

A L F R E D N O Y E S
P O E T O F T R A D I T I O N

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B I O G R A P H I C A L N O T E S¹

Alfred Noyes was born in Staffordshire, England, in the year 1880. The exact date of his birth was September 16 of that year.

He was educated at Exeter College, Oxford, but left the University without taking a degree. During his student days he was well known as an athlete, and rowed in the Exeter boat. He was also an excellent student, and wrote verse for various undergraduate magazines.²

His first poetry was published shortly after he left Oxford, and his output has grown to enormous proportions since that time. He was but forty years old when he had the pleasure of seeing his verse issued in a collected edition in 1920.

Noyes was invited to the United States in 1913 where he was the Lowell Lecturer at Harvard University giving a series of lectures on "The Sea in English Poetry". The following year (1914) he was appointed Murray Professor of English Literature at Princeton University. He held this post, with one short interlude in other work, until 1923. The interlude referred to embraced a brief period during the last war when he held a temporary post with the British Foreign Office after

1. The major portion of the information used in preparing this life was taken from Who's Who, A. & C. Black, Lond. 1941

2. Among these magazines were a now extinct publication The Jester, and another known as The Broad.

being rejected on physical grounds for active military service.

Since 1923, Mr. Noyes has lived largely in England, but has recently been living in the United States and Canada.

In 1918 he was honored for his services to the Crown and created C.B.E. He has also received the honorary degree of LL.D. from the University of Glasgow, in 1927, and that of D. Litt. from Yale University, in 1913.

He has been a contributor to such well known magazines as Blackwood's, Cornhill, The Fortnightly Review, and Atlantic Monthly.

Mr. Noyes has been twice married, the first time to Garnett Daniels, This marriage took place in 1907, and Mrs. Noyes died in 1926. In the following year he was married a second time. His second wife was Mary Weld-Blundell, the widow of an American army officer.

He gives as his favourite recreations: rowing, swimming, and golf. He is also a member of the Beefsteak and Athenaeum Clubs of London.

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

In the midst of the confusion, license, formlessness and immorality of contemporary literature, there is one man who has stood out, strong and unafraid, for the old ideals and traditions. That man is Alfred Noyes. His has been the voice crying in the wilderness, a voice often unheard and more often ridiculed, but which has persisted in its demands for literary law and order.

It is the purpose of this dissertation to investigate Noyes and his poetry, and, if possible, to discover the true nature of that tradition which he has so constantly preached and practised. It is proposed to begin with a survey of the backgrounds of modern English poetry. This survey should indicate some of the movements and rebellions which have made that poetry what it is to-day, and against which Noyes has struggled so violently. Thus we may learn exactly what it is for which he is fighting. From the backgrounds we shall progress to a consideration of the essential nature of both tradition and revolt in poetry. The arrival at some definition of tradition should give us a handy yard-stick by which we may measure Noyes's poetical achievements and theories.

The material outlined above is, of course, of a preliminary nature. The body of the dissertation, that part in which we actually examine and analyse the work of Noyes, will consist of three chapters, each of

which will approach his traditionalism from a somewhat different angle. The first of these will consider Noyes as the poet of tradition in form. The second will take up the question of traditional subject matter or material in his verse, and the third will examine his traditional spirit. The spiritual angle is of particular importance in the light of his recent conversion to the Catholic Church. Finally, it is hoped that some specific as well as general conclusions may be drawn.

Evaluation of the work and art of any contemporary is dangerous and difficult. It is often almost impossible to view such a man in his true light. We are too close to him, too near the forest to see the trees. Nor are we actually in a position to form a just estimate of one who is still active and still in process of development. Despite these dangers and difficulties, I feel that Noyes has written enough, and said enough to make him and his philosophy of poetry a standard part of English literary history. Certainly he is a man of great interest and importance. In view of the position he has held in the literary life of both England and America, it is remarkable how little has been written about him. The standard work is the study by the late Walter Jerrold, a work to which any student of Noyes must acknowledge an enormous debt of gratitude.¹

1. Walter Jerrold, Alfred Noyes, London, Shaylor, 1920.

Noyes is a man of such peculiar intensity that one cannot hold the middle ground in any question of likes and dislikes. You are either for him or against him. Modern criticism almost invariably and inevitably is against him for reasons which we shall discover in the course of this dissertation.

I have endeavoured as far as possible to let Mr. Noyes speak for himself through the media of his poetry and his prose writings. I freely admit that his literary beliefs and theories find in me a hearty subscriber, but I trust that my own personal leanings have not blinded me to his many faults, and that the result will be as free from prejudice as it is within my power to make it.

We live in an age where it is fashionable to shout down the old established things of life, in an age where poetry has little rhyme and even less reason. Like Ernest Dowson, our poets cry "for madder music, and for stronger wine." Only the new is acceptable to our critics. We are tormented by plagues of poetic innovators, symbolists, imagists, expressionists, impressionists and dabblers in vers libre. Tennyson is dead! Long live Spender, Auden, Day-Lewis and Eliot! To such as give their unqualified approval to the new order of things my study of Noyes will probably strike a note of unregenerate Victorianism. To those others who feel, like myself, that we may still profit from the lessons of the past, and who

further feel that a good poem on a rose is not less worthy of approval than, let us say, a good poem on a garbage scow, I sincerely hope will be brought a feeling of satisfaction that one English Poet at least is brave enough to dare the jeers of his contemporaries, and honest enough to campaign for what he still believes to be poetic truth.

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C H A P T E R I

THE BACKGROUNDS OF MODERN ENGLISH POETRY

The new poetry of to-day is the end product of a long and often unrelated series of revolts and rebellions against the main stream of English verse as represented by Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton and Tennyson. More specifically it is the culmination of a carefully and skilfully waged attack on the Tennysonian tradition.

Tennyson's greatest crime seems to have been that he was a popular poet, that he was read widely and avidly by the masses. It is interesting to note that much of the unfavorable criticism leveled against Alfred Noyes today stems from the same source. It was not so much Tennyson himself who was the target for the arrows of the nineteenth century innovators as the things for which they believed he stood, smug Victorian morality, a "safe and sane" attitude towards life, extremely regular metrical patterns, and a general stuffiness, all of which were found intolerable. Cleanth Brooks sees in the general revulsion from Victorianism, as represented by Tennyson, a preoccupation with the materials of poetry which has revealed itself in two forms. These are "a tendency to rest in the mere objective description of things, and a tendency to substitute new and unworked material for old."¹ To this must

1. Cleanth Brooks, Modern Poetry and the Tradition, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1939, p.69.

be added a complete revision of the commonly accepted forms of poetry, with greater elasticity and freedom allowed the artist.

The first revolt from accepted Victorian tradition during the past century was that of the Pre-Raphaelites. To them, and with some reason, has been applied the term "the fleshly school" of poetry. They allowed themselves a far greater preoccupation with the more purely animal aspects of human existence than had been hitherto known during the period. To this they added the warm, sensual reality of the painter on canvas. A greater degree of license became discernable in their verses, particularly in the fields of poetic imagery, and in the use of figures of speech. The one element of Pre-Raphaelite poetry which most contributed to the coming breakdown of the old standards was its comparative vagueness and obscurity. The esoteric quality of much of today's verse may be traced directly to this first breach in the bastions of intelligibility. Like the "new" poets, the Pre-Raphaelites wrote for the few, not for the general public. The shadowy, over-intellectualized work of the Rossettis and William Morris finds its counterpart in the Eliots and Audens of our own era.

The revolt was continued by Swinburne. He too discarded the accepted ideals of Victorian morality, and, spurred on by his Greek, pagan conception of aesthetics, instead idealized the pleasures of the world of the senses.

In the field of prosody Swinburne was an experimenter who created a number of new metres and rhythms, and remolded for his own purposes those metres already in accepted usage.

Innovators and rebels as they undoubtedly were, Swinburne and the Pre-Raphaelites did manage, on the whole, to hew rather closely to the main line of Victorian poetry. Much as they shocked their contemporaries, their position in the history of English literature is very definitely with the times in which they lived and wrote. Many of their ideas, and technical achievements were embodied in the general tradition of our poetry. The next revolutionary movement, however, was of a much more serious and flagrant nature. I refer to the so-called "aesthetic" movement of the last decade of the nineteenth century. Here we find the first really concerted effort to drive the Tennysonians from the field. As the eight-nineties dawned, an age and a whole way of life was passing out of existence. Queen Victoria was to live for some years, but the period which bears her name was slowly fading, and was to die before her. The two poets who most closely are associated with the Victorian period had reached the end of the road. Browning had died in 1889, and Tennyson was to die in 1891. The aesthetes had determined to bury the Poet Laureate not in Westminster Abbey, but in a grave of oblivion. As he breathed his last, they were proclaiming a new era in poetry and art. "Art for art's sake" was their rallying cry. Down with false

morality! Oscar Wilde was proudly proclaiming that there were neither good nor bad books, only well written books and badly written books. Drinking absinthe and smoking Turkish cigarettes in imitation of the French decadents, they glorified sin in their verses, and too often in their lives. Elaine the fair, Elaine the lovable became an object of scorn, and the Blessed Damozel a shadowy non-entity; the demi-mondaine of the Strand was their ideal of woman-hood. Glorification of the night, of stage doors and fashionable restaurants, hints of strange and scarlet sins, of these were fashioned their poems. The witty, but empty phrase was their distinguishing mark, and the green carnation was their badge of honor. What the poet said was not important, but how he said it. Truly Tennyson was dead, and a new and more marvelous age had come into being.

The bubble burst as quickly as it had been blown up. The unsavoury trial and conviction of Oscar Wilde was the greatest single factor in the deflation, but a general public revulsion against the whole decadent spirit was also responsible. Exposed to a thorough examination in the light of day, the whole aesthetic movement was revealed as an empty sham. From its ruins survived only a few of the exquisite lyrics of Ernest Dowson, and Wilde's Ballad of Reading Gaol. What had happened was that a small group of men, disillusioned with life, had sought refuge in sensuality and evil, and had discovered too late that the game was not worth the candle. Their

sins were sad sins, and their gaiety was the forced gaiety of despair. What little comfort we can derive from the pitiable spectacle comes from the final realization on the part of many of the decadents that true consolation may be found only in the Catholic Church. That was, at least, the lesson learned by Wilde, Dowson, Beardsley and Lionel Johnson.

This is not the place for a more detailed review of the aesthetic movement. For further study, the excellent work of Holbrook Jackson on the period is recommended.²

Coinciding with the aesthetic movement, but diametrically opposed to it in spirit and practise, was the counter-revolt carried out by what Louis Untermeyer has called "the muscular school of poetry."³ Kipling, Henley, Stevenson, and Sir Henry Newbolt best represent the ideals of this group. The "muscular" school was in agreement with the aesthetes on one point, and that was that the sentimentality of the Victorians was abhorrent. The direction of the rebellion in the case of Kipling, Henley and the others was towards a certain over-hearty manliness, in direct contrast to the lilies and langours of Wilde and Dowson. To this was added much beating of the drums for the glorification of the policy of imperialism, an awakened interest in the outdoors, and the intro-

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2. Holbrook Jackson, The Eighteen-Nineties, New York, Kennerley, 1914.
 3. Louis Untermeyer, An Anthology of Modern British Poetry, New York, Harcourt Brace, 1936, p.p.3-18.

duction of the machine into poetry. As a counter-irritant to the decadence of the Yellow Book, and the Savoy the "muscular" reaction was of considerable value, but the actual poetic merit of their work, discounting some of the best of Kipling, is questionable. What they did succeed in doing was to open up the doors of poetry, and to admit a current of sorely needed fresh air. In addition, they infused into the prevailing anaemia a new draught of red blood and a more healthy and sane attitude towards life.

The dawn of the twentieth century brought with it the final breakdown in the barriers of established poetical tradition. A horde of innovators and experimentalists came to the fore, and a score or more of new "schools" of poetry gave them ample opportunity to try out their methods and exercise their talents. One modern critic has named for us the battle cries of this "new" poetry, and they are "War on the eloquent!" and "Death to the cliché!"⁴

The so-called "little periodicals" did much to encourage the present day experimentalists. As organs of separate groups they fostered the aims of the particular schools to which they had dedicated their often brief and fleeting lives. The result of this was that the poetry of revolt tended to become the poetry of the coterie.

4. John Livingstone Lowes, Convention and Revolt in Poetry, Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1930, p.178.

The audience was limited to the elite; there was a definite attempt to widen the gap between the Philistines and the intellegentsia, and shocking the middle classes became a major pastime.

Poetic chaos has been inevitable in this modern system. Each little group claims to be a law unto itself; each poet is to write as he pleases. Symbolists, imagists, impressionists, and expressionists each has claimed to hold the key to the storehouse of poetic truth. General guiding principles and fundamental laws have been rudely cast aside. Order and good taste mean nothing.

It must be kept in mind that the currents and cross-currents of contemporary poetry are complex and difficult to analyze. It is quite obvious that much modern experimentalism is sincere, and equally obvious that much of it has made genuine and noteworthy contributions to the body of English verse. On the other hand a great deal of our present day poetry is unworthy of the name.

At the same time as our experimentalists have been forcing their wares upon the reading public a certain group of men have stayed clear of the general trend of revolt, and have adhered religiously to the older traditions of their craft.

"In the midst of the currents and counter-currents of experimental poetic activity, the great tradition of English romantic poetry has not gone unheeded, and work that is worthy of that great tradition deserves

praise no less than work that is conscientiously but often feebly experimental."⁵

Not only in form has modern poetry broken away from the tradition, but in subject matter as well. The use of propaganda for political, economic and social purposes has made of the modern poet an agent for those groups who wish to bend or shape public opinion. The machine age has invaded the field of verse with a vengeance. The aeroplane, the locomotive, the skyscraper and the dynamo serve as inspiration in the place of the time-honored poetical symbols of beauty. It is proposed to investigate this question of tradition and revolt in a further chapter more fully, so that I shall content myself with a brief review only at this time.

One element of contemporary poetry about which I should like to say one word before I leave the subject is that of pessimism. The pessimistic approach to life is almost a sine qua non of the twentieth century poet's bag of tricks. Granted that the world is in a particularly unhappy phase of its long history, we can certainly gain little consolation from the utterances of our living

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5. T. Manly and E. Rickert, Contemporary Literature, New York, Harcourt Brace, 1935, p.73. A further reference in the same volume, p.75 illustrates the harsh and often unfair criticism to which Noyes is subjected today. "Traditionalism at its worst is exemplified in the voluminous products of Alfred Noyes, whose ideas are frankly Victorian and whose verse technique is that of a saccharine Kipling. --- He is as remote from the living movement of modern poetry as it is possible for a modestly literate person to be."

bards. A complete lack of faith in the future, and a deliberate refusal to accept the possibility of a guiding hand in our destinies has brought about this condition of affairs. The whole philosophy of the moderns is summed up in the melancholy and hopeless line from T. S. Eliot - "This is the way the world ends, not with a bang, but a whimper."⁶

It is possible to trace much of this pessimism in the verse of our time to the first World War. Many of the younger generation of poets had served in that conflict, and brought back with them to civil life minds and souls seared by the experiences through which they had passed. As young men they had been brought for the first time face to face with death, an experience not part of the normal life of the very young, and many of them never recovered from the experience. The attitude of "what does it matter?", the cynical disregard for human life, the breaking down of all moral standards, and the atmosphere of despair which were so characteristic of the post-war years naturally found their way into the poetry of the times as it did into the novel and the short story.

A second factor in the melancholy state of modern poetry was that brought on by the financial depression, and the inevitable despair which it aroused. Along with this came the feeling that our entire economic and political structure was crashing about our ears. Once

6. Thomas Stearns Eliot, Collected Poems, New York, Harcourt, 1934, p.41.

again, it was the poet who took up the cry and all alone bewailed his outcast fate. In the natural course of events many of the younger men turned to the theories of Communism for relief, and the past ten years has been marked by a veritable flood of proletarian poetry or poetry of the masses. Ironically enough, this poetry of the masses is of its very obscure nature, completely unintelligible to those very same masses.

The whole sad situation hinges, as we have already remarked, on the fact that the poet has no anchor, no hope to which to cling, and, above all, he has no belief in the Divinity nor in the supernatural to inspire and encourage him.

One of the most encouraging signs in the midst of this confusion and despair is the inspiring work of the men who have allied themselves with the Catholic literary revival. The number of literary men and women in England who have become converts to the Church within the past twenty years is indicative of the growing conviction on the part of many thinking persons that a divine guidance is necessary, and that the things of this world will not suffice to insure eternal happiness. Of course, as is well known, Alfred Noyes is one of those who have seen the light.

The list of Catholic poets is growing daily. Their work is inspiring and vital. Above all, they are not infected by the germs of pessimism, of despair, of immor-

ality, and of chaotic disorder which so strongly have been absorbed into the blood stream of their contemporaries. It is not too much to prophesy that the literary hope of the future, both in England and in America, lies in the work of the Catholic group. Noyes has been a consistent enemy of the attitudes and theories of contemporary literature. This past fall he went so far as to make the grave charge that the present evil days upon which we have fallen are directly traceable to the pernicious influence of certain modern writers, and the general disabling propaganda of literary radicalism.

He repeated the same charges in an interview with the reporters of a leading New York newspaper. Specifically he stated that " 'arty' book critics form a literary fifth column which undermines faith, destroys our ideals and turns away our love for the great writers of the past." He further called Proust "a major influence in the collapse of France", and suggests that the "judgements of modern critics derive from the lunatic asylum."⁸ Thus he places the blame for the collapse of a modern European power directly at the door of a modern novelist, and condemns

8. "Noyes says Proust hurts Christianity", an interview in the New York World-Telegram, March 31, 1942, p.24, Col.2. It is interesting to note the cold reception by most critics of Mr. Noyes remarks. He was condemned as an "old fogey", and his comments passed off with the usual remarks about his old fashioned Victorianism. This is indicative of the present critical attitude towards anyone who attempts to uphold the old traditions and standards. In view of Mr. Noyes position in the world of letters, it seems that his remarks might have aroused at least more interest and comment than they did. The policy seemed to be one of ignoring him completely.

modern criticism for its encouragement of the false, the unworthy and the immoral.

Certainly some change would seem to be in order from the present state of affairs. What that change will be, and what direction the poetry and general literature of the future will take are problematical and beyond the limits of this study. We are primarily concerned with a man who in our own times has boldly taken his stand against the present fashions, and has fought the good fight against our literary bolsheviki.

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C H A P T E R II

THE NATURE OF TRADITION AND REVOLT IN POETRY

Tradition in literature may be defined as the accumulated knowledge, taste and experience handed down from one generation of artists and writers to another, embodying certain historical conceptions and usages. The tradition of poetry has been defined as "nothing but the accumulation from countless ages of experiment of the knowledge how to make language approximate most closely to the infinite variety of imagination."¹ It cannot be strongly emphasized that tradition and convention are not one and the same thing. Convention in any art "represents a concurrence in certain accepted methods of communication."² Tradition then is a broader, more far-reaching conception, involving as it does more complex philosophical ideas and connotations. Milton and Shakespeare, for example destroyed conventions, but created traditions. Edward Davison in a remarkably clear analysis of poetical tradition speaks of it in the following manner. "There are then certain guiding traditions of poetry. A poet writes in patterns of verse, either existing or self-invented. These are governed by repetitions of rhythm (sometimes of rhyme) admitting such

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1. Lascelles Abercrombie, The Theory of Poetry, New York, Harcourt, 1930, p.69.
 2. J. L. Lowes, op. cit., p.3.

variations as can be achieved without offending the essential character of the basic pattern."³

The same critic continues "there is also a tradition that poetry should be generally intelligible. A poet may borrow and is justified in so doing where he improves or has obviously tried to improve his original. Certain phenomena of human existence have generally interested poets. They are birth, death, love, the changes wrought by time, and obvious concrete evidences and symbols of those occurrences, stars, children, flowers, mountains and graves. Of these, great poems are made."⁴

It is generally admitted that we must distinguish between the poetry of a mere imitator who uses traditional materials in traditional verse, and poetry which is honestly conceived and written in the broad traditional spirit.

It is also of importance to recognize that poetry is one long continuous movement. The greatest English poets have been derivative. It is impossible to ignore the influences of the past. John Masfield, for example, derives much of his work from Chaucer; this does not mean that he is a mere imitator of Chaucer. There is a confused idea abroad today that regard for poetic tradition is incompatible with poetic individuality. This misconception is a direct result of assuming that the words

3. Edward Davison, Some Modern Poets, New York, Harper, 1928, p.3.

4. Davison, op. cit., p.4

traditional and conventional, and derivative and imitative are synonymous. We must accept the lessons of the past, and turn those lessons to our own best uses, and this may be done without being in any sense slavish followers of possibly outmoded conventions.

Poetic revolt aims to break down and destroy what it feels to be objectionable in the traditions and conventions of the past, and to substitute new forms, materials and ideas for those believed out-moded and out of date. Lowes suggests that most revolt is based on the "survival of the unfittest in conventions."⁵ On the whole the poetical revolutions in our literary history have been healthy and constructive. Some of our greatest poets have been rebels; Wordsworth and Shelley are good cases in point.

The present day revolt lacks the honesty and the consistency of the older movements. It tends to tear down without suggesting anything worthwhile to replace that which has been destroyed. It substitutes poetic anarchy for law and order. It excludes too much of the creative and imaginative, and there is too much insistence on the concrete and external. The whole system is accentuated by the frank revolt against metrical conventions with a great amount of modern poetry turning its back on metre entirely. The result has been a body of literature which is not poetry at all but rhythmic prose. This charge that

5. Lowes, op. cit., p.147.

the moderns have broken down the division between poetry and prose is one of the most widespread and serious made against the "new" poetry.

Lowes quotes two interesting passages to bear out his ideas on the close resemblance between a specimen of free verse and one of poetical or rhythmic prose. Both are arranged as poetic stanzas. I feel that they are worth re-quoting.

Her face was like the after-sunset,
Across a rose-garden,
With the wings of an eagle
Poised outspread on the light.

-- from "Sandra Belloni"
by George Meredith.

The light of her face falls from its flower,
As a hyacinth,
Hidden in a far valley,
Perishes upon burnt grass.

-- lines from a poem
by H.D.

"The resemblance between the two is startling, yet the first is prose and the second is free verse."⁶ The only essential difference between the forms of free verse and rhythmic prose, the author continues, is that "free verse maintains its rhythms consistently, and in prose the rhythms are occasional."⁷

No one would wish to argue that metre is essential to all poetry, the Book of Job is poetry without metre, but

6. Lowes, op.cit., p.p.277-278.

7. Ibid, p.280.

at the same time it is equally foolish to contend that metre is not suitable for poetry at all as some of our moderns would have it.

The refusal of modern poets to accept the regular rhythms of the past has called down the righteous wrath of Noyes on many occasions. When he writes of this subject he always uses the order and regularity of the Universe as his authority. The following appears in one of his essays: "The revolutionist believes that the recurrent and regular rhythms of the tides, the stars, the human heart, and every true poet were invented by Queen Victoria."⁸ He was referring here, of course, to the popular habit of ridiculing the Victorian age as the cradle of old-fashioned practices in poetic usages and regular metres. In the same essay he quotes the late G. K. Chesterton on the subject of free-verse. "'Free-verse', as Mr. Chesterton said, 'you might as well call sleeping in a ditch "free" architecture.'⁹ We shall see somewhat later in this study that Noyes's condemnation of poetic irregularities does not imply his rejection of new metrical forms, but that, on the contrary, he has experimented in that direction himself.

It has been pointed out by many critics that metre is far more expressive than free rhythm, because metre includes "variation and repetition, but free rhythm includes

8. Alfred Noyes, Some Aspects of Modern Poetry, New York, Stokes, 1924, p.327.

9. Ibid, p.325.

variation only."¹⁰ In other words the poet who refuses to accept metre adds nothing; he weakens his verse, and fails to make the most of his obvious potentialities.

