

CHAPTER – IV
FRANCIS THOMPSON :
AUTHENTICITY OF HIS VISION

Francis Thompson, denying or tending to deny a positive quality to his poetic vision, seem to have been influenced by knowledge of the unsavoury biographical details of his life- his addiction to opium and his days of misery in London. For example, J.C. Reid maintains that much of Thompson's verse is tenuous, embodying little religious experience; he restricts his achievement as a religious poet to a few poems including 'The Hound of Heaven' and 'In No Strange Land.'¹ J.M. Cohen, taking a more balanced view, traces the strength and weakness of his poetic vision to his estrangement from human fellowship : the strength revealed in "an immediate perception of the underlying reality ... something seen with the simplicity of a child" and the weakness betrayed by "the inanity of his secular judgements."² Austin Harrison questions the artistic quality of this vision on account of the poet's preoccupation with dogma. His plea is that "in the vision of the artist we want creation and not dogma; freedom, not theory; the love which is universal; we want personality. Thompson gives us only pontification; he pontificates. He is never free to sing like the lark. His very ecstasy is sacerdotal."³ This view betrays a lack of objectivity as it fails to discern Thompson's lyrical gift, acknowledged even by those who are otherwise severe on his faults.

The sympathetic reader of Thompson's poems is convinced of two things—the autobiographical character of much of his verse and the authenticity of his vision. Gained through an acute experience of pain and sorrow (identifiable with the Christian virtues of humility and suffering), Thompson's is a vision appealingly human in its constant awareness of the fallen state of man alienated from the kingdom of God. Though he does not always engage our hearts, many of his poems are powerful expressions of the soul's craving for the state of primal innocence and joy. There are two sides to Thompson's personality : the artist delighting in the pursuit of Beauty (the inheritor of the tradition of Spenser and Keats), and the man of strong Catholic faith, which he held firmly even during the days of his abject poverty and distress. Aestheticism in him, however, never gained an upper hand. Always subordinated to the religious impulse, it was governed by an intellectual purpose as the poet progressed in religious thought. The pursuit of Beauty, as understood and practised by Thompson, was thus never divorced from his religious sense. Correspondingly, his best poems possess two essential qualities : "beauty of expression and great depth of meaning,"⁴ a synthesis characteristic of all great poetry.

Thompson's understanding of poetic symbolism (in relation to Christian mysticism) matured after he came into direct contact with Patmore. This is revealed in a number of his *New Poems* (1897), the volume he dedicated to the elder poet. Aware throughout of the intimate relation between contemplation and poetic inspiration, Thompson found himself in

agreement with the maturer opinions of Patmore, followed by a positive gain in his own insights under the latter's inspiration. We have considered some of Patmore's important statements (in *Religio Poetae* and *The Rod, The Root and The Flower*) on the affinity he sees between poetic perception and the perception of the religious seer or mystic. Let us recall one statement as an illustration :

The poet is *par excellence*, the perceiver, nothing having any interest for him, unless he can, as it were see it and touch it with spiritual senses, with which he is permanently endowed.⁵

A near identity of views, in regard to the relation between 'Sanctity and Song,' between mystical contemplation and poetry, is reflected in what Thompson says on the subject :

- (i) The insight of the poet springs from intuition, which is the highest reason, and is acquired through contemplation, which is the highest effort.⁶
- (ii) The psychology of the poet, above all, (or of the musician, or, less strikingly, the artist), affords the closest natural parallel to the special psychology of the saint The weapon of the poet or saint is intuition, and contemplation is the state, the attitude, which disposes the mind to receive intuitions.⁷
- (iii) In proportion to the height of their sanctity the saints are inevitable poets. Sanctity is essential song.⁸

It is evident that what is said in the above statements about the saint should be applicable to the mystic too. Mystical illumination is conceived by Thompson as the goal of poetic contemplation. This is revealed in a number of his poems concerned with his own state of spiritual deprivation. We see the poet looking forward, in this state, to the delights of a spiritual dawn in the manner of the mystics going through the experience of the Dark Night. Thompson's constant interest in contemplating the mystery of death in its bearing, particularly, on the process of poetic creation (conceived as involving an acute experience of pain) reminds us throughout of the significance attached to the concept of 'mystical death.' Poetry and mysticism for him are closely linked; accordingly, he seeks "the promised dawn in terms of poetic inspiration."⁹

In Thompson's day, the term 'mysticism' was abused and much misunderstood. Patmore defined mysticism as the "science of ultimates" to clear away the general confusion about its meaning. He, however, used the term cautiously and sparingly. He was aware that people confused it with mere emotionalism or with what is misty and vague. Thompson too was "well aware of the dangers of false mysticism and of the possibility of its being confused with the true."¹⁰ Patmore significantly wrote to him:

I look to you to crush all this false mysticism. Crush it; you can do it if you like; you are the man to do it.¹¹

Thomson associated clarity and precision with genuine mysticism; he did not approve of the vagueness which marked false mysticism in his day. Mysticism, in his view, does not run counter to the claims of reason :

A mystic poet who is vaporous fancy will not go far. Every such poet should be able to give a clear and logical resume of his teaching as terse as a page of scholastic teaching.¹²

In his concern for clarity as an important characteristic of genuine mysticism, Thomson goes too far in expecting the mystic poet to give a prose “resume” of his “teaching” Poetic expressions of mystical truths or experiences cannot be subjected to *definitive* interpretations. One would rather agree with Valery, who says “where there can be a resume, there is no poetry”, than accept Thomson’s position on the issue. However, the point that Thomson maintains about clarity as opposed to vagueness has to be accepted as valid. But what is clearly expressed poetically need not be paraphrasable. Surprisingly Austin Harrison finds Thomson deficient in the very clarity the latter prizes in mystic poets :

As the poet of mysticism Thomson will always appeal to the nebulous-minded, scarcely to those who seek music in poetry or clear and profound thinking.¹³

We do not miss “clear and profound thinking” in the best specimens of Thomson’s mystical verse. The reader may have to make a little effort to discover it in the indirect and suggestive language of symbolism. In fact, it is Thomson’s special mark as a poet that he is able to relate the seen to the

unseen; many of his poems amply illustrate that “mysticism is not the enemy of clarity.”¹⁴ Another statement of Thompson’s confirms that he considered vagueness or nebulosity as alien to the character of mysticism :

The core of mysticism is a *fact*, not an understanding or feeling. Still less is it an *endeavour* after a something nameless and unattainable. All true mystics know well about what they seek; and that it can be gained or missed according to the fidelity of their own effort. The thing sought is *Union*.¹⁵

J.M. Cohen, had “a talent for otherworldly affairs, at first religious but finally mystical.”¹⁶ In *New Poems*, as also in the poet’s critical opinions, his intellectual growth is clearly reflected. Some of his earlier poems provide evidence of a certain degree of mystical perception fused with innocent belief. Then there are the early poems in which Pagan myths are freely associated with Christian themes, and the resultant poetry is powerfully mystical. *New Poems*, however, include the most mystical of Thompson’s poems under the subtitle ‘Sight and Insight.’ Speaking of these poems in the cancelled Preface, the poet wrote :

