across the mid-May earth[18]. In the simplicities of nature, in complete innocence, she recognized the greatest triumph of beauty.

G.K. Chesterton wrote in high praise of her discrimination. "If she shrank involuntarily from anything hackneyed, it was rather from the repetitions of literature than the repetitions of life".

---

15 Viola Meynell, Alice Meynell: A Memoir, London, Cape, 1929, p. 228.

16 Alice Meynell, Essays, 1914, p. 3.

17 --------, Wayfaring, p. 73.

18 --------, Essays, 1914, p. 126, 178, 184, 191.

> She did not mind how many flowers were in the fields, but she did once say that there were too many in carpets and curtains. If anything bored her it was not the ordinary prosaic but rather the ordinary poetical. One would never have minded challenging her to write a little essay on a door-scraper or an umbrella-stand; and I'm sure she would, in the most real and most mystical sense have thrown a new light on it. But I doubt if anybody would have the moral courage to ask her to write on the ruins of a famous abbey by moonlight...[19]

Travelling through the Alps she notes "the conspicuous show of the cascades that take their leap from the rocks", but her keenest pleasure is for the sweetness and freshness of the "minute, perpetual waterfall that hides in moss and undergrowth".

> The air is nowhere silent, and hardly a blade of grass is unstirred by the delicate thrill of water. Without paths it drops minutely and invisibly into the lakes, the gentlest of all the signs of the barren and lofty snow.[20]

The natural beauties of her preference, the simplicities rather than the grandeurs, her delicate choice of words so typical of her noble mind unerringly lead one to beauties above and beyond those of this world.

---

19 G.K. Chesterton, "Alice Meynell", in The Dublin Review, Vol. 172, issue of Jan. 1923, p. 9.

20 Alice Meynell, Prose and Poetry, 1947, p. 265-266.

Simplicity and vigilance were essential to her art.

> A boat's wake on a smooth water will be so played with by its reflection as to disappoint conjecture and to delight the eye, which is a summary way of teaching the painter simplicity and vigilance.[21]

She demands of the artist, the writer, the actor, indeed of all who would live nobly, that complete simplicity that denotes sincerity. With an authority that she may well claim because of a wide culture and a lifelong study of art, she draws attention repeatedly in her Children of Old Masters, to a lack of simplicity. "We have seen", she says, "how rare is simplicity in the dealings of art with the figure of childhood". Some of Tintoretto's children she praises:"The new-born Christ of his Adoration of the Shepherds, unveiled in a stream of lovely light by a most beautiful Virgin, is a sincere baby". Her love for light and shadow is implicit in the following:

> The Tintoretto's Virgin against a visionary sun, sits as though no other had ever been enthroned and holds a veritable Child, a beautiful and animated creature, looking downwards with an infantile impulse, full of liberal grace, the little head, in a Tintoretto radiance, casting a Tintoretto shadow on the shoulder and the breast.[22]

---

21 Alice Meynell, Wayfaring, p. 37.

22 --------, Children of the Old Masters, London, Duckworth, 1903, p. 58, 85.

Raphael's Boy of the Madonna della Seggliola, she judges to be "at once a hackneyed work and a fresh". She is charmed by the natural turn of the Boy's head (natural - not for the sake of attitude). She notes too, that "this is a clasped child, not one touched at a distance, and with the unconstraining hand and the parted fingers of Italian grace"[23].

Luca Signorelli's Coronation of St. Cecilia, she finds to be strained and conventional, tedious - "with a tediousness wholly of the Latin race, the tediousness of habitual exaggeration"[24]. All insincerity jars upon her whether it be the depicting of a child in an adult attitude, the prettiness that denotes lack of mental ingenuity, or worse, lack of love.

Botticelli, she considered, achieved best the beauty of simple nobility when, in designing, "he did not labour especially for wisdom and the favour of God and man"[25]. She maintained that an artist need never hope to paint a child beautifully if his were an incomplete love "or one might rather say a love that filled completely the capacities of a somewhat shallow heart"[26].

---

23 Ibid., p. 68.

24 Ibid., p. 61.

25 Ibid., p. 35.

26 Ibid., p. 37.

Keenly observant too, is her comment on the Florentine artist:

> Filippino's angels in his great picture, <u>The Vision of St. Bernard</u>, are young; their stature is more childish than the character of their heads and they are moreover bent, so that the erect figure of Mary may have a foil. They share something of the commonplace of angelic beauty as the rocks under which St. Bernard sits writing at a rustic desk have the commonplace of an unobserved nature being designed by the hand of a man who never cared to see a rock or a wayside stone as it is.[27]

Rosso wins her praise for "the impetuous head of his little angeoletto with the cheek pressed upon the lute, the mouth close to the strings, the wings erect, and the wild hair; Fra Bartolomeo, for his beautiful winged boy, a singer to his lute; Carpaccio's middle child in the <u>Presentation of Christ</u>, one of the loveliest figures of Venetian art for childlike intentness upon his lute[28]. Hers is ever sheer delight in simplicity and naturalness.

Rembrandt's touch of incomparable genius, she attributes to the fact that he did by actual intention what other artists did by habitual intention. "There is no surer sign of that immeasurable superiority of spirit and truth than the power and peace of the mere action of looking on"[29], the action of his child spectator in the painting, <u>Nativity</u>.

---

27 <u>Ibid</u>., p. 43.

28 <u>Ibid</u>., p. 45.

29 <u>Ibid</u>., p. 52.

Of the artist in drama also, she demanded simplicity. Admirer of the Italian stage for its technique without convention, she found the English stage in many ways lacking. The English actor she found "preoccupied and therefore never single, never wholly possessed by the one thing at a time". She declared, "Nature is the only authentic art of the stage and the Italian woman is natural"[30].

In 1905 she witnessed the mystery play, School of the Cross, in the village of Oberammergau. The mere recollection of it seemed to fill her with awe, for here, she had found in an actor - the one who portrayed Christ - rare singularity of soul. Here was the simplicity she loved.

> He lives down the image made by Rembrandt for Emmaus, and that made by Tintoretto for Calvary. The art is theirs, and more than actual beauty, and genius speaks in them. But 'Ah', the pilgrim remembers, 'there was a wild breeze in the mountains, and I saw the hair of Christ lifted, and His cincture fluttered. I saw His tired breast rise upon a breath.[31]

Supreme loveliness in all forms of literature, in all forms of art, could best be achieved by means of the utmost simplicity; of this she became more convinced with the years. In her essay, The Brontës, both sisters receive her praise, though Emily has her greater admiration.

---

30 Alice Meynell, The Colour of Life, London, Lane, 1896, p. 47, 49.

31 --------, Prose and Poetry, p. 289.

> Whereas Charlotte Bronte walked, with exultation and enterprise, upon the road of symbols, under the guidance of her own visiting genius... Emily practised imagery sparingly. Her style had the key of an inner prose which seems to leave imagery behind in the way of approaches - the apparelled and arrayed approaches and ritual of literature - and so to go further and to be admitted among simple realities and antitypes... Charlotte... has moments of pure narrative, whereof each word is such a key as I spoke of just now, and unlocks an inner and yet an inner door of spiritual realities...[32]

George Meredith's true greatness she recognized "in thought, in passion, in the art of letters". She considered though, that his work lacked "the great and high repose of art" so essential for classic simplicity. "He must be afraid of nothing who writes at the greatest heights", she declared, "and Meredith feared the commonplace"[33]. On his part, it was the very simplicity of Alice Meynell's work that he most admired - "the style correcting wealth and attaining to simplicity by trained art"[34].

If Alice Meynell denied George Meredith one quality of beauty in art, she found "nothing in literature more fearless than his phrase. What is there wilder than a wild image? It is like the forms of the flying cloud. But Meredith compels the wild image to serve him"[35].

---

32 Ibid., p. 104.

33 Alice Meynell, The Second Person Singular, Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, London, 1922, p. 118.

