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Contemporary criticism, personal and literary, of Alice Meynell

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Contemporary Criticism, Personal and Literal, of Alice Meynell

by

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ALICE MEYNELL

"She will become one of the fairest and steadiest lights of English Literature, though she may remain inconspicuous to the crowd, incapable of perfectness."

......Coventry Patmore
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION
INTRODUCTION

The nineteenth century closed with a decade that was decadent, reactionary, amazing, a decade recalling flaming personalities, numerous reform movements, the dying-out of Victorianism, the spread of evolution. There seemed to be a widespread sense of disaster as the century drew to a close. The staidness, the stability of Victorianism had been drowned in the sea of new movements. There was the New Party, the New Age, the New Realism, the New Paganism, the New Spirit, the New Woman, the New Drama, etc. There was the socialism of Shaw, Wells and William Morris, the imperialism of William Ernest Henley, the evolutionism of Darwin, the advance of the middle-class, the tossing aside of convention and the beginning of a freedom that had no limits.

"The significance of the nineties", says Richard Le Gallienne, "is that they began to apply all the new ideas that had been accumulating from the disintegrating action of scientific and philosophic thought on every kind of spiritual, moral, social and artistic convention, and all forms of authority demanding obedience merely as authority." (1)

The artistic world was stunned, but amused, by the literary decadents, especially by Oscar Wilde, Aubrey Beardsley and Ernest Dowson. They were the cynosure of the decade. The brilliance of Swinburne, Morris, Meredith, Ruskin, Pater, Huxley was eclipsed by the Beardsley-Wilde-Dowson brand of decadence.

Speaking of Oscar Wilde, Richard Le Gallienne asserts, "In him the

(1) "The Romantic Nineties" - by Richard Le Gallienne
The liberty of the decadents had come to mean "The inalienable right of a few vivid personalities to express themselves fully without regard to morality or convention."

Even that body of conservative and religious people who maintain the equilibrium of a nation in all times of stress were profoundly affected by this decade. Holbrook Jackson has observed, "No family wore its record record for solid British respectability on no matter how secure a basis, was immune from the new ideas; and if the bourgeoisie of the eighteen-eighties were inspired to throw their mahogany into the streets, their successors in the eighteen-nineties were barely constrained from doing the same with their most cherished principles. The staidest Non-conformist circles begot strange, pale youths with abundant hair, whose abandoned thoughts expressed themselves in 'purple patches' of prose, and whose sole aim in life was to live passionately in a succession of 'scarlet moments'. Life testing was the fashion, and the rising generation felt as though it was slipping out of the cages of convention into a freedom full of tremendous possibilities." (1)

Romanticism had flourished for a century. It had given birth to the decade of decadence and the denouement of this era marked the end of Romanticism.

(1) "Catholic Literary Revival" - Calvert Alexander p. 96
By 1895 much of the excitement of the transitional decade was beginning to subside. Many of the more colorful personalities had lost their vividness. The century was ending and man was looking forward, anxiously and hopefully, to the sunrise of the modern century.

In the last years of the nineteenth century there was a renewed interest in literature and the arts. New ideas, revolutionary ideas from France were entering England to counteract the staid self-satisfaction of Victorianism. A renovation was taking place in all the arts; predominantly in literature was this change perceived. "Fin de siecle" was the term applied to the decade starting with 1890. But it was not so much the ending of one century as it was the beginning of a new one.

The most celebrated of the places where the literary personalities of this decade gathered was the drawing-room at Palace Court, presided over by Alice Meynell, of whom Richard Le Gallienne has written "a veritable Egeria in the London literary world, the center of a salon that recalled the salons of pre-revolutionary France...." (1) The magnet which drew the outstanding minds to Palace Court was the personal charm and intellectual energy of the wife of Wilfrid Meynell. "I may say," declared Charles Lewis Hind, "that calling at that house meant arriving at half-past three, staying until midnight, and meeting in the course of the year most of the literary folk worth knowing." (2)

(1) "The Romantic Nineties" - by Richard Le Gallienne  p. 113
(2) "The Diary of a Looker-On" - Charles Lewis Hind
By 1890 Alice Meynell was well-known for her delicate, exquisite verse and her thoughtful, polished prose. Besides she was young, beautiful, steeped in the culture of the classical age and yet a modern, sympathetic toward new political and artistic tendencies. She was admired by Tennyson, Browning, Patmore, deVere, Meredith and Thompson, as well as by the younger writers of the day.

The Meynell drawing-room became the famed rendezvous of renowned celebrities and there were found the personages who would lay the literary foundations not only for the last half of the nineteenth century, but for the beginning of the twentieth century. Aubrey Beardsley would visit with his portfolio of sketches. It was the meeting place for W. E. Henley, editor of "National Observer", E. V. Lucas, Oscar Wilde and his brother, Willie Wilde, William Watson, Stephen Phillips, G. K. Chesterton, Herbert Treoch, Lionel Johnson, Katharine Tynan, W. B. Yeats, Richard Le Gallienne, Ezra Pound, Walter De La Mare, and Wilfrid Blunt. This literary heart of England drew Coventry Patmore and George Meredith, who worshipped the intellectual genius of Alice Meynell.

"Your Johnson" she signed her letters to her husband. Certainly this circle with the quiet, modern poetess as center, was the modern equivalent, but on a much larger scale, of Dr. Johnson's renowned coterie of the eighteenth century.

The "Romantic '90s" is the decade in which new freedom sprung up and found a vital expression. Of this period Richard Le Gallienne has reported, "Such achievements as the twentieth century can boast are merely extensions
of what the men and women of the '90s began, and perhaps today we have less sowing, or even reaping, than running to seed." (1) A new world was beginning to open up and the pioneers were men and women outstanding at the time.

Alice Meynell brought together the new personalities of a coming generation and the old ones of a passing generation. The purpose of this thesis is to show her relationship with contemporary writers, the interest that prominent authors had in her, in some instances the influence she exerted on them, the respect and admiration in which she was held, and their opinion of her verse and prose. Wilfrid Meynell was so much a part of her life that it is impossible to write a thesis on Alice Meynell without including him.

The thesis contains the following material: her life, including her childhood, during which time her father, Thomas James Thompson, exerted a tremendous influence on his daughter; her marriage to Wilfrid Meynell and the relationship between the parents and children within the family; the literary life at Palace Court; the interest and encouragement of Aubrey de Vere; her friendship with George Meredith; the mutual admiration between the poetess and Coventry Patmore; the opinion of her writings by minor contemporary critics of the day as found in the "Athenaeum", the "Bookman", etc.; and the esteem of G. K. Chesterton, Theodore Maynard and Alfred Noyes. In the chapter on Francis Thompson there is considerable mention of Wilfrid Meynell for, although Alice Meynell was the poet's inspiration and his

(1) "The Romantic Nineties" - Richard Le Gallienne p. 129
affection for her amounted almost to adoration, it was her editor-husband who was directly responsible for discovering his genius, saving his life and constantly encouraging him.
CHAPTER II

ALICE MEYNELL
A. Her Early Life
B. Her Life with Wilfrid Meynell
CHAPTER II

ALICE MEYNELL
A. Her Early Life

Even when very young, Alice Thompson Meynell had great men about her. Charles Dickens was a frequent visitor at the home of her father, Thomas James Thompson and an ardent admirer of his beautiful wife, Christina, a talented pianist and painter. He would hold the two little Thompson girls on his knees - Elizabeth, who would one day be Lady Butler, England's most famous painter of battle scenes; and Alice, who was to become an outstanding woman critic, the "Poetess of Poets", the confidante of Coventry Patmore, close friend of George Meredith, supreme inspiration of Francis Thompson, and who caused Wilfrid Meynell to declare that she had made for him forty-five years of heaven on earth.

The Thompson family led a nomadic existence; through the father's choice they would wander over Italy. Early memories instilled the love of that country deep in Alice's heart and caused her to place that country foremost in her affection. The mother's attachments to her family in England would bring the Thompsons back to the island. The father took care of the children's education, teaching them as if they were boys. In later years Alice Meynell rarely reminisced concerning her childhood, but the thoughts and reflections of days spent in Italy are found in her essays on childhood.

The profound influence which the father had on his two young daughters is recorded in her short essay called "A Remembrance". She spoke of his
silence, which she believed was better worth interpreting than the speech of many other men. It was through his silence rather than through his speech, a "subtle education", that he taught his children. In a poem written toward the end of her life and dedicated to her sister, Alice Meynell immortalized her father:

"Our father works in us,
The daughters of his manhood. Not undone
Is he, not wasted, though transmuted thus,
And though he left no son." (1)

It was when Alice was seventeen and the family was living in England, with her mother and sister absorbed in their painting, that she lamented her idleness and made her first pronouncement concerning the status and rights of women, which she re-echoed throughout her life: "Of all the sins of which the cry must surely come to Heaven, the greatest, judged by all the laws of God and humanity, is the miserable selfishness of men that keeps women from work – work, the salvation of the world, the winner of the dreamless sleep, and the dreamless thought too, the strengthener of mind and body."

(2) The rest of her life was devoted to that work for which she had so fervently yearned. She assisted her husband in his editing of magazines, read proof, reviewed books, translated Papal encyclicals and followed her own particular literary pursuits while bringing up a family of seven children and entertaining the foremost literary personalities of the day.

(1) "A Father of Women" by Alice Meynell
(2) "Alice Meynell: A Memoir" by Viola Meynell  p. 37
Sorrow and fame first marked her when she was in her early twenties. "Renouncement", the poem which Christina Rossetti knew by heart and recited to her close friends and which she declared was one of the three finest sonnets ever written by a woman, set forth the deep grief the young girl felt when she knew she must break off her friendship with the priest who had received her into the Church, and whose friendship had become so precious to her. A slim volume of her poems was published under the title of "Preludes" in 1875 and her fame was established.

It has been said of Alice Meynell that she was blessed in her parents, blessed in her husband, blessed in her children, and blessed in her death, and all this is true. She never had an unsuccessful period in her life. Her first published poems were praised by critics. John Ruskin, in a letter to her mother, said that in the slender volume of the "Preludes" he found "The finest things I have yet seen or felt in modern verse." (1)

Because of Elizabeth's successful career as an artist, it was necessary for the family to establish headquarters in London. There Alice made the acquaintance of Aubrey de Vere, who encouraged her with the words of approval that Tennyson expressed when reading her verse. It was through Aubrey de Vere that an invitation came to the two young girls to visit Tennyson at Aldworth, Blackdown, his sequestered retreat.

The thirty-seven poems in "Preludes" set forth certain themes and distinctions of style which were always present in her writings. "A poet of one mood in all my lays," said Alice Meynell of her own verse. Almost all her future poems were suggested by those in her first volume. In

(1) "They Have Seen His Star" by Valentine Long p. 41
reading her later poems there is little chance of novelty, but there is always the complete and arresting originality which runs through all of her verse and prose.

Robert Browning came upon a review of her book and was so interested in the excerpts that were quoted that he obtained a complete copy of her verse. His disappointment was not in her writing but in the review which he believed underestimated the value of her work.
Besides establishing her fame, "Preludes", and in particular the sonnet "My Heart shall be thy Garden", brought her a husband. After Wilfrid Meynell had read a review of her writing, it became his greatest wish to meet the young lady. A mutual friend introduced them and their literary interests immediately became the bond which drew them together and soon resulted in their engagement.

In the autumn of 1877 Mr. and Mrs. Meynell started their married life together, beginning their career of journalism, for which they had previously made elaborate plans. In later years their writings resulted in their home becoming the center of the literary circle of that time. On Sunday evening their house at Palace Court became the meeting place for such notables as W. E. Henley, E. V. Lucas, William Watson, Stephen Phillips, Herbert Trench, Wilfrid Blunt, Lionel Johnson, W. B. Yeats, Ezra Pound, Katharine Tynan, Aubrey de Vere, G. K. Chesterton, Richard Le Gallienne, Walter De La Mare, Aubrey Beardsley and Oscar Wilde.

At the request of Cardinal Manning, in 1881 Wilfrid Meynell became editor of the "Weekly Register", a Catholic periodical. For eighteen years he performed the duties of editor, sub-editor, contributor and office-boy. Besides assisting her husband, Mrs. Meynell contributed to the "Spectator" and "Saturday Review", two outstanding literary publications.
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The best production of the joint enterprise of the Meynells was the monthly literary magazine "Merry England" which was started in 1883. This expressed many of Wilfrid Meynell's enthusiastic ideas and supported the social revolution of the Young England Movement, the revival of the peasantry, the abolishing of the wrongs of the poor, and the spread of art and literature.

Contributors to the magazine included Coventry Patmore, Aubrey De Vere, Katharine Tynan, Wilfrid Blunt and Cardinal Manning. Here Lionel Johnson appeared in print for the first time. Some of the earliest work of W. H. Hudson and Hilaire Belloc was printed in "Merry England". It was through the medium of this magazine that the genius of Francis Thompson was discovered to the world.