The first section exhibits mysticism in a limited and varying degree. I feel my instrument yet too imperfect to profane by it the higher ranges.¹⁷

The mysticism in Thompson is seen to take two forms—immanent and transcendental. The former is revealed in his attitude to Nature and the material universe. He takes a sacramental view of the natural world—a tendency inherent in him, which he does not owe specifically to his religious background. This links him with the general order of mystics who lean

towards an “ ‘immanent’ type of religious experience.”¹⁸ In such mystics, the tendency to find the divine presence in the things of this world sometimes overshoots the mark, and then God is identified with the things themselves : the ‘immanent’ attitude ‘degenerates’ into pantheism and the transcendent One is completely forgotten. Thompson’s Nature poems may give the casual reader the impression that he looks at the world in the manner of the pantheist; but, beyond his seemingly Pagan response to Nature, his Christian view of the natural world is also evident to the careful reader. At many places, the poet insists on the fact that Nature owes her power and glory to God. His immanent vision is thus essentially Christian in character, though it seems to shade sometimes into the pantheistic. In ‘Paganism : Old and New’, Thompson makes his position clear, maintaining that what the old Paganism saw only crudely acquired a spiritual content in Christianity. He has a sympathetic understanding of the Pagan view, seeing in it a precursor of the Christian doctrine of Incarnation. This reflects the *catholicity* of his outlook as a Christian and accounts for that quality of his religious sensibility—expressed in such mystical poems as the ‘Orient ode’—which endears him even to those who do not share his faith.

The other form that mysticism takes in him relates to his sense of the transcendent One (often the personal God of Christianity), seen as remote and not attainable. This feeling is strongly present in the poet’s constant craving for the spiritual delights of the heavenly state. It is revealed to us in his sense of his own wretchedness and smallness, accentuated by his contemplation of

the joys of divine union which he so passionately, and sometimes pathetically, hungers after. The transcendental aspiration (of a mystical character) is more marked in Thompson than in Patmore. In combining the immanent and transcendental attitudes, achieved in the best of his poems, Thompson exemplifies Christian mysticism thoroughly.

Thompson's mysticism, however, gains in depth and intensity (and consequently in authenticity) in his religious poems. *Poems of Innocence*: The relation between childhood and innocence is an important theme of poetic mysticism, best represented in English poetry by Traherne, Blake and Wordsworth. Thompson can also be associated with this tradition. His poems on children and his references to childhood show something child-like in the poet himself. When Traherne and Wordsworth speak of childhood, they give us an account of their own experience : their recollection of an illuminated vision of the world. Thompson's poems do not offer this kind of experience. He pictures his childhood world as one of fantasy and dream—a kind of private heaven to which he would gladly return as an adult. But when he turns to the children themselves and celebrates his love for them, it is their state of innocence that he values most. A Christian awareness of man's primal state before the Fall, rather than mere nostalgia for the 'Eden of Infancy,' move him to pay tributes to them. He sings of 'innocence' in accents which remind us of Blake, but when it comes to 'experience,' his vision falls short of the depth and power that distinguish Blake's prophetic vision of life : an integral vision in which 'innocence' and 'experience' find a

meaningful synthesis. Viewing life from his own state of deprivation and sorrow, Thompson offers us only a onesided vision; his song of ‘experience’ has in it, at best, a ring of “the still sad music of humanity.”

Innocence and simplicity, associated with childhood, are valued as spiritual qualities and cultivated *consciously* by persons aspiring to the mystic state. There is nothing regressive about this attitude. What is actually aimed at through this positive effort is inward purity : a cleansing of the powers of perception in the Blakean sense. Some poets and mystics are naturally gifted with this inward purity; their perception is fresh and unspoiled as the child’s. This holds true of Thompson as well. It is significant that he was aware of this quality in Shelley. In his famous essay on the poet, Thompson describes him as “the enchanted child.” This is how he characterizes the state of the child:

Know you what it is to be a child? It is to be something different from the man of today. It is to have a spirit yet streaming from the waters of baptism; it is to believe in love, to believe in loveliness, to believe in belief; it is to be so little that the elves can reach to whisper in your ear; it is to turn pumpkins into coaches, and mice into horses, lowness into loftiness, and nothing into everything, for each child has its fairy god-mother in its own soul; it is to live in a nutshell and to count yourself the king of infinite space; it is.

To see a world in a grain of sand,

And heaven in a wild flower,

Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,

And eternity in an hour;

It is to know not as yet that you are under sentence of life, nor petition that it be commuted into death.¹⁹

Thompson must have unconsciously indentified himself with Shelley when he described him as the “enchanted child” and paid tributes to his powers of perception. His own accounts of himself give us a clear idea of his psychological make-up and leave us in no doubt that what he has said about Shelley is applicable in no less a degree to himself :

- (i) I did not want responsibility, did not want to be a man. Toys I could surrender, with chagrin, so that I had my great toy of imagination whereby the world became to me my box of toys.²⁰
- (ii) There is a sense in which I have all my life been and even now remain a child. But in another sense I was never a child, never shared children’s thoughts, ways, tastes, manner of life and outlook on life. I played—I never ceased to play, —but my sport was solitary sport. Even when I played, with my sisters, from the time I began to read (about my sixth year) the game often, I think, meant one thing to me and quite another to them.²¹

On the evidence of the above statements, supported further by the visionary quality of Thompson’s verse, we can reasonably conclude that from his childhood he had the making of a contemplative. As a voracious reader with

a contemplative bent of mind, he was destined to grow into a mystic poet of the visionary type.

An important part of the Catholic tradition in which Thompson was brought up consists in celebrating childhood as symbolic of primal innocence and joy: a fact that determines the religious inspiration behind these poems. The literary influences are also traceable; the poems breathe something of the spirit of Blake's 'Songs of Innocence' and Wordsworth's 'Lucy poems.'

'Daisy' is the first important poem of the sequence. In theme and style, it reminds the reader of Wordsworth. The poem is based on an actual experience: the poet met a simple country girl, Daisy by name, during one of his walks by the hillside in Storrington. Her tokens to the poet —“A look, a word of her winsome mouth/And a wild raspberry” —were the best expressions of the innocence she epitomised. The 'child' in the poet was drawn by some sort of a spiritual affinity to the girl. The meeting gave him instant joy, but it simultaneously gave him a feeling of “sadness in the sweet.” Having got a glimpse of the 'paradise', he had left behind, his momentary happiness was followed by the bitter realization that what he had lost could no more be retrieved :

She went her unremembering way,

She went and left in me

The pang of all the partings gone,

And partings yet to be.

