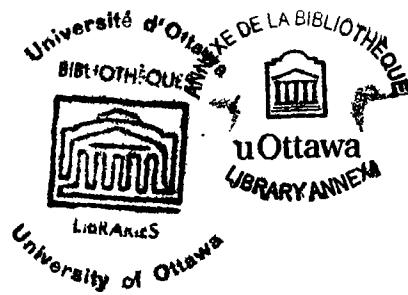


WILFRID MEYNELL  
PROPAGANDIST OF THE CATHOLIC LITERARY REVIVAL

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of Arts of the University of Ottawa  
through the Department of English  
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CURRICULUM STUDIORUM

Sister Louise Marguerite, S.G.C., (Albina Ouellette), was born February 22, 1910, in Alexandria, Ontario, Canada. She received the Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Ottawa in 1944; the Master of Arts degree in English from the University of Ottawa in 1949; her thesis was Dickens's "Bill of Rights" for the Child in the Light of Catholic Principles of Education.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
INTRODUCTION .....	vi
I.- NEED FOR CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDA .....	1
1. Social Misery in Victorian England .....	3
2. Want of Truth in Politics, Religion, and Literature.....	4
3. Soulless Philosophy of Life .....	6
4. Prescriptions for Remedy .....	9
5. Divorce of Theology and Christian Values .	17
6. Triumph of Secularism .....	22
II.- CRUSADING PROPAGANDIST .....	29
1. Answer to Victorian Dilemma .....	29
2. Gifts of a Catholic Literary Propagandist	33
3. A Catholic and Literary Home .....	37
4. Meynell's Personal Influence .....	44
5. Catholicism and Culture .....	53
6. Catholic Journalism and Creative Literature	61
III.- THE CREDO OF A CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDIST .	68
1. The True "Merry England" Ideal .....	68
2. The Catholic Cultural Ideal .....	73
3. The Catholic Literary Ideal .....	85
4. The Catholic Ideal and Reality .....	93
IV.- MERRY ENGLAND AND CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDA	97
1. General Picture .....	98
2. The "Merry England" Tradition and Catholicism .....	101
3. Sociology and Catholicism .....	109
4. Theology and Literature .....	118
5. Triumphs of <u>Merry England</u> .....	147
V.- MEYNELL'S SHARE IN THE MAKING OF A CATHOLIC WRITER .....	150
1. The Meynell-Thompson Relationship .....	153
2. First Encounter with Thompson .....	154
3. Intuition of Thompson's Greatness .....	160
4. Development of Thompson's Genius .....	162
5. Thompson's Established Fame .....	184

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

v

VI.- THE COMPANIONSHIP OF LITERATURE AND THEOLOGY .....	190
1. Meynell: Educator of Catholic Literary Opinion .....	190
2. Alice Meynell and Christian Inspiration ....	192
3. Identical Ideals of Meynell and Thompson ...	194
4. Integral Christianity and Letters .....	201
5. Fruitful Interrelationship between Theology and Literature .....	214
 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION .....	 228
 BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	 233
 Appendix	
1. MANIFESTO OF <u>MERRY ENGLAND</u> .....	254
2. ABSTRACT OF <u>Wilfrid Meynell, Propagandist of</u> <u>the Catholic Literary Revival</u> .....	256

## INTRODUCTION

Wilfrid Meynell's importance in the history of English letters is related to the circle of Catholic writers which at the turn of the nineteenth century had a special and unique brilliance. The share which he contributed to the general effectiveness of the group is overshadowed by the more securely established fame of his illustrious wife, Alice Meynell, the central figure, and of Francis Thompson, the leading figure of the early Catholic Revival. Meynell died in 1948, in a silence scarcely disturbed by a few moving obituary notes. The histories of English Catholic literature sum up his achievement in a sentence or two dropped into the romantic story of the discovery of Francis Thompson. His name cedes first rank to that of Francis Thompson in Everard Meynell's official biography of the poet.<sup>1</sup> In Francis Thompson and Wilfrid Meynell, written in 1953, Viola Meynell claims to be the first to give an "account" of her father. She presents "the personal story and characteristics of the two men", deliberately disclaiming the larger field of their "achievements and place

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<sup>1</sup> Everard Meynell, The Life of Francis Thompson, New York, Scribner's, 1913.

## INTRODUCTION

vii

in their respective worlds".<sup>1</sup>

It seems to this writer that English Catholic literature (and, in particular, the history of the English Catholic press) owes too much to the obscure work of this influential figure to pass over as lightly, if not to ignore almost completely, the essential role which he played in its development. This study is, consequently, the first tentative estimate of Wilfrid Meynell's unique and essential contribution, as propagandist, to the advancement of the Catholic Literary Renaissance of the last decades of the nineteenth century. It is the contention here that, even if he had not fulfilled the providential mission of giving Thompson's poetry to the world, he would still have a claim to greatness. His attempt to bring out the Catholic Church in its proper place in industrial, intellectual, and artistic life seems to be the great work of his life.

It is with these aspects of Meynell's contributions to English Catholic culture that the framework of this thesis has been conceived: exposition of the progressive disappearance in Victorian thought of the certitudes derived from religious faith and metaphysical insight which had formed the basis and granted reality to the idea of

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<sup>1</sup> Viola Meynell, Francis Thompson and Wilfrid Meynell, New York, Dutton, 1953, p. 1.

## INTRODUCTION

viii

Christian man and culture (Ch. I); Wilfrid Meynell's launching of a crusade, Catholic and literary, for propagating the traditional Christian concept of life and culture through Catholic journalism—the project being incarnated in the Merry England periodical (Ch. II); an analysis of the Manifesto of Merry England, the formulation of Meynell's ideals, embodying the essential elements of the socio-religious-artistic pattern of medieval culture, traditional in principle and modern in application (Ch. III); a study of the several issues of the periodical brought to bear testimony to the fulfillment, limited only by creative genius, of the promises of the Manifesto (Ch. IV); one fruit of the Merry England project, the sponsorship of Catholic writers, is exemplified in the discovery and subsequent development of Francis Thompson's genius and fame (Ch. V); a second fruit, the education of Catholic literary opinion: the Merry England ideology is shown as common to the nineteenth-century Catholic literary opinion and to that of the modern resurgence of Catholic letters (Ch. VI, Summary and Conclusions).

As a propagandist, the cause which Meynell endeavoured to promote was that of the Catholic group of writers. Consequently, the term "propaganda" as used in this discussion will apply to a concerted movement, that of the early Catholic Revival, designed to spread Catholic

## INTRODUCTION

ix

principles as an antidote to the erroneous ideals of the Victorian age, religious, social, artistic, and literary. Prominence will be given to the Merry England periodical, the main organ and one of the most potent factors of the Victorian Catholic Renaissance. The reader will allow for latitude if in what was intended to be a study of Wilfrid Meynell's achievement, so much importance should be given to Alice Meynell and Francis Thompson, his two closest associates. Alice Meynell shaped the Catholic Revival into a movement, acted as co-founder and co-editor of Merry England, contributed to it generously by her own works, and played an important part in the rehabilitation of Francis Thompson. She will be included as co-propagandist. Francis Thompson gave classical expression to the Meynell ideology. It will be observed that no attempt has been made at a critical estimate of his works.

The story of the struggle to revive Catholicism in the life and culture of later Victorian England may have a more than purely speculative and historical interest for our day when Catholic creative literature is attaining to world-wide dimensions. With some of these problems both religious and literary, many contemporary thinkers are more deeply concerned than ever: the conciliation of religion and culture, of theology and imaginative literature, remains the central problem of serious writers, Catholics and

## INTRODUCTION

x

non-Catholics alike.

The contents of this thesis have been drawn from the Thompson-Meynell Collection at the Boston College Library, Boston, Massachusetts. This collection of Thompsoniana contains 600 manuscripts among which are the "Hound of Heaven" and the "Shelley" article as well as 111 notebooks, some of which will be mentioned in this work. The Boston College Library also possesses a complete file of The Pen magazine, one of the two complete files of the Merry England periodical known to exist (the other is in the Bodleian Library, Oxford), and a complete file of The Weekly Register, from the years 1881 to 1899, in bound volumes or microfilm copies. The collection also includes the separately published works of Thompson, of Alice and Wilfrid Meynell, and of Coventry Patmore, to name but the works more closely connected with this thesis. Through the generosity of Rev. Terence L. Connolly, S.J., Director of the Boston College Library and Curator of the Thompson Collection, it has been my privilege to study from this Collection over a period of three summer sessions.

## CHAPTER I

## NEED FOR CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDA

The significance of Meynell's achievement as propagandist for the Catholic Literary Revival is commensurate not only with the future place which Catholic writers were to hold in English literary history but also with the immediate needs of the times which he served. An appreciation of his activities necessarily implies an awareness of the intellectual, religious, sociological, and artistic climate in which they grew. The character and extent of his influence bear the stamp of the needs and potentialities of the later Victorian era.

It is to Carlyle, the greatest moral influence of the century, that one must look to find a vivid picture of the decline of values in the life and culture of the nineteenth-century world. Among the great non-Catholic prose writers who commented on the standards and attitudes of the age, he stands for the ethical and religious side of the purely Romantic movement—a movement built on faith in the spiritual and the unseen. His own emotional and ideological struggles, his study of German transcendental philosophy, and his dissatisfaction with his own times filled him with a desire to save his age from the scientific

materialism into which it had fallen. He had witnessed the growth of utilitarianism, democracy, and an industrial system based upon individual commercial enterprise; he burned with indignation before the money-worship of the bourgeoisie, the abject condition of wage-earners, the whole social milieu produced by laissez-faire economics. He was the first of the nineteenth-century prophets to look with foreboding upon the break-up of an old system which had its faults, but was at least orderly, and the oncoming of changes which led to a chaos of thought in politics and religion, to the confusion of standards in social ethics, to a lost sense of spiritual values in all departments of life.

Carlyle's very popular work, Past and Present (1843), seems to offer the most pertinent frame of reference for the purpose of this study. It is his principal contemporary social criticism and a reiteration of his characteristic message to the Victorian generation. In search of an ideal with which to compare industrial civilization, he falls back on Catholic Medieval England. The past in the title is twelfth-century England. From the medieval chronicle of Jocelyn of Brakelond, monk of "Bury St. Edmunds", he extracts an idyllic story of life in a monastery under the benevolent rule of Abbot Samson who lived in a day when reverence for God, obedience, and

chivalric devotion to true leaders created a stable world. The present is the picture of Carlyle's Modern England, the "hungry forties" corroded by sham and cant in all their forms—a world of dissolution, injustice, and mutiny. The pictures speak for themselves and accentuate the odious contrast between the Heavenly-enlightened order of the twelfth-century monastery and the Hell-in-England chaos of the Victorian era dead to spiritual realities.

#### 1. Social Misery in Victorian England

Indeed, the social condition of Victorian England was deplorable and ominous. Wealth increased more and more, and at the same time gathered itself into masses, strangely altering the old relations and increasing the distance between the rich and the poor. Carlyle scornfully scathes this "Corn-Law Paradise of Donothings" with its "Joe-Manton Aristocracies" and "giant Working-Mammonism"—all those political economists who are responsible for the sordid existence of the slaves of industry, and who

[...] coldly see the all-conquering valiant Sons of Toil sit enchanted, by the million, in their Poor-Law Bastilles, as if this were Nature's Law;<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Carlyle, Past and Present, New York, Burt Publishing, 1843, p. 202.

## NEED FOR CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDA

4

With the same deadly irony he pictures those "Twelve-hundred-thousand workers in England alone; their cunning right-hand lamed, lying idle in their sorrowful bosom; their hopes, outlooks, share of this fair world, shut-in by narrow walls."<sup>1</sup> They sit there in mute appeal

[...] with a glance that seemed to say, "Do not look at us. We sit enchanted here, we know not why. The Sun shines and the Earth calls; and, by the governing Powers and Impotences of this England, we are forbidden to obey. It is impossible, they tell us."<sup>2</sup>

This "successful industry of England", Carlyle remarks, has made nobody "stronger", "braver", "happier".

## 2. Want of Truth in Politics, Religion, and Literature

Unable to penetrate to the fundamental cause of social misery, Carlyle lays the blame at the door of democracy which he feels to be the great force killing the spiritual values in men. The meaning of democracy he interprets in terms of "False Aristocracies" or "No-Aristocracy":

Democracy, which means despair of finding any heroes to govern you, and contented putting-up with want of them,—alas, thou too, 'mein Lieber', seest well how close it is of kin to Atheism, and other sad Isms: he who discovers no God whatever, how shall he discover Heroes, the visible Temples of God?<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 256.

## NEED FOR CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDA

5

The "Corn-Lawing Aristocracy", he claims, does not govern nor does it understand that it is expected to govern:

[...] Aristocracy has become Phantasm-Aristocracy, no longer able to do its work, not in the least conscious that it has any work longer to do. Unable, totally careless to do its work; careful only to clamor for the wages of doing its work,— nay for higher, and palpably undue wages, and Corn-Laws and an increase of rents, the old rate of wages not being adequate now!<sup>1</sup>

Renting the flimsy veil of sham and conventionality in politics, he pierces through its thousand soul-killing cant and its oft-repeated hearsays. He exposes the gross idolatry of self-pleasure and gold which lies beneath the surface of Parliamentary "jargon":

A Corn-Law demonstrating itself openly, for ten years more, with "arguments" to make the angels, and some other classes of creatures, weep! For men are not ashamed to rise in Parliament and elsewhere, and speak the things they do not think, "Expediency", "Necessities of Party", etc., etc.<sup>2</sup>

The same "screech-owl phantasm of talk and struggle", the same "dreary Cant" he finds in the Church. "Religion," he says, "is based on baleful Atheisms, Mammonism, Joe-Manton Dilettantism, with their appropriate Cants and Idolism." Literature gives similar testimony. He sees little more in poetry than speech without meaning, and, as such, it also becomes for him a mockery and a cant. "In the Chaos of

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 167.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 180.

Formulas," he insists, man "has quietly lost sight of Fact", "God-Veracity has given way to Devil-Falsities", "the temporal carries it over the eternal", "foolish men mistake transient superficial Semblance for eternal fact". This is the "Deplorablest" world with all its forms of "Falsehood": a sham society with laws based on Semblance, guided by "Mock-Superiors"—"quack-heroes" for whom the only goal in life is "sham success".

### 3. Soulless Philosophy of Life

The false conception of reality fashioned by the Philosophical Radicals, Carlyle observes, is accompanied by a corresponding view of life. The material and immediately practical have become the only important values in life. Man has lost his belief in the "Invisible", the "Quack" has become God, and man a "Mammon-worshipper" with a new gospel, a "Cash-Gospel". The mysterious relation between God and man has been forgotten, and has become a "cant, a doubt, a dim inanity". God's absolute laws have become a "brutish god-forgetting Philosophy of Life-theory". Men sit bewildered in their spiritual blindness, the prey of false ideologies which colour their interpretation of the meaning of the universe and man's place in it:

## NEED FOR CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDA

7

[...] The Universe has become a Humbug to these Apes who thought it one. There they sit and chatter, to this hour: [...] looking out through those blinking smoke-bleared eyes of theirs, into the wonderfulest universal smoky Twilight and undecipherable disordered Dusk of Things; wholly and Uncertainty, Unintelligibility, they and it;<sup>1</sup>

Man's "Hell" is "the terror of not succeeding, of not making money", and his "Heaven", his "one reality among so many Phantasms", is "the making of money".

Carlyle presents his "sham hero" as the epitome of the ideas and life-values of this world of "Puffery":

[...] my right honorable friend Sir Jabesh Windbag, Mr. Facing-both-ways, Viscount Mealymouth, Earl of Windlestraw, or what other Cagliostro, Cagliostrino, Cagliostraccio, the course of Fortune and Parliamentary Majorities has constitutionally guided to that dignity, any time during these last sorrowful hundred-and-fifty years [...] strong only in the faith that Paragraphs and Plausibilities bring votes; that Force of Public Opinion, as he calls it, is the primal Necessity of Things, and highest God we have:<sup>2</sup>

Jabesh's way of life is faithless, directless: a "Columbus" heading his way from "the indistrict country of "NOWHERE", "to the indistinct country of "Whitherward", and he infallibly arrives "Thitherward".

Carlyle likewise brands as false the cheerfulness of the Utilitarians, and denounces their "babbling" over a

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 182.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 264.

## NEED FOR CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDA

8

happiness founded on a "Greatest-Happiness" principle:

Does not the whole wretchedness, the whole Atheism as I call it, of man's ways, in these generations, shadow itself for us in that unspeakable Life-Philosophy of his: The pretention to be what he calls "happy?" Every pitifulest whipster that walks within a skin has his head filled with the notion that he is, shall be, or by all human and divine laws ought to be "happy."<sup>1</sup>

Carlyle's philosophy of happiness is derived from the Puritan fear of all that is light and easy. For him the only source of happiness is to be found in work.

Carlyle realizes the fact that the utilitarian rational scheme of contemporary philosophy is no longer concerned with the moral, religious, and spiritual conditions of the people, but with their physical, practical, and economic conditions as regulated by laws:

[...] Religion, Christian Church, Moral Duty; the fact that man had a soul at all; that in man's life there was any eternal truth or justice at all,—has been as good as left quietly out of sight.<sup>2</sup>

This new "Life-Philosophy" he sees propagated generally "from the throats and pens and thought of all-but men". As a consequence, he claims that man has lost all power of thought. He remarks

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 184.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 200.

## NEED FOR CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDA

9

[...] not only that men have "no religion," but that they have next to no reflection; and go about with heads full of mere extraneous noises, with eyes wide-open but visionless,—for most part in the somnambulist state.<sup>1</sup>

The root of all the woes of the day he finds in the fact that

[...] man has lost the soul out of him; and now after the due period,—begins to find the want of it! This is verily the plague-spot; center of the universal Social Gangrene, threatening all modern things with frightful death.<sup>2</sup>

Such is the Carlylean picture of the rapid decline of spiritual values in the general background of English life.

#### 4. Prescriptions for Remedy

The best method of solution for the ills of society, Carlyle finds, is one of enlightenment and persuasion; he would advocate the enactment of an Education Bill to bid God's Light to come into the world":

To irradiate with intelligence, that is to say, with order, arrangement and all blessedness, the Chaotic, Unintelligent: how except by educating can you accomplish this? That thought, reflection, articulate utterance and understanding be awakened in these individual million heads, which are the atoms of your Chaos: there is no other way of illuminating any Chaos!<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 208.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 164.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 311.

He therefore "outlines"

That a "Splendor of God," in one form or other, will have to unfold itself from the heart of these our Industrial Ages too; or they will never get themselves "organized;" but continue chaotic, distressed, distracted evermore, and have to perish in frantic suicidal dissolution.<sup>1</sup>

As a remedy for the evils of the day he prescribes:

i) Hero-worship.- The leadership of the hero would enforce unity, coherence, and direction. He prophesies

That there will again be a King in Israel; a system of Order and Government; and every man shall, in some measure, see himself constrained to do that which is right in the King's eyes.<sup>2</sup>

ii) Prayer by Work.- Blasting the lazy material comfort-seeking of the middle-class, he preaches the sacredness of labour as the one permanent value of life. All his works advocate the doctrine of good behaviour safeguarded by hard work. Out of his gospel of work he fashions his gospel of duty and obedience. "Prayer by Working", the sanctification of "Works" and "Action", he believes, is the only good form of "Worship": "Labor is Worship". The salvation of the working-classes could be attained by the leadership of a strong man. The "hero" as "the soul of all business among men" would be the instrument invested with

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 293.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 293.

God-power to solve the great problem of the organization of labour.

iii) Ideals of Medievalism.— Against the spiritual blindness and mediocrity, which he believes to be fostered by industrialism and democracy, he poses for modern society the ideals of medieval monasticism. One thing Medieval Catholicism could offer is a true working land aristocracy as well as true, permanent, eternal values of life:

"Monarchism, Feudalism, with a real King Plantagenet, with real Abbots Samson, and their living realities, how blessed". The Middle Ages, as he pictures them, are "the rugged stalwart ages", "full of earnestness of a rude God's Truth", which make for a blessed "God's World" and a life of "antique devoutness, antique veracity and heroism". The Burg of St. Edmund is a prosperous, lively town, a real world with twenty thousand "souls" busy at hard work amidst fruitfulness, greenness and sunshine, experiencing both the practical and spiritual realities of life, and forever mindful of their eternal destiny.

The reader is invited to mark Abbot Samson, the living ideal of a true governor—a "born" governor with "a heart-aborrence of whatever is incoherent, pusillanimous, unveracious—that is to say chaotic, ungoverned." He proves to be the true royal governor and the "justest of judges". His first concern has been to set order in the "confusion

of Convent finance" and to restore genuine spiritual ideals in the monastery. As a result a new life springs beneficent; his monks live in an atmosphere of serene, peaceful religious certitude, free from restless doubt, and a "Splendor of God" informs their work and life. The right coordination of the material and spiritual achievements of man, this enriching reconciliation of the temporal and the eternal, he finds in Samson's ideals of government. This "great antique heart" makes the "Earth's business all a kind of worship." The secret of Samson's success is his adherence to a true religion—a religion free from cant, "not a talking theory", but "a silent practice" which makes a part of himself: "This is abbot Samson's Catholicism of the Twelfth Century"; "unnoisy, unconscious,—practical, total, heart-and-soul demonstrative of a Church,..."<sup>1</sup>

Carlyle ends on a note of confident anticipation and hope for the future. Contrarily to the Utilitarian disciples of Bentham who assumed that their "Greatest-Happiness" principle was to make heaven of earth in a very short time, he prophesies:

When Mammon-worshippers here and there begin to be God-worshippers, and bipeds-of-prey become men, and there is a Soul left once more in the huge-pulsing elephantine mechanic Animalism of this Earth, it will be again a blessed Earth.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 139-140.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 345.

iv) Enlightenment through Literature.— Again, he finds promise in the potential power of literature as a vehicle for truth; the function of the "Men of Letters" is to "see Truth and speak against the hearsaying and canting of the bewildered, benighted mortals".

I conclude that the Men of Letters too may become a "Chivalry," an actual instead of a virtual Priesthood, with result immeasurable,— so soon as there is nobleness in themselves for that.<sup>1</sup>

In his Latter-Day Pamphlets, exposing the same view as Past and Present, Carlyle stresses further the importance of literature which he would make a substitute for religion:

The Fine Arts are by some thought to be a kind of religion; the chief religion this poor Europe is to have in time coming; and undoubtedly it is in Literature, Poetry and the other kindred Arts, where at least a certain manliness of temper, and liberty to follow truth, prevails or might prevail, that the world's chosen souls do now take refuge, and attempt what 'Worship of the Beautiful' may still be possible for them.<sup>2</sup>

Inspired, as he tells us, by the teachings of "Fichte" and "Nature", he claims

[...] that the man born with what we call 'genius', which will mean, born with better and larger understanding than others; the man in whom 'the inspiration of the Almighty' given to all men, has a higher potentiality;—that he, and properly he only, is the perpetual Priest of Men;<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 343.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Carlyle, "Jesuitism," in Latter-Day Pamphlets, London, Chapman and Hall, 1894, p. 271.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

## NEED FOR CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDA

14

These convictions follow his theory of "Heroes and Hero-Worship". Among those who have shaped the destiny of their times, he presents heroes not only from among rulers and warriors but also from among poets and writers. The true poet, he thinks, could restore the spiritual ideals to the Victorian society. The "Prophet" and "Poet", which, "well understood, have much kindred of meaning", share the same functions. They

[...] have penetrated both of them into the sacred mystery of the Universe; [...] That divine mystery, which lies everywhere in all Beings, "the Divine Idea of the World, that which lies at the bottom of Appearance," [...] of which all Appearance, from the starry sky to the grass of the field, but especially the Appearance of Man and his work, is but the vesture, the embodiment that renders it visible.<sup>1</sup>

The poet's "message", therefore, is "to reveal that to us,— that sacred mystery which he more than others lives ever present with."<sup>2</sup> Shakespeare, as a "Saint of Poetry", is to Carlyle "a blessed heaven-sent Bringer of Light".<sup>3</sup>

This "Light", Carlyle thought he had found in a "spiritual New-birth" achieved through self-annihilation and hard work. A record of his spiritual triumph is found

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Carlyle, On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic History, London, Routledge, 1888, p. 70.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 92.

in two chapters of Sartor Resartus, namely, "The Everlasting Yea" and "Natural Supernaturalism".<sup>1</sup> The reader follows his "glorious revolution" from his "Forty Days" of "temptation" in the "Wilderness" which is "the wide World in an Atheistic Century" to "that Mountain which has no summit, or whose summit is in Heaven only". There he "awoke to a new Heaven and a new Earth". He has pierced through the appearance of things to find their hidden meaning:

[...] he has looked fixedly on Existence, till, one after the other, its earthly hulls and garnitures have all melted away; and now, to his rapt vision, the interior celestial Holy of Holies lies disclosed.<sup>2</sup>

He has learned that "The Universe is not dead and demoniacal, a charnel-house with spectres; but godlike, and my Father's!"<sup>3</sup> He now realizes with wonder

[...] that this fair Universe, [...] is in very deed the star-domed City of God; that through every star, through every grass-blade, and most through every living Soul, the glory of a present God still beams. But Nature, which is the Time-vesture of God, and reveals Him to the wise, hides Him from the foolish.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Carlyle, Sartor Resartus, London, Routledge, 1888, "The Everlasting Yea", p. 124-136; "Natural Supernaturalism", p. 167-176.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 167.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 172.

## NEED FOR CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDA

16

He looks "with other eyes" upon his fellow man, calls him "Brother" with "infinite Love" and "infinite Pity".

Concerning man and his destiny, he asks:

Are we not Spirits, that are shaped into a body, into an Appearance; and that fade-away again into air and Invisibility? [...] we start out of Nothingness, take figure, and are Apparitions; round us, as round the veriest spectre, is Eternity; and to Eternity minutes are as years and aeons. Come there not tones of Love and Faith, as from celestial harp-strings, like the Song of beatified Souls? [...] Thus, like a God-created, fire-breathing Spirit-host, we emerge from the Inane; haste stormfully across the astonished Earth; then plunge again into the Inane. [...] But whence?— O Heaven, whither? Sense knows not; Faith knows not; only that it is through Mystery to Mystery, from God to God.<sup>1</sup>

From these glimpses of light he derives his philosophy of happiness:

[...] Man's Unhappiness, as I construe, comes of his Greatness; it is because there is an Infinite in him, which with all his cunning he cannot quite bury under the Finite. Will the whole Finance Ministers and Upholsterers and Confectioners of modern Europe undertake, in joint-stock company, to make one Shoeblick Happy? They cannot accomplish it, above an hour or two; for the Shoeblick also has a Soul quite other than his Stomach;...<sup>2</sup>

With Goethe he believes that "It is only with Renunciation (Entsagen) that Life, properly speaking, can be said to begin."<sup>3</sup> He draws again from Goethe to find the final

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 172-174.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 144.

solution of life and tells us that

[...] there is in man a Higher than Love of Happiness: he can do without Happiness, and instead thereof find Blessedness! [...] Love not Pleasure; love God. This is the EVERLASTING YEA, wherein all contradiction is solved; wherein whoso walks and works, it is well with him.<sup>1</sup>

##### 5. Divorce of Theology and Christian Values

Carlyle's message to his generation could be summarized in his own words: "the loss of religious belief is the loss of everything", and "for man's well-being, Faith is properly the one thing needful." The foregoing pages of this chapter carry examples of his insights into spiritual truth and his brilliant glimpses into the "divine idea" of human and external nature. Against the claims of rationalism which finds the source of all real knowledge in rational demonstration founded upon concrete experience, he rightly affirms the existence of the spiritual and symbolic, and proclaims an "inwardness in all outwardness" of things. Amidst the gross materialism of a smugly scientific world, he pleads for the reconciliation of the material and spiritual, of the temporal and eternal.

However, the truths set forth by Carlyle are but transient gleams of insight without theological foundation.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 144.

He is a moralist without dogma; his religious ideas are German metaphysics moralized and his morals are inherited from a Puritan ancestry. He takes his view of life from his anti-mechanistic philosophy steeped in Teutonic transcendentalism. A man of intuition and feeling, he understands social evils in flashes of emotion and imagination. He fashions his own personal concepts of God and nature. To him Christianity is an "antiquated" mythus. He anticipates the hero yet-to-be-born who would reincarnate the spirit of religion into a new and modern mythus.<sup>1</sup> To find this ideal he looks within himself: "Feel it in thy heart and then say whether it is of God! This is Belief; all else is Opinion."<sup>2</sup>

For all these reasons Carlyle's greatest weakness as a thinker is a lack of system. He can explain the evils of the age, but he does not know how to right them. He offers nothing positive on which one can rebuild the world. His wisdom startles and provokes rather than informs the reader. His prophecies won for him but the dubious sentimental approval of his generation which remained determined to go its own way:

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 129.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 147.

It satisfied the demands of religious sentiment at the same time that it sapped the foundation of religious dogma. It provided a temporary resting place for spirits wearied by the search for truth and not prepared to make a clean break with the past. In his philosophy of nature he was doing his best [...] to make a passage from a supernatural to a natural reading of the world...<sup>1</sup>

However, Carlyle's rifts of truth, couched in a vehement startling style, shocked his readers into attention. His exasperated denunciations set his readers thinking and wondering about culture and economics and social affairs. His point of view is representative of an age in revolt. His dominating voice leads in the series of problems raised by the more serious Victorian writers against the vulgarization and selfishness of a society devoted to material needs, against the mechanical triumphs achieved by the exploitation of human beings and at the expense of spiritual and aesthetic values. His fundamental belief, curiously similar to Langland's<sup>2</sup>, that only hard, honest work could save humanity, was a healthy antidote to the parasitism of the moneyed manufacturing class. His teachings inspired social reformers like Ruskin, Mrs. Browning, Dickens, and

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Beach, Concept of Nature in Nineteenth Century Poetry, New York, Pageant Book, 1956, p. 317.

<sup>2</sup> William Langland, The Vision of William Concerning Piers the Plowman, edited by Rev. Walter W. Skeat, Oxford, Clarendon, 1869.

William Morris. In his pleadings for a return to medieval institutions as a cure for the industrial mediocrity and the spiritual stagnation of his age, he pointed the way to the crusade of reactionary writers who looked into the past to seek cultural and spiritual values with which to enrich their times. While Carlyle lashes his contemporaries as murderers of the soul, Ruskin, his disciple, attacks them for the readiness with which they accept the ugliness of their surroundings—an ugliness which he finds indicative of their spiritual degradation. Arnold criticizes them for depriving men of the full and best use of their spiritual faculties. Each writer, in his search for values, seeks to put forth constructive suggestions of his own as the sovereign remedy for the ills of the times. While Carlyle believes in moral salvation of society by work, hard work and plenty of it, Ruskin qualifies the prescription by associating work with beauty. For Arnold culture and poetry could save the world.

It is to the credit of Ruskin and Arnold, as well as to that of Carlyle, that they introduce the religious issue in their suggestions for reform. However, though they advocate the religious and philosophical values of Christianity, their interpretation of these values is purely personal and devoid of theology and belief. Carlyle advocates social morality achieved by works rather than Christian morality

based on faith. Ruskin dignifies his preachments by a strong belief in the spiritual values of Christianity, but he never associates Christianity with dogma. Arnold was sure that man could neither do without the Christian religion nor do with it as it was then constituted; he tried, therefore, to desupernaturalize it. The spirit of Christianity was worth preserving, he decided, but Christian dogma must adapt itself to the contributions of science and enlightened thought.

In all the currents of thought in Victorian England, Newman stands out as the chief proponent of the Oxford Movement. This movement was led by a group of deeply spiritual men, who, alienated by the materialism of the era, desired to rescue Anglicanism from the grip of political and worldly domination which made it a religion without a soul and a liturgy without a meaning. For them, the return to the medieval ideal was a return to an age when the rights of religion were immune from secularism. They asserted the superiority of spiritual values, and endeavoured to restore the ancient ceremonies and practices originally rooted in religion. They were particularly concerned with the doctrines of which the ceremonies they revived were a symbol. Newman's progress from Evangelicalism to Catholicism estranged him from the Puseyites who abandoned the movement in 1843. As soon as the Tractarians ceased to enlighten

the thought and culture of Oxford, others, such as Arnold and Ruskin, perpetuated their ideals by offering what might be called substitutes for Newmanism. Influenced by Ruskin, the members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood became the chief propagators of the new quest for beauty. They, too, turned to the Middle Ages for inspiration to revivify their artistic world. Lacking depth and intellectual strength, the movement had spent its force in the 1880's, but furnished a sort of aesthetic background for a poet such as Swinburne and for the new-pagan philosophy of Walter Pater.

#### 6. Triumph of Secularism

Towards the end of the nineteenth century a secularistic philosophy of life was well established. Romanticism, which had saturated the inlands of religion, morals, politics, and literature, became a philosophy recognizing emotionalism as the deeper source of religion and placing philosophical and theological formulas as secondary products. Scientific positivism applied scientific methods to everything without regard to the older cultural and spiritual foundations of civilization. Evolutionism challenged accepted opinions on the origin and nature of man. Pragmatism made utility a substitute for truth. The basis of certainty was changed, and a new Revelation was being found in science and in self. There was a conviction,

then quite widespread, that the old order of things advocated by religion was demonstrably false, and that for a fresher grasp of reality one must turn to the new concepts of man, God, and the universe being constructed by man. Romano Guardini points out the main significance of these autonomous trends of thought as an influence on modern man's concept of reality:

The new picture of reality was dominated by a number of conceptions, the most important of which was the modern view of "Nature." It had come to signify whatever was given immediately to the mind and sensibilities of man. It was all those things which existed in the world prior to anything man did to them; it was also the sum total of energy, matter, essences and natural laws. Thus "Nature" was readily made a matter of value in itself. It became the norm which guided man in action and in reason toward whatever was right or healthful or perfect. [...] the man who was morally good was the "natural" man; so too was the "natural" society or form of government or manner of education or way of life.<sup>1</sup>

This summary indirectly reflects the influence of Carlyle for whom "Alternative expressions for the laws of nature are the terms Reality, Fact, Truth."<sup>2</sup>

At the core of this cultural and religious disintegration was the emergence of the modern concept of man—a concept which, curiously enough, both exalted and debased

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<sup>1</sup> Romano Guardini, The End of the Modern World, New York, Sheed, p. 52-53.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Warren Beach, op. cit., p. 312.

human nature. Since the Renaissance the dignity of man at the height of personal development had been seen with a new awareness. From the twin standards of personality and the "natural", man declared himself absolute and unconditioned, set himself up as God, and human genius became the measure of all things. At the same time was born the conception of the new man made to the image and likeness of the ape or the machine. This narrow view of man and his destiny deprived him of his spirituality and intelligence and immortality, and left him only his physical shell. Responsibility was but a word, natural rights were simple nonsense, and morality remained only a matter of correct calculation. The concept of brotherhood had become a shallow and convenient social avuncular fellowship based on a superficial harmonizing of society. This anthropocentric humanism was the Romantic movement brought to its logical conclusion—a separation of religion from life.

The process of secularization was accompanied with a decline of those beliefs and hopes on which the Victorian spirit had been founded. The 1890's, at the tail of an expiring tradition, witnessed the dissipation of the Romantic movement—the triumph of unreality. This last decade of the Victorian era was dovetailed in the rising tide of unbelief and infidelity—the predominance of liberalism and evolutionism over what was left of

Protestantism. The first half was remarkable for a literary and artistic renaissance degenerating into decadence; the second for its advocacy of imperialism degenerating into jingoism.