34 Viola Meynell, Memoirs, p. 133.

35 Alice Meynell, Prose and Poetry, 1947, p. 145.

In her essay, Symmetry and Incident, Alice Meynell discusses Japanese art:

> ... the distances, the greatness, the winds and the waves of the world, coloured plains and the flight of a sky are all certainly alien to the perceptions of a people intent upon little deformities... They are not in search of the perpetual slight novelty which was Aristotle's ideal of the language poetic ("a little wildly, or with the flower of the mind", says Emerson of the way of a poet's speech) - and such novelty it is like the frequent pulse of the pinion that keeps verse upon the wing...[36]

Not only verse! We find trace of such wildness in many of her essays for her conceptions are frequently poetic even here.

Writing of rain, she says, "The round wheel dazzles it, and the stroke of the bird's wing shakes it off like a captivity evaded"... "We see by flashes but... nature flashes on our meditative eyes"[37]. In Solitude, she writes: "The wild man is alone at will, and so is the man for whom civilization has been kind..." But "for the solitude that has a sky and a horizon they (the multitude) know not how to wish"[38]. She recalls "bells of tender voices, and pure, warm, light, and golden throats, precisely tuned. The hounds of Theseus had not a more just scale, tuned in a peal, than a North Italian

---

36 Alice Meynell, Colour of Life, p. 81.

37 --------, Spirit of Place, p. 78.

38 Ibid., p. 16-17.

Belfry holds in leash". She admires "the little secluded sequestered art of composing melodies for bells - charming division of an art - having its own ends and means, and keeping its own wings for unfolding by law"[39].

Alice Meynell's praise of others may frequently be turned to her own praise. Quoting sentences from John Ruskin's The Seven Lamps of Architecture, for the felicity of his images, she writes: "His thought is itself a pool of freshness, clearness and mystery, holding not the darkness only but also reflected suns[40]. Mrs. Tuell has said of her, "The ways of her vision are the ways of light; in her companionship we are pilgrims of the sun"[41].

Sunlight transforms her world of beauty. "Some will tell us that unveiled light is too clear and sharp for art", she remarks in Charmain. "So much the worse for art -"[42]. In the Alps she felt the days were Italy's, open to the sun and the luminous plain[43]; after a storm she thrilled to "the whiteness of foam in sunshine"[44]; looking towards the horizon

---

39 Alice Meynell, Spirit of Place, p. 5-6.

40 --------, Prose and Poetry, p. 339.

41 Mrs. A.K. Tuell, Mrs. Meynell and Her Literary Generation, New York, Dutton, 1925, p. 158.

42 Alice Meynell, Prose and Poetry, p. 230.

43 Ibid., p. 235.

44 Alice Meynell, Wayfaring, p. 24.

she discovered that "even the dark things drawn upon the bright edges of the sky are lucid"[45]; wherever there were living waters she found translucent shadows[46].

> While that image (of the sun) burns within every stream, within every sea, within every lake, within every pool and pond of this world, the earth seems to multiply the very centre of life. She goes carrying suns. It is dazzling to think of that cargo, that treasury, those guests and sojourners, those strangers within her gates, who are but one and yet are so renewed. Of all the mental visions of the earth this is the most brilliant. Suns lurk throughout her daylight; suns in her deep places, separate, single, and fervent. All the coolness of the summer contains these suns; they are the heart in the breast of waters. They lie in the ice of the north, round and still in the equatorial ocean, and broken into sparkles and spray by quicker seas. They are caught in the fjords. The tides swing them up the coast and out again.[47]

Mental visions! The light of the sun lends graver beauty to all and inspires noble thoughts. Again her philosophy of multitude in simplicity! Yet, she feels that it is "in the hours of sleep that the mind, by some divine paradox, has the extremest sense of light".

---

45 *Ibid.*, p. 27.

46 *Ibid.*, p. 34.

47 *Ibid.*, p. 41.

> Corot also took the brilliant opportunity of the hours of sleep. In some landscapes of his early manner he has the very light of dreams... so spiritual an illumination... The (painter) carries the mood of man's night out into the sunshine - Corot did so - and lives the life of night, in all its genius, in the presence of a risen sun. In the only time when the heart can dream of light, in the night of visions with the rhythmic power of night at its dark noon in his mind, his eyes see the soaring of the actual sun.[48]

A true artist, she maintains, must be of a contemplative nature, one who thinks his long, grave thoughts in solitude, away from the noises of the world. His deep thoughts evolve and find adequate expression only in tranquillity, best realized when the mighty heart of the world is at rest.

Mrs. A.K. Tuell, after much scholarly research, finds reason enough to disprove the charge that several critics have made - that there is much sadness in Alice Meynell's work. "She who has been known so often as interpreter of grief", declares Mrs. Tuell, "has given more surely than Stevenson the summons to a right gladness of living. Her recoil from the dismal... is in the name of grace and light"[49].

In a masterly essay, Pessimism in Fiction, Alice Meynell points out that Robert Browning's optimistic statement, "All's right with the world", is just as vain as the pessimist's, "All's wrong with it". But she finds evidence

---

48 Alice Meynell, Essays, 1914, p. 91.

49 Mrs. A.K. Tuell, op. cit., p. 102.

of spiritual sloth in the pessimist's activities, for his is the "easier" way. Paul Claudel's L'Otage she hails as true antithesis of pessimism. "It is a tale of exceeding ill and a little good, of a world wherewith all is not right... the solace is in the form of a momentary act of divine death after exceeding ill". Characteristically she ends with,- "L'Otage should be administered to pessimists, or rather to their readers, for tears, and Mr. Jacobs for laughter"[50].

The easy way was never that of her choice nor did she admire it in others. Art, like prayer, she thought, could not be easy. "To make that beautiful which is beautiful already is a work that needs not a beautiful touch merely but a strong one..."[51]. Because literary excellence is a matter of sacrifice it must necessarily be difficult of mastery. "The birds flying high for mountain air in the heat, wing nothing but their own weight", she says. "You will not envy them for so brief a success"[52].

Her distaste for effects achieved at little cost is clearly stated in her criticism of Holman Hunt's Shadow of

---

50 Alice Meynell, Second Person Singular, Oxford U. Press, 1922, p. 122-126.

51 --------, Prose and Poetry, p. 348.

52 --------, Essays, 1914, p. 16.

the Cross, "an accidental shadow of the body of Christ, stretching weary arms at the close of a day's work, accidentally combines with the horizontal line of a row of tools to form a cross". She considers this unworthy to be called imagination. "Is it not the phantasy of very little cost?"[53].

On the other hand she praises Rossetti's better judgement.

> His design, The Passover is symbolical in a better way. Here is no cheap fancy. Rossetti has painted an actual incident of a Paschal day at Nazareth (the incident itself the symbol) and has drawn it as a simple and forthright record of a greatly significant fact.[54]

Perpetual freshness and perpetual initiative she demanded of the true artist. She thought the artist had much to learn in this respect from the monk:

> Every midnight the sweet contralto bells call the community, who get up daily to this difficult service. Of all duties this one never grows easy or familiar, and therefore never habitual... It is not merely that the friars overcome the habit of sleep. The subtler point is that they can never acquire the habit of sacrificing sleep... There is absolutely no limit to the superfluous activities, to the art, to the literature, implicitly renounced by the dwellers within such walls as these.[55]

---

53 Alice Meynell, Mary, the Mother of Jesus, London, Warner, 1900, p. 124.

54 Ibid., p.124.

55 Alice Meynell, Essays, 1914, p. 120.

Morality find no place in her art, explicitly, that is, for well does she understand that art and morality are quite different. She praises and thanks Charles Dickens for his admirable art of caricature but wherever she finds him the moralist (which is frequently) she finds that he does violence to his "excellent art"[56].

Truth, unflinching truth, she looks for in all art. Therefore she would have the artist give his thoughts "noble forefathers".

> The very habit of our thoughts may be persuaded one way unawares by their antenatal history. Their companions must be lovely, but need be no lovelier than their ancestors; and being so fathered and so husbanded, our thoughts may be intrusted to keep the counsels of literature.[57]

She would have him "aware of the beauty that comes of pausing slightly upon the smaller and slighter actions, such as meaner men are apt to hurry out of the way". To her, style implied "a candour and simplicity of means, an action, a gesture as it were, in the doing of small things"; it was "the ignorance of secret ways..."