(Poetical Works. Ed. Wilfred Meynell. 1937; rpt. Lonon: O.U.P.,
1965. p.6)

‘The Poppy,’ the next poem of the sequence, is built round a theme somewhat similar to that of ‘Daisy.’ The incident narrated here is equally commonplace: Monica, one of the Meynell children, accompanies the poet during his walk across a field; she impulsively plucks a red poppy which she instantly offers to the latter as a gift. This contact with ‘innocence’ gives the poet a sense of exultation, soon followed by his sombre reflections on life’s sorrows. Such an experience gave an edge to his “sense of isolation from human kind” and, in effect, intensified his craving for the unearthly joys of the spiritual realm. The reference to his “withered dreams” (somehow associated by the poet with the poppy), in the context of the theme of innocence, suggests only a deeply felt need for spiritual redress. Thompson’s love for children is not just escapist, i.e., rooted in the desire for freedom from care and responsibility, as several critics would suggest. It is actually based on the spiritual significance he attaches to the state of innocence represented by childhood. His insistent references to his own unworthiness and wretchedness are but pointers to his humility—the mark of an aspirant for divine grace.

The theme of innocence is treated elaborately in Thompson’s longest poem entitled *Sister Songs*. It consists of Parts I and II which celebrate the poet’s love for the two Meynell children, Madeline and Monica. Published as a separate volume in 1895, it was actually composed around the year 1891 during which the poet wrote his most famous poem, ‘The Hound of Heaven.’ As far as craftsmanship is concerned, it does not show the poet to advantage:

the language is mostly ornate and the imagery excessive; the meaning tends to get obscured in the pile of images and incidental detail. There is no clear progression of thought, though a thread of continuity holding the images together may be discerned by the careful reader. Thompson, reclaimed by the Meynells from his state of adversity, came to love their children; he drew spiritual comfort and joy from their presence. Owing its inspiration to the children's innocent love, and written out of a sense of gratitude to their parents, *Sister Songs* is essentially concerned with the poet's own spiritual history. Part I, devoted to Madeline, referred to as Sylvia, the younger of the two girls, is gayer in mood than the succeeding part : the references to Nature, whose blessings for the girl are invoked in the Wordsworthian spirit, contribute largely to this mood. Here is Thompson's prayer for the girl; he remembers how she offered him a kiss that brought happiness to his sad soul :

*Spring, goddess, is it thou, desired long?
And art thou girded round with this young train?—
If ever I did do thee ease in song,
Now of thy grace let me one meed obtain,
And list thou to one plain.
Oh, keep still in thy train,
After the years when others therefrom fade,
This tiny, well-beloved maid!
To whom the gate of my heart's fortalice,*

*With all which in it is,
And the shy self who doth therein immew him
'Gainst what loud leaguerers battaliously woo him,
I, bribed traitor to him,
Set open for one kiss.*

(Ibid., p. 27)

In part II, which is addressed to Monica, the theme of childhood is linked with other themes : the nature of poetic inspiration (also touched upon in the Proem to Part I), the pursuit of ideal Beauty, and the transience of earthly things. In the manner and spirit of Shelley, Thompson contemplates the phenomenon of change and declares himself to be “Beauty’s eremite,” the pursuer of ideal Beauty, which he can never realize in physical form. It is only glimpsed for him in Monica’s beauty, stimulating in him a craving for that love which is impossible of fulfilment on earth. Reflections of this sort are productive of a feeling bordering on the mystical (though not specifically Christian). Finally the poet thinks of the potential woman in the girl with the powers of sex now latent, but sure to be active when she comes of age. This leads him to think of Child-Christ whose spiritual powers had likewise to await the growth of his body before they could be operative. A distinctively Christian note is struck in the following lines which dwell upon the theme of Incarnation :

*The heavens decree
All power fulfil itself as soul in thee.*

*For supreme spirit subject was to clay,
And Law from its own servants learned a law,
And Light besought a lamp unto its way,
And Awe was reined in awe,
At one small house of Nazareth;
 And Golgotha
Saw Breath to breathlessness resign its breath,
And Life do homage for its crown to death.*

(Ibid., p. 39)

In *Sister Songs* Thompson sang of innocence and womanhood together. In *Love in Diana's Lap* he pays his best tribute to womanhood. It is a sequence of poems (eleven in the definitive edition) most of which were composed around the year 1891 and included in *Poems* (1893). Alice Meynell is the woman celebrated in the sequence; she is seen almost as a divinity, sharing the graces of the Holy Mother herself. The poetry expresses Thompson's gratitude to the lady, his intense regard for her spiritual and intellectual qualities (which had made her a lovable figure in the eyes of such admirers as George Meredith and Patmore). But as the central figure in the series of poems, she does not emerge as a concrete person. The mystical adoration of Mrs. Meynell is actually an indirect song of praise to essential womanhood, reminding us sometime of Shelley's Platonic love of Beauty and sometime of Crashaw's religious devotion to the divine Mary. The language is marked by an extravagance reminiscent of the language of

courtly love; the conceits employed suggest the influence of Donne. Friendly critics have been generous in comparing Thompson's love for Alice Meynell to "Petrarch's love for Laura and Dante's love for Beatrice."²²

In Thompson's love of child or devotion to woman, we saw clear marks of an intense spirituality, displayed by saints and mystics. What is human in these poems acquires sanctity through its being constantly referred to, and linked with, divine love. Taken together, they provide the picture of an awakened soul whose craving for contact with the Divine is intensified by the experience of human love. The experience makes him invariably sad rather than ecstatic. It is a painful reminder to him of his own unworthiness :his hesitancy in responding fully to the promptings of the higher love he is aware of as a devout Catholic. This is generally the psychological condition of the mystic during the Purgative stage : drawn to the divine and yet not feeling himself adequately fitted to be the recipient of Grace. We find this condition better illustrated in Thompson's poems more directly concerned with divine love, to which we must now pay our attention. The mysticism they represent is, on the whole, Christian in motive and inspiration though it also assumes forms akin to Nature mysticism. In its universal appeal, it shares the qualities of poetic mysticism in general : using images and symbols common to all forms of faith.

Poems of Divine Love : We begin with "The Hound of Heaven," unquestionably the best-known of Thompson's poems and considered by many as his master-piece. Published in *Merry England* in July 1890, it was

included in *Poems* (1893). A number of editions of the poem and its translations into several languages have appeared since its first publication. It is largely this poem which has contributed to Thompson's reputation as a mystic. Evelyn Underhill calls him "the greatest mystical poet of our modern times."²³ In Caroline Spurgeon's view, "through all that he [Thompson] writes there breathes the spirit of mystic devotion and aspiration."²⁴ This is pre-eminently true of 'The Hound of Heaven.' Patmore has praised the poem as "one of the very few 'great' odes of which the language can boast"²⁵ Here is an utterance which proceeds from the depths of the poet's soul; its powerful appeal comes from the utmost sincerity behind it. A rich sequence of arresting images develop and unfold the theme handled with considerable skill. Here is an analysis of the images in the introductory passage of the poem :

I FLED Him, down the nights and down the days;
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears
I hid from Him, and under running laughter,
Up vistaed hopes I sped;
And shot, precipitated,
Adown Titanic glooms of chasmed fears,
From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.
But with unhurrying chase,