The letters written by Alice Meynell to her husband disclose the depth of her affection for her editor-husband. In 1901 when the children were no longer infants, Mrs. Meynell made a trip to America. Throughout her stay her thoughts were constantly directed toward her husband and children, as shown by the following quotations from her letters: (1)

"Darling Wilfrid, you have the children and they have you, but what have I?"

"To my great happiness the whole batch of letters arrived this noon. How infinitely delightful and touching to see those words written by hands so dear..."

It perhaps was easier for Alice Meynell who always feared that she could not show the depth of her love, to express her feelings in writing: (1)

(1) Extracts taken from her letters to her husband in "Alice Meynell: A Memoir" by Viola Meynell p. 169-194
"Oh my own Love, how much I think of you! Oh my beloved sons and daughters!"

"My longing to see you is sometimes too keen."

"It will be too much happiness to see you."

"How lonely I am on this hemisphere!"

She wrote of having a dream of meeting her husband in the mountains, canyons or plains. "I dream of you night by night, wildly of course; but always of some sudden meeting. Oh my Love." When there is a possibility of her staying longer in America she wrote: "It is with tears that I think of staying longer away from you. How can I? Oh, Wilfrid, I feel about the separation all that you do, with the poignant pain of absence from the children added."

The novelty of New York, lunching with Ethel Barrymore at the Waldorf-Astoria, an invitation from Mrs. Roosevelt to attend the White House, her surprise at finding that her work was so well known in the United States, the popular reception and tremendous ovation she received, the fascination of Chicago, Denver and California, which she called an earthly paradise, all this newness and excitement lost the lustre which sharing them with her beloved husband would have furnished. Her letters to him were usually signed "Your devoted Johnson."

Wilfrid Meynell's greatest friend was Wilfrid Blunt, a poet and traveller, whose wife was Lady Anne Blunt, a grand-daughter of Byron. She shared her desire for adventurous travelling with her husband. The Meynell family made constant visits to their beautiful Elizabethan house near Southwater. The friendship, which lasted for forty years, enriched the
lives of the young family, filled with admiration for the life the Blunts led. To their wonderful parties and to their cottage at Langport in Somerset the Meynells were invited.

When the children were grown, Mrs. Meynell found time to travel, especially to her chosen land, Italy. From Venice in 1909 she wrote to her husband: "Olivia is the sweetest companion, always considerate and complaining of nothing. How wise is she who chooses not only her husband but her children's father, and thus has such sons and daughters as ours." (1)

The enjoyment that self-confidence affords was never felt by Mrs. Meynell, even with all the admiration she commanded and all the social functions she attended. Her whole view of any visit depended on whether or not she was accompanied by her husband, receiving the comfort of his familiar presence.

The home ties that bound the children to their parents were so strong that when they were married they remained in almost daily touch with their parents. When Madeline, the second eldest daughter, was married, she wrote to her parents, "I have never known anything and can never know anything, like your kindness to me. My life has been perfectly happy until now, and now the only unhappiness is leaving you both. If I had known how hard it would be, I don't think I would have undertaken to do it. I thank you with all my heart for your wonderful goodness to me. And I thank God for having given me such parents." (2)

(1) "Alice Meynell: A Memoir" by Viola Meynell p. 241
(2) "Alice Meynell: A Memoir" by Viola Meynell p. 252
To the world the name of Wilfrid Meynell is perhaps overshadowed by the renown of his famous wife. To Alice Meynell he was the all-important center and heart of her life. Today Wilfrid Meynell is ninety-one years old. His greatest wish is to spread the knowledge of the exquisite genius of the woman who had made this earth a heaven for him.
CHAPTER III

LITERARY FRIENDSHIPS

A. Early Interest of Aubrey De Vere
B. Life at Palace Court
C. Coventry Patmore
D. George Meredith
E. Katharine Tynan
CHAPTER III

A

Early Interest of Aubrey De Vere

Before the publication of her poems, Mrs. Meynell (then Alice Thompson), sought Aubrey de Vere's advice, "Many things that you said have opened my eyes to my own great ignorance and to the errors of taste and judgment which mar my work." (1) She sent her manuscripts to him and he showed them to Tennyson, to Sir Henry Taylor, to Coventry Patmore.

His early interest in her work is shown in his correspondence. "I was very much interested at hearing you had made up your mind on the subject of publication. I believe that when we discussed the subject, I was rather on the side of waiting a little. But a young poet is somewhat the slave of what he has written so long as it remains in his desk." (2)

Through Aubrey de Vere's intervention Alice and her sister received an invitation to visit Tennyson at his secluded home in Aldworth, Blackdown. It was a hard experience for the young girls, in fear at the thought of meeting the great poet. But when they discovered that he deliberately tried to inspire them with awe, they no longer feared him. On one of the later visits to Tennyson's home, the aging poet said to the young poetess, "Others weary me with their sendings, but your poems I have had to get for myself." (3)

(1) "Alice Meynell" - by Viola Meynell p. 48
(2) op. cit. - p. 49
(3) Mrs. Meynell and Her Literary Generation - by Anne K.
Title: Effect of Pesticide on Fishes

Keywords: Environmental, Pest Control, Aquatic Ecosystem, Ecological Impact, Fish Populations

Abstract: This study investigates the impact of pesticide usage on fish populations in aquatic ecosystems. The research highlights the detrimental effects of common pesticides on fish health and survival, emphasizing the need for alternative, eco-friendly methods of pest control. The study's findings contribute to the ongoing discourse on environmental health and sustainability.

Introduction: Pesticides are widely used in agriculture to control pests, but their widespread application has led to unintended consequences for non-target species, including fish. This study aims to explore the specific effects of various pesticides on fish populations and to propose sustainable alternatives.

Methodology: A comprehensive review of existing literature, coupled with experiments conducted in controlled environments, was utilized to assess the impact of pesticides on fish health and behavior. The study included both laboratory and field trials to ensure a robust understanding of the effects under different conditions.

Results: The results indicated significant reductions in fish populations following the application of commonly used pesticides. These reductions were accompanied by altered behavior patterns, indicating potential long-term impacts on the ecosystem.

Discussion: The findings suggest that conventional pesticide usage poses a significant threat to aquatic ecosystems, particularly fish populations. The study recommends the implementation of eco-friendly pest control methods to mitigate these negative effects. The development of sustainable agricultural practices that balance pest control with environmental preservation is crucial for the health of aquatic ecosystems.

Conclusion: While pesticides remain a vital tool in pest control, their widespread use requires careful consideration of the potential ecological impacts. The results of this study underscore the need for innovation in pest control strategies to safeguard fish populations and ensure the sustainability of aquatic ecosystems.

References: [List of relevant sources and studies]

Appendix: [Additional data and methodologies]

Graphs and Figures: [Visual representations of study results]

Tables: [Summary of data and findings]

Acknowledgments: [Gratitude to contributors and institutions]
"I am glad," writes Aubrey de Vere, "that you mean to pay the Tennysons another visit... He could give you many a useful hint as to Poetry considered as an art. Italy will, I trust, be propitious to your poetry. You must throw your heart into it, and be constant to it, without being anxious about it." (1)

While she was in Italy, she undertook a translation for him at his request. She received the following encouraging letter from him, dated September 12, 1876: "I am very much obliged to you for finding time to write to me amid the orange-groves of the South, and not less obliged to you for so kindly undertaking the translation I was so anxious to see done by you... Translation is a difficult thing, but it is also a fascinating one to those who have the gift. Only poets can translate poetry, and then only if diction and versatility rank high among their gifts. Shelley and Coleridge are, I think, our best poetical translators; and if the former had fulfilled his intention of translating 'Aeschylus', he could perhaps have given us the sublimest volume in the language, and disciplined his own genius, both in the best and speediest way to perfect his own powers for original compositions of solid greatness. Solidity was what his genius lacked, and this it lacked because it had never learned self-control. Wordsworth told me that he had translated above a score of Michael Angelo's sonnets, though he had only thought three of them perfect enough for publication." (2)

(1) "Aubrey de Vere" - by Wilfrid Ward - p. 303-304
(2) op. cit. - p. 304
During the first year of their married life, Mr. and Mrs. Meynell met Sir Henry and Lady Taylor, who was a cousin of Aubrey de Vere's. "I hope you will like my young poet friend, Alice Meynell. To me she is very interesting, but you will find her shy," (1) he wrote to Lady Taylor.

Sir Henry Taylor, a friend of Tennyson, Wordsworth, Rogers, Carlyle and Mill, was well-known at that time for his work "Philip van Artevelde". This new friendship widened the circle of literary acquaintances for the young couple. Through visits at Bournemouth, where the Taylors lived, Mrs. Meynell, who believed that Shelley had had a profound influence on her life as well as on her writings, met the famed poet's descendants, both by Harriet and Mary.

In the diary which Mrs. Meynell kept at various times in her life she related the visits of Aubrey de Vere. One incident mentioned is how he related winning from Wordsworth his first but reluctant approval of Tennyson by reading to him, "Of Old Sate Freedom on the Heights". Wordsworth had been of the belief that a lad of a mere twenty-one years could not possibly write poetry for men to read.

Of de Vere's own writing Alice Meynell expressed the following criticism: "The gentler things in his work are strong; I imply a certain weakness in the violent things." (2)

(1) "Alice Meynell" - by Viola Meynell  p. 62
(2) "Alice Meynell" - by Viola Meynell  p. 112
CHAPTER III

B

LIFE AT PALACE COURT

The Palace Court house, later called No. 47, was built by the Meynells according to their own design. It was a five-story, red brick house with a tall gable and small-paned windows - a house large enough to hold the seven active Meynell children and their industrious parents.

It was after the adventure of moving had quieted down to the routine business of the weekly publication that Alice Meynell had discovered her mastery of the art of essay writing. She sent her essay "The Rhythm of Life" to W. E. Henley, the editor of the "National Observer". The typical hard-boiled editor appealed to her for more articles, "If you've any more 'Rhythms of Life' I shall be proud to take them on, one of the best things it has so far been my privilege to print." After a pause in which he had received no material from her, he implored, "Are you never going to write for me again?" (1) Her critical powers were highly valued by the editor, who sent her some of his own verse to criticize.

In 1893 her essays were collected and published under the title of "The Rhythm of Life". In the same year many of the poems that appeared in her first volume "Preludes" were reprinted under the title of "Poems". The book of essays contained a review of the odes of Coventry Patmore in which she has said, "Through nearly the whole of Coventry Patmore's poetry, there

(1) "Alice Meynell" - by Viola Meynell p. 72
is an endurance of the mortal touch. Nay, more, he has the endurance of the immortal touch." (1)

The library was the publishing department in the Palace Court home. There was located the long library table, buried under an avalanche of papers which seldom diminished enough to reveal the top of the table itself - manuscripts, newspaper clippings, letters - waiting for a lull which never seemed to come in the busy lives of the Meynells.

The routine of life at Palace Court, if it can be called routine, was interrupted in 1895 by a letter of Coventry Patmore's to the "Saturday Review" advocating her appointment to the poet laureateship. The children were astir with excitement that the fame already won by their mother might result in her holding the coveted laureateship.

The following year, her essays "The Colour of Life" were published. Many of her articles which appeared in the "Pall Mall Gazette" in the column under the heading "The Wares of Autolysus" were contained there. The depth of her thought, which so marked her first volume "The Rhythm of Life" is not so marked here, for these essays were swiftly penned to make the weekly deadline. Yet her originality and delicacy is unfailing.

One of the friends who often dropped in at Palace Court was Vernon Blackburn, who worked for Henley as music critic of the "Pall Mall Gazette". He had a great admiration for Alice Meynell and made himself completely at home in the household. He would entertain the children by playing the piano with his fat, but nimble fingers and sing in a weak, rather high voice.

(1) "Poetry of Coventry Patmore" - by Alice Meynell in "Rhythm of Life"
His admiration for Mrs. Meynell caused him to pattern his style after hers and he succeeded so well in his imitation that the proof of one of her articles was sent to him for correction.

Mrs. Meynell was a gracious hostess in the pleasant drawing-room at Palace Court, which was very spacious and panelled with old Japanese gold-thread embroideries. In his book "The Romantic 90's", which deals with life in London in that decade, Richard Le Gallienne has given this lovely description of Alice Meynell: "Never surely was a lady who carried her learning and wore the flower of her gentle humane sanctity with such quiet grace, with so gentle and understanding a smile. The touch of exquisite asceticism about her seemed but to accent the sensitive sympathy of her manner, the manner of one quite humanly and simply in this world, with all its varied interests, and yet not of it. There was the charm of the beautiful abbess about her, with the added 'esprit' of intellectual sophistication. However quietly she sat in her drawing room of an evening with her family and friends about her, her presence radiated a peculiarly lovely serenity, like a twilight gay with stars. But there was nothing austere or withdrawn about her. In that very lively household of young people she was one with the general fun, which under the direction of her buoyant genial husband used often to wax fast and furious and made dinner there a particularly exhilarating occasion. I give thanks here for the many joyous hours I have spent at the laughing board, and I have no other such picture of a full and harmonious home life to set by its side." (1)

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(1) "The Romantic Nineties" - by Richard Le Gallienne
A casual acquaintance, Major Fitzroy Gardner, speaks of Mrs. Meynell as "no ordinary highbrow but a very beautiful woman whose presence, as much as her writing, was an inspiration...She had the face of an angel....She possessed an instinctively gracious dignity of manner, yet the sense of humour of a frivolous girl." (1)

At Palace Court Sunday afternoon was reserved for callers, while in the evening there was a more informal group. Agnes Tobin, a poet from California, would bring a touch of America into the gatherings. Aubrey Beardsley would arrive with his portfolio of drawings. Oscar Wilde would bring his brother, Willie Wilde, whose brand of humour was as clever as that of his famed brother. Lionel Johnson, weak and pale, would be present. Katharine Tynan would arrive with W. B. Yeats. Other visitors were William Watson, Stephen Phillips, and Herbert Trench, who, in a delightful poem, wrote that Mrs. Meynell was, as it were, "woven of rapture".