The blind ridicule of the past has, as we have already suggested, been directed principally at the Victorians, and their poetic sentimentalities have been constantly scorned. What the poets of our time fail to realize is that Tennyson and the others were interpreting their time as honestly and sincerely as it was within their power to do. They lived in a period which was frankly and definitely sentimental, a period of strict morality, a period of insistence on codes and regulations. Tennyson, who is the *bête noire* of the moderns, was certainly aware himself of the most objectionable features of the age in which he lived. No one, for example, could have been more savage in his attacks on the high-born English aristocrat of the time, and he has taken off his stony stare to perfection. Davison sums it up very well. "I have usually found that those who insist loudest that the modern poet should take care to reflect the particular life and thought of his own generation are the same people who object most noisily to dead poets (Tennyson for instance) who were at pains to do the same thing for their own age."¹¹

Another very common feature of modern poetry is its use of machinery, the machine age, and science in its

10. Abercrombie, op. cit., p.132

11. Davison, op.cit., p.18.

choice of subject matter. This trend is not entirely new in English verse, Kipling did it years ago in "M'Andrew's Hymn", but in recent years it has been carried to extremes. It seems to me that the poet is here on extremely dangerous ground. Poetry, of its very nature, would seem to transcend the purely mechanical. That a dynamo or an express train are beautiful in their own way is undeniable, but that they are necessarily more beautiful than a sunset, or a rose-garden is questionable.

The stuff of science in poetry is also open to some strenuous objections. Objects, ideas and things of use from time immemorial have a decided advantage over the machinery of modern life. Things as things belong to prose, not to poetry. True poetry must catch the permanent values behind the wonders of science. Noyes absolves himself from the charges made against science in poetry, even though he is the author of an epic of Science, the Torch-Bearers. In this work he does not speak of science as such, but is concerned with the larger philosophies and concepts beyond and above the achievements of research and discovery. On the whole, however, this is one of his least successful efforts, and we must agree with Lowes that "to poetize science is to court mortality."¹² As Wordsworth put it, "it is not material to us as enjoying and suffering beings."

12. Lowes, op.cit., p.298

The general spirit of modern poetic revolt is iconoclastic. It is based on the false assumption that any art may be carried out without law or authority, whereas the common experience of mankind is to the contrary. I refer here not to those changeable laws which govern mere conventions, but to the broader concepts of what is right, fitting and proper which form a part of the broad poetic tradition of English verse. The true rebel has always defended the main tradition of poetry. Noyes writes of Shelley in these words:

"The task of Shelley was rebellion. It had nothing to do with the cheap and easy rebellions of today; the insurrection of the lower faculties against the higher, the animal against the soul, the senses against the affections, the passions against the intellect; the pinchbeck rebellions of the sophisticated against the children of light; the cynical rebellions of the world and the flesh and the devil against the loyalties of the spirit of man and the highest glories of his art and literature."¹³

Noyes firmly believes that poetry is religion, that it is something exalted and he cannot stomach the mere cleverness which masquerades as poetry today.

Along with the contemporary disrespect for the laws of metrics and rhythm has come into existence a disrespect for the laws of common decency and morality. The sweepings of the gutter and the drainage of the sewer are now thought fit subjects for the dignity of poetic utterance. This state of affairs, of course, has not yet

13. Alfred Noyes, *A Pageant of Letters*, New York, Sheed and Ward, 1940, p.137-8

affected poetry to the extent that it has invaded our prose literature, but the tendency is widespread enough in certain versifiers to be alarming. The feeling of "let's pretend" is going out of our poetry, and the harsh and often unpleasant realities of life are taking its place. This is indeed unfortunate; a great part of the joy to be derived from the reading of verse was to be found in getting out of ourselves into a world of imagination and dreams, a world in which we could forget momentarily the hardships of the life we live. This has been in the past one of the functions of truly great literature, this carrying of the reader for a few brief moments into a better and happier plane of existence.

We have spoken of the pessimism of modern poetry. This is well illustrated in the verses of the late A. E. Housman, Housman who found in "the hangman's noose and malt the best answers to the riddle of life."¹⁴

"Hope not despair should be the keynote of poetry; we must not let the meaning go out of everything."¹⁵ Thus does Noyes express himself on the pessimism of the day.

It all comes down again to the one simple fact that law and order must once again assume their rightful places in the scheme of things poetic. The world and all creation are governed by inexorable and unchangeable

14. Noyes, A Pageant of Letters, P.83

15. Noyes, A Pageant of Letters, P.228

law, and poetry should be no exception. Here again Noyes is adamant. He refers to the present day concept of the Universe in these words. "We cannot accept the suggestion that the Universe is a gigantic game of bubbles blown by an imbecile and unwitting power."¹⁶ The lines quoted certainly make up the philosophy of much modern poetry.

Because we are tired of restrictions is no reason for us to abandon them. There has been a barbarous lowering of standards, but true genius has never been opposed to law, it has recognized its necessity and conformed to it. Once again let Noyes express it in his own words. "Without law there is no freedom, organization is necessary, rules are necessary---all nations have felt and obeyed this need in the invention of measured sounds and metre as the vehicle of poetry."¹⁷ False originality does not constitute genius and never will; the spirit of the artist will always be circumscribed by rules.

Referring to the lack of spiritual standards in poetry today a world famous cleric of the Church of England made the following statement.

"The strange ebullition of utterly depraved art and literature which, it must be remembered, is a European, not only a British disease, seems to be caused by the loss of spiritual standards revered by all. There are fundamental principles which were once under the keeping of a great religion, which in its highest forms brought all human life into a grand and beautiful harmony. This religion has now been rejected by the major-

16. Ibid, P.234

17. Ibid, P.273

rity, who have no philosophy nor discipline to put in its place. Ever since 1789, there has been an anarchic movement in European society, uprooting men from the soil on which their families had lived for centuries and leaving them to drift rudderless upon the stormy sea of a chaotic civilization."¹⁸

The same man speaks of the lack of form in modern poetry. "A picture which is out of drawing, and a poem which does not scan, require no laborious apprenticeship. It is not necessary to 'make' a cubist or a free-verse writer; he has unfortunately been 'born'."¹⁹ The inference is obvious; the new poetry is the lazy man's poetry, and it requires neither effort nor training.

Against all these false doctrines, sloppy techniques, disregard for rules and the other appurtenances of the new poetry stand the poets of the great tradition, the ancient and honorable line of Chaucer, of Spenser, of Shakespeare, of Milton, of Dryden, of Wordsworth, of Tennyson. These were the men who created, carried on, and believed in the time honored graces and beauties of poetry. They treated it as an art in words, and preserved the beauties of our English tongue. It is to this noble tradition that I honestly believe belongs the poet Noyes. The poets of this tradition "escape the rapids of the rebels, the shallows of ineptitude, the backwaters of imitation and the bogs and morasses of eccentricity."²⁰ They believe that

18. William R. Inge, Lay Thoughts of a Dean, New York, Putnam, 1926, p.32.

19. Inge, op.cit., p.32

20. Felix E. Schelling, Appraisements and Asperities, Philadelphia, Lippincott, 1922, p.82.

it is not always the function of poetry to stun and amaze, but that there is a place for balm and alleviation as well in that most beautiful of all the arts.

The quality of eccentricity is strongly marked in contemporary verse. Punctuation has been reduced to a minimum, or has been abolished entirely. The same fate has met the use of Capitalization. There seems to be a prevailing notion that such aids to the reading and understanding of poetry are mere concessions to the Victorians.

Mention has already been made of the obscurity of modern poetry. The work of T. S. Eliot is an example of this tendency. His pages are filled with little known and often insignificant references and quotations, so obscure that the average reader is forced to the use of a concordance for a complete understanding. This is definitely in line with the conception that poetry is not for the many, but for the chosen few. This concept is further amplified by the common practice of interpolating lines of verse in a foreign tongue. The self-evident fact that poetry may be of excellent quality and still be popular has been completely overlooked.

The question of prescribed form in poetry is one that has been widely debated. It is generally accepted that such prescribed form goes back no earlier than the time of the troubadours.²¹ From the time of Chaucer,

21. Abercrombie, op.cit., p.71.

however, it has been accepted as an almost integral part of poetic technique.

There are of course a number of traditions in English poetry, but the one to which we have been primarily referring is what we are pleased to call the main tradition, the tradition of the major poets in our language. A modern critic of poetry professes to see in the "new" poetry a general by-passing of what he calls one branch of that tradition, but an adherence to another branch. He maintains that in the use of metaphors and tone shifts modern poetry goes back to the poetry of wit of the seventeenth century, to the work of Donne and Marvell. His argument is ingenious and I should like to outline it.

According to the argument mentioned above, "the fundamental resemblance between the moderns and the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is a matter of attitude, with emphasis on the witty and ironical."²² He believes that our orthodox ideas of metaphor as ornament and decoration derive from the classical ideas which began with Dryden. If this point of view can be accepted, then our pre-conceived notions must be discarded, and the moderns are really in an older tradition than, let us say, Tennyson.

Let us attempt to put his theory into the form of a chart. We should then have something like this.

Tradition I. Wyatt --- The Elizabethans --- the
Metaphysical poets --- The Moderns
(symbolists, Eliot, Ransom, Yeats, etc.)

22. Brooks, op.cit., p.53.

The characteristics of this first tradition would include bold metaphors, wit, irony and the inclusion of unpoetic material.

Tradition II. The scientific spirit of Bacon and Hobbes
--- Dryden --- the Neo-Classicists ---
the Pre-Romantics --- Keats and Shelley
--- the Victorians --- (Noyes ?)

The characteristics of this second tradition would include beautiful, restrained metaphors, fixed structure, didacticism, and limited poetic material (the matter of poetry).²³

The same critic maintains that "the successful use of prosaic and unpleasant materials and the union of the intellectual with the emotional, so characteristic of modern verse, are symptoms of imaginative power, not symptoms of the death of poetry."²⁴

The ideas outlined above are simply theories, and should be accepted as such. They are interesting in view of the desperate attempts of the adherents of the new schools of verse to build up a case for their side. They are striving desperately to justify their position, and to defend their theories, and the argument of Brooks is one of the most tenable to emerge from their camp.

Finally we come to the question of spirituality in poetry. There is a distinct and definite feeling

23. Brooks, op.cit, pp.54-69.

24. Ibid, p.53.

abroad today that the wholesomely spiritual and religious in verse is out of place and a thing of the past. The poets no longer see this as God's world; they think of nature as a combination of blind forces with no divinity in it. They have destroyed the meaning and the purpose of human life, and this is the source of their all-prevailing pessimism. An excellent refutation of that attitude is found in the passage which follows.

"The very idea that poetry has a message may be distasteful to some critics. What end can there be beyond poetry itself? But as life is full of meaning, constant witness to the spirit's striving after the Eternal, poetry as the most subtle and penetrative of all interpretations of life, must bring its testimony. Religion cannot express itself without poetry, and the noblest poetry has been religious."²⁵

This brief summary of the essential elements of modern poetic revolt as opposed to the accepted traditions of English poetry leads us into the body of our thesis. We are about to examine the work of an artist who stands for the forces of law and decency in poetry, in religion and in every day life. Born in 1880, Alfred Noyes might have been expected to succumb to the lure of the "new" poetry as did so many of his contemporaries. Too young to participate in the revolt of the eighteen-nineties, he might very easily have joined one of the poetic cliques which sprang up after the dawn of the twentieth century. That he did not do so is a tribute to his classical and tradi-

25. Arthur S. Hoyt, The Spiritual Message of Modern English Poetry, New York, Macmillan, 1924, foreword, p IX.

tional education, his fine poetic acumen and his inherent good sense. We are to investigate the poetical theories of a man whose sense of the absolute necessity for some guiding authority led him eventually into the Catholic Church which alone, as he recognized, stands as a signpost pointing the way to truth in a bewildered world.

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C H A P T E R I I I

NOYES AND THE TRADITION OF POETIC FORM

Alfred Noyes has been an unrelenting defender of the accepted forms of poetry since the appearance of his first volume of verse in 1902. He has constantly emphasized the rhythmic law, and considers order the first law of heaven. His training and experience as an oarsman at Oxford may well have implanted in his mind the necessity and essential beauty of rhythm. Anyone who has had the privilege of watching an eight-oared shell in action will have some conception of the rhythmical effort involved and the perfection which is the inevitable result.

Defender of the ancient metres as he is, Noyes has not scorned experiment nor shunned the new entirely. As Fr. Alexander puts it:

"It seems to me that Noyes, despite his opposition to free verse, has a conception clearer than any of his contemporaries of what is the primary thing needed to revive the soul of contemporary poetry. The poet, he insists, must first obtain a fresh grasp on reality. Given this, the proper technique for its expression will follow spontaneously, and not in the eccentric and labored manner of those who seek first the new forms and having achieved them can only stuff them full of what is obviously old and conventional - yesterday's heresies, Victorian metaphysics, raw scientific dogmas, and the rest."¹

As the defender of the older forms of artistic experience, Noyes believes that most revolt is blind,

1. Calvert Alexander S.J., The Catholic Literary Revival, Milwaukee, Bruce, 1935, pp.257-8.

and an attempt at isolation, and he further contends that a new poetic idea may be of value only when it comes into being as a result of continuous growth, and not as a complete break with the past. He cannot condone the philosophy which holds that the past is wholly dead, is nothing more than a "bucket of ashes." Above all does he condemn the poetic fashions of the moment, those nebulous and fleeting fashions which are here today and gone tomorrow, but which catch the fancy of the pseudo-intellectuals and the more advanced critics. Let us hear Noyes on the subject as it is expressed in one of his satirical poems.

"Fashions"

"Fashion on fashion on fashion
 (With only the truth growing old!)
And here's the new purple of passion!
 (And Love waiting out in the cold!)
 Who'll buy?
They are crying new lamps for Aladdin,
 New worlds for the old and the true;
And nobody seems to remember ---
 The magic was not in the new.

They are hawking a new rose for Eden,
 It has feathers. It's green. I suppose
The only thing wrong with their rose is
 The fact that it isn't a rose.
 Who'll buy?
And here's a new song without metre;
 And here again, nothing is wrong
(For nothing on earth could be neater)
 Except that it isn't a song.

An inspired and divine generation
 Is flogging, with all of its force
(And unanimous "Rebel" damnation)
 A frozen Victorian horse.
 Who'll buy?

"Yes. It's dead, Here's the hair that deluded
Our grandmother's horrible taste.
But look--and look well--they've included
Some better things too, in their haste.

Did the anti-macassars abet them?
Were they hidden in sofas of plush?
Did an Anglican bishop forget them,
Or leave them behind in the crush?
Who'll buy?

Here's Tennyson, going quite cheaply.
He propped a stuffed bird in the hall;
And to Lady Cocotte (who thinks deeply)
That settles it once and for all.

Here's ITEM, a ring, very plain, sirs;
And ITEM, a God (but he's dead).
They say that you'll need Him again, sirs;
So, ITEM, a cross for His head,
Who'll buy?

Yes, they say that He'll rise from the dead, sirs,
It is only the fashions that die;
And--here are the thorns for His head, sirs,²
They'll keep till you need 'em. Who'll buy?²

Here is summed up very neatly the beliefs of Alfred Noyes concerning the brief ephemeral fashions which plague modern art and literature; here are his thoughts on the strange, warped philosophies of the twentieth century. It will be noted how his argument is gradually amplified. He begins with certain observations on modern art and poetry, and then rises to more general and serious charges against the present day attitude towards religion and God. Included also is one of his favorite themes, the attack on those who speak with disfavor of the Victorians and Tennyson. Written in a comic vein, the poem actually is a serious work containing much of his essential idealism.

2. Alfred Noyes, Collected Poems, New York, Stokes, 1920, 3 vols., vol.2, pp.312-313. As a great part of this study is based on these volumes, the letters C.P. will be used in future to identify them.

Noyes is a versatile artist who has turned his hand with excellent effect to almost all the accepted verse forms and patterns. The common opinion is that he is at his best in the field of narrative poetry, and weakest in the lyric. So thinks, for example Fr. Alexander. "He (Noyes) has written too much in the lyric form; his lyrics lack sincerity, and are merely well done exercises."³

There can be no questioning the fact that Noyes has been unusually successful in the traditional narrative forms such as the ballad. Of this particular type, the well known work "The Highwayman" is an excellent example. The poem is romantic, colorful, and simple in form, and it has an infectious rollicking rhythm which is peculiar to our poet. I should like to quote one stanza to illustrate the swift-moving action and the vivid pictorial powers of Noyes as a narrative artist.

"Back, he spurred like a madman, shrieking a curse to the sky,
With the white road smoking behind him and his rapier
brandished high!
Blood-red were his spurs i' the golden noon; wine-red was
his velvet coat.
When they shot him down on the highway
Down like a dog on the highway,
And he lay in his blood on the highway with the bunch of
lace at his throat."⁴

The poem "The Highwayman" illustrates the power of Noyes to recreate for us in his verse the life of long-ago, "the days when the roads were romantically dange-

4. Noyes, C.P., Vol. 2, p.195.

rous because of highwaymen and not sordidly dangerous because of bad motor-drivers."⁵ It is the same ability to bring back a more glamorous past which characterizes many of Noyes's best narrative works. At any rate, "The Highwayman" is a model as a carefully planned narrative poem with its suggestion of movement and its recurring refrains and rhythms. In addition, those who claim that Noyes is wedded to outmoded conventions might well examine the metre of the poem which is distinctly new and different.

Tales of the Mermaid Tavern also serve as an index to our author's narrative achievements. The closely woven series of poems which make up this work takes us back into, and make us part of the age of Elizabeth. Here Noyes varies the sweep of his blank verse with interpolated songs, breaking the monotony of the narrative and adding a note of realism. The blank verse itself is of excellent quality as witness the following fine glimpse of Shakespeare.

And, as he leaned to Drayton, droning thus,
I saw a light gleam of celestial mirth
Flit o'er the face of Shakespeare--scarce a smile--
A swift irradiation from within
As of a cloud that softly veils the sun.⁶

Tales of the Mermaid Tavern is also of inestimable value for its interpretation of the character and tragic fall of Christopher Marlowe, as Noyes vindicates him from many of the charges leveled against him. This is but one of many instances of the careful research and plan-

5. Patrick Braybrooke, Some Victorian and Georgian Catholics, London, Burns, Oates and Washbourne, 1932, P.174.

6. Noyes, C.P., Vol.2, p.321.

ning that went into the making of this piece. The author actually seems to have lived in the period of which he writes, and the whole world of Elizabethan England comes alive before our eyes. Here is the true spirit of a great national period, with all its virile youthfulness. For sheer enjoyment I place this work in the very forefront of Noyes's poetry. It is interesting to note what a contemporary critic had to say of it at the time of its first appearance. He speaks of the tumultuous energy of the whole performance, and praises the various and cunningly handled play of rhythm. He admires some of the beautiful passages, but he contends that the whole atmosphere is one of "allusion rather than of realization", and concludes that the author "has allowed a subtle and inventive ear to impose upon a too easily contented imagination."⁷

Drake is Noyes's only attempt at the epic form. He himself calls it an English epic, but I am inclined to believe that he has fallen far short of the mark. True epics are extremely rare in the history of literature, and we should think none the less of him for his comparative failure. Noyes, himself, I think, would be the first to admit that he was no Milton. The epic calls for a peculiar genius in its composition, and the simple fact is that that genius was lacking here.

7. The Athenaeum, London, Saturday, June 28, 1913, p.691.

The preceding observation does not mean that Drake is not an excellent piece of writing. It contains many individual passages of rare strength and beauty, some of them approximating the famous "grand style", but these passages are too few and too widely scattered throughout the work. The greatest fault to be found with it is its lack of sustained force, and the author's failure to maintain a constant level of excellence. My own opinion is that Noyes tired of his labours at various points during the writing, and then was able to renew his interest. The rather unusual method of publication may also have had something to do with the poem's uneven quality. It was published serially in Blackwood's Magazine during the years 1906-1908. This was an entirely new procedure in the history of poetry, and shocked the literary world of the time. Incidentally, it is a good argument against those who hold that Noyes is hemmed in by conventions. At the same time, the fact that Drake was composed on the installment plan may also have contributed to its unevenness.

The story of Sir Francis Drake and the rise of English sea-power during the age of Elizabeth is certainly a theme of epic proportions, and the author made no mistake in selecting it. The figure of Drake dominates the poem, and the lesser characters are vague and shadowy. In this respect Noyes was following the tradition of Milton who allowed Lucifer to dominate Paradise Lost. The influence of Tennyson is also apparent, as in the passage which follows.

Not knowing if he went to life or death,
Not caring greatly, so that he were true
To his own sleepless and unfaltering soul
Which could not choose but hear the ringing call
Across the splendours of the Spanish Main
From ever fading, ever new horizons,
And shores beyond the sunset and the sea.⁸

The resemblance between these lines and certain others in Tennyson's Ulysses is obvious.

Drake is most certainly in the direct tradition of the epic in both its choice of heroic material and its use of the accepted blank verse, but it is in no sense a mere imitation. For example at many points in the narrative Noyes shifts into rhymed lines which do much to break the monotony of the prevailing form. At one place in the action which describes the approach of the Spanish Armada the verse falls into quatrains and then into Spenserian stanzas. There is certainly nothing of the conventional here. The peculiar propriety of the stanzas is evident as the verses expand into the Spenserians to suggest the coming of the mighty and ponderous ships of Spain. I shall include an example of the quatrain and the Spenserian stanza for illustration. The quatrain is especially descriptive.

And now the noon began to wane; the west
With slow rich colours filled and shadowy forms
Dark curdling wreaths and fogs with crimsoned breast,
And tangled Zones of dusk like frozen storms,⁹

The spenserian stanza now heralds the slow and deliberate approach of the Armada.

8. Noyes, C.P., vol.1, p.252.

9. Noyes, C.P., Drake, vol.1., p.398.

There, in one heaven-wide storm, great masts and clouds
Of sail crept slowly forth, the ships of Spain!
From North to South, their tangled spars and shrouds
Controlled the slow wind as with bit and rein;
Onward they rode in insolent disdain
Sighting the little fleet of England there,
While o'er the sullen splendour of the main
Three solemn guns tolled all their host to prayer,
And their great ensign blazoned all the doom-fraught air.¹⁰

This willingness to break away from the accepted blank verse pattern is indicative of Noyes keen poetic sense and his almost uncanny ear. He suits his rhythms, his stanzas and his metre to his story with a knack for correct expression. To repeat, this is no slavish following of the past, but a willingness to improvise and create patterns for himself.

As in The Tales of the Mermaid Tavern, Drake, contains many lyrics and songs interspersed through the narrative. This once again helps to enliven the story and to break the monotony.

Sadly enough, despite these metrical innovations, and the occasional sections of great beauty, the poem lacks something. It is for one thing exceedingly slow, and it must be read in small doses. To attempt to read it at a single sitting is to attempt the impossible.

Noyes himself acknowledged the exorbitant length of the poem. As it originally appeared it consisted of twelve books, and this was reduced to ten by the revision of 1929. I might mention in this regard that the custom of revision is common with him. At periodic intervals he has

10. Noyes, C.P. Drake, vol.1., p.398;

shortened or rewritten many of his verses, and in some instances, removed complete poems from his collected work. I doubt the complete advisability of this procedure. The revisions are not always felicitous, and I hold that the reader is entitled to a presentation of the works in their original state.

The lyrics of Noyes are so many in number, and so varied in theme and pattern that they almost defy analysis. Contrary to general opinion, Jerrold sees in them the highest expression of his poetic talents. He tells us that "Noyes is instinctively a lyricist with his sensuous joy of beauty, his love of country, and his firmness of faith. He has a command of the varied expressions of lyric spontaneity and the lyric impulse is always present in him."¹¹ That this is true is to some extent confirmed by his habitual insertion of lyric pieces in his narratives, a practice of which we have already made mention.

