THE PROSE WORKS OF

JOHN DONNE.

An Essay.

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INTRODUCTION.

The seventeenth century in England was an age of intense religious feeling. The paganism of the earlier Renascence had passed away. A reaction followed and all classes were seized by an absorbing interest in theological questions. The translation of the Bible, published early in the reign of James I., nourished the religious and poetic instinct in every household. The learned James was accustomed to discourse on divinity as he sat at meals. Ignorant citizens discussed questions of original sin and theories of the Trinity with that fervour and acrimony which is reserved now almost exclusively for politics. "At St John's College, the study of divinity was being pursued by the great majority of Fellows with so much eagerness that the college had almost become a theological seminary".

The great writers of the Elizabethan period had reverted to the Greek manner of approaching the ultimate problems. They considered the nature of man "how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form

and moving how express and admirable! in action how
like an angel! in apprehension how like a god! the
beauty of the world! the paragon of animals! " (1)
and, as Plato had done long before, deduced thence the
existence of some supreme beauty and reason and goodness.
They found the infinite in the nature of man. The time
for the worship of external nature had not yet come, but
it was in the same manner that long afterwards Wordsworth
and Meredith, by a loving communion with earth, found

" A soul beside our own to quicken, quell,
Irradite, and through ruinous floods uplift" (2)
Theirs was the true mysticism. They had a firm grasp
of the realities of life, and waked like Jacob to see
that this hard earth and stony resting place is the
place of angels and the Gate of Heaven.

Donne and his contemporaries adopted the mediaeval
conception of life. Theirs was the false mysticism
which turned its back on this world to seek another,
which separated by a sharp line of demarcation things
temporal from things eternal, which sought to magnify
God by degrading his creatures. They brooded with morbid
persistency on sin, that leprosy which defiled the soul

2. Meredith. 'My Theme'
as the plague the flesh and turned it into a mass of putridity. Men devoted themselves with feverish eagerness to the study of theology because it showed a way of escape from the terrors of this world.

From the time when the pusillanimous James mounted the English throne, England seemed paralysed by chilly fear. It was the reaction after years of great stress. As a man walks fearless on the edge of a precipice, and then wakes trembling in the night at the recollection, so the nation was haunted by the memory of the dangers it had so narrowly escaped. The Armada and the Gunpowder destruction Plot, that deliverance "from distination in the bowels of the sea in an invasion, and from destruction in the bowels of the earth, in the powder-treason" (1) are fresh in men's minds. The courage and careless greatness of the Elizabethans are gone. Their successors are men of a smaller cast. The glory of English daring on the high seas flickered out in the childish expedition of Essex against Cadiz; Raleigh, the last of the heroes, perished on the scaffold.

1.
LXXX Sermons p. 88.
Many causes contributed to increase the general gloom.
Fear of the Roman Catholics and the horrors of the
Inquisition, terrible in reality and exaggerated by
rumour, brooded like a dark cloud over the minds of
Protestants. Every ship returning from the Indies
brought fresh tales of the devilish cruelty of the
Spanish fanatics, who, not content with tormenting the
wretched Indians till they took refuge in suicide,
destroyed their hope of freedom in death by making them
believe they would be met in the next world by more
(1) cruel agonies. It was commonly thought that papist
sentinels were stationed in every corner to tempt
Englishmen to rejoin the ancient church. Donne warns
his congregation to beware the advances of these insidious
foes, and not to "send for such a physician as brings a
Roman priest for his apothecary, not to entertain such
a schoolmaster as brings a Roman priest for his usher,
nor such a mercer, as brings a priest for his tailor" (2)

So

The Turks and Mohammedan religion, as remote to us,
were another ever-present source of fear to Jacobean
England. The Crescent had but recently been driven from
Spain. In 1529 its armies had surged in a great tide
against eastern Europe, advancing to the very walls of Vienna. Raleigh, writing in the Tower, declared that "since the fall of the Roman Empire, there hath been no state fearful in the east but that of the Turk... seeking to root out the true religion". Donne prays for "a bank against that deluge, wherewith thine enemy the Turk threatens to overflow thy people". The clause in the Litany beseeching the Lord to show pity upon all prisoners and captives was inserted primarily on behalf of those captured at sea by Turkish pirates.

Nature, as if infected by the prevalent gloom and lack of courage, sent many bad harvests in succession. The country labourers, wretched and half starved, flocked into the towns, there to drift into beggary and crime. The stern laws against vagabonds and vagrants proved hopelessly ineffectual. Donne notes harshly that "amongst these herds of vagabonds and incorrigible rogues, that fill porches, and barns in the country, a very great part of them was never baptised: people of a promiscuous generation, and of a mischievous education; ill brought into the world and never brought into the church."

2. LXXX Sermons p. 415.
He describes the poor as dogs and deprecates the giving to them of the children's bread. One of his arguments in favour of the colonisation of Virginia was that it would sweep the streets and wash the doors from idle persons and the children of idle persons.

In addition to these causes of distress there were the ravages of the plague and the wide-spread mortality which accompanied it. It would be difficult to estimate how far the frequent recurrence of this scourge was responsible for the poisoning of the popular imagination, for the unwholesome brooding over details of physical decay and corruption. Life became inevitably a meditation on death when the earth was newly swollen "with the waves and billows of graves", when mourners went about the streets because "there was not a house where there was not one dead."