Amid the myriad tasks associated with the growing family and the weekly publications, Mrs. Meynell managed to find enough time to edit "The Flower of the Mind" in 1897, an anthology of poems from Chaucer to Wordsworth with an introduction and with notes. After this came the translation from French of a book on Lourdes, and from Italian of a book called "The Madonna"; then followed a collection of essays on London to accompany a book of photogravures called "London Impressions". A new volume of essays, "The Spirit of Place", was published in 1899.

(1) "Alice Meynell" - by Viola Meynell p. 143
The hardest task she undertook was the writing of a book on Ruskin - a summary of his ideas for the "Modern English Writers" series. A review of the book in the "Times" in which the critic disagreed with parts of Mrs. Meynell's treatment of Ruskin, ended: "Speaking after reflection, we fancy that few people in England could have written a better book." (1)

She had not wholly turned away from verse-writing, but her poems accumulated slowly over the years and in 1901, while Mrs. Meynell was on her lecture tour in America, the book "Later Poems" was published. With the help of Everard, an art student, she wrote "Children of the Old Masters", an illustrated art-book; and this was published in 1905.

Both she and her husband contributed to "The Daily Chronicle" and there was friendly rivalry as to which one would have the most space in the paper. They contributed short paragraphs on various subjects under the heading of "The Office Window".

Another work was her selections from the poems of John Bannister Tabb. But most important was her work in literary criticism. "In all her criticism", said a writer in the "Times", "whether of life, of art, or of literature, Mrs. Meynell has remained inflexibly faithful to principles which are so clearly and spontaneously the outcome of impulse and imagination as of a steadfast judgment. That is her time's debt to her." (2)

Many references to Shakespeare are found in her criticisms. Her daughter, Viola Meynell, believes that if one could make a record of her

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(1) "Alice Meynell" - by Viola Meynell p. 162
(2) Ibid - p. 204
mother's feeling for Shakespeare alone, there would be little else of importance to say about her.

Similar to the manner of Thompson, she spoke with the decision of a master in her field; in her literary opinions she was firm. Her disapproval of Swinburne and her strong belief in Coventry Patmore's supreme genius did not meet with the critics' approval.

The Catholic Literary Revival was organized and first took the form of a movement under the direction of Alice Meynell. The Catholic writers gathered at her home and received her encouragement. With them she worked for the return to English literature of the essential Christian spirit. She regarded the Christian tradition in intimate contact with the glories of the European past. She believed that "Art for art's sake" was an eccentric heresy which took away the center which nourished all literature. She aided and inspired Coventry Patmore, Lionel Johnson, and Francis Thompson to write fearlessly in spite of the pressure of hostile public opinion which had so long been rampant in England.

Both Catholic and non-Catholic met at Palace Court. If she did not bring all her followers to a belief of what she considered truth, she at least taught them respect. G. K. Chesterton and Alfred Noyes, later converts, were impressed by the sanctity and religion of she who, as a young woman, took private instruction and was converted, unknown even to intimate friends. This circle, headed by Mrs. Meynell, was but one of the many influential groups which flourished in the closing decade of the nineteenth century and contributed to the creation of a new age.
An acquaintance of many years' standing but an infrequent visitor was John Sargent, who wrote his appreciation of Mrs. Meynell's writings, "I daresay you get many a note written as this one is on a Wednesday evening to tell you that you have given great pleasure - and I can recall at least one that you did not get because it was not posted, for fear of boring. I shall be reckless tonight and give you thanks for many a delight brought home, or for the slight push that sends a doubtful idol toppling. I don't know which I enjoy most." He requested her to write an introduction for a book, and when she had complied with his request, Sargent wrote: "I have just read your introductory note with a feeling of gratitude that dates from the time when you consented to do it, and that is now doubled, for you have done it well." (1)

In 1905 the Meynells left Palace Court to move nearer to town.

(1) "Alice Meynell" - by Viola Meynell p. 217
Alice Meynell always regretted that she failed to make her love for other people felt by them. "All my troubles", she wrote in a letter to a beloved older friend, "are little, old, foolish, trivial as they always were - the troubles of my spiritual life, I mean. But as to sorrow, my failure of love to those that loved me can never be cancelled or undone. So I never fail in a provision of grief for any night of my life." (1) She always grieved that she had never shown her parents the depth of her love for them. The strong ties that bound her to other people were considered by her in the light of literary friendships. That she should show her affection and need for them did not seem to occur to her.

Coventry Patmore's friendship with Alice Meynell grew into an infatuation - an intense deep love for the intellect of this brilliant, amazing woman who gave him an understanding which no one else had ever offered him. The appreciation for his poetry which he so longed for he found in her words: "I have never told you what I think of your poetry. It is the greatest thing in the world, the most harrowing and the sweetest. I can hardly realize that he who has written it and who is greater than his words is celestially kind to me and calls me friend." (2)

(1) "Alice Meynell" - by Viola Meynell  p. 121
(2) "Portrait of My Family" - by Derek Patmore  p. 234
In 1891 Coventry Patmore had moved to a queer, ramshackle, thirty-three room house, called the "Lodge" situated in Lymington on a muddy point of land, opposite the Isle of Wight. The atmosphere of seclusion which permeated his new habitation admirably suited his poetic temperament. Francis Thompson often visited; Alice Meynell and her husband would spend weekends there, and it was at the Lodge that John Sargent painted one of his famous portraits of Coventry Patmore.

Their mutual admiration for each other's work had been the foundation of the friendship which flourished both at the Lodge and in his frequent visits to the Meynells' house in Palace Court. For both Alice and Wilfrid Meynell delighted in the new acquaintance with their distinguished friend with an eagerness which pleased him. Mrs. Meynell would take him with her to the numerous parties, receptions and teas to which she was always invited.

The companionship of women had always been essential to Patmore, but in the remarkable mind of Alice Meynell he found a delight he had never before experienced. In the December 1892 issue of the *Fortnightly Review* he paid her the highest tribute. He expressed his admiration for her poems and admitted that with the possible exception of the work of Christina Rossetti they were as near to being poetry as any woman had succeeded in writing. But it was to her prose that he attributed his highest praise. He declared that she "has shown an amount of perceptive reason and ability to discern self-evident things as yet undiscerned, a reticence, fulness and effectiveness of expression, which places her in the very front rank of living writers in prose. At least half of this little volume is classical work, embodying as it does, new thought of general and permanent
significance in perfect language, and bearing, in every sentence, the hallmark of genius, namely the marriage of masculine force of insight with feminine grace and tact of expression." (1)

He compared her essays to Emerson's, stating that Emerson's "transcendentalism" afforded him an easier field than that which Alice Meynell had chosen to write about. She wrote beautifully and originally about abstract truths. He admired her for never displaying any scorn and contempt, though using epigram.

Coventry Patmore frequently visited Palace Court. Yet the Meynell children always considered his arrival a stirring event and shared in their parent's adoration for him. He writes to his wife at home while staying at Palace Court: "If they (the Meynells) were entertaining Shakespeare or Dante, they could not be more anxious to please and distinguish, and they so manage it that one cannot but feel gratified by their adulation." (2)

Alice Meynell's frail appearance often startled him and he worried to such an extent during the time one of the Meynell children had pneumonia that he offered his services in correcting proofs for the "Weekly Register" so that she might find more time for rest. After this family worry was over, the tired mother visited Lymington and Coventry Patmore wrote to Wilfrid Meynell: "I can guess how much happiness you give up in giving up a fortnight of her sweet society by the pleasure which the prospect of enjoying it gives me." (3) His days would be filled with loneliness following such a visit and he would look forward anxiously to his next visit to

(1) "Fortnightly Review" - December 1892 - "Mrs. Meynell, Poet and Essayist" - by Coventry Patmore
(2) "Portrait of My Family" - by Derek Patmore p. 280
(3) "Portrait of My Family" - by Derek Patmore p. 280
the Meynell home.

Viola Meynell tells us that Coventry Patmore's poetry broke her mother's heart, yet was the happiness of her life. "I hope you will forgive me for keeping your MSS. a little longer," Mrs. Meynell wrote to him. "They are quite safe and I cannot tell you what a consolation it is to me to read them as I can get time. But I read them with many tears and my heart is full of sorrow." (1)

She was not only his dearest friend but acted also the part of severest critic. She could pierce through his greatness and perceive his defects. She realized the frankness of her criticism and in correcting his work would apologize for it. Passages which did not stir her she would bring to his attention. At one time she accused him of not knowing thoroughly the men he slighted, mentioning this as a possible reason for the unpopularity of his work. She tried to save him from making rash and scornful statements which resulted in his being disliked. She obtained much enjoyment in being of service to him. "It has been a happiness to read again, through and through, the words of the greatest intellect I have ever known." (2)

To win new readers for him she selected from among his poems those which she believed would meet with popular approval and wrote the introduction herself. These were published in 1895 under the title "Poems of Pathos and Delight". Her care in selection had a great effect on the subsequent sale of his writings.

(1) "Alice Meynell" - by Viola Meynell p. 112
(2) "Portrait of My Family" - by Derek Patmore p. 282
Although Alice Meynell was admired by all the brilliant intellects of the day, she received deepest enjoyment from that bestowed on her by Coventry Patmore. She wrote to him after he had praised her: "I ought now once and forever to lay aside my vanity and ambition and desire for recognition - indeed I do." (1)

Coventry Patmore was a man of superlatives. If he heard a blackbird singing in the evening he would declare it was a nightingale and when describing the episode later would make it a chorus of nightingales. Due allowance must be made for his exaggerations, but his praise for Alice Meynell was so often reiterated that his sincerity becomes evident. "She will become one of the fairest and steadiest lights of English literature, though she may remain inconspicuous to the crowd, incapable of perfectness." (2)

Mrs. Meynell accompanied Coventry Patmore to Sargent's studio when the portrait which now hangs in the National Portrait Gallery was painted. At the poet's request a drawing of Mrs. Meynell was made by the famous artist. The social life of London was rather exhausting for the aging poet but he endured it and his new fame quietly and submissively for the sake of enjoying Mrs. Meynell's company. Although he appreciated beautiful women and was in turn admired by them, he was never at ease at large social functions. His passionate devotion to Mrs. Meynell kept him in London and brought him into contact with W. E. Henley, an influential literary editor, the brilliant poet, Lionel Johnson, and other foremost writers. He helped

(1) op. cit. p. 284
(2) "Fortnightly Review" - December 1892 - "Mrs. Meynell, Poet and Essayist" - by Coventry Patmore
in the Meynell's literary labors by correcting columns of proof, for Wilfrid Meynell's eyes were commencing to fail after years of tedious proof-reading.

Since Francis Thompson spent a great deal of time in the Meynell household, it was inevitable that he should meet Coventry Patmore. The two poets were instantly attracted to each other and Francis Thompson soon became an admirer of Patmore with this admiration resulting in a deep and lasting friendship. He wrote to the older man, "You are the only man with whom I can talk at all...Yours is a conversation of a man who has trodden before me the way which for years I trod alone, and often desperate, seeing no guiding parallel among modern poets to my aims and experience." (1)

When during the last two years of his life Coventry Patmore found that his place in Alice Meynell's affections had been taken by George Meredith, it was Francis Thompson who comforted him. The friendship with Alice Meynell which so passionately delighted him for four years was doomed to end in bitter loneliness and despair, for Coventry Patmore had fallen in love with her. Alice Meynell, disappointed, withdrew from his presence into the security of her family.

He kept up his correspondence with Wilfrid Meynell, inquiring anxiously about her health and reading her work enthusiastically. He wrote: "Your wife's prose is the finest that was ever written, and none but kindred genius can see how great it is. I am glad to see that all the few competent judges are gradually coming to confirm all that I have ever said in her praise. If I were you, I should go mad with pride and joy." (2)

(1) "Portrait of My Family" - Derek Patmore p. 214
(2) "Alice Meynell" - by Viola Meynell p. 118
The supreme token of his undying admiration for Alice Meynell was made known in 1895 when he wrote a letter to the "Saturday Review" in which he advocated her appointment to the Laureateship which had been left vacant since no one was considered worthy enough to take Tennyson's place.

Without her companionship his last days were lonely. In 1896 he wrote, "One cannot live long without delight." (1) Her memory haunted his thoughts, as he waited unafraid to die.

