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John Keble

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**John Keble** \*

AN ESSAY ON THE

AUTHOR OF THE 'CHRISTIAN YEAR'

BY J. C. SHAIRP ✕

PROFESSOR OF HUMANITY ST. ANDREWS.

EDINBURGH

EDMONSTON & DOUGLAS

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## Preface.

IT may seem hardly worth while to republish, in a separate form, so brief a tract as this. And, indeed, had I taken counsel with myself alone, I might have waited in hope of some day making it part of a larger book. But a wish was expressed by one, to whom I could not but defer, that the republication, in one form or another, should be undertaken without delay. This opinion, most kindly conveyed to me by the chosen friend of Keble—Sir J. T. Coleridge,—at once determined me. I could not be wrong in following the suggestion of one whose name gave it so great weight. At the same time I am happy to take the opportunity which this preface affords me to acknowledge the

free, I hope not too free, use I have made of Sir J. T. Coleridge's delightful letters in *The Guardian* for the facts of the poet's life.

Some interval must necessarily elapse before a regular Life of Keble can be written. Meantime this essay, revised and somewhat enlarged as it now is, may have an interest which it will probably lose when the Biography appears. Another circumstance may possibly give it some value: while Keble will generally be portrayed by those who have been all their lives surrounded with the same associations as he was, he is here described as he appeared to one reared amid quite other traditions.

J. C. SHAIRP.

ST. ANDREWS, Nov. 7, 1866.



## John Keble.

SECTION FIRST.—OXFORD IN 1840-41.

THE closing chapter of Lockhart's *Life of Scott* begins with these words: 'We read in Solomon, "The heart knoweth its own bitterness;" and a wise poet of our own time thus beautifully expands the saying—

"Why should we faint, and fear to live alone,  
Since all alone, so Heaven has will'd, we die,  
Nor even the tenderest heart, and next our own,  
Knows half the reasons why we smile and sigh?"

On glancing to the footnote to see who the wise poet of our own time might be, the reader saw, for the first time perhaps, the name of *Keble and The Christian Year*. To many in Scotland, at least, this was the earliest intimation of the existence of the

poet, and the work that has immortalized him. If some friend soon afterwards happened to bring from England a copy of *The Christian Year*, and make a present of it, the young reader could not but be struck by a lyric here and there, which opened a new vein, and struck a note of meditative feeling, not exactly like anything he had heard before. But the little book contained much that was strange and unintelligible, some things even startling. Very vague were the rumours which at that time reached Scotland of the author. Men said he belonged to a party of Churchmen who were making a great stir in Oxford, and leavening the University with a kind of thought which was novel, and supposed to be dangerous. The most definite thing said was that the new school had a general Romanizing tendency. But this must be a mistake or strange exaggeration. Folly and sentimentalism might no doubt go far enough at Oxford. But as for Romanism, the revival of such antiquated nonsense was simply impossible in this enlightened nine-

teenth century. If such an absurdity were to show itself openly, was there not still extant the *Edinburgh Review* ready to crush it? To many such ere now it had administered the quietus. Would it not deal as summarily with this one too? Such was the kind of talk that was heard when Scott's *Life* appeared in 1838. For more exact information, young men who were inquisitive had to wait, till a few years later gave them opportunities of seeing for themselves, and coming into personal contact with what was actually going on in Oxford.

It was a strange experience, for a young man trained anywhere, much more for one born and bred in Scotland, and trained within The Kirk, to enter Oxford when the religious movement was at its height. He found himself all at once in the midst of a system of teaching which unchurched himself and all whom he had hitherto known. In his simplicity he had believed that spiritual religion was a thing of the heart, and that neither Episcopacy nor Presbytery availeth anything. But here were men—

able, learned, devout-minded men—maintaining that outward rites and ceremonies were of the very essence, and that, where these were not, there was no true Christianity. How could men, such as these were reported to be, really go back themselves and try to lead others back to what were but the beggarly elements? It was all very perplexing, not to say irritating. However, there might be something more behind, which a young man could not understand. So he would wait and see what he would see.

Soon he came to know that the only portions of Oxford society, unaffected by the new influence, were the two extremes. The older dons, that is, the heads of houses, and the senior tutors, were unmoved by it, except to opposition. The whole younger half of the undergraduates generally took no part in it. But the great body that lay between these extremes, that is, most of the younger fellows of colleges, and most of the scholars and elder undergraduates, at least those of them who read or thought at all,



were in some way or other busy with the new questions. When in time the new-comer began to know some of the men who sympathized with the movement, the first impression was of something constrained and artificial in their manners and deportment. High character and ability many of them were said to have ; but to a chance observer it seemed that, in as far as their system had moulded them, it had made them the opposite of natural in their views of things, and in their whole mental attitude. You almost longed for some free breath of mountain air to sweep away the stifling atmosphere that was about you. This might come partly, no doubt, from the feeling with which you knew that these men must from their system regard you, and all who had the misfortune to be born outside of their sacred pale. Not that they ever expressed such views in your hearing. Good manners, as well as their habitual reserve, forbade this. But, though they did not say it, you knew quite well what they felt. And if at any time the ' young barbarian ' put a direct

question, or made a remark which went straight at these opinions, they would only look at him, astonished at his rudeness and profanity, and would shrink into themselves.

Now and then, however, it would happen that some adherent, or even leading man of the movement, more frank and outspoken than the rest, would deign to speak out his principles, and even to discuss them with undergraduates and controversial Scots. To him urging the necessity of Apostolical Succession, and the sacerdotal view of the Sacraments, some young man might venture to reply—‘ Well ! if all you say be true, then I never can have known a Christian. For up to this time I have lived among people who were strangers to all these things, which, you tell me, are essentials of Christianity. And I am quite sure that, if I have never known a Christian till now, I shall never know one.’ The answer to this would probably be, ‘ There is much in what you say. No doubt high virtues, very like the Christian graces, are to be found outside of the

Christian Church. But it is a remarkable thing, those best acquainted with Church history tell me, that outside of the pale of the Church the saintly character is never found.' This *naïve* reply was not likely to have much weight with the young listener. It would have taken something stronger to make him break faith with all that was most sacred in his early recollections. Beautiful examples of Presbyterian piety had stamped impressions on his memory not to be effaced by sacerdotal theories or subtleties of the schools. 'And the Church system which began by disowning these examples placed a barrier to its acceptance at the very outset.

But however unbelievable their theory, further acquaintance with the younger men of the new school, whether junior fellows or undergraduate scholars, disclosed many traits of character that could not but awaken respect, or something more. If there was about many of them a constraint and reserve which seemed unnatural, there was also in many an unworldliness and self-denial, a

purity of life and elevation of aim, in some a generosity of purpose and depth of devotion, not to be gainsaid. Could the movement which produced these qualities, or even attracted them to itself, be wholly false and bad? This movement, moreover, when at its height, extended its influence far beyond the circle of those who directly adopted its views. There was not a reading man at least in Oxford, who was not more or less indirectly influenced by it. Only the very idle or the very frivolous were wholly proof against it. On all others it impressed a sobriety of conduct and a seriousness not usually found among large bodies of young men. It raised the tone of average morality in Oxford to a level which perhaps it had never before reached. You may call it over-wrought and too highly strung. Perhaps it was. It was better, however, for young men to be so, than to be doubters or cynics.



## SECTION II.

### MR. NEWMAN, HIS INFLUENCE IN OXFORD.

**I**F such was the general aspect of Oxford society at that time, where was the centre and soul from which so mighty a power emanated? At that time it lay, and had for some years lain, mainly in one man—a man in many ways the most remarkable that England has seen during this century, perhaps the most remarkable whom the English Church has produced in any century,—John Henry Newman.

The influence he had gained, apparently without setting himself to seek it, was something altogether unlike anything else in our time. A mysterious veneration had by degrees gathered round him, till now it was

almost as though some Ambrose or Augustine of elder ages had reappeared. He himself tells how one day, when he was an undergraduate, a friend with whom he was walking in the Oxford street cried out eagerly, 'There's Keble!' and with what awe he looked at him! A few years, and the same took place with regard to himself. In Oriel Lane light-hearted undergraduates would drop their voices and whisper, 'There's Newman!' when, head thrust forward, and gaze fixed as though on some vision seen only by himself, with swift, noiseless step he went by. Awe fell on them for a moment, almost as if it had been some apparition that had passed. For his inner circle of friends, many of them younger men, he was said to have a quite romantic affection, which they returned with the most ardent devotion and the intensest faith in him. But to the outer world he was a mystery. What were the qualities that inspired these feelings? There was of course learning and refinement, there was genius, not indeed of a philosopher, but of a subtle and original thinker, an unequalled



edge of dialectic, and these all glorified by the imagination of a poet. Then there was the utter unworldliness, the setting at naught of all things which men most prize, the tamelessness of soul, which was ready to essay the impossible. Men felt that here was

‘One of that small transfigured band  
Whom the world cannot tame.’

It was this mysteriousness which, beyond all his gifts of head and heart, so strangely fascinated and overawed,—that something about him which made it impossible to reckon his course and take his bearings, that soul-hunger and quenchless yearning which nothing short of the eternal could satisfy. This deep, resolute ardour of soul was no doubt an offence not to be forgiven by older men, especially by the wary and worldly-wise; but it was the very spell which drew to him the hearts of all the younger and the more enthusiastic. Such was the impression he had made in Oxford just before he relinquished his hold on it. And if at that time it seemed to persons at a distance extravagant

and absurd, they may have since learned enough to make it plain to them that there was enough in him who was the object of it to justify the impression.

But it may be asked, what actions or definite results were there to account for so deep and widespread a veneration? Of course there were the numerous products of his prolific pen, his works, controversial, theological, religious. But none of these were so deep in learning as some of Dr. Pusey's writings, nor so widely popular as *The Christian Year*; and yet both Dr. Pusey and Mr. Keble were at that time quite second in importance to Mr. Newman. The centre from which his power went forth was the pulpit of St. Mary's, with those wonderful afternoon sermons. Sunday after Sunday, year by year, they went on, each continuing and deepening the impression made by the last. As the hour interfered with the dinner-hour of the colleges, most men preferred a warm dinner without Newman's sermon to a cold one with it, so the audience was not crowded—the large church little more than half filled.