Currents of false optimism and pessimism took over by turns. Art and literature which had fled from reality during these turbulent years compromised with this bleak reality. A materialistic and joyless creed sought refuge in the ivory tower of the "art for art's sake" avoidance of reality. This was a feigned protest against the so-called "confusion and enfeeblement" of the nineteenth-century philosophy. It was a brave adventure into falsely idealistic humanism by a self-centred group who restricted truth to the validity of personal or of public opinion. Theirs was a search for a new society free from the influence of its traditional culture, for a new literature free from adherence to orthodoxy, whether religious, ethical, social, or aesthetic. Aestheticism thus passed into sheer dandyism—a dandyism of the intellect characteristic of the uncompromising art-sufficiency of Whistler, of the self-consciousness of Wilde, of the restless curiosity of Beardsley, and of the sottish depravity of Ernest Dowson. Thomas Hardy, helpless under the heel of Chance, George Gissing haunted by Fate, and James Thomson wailing in the lower depths of "The City of Dreadful Night", were steadfast

in their pessimism.

Journalism had grown up with all those forces of perversion to serve as chief informal agency of Victorian education. Nearly every major Victorian author wrote for daily and weekly journals, for reviews and magazines which sprang up with equal vigour. A flood of false propaganda permeated the great prose and poetry in an effort to persuade man to belief and action:

[...] there was to be a wholesale reception into public life of men, and of women too, who made no secret of their rejection of every form of "institutional religion", who openly planned and worked for the new non-religious century, and this in novels and poems as well as in treaties of natural science and social philosophy.<sup>1</sup>

During the "Romantic 90's" decadent poets, critics, illustrators, and publishers clustered about the periodicals which typified the "high journalism" of the day. The periodical had become the most effective means of propaganda for whosoever desired to influence public opinion.

Dissatisfied with the pessimism and world weariness of the period and appalled by the concept of a meaningless universe, Wilfrid Meynell made it his mission in life to spread the faith and vigour of Catholicism as a solution to the Victorian predicament. For him, as for the small group

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<sup>1</sup> George Beck, The English Catholics 1850-1950, London, Burns Oates, 1950, p. 4.

of fin de siècle Catholic writers who had aligned their life with the Divine Creative Force moving in the universe, the Victorian age, commonly stamped as the "golden age of lost opportunity", did offer fertile ground for the seeds of a genuine spiritual regeneration. He understood the climate of his age, was aware of its tendencies, of its readiness for change in its habits of mind, of the incredible importance of literary propaganda as a moulder of public opinion, and deliberately sought to serve its highest purpose. The press, wisely used for the propagation of unchanging truth in an age led more and more by "fashionable truth",—this he considered a wholesome antidote to the needs of the times.

In this chapter an attempt has been made to reveal the spiritual aspirations of the later Victorian age. These are characteristic of the Romantic Carlylean outlook traced to its inevitable outcome: Carlyle's search for truth and happiness has been shown as roughly representative of the long period of conflict in society and in the individual, and of the vain attempt to harmonize in religion through literature the diversified and changing attitudes in life and thought. The failure of this attempt has been ascribed to the divorce of spiritual values and theology. Wilfrid Meynell's career as a Catholic journalist is an answer to the needs of the age. It is with these considerations in

NEED FOR CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDA

28

mind that his life and work will be studied in the following chapters in order to come to some estimate of his contribution to English Catholic life and culture.

## CHAPTER II

## CRUSADING PROPAGANDIST

Francis Thompson's judgement on Carlyle's influence confirms the general estimate of his works which concludes the brief study of the preceding chapter. The author of Sartor Resartus, he states,

[...] in the main awakened only a yearning and most justified dissatisfaction with the sordid age in which he lived, but failed to satisfy the yearning he created.<sup>1</sup>

In fact, Tennyson's "Ulysses", thwarted in his aspirations and searching in his discontent, is representative of a whole generation of

[...] restless, broken, questing hearts, chafing in exile, profoundly conscious of the bitterness at the very core of life, aware of some terrible inescapable doom, yet always hoping for the realization of a dimly perceived hope of happiness.<sup>2</sup>

## 1. Answer to Victorian Dilemma

Wilfrid Meynell's review of Victorian writers, Tennyson and a few "minor bards typical of the rest",

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<sup>1</sup> Francis Thompson, "Sartor Re-Read", in A Renegade Poet and Other Essays, Boston, Ball Publishing, 1910, p. 286.

<sup>2</sup> Blanche Kelly, "Introduction" to The Well of English, London, Harper, 1936, p. xv.

reveals his keen awareness of the literary trends of his era:

Outside the Catholic Church, religion is shrouded in a doubt and uncertainty, which are very freely expressed by the majority of the poets of the day, from the Laureate downwards: they have nothing to tell us—not even a definite Protestantism.<sup>1</sup>

He goes to the heart of the problem when he explains the vagueness in Tennyson's poetry as the product of religious "mistiness": "His Christianity, if we judge aright, is altogether indefinite; it 'faintly trusts a larger hope' and it 'gropes in darkness up to God'."<sup>2</sup>

Guided by an "As If" philosophy, the poets, conformists of the age, have lost hold on truth. Marston's concepts of the main realities of life are confused:

When he speaks of paradise, he adds, as though afraid to commit himself, "If Paradise there be"; he thinks that the "Body and soul go both ways" after death, but he is not at all sure; and he sometimes uses language which would be very painful if we regarded God of whom he speaks as any other than a mythological creation of his own.<sup>3</sup>

Marston, adds Meynell, is "a minstrel singing in the night sad things and strange". Tennyson and Marston and others of their school, he concludes, lack that groundwork of

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<sup>1</sup> Wilfrid Meynell, "Recent Poetry", in The Irish Monthly, Vol. 5, issue of Feb. 1877, p. 151-159.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

truth which could give reality to these sincere longings "for they know not what". Their works are "wanting in precisely that warmth and reality which the touch of faith alone can give."<sup>1</sup> These poets, consequently, fail to fulfil their "glorious mission" in life:

Aubrey de Vere says somewhere that the principal end of poetry is to please: but the effect of much modern poetry is certainly to distress. We come to our poets to be blessed, and lo! they too curse us altogether.<sup>2</sup>

Meynell had seen developing, in his own lifetime, that new paganism based upon the rejection of Christ,— a paganism which led eventually to the denial of a personal God. He realized that "Aestheticism" had become the expression of a civilization growing more and more pagan, more and more incompatible with Catholicity. He considered this new paganism the real enemy both of the Catholic Church and of the Christian society in which he lived:

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

The heart of the matter lies in that little Renaissance of painting, of poetry, of criticism which has changed so signally the temper and mood of England towards the arts. This is something more than a mere trifle for—setting aside the other arts—literature is a matter of such moment in the world, being, next to religion, the most important thing under the sun so that nothing which proves any distinct change in the literary tone of a country should be regarded as slight or contemptible.<sup>1</sup>

It was against this crusading which Meynell had to contend. The aesthetic revival was not, he thought, mal à propos at an epoch when the world had reached a pitch of outward ugliness hardly attained in any previous age of its history. However, this revival had to be submitted to the principles of Catholic theology: "We should pray that the young genius—yes, and the young taste of England, should be, not Philistinized, but converted to God."<sup>2</sup> When literature became the reigning fashion as a vehicle of false philosophy

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<sup>1</sup> Anonymous, "The Little Renaissance", in The Weekly Register, Vol. 65, issue of Jan. 14, 1882, p. 2. Meynell's articles, published in The Weekly Register, under anonymous authorship, are easily identified as his on account of a similitude of ideas with, and references to his articles in Merry England.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. In "Essays in Criticism" Matthew Arnold began his onslaught upon the Philistinism (a phrase he borrowed from Henrich Heine) of the English bourgeois class. The word "Philistines" was used frequently by him thereafter to signify the provincialism, narrowmindedness, and vulgarity of the culture fostered by industrialism. (Matthew Arnold, Essays in Criticism, New York, Burt Publishing, 1865, p. 115-112.)

in life and art, bringing the sacred and the profane before the multitude and placing it at the mercy of an unenlightened and capricious opinion, he realized what advantages might be derived if Catholics chose to nurture and maintain their own genuine creative literature in order to propagate a knowledge of the true realities and delights of life.

## 2. Gifts of a Catholic Literary Propagandist

Having faithfully pursued his chosen way of Catholic belief, Meynell possessed the fundamental standards by which he could interpret the source, direction, and purpose of the prevailing trends of thought in the light of the eternal verities, and then explain his lifework to himself. Moreover, he was ideally suited by temperament and training for the role that Providence had assigned to him in the broad current of English life and culture.

What this role consisted in was service—the idea of going through the world, in a Christian way, ministering to others. Meynell, all his life, proved himself proud and worthy of a noble ascendancy which he called a long "tradition of service". He was born in 1852 at Picton House, Newcastle-on-Tyne, of a stalwart middle-class family of the North of England. His mother belonged to a family of York—one of the Tukes famous for their social devotedness: his grandfather, a friend of Wilberforce, had devoted himself

to the anti-slavery campaign; his maternal great-grandfather, William Tuke of York, had fought for the reform of the treatment of the insane, and it was due to his initiative that was born the modern attitude in Great Britain towards the mentally ill. A philanthropist uncle, James Tuke, was zealous in relieving the Irish famines of his time.

The Meynell family were members of the Society of Friends. The young Wilfrid was consequently brought up in the solidly Biblical and actively charitable atmosphere peculiar to a Quaker family without finding in it, however, the spiritual equilibrium which he was seeking. He first attended the Quaker Ackworth School at Croydon, and spent but one year at the Bootham School of York. He abandoned his educational pursuits at the age of sixteen in favour of religion and poetry. He will later allude to these days of religious fervour in a letter to his daughter visiting Newcastle: "How many tears have I shed in the church when, in my early youth, I had no other interest or attachment than those which belonged to the expression of religion."<sup>1</sup> Still in his teens, he was already emerging as a writer—a prolific writer of his characteristic juvenilia in his tales of touching virtue and sentimental verse. In collaboration

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<sup>1</sup> Viola Meynell, op. cit., p. 3.

with his brother Philip and a friend, he produced his first volume, Verses by Three Friends.<sup>1</sup>

It happened that one day he found himself seated in a railroad carriage by the side of a Dominican with whom he engaged in conversation and with whom he soon made friends. Their relationships were to lead him, a few days after his eighteenth birthday, to adopt the Catholic faith and the Church in which could be found the basic doctrine to all the truths his mother had taught him from the Bible. Relating his conversion to a friend, he confides:

[...] I was never converted, I merely discovered that I had always been a Catholic. And as soon as I had freed myself from the foolish things some foolish bigots taught me, I was received into the Catholic Church.<sup>2</sup>

In his early twenties, Meynell left for London, and for a long time lived with the Fathers of Charity in Ely Place near the old church of St. Etheldreda, one of the few churches of the pre-Reformation days which had reverted to the Catholic Church. True to the family tradition of idealism, young Wilfrid began working in the London slums under the direction of Father Lockhart, the rector of the priest's house—a man of noble countenance and stature, an

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Rev. Terence L. Connolly, S.J., Francis Thompson: In His Paths, Milwaukee, Bruce, 1944, p. 35.

ardent preacher, a journalist and editor of Catholic periodicals, and an author of books. Meynell led there an austere life, busying himself with social and religious works and beginning to write and to publish a few articles in the pages of The Lamp edited by Father Lockhart. He had found the congenial profession to which he would devote his life:

[...] to Wilfrid Meynell the chance of associating himself with the social and literary work connected with St. Etheldreda's had been just the kind of opportunity he most wished for.<sup>1</sup>

These were formative years for Meynell: as his later peculiar vocation was then clear to him, we can say that these were years of conscious specialized training and deliberate preparation as a propagandist. He apparently emerged from these experiences cognizant of the problems of the labourer, of the poor, of education, cognizant of the value of literature as a power of apostolate. There, he saw the Catholic faith being lived in poverty, invigorating the lives of individuals and giving a spiritual basis to the community. He saw, exemplified in Father Lockhart and his companions, the model of Christian charity towards the unfortunate. These were the vital realities of the new

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<sup>1</sup> Viola Meynell, Alice Meynell, London, Jonathan Cape, 1929, p. 59.

civilization in which he placed his future hope. Viola Meynell tells us of the impact these experiences had on her father's life:

Meynell assisted in the work of the parish, and caught a life-long habit of being unable to pass a beggar without making a momentary friend of him. He shared the Fathers' habits of self-denial, and never abandoned them.<sup>1</sup>

From Father Lockhart he also learned to experience "that complete brotherliness with the uncouth, the ragged, and the unrepresentable"<sup>2</sup> which made him the natural apostle of the poor whether in material or spiritual need. Through Father Lockhart he met Cardinal Manning who was to become a life-long friend and one of the main influences in his life as a Catholic journalist.

### 3. A Catholic and Literary Home

It was while he was at St. Etheldreda's that he read in the Pall Mall Gazette a review of a collection of poems by an unknown young poet, Alice Thompson. He was much impressed by a brief poem which the critic quoted, and resolved immediately to make the acquaintance of its author. Their courtship was accompanied by numerous exchanges of

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<sup>1</sup> Viola Meynell, Francis Thompson and Wilfrid Meynell, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

poems—a semi-public correspondence, since a number of these writings were published immediately by their authors in various periodicals of the time.

Their marriage, in 1877, meant the beginning of a heroic partnership in the art of living and the entrance on a literary fellowship of a long lifetime. It was a life profoundly happy, so much did the harmony of that household remain from the first to the last day a source of joy to themselves, to their eight children, and their friends. Richard Le Gallienne draws this charming picture of the Meynell home life:

However quietly she sat in her drawing-room of an evening with her family and friends about her, her presence radiated a peculiarly lovely serenity, like a twilight gay with stars. In that very lively household of young people, girls and boys since grown up to write very individual books for themselves, she was one with the general fun, which under the direction of her buoyant husband—appropriately the editor of a magazine called Merrie England and still, I am glad to think, one of the best raconteurs in London—used often to wax fast and furious and made dinner there, a particularly exhilarating occasion. I give thanks here for the many joyous hours I have spent at the laughing board, and I have no other such picture of a full and harmonious home life to set by its side.<sup>1</sup>

The Meynell home was an example of a truly Catholic home. The strength and startling simplicity of their

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Le Gallienne, The Romantic 90's, London, Doubleday, 1925, p. 130.

Catholic way of life, the happiness of their Catholic living, their hearts and hands always open to the needy, be it materially or spiritually,—all these testimonies bore eloquent witness to religion:

What is required of those who believe in God is a witness of God; and what the world demands and expects of the Christian is first and foremost to see the love of truth and brotherly love made genuinely present in and through man's personal life—to see a gleam of the Gospel shining in the one place where the crucial tests and crucial proof are to be found, namely, the obscure context of relations from person to person.<sup>1</sup>

It was certainly not trivial for Meynell to have a marriage of such sympathy and such enrichment of literary influence. Alice Meynell's artistic and literary aptitudes were the fruit of a precocious and highly developed culture. A finer heritage of taste one could not desire for poet and critic. Her mother was an amateur pianist of note and a painter. Her father was a man of wide culture with a rightness and assurance of judgement in art and letters which she came to feel as the only safe criterion. Other influences in her education were found in her travelling with her nomadic parents between England, France, and Italy, where she enjoyed constant contact with writers and artists. As

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph W. Evans and Leo R. Ward, ed., The Social and Political Philosophy of Jacques Maritain, New York, Scribner's, 1955, p. 184.

early as 1874 Alice Thompson had already chosen and loved literature for many years, and had submitted for criticism a manuscript of her "Preludes" to Aubrey de Vere whom she had met through members of the small Catholic society. De Vere had won encouraging words of approval for her from Tennyson, Sir Henry Taylor, and Coventry Patmore. In her twenties these "Preludes" were drawing praise from Ruskin, Browning, Rossetti, and George Eliot. Now and then some of her poems appeared in the Pall Mall Gazette. It was, as we have seen, Wilfrid's recognition of their excellence which led to their courtship and marriage.

Her artistic and literary aptitudes she brought with her into the service of the Catholic Church. At the age of eighteen she made profession of the Catholic faith for a cause definite and stated: in Catholicism she saw the answer to a personal need for a guide—the practical enforcement of Christianity:

Already ardently a Christian, in Catholicism she saw the logical administration of the Christian moral law; and as that she adopted it with a deliberate rational choice, and with what earthly judgement she possessed, more than as a key to the unseen.<sup>1</sup>

Her conversion, embraced in all its implications, was unique by its far-reaching effects on others. For her a Christian

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<sup>1</sup> Viola Meynell, Alice Meynell, p. 43.

way of life was the logic of belief. It became the dominant quality of her personality and her muse and the secret of her main influence in the literary world.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Meynell became Catholics shortly before their first meeting. Both were animated with an ardent love for things of the mind and the beauties of literature. They wished from the very start to consecrate themselves to a literary career. Wilfrid's extraordinary taste and talent wedded to Alice's extraordinary charm and genius made for an admirable couple which drew the somewhat unlikely acquaintances even from the earliest days of their married life. In the heyday of the nineties, they entertained most of the literary celebrities of the time, Catholics and non-Catholics alike. By then they had built for themselves a home in Palace Court out of the Bayswater Road in London.

Here Wilfrid and Alice Meynell made the nearest approach to a Catholic and literary salon. In fact the drawing room at Palace Court was considered the literary heart of London. If one were to name those who met at the Meynell home, the list would cover much of what was illustrious in the England of their time. Their home became a meeting place on Sunday evenings for such nobilities as W.E. Henley, E.V. Lucas, William Watson, Stephen Philips, Herbert French, Wilfrid Blunt, Ezra Pound, W.B. Yeats,

## CRUSADING PROPAGANDIST

42

Richard Le Gallienne, Walter de la Mare, and Browning. Many a circumstance seemed calculated to separate Catholics from aesthetes—and yet the two came together. There was this strange union between the pilgrims in search of beauty and those in search of the Faith. The first were seized with a splendid devotion, not to the inner past, but to all the outer glory and brilliance in which it is enshrined. Even Aubrey Beardsley, and, in his earlier days, Oscar Wilde and his brothers were constant visitors. But at the home of Alice Meynell were especially to be found writers who reacted against pessimism and pagan exaltation, against the mere materialistic life and nature too passionate to be healthy. They were, most of them, converts to the Church who were out to seek that old spirit of Christianity which had given foundation and granted reality to English Catholic tradition. Poets born in the faith were drawn in their turn into the inner group that was working, under her direction, to restore to English literature its essential Catholic spirit. There was Aubrey de Vere, a friend to Wordsworth and Tennyson, Coventry Patmore, Francis Thompson, Katharine Tynan Hinkson, Lionel Johnson, and Katie King. Katharine Tynan stresses the broad literary connections of the Meynell home:

The Meynells, in fact, were in touch with pretty well all literary England in the later Victorian and Edwardine days. Their touch with literature goes further back. Dickens and Ruskin<sup>1</sup> were among the friends of Alice Meynell's parents.

This literary circle bore no affinity to those salons which, as recorded in history, were laboriously created by clever women as a mirror for their brilliance. Alice Meynell used all the power of her intelligent grace to draw the writers nearer to the Catholic truth. As leading Catholic literary figure of the 1890's, she shaped the then-existing forces of the Catholic Literary Revival into a movement, gave it a community and solidarity of purpose, and won for it a notable recognition. To the outer circle of the nation's literary celebrities of diverse opinions and beliefs, she was able to show the position of the Church in the world and break down hostility to the Catholic Revival. Chesterton came under her influence at that time, though at first he did not understand her real depths. But he finally came to know "she was a message from the Sun".<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Katharine Tynan, "The Shrine of Alice Meynell", in Commonweal, Vol. 13, issue of Jan. 21, 1931, p. 317-319.

<sup>2</sup> Gilbert Keith Chesterton, Autobiography, London, Burns Oates, 1936, p. 287.

#### 4. Meynell's Personal Influence

Alice Meynell was essentially the spirit of the literary circle. However, much of her power of influence was sustained by the character of her husband. Their daughter Viola acknowledges their mutual credit in their power of influence:

Certainly Patmore did not link her entirely and exclusively with her husband, nor include him in any special degree of interest. He did not realize that though her powers were far beyond her husband's, she was united to him in an equality in which it cannot be said which gave and which received the most.<sup>1</sup>

As she preserved the exquisitely literary atmosphere, its spirit of notable hospitality and serene scholarly distinction, so did he preserve in her the powers that have engendered this effectiveness, not only in the happy security found in a full and harmonious life, but also in the blending of her influence to his personal prestige and talent. How intimately he was associated with those intellectuals, how frequently or exactly in what capacity he was in contact with them, is rather difficult to surmise. However modest might have been Meynell's part in this intellectual group, we know that he worked and consorted

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<sup>1</sup> Viola Meynell, Francis Thompson and Wilfrid Meynell, p. 106.

## CRUSADING PROPAGANDIST

45

with them. He utilized his large circle of personal acquaintances to promote the ideas he pleaded for as author and editor.

However, it was the man far more than the writer who played a role in English literary history. The charm of his personality, vivid and vigorous, seemed to wield an ineffable influence over those who came in contact with him, drawing and holding those of the most different habits of mind with a sense of wide-reaching and all-embracing sympathy. And it is almost Francis Egan's significant title, "Everybody's St. Francis", which comes to mind when one thinks of this exceptional man. A study of his character reveals many remarkable resemblances between the patron of Catholic Action and the modern revivalist of Christian joy and culture. We have that same suave commingling of youth and maturity, of gentleness and power, of simplicity and graciousness, of humility and prestige, of twinkling humour and sound sense, of patience and boundless energy. We also discern other noble traits which we recognize as typically Franciscan: his steadfast faith in God, his high regard for man, however peccant, his chivalrous attitude towards womanhood, and his particular reverence for priests. In the warmth of his Christlike charity—as seen in his self-abnegating sympathy and endless generosity towards all unfortunate, particularly towards the poor—we cannot but

see the active Poverello always so irrevocably eager to be of service. In fact, a particular spirit of the Meynell home and a significant source of influence can be found in their interest in and the quality of their attachment to things Franciscan. There was a relationship of devoted friendliness and mutual service between the Meynells and the "bearded counsellors of God".

The main secret of Meynell's influence was his faith—a cheerful faith coupled with courage and energy. His experience of religion as a Quaker had given him that strong sense of the reality and presence of God. As a Christian he was unconquerably confident and hopeful in the value of the message of Christian joy which the Incarnate Son had brought to the world. The reader of the several biographical data and of the different obituary notes, written on the occasion of his death, would define his philosophy of life as that profoundly religious full-of-the-love-of-God outlook upon the world and men and the joy of life flowing from that outlook. He had, like St. Francis, the enviable faculty of admiring and enjoying all creation with a never-ending wonder, closely associating nature with its Creator: "he was always marvelling afresh at the sun, trees, water with its reflections—they were miracles

performed before his eyes."<sup>1</sup> A friend visiting him during his later years admiringly pictures his childlike awe before the natural scenery as they travel along the Sussex countryside:

[...] Once as we passed through mile after mile of trees, he gazed for some time in silence. Then suddenly he exclaimed with all the simplicity and wonder of a child: 'Just look at those myriads of leaves, my dear Father, sprung from nowhere! And soon they will fall. And then in spring there will be myriads of new ones. Oh, my! What a marvellous manifestation of the beauty and power of the Creator!<sup>2</sup>

This freshness of view added the particular charm of youth to his personality:

Whenever his conversation became particularly animated or anything was said that greatly pleased him, his folded hands parted in a unique gesture and he exclaimed, 'Oh, dear!' The tone was clearly one of mingled admiration, wonder and delight.<sup>3</sup>

Even to extreme old age he kept that joy of youth which only the happy few know how to retain in mature life. His glance of humour and eager inquiry made for a playful mood which the children recognized as one with them. He was particularly happy among small things and little people.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 130.

<sup>2</sup> Rev. Terence L. Connolly, In His Paths, p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

This did not prevent his hero-worship for great personalities such as Cardinal Manning, Disraeli, and Wilfrid Scawen Blunt. A beggar in rags and the magnificent personality he met with the same spontaneity and attractive cordiality which made for immediate friendship with both:

I know of no man, and can imagine none, to whom another can so easily unburden himself of uneasiness and formalities as to my father. To him the poor and rich are as the fishes and the flames to St. Francis, his brothers and his friends on sight, even if those are shy as fishes and sightless as flame.<sup>1</sup>

He might have loved the beggar more because he was poor, for he was one of those who believed in giving to those who asked, whether it was money or a book or a precious manuscript. In fact, his usual contacts included beggars on the streets. He took Christ at his word and saw Him in the needy. He brought alms but he also brought love and friendliness. Meynell could be on a level with the suffering and the poor:

He obeyed Christ in identifying Him with every poor man he saw. He never passed one without a gift often elaborately given. Sometimes he put both hands behind his back, saying there was a penny in one, half-a-crown in the other, and told the poor man to choose, always of course producing the half-crown, but pretending to be disgusted at his own ill-luck.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Everard Meynell, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

<sup>2</sup> Barbara Wall, "Wilfrid Meynell", in *America*, Vol. 80, issue of Dec. 4, 1948, p. 236.

And Franciscan-like he often "kissed the beggarly hands that he was filling."<sup>1</sup> His charity was limited only by his power to give.

Ready human contacts were his way of life. His profound popular instinct was the key to his general influence. This easy sociability was based on a true interest in other people: "the love which was what religion meant to him he needed to feel in every contact of every day."<sup>2</sup> And the innumerable friendships which so many great men bore him suffice to prove that he was worthy of great friendships. He knew every one of importance in England for half a century and the majority of them were his friends. Meynell, indeed, was popular with every type of intellectual Englishman from the great prelate, Cardinal Manning, with whom he stood in the days of the Dock Strike, to Francis Thompson, the great genius whom he saved from the streets to enrich the world. Between Manning and Thompson, he was on closer than speaking terms with Browning, Yeats, Stevenson, and with a host of lesser literary lights in the Catholic and non-Catholic world. He was on particular intimate terms with Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, Professor St. George Mivart, and Sir William Butler.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Viola Meynell, op. cit., p. 207.

The men in the writing world drawn into contact with Meynell sought his influence and services as a man of action. His practical ascendancy, resourcefulness, and business acumen attracted those wanting such qualities. All approached him with the characteristic belief that the decision to be taken or the service to be rendered was in infallible hands:

A thing he inspired in his friends was reliance, the confidence that what was needed would be given. Of the love which means service he had plenty to <sup>1</sup> give and he was fast-acting in any practical need.<sup>1</sup>

Others went to him on the basis of mutual confidence and for quick sympathy. He would sometimes serve as "the smoother of ways" with the magnificent Meredith and the sensitive and autocratic Patmore in their misunderstandings with their "goddess", Mrs. Meynell. He likewise acted as liaison officer among persons of all faiths and all opinions. He belonged to no party, but was on good terms with them all. Catholics and non-Catholics enjoyed gathering around him to exchange their views. He was forever bringing together kindred thinkers, forever establishing links between literary interests.

Meynell's contacts with his fellow-men were characterized by that harmony which leaves room for an

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

intellectual argumentation. He insisted on being himself:

In considering Meynell's main friends the common denominator to be seen among them is that they were men of strong independent views, not afraid to be the exception. It is possible to think of the names of many with whom he had much in common and with whom acquaintance never went far if they were without the unconvention-quality of his own leanings. To be in a minority was after all the English climate for a Catholic, and one which must have suited him well enough since his affinity was with the anti-imperialists, Home Rulers, Boer War dissentients, and extreme social reformers.<sup>1</sup>

Being oneself was particularly difficult. Everything was against it. He and his solitary Catholic group had their own views in a field of thought and art in which most of the Victorian world did not believe. In an age which was pre-eminently one of transition, when new lights on matters scientific and historical, and new over-mastering impulses on matters social, political, and philosophical. were making their appearance year by year, he was always more or less in the middle of opposing forces.

All his associates speak of his effectiveness as an earnest informal talker. His racy cleverness and shrewdness of mind gave a turn of delicious brilliance to his conversation—small talk made up of platitudes and a dash of witticism always flavoured with good will and generosity. The great nobility of the man was never hidden. His

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

opinions he bared like dueling swords and skilfully used in thrusting or defence against false doctrines. If the opponent happened to be a scholar of some distinction, soaring on the wings of his own rhetoric, Meynell's invincible pragmatism would pin him to a fact. With a man of a port somewhat too dignified to seem altogether intelligent, he became not the duelist but the "Puckish jester". And in each case his sweet amiable disposition paved the way for success in controversy. Cameron Rogers speaks as a witness of those engaging "word-plays":

The trail that leads him is never rudely hedged by thorn or bramble and the trap itself is no shattering experience but both unsheath a coxcomb from his folly and a pompous personage from his savorless complacency. And neither coxcomb nor personage resent the operation.<sup>1</sup>

Behind this brilliant wit, Alfred Noyes could discern an underlying philosophy which gave strength, vitality, and permanence to what he said in his strenuous endeavours to enlighten Catholic thought:

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<sup>1</sup> Cameron Rogers, "Wilfrid Meynell", in Thought, Vol. 3, issue of Dec. 1928, p. 479-490.

He could say something that appeared to be mere persiflage and yet carried a quite profound meaning [...], and could bewilder the agnostic by explaining to him that in his digestive process at supper he was co-operating in a kind of transsubstantiation and would follow the somewhat startling jest with a more serious remark which really comprehended the heights and depths of the sacramental principle in art, nature and religion.<sup>1</sup>

Because of this genuine interest in the position and the state of mind of those outside the Church, Meynell was able to reach a large number of intelligent Englishmen who were concerned about religion.

Thus, as a man around whom Catholic thinkers and writers gathered, Meynell was important. Whatever brand of character he was made its impression through the several channels by which he chose to influence public opinion. The patronage and encouragement of culture in all its forms were devices for the dissemination of Catholic principles; the fostering of creative literature, a means of making contacts between the Catholic and secular worlds.

### 5. Catholicism and Culture

It was the great service of Newman to have discovered that the fundamental cause of the ills of the age lay in the result of its break with the beliefs of the

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<sup>1</sup> Alfred Noyes, Two Worlds for Memory, Philadelphia, Lippincott, 1953, p. 34-35.

Catholic Church. In his search for fully satisfying principles of certitude and authority, he found that modern thought had been increasingly secularistic and getting away from theology and religion. He therefore concluded that the problem of the age demanded a divine solution, a Redemption, an extraordinary intervention of God in human affairs. This, he thought, was the first principle that must be grasped and restored before anything could be done about the reviving of art and culture. In the confused intellectual atmosphere of the Victorian Age, when a narrow scientific materialism challenged the validity of so much which the imagination affirmed, the Roman Catholic Church, Newman asserted, offered a common set of principles that would focus the mind of writers among shifting values. To those who were prepared to accept her dogmas, she presented a metaphysical system which had formed the basis of the universal culture of Christendom. Furthermore, Catholicism provided a sense of belonging to a corporate body, a community, though a restricted one, all of whose members shared the same basis of belief and action:

Coming to you then from the very time of the Apostles, spreading out into all lands, triumphing over a thousand revolutions, exhibiting so awful a unity, glorying in so mysterious a vitality, so majestic, so imperturbable, so bold, so saintly, so sublime, so beautiful. Oh, ye sons of men, can ye doubt that she is the Divine Messenger for whom you seek?

Oh, long sought after, tardily found, desire of the eyes, joy of the heart, the truth after many shadows, the fullness after many foretastes, the home after many storms, come to her, poor wanderers, for she it is, and she alone, who can unfold the meaning of your being and the secret of your destiny. She alone can open to you the gate of heaven, and put you on your way!<sup>1</sup>

Newman deplored the disability among the "hereditary Christians" who, he felt, should "aspire to be on a level with Protestants in discipline and refinement of intellect" in order to "furnish to the dignity, the energy, and the influence of Truth".<sup>2</sup> As a remedy he advanced his theory of a liberal education. In his lecture "Christianity and Letters", he presents the Arts as

[...] those august methods of enlarging the mind, and cultivating the intellect, and refining the feelings, in which the process of Civilization has ever consisted.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John Henry Cardinal Newman, "Mysteries of Nature and of Grace", in Discourses to Mixed Congregations, London, Brunns Oates, 1871, p. 282.

<sup>2</sup> -----, "Preface" to The Idea of a University, London, Longmans, 1929, p. xv-xviii.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 256.

and "the literature of Greece, continued into, and enriched by the literature of Rome", as the "instrument of education, and the food of civilization, from the first times of the world down to this day".<sup>1</sup> He saw the necessity of cultivating English literature as an antidote to the general character of secular national literature which he found of marked Protestant colour and "bad" at its "best" when weighed in the balance of truth and morality. He paved the way for the revival of Catholic letters. The more immediate and concrete matters he left to others. His genius lay in providing an intellectual and theological framework that others could enlarge to meet the rising problems of the age.

As a popularizer of Newman's ideals, Wilfrid Meynell takes his place among the lay leaders—most of them converts—who helped in their several ways to uphold the beliefs of the Catholic Church and its cultural heritage before the Victorian world. It was in accordance with the tradition of the times that a considerable prestige was accorded to the lay apostles of the Catholic body. While secularism was gradually increasing, liaison works between Catholicism and the English mind, begun under the shadow of Newman, tried to solve the basic problem of adapting the Church to modern society in such a fashion as to secure freedom for the

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 261.

Church and at the same time save modern society by bringing it into the Church's embrace. Meynell, and with him Wilfrid Ward, were among the first to grasp what was happening, and they developed a special sensitiveness to the Church's aspirations. Aware that religion was no longer recognized by public life, that the Catholic Church was being "fashioned" by a silent intellectual work, they saw the need for highly-cultured Catholics who were to act as witnesses of the high ideals and sound scholarship which Catholicism stands for.

Each matured a view, both of his own character and experience, of common action against pagan ethics and the lack of faith in the unseen. Ward was a man of scholarship and intellect. His aim was to be a true disciple of Newman rather than a thinker on his own right; as a philosopher, he presented Newman's vindication of the Catholic Church. Meynell, a man of letters, believed that art could make "the beauty of God's Church manifest to man", that literature, as a form of aesthetic experience, had a contribution to make in the formation of the beliefs by which a nation lives.

In their attempt to renew the artistic imagination through the application of Catholic dogma to poetry, Aubrey de Vere, Coventry Patmore, and Gerard Manley Hopkins had already led the way to the poetic rediscovery of realities which the world had lost. However, this was done at the

price of isolation from the main currents of Victorian thought. Catholicism was in retreat. Catholic thinkers and writers were therefore without influence as they had refused to ride the intellectual tide. Patmore's uncompromising Catholicism explains the poor reception of his works by the Victorian literary world. Robert Bridges, Hopkin's literary executor, withheld the publication of the Poet's works until after World War I, feeling that these were too advanced for the taste of his generation.<sup>1</sup> The Catholics were thus dwarfed into insignificance through prejudice and ignorance in the Catholic and non-Catholic world.