Technically the lyric poetry of Noyes is something at which to marvel. He writes with extraordinary ease and fluency, and even his most bitter enemies will admit his skill as a metrist. This same easy fluency has occasionally led him into technical difficulties. As a poet to whom writing comes naturally and without undue effort, he makes frequent lapses from correct poetical procedure. Among these lapses might be mentioned his "occasional, sloppy" use of rhyme. "A Song of England" is full

11. Jerrold, op.cit.,pp.88-89.

of these poor and careless rhymes. One stanza in particular will serve as an example.

"There is a song of England that thrills the beating blood
With burning cries and yearning
Tides of hidden aspiration hardly known or understood;
Aspirations of the creature
Towards the unity of nature;
Sudden chivalries revealing whence the longing is renewed
In the men that live for England, live and love and die
for England:
By the light of their desire
They shall blindly blunder higher,
To a wider, grander Kingdom and a deeper, nobler Good."¹²

The rhymes blood and understood, and creature and nature are especially bad, and desire and higher are not much better. In the same poems are found such rhymes as whispers with vespers and shadows with meadows.

In his lyrics Noyes has made use of an infinite variety of accepted and traditional metres and stanzas, but he has also gone far beyond these more conventional patterns. He has not hesitated to adapt and change these forms to suit his own needs; he has made some daring metrical experiments of his own, and he has created certain entirely new forms. As he himself says: "we are only at the beginnings of metrical invention. The true line of progress is development. Newness is not achieved by simply doing the opposite of what was done by the past."¹³ The "new" metres of Noyes then are not really new in the sense that they represent a complete break with tradition, but they are new in the sense that they represent a logical development from the older forms

12. Noyes, "A Song of England", C.P.; C.P., vol.1., pp.55-57.

13. Noyes, Some Aspects of Modern Poetry, p.58.

modified and changed to conform to modern conditions and situations. A good example of this is to be found in his experiments with initial rhyme. Now the use of rhyme is a part of the broad tradition of poetry. It is not essential for all poetry, but that it is suitable for much poetry is undeniable. The conventions of rhyme place it either at the end of the line (the most accepted position), or within the line itself (internal rhyme). Noyes accepts the broad tradition of rhyme, but he modifies the convention which dictates the position of rhyme. The result was the daring experiment in initial rhyme to be found in "Astrid".

White-armed Astrid,---ah, but she was beautiful!
Nightly wandered weeping thro' the ferns in the moon,
Slowly, weaving her strange garland in the forest,
Crowned with white violets,
Gowned in green.
Holy was that glen where she glided,
Making her wild garland as Merlin had bidden her,
Breaking off the milk-white horns of the honeysuckle,
Sweetly dripped the dew upon her small white
Feet.¹⁴

The strange haunting effect of the above was a complete vindication of the experiment. The compensatory use of alliteration for terminal rhyme is also of interest.

Skillful use of rhyme variation may also be observed in a poem already quoted, "A Song of England". Here we can see the employment of internal rhyme with another word in the same stanza.

14. Noyes, "Astrid", C.P., vol. 3, p.54.

So sad it is and glad it is
That men who hear it, madden and their eyes are wet and
blind-¹⁵

Let us now turn to some of Noyes's other metrical innovations. The combination of quatrains with Spenserian stanzas has already been noted in Drake; the same extremely rare combination may also be observed in "The Phantom Fleet". Here eight quatrains are followed by nine Spenserian stanzas, and the poem is concluded with eight more quatrains. Here again may we see the following of tradition with the breaking of convention. Both the quatrain and the Spenserian are integral parts of the main poetic tradition, but the arrangement of Noyes is definitely unconventional. The most important thing about it is that it is successful, that the author carries it off. Here is how the transition from one stanzaic form into the other is made.

Knowledge has made a deadlier pact with death,
Nor strength nor steel availed against that bond:
Slowly approached--and Britain held her breath--
The battle booming from the deeps beyond.

O, then what darkness rolled upon the wind,
Threatening the Torch that Britain held on high?
Where all her navies, baffled, broken, blind,
Slunk backward, snarling in their agony!
Who guards the gates of Freedom now? The cry
Stabbed heaven! England, the shattered ramparts fall!
Then, like a trumpet shivering through the sky
O, like white lightning rending the black pall
Of heaven, an answer pealed; Her dead shall hear that
call.¹⁶

15. Noyes, "A Song of England", C.P., vol.1, p.56.

16. Noyes, "The Phantom Fleet", C.P., vol.3, p.290.

We come from the Loom of the Weaver that weaves the Web
of Years. (stanza 7.)¹⁸

The same original use of the refrain may be noted in "The Barrel-Organ" where there is a new scheme of interweaving and variation.

An innovation is to be found in the first part of the poem "Orpheus and Eurydice" where there is a recurrent metre new to English versification.

Height over height, the purple pine-woods clung to the
rich Arcadian mountains,
Holy-sweet as a sea of incense, under the low, dark crimson
skies:
Glad were the glens where Eurydice bathed, in the beauty
of dawn, at the haunted fountains
Deep in the blue hyacinthine hollows, whence all the
rivers of Arcady rise.¹⁹

Still another new and unusual metre was used in "Nelson's Year".

God gave this year to England;
And what He gives He takes again;
He gives us life, He gives us death; our victories have wings;
He gives us love and in its heart He hides the whole world's
heart of pain:
We gain by loss: impartially the eternal balance swings!
Ay; in the fire we cherish
Our thoughts and dreams may perish;
Yet shall it burn for England's sake triumphant as of old!
What sacrifice could gain for her
Our own shall maintain for her,
And hold the gates of Freedom wide that take no keys of gold.²⁰

Additional new metres are employed in "The Haunted Palace", "The Lord of Misrule", "The Heart of the

18. Noyes, "The Loom of Years", C.P., vol.1, p.p.1-2

19. Noyes, "Orpheus and Eurydice", C.P., vol.1., p.p.211-212

20. Ibid., "Nelson's Year", vol.1.p.178.

Woods", and "Haunted in Old Japan", to mention but a few. Anyone who takes them into consideration must question the contention that Noyes is a slavish follower of tradition and convention.

The unconventional methods which we have illustrated hardly seem to fit into the commonly accepted picture of Noyes as an old fashioned confectioner and a mere camp follower of the past. Instead the poet insists on what he calls "the reconciliation of an open and eager outlook for the new with a vital love and real reverence for the past."²¹

We have been considering Noyes as an experimenter in verse. Let us now turn to his more traditional achievements. He has, as we have mentioned, written extensively in all the accepted metres and stanza forms. We have noted his use of blank verse in his narratives, as well as the somewhat unconventional treatment of the traditional quatrain and the Spenserian stanza. He has also written verse in the old ballad measure and in terza rima. He has experimented with the sonnet and with many of the so-called French forms, including the ballade and the triolet.

Throughout all his more traditional poetry the influence of certain writers is dominant. The chief of these, of course, is Tennyson, his poetic idol, but there may also be noted the influences of Southey, Shelley, Swin-

21. Alfred Noyes, from an address delivered at Columbia University in New York City, March 7, 1913.

burne, Stevenson and Kipling. He has also acknowledged a debt to certain American poets, Longfellow and Emerson in particular.

Noyes believed that Tennyson was the Chaucer of the nineteenth century. He sums up for us his belief in the greatness of the former poet laureate as follows:

1. Tennyson was the poet of honorable lucidity.
2. Tennyson was the voice of a century's awakening.
3. Tennyson's poetry possessed Vergilian perfection of language and form.
4. Tennyson had the quality of great and lovable simplicity.
5. Tennyson possessed real kingliness of soul.
6. Tennyson's treatment of landscape alone would give him the place of the master-poet of England, as Turner was the master-painter.
7. There is in the poetry of Tennyson sensuous chords of color and fiery clouds of passion.
8. Tennyson possessed certainty of vision, sureness of touch, completeness of conception, and an inevitable and natural progression.
9. Tennyson possessed a high scale of values as opposed to the "fleshly" school of Morris, Rossetti and Swinburne.²²

With such opinions it is no wonder that Noyes has looked to Tennyson as his inspiration and his master. Generally speaking the direct influence of this Victorian on our poet is one of material and spirit rather than of form.

22. Alfred Noyes, William Morris in "English Men of Letters" Series, London, Macmillan, 1914, p.147-148.

The direct metrical influence of other poets is far more easily traced. A glance at Noyes's Forest of Wild Thyme will reward us with an interesting link between Noyes and Southey. Many of our poet's lines in the above mentioned poem recall similar ones from the nineteenth century author's Battle of Blenheim. Specifically we might mention the stanza in The Forest of Wild Thyme which begins:

Why, mother once had sung it us
When, ere we went to bed,
She told the tale of Pyramus ---²³

Southey's well known refrain "why, 'twas a famous victory" has an echo in the refrain by Noyes which mourns the lost boy, Peterkin. Incidentally, the boy in both poems has the same name. The use of the rather unusual "Peterkin" seems something more than mere coincidence in view of the other similarities.

A rather striking similarity to the seventeenth century Robert Herrick may be found in the opening couplet of the "epilogue" in The Flower of Old Japan.

Carol, every violet has
Heaven for a looking glass!²⁴

One critic professes to see in John Keats the poet to whom Noyes owes most in craftsmanship and technique.²⁵ I have been unable to trace much of this technical indebtedness. There is undoubtedly some connection between the two men, however. Both were worshippers of poetic beauty, and

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23. Noyes, "The Forest of Wild Thyme", C.P., vol.1., p.131.
24. Noyes, "The Flower of Old Japan", C.P., vol.1., p.47 .
25. Coulson Kernahan, Six Famous Living Poets, London, Butterworth, rev.ed., 1926. p.197.

both found much of their inspiration in classical and Greek subjects. In Noyes's poem Mount Ida there may be some technical influence as well.

Not cypress, but this warm pine-plumage now
Fragrant with sap, I pluck; nor bid you weep,
Ye Muses that still haunt the heavenly brow
Of Ida, though the ascent is hard and steep:
Weep not for him who left us wrapped in sleep
At dawn beneath the holy mountain's breast
And all alone from Ilion's gleaming shore
Clomb the high sea-ward glens, fain to drink deep
Of earth's old glory from your silent crest,
Take the cloud-conquering throne
Of gods, and gaze alone
Thro' heaven. Darkling we slept who saw his face no more.²⁶

The spirit of Keats is certainly present in the stanza quoted.

Noyes himself has acknowledged his poetic debt to Rudyard Kipling. As with so many other influences, this has been chiefly one of spirit, in this case the spirit of imperialism and patriotism, but there has been a definite influence of form and metre as well. The direct and sometimes brusque quality of Kipling's language and poetic diction have undoubtedly found their counterpart in the simplicity of Noyes. Both men were singers of simple songs with a wide popular appeal, and both believed that poetry of the popular type, could be none the less excellent poetry. From the metrical standpoint, one at least of Noyes's poems was directly modeled on one of Kipling's. The model in this case was the world famous "Recessional" written by Kipling on the occasion of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, a poem

26. Noyes, "Mount Ida", C.P., vol.2., p.120.

which aroused much comment on its first appearance. The poem by Noyes which follows it so closely is "The Empire-Builders". The resemblance is so close and so obvious that it seems highly probable that it was done deliberately.

Who are the Empire-Builders? They
Whose desperate arrogance demands
A self-reflecting power to sway
A hundred little selfless lands?

Lord God of battles, ere we bow
To these and to their soulless lust,
Let fall Thy thunders on us now
And strike us equal to the dust.²⁷

The idea that there is a far mightier and stronger power than that of the British Empire is common to both poems. The metre is also the same, with the use of the quatrain with alternating rhymes. This simple direct stanza has always been a favorite with Noyes, by the way. We shall have occasion to return again to the question of Kipling's influence when we come to the consideration of Noyes's traditional material.

The debt of Noyes to Robert Louis Stevenson is to be found in the same peculiar child-like quality common to both poets. Once again the influence is primarily one of the spirit. There is one rather interesting stanza in The Flower of Old Japan which mentions Stevenson, and includes a faint echo of that poet's own epitaph.

Do you remember? Yes; I know
You must remember still:
He left us, not so long ago,

27. Noyes, "The Empire Builders", C.P., vol.1., p.175

Carolling with a will,
Because he knew that he should lie
Under the comfortable sky
Upon a lonely hill,
In old Japan, when day was done;
"Dear Robert Louis Stevenson." 28

The influence of Swinburne is evident in a certain languorous quality possessed by the poetry of Noyes, as well as in the latter's fondness for metrical invention. As a matter of fact, Swinburne was one of the first to recognize the poetic possibilities of the young poet. He praised his early work, and foresaw a bright future for the artist. Noyes never forgot that kindness and interest, and in his "Ode on the Seventieth Birthday of Swinburne" he pays him tribute.

He needs no crown of ours, whose golden heart
Poured out its wealth so freely in pure praise
Of others: him the imperishable bays
Crown, and on Sunium's height he sits apart;²⁹

and then again:

He is one with the world's great heart beyond the years,
One with the pulsing rhyme
Of tides that work some heavenly rhythmic will,
And hold the secret of all human tears.³⁰

From Swinburne, Noyes seems to have evolved his ready and unusual command of visual description.

Her red-gold hair against the far green sea
Blew thickly out: her slender golden form
Shone dark against the richly waning west---³¹

28. Ibid, "The Flower of Old Japan", p.18.

29. Noyes, "Ode on the Seventieth Birthday of Swinburne", C.P., vol.1., p.186

30. Ibid, p.187

31. Ibid, "The Rock Pool", vol.2,p.19.

All the influences that we have noted are in tune with Noyes's conception of poetry as a natural growth and development. He has, boldly and without hesitation, used what he thinks best, of those who have gone before him. He holds that the lessons of the past can contribute much towards the poetry of the future, and he intends to absorb and utilize as many of those lessons as he can. Once again, let me emphasize that this is not slavish imitation. Noyes has followed, but he has not copied. Always have the techniques and theories of the past been adapted for his present purposes, changed and rearranged to meet his present needs. His influences are many, and absolve him of the charge of being dominated by the previous poetry of any one man. Certainly the list is catholic; the man who can follow both Keats and Kipling, Southey and Swinburne cannot be accused of any serious lack of originality. One thing in common all his influences possess, and that is the fact that they were all poets of the great tradition, men who helped to build up the important main trends in English poetry.

An interesting use of tradition in Noyes, and one that might lay him open to the accusation of being unoriginal is his use of lines taken bodily from other poets, and lines from old fairy tales and folk legends. Such borrowings make their appearance in many of his poems, but once again the charges have no basis in fact. On the contrary, the interposition, and inclusion of such verses in

the midst of his original poetry adds greatly to the interest of the verse, and provides a somewhat novel experiment in form. In The Forest of Wild Thyme we find the entire poem revolving around the lines from Tennyson, "Little flower, but if I could understand", which Noyes without hesitation includes as a part of his own verses. In the same work, there are a number of lines from nursery rhymes, known to all of this and previous generations. The lines are quoted directly, and then the thoughts are expanded in Noyes's own words. Lines from Shakespeare's Midsummer Night's Dream receive the same treatment. Thus we find in this single poem, directly quoted, and included as part of the verse scheme the following:

1. A quotation from Tennyson's "Flower in the Crannied Wall".
2. A quotation from Shakespeare's Midsummer Night's Dream
3. Quotations from these nursery rhymes:
 - "Ladybird, ladybird, fly away home"
 - "Who killed Cock Robin?"
 - "Little Boy Blue, come blow your horn."
 - "The Spider and the Fly"
 - "See-Saw; Marjorie Daw"
 - "Dickory, Dickory Dock"³²

The novelty and originality of Noyes's methods speak for themselves in The Forest of Wild Thyme.

32. Noyes, "The Forest of Wild Thyme", C.P., vol.1.p.p.123-171.

Written as a dream of childhood, it wishes to include the stuff of which childhood is woven, and what could be more natural or appropriate than the nursery rhymes which have delighted children of all ages and of all times. Noyes makes no apologies for his borrowings; he feels that they justify themselves. This is not mere plagiarism, for the author frankly and honestly acknowledges his debt. What makes the whole thing more technically interesting is the clever method by which the author weaves the childhood verses into the body of the poem, and makes them integral parts of his work. His own variations and developments of his originals should relieve him from any unfounded accusations that might be made against him.

Here once again is the poet's use of what is already at hand for his own peculiar purposes. Noyes works here on the very plausible idea that he has already included enough original material to justify his position as a creative artist, and no one should quarrel with him if he also makes use of material which blends perfectly with his story and with his theme, particularly when he makes no attempt to hide the source of this ready made material. Here is the ideal blending of the best of the old with the best of the new, and he need make no apologies for the result.

It is in his poetic diction and language that Noyes is probably most traditional. An enthusiasm for big words and ringing phrases has marked his work from the very start of his career. This has caused his poetry to be crowded with high-flown and rhetorical expression. At the same time there is a good deal of what has been called "that ready made romanticism which insists on gratuitous roses, moons, and galleons."³³ The general impression is that his diction of the romantic nineteenth century variety has been over-used. Just why his frank rhetoric should be considered a weakness is most difficult to understand. Certainly the great poets of the past, Shakespeare and Milton among others, have been rhetorical. A certain amount of rhetoric has always been admitted as a part of the poetic tradition.

The language of poetry and the language of prose are not the same. Certain words and expressions lend themselves more naturally to that musical effect which is so greatly to be desired in poetic composition. Noyes has recognized that desirability, and has chosen consciously and deliberately the words and phrases which best bring out the music of verse. If poetry is to raise man from the level of his normal existence, and take him for a time into the realms of beauty and imagination, then language which most helps in that process is the enobling and beauty-creating language peculiar to the highest poetic utterance.

33. Davison, op.cit., p.204.

One aspect of Noyes's poetic language and diction is disturbing to many, and that is the fact that he is over lavish and uneconomical with words. He has the unfortunate habit of multiplying words to gain desired effects. This often takes the form of repetition or the use of the refrain or chorus in his poetry.

In line with the same procedure is his use of punctuation to supply deficiencies in language, and to emphasize his meaning and metre. This is characterized by the excessive employment of dashes and exclamation marks. The use of Oh! and Ah! without discrimination is still another weakness of the same type. In other words, Noyes seems to have difficulty in making his words alone say what he wants them to say, and must then resort to these artificialities to indicate that more is meant than actually appears to the eye. So wide and constant has been his use of these artificial devices that they have become an essential part of his verse, and he cannot do without them. How different this is from much of our modern poetry which has reduced punctuation to a minimum, and in some cases eliminated it entirely.

To illustrate the use of punctuation and exclamation in Noyes it is only necessary to open any of his volumes at random, and we are confronted with the concrete evidence, as in the three instances which follow. All three were discovered by simply opening a book of Noyes's poetry, and without any search or effort.

1. Ah that tree; I have sat in its boughs and looked seaward for hours.
2. Ah what wonders round us rose
When we dared to pause and look.
3. Oh, if you get dizzy when authors write--

Noyes has placed great emphasis on the use of traditional alliteration in his verse. He has used this device with great and telling effect. Many of his alliterative passages remind us of those in the poems of Swinburne with his marvellous "lisp of leaves and ripple of rain". The use of alliteration of course is age-old and time honored in English poetry, and may be traced back as far as the oldest Anglo-Saxon, Beowulf, and other poems of the same period depend for much of their effect upon it. Some of the examples in Noyes are extremely well done, and are distinct aids to the rhythmic flow of his metres.

1. Where the white sand sleeps at moon--
2. In the heart of a grey-haired woman who makes in a world of pain --
3. And in the bubbling blood each nose was buried deep--
4. Nightly wandered weeping thro' the ferns in the moon --

The list could be continued indefinitely with all examples proving Noyes's mastery of the art of handling and combining words. Some are beautiful, still others are ugly, but all contribute to the general poetic effect.

Of great interest is the treatment of poetic figures in Noyes's verse. Here also he has followed the

accepted rules for simile, metaphor and the other strophes, but he has also done much experimentation, and has created some bold and daring figures which do not conform to our predetermined ideas on such devices. Naturally the traditional figures predominate, and he has been more than successful in their use. "The Highwayman" provides us with some excellent examples of the more conventional metaphor and simile.

The moon was a ghostly galleon tossed upon cloudy seas,
The road was a ribbon of moonlight over the purple moor,³⁴

and

His eyes were hollows of madness, his hair like mouldy
hay,³⁵

The two metaphors in the first quotation are well done, but they are not particularly new or exciting. They are what we would expect from a traditional poet. The simile in the second quotation is more daring, but not altogether new.

Let us now examine some of Noyes's more original figures. Consider the following from "The World's May Queen".

The Dawn comes up like a primrose girl
With a crowd of flowers in a basket of pearl
For England.³⁶

This is completely unexpected and startling. Even more so is this one from "The Forest of Wild Thyme".

His bulging eyes began to glow
Like great red match-heads rubbed at night,³⁷

34. Noyes, "The Highwayman", C.P., vol.1., p.192

35. Ibid, p.192.

36. Noyes, "The World's May-Queen", C.P., vol.1., p.53

37. Ibid, p.146. "The Forest of Wild Thyme".

The use of repetition and refrain has had some rather wide employment in Noyes's poetry. This is sometimes a line that is repeated in several stanzas as "There is a song of England" in A Song of England,³⁸ and "Carol of birds between showers" in A May-Day Carol.³⁹ Again an entire stanza may be used as refrain as in the case of "The Barrel Organ".⁴⁰ Frequently a stanza, either the first or second, is repeated as the final stanza as in "The Progress of Love."⁴¹

The rhythm of Noyes verse is dominated by his prevailing use of the spondee, a foot made up of two long syllables. This gives a certain heaviness and emphasis to his lines. This weighty accentual system accounts for the drum beat effect of much of his verse, as in a line like "On the broad black breast of a midnight lake. "The spondee may be noted here in the second foot.

The same spondaic effect is to be found in "A Song of Sherwood" where it is achieved by omitting the unaccented syllable from one or more of the feet in a line

Friar Tuck and Little John are riding down together
With quarter-staff and drinking-cup and grey goose-feather.⁴²

Noyes has always held that rhythm is essential to poetry. He believes that the art of the poet is also the art of the singer. He has succeeded in giving to his

38. Ibid, "A Song of England", p.55.

39. Ibid, "A May-Day Carol, vol.2,p.52.

40. Ibid, "The Barrel Organ", vol.1.,pp.80-85.

41. Ibid, "The Progress of Love", pp.94-123.

42. Noyes, "A Song of Sherwood", C.P., vol.1,pp.49-50.

own poetry a peculiar singing quality which bears out in practice his own theories. There is in his work, a magnificent swing in his more solemn moments, and a gay, infectious melody in his lighter, more happy ones. Thus he suits the rhythm, the swing and the timing of his verses to suit his varied subjects. The prevailing rhythm is one of gaiety and merriment, rollicking and joyous.

In his own writings and public statements, Noyes has referred again and again to the necessity and the desirability of rhythm in poetry. In a newspaper interview he said: "The basis of poetry is the sense of rhythm, and the sense of rhythm is universal."⁴³ In one of his prose essays we read: "The essential element of poetry is the musical element, the element of song. This is what distinguishes poetry from prose. Music is dictated by the pulse of life; it is a rhythmical art which obeys rhythmical laws."⁴⁴

The insistence on the musical element in verse has had a profound effect on the work of Noyes. It has resulted in a smoothness and fluency lacking in most of his contemporaries. The products of his art are never harsh and ugly to the ear; there are now dissonances. Even ugly and unpleasant subject matter, and he has not disdained to treat such material, is couched in language and rhythm which is appealing, fluid and sensitive.

The term "rollicking" is most often applied

43. Alfred Noyes, from an interview with Montrose J. Moses in the New York Times, March 18, 1914.

44. Alfred Noyes, Some Aspects of Modern Poetry, p.52

to the rhythms of Noyes. It is singularly appropriate, and accurately describes them. They tumble and cascade with an almost uncontrolled vivacity and joyousness throughout his work.

Noyes, of course, sees in the rhythm of poetry merely one manifestation of the Divine order and harmony of the Universe. In the interview quoted before, he spoke of his beliefs on this subject.