The service was very simple, no pomp, no ritualism ; for it was characteristic of the leading men of the movement that they left these things to the weaker brethren. Their thoughts, at all events, were set on great questions which touched the heart of unseen things. About the service, the most remarkable thing was the beauty, the silver intonation of Mr. Newman's voice, as he read the lessons. It seemed to bring new meaning out of the familiar words. Still lingers in memory the tone with which he read, ' But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.' When he began to preach, a stranger was not likely to be much struck, especially if he had been accustomed to pulpit-oratory of the Boanerges sort. Here was no vehemence, no declamation, no show of elaborated argument, so that one who came prepared to hear a ' great intellectual effort ' was almost sure to go away disappointed. Indeed, we believe that if he had preached one of his St. Mary's sermons before a Scotch town congregation, they would have thought the preacher a

‘silly body.’ The delivery had a peculiarity which it took a new hearer some time to get over. Each separate sentence, or at least each short paragraph, was spoken rapidly, but with great clearness of intonation; and then at its close there was a pause, lasting for nearly half a minute; then another rapidly but clearly spoken sentence, followed by another pause. It took some time to get over this, but, that once done, the wonderful charm began to dawn on you. The look and bearing of the preacher were as of one who dwelt apart, who, though he knew his age well, did not live in it. From his seclusion of study, and abstinence, and prayer, from habitual dwelling in the unseen, he seemed to come forth that one day of the week to speak to others of the things he had seen and known. Those who never heard him might fancy that his sermons would generally be about apostolical succession or rights of the Church, or against Dissenters. Nothing of the kind. You might hear him preach for weeks without an allusion to these things. What there

was of High Church teaching was implied rather than enforced. The local, the temporary, and the modern were ennobled by the presence of the catholic truth belonging to all ages that pervaded the whole. His power showed itself chiefly in the new and unlooked-for way in which he touched into life old truths, moral or spiritual, which all Christians acknowledge, but most have ceased to feel—when he spoke of ‘Unreal Words,’ of ‘The Individuality of the Soul,’ of ‘The Invisible World,’ of a ‘Particular Providence ;’ or again, of ‘The Ventures of Faith,’ ‘Warfare the condition of Victory,’ ‘The Cross of Christ the Measure of the World,’ ‘The Church a Home for the Lonely.’ As he spoke, how the old truth became new ! how it came home with a meaning never felt before ! He laid his finger—how gently, yet how powerfully,—on some inner place in the hearer’s heart, and told him things about himself he had never known till then. Subtlest truths which it would have taken philosophers pages of circumlocution and big words to state, were dropt out by the way in

a sentence or two of the most transparent Saxon. What delicacy of style yet what strength! how simple yet how suggestive! how homely yet how refined! how penetrating yet how tender-hearted! If now and then there was a forlorn undertone which at the time seemed inexplicable, if he spoke of 'many a sad secret which a man dare not tell lest he find no sympathy,' of 'secrets lying like cold ice upon the heart,' of 'some solitary incommunicable grief,' you might be perplexed at the drift of what he said, but you felt all the more drawn to the speaker. To call these sermons eloquent would not be the word for them; high poems they were rather, as of an inspired singer, or the outpourings as of a prophet rapt, yet self-possessed. And the tone of voice in which they were spoken, once you grew accustomed to it, sounded like a fine strain of unearthly music. Through the stillness of that high Gothic building the words fell on the ear like the measured drippings of water in some vast dim cave. After hearing these sermons you might come away

still not believing the tenets peculiar to the High Church system; but you would be harder than most men, if you did not feel more than ever ashamed of coarseness, selfishness, worldliness, if you did not feel the things of faith brought closer to the soul.

There was one occasion of a different kind, when he spoke from St. Mary's pulpit for the last time, not as Parish minister, but as University preacher. It was the crisis of the movement. All Oxford assembled to hear what Newman had to say, and St. Mary's was crowded to the door. The subject he spoke of was 'the theory of Development in Christian Doctrine,' a subject which, since then, has become common property, but which at that time was new even to the ablest men in Oxford. For an hour and a half he drew out the argument, and perhaps the acutest there did not quite follow the line of thought, or felt wearied by the length of it, illustrated though it was by some startling examples. Such was the famous

‘Protestantism has at various times developed into Polygamy,’ or the still more famous ‘Scripture says the sun moves round the earth, Science that the earth moves, and the sun is comparatively at rest. How can we determine which of these opposite statements is true, till we know what motion is?’ Few probably who heard it have forgot the tone of voice with which he uttered the beautiful passage about music as the audible embodiment of some unknown reality behind, itself sweeping like a strain of splendid music out of the heart of a subtle argument:—

‘Take another instance of an outward and earthly form, or economy, under which great wonders unknown seem to be typified—I mean musical sounds, as they are exhibited most perfectly in instrumental harmony. There are seven notes in the scale; make them fourteen; yet what a slender outfit for so vast an enterprise! What science brings so much out of so little? Out of what poor elements does some great master create his new world! Shall we say that all this



exuberant inventiveness is a mere ingenuity or trick of art, like some game or fashion of the day, without reality, without meaning? We may do so; and then, perhaps, we shall also account the science of theology to be a matter of words; yet, as there is a divinity in the theology of the Church, which those who feel cannot communicate, so there is also in the wonderful creation of sublimity and beauty of which I am speaking. To many men the very names which the science employs are utterly incomprehensible. To speak of an idea or a subject seems to be fanciful or trifling, and of the views which it opens upon us to be childish extravagance; yet is it possible that that inexhaustible evolution and disposition of notes, so rich yet so simple, so intricate yet so regulated, so various yet so majestic, should be a mere sound which is gone and perishes? Can it be that those mysterious stirrings of heart, and keen emotions, and strange yearnings after we know not what, and awful impressions from we know not whence, should be wrought in us by what is unsubstantial,

and comes and goes, and begins and ends in itself? It is not so; it cannot be. No; they have escaped from some higher sphere; they are the outpourings of eternal harmony in the medium of created sound; they are echoes from our Home; they are the voices of Angels, or the *Magnificat* of Saints, or the living laws of Divine governance, or the Divine attributes; something are they besides themselves, which we cannot compass, which we cannot utter, though mortal man, and he perhaps not otherwise distinguished above his fellows, has the power of eliciting them.'





### SECTION III.

#### MR. NEWMAN'S DEPARTURE FROM OXFORD.

**T**HIS was preached in the winter of 1843, the last time he appeared in the University pulpit. His parochial sermons had by this time assumed an uneasy tone which perplexed his followers with fear of change. That summer solved their doubt. In the quiet chapel of Littlemore which he himself had built, when all Oxford was absent during the long vacation, he preached his last Anglican sermon to the country people, and only a few friends, and poured forth that affecting and mournful farewell to the Church of England. The sermon is entitled 'The Parting of Friends.' The text was 'Man goeth forth to his work and his

labour until the evening.' He went through all the instances recorded in the Bible of human affection sorely tried, reproducing the incidents in the very words of Scripture,—Jacob, Hagar, Naomi, Jonathan and David, St. Paul and the elders of Ephesus, and last, the weeping over Jerusalem, and the 'Behold, your house is left unto you desolate,'—and then he bursts forth—'A lesson, surely, and a warning to us all, in every place where He puts His name, to the end of time, lest we be cold towards His gifts, or unbelieving towards His word, or jealous of His workings, or heartless towards His mercies. . . . O mother of saints! O school of the wise! O nurse of the heroic! of whom went forth, in whom have dwelt memorable names of old, to spread the truth abroad, or to cherish and illustrate it at home! O thou, from whom surrounding nations lit their lamps! O virgin of Israel! wherefore dost thou now sit on the ground and keep silence, like one of the foolish women who were without oil on the coming of the Bridegroom? Where is now the ruler in Sion, and the doctor in the

Temple, and the ascetic on Carmel, and the herald in the wilderness, and the preacher in the market-place? Where are thy "effectual fervent prayers" offered in secret, and thy alms and good works coming up as a memorial before God? How is it, O once holy place, that "the land mourneth, for the corn is wasted, the new wine is dried up, the oil languisheth, because joy is withered away from the sons of men?" Alas for the day! how do the beasts groan! the herds of cattle are perplexed, because they have no pasture; yea, the flocks are made desolate. Lebanon is ashamed and hewn down; Sharon is like a wilderness, and Bashan and Carmel shake off their fruits. O my mother, whence is this unto thee, that thou hast good things poured upon thee and canst not keep them, and bearest children, yet darest not own them? Why hast thou not the skill to use their services, nor the heart to rejoice in their love? How is it that whatever is generous in purpose, and tender or deep in devotion, thy flower and thy promise, falls from thy bosom, and finds no home within

thine arms? Who hath put this note upon thee, to have "a miscarrying womb, and dry breasts," to be strange to thine own flesh, and thine eye cruel to thy little ones? Thine own offspring, the fruit of thy womb, who love thee and would toil for thee, thou dost gaze upon with fear, as though a portent, or thou dost loath as an offence; at best thou dost but endure, as if they had no claim but on thy patience, self-possession, and vigilance, to be rid of them as easily as thou mayest. Thou makest them "stand all the day idle" as the very condition of thy bearing with them; or thou biddest them begone where they will be more welcome; or thou sellest them for nought to the stranger that passes by. And what wilt thou do in the end thereof?

'Scripture is a refuge in any trouble; only let us be on our guard against seeming to use it farther than is fitting, or doing more than sheltering ourselves under its shadow. Let us use it according to our measure. It is far higher and wider than our need, and it conceals our feelings while it gives expres-

sion to them. It is sacred and heavenly ; and it restrains and purifies, while it sanctions them. . . . And O my brethren, O kind and affectionate hearts, O loving friends, should you know any one whose lot it has been, by writing or by word of mouth, in some degree to help you thus to act ; if he has ever told you what you knew about yourselves, or what you did not know ; has read to you your wants and feelings, and comforted you by the very reading ; has made you feel that there was a higher life than this daily one, and a brighter world than that you see ; or encouraged you, or sobered you, or opened a way to the inquiring, or soothed the perplexed, if what he has said or done has ever made you take interest in him, and feel well-inclined towards him, remember such a one in time to come, though you hear him not, and pray for him, that in all things he may know God's will, and at all times he may be ready to fulfil it.'

Then followed the resignation of his fellowship, the retirement to Littlemore, the withdrawal even from the intercourse of his

friends, the unloosing of all the ties that bound him to Oxford, the two years' pondering of the step he was about to take,—so that when in 1845 he entered the Church of Rome, he did it by himself, making himself as much as possible responsible only for his own act, and followed by but one or two young friends who would not be kept back. Those who witnessed these things, and knew that, if a large following had been his object, he might, by leaving the Church of England three years earlier, in the plenitude of his power, have taken almost all the flower of young Oxford with him, needed no *Apologia* to convince them of his honesty of purpose. And the moral power his presence had been in Oxford was proved by nothing more than by the tremendous reaction that followed his departure,—a reaction from which I know not if that University has yet recovered. Such was the impression made by that eventful time on impartial but not uninterested spectators—on those who by early education and conviction were kept quite aloof from the peculiar tenets of

High Churchmen, but who could not but be struck by the moral quickening which resulted from the movement, and by the marvellous character of him who was the soul of it.





#### SECTION IV.

##### KEBLE'S EARLY YEARS.

**D**R. NEWMAN himself tells us that all the while the true and primary author of that movement was out of sight. The Rev. John Keble was at a distance from Oxford, in his vicarage at Hursley, there living in his own life, and carrying out in his daily services and parish ministry those truths which he had first brought forward, and Newman had carried out, in Oxford. But though out of sight, he was not out of mind. *The Christian Year* was in the hands of every one, even the youngest under-graduate. Besides its more intrinsic qualities, the tone of it blended well with the sentiment which the venerable aspect of the old city awakened.