In fact, the problem of art and letters produced a crisis in the conscience of many Victorian Catholics: "To the nineteenth-century convert it seemed that he was making a disjunctive choice between art and religion."<sup>2</sup> And there were many hereditary Catholics who had little understanding of literary things, and had a suspicion that a life spent in the service of the arts was not likely to lead to eternal salvation. David Matthew speaks of the complete separation between official Victorian Roman Catholicism and the Catholic Literary Revival in England after the death of Cardinal Manning in 1892. All during the regime of Cardinal

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<sup>1</sup> Calvert Alexander, S.J., The Catholic Literary Revival, Milwaukee, Bruce, 1935, p. 55.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

Vaughan (1892-1903) there was no association between the official representatives of Catholicism and the literary activities with which Thompson was associated.<sup>1</sup> Thompson and Meynell were profoundly disturbed by the situation. Thompson lamented that many men of creative genius had been and would be lost to the Church because of the indifference displayed towards their works. Catholics, he said, had not only failed to compete with Satan for the soul of many great modern artists, but, worse than that, the official ecclesiastical mind had appeared to scorn and distrust those whose creative gifts God's adversary both honoured and welcomed. The admirable generosity of so many artists working to introduce beauty into the House of God, he insisted, should be duly appreciated.<sup>2</sup>

In the non-Catholic world, Catholicism was misconceived even in the traditional culture, and was represented as something that hampered, restrained, even crippled the energy and output of human genius. It was believed, consequently, that from Catholics one could not

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<sup>1</sup> David Matthew, Catholicism in England 1535-1935, London, Longmans, 1936, p. 224.

<sup>2</sup> Francis Thompson, Notebook 35, 7, Ms. at Boston College. "Of the 111 Thompson Notebooks in the collection, 62 are complete and others, fragmentary." (Librarium, Boston College Library, No. 10, issue of Dec. 18, 1959.) These notebooks are about to be published in catalogue form.

look for literary work that was either abundant or good:

It was long a conviction in the mind of the average English Protestant that Catholicity exerted a stunting influence on literary development, a belief which the educational disabilities incidental to English Catholicism for some time tended to confirm. The idea in the Protestant mind was something after this fashion—that from Martin Luther came the Reformation, from the Reformation came those twin gifts of Heaven, Good Queen Bess and William Shakespeare, from Good Queen Bess came our greatness, and from<sup>1</sup> William Shakespeare came our literature.

The truth was that the country did not yet possess a sufficiently numerous and cultured Catholic society capable of producing what might claim to be literature. The Catholic voice had been suppressed in England for three centuries, and the Church's fight for self-preservation had made impossible her old patronage of fine arts. The Church had become primarily militant defending Catholic dogma through rigid definition, and the intellectual element properly so called was necessarily sacrificed for the controversial and the devotional, with the result that the cultural side of the Church had been eclipsed.

Writing in The Tablet in 1890, Thompson will account for this tension which existed between Catholicism and literature:

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<sup>1</sup> Rev. Terence L. Connolly, S.J., "Foreword" to Literary Criticism by Thompson, New York, Dutton, 1948, p. ix.

Fifty years ago it could hardly be said that we had literature. Such little as we had was mainly controversial, and aimed more at hard knocks than at giving them with a grace [...] we had no press; the Graces cast no eye upon our literature; artists in style we had none, novelists were probably considered offspring of the Evil One, and poetry was a thing undreamed; it would have been as out of place as a polished helmet in desert warfare. So that the great Protestant community about us grew to believe that Catholicism was inimical to culture; and it did indeed seem as if the culture which not Catholicism but themselves had withered up in us was beyond revival.<sup>1</sup>

By fostering Catholic creative writers, Meynell hoped to force the non-Catholics to recognize Catholic genius and talent in a field where they were best able to appreciate their value. A great poem, he thought, would, in the state of the reading world, do more to enable the Catholic religion to assume its proper place in life than the theological treatise or the polemical tract, however able or learned.

#### 6. Catholic Journalism and Creative Literature

Meynell was aware that the task of building a Catholic literature in later Victorian England was a very difficult one, and that he would have to contend with many drawbacks. It was difficult for true literary men to be formed in such an environment, and still more difficult for

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 545.

them to find an appreciative reading public. If Catholic writers were to make a contribution to English life and thought, it was of great importance that more attention be given to what was really informing, that is, to the creation of a great, strong Catholic aristocracy of intellect capable of sustaining a Catholic literature that could reflect a robust Catholic faith and true Catholic culture. He knew that the Catholic writer would be misrepresented and misapprehended till he succeeded in making for himself an audience disciplined in the appreciation of genuine Catholic aesthetic values. In an age where the public replaced the patron, there was the need to produce more and better Catholic readers, to attract Catholics to creative literature, and to make Protestants familiar with Catholic literature.

The project of nurturing and disseminating this spiritual leaven called for the services of both the educator and the propagandist. Meynell found in the press the practical medium for reaching the public which had to be addressed. He thought that journalism and authorship should meet to solve the problem of Victorian culture. To this purpose there was, at the moment, no literary vehicle which promised more advantage to the aspiring writer than the periodical:

Journalism, while it affords scope for the most brilliant and practised powers, is also the legitimate sphere for the literary beginner. His capacity is there put to the test by a process which, unlike that of publishing a book, costs him nothing in case of failure; while the acceptance of his contributions is an earnest of his future success. Nearly all our great writers, whether journalists or not, began by contributing timorously and obscurely to the newspaper periodical press; and there are thousands of aspirants to-day eager to follow in their footsteps, and to take a place in the Republic of Letters, if they only knew how and where to make a start.<sup>1</sup>

Meynell was especially sensitive to the lack of interest in poetry displayed by almost all the Catholic publications in Victorian England. In the first decades after the revival of the Catholic hierarchy in England, the Catholic Reviews were filled with matters polemical, theological, and historical; scarcely any pure literature appeared under the editorship of Wilfrid Ward's father, William G. Ward. The Dublin Review, the oldest Catholic periodical, was marked by a highly controversial tone. When controlled by the future Cardinal Archbishop Henry E. Manning, during the years 1863-1878, there was no room in it for any writing that did not directly serve the causes which he espoused. Similarly, when Father Herbert Vaughan controlled The Tablet in the years 1868-1884, literature and

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<sup>1</sup> John Oldcastle (Wilfrid Meynell), "Introduction" to Journals and Journalism: With a Guide for Literary Beginners, London, Field and Tuer, 1880, p. 11.

the fine arts were treated, if at all, as instruments in the service of ecclesiastical interests. Even The Rambler, which had numbered Newman and John Acton among its editorialists, was more concerned, in the years 1848-1859, with philosophical and theological problems than with creative literature. Only The Month, begun in 1864, was avowedly concerned with literature. In its early days it published a good deal of poetry. Aubrey de Vere was a contributor and Newman's "Dream of Gerontius" first appeared in it in 1865. However, it soon gave more importance to strictly ecclesiastical interests than it had done at first. This was markedly true under the editorship of Father John Gerard (1894-1912), and belles lettres received scant attention until he was succeeded by Father Joseph Keating, a priest who was much interested in the works of Hopkins.

In those difficult and meagre years, Newman's pen and that of Aubrey de Vere had been the chief instruments in producing Catholic literature in distinction from the polemics and the theology of the periodicals. To maintain the gains already made, the Meynells turned to their true calling. Already during their engagement, they had decided to publish a magazine with contributions from Ruskin, Tennyson, Matthew Arnold, and other prominent writers. But it took three years for the dream of the young couple to take shape. In 1880 appeared the first issue of the weekly

magazine, The Pen: A Journal of Literature, edited by Wilfrid Meynell. The editorial of the first number introduced it as a literary venture. It was to carry

[...] original essays on Literary subjects, which it is hoped may delight, yet not unlearned. Biographies of eminent Authors, and Poems, will be given, week by week. And if an effort is made to please the more fugitive fancy by paragraphs of Literary table-talk, entire care will be taken that the reader is not amused at the expense of any private or professional interest whatever.<sup>1</sup>

However, Mr. and Mrs. Meynell had to write the great part of it, and to give up all hope of the collaboration of famous authors. After seven issues only, they had to face their first failure, and the review ceased to appear.

A few months later Cardinal Manning offered to Meynell the editorship of the Westminster diocesan journal, The Weekly Register. For eighteen years, from July 1881 to June 1899, this was to be the main source of income for the family. It was devoted specially to Catholic news. Accounts of ecclesiastical activities and episcopal texts occupied many of its pages. It was to Meynell's credit, however, that he succeeded in bringing to this dull weekly, narrowly confined to clerical matters, a breath of fresh air from the outside; foreign affairs and social news, even literary news, figured more and more. The first number,

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<sup>1</sup> Anonymous, in The Pen, issue of May 22, 1880, p. 1.

after he took over its editorship, announced a change of policy:

[...] we propose, for ourselves, to compress into small compass reports of sermons save where they are memorable—and of religious ceremonies—save when they mark our progress as a community. The space thus saved will be devoted to a complete summary of the Week's News, and to notices of Science, Art, the legitimate Drama, Literature, and Law. Social topics will be treated in articles and paragraphs with such brightness and lightness as may be attained without bitterness and without levity.<sup>1</sup>

To this end, the editor told his readers, the best available Catholic talents were "banded together" for the first time in the service of a Catholic journal. The venture was abundantly successful. It meant the addition of six hundred subscribers within six months.

But it was not in an ecclesiastical weekly that Meynell's real convictions could be fully expressed. Alice and Wilfrid wrote increasingly for the great London Press: the Academy, the Athenaeum, the Daily Chronicle, the Dublin Review, the National Observer, the Nineteenth Century, the Pall Mall Gazette, the Saturday Review, the Spectator, the Tablet, the Windsor Magazine, the Magazine of Art, and the Art Journal. However, they were not forgetting their old

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<sup>1</sup> Anonymous, in The Weekly Register, Vol. 64, issue of July 9, 1881, p. 1.

project, and, in 1883, they finally launched their very own periodical, Merry England, a general monthly cultural magazine, Catholic by inspiration. From their long table in Palace Court library, Mr. and Mrs. Meynell worked for twelve years, the busiest years of their life, as central figures and propagandists of the Catholic Literary Revival in Victorian England. In their hands, the timely periodical became the vital organ for the spread of Catholic principles and the sponsorship of Catholic writers.

This, then, was Meynell's answer to Carlyle's dilemma and to that of his generation: to guide literary achievement along a common path of Catholicism and art that would satisfy equally the spiritual and aesthetic needs of the Victorian reader. To this purpose, Merry England was conceived as the leading factor for the promotion of Catholic literature, and, through the medium of Catholic literature, for the propagation of Catholic truth.

The following chapter will present a study of the Manifesto of Merry England to reveal the purpose of the magazine—religious, cultural, and literary.

## CHAPTER III

## CREDO OF A CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDIST

On Primrose Day, May 23, 1883, anniversary of Lord Beaconsfield's death, Londoners read Merry England for the first time. Wilfrid Meynell, a great admirer of Disraeli, issued the first publication of his magazine on this day so called to honour his hero's favourite flower. In his famous novel Sybil, written under the influence of Carlyle, Disraeli had drawn a heart-rending picture of the sufferings of the working class in the early years of Queen Victoria's reign. Young people, ready to do a good turn to the poor, had formed a party around him, called "New England".

## 1. The True "Merry England" Ideal

An etching, showing Disraeli in the act of addressing Parliament, illustrates George Saintsbury's opening article of Meynell's magazine, entitled "The New England Party". The purpose and influence of the Party, as summarized in this article, accounts for the editorial policy of the magazine:

Young England aimed at dissolving the rigid barrier between the different classes of the population by the influence of mutual good offices, by the humanizing effects of arts and letters, by a common enjoyment of enjoyable religious functions, by popularizing the ideas of a national tradition and historical continuity, by restoring the merriment of life, by protesting against the exchange of money and receipts for money as a sufficient summary of the relations of man and man.<sup>1</sup>

Saintsbury then stresses the widespread influence of this social movement on the literary trends of the age:

Indeed, to trace the ramifications of agreement, dissent, protest, and silent adoption of more or less of the tendencies of the movement, would be to make a survey of the literature of the period. It is perceptible no less in "Past and Present" (far removed as Carlyle was from sympathy with Young England) than in "The Broad Stone of Honour" little less in "The Princess" than in "Coningsby".<sup>2</sup>

An article in The Weekly Register heralded the new periodical, Merry England. Here, Meynell recognizes the New England movement as a vain effort to restore to national character its traditional gaiety:

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<sup>1</sup> George Saintsbury, "The Young England Movement", in Merry England, Vol. 1, issue of May 1883, p. 1-13.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

The more considerable attempt to revive merriment in our country, and almost in our own time, by the Young England Party movement, has, indeed, left its mark, and a very graceful one, on contemporary politics, literature and sociology; but the maypole has proved to be only a midsummer night's dream; the agricultural labourer, who was to have been converted into a peasant, is an agricultural labourer still.<sup>1</sup>

Its deficiencies are explained in terms of religion:

There was no absence of good religious intentions in the Young Englanders. They knew in their hearts, almost as well as we ourselves know it, that England can never be merry until she is Christian. They talked about "the National Church" but the National Church would not and could not dance to their piping. By that failure, on the part of the Protestant Establishment, to reach the hearts of the people, the Young England Party was of necessity a failure and a dream.<sup>2</sup>

The policy of the magazine had therefore been shaped to make up for the inadequacies of the Young England Movement:

Men, like Frederich Faber, thus learned to look to the Catholic Church to do what the Protestant Church could not do; [...] Where Father Faber looked, there look we; and the hour seems to be ripe for the Catholics in this country to come forward once again—not in a spirit of self-assertive controversy, and still less in a spirit of apology for the Faith that is in them—to place before their fellow-countrymen the only remedy for the ills which are now preying on the very vitals of society.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Anonymous, "Merry England", in The Weekly Register, Vol. 67, issue of Apr. 14, 1883, p. 465-466.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

## CREDO OF A CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDIST

71

The magazine took its name from the Wordsworth sonnet, "Merry England", which generally follows the title page in the bound volume:

They call thee "Merry England" in old time,  
 A happy people won for thee that name,  
 With envy heard in many a distant clime;  
 And spite of change, for me thou keep'st the same  
 Endearing title, a responsive chime  
 To the heart's fond belief, though some there are  
 Whose sterner judgment deem that word a snare  
 For inattentive Fancy, like the lime  
 Which foolish birds are caught with. Can I ask,  
 This face of rural beauty be a mask  
 For discontent, and poverty and crime?  
 These spreading towns a cloak for lawless will?  
 Forbid it, Heaven!—that Merry England still  
 May be thy rightful name in prose or rhyme!<sup>1</sup>

In crowning his periodical with so impressive a title, the editor had bridged several centuries in his dreams to re-discover the spiritual vitality of a period when Catholicism characterized English society. For whatever may have been the shortcomings of the Middle Ages, they were the ages of Faith and Hope based on the love which Christ had brought into the world. Merry England preaches an optimism that is born of complete faith in a time of disillusionment:

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Hutchinson, ed., The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, London, Oxford University Press, 1914, p. 463.

On this point there should be no mistake. "Merry" as applied to "England" was not used in the common significance now attached to the adjective. It meant "brave" England; rather than comic or boisterous England; brave and "merry" even in the midst of human sorrow, by reason of its clear conscience and fresh and primitive feelings, and its living hope in a hereafter.<sup>1</sup>

The medieval ideal to which Meynell joyfully reverts in his magazine was to bring light on the idealized conception of the Middle Ages as imagined by the Romantics. He wished the Middle Ages to be seen, not in their external prettiness only, but in their inner radiance. Mindful of the fact that the best of English tradition had drawn its vital inspiration from Merry England's Catholic culture, he meant to salvage the supernatural principles which, in those ages, formed the basis of an ideal social order and art. The spirit of medieval life, timeless and fertile as it is, could be made effective in modern life. A philosophy which reality had worked out could again become a working philosophy and a reasonable ideal.

The Manifesto of the magazine was to provide a formula which could save the true substance of the Victorian

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<sup>1</sup> Anonymous, "Reviews and Views", in Merry England, Vol. 2, issue of Dec. 1883, p. 67. In his essay "Cheerfulness in Life and Art", Coventry Patmore defines cheerfulness in almost identical terms and makes it an essential of genuine art and life. (Coventry Patmore, Principle in Art, London, Duckworth, 1889, p. 5-9.)

non-Catholic writers' aspirations modified by the false philosophy of life on which they were founded. In the present chapter, its tenets will be studied in their relation to the Victorian dilemma. As a more convenient method of study, a section-by-section analysis will be made following the textual development of the Manifesto.

## 2. The Catholic Cultural Ideal

While the rapid growth of populations baffles the political economist, the profusion of periodical literature may well perplex the general reader; and there are those who, declining to be doctrinaires in their dealings with humanity, would limit by a strenuous Malthusianism the multiplication of magazines. Some words by way of explanation are due, therefore, from him who would bespeak for yet another candidate in the same kind the Public favour.

The Manifesto strikes a note of gentle irony in its subtle allusion to the vague abstractions and logic chopping of Malthusianism and its laissez-faire policy.<sup>1</sup> Meynell was well aware of the fact that the perennial attack upon the worth of poetry to society had been renewed in the nineteenth century in the name of an ill-conceived utilitarianism. As T.S. Peacock had put it in a letter to

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<sup>1</sup> G.M. Young refers to Malthus' Essay on Population as "a body of doctrine which to question was impious or irrational". It was "snipped into texts", says he, "for the guidance of those who did not wish to think at all, and repression of those who wished to think for themselves". (George Malcolm Young, Victorian England: Portrait of an Age, London, Oxford University Press, 1936, p. 12.)

Shelley, as far back as 1820, it had appeared to many that

Moral, political and physical science have entirely withdrawn from poetry the attention of all those whose attention is worth having.<sup>1</sup>

To the Benthamite editors of the Westminster Review, in the years 1824-1836, poetry appeared but a trifling thing; although this journal represented an extreme bias, its essential Philistinism was unquestionably typical of the feeling of a significant number of people, which feeling did not decline as the century progressed.<sup>2</sup> For if extreme Benthamism was undermined by the modifying intelligence of its greatest offshoot, John Stuart Mill, it was nonetheless very much alive in the eighties and nineties, especially among those whom Carlyle had described as Millocracy. Meynell cared deeply for Merry England's receiving its proper recognition among Englishmen generally and among English Catholics in particular.

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<sup>1</sup> Herbert, F.B. Brett-Smith, ed., Peacock's Four Ages of Poetry, Shelley's Defence of Poetry, Browning's Essay on Shelley, Oxford, 1937, p. xi.

<sup>2</sup> George Nesbitt, Benthamite Reviewing: The First Twelve Years of the Westminster Review (1824-1836), New York, Columbia University Press, 1934.

Professor Ruskin does not love the steam plough, yet surely the steam plough in the midst of scenery the most idyllic is a better alternative—where such the alternative must be—than a starving people. The Professor indeed supposes that the modern ploughboy's whistling, as well as his work, will be done by steam; but we have faith that the rustic will yet whistle for himself, albeit no longer for "want of thought". Frankly accepting the conditions of Modern England, we would have it a Merry England too.

Ruskin's artistic researches brought him closer to the teachings of Carlyle; he began to concentrate on the economic conditions which were responsible for a soulless art. With Carlyle he found that the current order of industrial society was depriving humanity of decency and dignity; that man was

[...] a mere Work-Machine, for whom the divine gift of Thought were no other than the terrestrial gift of Steam is to the Steam-engine; a power whereby Cotton might be spun, and money and money's worth realized.<sup>1</sup>

Meynell maintained that the modern Victorian world of invention and industry could retain the cultural values sustained by the Medieval tradition. He was aware of two worlds: to continue, the present had to retain its hold on the past—its great Christian heritage—, but at the same time it had to keep abreast of the modern world. He accepted the perfection and extension of the mechanical equipment in industrialization as a need. His remedy, therefore, to what he considered the greatest disease of

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Carlyle, Sartor Resartus, p. 169.

the times—the dissociation of the things of God and the things of the world—was one of reconciliation. Despite the wrong ideology which was linked to it, the Victorian civilization still involved in its very substance the sacred heritage of human and divine values based on Catholic Tradition, a heritage which had been weakened in its efficiency but not completely destroyed in its potential reserves. By the power of the Catholic religion, he believed that a merry England might yet be made out of Modern England: "We have faith that, under happier religious and social conditions, the rustic will yet again whistle for himself albeit no longer for "want of thought".<sup>1</sup>

The Manifesto sets a pattern for a form of society characterized by a Christianity that embraces both the natural and supernatural elements of life.

This is the ideal which Meynell holds up as a remedy to the plight of Ruskin's ploughman, who, with that other rustic, "Cymon", plodded his way aimlessly and

[...] trudg'd along unknowing what he sought,  
And whistled as he went for want of thought.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Anonymous, "Merry England", in The Weekly Register, Vol. 79, issue of Jan. 5, 1889, p. 31.

<sup>2</sup> W.D. Christie, ed., "Cymon and Iphigenia", The Poetical Works of John Dryden, London, Macmillan, 1870, p. 633-653.

## CREDO OF A CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDIST

77

Though the maypole be a thing of the past, the same instinct for joy which moved men and maidens on the village greens of long ago is ready to assert itself still—Heaven sees in what distorted fashion—in our manufacturing towns, in our dense sea-ports, and our fields of coal. In London alone there are "two millions who never smile"—the members alas! of a great family scattered, nay rather huddled, in every city and every village, through the land.

With Meynell, as with his co-religionists, the dream of a Catholic England was mingled with the dream of a happier England. The needs of the age were various enough, but none seemed as pressing as the need for sweetness and cheerfulness of heart. The bewildered Victorian reached for that fundamental necessity of nature which is pleasure, but he did not find authentic happiness. The Victorian industrial worker endured the miseries following the progress of modern civilization based upon the principle of seeking first the kingdom of this world and its glory and letting the Kingdom of God and its righteousness fare as they might.

Jacques Maritain explains the decline in popular happiness in the modern world as the logical outcome of the gradual process of secularism which brought about a break with Christian values. Modern man, says he,

[...] knew truths—without the Truth; [...] claimed human rights and dignity—without God, [...] trusted in peace and fraternity without Christ, [...] believed in liberty—without the mastery of self or moral responsibility, [...] placed his hope in machinism, in technique, and in mechanical or industrial civilization—without wisdom to dominate them and put them at the service of human good and freedom, [...] looked for happiness—without any final end to be aimed at, or any rational pattern to which to adhere; the most natural concept and motive power, that of happiness, was thus warped by the loss of the concept and the sense of purpose or finality (for finality is but one with happiness). Happiness became the movement itself toward happiness, a movement at once limitless and increasingly lower, more and more stagnant.<sup>1</sup>

In launching their magazine the promoters of Merry England set themselves to discuss:

How to restore some quality to modern and unlovely life—by what legislation, by the exercise of what charitable effort, and by the promulgation of what principles of sincerity.<sup>2</sup>

The progress of Catholicism in England coincided with the renaissance of social compassion in secular society. Modern man had sought the rehabilitation of the human creature in a separation from God. It was to be sought in God. Meynell adopted the cause of Cardinal Manning as champion of the rights of the labouring classes, and founded

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph W. Evans and Leo R. Ward, ed., op. cit., p. 157-158.

<sup>2</sup> Anonymous, "Reviews and Views", in Merry England, Vol. 2, issue of Jan. 1884, p. 67.

his magazine with the special purpose of restoring Catholic principles to social life: "I felt the need of an organ to put forward Catholic principles especially in regard to the redemption of the workers."<sup>1</sup> He hoped to revive, under some form suitable for modern England, that vital religious ideal which had shaped medieval civilization into a socio-religious unity commonly known as Christendom of which Etienne Gilson has written:

Christendom, that is to say a universal society of all Christians, tied together, even in the temporal order, by the bonds of their common faith and common charity; men thinking, feeling, and behaving as true Christians should do, loving and helping each other as true children of the same Father who is in heaven—all those magnificent virtues were perhaps not much more common in medieval society than they are now. The main difference between our medieval ancestors and ourselves does not lie there, it rather rests with their belief in the absolute value of those virtues. The best among them were fully convinced that there was an order of absolute religious truth, of absolute ethical goodness, of absolute political and social justice, to which differences had to submit and by which they had to be judged.<sup>2</sup>

An order of popular happiness was realized in Catholic England. The power of the world always instinctively at war with the power of the kingdom of God was kept under by the predominating influence of Catholic social fraternal ideals.

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<sup>1</sup> Viola Meynell, op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Etienne Gilson, Medieval Universalism and Its Present Value, New York, Sheed and Ward, 1937, p. 11.

How their toil may be lightened and dignified for them, their sky cleared, and their air sweetened, and the care for that light and sweetness cultivated in themselves;

Meynell was concerned with erecting a social order in which the art of living would be possible, free from the tyranny of ignorance and spiritual thralldom. He hoped for more idealistic conditions of work that would compensate for the constraints imposed on man by the necessity of the work to be done, in itself not human but technical, and an affliction for the radical aspirations of personality. He urged that the unpleasant work be made more happy and exalting. What the industrial worker needed most was more light and beauty. Through the influence of spiritual energies transforming the secular life from within, the conditions of work could become less and less enslaving, and tend to a state of real emancipation for those "two millions who never smile".

The secular and the religious were to work together, but to this a third term was necessary by which the inner life and external condition might be united peacefully, and effectively carried forward. This third term was the ideal of beauty, not beauty as the mere object of sense and imagination, not merely intellectual beauty, but beauty as the ideal of all the faculties, corresponding to man's whole nature, body and soul. This beauty was to be sought in every department of life. True culture was to reveal and

realize it. Hence all culture was to be aesthetic. As a result, order would be brought out of confusion, the world would be saved, on the one hand, from lapsing into barbarism, and, on the other, from wasting itself in the artificiality of intellectualism.

In speaking of the universal ideal of "light and sweetness", it seems as if Meynell wanted to refer to the first chapter of Arnold's Culture and Anarchy, entitled "Sweetness and Light". Here Arnold expounds his "Hellenistic" ideal of the pursuit of perfection through culture "in which the character of beauty and intelligence are both present." He claims that a humanity worthy of its calling must learn to co-ordinate its moral with its aesthetic and intellectual nature. The pursuit of "sweetness and light", he describes as the "harmonious expansion of the gifts of thought and feeling, which make the peculiar dignity, wealth, and happiness of human nature."<sup>1</sup>

Arnold proceeds on the assumption that the end to be aimed at is the realization of the potentialities of natural man and, hence, the method he proposes is the cultivation of man's natural powers and faculties. He forgets man's dignity as a redeemed human being. It is this dignity that Meynell

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Arnold, Culture and Anarchy, London, Smith Elder, 1905, p. 8.

insists upon. The man of Christian humanism has an ultimate end, God to be seen and possessed. Christianity educates, it cultivates, not as an end in itself, but as a means of fostering the supernatural.

The Manifesto continues:

how marriage may be, not more rash, yet more possible and more righteous, among them; how maternity, losing at least its mental anguish, may regain, once more the ancient "joy that a man is born into the world;" how the children who now perish in their infancy may be saved to society and to thrifty homes; how old age may be made a season of honourable peace and of a well-earned pension, rather than of workhouse misery, which—cruel as death—puts asunder husband and wife; how Religion may be made more dear—at once more divine and more human; and the reverences and tenderesses of life multiplied among them:

Where the working man found his happiness the most rudely assailed was in his home life. The sacrifice of human beings to capital had led to the destruction of domestic life, to the neglect of children, to the turning of wives and mothers into living machines, and of fathers and husbands into "creatures of burden". The only home for them was some rented room in a promiscuous tenement or shanty in a filthy street or alley. The good and the bad were crowded amidst misery and sin. When they were old or infirm they were thrown into the street or poorhouse.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Chapter I, p. 3-4.

## CREDO OF A CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDIST

83

As a remedy for these social ills, the Manifesto pleads for a return to a chivalrous appreciation of true womanhood, for an understanding of the role and the dignity of motherhood, for the restoration of domestic life and the reverences of the home. It involves such principles as would give to the life of the social body a truly human and divine character. It recognizes and sanctions those rights which we call the fundamental rights of the human person: the right to life, the right to found a family, itself assured the freedoms proper to it. It suggests that it is the function of the state, through its legislation, to help the family accomplish this mission as well as to provide a society which would permit man to live in the wholeness of his responsibility, his dignity, and his supernatural destiny.

To sum up, the Manifesto reveals the essential spirit of the Catholic industrial ideal: popular happiness established on the law of brotherly love in Christ, the inalienable dignity of work, and the dignity of the poor. It suggests the supreme pattern of a genuine democratic society which includes the development both of a powerful technical equipment and of a rational politico-social organization quickened by the inner ferment of Evangelical inspiration.

These principles of Christian social order are purposely treated as a way of culture. Meynell was aware of the power of Catholic culture as a fulcrum to save the arts and literature from disintegration, for the art of living is chief of all the arts and necessarily inspires them.

If Catholics [...] find that the tone of the greater part of literature of the day is unhealthy and unwholesome, it is upon society that they must act. Let society be reformed and a purer literature will spring up, suited to purer tastes.<sup>1</sup>

Christopher Dawson confirms Meynell's conviction when he shows to what extent Catholicism, in a state of close communion with European culture, was an element of medieval life before it was translated into art:

I do not maintain that the general level of religious life was higher than at other times or that the state of the Church was healthier, still less that scandals were rarer or moral evils less obvious. What one can assert is that in the Middle Ages more than at other periods in the life of our civilization, the European culture and the Christian religion were in a state of communion: the highest expressions of mediaeval culture, whether in art, in literature or in philosophy, were religious and the greatest representatives of mediaeval religion were also the leaders of mediaeval culture.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Anonymous, "Contemporary Literature", in The Weekly Register, Vol. 88, issue of Sept. 12, 1893, p. 299-300.

<sup>2</sup> Christopher Dawson, Mediaeval Religion and Other Essays, London, Sheed and Ward, 1934, p. 119-120.

## 3. The Catholic Literary Ideal

Such topics as these we shall attempt to treat with a freshness and delicacy which will redeem them from the dulness of blue-books, and will bid for the sympathy even of the happy and the young—the England which is Merry in all epochs. And if not in these, at least in less difficult problems concerning a Nation's welfare we shall have scope for fancy, and take opportunities for fun. We spare our readers the trite remark that Literature and Art are great elements of human happiness; but we shall make no apology for recognizing the fact by the publication of frequent papers, critical and biographical, about the painters and the writers of the present and the past; and this at least we may promise, that our Literature shall be literary Literature and our Art shall be artistic Art.

In his attempt to educate contemporary thought with respect to Catholic tradition, the editor is mindful of the laws governing public opinion. English culture had long been a Christian culture divorced from the Christian religion inasmuch as religion had been confined to the pulpit. Here, faith was to appear as a system that did not ignore the new world, but rather understood and took account of that world's moral difficulties and intellectual problems, and offered a solution for both. When truth could not be defended by apologetics, incomprehensible in an age supported by science, the objective representation of the life of the Church could effectively recall and reinforce the teachings of religion, indirectly refute calumnies, and adroitly correct misconceptions as to Catholic faith and practice.

As a relief from the dry abstracts of theology, the excellence of Catholicism, as a magnificent force creative of truth and beauty, was to be reconciled with the wonder and glory of art, and, thus, bring home to the reader a Catholic experience of life. The serious things of the world were not to be eschewed, but they were to be touched with freshness and finish. In lighter topics place was to be made for the play of fancy as well as to the graces of wit and pleasantry. In all cases, writers were to be true to nature, history, religion, and morals, and this without entrenching upon the province of theology or controversy.

Meynell understood that, if the art of living inspires the arts, life, in turn, might be inspired by them. Since the Catholic Church alone had the precious truth which is at the root of true culture, Catholic writers were "to act on society in the same manner as the leaven does which the woman introduces into the mass of dough that is to become the wholesome food of thousands."<sup>1</sup> The poet, according to Meynell, "is not merely a singer; he is also an interpreter and teacher."<sup>2</sup> At that time when persistent effort was made to interpret life in terms of science, he

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<sup>1</sup> Anonymous, in The Weekly Register, op. cit.

<sup>2</sup> Wilfrid Meynell, "Some Recent Poetry", op. cit.

believed that the absolute experience of dogma would make man feel the direction of life and the meaning of existence itself. The true poet's mission, he claimed, is

[...] to give a voice to love and hope and faith, and to lead, like a guiding star, the weary mariner to that haven of rest, where alone the ideal of which he has dreamed on earth, and which poetry has vainly striven to embody, will become at last and eternally real.<sup>1</sup>

In introducing their readers to genuine literature the promoters of Merry England were not concerned so much with theology as with that sense of the reality of absolute values that creates beliefs and becomes a dwelling place for faith. Meynell believed that objective truth was arrived at by art,<sup>2</sup> but he did not confound theological truth with aesthetic truth.<sup>3</sup> The truth requisite for poetry is neither the revealed truth of dogma nor the fact of science. Genuine poetry embodies principles of universal truth and beauty as art embodies them. In his essay "Hieroglyphics", Arthur Machen develops the thesis that fine literature is "the aesthetic expression of the eternal things that are in man", and concludes that it is necessarily the manifestation of

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Neville Braybrooke, "Two Editors: Wilfrid Ward and Wilfrid Meynell", in Dublin Review, Vol. 228, issue of Spring 1954, p. 46-52.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Chapter II, p. 32.

Catholic dogma.<sup>1</sup>

Poetry as an art for the sake of experience, in which technique is integrated with the philosophy of the subject, was the true remedy against the separation produced by the pragmatic distortions of experience advocated by the exponents of the "Art-for-Art's Sake" movement—this great divider and destroyer of standards in life and culture. The integrity of creative experience, as found in true poetry, provides a way of interpretation by means of organic wholes which nourishes the mind and spirit, and becomes the very foundation on which are built the principles and practices of a liberal education—an education that gives, as stated by Newman, a "connected grasp of things". Parts are more clearly seen in relation to the whole, and their significance is consequently more quickly understood. The interpretation of the truth latent at the core becomes a process to be experienced, and "meaning" controls the process. As the reader penetrates the realm of meanings, he seeks, in different ways, to define the delicate relationship of man to the universe, the relationship of man to man and to God. This deepens his insight into human nature, into man's creatureship and earthly predicament, his potentialities

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Machen, "Hieroglyphics", in Literary Review, Vol. 6, issue of Nov. 27, 1923, p. 274-281.

for good and evil, and his need for the salvation of his soul. Thus genuine poetry unlocks to the soul the secrecy of its relations to the Infinite: it "tells us distinctly that man is not the creature of the drawing room and the Stock Exchange, but a lonely awful soul confronted by the Source of all Souls".<sup>1</sup> What the poet tells us comes like a revelation. As it awakens a sense of awe and wonder for the intangibles of life, it feeds nobly and happily man's sense of his eternal destiny. Meynell would have agreed with Maritain's opinion that the end of literature as a fine art is similar to the end of human nature itself:

Art teaches men the pleasures of the spirit, and because it is itself sensitive and adapted to their nature, it is better able to lead them to what is nobler than itself. So in natural life it plays the same part, so to speak, as the "sensible graces" in the spiritual life; and from afar off, without thinking, it prepares the human race for contemplation (the contemplation of the Saints) the spiritual joy of which surpasses every other joy and seems to be the end of all human activities.<sup>2</sup>

The full potency of literature is realized when truth is seen in the light of Catholic theology which interprets the experience of life in terms of the dual nature of man elevated by grace. In the light of the foregoing opinions,

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Maritain, Art and Scholasticism, London, Sheed and Ward, 1949, p. 62.

## CREDO OF A CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDIST

90

Meynell's definition of the poet as "teacher and interpreter" (as well as singer) is justified.

Christian art and art itself had deteriorated just in proportion as men had lost the Christian faith and the Christian ideal, till it had nearly ceased to deserve the name of art by embodying no thought or conception above the actual. If Catholic literature was destined to live, and to exert a creative influence on the national character, there was an imperative need for the contributors of Merry England to put God in their philosophy of art as of life, to establish reality in their conceptions, to seek beauty in its source, and commune with the real Ideal.