*And unperturbed pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
They beat—and a voice beat
More instant than the Feet—
'All things betray thee, who betrayest Me.'*

(Ibid., p. 77)

The images are appropriate to the theme of 'pursuit' or, conversely, to that of 'flight.' We visualize the fugitive soul's movement through time— 'the nights,' 'the days' and 'the arches of the years' forming a well-knit sequence of images, the 'arches' image being particularly effective in concretizing the related concept of 'movement.' The next image, 'the labyrinthine ways', suggests the deviousness of man's thinking that leads him away from God. It ties up with the previous images suggesting movement. Another important image that follows, which is very vivid and arresting, is provided by 'Titanic glooms of chasmed fears'; it points to the psychological condition of the fugitive soul, already caught up in the 'maze' of reasoning (that weans the soul away from God). The image that is recurrent in the succeeding lines of the passage is that of 'the feet' of God pursuing the soul. The words chosen to convey the images fall into a recognizable pattern; they are linked by their close association with the concept of 'chase' central to the poem.

The poem has been described as "a rhythmical masterpiece." The variations in rhythm and the quick succession of images give the poem a dramatic quality. The choice of the title, in reference to the role of the Deity,

does not immediately strike us as happy. The word 'Hound' suggests the opposite of divine benevolence which the poem ultimately celebrates. Its appropriateness is appreciated only when we have actually gone through the whole poem : the 'fugitive' soul's dread of the "tremendous Lover" reflects a distorted perception of the true character of divinity; Love is seen as a 'Hound.' The theme of Love-chase (God's pursuit of the human soul), with which the poem deals, is an old one, familiar to students of mysticism. Devotional mystics throughout the world have viewed the relation between the soul (the seeker) and God (the object of worship) as one based on mutual love. While singing of divine love, they have often analogized this relation to the game of hide-and-seek in which the roles of the seeker and the sought may sometimes be reversed. The Hindu mystic thus views the whole cosmic order as *Lila* (divine sport) in which the soul's separation from God is actually a preparation for the final union. Christian mysticism conceives of the Love-chase as the necessary corollary of the principle of divine grace. Thompson's poem confirms this. Critics have tried to trace the various influences, literary and theological, that have gone into the shaping of the ode. John Thomson has, for example, very painstakingly drawn attention to many such probable sources— St. Augustine's Confessions, St. John of the Cross, St. Teresa, Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* (in connection with the title) and *Epipsychidion*, Herbert's 'Pulley,' Vaughan's 'Retirement' and 'Pursuit.'²⁶ Underhill also mentions Plotinus, St. Augustine, Mechthild of Madgeburg and Eckhart as having spoken of experiences analogous to that

described in ‘The Hound of Heaven.’²⁷ Notwithstanding the literary echoes and borrowings, and howsoever old the theme, Thomspson’s poem remains his achievement, a record of his *personal* experience inasmuch as “the Following Love, the mystics say, is a fact of experience, not a poetic idea.”²⁸ No other poem in the whole range of English literature, or utterance of an individual mystic, has rendered the theme of Love-chase so vivid and authentic. The poet and the mystic have collaborated here in producing a “masterpiece.”

Till the moment of crisis is reached in the soul’s struggle, its chase by the “strong Feet” of God is depicted in a sequence of four phases. In the first phase, the fugitive seeks refuge in human sympathies. Strictly speaking, his flight is but an evasion of God, based on a fear of the overwhelming nature of divine love; in a sense, the behavior of the fugitive is ambivalent inasmuch as he is aware, throughout the chase, of God’s loving disposition towards him:²⁹

*I pleaded, outlaw-wise,
By many a hearted casement, curtained red,
Trellised with intertwining charities;
(For, though I knew His love Who followed
Yet was I sore adread
Lest, having Him, I must have naught beside.)
But, if one little casement parted wide,
The gust of His approach would clash it to:
Fear wist not to evade, as Love wist to pursue.*

(Ibid., p.77)

In the next phase, the fugitive turns to regions far removed from the human sphere. Here again he finds no shelter; everything he approaches remains loyal to the Creator :

*I tempted all His servitors, but to find
My own betrayal in their constancy,
In faith to Him their fickleness to me,
Their traitorous trueness, and their loyal deceit.*

(Ibid., p. 78)

In the third phase the fugitive turns to little children and tries to seek satisfaction in their love but fails to evoke any response in them :

*I turned me to them very wistfully;
But just as their young eyes grew sudden fair
With drawing answers there,
Their angel plucked them from me by the hair.*

(Ibid., p. 78)

In the final phase, the fugitive gives himself upto Nature, and begins to cultivate intimacy with the natural world. But here too he finds little satisfaction. He realizes that the “poor stepdame” cannot ease his “human smart.” In all these futile efforts to evade divinity and seek satisfaction elsewhere, the fugitive meets failure after failure. Meanwhile the pursuer has been reiterating the note of admonition :

*‘Naught shelters thee, who wilt not shelter Me.’
‘Lo! naught contents thee, who content’st not Me.’*

(Ibid., p. 79)

Then comes the moment of self-examination for the fugitive. His resources are exhausted and his energies spent up; his pride is gone and he is utterly helpless. His disillusionment leads to an attitude of complete surrender to the will of God :

Naked I wait Thy love's uplifted stroke!

My harness piece by piece Thou has hewn from me.

And smitten me to my knee;

I am defenceless utterly.

(Ibid., p. 80)

Prepared to make amends for his past follies, he goes through the mortification necessary for his regeneration. He learns humility :

..... grimed with smears,

I stand amid the dust o' the mounded years—

My mangled youth lies dead beneath the heap.

(Ibid., p. 80.)

Taking stock of his past and dimly visualizing his future, he contemplates Death, as the final purificatory step towards his regeneration. He finds the divine Voice now at hand, "like a bursting sea." What he hears are words of gentle admonition conveying also an assurance of protective Grace :

Lo, all things fly thee, for thou fliest Me!

Strange, piteous, futile thing!

Wherefore should any set thee love apart ?

Seeing none but I makes much of naught' (He said),

.....
*Whom wilt thou find to love ignoble thee,
Save Me, save only Me?
All which I took from thee I did but take,
Not for thy harms,
But just that thou might'st seek it in My arms.
All which thy child's mistake
Fancies as lost, I have stored for thee at home:
Rise, clasp My hand, and come!*

(Ibid., p. 81)

We see that Thompson's poem does not actually stress renunciation of worldly things or plead for an ascetic attitude to life. It only shows the absurdity of loving the things of the world to the exclusion or neglect of God. Everything else is automatically taken care of when God is remembered as the Author of Creation. The best way to harmonize our relationship with the world is to adopt the right attitude to divinity—that of love and self-surrender. That seems to be the point of view implicit in the poem. As a record of the poet's own spiritual history, it depicts, largely, the phase of 'purgation' leading to 'illumination.'