---

56 Alice Meynell, Prose and Poetry, p. 113.

57 --------, Essays, 1914, p. 100-101.

> This, then, was the style of a master, who does not lapse from 'incidental greatness', has no mean precision out of sight, to prepare the finish of his phrases, and does not think the means and the approaches are to be plotted and concealed. Without anxiety, without haste, and without misgiving are all great things to be done and neither interruption in the doing nor ruin after they are done finds anything in them to betray. There was never any disgrace of means, and when the world sees the work broken through there is no disgrace of discovery. The labour of Michaelangelo's chisel, little more than begun, a Roman structure long exposed in disarray - upon these the light of day looks full, and the Roman and the Florentine have their unrefuted praise.[58]

Implicit in her prose as well as her poetry are all qualities of beauty: truth, clarity, novelty, unity, balance, sincerity, simplicity, vigilance, restraint, virility, wildness, freshness, beauty of style - all these qualities are strikingly evident in her work. Some critics, like Le Gallienne, have found her essays lacking in unity. However, her own words, quoted in this chapter, attest to her desire for this quality and sometimes she proves her ability to achieve it.

Let us next consider the beauty of her words, her desire for a return to the language of greater tranquillity. "One of the most charming things", she has said, "that a writer of English can achieve is the repayment of the united teaching by linking their results so exquisitely in his own

---

58 Alice Meynell, Prose and Poetry, p. 269, 272.

practice that the words of the two schools shall be made to meet each other with a surprise and delight that shall prove them at once gayer strangers and sweeter companions than the world knew they were"[59].

---

59 Alice Meynell, Prose and Poetry, 1947, p. 174.

CHAPTER V

PHILOSOPHY OF BEAUTY IN HER WORDS

"Right language enlarges the soul as no other power or influence may do", says Alice Meynell in Domus Augusta.

> Who for instance but trusts more nobly for knowing the full word of his confidence? Who but loves more penetratingly for possessing the ultimate syllable of his tenderness?... The poet pledges his word, his sentence, his verse, and finds therein a peculiar sanction... Consciousness and word are almost as closely united as thought and the word.[1]

Her austere truthfulness is mirrored in the profound thoughts she expresses so lucidly by means of the most finely exact word. The words of her choice are jewelled words at times, much like those of her beloved Seventeenth Century poets; yet they are simple words of every day taking on beauty and fresh significance only because of the thoughts they express. Walter de la Mare shared the admiration of many for her use of language. In praise of her essays he wrote:

> Truths like these are a distillation of naked experience, not mere treasure trove. They come of a discipline that has been learned, suffered, as well as divined. So too with the expression of it. "The stroke of the raindrop which is the drop and its path at once; 'lines of poetry that cast sunrise shadows'; the felicity of such writing is

---

1 Alice Meynell, Essays, 1914, p. 83.

> the rare truth it tells..." When that thought takes flight on the wings of the imagination, beauty dwells in the words, and so lives on in Memory.[2]

Admirable is her simplicity. Sentences taken almost at random reveal her remarkable way with the simplest of words. In her essay, Cloud, proclaimed as "the sun's treasurer, holding the light that the world has lost", she declared:

> It is the cloud that, holding the sun's rays in a sheaf as a giant holds a handful of spears, strikes the horizon, touches the extreme edge with a delicate revelation of light, or suddenly puts it out and makes the foreground shine... But its greatest things are done from its own place, aloft. Thence does it distribute the sun... Its own beauty is unaltered when it has no earthly beauty to improve...[3]

She has a way of suffusing words with lovely light and colour and always there is the underlying thought of the nobler beauty that natural beauties only faintly suggest:

> In the east stands the gentle and lighted cloud that doubles its wild rose upon the river, and lays its lofty image in beneath the lilies, between the grey reeds, under the blue bloom of water - erect, profound, having sight of the sun of an ended day, and of a new night in the east.[4]

---

2 Walter de la Mare, Private View, London, Faber, 1953, p. 232.

3 Alice Meynell, The Colour of Life, London, Lane, 1896, p. 17, 21.

4 -------, Wayfaring, London, Cape, 1929, p. 38.

Even the simplest words acquire a distinctive charm just because of the beautiful thought they embody. Indeed so profound and original are her usual thoughts about ordinary sights that long thoughts are awakened within us as a result of the briefest expression of her thought. In A Comparison in a Seaside Field, her use of the word, "confessed" is typical of her way:

> Far off, the noble Summer rules,
> Violent in the ardent rose,
> His sun alight in mirroring pools,
> Braggart on Alps of vanquished snows;
>
> . . . .
> But here, in negligible flower,
> Summer is not proclaimed: - confessed.[5]

Hers was a poetic appreciation of the mystery and music of words. J.J. Reilly claimed:

> With an almost infallible sense of primary meanings and rich implications, she sought and found those that stirred with life and carried the pulse of thought to the remote part of her sentences. Words in groups, ready-made phrases, fit for the facile employ of modern journalism found no place in her work... Inevitably she looked upon words as a lapidary upon jewels. Each must itself be perfect and yet so subdued to the pre-ordained scheme of colour and form as to make harmony minister to beauty. She never - to use a phrase of her own - lets the word run errands... for a poet to do that, even in prose, would be a sin against the light... She has not only a poet's sense of the flavour, colour, and nuances of words but she feels an impatience, however well-bred, of a style which fails to move trippingly on. Like Horace she

---

5 Alice Meynell, Poems, 1947, p. 106.

> looks with loving eye upon lines that advance with airiness and grace... To read Alice Meynell is to learn from her preoccupation with her own and others' diction, that words have an individuality, almost a personality of their own, and that the general disregard of their claims is a Boeotian offence against the noblest of living tongues...[6]

She felt that the exaggerated use of monosyllables destroyed the beauty of language; that the lack of poise and pause implied a lack of vitality. Frequently she used a skilful combination of alien words: magisterial ways, inarticulate call, unfaded brow, imperial call, remembered skies, calculated sea, incalculable tryst, unpurchasable word, uncovenanted beauty, to mention but a few. Very penetratingly has she reasoned that "a certain spiritualizing and subtilizing effect of alien derivations is a privilege and an advantage incalculable"[7]. She recognized Shakespeare's superb mastery of language in such combinations of words as "Superfluous kings", "A lass unparalled", multitudinous seas"7.

She attributed the undermining of language in the nineteenth century to the influence of Gibbon, "who changed a hundred years of English prose". In her essay, A Corrupt Following, she deplores his lax grammar, his stilted way with

---

6 J.J. Reilly, "A Poet in Prose", in Dear Prue's Husband, New York, Macmillan, 1932, p. 319.

7 Alice Meynell, Prose and Poetry, p. 175.

words at times, his "frigid prodigality", for although his style retains "elegance" in spite of these weaknesses, that of his followers does not[8].

Charlotte Bronte, she claims, was greatly influenced by this "corrupt following" of Gibbon.

> She practised those verbs 'to evince', 'to reside', 'to intimate', 'to peruse'. She wrote 'communicating instruction' for 'teaching'... Encumbered by this drift and refuse of English, Charlotte Bronte yet achieved the miracle of her vocabulary. It is less wonderful that she should have appeared out of such a parsonage than that she should have arisen out of such a language.
>
> ... It must have been with rapture that she claimed her own simplicity. And with what a moderation, how temperately, and how seldom she used her mastery...[9]

Alice Meynell never fails to note the word of genius. She quotes Charlotte Bronte's use of "wastes" in "the sound that so wastes our strength", and again, the word "wronged" in "some wronged and fettered wild beast or bird". She notes too, however, that the most "eloquent" pages are perhaps "unluckily those wherein we miss the friction - friction that sensibly proves the use, the buoyancy, the act of language"[10]. Alice Meynell herself uses words of genius, as in the use of the word "alone", speaking of Elizabeth Browning's

---

8 Alice Meynell, Prose and Poetry, 1947, p. 177-178.

9 Ibid., p. 98.

10 Ibid., p. 102.

death: "... The common price of human love ... was paid a thousand times by anticipation... She had to die at last, as also the unloved die, alone, although she was in his arms"[11].