And since we hold that the length of our railroads is no measure of the happiness of life, and the electric light is no substitute for a Star in the East, nor literature a glory nor art anything else than a shame, if they disown fealty to the All-Father, we shall seek to revive in our hearts, and in the hearts of others, the enthusiasm of the Christian Faith.

The Manifesto rightfully claims that a return to integral Christianity is the world's only hope when error thrives in minds that prefer self-realization in a material world to selfhood in the Kingdom of God. It advocates a Christian order which is first of all theological. It sublimates the Christian faith by allying it with the notion of God's universal fatherhood, making God the primary source of all authority, and the spiritual pole to personality. The all-embracing conception of integral Christianity is to

reconcile the will to social restoration, the free play of art and science under the supremacy of theological principles and the primacy of Charity. All things are to be integrated in Christ. A revelation of the Christian ideal permeating every facet of life and culture is the one solution applied to the wants of the age.

All these ideals, better suggested than baldly stated, are gathered in a climactic arrangement and brought to a focus to form a Christocentric pattern enkindling the core of the Manifesto and the motto of the magazine with "meaning, internal harmony, and dynamism": "we shall seek to revive in our own hearts, and in the hearts of others, the enthusiasm of the Christian Faith." The Manifesto makes clear how literally it is to follow the ideal of Aubrey de Vere who proclaimed that the whole truth after which the age was blindly striving was to be found in the Incarnation. Like Patmore, he recognized the Incarnation of Christ as "the Complement of Creation". It was the bridge "thrown across that gulf which had else for ever separated the Finite from the Infinite."<sup>1</sup> The Manifesto also reveals that its inspiration was at one with that of the life and work of Alice Meynell. In fact, she, as co-founder of Merry England,

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<sup>1</sup> Aubrey de Vere, "Preface" to May Carols, London, Burns Oates, 1907, p. xiii-xxxviii.

had been active with Mr. Meynell in shaping its policy. Both were engaged as journalists in the hope of restoring the Kingdom of Christ in the world. She wished Catholic Tradition to stand, not apart, but in the centre of things,

[...] in intimate contact with the glories of the European past and the really valuable tendencies in the present, engaged in the work of carrying forward the main stream of English letters.<sup>1</sup>

The Merry England motto mirrors the influence of Franciscanism which "in all its phases and applications, in philosophy and theology, in art and literature, is by its very nature Christocentric".<sup>2</sup> In fact, among the makers of the "Merry England" tradition were the followers of St. Francis who came to England in 1224, and were the first to spread the new spiritual culture based on "the evangelical piety and the devotion to the Humanity of Jesus that found its supreme expression in the life of St. Francis".<sup>3</sup> If the main purpose of their crusade was doctrinal, still they are thought of as playing an equally important part in revivifying English culture and art. In an effort to

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<sup>1</sup> Calvert Alexander, The Catholic Literary Revival, p. 116.

<sup>2</sup> Rev. Henry Senft, O.M.C., "The Influence of Franciscanism in Catholic English Literature", in Catholic English Literature, Brookland, Washington, D.C., Published by the Franciscan Educational Conference, 1940, p. 216.

<sup>3</sup> Christopher Dawson, op. cit., p. 48.

popularize philosophy and theology they introduced incidents of daily life, stories, anecdotes, popular tradition or legend, and even sacred verse in their sermons. Father Senft records the effects of the friars' "philosophy of education": "It reached the hearts of the people in an intimate moving way that brought home to them as never before the truths of their Christian religion."<sup>1</sup>

#### 4. The Catholic Ideal and Reality

Moreover, in religion as in literature, in art and in sociology, we shall seek to fulfil Dr. Johnson's precept, and "clear our minds of cant"—the cant of commerce and the cant of capital, the cant even of chivalry and of labour, the cant of medievalism no less than the cant of modern days.

In his effort to inform the secular world with Christian faith, Meynell offers a synthesis of belief that involves Catholicism's assimilation of everything valid in modern thought. However, he does not try to effect a reconciliation by toning down the Church's doctrine, by altering it ever so little in order to "modernize" it. There is no spirit of compliance with liberal Protestantism. He would remove all the human barriers, restrictions, and limitations that the Victorian, through his compromising, had placed upon the integrity of his human search for fully

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<sup>1</sup> Rev. Henry Senft, O.M.C., op. cit., p. 219.

satisfying principles of certitude and authority. The age did not err in its demand for the ideal. Its error was in confounding the ideal with the sentimental. Its disillusion had proved its convictions erroneous. Therein lay the Catholic propagandist's opportunity to throw light upon and break the false optimisms of the modern mind. Samuel Johnson had denounced sentimental optimism as cant. Meynell picks up the word, with and against Carlyle, to apply it to the Victorian tendency of seeking an ideal in the realities of an industrial and emancipated middle-class and an aesthetic world of fancy.<sup>1</sup>

The Merry England ideology advocates Catholicism as the integrating woof to the warp of the secular activities of the era in the fields of sociology, arts, and letters. The two are to meet without compromise to the integrity of either, but for the increased efficacy of both. It only advocates what the Victorian prophets had in mind if they had but understood themselves. The solution it brings is fundamental and complementary to Arnold's "Hellenistic" ideal

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<sup>1</sup> G.M. Young applies the term "Cant" to the "homiletic cadence" which was "so persistent in Victorian oratory and literature". "The sermon", he says, "was the standard vehicle of serious truth." By "serious truth" he means "The acknowledged truth" or "all those dogmas which a victorious middle class had imposed on the nation". (George Malcolm Young, op. cit., p. 14-15.)

of "Sweetness and Light", to Ruskin's teaching of the relation between art and the way of life, to Carlyle's "outline: "That a Splendor of God, in one form or other [...] unfold itself from the heart of these [...] Industrial Ages..." The difference between their point of view and that of Meynell is that they secularize the supernatural while the latter would supernaturalize the secular. It is not that he would have less of the secular than they, but he would have it under more orthodox conditions. In the final analysis, the projectors of the magazine hoped to possess themselves of the secular literature of the age and to make it speak the language of truth.

Here, then, is an eloquent credo of desirable literary propaganda. In its two pages, the Manifesto reveals the essential principles for the effective reconciliation of art and Catholicism, for the integration of life and literature from the Christian point of view. The title "Merry England" was happily chosen to raise expectations for the restoration of the English language to its ancient glory as a medium for a Catholic people. It was the familiar symbol of a prototype of culture, charged with the aspirations of the Victorian search. For the little Catholic group rallied about it, this title recalled the lost secret of Catholic Tradition and all the harmonies that had been destroyed; it meant the revival of medieval

universalism which would reconcile the past and present, Jerusalem and Athens; it recognized the sacred appeal of art as the effective instrument of the Catholic missionary spirit to carry on the august methods of spreading Catholic culture. Then "Merry England" became the sign of a universal solution to a perennial problem.

The following chapter will attempt to illustrate to what extent the promises of the Manifesto have been fulfilled. The departments of philosophy, history, and sociology, reviving standards of Catholic life and culture, will be included as ancillary to creative literature and literary criticism.

## CHAPTER IV

## MERRY ENGLAND AND CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDA

A survey of the Merry England collection reveals the unity of purpose and the strength of hope, emphasized in the Manifesto, that "Modern England" might yet be a "Merry England". The reader finds evidence of a marked corporate endeavour, among the contributors, to answer the challenge of bringing the secular Victorian world into the fold of genuine Christian culture. Not only do the writers follow the trends of the century in its rediscovery of the purely cultural values of the medieval tradition, but they also bring to light the fact that medieval religion and philosophy nourished this culture. Torchbearers of the Catholic cultural tradition and trumpeters of hope, they see to it that the magazine be a worthy reminder of a once merry England:

[...] there are many to act as guides and to proclaim from the housetops how Merry England may again become something more than a name and a tradition of the past.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Anonymous, "Dreary London", in Merry England, Vol. 3, issue of Mar. 1884, p. 343-344.

## MERRY ENGLAND AND CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDA 98

## 1. General Picture

This illustrated monthly was meant "to provide for intelligent and educated readers a thoroughly good Catholic magazine abreast of the age in literary, artistic, and social attractions."<sup>1</sup> Each issue carries seventy or more pages. There is an initial article on current events, some outstanding national personage or an important movement of the epoch. Then, generally follows a short story, an item of historical interest or a bit of light fiction. An essay on architecture, painting or music enriches the subject matter. There is always a goodly share of literary criticism. An informal section, entitled "Reviews and Views", contains book notes, biographical incidents, essays in embryo on letters and painting, and other odds and ends to delight the hasty reader. "Reviews and Views" change from time to time to "Gesta Romanorum" or "Pulpit of Merry England". With this change the columns offer social and editorial paragraphs giving a clue to the mental and spiritual history of the Middle Ages. Later, these miscellaneous pages take on various titles: "Leaves from a Lady's Notebook", when the section is written by women, or "Obiter Dicta", editorial paragraphs on diverse subjects.

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<sup>1</sup> Anonymous, in Merry England, Vol. 18, issue of Nov. 1891, p. 241.

## MERRY ENGLAND AND CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDA 99

Merry England was used as a medium for the spread of works of art. Each number has a capital etching or an engraving as frontispiece. Full page illustrations accompany the historical sketches and articles in architecture and art. Volume XII introduces a Catholic Portrait Gallery including the figures of outstanding Catholic prelates or prominent lay contemporaries.

Investigation of the Merry England set of volumes brings forth the names of many famous Catholic personalities: Aubrey de Vere, Cardinal Manning, Coventry Patmore, Lionel Johnson, Katharine Tynan, Wilfrid Ward, Father Cuthbert, O.S.F.C., Hilaire Belloc, and Francis Thompson. The contributions are not limited to Catholic authors. The journal occasionally carries articles by non-Catholic writers: George Saintsbury, William R. Hudson, William Morris, C. Kegan Paul, Andrew Lang, and Richard D. Blackmore. Merry England was first of all an arena where young writers were tested and often brought to maturity. Both Hilaire Belloc and Lionel Johnson sent in contributions before they produced their first volumes. Katharine Tynan received public recognition and acclaim through its pages.

The main contributors are the editor, his wife, as co-editor, and Francis Thompson. They write sometimes under their own names, sometimes under common pseudonyms such as Francis Tancred and Francis Phillimore:

## MERRY ENGLAND AND CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDA 100

We had several pen names that were the common property of my dear wife, Francis Thompson, and (I blush to make the association) of myself [...]. My most frequent pen name was John Oldcastle, and when I edited and adopted two or three anonymous articles, published in Catholic magazines [...]. I gave them the signature A.C. Opie (which meant a copy). Thus did we amuse ourselves, thinking, not without reason, that readers would weary of the interminable repetition of our proper names.<sup>1</sup>

To this magazine which was his own from the very beginning, or rather, his and Mrs. Meynell's (for "they laboured together in a steady comradeship that involved at times the work of author, editor, and proof-reader as well"<sup>2</sup>) the editor contributed generously. Among the one hundred and two articles signed by him, not to mention the unsigned ones, we find historical topics, biographical sketches, literary criticism, short stories, and poetry. Mrs. Meynell freshens almost every one of the twelve years' monthly issues with the subtle comments of her prose, and, occasionally, with the "shy beginning of her second venture into poetry."<sup>3</sup> From 1888 to 1895, Francis Thompson gave to

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<sup>1</sup> Wilfrid Meynell, Letter written to Sister Angela Marie Mahoney, O.P., included in An Index of Articles in "Merry England" 1883-1895. A Classification Submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts Department of English of De Paul University, Chicago, Illinois, Aug. 1935, p. 110-111.

<sup>2</sup> Anne Kimball Tuell, Mrs. Meynell and Her Generation, New York, Dutton, 1925, p. 64.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 68.

## MERRY ENGLAND AND CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDA 101

the readers of Merry England nearly half a hundred poems together with an almost equal number of prose selections including essays, literary criticism, one short story, and the nucleus of "The Life of St. Ignatius Loyola".

To what extent the contributors strove to apply the universal integrating power of Christian humanism to the elements of secular culture is beautifully manifest in the several departments of the magazine. A revival of the standards of the medieval past blending artistically with the ideals of the Victorian era make for a reconciliation of the traditional and the modern, of the truly religious and the cultural.

## 2. The "Merry England" Tradition and Catholicism

1) True Medievalism.— Father Cuthbert's series of philosophical papers, expounding a balanced view of medievalism, are particularly appropriate to the distinctive features of the magazine. His timely articles unveil the false conceptions of modernism with regard to the relations of the Church and scholastic thought. Each paper points out a popular misconception of modern thought, explains its falsity, and reveals that the true answer of medievalism to the problems of the Victorian world is the answer of Catholicism. The real concept of medievalism, Father Cuthbert tells his readers, is to be found in

## MERRY ENGLAND AND CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDA 102

[...] a truthful and integral form of Christianity; and you cannot consistently deny this truthfulness without altogether rejecting Catholicism as a historical fact. But both devoted and bitterest foe have conjoined in falsifying its truth, and so have contributed in each to the present discontent against the Church of that period; and to appreciate the actual truth of medieval Christianity is the first step in the way of constructing the truth of the present.<sup>1</sup>

The error of those Catholic theologians and scientists, who, in their enthusiasm over the modern spirit, would dissociate Catholic truth from scholasticism, he explains, is due partly to their confounding a corrupted idea of scholasticism with its earlier and genuine creative thought, and partly from the subjective condition of the mind:

Scientific research, when not grasped by a powerful soul, has of its very nature a tendency to destroy catholicity or wholeness of spirit; and so too have systematizing philosophies. The very attempt at a universal solution of all truth, equally with the exclusive search after particular truth, inclines to limit thought—the receptivity of truth—and to narrow the moral sympathies which lead to truth. The adversaries of Catholicism are within the fold as well as without. It is not only the modern rationalist who fails to grasp its actual position and the meaning of its history; there is also the systematizer, who professes to be a votary of Catholic truth, and would yet reduce it to the terms of syllogism and the verbal accuracy of a formula, imagines he has sounded the depths of his Faith and made himself master of its domain.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Father Cuthbert, O.S.F.C., "The Idea of Medievalism", in Merry England, Vol. 18, issue of Apr. 1892, p. 264-267.

<sup>2</sup> -----, "Scholasticism and Modern Thought", in Merry England, Vol. 19, issue of May 1892, p. 47-64.

These false conceptions he attributes to a want of appreciation of scholastic development. He goes on to describe "scholasticism" as the pure understanding of Christian tradition which leads to a just appreciation of the significance of Christians. He then establishes a comparison between pagan and Christian thought as a basis for culture and art, showing the superiority of scholasticism over the ancient pagan philosophy.

In "Catholicism Past and Present", he shows how Catholicism may well be "an enigma and a contradiction to the outer world and to all who take the view of the outer world and look not within."<sup>1</sup> As a remedy, he recommends a reconciliation of tradition with the modern world: "The modern world is still in rebellion against the Past and as such can never be acknowledged by the Church and by Catholicism."<sup>2</sup> He finds hope in the fact that progress has begun along that line:

The influx of the World-life into Catholicism in the spirit of such men as J. H. Newman and the late Cardinal Archbishop Manning as of that later stream as yet unnamed but not unknown; and again in the awakening of the free spirit of Catholic democracy, has without doubt effected much.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> -----, "Catholicism Past and Present", in Merry England, Vol. 19, issue of June 1892, p. 84-104.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

"A Wayside Essay" reveals the urgent need of the spiritualization of religious life and thought:

The materialism of thought of the past centuries has acted fearfully like a sapping corrosion upon the moral life even of the professedly orthodox, degrading the moral instinct into an instinct of expediency seeking the reason of itself in the necessity of conventionalism rather than in the necessity of life.<sup>1</sup>

He continues: "a more spiritual religion must be founded in a more spiritual instinct of life and not in a more spiritual theory or idea." He goes on to explain that a spiritual understanding of the dogmas of Christianity as the supreme truths of life is the basic need for the right appreciation of religious social work.

Two other essays by Father Cuthbert are more distinctly Franciscan. In "Francis of Assisi, Saint and Reformer",<sup>2</sup> he sets forth the true principle of St. Francis's reform, that is, the spirit of universal brotherhood, based on a genuine principle of individualism, and then applies them to the need of his contemporary world. "A Phase of Medieval Life"<sup>3</sup> traces the revolt from Feudalism

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<sup>1</sup> -----, "A Wayside Essay", in Merry England, Vol. 20, issue of Nov. 1892, p. 9-13.

<sup>2</sup> -----, "Francis of Assisi, Saint and Reformer", in Merry England, Vol. 17, issue of Oct. 1891, p. 335-352.

<sup>3</sup> -----, "A Phase of Medieval Life", in Merry England, Vol. 18, issue of Jan. 1892, p. 173-188.

## MERRY ENGLAND AND CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDA 105

which culminated in the consecration of the individual freedom by the Franciscan Order.

Father Cuthbert would seem to appear as "philosopher and guide" of Merry England. His essays are representative of the basic philosophical principles and of the Franciscan note which pervade the several contributions of the magazine.

ii) National Culture and Catholic Tradition.— To present Catholicism as a cultural force, many an interesting serial about the rich and storied past and present are made to rescue the positive elements of Catholic history and restore them to life. This forms a solid mass of historical literature which shows the extent of the influence exerted by Catholic culture in the formation and development of the greatest traditions of English national history. Some of these serials are presented monthly over a period of a year or even longer. Such is the historical series about the "Monuments of England", treasures "Delved from Dugdale",<sup>1</sup> which traces the origin of most of the old religious houses in England from obscure tradition. It stresses the extent

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<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Vernon Blackburn, "Delved from Dugdale", in Merry England, Vol. 7, issue of Oct. 1886, p. 402-418; Vol. 8, issue of Nov. 1886, p. 40-49; Vol. 8, issue of Feb. 1887, p. 247-262; Vol. 9, issue of Aug. 1887, p. 191-199; Vol. 11, issue of Sept. 1888, p. 307-317; Vol. 20, issue of Feb. 1893, p. 245-262.

## MERRY ENGLAND AND CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDA 106

and character, the depth and continuance of Christian culture brought to England by the pioneer missionaries and developed under their direction.

Volume VIII introduces a most diverting series of manuscripts called "The Haycock Papers",<sup>1</sup> edited by Joseph Gillow, in which is given a concise record of the literary efforts, educational struggles, and the sufferings for religion's sake of the Catholics in England from the breach with Rome in 1534 to the late eighteen-eighties. These articles form an important contribution to the post-Reformation history of the Catholic Church in England.

In an extended appreciation of the "Gillow Papers", Rev. T. E. Bridgett comments on the special appropriateness of these pages in Merry England, associating the philosophy of happiness illustrated in the lives of the persecuted Catholics with that expounded in the policy of the magazine:

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Gillow, "The Haycock Papers", in Merry England, Vol. 8, issue of Nov. 1886, p. 50-61; issue of Dec. 1886, p. 118-123; issue of Feb. 1887, p. 275-290; issue of Mar. 1887, p. 354-362; issue of Apr. 1887, p. 412-431; issue of May 1887, p. 477-498; Vol. 9, issue of June 1887, p. 63-76; issue of Aug. 1887, p. 223-241; issue of Sept. 1887, p. 313-326; issue of Oct. 1887, p. 379-398; Vol. 10, issue of Nov. 1887, p. 451-464; issue of Dec. 1887, p. 521-528; issue of Jan. 1888, p. 597-608; issue of Feb. 1888, p. 662-678; issue of Mar. 1888, p. 736-746; issue of Apr. 1888, p. 808-818; Vol. 11, issue of May 1888, p. 57-66.

## MERRY ENGLAND AND CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDA 107

If prosperity or pleasure or abundant jokes were necessary for merriment, the majority of these victims of the Penal Laws would seem at first sight to have little in common with the name of this magazine. But if simple earnest hearts, good consciences, and a lively trust in God's providence, had anything to do with antique merriment, then the Catholics of England, since the schism, have retained in spite of persecutions their forefathers' character —no less than their religion. It is wonderful how little was needed to make happy and merry those great yet childlike hearts of the Middle Ages, and how hard it is to galvanize modern society into a smile.<sup>1</sup>

Among the "sufferers for conscience" which Mr. Gillow makes better known, Father Bridgett chooses Sir Thomas More as a "typical representative" of that group of persecuted individuals who were "merry, though their history dealt with fines, imprisonment, and even death."<sup>2</sup> This is the meaning which he would have his readers apply to the Middle Ages and the name of the magazine rather than having it connected, as was commonly done, "with May games and joyous pilgrimages and festive processions."

Always striving for Catholic recognition, Wilfrid Meynell brings new light on a "forgotten chapter" in the history of labour. To vindicate the work of the monks against a radical and unfair prejudice, he pays tribute to

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<sup>1</sup> Rev. T.E. Bridgett, C.S.S.R., "English Catholics", in Merry England, Vol. 8, issue of June 1886, p. 131-136.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

## MERRY ENGLAND AND CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDA 108

the earnest unselfish industry of the old monks in the days of monasticism when "much that was best and noblest in humanity found its highest expression in the single lives of the inhabitants of the cloister":

And that this truth of the dignity and nobility of work, which we are all insisting on now, and which makes a Carlyle hail with emphasis the British workman as his "horny-handed brother" was first made possible and taught, by the example of the inmates of the monasteries, is surely the strangest and most forgotten chapter in all the long story of human labour.<sup>1</sup>

Again, through numerous historical biographies, Maynell writes convincingly of men and women of note as of lesser figures of his own day. Thus, through brief sympathetic biography and more extended critical appraisal, he illumines the personality, achievement, and value to the Church and posterity of His Holiness Pope Leo XIII, Cardinal Newman, and Cardinal Manning, or of notable contemporary Catholic lay figures like William George Ward or the Duke of Norfolk. The important work of Cardinal Newman is commemorated in the issue of October 1885, on the fortieth anniversary of his conversion to the Catholic faith. The May 1886 issue records a complete copy of biographical data on Cardinal Manning to whose memory both the February and

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<sup>1</sup> Wilfrid Meynell, "Horny-Handed Brothers", in Merry England, Vol. 1, issue of June 1883, p. 173-182.

March 1892 numbers are also dedicated. The July 1887 issue contains the life and letters of His Holiness Pope Leo XIII, and is offered as a memorial edition. In "Forty Years Controversy", Meynell gives a brief and animated sketch of the career of Dr. William George Ward and his life of literary polemics. These sketches give light and colour to those heroic figures who upheld and carried on the Catholic tradition, and kept alive the Catholic faith.

The good work which Newman and Manning had done in diffusing a knowledge of the true relations of the Church to culture—generous patronage and encouragement, instead of supposed opposition—would, Meynell thought, be greatly furthered by the wide distribution of the information contained in Merry England with regard to the supremely helpful attitude of the Church towards the important social reforms and, especially, towards art and literature.

### 3. Sociology and Catholicism

i) Catholicism and the Social Order.— The impetus given to the action of the Catholic spirit upon social problems by the liberal, farsighted Cardinal Manning was accepted with devotion by many convert laymen, in particular, by Wilfrid Meynell who worked closely with him in the field of Catholic journalism. The prelate supported the Merry England periodical because the editor's purpose in founding

## MERRY ENGLAND AND CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDA 110

it was to put forward a Catholic social philosophy.

The articles on social reform illustrate Cardinal Manning's convictions that sociology and theology share a very real plan of interconnection. In the pages of Merry England, Catholicism offers many a solution to the social problems of the day. Sometimes, the Church gives a direct answer to a crucial question such as capitalism and the working class as in "The Church and the Workman".<sup>1</sup> In other cases, such as in that of the "Infant's Custody Act", 1893, Catholic principles enlighten the discussion on the rights of women in the education of the child, especially in matters of religion.<sup>2</sup>

Thompson's essay on General Booth's "In Darkest England and the Way Out", in which he speaks as a Catholic to Catholics, exemplifies the true Catholic approach to the Protestant philanthropy of later Victorian England. During the years 1885-1888, when he lived the life of a derelict in London, he became aware that the world of commercial materialism brutalized the minds and bodies of the silent, up-rooted thousands who inhabited the lower depths of London.

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<sup>1</sup> Alphonso Cardinal Capecelatro, "The Church and the Workman", in Merry England, Vol. 16, issue of June 1886, p. 229-340.

<sup>2</sup> J. F. Cox, "Mother and Child", in Merry England, Vol. 1, issue of June 1883, p. 225.

## MERRY ENGLAND AND CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDA 111

He viewed these conditions as ominous:

A region whose hedgerows have set to brick,  
 whose soil is chilled to stone; where flowers are  
 sold and women, where the men wither and the stars;  
 whose streets to me on the most glittering day are  
 black. For I unveil their secret meanings. I read  
 their human hieroglyphs. I diagnose from a hundred  
 occult signs the disease which perturbs their  
 populous pulses.<sup>1</sup>

He gives a detailed analysis of Booth's program of rehabilitation, relating the latter's debt and that of the Salvation Army to the spirit and teachings of St. Francis of Assisi. He clearly sees the effects of the proselytizing upon the Catholic poor. He suggests that any program might again be brought to effectiveness if it were less centralized, and if it were permeated with a religion that was brighter and more attractive than that of the Army seemed to be. He then proceeds to invoke the aid of the Franciscan Tertiaries for work among the slums summoning them to "active works of Charity", stirring them to courage in their faith:

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<sup>1</sup> Francis Tancred [Francis Thompson], "Catholics in Darkest England", in Merry England, Vol. 16, issue of Jan. 1891, p. 171.

## MERRY ENGLAND AND CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDA 112

Can men conjure in the ways of Booth, and not with the name of Manning? If they are shielded by the red jersey, you shall be shielded by the reflex of that princely red at Westminster. [...] What sword have they, but you have a keener? For blood and fire, gentle humility; for the joy of a religious alcoholism, the joy of that peace which passeth understanding; for the tumults, the depths of the spirit; for the discipline of trumpets, the discipline of the Sacraments; for the chiming of tambourines, Mary's name pensile like a bell-tongue in men's resonant souls; for hearts clashed open by a whirlwind, the soft summons of Him Who stands at the door and knocks. If with these you cannot conquer, then you could not with charriots and horsemen.<sup>1</sup>

At a moment when the problem of education in its relation to the Church and to the State was on the eve of some attempt at solution, Wilfrid Meynell had been requested to make a timely contribution to the controversy by a publication of the life of Blessed John Baptist de la Salle, founder of the free Elementary School. The composition of the monograph was entrusted to Francis Thompson who presented the Brothers of the Christian Schools as the ideal instruments at hand to apply the true principles of free education: "Free education is upon us; and here, in our midst, are the Free Educators". Thompson shows the need for this type of education as a solution to the social questions of the day:

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

## MERRY ENGLAND AND CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDA 113

No scheme, be it General Booth's or another's, will avail to save more than a fraction—may it be a large fraction!—out of that drift of adult misery wherewith the iniquitous neglect of our forefathers has encumbered the streets. But the children! There is the chance; there, alas, also is the fear! Think of it! If Christ stood amidst London slums, he could not say: 'Except ye become as these little children'. For better your children were cast from the bridged of London, then they should become as those little ones. Could they be gathered together and educated in the truest sense of the word; could the children of the nation at large be so educated as to cut off future recruits to the ranks of Darkest England; then it would need no astrology to cast the horoscope of to-morrow. "La tête de l'homme du peuple, or rather, de l'enfant du peuple—around that sways the conflict. Who grasps the child grasps the future.<sup>1</sup>

He extols the Congregation as an "Order of Schoolmasters [...] which ennobles and glorifies the teacher's calling by making it a religion."

The aim of the monograph, as defined by Thompson himself, could be applied to his preceding essay, "Catholics in Darkest England", as well as to the purpose of Merry England as a whole:

We are raising from the dust a fallen standard of Christianity: not in phrase merely, but in practice, not by lips only, but by lives also, we are re-affirming the Brotherhood of Man.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Francis Thompson, "The Life and Labor of Saint John Baptist de la Salle", in Merry England, Vol. 16, issue of Apr. 1891, p. 1-17.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

The timeliness of these contributions concerning the social order and their conformance to the authoritative principles of the Church may be inferred by reading them in the light of the following passage from the encyclical "Rerum Novarum" written by His Holiness Pope Leo XIII in May 1891. Concerned with the hostility of the two classes of society, the rich and the poor, His Holiness writes:

[...] if Christian precepts prevail, the two classes will not only be united in the bonds of friendship, but also in those of brotherly love. For they will understand and feel that all men are the children of the common Father, that is, of God; that all have the same end, which is God himself, [...] that all and each are redeemed by Jesus Christ, and raised to the dignity of children of God, and are thus united in brotherly ties both with each other and with Jesus Christ, the "first born among many brethren" [...] if society is to be cured now, in no other way can it be cured but by a return to the Christian life and Christian institutions.<sup>1</sup>

Although the theme of social reform was gradually diverted to give way to the more purely cultural aspects of the magazine, still we find a considerable number of articles asserting the basic principles of human liberty and happiness in conformance with "the rights of God and rights of man".

ii) Beauty and the Catholic Social Order.— The projectors of Merry England would seem to adopt the

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<sup>1</sup> Rev. Gerald C. Treacy, S.J., ed., Five Great Encyclicals, New York, Paulist Press, 1939, p. 12-13.

## MERRY ENGLAND AND CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDA 115

fundamental characteristic of Ruskin's preachments in their welding the influence of beauty into a doctrine of social values. A desire to find a place for beauty in everyday living appears as a conscious part of their plan for reform.

Quoting after Ruskin, "Faith cannot live in hideous towns," Wilfrid Meynell protests against the modern conditions that deprive the nation of its popular instinct for beauty:

A museum is the outcome of modern life, the confession of the deficient conditions of the modern world; its beautiful things are a deliberate excuse for general ugliness, its rarities a conscious apology for universal commonness, its unique things for the wholesale productions of the manufactory, its precious things for the enormous and vulgar cheapness of popular possessions. In a beautiful age there would be no museums, the streets would be the academies of architecture, the church and the home, the schools of sculpture and of painting; in its cottages would be studied the beauty of useful form finely adapted to the limitations and demands to invaluable material; in the palace would be the elegant line and the opulence of ornaments.<sup>1</sup>

This instinct he considers "infallible in all healthy young nations", and the loss of it, he concludes, can "only be atoned for by the processes of education."<sup>2</sup>

Education in art was meant not only to satisfy the social vogue for beauty in the "Haut monde" of society but

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<sup>1</sup> Wilfrid Meynell, "A Manchester Museum", in Merry England, Vol. 1, issue of Oct. 1883, p. 441-448.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

## MERRY ENGLAND AND CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDA 116

also to diffuse interest and appreciation over the general public, with particular concern for the whole Catholic body, both among the educated Catholics and the uneducated poor.

Mrs. Meynell deplores the fact that

[...] the Academy and the Grosvenor Gallery exhibited sketches and studies by the Old Master, which said much both to artists and public but said it explicitly to artists—vaguely to the public.<sup>1</sup>

She felt that the Victorian "decivilized in the matter of his ideals [...] should be instructed to find beauty in natural and human things [...] to appreciate the beauty of the mere truth."<sup>2</sup> Like Ruskin she believed that the beauty which is indeed to be a joy for ever, must be a joy for all.

Consequently, the promoters of the magazine could suggest no brighter remedy for the "ennui" that saddened English life than that of spreading everywhere the influence of beauty. We find a considerable number of articles by authorities on architectural subjects. In a series of critical and historical studies, George Aitchison, A.R.A., strives "to make the language of the living stone" understood by the people. In his contributions, Bernard Whelan stresses the important part the architect has to play

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<sup>1</sup> Alice Meynell, "George Clausen", R.A., in Merry England, Vol. 10, issue of Apr. 1888, p. 749-756.

<sup>2</sup> -----, "The Story of a Picture", in Merry England, Vol. 1, issue of July 1883, p. 189-196.

## MERRY ENGLAND AND CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDA 117

in the economy of every civilization. In a characteristic contribution entitled "The Medieval and the Modern Craftsman", a paper which had been read before the "Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings", William Morris invites his audience "to preserve what relics of the old order are yet left for the instruction, the pleasure, and the hope of the new".<sup>1</sup>

The section "Reviews and Views" is studded with paragraphs on art from the pen of Mrs. Meynell. She gives reports of lectures on painting given by Frederick Leighton, P.R.A., as well as reviews and criticism of the principal art exhibitions at the London galleries—the Royal Academy and Grosvenor. There are comments on the old as well as on the Victorian artists such as John Everett Millais, Sir Joshua Reynolds, and Edward Burne-Jones. Mrs. Meynell writes as an amateur on art. The close relationship of art to ordinary life is stressed. The emphasis is laid on the human beings who made the art and on those who viewed it. All the time she is getting at the principles which will give the general reader a love for and an understanding of the background of all that is most enduring in the arts.

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<sup>1</sup> William Morris, "The Medieval and the Modern Craftsman", in Merry England, Vol. 11, issue of May 1888, p. 62-67.

## 4. Theology and Literature

Selections chosen among the representative works of the three most influential writers of the magazine will suffice to illustrate their opinion on the interrelated aspects of a common theme—the reconciliation between literature and religion, between the creative imagination and the Christian faith.

In "How to Write Stories", addressed to those who rebelled against the doctrine of telling stories for a purpose, Alice Meynell displays her views on the problem of poetry and communication:

A life-time told briefly may serve many useful purposes but however eventful it may be, and however discreetly the events may be selected for influence, purpose and effect, the whole does not give us a short story written in artistic obedience to the necessities of its kind.<sup>1</sup>

Mrs. Meynell was aware of the distinction between the communicative effect and the aesthetic effect in a literary production:

It is a commonplace of minor criticism to condemn stories with a purpose. And for this we must blame the crowd of books that have a purpose and little else—books written with a great amount of inveterate sincerity, but without the literary accent of conviction; in fact without talent. For that lack there is no dispensation [...] Art [...] will not forgive a shortcoming in the one thing needful;<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Alice Meynell, "How to Write Stories", in Merry England, Vol. 11, issue of July 1888, p. 137-144.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

## MERRY ENGLAND AND CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDA 119

This view on literary theory compares favourably with Jacques Maritain's norms on the subject: "The greatest poets, and the most disinterested, the most 'gratuitous,' had some message for mankind."<sup>1</sup> And previously:

[...] the artist may work for any and every human intention he likes, but the work taken by itself must be performed and constructed for its own proper beauty alone.<sup>2</sup>

Thompson's views on the profound interrelations between theology and literature might be illustrated from two of his essays. Against the Victorian popular non-Catholic prejudice that Catholicism was inimical to culture, he has much to say on the contribution of religion to poetry, the help which religion is to art. The entire essay "Paganism Old and New" is a development of the thesis that the Christian religion has greatly magnified the beauty of poetry and the other arts. It ends with the conclusion:

[...] it would hardly be more than a pardonable exaggeration to call Christianity (in so far as it has influenced the arts) the religion of beauty, and Paganism the religion of form and sense.<sup>3</sup>

His essay "A Renegade Poet on the Poet" is an answer to the Catholic prejudice that poetry is evil:

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<sup>1</sup> Jacques Maritain, op. cit., p. 104.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>3</sup> Francis Thompson, "Paganism Old and New", in Merry England, Vol. 11, issue of June 1888, p. 99-105.