Most of the poems under the title 'Sight and Insight,' included in *New Poems*, were written during Thompson's stay at the Capuchin Monastery, Pantasaph (1892-97). His discussions on Catholic theology with Franciscan Fathers there and the religious atmosphere of the place proved refreshing for

him, both spiritually and intellectually. His intimate and fruitful friendship with Patmore also began here and lasted till the latter's death. The new inspiration provided by these influences is clearly reflected in the altered tone and quality of the 'Sight and Insight' poems, which we are going to consider now. Thompson modestly acknowledged his debt to Patmore in the 'Dedication' to *New Poems*. The poems, however, also indicate a definite growth in the poet's own individual talent. They confirm a maturing of his insights as a mystic poet. Thompson had proposed several titles for the section. 'Sight and Insight,' one among them being 'Mystical Poems.'

The 'Sight and Insight' sequence opens with 'The Mistress of Vision'. Thompson himself described the poem as "a phantasy with no more than an illusive tinge of psychic significance." This, however, does not explain its full significance. That it seems romantic in setting and texture (in the first 9 stanzas particularly) cannot be denied.³⁰ But, besides the enchanting element, the poem has a substantial core of meaning. The poem is concerned with Thompson's pet theme of poetic inspiration, which is hardly distinguishable from the illumination sought by the mystic. As we have seen, Patmore too links the activities of the poet and the seer. The theme, however, dominates Thompson's poetry. In the poem under discussion, the poet's utterance attains unusual clarity and precision in Stanza XX, which consists of the lines spoken by "The Lady of fair weeping" to the seeker after transcendental truths. Forceful and prophetic in appeal (reminding us of the language of the

Bible), the lines stress asceticism and Christian love as the means to the wisdom beyond human understanding :

*'Pierce the heart to find the key;
With thee take
Only what none else would keep;
Learn to dream when thou dost wake,
Learn to wake when thou dost sleep;
Learn to water joy with tears,
Learn from fears to vanquish fears,
To hope, for that thou dar'st not despair,
Exult, for that thou dar'st not grieve;
Plough thou the rock until it bear;
Know, for thou else couldst not believe;
Lose, that the lost thou may'st receive;
Die, for none other way canst live.
When earth and heaven lay down their veil,
And that apocalypse turns thee pale;
When thy seeing blindeth thee
To what thy fellow-mortals see;
When their sight to thee is sightless;
Their living, death; their light, most lightless;
Search no more—
Pass the gates of Luthany, tread the region of Elenore.'*

(Ibid., pp. 155-56)

The passage gives us a clear idea of the quality of the transcendental vision which is within the reach of the mystic. What he achieves, after he has gone through the necessary discipline, is a kind of new birth: the transmutation of his personality whereby he acquires a new vision and is 'deified.' Emphasis is laid on the obligatory nature of the spiritual struggle the aspirant for Grace must undergo. In 'The Hound of Heaven,' on the other hand, divine Grace was shown as operating on its own, Love being the pursuer of the soul. Stanza XXII of 'The Mistress of Vision' provides further illuminative hints about the vision attainable through the conquest of the self. It is a vision of Reality embracing what is here and now and what is beyond; the immanent and the transcendental are harmonized in it. As we shall see, Thompson's conviction here that "one unifying divine idea underlies all things,"³¹ is echoed later in the poem 'In No Strange Land'. The stanza under discussion (st. XXII) is reproduced below :

*When to the new eyes of thee
All things by immortal power
Near or far,
Hiddenly
To each other linked are,
That thou canst not stir a flower
Without troubling of a star;
When thy song is shield and mirror
To the fair snake-curved Pain,*

*Where thou dar'st affront her terror
That on her thou may'st attain
Persean conquest; seek no more,
O seek no more!
Pass the gates of Luthany, tread the region Elenore.'*

(Ibid., p. 156)

The lines prefixed as a motto to 'The Mistress of Vision' are appropriate to the underlying conception of poem :

Wisdom is easily seen by them that love her,
and is found by them that seek her.

To think therefore upon her is perfect understanding.

WISDOM, VI

The "Lady of fair weeping," who is "The Mistress of Vison," is herself the wisdom-symbol. Her mystic voice is 'Silence,' Wisdom beyond the 'word.' Stanza XXV towards the conclusion makes this abundantly clear :

Her tears made dulcet fretting,

Her voice had no word, (Italics mine)

More than thunder or the bird.

Yet, unforgetting,

The ravished soul her meanings knew, Mine ears heard not, and I
heard.

(Ibid., p. 157)

In the first stanza of the poem, the poet said : "Mine eyes saw not, and I saw," and here he says his "ears heard not" but he "heard." This is an

affirmation of a vision transcending the senses, the pursuit of which is the sole concern of mystic contemplation.

‘The Mistress of Vision’ is followed (in the sequence) by ‘Contemplation,’ which is easily among Thompson’s best poems, concerned with the theme of poetic creation. The poem portrays Nature in a mood which closely resembles the mystical state associated with the “Prayer of Quiet.” In none of Thompson’s other poems are we given as vivid an account of the poetic state (and of its affinity with quiet contemplation) as here.

The next two poems, ‘By Reason of Thy Law’ and ‘The Dread of Height,’ are inter-related thematically. They remind us of Patmore’s ‘Faint Yet Pursuing’ and ‘Victory in Defeat,’ which too have a similar theme. The close affinity between ‘By Reason of Thy Law’ and ‘Faint Yet Pursuing’ is directly suggested by the kind and pattern of imagery in the two poems. All the four poems dwell essentially on the slippery nature of the spiritual path and the dangers that the aspirant has to guard himself against, at every step, before he attains the goal.³² In ‘By Reason of Thy Law’ the poet depicts himself as passing through a state of deprivation marked by an experience of deep anguish, in eager expectation of the spiritual dawn that follows ‘the dark night.’ Lying low in that state, he is yet cheered up, intermittently, by intimations of the Illuminative Way :

In this Avernian sky,

This sultry and incumbent canopy

Of dull and doomed regret;

*Where on the unseen verges yet, O yet,
At intervals,
Trembles, and falls,
Faint lightning of remembered transient sweet—
Ah, far too sweet
But to be sweet a little, a little sweet, and fleet;*

(Ibid., p. 160)

‘The Dread of Height’ reveals Thompson’s awareness of the need to moderate his spiritual aspirations lest aiming at heights, he should have a miserable fall. An excessive hunger for spiritual delights is likely to breed in the aspirant a distaste for the common duties of life. This may recoil on him, depriving him of these delights altogether and leading him to sin and ruination. Thompson voices this feeling in these lines, frankly acknowledging that the highest ranges of mysticism are still beyond his capacity :

*Too well, too well
My flesh doth know the heart-perturbing thing;
That dread theology alone
Is mine,
Most native and my own;
And ever with victorious toil
When I have made
Of the deific peaks dim escalade
My soul with anguish and recoil*

*Doth like a city in an earthquake rock,
As at my feet the abyss is cloven then,
With deeper menace than for other men,
Of my potential cousinship with mire;*