Shakespeare haunted her life and writings, we are told. In Superfluous Kings, we find words of genius commented upon as only Alice Meynell would. Lear was "every inch" a king. Even when this play was presented on the Italian stage, in Italian, - "It needed Shakespeare's word to vindicate Shakespeare's royalism". That one cry, "every inch" must be uttered in English:

> No Italian will serve; the Latin mind has not this degree of imaginative reverence, nor has the Italian language the faculty of giving sudden greatness to a customary word.[12]

Antony's words to Cleopatra she considered "the most surprising lines in any of the tragedies - it is only as the lover of a queen that he has the right to them".

> To him is assigned the startling word, the incomparable word of amorous and tender ceremony - 'Egypt'.
> I am dying, Egypt dying.
> That territorial name, murmured to his love in the hour of death, and in her arms - I know not in the records of all genius any other such august farewell. Lear's word is outdone here. Lear a king in every inch of his aged body, but Cleopatra a queen in

---

11 Ibid., p. 354.

12 Alice Meynell, Prose and Poetry, p. 38.

> every league of her ancient realm. Has not majesty spoken its one unexpected word in the mouth of such a lover?[13]

Alice Meynell gives proof here that she finds inexhaustible beauty in words; even a single word opens up great vistas in her thought-world. In Shakespeare's use of the word superfluous, to describe kings, she found another glory of his art.

> The derision of the word 'superfluous' implies, in reversal, an inalienable dignity... The final contradiction is not here; but in the grave itself, in the hidden burial, out of the sight of the populous; it needs the utmost of Shakespeare's passion of royalty to answer to that depth...
>
> When the mortality of kings is no sharper sarcasm than is the mortality we all inherit, then the lamps and the gold that enshrine the bony heads of Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar at Cologne may take their place, outside of cathedrals, with the unnamed relics of the shepherds who preceded the kings to the manger.[14]

In Poetry and Childhood, Alice Meynell recalled the charm of Victor Hugo's words for her. His pages were replete with words reminiscent of her lovely childhood, spent chiefly in France and Italy. The lyrics of this great poet were dear to her because of words whose shape and figure and spirit she had known as a child.

---

13 Alice Meynell, Prose and Poetry, p. 39-40.

14 Ibid., p. 40.

> They had but dropped to sleep in imperishable memory; they wake again, and they are more fresh to the heart than swallows, and than torrents from the Alps.
> Here then is the tongue of poetry... The child and the poet know it together... In the first place that poet is unique. He, too, breathes the breath of the moss closely; he has not only the child's sense of it, but also the child's inexpert and invaluable word... The word of poetry in after-life is sublime and tragic by will, by force and conquest; the word in the French of Hugo, has for me but to be uttered.[15]

Yet she claims, "I have no praise for the French poetic tongue". Why was this? The "splendour of alternative" was lacking. "It has the strangest blanks. It cannot so much as call an author shallow, nor a teacup, nor a sea"[16]. It has no dual inheritance as has the English tongue; it has no "sequestered poetic and religious language". Nor has it powerful negatives.

> Peu is the only negative for some of the most energetic adjectives. Meanwhile we have our profound and powerful particle, the 'un' that summons in order that it may banish, and keeps the word present to hear sentence and denial, showing the word 'unloved to be no less than archangel ruined.[17]

Alice Meynell described Italian as an easy and indulgent language. "For though the Italians have a poetic

---

15 Alice Meynell, Prose and Poetry, p. 138-139.

16 Idem, p. 140.

17 Idem, Ibid., p. 172.

Italian, the differences of this with their daily prose are rather in the form of the words than in the words themselves.

> Perhaps an Italian poet who should inspire himself with a northern sense of imagery might solve the clinging curving and intricate knots of this poetic 'situation' and might make Italian new by a change... But this is not what has been done by Ada Negri, the poet of 'Tempeste' and 'Fatalita'... She uses the language in its conventional poetic form, with all the conditions of Italian literature, and uses it for the purposes of Italian thought. With all this she is a free woman, and proves her freedom.

Great is her admiration for Ada Negri who has overcome the difficulties of her "easy" language "because of the mere vitality of her own spirit".

> She has impulse more than sufficient to disengage her sweetness from the sweetness of words, her passion from the passion of language, and her sympathy from the sympathy of panic and contagion.[18]

In The Seventeenth Century, she praises Lucy Hutchinson as "a woman of letters in a far more serious sense than our own time uses". Obviously charmed by this writer's artistic economy and dignified use of language "kept unmarred for her use", she exclaims, "What an England was hers! And what an English! A memorable vintage of our literature and speech was granted in her day.. we owe much to those who - as she did - garnered it in"[19].

---

18 Alice Meynell, Prose and Poetry, 1947, p. 348-349.

19 --------, Essays, 1914, p. 195, 200.

The mystical poets of the seventeenth century, "who grew perfect in difficulty" received glowing praise in The Mystical Lyric. Later writers, for the most part, she considered too polished, too stilted and self-conscious.

> The eighteenth century was not without poetic aspiration. It excites itself to a "noble rage", and "madness" and "madding" were words of its poetic vocabulary. Its eye rolled and it put straws in its hair - nay - straws in its periwig - but it had no delirium of rapturous health.[20]

Alice Meynell's own style was known for its vigours as well as for its exquisite delicacy. Unfailingly she recognized this quality in others. Ruskin receives her praise for his beautiful and impassioned literary works.

> One thing he never lacks, never flags in, and that is an invincible vitality... Ruskin's own drawing... his animation and re-animation of the language, all are the expression of vital energy such as he taught the workers with stone, that it might give power to the plan, and deal the chisel mighty blows.[21]

George Meredith's amazing vocabulary and vitality delighted her although she did object to his strange use of words. Scathing is her comment upon Swinburne's vocabulary: "It is to what I dare to call the pocket vocabulary of such poets as Swinburne that our unwilling attention is compelled".

---

20 Alice Meynell, Prose and Poetry, 1947, p. 325, 329.

21 Ibid., p. 342.

George Meredith she acclaims as a "singer of words". To her fastidious and true ear, Swinburne's music "seems a tune"; Meredith's, "a melody"[22].

Of Swinburne she said, "I believe the words to hold and use his meaning, rather than the meaning to compass and grasp and use the word". With him, words soon "became habitual... so that they quickly lost the light, the breeze, the breath";... She was forced to the conclusion, nevertheless, that in spite of his "secondhand and enfeebled and excited manner"[23], the art of his word was pre-eminently successful.

But in Tennyson's page she found a rich and wonderful use of words:

> He showed the perpetually transfigured landscape in transfiguring words. He is the captain of our dreams. Others have lighted a candle in England, he lit a sun. Through him our daily suns, and also the backward and historic suns long since set, which he did not sing, are magnified; and he bestows upon us an exalted retrospection. Through him Napoleon's sun of Austerlitz rises, for us, with a more brilliant menace upon arms and the plain; through him Fielding's 'most melancholy sun' lights the dying man to the setting forth on that last voyage of his with such an immortal gleam, denying hope, as would not have lighted, for us, the memory of that seaward morning, had our poetry not undergone the illumination, the transcendent sunrise, of Tennyson's genius.[24]

---

22 Alice Meynell, Prose and Poetry, 1947, p. 346.

23 Ibid., p. 150, 154, 160.

24 Ibid., p. 89.

In revealing the beauty of Tennyson's treasury of words, his very transfiguration of words, she reveals the fresh and exalted sense of beauty that was hers.

In her travels she found the spirit of place in "the little language":

> Every language in the world has its own phrase, fresh for the stranger's fresh and alien sense of its signal significance... To the same local boundaries and enclosed skies belongs the charm of those buoyant words
>
> Felice chi vi mira
> Ma piu felice chi per voi sospira!
>
> And it is not only a charm of elastic sound or of grace... It is rather the profounder advantage whereby the rhymes are freighted with such feeling as the very language keeps in store.
>
> Anima pellegrina!
>
> this is the facile Italian ecstasy, and it rises into an Italian heaven.[25]

It is so like Alice Meynell to choose from the many possible words the very ones most fraught with meaning. The French word of her choice to prove the beauty of the "little language" is ensoleillé! "Nowhere else is the sun served with such a word", she exclaims with evident delight.