## MERRY ENGLAND AND CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDA 120

[...] poetry is the teacher of beauty; and without beauty men would soon lose the conception of a God, and exchange God for the devil: as indeed happens at this day among many savages where the worships of ugliness and of the devil flourish together. Whence it was, doubtless, that poetry and religion were of old so united, as is seen in the prophetic books of the Bible. Where men are not kept in mind of beauty they become lower than the beasts;...<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Maritain, quoting St. Thomas Aquinas, upholds the same principle:

Art is a fundamental necessity in the human state. 'No man,' says St. Thomas following Aristotle, 'can live without pleasure. Therefore a man deprived of the pleasures of the spirit goes over to the pleasures of the flesh'.<sup>2</sup>

Dealing with the function of the "true poet", Wilfrid Meynell states:

It is his part to give to language a new life, and in his keeping is the Living Word. By giving to his own unique experience a fitting expression, he does not merely use speech, he re-informs it. He gives his own heart to words, a new meaning to sound, so that, by a sort of anti-type of the Incarnation, his flesh becomes Word for the teaching of mankind.<sup>3</sup>

There would seem to be a close harmony of conception in Thompson's view on the subject:

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<sup>1</sup> -----, "A Renegade Poet on the Poet", in Merry England, Vol. 19, issue of June 1892, p. 164-166.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Maritain, op. cit., p. 62.

<sup>3</sup> Wilfrid Meynell, "A New Poet", in Merry England, Vol. 22, issue of Nov, 1893, p. 1-10.

## MERRY ENGLAND AND CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDA 121

Theology and philosophy are the soul of truth; but they must be clothed with flesh, to create an organism which can come down and live among men. Therefore Christ became incarnate, to create Christianity. Be it spoken with reverence, a great poet, for example, who is likewise a great thinker, does for truth what Christ did for God, the Supreme Truth.<sup>1</sup>

In the same essay Thompson goes to the root of the problem on the interrelationship of religion and literature.

Treating of man's desire for religion without the form of religion, he uses Ruskin as example because "his words represent not mere Protestant prejudice, but the current secular prejudice of the age."<sup>2</sup> Of Ruskin he says:

He desires life, in fact, to be religious without the form of religion; even as, in his own later tendencies, he has apparently aimed to be a Catholic without Catholic belief. One sees this revolt from form, with its inevitable consequences, in his teaching and his thought.<sup>3</sup>

After dealing with Ruskin, he addresses the men of his day with a strong eulogy on the inherent perfection of the form existing in the Catholic Church. He upholds the orthodoxy of the Church which adapts itself to changing conditions, yet does so without changing its essential nature and dogma:

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<sup>1</sup> Francis Thompson, "Form and Formalism", in Franciscan Annals, Vol. 8, issue of March 1893, p. 71-76.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

## MERRY ENGLAND AND CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDA 122

What, you builders of futurity! You have life, yet not form? Such thing is not known to man as life without form. To avoid formalism by destroying form, is to remedy carnality by committing suicide. You have the spirit freed from the letter then, with a vengeance; but the spirit, somehow, no longer quickens. Yet may not form change? Yes, in so far as the life changes, not otherwise. The Church is like man's body: which grows to completion altering or adding a little in superficialities and details of figure, but unchanging in essential line and structure. Each bone, muscle, nerve, and blood-vessel, though it have increase is in form, position, and constitution immutable. And with the Church, also, which is Christ's body, you may add in non-essentials, you may develop in essentials; but you shall not alter in essentials by so much as a clause of its dogmatic theology. 'That the Scripture may be fulfilled: You shall not break a bone of Him.'<sup>1</sup>

The principles of literary theory brought forward in the preceding examples include the religious and philosophical elements as the essential attributes of true greatness in literature. Literary practice dominated by these theoretical views can be recognized in the pioneer efforts of the makers of Merry England earnestly seeking a frame for traditional values in the popular literary forms.

i) The Essay.— A variety of distinguished essays from the pen of Mrs. Meynell, sometimes reprints from the Pall Mall Gazette, or, more frequently, articles printed for the first time in Merry England, appear regularly in the pages of the magazine. Of religion itself Mrs. Meynell's prose says little. Yet, as Katherine Brégy

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

## MERRY ENGLAND AND CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDA 123

intimates, "the whole science of the saints rests by implication within her pages."<sup>1</sup> This was part of her broad Catholic intent to bring the English nation to Catholicism as well as to make her reader "a little more a citizen of the world".

Mrs. Meynell is at her best in her characteristic form which she called "commentaries", that is, the more liberal essay where criticism is of life, rather than of letters. These are full of profound searching sensitive appreciations on all kinds of subjects with preferences for the most humble people and things of life. Her frequent theme is "provincialism". An article on "Hobbies", one of the series of "Bogies of Provincial Life", reveals the customs of the dwellers in the great metropolis, who, she shows clearly enough, surround themselves with an atmosphere of provincialism and their hobbies, in a circle as restricted and as narrow "as in the most secluded village". To be of the province, is, by her definition, "to live, anywhere, in a little village of the mind herded with others like ourselves, with the same type of thought, the same standards as ourselves" [...]. "Be of the centre", she insists, "where ideas meet and mingle".<sup>2</sup> Liberality is the

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<sup>1</sup> Katherine Brégy, The Poets' Chantry, London, Herbert and Daniel, 1912, p. 164.

<sup>2</sup> Alice Meynell, "Bogies of Provincial Life", in Merry England, Vol. 1, issue of Sept. 1893, p. 385-390; issue of Oct. 1893, p. 464-468.

## MERRY ENGLAND AND CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDA 124

special mark of her early journalism. She was liberal in freedom from prejudice in her consideration of religion as well as of literature. Although Catholic at heart, in all her reflections she had a deep appreciation for religious values within the Church of England. If controversy comes, she used to bid, let it be instructed, avoiding what she named "the uneasy certainties of bigotry". The Catholic faith could well be confident, she thought, in its great heritage of traditional truth.

This theme finds a broader application in one of her representative essays, "For Faith and Science", which expresses her keen appreciation of St. George Mivart's services to science and religion. In addition to being a biologist, he was a staunch Catholic. She warns against contempt, and calls for tenderness and pity for those who have gone astray in the complicated mazes of the modern mind, misled "by a wrong reading of the records written by the Creator Himself in the signs of His world and the bones of His creatures." She insists that the day is past when the questionings of the "Positivist, the Evolutionist, the Pessimist are to be met by a passing pulpit allusion, by the stolid and cheerful severities of readymade polemics." She praises Mivart's noble efforts to enlighten Victorian thought. She upholds his attitude when he warns his readers against "the common ingratitude for a gaiety that

overspreads the whole teeming, flowering, devouring world of life--the world where there are for a moment of dying, countless moments of happy living." Then follows, as usual, what Meredith called her "veritable little sermons": "No more than George Eliot does he offer an anaesthetics to the soul called upon to endure. With her, he acknowledges: 'It is no wonder that mankind needs a suffering God;' but he presents that suffering God to our sweetness, our sympathy, and happier obedience."<sup>1</sup>

Gems of brilliant thought scattered in the recommendations of her prose give the reader both pleasure and food for meditation. Her charming article on the Carlyle home, ironically entitled "Lovely and Pleasant in Their Lives", is a call to revive the national ideal of the home: "We all live in the presence of some ideal; if the ideal is our own and judges us from our own conscience, we shall live altogether nobly."<sup>2</sup> And again: "If religion is to be old and secure and life mysterious still among disillusionings, and young and fresh at the hour of our death,

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<sup>1</sup> Alice Meynell, "For Faith and Science", in Merry England, Vol. 5, issue of Sept. 1885, p. 285-293.

<sup>2</sup> -----, "Lovely and Pleasant in their Lives", in Merry England, Vol. 1, issue of June 1883, p. 108-113.

memories of the four Gospels must stand."<sup>1</sup> Warning against dullness: "There should be nothing habitual at all in literature, as there must not be in prayer; every movement should have a special intention, an impulse to itself, a separate thought."<sup>2</sup> Many other such examples could be brought as evidence to justify Katherine Brégy's estimate of Alice Meynell's works. Borrowing Pater's words Miss Brégy says: 'To treat life in the spirit of art [...] is not far from the kingdom of Heaven, since the ultimate artist is God alone.'<sup>3</sup>

Coventry Patmore wrote but sparingly for Merry England. His friendship with the Meynells was not established until 1892.<sup>4</sup> After Mrs. Meynell had written an article on Patmore's poetry in the National Observer, mutual appreciation of each other's work paved the way for the warm friendship which ensued. Patmore soon became a frequent visitor at Palace Court, and became increasingly aware of

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<sup>1</sup> -----, "Out of Munich", in Merry England, Vol. 14, issue of Apr. 1890, p. 391-397.

<sup>2</sup> -----, "Anthony Trollope", in Merry England, Vol. 2, issue of Nov. 1883, p. 12-22.

<sup>3</sup> Katherine Brégy, op. cit., p. 171.

<sup>4</sup> Basil Champneys, Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore, in 2 volumes, London, George Bell, 1900, p. 344.

## MERRY ENGLAND AND CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDA 127

the intensity of the Meynell work. This led him to offer assistance. He wrote:

My dear Wilfrid,

You and Alice must find it very hard to get on with your next numbers of your two periodicals. It had struck me that I might help you by sending a little article for the next number of Merry England if it is not too late.<sup>1</sup>

The article appeared in the next issue of the magazine.

Oddly enough, this essay had a direct bearing on a commonly made criticism of his own work. Patmore's works were generally recognized as deep, obscure, intricate, difficult to read. "He is at once one of the most popular and one of the least popular of the living poets."<sup>2</sup> Perhaps the author was aware of this censure of his writing when he wrote:

The greatest of all advantages of reading books we cannot wholly understand is the advantage of keeping company with the intellectually great, apart from any specific and tangible acquisition of knowledge.<sup>3</sup>

Patmore scorned the literary ignorance and slovenliness of his age. He excoriated the younger critics of the late Victorian era:

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<sup>1</sup> Derek Patmore, Portrait of My Family, London, Cassell, 1935, p. 212.

<sup>2</sup> Alice Meynell, "Twixt Anacreon and Plato", in Merry England, Vol. 6, issue of Dec. 1885, p. 69-80.

<sup>3</sup> Coventry Patmore, "On Obscure Books", in Merry England, Vol. 20, issue of Dec. 1892, p. 83-86.

## MERRY ENGLAND AND CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDA 128

Were the "Divine Comedy" to appear for the first time now, it could never be heard of except in the small-type notices of the literary papers, in which the young man who criticizes poetry, because he has not learned to do anything else, would hasten to avail himself of so rare an opportunity of being funny.<sup>1</sup>

Again, in the same essay we read:

[...] there is almost a complete lack of men of letters. We have only newspapers, magazine and book sellers, hacks clever enough indeed, but without insight, character, or any care for a desire to propagate a knowledge of the true realities and delights of life.<sup>2</sup>

ii) Literary Criticism.— Mrs. Meynell's most important work for Merry England is unquestionably her literary criticism. Almost each number carries some review of the works of a contemporary writer, more often chosen from the non-Catholic world. Praise and censure are meted out without respect of persons. Speaking of George Eliot she remarks:

As the most concentrated in manner and matter George Eliot will be curiously read in the dilution of her letters and her journal. She rejected much and her literature was what literature should be, the double cream of her thought.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Coventry Patmore, "Attention", in Merry England, Vol. 20, issue of Nov. 1892, p. 4-8.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Alice Meynell, "George Eliot", in Merry England, Vol. 4, issue of Mar. 1886, p. 293-298.

## MERRY ENGLAND AND CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDA 129

A favourable criticism of Barrack Room Ballads closes with Mrs. Meynell's usual calm a bit ruffled:

Mr. Rudyard Kipling's hearing and seeing, and smelling are one with his word which proves him a true writer, but there are some words that are to be formed, as the right ultimate of a man's art, but not to be communicated.<sup>1</sup>

An open mind and fearless soul marks this entire selection. The literary critic does not always commend. Speaking of Charles Reade, she writes:

His originality was a little too intentional to be convincing. His was, indeed, not a literary style at all. It was the narrative manner of an excitable and exciting raconteur.<sup>2</sup>

In "Reviews and Views", her criticism appears as casual, suggestive bits of wisdom. They reveal her opinion of the Victorian writers: Arnold, Browning, the Carlyles, Swinburne, and Meredith are among the many who are discussed in these attractive sections. "Mr. Meredith's note is at times excessively beautiful, always interesting and always significant",<sup>3</sup> she writes, when reviewing a volume of his poetry. In a discussion of Carlyle's

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1 -----, "The Soldier's Poet", in Merry England, Vol. 20, issue of Apr. 1893, p. 442-449.

2 -----, "Charles Reade", in Merry England, Vol. 3, issue of May 1884, p. 18-21.

3 -----, "Reviews and Views", in Merry England, Vol. 1, issue of Aug. 1883, p. 316.

## MERRY ENGLAND AND CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDA 130

reminiscences, which bear the title "Jane Welsh Carlyle", she prophesies on Carlyle's influence:

[...] his influence will rise or ebb with the teaching of Schopenhauer. There is a dreadful secret which has been whispered between Carlyle and the thinkers of our day—it was the only thing he whispered and did not shout—and its name is Pessimism. It weighed upon his common complex heart; he is profoundly pathetic in some moments of intimate despondency; and long after the mischief he did to the English language and to the national notion of right and wrong has passed away his sigh will still, one cannot but fear, be finding echoes.<sup>1</sup>

A study of Thompson's contributions to Merry England in the field of literary criticism could add an important chapter to the history of Victorian literary opinion: Bunyan, Crashaw, Rossetti, Shelley, Coleridge, Shakespeare, Gray, Pope, and Spenser are in turn the subject of his criticism. Some of these works have been reprinted in the volume of prose edited by Wilfrid Meynell.<sup>2</sup> Others are found in Literary Criticisms by Francis Thompson edited by Rev. Terence L. Connolly, S.J. A few are still uncollected. The singular appropriateness of this criticism in Merry England, and its value in an "age of clashing theories in

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<sup>1</sup> -----, "Reviews and Views", in Merry England, Vol. 1, issue of June 1883, p. 85.

<sup>2</sup> Wilfrid Meynell, ed., The Works of Francis Thompson, London, Burns Oates, 1913, Vol. 3.

## MERRY ENGLAND AND CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDA 131

literature, art, or religion", may be inferred from Father Connolly's estimate of the writer:

As a critic, his was the art that conceals art. Never obtruding his principles unnecessarily; seldom, even explicitly invoking them, his criticism was completely permeated with them. To borrow his own metaphor, the dry bones of philosophy and dogma were the skeleton of his work, and in criticism, as in poetry, he clothed this skeleton with the flesh and blood of his artistry and breathed into it the living soul of Truth.<sup>1</sup>

iii) Fiction.— The fiction of the magazine is confined to a complete short story published every month. Stories illustrative of high ideals, of morality and good manners become a framework for principles which make for Catholic belief, sound opinion and sentiments, and a wholesome approach to human relationships.

Alice Corkran was the first contributor of short stories in Merry England. According to Mrs. Meynell, she held "a distinct, if not a unique place among English contemporary authors as a writer of short stories."<sup>2</sup> One of her best contributions is "Miss Martha's Bag".<sup>3</sup> It is one of her characteristic stories with a purpose. "The

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<sup>1</sup> Rev. Terence L. Connolly, S.J., Literary Criticism by Francis Thompson, p. ix.

<sup>2</sup> Alice Meynell, "How to Write Stories", op. cit.

<sup>3</sup> Alice Corkran, "Miss Martha's Bag", in Merry England, Vol. 1, issue of May 1883, p. 52-68.

## MERRY ENGLAND AND CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDA 132

Young Philistine",<sup>1</sup> a serial, reveals her weakness of style:

Here there is a little of the exaggeration of the ordinary story-teller, the exaggeration which seems inevitable on the English stage, but which is out of accord with Miss Corkran's life-like moderation.<sup>2</sup>

Clara Mulholland, who succeeded Alice Corkran, excelled the latter in style. Her stories reveal a deep insight into character and a warm love for England and the English people.<sup>3</sup>

Katharine Tynan's short stories, such as "Shameen", portray the strong spirit of Irish loyalty and love of country. There are fine examples of her characteristic themes and accurate character portrayal:

Purity she was; she was like a little wisp of thistledown, so light, and airy she was, an' her face was as innocent as a daisy, an' soft an' pale an' set in hair like fine gold. She was delicate-lookin' an' yet wholesome.<sup>4</sup>

Franciscan sympathies dominated much of her later work. These are perceived in her love of nature and of little

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<sup>1</sup> -----, "A Young Philistine", in Merry England, Vol. 5, issue of Aug. 1885, p. 243-259; issue of Sept. 1885, p. 306-323.

<sup>2</sup> Alice Meynell, op. cit.

<sup>3</sup> Clara Mulholland, "Molly's Aversion", in Merry England, Vol. 8, issue of Dec. 1886, p. 16-39.

<sup>4</sup> Katharine Tynan, "Shameen", in Merry England, Vol. 20, issue of April 1893, p. 479-484.

## MERRY ENGLAND AND CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDA 133

children as well as in her interest in the childhood of Christ. The following description is consonant with these sympathies:

Roses in all colours, from tiny close white things, nine or ten on a spray, through all the gamut of yellow, pink, rose, red, and velvety darkness that is almost black [...] The roses are over the house and in the beds, but the house ends are flanked by huge hollyhocks.<sup>1</sup>

An understanding of the poor and suffering could alone have prompted this picture of a dear old lady who had lost her only son:

If she cried, it was when alone; and I think she must have cried a great deal, for she became in time, more than half blind, and her eyes had a pale look, as if the colour were washed away.<sup>2</sup>

Without touching upon the deeper aspects of Catholicism, she has given the religious conception of the common people of Ireland, with its simplicity, its complete surrender to the emotions of sympathy and wonder.

Mr. Wilfrid Meynell did some significant work in the field of short-story writing. Many historical incidents were woven into tales. "A Soldier of Fortune and of Faith",<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Wilfrid Meynell, "A Soldier of Fortune and of Faith", in Merry England, Vol. 2, issue of Feb. 1884, p. 213-223.

## MERRY ENGLAND AND CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDA 134

the story of Charles Gordon, to whom the English Government had confided the task of restoring peace to the Soudan, furnishes splendid story material. Meynell passes very lightly on what may be counted the achievement of General Gordon's life, sets himself to sketch the character of the man, and lays bare those spiritual impulses which have made him what he was. Although he was not a Catholic, Meynell suggests, this general exemplified in his actions and conversations a most remarkable spirit of Christianity. Very interestingly woven into a story is the series of delightful letters between Thomas More and his daughter Meg.<sup>1</sup> Here are revealed the Saint's tender love for his children, his high esteem for the education of woman, his sincere loyalty to his earthly king, and his absolute allegiance to his Heavenly King. A contemporaneous issue of The Tablet gave remarkable credit to this "monography of letter-writing" which it esteemed "worthy to take its place among the material of some coming life of Blessed More".<sup>2</sup>

Among the local-colour story writers of Merry England was Kate Douglas King. Her experience while working in the

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<sup>1</sup> -----, "The Women of the More Family", in Merry England, Vol. 8, issue of Mar. 1887, p. 291-318.

<sup>2</sup> Anonymous, "Merry England", in The Tablet, Vol. 17, issue of Mar. 12, 1887, p. 410.

## MERRY ENGLAND AND CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDA 135

East End of London supplied her with a familiar background and setting. The reader is transported to the slum districts, where he meets the most impoverished people of the city, where he witnesses the direct conditions of malnutrition, family neglect, and brutal treatment of little ones. The public must have eagerly awaited the issues of such serials as "The Love-Tale of Leland Jeffries",<sup>1</sup> or "The Romance of a Sackmaker".<sup>2</sup> More poignant than either of these are "A Little Black Sheep"<sup>3</sup> and "Danny", both of which are narrated with vividness and intensity, yet with sufficient emotional restraint to prevent them from deteriorating into sentimentalism. Mrs. King had the art of depicting childhood:

Two little feet, pattering here, there, and everywhere; two long, lean legs, a belted dressing-gown; two gleaming green and black eyes and a closely-cropped head; this was Danny.<sup>4</sup>

Or again:

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<sup>1</sup> Kate Douglas King, "The Love Tale of Leland Jeffries", in Merry England, Vol. 21, issue of June 1893, p. 104-124; issue of July 1893, p. 174-201.

<sup>2</sup> -----, "The Romance of a Sackmaker", in Merry England, Vol. 22, issue of May 1894, p. 349-361; issue of Apr. 1894, p. 445-457.

<sup>3</sup> -----, "A Little Black Sheep", in Merry England Vol. 24, issue of Nov. 1894, p. 23-26.

<sup>4</sup> -----, "Danny", in Merry England, Vol. 22, issue of 1894, p. 37-42.

## MERRY ENGLAND AND CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDA 136

I know now, exactly all that is really matter to know, to know, in the whole whole world because I know what the real worth of everything is. And it is being eight years old that has made me know.<sup>1</sup>

"Danny" is the story of a gentle, lovable dear little tot of three who meets his death by drowning while trying to save his little friends.

Hilaire Belloc made his literary début in the pages of Merry England with the contribution of a short story. He was at that time but a lad of eighteen whose schooling had been interrupted a year before that he might serve a term in the French artillery. Probably this interval in the service showed its first literary fruit in the short story "Buzenal" which was printed in the May 1888 issue of the magazine. The story has its setting in France of 1870. Its theme is the age-old love triangle, but its style is unusually fine. The potential writer paints vividly:

[...] the last house stands on your left, a little cottage, thatched, green with moss, and with everything about it to match: an old gate, a very old apple tree; a plot behind the house in the open plain, which had belonged to the cottage forever so long and, to give life, to the picture, an old woman in a red handkerchief by way of cap, placed there perhaps to give colour and a point of light—I do not know...<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Hilairy Belloc, "Buzenal", in Merry England, Vol. 11, issue of May 1888, p. 37-56.

## MERRY ENGLAND AND CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDA 137

The discerning reader will note here something of promise and expectancy. Future years proved the work of the novice of 1888. The same story carries a shrewd statement which is almost ironical in the light of Mr. Belloc's later reputation as an historian. "History has been called distilled falsehood".<sup>1</sup>

At intervals, American authors contributed to the journal. Mary Agnes Tincker, a New Englander and convert, sent monthly stories for more than two years. One serial, "Daybreak"<sup>2</sup>, is a miniature novel with sustained plot. It features a convert to the Catholic faith whose devotion to her new-found source of strength made her a lay apostle in the Protestant family with whom she lived. Miss Tincker's best short stories, set against a New England background, picture the reaction of the sombre provincial Puritan to the joyous ideals of Catholicism.<sup>3</sup>

iv) Poetry.— The poetry of the magazine, all the way from the lilting lyric in light vein to the magnificent

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> M. A. Tincker, "Daybreak", in Merry England, Vol. 13, issue of May 1889, p. 4-30; issue of June 1889, p. 80-109; issue of July 1889, p. 149-175; issue of Aug. 1889, p. 233-257; issue of Sept. 1889, p. 325-353.

<sup>3</sup> -----, "Christmas Incident", in Merry England, Vol. 8, issue of Dec. 1886, p. 83-96.

## MERRY ENGLAND AND CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDA 138

ode "The Hound of Heaven", possesses, in varying degrees, the essential marks by which we may recognize the "Merry England" tradition.

The full appreciation of the central fact of true religion—the Incarnation of the Son of God—and of all its implications had produced the glorious Middle Ages. The gift of renewed inspiration among the nineteenth-century Catholic poets was based on this awareness of the Incarnational fact, "of the descent of the supernatural into the world in the reality of Christ". The principles of medieval Christian humanism applied to the Victorian trends of life and literature produced the characteristic themes and manner of treatment common to both periods. The chivalrous cult of womanhood is tempered by the Catholic devotion to the Mother of God. The praise of childhood is enhanced by the childhood of Christ. Honour is due to all men because man has been reborn through an Incarnation and Redemption. Love and friendship take their meaning in Christ, our Brother. A sacramental view of nature is based on the fact that this is God's world. There is that peculiar Franciscan vision of the universe that sees the natural quite "naturally" crowned by the supernatural, that realizes the divine at work in the human.

In fact, the spirit of St. Francis looms large in the pages of the magazine. The note of true joy entered

## MERRY ENGLAND AND CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDA 139

again in English literature with the poetry of those converts who had found reason to hope in a return to a life of faith and Charity. The writers of Merry England recollected that the joy and gladness of human life should be as well represented as the other elements of daily experience. The first poem of the opening number strikes a note of genuine cheerfulness which is sustained throughout the several issues:

I am come to my favourite acacia,  
                   if you please;  
 With a whistle, and a chuckle,  
                   and a rustle of my wings;  
 I am not in a hurry,  
                   but intend to sing at ease,  
 Of the flowers, and the weather,  
                   and a world of other things.  
 Whistle, merry birdie, whistle,  
                   while you whistle may:  
 I would not live in London Town  
                   for a thousand pounds a day.<sup>1</sup>

There is a touch of Chaucer's lyricism in this outburst of gladness inspired by fine weather, bird notes, and colourful flowers.

Lyricism and song find their way in Katharine Tynan's contributions. Her works treat of various subjects but all have that joyful, light-hearted spirit emanating from her earlier poetry. Her optimism and gaiety impart

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<sup>1</sup> Richard D. Blackmore, "Blackbird", in Merry England, Vol. 1, issue of May 1883, p. 11.

## MERRY ENGLAND AND CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDA 140

freshness and spontaneity to her poems. How often she sings of April, of May, of budding flowers, of winter's edge, and spring's beginning:

The Spring comes slowly up this way!  
She hath delicious things to say.

.....  
The Spring comes slowly up this way  
To make the world high holiday.<sup>1</sup>

A tone of longing prevails in another lilting poem:

Sing out, o blackbird, my king,  
My heart is sick for the Spring  
And O, the drenching grey weather  
With April half through her, tether,  
And May on the wing!

.....  
The thrush has got a new lover  
But o my kind Winter that's over!  
The summer is near!<sup>2</sup>

There is the charming Franciscan note in the following lines:

O, little ass and ox, in truth  
Great glory shall acerue to both,  
For when the cold world lay in sloth  
Ye kept the watch with joy.  
And by your breath the frosts were thawed,  
Your kind brown eyes saw and were awed,  
King of the world, the Angel's God,  
And mine own new-born Boy.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Katharine Tynan, "A New Old Song", in Merry England, Vol. 17, issue of May 1891, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> -----, "Nativity", in Merry England, Vol. 20, issue of Jan. 1893, p. 163-171.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

## MERRY ENGLAND AND CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDA 141

The poetic play about Our Lord's birth from which these lines are taken, is naive, artistic, and devout. Although it is written in dialogue, its strength is in its lyricism and in the human qualities revealed by the shepherds and Our Lady. The closing passage, reminiscent of Irish hospitality, has Our Lady gently bidding farewell to the Kings and shepherds:

Kind gentlefolk, who come to seek  
My little Son, new-born and weak,  
I thank you, since He cannot speak,  
And lift His Hand to bless.

.....  
At in-going and out-coming  
And on your homeward way faring,  
And wife and wean and everything  
Ye hold in tenderness.

.....  
Be free from woe, wher'er you go  
Kind gentlefolk, that honor so  
The Babe that came in frost and snow,  
He bids ye go in peace.<sup>1</sup>

Aubrey de Vere, the dean of Victorian Catholic poets, wrote a poem for one of the first issues of Merry England.

"Line to an Old Larch-Tree at Curragh Chase" recalls the author's birthplace and childhood:

What secret spell hath bound me to this spot  
Thus long,

This poem might be given as an example of his "attempt towards a Christian rendering of external nature":

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

## MERRY ENGLAND AND CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDA 142

I see that glimmering forehead eastward bowed;  
 I see thee stretching forth thy thousand hands  
 In Eastward adoration.<sup>1</sup>

Young Lionel Johnson, not yet a member of the Catholic Church, sent a splendid contribution to the miscellany. It was a poem inspired by his listening to the litany of Our Lady as it was being sung in the Church of St. Aloysius. This prayerful lyric wells from the heart of a lad of twenty who was soon to become one of Christ's fold. He addresses Our Lady as his friend and familiar:

Ah Mother, whom with many names one name  
 By love of love that cannot light on one  
 That without shame  
 Should give Thee as Thou art, not leave undone  
 Thy chiefest excellence.

To thee our music flows  
 That makes music for us to Thy Son  
 Ah, when the shadows come  
 Laden with all the continuances of fear  
 Ah, Mary, lead us home.<sup>2</sup>

The poem was entitled: "Lines: Written by a Protestant on Hearing for the First Time the Litany of Loretto Sung in the Church of St. Aloysius, Oxford". Johnson later changed the title of this poem to "A Descant Upon the Litany of Loretto",

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<sup>1</sup> Aubrey de Vere, "Lines to an Old Larch-Tree at Curragh Chase", in Merry England, Vol. 1, issue of June 1883, p. 334.

<sup>2</sup> Lionel Johnson, "Lines: Written by a Protestant on Hearing for the First Time the Litany of Loretto Sung in the Church of St. Aloysius, Oxford", in Merry England, Vol. 9, issue of Oct. 1887, p. 376-378.

## MERRY ENGLAND AND CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDA 143

and it is thus that it appears in the collected works.<sup>1</sup>

Two short lyrics were contributed to the magazine by Hilaire Belloc. "A Little Blue Bird"<sup>2</sup> is the revelation of a would-be-poet's soul, the desire of a singer to imitate the art of the bird. The young Greek student, envying the bard of old, reveals himself in the lyric "Homer":

[...] thou brought'st the far times near  
And sang'st the battle sound, the hollow pipe,  
The while Odysseus bent his hoary head to hear.<sup>3</sup>

At the time of this writing, Belloc had anglicized his name and was spelling it "Hilary".

Mr. Meynell was not primarily a poet, as he himself would have been the first to assert:

For all my life I loved the Muse,  
But never found her kind and willing.<sup>4</sup>

In his modesty, he attributed his capability in this type of writing to his wife:

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<sup>1</sup> Wilfrid Meynell, ed., The Religious Poems of Lionel Johnson, London, Burns Oates, 1916, p. 35.

<sup>2</sup> Hilary Belloc, "A Little Blue Bird", in Merry England, Vol. 11, issue of Sept. 1888, p. 318.

<sup>3</sup> -----, "Homer", in Merry England, Vol. 11, issue of Oct. 1888, p. 129.

<sup>4</sup> Wilfrid Meynell, "Introduction" to Verses and Reverses, London, Herbert and Daniel, 1910, p. iii.

## MERRY ENGLAND AND CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDA 144

He tried to fly, but had no wings,  
 And yet his heart avers  
 That all his poor reversing things,  
 Reversing still are Hers.<sup>1</sup>

Yet many of the poems and verses which he wrote for the various issues of his magazine displayed a depth of thought and distinct cadence. His poems sing of love and beauty and childhood in a spirit of religion such as he rejoiced to disseminate. An oft-heard truth is given a new turn in the following:

You mother every human babe  
 And beast and bird;  
 And is another's soul dismayed,  
 Your own is stirred.

.....  
 Ah, gentle wife, you grieve amiss,  
 And waste love-labour  
 You are yourself remember this  
 Your nearest neighbour.<sup>2</sup>

This depth of feeling for his "dear Alicia" is seen in every phrase of Mr. Meynell's words:

O sweet my wife, in my deep heart  
 As pearl of flower, you're set apart.  
 In women, lovers find who seek  
 The type and yet the true unique.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> John Oldcastle (Wilfrid Meynell), "Love Thy Neighbour", in Merry England, Vol. 21, issue of July 1893, p. 218.

<sup>3</sup> -----, "The Unique", in Merry England, Vol. 17, issue of Aug. 1891, p. 234.

## MERRY ENGLAND AND CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDA 145

His chivalry towards women finds delicate and decisive expression over and over again in his works:

Two million women in one place  
The City's citadel of grace  
My London, this shall be thy pride,  
That these within thy bounds abide.<sup>1</sup>

A merry mood, a fun-loving spirit, and a playful attitude became this genial editor much more than a serious vein:

She said, "Time's fleet". And  
I, "O Sweet,  
It spares your beauty's glory!"  
But she: "Alas! my looking-glass  
Tells me another story."

.....  
"My heaven's fixed star, O  
friend, you are:—  
The youngest of young lovers."  
Sighed she: "Alack! my almanac  
The plainer truth discovers."

.....  
Sweet wife, Life's lies cheat  
not Love's eyes  
Love's eyes alone discern.  
Their verdict take: your mirror break  
Your calendar go burn.<sup>2</sup>

Mr. Meynell's poetry was at times nothing more than a useful "commodity for filling up space when the article did not quite reach to the bottom of the column."<sup>3</sup> It

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<sup>1</sup> -----, "London Pride", in Merry England, Vol. 7, issue of June 1886, p. 146.

<sup>2</sup> -----, "Husband and Wife", in Merry England, Vol. 16, issue of Jan. 1891, p. 241.

<sup>3</sup> Theodore Maynard, The World I Saw, Milwaukee, Bruce, 1938, p. 195.

## MERRY ENGLAND AND CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDA 146

gives an insight into the ideals of a benign man who wrote as he lived, without ostentation, simply, merrily, and honorably.

Mrs. Meynell contributed some ten poems to the magazine. These were not representative of her best poetry. Only one, published as the closing item of the final issue of the whole collection, held the key of the essential message she tried to impress on her associates. Her hope and vision and courage, as seen in her life and letters, were founded on the life and teachings of the one who in all human history has made the irrefutable claim: "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life":

Thou art the Way.  
 Hadst Thou been nothing but the goal,  
 I cannot say  
 If Thou hadst ever met my soul.  
 I cannot see—  
 I, child of process, if there lies  
 An end for me,  
 Full of repose, full of replies.<sup>1</sup>

Her concept of Christ as the Way—the day-by-day travelling to God that is Christ—is the burden of much of her poetry.

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<sup>1</sup> Alice Meynell, "I Am the Way", in Merry England, Vol. 24, issue of Mar. 1895, p. 412.

5. Triumphs of Merry England

In Francis Thompson, Wilfrid Meynell had found "his" poet. This was part of the great triumph of Merry England and a source of satisfaction for the editor when he had to cease publication for financial reasons:

A magazine depends for its pecuniary success on its advertisements. These were out of our reach. But before I stopped publication, because I needed to economize in the interests of a large growing family, the magazine had done its work by its discovery and salvation of Francis Thompson.<sup>1</sup>

The magazine had other merits, surely as important, maybe more. For twelve years it had spread Catholic principles, had recruited a few of the most brilliant writers of Great Britain, and had contributed to the reconciliation of journalism and fine literature. In the final issue, that of March 1895, the editor notes:

We have lighted on good times in Literature. It is possible now to be a fine artist and at the same time have a fairly large following. It was not always so. When Merry England was first established there was little prospect of a hearing elsewhere for any but a few dominating voices. Now, there is hardly a paper that does not welcome the kind of writing which was then thought superfine in journalism. And with that general change for the better, our own occupation seems almost gone.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Wilfrid Meynell, in a letter to Sr. Angela Marie Mahoney, O.P., dated Sept. 1933, in An Index to Articles in Merry England 1883-1895, p. 108-109.

<sup>2</sup> Anonymous, "Reviews and Views", in Merry England, Vol. 24, issue of Mar. 1895, p. 403.

## MERRY ENGLAND AND CATHOLIC LITERARY PROPAGANDA 148

The triumph of the Meynell venture was just this. It realized the ideal of a Catholic literary periodical. Missionary in its ideals, and envisaging not only the Catholic group as its field but also thinking of those outside the Church, it integrated the secular and religious, the highly cultural and the popular trends of the age.