It used to be pleasing to try and identify amid the scenery around Oxford some of the descriptions of nature with which the poems are inlaid. During these years the poet-priest's figure was but seldom seen in the streets of Oxford,—only when some great question affecting the Church, some discussion of No. 90, or trial of Mr. Ward, had summoned Convocation together. Once, if my memory serves, I remember to have seen him in the University pulpit at St. Mary's, but his voice was not strong, and did not reach many of the audience. His service to his party had lain in another direction. It was he who, by his character, had first awakened a new tone of sentiment in Oxford, and attracted to himself whatever else was like minded. He had sounded the first note which woke that sentiment into action, and embodied it in a party. He had kept up, though from a distance, sympathetic intercourse with the chief actors, counselled and encouraged them. Above all, he gave poetry to the movement, and a poetic aspect. Polemics by themselves are dreary work.

They do not touch the springs of young hearts. But he who, in the midst of any line of thought, unlocks a fountain of genuine poetry, does more to humanize it, and win for it a way to men's affections, than he who writes a hundred volumes, however able, of controversy. Without disparagement to the patristic and other learning of the party, the two permanent monuments of genius which it has bequeathed to England may be said to be Newman's *Parochial Sermons*, and Keble's *Christian Year*.

All that was known of Keble at that time to the outer world of Oxford was vague and scanty. The few facts here added are taken from what has since been made public by two of his most attached friends, Sir John Coleridge and Dr. Newman, the former in his beautiful letters, memorial of Keble, the latter in his *Apologia*. Yet these facts, though few, are well worthy of attention, both because Keble's character is more than his poetry, and because his poetry can only be rightly understood in the light of his character. For there is no poet whose poetry is more truly an

image of the man himself, both in his inner nature, and in his outward circumstances.

His father, whose name the poet bore, was a country clergyman, vicar of Coln-St.-Aldwynd's, in Gloucestershire, but the house in which he lived, and in which the poet was born, was at Fairford, three miles distant from the cure. John was the second child, and elder son of a family which consisted of two sons and two daughters. His mother, Sarah Maule, was, we have heard, of Scottish extraction. The father, who lived till his ninetieth year, was a man of no common ability. Of him his son, we are told, 'always spoke not only with the love of a son, but with the profoundest reverence for his goodness and wisdom.' It would seem that this was one of the few clerical homes in England in which the opinions, traditions, and peculiar piety of the Nonjurors lived on into the present century. Unlike most sons distinguished for ability, John Keble never outgrew the period of absolute filial reverence, never questioned a single opinion or prepossession which he had imbibed from

his father. Some of his less reverential companions used to think that this was an intellectual loss to him.

The father's ability and scholarship are proved by his having himself educated his son, and sent him up to Oxford so well prepared, that at the age of fifteen he gained a Corpus scholarship, an honour which seems to have then held the same place in university estimation that Balliol scholarships have long held and still hold. This strictly home training, in the quiet of a Gloucestershire parsonage, placed in the very heart of rural England, under a roof where the old High Church tradition lived on, blended with what was best in modern piety, makes itself felt in every line the poet wrote. On all hands one hears it said that there is no education like that of one of the old English public schools. For the great run of ordinary boys, whether quick-witted and competitive, or lazy and selfish, this may perhaps be true; but for natures of finer texture, for all boys who have a decided and original bias, how much is there

that the rough handling of a public school would ruthlessly crush? From all the better public schools coarse bullying, we know, has disappeared; but for peculiarity of any kind, for whatever does not conform itself to the 'tyrant tradition'—a manly and straightforward one we admit—they have still but little tolerance. If Keble had once imbibed the public school spirit, *The Christian Year* would either never have been written, or it would have lacked some of its tenderest, most characteristic traits.



## SECTION V.

### HIS LIFE IN OXFORD AND IN FAIRFORD.

**I**F he was fortunate in having his boy-education at home, he was not less happy in the college which he entered and the companions he met there. It is the happiness of college life that a young man can command just as much retirement, and as much society as he pleases, and of the kind that he pleases. All readers of Arnold's Life will remember the picture there drawn of the Scholars' Common Room at Corpus, by one of the last survivors, the venerable Sir J. Coleridge. He tells us that, when Keble came into residence, early in 1807, it was but a small society, numbering only about twenty undergradu-



ate scholars, and these rather under the usual age, who lived on the most familiar terms with each other. The Bachelor scholars resided and lived entirely with the undergraduates. Two of Keble's chief friends among the Corpus scholars, though younger in academic standing than himself, were Coleridge, afterwards Judge Coleridge, and Arnold. Keble indeed must have already graduated before Arnold came into residence. Besides these were many other men distinguished in their day in the University, but less known to the outer world. It was a stirring time when Keble was an undergraduate. Within the University the first wakening after long slumber had begun, and competitions for honours had been just established. From without news of the great Peninsular battles was arriving from time to time. Scott's trumpet-blasts of poetry were stirring young hearts. In Corpus Common Room, as elsewhere, the battles were fought over again, and the classical and romantic schools of poetry were vehemently discussed. And among these

more exciting subjects, the young scholar Coleridge would insinuate the stiller and deeper tones of Wordsworth's lyrical ballads, which, then but little known, he had heard of from his great uncle. These two, Scott and Wordsworth, were to the end Keble's first favourites of contemporary poets, and those who chiefly moulded his taste and style. Most of the scholars were high Tories in Church and State, great respecters of things as they are; none, no doubt, more so than Keble. The great questioner of the prevailing creed was Arnold, who often brought down on his own head the concentrated arguments of the whole Common Room. But youth's genial warmth healed these undergraduate disputes, as, alas! the same controversies could not be healed when taken up by the same combatants at a later day. In that kindly atmosphere Keble's affectionate nature expanded, as a flower in the sun. His was a temperament to drink in deeply whatever there was of finest influence in Oxford. No doubt the learning he there gained was something to him, but far more



was the vision of the fair city herself, 'with high aisle, and solemn cloister, seated among groves, green meadows, and calm streams.' These, and the young friendships which they for a few years embosom, are what made Oxford then, and make it even now, the one spot in England wherein 'the darlings of the nation' find romance still realized. Keble seems to have been much the same in character then as in after years. His affection toward the friends he made at Oxford was warm and deep, and lasted in most instances with his life. With what feelings they regarded him may be gathered from the words of his brother scholar at Corpus, who, when a fifty-five years' friendship had come to its earthly close, could say of him, 'It was the singular happiness of his nature, remarkable even in his undergraduate days, that love for him was always sanctified, as it were, by reverence—reverence that did not make the love less tender, and love that did but add intensity to the reverence.'

In Easter term 1810, Keble obtained

double first class honours, and this success was soon afterwards followed by another still greater—his election to an Oriel Fellowship. The Oriel Common Room numbered among its Fellows, then and for some time afterwards, all that was most distinguished in Oxford for mental power and originality. Copleston, Davison, Whately, then belonged to it, and were among Keble's electors. Arnold, Newman, Pusey, were soon afterwards chosen Fellows of the same college. 'Round the fire of the Oriel Common Room,' we are told, 'there were learned and able, not rarely subtle and disputatious conversations, in which this lad of nineteen was called to take his part. Amid these he sometimes yearned for the more easy, yet not unintellectual, society of his old friends at Corpus.' He found, no doubt, that undergraduate days are more congenial to warm friendships, than the highly rarefied atmosphere of an intellectual Common Room. Where men touch chiefly by the head, they find that this is the seat as frequently of a repulsive as of an attractive

force. While he was an undergraduate, and during the early days of his fellowship, he wrote a good many beautiful little poems, which his friends still possess, and the year after his election to Oriel, he gained the University prizes for the English and Latin essay.

The interval from 1810 to 1815 he spent in Oriel, taking part in college tuition, and acting as an examiner in the Degree Schools. Was it some time during these years, or at a later date, that the incident recorded by Dr. Newman took place? 'When one day I was walking in High Street, with my dear earliest friend, with what eagerness did he cry out, "There's Keble!" and with what awe did I look at him! Then at another time I heard a Master of Arts of my college give an account, how he had just then had occasion to introduce himself on some business to Keble, and how gentle, courteous, and unaffected Keble had been, so as almost to put him out of countenance. Then, too, it was reported, truly or falsely, how a rising man of brilliant reputation, the

present Dean of St. Paul's, Dr. Milman, admired and loved him, adding, that somehow he was strangely unlike any one else.'

In 1815 he was ordained Deacon, the following year Priest; soon afterwards he left the University, and never again permanently resided there. He had chosen the calling of a clergyman, and though within that field other paths more gratifying to ambition lay open to him, he turned aside from them, and gave himself to parochial work as the regular employment of his life. He became his father's curate, and lived with him at Fairford, engaged in this duty for twenty years, more or less. This rare absence or restraint of ambition, where it might have seemed natural or even right to have gratified it, was quite in keeping with Keble's whole character. 'The Church,' says Sir J. Coleridge, 'he had deliberately chosen to be his profession, and he desired to follow out that in a country cure. With this he associated, and scarcely placed on a lower level,

the affectionate discharge of his duties as a son and brother. Calls, temporary calls of duty to his college and university, for a time and at intervals diverted him (he was again Public Examiner from 1821 to 1823); but he always kept these outlines in view, and as the occasion passed away, reverted to them with the permanent devotion of his heart. Traces of this feeling may be found again and again in *The Christian Year*.'

This book was first given to the world on the 23d of June 1827, when Keble was in his thirty-fifth year. This, the great work of his life, which will keep his name fresh in men's memory when all else that he has done will be forgotten, had been the silent gathering of years. Single poems had been in his friends' hands at least as early as 1819. They had urged him to complete the series, and by 1827 this was done. No record of the exact time when each poem was written has yet appeared. We should imagine that more of them were composed at Fairford than at Oxford. The discussion

and criticism natural to a university are not generally favourable to poetic creation of any kind, least of all to so meditative a strain as Keble's was. But it may have been that in this, as in other things, he was 'unlike any one else.' It was only at the urgent entreaty of his friends that he published the little book. He was not anxious about poetic fame, and never thought that these poems would secure it. His own plan was 'to go on improving the series all his life, and leave it to come out, if judged useful, only when he should be fairly out of the way.' Had this plan been acted on, how many thousands would have been defrauded of the soothing delight these poems have ministered to them! But even those who most strongly counselled the publication little dreamt what a destiny was in store for that little book. Of course, if the author had kept it by him he might have smoothed away some of its defects, but who knows how much it might have lost too in the process? 'No one,' we are told, 'knew



its literary shortcomings better than the author himself. Wisely, and not in pride, or through indolence, he abandoned the attempt at second-hand to amend this inharmonious line, or that imperfect rhyme, or the instances here and there in which his idea may be somewhat obscurely expressed. Wordsworth's acute poetical sense recognised such faults; yet the book was his delight.' Probably it was a wise resolve. All emendation of poetry long after its first composition runs the risk of spoiling it. The author has to take up in one mood what was originally conceived in another. His first warm feeling of the sentiment has gone cold, and he cannot at a later time revive it. This is true of all poetry, more especially of that which deals with subtle and evanescent emotions which can never perhaps recur exactly in the same form. Once only in a lifetime may he succeed in catching

'Those brief unisons, which on the brain  
One tone that never can recur has cast,  
One accent never to return again.'