> It is not to be said or written without a convincing sense of sunshine, and from the very word comes light and radiation. The unaccustomed North could not have made it, nor the accustomed South, but only a nation part-north and part-south; therefore neither Italy nor England can rival it.[26]

---

25 Alice Meynell, Prose and Poetry, p. 160, 161.

26 Ibid., p. 163.

Here we have Alice Meynell's typical use of single word and its negative to compress real thought. To a remarkable degree, she habitually compressed rather than expanded ideas.

Our English birthright is rich in inimitable words. Averring that every great English author has abundant possession of such words, she quotes Haydon, who was "hardly an author but a painter:

> He has incomparable language when he is at a certain page of his life; at that time he sat down to sketch his child, dying in its babyhood, and the head he studied was, he says, full of 'power and grief'.[27]

Profound and subtle thoughts sometimes seem to lie too deep for adequate expression unless it be in the words of genius. Many outstanding writers have claimed for Alice Meynell the power to express seemingly elusive thought with a clarity and truth that is unique. Because her sincerity and simplicity are so great, because her mind is so original and her feelings are so delicate, she has the ability to touch and enlarge minds and hearts by the sheer truth of her word.

Long familiarity with several languages and a fine appreciation of musical values had given her an exquisitely delicate perception of the distinctive quality of words,

---

27 Alice Meynell, Prose and Poetry, p. 162.

their shades of meaning, the perfection of the utterly simple word containing the seed of thought. Words held great charm for her; words, not merely beautiful in themselves but acquiring beauty from a novel use.

Concluding her essay, Composure, she leaves us with a striking thought:

> To Letters we now look for the guidance and direction which the very closeness of the emotion taking us by the heart makes necessary. Shall not the Thing more and more, as we compose ourselves to literature, assume the honour, the hesitation, the leisure, the reconciliation of the Word?[28]

In this chapter we have seen that the simple beauty of her own words as well as the literary criticisms she wrote bear testimony to her conviction that words may give tangible form to spiritual beauty.

---

28 Ibid., p. 176.

CHAPTER VI

BEAUTY OF HER CONCEPTS

"Perfect personal distinctness of Experience would be in literature a delicate Innocence". Alice Meynell would have the author's "pudeur of personality thus simple and inviolate"; she would not have him either "love or remember in common"[1]. Her own creative mind followed an untravelled way; she mused:

> .... upon the dusky height
> Between two stars towards night.[2]

Solitude and silence were dear to her profoundly contemplative mind; she was quick to perceive beauty wherever it was to be found, whether in Shakespeare, the lyrical Milton, Shelley, or Thompson, or again, in whatever object claimed the thought of her lofty mind. In Mary, the Mother of Jesus, she awakens thoughts of peerless beauty:

> Of all reflective glory the glory of the Mother of Christ is the supreme example - so perfect an example that it might rather be called the solitary pattern. Have some enthusiasts seemed - whether they were poets writing sonnets in honour of the moon or Christians singing hymns in honour of Mary - to give their more sensible tenderness to the secondary splendour, have they seemed to forget that

---

1 Alice Meynell, Essays, 1914, p. 88.

2 --------, Poems, 1947, p. 115.

> the moonlight is the sunlight simply returned, and Mary a moon to the Sun of Christ, they have only seemed... And this similitude of Mary and the moon is so perfect that it is a wonder the simple should need, or the churches erect, images of the Virgin... under any invocation whatever, when month by month, newly lighted every month, the moon presents her absolute similitude, her image with the superscription of her Lord. And yet there is a nation with a noble language that incredibly makes the moon masculine, facing - with effrontery - a feminine sun.[3]

In Aenigma Christi she acknowledges that no earthly creature, not even His perfect mother, can approach His capacity for love and grief. Yet in lines of utter loveliness and simplicity she proclaims that Christ is imaged in Mary; so perfect is the image that the more we know of her, the closer we approach to a true realization of the beauty of the Infinite.

> None can be like Him, none;
> Not she who bore Him. Yet I saw the whole
> Eternal, infinite Christ within the one
> Small mirror of her soul.[4]

In 1918, when her heart ached for her suffering land and its people, she noted with exactitude the natural glories of that summer - "the caressing pencils of the sun", houses transfigured, the 'long unlovely' street impearled", beauty ... prosperity everywhere, and amid all this, the destruction

---

3 A. Meynell, Mary, the Mother of Jesus, London, Warner, 1912, p. 44, 45.

4 --------, Prose and Poetry, p. 181.

of the flower of English youth, whose natural right it was to inherit and enjoy this tranquil beauty. She observes "the chaste young silver sun went up, - not the conventional gold, but chaste silver, - symbolic of the noble life and nobler death of many a soldier who died "on the very kiss of God"[5]. Characteristically, she does not leave us on a sad note; rather, she exalts to a spiritual plane - these youths have repeated in their lives the very sacrifice of Christ.

In Wind in Clear Weather she joyously claims for this "miracle wind... delicate stepper and discreet, luminous day, and spacious night". She compares this clean, clear wind to the perfect man who also may claim:

> His open earth - the single way;
> His narrow road - the open sun.[6]

Such is her way of life - a glad acceptance of bonds for the very freedom she enjoys therein.

---

5 A. Meynell, Prose and Poetry, p. 69, 70.

6 Ibid., p. 71.

Sunlight and shadow hold infinite charm for her. "Why will art insist upon its importunate immortality"? she asks.

> Wiser is the drama, and wiser the dance, that do not pause upon an attitude. But these walk with passion or pleasure, while the shadow walks with the earth. It alters as the hours wheel. Moreover, while the habit of your sunward thoughts is still flowing southward, after the winter and the spring... The trees show you a shadow for every leaf, and the poplars are sprinkled upon the shining sky with little shadows that look translucent. The liveliness of every shadow is that some light is reflected into it; shade and shine have been entangled as though by some wild wind through their million molecules...

She reflects upon shadows thrown across the drawn blinds of a sick room where "shadows and their life will be carried across by a bird". To her mind, the shadow of a cloud, not having "shape, colour, approach or flight" is but an eclipse, while "the flying bird shows him wings. What flash of light could be more bright for him than such a flash of darkness"[7]? she asks.

Very great is her admiration for Tintoretto's art:

> Master, thy enterprise
> Magnificent, magnanimous, was well done,
> Which seized the head of Art, and turned her eyes -
> The simpleton - and made her front the sun
>
> . . . .
> Look sunward, Angel, then!
> Carry the fortress-heavens by that hand;
> Still be the interpreter of suns to men;
> And shadow us, O thou Tower! for thou shalt stand.[8]

---

7 A. Meynell, Essays, London, Burns, 1914, p. 188, 190.

8 --------, Prose and Poetry, p. 81, 82.

Her own artistry followed a similar pattern, in life and in letters for we find her, figuratively and literally, setting the darkened figure of man against the sun and against the cloud. Sublime is her contemplation of the Sun of Justice from the shadow side of things; that is, this earth of ours. Hence, she found reflected beauty everywhere and in all things.

In Wells, she deplored modern man's "sorry mysteries and unattractive secrets" his method of supplying water in cities and villages. He "hides the streams, under stress and pressure in paltry pipes" under the earth, while the artist craftsman of other times "lifted up the arches of the aqueduct". Her admiration is for wells - "the noonday sun himself is visible there"-

> The Romans knew how to cause the parted floods to measure their plain with the strong, steady, and level flight of arches from the watersheds in the hills to the arid city; and having the waters captive, they knew how to compel them to take part, by fountains in this Roman triumph. They had the wit to boast thus of their brilliant prisoner.
>
> None more splendid came bound to Rome, or graced captivity with a more invincible liberty of the heart...[9]

---

9 A. Meynell, Essays, p. 7, 8, 10.

The Illusion of Historic Time contains echoes of childhood years:

> Childhood is itself Antiquity... For in childhood change does not go at that mere hasty amble; it rushes; but it has enormous space for its flight... His nurse's lullaby is translated into the mysteries of time. She sings absolutely immemorial words. It matters little what they may mean to waking ears, to the ears of a child going to sleep they tell of the beginning of the world...[10]

Ideal mother that she was, she never ceased to wonder at the gradual development of human powers, so different in each child, so eloquent of the infinite power of the Creator:

> A poppy bud, packed into tight bundles by so hard and resolute a hand that the petals of the flower never afterwards lose the creases, is a type of the child. Nothing but the unfolding, which is as yet in the non-existing future, can explain the manner of the close folding of character. In both flower and child it looks as though the process had been the reverse of what it was - as though a finished and open thing had been folded up into the bud - so plainly and certainly is the future implied, and the intention of compressing and folding-close made manifest.[11]

"Is the fruit for the flower or the flower for the fruit, or the fruit for the seeds which it is formed to shelter and contain? Alice Meynell queried, as she considered the prevalence in literature of the fashion of hurrying childhood, especially that of little girls.