For the reader of to-day, Merry England is more than an historical document. Its genuine and genial policy, the choice of subjects and balance of articles, the beauty of presentation and wealth of illustrations—all are characteristics which give it an attractive and abiding interest. All are standards of value which will always be set by those who never cease to persevere for the divine right of the soul, the essential dignity of the human mind, and the aristocracy of good taste. Merry England is often of indubitable literary value. Representative of the Catholic group of writers, it serves the end of literary history. In its harmony of principles, philosophical, and aesthetic, it serves the ends of literary theory. Reaffirming the interrelation of literature and religion, it brings the reader in contact with a reality which takes hold of the Victorian world—a vital contact with the spiritual and artistic traditions of the "Merry England" tradition.

Such a study helps re-create the values and enthusiasms which shaped the first reputation of the English Catholic poets, and determined the subsequent developments of the Catholic Literary Revival. It was the magazine's happy combination of artistic excellence with spiritual beauty which had led both to the discovery and salvation of Francis Thompson:

It was the attraction of a Catholic magazine which professedly loved Literature, that led Mr. Thompson to contribute to our pages his first published verses; and, once begun, to go forward with no pauses.<sup>1</sup>

The story of the discovery of Francis Thompson through the pages of Merry England is a commonplace of history. To reach a reasonable estimate of the role played by the periodical in the salvation of the poet, the contributions of Thompson will be studied in the light of his biography. As the pages of the magazine chronologically record the flowerage and fruitage of Meynell's effective patronage, they offer a pattern of the ideal editor-author relationship which may well serve as inspiration and stimulus to the modern Catholic literary journalist.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER V

## MEYNELL'S SHARE IN THE MAKING OF A CATHOLIC WRITER

In the introduction to English Literary Periodicals Walter Graham stresses the part played by the literary editor in the making of literature.

The Literary Editor's chief function is to procure the correct type of writers for the work his magazine proposes to do, for the literary periodical is a vital phase in the making of literature and its true importance lies in its encouraging,<sup>1</sup> supporting and developing the talent of writers.

This chapter sums up Wilfrid Meynell's essential ideal and actual success as editor of Merry England, the chief organ of his influence on Catholic letters. He was forever seeking adherents to a cause universal in scope and Catholic in significance, forever training his writers to be artistic carriers of Christian truth to a mass of readers. To inculcate the few who were to influence the many was his propaganda technique. Though he found but one Francis Thompson in his net, we read in The Weekly Register of the advent of a "crowd of writers" who

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Graham, "Introduction" to English Literary Periodicals, New York, Nelson, 1930, p. xviii.

## MEYNELL'S SHARE IN THE MAKING OF A CATHOLIC WRITER 151

[...] do accomplish in their several ways the task incumbent on them of dissipating prejudice, keeping up a high moral tone in the daily and monthly publications, spreading the light, and preventing the enemies from seizing upon all the points of vantage accessible to recognized authority.<sup>1</sup>

In one of his notebooks Francis Thompson asserts that Meynell ranked second only to W. E. Henley, the editor of the National Observer, for the number of young writers launched in the literary world.<sup>2</sup> In 1897, Father Anselm, O.F.M., wrote to Meynell with gratitude:

[...] I have always professed and still do profess that you are unquestionably our only Patriarch, Guide and Friend in the world of letters, and if our name has reached the finer circles of thought and action it is entirely through you and your peerless wife.<sup>3</sup>

Miss Tuell speaks for a good number of writers (in particular, American writers) who benefited from Meynell's generous services as fosterer of literary talent during his many years of retirement from active work. Referring to Mr. and Mrs. Meynell, she writes:

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<sup>1</sup> Anonymous, "The Larger Oxford Movement", in The Weekly Register, Vol. 96, issue of September 25, 1897, p. 395-398.

<sup>2</sup> Notebook 18, Ms. at Boston College, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Viola Meynell, op. cit., p. 41.

## MEYNELL'S SHARE IN THE MAKING OF A CATHOLIC WRITER 152

Their creative act in the saving of Francis Thompson is matter of literary history. But never can be known the multitudinous acts of minor generosity, the encouraging of the wavering, of a slight but sure literary gift in search of recognition...<sup>1</sup>

Meynell's qualifications as literary editor were not chiefly of a scholarly character. He

[...] was a man of feeling and intuition rather than of intellect, with little literary erudition beyond what might be hastily improvised for the purpose of immediate journalism; [...] With the world of poetry he could not do otherwise than identify himself completely, and would not have thought that anyone could be more closely associated with it.<sup>2</sup>

Notwithstanding this absence of a deeply intellectual life, he was known as a discerning man of letters possessed of a sound judgement and a remarkable faculty for talent spotting. His unflinching intuitive recognition of the potency and promise in the budding writer accounts in good part for his far-reaching influence in the literary world. The preceding chapter attempted to illustrate to what extent he had that quality which permits the editor "to procure the correct type of writers for the work his magazine proposes to do". The present chapter is meant to give an example of the ideal literary editor in his

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<sup>1</sup> Anne Kimball Tuell, op. cit., p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Viola Meynell, op. cit., p. 127-128.

## MEYNELL'S SHARE IN THE MAKING OF A CATHOLIC WRITER 153

"encouraging, supporting and developing the talent of writers".

### 1. The Meynell-Thompson Relationship

The editor-author relationship between Meynell and Thompson, though unique in many aspects, remains representative of the stewardship with which the former served the art of the other young writers in accordance with their needs. The explanation for Meynell's over-all influence upon the poet can be found in his very character:

[...] it is possible to think that no other man alive would have filled the part, in an all-round way, of Thompson's unusual requirements as Wilfrid Meynell filled it by being himself.<sup>1</sup>

This role towards the poet was but one of the many occupations in the busy editor's life, but it was one that held a central place in his heart and existence. Thompson's poetical activity seemed to make a part of Meynell's personality:

Thompson's poetry has been more to him than the work of any one poet often is to anybody, so that if one were to imagine the non-existence of that poetry one would have to imagine him a different man.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>2</sup> -----, Alice Meynell, p. 70.

## MEYNELL'S SHARE IN THE MAKING OF A CATHOLIC WRITER 154

The importance given to Thompson and his poetry in this chapter must therefore find its justification in the light it throws on the influence of Meynell's activities as a sponsor of Catholic writers.

Thompson owed his life and inspiration to the Meynells and to those whom they influenced. His poetry and prose manifest his reactions to those conditions that combined to develop his potentialities as a writer. Meynell's part was to channel these influences about the poet and his fame, but only after he had coaxed him into physical health and the fulness of his genius.

## 2. First Encounter with Thompson

The years which preceded Meynell's discovery of Thompson had nurtured in the latter a Catholic poet and a journalist. Thompson's thought and ideals had been shaped during his early years of training in a Catholic home and at St. Cuthbert's College, Ushaw. His view of life and literature had been further influenced by his unsuccessful attempt to qualify for the priesthood, his equally unsuccessful experience as medical student at Owens College, Manchester, his struggle with opium, and his precarious life as a vagrant in the London streets until 1888. "It speaks well for his Catholic training", says Father L.T. Connolly, "that [...] during the three years of his outcast days in

## MEYNELL'S SHARE IN THE MAKING OF A CATHOLIC WRITER 155

London he never changed the standards of his Catholic ideals."<sup>1</sup> And Everard Meynell asserts, "Neither his happiness, nor his tenderness, nor his sensibility had been marred,..."<sup>2</sup> In a biographical note to Selected Poems, Wilfrid Meynell expresses his belief that

In Manchester, Literature, if not Melancholy, had already marked him for her own; and it was his copy of Religio Medici rather than that of the Materia Medica that he put under his pillow, perhaps the lump of it suggesting to him his after image of the poet's dreaming.<sup>3</sup>

When at last Thompson wandered penniless in the streets, he thought of literary labours as a source of profit. He sought respectable contemporary non-Catholic publications who would print his works, but his contributions remained unanswered:

At McMaster's, too, he had pen and paper, and he was writing both poetry and prose, and some of this was sent to magazines, without success.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Rev. T.L. Connolly, S.J., ed., "Francis Thompson: Some Biographical Notes", in Poems of Francis Thompson, New York, Appleton Century, 1932, p. xviii.

<sup>2</sup> Everard Meynell, op. cit., p. 93.

<sup>3</sup> Wilfrid Meynell, "A Biographical Note of Francis Thompson", in Selected Poems of Francis Thompson, New York, Dodd, Mead, 1921, p. xi.

<sup>4</sup> Viola Meynell, Francis Thompson and Wilfrid Meynell, p. 19.

## MEYNELL'S SHARE IN THE MAKING OF A CATHOLIC WRITER 156

As a result of his unsuccessful attempts at recognition "There died in him the idea that he might have the power to write;..."<sup>1</sup>

The literary magazine which was to draw Thompson from the streets, he had read from the first issue. He had known the magazine as a student at Manchester. His uncle, Edward Healy Thompson, had been among its first subscribers. Thompson had noticed it especially during his visit at home at Christmas 1886. And even in the depth of his misery, he had spent two pence to buy an old edition of the periodical in which one poem among others had pleased him particularly.<sup>2</sup> The revelation of kindred ideals found in the magazine had nerved his hand to write for it. "He knew the target at which he aimed",<sup>3</sup> writes Everard Meynell. For the editor of the magazine Thompson had entertained a secret admiration and respect. This is evident in the letter covering the manuscripts addressed to Meynell: "I do not desire the return of the manuscript, regarding your judgement of its worthlessness as quite final."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> This was the issue of April 1885, containing a poem by Katharine Tynan, entitled "Poppies". Cf. Letter of Francis Thompson, to Katharine Tynan, dated July 15, 1885, in The Middle Years, by Katharine Tynan, New York, Houghton Mifflin, 1917, p. 14 and ff.

<sup>3</sup> Everard Meynell, op. cit., p. 86.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 85.

## MEYNELL'S SHARE IN THE MAKING OF A CATHOLIC WRITER 157

Meynell's discovery of Thompson is too well known to bear repetition. Let us call to mind a few salient points of the hard story which challenged Meynell's Christian charity and generous ingenuity from the outset of their relationship. We remember the desperate letter sent by the young unknown poet in February 1887 to the editor of the magazine, the long fruitless period of waiting, Meynell having pigeon-holed the manuscripts without reading them, the discovery and astonished admiration of them almost a year later, his decision to reprint the brief poem "The Passion of Mary", hoping that the author, seeing his work published, would make himself known. Then a few days later, there is the pathetic visit of Thompson, a beggar in rags, faint from hunger and illness, so timid that he must pluck up his courage many times before he finally dares to open wide the door of Meynell's office. Thompson will picture the painful apprehensiveness that shook him at that crucial moment as he awaited tortured between hope and despair:

Like one who sweats before a despot's gate,  
 Summoned by some presaging scroll of fate,  
 And knows not whether kiss or dagger wait;  
 And all so sickened is his countenance,  
 The courtiers buzz, 'Lo, doomed!' and look at him  
 [askance:—

At Fate's dread portal then  
 Even so stood I, I ken,  
 Even so stood I, between a joy and fear,  
 And said to mine own heart, 'Now if the end be here!'<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Rev. T.L. Connolly, S.J., op. cit., p. 35.

## MEYNELL'S SHARE IN THE MAKING OF A CATHOLIC WRITER 158

In the editor the poet was meeting his first public. The reader waits with awe for the issue of the rather difficult conversation which began between the pathetic derelict who was to prove one of the supreme poets of modern England and the discerning editor who was to render potent for humankind a wealth of latent poetical powers just about to be smothered or enkindled. Meynell's first words were those of an appreciative admirer: "You must have had access to many books when you wrote that essay."<sup>1</sup> This remark was characteristic of Meynell. He believed in that praise which generates the power it believes in: "I always think I have more capacity for admiration, than other people. Wordsworth says we live by admiration, and I literally do."<sup>2</sup>

Thompson accepted remuneration for his first contributions, made no confidences, sought no sympathy, remained secretive as if overwhelmed, refusing the offer made to him of a small weekly sum as means of subsistence. When Meynell would have made plans for regular contributions, Thompson could not be held from the imperious instinct of flight to the streets. He left with the bare promise of

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<sup>1</sup> Everard Meynell, op. cit., p. 89.

<sup>2</sup> Wilfrid Meynell, in a letter written to F. Holland Day, American publisher, from 47 Palace Court, London, dated Feb. 9, 1895. Ms. at Boston College.

## MEYNELL'S SHARE IN THE MAKING OF A CATHOLIC WRITER 159

coming back. And Meynell remained with a sense of failure over his vain efforts to help the derelict. But his kindness and ingenuous wisdom had already exerted their influence:

Thou wert to me that earnest of day's light,  
 When, like the back of a gold-mailed saurian  
 Heaving its slow length from Nilotic slime,  
 The first long gleaming fissure runs Aurorian  
 Athwart the yet dun firmament of prime.  
 Stretched on the margin of the cruel sea  
 When they had rescued me,  
 With faint and painful pulses was I lying;  
 Not yet discerning well  
 If I had 'scaped, or were an icicle,  
 Whose thawing is its dying.<sup>1</sup>

Here was someone who was offering the outcast a task that he was capable of carrying out. Here he had found a field of achievement equal to his aspiring genius, equal to the vastness of his dreams. Meynell's loving simplicity and self-abnegating generosity gradually made their way to the poet's heart:

[...] the writing-opening was for him like a possible key to true life, and the editor's friendliness had made its mark, for Thompson came again to the office, and subjects for Merry England articles were discussed, and he came again, and soon was introduced to the editor's home in Upper Phillimore Place.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Rev. T.L. Connolly, S.J., op. cit., p. 34.

<sup>2</sup> Viola Meynell, op. cit., p. 28.

## MEYNELL'S SHARE IN THE MAKING OF A CATHOLIC WRITER 160

## 3. Intuition of Thompson's Greatness

The artlessness and tender familiarity of Meynell's friendliness embodies Thompson's definition of that peculiar simplicity which is common to the genuine Franciscan and the poet:

It consists, mainly, in the contentment of every man to be and appear what he is. [...] This unassertive taking for granted that he is just himself combined with matter-of-fact thoughtfulness for others, makes him a gentleman whatever his trick of speech or manner. It causes every stranger to feel himself domesticated with him. It is this lofty and unsought genuineness which makes the true poet take to the Franciscan, and the true Franciscan to the poet. For the Franciscan embodies in himself the poet's ideal, which is sensitive and candid self-realization—the spontaneous candour of a child combined with adult consciousness: while he has the native amity towards his fellow-mortals which, in the poet, is too often absorbed by egoism. Two things in this world are poetry, and luckily do not know it:—the child and the Franciscan.<sup>1</sup>

The Franciscan simplicity of Meynell, an index of his sincerity of heart and greatness of mind, made him live great poetry when he did not write it. This phenomenon might serve to explain that intuitive identification between Meynell's ideal and Thompson's poetry which Viola Meynell seems to imply. She remarks that they "were peculiarly

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<sup>1</sup> Rev. Terence L. Connolly, S.J., In His Paths, p. 132.

## MEYNELL'S SHARE IN THE MAKING OF A CATHOLIC WRITER 161

[...] united".<sup>1</sup> Speaking of her father, she writes: "In Thompson's most difficult poems he was even unaware of their obscurity. They were, as he read them aloud, his adopted speech."<sup>2</sup> She also wonders at Meynell's exceptional "enthrallment" with Thompson's works:

In Wilfrid Meynell there was one to whom Francis Thompson's work appealed without conditions; there seemed no end to its fitness for him nor his accordance with it—a fact which also contains an everlasting element of surprise.<sup>3</sup>

In an earlier book, she had written of the overwhelming influence of Thompson's poetry on Meynell's life:

What a transforming thing to him his love of Francis Thompson's poetry has been can be felt only by his family who know how much of the thought and incident of his life have been made of it. [...] To my mother the advent of Francis Thompson and his poetry was a less transforming thing. Though she found him a great poet, he did not raise the very status of contemporary poetry, as he did to my father.<sup>4</sup>

Mr. Garvin's acknowledgement was founded when he wrote to Meynell in 1894, "... Mr. Thompson owes much to your intuition of his greatness."<sup>5</sup> In fact, for twenty years

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<sup>1</sup> Viola Meynell, op. cit., p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 128.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>4</sup> -----, Alice Meynell, p. 70.

<sup>5</sup> -----, Francis Thompson and Wilfrid Meynell, p. 100. (J. Louis Garvin was a journalist on the Newcastle Daily Chronicle and the Bookman.)

## MEYNELL'S SHARE IN THE MAKING OF A CATHOLIC WRITER 162

after the discovery of the poet, Meynell carried, without even complaining, the burden of a friendly patronage, rewarding perhaps, but most exacting. To this relationship Thompson brought all he had: his poetry. Meynell provided all the rest. He "was pilot, friend, purse, anything, everything, to the poet"<sup>1</sup>, says Lewis Hind, editor of the Academy. With Christlike gentleness and tact, he saw to the needs of his poet, as his second half, equally eager that he should stand well with the public, and zealous to promote his triumphs without egotism and share them without vanity. This, according to Father Connolly, was "his way of applying the Baptist's principle to 'other Christs': He must become more and more, I must become less and less."<sup>2</sup>

## 4. Development of Thompson's Genius

From the first encounter, Meynell realized that Thompson's most immediate need was the restoration of his physical health. Though the doctor despaired of his recovery, Meynell's pervasive influence over Thompson won

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<sup>1</sup> Holbrook Jackson, The Eighteen-Nineties, London, Grant Richards, 1913, p. 207.

<sup>2</sup> Rev. T.L. Connolly, S.J., "Francis Thompson and Wilfrid Meynell", in Renascence, Vol. 6, issue of Autumn 1953, p. 62-65.

## MEYNELL'S SHARE IN THE MAKING OF A CATHOLIC WRITER 163

for him a stay at a private hospital where he was treated for the debilitating effects of malnutrition, and relieved from the exposure to his habit of taking laudanum. We do not know exactly at what time Thompson began his normal life by accepting this cure. Most probably this was several months after the appearance of the first poem in Merry England, for, after the printing in April, May, and June of the two poems and the essay sent in 1887, nothing will appear from his pen before November 1888. This was his essay "Bunyan in the Light of Modern Criticism", the first display of his literary criticism. In December, we find a sonnet "Not Even in Dreams", and nothing else by Thompson will be published for another four months.

i) Flowering of Genius.— Early in 1889, through the influence of the Meynells, Thompson was placed in the care of the Premonstatensian monks at Storrington in Sussex. Hardly had Meynell succeeded in convincing Thompson that he should take care of his health, and cure himself of his addiction to opium that the poet began to feel the stirring pulse of his revived powers of soul and body. And Meynell found himself well rewarded for his efforts by the sudden blossoming of his poet's genius. From the beginning of April 1889, Thompson began to write abundantly. Each issue of Merry England carried some poem or article of his.

## MEYNELL'S SHARE IN THE MAKING OF A CATHOLIC WRITER 164

It was at this time that Thompson met at the Meynells the future Cardinal Vaughan, proprietor of the Dublin Review, who invited him to contribute to his periodical. Two of Thompson's articles were accepted and published, one in April, "The Irish Minstrelsy", and another in July, "The Macbeth Controversy". Meanwhile, Merry England was publishing in rapid succession: "Literary Coincidence", "Crashaw", "The Error of Extreme Realists", "The Way of Imperfection", and "Nature's Immortality". It was also at that time that Thompson wrote his most important essay, "Shelley", which was rejected and printed but posthumously by the Dublin Review. Evidence of Thompson's close adherence to Meynell's guidance may be found in his letter written to Bishop Carroll, in 1889, when this essay had been refused by the Dublin Review.

[...] It has not been inserted in the current issue of the Dublin—a fact which looks ominous. First, you see, I prefaced it by a fiery attack on Catholic Philistinism [...] driven home with all the rhetoric which I could muster. That is pretty sure to be a stumbling-block. I consulted Mr. Meynell as to its suppression, but he said 'Leave it in.' I suspect that he thoroughly agrees with it. Secondly, it is written at an almost incessant level of poetic prose, and seethes with imagery like my poetry itself. Now the sober, ponderous, ecclesiastical Dublin confronted with poetic prose must be considerably scared. [...] Mr. Meynell's opinion was '"Shelley" is splendid'.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Everard Meynell, op. cit., p. 97-98.

## MEYNELL'S SHARE IN THE MAKING OF A CATHOLIC WRITER 165

In addition to his seven prose essays, Francis Thompson wrote most of his Poems while he was at Storrington. These included such important works as "The Sere of the Leaf", "Song of the Hours", the delightful "Daisy" illumined by the South Downs of Sussex, and many minor poetical contributions. The climax to this group came in September when he sent his "Ode to the Setting Sun", inspired by the sight of the Cross within the Priory grounds at sunset. This first unmistakable proof of his poetical power confirmed in a startling manner the judgement of Meynell who, in the slight manuscripts of 1887, had discerned the promise of genius. The enthusiasm and rejoicing in the Meynell household can be gathered from Everard Meynell's statement:

[...] on receiving it, his editor with my mother and a young friend, Mr. Vernon Blackburn, straightway took the train to congratulate him on this first conclusive sign of the splendour of his powers.<sup>1</sup>

Led by this enthusiasm and his high hope to obtain recognition for Thompson's works, Meynell sewed together a few pages of Merry England which carried his poetry, sent one collection to Tennyson and another to Browning in Italy. Tennyson remained indifferent. Browning, on the contrary,

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 95.

## MEYNELL'S SHARE IN THE MAKING OF A CATHOLIC WRITER 166

in a letter of praise and encouragement, hailed the poet in Thompson, inciting him to launch himself wholeheartedly on a literary career. Confirmed in his enthusiasm, Meynell published a facsimile of the letter in the January 1890 issue of Merry England. Before so significant an appraisal of his works, Thompson's enthusiasm was transformed into a flow of gratitude towards his mentor and propagandist:

[...] ye idea that in ye closing days of his life my writings should have been under his eye, and he should have sent me praise and encouragement, is one that I shall treasure to ye closing days of my life. To say that I owe this to you is to say little. I have already told you that long before I had seen you, you exercised, unknown to yourself, ye most decisive influence over my mental development when without such an influence my mental development was like to have utterly failed. And so to you I owe not merely Browning's notice, but also that ever I should have been worth his notice. The little flowers you sent him were sprung from your own seed. I only hope that ye time may not be far distant when better and less scanty flowers may repay ye pains, and patience, and tenderness of your gardening.<sup>1</sup>

ii) Genius in Full Splendour.— Convinced of the poet's cure and of the greatness of his genius, Meynell induced him to agree to come back to London where he could find easy access to books and work as a journalist. Thompson returned in February 1890. This meant for him the beginning of a new life—that of a man of letters or rather that of a hard-up journalist. He lodged not far from

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<sup>1</sup> Viola Meynell, op. cit., p. 38-39.

## MEYNELL'S SHARE IN THE MAKING OF A CATHOLIC WRITER 167

Palace Court. From now on the editor's household will be virtually his: "There was a window always alight for the poet—the window of the Meynell home,"<sup>1</sup> asserts Lewis Hind. Viola Meynell describes him as the "utterly dependent friend—the gentle, late, voluble, flushed, dozing visitor of every day."<sup>2</sup>

Hoping to provide a livelihood for his friend, Meynell tried to find periodicals which would agree to publish his prose, if not his poetry. He introduced his protégé to the leading Protestant literary periodicals. It was to no purpose: "... the walls of the Protestant periodical press remain still unshaken and to shake,"<sup>3</sup> wrote Thompson to Canon Carroll. The Catholic press other than that edited by Meynell was not more encouraging. For the jubilee number of The Tablet, May 1890, Meynell had asked Thompson to write a review of the achievements in Catholic letters of the previous fifty years. The article was rejected, and found among the poet's papers after his death. This was "Possibly because the editor did not concur in Thompson's high praise of Coventry Patmore," concludes

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<sup>1</sup> Holbrook Jackson, op. cit., p. 207.

<sup>2</sup> Viola Meynell, Alice Meynell, p. 71.

<sup>3</sup> Everard Meynell, op. cit., p. 123.

## MEYNELL'S SHARE IN THE MAKING OF A CATHOLIC WRITER 168

Father Connolly, This article entitled "Our Literary Life" was published in 1948 from the manuscript at Boston College Library.<sup>1</sup>

It remained for Meynell to provide work for Thompson by enlisting him as an essential collaborator of Merry England and entrusting him occasionally with reviews for The Weekly Register. Thompson was to write more and more for Merry England till he had to adopt several pen names to cover the great number of his articles.

Between January and August of 1890, six of Thompson's poems were published in Merry England. Among these was "A Dead Astronomer", the first verses of the poet to attract any praise from Catholics outside of London.<sup>2</sup> To the June 1890 issue, Thompson contributed his only short story, "Finis Coronat Opus", qualified by Meynell as a "fantasia" that "has hints of that slaying of domesticities which went to his own making of 'a poet out of a man'."<sup>3</sup> After the publication of "The Hound of Heaven" in July 1890, nothing appeared for several months. This might have been the time

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<sup>1</sup> Rev. T.L. Connolly, "Our Literary Life", in Literary Criticism by Francis Thompson, p. 545.

<sup>2</sup> Everard Meynell, op. cit., p. 124.

<sup>3</sup> Wilfrid Meynell, "Introduction" to Collected Works of Francis Thompson, Vol. III, p. ii.

## MEYNELL'S SHARE IN THE MAKING OF A CATHOLIC WRITER 169

when Thompson was working at "Sister Songs" written during this stay in London. The issue of January carried Thompson's article "Catholics in Darkest England". Cardinal Manning, impressed by the poetical and religious ardour of this prose, summoned Thompson through Wilfrid Meynell. This visit inspired Cardinal Manning to request, again through Meynell, the composition of "Life and Labours of Blessed John Baptist de la Salle" which appeared in Merry England a few months later. During the same year the magazine published "Health and Holiness", a sketch of the essay which was to be printed in separate form in 1905. The September and October issues contain an edifying monograph of St. Ignatius, stressing Thompson's recurring theme of the reconciliation of sanctity and song.

In the warmth of the intimate friendship enjoyed in the Meynell home peopled with happy children, Thompson's genius flowered in full splendour. "Sister Songs", handed as a Christmas offering to his friends, is the expressive poetical development of the sources of his inspiration as found in the influence of the Meynell family. The poem itself reveals the part played by the children in the life of the poet: Monica and Madeleine (Sylvia) have purified his soul and intensified his faith and hope. The "Inscription" addressed to the parents of the girls acknowledges the united influence of the father and the

## MEYNELL'S SHARE IN THE MAKING OF A CATHOLIC WRITER 170

mother on Thompson's poetry:

For we do know  
The hidden player by his harmonies,  
And by my thoughts I know what still hands thrill  
the keys.

He himself was

..... born to them in mind,  
Their youngest nursling of the spirit's kind.

Wilfrid Meynell is the one who

[...] twines from finest gracious daily things  
Strong, constant, noticeless, as are heart-strings,  
The golden cage wherein this song-bird sings;

Of Mrs. Meynell, he says:

And the other's sun gives hue to all my flowers,  
Which else pale flowers of Tartarus would grow,  
Where ghosts watch ghosts of blooms in ghostly  
bowers;—

Most of the poems of "Love in Dian's Lap" were also written during the eighteen months Thompson spent in London.

This sequence is the poetic rendering of Mrs. Meynell's influence in the development of the poet's artistic personality. Father Connolly summarizes this influence:

She was not only instrumental in rescuing Thompson from material destitution and spiritual despondency but she was, under God, the channel of supernatural grace and the inspiration of his poetry in the years that followed rescue from bodily death and spiritual despair.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Rev. T.L. Connolly, S.J., Poems of Francis Thompson, p. 338.

## MEYNELL'S SHARE IN THE MAKING OF A CATHOLIC WRITER 171

Quoting Meynell after Megroz, Father Connolly relates the incident which had led Thompson to the discovery of his poetic powers:

'I remember the first occasion on which he came to our house in the evening, I gave him Mrs. Meynell's little volume of Poems. He took it away to his lodgings, and when he came back he told us how he had sat up reading it that night, and finally had thrown it down in his excitement, and said aloud: 'Then, I, too, am a poet'! He found she had said things he wanted to say, and it came to him as a revelation that they were sayable.'<sup>1</sup>

The "Proemion" to these poems was no doubt written at this time of the year, for the theme is analogous to that of the "Inscription" of "Sister Songs". But a new source of sorrow appears: a certain consciousness that his inspiration has deserted the poet. "One year ago" he could say to his "Loved":

I will escort thee down the years,  
With me thou walk'st immortally.'<sup>2</sup>

But now, the grief of lost song becomes the very source of his inspiration. In a long introduction he sings his love for the Meynells: "O beloved, O ye Two," and laments the fact that he has spent all the splendour of his song writing about the children, so that for the parents, and

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 338.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

## MEYNELL'S SHARE IN THE MAKING OF A CATHOLIC WRITER 172

for the mother especially, only the "crumbs" are left. Almost all the poems published during that year show an unusual serenity of spirit—a spirit, however, which is not totally free from menacing sorrow. When he sings of autumn (A Corymbus for Autumn) or of his god-child (To My God-Child) he forgets his grief. But let one of the children hand him a poppy and it is enough to stir a pathetic response in the poet's heart. He smiles

And his smile, as nymphs from their laving meres  
Trembled up from a bath of tears;<sup>1</sup>

Let a child speak to him of passing years and this sets him meditating about life in terms of death:

Yea, on this frozen Alp of life  
Is the hospice we call death.<sup>2</sup>

iii) Height of Genius. Beginning of Fame. — This strain of melancholy, expressed more poignantly in his essay "Moestitiae Encomium" seems to coincide with a return to opium and a loss of physical health. All these conditions were of no little concern to Meynell. The Storrington experience was therefore repeated. Meynell made

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<sup>1</sup> Francis Thompson, "The Poppy" (To Monica), in Merry England, Vol. 17, issue of Aug. 1891, p. 167.

<sup>2</sup> -----, "Song of Youth and Age", in Merry England, Vol. 17, issue of Oct. 1891, p. 353. This poem was never reprinted.

## MEYNELL'S SHARE IN THE MAKING OF A CATHOLIC WRITER 173

arrangements with the Capuchins at Pantasaph in North Wales and Thompson went to live within the grounds of their monastery early in 1892. The friars ministered to the poet's material and spiritual needs with the greatest diligence. Thompson soon felt emancipated from the thralldom of opium. His health improved. He seemed alert and cheerful. To give his poet a helping hand up the first step of public fame, Meynell negotiated with John Lane, famous English publisher of the 1890's, to print Thompson's poems. He also made it Thompson's first concern to prepare his poems for publication. Along with Father Anselm, O.F. M., and Coventry Patmore, the Meynells assisted in the revision of the poems. When Meynell would have declined to share the honour of dedication, Thompson insisted:

I cannot consent to the withdrawal of your name [...] I should belie the truth and my own feelings if I represented Mrs. Meynell as the sole person to whom I owe what it has been given to me to accomplish in poetry.<sup>1</sup>

The poet's gratitude prevailed: a dedication poem entitled "To Wilfrid and Alice Meynell" introduces the first anthology of Thompson's poems published in 1893. Thompson addresses his benefactors with loving gratitude:

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<sup>1</sup> Everard Meynell, op. cit., p. 128-129.

## MEYNELL'S SHARE IN THE MAKING OF A CATHOLIC WRITER 174

To you, O dear givers!  
I give your own giving.<sup>1</sup>

Meynell had prepared the way for this volume by including four of Thompson's poems in his own anthology The Child Set in the Midst by Modern Poets published in 1892: "Daisy", "The Poppy", "A Song of Youth and Age", and "To My Godchild". The introduction hailed with pride these first sublime fruits of his protégé's genius:

One of our younger Poets, Mr. Francis Thompson who has eluded Fame as long as Shelley did, but cannot elude it longer, passes from the place of preparation to the place of fruition...<sup>2</sup>

In 1893, Poems was published. Only through the heroic faith in the greatness of his poet's genius could Meynell dare the odds of his venture.

To Wilfrid Meynell it was like the launching of a battleship, as crucial and seeming-precarious; he believed it was a great poet who was to see the light—but with the trepidation of a personal belief in the almost impossible.<sup>3</sup>

The volume attracted attention immediately. Some of the leaders of the literary world did not hesitate to pronounce the author a Crashaw, a worthy disciple of Dante,

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<sup>1</sup> Francis Thompson, Poems, London, John Lane, 1893, p. viii.

<sup>2</sup> Wilfrid Meynell, "Introduction" to The Child Set in the Midst by Modern Poets, London, Leadenhall Press, 1892, p. xix.

<sup>3</sup> Viola Meynell, Francis Thompson and Wilfrid Meynell, p. 43.

## MEYNELL'S SHARE IN THE MAKING OF A CATHOLIC WRITER 175

a companion of Cowley, and the equal of Shelley. In this general enthusiasm, none gloried more than Meynell himself. He discovered and hoarded every word of approval. The issue of December 28, 1895, of The Weekly Register printed a long series of these appreciative notices culled from such prominent contemporary journals as the Daily Chronicle, The St. James Gazette, and The World.

This enthusiastic reception was counterbalanced by a goodly share of harsh criticism in the Westminster Gazette, the National Observer, the Pall Mall Gazette, and even in the Tablet. The "alleged 'promoters'" of the poet were blamed for "log-rolling". The young writer was described as "the poet of a Catholic clique", one that was being "attacked by a most formidable conspiracy of adulation", a poet who "had been introduced to the world under the shelter of [...] a farrago of nonsense."<sup>1</sup>

The main impression among the public, however, was one of general welcome. Thompson read with pleasant surprise of the quick sale of the book. Meynell kept sending him all appreciative notices and communications, endorsing them with his own encouraging praise. Thompson who had failed to "feel any elation" towards his poems just

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<sup>1</sup> Everard Meynell, op. cit., p. 136-138.

## MEYNELL'S SHARE IN THE MAKING OF A CATHOLIC WRITER 176

before their publication could not now remain "indifferent", says Viola Meynell: "It would have been difficult to maintain that mood in face of the communications fired at him by his friend in his own enthusiasm."<sup>1</sup>

The four years spent at Pantasaph were among the most productive of Thompson's life as a poet. He enjoyed the religious atmosphere of the place. Under the influence of Father Anselm, O.F.M., his "philosopher and friend", he devoted much of his time to philosophico-religious studies. During these years Meynell was to help him to another great influence in his poetic career. In 1893, he commissioned Thompson with the writing of a review of Religio Poetae by Coventry Patmore. This meant the beginning of the correspondence and mutual admiration between Patmore and Thompson. Patmore had helped with the revision of Poems and had written his famous review of the volume in the Fortnightly as a common friend of the Meynells. When Patmore went to stay in Pantasaph, in 1894, a friendship was established which furthered the development of Thompson's intellectual genius, and inspired the composition of his greatest works found in New Poems prepared during the last three years of his residence at Pantasaph.

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<sup>1</sup> Viola Meynell, op. cit., p. 46.

## MEYNELL'S SHARE IN THE MAKING OF A CATHOLIC WRITER 177

A good part of Thompson's literary activities during his first year at Pantasaph had been devoted to the preparation of Poems. We find few of his contributions in the Merry England issues of 1892. At the death of Cardinal Manning, a memorial number of the magazine for February 1892 carried the poem "To the Dead Cardinal of Westminster" written at the demand of the editor. It is more or less a biographical poem expressing the poet's "grief and terror" at the thought of his destiny as a poet in terms of eternal life. Does his pursuit of beauty, in the midst of so many sufferings really prepare his salvation?—he wonders. The theme of life and death is again expressed in the poem "A Fallen Yew" found in the preceding issue of the magazine. The most important work published in 1892 was "The Making of Viola", another poem inspired by one of the Meynell children.