In 1833 Keble was appointed Professor of Poetry at Oxford. The Statutes then required the professor to give two or three lectures a year in Latin. The ancient language was required to be spoken from this chair longer than from any other, probably from fear of the trash men might talk if fairly unmuzzled. However prudent this may have been when a merely average functionary held the chair, it is greatly to be regretted that when it was filled by a true poet, who was intent on speaking the secret of his own art, he should have been so formidably weighted. The present gifted occupant of that chair has fortunately been set free, and has vindicated the newly acquired freedom by enriching our literature with the finest poetical criticism it has received since the days of Coleridge. But Keble had to work in trammels. He was the last man to rebel against any limitations imposed by the wisdom or unwisdom of our ancestors. Faithfully he buckled himself to the task of translating into well-rounded Latin periods



his cherished thoughts on his own favourite subject. Of the theory of poetry embodied in the two volumes of his published lectures, something may yet be said. The Latin is easy and unconstrained, the thought original and suggestive. A great contrast to the more than Ciceronian paragraphs of his predecessor Copleston, bristling as they do to a marvel with epigrammatic Latinity, but underneath that, containing little that is not commonplace.

With slight interruptions, Keble continued to live with his father at Fairford, and to assist him as his curate till 1835. 'In that year this tie was broken. At the very commencement of it the venerable old man, who to the last retained the full use of his faculties, was taken to his rest; and before the end of it Keble became the Vicar of Hursley, and the husband of Miss Charlotte Clarke, second daughter of an old college friend of his father's, who was incumbent of a parish in the neighbourhood of Fairford. This was the

happy settlement of his life. For himself he had now no ungratified wish, and the bonds then tied were loosened only by death.'



## SECTION VI.

### RISE OF THE OXFORD MOVEMENT.

ONLY two years before Keble left Fairford, and at the very time when he entered on his poetry professorship, began what is called the Oxford movement. Of this, Dr. Newman tells us, Keble was the real author. Let us cast a glance back and see how it arose, and what it aimed at. With what feelings Newman, when an undergraduate, looked at Keble, we have seen. Some years afterwards, it must have been in 1819 or 1820, Newman was elected to the Oriel Fellowship which Arnold vacated. Of that time he thus writes:—‘ I had to hasten to the Tower to receive the congratulations of all the Fellows. I bore

it till Keble took my hand, and then felt so abashed, and unworthy of the honour done me, that I seemed quite desirous of sinking into the ground. His had been the first name I had heard spoken of with reverence rather than admiration when I came up to Oxford.' This was probably the first meeting of these two. 'When I was elected Fellow of Oriel,' Dr. Newman continues, 'Keble was not in residence, and he was shy of me for years, in consequence of the marks I bore upon me of the evangelical and liberal schools. Hurrell Froude brought us together about 1828. It is one of his sayings preserved in his Remains: "If I was ever asked what good deed I had ever done, I should say that I had brought Keble and Newman to understand each other."' Thus made friends, these two were to work great things together.

It naturally occurs to ask how far is *The Christian Year* identified with the principles of the Tractarian movement. On the one hand, *The Christian Year* was published in 1827, the movement did not begin till 1833.

The former, therefore, cannot be regarded as in any way a child of the latter. And this accounts for what has often been remarked, how little of the peculiar Tractarian teaching appears in these poems. On the other hand, it is easy to see how the same nature which, in a season of quiet, when controversy was at a lull, shaped out of its own musings *The Christian Year*, would, when confronted with opposing tendencies, and forced into a dogmatic attitude, find its true expression in the Tractarian theory. Keble was by nature a poet, living by intuition, not by reasoning; intuition born of, fed by, home affection, tradition, devout religion. His whole being leaned on authority. 'Keble was a man who guided himself,' says Dr. Newman, 'and formed his judgments, not by processes of reason, by inquiry or argument, but, to use the word in a broad sense, by authority.' And by authority in its broad sense he means conscience, the Bible, the Church, antiquity, words of the wise, hereditary lessons, ethical truths, historical memories. 'It seemed to me as if he felt ever happier when he could

speaking and acting under some such primary and external sanction; and could use argument mainly as a means of recommending or explaining what had claims on his reception prior to proof. What he hated instinctively was heresy, insubordination, resistance to things established, claims of independence, disloyalty, innovation, a critical or censorious spirit.' Keble then lived by authority, and hated the dispositions that oppose it. There is a temper of mind which lives by denying authority—a temper whose essence, or at least whose bad side, is to foster these very dispositions which he hated. With that tone of mind and the men possessed by it, sooner or later he must needs have come into collision. For such a collision, Oxford did not want materials.

During Keble's time of residence, and after he went down, the University had been awakening from a long torpor, and entering on a new era. 'The march of the mind,' as it was called, was led by a number of active-minded and able men, whose chief rallying-point was Oriel Common Room, whose best

representative was Whately. These men had set themselves to raise the standard of teaching and discipline in the Colleges, and in the University. They were the University Reformers of their day, and to them Oxford, when first arousing itself from long intellectual slumber, owed much. As they had a common aim, to raise the intellectual standard, they were naturally much thrown together, and became the celebrities of the place. Those who did not belong to their party thought them not free from 'pride of reason,' an expression then, as now, derided by those who think themselves intellectual, but not the less on that account covering a real meaning. It is, as it has been called, 'the moral malady' which besets those who live mainly by intellect. Men who could not in heart go along with them thought they carried liberty of thought into presumption and rationalism. They seemed to submit the things of faith too much to human judgment, and to seek to limit their religious belief by their own powers of understanding. They seemed then, as now, 'to halve the



gospel of God's grace,' accepting the morality, and, if not rejecting, yet making little of the supernatural truths out of which that morality in a large measure springs. Such at least was the judgment of their opponents. From men of this stamp, energetic but hard, upright but not very humble or reverent, a man of deeper religious seriousness, like Keble, instinctively 'shrank into himself.' 'He was young in years when he became a University celebrity, and younger in mind. He had the purity and simplicity of a child. He had few sympathies with the intellectual party, who sincerely welcomed him as a brilliant specimen of young Oxford. He instinctively shut up before literary display, and pomp, and donnishness, faults which will always beset academical notabilities. He did not respond to their advances. "Poor Keble," H. Froude used gravely to say, "he was asked to join the aristocracy of talent, but he soon found his own level." He went into the country, but he did not lose his place in the minds of men because he was out of sight.' It could not be that Keble



and these men could really be in harmony, —they, ‘sons of Aufklärung,’ men of mere understanding, bringing all things to the one touchstone of logic and common-sense, and content with this; he, a child of faith, with more than half his nature in the unseen, and looking at things visible mainly as they shadow forth and reveal the invisible. They represented two opposite sides of human nature, sides in all but some rare instances antagonistic, and never seemingly more antagonistic than now. Dr. Arnold, indeed, though belonging in the main to the school of liberalism, combined with it more religious warmth than was common in his own party. It is this union of qualities generally thought incompatible, which perhaps was the main secret of his great influence. But the combination, which was almost unique in himself, he can hardly be said, by his example, to have rendered more easy for his followers in the present day.

The Catholic Emancipation was a trying and perplexing time for Keble. With the opponents of the measure in Oxford, the old

Tory part of Church and State, he had no sympathy. He saw that they had no principle of growth in them, that their only aim was to keep things as they were. His sympathy for the old Catholic religion, that feeling which had made him say in *The Christian Year*,

‘Speak gently of our sister’s fall,’

would naturally make him wish to see Catholic disabilities removed. But then he disliked both the men by whom, and the arguments by which, Emancipation was supported. He would rather have not seen the thing done at all, than done by the hands of Whiggery. A few years more brought on the crisis, the inevitable collision. The Earl Grey Administration, flushed with their great Reform victory, went on to lay hands on the English Church, that Church which for centuries had withstood the Whigs. They made their attack on the weakest point, the Irish Church, and suppressed three of its bishoprics. This might seem to be but a small matter in itself, but it was

an indication of more behind. Lord Grey had told the Bishops to set their house in order, and his party generally spoke of the Church as the mere creature of the State, which they might do with as they pleased. The Church must be liberalized, those last fangs must be pulled which had so often proved troublesome to Whiggery. This was too much for Keble. It touched him to the quick, and made him feel that now the time was come when he must speak and act. By nature he was no politician nor controversialist. He disliked the strife of tongues. But he was a man; he had deep religious convictions; and to change what was ancient and catholic in the Church was to touch the apple of his eye. When he looked to the old Tory party he saw no help in them. To the aggressive spirit they had nothing to oppose but outworn Church and State theories. The Bishops, too, were helpless, and spoke slightingly of apostolical succession and the nonjurors. Was the Establishment principle, then, the only rock on which the Church was built? Keble and

his young friends thought scorn of that. This feeling first found utterance in the assize sermon which Keble preached from the University pulpit, on Sunday the 14th of July 1833, and afterwards published under the title of 'National Apostasy.' 'I have ever considered and kept the day,' says Dr. Newman, 'as the start of the religious movement of 1833.' That sermon itself we have not seen, but the tone of it may be gathered from those lines in the *Lyra Apostolica*, where Keble speaks of

'The ruffian band,  
Come to reform where ne'er they came to pray.'

That was a trumpet-note which rallied to the standard of the Church whatever of ardour and devotion young Oxford then contained. These virtues had never been greatly countenanced in the Church of England. To staid respectability it has always been, and still is, one of the chief recommendations of that Church, that it is an embodied protest against what one of its own Bishops is said to have denounced as 'that most dangerous of all errors—enthusiasm.'

In the last century she had cast out enthusiasm in the person of Wesley ; at the beginning of this, she had barely tolerated it in the Newtons and Cecils, and other fathers of evangelicism. But here was a fresh attempt to reintroduce it in a new form. The young men who were roused by Keble's note of warning—able, zealous, resolute—flung aside with disdain timid arguments from expediency. They longed to do battle with that most prosaic of all political theories, Whiggery, and to smite to the ground the spirit of compromise which had so long paralysed the Church of England. They set themselves to defend the Church with weapons of ethereal temper, and they found them, as they believed, in reviving her claims to a heavenly origin and a divine prerogative. That these claims sounded strange to the ears even of Churchmen at that time was to these men no stumbling-block—rather an incentive to more fearless action. True, such a course shut them out from preferment, hitherto the one recognised aim of the abler English Churchmen. But

these younger men were content to do without preferment. They had at least got beyond that kind of worldliness. If self still clung to them in any shape, it was in that enlarged and nobler form, in which it is one with the glory of the Church Catholic in all ages. The views and aims of the new party soon took shape, in the 'Tracts for the Times.' If Keble was the starter of the movement, John Henry Newman soon became its leader. In all his conduct of it, one of his great aims was to give to the sentiments and views which had originated with Keble a consistent logical basis. The sequel all men know. The inner working of the movement may be read in *The Apologia*.