---

10 Ibid., p. 264, 265, 267.

11 Ibid., p. 235.

> Art, for example, had no little girls. There was always Cupid and the prosperous urchin-angels of the painters... but there were no 'little, radiant girls'. Now and then an Education of the Virgin is the exception and then it is always a matter of sewing and reading. As for the little girl saints, even when they were so young that their hands, like those of St. Agnes, slipped through their fetters, they are always recorded as refusing importunate suitors which seems necessary to make them interesting to the mediaeval mind, but mars them for ours.[12]

Well did she understand the attitude of a Marceline Valmore, a Eugénie de Guérin, and a Madame de Sévigné, who suffered in sympathy with their children. She saw in this attitude "the signs of a new and universal health - the prophesy of human unity". Nevertheless she would have preferred to note this "union of tenderness" on gay occasions as well[13].

In Children in Midwinter, she says, "Children are so flower-like that it is always a fresh surprise to see them blooming in winter.

> Now more than ever must the lover beware of making a comparison between the admired woman and the beauty of a child... The Elizabethan lyrist is safe among lilies and cherries, roses, pearls, and snow... the beautiful woman, widely and wisely likened to the flowers, which are inaccessibly more beautiful, must not for her own sake be likened to the always accessible child... Besides light and colour, children have a beauty of finish which is

---

12 Ibid., p. 254, 256.

13 A. Meynell, Spirit of Place, London, Lane, p. 82.

> much beyond that of more finished years... This beauty of finish is the peculiarity of their childhood, and loses, as years are added, that little extra character and that surprise of perfection.[14]

Nothing was too trivial to attract her attention but unfailingly the vital relation her keen mind made was distinctive and lovely. She has written an essay on Eyes - "eyes of men and women whose faces have been made memorable by their works". The colour, the eyes themselves, she does not consider, as regards beauty. "It is not the eye, but the eyelid, that is important, beautiful, eloquent, full of secrets":

> But all love and all genius have winged their flight from those slight and immeasurable movements, have flickered on the margins of lovely eyelids quick with thought. Life, spirit, sweetness are there in a small place; using the finest and the slenderest machinery; expressing meanings a whole world apart, by a difference of material action so fine that the sight which appreciates it cannot detect it; expressing intricacies of intellect; so incarnate in slender and sensitive flesh that nowhere else in the body of man is flesh so spiritual.[15]

Always she detects in human beauty that essential spiritual beauty which gives meaning to the lesser one. Thinking of

---

14 A. Meynell, Prose and Poetry, p. 316.

15 Ibid., p. 223, 226.

her daughter's "dark-bright eyes" she feels moved to write:

> Across what calm of tropic seas,
> 'Neath alien clusters of the nights,
> Looked, in the past, such eyes as these?
> Long-quenched, relumed, ancestral lights!
>
> The generations fostered them;
> And steadfast Nature, secretwise -
> . . . .
> So fine a treasure to transmit
> In its perfection to thy face.

Again the idea of human unity. Again the grave and lovely reflection. Olivia's eyes reveal her a "seedling child of that old stem", yet the soul shining through those eyes is "single, singular, apart"[16].

Perhaps no other poet has expressed so succinctly, thoughts about the Mystical Body. She sees Christ even in the agnostic, whose compassion toward the poor and suffering she observes.

> . . . . . One who did create
> Compassion, who alone invented pity,
> . . . .
> Saw Himself, as one looks in a glass,
> In those impassioned eyes.[17]

The sight of throngs of devout communicants returning to their places in church after receiving their "devoted Lord"

16 A. Meynell, <u>Poetry</u>, p. 72.

17 <u>Ibid</u>., p. 74.

inspires her to write A General Communion:

> I saw this people as a field of flowers,
> Each grown at such a price
> The sum of unimaginable powers
> Did no more than suffice.
>
> A thousand single central daisies they,
> A thousand of the one;
> For each, the entire monopoly of day;
> For each, the whole of the devoted sun.[18]

Constant in her work is the idea of unity in variety, constant the evidence of high intellectuality. Here, her concept is overwhelmingly beautiful, yet it is expressed with the utmost simplicity and restraint.

In solitude and silence she roams her own "wide thought - wildernesses"[19]. "O Poet", she exclaimed, "more than ocean, lonelier"!

> In inaccessible rest
> And storm remote, thou, sea of thoughts, dost stir
> Scattered through east to west, -...[20]

In one of her early poems, A Study, we find lines fraught with meaning and suggestion of great beauty.

> She therefore turned unto the Eastern hills
> Thrilled with a west wind sowing stars. She saw
> Her lonely upward way climb to the verge
> And ending of the day-time; and she knew
> The downward way in presence of the night.

---

18 Ibid., p. 50.

19 Ibid., p. 136.

20 Ibid., p. 47.

> She heard the fitful sheep-bells in the glen
> Move like a child's thoughts. There she felt the earth
> Lonely in space. And all things suddenly
> Shook with her tears. She went with shadowless feet,
> Moving along the shadow of the world,
> Faring alone to home and a long life,
> Setting a twilight face to meet the stars.[21]

The East - the source of light! Her imaginative power is visible in these lines, her poetic vitality and simplicity remarkable, her lyricism essentially interior. Her poem, A Day and a Life has something of the same imaginative thought:

> ... there are slopes of the Eastern lawn
> Among the hills - those morning places,
> With souls to the early time up-drawn;
> With tremulous dews and dreamy faces
> Set to the fresh thoughts of the dawn -
>
> Set to the innocent airs, and sweet
> Long sunshine of the morning only...[22]

Lovely light irradiates her verse; the clear morning light inspires fresh and innocent thoughts that naturally tend toward worthwhile achievement.

Frequent throughout her work are ideas on the communion and separation of personalities. The restrained ardour in each one of these poems only accentuates the strong beauty of her thoughts. She writes in her sonnet, Renunciation:

> Oh, just beyond the fairest thoughts that throng
> This breast, the thought of thee waits hidden yet bright;
> But it must never, never come in sight...[23]

---

21 Ibid., p. 176.

22 Ibid., p. 179.

23 Ibid., p. 13.

We have abundant proof that her spirit of renunciation, influenced her whole life as well as her art.

With the passage of years, Alice Meynell grew in stature. Her contemplative powers, always great, became more widely and deeply rooted. Her later poetry is instinct with longing for immutable beauty and unchanging truth. Never has she stopped at mere sensible beauty but rather has rejoiced in intellectual and moral beauty, and above all, in that beauty unsurpassed which is eternal.

At a Poet's Grave contains her profound thought that all created ideas however sublime can be only a limited participation in limitless truth, infinite Truth. Contemplation of the beauties of creation leave us ultimately powerless to express them. She writes:

> Days, nights, and flowers - obey your fancy's art,
> And mean your meanings, otherwhere; they own,
> Here in this little sanctuary alone,
> Meanings beyond the deepest poet's heart.[24]

Plato has said:

> What would we think of a mortal to whom it would be given to contemplate pure beauty, simple, without any mixture, and not garbed in flesh and human colours and other perishable vanities, but the very divine beauty itself? Do you not think that this man, being the only one who sees the beauty by the faculty to which beauty is perceptible,

---

24 Ibid., p. 163.

> could bring forth, not mere images of virtues, but veritable virtues, since he is attached and united to truth? Now man who brings forth and nourishes true virtue is deserving of being cherished by God. If any man can be immortal, it is this man.[25]

Many whose privilege it was to call Alice Meynell, friend, knew her to be a Saint of the Intellect. Coventry Patmore whom she had placed "twixt Anacreon and Plato" wrote in 1895:

> Really song cannot touch her. Art is a superficies, Life a solid. She is the solid out of which are made all shows of good and fair, and nothing but tongueless love can praise her.[26]

In final tribute Shane Leslie declared her "Poetess of Saints"[27]. She who found beauty in all, left us in all she wrote something of the beauty of her serene and gracious spirit.