Alice Meynell received the news of his death by telegram. Her daughter, Viola Meynell, records that she left her family assembled in the library and went alone into the drawing room. She tells us: "I can remember having no proper realization of what had happened - only horror that my mother should go into a dark room alone and remain there." (2)

When Edmund Gosse wrote his biography on Coventry Patmore, he realized what the poet had meant to Alice Meynell. He sent her his book with this note: "You will be my severest critic. You are almost the only one for whose opinion I shall care a snap." (3)

Fully appreciating the worth of each other's writing, the two poets were conscious that neither would ever receive popular acclaim. In her review of the "Unknown Eros" she declared that if his writing were to be considered high classical poetry in one hundred years, it would

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(1) "Portrait of My Family" - by Derek Patmore  p. 242
(2) "Alice Meynell" - by Viola Meynell  p.122
(3) op. cit. (2)  p. 212
necessitate having critics with a high classic quality of judgment. "It is to look for a more definite intelligence and for an explicit code of literary law, inasmuch as a mind trained in the less obvious measures and restraints both of thought and of verse is needed to recognize the law of the "Unknown Eros." She prophesied that the book would have few readers. "Its essential loneliness is its own quality." (1)

After his death Alice Meynell wrote, "Essentially he had but one subject: human love as a mystery; and but one character: an impassioned spirituality." Truly she has been called "the most subtle of Patmore's interpreters." (2)

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(1) "The Athenæum" - "Poetry of Coventry Patmore" - by Alice Meynell December 12, 1936

(2) "Portrait of My Family" - by Derek Patmore p. 196
CHAPTER III

George Meredith

"We waltzed together on celestial heights!" declared George Meredith in the typical rhapsodic manner of the poet-sportsman after a conversation with Alice Meynell. Though the possessor of the intricate style of a Browning, the poet delighted in the almost classic simplicity of Mrs. Meynell, found in her conversation and in her writings.

The glamour of a successful literary career enveloped the name "Meredith" and attracted outstanding literary personalities to his home at Box Hill. Though obscurity has now dimmed that glamour four decades after his death, while living he was considered the foremost of all the great Victorian writers. In addition to his reputation as a man of letters, Meredith's philosophy of enjoying life fully by living zestfully every moment was refreshing, though perhaps often exhausting, to the many men and women of distinction, who were attracted by his magnetic personality, his unusual recipe for living, his exalted spiritual enthusiasm and his outstanding genius.

The relationship between the ardent, energetic poet and the simple, delightful poetess had begun, as in the case of Coventry Patmore, through the medium of letters, and their mutual approval flourished before actual acquaintance had been made. In "The Wares of Autolycus", a column in the "Pall Mall Gazette", to which both Alice and Wilfrid Meynell contributed,
George Meredith read an unusual review of his work "The Amazing Marriage", which was published in 1895. "Poetry is the conspicuous secret of the book," it said. "As in this great book, so in life, poetry is not hidden. It is unrevealed. And there are mystics who aver that all the now unrevealed secrets of this human life are obvious things that we daily and ignorantly use - things that we know, yet do not recognize." (1) The critic continued the review by comparing Carinthia to Shakespeare's Helena in "Midsummer's Night Dream". The distinctive prose and discriminating appreciation aroused his admiration for the unknown reviewer. Meredith plagued the editor of the "Pall Mall Gazette" with requests for identification of the author until he received an answer.

Again, when he had read her article on Duse, also in the "Pall Mall Gazette", he avered that she had attained to the "high-water mark of literary criticism." The clarity, simplicity, depth and rare quality of her thought caused him to write - "The surprise coming on us from the combined grace of manner and sanity of thought is like one's dream of what the recognition of a new truth would be....She achieves the literary miracle of subordinating compressed choice language to grace of movement." (2) In the same review Meredith, who had not met the quiet literary wife of Wilfrid Meynell, predicted that she would one day rank as one of the great English-women of letters.

Beyond the bounds of her home and circle of friends where she was the center and glowing influence, Alice Meynell did not seek friendship. The

(1) "The Wares of Autolycus" - "Pall Mall Gazette" - November 29, 1895
(2) "The Life of George Meredith" - Robert Esmonde Lencourt
arduous labors of editing the "Weekly Register" and "Merry England" she shared with her husband. Her own particular literary pursuits, and the bringing-up of the seven Meynell children, which now and then sank into the background when an edition of the "Weekly Register" was due, but which was never neglected, satisfied her mind and occupied her busy days. She, therefore, hesitated when she learned that George Meredith, now sixty-eight, had among his few wishes the desire to know her. Both Wilfrid and Alice Meynell had great respect for the poet, even naming their youngest son "Francis Meredith".

Hoping to lure her into the group of his friends, Meredith wrote from Box Hill in March, 1896, inviting her acquaintance. "I shall teach you nothing that can be new to such a mind as yours, but I shall be leaven to your deeper thoughts of Earth and Life." (1) The following month he wrote, "Your willingness to come when the auspices are favorable shall water my desert until I see you here." Alice Meynell, perhaps a little awed at meeting the great man, had begged forgiveness beforehand for the reticence, which characterized her. For in the same letter he continued, "You write of your not being a talker. I can find the substance I want in your silences and can converse with them." He apologized for his own inclination to talk while admiring her silence. "Let me tell you that my mind is not always with my tongue in the act. I do it for the sake of sociability, and I am well-disposed either to listen or to worship the modest lips that have such golden reserves." (2)

(1) "Letters of George Meredith" - March 24, 1896
(2) "Letters of George Meredith" - April 28, 1896
His lifetime of tender reverence and admiration for the sanctity of womanhood seemed to reach its highest peak in his new friendship which opened to him the exquisit soul of the "pencilling Mamma", as he called Mrs. Meynell. Within a few months she became his most absorbing friend. He kept her supplied with the heavy double white violets which grew at Box Hill; he named a blue iris with a golden center "Alicia Coerulea"; he called her his "Beloved Portia"; and by June he addressed her as "Dearest friend."

Alice Meynell's greatest concern was to have others love and appreciate the poetry of Coventry Patmore as she herself did. With George Meredith she had little success, and one of their controversies involved the worth of the Patmorean verse. He believed that its value must be high to arouse the esteem of such a worthy literary critic as he considered her to be. Yet, in accordance with the opinions of other literary men of his day, he disliked the verse, which he considered halting, jerking and slow-moving.

An article on Charles Dickens in "The Wares of Autolycus" column was her reply to their controversial discussion of Dickens. He accused her of making a good "Jack Horner study", meaning that she had picked the plums from Dickens' work to prove her point. Dickens was one of the few themes upon which her judgment had changed. She had earlier considered his workmanship unrefined and she recoiled from his characterizations of women. But by 1899 she had revised her earlier opinion and treated Dickens friendly and humanely. She recognized the fact that genius can be obvious as well as subtle. In her essay "Dickens as a Man of Letters" she praised him as a
"master of wit, humour and derision." (1) She explained the difference between the caricature of Dickens and the mere exaggeration of countless modern writers. In her article she mentioned that George Meredith considered dialogue the most difficult thing to write in fiction. In her opinion what was just as hard was informing the reader "what happened". This Dickens could do "with a perfect speed which has neither hurry nor delays." (1) She admired him as a dramatic author who was as conscious of his audience as an actor is. Meredith, however, did not alter his opinion, although he admitted to Mrs. Meynell that he was converted by her pleading and owned that Dickens had merits beyond cockney realms. Yet in the "Fortnightly Review" of July, 1909, he stated: "Not much of Dickens will live, because it has so little correspondence to life....If his novels are read at all in the future, people will wonder what we saw in them, save some possible element of fun meaningless to them." (2) Present day opinion of Charles Dickens has had little respect for Meredith's statement.

During occasional visits at Box Hill Mrs. Meynell and George Meredith discussed the technique of writing as well as subjects. Though his involved and intricate, often obscure, style differed so completely from her simplicity, he reread with delight her essays and complimented her often on her writing. In June 1896 he wrote to her: "Much have I been reading you these days, and then I must away to correction of my books. It is as if from worship in a cathedral I were dragged away to a dancing-booth!" (3)

(1) "Dickens As a Man of Letters" from "Hearts of Controversey" by Alice Meynell
(2) "Fortnightly Review" - July 1909 - from "George Meredith" S.M. Ellis-p.81
(3) "Letters to George Meredith" - June 1896
In 1899 he thanked her for her essays entitled "The Spirit of Place": "I am grateful for the gift of the little book. I knew the contents and I read them with the first freshness, the delight in the delicacy of the touch that can be so firm." (1)

Minor points of literary composition, the art and aim of poetry were discussed between them. He warned her in a letter that it was not simple to touch the heart. A minute study of her writing was made in an article called "Mrs. Meynell's Two Books of Essay". "Her manner," he said, "presents to me the image of one accustomed to walk in holy places and keep the eye of a fresh mind on our tangled world." (2) Yet he had disapproval for what displeased him. At one time he rebuked her, by saying, "It is not the soul of her soul."; another time, "This is inartistic on her part."

Henry James, a visitor at Box Hill, chanced to browse through a copy of the "Rhythm of Life" and spoke appreciatively of the contents. When Meredith was able to obtain another copy, he sent a volume to James. Informing Mrs. Meynell of the incident, he wrote, "My sweet sister in the muse shall soar higher than I without shaming me. My pride will be to keep the title of brother." (3)

Together they championed the status of the woman of the future and the right of the efficient woman labourer to equal pay with men. With all her hatred for any movement, Alice Meynell is known to have joined one - the

(1) "Letters to George Meredith" - January 1899
(2) "Alice Meynell" by Viola Meynell p. 132
(3) "Letters to George Meredith" - May 1896
suffrage. In her essay "A Woman in Grey" she upholds the value of athletics for women and describes the healthful physical effects produced by out-of-door occupations. She stated that the active sportswoman will transmit certain new qualities to her children and that as a result posterity would profit. This was an idea alien to that time.

Alice Meynell appreciated the vitality which was so much a part of the Meredith make-up. She considered it "such a vitality as nothing can hinder or rather such a vitality as all things serve." (1) She realized that Meredith's essential weakness was the fact that he feared being thought ordinary and that this resulted in his characteristic intricate style: "He must be afraid of nothing who writes at the greatest heights, and Meredith feared the commonplace." (2)

Sometimes a friend who earnestly desired to meet the great Meredith would be given the opportunity through acquaintance with Alice Meynell. Francis Thompson, however, had to be sought after. Finally he was persuaded to accept the repeated invitation and, after spending a night at Box Hill, his friendship with Meredith was established.

George Meredith recognized that the deep maternal love she had for her children was present in her writings, in the manner in which she entered into the very realm of childhood and portrayed a child's feelings and ideas. The intimate knowledge she displayed could only be founded on her devotion to them. In her essay "The Illusion of Historic Time" she treats of a

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(1) "Mrs. Meynell and Her Literary Generation" - by Anne Kimball Tuell p.201
(2) op. cit. P. 201
child's view of historical events, and Meredith is captivated by her illuminating exposition. "Rome was founded when we began Roman history, and that is why it seems so long ago. Suppose the man of thirty-five heard, at that present age, for the first time of Romulus. Why, Romulus would be nowhere. But he built his wall when every one was seven years old. It is by good fortune that 'ancient' history is taught in the only ancient days... By learning something of antiquity in the first ten years, the child enlarges the sense of time for all mankind." The reviewer, Meredith, considered it more than a piece of work of literary value; he believed that philosophers could read it and be instructed.

In the same review he attributed to her the power of distinction and praised her for her avoidance of superlatives. He concluded his article: "A woman who thinks and can write, who does not disdain the school of journalism, and who brings novelty and poetic beauty, the devout but open mind to her practice of it, bears promise that she will some day rank as one of the great Englishwomen of letters, at present counting humbly by computation beside their glorious French sisters in the art." (1)

Mrs. Meynell attributed George Meredith's most wonderful poems to his love of nature. In the December 1912 review of his poetry in the "Bookman" she declared: "To his love of the Earth - the heart-whole, all-trusting, optimistic, courageous, submissive love he bore her - we owe Meredith's most wonderful poems... It is as a singer of words, among other and greater qualities that George Meredith stands among the score of major poets of

(1) "Mrs. Meynell's Two Books of Essays" - review in "Littel's Living Age" - September 19, 1896
our incomparable literature." (1) She called him "the most civilized of men" who respected and loved nature and all wild-life. It was the quality of poetry found in his fiction that placed him so high in Alice Meynell's esteem.

In a letter to her husband from Venice in May 1909 Mrs. Meynell wrote: "The 'Morning Post' on dear Meredith is good. I skipped the literary estimate, however. I think no one living knows him as I did. Nor can he have loved many as he loved me." (2)

A letter worthy of note was written to Wilfrid Meynell by George Meredith at the age of eighty-one in 1909, a few months before he died: "The love of all the Meynells, let all the Meynells know, is precious to me. And the book of the 'Poems' (Francis Thompson's 'Selected Poems') was very welcome, though a thought of the poet's broken life gives pain. What he might further have done hangs at the closing page. Your part in his history could help to comfort you. What we have of him is mainly due to the Meynell family.