The issues of Merry England for 1893 were enriched with a wealth of Thompsoniana. Every month saw the publication of a poem or an essay by one who was fast gaining recognition in literary circles. Among the most important poems were "To a Poet Breaking Silence", "Judgement in Heaven", "Desiderium Indesideratum" and "Ex Ore Infantium". Besides the three articles which Thompson wrote for the Franciscan Annals that year, "Form and Formalism" and his two papers on "Sanctity and Song", he

## MEYNELL'S SHARE IN THE MAKING OF A CATHOLIC WRITER 178

contributed five journalistic articles to Merry England, the most important of which was "The Poet's Religion".

These months of spiritual hope and literary activity gradually gave place to a period of depression and a consequent loss of poetic impulse. A friend of the Meynells, Mrs. Vernon Blackburn, wrote from Pantasaph. Speaking of Thompson, she says:

[...] I wish he could show some kind of human elation at his unprecedented success, but he seems to take it all in a dull, mechanical sort of way which is distressing. It is two months now since there has been a change in him.<sup>1</sup>

She then deplores that "He isn't doing a stroke of work."<sup>2</sup> The Meynells went to stay for a few days with Thompson at Pantasaph, early in January 1894. This visit was sufficient to call forth a renewal of inspiration in the poet and a fresh development of his works. In April 1894 he spoke to Father Anselm of "a return of all the old poetic power."<sup>3</sup> The poems of "Sight and Insight" as well as the "Ultima" poems which were to form the greatest part of his last volume New Poems were written at that time under the special influence of Coventry Patmore. Of these, "Any Saint" and

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<sup>1</sup> Viola Meynell, op. cit., p. 51.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>3</sup> Everard Meynell, op. cit., p. 183.

"An Anthem of Earth" were to be published in the 1894 issues of Merry England. Before the extinction of the magazine, in March 1895, only one more poem of Thompson's appeared. This last poem, "A Chorus from Isaiah" was never printed.

At Christmas 1895, Thompson spent three months in London with the Meynells who saw it necessary to relieve him from the intensely intellectual and solitary atmosphere of Pantasaph. During this time Meynell undertook to publish "Sister Songs". The volume appeared a few months later. It received a colder reception than Poems. The attack for "log rolling" took greater significance. The works were described in such abusive terms as "freaks of speech" and "ugly linguistic monstrosities". They were even parodied for their "Tatinisms" by the Saturday Review and Westminster Gazette.<sup>1</sup> And Thompson was to speak of his "ill-starred volume" which sold only "349 copies in twelve months".<sup>2</sup> Happily, they were still a few appreciative notices left to nourish Thompson's faint hope and Meynell's enthusiasm. Richard Le Gallienne reversing the terms of harsh criticism spoke of "magnificently prodigal expression";<sup>3</sup> Arnold

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p.154.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.150

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.145

## MEYNELL'S SHARE IN THE MAKING OF A CATHOLIC WRITER 180

Bennett, of "natural genius"<sup>1</sup>; Louis J. Garvin, of "prophetic ardours", "apocalyptic vision", and "supreme utterance".<sup>2</sup> The Weekly Register again published a series of such appreciative quotations as found in the Illustrated London News, the Academy, and the Times.<sup>3</sup>

In 1896, after the death of Coventry Patmore, Thompson left Pantasaph and was not to return. These had been happy years in spite of his physical ills and occasional moral depressions. He had freed himself, at least apparently, of the drug-habit. He had written a good number of his best works. In intense study and quiet meditation he had deepened the philosophical basis of religion and the critical basis of his art. Thus, most unconsciously, no doubt, he had prepared his future career as literary critic.

Thompson's last volume, New Poems, met exceptionally harsh criticism. A few examples will suffice to give evidence of rank obstinacy and hostile prejudice. His works were qualified as "nonsense verse", "barbarous jargon", the "wildest utterances" deprived of "motive power", a

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 244.

<sup>3</sup> Anonymous, in The Weekly Register, Vol. 90, issue of Dec. 28, 1895, p. 828.

## MEYNELL'S SHARE IN THE MAKING OF A CATHOLIC WRITER 181

"dictionary of obsolete English suffering from a fierce fit of delirium tremens".<sup>1</sup> There were a few cases of gracious welcome from the Athenaeum, the Daily Chronicle, the Edinburgh, the Academy, and the Bookman.<sup>2</sup> The opinion of the public was far from encouraging:

The book sold badly, and soon died, so that for the first half of the year in 1901 it brought in six shillings' worth of royalties: four copies had been sold. During the first half of 1902 the book found five buyers.<sup>3</sup>

The fact that New Poems, superior in merit to Poems, was given a remarkably colder reception could be explained:

Poems [...] was everywhere lauded because "Francis Thompson" was a completely noncommittal name of a hitherto unknown and unheard-of poet. And so Poems was judged upon its merits. But by the time New Poems appeared it was generally known that Thompson was not only a Roman Catholic and the son of parents who were converts, but he had even gone to a monastery to write his poems! As a consequence, New Poems was very differently received.<sup>4</sup>

Between the composition of "Anthem of Earth" in November 1894, and the publication of New Poems in 1897, Thompson wrote very little except two or three religious poems and one, "The Captain of Song", on the occasion of

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<sup>1</sup> Everard Meynell, op. cit., p. 240.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 241.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 242.

<sup>4</sup> Rev. T.L. Connolly, Francis Thompson: In His Paths, p. 99.

## MEYNELL'S SHARE IN THE MAKING OF A CATHOLIC WRITER 182

the death of Coventry Patmore in November 1896. With the publication of New Poems, as he himself said, his brief poetic career was really at an end. In a poem "To a Double Need", addressed to Wilfrid Meynell, he laments the fact that his muse has forsaken him so that he can no longer express his gratitude in immortal song:

Ah, gone the days when for undying kindness  
I still could render you undying song!  
You yet can give, but I can give no more;  
Fate, in her extreme blindness,  
Has wrought me so great wrong.  
I am left poor indeed;  
Gone is my sole and amends-making store,  
And I am needy with a double need.

Behold that I am like a fountained nymph,  
Lacking her customed lymph,  
The longing parched in stone upon her mouth,  
Unwatered by its ancient plenty. She  
(Remembering her irrevocable streams),  
A Thirst made marble, sits perpetually  
With sundered lips of still-memorial drouth.<sup>1</sup>

He recorded in one of his notebooks:

1897: End of Poet. Beginning of Journalist.  
The years of transition completed.<sup>2</sup>

From then on till his death, a little more than ten years later, Thompson will publish nothing but a few occasional poems of relatively minor importance and will devote his talent to journalism. In 1897, Lewis Hind, the

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<sup>1</sup> Everard Meynell, op. cit., p. 303.

<sup>2</sup> Rev. T.L. Connolly, S.J., Literary Criticism by Francis Thompson, p. vii.

## MEYNELL'S SHARE IN THE MAKING OF A CATHOLIC WRITER 183

editor of the Academy, hoping to relieve his friend, Wilfrid Meynell, "in the financial burden of piloting a poet" welcomed Thompson as a weekly contributor to his periodical. He was the first to give practical recognition to the poet's genius. He soon found that "Thompson's articles in the Academy gave distinction to the issue".<sup>1</sup> When Thompson, at his request, wrote his poem on "Cecil Rhodes" he could say that he was "prouder of having published that ode than of anything else that the Academy ever contained."<sup>2</sup> Thompson had been contributing regularly for seven years to the Academy when Lewis Hind left its editorship. From then on he was to write but spasmodically for this magazine. Meynell, therefore, introduced him to the Athenaeum for which he wrote till the last weeks of his life. Through Lewis Hind, Thompson met W.E. Henley, the editor of the National Observer. The latter took Thompson as collaborator in The New Review which became The Outlook a few months later under the editorship of Hind. Thompson wrote for more than a year for this periodical. The Daily Chronicle also accepted contributions from Thompson. Among these were his odes "Nineteenth Century" and "The Victorian Jubilee". To relieve Thompson from the time-limiting exigencies of

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<sup>1</sup> Holbrook Jackson, op. cit., p. 255-256.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

## MEYNELL'S SHARE IN THE MAKING OF A CATHOLIC WRITER 184

book-reviewing, Meynell, as literary adviser of the Burns and Oates publishers, was able to obtain more convenient conditions of work and pay for his friend. Thus, Thompson produced The Life of St. Ignatius commissioned by Meynell.

During all these years Meynell continued to bestow, with unwavering devotion, his kind offices upon Thompson. His genius for friendship, perfected by the Christian charity of a fervent Catholic, enabled him to face the sudden scruples and the periodical despair of his friend. Several times he persuaded the poet to alter his apparently irrevocable decisions to return to his life in the streets of London. Speaking of these recurring critical moments, Everard Meynell says:

With such fits my father made it his business to deal, and this he did with a persuasiveness and love that I think no other man could have summoned. But for the peculiar power F.T. would have returned to the streets.<sup>1</sup>

#### 5. Thompson's Established Fame

At the death of Thompson, in 1907, Meynell, now fifty-five years old, had a sense of duty done. He had not only succeeded in turning toward literature many of the greatest English Catholics, but had also incited the

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<sup>1</sup> Everard Meynell, op. cit., p. 118.

## MEYNELL'S SHARE IN THE MAKING OF A CATHOLIC WRITER 185

vocation of a great religious poet. From then on he placed the best of his energy in the effort to obtain recognition for his friend and never relented in his crusade till he had him proclaimed prince of poets.

In spite of the cold reception given to his New Poems Thompson's popularity had continued to grow. When, in 1909, the Dublin Review published the Shelley article which it had refused twenty years earlier, the enthusiastic welcome of the public launched Thompson on the path of fame:

In the years that followed, the fame of Francis Thompson knew nothing but increase. The praise was as unreserved as the neglect had been complete. Popularity was added to glory. The vagabond seeking shelter at night under bridges entered royal drawing-rooms as a phantom guest. On the eve of the Great War, Francis Thompson possessed the hearts of English youth. In the universities the students were tempted to abandon, for the sake of his mystic and intellectual poems, those of the great Tennyson himself, the representative of an epoch that was gone and who, twenty years before, had been mourned to the sound of the organ in Westminster Abbey.<sup>1</sup>

This popularity was nourished and strengthened through Meynell's activities as a propagandist. As Thompson's literary executor, he served the interests of his poetry with the same solicitude and love as he had cared for the poet himself. As literary adviser of the Burns and Oates firm, he had a series of Thompson's works published: the

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<sup>1</sup> Agnes de la Gorce, Francis Thompson, London, Burns Oates, 1933, p. 179.

## MEYNELL'S SHARE IN THE MAKING OF A CATHOLIC WRITER 186

essay, "Health and Holiness" in 1905, the eighth edition of Poems in 1908, the Selected Poems of Francis Thompson in 1908. This last volume "started on a career of unending sales" reaching the number of 18,000 volumes in the twelve months of 1910.<sup>1</sup> The first separate edition of the "Hound of Heaven" was handset at home by the Meynells, and was later published by Burns and Oates in 1908. In 1893, on the publication of Poems, Mr. H.D. Traill had written to Mr. Meynell: "A 'public' to appreciate 'The Hound of Heaven' is to me inconceivable."<sup>2</sup> And Everard Meynell remarks:

Yet in the three years after Thompson's death the separate edition of "The Hound of Heaven" sold fifty thousand copies; and, apart from anthologies, many more thousands were sold of the books containing it.<sup>3</sup>

The Life of St. Ignatius, printed in 1909, was also a Burns and Oates publication as well as the official biography of the poet by Everard Meynell which appeared simultaneously with the three-volume definitive edition of Thompson's works in 1913.

Wilfrid Meynell's introductory notes to these books which he edited as well as published made him a creative

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<sup>1</sup> Viola Meynell, op. cit., p. 195.

<sup>2</sup> Everard Meynell, op. cit., p. 144. H.D. Traill was a contributor to the Nineteenth Century and the Academy.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 144.

## MEYNELL'S SHARE IN THE MAKING OF A CATHOLIC WRITER 187

Catholic publisher. He was more than a mere propagandist; he was an informal educator. He did not simply spread the fame of Thompson's works; he wanted his readers to discover for themselves the values contained in these works. This ideal was based on a conviction we find expressed in one of his religious tracts, Faith Found in London, published in 1902. He says that Thompson

[...] like all the great teachers in all the Schools, must fail of full recognition till he creates his own environment and is himself his own leaven of the mass.<sup>1</sup>

Meynell was ever preparing the way for his writers, ever burrowing into public opinion in order to create and build a reading public skilled in the appreciation of Catholic literature. He stimulated thought, aroused interest, recommended reading. As prefacer of a large number of Thompson's works, he heralded the excellencies of his poet, emphasized the principles underlying his merits and his fame, and became instrumental in the creation of a taste for the truth and beauty by which the poet's works were to be enjoyed.<sup>2</sup> The phenomenal sales of Thompson's works seemed to justify Meynell's conviction and satisfy his

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<sup>1</sup> Wilfrid Meynell, Faith Found in London, London, Burns Oates, 1902, p. 154.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Bibliography, p. 243-248.

## MEYNELL'S SHARE IN THE MAKING OF A CATHOLIC WRITER 188

hopes. In a letter to a friend he shared his contentment:

Thompson can now be left to take care of himself. About 20,000 volumes of the Collected Works have been sold and on Xmas day the Dean of Westminster proclaimed his name from the pulpit in Westminster Abbey—a mention which is nearly as good as a tablet on its walls, though that must somehow or other be brought about.<sup>1</sup>

As patron of aspiring writers, Meynell fulfilled a mission and supplied a want particularly urgent in the "Eighteen-Nineties" in England. Osbert Burdett, in his description of the "Beardsley Period", speaks of those amateur writers of "aesthetic temper" that "survive mysteriously like blades of grass in the more neglected corners of the city", and who "suffer for want of a patron" that has disappeared. They "will not sue for patronage at the public door" he assures, and, consequently, they "perish like a lover for want of heart".<sup>2</sup> This account confirms Katharine Tynan's estimate of Meynell's devotion towards Thompson: "Without him there would have been in all probability no Francis Thompson." And just before she writes:

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<sup>1</sup> Viola Meynell, op. cit., p. 198.

<sup>2</sup> Osbert Burdett, The Beardsley Period, New York, Boni and Liveright, 1925, p. 263.

## MEYNELL'S SHARE IN THE MAKING OF A CATHOLIC WRITER 189

I doubt if any one else would have continued in patience, in love, in courage with the poor poet who was forever backsliding. He would have worried, worn out other people. Wilfrid saw in him always the divine fire,...

Meynell never spoke of the services he rendered Thompson but in gratitude:

'[...] let none be named the benefactor of him who gave to all more than any could give to him. He made all men his debtors, leaving to those who loved him the memory of his personality, and to English poetry an imperishable name.'

Theodore Maynard found in Meynell "the one man in all the world capable of knowing what a treasure he held, and sufficiently humble to hold it as a treasure."<sup>3</sup> In fact, Meynell was fortunate in finding a poet who exemplified his ideal of a Catholic writer and of what he considered an antidote to modern literature.

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<sup>1</sup> Katharine Tynan, "The Shrine of Alice Meynell", in Commonweal, Vol. 13, issue of Jan. 21, 1931, p. 317-319.

<sup>2</sup> Everard Meynell, op. cit., p. 351.

<sup>3</sup> Theodore Maynard, op. cit., p. 202-203.

## CHAPTER VI

## THE COMPANIONSHIP OF THEOLOGY AND LITERATURE

Further evidence of Meynell's influence as propagandist for the Catholic Literary Revival may be inferred from his "Notes" appended to Thompson's essay on Shelley first published in the Dublin Review in 1908, and soon reissued in separate form.

His Literary Executor thought it right that the Review for which it was originally designed should again have the offer of it, since a new generation of readers had arisen, and another editor, in days otherwise regenerate. Thus it happened that this orphan among Essays entered at last on a full inheritance of fame. Appreciative readers rapidly spread its renown beyond their orthodox ranks; and, for the first time in a long life of seventy-two years, the Dublin Review passed into a Second Edition. This was soon exhausted; but not the further demand, which this separate issue is designed to meet.<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Meynell: Educator of Catholic Literary Opinion

The change of attitude, which won a place for the essay in the once "ponderous, ecclesiastical" Dublin Review and so popular a recognition in the reading world, bears testimony to the effectiveness of Meynell's activities as educator of literary opinion.

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<sup>1</sup> Wilfrid Meynell, ed., in "Notes" on Shelley by Francis Thompson, New York, Scribner's, 1909, p. 80-81.

## THE COMPANIONSHIP OF THEOLOGY AND LITERATURE 191

Thompson's acknowledgment shows to what extent Merry England was a potent factor in this achievement: "It was the tone of the magazine, in contrast with that of other Catholic publications," writes Wilfrid Meynell, "which led Francis Thompson, in 1890, to write to his friend, Bishop Carroll:

'I admire more highly than ever the courage and the resource with which Mr. Meynell, who in his course through the dense sea of Catholic literary ignorance, has in my opinion—an opinion of long standing—done more than any man in these latter days to educate Catholic literary opinion, I was myself virtually his pupil, and his wife's long before I knew him.<sup>1</sup>

Thompson's contributions not only reveal him to be a faithful student of the Merry England ideal but also provide Meynell with the most significant instruments to promote this ideal. His prose and poetry often refer to his philosophy of art and illustrate his philosophy of life, both in keeping with the principles inspired in the Manifesto. In this chapter a few of his synthetically representative works, printed for the first time in Merry England, will serve to expose the basic philosophical principles underlying creative literary activity among English Catholics of the later nineteenth century. The

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<sup>1</sup> -----, in a letter to Sister Angela Marie Mahoney, O.P., op. cit., p. 109.

opening paragraphs of the Shelley article, described by Meynell as a "plea that Theology and Literature might be reconciled",<sup>1</sup> could be considered as the epitome of the doctrine propagated by Meynell. These will therefore be used as a frame of reference. The treatment of Thompson's works in this chapter will be purely expository and illustrative of Meynell's ideology.

## 2. Alice Meynell and Christian Inspiration

Thompson's inspiration is at one with that of Mrs. Meynell as leading figures in the English return to Catholic Tradition. The main body of her later poetry is representative of that of the fin du siècle writers whom she directed to reassert in song their faith in traditional Christianity. Implications of the doctrine of the Incarnation form her natural theme. Several of her poems coincide in time<sup>2</sup> and thought with the Church's reaffirmation of the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ. Hers is a Christocentric universe with Mary restored to her honoured place at the side of her Divine Son. In "Christ in the Universe",<sup>3</sup> she sees the Kingdom of God accomplished in the

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<sup>1</sup> -----, ed., Shelley by Francis Thompson, p. 80.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Ch. IV, p. 114.

<sup>3</sup> Alice Meynell, in The Poems of Alice Meynell, London, Hollis, 1947, p. 63.

## THE COMPANIONSHIP OF THEOLOGY AND LITERATURE 193

secret self of the individual soul, as in the heart of the "innumerable host of stars" which go their way, and do not know. Her poems on the Holy Eucharist emphasize the social aspects of Christianity—how all men are one in Christ. In "The Unknown God",<sup>1</sup> she adores God incarnated, realized in the life of a "stranger" who has just "received the Lord":

Christ in his numbered breath,  
Christ in his beating heart and in his death,  
Christ in his mystery! From that secret place  
And from that separate dwelling, give me grace!

Again, in "A General Communion",<sup>2</sup> she sees a "throng" fed at the "one holy board", separated "soul from human soul" yet united in their union with their "devoted Lord." Mrs. Meynell's awareness of Christ's presence in the world is again revealed in her tiny meditations, "I Am the Way", and "Via, et Veritas, et Vita". So well had she understood the concept of Christ as the Way that she could identify the suffering of her life and of every life with the Cross of Christ:

O flesh, O grief, thou thou shalt have our knee,  
Thou rood of every day!<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

The experience that Mrs. Meynell has re-created in her works in general is that of integral Christian living. Intimations of her Christian way of life may be found in her interpretation of Christian charity in "Lorenzo's Mother" and "In Manchester Square", in her choice in "Two Questions" of innocent suffering according to the mysterious economy of the Redemption, in her recognition of personal responsibility in "Free Will", in her understanding of humility in "The Newer Vainglory". What St. Francis stood for was her standard of living and is implied in "The Lady Poverty". All these themes she sang with a very human sincerity and a singular religious intensity. They have the charm of a Christianity young and fresh as Francis preached in Umbria.

### 3. Identical Ideals of Meynell and Thompson

Mr. Meynell's works are manifestations of ideals similar to those of Mrs. Meynell, if of less effective expression. He was not a great writer, but has left us many works on diverse topics. The great part of his efforts was devoted to the obscure work of journalism, and it is in the pages of innumerable journals and reviews that lie the hundreds of humble writings which permitted him to express his ardent convictions, social, political, literary, and religious. Besides his Life of Disraeli, he produced mostly occasional writings: collections of verses where the poet

## THE COMPANIONSHIP OF THEOLOGY AND LITERATURE 195

speaks a language familiar, simple, tender, and coloured with humour, or prose works dictated by contemporary events.

He spoke of himself as of "a journalist who sometimes rhymes". His versified poems emphasize the wonder of the natural, the ordinary, the casually accepted marvel of man and the world in which he lives. The themes of love and worship and beauty are often characterized by the felicitous alliance between profound seriousness and brilliant wit which marked his conversation. Their meaning often puzzles one for a moment. The following poem, "in his opinion", according to Father Connolly, "the best he has ever written"<sup>1</sup> has that impressiveness of discovery and delight which he felt at the miraculous suggestion of "Transubstantiation":

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<sup>1</sup> Rev. Terence L. Connolly, S.J., Francis Thompson: In His Paths, p. 71.

Man's body was ordained to tell  
 The tale of this sweet miracle.  
 For bread and wine, and all his food,  
 Are turned to flesh, are turned to blood;  
 And all men, at their common feasts,  
 Are transubstantiating priests.

Christ, as in Cana's miracle,  
 Generous, His creatures would excel,  
 So gave to men ordained the power  
 With His own Flesh and Blood to dower  
 The altar Bread, the altar Wine—  
 O daring plagiary divine!

Then walk awarely mid the corn  
 That will as human flesh be worn—  
 'Tis holy ground that thou dost tread.  
 And be indeed a worshipper,  
 Discerning in our daily bread  
 The Eucharist's biographer.<sup>1</sup>

His small books, religious and profane tracts, he used to forward his ideals. They are more or less thought-provoking tales, a mixture of history, fiction, and literary allusiveness, written with a deliberate purpose to win an audience for his Catholic writers. He never passes an opportunity to make some point. His philosophy, full of the Incarnational awareness, peeps out from them every time. It is an insistence on the necessity of a reconciliation of the human and the divine, of the secular and religious, of the earthly and heavenly in life and literature. It is a challenge to those who write that religious conviction does

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<sup>1</sup> Wilfrid Meynell, "Transubstantiation", printed for the first time in the Catholic World of America, Vol. 142, issue of Feb. 1936, p. 843.

not in any degree make for dullness and prosiness.

The hereditary Catholic who fails to know "how happy he is in his birthright as a Christian" he awakens to the meaning of the Catholic Church extending to all mankind the benefit of the Incarnation. Are all those Catholic Churches, he asks, more

[...] than the theatres which are set up all over the earth with a sort of universalism? Do they mean that God is still thought of as Love in the world; that the Incarnation is, as it were, continued in the birth of every son of man; that men give not merely a spare coin, but themselves, to the service of each other?<sup>1</sup>

Through the words of his ideal Irish patriot, he voices his political ideals in terms of the Mystical Body of Christ and man's final destiny:

Birth in Ireland gave me a bias towards Irish nationalism, while the spirit which inhabits my body told me that the politics of eternity should be my only concern, and that all other races, equally my own, were the children of the Great King [...] All our political ideals are symbols of spiritual destinies.<sup>2</sup>

The Cousins satirizes the "Cousinhood" which formed the Catholic aristocracy, a group of old Catholic families segregated in their conservatism and living an "effeminate" Catholicism as opposed to the "robust Catholicism" which the

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<sup>1</sup> -----, Faith Found in London, London, Burns Oates, 1902, p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> -----, Halt! Who's There?, New York, Putnam's, 1916, p. 56.

## THE COMPANIONSHIP OF THEOLOGY AND LITERATURE 198

Catholic convert literary movement offered. One of the group, young Miranda, appears more enlightened than the others:

"Your own poets have told you"—Miranda adopted the words of St. Paul in Sir Frederick's studio and often in her own room alone with her beloved authors. "Your own poets have told you," she said to herself when she heard people brush aside the axioms of love and life as they are put by theologians. "Your own poets have told you". You listen and learn from them. And in that way they too become—though they know it not—Teachers and Doctors of the Church of Man—aye, in a sense, therefore, of the Catholic Church. And this thought made a new intimacy between her and those immortal men and women of genius who have given to the nations what has been to many a human ear the Word of God.<sup>1</sup>

Miranda's "beloved authors" are the poets of the Catholic Literary Revival. The reader meets them throughout the book. Each chapter is introduced by a quotation from one of them: Alice Meynell, Coventry Patmore, Katharine Tynan, Aubrey de Vere, and Francis Thompson. In simultaneous issues of Merry England<sup>2</sup> and The Weekly Register,<sup>3</sup> the statement "Your Poets Have Told You" entitles an article which takes stock of the achievements of Merry England and the number of poets who have met their public through its

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<sup>1</sup> -----, The Cousins, London, Burns Oates, 1895, p. 19.

<sup>2</sup> "Reviews and Views", in Merry England, Vol. 24, issue of Mar. 1895, p. 404.

<sup>3</sup> Anonymous, "Your Poets Have Told You", in The Weekly Register, Vol. 91, issue of Apr. 13, 1895, p. 469-470.

pages.

In fact, the statement, "Your Own Poets Have Told You", with its development as found in the foregoing quotation, is the synthesis of the Merry England project: its need and purpose as shown in Chapter II of this thesis and its fulfilment as seen in Chapters III and IV. The same statement could serve as keynote of the introductory passage to the Shelley article. Thompson wrote this introduction because he believed that the misguided clergymen and orthodox Christians had lost faith in the true conception of the place of poetry and art in man's life, that they were losing one of man's great blessings, true poetry; finally, that as a result, both poetry and religion were suffering from the divorce of the two.

Addressing the pastors and "pious laics", he likens the poet's vocation to that of the priest:

Poetry is the preacher to men of the earthly as you of the Heavenly Fairness; of the earthly fairness which God has fashioned to His own image and likeness. You proclaim the day which the Lord has made, and poetry exults and rejoices in it. You praise the Creator for His works, and she shows you that they are good.<sup>1</sup>

This statement echoes Meynell's conviction that "the theologians, with their counsels of prudence, do but express

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<sup>1</sup>Wilfrid Meynell, ed., Shelley, by Francis Thompson, p. 16.

## THE COMPANIONSHIP OF THEOLOGY AND LITERATURE 200

in dull terms the experience of man in the ages and in the lands."<sup>1</sup>

Thompson gives his readers the following advice:

"What you theoretically know, vividly realize: that with many the religion of beauty must always be a passion and a power."<sup>2</sup> Though Thompson stresses the union of poetry and religion, yet he does not imply that poetry must be didactic and that to help religion this art must sing of religious themes: "Eye her not askance if she seldom sing directly of religion; the bird gives glory to God though it sing only of its innocent loves."<sup>3</sup> He explains that beauty "is only evil when divorced from the worship of the Primal Beauty."<sup>4</sup> It is, therefore, the whole of modern poetry that had to be elevated, spiritualized, and disciplined. This could be arrived at by the imposition upon literature of religious and philosophical as well as intellectual and moral principles:

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<sup>1</sup> -----, The Cousins, p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> -----, ed., Shelley by Francis Thompson, p. 19.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

This beautiful, wild, feline Poetry, wild because left to range the wilds, restore to the hearth of your charity, shelter under the rafter of your Faith; discipline her to the sweet restraints of your household, feed her with the meat from your table, soften her with the amity of your children; tame her, fondle her, cherish her—you will no longer then need to flee her. Suffer her to wanton, suffer her to play, so she play round the foot of the Cross!<sup>1</sup>

As conclusion, he claims that literature must be evaluated in itself, and quite apart from all consideration of sectarian controversy:

We ask, therefore, for a larger interest, not purely Catholic poetry, but in poetry generally, poetry in its widest sense. With few exceptions, whatsoever in our best poets is great and good to the non-Catholic, is great and good also to the Catholic;...<sup>2</sup>

These paragraphs, in the main, advocate a joyous return to Catholic Tradition as exemplified in medievalism. As the "palm and the laurel, Dominic and Dante, sanctity and song" were united of old, so would Thompson have them ever work together for the good both of religion and poetry.

##### 5. Integral Christianity and Letters

1) Theology and Literature.— Those basic principles underlying Thompson's philosophy of literature will be developed further and illustrated mainly from three of his

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

## THE COMPANIONSHIP OF THEOLOGY AND LITERATURE 202

works: "Paganism Old and New", "The Hound of Heaven", and "To a Poet Breaking Silence". These works are chosen for their closer relationship to the burden of the motto of Merry England:

And since we hold that the length of our railroads is no measure to the happiness of life, and the electric light is no substitute for a Star in the East, nor literature a glory, nor art anything else than a shame, if they disown fealty to the All-Father, we shall seek to revive in our own hearts, and in the hearts of others, the enthusiasm of the Christian Faith.<sup>1</sup>

Thompson recognized the deficiencies of pagan civilization and literature, and was aware of the added truth and beauty which Christian revelation gave to the world and to poetry. His finest and most complete treatment of the subject may be found in the essay "Paganism Old and New", the essay which led to his appearance in Wilfrid Meynell's office. It is an attempt to show that there was no real poetic beauty in Paganism, that Christianity alone was powerful enough to quicken the germs of beauty of the New Paganism exemplified in the pantheism of Keats and the gorgeous godless world of Shelley.

Thompson believed that, while any subject can be treated poetically, subjects are more suitable for poetry in proportion as they are by their nature beautiful:

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<sup>1</sup> The underlining is ours.

If there are two things on which the larger portion of our finest modern verse may be said to hinge, they are surely Nature and Love.<sup>1</sup>

Thompson considered love and poetry inseparable:

[...] without love no poetry can be beautiful; for all beautiful poetry comes from the heart. With love it was that Wordsworth and Shelley purchased the right to sing sweetly of Nature.<sup>2</sup>

Thompson rightly perceived that love and nature can only be adequately interpreted in the light of Christianity. He was well aware of what modern poets, because of the Christian influence in their works, added in the way of refinement and nobility to the ancient conceptions of nature and love:

[...] it would be the merest platitude to say that neither the one nor the other, as glorified by our modern poets, was known to the singers of old.<sup>3</sup>

Everard Meynell stresses Thompson's conformity to the literary creed of the Merry England Manifesto:

"Paganism Old and New," in which it was sought to expose the fallacy of searching for love of beauty and sweetness in the pagan mythology, and to reveal the essential modernity, and even Christianity, of Keats' and Shelley's pagan beauties, was a triumph of journalistic obedience and appropriateness.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Francis Thompson, "Paganism Old and New", in Merry England, Vol. 11, issue of June 1888, p. 99-110.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Everard Meynell, op. cit., p. 92.

Thompson believed that pagan poets were wanting in a true conception of the beauty and nobility of love. He marks the difference between the pagan and Christian view of love: "The distance between Catullus and the Vita Nuova, between Ovid and the House of Life, can be measured only by Christianity."<sup>1</sup> He states that true love is of a highly spiritual nature; that it can never be satisfied by material things, or material gratification. Love finds its true meaning in Christianity: "On the wings of Christianity came the great truth that Love is of the soul, and with the soul coeval."<sup>2</sup> Thompson amplifies this statement in a passage which makes another point for the revivalists of Christian humanism:

It was most just and natural, therefore, that from the Christian poets should come the full development of this truth. To Dante and the followers of Dante we must go for its ripe announcement. [...] Therefore, sings Dante, and sing all noble poets after him, that Love in this world is a pilgrim and a wanderer journeying to the New Jerusalem; not here is the consummation of its yearnings,...

These poets, continues Thompson, find "the fulfilment of Love" [...] in the union of spirit to spirit within the

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<sup>1</sup> Francis Thompson, op. cit.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

containing Spirit of God."<sup>1</sup>

In the same way Thompson considered that the most rewarding treatment of nature is possible only in the light of Christianity. The pagan view of nature, he felt, was incomplete. He states that Wordsworth and the Romantics held a deeper and truer conception of it, for they saw further into the "spirit of Nature."

Towards the end of his essay Thompson warns the Merry England readers against the paganistic tendencies of the later Victorian literature, against

[...] the false idea that a modern Paganism could perpetuate, from a purely artistic sense, the beauty proper to Christian literature: that it is possible for the imaginative worker, [...] to paint and perfume with the illusion of life a corpse. For refutation, witness the failure of our English painters, with all their art, to paint a Madonna which can hang beside the simplest old Florentine Virgin without exhibiting the absence of the ancient religious feeling. And what has befallen the loveliness of Catholicity would—in a few generations, when Christianity had faded out of the blood of men—befall the loveliness of Christianity.<sup>2</sup>

In connection with this tenet of Thompson's, the following statement of Meynell, written some ten years earlier, might illustrate further their common convictions. Speaking of Tennyson's poems such as "The Eve of St. Agnes", and "The Holy Grail", he says that they

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

## THE COMPANIONSHIP OF THEOLOGY AND LITERATURE 206

[...] are lovely portraits indeed, but they do not live; they are wanting in precisely that warmth and reality which the touch of faith alone can give. They are the poetical counterparts of Sir Joshua Reynold's Madonna in the National Gallery, and they might just as well be Venuses as Virgins. The Laureate handles with equal grace a Christian or a classical subject; and we can neither be sure that he throws his personality in the one more than the other.<sup>1</sup>

Thompson's essay "Nature's Immortality" furthers the development of his philosophy by interpreting nature in its relation to God and man. For him, man communes with nature but through God, the Creator of nature. Nature speaks the language of religion:

Absolute Nature lives not in our life, nor yet is lifeless, but lives in the life of God: and in so far, and so far merely, as man himself lives in that life, does he come into sympathy with Nature, and Nature with him. She is God's daughter, who stretches her hand only to her Father's friends. Not Shelley, not Wordsworth himself, ever drew so close to the heart of Nature as did the Seraph of Assisi, who was close to the Heart of God.<sup>2</sup>

Wordsworth's view of the "spirit of Nature" was inadequate, says Thompson, for he failed to realize that nature is but the objective presentment of the Divine Ideal. The function of the poet is "to see and restore the Divine idea of things, freed from the disfiguring accidents of their Fall."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Wilfrid Meynell, "Recent Poetry".

<sup>2</sup> Francis Thompson, "Nature's Immortality", in Merry England, Vol. 14, issue of Feb. 1890, p. 269-274.

<sup>3</sup> Everard Meynell, op. cit., p. 204.