## SECTION VII.

### KEBLE AFTER NEWMAN'S DEPARTURE.

AS for Keble during the eventful years that followed, though his place was still in his country cure, his sympathies and co-operation were with Newman and other friends in Oxford. He contributed some of the more important Tracts; poems of his embodying the sentiments of the party appeared from time to time, and were republished in the *Lyra Apostolica*. In 1841, when the famous No. 90 was published, to the scandal of the whole religious world, Keble was one of the few who stood by Newman. What then must his feelings have been when that younger friend, by whom he had so stood, with whom he had so often

taken counsel, abandoned the Church of England, and sought refuge in that of Rome? As late as 1863, a friend of his, when walking with him near Hursley, drew his attention to a broken piece of ground—a chalk-pit as it turned out—hard by. “Ah!” he said, “that is a sad place, connected with the most painful event of my life.” I began to fear that it had been the scene of some terrible accident which I had unwittingly recalled to his mind. “It was there,” he went on, “that I first knew for certain that J. H. N. had left us. We had made up our mind that such an event was all but inevitable; and one day I received a letter in his handwriting. I felt sure of what it contained, and I carried it about with me through the day, afraid to open it. At last I got away to that chalk-pit, and there forcing myself to read the letter, I found that my forebodings had been too true; it was the announcement that he was gone.”’

It seems natural to ask how it came that, when Newman left, Keble adhered to the Church of England. They were at one in



their fundamental principles. What, then, determined them to go different ways? Of many reasons that occur this one may be given. The two friends, though agreeing in their principles, differed widely in mental structure and in natural temperament. They differed scarcely less in training and circumstances. Keble, as we have seen, cared little for reasoning, and rested mainly on feeling and intuition. Newman, on the other hand, though fully alive to these, added an unrelenting intellectual instinct which could not be satisfied without a defined logical foundation for what it instinctively held. Not that Keble was without a theory. Taking from Butler the principle that probability is the guide of life, he applied it to theological truth. Butler, by a very questionable process, had employed the maxim of worldly prudence, that probability is the guide of life, as an argument for religion, but mainly in the natural sphere. Keble tried to carry it on into the sphere of revealed truth. The arguments which support religious doctrine, he said, may be only probable arguments

judged intellectually; but faith and love, being directed towards their Divine Object, and living in the contemplation of that Object, convert these probable arguments into certainties. In fact, the inward assurance, which devout faith has of the reality of its Object, makes doctrines practically certain, which may not be intellectually demonstrable. Newman tells us that he accepted this view so far, but, not being fully satisfied with it, tried, in his University sermons and other works, to supplement it with considerations of his own. In time, however, he felt it give way in his hands, and either abandoned it, or allowed it to carry him elsewhere.

But besides difference of mental structure, there were other causes which perhaps determined the divergent courses of the two friends. In the case of Keble, whatever is most sacred and endearing in the English Church had surrounded his infancy and boyhood, and gone with him into full manhood. With him loyalty to Home was hardly less sacred than loyalty to the Faith. These two

influences were so intertwined in the inner fibres of his nature that it would have been to him very death to separate them. Of Dr. Newman's early associations we know no more than the little he has himself disclosed. It would appear, however, that the Anglican Church never had so invincible a hold on him as it had on Keble. By few perhaps has it been seen in so winning an aspect as it wore in the quiet of that Gloucestershire parsonage.

When, in 1835, Keble left the home of his childhood for the vicarage of Hursley, he found a church there not at all to his mind. It seems to have been a plain, not beautiful, building of flint and rubble. He determined to have a new one built—new all but the tower—and in this he employed the profits of the many editions of *The Christian Year*; and when the building was finished, his friends, in token of their regard for him, filled all the windows with stained glass. 'Here daily for the residue of his life, until interrupted by the failing health of Mrs. Keble and his own, did he minister. . . . He

had not, in the popular sense, great gifts of delivery ; his voice was not powerful, nor was his ear perfect for harmony of sound ; but I think it was difficult not to be impressed deeply both by his reading and his preaching ; when he read, you saw that he felt, and he made you feel, that he was the servant of God, delivering His words ; or leading you, as one of like infirmities and sins with your own, in your prayer. When he preached it was with an affectionate simplicity and hearty earnestness which were very moving ; and the sermons themselves were at all times full of that abundant scriptural knowledge which was the most remarkable quality in him as a divine : it has always seemed to me among the most striking characteristics of *The Christian Year*. It is well known what his belief and feelings were in regard to the Sacraments. I remember on one occasion when I was present at a christening as godfather, how much he affected me, when a consciousness of his sense of the grace conferred became present to me. As he kept the newly-baptized infant for

some moments in his arms, he gazed on it intently and lovingly with a tear in his eye, and apparently absorbed in the thought of the child of wrath become the child of grace. Here his natural affections gave clearness and intensity to his belief; the fondest mother never loved children more dearly than this childless man.'

When Newman was gone, on Keble, along with Dr. Pusey, was thrown the chief burden of the toil and responsibility arising out of his position in the church. Naturally there was great searching of hearts amongst all the followers of the Oxford theology. Keble had to give himself to counsel the perplexed, to strengthen the wavering, and, as far as might be, to heal the breaches that had been made. Throughout the ecclesiastical contests of the last twenty years, though never loud or obtrusive, he yet took a resolute part in maintaining the principles with which his life had been identified. One last extract from Sir J. Coleridge's beautiful sketch of his friend will give all that need here be said of this portion of Keble's

life :—‘Circumstances had now placed him in a position which he would never have desired for himself, but from which a sense of duty compelled him not to shrink. Questions one after another arose touching the faith or the discipline of the Church, and affecting, as he believed, the morals and religion of the people. I need not specify the decisions of Courts or the proceedings in Parliament to which I allude; those whose consciences were disturbed, but who shrunk from public discussion, and those who stirred themselves in canvassing their propriety, or in counteracting their consequences, equally turned to him as a comforter and adviser in private and in public, and he could not turn a deaf ear to such applications. It is difficult to say with what affectionate zeal and industry he devoted himself to such cares, how much, and at length it is to be feared how injuriously to his health, he spent his time and strength in the labour these brought on him. Many of these involved, of course, questions of law, and it was not seldom that he applied to me



—and thus I can testify with what care and learning and acuteness he wrote upon them. Many of his fugitive pieces were thus occasioned; and should these be, as they ought to be, collected, they will be found to possess even more than temporary interest. I had occasion, but lately, to refer to his tract on “Marriage with the Wife’s Sister,” and I can only hope that the question will soon be argued in Parliament with the soundness and clearness which are there employed. But even all this does not represent the calls made on his time by private correspondence, by personal visits, or, where it was necessary, by frequent, sometimes by long journeys, taken for the support of religion. I need hardly say that his manner of doing all this concurred in raising up for him that immense personal influence which he possessed; people found in their best adviser the most unassuming, unwearied, affectionate friend, and they loved as well as venerated him.’

The appearance of Dr. Newman’s *Apologia* in 1864 was to Keble a great joy. Not that he had ever ceased to love Dr. Newman with



his old affection, but the separation of now nearly twenty years, and the cause of it, had been to Keble the sorest trial of his life. If the book contained some things regarding the Church of England which must have pained Keble, there was much more in it to gladden him; not only the entire human-heartedness of its tone, which made its way to the hearts even of strangers, but the deep and tender affection which it breathes to Dr. Newman's early friends, and the proof it gave that Rome had made no change either in his heart or head which could hinder their real sympathy. The result was that in September 1865 these three, Dr. Newman, Dr. Pusey, and Mr. Keble, met under the roof of Hursley vicarage, and after an interval of twenty years looked on each others' altered faces. It happened, however, that at the very time of this meeting Mrs. Keble had an alarming attack of illness. Keble writes: — 'He (Dr. Pusey) and J. H. N. met here the very day after my wife's attack. Pusey indeed was present when the attack began. Trying as it all was, I was very glad to

have them here, and to sit by them and listen.'

Soon after this, in October, Mr. and Mrs. Keble left Hursley for Bournemouth, not to return. Since the close of 1864 symptoms of declining health had shown themselves in him also. The long strain of the duties that accumulated on him in his later years, with the additional anxiety caused by Mrs. Keble's precarious health, had been gradually wearing him. After only a few days' illness he was taken to his rest on the day before last Good Friday. In a few weeks Mrs. Keble followed, and now they are laid side by side in Hursley churchyard.

The picture of this saintly life will of course in time be given to the world. It is much to be hoped that the task will be intrusted to some one able to do justice to it. There are two kinds of biographies, and of each kind we have seen examples in our own time. One is as a golden chalice, held up by some wise hand, to gather the earthly memory ere it is spilt on the ground. The other kind is as a millstone,

hung by partial, yet ill-judging friend, round the hero's neck to plunge him as deep as possible in oblivion. In looking back on the eminent men of last generation, we have seen one or two lives of the former stamp, many more of the latter. Let us indulge the hope that he who writes of Keble will take for his model the one or two nearly faultless biographies we possess, and above all that he will condense his work within such limits as will commend it not only to partial friends, but also to all thoughtful readers.

By his character and influence Keble did more than perhaps any other man to bring about the most wide-spread quickening of religious life which has taken place within the English Church since the Reformation. To him, and the party to which his very name was a tower of strength, England owes two great services. First, they, and they pre-eminently, have turned, and are still turning, a resolute front against the rationalizing spirit, which would pare down revelation to the measure of the human

understanding—cut away its foundation in the supernatural, and virtually reduce it to a moral system encased perhaps in a few historic facts. Secondly, they have introduced into the English Church a higher order of character, and taught it, we might almost say, new virtues. They have diffused widely through the clergy the contagion of their own zeal and resoluteness, their self-devotion and Christian chivalry. These are high services to have rendered to any country in any age. But with these acknowledgments two regrets must mingle: one, that with their defence of the faith they should have mixed up positions which are untenable, identifying with the simple faith doctrines which are no part of it, but rather alien accretions gathered by the Church in its progress down the ages. The result of this intermingling with Christianity things that seem superstitious, has been to drive many back into dislike and denial of that which is truly supernatural. The other cause of regret is, that they should have impaired the practical

power of their example by the exclusive and unsympathetic side they have turned towards their fellow-Christians in other Reformed communions. This exclusiveness kept back from the Oxford theologians the sympathies of many, who, but for this, would have been strongly drawn to them by their unworldliness, fervour, and self-devotion. Both errors have one source, the confounding the Church with the clergy, or rather, perhaps I should say, the attempt to place the essence of the Church in a priestly organization. But though these things must be said, it is not as of a partisan that one would most think of Keble. The circumstances of his time forced him to take a side, but his nature was too pure and holy to find fit expression in polemics; and the memory of his rare and saintly character will long survive in the hearts of his countrymen the party strifes in which it was his lot to mingle.