The smallest break in the eternal order and harmony is an immeasurable vacuum of the kind that both art and science abhor; for, if we admit it, the universe has no meaning. There is no break in the roll of that "harmony whereto the worlds beat time", and it is because great art brings out, as a conductor with a wand, the harmonies hidden by the dust of daily affairs, that in poetry, as time goes on, our race will come to find an even surer and surer stay.⁴⁵

This is in line with not only the essential laws of harmony, rhythm and metre on which Noyes insists, but also with his confirmed belief that poetry is religion of which we shall have more to say in a later chapter when we discuss the spirituality of his poetry.

It is only natural that the simple rhythms, and the easy, fluent metres of Noyes have aroused the anger and ridicule of modern criticism. In an age where profession of any belief in guiding principles is frowned upon, this is only to be expected. Those who hold with metrical anarchy and "the cult of unintelligibility" cannot be expected to appreciate, and approve of one who holds by older ideals

45. Alfred Noyes, Interview in the New York Times, March 18, 1914.

and standards. Perhaps this critical approval springs from Noyes's very diversity in both form and subject matter. The trouble seems to be in the fact that the critics cannot "pin him down." They claim that he has no feeling for the subtleties of modern rhythms, that he lives in the past. Well, the only answer to that is the very obvious truth that modern rhythms, on the whole are not subtle; they are simply meaningless.

One author who is an ardent admirer, and firm believer in Noyes and his theories of poetry puts the whole case this way: "if he were not so versatile, less versatile critics, instead of panting after him in vain, would be able to grasp him, get him under their microscopes, and recognize him for the poet that he is."⁴⁶

A favorite charge of the critics is that Noyes is a mere versifier, and that he writes jingles and rhymes rather than poetry. No charge could be further from the truth. Noyes has written admirably in all the known metres, and, as we have attempted to point out, has done excellent work along more purely experimental lines as well. His idea of poetry as a part of a slow, continuous development has not precluded variation and modification of accepted and conventional themes. He has upheld the honor of the tradition of poetic form, and, at the same time, has not shunned true originality which he conceives not as a break

46. Arthur St. John Adcock, Gods of Modern Grub Street, New York, Stokes, 1923, p.256.

from tradition, but as a growth.

A master of the French forms, of blank verse, of ballad measure, of the song, and all known lyric stanza forms, Noyes has rearranged, re-combined, and modified these forms to such an extent as to warrant the title of a truly creative and original artist. Convinced of the beauty of rhyme and its essential value in verse, he has experimented with various rhyme combinations, with initial rhyme, and with internal rhyme. He has originated many metres and patterns hitherto unknown to English poetry. He has brought into being new and daring figures of speech with sparkling innovations in the field of the metaphor and the simile.

The waste of words and the repetition which disturb our present day critics so much are not as culpable as might be imagined. The repetitions and the refrains of Noyes are the result of purposeful and intelligent planning. Variations in these same refrains are part of the verse pattern in many of his poems. They indicate changes in intensity, and they rise and fall with the mood and emotion involved. Furthermore, the refrain is definitely in the tradition of the popular ballad of the past, and it becomes in Noyes an integral part of the simplicity for which he has always strived. The use of repetition in any form of composition for purposes of emphasis has always been recognized and advocated.

Traditional Noyes certainly is, but that he

has allowed himself to be bound by convention is categorically denied. He upholds permanent values in poetry, just as he upholds them in politics and religion, but he not one to condemn something simply on the grounds that it is new. He is not a man overpowered by an "eternal nostalgia for the past" because it is the past, but because he believes that we have much to learn from the experiences and experiments of the great poets, of Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, and, despite the frowns of the intelligentsia, of Tennyson.

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C H A P T E R I V

NOYES AND TRADITIONAL POETIC MATERIAL

The previous chapter considered the question of poetic form, the "how" of verse. We are now to take up and investigate the material of Noyes's poetry, the stuff of which it is compounded, the "what" of it.

To begin with, we shall discover that the variety of subjects to be found in the work of Noyes equals the variety of forms he has employed. His natural bent is, of course, towards the more romantic and traditional materials, but he has not allowed his preference for the past to obscure his vision. He is equally at home with the things of modern life. He is not afraid of realism, nor does he completely shun the horrible and the ugly. His taste is catholic, and embraces a wide range of materials, both old and new.

Any classification of his poetry would indicate that certain themes and subjects predominate.

1. England, her greatness and her glory.
2. The land of fairies and make-believe.
3. Religion and the deep significance of the spiritual.
4. Nature and the beauty of the world.
5. The Classics and Classical mythology.
6. Satire.

7. War and peace.
8. The problems of contemporary life.
9. Love (usually spiritual, rather than worldly love).
10. Broad humour.
11. Medieval legend.
12. The romantic past.
13. Art and literature.
14. Science and its implications.
15. Miscellaneous subjects.

The list speaks for itself; it runs the gamut of human experience, and human problems. To Noyes almost everything is grist for his poetic mill.

The range of materials in his poetry has been widely recognized. As early as 1905, barely three years after the publication of his first work, a reviewer in an English magazine spoke of this extraordinary range. "Noyes is not over-specialized. His metres and methods are as diverse as his subjects, and the scope of the latter is unusually wide."¹

The diversity of subject matter is a direct result of the fact that Noyes is interested in life as life, and not in certain phases of it alone. He has one special and glorious gift, and that is the gift of admiration. He has never lost his sense of wonder at the myriad happenings round about him. All things interest him, and

1. From a review, "Two Singers" in Blackwood's Magazine, London, 177:251-254, Feb., 1905.p.252.

he is interested to the extent of wishing to record his impressions in poetic form.

Noyes is a true son of the land of his birth, and praise of England is one of his major themes. He is particularly devoted to the telling of England's glory as a sea-power. This theme finds its greatest expression in Drake, but it also finds its way into a long series of his minor poems. Love for the sea, and an acknowledgement of the part that it has played in the development of the British Empire have always been a part of the English tradition and heritage.

Not all critics have been favorably impressed with Noyes's treatment of the sea and its influence on Britain. Arnold Bennett has been one of the most savage attackers of this type of verse. He indicts Noyes as a member of what he calls the "sea and slaughter" school of poetry.² He continues "Noyes missed the mark in indicating the sea as 'the throne of England's fame.' The real throne of England's fame is not in the sea at all. Her true fame rests in a few acts of national justice she has accomplished, and from her generous impulses as a nation."³

I rather imagine that most critics and almost all Englishmen would be inclined to disagree with Mr. Bennett. The sea has played such an important part in the life

2. Arnold Bennett, Books and Persons, London, Chatto and Windus, 1917, p.231

3. Ibid, p.232.

of England, and has contributed so much to its standing as a world-power that to deny it would be to destroy one of the cornerstones of a long and proud tradition.

The story of Drake is, in reality, the story of the rise of England to a position of naval and seagoing eminence. We read of the exploits of the Elizabethan privateers who harried the coasts of Spain, and continued their activities in the West Indies and throughout the Spanish Main. We are told of the epic-making voyage of Sir Francis Drake around the world. The poem ends with the defeat of the Spanish Armada, and the establishing of Britain as mistress of the seas. The theme is one in which all Englishmen take great pride.

An epic which did not quite come off, Drake is still a remarkable piece of writing. The work is full of the sweep and glory of the sea, and with the courage and bravery of the English sea-dogs who sailed upon that sea and made it theirs. It is also quite naturally filled with that fierce love for country which characterizes so much of Noyes's work. In a passage which tells of the slow approach of the Armada upon the British coast he has written thus:

All around our England, our small struggling star,
Fortress of freedom, rock o' the world's desire,
Bearing at last the hope of all mankind,
The thickening darkness surged, and close at hand,
Those first, fierce cloudy fringes of the storm, ⁴

4. Noyes, Drake, Collected Poems, vol.1, p.366.

Noyes's love and feeling for his country are expressed in his continual references to England as his mother. That expression is found in the preface to the American edition of Drake, and in the exordium to the same poem.

Mother and love, fair England, hear my prayer.⁵

Like Kipling in "Recessional", Noyes recognizes the higher power of God in the affairs of men. This had been one of the essential features of "The Empire Builders" mentioned in a previous chapter. The same idea occurs at the very close of Drake where, in the very moment of his greatest triumph, the victorious captain speaks.

"Not unto us,"

Cried Drake, "not unto us- but unto Him
Who made the sea, belongs our England now!
Pray God that heart and mind and soul we prove
Worthy among the nations of this hour."⁶

Lines like these would seem to free Noyes from the opinion of many that he is nothing more than a writer of imperialistic and super-patriotic jingoism.

One of Noyes's most ardent admirers looks upon this imperialistic tendency as one of his few major weaknesses. "Noyes", he tells us, "is dangerously near offensive imperialism, and this is the danger into which most patriotic poets are plunged. It usually reflects a

5. Ibid, p. 250.

6. Ibid, p. 425.

tendency to ignore their country's faults."⁷ I cannot see where the patriotism of Noyes is in any way offensive. It is the part of every man to love and honor his country. Noyes never allows his emotions to run away with his common sense; his patriotism is never of the hysterical, flag-waving variety so common in the poetry of Kipling and Newbolt. As to ignoring his country's faults, is not that the accepted procedure with most men? It is not really so much a question of ignoring these faults as it is of minimizing them. The poetry of Noyes contains solemn warnings to his country to beware this or that policy, but he is certainly aware of faults and flaws when he does this. A ringing note of sincerity sets his verse apart from the false notes and false values of the self-conscious patriot. Let us quote some of the lines which reflect this sincere love for the homeland.

There is a song of England that none shall ever sing;
So sweet it is and fleet it is
That none whose words are not as fleet as birds upon
the wing,
And regal as her mountains,
And radiant as the fountains
Of rainbow-coloured sea-spray that every wave can fling
Against the cliffs of England, the sturdy cliffs of England,
Could more than seem to dream of it,
Or catch one flying gleam of it,
Above the seas of England that never cease to sing.⁸

It is in Tales of the Mermaid Tavern that Noyes has best recaptured the atmosphere and spirit of old

7. Braybrooke, op.cit., p.179

8. Noyes, "A Song of England", C.P., vol.1,p.55

England. The glories of the age of Elizabeth, with all its romance, adventure, good-fellowship, and sublime literary achievements, and here in abundance, and the majestic figures of Shakespeare, Marlowe, Jonson, Greene, Drayton, Bacon and Raleigh come to life again as we read. Jerrold has said of this work: "By flashes of happy description Noyes makes us see the people whom he himself sees as real".⁹ This power is evident in the following description of the arrival of the disgraced Raleigh seeking refuge from his enemies.

A shadow stood in the doorway. We looked up;
And there, but O, how changed, how worn and grey,
Sir Walter Raleigh, like a hunted thing,
Stared at us.

"Ben", he said, and glanced behind him.
Ben took a step towards him.

"O, my God,
Ben" whispered the old man in a husky voice,
Half timorous and half cunning, so unlike
His old heroic self that one might weep
To hear it. "Ben, I have given them all the slip!
I may be followed. Can you hide me here
Till it grows dark?"¹⁰

Noyes recreates the glories of the English sea-power of the past in "The Phantom Fleet. "Here the ghosts of long dead admirals, and captains return, and inspire the England of the present.

Nelson, our Nelson, frail and maimed and blind,
Stretched out his dead cold face against the foe:
And England's Raleigh followed hard behind,
With all his eager fighting heart aglow;
Glad, glad for England's sake once more to know
The old joy of battle and contempt of pain;
Glad, glad to die, if England willed it so,¹¹

9. Jerrold, op.cit., p.141.

10. Noyes, "Tales of the Mermaid Tavern", C.P., vol.2, p.412

11. Ibid, "The Phantom Fleet", C.P., vol.3, p.292.

and in a succeeding stanza;

And there were all those others, Drake and Blake,
Rodney and Howard, Byron, Collingwood;
With deathless eyes aflame for England's sake,¹²

In "The Lord of Misrule" there are pictures of the old May Day celebrations. In "The Tramp Transfigured" are fine descriptions of the English countryside. "A Round-head's Rallying Song" interprets the Puritan side of the seventeenth century, and may be read as a counterbalance to the well known Cavalier Songs of Robert Browning.

There are scattered English scenes and characters throughout all his volumes. Pictures of the London slums occur in "An East End Coffee Stall." A partial list of the English poems would also include, in addition to those mentioned before, the following:

1. "The Song of the Plough"
2. "The Silver Crook"
3. "Lavender"
4. "A Watchword of the Fleet"
5. "The Hedge-Rose Opens"
6. "The White Cliffs"
7. "The Sussex Sailor"
8. "A Devonshire Song"
9. "A Devonshire Christmas"
10. "Sherwood"
11. "Oxford Revisited"

12. Ibid. p.292.

The breath of English air, the fragrance of English flowers, and the spirit of English tradition is so much a part of the poetry of Noyes as to be almost inseparable from it. He has a real and deep feeling for the English country-side which we shall consider in more detail when we take up the question of his mature poetry.

It is in poetry dealing with the land of fairy and the world of make-believe that Noyes is most completely at home. In this respect his work shows a marked similarity to that of the late Sir James Barrie. Both men had that sense of wonder, and that feeling of eternal youth which must of necessity be present for the production of such material. The fantastic, the wonderful and the strange became in the poetry of Noyes a veritable land of enchantment. The delicate and sensitive humour of his fairy pieces never degenerates into mere nonsense verse like the work of Lewis Carrol and Edward Lear with which it has been often, and without reason, compared.

The fact that there is much of the child's wonder at the world in his poetry has made the fairy poetry of Noyes of great interest to children since its first appearance. There is much in this type of poem too subtle for the mind of the average child, but the poet has never allowed his allusions and references to more serious things to interfere with the essential features of a good story, and that particular type of excitement which appeals to the child in all of us. The land of fairy has been called "a

land of escape in which wonder is ever renaescent, the land in which dreams come true. A land of the fourth dimension lying all about us."¹³ It is into this land that Noyes pleads with us to follow him.

The world of these fairy poems is highly artificial and unreal, but this is by design and skillful planning.

"By his constant sense of the mystery of the universe, Noyes succeeds in carrying imaginative readers into the world of the imagination, and gives reality to that land of faery which, elsewhere, has too often degenerated into childish make-believe."¹⁴ The truth is that Noyes believes in this world of fancy; for him it is reality of a sort. It is a joyous, gay world in which the harshness and violence of every day life are banished. The author is an irrepressible optimist, and the fairy poems are filled with the eternal sunshine of childhood. This is a rare trait in modern verse, and has naturally aroused the ire of our critics who maintain that Noyes is not willing to face the sterner realities of life. Some few of these same critics sigh with relief when they encounter his poetry. The few believe rightly enough that the function of poetry may be to take us out of the problems of our worldly existence for a time and lead us into a better, if imaginary, place. One of them expresses himself in these words: "It

13. Jerrold, op.cit.,p.168

14. Jerrold, op.cit.,p.199.

is a pleasure to come out from the darkness and gloom of the moderns into the sunshine which illumines the sparkling world of his wholesome fancy."¹⁵

One of the most charming of Noyes's fairy poems is The Forest of Wild Thyme. We have already discussed the unusual metrical pattern of this poem, and the introduction of nursery rhymes into the body of the narrative. Designed primarily for children it tells of the quest for a fairyland in heaven. The quest ends in the discovery that fairyland or heaven, call it what you please, lie in the home. This is the message of Noyes that these things lie all about us.

The Forest of Wild Thyme is replete with tenderness, tenderness of thought and emotion which never falls off into pale sentimentality. Parental love, the lessons of wisdom and goodness, and the eternal love of God are among the themes which go to make up this poem. The search for "the smallest flower" leads the children through the marvellous realms of folk lore, nursery rhymes and legend.

Among the finest stanzas is that which describes the "City of Sleep".

Faint and sweet as a lily's repose
On the broad black breast of a midnight lake,
The City delighted the cradling night:
Like a straggling palace of cloud it rose;
The towers were crowned with a crystal light

15. Schelling, op.cit., p.83.

Like the starry crown of a white snowflake
As they pierced in a wild white pinnacled crowd,
Through the dusky wreaths of enchanted cloud
That swirled all around like a witch's hair. 16

The Forest of Wild Thyme also contains one of the most beautiful and touching of all Noyes's songs, a song which sums up the great mystery of the universe.

What is there hid in the heart of a rose,
Mother-mine?
Ah, who knows, who knows, who knows?
A man that died on a lonely hill
May tell you, perhaps, but none other will,
Little child.

What does it take to make a rose,
Mother-mine?
The God that died to make it knows
It takes the world's eternal wars,
It takes the moon and all the stars,
It takes the might of heaven and hell
And the everlasting Love as well,
Little child. 17

The thought of this little work is so finely spiritual, so tender and so simple that it deserves a high place in Noyes's collected works. In form it is reminiscent of the ballad with its question and answer technique. It might be compared in this regard with "Edward" or Rossetti's "Sister Helen".

The same world of fancy and make-believe may be discovered in The Flower of Old Japan. Noyes's Japan has little connection with the land of war-lords and bloody conquest we know today. It is not the real Japan, but a place of marvels and wonders. The poem itself is full of

16. Noyes, "The Forest of Wild Thyme", C.P., vol.1.,p.157
17. Ibid, p.167.

vivid colour and splendid imaginings.

Satin sails in a crimson dawn
Over the silky silver sea;
Purple veils of the dark withdrawn;
Heavens of pearl and porphyry;
Purple and white in the morning light
Over the water the town we knew,
In tiny state like a willow plate,
Shone and behind it the hills were blue.¹⁸

Throughout the work appears the figure of "Creeping-Sin". It is he who attempts to restrain the travellers from their journey and their search. Through this character there is a linking up of make-believe fancy with the world of reality. As we know, our world contains many creeping-sins, those people who would persuade us that there is no fairyland, no world of enchantment and dreams.

The poem ends with much the same thought as that of The Forest of Wild Thyme.

All the fairy tales were true,
And home the heart of fairyland.¹⁹

Beneath the surface of fantasy and the marvellous in The Flower of Old Japan lies a certain more serious aspect. There is, for example, a barely concealed attack on armaments and the race for arms superiority among the nations of the world. The satire occurs in that part of the poem which describes the curious race of the Ghastroi,

18. Noyes "The Flower of Old Japan, C.P., vol.1.p.24

19. Ibid, p.46.

the tiger-men.

Their dens are always ankle-deep
With twisted knives, and in their sleep
They often cut themselves; they say
That if you wish to live in peace
The surest way is not to cease
Collecting knives; and never a day
Can pass, unless they buy a few;
And as their enemies buy them too
They all avert the impending fray,
And starve their children and their wives
To buy the necessary knives. 20

The passage above may be cited as an example of Noyes' awareness of what was going on about him. In the midst of fairyland, he is conscious of the world in which he lives. Satires like the one we have quoted are not within the ken of the child-reader, and are only appreciated by adults, but they in no way distract from the child's enjoyment of the wondrous tale.

Sherwood gives us still another glimpse into the world of fairy beauty and fairy wisdom. It is poetry packed full of the spirit of old romance and the legends of the sprites and elves of Sherwood Forest. This is a poem which would seem to justify the statement of the critic who said: "Noyes has a something of his own - a native uncopied original which justifies his singing, and entitles him to perch on a leafy branch in the woods of literature, and which gives the reading world a reason for pausing to listen." 21

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20. Noyes, "The Flower of Old Japan", C.P., vol.1, p.37
21. William V. Kelley, Down the Road, New York, Eaton and Mains, 1911, p. 305.

Sherwood brings Robin Hood back to life again. Written in dramatic form, it revives for us all the characters of the Robin Hood stories, as well as the fairies Oberon, Titania and Puck, and introduces us to the wise fool "Shadow-of-a-Leaf."

The poem illustrates the statement that Noyes "has enlarged fairyland until it includes all of life."²² As in his other fairy poems he begs us to believe with him that the world is truly a place of wonder and romance, and that our progress through it should be a joyful adventure.

The fool, "Shadow-of-a-Leaf", appears elsewhere in the poetry of Noyes. He is in a certain sense his "familiar", an embodiment of the spirit of nature, an English Pan.

The world of the dreamer of dreams finds its expression in "The tramp Transfigured." Here is that curious blend of material and method, so common in Noyes, which comes from a mingling of the commonplace subject with a romantic treatment.

All the way to Fairyland across the thyme and heather,
Round a little bank of fern that rustled on the sky,
Me and stick and bundle, sir, we jogged along together-
(Changeable the weather? Well it ain't all pie!)
Just about the sunset- Wont you listen to my story?
Look at me! I'm only rags and tatters to your eye!
Sir, that blooming sunset crowned this battered hat with
Glory!
Me that was a crawling worm became a butterfly-
(Ain't it hot and dry?
Thank you, sir, thank you, sir!) a blooming butterfly.²³

22. Rica Brenner, Ten Modern Poets, N.Y., Harcourt, 1930, p. 256
23. Noyes, "The Tramp Transfigured", C.P., vol. 2, p. 37.

Here is droll cockney humour combined with the visions and dreams of the idealist who still believes in fairyland. Jerrold calls this poem, "joyous, uplifting, memory-haunting, a vision rich in the beauty of the earth."²⁴ Another critic is fascinated by the "Dickensian character of the tramp."²⁵ It is certainly Noyes at his happiest, if not at his very best.

The ability to combine the world of fantasy and high romance with the realities of life is further demonstrated in "Bacchus and the Pirates" and in "Forty Singing Seamen." In both there is a mixture of fantastic material and legend, and, at the same time, they are both couched in a rough vernacular.

There is no question as to Noyes's full and complete understanding of the heart of the child. In this regard he deserves the same high position as the author of Alice-in-Wonderland. His dream poems and his fairy material prove that. He has said of these same poems that they are not merely fairy tales, but they "constitute an attempt to follow the careless and happy feet of children back into the kingdom of those dreams which are the sole reality worth living and dying for--those beautiful dreams for which mankind has endured so many triumphant martyrdoms."²⁶

24. Jerrold, op.cit.,p.189.

25. William Lyon Phelps, The Advance of English Poetry in the Twentieth Century, New York, Dodd, Mead, 1928,p.59.

26. Alfred Noyes as quoted in Phelps, op.cit.,p.60

It is his fondness for the "stuff of dreams" and the world of make-believe which sets him most noticeably apart from his fellow-poets of the present day. The only dreams recognized by many contemporaries are Freudian nightmares. The magic of the dream-world, the vision of the dreamer are ignored in the insistence upon reality and intellectualism.

The treatment of love in the poetry of Noyes does not follow the conventional conception. His love is the love of the spirit rather than of the flesh, and his poetry on this theme is more often concerned with the deep and all-pervading love of God for Man than it is with the love that exists between Man and Woman. He has written little then on this subject in the generally accepted sense, but the atmosphere of love does penetrate into much of his work where it defies actual analysis. "In Cloak of Grey" represents love as a beggar seeking notice and attention.

Love's a pilgrim, cloaked in grey,
And his feet are pierced and bleeding:
Have ye seen him pass this way
Sorrowfully pleading?
Ye that weep the world today,
Have ye seen King Love to-day?

Because ye did not understand
Love cometh from afar,
A pilgrim out of Holy Land
Guided by a star:
Last night he came in cloak of grey,
Begging, Ye knew him not: he went his way.²⁷

27. Noyes, "In Cloak of Grey", C.P., vol.1,p.188.

This love of which the poet speaks is no earthly love, but something higher, something intensely spiritual, something Divine.

In "The Psyche of Our Day" is to be found an even more unorthodox conception of what we are pleased to call Love. In this poem it is suggested that the real name of Love may be Death. In the last stanza of the work, after praising the beauty and glory of Love, the poet continues,

So hold it, keep it, count it, sweet,
Until the end, until the end.
It is not cruelty, but bliss
That pains and is so fond:
Crush life like thyme beneath your feet,
And O, my love, when that strange friend,
The Shadow of Wings, which men call Death,
Shall close your eyes, with that last kiss,
Ask not His name. A rosier breath
Shall waken you - beyond.²⁸

Noyes believes that mother-love is one of the highest and most sublimely beautiful of all loves. There are many references to it in his poetry, not the least appealing being the lovely song on the theme in The Forest of Wild Thyme.