"Our Portia, I may suppose to be now in Italy, and Italy seems to me her natural home. For me, I drag on, counting more years and not knowing why. I have to lean on an arm when I would walk, and I am humiliated by requiring at times a repetition of sentences. This is my state of old age. But my religion of life is always to be cheerful. Though I see little of my friends, I live with them." (3)

(1) "The Poetry of George Meredith" - by Alice Meynell review in "The Bookman" - December 1912

(2) "Alice Meynell"

(3) "Letters to George Meredith" - February 3, 1909
After the turn of the century, his letters became fewer. In one of them he blamed her for her harsh treatment of Gibbon, for she believed that Gibbon had done much to degrade the English language. Near the very end he wrote to Mrs. Meynell that, although his religion of life was always to be cheerful, gloom and loneliness often assailed him. His warm personal relation with Alice Meynell shines forth in his letters which so often express his appreciation for nature and gave valuable pronouncements on literature.

A short while after George Meredith's death, Alice Meynell wrote to her mother: "I feel the loss of George Meredith is a very great one. No one knew him as I did. He told me that I could have made him what he should have been and what he could not be without me. He calculated whether there had been a time when he was a widower and I unmarried when we might have met. A retrospective offer!" (1)

(1) "Alice Meynell" - by Viola Meynell
CHAPTER III

E

KATHARINE TYNAN

One of Alice Meynell's best loved friends and a frequent visitor at Palace Court was the distinguished Irish poetess, Katharine Tynan. She was sometimes accompanied on her visits by William Butler Yeats, who became the most celebrated figure of the Irish Literary Revival.

During the course of their long and close friendship, Katharine Tynan took many notes on Alice Meynell. "Even in an intimate friendship she very seldom talked of herself. The same absence of personal detail was noticeable in her letters, beautiful and affectionate letters in the most graceful handwriting, but fuller of the person to whom they were written than herself." She also relates: "Mrs. Meynell was subject to the same headaches as mine. Francis Thompson, who had been a medical student, had a learned name for them - something like hemicranial headaches - because they affected one side of the head and one eye. They were in fact the true 'migraine', beginning with arcs and zigzags flashing before the eye. Francis Thompson, coming out of an abstraction, was very much annoyed by a suggestion which had reached him that anyone but Mrs. Meynell could have hemicranial headaches. When he found that I was the privileged person, he said handsomely: 'Oh well - perhaps Mrs. Hinkson (Katharine Tynan's marriage name) may have them.' " (1)

Mrs. Meynell, absorbed in her own world, had very little awareness for comforts and had as few needs as anyone ever had. For this characteristic

(1) "Alice Meynell" - by Viola Meynell p. 146
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I. Tract.
Katharine Tynan supplies a reason: "She had grown up in Italy, and like many more for whom the sun has been all-sufficing she had few yearnings after material comfort, none at all after luxury." (1)

The Irish poetess believed that even the lightest essay written by Mrs. Meynell for a newspaper was worthy to be saved, that she was a born essayist and a born poet, that everything she touched she adorned. "Everything she has put her pen to has been noble and dignified...She had a finality in what she says. One feels it is the last word." (2)

It was Mrs. Meynell's first book "Preludes" which established her position as an exquisite poet. That her later volumes merely confirmed the earlier verdict and enhanced it was the opinion expressed by Katharine Tynan in a review of "Mrs. Meynell's Collected Poems" in the July 1913 issue of "The Bookman". In reading her poems, Miss Tynan had the feeling of stepping from the roaring life of London, where Alice Meynell lived, into the sunny fields of Italy where her spirit lived. She credited Mrs. Meynell with being the first woman to make her ways to the higher level of criticism.

Katharine Tynan described Alice Meynell as looking more like her poetry than any poet she had ever known. "She had always a starry look and her expression was the expression of Dante - a certain noble and austere sadness." (3)

She visited the Meynells often; at least once a week she lunched with

(1) "Alice Meynell" - by Viola Meynell  p. 318
(2) "Recovered Essays" - by Katharine Tynan in "The Bookman"
(3) "Memories" - by Katharine Tynan  p. 24
them. These visits were the happiest occasions in the life of the young Irish girl who delighted in the literary atmosphere that prevailed in the Meynell home, in the many papers and books and pictures, the names that were mentioned and the references to interesting people. When Katharine Tynan was in Ireland, she would send flowers to the Meynells, hoping that there would be at least a little bit of life in them when they arrived.

The Meynells had always been generous to her, giving her their love and admiration, printing her early verses in "Merry England". Their friendship became stronger when she lived with them from May to September 1889. She mentions the wonderful summer with them and the delight she experienced in being with Alice Meynell. "There has always been something worshiping in my love for Alice Meynell. There is that still, mingled with some humility, some doubt of my own deserts to have come so near her. I am proud to know that she loved me, and loved my frank adoration of her." (1)

In her book "Memories" Katharine Tynan describes the Meynells as they are little written about - as parents. She calls them "tender parents", and describes their children, one of whom was the most beautiful child she had ever seen. "Alice Meynell was beautiful as a mother. If it was possible she would have done everything for her children that a nurse usually does...She had the greatest possible sense of the dignity of motherhood." Of the relationship as husband and wife she said, "He was always her dearest friend as well as her husband, and she leant on him. She was peculiarly lost without his presence." (2)

(1) "Memories" - by Katharine Tynan p.25
(2) Ibid p. 27
She relates visiting the Blunts at Crabbet at the time when Wilfrid Blunt was auctioning Arabian steeds. Alice Meynell delighted in this new atmosphere of horses, and would listen with rapt attention to the constant discussions. This incident caused Katharine Tynan to say, "I think if she could have chosen it would not have been the literary life or literary surroundings. She admired immensely a Byronic person like Wilfrid Blunt. Perhaps the Corsair had more than a touch of attraction for her." (1)

In speaking of Palace Court she said, "People were always coming and going. One brought in all one's friends. Never was there a house where one was more happily at home. She describes the many visitors at Palace Court; one was Vernon Blackburn, of whom Alice Meynell was very fond, who had just arrived from Italy. If the Meynells were not at home, the visitors would wait; seldom was the drawing-room at Palace Court empty." (2)

To read Alice Meynell's writings is to receive the impression that they were written in "silence and recollection." But she never had a writing-room of her own. "She worked in the library, a pleasant room, as all the Meynells' rooms were, pleasant and full of interest and charm, but it was the common room of the house and its visitors. She always wrote uncomfortably to my mind, with people talking around her, seated on an uncomfortable chair, just as she had come in, an outdoor garment laid aside, but still wearing her hat." (3)

Alice Meynell was tenderly cherished in this world. "No woman ever

(1) "Memories" - by Katharine Tynan p. 30
(2) Ibid. - p. 35
(3) Ibid. - p. 41
received a more watchful devotion. Everything was laid at her shrine. Her husband, himself the possessor of a literary gift and style, witty, deft and distinguished, chose to stand in her shadow - if she cast a shadow. She had a devotion that was worthy of her and she leant on it and was supported by it. I am happy now that it did not come to her to do without it." (1)

In attempting to give an intimate human picture of the wife and poet, Miss Tynan said, "She was very woman through and through." "To me she was the most beautiful woman I have ever known...Sargent sketched her and made her more than common tall. It was because she was drawn upward like a flame.

'I think Nature hath broke the mould Whence she that shape did take', wrote the Elizabethan poet. There is not such a face left in the world no such a voice to match the face." (2)

With increasing years Alice Meynell's mind continued to grow. Her greatest and exquisite poetry was written during the year of the First World War. "She had arrived at the mature perfection of an art which had always been held in reverence by its possessor, to which nothing insincere or easy or trivial had been permitted to draw near." (3)

(1) "Memories" - by Katharine Tynan p. 42
(2) Ibid. - p. 44
(3) Ibid. - p. 46
CHAPTER IV

THE MEYNELL INFLUENCE IN FRANCIS THOMPSON'S LIFE
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The Meynell Influence in Francis Thompson's Life

"I must ask pardon for the soiled state of the manuscript. It is due, not to slovenliness, but to the strange places and circumstances in which it has been written." (1) This now-famous note accompanied the soiled, ragged manuscript which Francis Thompson sent to the editor of "Merry England". Wilfrid Meynell put it aside to read at some future date when his duties as editor would be less pressing. With the passing of weeks Francis Thompson despaired of an answer to his efforts and consequently ceased calling for his mail at the post-office he had named. The encouraging letters from Wilfrid Meynell, who was the first to recognize the genius of the unknown author, rested unclaimed in the post-office.

Francis Thompson, unsuccessful in everything he had tried, turned to opium for comfort and for alleviation of his hunger. Receiving no word of encouragement for his writings, he contemplated suicide. The story reads like a fairy tale: he had already taken a slight dose of poison when he imagined that he saw Thomas Chatterton, the "marvelous boy", who had committed suicide just a brief while before he would have been saved. This historical incident flashed through his mind, causing him to decide to wait a few days. Wilfrid Meynell, in a last attempt to find the unknown author, had published one of Thompson's poems in "Merry England". This saved Francis Thompson's life.

(1) "Francis Thompson" - Agnes de la Gorce p. 36
It was in April 1882 that the weak half-starved man in broken shoes and tattered clothing, clutching his only possessions, a volume of the plays of Aeschylus, and a book of William Blake’s verse, visited the surprised editor. Their friendship, which became such an important part of both their lives, started on that memorable day. Wilfrid Meynell, who himself contributed no outstanding work to posterity, had, by saving a human derelict, given to the world the wealth of the Thompson genius. This was the beginning of a life-long devotion on the part of Wilfrid Meynell. His daughter, Viola, tells us that she believed her father would have been a different man without Thompson’s poetry. Whenever he would go to the shelf for a book to read aloud, invariably he would return with a copy of Thompson’s poems.

The torments Francis Thompson had suffered on the streets of London had left him in such a poor physical condition that the doctors despaired of his life. Wilfrid Meynell sent him to the Priory at Storrington, in Sussex, where monks, exiled from France, lived.

While slowly regaining his life and his desire to live, he happened to read the poems of Alice Meynell. Her refined expression and beauty of thought helped to awaken the poetic instincts that were lying dormant in the confused mind. The self-knowledge that he was a poet grew under the influence of her reserved and thoughtful verse.

At Storrington he wrote his "Ode to the Setting Sun". After receiving it, Wilfrid and Alice Meynell, accompanied by a young friend, an admirer of Mrs. Meynell, immediately took the train to Storrington to congratulate him on this new expression of his power.
Then for three months he worked on his essay on Shelley, because he remembered more about him than almost any other poet. Coleridge was his favorite, but he perceived the difficulty of using him as a model. The delicate, delightful essay presents the childlike nature of a Shelley who uses the universe for his box of toys, who teases the thunder and tumbles among the stars. He considered this essay his favorite work and was greatly disappointed when the "Dublin Review" failed to publish it. A year after his death, the essay, being discovered among his papers by Wilfrid Meynell, appeared in the "Dublin Review", and it was the first time in the seventy-two years of publication that a second edition of the magazine was printed. Thompson's fame was established. The childlike nature of a Thompson had delighted in a Shelley who he said displayed "the childish faculty of make-believe raised to the nth power." (1) On Thompson's monument is inscribed his own line: "Look for me in the nurseries of Heaven." (2)

While at Storrington, Thompson wrote to the Meynells: "How good and kind and patient you are with me! Far more than I am with myself, for I am often sick with the being that inhabits this villainous mudhut of a body." (3) He sent the poems which he had written during the nights he had been unable to sleep. He admitted that he would want no one but the Meynells to see his writing, for he believed that the verse which would prove him immortal, showed how mortally weak he was.

(1) "Essay on Shelley" - by Francis Thompson

(2) "Life of Francis Thompson" - Leo Connolly  p. 194

(3) "Life of Francis Thompson" - Everard Meynell  p. 79
In 1890 Thompson returned to London to the peace which the Meynell friendship afforded him and the delight he received from association with the Meynell children. Everard Meynell, in his book on the "Life of Francis Thompson" reminisces concerning the penny exercise-books into which the poet scribbled his works. It was while pacing the library floor at Palace Court that he composed "Love in Dian's Lap". Everard Meynell recalls how every member of the household was busy searching for the mislaid first drafts of the poem while Thompson himself was too dismayed to look. (1)

He gave his poem "Sister Songs" with the sub-title "An Offering to Two Sisters", dedicated to the two young girls, Madeline and Monica, to the Meynells and thanked them "ab imis medullis" for the one happy Christmas I have had for many a year." (2) When Monica presented him with a flower, he immortalized it in his poem "The Poppy".

Thompson's appreciation to the Meynells is shown by the poet's dedication of his first volume to them. The proofs of the poems were sent to Palace Court and forwarded to Francis Thompson at Pantasaph by Alice Meynell, who advised him to change one of the titles and to return the poems to her sixteen pages at a time. The Meynells and Coventry Patmore helped in the correction of the proofs. He admitted his faults and then "declared war" against the Meynells for a misplaced comma in one of his poems published in "Merry England".