---

25 Plato, Banquet, ch. 29 (211c), in Garrigou-Lagrange, R., Life Everlasting, London, Herder, 1952, p. 213.

26 V. Long, They Have Seen His Star, Patterson, New Jersey, St. Anthony Guild Press, 1938, p. 44.

27 Leslie Shane, Studies in Sublime Failures, London, Benn, 1932, p. 168.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Among Alice Meynell's contemporaries, the most distinguished literary artists, friends of her youth as well as those of her maturer years, were high in praise of her artistic gifts. All shared the opinion that the processes of time would eventually and inevitably reveal in full the richness and beauty of her gifts to posterity, contained in her profound and lovely work.

Apart from personal studies, records, and impressions of poets and scholars, many among them renowned in the literary world, purely objective studies have been made. These latter have revealed a staggering bibliography of Alice Meynell's writings, chiefly found in outstanding literary journals of her day and signed with a pseudonym. So uniformly exquisite and original are these articles that the authorship is not to be questioned. Studies have been made of her mysticism, her literary and religious influence, the literary value of her poetry, essays, and criticism. After much research, scholars have concluded that her literary ancestry cannot be determined; hers was a creative mind, though she held firmly to traditional laws and techniques.

Although literary scholars have been unanimous in their praise of her artistry, they have not approached

their study from the viewpoint of Beauty alone; theirs has been a wider scope.

This thesis purports to stress only the beauty of Alice Meynell's life and work, basing all evaluations upon aesthetic theories of ancient and modern philosophers and literary critics of note. Chapter One defines beauty according to Plato, Aquinas, Jacques Maritain, Coventry Patmore, Francis Thompson, George Meredith and others. Chapter II records Alice Meynell's life, only insofar as these details pertain to the qualities essential to beauty as considered in Chapter One. Chapter III considers in her poetry the qualities of simplicity, wildness, truth, goodness, law, originality, perfection of technique, restraint, silence, contemplation, clarity, and unity in variety. Chapter IV studies Alice Meynell's prose in the light of the above attributes. Chapter V reveals her power with words. Chapter VI contains uniquely beautiful concepts in her prose and poetry reflecting the serene loveliness of her lofty and penetrating mind.

Since no one else has made a thorough study of the notion or concept or presence of beauty in Alice Meynell's life and works, this thesis does contribute a modest bit to a better and deeper understanding of a too-frequently ignored literary figure.

The assertion has been made that Alice Meynell was a pioneer in the work of restoring poetry to classical economy; that T. S. Eliot and E. Pound have brought this to greater perfection. It would seem profitable to study the philosophy of beauty of these two authors in comparison with that of Alice Meynell. Yet another assertion has been ventured: that Sister Madeleva is Alice Meynell's true successor. It might be rewarding to draw a parallel between these two deeply spiritual personalities and their work. It would be most interesting to trace the influence of Mrs. Meynell on modern writers because of her Philosophy of Beauty.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bliss, Geoffrey, "The Poetry of Alice Meynell" in The Month, Vol. 141, issue of April 1923, p. 315-320.
An appreciation, chiefly for what he considers the most interesting and extraordinary juvenilia in the history of English literature. Claims that her later poetry is too purely intellectual.

Bregy, Katherine, The Poets' Chantry, London, Herbert, 1912, p. 159-176.
A personal, eulogistic, scholarly appraisal of Alice Meynell's works.

Carritt, E.F., Philosophies of Beauty, New York, Oxford, 1931, 331pp.
Contains sources of aesthetic theory from Socrates to Robert Bridges. The author considers that Platonic philosophy contains the seed of all aesthetic philosophy.

Chesterton, G.K., Autobiography, London, Burns Oates, 1936, p. 286, 287.
Contains a tribute to Alice Meynell for her Christian stoicism.

--------, "Alice Meynell" in The Dublin Review, Vol. 172, No. 344, issue of Jan. 1923, p. 1-12.
In high praise of her artistic adventures and achievements, her originality and truthfulness.

Connolly, T., "Alice Meynell's Centenary", in America, Vol. 78, issue of Oct. 18, 1947, p. 73-74.
Proves Mrs. Meynell a lover of silence and contemplation. He considers her part in the Catholic Revival of vital significance.

--------, Centenary Tribute, Boston, Humphries, 1948, 72pp.
Tributes to the memory of Alice Meynell given at Boston College Centenary Symposium by R.F. Wilberforce, Mrs. A.K. Tuell, Sister Madeleva, and T.L. Connolly.

Dimnet, Ernest, My Old World, London, Cape, 1939, p. 291.
Mentions his first meeting with Alice Meynell and the deep impression she made upon him because of her spirituality.

Dixon, Scott, "The Art of Mrs. Meynell", in English Men of Letters, London, Hodder, 1923, p. 214-220.
Minute analysis and unerring scientific appraisal of the technical perfection of Alice Meynell's prose.

Drinkwater, John, "Alice Meynell" in The Muse in Council, London, Sidgwick, 1925, p. 153-174.
A judgment of her poetry in the light of his knowledge of and admiration for her. Claims that she is humble only because of the divine company in which she moves.

Flaccus, Louis, The Spirit and Substance of Art, New York, Crofts, 1931, 234 pp.
A study of the substance, form and spirit of art; brilliant, thought-provoking, and subjective.

Garragou-Lagrange, R., Life Everlasting, London, Herder, 1952, p. 213.
Contains quotation from Plato concerning Supreme Beauty.

Garvin, J.L., "Alice Meynell" in The Living Age, Vol. 29, 1923, p. 103-108.
Ranks Mrs. Meynell next in rank to Bacon and Hazlitt, for her prose while he claims no living poet can match her poetry for weight of significance and severe felicity of form.

Hind, C.L., Authors and I, New York, Lane, 1921, p. 217-222.
Recalls visits to the Meynell home - "one of the few where poetry and thought have been consistently honoured".

Le Gallienne, The Romantic Nineties, London, Doubleday, 1925, 271pp.
In a natural and entertaining manner, the author tells about his meetings with literary celebrities, many of them at the Meynell's.

Long, Valentine, They Have Seen His Star, Patterson, New Jersey, St. Anthony Guild Press, 1938, p. 37-53.
Contains two essays on Alice Meynell - "Flower of the Nineties", and "Poetess of Poets". Claims that she ranks with the immortals.

Madeleva, Sister, "Religious Poetry", in Chaucer's Nuns, New York, Appleton, 1925, p. 135.
A criticism of her religious poetry for its lack of abandonment, the price her restraint cost her.

Mare, de la, W., "Alice Meynell: Without Misgivings", in Private View, London, Faber, 1953, p. 5-256.
Contains a review of her Essays (1914), praising their independence of fashion and ways of thought, their rare delicacy, balance and charm.

Maritain, Jacques, Art and Scholasticism, London, Sheed, 1947, p. vii-178.
Contains enlightening chapters on "Art and Beauty", "The Rules of Art", and "Purity of Art".

--------, Creative Intuitive in Art and Poetry, New York, Pantheon, 1953, 423pp.
Chapter V on Poetry and Beauty of especial interest for this thesis.

Martindale, C.C., "Alice Meynell", in The Catholic World, Vol. 166, issue of Nov. 1947, p. 176.
In praise of the catholicity of her thought and the eminent truthfulness of her great mind. He proclaims her as Poet of the Mystical Body.