The nature poetry of Noyes is of wide, universal appeal. It breathes the spirit of Spring and the English country-side. The sunshine of the world filters through it; it is essentially joyous and gay, but there

28. Noyes, "The Psyche of Our Day", C.P., vol.3, p.33. Note also the use of the word "thyme" in line 5 of the stanza. It seems to be one of Noyes's favorites, and is repeated constantly throughout his collected poems.

may often be discerned an underlying sadness, the sadness of the man who reflects on the transitory nature of the world's beauties. This feeling finds expression in such a poem as "The Waggon."

Crimson and black on the sky, a waggon of clover
Slowly goes rumbling, over the white chalk road;
And I lie in the golden grass there, wondering why
So little a thing
As the jingle and ring of the harness,
The hot creak of leather,
The peace of the plodding,
Should suddenly, stabbingly, make it
Strange that men die. 29

On the whole the approach is much happier, however. Noyes is a natural optimist, and his more gloomy moods are seldom of any long duration. His good spirits persist, and we have exquisite memories of Devonshire lanes, of the Sussex Downs, of hedge-roses, and clover.

"The Barrel-Organ" is probably the best known of all his poems. Here indeed is the very essence of Springtime. In this work Noyes makes dramatic use of contrast. We see the busy throngs of London, each with his or her peculiar problem, and each member of that crowd is stirred by the music of the barrel-organ. Each returns for a brief space of time into the "land where the dead dreams go. Each thinks and dreams of what was, and of what might have been. Through it all runs the lilting strains of "Come down to Kew in Lilac Time, it isn't far from London." Thus we are reminded of how close we all are to the wonders of Nature,

29. Noyes, "The Waggon", C.P., vol.3., p.48.

if we will but take heed, and try to find them.

Everywhere in the collected poems we may find delicate reflections of the world's beauty. The finely lyrical "The Hedge-Rose Opens" is an excellent illustration of the poet's treatment of Nature.

How passionately it opens after rain,
And O, how like a prayer
To those great shining skies! Do they disdain
A bride so small and fair?
See the imploring petals, how they part
And utterly lay bare
The perishing treasures of that piteous heart
In wild surrender there.
What? Would'st thou, too, drink up the Eternal bliss,
Ecstatically dare,
O, little bride of God to invoke His kiss?-
But O, how like a prayer!³⁰

The poem last quoted brings out another element of Noyes's attitude towards Nature. He sees the marvels of the natural world as manifestations of the greatness and goodness of God, and views each created thing as in itself a prayer to divinity. This subjective point of view is somewhat reminiscent of Wordsworth, but does not contain the latter's pantheistic approach.

Ordinarily Noyes is satisfied simply to watch and to admire. The result is often a masterpiece of restrained and suggestive writing as in "The May-Tree."

The May-tree on the hill
Stands in the night
So fragrant and so still,
So dusky white.

30. Noyes, "The Hedge-Rose Opens", C.P., vol.3, p.29

That, stealing from the wood
In that sweet air,
You'd think Diana stood
Before you there ³¹

The same deep feeling is evident in "Beautiful on the Bough."

Beautiful on the bough
The song-thrush in summer-time
Carelessly sings. ³²

From the very beginnings of his poetical career, Noyes has been extremely outspoken on the question of war and peace. He has considered war an abomination, and has done his utmost to emphasize its futility and its ugliness. This is, in a sense, a deliberate reversal of Kipling's imperialism. Noyes, like Tennyson, has tried to preach the ideal of a universal brotherhood of man, and of a parliament and union of men for the mutual discussion of the problems which arise in international affairs.

He has been especially interested in the question of Anglo-American unity, and must undoubtedly be more than pleased with the present state of cooperation between the two great English-speaking countries of the world. The British Empire and the United States, he contends, are the sole hope for world democracy and freedom. He feels that both have common traditions of language and culture which link them closely together.

31. Noyes, "The May-Tree", C.P., vol. 3, p. 30.

32. Ibid, p. 260., "Beautiful on the Bough".

In his war poetry Noyes has not hesitated to speak out boldly and frankly. He has made use of realistic material to excellent effect, and completely absolves himself from the charges that he is little more than a "milk and water poet" who fears to face the ugly and the more unpleasant phases of our existence.

In his poem "The Union" may be found an expression of his fondest hopes and dreams on the subject of world unity. The theme is that of a united world pledged to the principles of common decency, and working for the good of all mankind, the whole under the guidance of God and Christian principles. The work was written in 1917 and contains the following lines.

Flag of the sky, proud flag of that wide communion,
Too mighty for thought to scan;
Flag of the many in one, and that last world-union
That kingdom of God in man;
Ours was a dream in the night of that last federation,
But yours is the glory unfurled-
The marshalled nations and stars that shall make
one nation
One singing star of the world.³³

In the nature of a prophecy is Noyes's poem, "The Dawn of Peace." Alas! it is a prophecy as yet unfulfilled, but which may one day come to pass. It sees a universal and lasting peace in which the word of God will not be lost.

It is the Dawn of Peace! The nations
From East to West have heard a cry-

33. Noyes, "The Union", C.P., vol.3, p.149.

"Through all earth's blood-red generations
By hate and slaughter climbed thus high,
Here- on this height- still to aspire,
One only path remains untrod,
One path of love and peace climbs higher!
Make straight that highway for our God."³⁴

Pride and joy in the common alliance of
England and the United States for the cause of freedom and
liberty is contained in his poem, "The avenue of the Allies."

There, in the darkness, the glories are mated,
There, in the darkness, a world is created.³⁵

Noyes has had much to say of the men who die
in war for a cause in which they believe. To this category
belongs the short series of sonnets entitled "The Victorious
Dead". These sonnets, by the way, are written in the Shakes-
pearean form with three quatrains and a couplet, and a re-
semblance has been remarked concerning the quatrains to the
stanzas of Tennyson's In Memoriam.

By meadow and mountain, river and hawthorn-brake
In sacramental peace, from sea to sea,
The land they loved grows lovelier for their sake,
Shines with their hope, enshrines their memory,

Communes with heaven again, and makes us whole,³⁶
Through man's new faith in man's immortal soul.

A far more gloomy picture of the sacrifice
of the world's young men is to be found in "A Victory Dance."
The scene is a "victory" ball after the last World War, and

34. Ibid, "The Dawn of Peace", vol.2,p.440.

35. Noyes, "The Avenue of the Allies", C.P., vol.3,p.142.

36. Ibid, "The Victorious Dead", C.P., vol.3,p.222.

the merry-makers dance about unmindful of the significance of the occasion. The ghosts of those who have fallen in battle stand about the walls watching. They are amazed at the spectacle, and indicate that they had expected something far different. One of them says:

"I thought they'd be praying
For worlds to men," 37

A statesman remarks:

"I'm glad they can busy
Their thoughts elsewhere!
We mustn't reproach 'em.
They're young you see." 38

The inevitable answer comes from the shades:

"Ah," said the dead men, 39
"So were we!"

The thought of this last poem is somewhat at variance with that of "The Victorious Dead." In "A Victory Dance" Noyes seems to think that perhaps the sacrifice was all in vain, whereas in the other work he speaks of the dead as remembered and triumphant.

Noyes did not see active service during the last war, because of physical disability, and was not as directly influenced by it as some of his contemporaries. At the same time he is completely convinced of the horrors of the modern type of warfare, and has expressed himself in no uncertain terms on the subject. This attitude is found particularly in Lucifer's Feast and in The Wine-Press.

37. Noyes, "A Victory Dance", C.P., vol. 3, p. 269.

38. Ibid, p. 270.

39. Ibid, p. 270.

Lucifer's Feast was written in 1909, and is in effect a prophecy of the impending struggle of the first Great War, 1914-1918. Kernahan speaks of this poem as "sickly with the odor of blood."⁴⁰ In it Noyes warns that wars will eventually mean the end of civilization if efforts are not made to stop them. Written in a passionate rhetorical manner, it proves that Noyes can be as convincing a realist as he pleases. The poet visualizes a feast to which the Devil has invited England and Germany; it is a feast of horrors and blood. After showing them the unspeakable cruelties of war, Satan asks them if they will still fight. The answer is yes, and even the Devil himself is forced to rise from the table in disgust. For sheer brutality of realistic portraiture, contemporary literature has little to equal it. Consider the following lines:

The blood-greased wheels of cannon thundering into line
O'er that red writhe of pain, rent groin and shattered
 spine,
The moaning faceless face that kissed its child last night,
The raw pulp of the heart that beat for love's delight,
The heap of twisting bodies, clotted and congealed
In one red huddle of anguish on the loathsome field,
The seas of obscene slaughter spewing their blood-red
 yeast,
Multitudes pouring out their entrails for the feast,
Knowing not why, but dying, they think, for some high cause,⁴¹

In a briefer passage we have concentrated horror. The poet is speaking of the first course of the ghastly banquet.

40. Kernahan, op.cit.,p.196

41. Noyes, "Lucifer's Feast",C.P., vol.2,p.103.

Each takes upon his plate a small round thing that drips
And quivers, a child's heart.⁴²

This is a far cry from the poet who wrote
The Forest of Wild Thyme or the delicate romantic Sherwood.
It serves to prove that Noyes is not merely a poet of fancy,
but when the occasion arises he can be as brutally frank
and realistic as any poet now living.

The Wine-Press continues the same theme.
It was written in 1913, and continues the spirit of pro-
phesy. Like the earlier work it is a severe and terrible
indictment of war and the politicians who make that war pos-
sible. It is an exposition of the sheer bestiality which
so often is the accompaniment of modern war-fare. The fol-
lowing passages speak for themselves.

Slaughter! Slaughter! Slaughter!
The cold machines whirred on,
And strange things crawled amongst the wheat
With entrails dragging round their feet,
And over the foul red shambles
A fearful sunlight shone.
And a remnant reached the trenches
Where the black-mouthed guns lay still.
There was no cloud in the blue sky,
No sight, no sound of an enemy.
The sunlight slept on the valley,
And the dead slept on the hill.⁴³

The bestiality of war finds its expres-
sion in other lines from the same work.

The embers of his hut still burned;
And, in the deep blue gloom,
His bursting eyeballs yet could see
A white shape under the apple-tree,

42. Ibid, p.102.

43. Noyes, "The Wine-Press", C.P., vol.3, p.92.

A naked body, dabbled with red,
Like a drift of apple-bloom

She lay like a broken sacrament
That the dogs have defiled,
"Sonia! Sonia! Speak to me!"
He babbled like a child. 44

Here is no softness, no sweetness, but the plain unvarnished reality of war. Noyes's bitter words come from his heart, and he can make us see the agonies and terrors he described.

Noyes's choice of realistic material has not been limited to his expositions of the horrors of war. He has also done some finely realistic studies of life among the London poor. These verses have a certain photographic quality which speaks well for the author's acute powers of observation. They further demonstrate his willingness to face the facts of existence, be they pleasant or unpleasant. Finally there is in this particular group of poems that exceedingly rare streak of melancholy which appears at infrequent intervals throughout Noyes's work. One of the very best examples of this class of his poetry is "An East-End Coffee Stall." The setting is that familiar sight to all Londoners, the all-night restaurant and coffee stall patronized in the West-End by rich and poor alike, but in the East-End by only the very poor.

Faces of our humanity, ravaged, white,
Wrenched with old love, old hate, older despair,
Steal out of vile filth-dropping dens to stare
On that wild monstrosity of a naphtha light.

44. Ibid, p.102.

See, with lean faces rapturously aglow
For a brief while they dream and munch and drink;
Then, one by one, once more, silently slink
Back, back into the gulping mist. They go,

One by one, out of the ring of light!
They creep, like crippled rats, into the gloom,
Into the fogs of life and death and doom,
Into the night, the immeasurable night. 45

Even more grimly realistic is the poem
"Red of the Dawn" which is a tragedy of the slums. It is the
story of a "singing girl" of the public houses and taverns,
and of her death in her miserable room. Some of the stanzas
are particularly well done in their concentrated horror.

And she sleeps well; for she was tired!
That huddled shape beneath the sheet
With knees up-drawn, no wind or sleet
Can wake her now! Sleep she desired;
And she sleeps well for she was tired.

The dawn peers in with blood-shot eyes;
The crust, the broken cup are there!
She does not rise yet to prepare
Her scanty meal. God does not rise
And pluck the blood-stained sheets from her;
But Dawn peers in with haggard eyes. 46

To the same classification belongs "In a
Railway Carriage". Here is, for example, a portrait of a
drunken woman from that piece of descriptive writing.

Dark, besotted, malignant, vacant
Slobbering, wrinkled, old,
Weary and wickedly smiling,
She nodded against the gold.

45. Noyes, "An East-End Coffee Stall", C.P., vol.2, pp.32-33.
46. Ibid, "Red of the Dawn", C.P., vol.2, p.35

Pitiful, loathsome, maudlin, lonely
Her moist, inhuman eyes
Blinked at the flies on the window,
And could not see the skies.

As a beast that turns and returns to a mirror
And will not see its face,
Her eyes rejected the sunset,
Her soul lay dead in its place,
Dead in the furrows and folds of her flesh
As a corpse lies lapped in a shroud;
Silently floated beside her
The isles of sunset cloud.⁴⁷

The kind of writing that we have been illustrating should entitle Noyes to a foremost place among the living realists. He has used his eyes to good advantage, and has not always liked what he has seen, but is unafraid to record his impressions. One critic of our poet has summed it up: "Mr. Noyes is as keenly aware of the sidewalk as of the stars."⁴⁸

Not all the realistic material of Noyes is treated in the same brutally frank manner as in those works we have indicated. Quite frequently his romantic attachments are too strong for him. Material which is of itself realistic then receives some rather strange treatment at his hands. Consider "The Newspaper Boy." Certainly the title is prosaic and down to earth. Here is how he treats the theme.

Elf of the city, a lean little hollow-eyed boy
Ragged and tattered, but lithe as a slip of the Spring,
Under the lamp-light he runs with a reckless joy
Shouting a murderer's doom or the death of a King.⁴⁹

47. Noyes, "In a Railway Carriage", C.P., vol.2, p.31.

48. John Owen Beaty, "The Poetry of Alfred Noyes" South Atlantic Quarterly, 14:126-137, 1915, p.128.

49. Noyes, "The Newspaper Boy", C.P., vol.2, p.64.

It will be noticed that the news-boy becomes the "elf of the city." The romantic angle has taken possession, and the ordinary becomes part of the dream world.

The same sort of thing is to be found in "The Electric Tram."

And the lightning draws my car tow'rds the golden evening star, 50

Quantitatively the balance of Noyes's poetry falls definitely on the romantic side. There is no question of that, and it would be foolish to deny it. His very nature leads him into paths which are remote from the realities of life, but the author of "In a Railway Carriage", and "The Wine-Press" cannot be said to be ignorant of those same realities. There is little of the "sweetness and light" of the Victorians in "An East-End Coffee Stall."

When all is said and done, what the moderns mean by the realities are often only the unpleasant realities, the sordid, ugly things of life. A rose is as real as a latrine, and a sun-set as real as a test-tube. Noyes has simply chosen to write about those real things which appeal to him. They happen to be the happier more pleasant things of our existence, the things of which poetry has always been compounded. That he is aware of the unpleasant and the horrible is proved by certain of his poems, but that such poems are in a minority is deliberate and the result

50. Ibid, "The Electric Tram", C.P., vol.2,p.128.

of a free and unhampered choice. Here he is really the rebel, as he is in revolt against what the twentieth century poet believes to be the stuff of poetry. He accepts a certain amount of the new material, but he is really interested in the "old in the new", the eternal truths that lie behind and beyond the variable materials of today.

Noyes has made some use of classical material in his verse, but most romantic poets do not handle such material well, and he is no exception to the general rule. The vales of Arcady, the slopes of Olympus, and the gardens of Proserpine are too formal, too artificial for one whose dreams are of the Sussex Downs or the fields of fairyland. He is essentially a virile, manly poet, and he lacks the languorous, somewhat feminine touch which seems so necessary for one who concerns himself with classical subjects. The beauty with which Noyes is primarily concerned is a rugged Anglo-Saxon quality, and has little connection with the faint, dreamy beauty of Greek and classical pastorals.

What he has done in this field owes, as has been mentioned, a certain debt to Swinburne. The influence of Keats has also been indicated along the same lines. That Noyes has not attempted more work in the classical tradition is somewhat surprising, in view of his training in school and at Oxford. His distaste for the super-aestheticism of the late nineteenth century, supposedly stimulated by the classics, may be responsible for this.

His classical poetry would include the following works: "Mount Ida", "The Inn of Apollo", and "Orpheus and Eurydice." In the latter he has caught some of the graceful, slow beauty of the pastoral tradition.

Only now when the purple vintage bubbles and winks in the
Autumn glory,
Only now when the great white oxen drag the weight of the
harvest home,
Sunburnt laborers, under the star of the sunset, sing as an
old-world story
How two pale and thwarted lovers ever through Arcady still
must roam. 51

Despite his use of those two classic "musts", the purple vintage, and the white oxen, Noyes never quite achieves the true flavor, even in such a piece of excellent writing as the above. I think that it must be admitted that he has added little of importance to the general store of English classical poetry, and that we must look elsewhere for his true worth.

Poetry of religious and spiritual significance plays such an important part in Noyes's work, probably the most important part, that we shall devote an entire chapter to it, and merely make passing mention of it here.

It was not until late in his career that Science as possible material for poetry first came into his varied list of subject matters. The result was his epic trilogy, The Torch-Bearers. Like the poetry of religious and spiritual import, with which it has a close rela-

51. Noyes, "Orpheus and Eurydice", C.P., vol.1, p.219.

tionship, this work is of such magnitude that it too seems worthy of special, individual treatment, and it will be considered in the chapter on the later poetry of Noyes.

As a matter of record, it must be admitted that the poetic material of Noyes is far more traditional than his methods. He has adhered to certain generally accepted rules for the choice of subject matter. Poetry of fantasy and make-believe is as old as poetry itself. Patriotic poetry was written by the Greeks and Romans. In his choice of subjects, he has been most interested in things of permanence. The themes of his poems are as old as life itself. Love, honor, fairyland, the beauties of nature, birth and death, the sea, one's native land, all these have been the poet's stock in trade from time immemorial. The probability is that they will always be so. Noyes prefers to write of these eternal and unchanging aspects of life, rather than to interest himself in mere topicalities of the day. In this he would seem to have made the wiser choice.

The poetical material of Noyes cannot be accused of being monotonous. On the contrary, it is infinitely varied. One quality all his verse possesses is that of decency; he has never descended to the level of his contemporaries in this respect. Like Tennyson he has written nothing of which he may be ashamed on moral grounds. Some few of his earlier works of which he had some doubts on this score were suppressed in later editions.

He has been accused of "starting a little Romantic revival all his own."⁵² The statement should not remain unchallenged. His materials and subjects are not of the Romantic school alone; they are the materials of poetry as distinguished from those of prose. Just as there is a language of poetry, so there are certain subjects and themes which are essentially poetical. These are the subjects which Noyes has chosen for his verses. He has at the same time, not shut his eyes to the new. He is not an escapist, and is awake to the things about him. The sordid and the ugly have not been passed by in his poetry. When he writes of the more unpleasant aspects of life he throws the full force of his poetic genius and ability into the task.

The excellent American literary critic, Brian Hooker writes of Noyes in these words: "He insists upon the timeliness of traditional subjects and the immortal meaning of modern ones; upon the new bodies of the old, the old souls of the new."⁵³ This would seem to sum up the situation very neatly. Noyes believes in just that happy combination of the old and the new of which all great art is pieced together. He assumes rightly that certain elements in our existence are unchanging, and from these should come the basic "stuff" of poetry.

52. E. Colby, "Who is Alfred Noyes?", Catholic World, 97:289-304, June, '13, p.291.

53. Brian Hooker, "The Poetry of Alfred Noyes", Century, 88:349-53, July, '14, p.350.

Along with this fundamental belief, he has acknowledged the leavening influence of the new. The prime insistence is that the roots of poetry, both in form and subject matter, lie in the past. Upon this poetic tree may then be grafted new branches, so long as the new growths are in harmony with and do not destroy the natural growth of the organism. The idea that the main line of the poetic tradition must not be disturbed or tampered with is the important one. If the new branches do not conform to the general line of development, then they must be destroyed as not fit for the poetic ideal.

In material then, as well as in method Noyes is traditional but not conventional. He insists upon the main tradition, but sees fit to ignore or to change the conventions of the moment.

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C H A P T E R V

THE TRADITION OF SPIRIT AND RELIGION IN THE
POETRY OF NOYES

The conversion of Alfred Noyes to the Roman Catholic Church was the culmination of a lifetime devoted to certain spiritual ideals. It was a completely logical step fully in accordance with his previously expressed beliefs and with the standards he has always championed. When questioned as to his conversion, he defended his position in an open letter to the London Spectator. I should like to quote from that letter in some detail, as it sums up the situation admirably.

If any reader cares to know it, one of the chief reasons that led me to the Church that built all our Cathedrals (and Westminster Abbey), and crowned the majority of our English kings--perhaps your correspondents will prefer this description to-- "Catholic"-- was my conviction that the long struggle for truth about the great ultimate realities has not been as empty as the agnostics think; that man has been met half-way on the road of evolution, by the Divine (et homo factus est); that this meeting was the turning point in the world's history; that certain great truths have been revealed (not by flesh and blood); that hundreds of other truths, negative and positive, necessarily flow from them, which civilization cannot afford to lose; that these truths require a central authority, above the mere capriciousness of private judgment; that the truths are being attacked and abandoned on all sides by an utterly superficial "modernism" in a way that menaces the whole structure of modern life; and that no power on earth is ready to stand by those truths, with adequate intellectual resources and without compromise to the end, but that power which I call the Catholic Church I do not understand the picking and choosing of things and texts, by the Bible Christians, out of their infallible

Bible -- and least of all when they whittle away the most overwhelming and tremendous passages. Given a belief in the Maker of that promise, who stands behind the Body that He founded until the consummation of all things, I can understand the claim of that Body to interpret, indefectibly, the book which it gathered together with its own hands, and selected with or by its own divinely imparted authority. But the Catholic Church cannot dispense with that belief, and all that flows from it. To admit that those who can dispense with it are Catholics would be to dissolve the original Rock¹ into the sands again, as all others are dissolving.

The keystone of this fundamental belief of Noyes is, of course, Authority. We must, he holds, have some guiding power in all our affairs. This is true not only of our religious life, but of our art and our literature also. It is interesting to note that he was to feel the full weight of that authority to which he had made voluntary submission, shortly after his reception into the Church. The case in question had to do with his study of Voltaire. The work was condemned by the Church, and Mr. Noyes and his publishers, Sheed and Ward, were notified that it must be withdrawn from circulation, and revised. His first reaction was one of violent protest, as an extract from his letter to Cardinal Hinsley will demonstrate.

So far as I know, it is the first time in history that any English writer of any standing or indeed any English writer who in his work --whatever his

1. An open letter from Alfred Noyes to the London Spectator, as quoted by Stanley B. James in Missionary, N^ov., 1931, P. 384.

personal failures may be-- has revered "conscience as his king" has had such an order addressed to him in such terms. ²

The important thing about the whole controversy is that Noyes did make his submission. The work in question was withdrawn, and republished in the revised version. The experience must have been an unusual one for Noyes. Authority had been for him a more or less theoretical ideal, and now he had felt the full weight of authority in action. It is a tribute to his common sense, and his steadfast adherence to his own expressed views that he made his humble acknowledgment of the right of that authority to dictate to him. It was the first severe, practical test of his beliefs, and his submission proved them to be more than theories.

The philosophy of all Noyes's poetry is based on this central idea of guidance and authority, and this has been so from the start of his career. Order and law he deems essential in both life and literature.