SECTION VIII.

*LYRA INNOCENTIUM.*

OF his two prose books, his edition of Hooker's works, which has, we believe, superseded every other, and his Life of the good Bishop Wilson of Sodor and Man, the author of the *Sacra Privata*, this is not the place to speak. But before turning to *The Christian Year*, one word must be said about his later book of poetry, the *Lyra Innocentium*. It appeared in 1846, at an interval of nearly twenty years after *The Christian Year*. This collection of poems he speaks of in May 1845, as 'a set of things which have been accumulating on me for the last three or four years. It has been a great comfort to me in the desolating anxiety of the last two years, and I wish I



could settle at once on some other such work.' Children, as we have seen, had always been peculiarly dear to this childless man, and he had at first wished to have made these poems a Christian Year for teachers and nurses, and others much employed about children. In time it took a different shape, but it is perhaps to be regretted that he had not made it what he at first intended. Children, their thoughts and ways, and the feelings they awaken in their elders, are themes of quite exhaustless interest. And yet how seldom has any poet of adequate tenderness and depth approached that mysterious world of childhood! Wordsworth, indeed, has felt it deeply, and expressed it in some of his most exquisite poems :—

‘ O dearest, dearest boy, my heart  
For better lore would seldom yearn,  
Could I but teach the hundredth part  
Of what from thee I learn.’

This verse from Wordsworth is indeed the motto chosen by Keble for his *Lyra Innocentium*.



Of the poems on children which the *Lyra* contains, we are free to confess that they approach their subject too exclusively from the Church side for general interest. 'Looking Westward,' 'The Bird's Nest,' 'Bereavement,' 'The Manna Gatherers,' are fine lyrics, equal perhaps to most in *The Christian Year*. But there is no thought in the *Lyra Innocentium* about childhood that comes near that earlier strain in which the poet, as he looks on children ranged to receive their first lessons in religion, bursts forth—

'Oh! say not, dream not, heavenly notes  
To childish ears are vain,  
That the young mind at random floats,  
And cannot reach the strain.

'Dim or unheard, the words may fall,  
And yet the heaven-taught mind  
May learn the sacred air, and all  
The harmony unwind.

'Was not our Lord a little child,  
Taught by degrees to pray,  
By father dear and mother mild  
Instructed day by day?'

Then, after an interval, he goes on—

‘ Each little voice in turn  
Some glorious truth proclaims,  
What sages would have died to learn,  
Now taught by cottage dames.

‘ And if some tones be false or low,  
What are all prayers beneath  
But cries of babes, that cannot know  
Half the deep thought they breathe?’

Whatever the reason may be, certainly the later book does not strike home to the universal heart as *The Christian Year* did, and it never has attained anything like the same popularity.

The reference to ecclesiastical usages, not known to the many, and the more pronounced High Church feeling which it embodies, will partly account for this. It is certainly much more restricted and less catholic in its range. Partly also it may be that the fountain of inspiration does not flow so fully as in earlier years. It may not have been that time had chilled it: but other duties and cares had come thick upon him since his poetic springtime. Especially the

polemical stir in which his share in the Oxford movement had involved him, and the anxiety in the midst of which the *Lyra Innocentium* was composed, must have left little of that leisure either of time or heart which is necessary for a free-flowing minstrelsy.

It may help to the fuller understanding of *The Christian Year*, if we turn for a moment to Keble's theory of poetry. He has set it forth at large in his *Prælections on Poetry*, more shortly in his review of the *Life of Scott*, which, once famous in Oxford, is almost unknown to the present generation. That review, which first appeared in the *British Critic*, is well worthy of being republished, both as an exposition of Keble's character, and of his views on poetry, and also as a study of Scott by a reverential admirer, in many things very unlike himself. The theory is that poetry is the natural relief of minds overpowered by some engrossing idea, or strong emotion, or ruling taste, or imaginative regret, which from some cause or other they are kept from directly indulging. Rhythm and metrical form serve to regulate

and restrain, while they express those strong or deep emotions, 'which need relief, but cannot endure publicity.' They are at once a 'vent for eager feelings and a veil to draw over them. For the utterance of high or tender feeling controlled and modified by a certain reserve is the very soul of poetry.'

On this principle Keble founds what he regards as an essential distinction between primary and secondary poets. Primary poets are they who are driven by some overmastering enthusiasm, by passionate devotion to some range of objects, or line of thought, or aspect of life or nature, to utter their feelings in song. They sing, as it were, because they cannot help it. There is a melody within them which will out, a fire in their blood which cannot be suppressed. This is the true poetic *μανία* of which Plato speaks. Secondary poets are not urged to poetry by any such overflowing sentiment; but learning, admiration of great masters, choice, and a certain literary turn, have made them poetic artists. They were not born, but being possessed of *εὐφροσύνη*, have made them-

selves, poets. Of the former kind are Homer, Lucretius, Shakspeare, Burns, Scott; of the latter, Euripides, Dryden, Milton. This view, if it be somewhat too narrow a basis on which to found a comprehensive theory of poetry, certainly does lay hold of one side of the truth generally overlooked. In our own day, how many are there! possessed of a large measure of artistic faculty, able to treat poetically anything they take up, wanting only in one thing,—a subject which absorbs their interest. There is nothing in human life, or history, or nature, which they have made peculiarly their own, nothing about which they feel more deeply, or which they know more intimately, than the host of educated men. And so, though with a ‘skill in composition and felicity of language’ greater than many poets possess, they are still felt to be literary men rather than poets, because they have no genuine impulse, no divine enthusiasm, driving them to seek relief in poetry.



## SECTION IX.

### *THE CHRISTIAN YEAR:* FOUR CHARACTERISTICS OF IT.

IF we apply to himself the author's own canon, *The Christian Year* would place him in the rank of primary poets. Not that it displays anything like the highest artistic faculty, but because it evidently flows from a native spring of inspiration. As far as it goes, it is genuine poetry. The author sings in a strain of his own of the things he has known, and felt, and loved. Beneath all the layers that early education and Oxford training have superimposed, there is felt to be a glow of internal heat not derived from these.

The characteristic qualities of the book seem to be—*First*, a tone of religious feeling, fresh, deep, and tender, beyond what was



common even among religious men in the author's day, perhaps in any day ; *secondly*, great intensity and tenderness of home affection ; *thirdly*, a shy and delicate reserve, which loved quiet paths and shunned publicity ; *fourthly*, a pure love of nature, and a spiritual eye to read nature's symbolism.

‘ He sang of love, with quiet blending,  
Slow to begin, and never-ending,  
Of serious faith, and inward glee.’

To English Church people without number *The Christian Year* has long been not only a cherished classic, but a sacred book, which they place beside their Bible and their Prayer-Book. On the other hand, a generation of literary young men has grown up, who, having had their tastes formed on a newer, more highly-spiced style of poetry, scarcely know *The Christian Year*, and, if they knew it, would turn away from what seemed to them its meagre literary merit. It would be impossible to say anything regarding it which would not seem faint praise to the one class, and exaggeration to the other. But without trying to meet the views of either, it is



worth while to study the poem for ourselves.

It cannot be too clearly kept in view that Keble is not a hymn-writer, and that *The Christian Year* is not a collection of hymns. Those who have come to it expecting to find genuine hymns, will turn away in disappointment. They will seek in vain for anything of the directness, the fervour, the strong simplicity which has delighted them in Charles Wesley. But to ask this is to mistake the nature and form of Keble's poems. There is all the difference between them and Charles Wesley's, that there is between meditation on the one hand, and prayer, or thanksgiving, or praise on the other. Indeed, so little did Keble's genius fit him for hymn-writing, that in his two poems which are intended to be hymns—those for the morning and the evening—the opening in either case is a description of natural facts, wholly unsuited for hymn purposes. And so when these two poems are adopted into hymn collections, as they often are, a mere selection of certain stanzas from each is all that has been found possible.

Besides these two, there is no other poem in the book, any large part of which can be used as a hymn. For they are all lyrical religious meditations, not hymns at all. Yet true though this is, every here and there, out of the midst of the reflections, there does flash a verse of fervid emotion and direct heart-appeal to God, which is quite hymnal in character. These occasional bursts are among the highest beauties of *The Christian Year*. Yet they are not so frequent or so long-sustained as to change the prevailing meditative cast of the whole book. It is owing perhaps to this prevalence of meditation, and that often of a refined and subtle kind, that *The Christian Year* is not, as we have often heard said, so well adapted as some simpler, less poetical collections, to be read by the sick-bed to the faint and weak. Unless long familiarity has made it easy, it requires more thought and mental elasticity to follow it, than the sick for the most part can supply. Yet it contains single verses, many, though not whole poems, which will come home full of consolation to any, even the weakest spirit.

On the whole, however, it is not with Charles Wesley, or any of the hymn-writers of this or the past century, nor even with Cowper in his hymns or his larger poems, that Keble should be compared. In outward form, and not a little in inward spirit, the religious poets to whom he bears the strongest likeness, are Henry Vaughan and George Herbert, both of the seventeenth century. A comparison with these would be interesting, were this the place for it, but at present I must confine myself to the consideration of the special characteristics of *The Christian Year*. These seem to be the following:—



## SECTION X.

### (1.) ITS PECULIAR TONE OF RELIGIOUS FEELING.

IT embodies deep and tender religious sentiment in a form which is old, and yet new. Our best critic has lately told us that 'the inevitable business for the modern poet, as it was for the Greek poet in the days of Pericles, is to interpret human life afresh, and find a new spiritual basis for it.' Keble did not think so. He was content with the interpretation which Christianity has put on human life, and wished only to read man and nature, as far as might be, in this light. Goethe, we suppose, is the great modern instance of a poet who has tried 'to give a moral interpretation of man and the world from an independent point of view.' Of course it would be simply ridiculous for a

moment to place the poetic powers of Keble in comparison with such an one as Goethe. But, disparate as their powers are, Keble with his limited faculty, just by virtue of his having accepted the Christian interpretation, while the other rejected it, has spoken, we venture to think, more words that satisfy man's deepest yearnings, that sink into those simple places of the heart which lie beneath all culture, than Goethe with all his world-wide breadth has done. The religion which Keble laid to heart, and lived by, would not seem to have come to him through prolonged spiritual conflicts, as did that of the great Puritans; neither had he reached it by laborious critical processes, as modern philosophers would have us do. He had learnt it first at his mother's knee. Then it was systematized and confirmed by the daily teaching of the Church he so devoutly loved. Time brought to it expansions from various quarters, but no break. The powerful influences of his university, direct and indirect, chivalry reawakening in Scott's poetry, meditative depth in Wordsworth,

these all melted naturally into his primal faith, and combined with the general tendencies of the time to carry him in spirit back into those older ages where his imagination found ampler range, his devotion severer, more self-denying virtues than modern life engenders. Out of that great past he brought some of the sterner stuff of which the martyrs were made, and introduced it like iron into the blood of modern religious feeling. A poet who received all these influences into himself and vitalized them, could not but make the old new. For not till the authoritative had been inwardly transfused into the moral and spiritual did it for the most part find vent in his poetry. There are exceptions to this which form what we regard as among the shortcomings of *The Christian Year*. But in all its finer, more vital poems the catholic faith has become personal, rests frankly on intuition and experience, as frankly as the vaguer more impersonal meditations of greater poets.