## THE COMPANIONSHIP OF THEOLOGY AND LITERATURE 207

Thompson chose as mission for himself to "be the poet of the return to God."<sup>1</sup> Poetry could restore the "Divine idea" of things, and so help religion, without teaching religion or morality, provided the poet let her "play round the foot of the Cross".

ii) Theology and Life.— As is frequently the case in Thompson's writing, the ideology found in his prose is expressed in his poetry. The meaning of "Paganism Old and New", completed by "Nature's Immortality", has its counterpart in the theme of "The Hound of Heaven". This fact is acknowledged by Everard Meynell. Speaking of Thompson's "Nature's Immortality" he remarks:

There, again, the complete reasonableness and sincerity of his poetry is put to the test of his prose. It is as if another and most essential witness vouched for the wisdom of "The Hound of Heaven"—a witness who, after focussing the different vision of a different art, upon the same experience, swore to the same truth.<sup>2</sup>

Just as the two essays could be called a "plea that Theology and Literature might be reconciled," the poem "The Hound of Heaven" might serve as an illustration of the reconciliation of theology and life. "The Hound of Heaven" is full of the inadequacy of Nature",<sup>3</sup> says Everard Meynell,

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 205.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 206.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 205.

and one might add, full of the inadequacy of human love. Father Connolly chooses this poem as the most representative of Thompson's poetic mission: "No one of his poems reflects so clearly the mood of one whose ambition was to be the poet not of the return to Nature, but of the return to God."<sup>1</sup>

This poem, commonly recognized as the summation of Thompson's philosophy of life and of happiness, offers a singular parallel to the ideal inspired by the Merry England motto which states: "the length of our railroads is no measure for the happiness of life, and the electric light is no substitute for a Star in the East". "The Hound of Heaven" portrays the experience of a man and an age, the result of having made the love of nature and man "substitutes for the love of God, or means of distracting the soul from God's service."<sup>2</sup> It reveals in individual form the universal experience of a soul "looking to external things for the happiness which can be found only in God."<sup>3</sup> The poem like the Manifesto suggests the fact that happiness is to be found in the reconciliation of the two, the "human" and the "divine", as manifested in Christ. The poem alludes

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<sup>1</sup> Rev. Terence L. Connolly, ed., Poems of Francis Thompson, p. 350.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 369.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 368.

to the disappearance of the Christian experience from the modern secularized world, and stands for the poet's own efforts to recover it in his life and poetry. His own problems are speculated, suffered, and solved with his times.

"The Hound of Heaven" points a finger of rebuke at the secular humanists who have fostered the cult of disharmony between God and man, between God and the world, who have, consequently, removed the harmony in the relationship of man with man, in man's relationship with the world. The reader follows man in his complacent efforts to construct his own secular paradise, gradually separating himself from God "Lest having Him" he "must have naught beside".<sup>1</sup> Man appears as a worshiper of the finite, surrendering to one cult after another as substitutes for God. The cult of mere human reason, made a substitute for faith and Revelation as a norm for even religious knowledge and philosophy, ensnares him in the "labyrinthine ways" of his "own mind" as it flees from God, amidst its falsely optimistic and pessimistic philosophies. Man adopts the cult of the "Brotherhood of Man", separated from the "Fatherhood of God", the cult of Science forgetful of the Creator and "Nature's secrecies", the cult of Speed, cut-off from fidelity and stability to

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<sup>1</sup> Francis Thompson, "The Hound of Heaven", in Merry England, Vol. 15, issue of July 1890, p. 163-168.

## THE COMPANIONSHIP OF THEOLOGY AND LITERATURE 210

Tradition, the cult of the self gratified in the cult of the child, the cult of external nature separated from the Creator of nature. All these false conceptions and autonomous pursuits are presented as so many channels of escape, luring man away from the all-transcendent influence of God's authority and all-consuming love, tearing his life asunder, shattering the harmonies and happy completeness of his being.

The soul makes its way, fluctuating between rapt admiration for the world of Man and the bitterness of disappointment which the disorder of his torn existence, directed by himself, brings upon him. Such division cannot quench his unconscious thirst for harmony, order, unity. Denials, compromises, personal religious assertions cannot satisfy his thirst for truth and innermost yearnings. Comparing his longings and findings, he realizes that one dream has been shattered after another. Disappointed, baffled, amidst the numerous contrasts of opportunity and waste, amidst so many disharmonies of hope and disillusion, he breaks into a cry of déspair:

Ah! is Thy love indeed  
A weed, albeit an amaranthine weed,  
Suffering no flowers except its own to mount?

Thompson's question is based on the fact that in man's heart there was never extinguished the expectation of a return to the primordial condition and the hope for fulfillment of the harmonious design of creation. To satisfy

## THE COMPANIONSHIP OF THEOLOGY AND LITERATURE 211

his yearnings, man must therefore return to God, Harmony itself, the source of all order and unity which He shares with His creatures. To "restore the Divine idea", Thompson offers the way of Christianity—a Christian synthesis of the human and the divine. The strength of this synthesis lies in the comprehension that love of nature and of man are not separated from, but included in the Christ-life:

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

The poem leaves the reader strong with the conclusion that each single human activity must ever draw from the Eternal its purpose, fruitfulness, and certainty. It asserts that there is no opposition between science and faith, between the secular and the religious. It affirms that theology is the ultimate norm of all other disciplines.

The efficacy of the solution is to be found in the experience of Divine Love:

'Thou dravest love from thee, who dravest Me".

In this poem as in all his works, Thompson's ultimate inspiration is God Incarnate in Jesus Christ: "The chase of the 'Hound of Heaven' ends in a divine embrace; like that ending is the ending of all his verse."<sup>1</sup> For him Christ is

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<sup>1</sup> Everard Meynell, op. cit., p. 211.

## THE COMPANIONSHIP OF THEOLOGY AND LITERATURE 212

the true Orient, the central reality of life, the unseen world an ever present reality. This belief gives man and, through him, the entire universe, meaning and direction. The poem suggests the highest signification of man, his relation to his redeeming personal God, his relation to man under the headship of Christ. It implies that God's presence in the world and His union in nature with man can "restore the Divine Ideal", and can set aright the roots of all disorder which lay in the damage caused by original sin. God-made-Man is the bond of unity, the source of order and the basis of harmony in all creatures. He is the close link which binds the transient and the eternal, establishes the essential connection between the eternal and the temporal, and fuses the visible and invisible worlds. He is the "Splendor of God" irradiated upon the natural world.

"The Hound of Heaven" is suffused with the affirmation of supernatural Faith in the unseen, of Christian Hope and Love flowing from the Charity of Christ. The intangibles of life (love, conflict, sacrifice) are interpreted against the pattern of Christ-love. The meaning of renunciation is re-stated:

Ah! Must thou char the wood ere Thou canst  
limn with it?

There is the resolution of man's pain and suffering:

Is my gloom, after all,  
Shade of His Hand, outstretched caressingly?

## THE COMPANIONSHIP OF THEOLOGY AND LITERATURE 213

This "sacramental" picture of the theological truths concerning God, man, and the universe points to the Catholic philosophy of life which answers the questions that men cannot solve by reason. Here, says a commentator,

[...] is a poet who, in one unique ode, stated the whole burden of Victorian inquiry and speculation and gave a solution explicitly mystical, obviously Christian and implicitly Catholic.<sup>1</sup>

The integrating power of Catholic faith infuses a system in the intellectual disorder of the nineteenth century. The order and harmony of its vital philosophical tradition makes for that sublime unity for which the Victorian prophets were so avid. Read in the light of Sartor Resartus and its sequel Past and Present, "The Hound of Heaven" gives purpose and direction to Carlyle's "glimpses of truth" and "burning intuitions" that "could never combine into any diffused radiance of system."<sup>2</sup>

"The Hound of Heaven" is a fine illustration of Meynell's ideal concerning the mission of the poet as "interpreter and teacher as well as singer". Thompson's treatment here is that of an interpreter probing into the

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<sup>1</sup> Albert A. Cock, "Francis Thompson", in the Dublin Review, Vol.132, issue of Oct. 1911, p. 247-277.

<sup>2</sup> Francis Thompson, "Sartor Re-read", in A Renegade Poet and Other Essays, p. 287.

ultimate meaning of man and his life. This is perhaps his most vivid description of that journey to which every man is destined; then, Thompson does fulfil that function which is

[...] to give a voice to love and hope and faith, and to lead, like a guiding star, the weary mariner to that haven of rest, where alone the ideal of which he has dreamed on earth, and which poetry has vainly striven to embody, will become at last and eternally real.<sup>1</sup>

Meynell's definition of the mission of the poet satisfies Maritain's conception of the "vocation" of the artist who, he claims, is "on the road which leads upright souls to God".<sup>2</sup>

#### 5. Fruitful Interrelationship between Theology and Literature

1) Literature: Handmaid of Religion. — "The Hound of Heaven" is also a striking example of Thompson's belief that "Theology and philosophy [...] must be clothed with flesh, to create an organism which can come down and live among men." To keep in touch with the human and the divine forms a part of his characteristic manner of treatment. In a review of his Poems, including "The Hound of Heaven"

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<sup>1</sup> Wilfrid Meynell, "Recent Poetry", op. cit.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Maritain, Art and Scholasticism, p. 30.

Patmore observes:

The main region of Mr. Thompson's poetry is the inexhaustible and hitherto almost unworked mine of Catholic philosophy. Not but that he knows better than to make his religion the direct subject of any of his poems, unless it presents itself to him as a human passion, and the most human of passions, as it does in the splendid ode just noticed, in which God's long pursuit and final conquest of the resisting soul as described in a torrent of as humanly impressive verse as was ever inspired by a natural affection.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, this poem is representative of Thompson's attempt to attain the union of "Sanctity and Song"—the hard and rare union of what Maritain calls "two absolutes". This ideal is expressed in many ways throughout his works. It forms the theme of "To a Poet Breaking Silence" in which he prays Mrs. Meynell to teach him the way of her poetry, that of a poet who is also a follower of Christ. These lines, Meynell repeats as a description of Thompson's own poetry in which he finds the actual fulfillment of his view of the supernatural and its relation to subject matter:

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<sup>1</sup> Coventry Patmore, "Mr. Francis Thompson, a New Poet", in The Fortnightly Review, Vol. 55, issue of Jan. 1894, p. 157-166.

This aroma of Catholicism expressed in all great literature—though it be what is called secular in subject—this absolute and elementary unity between ethics of morality and art in composition—not only exists as an atmosphere round all that Mr. Thompson writes; but finds expression itself in the lovely lines he has written "To a poet breaking silence" whom he bids

From Moses and the Muses draw,  
The tables of thy double law!<sup>1</sup>

This Christian synthesis, integrating Classical standards and the Catholic faith, he upholds as the characteristic mark of all great poetry:

To all great poets, indeed those lines expressing the dual nature, at once human and divine, of the Living Word of Poetry, may be addressed:

Ah! let the sweet birds of the Lord  
With earth's waters make accord;  
Teach how the crucifix may be  
Carven from the laurel-tree,  
Fruit of the Hesperides  
Burnish take on Eden-trees,  
The Muses' sacred grove be wet  
With the red dew of Olivet,  
And Sappho lay her burning brows,  
In white Cecilia's lap of snows!<sup>2</sup>

From these convictions Meynell draws the principle that no limitations of the field for artistic work are caused by the artist's adherence to the Catholic faith and its body of teaching:

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<sup>1</sup> Wilfrid Meynell, "The New Poet", in Merry England, Vol. 22, issue of Nov. 1893, p. 1-10.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

## THE COMPANIONSHIP OF THEOLOGY AND LITERATURE 217

From a Catholic poet we need not exact direct treatment of Catholic dogmas; these are best expressed in poetry only to the extent, that they are expressed in poetry in the Scriptures.<sup>1</sup>

This view echoes that of Thompson's as seen in the introduction to his Shelley article as well as that commonly accepted by Catholic critics. Any subject in harmony with man's rational nature is proper material for art. Any subject not treated in harmony with man's rational nature is not a basis for true art, Catholic or non-Catholic. This principle is in accordance with Newman's conception of Catholic literature:

[...] by "Catholic Literature" is not to be understood a literature which treats exclusively or primarily of Catholic matters, of Catholic doctrine, controversy, history, persons, or politics; but it includes all subjects of literature whatever, treated as a Catholic would treat them, and as he only can treat them.<sup>2</sup>

Only a rational treatment of life will reveal its reality and its beauty. Here is where the service of religion to art becomes important. The Christian poet aims to be true in his literary productions, not only to the higher and more real nature but to a nature elevated, by the infused habits of grace, above itself to the plane of

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> John Henry Cardinal Newman, "English Catholic Literature", in The Idea of a University, London, Longmans, 1929, p. 296.

the supernatural. Viewing literature as the direct expression of natural truth, he simply develops and magnifies its content. It is this quality that gives to Christian art its superiority over all pagan art:

The definition of Christian art is to be found in its subject and its spirit; (...). It is the art of humanity redeemed. It is implanted in the Christian soul, by the side of the running waters, under the sky of the theological virtues, amid the breaths of the seven gifts of the Spirit. It is natural for it to bear Christian fruit.

Everything, sacred and profane, belongs to it. It is at home in the whole range of man's industry and joy.<sup>1</sup>

In his article on Thompson's poetry, Meynell considers the inner value, the worth of its principles as a standard in literature. Poetry which extends to the supernatural yet does not lose touch with human things enables the writer to translate for the reader the things of the spirit by the things of the senses:

(...) the seeing eye can catch glimpses of answering truths—type tumbles on the top of type through all the physical and spiritual creation.<sup>2</sup>

It enables the reader to apprehend by means of material symbols those spiritual realities which transcend human experience and give the supernatural a point of contact with the natural. Meynell exemplifies this principle by

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<sup>1</sup> Jacques Maritain, Art and Scholasticism, p. 53.

<sup>2</sup> Wilfrid Meynell, op. cit.

referring to Thompson's "Manus Animam Pinxit":

No mere mortal woman ever was so sung. It is man and woman as Divine proxies that the poet, in advance of others, takes to his heart and extols with his pen. Thus has he united divinity and humanity in poetry; and thus, in another sense than has already been indicated, it seems not too fantastic to say that the Flesh becomes again the Word—the woman becomes the verse. And this Word will again be transformed to Flesh by moulding man, and making for him ideals to be realized as the Creation continues through centuries yet to run.<sup>1</sup>

The theme of this passage is analogous to that of Coventry Patmore's essay "Dieu et ma Dame".<sup>2</sup> In the introduction to his comprehensive study of Patmore's poems, Father Connolly summarizes the poet's thought on the subject:

For Patmore the beauty and loveliness of all other women was but a reflection of the beauty and loveliness of Mary. And the beauty and loveliness of Mary were but a reflection of the beauty and loveliness of Jesus Christ, Who was God-made-Man.<sup>3</sup>

Like Meynell and Thompson, Patmore believed in the power of art to bring home to the Victorian mind the awareness of the wonder of the Word:

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Coventry Patmore, Principles in Art, p. 349-362.

<sup>3</sup> Connolly, Terence L., S.J., ed., Mystical Poems of Nuptial Love, Boston, Bruce Humphries, 1938, p. xvi.

Poetry of the very highest and most austere order is almost the only form in which the corollaries of the doctrine of the Incarnation, to which the deepest minds are now waking, can be safely approached. Prose and the pulpit must yet, for a long while, persevere in

Smiting the brutish ear with doctrine hard,  
Wherein Truth strives to look as near a lie  
As can comport with her divinity;

but the poet may speak with comparative boldness, because there is little danger of his being believed or listened to except by those who already know, as they only can know who have learned that nature (natura) is only 'about to be' until through grace, it comes to its glorious actuality.<sup>1</sup>

That Patmore lived up to his ideal may be found in Father Connolly's estimate of his works:

The Incarnation, not merely a dogma to which a cold intellectual assent is given, but a truth which pervades and possesses one, in its essence and in all its corollaries, was the centre of Patmore's life and art.<sup>2</sup>

It was the mission of the poet, Patmore thought, to reacquaint the Victorian World with the true meaning of love which had fled from England. He chose to interpret it by a close analogy between the love of God—translated and brought closer to man through the Incarnation—and human love with which his age seemed so well acquainted.

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<sup>1</sup> Coventry Patmore, "Mr. Francis Thompson, a New Poet", op. cit.

<sup>2</sup> Connolly, Terence L., S.J., ed., op. cit.

ii) Religion: Vitality of Literary Form.— Against the assertion that orthodoxy in religion or philosophy is intellectually devitalizing, Meynell maintains that the energy of truth enters vitally, and shines upon the spiritual and intellectual form of a poet's work, and is clearly a part of its strength: "[...] the great principles of Christianity are apparent in the great poet's mere mechanism." A writer's beliefs enter into his work to give it that "vitality" and "new life" which every "true poet" must give to his words: "He does not merely use speech, he re-informs it. He gives his own heart to words, a new meaning to sound..."<sup>1</sup> Meynell's conclusion is logical: "[...] a great poet must in heart and principle be a great Catholic also whether he knows it or not."<sup>2</sup> This conviction is confirmed by Maritain:

If you want to produce Christian work, be a Christian, and try to make a work of beauty into which you have put your heart; do not adopt a Christian pose.<sup>3</sup>

The foregoing elements of Meynell's philosophy of art seem to connect with Maritain's concept of the true form in poetry. In the light of Maritain's principles,

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<sup>1</sup> Wilfrid Meynell, op. cit.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Jacques Maritain, op. cit., p. 54.

Frank O'Malley explores the relation between theology and literature, and makes a case for the Christian poet who "possesses deeper insight than that of his unbelieving craftsman into the fundamental problem of matter and form."<sup>1</sup>

He affirms that the Catholic

[...] incarnational awareness, this grasp of the liturgical, factual reality of Christ-in-time, Christ-in-the-universe, can enliven the poet's vision and illumine, inform, his words.

He writes further that

The Christian poet has the astonishing consciousness of the Word—providing the spiritual form, the unity of all creation—and it shines through his words.

As a consequence, with the Catholic poet, says O'Malley, the "Form" is

[...] more wondrously and totally resolved in the poet's inevitable ability to realize, with ontologic force, the splendor of spiritual form (shining in every living thing) which he, in the creative act of poetry, breathes into his matter, renewing rather than warping it.<sup>2</sup>

O'Malley's affirmation is strengthened by Maritain's conception of "artistic activity" exemplified in Hopkins'

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<sup>1</sup> Frank O'Malley, "The Renaissance of the Novelist and the Poet", in The Catholic Renaissance in a Disintegrating World, edited by Norman Weyand, Chicago, Loyola University Press, 1951, p. 65. (Frank O'Malley is one of the most prominent contributors to the Renaissance periodical.)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 65-66.

works. Concerning the elements of artistic activity

Maritain remarks:

[...] the things made present to the soul, by the sensible symbols of art—by rhythm, sound, line, colour, form, volume, words, metre, rhyme and image, the proximate matter of art—are themselves merely a material element of the beauty of the work, just like the symbols in question; they are the remote matter, so to speak, at the disposal of the artist, on which he must make the brilliance of a form, the light of being shine.<sup>1</sup>

"For the Catholic poet", adds O'Malley, "the brilliance of a form, the reflection of the light of being, is really and ultimately the Christ-Form, expressing the concord, the unity of everything as God's creation."<sup>2</sup> With Maritain, O'Malley chooses Hopkins as the great poet and quotes:

If I looked for a poem incarnating in itself and manifesting in the finest way poetic experience as I have tried to describe it, I would suggest Gerard Manley Hopkins' sonnet entitled God's Grandeur [...] Here a powerful intellectual matter has been vitalized and brought to a creative spiritual unity in the inner flame of intuitive emotion, and the created object appears as necessary in each of its syllables and as abounding in meanings as a fully rounded world, because everything in it has been formed and vitally determined by this intuitive emotion.<sup>3</sup>

"Hopkins", says O'Malley, "is the 'pure poet' that looks upon reality with "a profoundly dynamic response", whose

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<sup>1</sup> Jacques Maritain, op. cit., p. 45.

<sup>2</sup> Frank O'Malley, op. cit., p. 66.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

"Word has been made flesh indeed in his mind and poetry", whose "Word is animated with warm, breathing reality".<sup>1</sup> These expressions recall Meynell's ideals and those qualities he thinks he has found in Thompson.

iii) A Universal Solution to a Perennial Problem.—

There is, in Patmore's estimate, a statement which can serve to point up definitely Thompson's essential contribution to the Catholic renaissance in modern literature:

Mr. Thompson places himself by these poems, in the front rank of the pioneers of the movement, which if it be not checked, as in the history of the world it has once or twice been checked before, by premature formulation and by popular and profane perversion, must end in creating "a new heaven and a new earth."<sup>2</sup>

By placing Thompson in the middle of the unusually cohesive group of the later Victorian Catholic poets revolving around the Meynell lodestar, it is possible to summarize the ideal which they pursued and which directed them to a goal reconcilable with the contemporary resurgence of Catholic letters. In the cultural activities of the Meynell-Thompson group of writers may be found the first intimations of the modern anti-Romantic movement designated

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Coventry Patmore, op. cit.

as the "New Humanism". This is a return to the principles of medieval humanism based on the synthesis established in the natural world by the ancient philosophers of Athens and Rome, and completed and elevated by the leading Christian Scholars of the Middle Ages. This is a renewal of Christian humanism as the source of an integrated philosophy of culture and of a sane philosophy of happiness reconciling

(...) reason with Revelation in the search for truth, conscience with Divine counsels and commandments in the search for righteousness, taste with supernatural Grace in the search for beauty.<sup>1</sup>

The renewal of the spiritual form, through a reconciliation of the natural and the supernatural in life and literature is the chief characteristic of the renaissance of Catholic poetry. Aubrey de Vere's preface to the May Carols which might be called the "Proclamation" of the Catholic Literary Revival in England, is an attempt to revive the emotional and imaginative elements of religious poetry that had almost ceased to exist in England. The first sentence gives its entire purpose: the "May Carols", De Vere insists,

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<sup>1</sup> Gerald G. Walsh, S. J., "The Tradition of Christian Humanism", in Literature: Channel of Culture, New York, Harcourt, 1948, p. 42-44.

[...] must be regarded not as a collection of Hymns but as a poem on the Incarnation, a poem dedicated to the honor of the Virgin Mother, and preserving ever, as [...] aim, that of illustrating Christianity, at once as a Theological Truth and as a living Power, reigning among the Humanities and renewing the affections and imagination of man.<sup>1</sup>

This literary creed is identical with "certain profound aspirations of contemporary art" as described by Maritain with special reference to Paul Claudel's aspirations. He remarks that modern poetry, as conceived by Claudel,

[...] feels that it is its duty to piece together again, to reconcile the faculties of imagination and sensibility with religious knowledge, to recover "the whole man in the integral and indissoluble unity of his double nature, the spiritual and the carnal, as in the intricacies of his nature and supernature, his life on earth and the mystery of the operations of Heaven."<sup>2</sup>

This fresh encounter between religion and imaginative literature is a readjustment between poetry and the world in and for which it is produced. In a civilization in which the man of letters deems himself a spiritual and intellectual substitute for religion, and offers his readers the integrating power of art as a remedy to the ills of the age, the Catholic creative spirit advocates the integration of art with Catholicism to increase the power both of art and religion. The principles of a Catholic

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<sup>1</sup> Aubrey de Vere, "Preface" to May Carols, p. xiii.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Maritain, Art and Scholasticism, p. 93.

## THE COMPANIONSHIP OF THEOLOGY AND LITERATURE 227

aesthetics seem to offer the whole solution to the problem of substance and form in literature as discussed by the non-Catholic writer, Nathan A. Scott Jr., in Modern Literature and the Religious Frontier.<sup>1</sup>

The core of Thompson's thought on the relation of poetry and religion sums up that of the literary group which he represents:

Once poetry was, as she should be, the lesser sister and helpmate of the Church; the minister to the mind, as the Church to the soul.<sup>2</sup>

Then, Catholic creative literature is the answer to Carlyle's prescription:

Ever must the fine arts be, if not religion, yet indissolubly united to it, dependent on it, vitally blended with it as body is with soul.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Nathan A. Scott Jr., Modern Literature and the Religious Frontier, New York, Harper, 1958.

<sup>2</sup> Wilfrid Meynell, ed., Shelley, by Francis Thompson, p. 18.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Carlyle, "Jesuitism", in Latter-Day Pamphlets, p. 271.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In the foregoing study, the impact of Catholicism on English letters and the wide reading public has been shown to have developed markedly during the later Victorian era. Evidence has been brought to justify the claim that Wilfrid Meynell's personal influence, coupled with his journalistic pursuits and his own writings, were instrumental in the attainment of this common ideal by the Meynell-Thompson group of writers. His achievement may be summarized as the fostering of art for the sake of Religion, thus interpreting in terms of life Newman's abstract teachings in Catholic theology and philosophy. This was Meynell's answer to the "Art for Art's Sake" movement, itself the climax of the want of metaphysical and religious certitude behind Ruskin's teaching of beauty for the sake of beauty and Arnold's advocacy of culture for the sake of culture. This was the great service which he attempted to render his bewildered age living the aftermath of Carlyle's subjective idealism and impractical creed.

The measure of Meynell's service to English literature and to Religion can be estimated by the extent to which the ideals which he propagated have become commonplace in the modern Catholic resurgence of letters. The conclusions drawn from the present discussion take the

form of philosophical principles as standards in art and culture.

First. The modern Catholic literary renaissance finds its vital inspiration in a return to and development of traditional Christian culture and humanism. Consequently, the rebirth of Catholic letters is a continuation and a re-flowering (not a radical innovation) of the classical and scholastic standards fused in a general Catholic culture as it existed in the Middle Ages. However, the revival of the medieval tradition is not a purely historic re-creation of the past: it is relevant to the problems of Christian culture in the present; it is at the same time a reaction against and a substitute for the faulty philosophy and theology that underlie the Protestant ascendancy and the neo-paganism of today. Therefore, to sum up a first conclusion: the Catholic standard is both traditional and contemporary; to continue, the Catholic literary revival must prove itself "healthily modern"; that is, it must revive the lasting value of medieval thought and culture under some form suitable for the modern and contemporary world.

Second. A piece of literature as a fine art is more than a concatenation of words artfully arranged to produce a pleasing mental or emotional effect; it is also a representation and an interpretation of human life. It is

therefore impregnated with rational philosophic thought based on a true system of beliefs, metaphysics, and ethics. From the above statements a second principle may be inferred: there is a place for theological and philosophical as well as intellectual and moral standards in art; the true greatness of a piece of literature must be judged on the basis of both the doctrinal and the aesthetic aspects of criticism.

Third. A genuine Catholic aesthetics joins a universalist attitude to a Catholic philosophy of art and culture. Essentially, Catholic means universal. Then, the expressive phrase Catholic literature should take its true meaning and place as an ideal, not only in the Catholic but also in the non-Catholic literary world. To this effect, certain standards must be established: if the Catholic writer is to become a creator of a genuine literary ideal and a propagator of Catholic culture, if he is to be considered other than a "propagandist of doctrine and purveyor of lessons", if he is to bear witness to the fact that the Catholic creed does not act as a curb upon thought and upon the fullest liberty demanded by art; then, he must be a strong virile writer in the true artistic and philosophic tradition; that is, he cannot be less than a master in literary craftsmanship, a Catholic of enlightened and uncompromising religious convictions as well as a

scholar of powerful intellect and all-round culture.

Wilfrid Meynell's life and work might well serve as a standard of excellence and achievement in the field of Catholic literary journalism. The core of the Merry England ideal remains unaltered; its power of revival, religious and literary, survives as one solution to the cultural problems vexing the contemporary world. Our immediate needs still demand more and better Catholic creative writers and a wider and more discerning reading public. The future of Catholic creative writing calls for "heroes as men of letters", such as Meynell, whose zest for truth and greatness of mind could inspire the editorial policy that champions a seemingly lost cause, and upholds the unsung little periodical that still has a unique part to play in the discovery and encouragement of original talent. The aspiring writer still depends on the influence of the educator of literary opinion who must continue to pull down the barrier between the creative writer and the Catholic theologian, between the creative writer and the intellectual, economic, and political man.

This has not been an exhaustive study of the Merry England periodical nor was it intended to be such. Rather, an attempt was made to illustrate how far its contributors have caught the Catholic spirit and have been imbued with traditional Christian humanism. This magazine abounds in

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

232

material which throws light on the application of Catholic principles to social, political, and artistic culture in the forms in which modern society brings them, and could open to the student vistas and possibilities in the field of Catholic literary journalism.

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One Shilling.]

[Monthly.

*The New Magazine will be published on the  
First of May.*

## MERRY ENGLAND

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### MANIFESTO OF "MERRY ENGLAND."

*WHILE the rapid growth of populations baffles the political economist, the profusion of periodical literature may well perplex the general reader: and there are those who, declining to be doctrinaires in their dealings with humanity, would limit by a strenuous Malthusianism the multiplication of magazines. Some words by way of explanation are due, therefore, from him who would bespeak for yet another candidate in the same kind the Public favour.*

*Professor Ruskin does not love the steam plough, yet surely the steam plough in the midst of scenery the most idyllic is a better alternative—where such the alternative must be—than a starving people. The Professor indeed supposes that the modern ploughboy's whistling, as well as his work, will be done by steam; but we have faith that the rustic will yet again whistle for himself, albeit no longer for "want of thought." Frankly accepting the conditions of Modern England, we would have it a Merry England too. Though the maypole be a thing of the past, the same instinct for joy which moved men and maidens on the village greens of long ago is ready to assert itself still—Heaven sees in what distorted fashion—in our manufacturing towns, in our dense sea-ports, and our fields of coal. In London alone there are "two millions who never smile"—the members, alas! of a great family scattered, nay rather huddled, in every city and every village, through the land. How their toil may be lightened and dignified for them, their sky cleared, and their air sweetened, and the care for that light and sweetness cultivated in themselves; how marriage may*

*be, not more rash, yet more possible and more righteous, among them; how maternity, losing at least its mental anguish, may regain, once more, the ancient "joy that a man is born into the world," how the children who now perish in their infancy may be saved to society and to thrifty homes; how old age may be made a season of honourable peace and of a well-earned pension, rather than of workhouse misery, which—cruel as death—puts asunder husband and wife; how Religion may be made more dear—at once more divine and more human, and the reverences and tendernesses of life multiplied among them:—how all this may be, the writers in the new Magazine will, month by month, invite their Readers to consider.*

*Such topics as these we shall attempt to treat with a freshness and delicacy which will redeem them from the dulness of blue-books, and will bid for the sympathy even of the happy and the young—the England which is Merry in all epochs. And if not in these, at least in less difficult problems concerning a Nation's welfare we shall have scope for fancy, and take opportunities for fun. We spare our readers the trite remark that Literature and Art are great elements of human happiness, but we shall make no apology for recognizing the fact by the publication of frequent papers, critical and biographical, about the painters and the writers of the present and the past, and thus at least we may promise, that our Literature shall be literary Literature and our Art shall be artistic Art. And since we hold that the length of our railroads is no measure of the happiness of life, and the electric light is no substitute for a Star in the East, nor literature a glory, nor art anything else than a shame, if they disown fealty to the All-Father, we shall seek to revive in our own hearts, and in the hearts of others, the enthusiasm of the Christian Faith. Moreover, in religion as in literature, in art and in sociology, we shall seek to fulfil Dr. Johnson's precept, and "clear our minds of cant"—the cant of commerce and the cant of capital, the cant even of chivalry and of labour, the cant of mediævalism no less than the cant of modern days.*

THE NEW MAGAZINE WILL BE SENT TO SUBSCRIBERS POST-FREE FOR TWELVE SHILLINGS PER ANNUM, ON APPLICATION TO THE PUBLISHER OF "MERRY ENGLAND," AT THE OFFICE,

44, ESSEX STREET, STRAND, LONDON, W.C.

## ABSTRACT OF

Wilfrid Meynell  
Propagandist of the Catholic Literary Revival

The purpose of this study is to make some estimate of Wilfrid Meynell's contribution, as propagandist, to the early Catholic Literary Revival in Victorian England. His achievements are evaluated in terms of the needs of the century which he served and with a view of their abiding significance in the field of contemporary Catholic letters.

The first chapter gives a general survey of the attempts of an anti-supernatural Victorian society to hold together a disintegrating culture which had been founded on a supernatural principle. It shows the need of a creed to steer by amidst the conflicting ideologies of a world looking to literature for guidance in the interpretation of life and culture.

The second chapter represents Wilfrid Meynell as a propagandist crusading for the preoccupancy of Catholicism in the rising pagan generation. He is seen as dedicating his life to the buttressing of Alice Meynell's influence amidst the literary celebrities of Victorian London, and sharing her efforts to bring the diverse elements of secular culture in harmony with the genuine Christian ideal of civilization while defending the utility and worth of aesthetic experience against the contempt of practical

## ABSTRACT

materialists and the neglect or suspicion of their co-religionists. A great part of their efforts was devoted to the obscure work of journalism. Besides contributing to innumerable journals and reviews, Wilfrid Meynell was to be editor-in-chief of three different periodicals: The Pen: A Journal of Literature, from May 22 to July 3, 1880; The Weekly Register, from July 1881 to 1898; Merry England, from May 1883 to March 1895. Mrs. Meynell, one of the leading woman journalists of the period, was co-founder and co-editor of The Pen and Merry England, and furnished a considerable number of contributions to The Weekly Register, to name but the main journalistic activities through which she collaborated, as co-propagandist, with Wilfrid Meynell. Their main project to the purpose of propaganda is shown to be the launching of the Merry England periodical as the chief organ of the Catholic Literary Revival—a monthly magazine of general literature devoted to the sponsorship of creative writers and to the education of the reading public.

Chapter three, an analysis of the Manifesto of Merry England, reveals Catholicism as the ideological key to a genuine renaissance of Catholic cultural standards based on the lasting values and inherent vitality of the universal theological order of medieval Christendom. It explores the implications of integral Christianity and applies them to

## ABSTRACT

the total problem of Victorian culture.

In the following chapter, illustrations of the Merry England ideology are culled from the several contributions of the periodical. A dynamic Catholic spirit is seen to penetrate every department of the magazine (that of philosophy, history, sociology, and creative literature), establishing a vital contact between the theological and philosophical foundations of medieval tradition and the cultural aspirations of the Victorian world. From the writings of the three main contributors of Merry England—Francis Thompson, Alice Meynell, and Wilfrid Meynell—the fundamental principles regarding the interrelations between theology and literature are discussed. The various contributions used for illustrative purposes present an authentic cross section of the Revival in nineteenth-century England.

In chapter five, Meynell's role as propagandist, revealed particularly in the patronage of aspiring writers, is exemplified in his relation with Francis Thompson. He is shown as making his poet's career, bringing financial and moral support according to his needs, sustaining his ideals and ambitions, educating the way for the recognition of his works, and spreading his fame. In all his works, whether as journalist, editor, and author or in his other activities as publisher, literary adviser, and press-agent,

## ABSTRACT

Meynell is seen at the service of poetry in others; and this, for the sake of Religion.

The remaining chapter and conclusions point to the Merry England ideal—the fruitful interrelations between theology and literature. The reconciliation between the Christian faith and the creative imagination, representing a happy means between didacticism and pure aestheticism, is at once the epitome of nineteenth-century Catholic literary opinion as propagated by Wilfrid Meynell and the dominating characteristic of the modern resurgence of Catholic letters. This Catholic literary ideal is shown to offer the true answer to both the nineteenth-century secular writer looking to literature for the spiritual realities of life and the contemporary non-Catholic writer in his search for meaningful symbol.

For his distinguished service to the Church and to literature, Wilfrid Meynell is given a unique and essential place in the pioneering Catholic literary movement which prepared the way for the present-day development and significance of English Catholic letters.

This study makes use of the Thompson-Meynell Collection belonging to the library of Boston College, Boston, Massachusetts. This collection of Thompsoniana contains 600 manuscripts as well as 111 notebooks. The Boston College Library also possesses a complete file of

ABSTRACT

The Pen magazine, one of the two complete files of the Merry England periodical known to exist, and a complete file of The Weekly Register, from the years 1881 to 1899, in bound volumes or microfilm copies. The collection also includes the separately published works of Thompson, of Alice and Wilfrid Meynell, and of Coventry Patmore, to name but the works more closely connected with this thesis.