We have already observed how he has carried his concepts of law, order, and authority into the spheres of poetic form and poetic subject matter. It is now proposed to investigate these same concepts in connection with the basic spirit of his poetry and with his religious ideals.

Noyes is a deeply religious man. As a matter

2. A letter from Alfred Noyes to the Cardinal-Archbishop of Westminster, Arthur Hinsley; from the London Times, August, 1938.

of fact the moderns think him too religious, and this may be one of the factors in his almost unprecedented drop from literary grace. His faith pervades all his work, whether the stated subjects are of a religious nature or not. This faith is an essential part of the man, and it cannot be separated either from him or from his verse.

Because he has a spiritual anchor, Noyes is a confirmed optimist. He has a sane and joyous outlook on life which is completely at variance with the pessimism of modern verse as a whole. This has also contributed to contemporary critical dislike of him as a poet. The accepted opinion today is that the cheerful man must of necessity be the unthinking man. Nothing could be further from the truth. "Cheerfulness is not the sign of a superficial mind, nor melancholy the mark of deep thinking. Pessimism is no proof of intellectual greatness."³ It is true that the average man looking at the world today has little cause for rejoicing, but Noyes is not the average man. He sees beyond the surface troubles of our existence to a better life for the future. The poet of faith must be an optimist. His faith teaches and reassures him that this plane of life is but a way-station on the road to an eternal life.

Beyond the consideration of a life to come is the simple self-evident fact that the world in which we live is a beautiful place. Hitler cannot destroy the sunrise.

3. Phelps, op.cit.,p.64.

The stars will survive, despite the firing of anti-aircraft guns. There is much to be thankful for in the existence we lead. All honest writers will report the world as they see it, and Noyes would be breaking faith with himself if he wrote in any other fashion than the one he has chosen. He has always loved life, and the beauty of the world. When he writes of the happiness of simply being alive, he is doing the honest thing, for he is telling the truths of his own experience. Life for him is worth living, and he shows it in his poetic striving for bravery, purity and hope. It is demonstrated in his striving after the romance of life and for the real truth that lies behind it.

Like any normal man, Noyes has his moments of extreme melancholy. We have already indicated how some of these moments have been crystallized in verse. The thing to remember in connection with this mood is that it never becomes despair. In the world of this poet there is nothing so bad that it cannot be mended or rectified.

He has always recognized the fact that man is in a very real and fundamental sense a dependent being. The mood of supplication and hope is often discernable throughout his work. His answer to the despair of the moderns is to be found in "To the Pessimists".

Though man's blind Justice bare an unjust blade,
Earth's darkling error is one proof the more
That when heaven's wider balances are weighed,
Diviner Justice shall redress the score;

For there's one debt most certain to be paid,--⁴
The Maker's debt to that which He has made.

Here is the answer of the man of faith who recognizes the existence of a higher, greater power than those of earth.

Noyes has stated that the "highest poetry is that which reveals the Eternal Reality most fully; and it is to be found in words which (however we may explain them) appear to be both human and divine, in a sense that attaches to no other words."⁵ He has a most exalted opinion of the poet's function in the world, a conception not unlike that of Shelley. He believes that the poet must stop holding up the mirror to the confusion of the world, and must instead rebuild the world!⁶

At the very roots of his philosophy of life are certain fundamental convictions. Among them is the belief that Christ has overcome the world. In a world overcome by God, good must finally flourish. Because the world has been overcome by God we can be happy. Here is the real source of his optimism. His joy is the eternal joy of all Christians that Christ has triumphed. This feeling is expressed admirably in "Resurrection."

4. Noyes, "To the Pessimists", C.P., vol.3.,pp.285-286.

5. Noyes, Pageant of Letters, p.295.

6. Alexander, op.cit.,p.262.

"He is dead," we cried, and even amid that gloom
The wintry veil was rent! The new-born day
Showed us the Angel seated in the tomb 7
And the stone rolled away.

Noyes is convinced that poetry has a message. This idea is repugnant to the moderns. They believe that there can be no end beyond poetry itself. This he denies both in theory and in practice. With his lofty conception of the poet's function he holds that verse is not an end but a means to an end.

Many of the poems of Noyes deal directly with religious questions. Among them may be mentioned "The Old Skeptic", "De Profundis", "Christ Crucified" and "The Quest".

In the poem "The Old Skeptic" is a plea for simple faith. The old diehard, a doubter and an agnostic, realizes that true happiness lies only in that "peace which the world cannot give." He resigns himself to the inevitable, and seeks once more the love of Christ.

I will go back to my home and look at the wayside flowers,
And hear from the wayside cabins the kind old hymns again,
Where Christ holds out His arms in the quiet evening hours,
And the light of the chapel porches broods on the peaceful
lane.

And there I shall hear men praying the deep old foolish
prayers
And there I shall see, once more, the fond old faith con-
fessed,
And the strange old light on their faces who hear as a blind
man hears,-
Come unto Me, ye weary, and I will give you rest.

7. Noyes, "Resurrection", C.P., vol.2, p.77

have noted before in the poem "Resurrection." Notice also should be taken of the use of a quotation from Sacred Scripture, a favorite device of Noyes, and one found often in his verses.

We have written of the lack of pessimism in the poetry of Noyes. The wave of pessimism which has swept over our poetry in recent years is of course explainable by the loss of faith so evident in our time. This attitude has produced in the masses of the people a certain distrust. It is part of Noyes fundamental spirit and philosophy that the poet has some responsibility to his public. This responsibility should, he believes, take the form of a determined effort to dispel this distrust, and at the same time, to make the public aware of the poet's lofty mission and powers of leadership. He does this by emphasizing that no matter what we have destroyed, it has been rebuilt by Christ. The result is calculated to instill in the people a sense of faith and hope, and to wean them away from the general atmosphere of despair which pervades so much modern literature.

The intense spirituality of Noyes has been widely recognized. As one critic puts it: "To him the Cross spans with outstretched arms God's visible and invisible world."¹⁰ This spirituality often takes the form of

10. Kernahan, op.cit., p.210

an attack on those who assert that Christ is no more than man, and who further assert that we are nothing more than the products of some chance combination from the primeval ooze and slime. "Before the World" is such an attack. In the American edition this same poem is entitled "The Origin of Life". The verses take the form of a series of questions to those who hold with certain pseudo-scientific theories of the origin of life.

Will you have courage, then, to bow the head
 And say, when all is said -
"Out of this Nothingness arose our thought!
 This black abysmal Nought
Woke, and brought forth that lighted City street,
 Those towers, that armoured fleet?"¹¹

The poem concludes with a final challenge.

 Dare you re-ignite, then,
 One faith for faithless men,
And say you found, on that dark road you trod,¹²
 In the beginning - GOD?

The grandeur and greatness of spiritual thought is to be found in "The Paradox." It contains Noyes's idea of God, and it carries us far beyond the confines of our little world into realms of the spirit, vast and immense. With it all is that tremendous hope for the future so characteristic of the poet.

11. Noyes, "The Origin of Life", C.P., p.86
12. Ibid, p.87.

Yet all that is broken shall be mended,
And all that is lost shall be found,
I will bind up every wound,
When that which is begun shall be ended. 13

In "The Cottage of the Kindly Light", Noyes retells the old story from the Bible of "the only son of his mother, and she was a widow." This poem is filled with the fragrance of simple faith. It is in marked contrast to the poem quoted above, and displays the wide range and variety of his religious work.

In the tender and sympathetic "Slumber-Songs of the Madonna" Noyes writes with great depth of feeling and restraint. The theme of mother-love so often in evidence in his poetry is here intensified and made highly significant. Throughout the verses can be discerned the foreshadowing of the Divine Tragedy.

Clenched little hands like crumpled roses
Dimpled and dear,
Feet like flowers that the dawn uncloses,
What do I fear?
Little hands, will you ever be clenched in anguish?
White little limbs, will you droop and languish?
Nay, what do I hear?
I hear a shouting, far away,
You shall ride on a kingly palm-strewn way 14
Some day!

The reverend spirit evidenced in the poet's treatment of the Blessed Mother of God in this poem is perhaps in itself a foreshadowing of the time when he him-

13. Noyes, "The Paradox", C.P., vol.1.p.94.

14. Noyes, "Slumber-Songs of the Madonna", C.P., vol.1.p.234.

self is to enter the Catholic Church.

It has been said of Noyes that he "peers into the nobler aspects of life to find the stuff of poetry."¹⁵ This statement is on the whole a true one. He has shunned the base and the ignoble, because he finds them prosaic. He wishes his poetry to lead his public onward and upward. He believes that great poetry must be inspiring poetry, and that the gutter and the sewer provide nothing of an inspirational nature. As a religious man, immorality in literature is abhorrent to him and he has studiously avoided it.

Still another critic has pointed out that there are certain evidences of religious bigotry present in the earlier poetry of Noyes.¹⁶ This is most apparent in Drake where the poet makes several slighting references to the Inquisition and to the religious habits of the Spaniards. This is of some interest in the light of his later conversion to the Church, but it is no more than might have been expected from a man raised in the traditions of English Protestantism, and probably brought up with the pictures and bigotry of Kingsley's Westward Ho! firmly impressed upon his mind. The fact that Noyes was able to discard these preconceived notions, and accepted the truth, is further evidence of the man's absolute sincerity.

Noyes is not a Catholic poet in the real sense of the word. He is "not so much a Catholic poet, as

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15. J.R.N. Maxwell S.J., "Alfred Noyes: a Poet in the City of God", America, 40:364-5, Jan. 18, '30, p.364.
16. James F. Kearney, "Alfred Noyes: Victorian", America, 33:547-8, Sept. 19, '25, P.548.

a poet who became a Catholic."¹⁷ By this is meant that Catholic doctrines and teachings, as such, do not appear explicitly in his poetry. It is only in very recent years that the Catholic spirit, as distinguished from the general Christian spirit, has been at all in evidence. Behind all his work, however, and stated implicitly is the influence of Catholicism. This takes many forms, but the idea of central authority is perhaps the most dominant of them all.

The conversion of Alfred Noyes to Catholicism is further evidence of his adherence to tradition. It was a completely logical step for a man who has always insisted that the roots of our culture and our civilization lie in the past. When all is said and done, the Catholic Church alone can point to an uninterrupted history from the very earliest beginnings of the Christian era. It alone fulfills the conditions of growth and development which he has held as essential. His beliefs that a complete break with the past constitutes anarchy and that a slow, continuous development alone constitutes progress were bound naturally to lead him to that one Church which has grown on those principles, the principles for which he has crusaded and fought.

His ever-repeated assertions to the effect that authority and guidance are necessary for life are also indicative of the attraction which the Church would hold for him. The Catholic Church alone among the Christian

17. Stanley James, "Some Notable Converts", Missionary, 45:382-84, Nov., 1931, p.383.

denominations relies upon a strong central authority for its teaching and its doctrines. In a world torn by strife and dissension, it has clung tenaciously to its principles. It represents permanence, and permanence has been for Noyes something of an absolute necessity. He has viewed with increasing alarm the modern tendency to modify and concede. This willingness to give up essentials and to make certain concessions to the demands and fashions of the moment has unfortunately spread into the ranks of the Protestant groups. As he looked about him he was able to observe that the Catholic Church alone made no such concessions. The result then for one of his tendencies and expressed views was inevitable.

The question of tradition and mere convention comes up in this connection. The Catholic Church is the Church of tradition, the tradition that Noyes admires and loves. The great difference between it and the Protestant groups is that it has been willing to modify certain of its conventions to suit the changing times, but it has never allowed the main course of its tradition to be changed or altered. The Protestants, on the other hand, have not only modified conventions, but they have allowed their major traditions also to fall by the wayside. We have already mentioned Noyes's modification of convention to conform to present-day needs and his strict observance of the main currents of poetic tradition. The Church to which he now belongs then holds in the religious sense to the exact views

held by him in the poetic sense. To a man who holds as Noyes does that poetry is religion Catholicism is the only answer.

Noyes interest in religious matters and in the spiritual side of our existence has given to his poetry a certain element of didacticism. He is a poet with a message and he intends to give us that message whether we like it or not. We have already spoken of his belief in the poet's high mission, and his religious verse tends to bear out his contentions.

This spiritual element in his poetry was not always apparent. Many critics thought his early poetry was entirely too trivial, and was saved only by his facile versification. Compton Mackenzie wrote of him: "He had in the first rapture of his youthful singing absolutely nothing to sing about that seemed to his contemporaries momentous. When Noyes began to write verse he was like the gentleman in the song 'all dressed up but no place to go.'"¹⁸ So it goes; the poet's lot is indeed not an 'appy one. The same critics who belaboured him for his triviality, and complained that he had no message, now turn on him because he does have a message. Time moves, custom changes, and the poet is always wrong. The fact is that the message was always there, if the reader took the trouble to look for it.

18. Compton Mackenzie, Literature in My Time, London, Rich and Cowan, 1933, pp. 137-8.

As a young man, the spiritual significance was often obscured by youthful exuberance, by a natural gaiety and light-heartedness. In later years, as he became more aware of the problems of existence and of the importance of the spiritual in our daily affairs, the religious aspects of his verse assumed more importance, and tended to overshadow the technical virtuositities of his writing. The poet who had been too artificial and too trivial became too didactic and too "preachy" for the reviewers who never seemed quite able to make up their minds about him.

Despite the increasing evidence of the teaching-preaching element in his poetry, Noyes has never overlooked the primary purpose of all literature, the giving of pleasure. The creation of beauty and music has retained the upper hand.

It is in a recent volume of essays that Noyes has most clearly stated his views on the importance of religion to the poet. He speaks of Christianity as the "one great influence in European literature."¹⁹ He then quotes lines from Shelley to prove his contention that even anti-Christian writers make some confession of faith.

That Light whose smile kindles the universe,
That Beauty in which all things work and move.²⁰

Much of the same volume is devoted to the question of freedom versus authority. He tells us that

19. Alfred Noyes, The Opalescent Parrot, London, Sheed and Ward, 1929, p.168.
20. Ibid, p.182.

authority is a thing of the present as well as of the past. "The universe is a conservative institution with laws and forms not easily broken."²¹ The one and only abiding authority he concludes is that of "the God who became Man."²²

Service to the authority of God is in itself perfect freedom. There is no interference with the poet who follows that authority, because he is following the Truth.²³ Poetry which follows it leads us into "the loftier world where there is an end of the small cleverness and the little aesthetic snobberies of an hour."²⁴

In No Other Man, a novel by Noyes, which appeared in 1940 the attack on modern materialism is continued. This work takes the form of an allegorical conflict between the forces of good and evil. His love and respect for the tradition of the past, and his hatred for modern immorality are expressed in such passages as that in which he writes of "wiping out the spiritual experiences of two thousand years and substituting the nightmares of a sanitary inspector."²⁵ He continues in the same vein for some pages, piling up arguments against the spiritual revolt of the present. In the same volume this is what he has to say of contemporary artists: "the artists and writers of our day are in complete revolt. This is quite true and

21. Ibid, p.183

22. Ibid, p.182

23. Ibid, p.243

24. Ibid, p.243

25. Alfred Noyes, No Other Man, New York, Stokes, 1940, p.248.

how revolting they are."²⁶

Among the most important characteristics of Noyes is his manliness. He never allows his spiritual beliefs to become effete or sugar-coated. His religion is a healthy religion, the religion of a man. There is neither in the man nor in his poetry any traces of unhealthy piety. He is no anchorite, but he lives his faith in the midst of a busy world. He is normal in every respect and bears out the statement of a brother writer who said that "the artistic temperament is the disease of the small artist. I cannot think of one considerable artist-unless it be Lucan-of whom we can say that he was deficient in manliness."²⁷

Noyes has not protested so much against the science of today as he has against effect of the science of yesterday upon the life of today. He is against the pitiless and swift machinery of modern existence, because he believes that life has a purpose. That purpose he feels is overlooked in the mechanistic life we lead. He tells us that Bolshevism of the intellectual type "has been more responsible for the present peril of civilization than has been generally realized."²⁸ The essential point once again is that we must not lose sight of our standards, and we must not throw over-board the heirlooms of the past that have been bequeathed to us. The real rebel he says is

26. Ibid, p.118

27. Theodore Maynard, Preface to Poetry, as quoted in ...over the bent World, A Modern Catholic Anthology, edited by Sr.Mary Louise S.L., New York, Sheed and Ward, 1939, p.351.

28. Alfred Noyes, "Fallacy of our Literary Bolsheviki", Literary Digest, 65:34-5, Ja.26 '20, p.34.

"the man who stands by the unpopular truth."²⁹

As a Catholic Noyes must now make his poetry appeal to a hostile world. He has added therefore another element to those which have already been used against him. Attacked as a poetic traditionalist, he must now face the grave charge of being a religious traditionalist as well. This is more than most present-day critics can swallow, and the attitude of our reviewers is more hostile than ever.

Noyes has been called "the most positively spiritual and Christian of all modern English poets."³⁰ This statement would be difficult to contradict. In the midst of poetic decay, revolt and disillusion he has stood for the things of permanence. Neither a recluse nor a dreamer, he is an interpreter of his brother-man. He has emphasized the union of nature and man, the union of the natural and the spiritual. This never takes the form of flat, stale moralizing. He is sincere; he has a true sense of beauty, and he conveys his message with admirable restraint and artistry. The truth stands out from his pages. The fine poem "Gorse" is especially notable for this spiritual, interpretive quality.

Dead and un-born, the same blue skies
Cover us! Love, as I read your eyes,
Do I not know whose love enfolds us,
As we fold the past in our memories,
Past, present, future, the old and the new?
From the depths of the grave a cry breaks through

29. Ibid, p.34

30. Hoyt, op.cit.,p.253.

And trembles, a sky-lark blind in the azure
The depths of the all-enfolding blue.
O, resurrection of folded years
Deep in our hearts, with your smiles and tears,
Dead and un-born shall not He remember
Who folds our cry in His heart and hears. 31

The treatment of nature in the poetry of Noyes is essentially spiritual. He cannot conform to the modern conception of nature as non-moral. He sees in it more than mere force or law, rather does he look on it as something divine, the symbol of eternity. This is God's world, and it is a world with a meaning and a purpose. The man "who sees in nature the symbol of the eternal, who interprets the pain and struggle of our existence as the discipline for a higher life and who looks on life as the growing of a soul, does not look on Death as an enemy but as the messenger of something better to come."³² This philosophy is the source of his unflinching optimism, the reason that life for him is worth living.

In his spiritual intensity many have professed to see something of Browning. The comparison seems to me somewhat far-fetched. There is in Noyes nothing of the haze and vagueness of the Victorian poet. Noyes may not be as great a writer, but he is surely a straighter thinker. He possesses the virtue of extreme simplicity, a virtue too frequently absent in the poems of Browning. The truth is that Noyes is himself a simple man in the very best sense

31. Noyes, "Gorse", C.P., vol. 2, pp. 68-9

32. Hoyt, op.cit., p. 257.

of the word. It is this very simplicity that has confounded his critics. We have become so accustomed to reading more into poetry than appears on the surface that we are bewildered by a man who says only what he wishes to say.

It is on the religious and spiritual side that Noyes is, by a curious paradox, at one and the same time both an unyielding follower of tradition and a true rebel.

He holds by certain definite truths of religion. He, for example, believes that as thinking persons we must subject ourselves to authority. The highest of all authorities is God. Service to God is essential for perfect happiness, but this service is never burdensome for it is a service of love. This attitude is traditional; it is part of the great tradition of Christianity.

The second item in his list of essential beliefs is that Christ has overcome the world. In a world overcome by Christ, nothing is so bad that it cannot be rectified. From this comes his note of supreme and joyous optimism. Here again he is in the line of Christian tradition, but here also he is a rebel. It is considered a sign of weakness to look upon the world with approval. In this case Noyes is abiding by the "unpopular truth" of which he has himself written.

He holds a brief for the fundamental decencies of life. Here again he is in the tradition which holds that

good is preferable to evil. Here too he is a rebel because decency and good are unfashionable.

He believes in a future life, and in a world to come far better than the one in which we live. Here he is directly at variance with the modern materialists and the atheists who tell us that this life is the end of everything.

He believes in laws and rules of conduct both for our personal actions and the writing of our poetry. This is denied by the moderns who tell us that we should live as we please and write as we please, and who seem unaware that many of them are both living and writing abominably.

Noyes preaches the gospel of the permanent, the things that are unchangeable. He writes not for the day but for all time. He writes of eternal things like love and honour, courage and devotion. In a time when those things are ridiculed and despised he still champions them as worthwhile and desirable.

Above all, he is honestly and sincerely a religious man who is unashamed of his faith. It takes a certain moral courage to profess such beliefs today and Noyes possesses that courage. His poetry proves that. Beyond the mere question of writing religious and spiritual verse, he has demonstrated in a more practical way his religious courage by abandoning the faith in which he was reared to join another not altogether acceptable

to the great majority of his countrymen. He is therefore more than a theorizer; he tries to put his concepts and ideals into the living of his life.

In a certain sense Noyes abandoned one tradition to accept another and older one when he became a communicant of the Catholic Church. He had been raised from childhood in the tradition of the Anglican Church, but with his sure sense of fitness he turned spiritually to that group which alone possessed the true tradition stretching back to the time of Christ. In this regard there are definite similarities between his career and that of the founder of modern Catholic literature in England, the great Cardinal Newman.

Spiritually Noyes has made himself one with the important group of Anglo-Catholic literary figures. He has become a part of the movement which is threatening to revolutionize writing in England today. He is not then in any sense an isolated figure as some of his opponents would have us believe. His spiritual doctrines are shared by some of the most important minds in the country. He may look about him, and feel himself to have the backing and the fellowship of Philip Gibbs, Sheila Kaye-Smith, Hilaire Belloc, Ronald Knox, Douglas Jerrold, Bruce Marshall, Maurice Baring and the other hundreds of intellectuals who feel and write as he does, most of them, like himself, converts. Traditionalism is scorned today, but with such a formidable group in the field to fight for it, its future looks brighter than it has for years. Noyes's vision of a literature in

which sane principles rule may yet be realized. His insistence on authority and guidance is shared by his fellow workers, and no longer does he hold the fort alone.

His place in English Catholic literature is too recent to properly evaluate it. He will probably be more a co-worker in the movement than an influence on the others.

To sum up the spiritual tradition of Noyes' poetry, it follows fundamental principles handed down from the dawn of the Christian era. It adheres to the greatest of all our Western Traditions, the tradition of the Catholic Church. It is based on permanent values which no amount of modern contempt can destroy.

Let us emphasize that here as in the case of poetic material and poetic form Noyes is a follower of tradition not of convention. If he had been more conventional he would most certainly have remained in the church of his birth.

Authority and law have fashioned the spiritual elements of his poetry in the same way as they fashioned his form and his matter, and in all three we find no slavish imitation, but a strict following of the truth as he sees it.

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CHAPTER VI

THE LATER COLLECTED POEMS

Alfred Noyes has given two collections of shorter poems to the world since the appearance of his three volume edition in 1920. The first of these, Dick Turpin's Ride,¹ was published in 1927, and the second, Shadows on the Down,² was presented in 1941.

Both books are slender, and they add little quantitatively to the bulk of the poet's work. General critical reception was highly unfavorable, and most reviewers devoted little space to this later poetry in their periodicals.

A glance at the 1927 volume will convince the reader that Noyes has changed very little in the seven years that intervened between the publication of this and his 1920 collection. He still follows his same ideals and standards. By 1927, however, literary standards and morals had reached an extremely low level. The "new" poetry had taken over, and it is not surprising that the "old-fashioned" verse of Noyes, written according to rules, and in good taste, should meet the cool reception it did.

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1. Alfred Noyes, Dick Turpin's Ride and Other Poems, New York, Stokes, 1927, This appeared in England as vol.4 of the collected works.
 2. Alfred Noyes, Shadows on the Down and Other Poems, New York, Stokes, 1941.