‘The eye in smiles may wander round,  
 Caught by earth’s shadows as they fleet,  
 But for the soul no home is found,  
 Save Him who made it, meet.’

Or again the well-known—

‘Abide with me from morn till eve,  
 For without Thee I cannot live :  
 Abide with me when night is nigh,  
 For without Thee I dare not die.’

Or again—

‘—— who loves the Lord aright,  
 No soul of man can worthless find ;  
 All will be precious in his sight,  
 Since Christ on all hath shined.’

It is the many words, simple yet deep, devoutly Christian yet intensely human, like these, scattered throughout its pages, that have endeared *The Christian Year* to countless hearts within the English Church, and to many a heart beyond it. The new elements in the book are perhaps these—first, it translates religious sentiment out of the ancient and exclusively Hebrew dialect into the language of modern feeling. Hitherto English devotional poets, with the exception perhaps of Cowper, in some passages,



had adhered rigorously to the scriptural imagery and phraseology. This, besides immensely limiting their range, made their words often fall wide of modern experience. Keble took the thoughts and sentiments of which men at the present day are conscious, expressed them in fitting modern words, and transfused into them the Christian spirit. Secondly, there is visible in him, first perhaps of his contemporaries,—that which seems the best characteristic of modern religion,—combined with devout reverence for the person of our Lord, a closer, more personal love to Him as to a living friend. There were no doubt rare exceptions here and there, but, generally speaking, religious men before spoke of our Lord in a more distant way, as one holding the central place rather in a dogmatic system than in the devout affections. The best men of our own time have gone beyond this. The Lord of the Gospels, in his Divine Humanity, has come closer to their hearts, and made Himself known in a more intimate and endearing way. In none perhaps was this change of feeling earlier

seen, or more strongly marked, than in Keble. Thirdly, there is the close and abundant knowledge of Scripture, with a fine and delicate feeling for the beauty of its language. Without confining himself to the imagery or language of the Bible, he everywhere shows his intimacy with it, and interweaves its words very naturally and gracefully with his own.

These are some of the more catholic notes of the book which have won for it a place in the affections of Christians of every communion. This depth of catholic religious sentiment, it is, no doubt, which is its chief and most valuable characteristic. From this some may be ready to draw an argument for Christian morality disjoined from Christian doctrine, or for some all-embracing religion which would comprehend whatever the various Churches agree in, discarding all in which they differ. What that residuum exactly is no one has yet stated. But before drawing such an argument from *The Christian Year*, it may be as well to ask whether that book would have been so charged with

devout Christian sentiment if its author had not held with all his heart those doctrinal truths which in his case gave birth to that sentiment, but which many now wish to get rid of? If we love the consummate flower, it might be as well not to begin by cutting away the root.

There is, however, another side on which *The Christian Year* is less catholic in its character. This, which may be called its ecclesiastical side, is inherent in the very form of the book. A poem for each Sunday in the year would be welcome to very many, but then what is to determine the subject of each Sunday's poem? A chance verse or phrase in the Gospel for the day, as this is given in the Prayer-Book, is hardly a catholic or universal ground for fixing the subject. Again, Christmas, Good Friday, Easter Day, Whitsunday, have of course a catholic meaning, because these days, though not observed by all Churches, are yet memorials of the sacred facts by which all Christians live. But the lesser Saints' Days, Circumcision, Purification, as well as the

occasional services, have a local and temporary, not a universal import. Accordingly, a perusal of the poems suggests what the preface to them confirms, that they did not all flow off from a free spontaneous inspiration awakened by the thought natural to each day, but that a good number were either poems previously composed and afterwards adapted to some particular Sunday, or written as it were to order after the thought of rounding *The Christian Year* had arisen. So clear does this seem that it would not be hard to go through the several poems and lay finger here on the spontaneous effusions, there on those of more laboured manufacture. The former flow from the first verse to the last lucid in thought, simple and almost faultless in diction; no break in the sense, no obscurity; seldom any harshness or poverty in the diction. The others are imperfect in rhythm and language, defaced by the conventionalities of poetic diction, frequently obscure or artificial, the thread of thought broken or hard to catch. The one set are like mountain streams, that run down the

hill-side in sunshine clear and bright from end to end, the other are like streams that find their way through difficult places, often hidden underground or buried in heaps of stones. Yet even the most defective of them come forth to light in some single verse of profound thought or tender feeling, so well expressed as to make the reader willingly forgive for that one gleam the imperfection of the rest.



## SECTION XI.

### (2.) HOME-FEELING.

THE next quality I would notice is the deep tone of home affection which runs through these poems. This, perhaps as much as anything, has endeared them to his home-loving countrymen. Such is that feeling for an ancient home breathed in

‘Since all that is not Heaven must fade,  
Light be the hand of Ruin laid  
Upon the home I love :  
With lulling spell let soft Decay  
Steal on, and spare the giant sway,  
The crash of tower and grove.

‘Far opening down some woodland deep  
In their own quiet glade should sleep  
The relics dear to thought,  
And wild-flower wreaths from side to side  
Their waving tracery hang, to hide  
What ruthless Time has wrought.’

Again, the hymn for St. Andrew's Day is so well known and loved as hardly to need quoting. Every line of it is instinct with simple pure affection, yet never, one might think, so deeply felt or so well expressed as here—

'When brothers part for manhood's race,  
 What gift may most endearing prove  
 To keep fond memory in her place,  
 And certify a brother's love ?

'No fading frail memorial give  
 To soothe his soul when thou art gone,  
 But wreaths of hope for aye to live,  
 And thoughts of good together done.'

Besides the more obvious allusions to the household charities, there are many delicate, more reserved touches on the same chord. Such is the—

'I cannot paint to Memory's eye  
 The scene, the glance, I dearest love—  
 Unchanged themselves, in me they die,  
 Or faint, or false, their shadows prove.

'Meanwhile, if over sea or sky  
 Some tender lights unnoticed fleet,  
 Or on loved features dawn and die,  
 Unread, to us, their lesson sweet ;

'Yet are there saddening sights around,  
 Which Heaven, in mercy, spares us too.'



But there is no need to go on with quotations. Many more such passages will occur to every reader. High education and refined thought in him had not weakened, but only made natural affection more pure and intense. Yet in all the tenderness there is no trace of effeminacy. True, the woman's heart everywhere shows itself. But as it has been said that in the countenance of most men of genius there is something of a womanly expression not seen in the faces of other men; so it is distinctive of true poetic temper that it ever carries the woman's heart within the man's. And certainly of no poet's heart does this hold more truly than of Keble's. They, however, must be but blind critics, insensible to the finer pathos of human life, who have on this account called Keble's poetry 'effeminate.' The woman's heart in him is blended with the martyr's courage. Hardly any modern poetry breathes so firm self-control, so fixed yet calm resolve, so stern self-denial. If these be qualities that can consist with effeminacy, then Keble's poetry may be allowed to

pass for effeminate. But those who brought this charge against it, misled, it may be, by the loud bluster that passes with many for manliness, seem not to be aware that the bravest and most trustworthy manhood is also the gentlest and most tender-hearted; that, according to the saying, 'A man is never so much a man as when he becomes most in heart a child.'



## SECTION XII.

### (3.) RESERVE.

THIS naturally leads on to the notice of another characteristic of this poetry—the fine reserve, which does not publish aloud, but only delicately hints its deeper feelings. It was an intrinsic part of Keble's nature to shrink from obtruding himself, to dislike display,

‘ To love the sober shade  
More than the laughing light.’

And one object he had in publishing *The Christian Year* was the hope that it might supply a sober standard of devotional feeling, in unison with that presented by the Prayer-Book. The time, he thought, was one of unbounded curiosity and morbid craving for excitement, symptoms which have

not abated during the forty years since Keble so spoke. He wished, as far as might be, to supply some antidote to these tendencies. Again modern thought has, as all know, turned in upon itself, and discovered a whole internal world of reflections and sensibilities hardly expressed in the older literature. Keble so far shared this tendency with his contemporaries. But he set himself not to feed and pamper it, but to direct, to sober, and to brace it, by bringing it into the presence of realities higher than itself.

This feeling of delicate reserve, sobered and strengthened by Christian thought, comes out in many of the poems, in none perhaps more than in the one which contains these stanzas :—

‘ E’en human Love will shrink from sight  
Here in the coarse rude earth :  
How then should rash intruding glance  
Break in upon *her* sacred trance  
Who boasts a heavenly birth ?

‘ So still and secret is her growth,  
Ever the truest heart,  
Where deepest strikes her kindly root  
For hope or joy, for flower or fruit,  
Least knows its happy part.

## John Keble.

‘ God only, and good angels, look  
    Behind the blissful screen—  
As when, triumphant o’er His woes,  
The Son of God by moonlight rose,  
    By all but Heaven unseen.’

We would not pause on verbal criticisms,—only the last line of the second stanza here is one of many instances in which the beauty of the finest thoughts is marred by the admission of some hackneyed conventional phrase. Otherwise, these stanzas, as well as the whole poem in which they occur, are in Keble’s finest and most native vein. In keeping with the feeling breathed by these lines is another which should be noted. As he keeps his own deepest feelings under a close veil of reserve, so he loves best the virtues and the characters which are least obtrusive, and generally get least praise. Things which the world least recognises, for these he reserves his heart’s best sympathy. For the loud, the successful, the caressed, he has no word, but perhaps one of admonition. It is the poor, the bowed down, the lonely, the forsaken, who draw out his thoughts of tenderest consolation. And

what makes this the nobler in Keble is, that it does not seem to come from the principle of *haud ignarus mali*, but rather from pure strength of Christian sympathy. The traits of character for which he has the keenest eye, the virtues on which he dwells most lovingly, are those which men in general take least note of. The nameless children of the family of God kindle in him a deep enthusiasm, such as most poets have reserved for the earth's great heroes. Thus, in one of his finest passages, after contrasting those Christians who live in the 'green earth' and under the 'open sky' of the country, with those whose lot is cast in the streets and stifling alleys of the crowded city, he bursts forth—

‘ But Love ’s a flower that will not die  
For lack of leafy screen,  
And Christian Hope can cheer the eye  
That ne'er saw vernal green ;  
Then be ye sure that Love can bless  
E'en in this crowded loneliness,  
Where ever-moving myriads seem to say,  
Go—thou art nought to us, nor we to thee—away  
‘ There are in this loud stunning tide  
Of human care and crime ;

## John Keble.

With whom the melodies abide  
 Of th' everlasting chime ;  
 Who carry music in their heart  
 Through dusky lane and wrangling mart,  
 Plying their daily task with busier feet,  
 Because their secret souls a holy strain repeat.'