(Ibid., p. 163)

A native sense of divine immanence is evident in the ‘Ode to the Setting sun,’ the first important poem of length that Thompson wrote at Storrington in 1889 (when he had controlled the drug-habit). The poet informs us that it was written before he “had seen any of Mr. Patmore’s work” and describes it as “not unworthy of preservation, though it was my first poem of any significance.”³³ It represents his first significant attempt at an interpretation of Nature in the light of his own perceptions. For the greater part pantheistic in spirit and reflecting almost an attitude of Pagan worship, it is not without a Christian feeling. It looks forward to the ‘Orient Ode,’ placed next to the ‘Dread of Height’ in the section called ‘Sight and Insight.’ In the ‘Orient Ode’ (written at Pantasaph), the Christian feeling is stronger and more marked. The ‘Ode to the Setting Sun’ is largely a melancholy poem. The setting sun reminds the poet of the two important inter-related mysteries of life : birth and death. Death impresses him as being holier in significance :

*Alpha and Omega, sadness and mirth,
The springing music, and its wasting breath—
The fairest things in life are Death and Birth,
And of these two things the fairer thing is Death.*

*Mystical twins of Time inseparable,
The younger has the holier sway :
It is the falling star that trails the light,
It is the breaking wave that hath the might,
The passing shower that rainbows maniple.*

(Ibid., p. 83)

Several passages, giving evidence of Thompson's classical studies at Ushaw, tell of the splendour and grandeur of the sun imagined as a god worshipped in Pagan times. The poet's knowledge of nineteenth century science is also reflected in the passages describing the sun's influence in forming beautiful things on the earth. The sun-set induces the poet to reflect pensively on pain and mortality. These lines, sounding almost Shelleyan, have a deeply personal ring in them :

*Whatso looks lovelily
Is but the rainbow on life's weeping rain,
Why have we longings of immortal pain,
And all we long for mortal? Woe is me,
And all our chants but chaplet some decay,
As mine this vanishing, —nay, vanished Day.*

(Ibid., p. 88)

In the concluding passage of the ode Thompson switches back to his contemplation of the meaning of birth and death as "Mystical twins of Time." He sees them as inseparable :

Till skies be fugitives,

*Till Time, the hidden root of change, updries,
Are Birth and Death inseparable on earth;
For they are twain yet one, and Death is Birth.*

(Ibid., p. 89)

In the ‘After-Strain,’ the poet’s mood brightens up a little with his invocation of the mercy of “Queen Mary.” Together with the reference to “That King-Maker of Creation” in the ode proper, this invocation introduces a Christian element into what could otherwise be described as a poem of Nature–mysticism free from dogma. These lines are concerned with the joy of poetic creation, suffering being seen as inseparable from the process (as birth and death, the “Mystical twins of Time,” are inseparable) :

*Oh, this Medusa-pleasure with her stings!
This essence of all suffering, which is joy!
I am not thankless for the spell it brings,
Though tears must be told down for the charmed toy.*

(Ibid., p. 90)

True to his habit, Thompson has brought in his favourite theme of poetic creation, which seems appropriate in a poem devoted to ‘the god of song.’

‘Thematically, the ‘Orient Ode’ is close to the ode discussed above. It is a product of careful craftsmanship; its language is comparatively simple. Patmore’s influence is felt in its technical superiority over the other ode as also in its conscious use of theology. The imagery here is disciplined, more ecclesiastical than mythological. As Thompson wrote to Patmore, the poem “was suggested by certain passages in the liturgy for Holy Saturday.”³⁴ The

title refers to Christ, ‘the Orient.’ The poem attempts an exposition of the significance of the Incarnation, Crucifixion and Resurrection as suggested in the elaborate Catholic ritual connected with the Blessed Sacrament. The first stanza deals specially with Benediction. The poet reads a corresponding religious meaning into the whole course of the sun, from dawn to dusk, across the sky. He is at greater pains here, than in the ‘Ode to the Setting Sun,’ to offer an interpretation of Nature in Christian terms. Despite this, something of the Pagan attitude persists in his adoration of the sun. The central theme of the earlier ode—the immanence of God and the inter-relationship of birth and death—is handled here more purposefully, borne out by the clear progression of thought and the relative avoidance of superfluities. The sun is depicted in its complementary roles of a destroyer and a preserver. Thompson once again displays a perceptive knowledge of contemporary science in his grasp of the significance of solar energy. Peter Butter appropriately states that the “*Orient Ode* is a hymn to the sun—as the physical sun, as an emblem of Christ and as Apollo, God of poetry.”³⁵ The poem gives evidence of Thompson’s progress in the handling of religious symbolism, though his attempt to achieve an integration of several meanings is not as successful as Patmore’s is in his odes. Such lines as these echo the elder poet :

Thou join’st the woman to the man;

And life with Death

In obscure nuptials moveth,

Commingling alien yet affined breath.

(Ibid., p. 165)

Again, these lines remind us of Patmore's thinking on the relation of the Church to Christ :

Thou to thy spousal universal

Art Husband, she thy Wife and Church;

Who in most dusk and vidual curch,

Her Lord being hence,

Keeps her cold sorrows by the hearse.

(Ibid., p. 168)

Thompson truly appreciates the Pagan attitude in suggesting that it is not, essentially, incompatible with the Christian belief :

Light out of Light!

Resplendent and prevailing Word

Of the Unheard!

Not unto thee, great Image, not to thee

Did the wise heathen bend an idle knee;

And in an age of faith grown frore

If I too shall adore,

Be it accounted unto me

A bright sciential idolatory!³⁶

(Ibid., p. 167)

The concluding lines touch upon the immanence of Christ. The attainment of a vision of this immanence is for Thompson his highest poetic goal :

*'By this, O Singer, know we if thou see.
When men shall say to thee; Lo! Christ is here,
When men shall say to thee; Lo! Christ is there,
Believe them: Yea, and this—then art thou seer,
When all thy crying clear
Is but : Lo here! lo there!— ah me, lo everywhere!'*

(Ibid., p. 169)

As a mystical poem, 'Any Saint' gives the reader a definite feeling of the Illuminative Way. It throughout preserves its cheerful tone. The poet writes from a sense of closeness to the Divine, anticipating the final union.³⁷ He has a Christian mystic's awareness of human weaknesses and limitations and sees a source of inexhaustible spiritual strength in the divine humanity of Christ. The value of the Incarnation, as a vital factor in ensuring his spiritual ascent, is fully realized by the poet :

*His shoulder did I hold
Too high that I, o'erbold
Weak one,
Should lean thereon.
But He a little hath
Declined His stately path
And my
Feet set more high;
That the slack arm may reach
His shoulder, and faint speech*

Stir

His unwithering hair.

(Ibid., pp. 180-81)

The poet's confident dependence on God is rewarded with a sense of fulfilment; the divine is now within his grasp :

And bolder now and bolder

I lean upon that shoulder,

So dear

He is and near :

And with His aureole'

The tresses of my soul

Are blent

In wished content.