Maynard, Theodore, "Alice Meynell and Her Circle" in The World I Saw, Milwaukee, Bruce, 1939, p. 195-203.
Recollections of his visits to the Meynell home. Mentions the literary and other celebrities who frequently gathered there.

--------, "Art of Alice Meynell" in Carven From the Laurel Tree, New York, McBride, 1919, p. 37-43.
In praise of her prose. Claims that her pages were brooded over and lived into.

--------, "Spring and a China Shepherdess" in Our Best Poets, New York, Holt, 1922, p. 17-28.
Notes the artistic excellence of her work, her intellectuality, and austerity. Finds lack of abandonment in her poetry.

Meredith, George, The Letters of George Meredith to Alice Meynell, London, Nonesuch, 1923, 102pp.
Contains also his review of her two books of essays, "The Rhythm of Life", and "The Colour of Life", published by him in The National Review, August 1896. Praises her brilliant gifts.

Meynell, Alice, Children of the Old Masters, London, Duckworth, 1903, 86 pp.
Essay recording the changes of sight and spirit during the course of five centuries of Italian art. She notes the restraint and simplicity in real art and condemns affectation of all kinds.

--------, Colour of Life, London, Lane, 1906, 103pp.
Contains fourteen essays that mark her distinct power of observation and her sound critical judgment in matters of art.

--------, Essays, Burns, London, 1914, 267pp.
Collection into one volume of many essays previously published. Reveal her full mastery of English prose.

--------, Poems, (edited by Sir Francis Meynell), London, Hollis, 1947, 192pp.
Collection of previously published poems, placing first in the book poems of her middle and later years, for Mrs. Meynell herself esteemed these beyond her early poems.

--------, Prose and Poetry, (edited by Frederick Page, et al.), London, Cape, 1947, 392pp.
Fine biographical and critical introduction by V. Sackville West. Contains poems and essays published from 1893 to 1923. The editors of this centenary edition, F. Page, V. Meynell, O. Sowerby, and F. Meynell have tried to make choice of the prose and poetry that best embody her profound and lovely thought.

--------, Second Person Singular, London, Oxford, 1922, 140pp.
Twenty brief but exquisite essays. Praiseworthy for content, style and variety.

--------, Spirit of Place, London, Lane, 1899, 106pp.
Seventeen Essays remarkable for close thinking and expert expression.

--------, Wayfaring, London, Cape, 1929, 222pp.
A selection of essays first published in the Pall Mall Gazette with later revisions of her own. A few poems, proper to Wayfarings supplement the prose. Gives evidence of acute powers of observation.

--------, Mary, the Mother of Jesus, London, Warner, 1912, 143pp.
This essay reflects the quiet richness of her spiritual life. It reveals her stylistic discipline and love of real art.

Meynell, Viola, Alice Meynell: A Memoir, London, Cape, 1929, 345pp.
This work is not intended as a biography, but simply to shape and preserve a personal memory. Many opinions of literary artists are inserted, but no attempt is made to analyze or evaluate.

Moorehouse, E.H., "The Flower of the Mind" Alice Meynell and Her Work" in The Fortnightly Review, Vol. 119, issue of Jan. 1923, p. 64-73.
Scholarly study of her literary qualities, especially of her power with words. Mentions her literary friendships.

Nivenson, H., "Alice Meynell" in The Critic, Vol. 43, 1903, p. 345.
Scholarly criticism according her highest praise for the quality of her work reflecting her personality.

Noyes, A., "Alice Meynell" in Pageant of Letters, New York, Sheed, 1940, p. 318-328.
Same highly eulogistic article in Some Aspects of Modern Poetry - in praise of a personal friend and great artist.

Patmore, Coventry, "Mrs. Meynell", in Principles in Art, London, Duckworth, 1913, p. 118-128.
Contains a highly eulogistic chapter in which he makes Mrs. Meynell's name synonymous with distinction. Places her in the front line of living prose writers but denies her the right to be placed among classical poets.

Reilly, J.J., "Alice Meynell: A Poet in Prose", in Dear Prue's Husband, New York, Macmillan, 1932, p. 195-213.
A discerning and highly laudatory appraisal of Mrs. Meynell and her prose.

Reilly, Thos. B., "A Study of Mrs. Meynell's Poems", in The Catholic World, Vol. 73, issue of July 1901, p. 521-530.
A scholarly study of several of her poems illustrating the higher qualities of art.

Shane, Leslie, "Coventry Patmore" in Studies in Sublime Failure, London, Benn, 1932, p. 115-178.
Contains C. Patmore's eulogy of Alice Meynell and one of her reviews of his work.

Speckbaugh, "Restraint", in Spirit, issue of Sept. 1938, p. 119.
The author establishes the quality of restraint on firm and convincing bases; he claims that the entire goal of poetry is accomplished because of the use of restraint, one of the foundations of poetics.

Squire, J.C., "Alice Meynell", in Essays on Poetry, London, Hodder, 1923, p. 98-121.
Personal appraisal of one who valued her friendship. Praises her self-control in art and in life. Finds evidence of independence of thought.

Thompson, Fr., Literary Criticism, New York, Dutton, 1948, p. 187-191, 552-554.
Contains a review of Mrs. Meynell's poems first published in 1893 for The Tablet. Its comprehension of her work and its unqualified praise of her poetry illustrates the catholicity of Thompson's literary taste and critical judgment.

Thornton, F., Return to Tradition, Milwaukee, Bruce, 1948, p. xiii and p. 73.
Claims that the Catholic Literary Revival flared to full brilliance in the Meynell home. Praises her emotional dynamism and intellectual powers.

Toole, H., "Charm of Alice Meynell's Poetry", in America, Vol. 41, issue of Aug. 10, 1929, p. 451-453.
Analysis of several of her poems with brief reference to her poetic technique. Stresses her use of common words to say uncommon things.

Tuell, A.K., Mrs Meynell and Her Literary Generation, New York, Dutton, 1925, 286pp.
A critical study of Mrs. Meynell's complete literary product, only a moderate fraction of which has been republished.

Tynan, Katherine, "Alice Meynell", in The Catholic World, Vol. 129, issue of Sept. 1929, p. 641-651.
Personal, intimate account of Alice Meynell as a charming personality, a perfect woman and artist, even a saint.

Wilberforce, R., "Alice Meynell's Essays" in The Catholic World, Vol. 161, Mar. 1948, p. 569.
Notes that Horace would have found delight in her writings. Claims that she is not deliberately abstruse but that her thoughts are often too deep for adequate expression.

Abstract

This thesis is meant to be a literary study of Alice Meynell's philosophy of beauty as revealed in her life and work. The criteria used will be concepts of beauty enunciated by thinkers who are illustrious either in the field of philosophy or in the field of art.

Both her prose and her poetry will be studied in the light of fundamental notions of beauty. These notions are set forth in Chapter One. Chapter Two considers only those details of her life that concern beauty as defined in Chapter One, or that throw light upon attitudes or qualities of beauty revealed in later chapters. This chapter also contains the opinions and judgments of outstanding literary scholars and poets in praise of her beauty as an artist and woman. In Chapter Three her poetry is studied for evidence of the qualities of beauty; namely, simplicity, wildness (in the sense that Alice Meynell defines it), truth, goodness, law, originality, perfection of technique, restraint, silence, contemplation, clarity, and unity in variety. Chapter Five reveals her preoccupation with words which she considers the holy body of thought. It contains her comments about those whose style is masterly because of their verbal hon sty; it gives proof of her own power with words. Chapter Six bears testimony to the beauty of her thought-world as it appears in her unusual concepts.

This thesis proves that beauty is present in her life and work, according to the theories of Plato, Jacques Maritain, Coventry Patmore, Francis Thompson, Theodore Maynard and others. It may be considered a complement to other studies of her talents, influence, works, mysticism and the like.

T. S. Eliot and E. Pound have made great strides in the use of classical economy. As Alice Meynell is considered the pioneer in the work of restoring poetry to classical economy, it seems likely that these authors have learned much from her. A study of comparison betwsen the poetry of Eliot and Pound and that of Alice Meynell might be very rewarding. Sister Madeleva is considered Alice Meynell's true successor. It would be interesting to draw a parallel between the two in order to prove this assertion.