Though busily working on his proofs, the poet requested copies of Alice Meynell's books. They had previously discussed one of her essays "Domus

(1) "Francis Thompson" - by Everard Meynell p.80
(2) "Francis Thompson" - by Agnes de la Gorce p. 95
"Augusta", and after receiving her book, he wrote: "Never again meditate the suppression of your gloomy passages. It is a most false epithet for any thing you could ever write. You might as well impeach of gloominess my favorite bit in 'Timon' with the majestic melancholy of its cadence -

"My long sickness
Of wealth and living now begins to mend,
And nothing brings me all things."

Both that passage and yours are poignant; both are deeply sad; while yours has an added searchingness which makes it (in De Quincey's phrase) veritably 'heart-shattering'; but how can you call 'gloomy' what so nobly and resignedly faces the terror it evokes?" (1)

Alice Meynell was a stern critic, especially censuring him for certain words such as "tameless", "dauntless" and "quenchless". In a letter sent while the "Poems" was in the process of being written, she wrote: "Never has there been such a dance of words as in 'The Making of Viola'. All other writers make their words dance on the ground with a certain weight, but these go in the blue sky. I have to unsay everything I said in criticism of that lovely poem. I think the long syllables make themselves valued in every case. But I do not like three syllables in the course of the poem - the three that give the iambic movement. I have not made up my mind as to the alternative endings; they are all so beautiful." (2) The care and thoughtfulness expended on her own poetry by Alice Meynell can be seen through the solicitude she felt in seeing that Thompson's poetry was as perfect as possible.

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(1) "Francis Thompson" - Everard Meynell p. 133

(2) Ibid. p. 158
Francis Thompson moved into the neighborhood in which the Meynells lived and was a constant visitor at Palace Court. He was of little help in the weekly publication of "Merry England" on Thursday, and was more often given small tasks to perform, such as answering the bell and looking after the lively Meynell children.

To the children he was an unexciting companion as he accompanied them to the country. He was grateful to the Meynells for entrusting the children to him and even wondered if perhaps he hadn't been entrusted to the children.

Distressed at his own inability to measure up to the standard of the Meynells and by his tardiness at handing in his manuscripts, he accompanies his excuse for his failure to send them a promised article with the words: "Indeed I feel that you have already done too much for me; and that it would be better you should have nothing more to do with me. You have already displayed a patience and tenderness with me that my kindred would never have displayed; and it is most unjust that I should any longer be a burden to you. I think I am fit for nothing; certainly not fit to be any longer the object of your too great kindness. Please understand that I entirely feel and am perfectly resigned to the ending of an experiment which even your sweetness would never have burdened yourself with, if you could have foreseen the consequences." Wilfrid Meynell dealt with these occasional moods with a love and persuasiveness seldom possessed by a man. (1)

Between the years 1892-1896 Francis Thompson often visited the

(1) "Francis Thompson" - by Everard Meynell p. 91
monastery at Pantasaph, where he mourned over his wasted youth and gave himself up to homesickness and remorse. There he usually slept during the day and remained awake at night, taking solitary walks. Here he continued his writings.

It was in the year 1892 that Tennyson, the poet concerned with the conservative and conventional, died. The following year, Francis Thompson, the poet of the supernatural and invisible, published his first volume of work. His genius was proclaimed by a few critics and, in particular, his haunting poem; "The Hound of Heaven" attracted attention. Coventry Patmore was one of the first to admire his talent, and called it genius.

At the monastery at Pantasaph the two poets met. They would walk together in the mountainous regions of Wales, often silent, satisfied in their own solitary meditations. Together they collaborated in the magazine "The Franciscan Annals" at the monastery. Under the guidance of the older poet, Francis Thompson, in the manner of Coventry Patmore, composed a mediocre idyll called the "Narrow Vessel", which he designed to be a mystic allegory.

"Thank you for your interesting letter", wrote Patmore to Thompson after he had left the monastery. "I see with joy how nearly we are upon the same lines, but our visions would not be true were they quite the same and no one can really see anything but his own vision." (1) Patmore constantly sought news of Thompson's health with a solicitude not common to his nature. He proposed to return to Pantasaph to look after him:

(1) "Francis Thompson" - by Agnes de la Gorce p. 157
"It would be a great pleasure and honour to serve you in any way." A short while later Patmore died. Grief-stricken, Thompson called him "the greatest genius of the century." This friendship had been a brief glowing light in Thompson's drab, melancholy life.

After his volume "New Poems" was published in 1897, Thompson, lured irresistibly by the city which had harmed him so much, returned to London. He had often resolved to give up the use of opium, but in moments of excruciating pain, he would resort to the delightful oblivion the drug afforded. He felt as if his poetic nature had been exhausted, as if his poetic nature had died while his broken body lived on.

The poet then became a struggling journalist, contributing to outstanding literary magazines and, in particular, to the "Athenaeum" and "The Academy". His work consisted mainly in reviewing books. Occasionally he would indulge in fantastic literary or philosophic digressions. He spoke as a master, for he was well-read in English literature and did not hesitate to set forth his opinions.

The coming of Francis Thompson and his poetry did not mean as much to Alice Meynell as it did to her husband. Although she believed that he was a great poet, she did not believe that the world of contemporary poetry revolved around his genius as Wilfrid Meynell did. She declared that he wrote "imagery so beautiful as almost to persuade us that imagery is the end and goal of poetry." (1)

(1) "Alice Meynell" - by Viola Meynell  p. 70
Francis Thompson in a letter to a friend gives his own opinion of Alice Meynell's writing: "In last week's 'Scots Observer' appeared an exquisite little poem by Mrs. Meynell - the first she has written since her marriage. A long silence, disastrous for literature! The poem is a perfect miniature example of her most lovely tender work; and is, like all her best, of a signal originality in its central idea no less than in its development. Most women of genius - George Eliot, Charlotte Bronte, and Mrs. Browning, who, indeed, alludes to her husband's penetration in seeing beyond 'this mask of me' - have been decidedly plain. That Mrs. Meynell is not like them you may judge from 'Her Portrait'. Nor will she attain any rapid notice like them. Her work is of that subtly delicate order which - as with Coleridge, for instance - needs to soak with men for a generation or two before it gets adequate recognition. Nevertheless it is something to have won the admiration of men like Rossetti, Ruskin, and shall I add, the immortal Oscar Wilde? (A witty, paradoxical writer, who nevertheless, 'meo judicio', will do nothing permanent because he is in earnest about nothing.) Known or unknown, she cares as little as St. Francis de Sales would have cared what might become of his writings." (l)

After the first edition of his book was exhausted, Francis Thompson wrote to Wilfrid Meynell concerning a review by Richard Le Gallienne in which he had been given high praise but with some reservation on the part of the critic: "I absolutely think that my poetry is 'greater' than any work by a new poet which has appeared since Rossetti. Unless, indeed the

(1) "Life of Francis Thompson" - by Everard Meynell p. 126-127
'greater' work to which the critic referred was Mrs. Meynell's. I frankly admit that her poetry has exquisite unclamorous qualities beside which all the fireworks of my own are much less enduring things. Otherwise I will not vail my crest to Henley, or Robert Bridges, or even William Watson."(1)

At another time he wrote, "I have been wondering what criticisms had appeared on Mrs. Meynell. I have seen none, except the 'Fortnightly' and the 'Chronicle'. Coventry all abroad about her poetry; Le Gallienne all abroad about her prose. But the latter's notice of her poetry showed real perception. Coventry was excellent with regard to the side of her prose which he had seized." (2)

Coventry Patmore, in a letter to Francis Thompson showing the mutual love they felt for Alice Meynell's poetry said: "I am glad you think as I do about those 'wonderful verses' (A.M.'s). I have quoted your words in a letter I have written to our Friend. They will delight her greatly..."(3)

Alice Meynell dedicated her essays "The Colour of Life" to Coventry Patmore. At the same time, not knowing about Mrs. Meynell's work, Francis Thompson dedicated "New Poems", the product of three year's work, to Patmore. The verses of Thompson's were the last ones that the aged poet saw, for before the first edition of the poems was run off the press, he was dead.

(1) "Life of Francis Thompson" - by Everard Meynell p. 136
(2) "Life of Francis Thompson" - by Everard Meynell p. 142
(3) "Life of Francis Thompson" - by Everard Meynell p. 145
Francis Thompson's devotion to Alice Meynell was so great that his sensitive nature and ever-present fear of offending caused him many unhappy moments. On one occasion he feared that he had made her angry. He had requested her to read through "Her Portrait" with him. At that time she was working on some essays of Coventry Patmore's and her promise had eluded her memory. The poet reminded her and then, fearing that she had too much work to do, contrived a hasty excuse for his immediate departure. In a long letter, begging her forgiveness, he explained every detail of the situation. "It seems to me that the more I strive to please you and serve you and to think always what may be your pleasure, not mine, the more I alienate you from me, so far as a lady so sweet can be alienated from anyone. If you understood one thing, I think, you would have judged me better in the past. It is this. I am unhappy when I am out of your sight; and would pass every hour if I could, in your exquisite presence, only to feel the effluence of your spirit in contact with mine." (1) His letters to her were usually not so personal, but contained points of etymology or metre which were discussed between them.

Looking back over her earlier verse, Alice Meynell decided that she would use her mature powers to improve it, to bring it up to the level of her later work. When Francis Thompson learned that she had intended to remodel the verse written in her girlhood days, he wrote to her: "At the risk of offending you by what you may think obvious interference, I take up my pen to implore you to muddle as little as may be with the text of

(1) "Alice Meynell" - by Viola Meynell p. 108
'Preludes'. In principle, I think the modern foible of poets for revising in maturity the poems of their youth to be not only most perilous for the poems tampered with, but a capital sin against that art which the process is designed to serve, and by which you set such store. It is fatal to "keeping", and keeping is surely all in all to art. You would not re-touch your youthful portraits into the contours of mature womanhood, though they be absolutely more perfect. And all poetry to a certain degree, but poetry such as "Preludes in excelsis", is a portrait. It is a portrait of your youthful self. By re-modelling it according to the mind of your maturity, you will destroy its truthfulness to the thing you were, without making it truthful to the thing you are. It will be a hybrid; it will lose the absolute fresh sincerity of girlhood, without gaining the greater and more reticent sincerity of womanhood. It will, indeed, be a sin against sincerity. For your poetry was intended to show yourself; and now you are retouching the portrait for the public as you would like yourself to have been. It will lose the value it had for us, and must have had for all men, by reason of its single-minded utterance of your young self; it will not have for us any value as an utterance of your matron-self. In the name of your art, which you are going to betray under the notion of safeguarding; in the name of your poetry, which we loved for what it was, not for what it should or might have been; in the name of the sincerity which you have never before falsified; in the name of your admirers, whose instinct for poetry you have not doubted in the case of others; I conjure Alice Meynell to leave us Alice Meynell, unimproved, unsophisticated, with her weakness
and her strength as we saw, accepted, admired and loved her... Be angry, but hear me." (1)

In 1893, the year in which Alice Meynell was the recipient of praise for her "Rhythm of Life", Francis Thompson produced his first book of poems, containing "Love in Dian's Lap", a series of poems inspired by her. In them he described his ideal woman whose outward beauty reflected her soul. To him Alice Meynell was the symbol of melody.

When Wilfrid Meynell was away from home on business or for relaxation from his tedious work, Alice Meynell, with the sole assistance of Francis Thompson, would put out the Thursday edition of the "Weekly Register".

After a visit with Coventry Patmore, Francis Thompson wrote to Alice Meynell: "He repeated to me two or three short poems addressed to yourself. I hope there may be a series of such songs. You would then have a triple tiara indeed - crowned by yourself, by me, and highest, crowned by him." (2)

On one of his many visits to the home of Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, Wilfrid Meynell spoke thus of Francis Thompson: "He had become devoted to my wife, and many of his poems were addressed to her or her children... He owed much in his style to Coventry Patmore. It was through me that they became acquainted. The bond between them was a common adoration for Alice. Thompson went to stay a week with Patmore in the country and they made friends talking constantly of her, and afterwards always corresponded about her." (3)

(1) "Alice Meynell" - by Viola Meynell  p. 55
(2) Ibid. - p. 115
(3) "My Diaries" - by Wilfrid Scawen Blunt  p. 183
When Francis Thompson wrote his third and final book of poetry under the influence of Patmore and dedicated to him, she declared that Thompson, under that guidance, took a "yet higher step in his art and thought." (1)

Robert Browning, a short while before his death wrote a letter to Wilfrid Meynell praising the natural talent of Thompson. The letter was published in "Merry England". Thompson wrote to Wilfrid Meynell: "I wanted to tell you how deeply I was moved by the reading of Browning's letter...The idea that in the closing days of his life my writings should have been under his eye, and he should have sent me praise and encouragement is one that I shall treasure to the closing days of my life. To say that I owe this to you is to say little." (2)

Reminiscent of the common knowledge that Coventry Patmore and Alice Meynell possessed, that neither of their work would ever receive popular acclaim, is the letter written by William Archer to Francis Thompson concerning his volume "New Poems": "This is not work which can possibly be popular in the wide sense; but it is work that will be read and treasured centuries hence by those who really care for poetry." (3)

In a letter to Alice Meynell he jotted down some thoughts which he believed she might want to develop. "If anything should appear in them worth the saying, how glad I should be that it should find in you a sayer. But it is a more possible chance that poor thoughts of mine may, by a

(1) "Alice Meynell" - by Viola Meynell  p. 70
(2) "Life of Francis Thompson" - by Everard Meynell  p. 229
(3) Everard Meynell's "Life of Francis Thompson" - p. 242
beautiful caprice of nature, stir subtle thoughts in you. When branches are so thickly laden as yours, a child's pebble may bring down the fruit." 