(Ibid., p. 181)

The following passages remind us of Patmore's language of mystical union. This is something we only occasionally come across in Thompson. Yet even here, there is an important shade of difference which distinguishes him from the "laureat of wedded love." The latter approves of "vanity" in woman, which he attributes to her being favoured and sought after by man. He sees this "vanity" as not incompatible with modesty. The bride, in his view, has a legitimate reason to be conscious of the charms which render her adorable in the eyes of the bridegroom. This position is maintained not only in *The Angel* but in the 'Psyche' poems too where the marital relation is built into a mystic

symbolism. Thompson cannot forget human imperfection. He sees in the soul's humility the best guarantee of divine grace :

*Yea, this too gentle Lover
Hath flattering words to move her
To pride
By His sweet side.*

*Ah, Love! somewhat let be—
Lest my humility
Grow weak
When Thou dost speak,*

*Rebate thy tender suit,
Lest to herself impute
Some worth
Thy bride of earth!*

*A maid too easily
Conceits herself to be
Those things
Her Lover sings;*

And being straitly wooed

Believes herself the Good

And Fair

He seeks in her.

(Ibid., pp. 181-82)

Thinking of man as he was made in God's image (rather than of himself with a sense of his own imperfections), Thompson writes of "the wedding of human and divine in man"³⁸ in a manner that both recalls and rivals Patmore's:

Man! swinging-wicket set

Between

The Unseen and Seen;

Lo, God's two worlds immense,

Of spirit and of sense,

Wed

In this narrow bed;

Yea, and the midge's hymn

Answers the seraphim

Athwart

Thy body's court!

(Ibid., p. 183)

Thompson's growing consciousness and intellectual grasp of the one immanental relation linking all things, strengthened in him by his knowledge

of traditional symbolism and contact with Patmore, is evident in these lines in praise of man :

Thee His great utterance bore,

O secret metaphor

Of what

Thou dream'st no jot!

Cosmic metonymy;

Weak world-unshuttering key;

One

Seal of Solomon!

(Ibid., p. 184)

The renunciatory Biblical tone of the celebrated key-passage in 'The Mistress of Vision' is echoed in the later passages of the poem such as the following :

Compost of Heaven and Mire,

Slow foot and swift desire!

Lo,

To have Yes, choose No;

Gird, and Thou shalt unbind;

Seek not, and thou shalt find;

To eat,

Deny thy meat;

And thou shalt be fulfilled

With all sweet things unwilled :

(Ibid., pp. 184-85)

The paradox of man as a compound of weakness and strength, which is insisted upon in the poem, is summed up thus :

*Stoop, stoop; for thou dost fear
The nettle's wrathful spear,
So slight
Art thou of might!
Rise; for Heaven hath no frown
When thou to thee pluck'st down.
Strong clod!
The neck of God.*

(Ibid., p. 186)

The painful note that often runs through Thompson's verse is also somehow absent in 'Assumpta Maria.' A lively feeling, reflecting a "taste of spiritual summer," informs the glorification of the blessed Virgin. The poem attempts to unite the particulars of the Catholic liturgy of the Assumption with the nuptial analogy handled by Patmore, in his characteristic manner, in *The Unkonwn Eros* odes. The fusion is not achieved by Thompson in any significant sense. His poem does not progress much beyond devotional piety. There is not enough evidence here of mysticism rendered articulate through symbolism. The divine Motherhood of Mary is, however, depicted appropriately :

I, the flesh-girt Paradises

*Gardenered by the Adam new,
Daintied o'er with dear devices
Which He loveth, for He grew.
I, the boundless strict Savannah
Which God's leaping feet go through;
I, the Heaven whence the Manna,
Weary Israel, slid on you!*

(Ibid., pp. 186-87)

'Carmen Genesis' (1910) is a poetic rendering of the Biblical account of the creation of the world, a theme dealt with much more elaborately, in a related context, in 'From The Night of Forebeing.' Thompson dwells upon the closeness he sees between the poetic process and the divine act of creation. He does not talk here, as he often does, of the suffering that the poet must go through in exercising his creative powers. He confers on him a divine status and emphasizes his prophethood:

*Poet! still, still thou dost rehearse,
In the great fiat of thy Verse,
Creation's primal plot;
And what thy Maker in the whole
Worked, little maker, in thy soul
Thou work'st, and men know not.*

(Ibid., p. 191.)

Turning to himself, Thompson affirms his own gift of poetic insight; it enables him to view the whole natural world sacramentally :

*With beautiful importunacy
All things plead, 'We are fair!' To me
Thy world's a morning haunt,
A bride whose zone no man hath slipt
But I, with baptism still bedript
Of the prime water's font.*

(Ibid., p. 192)

In Thompson's view, Pagan love had a significance of its own. It was a precursor of Christian love and pointed the way to what is spiritual and transcendental about human love. As a devout Catholic, the poet sees the most excellent example of the higher type of love in Mary's devotion to God. She embodies his vision of ideal womanhood, as may be seen in 'The After Woman.' In maturity of conception, Patmore's poems on the blessed Virgin exceed the mark attained by Thompson here or elsewhere, though the devotional strain is no less conspicuous in him. We miss Patmore's intellectual force in Thompson's lines :

*Who knows the gifts which you shall give,
Daughter of the newer Eve ?
You, if my soul be augur, you
Shall—O what shall you not, Sweet, do?
The celestial traitress play,
And all mankind to bliss betray;
With sacrosanct cajoleries*

And starry treachery of your eyes,

Tempt us back to paradise!

(Ibid., p. 195.)

The authenticity of Thompson's mystic vision is nowhere better revealed than in 'All Flesh' and 'In No Strange Land.' That he has made his mark here as a mystic poet is universally acknowledged. Even such critics as Cohen and Reid, who do not recognize all that the poet wrote as mystical, share this view. It must, however, be emphasized that Thompson has not suddenly stumbled upon 'illumination' here. The vision of the two poems is unmistakably present, though in varying degrees of intensity, in his earlier poems including the select ones we have considered. 'All Flesh' thus looks back to 'The Snowflake' which glorifies the divinity inherent in small things and to 'Any Saint' which measures man's smallness against his potential greatness. It upholds the spiritual basis of the universe, depicting it as informed with the divine principle from the minute "grassblade" to the "proud sun." This is given an imaginative expression and not simply stated as an idea :

O little blade, now vaunt

Thee, and be arrogant!

Tell the proud sun that he

Sweated in shaping thee;

Night, that she did unvest

Her mooned and argent breast

*To suckle thee. Heaven fain
Yearned over thee in rain,
And with wide parent wing,
Shadowed thee, vested thing,
Fed thee, and slaved for thy
Impotent tyranny.*

(Ibid., pp. 291-92.)