Let us now examine the individual poems in Dick Turpin's Ride. We shall apply the standards of traditional form, material, and spiritual content as we did in the case of the earlier verse.

The metre and verse forms of the 1927 poetry adhere closely to the accepted poetic tradition. For example, the title poem, "Dick Turpin's Ride" is written in rimed couplets suitable to the action of the narrative. Here too, as in the earlier work, there is an innovation. In this case it is the use of both internal, and end rime. Variety is secured in the two parts of the poem by the use of different line lengths. In part I the lines are rather short.

Dick Turpin dropped his smoking gun.
They had trapped him now, five men to one.

A gun in each hand of the crouching five,³
They could take Dick Turpin now, alive;

In Part II the length of the lines is considerably increased, and the internal rime is employed.

Away, through the ringing, cobbled street,
and out by the Northern Gate,
He rode that night, like a ghost in flight from
the dogs of his own fate.

By Crackskull Common, and Highgate Heath,
he heard the chase behind;
But he rode to forget-forget-forget-the
hounds of his own mind.

3. Noyes, "Dick Turpin's Ride", Dick Turpin's Ride and Other Poems, P.12.

And cherry-black Bess on the Enfield Road
flew light as a bird to her goal;
But her Rider carried a heavier load in his
own struggling soul.

He needed neither spur nor whip. He was
borne on a darker gale.
He rode like a hurricane-hunted ship, with
the doom-wind in her sail. 4

The unusual rime scheme in the last two stanzas is of exceptional interest. Note the riming of Road and load, and goal and soul in one stanza, and of whip and ship, and gale and sail in the other.

One of the longer poems in the volume is "A Night at St. Helena." Here Noyes has made use of traditional blank verse.

Austerlitz, Wagram, Moscow in my hands;
And I in thine, oh, God, and I in thine;
The illimitable white wilderness around
The burning city and the long road home; 5
The white way of the innumerable dead

Blank verse is also used as the metre of another poem in the same collection, "Atlas and Medusa."⁶

Many of the poems in the volume are written in Noyes's favorite quatrain. Some of these as, for example, "The Grey Spring" are rimed abcb.

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4. Noyes, "Dick Turpin's Ride", Dick Turpin's Ride, pp.13-14.
 5. Ibid, "A Night at St.Helena", pp.196-7. This is an early poem, hitherto unavailable, and printed in this collection by request.
 6. Ibid, "Atlas and Medusa", pp.156-168

I saw the green Spring
Wading the brooks
With wild jay laughter,⁷
And hoyden looks.

Other quatrains such as those of "Sero Te Amavi" employ the abab rime-scheme.

The ways of earth are not her ways.
There is not any land
Where you shall see her face ⁸
Or touch her hand.

Still others as in "The Shining Streets of London" are written aabb.

Now, in the twilight, after rain
The wet black streets shine out again;
And, softening through the coloured gloom, ⁹
The lamps like burning tulips bloom.

There are also present typical five, seven, and eight line stanzas. Finally there are a few which are really unusual and different from accepted forms.

A good example of the unusual stanza is to be found in the poem "Pagan Marjorie".

When Marjorie walked in the wood
There was nothing to frighten her there.
She was beautiful, bold, and good;
But the little leaves whispered, "Beware!"
For she walked,
Alone in the Wood,
Like a daughter of Berkely Square. ¹⁰

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7. Noyes, "The Grey Spring", Dick Turpin's Ride, p.35.
 8. Ibid, "Sero Te Amavi", p.34
 9. Ibid, "The Shining Streets of London", p.51
 10. Noyes, "Pagan Marjorie", Dick Turpin's Ride, p.71

A very rare stanza is the three line arrangement found in "Beauty in Eden". The aaa rime is also unusual.

And wild things came,
By loveliness made tame,
And fawned on her pure feet with eyes of flame.

Yet, though her splendour
Bade the wild earth surrender
And taught those burning panthers to attend her. 11

Here is Noyes up to his old tricks again. He bases his form on the accepted tradition, but then varies and changes it to suit his needs, and above all he experiments with new and unusual ideas.

The poetic material in Dick Turpin's Ride is, in general, characteristic of Noyes. There is, however, one notable difference to be noted. I refer to the number of highly personal poems of love and devotion addressed to his first wife who died in 1926.¹² One of the very best of these love poems is "The Double Fortress."

Though ramparts crumble and rusty gates
grow thin,
And our brave fortress dwine to a hollow
shell,
Thou shalt hear heavenly laughter, far
within;
Where, young as Love, two hidden lovers¹³
dwell.

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11. Ibid, "Beauty in Eden", p.154.
12. Noyes was married in 1906 to Garnett Daniels who died in 1926. In the following year (1927) he married Mary Weld-Blundell. Whether this was a tribute to his first wife is not for me to say.
13. Noyes, "The Double Fortress", Dick Turpin's Ride, p.7.

A lovely and poignant tribute to his dead wife is the dedication to the volume.

And, at times, there come,
On strange wings,
Now all songs are dumb
And youth is fled,
Whispers that still seem
Not all a dream,
But the loving things
Thou wouldst have said.¹⁴

"Dick Turpin's Ride", the title poem, has been mentioned for its form. The material of the poem is strongly suggestive of the earlier "The Highwayman." In both works are to be found the same romantic approach to the legendary deeds of the night-riders of the English roads, and the same rush and hurry of movement. Certain expressions are almost identical. For example, we read in "Dick Turpin's Ride":

The star-light struck their pistol butts, as¹⁵
they passed in a clattering crowd.,

and in the earlier "The Highwayman":

And he rode with a jewelled twinkle,
His pistol butts a -twinkle,
His rapier hilt a-twinkle under the jewelled sky.¹⁶

By a not quite so fortunate coincidence, Bess,

14. From the Dedication to Dick Turpin's Ride, p.vi.

15. Ibid, "Dick Turpin's Ride", p.16.

16. Noyes, "The Highwayman", C.P., vol.1.p.192.

the landlord's black-eyed daughter, in "The Highwayman" becomes in "Dick Turpin's Ride" Black Bess, the highwayman's famous horse. This is of course a purely accidental, albeit somewhat humorous, case of parallelism.

Love of country, a theme so often found in Noyes' earlier poetry, is represented in this collection by "Britain-To the Empire." Here patriotic feeling is subordinated to a warning that only by following the laws of God can the Empire really become great.

Who shaped this union? Neither you, nor I.
We are but instruments of the moving whole,
Blind instruments of that ultimate harmony
The music of the world-creating soul. 17

The world of make-believe and of fairy-land is, as we could be sure, not neglected. Noyes familiar, his other-self, appears again in "Shadow-of-a-Leaf." In the same vein are "Fey Joan" and "The Child in the Wood." In all of them is that same tender fancy and that same delicate otherworldliness we have come to recognize in the fairy poetry of our author. It is more subdued, to be sure, as he is an older man, but the same old spirit still shines through.

The peculiar treatment of realistic subjects which we have noted before in Noyes is in evidence in "The Shining Streets of London." The prosaic is made glorious, and the ugly becomes beautiful. This is the same mood as

17. Noyes, "Britain-To the Empire", Dick Turpin's Ride, p.112

we found in "The Barrel-Organ."

Busses (with coloured panes that spill
A splash of cherry or daffodil)
And lighted faces, row on row,
From darkness into darkness go. 18

The use of realistic material is restricted in this volume to a very few pieces. One of the best is "The Conductor." With its realistic features is incorporated a splendid example of the fundamental decency of mankind. As in his earlier realistic poems, Noyes sees the dreams and the visions that lie behind the harsh realities. I should like to quote a fine section of description from this poem.

When London sweated and choked with heat
and draught,
A man, like a sack of bones,
With a pinched, white, delicate face, and a
soft brown beard
(Saint John of Clapham!) climbed to the top
of the bus,
Painfully, hauled up the stair by the vigorous
hand
Of a buxom wench in front, and sturdily
pushed
By their two small boys below.
There was only one seat;
And the hot conductor bawled, "One only out-
side!" 19

Two things should be apparent to the reader in the passage above. One is the frank realism and the clear picture of the family boarding the bus. The other

18. Ibid, "The Shining Streets of London," p.52

19. Noyes, "The Conductor", Dick Turpin's Ride, p.56

is even more amazing; Noyes has written the poem in a form which would seem to be free verse. This latter observation however would be false as there is an extremely regular rhythm in the lines. What we actually have is a somewhat irregular blank verse.

Nature poetry is also represented. There are in this category such poems as "A Tree Against the Sky", "The Clear May", "April Air" and "The Hills of Youth". The latter is typical of the Noyes approach to the beauties of the world, and his keen observation and powers of description.

Once, on the far blue hills,
Alone with the pine and the cloud, in
those high still places;
Alone with a whisper of ferns and a chuckle
of rills,
And the peat-brown pools that mirrored the
angel's faces,
Pools that mirrored the wood-pigeon's grey-
blue feather,
And all my thistledown dreams as they
drifted along;
Once, oh! once, on the hills, thro' the red-
bloomed heather
I followed an elfin song. 20

In material then as in form Noyes has maintained his usual diversity, and has changed but little from the themes of his youth.

The spiritual and religious atmosphere of the poetry in the 1927 collection shows little progress to one who reads the verses casually. A closer inspection,

20. Noyes, "The Hills of Youth", Dick Turpin's Ride, p. 3.

however, will reveal that there are certain subtle differences to be noted. For one thing, the author is more mature and his spiritual outlook is often tinged by a nostalgic point of view. He sighs for the past, and recreates memories of things gone by. The flamboyant note of optimism has gone. This does not mean that Noyes has become a pessimist; it means that he is more sober, more reflective, not quite so sure of himself. As he has grown older, he has realized just how little he does know. This sober note of lost things is found in the poem "Seagulls on the Serpentine."

We are all of us
exiles!
Wheel back in your clamorous rings!
We have all of us lost the sea, and we all
remember.
But you- have wings. 21

Much of the spiritual verse in the collection is in the note of resignation to the will of God. This is particularly true of the poems which reflect his great loss in the death of his wife. With the resignation is the spirit of hope, hope for the future for her and for him in a better life to come.

The religious poetry of resignation and hope is well represented by "A Prayer."

Angels, where you soar
Up to God's own light,
Take my own lost bird
On your hearts to-night;

21. Noyes, "Seagulls on the Serpentine", Dick Turpin's Ride, p.78.

And, as grief once more
Mounts to heaven, and sings,
Let my love be heard
Whispering in your wings. 22

Of the poems in Dick Turpin's Ride and Other Poems the following observation has been made. "They demonstrate a deep sense of the beauties of nature; they contain much of human pathos and gaiety, and they have real sincerity of expression and depth of thought."²³ There is much to be said for this opinion. Noyes seems to grow in mental stature with the passing of the years. There would seem to be no excuse for the statement that Noyes has had his day. The 1927 volume, as we remarked, added little to the physical bulk of his poetry, but the general high level of attainment achieved in his earlier poetry is most certainly maintained here.

In 1941 Noyes presented his latest volume of Collected verse, Shadows on the Down and Other Poems. Like the preceding work it is an extremely small book, in this case amounting to only 110 pages.

As might be expected from the date of publication the poetry here has been influenced to some extent by the present war. Among these poems is "To the R.A.F.." The author's love for the great naval heroes of England

22. Noyes, "A Prayer", Dick Turpin's Ride, p.122

23. Catherine M. Neale, "Alfred Noyes, Litterateur" in Catholic Library World, 13:3-8, Oct. '41, p.7. This article also contains an excellent, comprehensive bibliography of the published writings of Noyes.

is here transferred to the flyers of the Royal Air Force. Noyes sees in today's pilots the natural inheritors of the glory and honor of the sea-dogs of the past. That sea-power has been superseded by air-power in the present conflict is a recognized fact and Noyes is fully aware of it.

Never since English ships went out
 To singe the beard of Spain,
Or English sea-dogs hunted death
 Along the Spanish Main,
Never since Drake and Raleigh won
 Our freedom of the seas,
Have sons of Britain dared and done
 More valiantly than these.

Whether at midnight or at noon,
 Through mist or open sky,
Eagles of freedom, all our hearts
 Are up with you on high;
While Britain's mighty ghosts look down
 From realms beyond the sun
And whisper, as their record pales, 24
 Their breathless, deep, Well done!

There is nothing especially new, nothing very startling in the form nor in the metre of any poem in the 1941 volume. A number of poems are written in blank verse of extreme regularity. There are several in his favorite quatrain form with the accepted rime schemes. There is one in rimed couplets, and there is a ballade.

"On the Eve of Invasion" displays a rather interesting pattern. There are, in this poem, three stanzas of six lines each with a refrain, and the rime scheme is aaa bbb.

24. Noyes, "To the R.A.F.", Shadows on the Down, p.2

Comes now the thunder-shock;
Now, as they rave and mock,
Stands the unshaken rock,
 England!
Lies have but fleeting breath,
Out of this night of death,
Wakes the strong voice that saith,²⁵
 "England again!"

The material of Shadows on the Down is also characteristic of Noyes. We have noted the poetry inspired by the war, and the two poems quoted have both belonged to that category. In the same classification belong "Sub Umbra Alarum" and "English Children in Canada."²⁶

Nature poetry is well represented. Noyes's true and real appreciation of the loveliness of the English countryside was never more in evidence. This appreciation is heightened by contrast with the anguish and horror of war which has been brought so near to the peace and beauty of the English landscape. The title poem, "Shadows on the Down", belongs to the group of nature verses.

 No shadow,
Believe me, Memory, but the purple thyme
Flowing by windmill and by wattled fold
On to the white chalk coast and sparkling sea.²⁷

The same feeling for the beauties of nature is in "Youth and Memory", with its hints of sentimentality.

25. Ibid, "On the Eve of Invasion", p.7

26. Ibid, pp.31-33.

27. Noyes, "Shadows on the Down", Shadows on the Down, p.1.

It is the month when the hills grow young and
remember.
The fields are a cloth of gold for the progress
of May;
And the flowers that Chaucer loved, in the Kentish
meadows,
Look up, in their myriads, now, at the eye of
day.
They never have changed their starry forms and
faces.
Age after age, they are wet with a living dew;
While the young leaves wake in the old oak-woods
of England,
And the heart remembers a word that makes all 28
things new.

This poetry is, as I have mentioned, sentimental, but this is a time when sentiment is strong in most of us. Writing of the poetry in Shadows on the Down a reviewer had this to say: "Here is poetry of the English countryside. It is simple and sincere poetry without distinction, conventional and thin. But! the things of which he writes are in the blood of Englishmen and they love them."²⁹

Several poems are written around Noyes's old theme of childhood, and the theme has suffered little at the hands of time. The same ability to evoke wonderment and the realms of golden unreality is still very much a part of his poetic talent. In this vein are "A Child's Gallop",³⁰ "The Strange Fisherman",³¹ and "At the Zoo."³²

28. Noyes, "Youth and Memory", Shadows on the Down, p.3

29. From a review of Shadows on the Down in Atlantic Monthly, December, 1941.

30. Noyes, "A Child's Gallop", Shadows on the Down, pp.60-61
The refrain in this poem is a child's version of an old nursery song in the patois of Languedoc.

31. Ibid, "The Strange Fisherman", pp.62-64.

32. Ibid, "At the Zoo", pp.66-67.

From the poem "The Strange Fisherman" come lines which are strangely reminiscent of an earlier Noyes.

When Billikins walked by the pool in the tangling
gardens,
Where Chinese ducks and the red-beaked
moor-fowl swim,
He came on an old man, fishing, under a willow
And Billikins thought, "That's luck! I must
talk to him." 33

This is the Noyes of "The Forest of Wild
Thymes" and of "The Flower of Old Japan.

Shadows on the Down is the first volume of collected poetry to appear since the author's conversion to the Church, and there is a certain amount of Catholic material in evidence for the first time. "The Dead Pope Speaks" belongs under this heading.

Caesar, the pax Romana seals my breath!
Caesar, the pax Romana folds my hands!
Cold, in this pax Romana, which is death,
I cannot speak to all those listening lands.
Caesar, quo vadis? Caesar must decide!
Peace-peace on earth-or Christ re-crucified. 34

The traditional material and form of the poems in the collection are quite obvious. If anything, Noyes has leaned more upon the past, and experimented less than in any of his earlier volumes.

The religious and spiritual tradition of Shadows on the Down is in strict accordance with Noyes's

33. Noyes, "The Strange Fisherman", Shadows on the Down, p.62.
34. Ibid, "The Dead Pope Speaks", p.12.

already established views. The idea of Christ's triumph is expressed in the concluding lines of "Ragnarok."

He who found Himself dying, and cried out "for-
saken,"
Raised manhood to Godhead,
And conquered our death. 35

The keystone of the author's spiritual philosophy, law and authority, is contained in "Paradisus Terrestris."

In every leaf and bud I saw
The single universal law

Whereby the one transcendent will
Rules its own creation still;

Moves the stars and sways the sea,
And lifts the sap through blossom and tree

Law that is blind, but to the blind,
And to the mind's eye speaks the Mind, 36

Here also is an answer to the moderns who tell us that the world is merely a combination of blind forces, the result of a fortuitous combination of chemicals.

The theme of Christ's gentleness and mercy is developed in "Indirections." The God of whom Noyes writes here is a God of Justice who knows our human weaknesses, and is gratified by our good deeds and saddened by our evil ones.

35. Noyes, "Ragnarok", Shadows on the Down, p.40

36. Ibid, "Paradisus Terrestris", p.43. The author's conversion to the Catholic Church seems to have strongly confirmed this as an essential doctrine.

Yet, in that hour, of furious death
When the strong seamen shrink dismayed,
Comes that most still, most instant breath-
It is I, be not afraid. 37

I think that the author to whom Noyes owes much in this poem is Francis Thompson. The latter's "Hound of Heaven" contains many lines which might have suggested the passage quoted above. In this respect it might be mentioned that it is only logical for the latest of our Catholic poets to turn to that strange and spiritual genius for inspiration. Thompson was one of the writers who, some years ago, recognized the poetic talents of Noyes. Both men have that same spiritual, almost fanatical, intensity, the intensity which marks the truly religious poet.

This latest of Noyes's volumes of collected short poems is then in the same great tradition of poetic form, material, and religious spirit as we have come to expect from him. I think this 1941 volume to be superior to the 1927. In the former there is a deeper sense of awareness of the problems of life and a high seriousness which seems lacking in the other. The poems of 1927 are too often in the trivial vein which marked so much of his earlier writing. In Shadows on the Down there is much that calls to mind the older Noyes, but it is stronger and firmer than the poetry of his youth. The convictions and opinions have hardened; the author is more sure of himself. Who knows but what with the renewed interest in things of the spirit

37. Noyes, "Indirections," Shadows on the Down, p.44.

brought on by the present war Noyes may not once again be restored to favor, and enjoy his former popularity.

One thing we can say for certain, and that is that our poet has not in the more than forty years in which his works have been published gone back on his ideals, either poetical or spiritual. The same strain may be noted from the early poems right up to the present day. Consistency is certainly one of his more prominent virtues.

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C H A P T E R V I I

IF JUDGMENT COMES

In 1941, the year of Shadows on the Down, appeared another work by Noyes. This was the book-length poem If Judgment Comes.¹ This was written as a separate work and forms part of no collection. Its theme is so special that it would seem to demand space in this study for individual attention.

Briefly, the poem If Judgment Comes is an attack on Adolf Hitler and the political theories of the Nazi party. It demonstrates the author's willingness to utilize the themes of contemporary life in his verse, and refutes the charges that he lives wholly in the past.

Reception of the poem has been somewhat confusing. Many critics have praised it; others have ridiculed or attacked it. Even the Catholic press has been far from uniform in its approach. Theodore Maynard wrote of it: "A bad poem. His (Noyes's) language is bombastic at one moment and flat at the next."²

The other extreme in critical comment is illustrated by the review in Commonweal. "If Judgment Comes

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1. Alfred Noyes, If Judgment Comes, New York, Stokes, 1941.
 2. Theodore Maynard, "A Review of If Judgment Comes" in Catholic World, 153:501, July, 1941.

is an idealistic plea for regeneration. It is direct and unsubtle, intensely felt and eloquent rhetoric addressed to the heart and reason of the world."³

The form of If Judgment Comes is strictly traditional. The prevailing metre is blank verse. The lines are generally of the accepted length, but Noyes has introduced longer and shorter lines at regular intervals to break the monotony of the pattern. The opening lines addressed to Hitler are above average and are worthy of quotation to illustrate the author's use of his medium.

You stand there, in the dock, before the world
For Judgment, with the froth of your last lie
White on your lips, the red blood on your hands;
The blood of children plastered on your boots;
The blood of women, dust of their rubbled
homes,
The fragments of their shattered skulls, whence
eyes
Once looked out softly, splatterings of their flesh,
Wisps of their hair, the golden and the grey
Clinging about you, while you whine to heaven
And hell that men misjudge you.

This Assize

Is held, then, on a somewhat higher hill 4
Where all appeals are heard.

I rather imagine that these lines are included in those condemned by Mr. Maynard as "bombastic", but they surely are intense, and give us a good figurative portrait of the modern tyrant.

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3. J.G.E. Hopkins, "A Review of If Judgment Comes" in Commonweal, 34:235, June 27, 1941.
 4. Noyes, If Judgment Comes, p.1.

The materials out of which the poem was compounded are of considerably greater interest and importance than the form.

In the first place, Noyes takes the opportunity of assailing those who failed to recognize in time the inherent dangers of Hitler and his regime. England and the English people are the particular objects of this assault.

Yet the cockney eye
Misjudged you, finding comedy in the lank
Straight forelock over the narrow stunted brow,⁵
The abrupt small lip-tuft, and that rigid stare.

The lines above are splendid examples of Noyes's peculiar genius for description. They emphasize also the evident fact that Hitler was too often cast as the comedian of the play by the English, rather than as the villain of the piece, his actual role.

Noyes continues his analysis:

Cockney humour
Leapt on its prey too soon. It never saw
The man behind the mask, the rigid mask
Of that unsmiling face; the unswerving eyes
Fixed in that steadfast cataleptic stare
On their one aim, or- if that aim should fail-
Fixed on the horror of a Gorgon's head
Whose hair rose, hissing, into rattlesnakes⁶
And turned you into stone.

There is one section of the poem in which

5. Noyes, If Judgment Comes, p.5

6. Ibid, p.15.

the author attacks the modern psychology of the Freudians and their insistence on the importance of the sub-conscious mind.

A master-stroke of genius, from the depths
Of the sub-conscious mind. This, as we know,
Is mightier than the conscious mind today;
Ends reason, makes a bubble of right and wrong,
And sets Art raving. In that witches' cauldron,
As bogus intellectuals taught your young,
The incestuous nightmares of the Inferno mix,
Coil and uncoil and breed, till Chaos comes
And fair is foul, once more, and foul is fair. ⁷

We can easily discern from the lines above that Noyes has not relaxed in his hatred of modern philosophical anarchy. He continues his diatribe:

.....the flock of charlatans who misused
The name of Science, under the cloak of Freud,
Breaking all barriers down 'twixt right and wrong⁸

Here is another traditional approach to the lawlessness of our times, and a confirmation of Noyes's unfaltering adherence to the old established principles.

Pseudo-intellectuals come in for an exceedingly severe lambasting throughout the work. He (Noyes) speaks with particular bitterness and disgust of Nietzsche's doctrine of the "super-man" which laid the foundation for Hitler's theories of Aryan and Nordic supremacy. He flays the modern psychologists who contend that we are nothing more

7. Noyes, If Judgment Comes, p.7

8. Ibid, p.7

than super machines. He continues his assault on the blind regimentation of the masses by the dictators of Europe, and turns the full weight of his invective against those who would crush and destroy Christianity itself.

A blind assault
In every country, on a world-wide front
Against the eternal values, once enshrined
In the one Faith of Christendom, had begun;
A blind assault, led on by little men,
The fools who, in their hearts, abolished God,
The pseudo-modern mob of "intellectuals"
Who always seem to lack that useful gift,
Intelligence.