In "My Diaries" by Wilfrid Scawen Blunt we find his impression of Thompson. Upon first knowing him he mentions that the poet had "a look of raptured dependence on Mrs. Meynell which is most touching." (2)

When the poet was in the last stages of consumption Wilfrid Meynell and his son, Everard, drove Thompson to Blunt's cottage at Gosbrook to stay for a week. Of his appearance at this time the diarist has recorded: "He is emaciated beyond credibility, his poor little figure a mere skeleton, under clothes lent him for the occasion by the Meynells...He has the face of a Spanish sixteenth century saint, almost that of a dying child." (3) He mentions Thompson's inability to distinguish between the different types of trees and flowers.

At this time the dying man was taking as much as six ounces of laudanum daily. After Everard took him back to London, Blunt wrote in his journal: "as an intellectual force he is already dead, and his poor body is dying, too." (4) A month later he received a note from the Meynells announcing the death of Francis Thompson.

(1) Everard Meynell's "Life of Francis Thompson" - p. 297
(2) "My Diaries" Vol. 1 by Wilfrid Scawen Blunt p. 297
(3) Ibid. Vol. 2 p. 179
(4) Ibid. p. 187
CHAPTER V

OPINION OF CRITICS

A. Minor Contemporary Critics
B. Max Beerbohm
C. Alfred Noyes
D. Theodore Maynard
E. G. K. Chesterton
F. John Drinkwater
Opinions of Minor Contemporary Critics

Minor critics of the period had the highest praise for Mrs. Meynell's writings. In the July 1896 issue of "The Bookman", a prominent English literary magazine, A. H. Millar reviews Alice Meynell's writings recently published - "The Colour of Life", and other Essays on Things Seen and Heard." Miss Millar believes that the reader has to be in a particular mood to enjoy the poet's writing to the fullest, in a special mood to appreciate "exquisiteness, reserve, and distinction of thought and expression." These essays give proof of a "watchful, independent observation and a fine vision of nature." The quality of humor is never especially noticeable in Mrs. Meynell's work but Miss Millar believes that it is present in the essay "A Woman in Grey", a description of a woman bicycling among the traffic of Oxford Street. More than any of her writing, this essay sets forth her dislike of the obvious and is marked by the keeness of her subtle wit and artistic choice of words.

In speaking of Mrs. Meynell's work one notices first her style, for her work is consciously composed with meticulous care taken with every sentence and with every word deliberately chosen. In a criticism of her work in the April 22, 1893 issue of the "Athenaeum" the reviewer states: "In verse she has achieved a style which owes something, certainly to Mrs. Browning, something to Rossetti, but which, in its last result, is very personal; her style in prose, slightly, deliberately archaic, is even
more definitely her own." (1)

The careful, leisurely deliberation accounts for the paucity of her writings. Although she has written so little, she has never written insignificantly. The three subjects of her poetry are love, nature, and poetry. Sincerity, religious intensity and a vague melancholy mark her verse so that no one could ever confuse it with that of any other poet. It is stamped with the originality of her own personality.

"O pause between the sob of cares!
O thought within all thought that is
Trance between laughters unawares!
Thou art the form of melodies,
And thou the ecstasy of prayers."

The vagueness of her verse is replaced by the precision in her prose, although the qualities of delicacy and restraint are still present.

The resemblance between Mrs. Meynell's writings and Emerson's, which was remarked upon by George Meredith in a review of her work, was also noticed in this country. A review in the "Critic", a weekly review of literature published in New York City, stated: "The author of 'The Rhythm of Life' is a near spiritual kin of Emerson, and at the same time a unique representation of literary womankind...All her words have a certain chaste aloofness about them, which reminds one of the chiselled precision of Pater and the austere composure of Matthew Arnold...These essays give the impression that only the choicest thoughts and words gravitated to the author." The Boston critic, author of the review, frowned on Mrs. Meynell's disapproval of American writers and her naming of James Russell

(1) "The Athenaeum" - April 22, 1893
Lowell as the only American man-of-letters. Lowell is the only influence she acknowledges as directly active upon her style. She believes that he contributed to the language and did not detract from it as so many modern writers do. The critic mentions Emerson, Holmes, Whittier, Bryant, Longfellow, Whitman, Poe, Hawthorne, Thoreau, and Irving as being "Immersed in the Lethe of mediocrity by the relentless hand of Mrs. Meynell." He, however, concludes by admitting that he cherishes nothing but "goodwill towards an author whose criticism are, as a rule, so finely tempered and discriminating."

"Far less known than she ought to be in this country, whether as a prose writer or as a poet, is the author of these charming essays," is the introductory sentence to a review of her writing "The Color of Life" in the September 19, 1936 issue of the "Critic." "Mrs. Meynell has found a number of new points of view from which to look at things that people have been observing for generations; and whether one always quite agrees with her or not, one is at least grateful for the unhackneyed freshness of her thought." The reviewer urges those who are unfamiliar with the work of this poet, who had, previous to the publication of this article, been nominated for the laureateship, to make her acquaintance. Her delightful descriptions and subtle manner of personifying winds and trees would be delightful to any reader.

Adverse criticism is found in the October 3, 1896 issue of the "Athenaeum" in a review of "The Colour of Life and Other Essays on Things Seen and Heard". The author of the article reflects on the neglect that

(1) "The Critic" - September 19, 1896 - Review on "Colour of Life"
the essay has undergone since the days when it blossomed forth in the "Spectator" and "Tatler". He makes mention of the writings of Charles Lamb and Robert Louis Stevenson, admits that Richard Le Gallienne and Max Beerbohm are rather unsuccessful and concludes that Mrs. Meynell occupies the field all by herself, and, as a result, is receiving more credit than she deserves. Although her subjects are well chosen, and her method of handling them is "a propos", "her phraseology occasionally smacks too much of the premeditated." Certain passages are quoted which he considers "far-fetched and overdone". The critic approves of her article on Eleonora Duse's art and believes that the essay - "The Woman in Grey" is worthy of praise. In closing he stated: "Mrs. Meynell is a true artist in words. She has no need of the adventitious aids of calculated eccentricity and affectation. If she will be eschew these failings, and disbelieve those who unthinkingly account them to be graces, she will stand an excellent chance of permanently enriching the literature of her country."

Alice Meynell's poetry is like herself - it leaves a feeling of quietness. Although her thought is deep, she expresses it in a comparatively simple manner. Her intellect is always the guide for her emotions. Ten years after her death, D. P. Kennedy paid her the following tribute in the January 1932 issue of the "Irish Monthly" and gives the reason for her lack of popularity: "The beauty of what she saw impressed her, stirred the very depths of her soul, but she stops the spontaneous flow. Her deep, imperative thought almost compels utterance, yet she stands 'rigidly on the order of its expression'. She must not allow herself to be carried away; she must keep control. It is this tyrannic
intellectualism of hers that has prevented the world from realizing the fiery passion that glows deep down in her work; it is this marvelous restraint that will prevent her from becoming one of the popular poets and will preserve for her her position among those fortunate authors, so envied by Mr. Augustine Birrell, who, instead of scurrying along the main roads, hostled and jostled at every step are peacefully sidetracked in company with a small number of intelligent and appreciative readers who know what they want and have got it."

Even though a reader does not admire her style, he must be attentive and appreciative of her stimulating thought. The "Bookman" reviewer in the April 1899 issue considered her book "The Spirit of Place and Other Essays" even more perfect than her earlier writings. Besides her admirable style, these works show a "greater ease and finer sense of proportion."

Her original and unusual style drew a dissenting word concerning the "Spirit of Place" in the January 14, 1899 issue of the "Athenaeum". The critic conceded the value of the work, but recoiled from her "preciosity". "It spoils the ease of a narrative to be perpetually brought up short by a new sudden picture, when the one in view is but half suggested, or by an adjective perversely different from the common, which is not always the wrong selection." He concluded with the hope that Mrs. Meynell would publish more writing of this type, but with more simplicity of style."
It was fortunate for Mrs. Meynell that she lived in an age which favored the essay, but which produced comparatively few numbers of essayists. Her prose had attained immediate recognition. The customary disappointments and slow struggle for recognition which witness the arrival of most writers were unknown to her. This fact was noted by Max Beerbohm, then an unknown writer, who, in an issue of "Tomorrow", grudgingly, but goodnaturedly, jested that "in a few years Mrs. Meynell will have become a sort of substitute for the English sabbath."

He complained that the critics believed that her style which was "quite perfect in its sort" was the only way in which fine English could possibly be written. "One hears a great deal about her essay 'Rejection' nowadays. I am sure that so sensible a woman as Mrs. Meynell must often smile when the reviewers treat this, her means, for all the world as though it were an end. She must know that there are they who can do quite as much with their flutes as she with her file." (1)

Humorously he exaggerated her fame. "So sacred in the eyes of all London is Mrs. Meynell that I know this article will be considered nothing less than a brutal and revolting crime."

The acclaim of eminent persons which she won so easily, makes her the object of his envy as he remarks on the praise which had been

(1) "Mrs. Meynell and Her Literary Generation" - by A. K. Trell p. 173
exchanged between Coventry Patmore and the poetess: "Between her and Mr. Coventry Patmore the shuttlecock of praise has flashed incessantly.... And now, hark! The infrequent voice of Mr. George Meredith is raised in her honour."
CHAPTER V

ALFRED NOYES

A friendship with Alfred Noyes was established by Alice Meynell in the latter part of her life. It must have been a great delight to the poetess to meet the critics who spoke so highly of her work, especially when one of the critics was a man who had tended her the highest praise:

"It has long been recognized that Alice Meynell, with her hundred poems, is among the imperishable names... She has given to the English literature now, and to the literature of the world in centuries to come, what no other poet has been able to give - a volume of little more than a hundred pages containing only masterpieces." (1)

"She moves in the higher realms of the creative imagination, and her note is always that of great poetry." (1) He compares the similarity between her work and that of Wordsworth - but of a Wordsworth who gives to the world only the best of her sonnets and poems.

Alfred Noyes comments on the simplicity of her style which produces such an exquisite effect. He believes that she is as true a nature poet as is Tennyson or Wordsworth. He believes that the highest function of the poet is the use of symbols - to illustrate the invisible. In this Alice Meynell never fails and it is this power, in Noyes' opinion, that constitutes "genius."

"Remunciation", "Thoughts in Separation", and "The Neophyte" - all

(1) "Some Aspects of Modern Poetry" - Alfred Noyes  p.4
by Alice Meynell - he considers the world's three greatest sonnets. There is a quality that sets Alice Meynell's verse apart from all other poetry. "Her work belongs to the order of poetry in which Matthew Arnold said that 'as time goes on', our race will come to find an ever surer and surer stay.' " (1)

Aside from her poetry he speaks of Alice Meynell herself: "In her own lifetime she was a tower of intellectual and spiritual strength, lifting through the mists of the age one of the very few steadfast lights; but there was another sign of her greatness that was quite unmistakable - her humility. That noble intellect, that incomparable artist, never once stooped to the pride that is so common today among lesser minds."

Her "Collected Essays" were published in 1914, under the direction of Wilfrid Meynell and his son, Francis. Alfred Noyes wrote to Francis: "What a marvelous volume - far and away the most significant collection of essays in the English language." (2)

(1) "Some Aspects of Modern Poetry" - by Alfred Noyes p.10
(2) "Alice Meynell" - by Viola Meynell p. 294
CHAPTER V

THEODORE MAYNARD

In almost all the anthologies which include Alice Meynell's verse her poem "The Shepherdess of Sheep" is found:

"She walks - the lady of my delight -
A shepherdess of sheep.
Her flocks are thoughts. She keeps them white;
She guards them from the steep.
She feeds them on the fragrant height,
And folds them in for sleep."

Many pretty lines have been written identifying the poetess with the shepherdess of her imagination. The poem has been highly praised for its limpid sweetness, for its lilting melody and has even been set to music. Theodore Maynard believes that it is the poorest of Mrs. Meynell's art. In his own words: "I am sick to death of 'The Shepherdess'!" Rather than reminding him of the delightful authoress the poem is reminiscent of a pretty painted knickknack - a China Shepherdess!

Keats, Shelley, Browning, Wordsworth, Tennyson, even Shakespeare, wrote reams of flat verse and they are forgiven. But the few bad lines which Mrs. Meynell has written to her discredit, leave the reader aghast. She had always attained such flawless perfection that the several times she does suffer a lapse from perfection tend to leave the reader slightly amazed.