The vision is rendered vivid and convincing through the use of clear and simple language (as the above lines illustrate). In terms of artistic resourcefulness, Thompson's achievement here consists in shaping his means to his ends. The temper reflected in the poem is consistently cheerful : we are in the full blaze of 'illumination' and at no point does the reader feel a falling off in its intensity. Here is evidence of a perception comparable to Blake's:

*One grass-blade in its veins
Wisdom's whole flood contains :
Thereon my foundering mind
Odyssean fate can find.*

(Ibid., p. 291)

The poet sees the hand of the majestic forces of nature in the shaping of a tiny thing as a grass-blade, which, in its turn, points only to the unseen hand of God. This interdependence testifies to the divine mystery which invests all objects, great and small :

*Be confident of thought,
Seeing that thou art naught;*

*And be thy pride thou'rt all
Delectably safe and small,
Epitomized in thee
Was the mystery
Which shakes the spheres conjoint—
God focussed to a point.*

(Ibid., p. 292)

Conscious of his kinship with the grass-blade, the poet sees in this relation an assurance of his inherent divinity:

*Unfathomably framed
Sister, I am not ashamed
Before the cherubin
To vaunt my flesh thy kin.
My one hand thine, and one
Imprisoned in God's own,
I am as God; alas,
And such a god of grass!
A little root clay-caught,
A wind, a flame, a thought,
Inestimably naught!*

(Ibid., p. 292)

Although the poem is not without a theistic commitment, the mystical note in it is not explicitly Christian.

The illuminated vision of 'All Flesh' acquires greater authenticity in 'In No Strange Land' (1908). The latter poem, probably the last that the poet wrote, carries a sure mark of what mystics mean by the 'Unitive' experience. The definiteness of the vision expressed is matched by Thompson's linguistic resourcefulness. The confident tone of the poem leaves one in no doubt that the poet has realized the Unseen. He is now at peace with himself and the world, sees everything as sacramental, animated by the immanent principle. The clear insights of the poem are surely the fruit of an intense spirituality of which we had the first powerful glimpse in 'The Hound of Heaven.' The vision of divinity presented in that poem was compulsive and spectacular in appeal. But it only signalled the beginning of a pursuit, not the end of it. Its wonderful rhythms and images depicted the soul as still restless, seeking to come to terms with the divinity it had dreaded. The mystical experience of which it is a record has its fruition in the calm vision of 'In No Strange Land'. It was observed about 'All Flesh' that its mysticism is religious but not overtly Christian. In 'In No Strange Land' the Christian note is unmistakable. Yet, in its first four stanzas, the spiritual realm is described in terms which accommodate, and do not come into conflict with, the immanent experience common to all forms of religious mysticism. Here is an account of divinity seen close at hand (by one whose "doors of perception" are open and no longer sealed, as applicable to those steeped in materialism):

O world invisible, we view thee,

*O world intangible, we touch thee,
O world unknowable, we know thee,
Inapprehensible, we clutch thee!
Does the fish soar to find the ocean,
The eagle plunge to find the air-
That we ask of the stars in motion
If they have rumour of thee there?*
(Ibid., p. 293)

The connection between things immediate and remote, which the poet had asserted in ‘The Mistress of Vision’ (stanza XII), is reiterated, more economically, in these suggestive lines :

*The angels keep their ancient places;—
Turn but a stone, and start a wing!
'Tis ye, 'tis your enstranged faces,
That miss the many-splendoured thing.*
(Ibid., p. 293)

Here is the passage recalling “the ladder of the vision” to which Thompson compared Alice Meynell’s soul in ‘Scala Jacobi Portague Eburnea’:

*But (when so sad thou canst not sadder)
Cry;—and upon thy so sore loss
Shall shine the traffic of Jacob’ ladder
Pitched betwixt Heaven and Charing Cross.*
(Ibid., p. 293)

The final passage, looking back to what the poet had wished for in the ‘Orient Ode’, (11.206-11), confirms his realization of the Incarnation:

Yea, in the night, my soul, my daughter,

Cry,—clinging Heaven by the hems;

And lo, Christ walking on the water

Not of Gennesareth, but Thames!

(Ibid., p. 293)

The small poem ‘The Singer Saith of His Song’ insists on the ‘inward’ character of poetic contemplation, an activity pursued in the ‘deeps’ of the soul in a state of perfect solitude and tranquility. Such activity promises the vision of the “Is beyond the Seems.” The penetrative insight leading to this vision is guaranteed to the seeker prepared to go through the necessary discipline that was emphasized in ‘The Mistress of Vision.’ Thompson draws our attention to the “unacquainted tongue” of his “Song,” which corresponds to “an alien tongue, of alien things” he associates with himself as a poet in ‘The Cloud’s Swan Song.’ All this points to his awareness of the esoteric nature of spiritual experience that the true poet shares with the mystic engaged in divine contemplation. Silence, he seems to suggest, is absorbing for either of them rather than speech. The mystical element in them is generally universal in appeal, though Christian in tone and reference. Several poems, including ‘The Hound of Heaven.’ show Thompson struggling towards ‘Illumination.’

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19. Francis Thompson, *Shelley*, pp. 28-29.
20. Quoted in Everard Meynell, p. 8.
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22. See *Poems of Francis Thompson*, p. 339.
23. *Mysticism*, p. 135.
24. *Mysticism in English Literature*, p. 149.
25. "Francis Thompson : A New Poet," *Fortnightly Review*, (1894), p. 22.
26. See John Thompson, *Francis Thompson : Poet and Mystic*, 3rd enl. ed. (London : S.M.H.K. and Co., Ltd., 1923), pp. 115-28.
27. See *Mysticism*, pp. 135-36.
28. *Ibid*, p. 136.
29. The ambivalence in the soul's behaviour towards Love is also evident in 'A Narrow Vessel' (read as an allegory) and 'Love and the Child,' the poems we have discussed earlier.
30. See *Poems of Francis Thompson*, p. 431.
31. Paul Van K. Thomson, p. 137.
32. In the *Katha Upanishad*, a well-known philosophical treatise in Sanskrit, the spiritual path leading to union with the Divine has been compared to the "razor's edge." The analogy suggests the difficulties and trials the spiritual aspirant has to undergo before he attains the goal, and the risks that the

pursuit of the Divine involves. Somerset Maugham adopted the phrase as the title of one of his novels.

33. See Everard Meynell, p. 176 and Paul K. Thomson, p. 83.
34. See Everard Meynell, p. 154.
35. Francis Thompson, p. 28.
36. It appears that the poet did not approve of his “bright sciential idolatory” later. According to his biographer, Everard Meynell, he rejected the ode, in effect, for accommodating the Pagan view.
37. A somewhat similar opinion is held by Peter Butter, who maintains that the poem suggest “something of the nature of Union” (Francis Thompson, p. 20). On the other hand, Leslie Johnston holds that the poem seems to show that Thompson “never emerged fully into the light of the ‘Illuminative Way’” (“Modern Mysticism : Some Prophet and Poets,” Quarterly Review, vol. 220, 1914, p. 232). This is belied by the optimistic and reassuring tone of the poem.
38. John Freeman, p. 307.