And as is the inward tone of feeling, so is its outward expression, chastened and subdued. There is no gorgeousness of colouring, no stunning sound, no highly spiced phrase or metaphor. From what have been the chief attractions of much poetry popular since his day,—scarlet hues and blare of trumpets, staring metaphors and metaphysical enigmas, he turned instinctively. He seemed to say to these,

'Farewell : for one short life we part :  
 I rather woo the soothing art,  
 Which only souls in sufferings tried  
 Bear to their suffering brethren's side.'

Those who have called other parts of Keble effeminate, might perhaps call this ascetic. If it is so, it is an asceticism in harmony with true Christianity, and with the sober wisdom that comes from life's experience.





### SECTION XIII.

#### (4.) DESCRIPTIONS OF NATURE.

MUCH has been said of Keble's eye for nature. His admirers perhaps exaggerate it, his depreciators as much underrate it. He certainly shared largely in that feeling about the visible world, so identified with Wordsworth that it is now called Wordsworthian,—that feeling which more than any other marks the direction in which modern imagination has enlarged and deepened. The appearances of nature furnish Keble with the framework in which most of his lyrics are set, the mould in which they are cast. Some whole poems, as the one beginning

‘ Lessons sweet of spring returning,’

are little more than descriptions of some scene in nature. Many more take some natural appearance and make it the symbol of a spiritual truth. Two small rills, born apart and afterwards blending in one large stream, are likened to two separate prayers uniting to bring about some great result. The autumn clouds, mantling round the sun for love, suggest that love is life's only sign. The robin singing unweariedly in the bleak November wind, suggests a lesson of content—

‘ Rather in all to be resigned than blest.’

These and many more are the natural appearances, which, some by resemblance, some by contrast, furnish him with key-notes of his religious meditations. In many you feel at once that the poet has struck a true note, one which will be owned by the universal imagination, wherever that faculty is sufficiently cultivated to be alive to it. In some you feel more doubtful,—the analogy appears to be somewhat more faint or far-fetched. In others you seem to see

clearly that the resemblance is arbitrary and capricious, a work of the mere fancy, not of the genuine imagination. An instance of the last kind has been severely commented on by a contemporary critic, who, on the strength of some doubtful analogies which occur in Keble's poems, has voted him no poet. This critic specially comments on one poem, in which the moon is made a symbol of the Church, the stars are made symbols of saints in heaven, and the trees in Eden of saints on earth. This, if it be not some remote allusion to passages of Scripture, must be allowed to be a mere ecclesiastical reading of nature's symbols, repudiated by the universal heart of man, and therefore by true poetry. But if this and some other instances, pitched on a false key, can be pointed out, how many more are there where the chord struck answers with a genuine tone? Even in the very poem which contains the symbolism condemned, is there not the following?—

‘The glorious sky embracing all  
 Is like the Maker’s love,  
 Wherewith encompassed great and small  
 In peace and order move.’

Here Keble has Christianized an analogy, acknowledged not only by the Greek conception of Zeus, but more or less, we believe, by the primeval faith of the whole Aryan race.

Of the many instances that might easily be gathered from these poems, in which that mysterious chord of analogy that binds together human feeling and the outward world is truly touched, one more must be given. It is from the poem on All Saints’ Day. As that day falls on the 1st of November, a time so often beautiful with the bright calm of St. Luke’s summer, the following lines serve well to harmonize the feeling of the season with the thoughts which the Church Festival is meant to awaken—

‘How quiet shows the woodland scene!  
 Each flower and tree; its duty done,  
 Reposing in decay serene,  
 Like weary men when age is won,

Such calm old age as conscience pure  
 And self-commanding hearts insure,  
 Waiting their summons to the sky,  
 Content to live, but not afraid to die.'

As might be looked for in a real lover of nature, Keble's imagery is that which he had lived in the midst of, and knew. The shady lanes, the more open hursts and downs, such as may be seen near Oxford, and farther west and south, 'England's primrose meadow paths,' the stiles worn by generations, and the grey church-tower embowered in elm-trees,—with these his habitual thoughts and sentiments suit well. Even in this familiar landscape his eye and ear have caught facts and aspects of nature, which, as far as I know, have never before been put down in books. Take that instance from the poem on the Fifth Sunday after Easter—

'Deep is the silence as of summer noon,  
     When a soft shower  
     Will trickle soon,  
 A gracious rain, freshening the weary bower—  
     O sweetly then far off is heard  
     The clear note of some lonely bird.'

Many an ear before Keble's must have heard a solitary thrush singing in the distant fields amid the deep hush that preludes the thunder-storm. But no poet before Keble, as far as I know, had seized that impressive image and embalmed it in verse. Not a few such images or aspects of the quiet English landscape will be found reclaimed fresh from the fields for the first time in *The Christian Year*. With this kind of scenery, which was familiar to him all his life, he is for the most part content, and seldom travels beyond it. Indeed a very true test of the genuineness of a poet's inspiration would seem to be, whether his imagery is mainly gathered from the scenes amidst which he has lived, or borrowed from the writings of former poets or other artificial sources. Seldom does Keble visit mountain lands, only once or twice in *The Christian Year*. But the poem for the 20th Sunday after Trinity, though good, might have been written by one who had never seen mountains, if only he had read descriptions of them.



Besides the English there is another kind of landscape in which Keble has shown himself at home. Dean Stanley has noted the fidelity with which he has pictured scenes in the Holy Land. This shows not only a close study of the hints that are to be found in the Bible, and in the modern books about Palestine,—it proves how quick must have been the insight into nature of one who, though he had never himself beheld that country, could from such materials call up pictures true enough to satisfy the eye of the most graphic of modern travellers even while gazing on those very scenes.

There are two sides which nature turns towards the imagination. One is that which the poet can read figuratively, in which he can see symbols and analogies of the spiritual world. This side Keble, as we have seen, felt and read, in the main I think truly, though sometimes he may have missed it. What the true reading is, and how it is to be discerned, is a weighty matter not to be entered on here. One thing, however, is certain, that the correspondency



between the natural object and the spiritual, between nature and the soul, is there, existing independently of the individual man. He did not make the correspondency; his part is to see and interpret truly what was there beforehand, not to read into nature his own views or moods waywardly and capriciously. The truest poet is he who reads nature's hieroglyphics most truly and most widely; and the test of the true reading is that it is at once welcomed by the universal imagination of man. This universal or catholic imagination of man is far different from the universal suffrage of man. It means the imagination of those in whom that faculty exists in the highest degree, cultivated to the finest sensibility. The imagination is the faculty which reads truly, the fancy that which reads capriciously, and so falsely. The former seizes true and real existences, analogies between nature and spirit; the latter makes arbitrary and fictitious ones. In the school of imagination, as opposed to fancy, Keble was a faithful and devout

student. It was the music of his pious spirit to read aright the symbolical side which nature turns towards man.

But nature has another side, of which there is no indication in Keble's poetry. We mean her infinite and unhuman side, which yields no symbols to soothe man's yearnings. Outside of and far beyond man, his hopes and fears, his strivings and aspirations, there lies the vast immensity of nature's forces, which pays him no homage, and yields him no sympathy. This aspect of nature may be seen even amid the tamest landscape, if we look to the clouds or the stars above us, or to the ocean roaring around our shores. But nowhere is it so borne in on man as in the midst of the vast deserts of the earth, or in the presence of the mountains, which seem so impassive and unchangeable. Their permanence and strength so contrast with man—of few years and full of trouble; they are so indifferent to his feelings or his destiny. He may smile or weep, he may live or die; they care not. They are the same in all their ongoings,

happen what will to him. They respond to the sunrises and the sunsets, but not to his sympathies. All the same they fulfil their mighty functions, careless though no human eye should ever look on them. So it is in all the great movements of nature. Man holds his festal days, and nature frowns; he goes forth from the death-chamber, and nature affronts him with sunshine and the song of birds. Evidently, it seems, she marches on, having a purpose of her own with which man has nothing to do: she keeps her own secret, and drops no hint to him. This mysterious silence, this unhuman indifference, this inexorable deafness, has impressed the imagination of the greatest poets with a vague yet sublime awe. The sense of it lay heavy on Lucretius, Shelley, Wordsworth, and drew out their souls' profoundest music. This side of things, whether philosophically or imaginatively regarded, seems to justify the saying, that 'the visible world still remains without its divine interpretation.' But it was not on thoughts of this kind that Keble loved to dwell. If they

ever occurred to him, he has nowhere expressed them. He was content with that other side of nature, of which I spoke first, the side which allows itself to be humanized, that is, to be interpreted by man's faith and devout aspirations. This was the side that suited his religious purpose, and to this he limited himself. Within this range few have ever interpreted nature more soothingly and beautifully.

These are a few of the qualities that would strike any one on first opening *The Christian Year*. They are not, however, enough to account for its unparalleled popularity. Indeed, popularity is no word to express the fact, that this book has been for years the cherished companion in their best moods of numbers of the best men, of the most diverse characters and schools, who have lived in our time. The secret of this power is a compound of many influences hard to state or explain. It has not been hindered by the blemishes obvious on the surface to every one, inharmonious rhythms, frequent obscurity, here and there poverty and convention-

ality of diction. In spite of these it has won its way to the hearts of the highly educated and refined, as no book of poetry, sacred or secular, in our time has done. Will it continue to do so? Will its own imperfections, and the changing currents of men's feelings, not alienate from it a generation rendered fastidious by poetry of more artistic perfection, more highly coloured, more richly flavoured? Without speaking too confidently, it may be expected to live on, if not in so wonderful esteem, yet widely read and deeply felt; for it makes its appeal to no temporary or accidental feelings, but mainly to that which is permanent in man. It can hardly be that it should lose its hold on the affections of English-speaking men as long as Christianity retains it. For if we may judge from the past, it will be long ere another character of the same rare and saintly beauty shall again concur with a poetic gift and power of poetic expression, not certainly of the highest, yet still of so high order. Broader and bolder imagination, greater artistic faculty, many poets

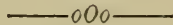
who were his contemporaries possessed. But in none of them did there burn a spiritual light so pure and heavenly, to transfigure these gifts from within. It is because *The Christian Year* has succeeded in conveying to the outer world some effluence of that character which his intimate friends so loved and revered in Keble, that, as I believe, he will not cease to hold a quite peculiar place in the affections of posterity.





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