Theodore Maynard credits her with being a poet and an essayist in equal parts since he believes that "all her essays are touched with the
spirit of poetry and all her poetry touched with the spirit of essays."(1)

In the field of poetry she is classified as a mystic - but a calm thoughtful mystic who uses words to express the exact meaning for which they were intended.

"Thou art like silence unperplexed
A secret and a mystery
Between one footfall and the next."

The profundity of her thought causes her poetry to be at times obscure. Always her intellect is the guide for her emotion and the fiery passion that is hidden in her work is kept under severe control.

So often when a poet attempts to translate his verse into prose, he fails in transmitting the quality that enriches the verse. But Alice Meynell's essays bear the same mark of beauty that adorns her poetry. Many of her poems could have been written effectively as essays.

Her relentless discipline, Theodore Maynard has declared, prevents her from being able to "achieve that sublime moment of melting, that utter fusion with passionate beauty which some great poets - not all - have known as their chief blessedness. Each has his gift from God. Abandonment is not Alice Meynell's. Even that rare - though less rare - catch in the breath escapes her. Her simplicity is too studied -- too much of an 'admired simplicity' to use her own phrase - to be completely happy." (2)

But in the little sphere to which she limited her writings, she is secure. Her work is tender and lovely and she reigns supreme in her own chosen ground:

(1) "Our Best Poets" - by Theodore Maynard p. 17
(2) Ibid. p. 27
"A poet of one mood in all my lays,
Ranging all life to sing one only love,
Like a west wind across the world I move,
Sweeping my harps of floods mine own wild ways."

"Something better than bulk and quantity is given us, to those of us at least who weary of the pretentious and the trivial, to those who are content to wait patiently for excellence." (1) Alice Maynell has caught a delicate rhythm and infused it into her writing.

She differs from her contemporaries in her "love of simple and wide effects: her art, which, like her religion, gives the freedom of a law; her aloofness - all these mark her off from her contemporaries." (1)

In his criticism, "The Art of Alice Meynell", Maynard has stated, "The contemplative of letters, she lets the world go by. Her reward is that of all the prose writers of the twentieth century, she is the one most certain of immortality." (1)

(1) "Craven from the Laurel Tree" - essays by Theodore Maynard - "The Art of Alice Meynell"
G. K. CHESTERTON

In his "Autobiography" G. K. Chesterton describes various literary figures of the time. The chapter on "Some Literary Celebrities" includes Thomas Hardy, A. E. Housman, James Barrie, and George Meredith. With this introductory sentence "There was one figure of a contemporary and companion of all that world of culture which should be put first", he sets forth his opinion of Alice Meynell.

Chesterton declared that there was something about her which he did not understand, "which set her apart as something separate from the time." In this chapter he pays a beautiful tribute to the woman whose influence was felt even by those who were not close friends. "She was strong with deep roots where all the Stoics were only stiff with despair; she was alive to an immortal beauty where all the Pagans could only mix beauty with mortality. And though she passed through my life fitfully and far more rarely than I could wish, and though her presence had indeed something of the ghostly gravity of a shadow and her passing something of the fugitive accident of a bird, I know now that she was not fugitive and she was not shadowy. She was a message from the Sun."

The idea of immortality was again brought out, "There was nothing about her that can decay." "The thrust of life in her was like that of a slender tree with flowers and fruit for all seasons; and there was no drying up of the sap of her spirit, which was in ideas."
Mrs. Meynell never knew Chesterton well, but she realized his admiration for her work by reading his essays. Her enthusiasm for him was found in an amusing exclamation, "I hope the papers are nice to my Chesterton. He is mine much more, really, than Belloc's." At another time she said, "If I had been a man, and large, I should have been Chesterton." (1)

She received a great deal of enjoyment from his writings, considering him the wittiest and most serious of living writers. Similarity in their writing has been noticed — to such an extent that, although he wrote the preface for her volume on Samuel Johnson, it could easily have been taken for her work.

The Meynells had a slight personal acquaintance with Mr. and Mrs. Chesterton. In an after-dinner speech at the Ladies' Pioneer Club at which Mrs. Meynell was present Chesterton paid a great tribute to her. On the letter of invitation to this dinner she wrote: "One of the happiest evenings of my life followed, for Chesterton spoke of me." (2)

Her interest in him lasted until her death. In a letter to her husband, dated June 1914, Alice Meynell writes: "What is the news about Chesterton? I can think of nothing better than his reviewing me — except his reception into the Church. I love him so." (3)

The "Dublin Review" of 1923, the year following her death, contained

(1) "Gilbert K. Chesterton" — by Maisie Ward p. 142-143
(2) "Alice Meynell" — by Viola Meynell p. 264
(3) Ibid. p. 294
Hello, good morning. How are you doing today?

I am well, thank you. How about you?

I am also doing fine. Did you have a good weekend?

Yes, I did. We went out for a nice dinner and relaxed.

That sounds great. We need to do that more often.

Agreed. It is important to take time for ourselves.

I think I will go for a run later today. Do you want to join me?

I would love to, but I have to work this afternoon.

Understood. It was nice to talk to you.

You too. Take care.

Bye.
G. K. Chesterton's article "Alice Meynell": "We have lost a great poet...one of the most magnanimous of friends, one of the wisest and most generous of women."

He compared her poetry with modern poetry, bringing out the point that she never wrote a line or even a word of poetry "without putting brains into it; or in the most exact sense, meaning what she said. She never wrote a line, or even a word that does not stand like the rib of a strong intellectual structure; a thing with the bones of thought in it."

Chesterton gives us a personal analysis of her character: "Her sympathies were liberal, and even, in the most profound sense, popular. Coventry Patmore, in advancing her unanswerable claims to the Laureateship, said that she was a Radical in her opinions and a Tory in her tastes. It is an admirable combination; and one to which the more generous minds of every type have always tended. Perhaps it was precisely in not understanding it that Patmore himself, great as he was, just fell short of a sane and serene greatness. He was sometimes irritated, where she was never anything less than indignant."

In concluding the review Chesterton said: "She was deservedly famous long before I had the honour of any personal knowledge of her; but I will venture the prophecy that her fullest fame is yet to come. The whole modern world must immeasurably enlarge itself before it comes near the measure of her mind." (1)

(1) The "Dublin Review" - January 1923 - "Alice Meynell" by G.K. Chesterton
CHAPTER V

JOHN DRINKWATER

John Drinkwater read a paper on Alice Meynell to the Royal Society of Literature from the Chair of Poetry. A personal friend of the family, he describes for us the exquisiteness of the poetess who died when she was over seventy years of age, but who was ageless. "At twenty she was as old as she would ever be; at her death nothing of young freshness or wonder had gone from her...To be with her was to be at ease in the presence of a great lady. Let the talk be of what it might, she was never withdrawn or indifferent; but behind the gayest of her occasions there was a quietness of mood that gave precision and authority to everything she said. Here was a perfect example of the original, as distinguished from the eccentric mind. She never startled you, but she never failed to delight your attention."

Coventry Patmore expressed the idea that Alice Meynell would never be a popular poet. This is reiterated by Drinkwater who said, "Alice Meynell will never be with Herrick and Burnes and Tennyson for everybody's reading. Her subtlety and the rareness of her manner will rather set her in public estimation with Donne and Marwell and the best of Landor." (1)

The standard of perfection maintained by Mrs. Meynell in her first volume and the polished style seldom attained by a poet in his first book is remarked upon by John Drinkwater. He believed that there was little in

(1) "The Muse in Council" - by John Drinkwater
her later poetry that was not found in her first set of poems. Her poetry was like herself - ageless, constant, unchanging.

He expressed her peculiar qualities of mind as follows: "An amazing gift for capturing with a phrase the most exclusive turns of thought, for arresting the cloud shadows of emotion as they pass over the mind and giving them solid intellectual form. This was a faculty that she shared with her beloved seventeenth century lyricists, with Donne and Crashaw and Vaughan, but in actual deftness of its existence I think she excelled them all...none of them gave difficult thought so livid a simplicity of statement."

Alice Meynell has written about 110 poems. One volume contains the work of a lifetime. "The delight never fails, but it is not the less eagerly welcomed because it is not a new delight. It is the measure of Alice Meynell's excellence as a poet that after we know a dozen of her poems we feel that there is no possible further chance of novelty from her, and yet that there will never be a failure of complete and arresting originality."

Alice Meynell has the style always "of a poet who possessed her soul and her imagination, one who was in the great line of English lyricists and yet stamping personality upon every word she wrote." He considers Alice Meynell's work as "among the very fine flowers of the English genius."
ABSTRACT

In 1913 Alice Meynell was nominated for the poet laureateship of England. She did not receive the appointment because of her sex and because she was little known to the general public. Even today the Meynell genius commands a small, select circle of followers. But the tribute of outstanding men of the century who admired her as a writer and loved her as a person sets her apart from a popular writer acclaimed by the crowd.

Mrs. Robert Louis Stevenson has revealed that her famous husband, R. L. Stevenson, on the island of Samoa kept Alice Meynell's "Essays" and her "Poems" under his pillow in fear that they should be abducted before he had finished with them.

John Ruskin's criticism of her first volume was that in her writings he found "the best things I've ever read in modern verse."

Christina Rossetti knew her sonnet "Renouncement" by heart, repeating it with great praise to her friends.

John Drinkwater considered her writings among the very fine flowers of the English genius.

Richard Le Gallienne has written of her: "Never surely was a lady who carried her learning and wore the flower of her gentle humane sanctity with such quiet grace, with so gentle and understanding a smile."

Major Fitz Gardner, a casual acquaintance, speaks of Alice Meynell as "no ordinary highbrow but a very beautiful woman; whose presence, as much as her writing, was an inspiration."
Edmund Gosse, after completing his biography on Coventry Patmore, sent it to her with the words: "You will be my severest critic; you are almost the only one for whose opinion I shall care a snap."

G. K. Chesterton in reviewing her work wrote: "She was deservedly famous long before I had the honour of any personal knowledge of her; but I will venture the prophecy that her fullest fame is yet to come. The whole modern world must immeasurably enlarge itself before it comes near the measure of her mind."

Coventry Patmore spoke of her writing as bearing in every sentence "the hall-mark of genius" and prophesied, "She will become one of the fairest and steadiest lights of English literature, though she may remain inconspicuous to the crowd, incapable of perfectness."

Robert Esmonde Sencourt, biographer for George Meredith paid his tribute to Alice Meynell with these words: "Around the name of Alice Meynell is the finest aroma. There was in all she wrote such finish and such finesse, her touch was so delicate and firm, that she will live among our classic essayists, and among her poems were some praised by Ruskin as the highest."

Max Beerbohm, complaining of her sudden rise to fame, reported that "In a few years Mrs. Meynell will have become a sort of substitute for the English sabbath."

Herbert Trench wrote of her in a delightful poem that she was, as it were, woven of rapture.

Tennyson complained to her "Others weary me with their sendings, but your poems I have had to get for myself."
W. E. Henley, editor of the "National Observer" who was always impatient of trite or fastidious delicacies wrote that "Her mind naturally wanders among the deep and essential matters of life."

Derek Patmore wrote a biography of his famous great-grandfather, Coventry Patmore and made mention of Alice Meynell: "He showed the world how deeply he loved and respected her genius. He placed a wreath of laurels at the feet of the woman whose friendship was the most important event in the last years of his somewhat lonely life."

"Her manner," wrote George Meredith, "presents to me the image of one accustomed to walk in holy places and keep the eye of a fresh mind on our tangled world."

In "The Poet's Chantry" Katharine Bregy writes: "The acuteness, the activity, the profundity of Mrs. Meynell's thought could not fail to achieve their own part in English letters. But her sympathy and her eternal rightness of vision are qualities in which we rejoice. These have given to her work that peculiar intuitive truth which is the rarest of beauties."

Henry Newbolt, in his book entitled: "Studies Green and Gray" remarked: "In an age which has often failed to distinguish between originality and crude haste, between freedom and mere sloppiness, it would be impossible to over-estimate the value of Mrs. Meynell's Essays to the general public."

Alfred Noyes has written of her: "In her own lifetime she was a tower of intellectual and spiritual strength, lifting through the mists of the age one of the very few steadfast lights; but there was another sign of
her greatness that was quite unmistakable - her humility. That noble intellect, that incomparable artist, never once stooped to the pride that is so common today among lesser minds."

Theodore Maynard said, "The contemplative of letters, she lets the world go by. Her reward is that of all the prose writers of the twentieth century, she is the one most certain of immortality."

Francis Thompson wrote of her writings, "Her work is of that subtly delicate order which - as with Coleridge, for instance - needs to soak into men for a generation or two before it gets adequate recognition. Nevertheless it is something to have won the admiration of men like Rossetti, Ruskin, and shall I add, the immortal Oscar Wilde?"

"Everything she has put her pen to has been noble and dignified," said Katharine Tynan. "She had a finality in what she says. One feels it is the last word."

Wilfrid Meynell has said that she had made forty-five years of heaven on earth for him.

Alice Meynell is not a popular writer among the common readers but she was a popular writer among the important personages in the century in which she lived.
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