Noyes sees the modern revolt against the accepted traditions of Art and Literature as a part of this greater revolt against the things we have always held dear. The note is a familiar one. The man who wrote "Fashions" more than thirty years ago now writes in the same vein the following lines in If Judgment Comes.

This blind assault,
Abolishing every code of right and wrong;
This monstrous wave of evil thought which flowed
Through Art and Letters, hailed by all the fools
Of fashion, poisoning the most vital springs
Of human life, had long prepared your way. 10

Here is reiterated Noyes' contention that much of the blame for the sad condition of the world today must be placed on the shoulders of contemporary writers. These charges he has repeated time and time again in his

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9. Noyes, If Judgment Comes, p.11.
10. Noyes, If Judgment Comes, p.12.

works, and in newspaper interviews. The subtle poison in the pens of our literary men has infected the hearts and minds of our people, and present day chaos is the result. This is also a return to his old plea for standards and laws to govern not only our books but our lives as well. The thought is repeated again in these lines:

And Art and Letters mocked at their own toils,
And violently ran down their easier way
To chaos and corruption. 11

Noyes seems to have an excellent conception of the true meaning of this present war. He hopes and prays that there will be no repetition of the mistakes and errors of the last great conflict. He sees this struggle as one, not between guns, tanks and aeroplanes, but between two philosophies of life, a conflict fought within the minds of men.

This is no war for blind material things.
This war is fought along a world-wide front
Within the mind of man; and there can be
No victory now but on that field of thought.
Bombs, aeroplanes, and cannon fight as well
For falsehood as for truth. They are neutrals all.
Thought only can decide; and, on that field,
This world-crime must be marked as crime for
ever,
And ended, or man's world itself will end. 12

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11. Ibid, p.45. Notice the constant repetition of phrases and expressions throughout this poem. Arts and Letters, blind assault etc.
12. Noyes, If Judgment Comes, p.43.

This appeals to me as a splendid summary of our present situation. We are fighting for our very existence. This must be the "war to end all wars." Civilization has reached a crisis in which we must either conquer or be prepared to accept barbarism.

The spiritual significance of the war is summed up in the concluding lines of the poem. In these lines are to be found the doctrine that men and the souls of men are more important than the State.

Christ never died for governments or laws,
He did not die to build a nation up.
He died for Men, the separate souls of Men. 13

The same spiritual thought is to be found in another series of lines. In them are the essence of the Christian religion and the foundation of a better world here on earth for the future.

One task remains for all mankind-
To vindicate the majesty of Truth,
That attribute of God;
And Conscience that bears witness to the Truth
In the blind breast of man; Conscience that
proves
Man's kinship with the Eternal, and prefers
Death to surrender of its glimpse of right,
Loss of all else to loss of that one good;
Conscience, whose last imperatives reveal
The ultimate nature of the Soul of things,
Above the State, above the universe,
Immanent, yet transcending all things made, 14
The Supreme Being, God.

13. Ibid, p.46.

14. Noyes, If Judgment Comes, p.41.

Of all the poems of Noyes this is the most positive, and the most dogmatic. He is more fierce here in his denunciation of modern errors than ever before. The attitude is not a new one, but it has been intensified and made stronger. In If Judgment Comes we find the final statement of his beliefs. He no longer laughs at the world's folly and evil, rather does he snarl at these things. He seems dangerously close to losing his temper completely, so angry has he become. This attitude is one that we should not condemn too hastily. The times demand anger. The time for laughing is over. We are faced with forces that are beyond the mere power of ridicule to overcome. Only by stern measures can we hope to make the world safe for religion, for common decency and for our ideals and hopes. Noyes has chosen the correct path when he substitutes snarls for jeers. His poetry may have suffered from the loss of the light, bright touch in which he was the acknowledged master, but his ideals are better served by his new approach. The hard and the bitter are not what we have come to expect in his poetry, but this is a hard and bitter world. In If Judgment Comes he has met the facts of our present position with admirable courage.

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C H A P T E R V I I I

THE TORCH-BEARERS

I have reserved for our last consideration Noyes's epic poem The Torch-Bearers, and freely admit that by so doing I have violated strict chronological order. This work made its appearance between the years 1922 and 1930, and therefore antedates other volumes already the subjects of our discussion. There are several reasons for leaving this poem to the very end. It is, first of all, our poet's most ambitious and most massive attempt. It is the one creation by Noyes which contains all his essential philosophy. It is, finally, the one poem by which, I think, his future reputation will stand or fall.

The Torch-Bearers is a trilogy. The three sections are Watchers of the Sky,¹ The Book of Earth,² and The Last Voyage.³ Together they form the heroic story of the great moments of scientific discovery from the earliest times down to the present. Here is an ambitious program, and one which the author undertook with full consciousness of the difficulties involved.

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1. The Torch-Bearers-I, Watchers of the Sky, New York, Stokes, 1922.
 2. The Torch-Bearers-II, The Book of Earth, New York, Stokes, 1925.
 3. The Torch-Bearers-III, The Last Voyage, New York, Stokes, 1930.

N.B. The names of the individual volumes will be used in connection with all references in this chapter, rather than the general title of the complete trilogy.

Noyes sees the history of scientific achievement as one of constant and orderly development in which the pioneers of Science are the torch-bearers handing down the torch of discovery from hand to hand throughout the centuries.

The picture of scientific achievement as one long and continuous process is quite in keeping with Noyes's views on development. What is true of science is also true of literature or any other form of human endeavour. The new must always be built upon the old. The past plays its part as well as the present. In other words we cannot discard tradition whether it be in science or in the arts, or in religion. The purpose of The Torch-Bearers is, in some measure to restore science to the great body of European tradition of which it is but a part.

It has been mentioned that the poet who attempts to write of science or of scientific subjects is treading on dangerous ground. Noyes has walked warily and with extreme caution, and has avoided most of the common errors committed by versifiers who walked the same road before him; the result is a poem devoid of the dryness and over-stressed mechanics so often found in this class of verse.

The Torch-Bearers is in itself an answer to many of the author's critics. Many of them have looked upon him as an enemy of scientific progress. They felt that he blamed our modern confusion on the scientific move-

ment. Nothing could be further from the truth. The trilogy proves to us that it is Noyes's firm belief that it is the philosophy behind much of the scientific movement which has brought about modern chaos and confusion, and not the accomplishments themselves.

As an epic The Torch-Bearers is far superior to Noyes's earlier attempt in the form, Drake. The later work is the epic of the individual soul, and as yet it cannot be truly evaluated.

One critic writes of The Torch-Bearers:

The poem springs directly from the author's sense of wonder. The verse rings true. What might have been dull, becomes exciting, and some passages are akin to the grand manner. ⁴

The first portion of the trilogy, entitled Watchers of the Sky, appeared in 1922. This is the dramatic story of the astronomers. It was inspired by a visit to the observatory atop Mt. Wilson in California. The occasion of this visit was the first test made of the great new telescope there. In this first volume the author tells of the men who made modern astronomy. We read of Copernicus, Tycho Brahe, Kepler, Galileo, Newton and the Herschels. Each astronomer is the central figure of one particular episode devoted to him and his labors.

In form the poem is traditional. The prevailing metre is an excellent blank verse. With this, according to his customary usage, are interspersed occasional

4. Davison, op.cit.,p.206.

lyrics. The high quality of the verse is illustrated by the following quotation.

So, all my life I pondered on that
 scheme
Which makes this earth the centre of all
 worlds,
Lighted and wheeled around by sun and
 moon
And that great crystal sphere wherein men
 thought
Myriads of lesser stars were fixed like
 lamps,
Each in its place,- one mighty glittering
 wheel
Revolving round this dark abode of man. 5

Noyes also makes splendid use of his blank verse for descriptive purposes. The lines which follow are majestic and noble. They illustrate that not only does the author use his eyes to good advantage, but is able to transfer also what he sees on to the printed page.

Once, as we rounded one steep curve, that
 made
The head swim at the canyoned gulf be-
 low,
We saw through thirty miles of lucid air
Elvishly small, sharp as a crumpled petal
Blown from the stem, a yard away, a sail
Lazily drifting on the warm blue sea. 6

The form of the poem then shows nothing of an experimental nature. It is in the true blank verse tradition, and is handled with exceptional ease and skill, not to say mastery.

5. Noyes, Watchers of the Sky, p.25

6. Ibid, p.6. This passage is one of those cited by Davison as being written in the "grand manner."

And, passing through it all those coloured
rays,
Drew them together again, reemerging all
On that dark screen, in one white spot of⁷
light.

No text-book of Physics has ever been clearer on the subject. Here scientific fact and discovery is made both interesting and understandable to the average reader. This is no mean feat.

As in the other sections of the trilogy, the characters of Watchers of the Sky are the torch-bearers. Each of them throws light on some new field of scientific knowledge, and passes on the torch to another. All of these men are painted as searchers for the truth, and the author asks whether it is not possible to carry this search for truth to a point where the great rhythmical laws of the universe, as revealed by science, demonstrate the true union of truth.

Throughout Watchers of the Sky we are constantly reminded of Noyes's passion for law and order. Science is portrayed as leading us to a vision of God. The idea of one man passing on the torch to another is symbolic of his confirmed belief in the continuity of things.

Although it was received somewhat disdainfully by most men of science and by most critics, there were many also to praise it. Among the latter might be

7. Noyes, Watchers of the Sky, pp.187-188.

mentioned Compton Mackenzie, J.C. Squire, and the late Sir Oliver Lodge who thought that it should receive a warm welcome from scientists. That section which tells the story of the Danish astronomer, Tycho Brahe has been possibly the most warmly praised of all, particularly for its dramatic contrast and its colour.

Noyes passes from the laws which govern the universe to those which are more closely concerned with the earth on which we live, in the second volume "The Book of Earth". Just as the first portion was inspired by an episode of his life in the United States, so was this second section. In this case the inspiration was furnished by a visit to the Grand Canyon of the Colorado.

The same vivid descriptions are in evidence here as in Watchers of the Sky. Consider the descriptive passage here quoted. The subject is the Colorado River as seen from the rim of the Canyon.

I saw the thin green thread of the Colorado,
The dragon of rivers, dwarfed to a vein of
 jade,
The Colorado that, out of the Rocky Moun-
 tains,
For fifteen hundred miles of glory and
 thunder,
Rolls to the broad Pacific. 8

The men treated in The Book of Earth are Pythagoras, Aristotle, Farabi, Leonardo da Vinci, Jean Guettard, Linnaeus, Lamarck, Goethe and Darwin. The

8. Noyes, The Book of Earth, p.3.

thread of continuity holding the work of all these men together in the poem is the growth of knowledge concerning the transformation of bodies which culminated in Darwin's theory of evolution. Written in blank verse as was the preceding section, this poem is varied by clever use of dialogue.

The greatest portion of The Book of Earth is that which deals with Darwin and evolution. Here the author keeps always in mind the spiritual element which goes beyond mere physical evolution. The Creator of all things is always kept before us.

The best single section of the poem is that which deals with the now famous meeting of the Royal Society at Oxford. Here is recorded the meeting of the two protagonists Bishop Wilberforce who attacked the theories of Darwin, and Huxley who defended them. The essential point of the whole matter, and the real tragedy of Darwin's life is revealed to us by Noyes when he states with discernment that Darwin saw the "way of the Power, but not the Power." ⁹

Noyes speaks of Darwin who:

while he marshalled his unnumbered
truths,
He lost the Truth; ¹⁰

9. Ibid, p.316.

10. Noyes, The Book of Earth, pp.312-313.

The controversy between law and blind chance in the affairs of the universe and of the earth which raged in the tormented mind and heart of Darwin is written of in these words:

He could not think
That chance decreed the boundless march of
law
He saw in the starry heavens, Yet he could
think
Of "chance" on earth; and, while he thought,
declare
"Chance" was not "chance" but law unrecog-
nized;
Then, even while he said it, he would use
The ambiguous word, base his own law on 11
"chance";

Finally the scientist hears:

through the blood-stained agony of the
world,
"Fear nothing. Follow Me. I am the Way." 12

The truth then which the torch-bearers find ultimately is not the truth of disillusion, of negation, and of blind chance. Rather is it the truth of faith, faith in a world of harmonious law, in the law of love and of God. 13

Noyes's art is stronger as he approaches the close of his trilogy, and it is most strong in the concluding volume The Last Voyage. Here the affirmations

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11. Ibid, p.318.
 12. Ibid, p.323.
 13. Brenner, op.cit,p.278.

and the truths of science neighbour the beliefs of religion. Here is where he succeeds in reuniting truth and beauty which was one of his avowed purposes in writing the entire epic.

The Last Voyage then is the goal towards which the whole poem has been slowly moving. The thesis of this last portion is briefly this; we may carry knowledge and the search for knowledge as far as we can, but at last we reach a limit, here we are confronted with the Great Unknowable. Here the greatest scientists of the world are no better than the average man or the man of simple faith. In Noyes's poem this is made concrete by the lines which tell of Pasteur's great confession of belief in the "Infinite" in his speech before the French Academy.

As in the cases of the two earlier sections of the work, Noyes would have us believe that "The Last Voyage" was also inspired by an actual experience. The particular experience in this case took place during a transatlantic steamer crossing. A child stricken suddenly ill is operated on by the ship's surgeon, while the directions for the operation are transmitted by wireless from another ship on which a famous specialist is sailing.

There is continual emphasis in the poem on the beauty and the necessity of law. The poem is brought to a close with a picture of the great scientists kneeling in adoration before the uplifted Host.

Then the heights and depths
Met in one point, - I saw the host upraised,

Above the struggling sea, against the sky,
Gathering a million thoughts into one centre,
With all those cloud-like drifting earth-
bound dreams
Of Something far more deeply interfused
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns;
Closed in Reality now. That living Will
Whereby this coloured pageant of the world
In each material and electric atom
Is here and now sustained, - a myriad dreams
Brought to one lucid instance, one clear Fact 14
By that far Voice, - In Memory of Me. . .

The poetry of The Last Voyage is of an extremely high order. The blank verse attains a certain nobility and a sustained level not always apparent in the two earlier volumes. Consider this description of Francis Bacon: 15

Under it, hunched in a tasseled high-
backed chair,
A lean form, with a mean and shifty face
Of empty craft, a green and viperish eye,
And, round his neck, the Chancellor's golden₁₆
chain.

The lines of Pasteur's profession of faith are among the finest in the entire three volume work. The old French scientist speaks of the mystery of the Infinite:

It is forced upon us,
None can avoid it. Everywhere in the world
Behind all facts, this ultimate mystery,
Remains, incomprehensible.
When this vision
Dawns on our human minds, we can but₁₇
kneel.

14. Noyes, The Last Voyage, p.180.

15. Bacon has always been one of Noyes's major dislikes. Another unflattering reference to him may be found in A Pageant of Letters by our author.

16. Noyes, The Last Voyage, p.23.

17. Ibid, p.128.

Then the conclusion of Pasteur's speech:

Blessed is he who bears within his breast
A God, a true ideal, and obeys it,
Whether through Art, or Science, or a life
Of simple goodness. There is a deep source
Of all good thoughts and actions. It reflects¹⁸
Light from the Infinite.

The confession of faith made by Pasteur and the other scientists in The Last Voyage is also Noyes's own confession of faith. He joined the Church a short time after the publication of this third volume of his epic of Science.

In none of his other works does Noyes stand out more strongly and more clearly for the great traditions as in the three sections of The Torch-Bearers. For his metre he chose one of the most traditional of all forms, blank verse. This is the time-honored medium for poetry of such scope and magnitude. The material of the work takes us back into the early days of scientific development and theory, and then proceeds in an orderly fashion up to the more recent happenings in that field.

It may be argued that Science as such is not a traditional subject for poetry. This is to some extent true. It illustrates the poet's fresh outlook on his art however, and absolves him from blind allegiance to older subjects. The important thing to remember in connection with this use of the materials of science in his poetry is that Noyes is not so much interested in the developments themselves as he is in the permanent things behind them. It is the quest for truth that is paramount, a quest for truth which has been going on for

18. Ibid, pp.131-132.

centuries and which is still in progress. This quest is part of the great European tradition of culture and development.

The Torch-Bearers emphasizes the unbroken chain by which science has advanced. None of its discoveries came into being from "scratch"; each was the logical and natural result of some previous experiment or discovery. That is the true meaning of the passing of the torch of knowledge and learning. That is the real meaning of tradition.

Finally Noyes goes back to one of the oldest traditions of all. The laws of Science lead eventually to the Great and Eternal Law. This is the tradition of faith and of Christianity. Beyond that which we can learn from physical and natural facts is the great Unknowable. Here is the poet's answer to the sceptics, the agnostics, the atheists of modern times.

In all things there must be harmony; there must be law; there must be order. This is the lesson of The Torch-Bearers. The great scientist is the man who, like Pasteur, asks for the faith of a Breton peasant. The great scientist is the man who can kneel and make his profession of faith, in all humility, before the up-raised Host. This is the greatest tradition of all. For almost two-thousand years it has been the central tradition of our Western civilization.

Noyes then has progressed considerably in his traditional outlook since his first writings. The tradition of which he writes is more universal in application than the mere tradition of form and poetic material which once was his only rallying-cry. Of course, the later is a logical and inevitable outcome of the earlier. Both are based fundamentally on the same principles. We must learn from the past, and law and order must be recognized and obeyed. Poetic and spiritual anarchy must be destroyed. This then is the final and complete answer to the modern iconoclasts.

There is no doubt that in The Torch-Bearers for the first time Noyes took his poetic mission seriously. In this work he put into practise his lofty ideals, and became a crusader for the cause he had advocated for so many years. He is still an active man, and the new horizons first shown us in the poem may yet be clarified and amplified. His work since The Torch-Bearers certainly has not lived up to its promise. As the critic Edward Davison wrote: "In The Torch-Bearers Noyes set out to conquer new latitudes of poetry. It will be interesting to note what treasure he ultimately brings home."¹⁹

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19. Davison, op.cit., p.217.

C H A P T E R X

CONCLUSIONS

From our study and consideration of the poetical works of Alfred Noyes we shall now attempt to draw some conclusions. These same conclusions arise primarily from observation of certain factors to be observed in his verse.

We are concerned here with Noyes as a poet of Tradition, and it is this traditional element of the man and his work which we shall now attempt to summarize and evaluate.

In the matter of poetic form it has, I think, been demonstrated that Noyes is strictly speaking traditional. This does not mean that he is conventional. Tradition is a broader, more generic term than convention, and refers to more sweeping and more generally cultural usages. Convention, on the other hand is more specifically concerned with mere mechanical customs and usages.

In poetic form Noyes is convinced that certainly widely accepted metres, stanzas, and verse patterns are by their very nature suitable for poetry. He believes in the laws of versification as handed down to us from the great poets of the English past. This is part of the main line of poetic tradition. He has no time for poetic lawlessness in this question of form.

At the same time Noyes is well enough aware of changed conditions to experiment with accepted forms. While he insists on basic principles, he is not bound by artificial conventions. His experiments in rime, metre and stanzaic arrangements prove that.

The language of his verse is also of the more traditional type. He holds that there is a "language of poetry". In this respect he differs widely from the so-called poets of the twentieth century who maintain that the language of poetry and prose are one and the same. This belief in a poetical language is also part of the main stream of English literary tradition. It is more than mere convention.

The major objection to Noyes in respect to his poetic form and language is that he is a misplaced Victorian. That he does confess allegiance to the great poets of the past century, and Tennyson in particular, is undeniable, but that he relies upon them entirely is false. There is in his form that which goes beyond Victorianism, goes back indeed to the very roots of English poetry, to Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton and Shelley.

The matter of Noyes's poetry is also broadly traditional. He writes of certain fundamental truths of life and human experience. He writes of life, of birth, of death, of the "nostalgia of immortality" and of human passions and feelings. These are all permanent things, the things that really matter.

He is at the same time aware of the things of the moment, of modern movements, and of the problems of contemporary life. He is not blind to the forces of his own generation. He is a man apart from his fellows in his treatment of this material however. He sees the fundamental things which lie beneath transient activities and fashions of the day. He is not interested in things which have no universal and general significance.

It is true that Noyes is in the romantic tradition. He does have a special place in his heart for the world of fancy and of make-believe. He does not however turn away from the realism of the world in which he lives. On the contrary his poetry contains excellent examples of his recognition of the horrors of war, of poverty, and of the slums. Where he draws the line is unpleasant realism for its own sake. He recognizes the existence of dirt and filth, both physical and moral. He is not afraid to face the facts. He refuses however to wallow in indecency for the sake of attracting a public which has grown to expect that sort of thing. The poet's mission as he conceives it is to lead the people up to better and nobler things, and not to drag them down into the depths of degradation.

From the spiritual and religious angle Noyes is also a traditionalist. In this respect he belongs to the oldest of all religious traditions in the Christian Church. His poetry reflects his sincere and honest opinions.

He sees law and order as vital and essential both in the writing of our poems, and in the living of our lives. He looks with contempt upon those who laugh at rules and regulations. True genius he holds is not that which flagrantly casts aside bonds of accepted usage and tradition, but rather that which accepts those same bonds with grace and even with thanks, and then uses them wisely and well. Acceptance of authority, he states, does not constitute slavery, rather in such acceptance alone can be found true freedom.

The gist of the matter is this. Noyes has been the object of much contemporary disapproval. This disapproval has been largely unjustified. Modern critics have confused the issue, and they have confused their terms.

Much of the confusion has arisen over the terms tradition and convention. Critics unfriendly to Noyes have called him traditional when they actually meant to call him conventional. We have already noted the essential difference between the two. Any quarrel with a poet on the grounds that he is traditional is senseless and ridiculous. A survey of the really important poets in the history of world literature will convince even the most biased observer that respect for tradition has marked their work. All poets who have amounted to anything have been in that sense traditional poets. They have learned the best of what their predecessors have had to offer, and used that

acquired knowledge to their own best advantage.

Actually then the moderns falsely represented Noyes at the outset by suggesting that he is a conventional poet. They say traditional, but actually refer to the less easily defended characteristic.

Chief among the charges brought against Alfred Noyes is the one which accuses him of traditionalism as if that were a major poetic crime. They fail to see the clear logic of his position when he presses for a recognition of the laws of growth and development in the history of our poetry. They ignore the obvious fact that all our literary materials are bequests from the past. The new is not really new in the sense of being a complete break with those things which have gone before. The new is really an elaboration, an extension of the old.

Any claim that Noyes is completely conventional is false. The man's experiments and his invention of subtle new metres and rime schemes prove that to be a fact.

The truth is that Alfred Noyes is a rebel rather than a blind follower of the conventions and traditions of the past. He has rebelled constantly and consistently against the conventions of his own generation. He has stood out against license and anarchy in his chosen profession at a time when it was the height of unpopularity to do so. He has not followed the mob; he has not taken the easier way. There are conventions in the poetry

of the twentieth century, just as there were conventions in the verse of the Victorians. Noyes has not fallen prey to the blandishments of contemporary verse-making, and by not falling in line with his brothers in the craft he proves himself a real rebel.

Spiritually Noyes has definitely been on the side of rebellion. He deserted the safe tradition of the Anglican Church to embrace the older, but far less socially (at least in England) acceptable Roman Catholic Church because he was convinced that in the Church he had entered was the Truth. This was not the act of a conventional man.

Time and again in his private life as well as in his writings Noyes has demonstrated that he is not conventional. He is traditional in the best and most acceptable sense of that word. To repeat, the fundamental error in the present judgment of this poet is the popular branding of his name with the terms traditional and conventional without explanation of the meanings of those same terms.

A day may come when the talents of Noyes will be recognized for what they are actually worth, and it is my firm contention and belief that those talents are of an extremely high order. Noyes first broke with poetic convention when he attended Oxford, as the rival university, Cambridge, has always held the monopoly on English poets. He has continued to defy conventions up to the present day.

The time, I hope, is not far off when he will be recognized for what he really is, a rebel against false conventions, and a mighty warrior for genuine and noble traditions.

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