This fear, which finds expression in the inhuman laws of James I. against witches, infected theology. Men saw God through the medium of their own darkness. They are haunted by the dread of hell. Life seems to them a mere plank, insecurely swung from rock to rock;

(1) Fifty Sermons. p. 389.
(2) Sermon preached to the honourable company of the Virginian Plantation. p. 22.
below surges a bottomless pit, red with never-dying flames. A savage God, Nero-like, drives his helpless creatures across the plank and watches the majority fall into the chasm below, there to be tortured everlastingly, because their heads were giddy, or a chance stumble hurled them from security.

No sane, wholesome literature could be born in such an atmosphere. To the gay flowers of the Elizabethans succeeded a crop of toadstools, gorgeous indeed to the eye, but full of mortal poison and heralding the fall of the year. In Shakespeare (it is a commonplace to say it) there is no shrinking from the tragedy and mystery of life. But whether on the dark heath near Forres, or on the frosty battlements of Elsinore, or in the pitiless storm which beat against the white head of the ancient king, in the midst of terror we feel the free winds about us and the open face of heaven above, and recognise that, though man is infinitely small, compared with these mighty and inexplicable forces, yet he partakes of their grandeur in the nobility of his spirit, and though he is stricken to the dust, yet his heroism is not wasted, nor his adventure lost.

In Webster and Tourneur terror is replaced by horror.
They dwell with almost hysterical exaggeration on the misery of life. Men are helpless atoms in the grip of a cruel and purposeless fate,

"Their lives a general mist of error
Their death a hideous storm of terror." (1)

They choose disease rather than health as the subject of their meditations, the diseased remorse of guilty souls, the ghastly writhings of the mind in the whirlpools of madness, the horrible corruption of the grave. They write of limbs corrupted with ulcers, the hoarse wolf scenting out carrion, nurses who strangle patients in the pesthouse, maggots and screech-owls, the black and melancholic yew-tree, the poisoned herbs of Thessaly. They never forget that

"Millions are now in graves, which at last day
Like mandrakes shall rise shrieking." (2)

"My life was a black charnel", is the dying confession of Flaminia. The noble figures of gracious goodness, such as the Duchess of Malfi herself, serve only by the brightness of their beauty to make the darkness more apparent.

"O this gloomy world!
In what a shadow, or deep pit of darkness,
Doth womanish and fearful mankind live." (3)

1. Duchess of Malfi IV 11. 218, 219
2. The White Devil. IV VI
Donne is in substantial agreement with this verdict. In his early poems, written when he was yet young, a soldier and a courtier, he cannot escape from the thought of death. In the storm those who remain below deck are "coffined in their cabins," while those who peep forth to ask for news remind him of the judgment day.

"And as sin-burdened souls from grave will creep
At the last day, some forth their cabins peep,
And trembling ask, "What news?"

Towards the close of his life he confesses that if there were any other way to be saved and get to heaven, than by being born into this life, he would not wish to have come into this world.

When men are happy and contented with their earthly fate they are not apt to dwell much on the thought of another world.

"Not till the fire is dying in the grate
Look we for any kinship with the stars" (1)

It was when Christian found that he was living in the city of Destruction that he fled from it in fear to seek a better country, that is, an heavenly. So it was through fear that the early seventeenth century was driven to the study of theology.

Donne the Layman. (a) Early Life.

John Donne was born in 1573 of an ancient Roman Catholic house. His father, according to Walton, belonged to a Welsh family. On his mother's side he was descended from the great Chancellor, Sir Thomas More, and "the worthy and laborious Judge Rastall, who left posterity the vast statutes of the law of this nation most exactly abridged". His mother's father was John Heywood, writer of interludes and musician, "a player on the virginal" to Henry VIII. These various threads combined to weave a rich and complex personality. Donne is at once poet and lawyer; the blood of martyrs flows in his veins; the mysticism of the Celt is combined with the love of gorgeous colour and ceremonial fostered by the pageantry of the Roman Catholic Church.

He was born into stirring times, the high summer of England's greatness. He went up to Hart Hall, Oxford, in 1584, the year of the colonisation of Virginia, the year of the publication of Euphuia. By 1590 when he entered Lincoln's Inn as a student of law, the defeat
of the Armada had freed England from the fear of Spain, the thunderous roll of Marlowe’s verse had inaugurated a new era for the English stage, Shakespeare had come up to London, and the young Spenser had newly crossed from Ireland to present to Elizabeth the first three books of the Faerie Queene.

Spiritually Donne does not belong to this season of high hopes and marvellous achievement. He was little influenced by the writings of his contemporaries and shows "a contempt for English standards of Literature and religion." (1) The reason for this aloofness is not far to seek. Three or four of the most impressionable years of his youth were spent in foreign travel. He had been nourished in the older faith, and belonged to the party whose hopes had been beaten to the ground by the death of the Queen of Scots in 1587. His life was darkened by the shadow of persecution. Two uncles, after suffering in various prisons for their religion, had been driven from their native land to die in exile as Fathers of Jesuit societies. In 1593, Donne’s brother Henry, younger than himself by a year, had

been imprisoned for harbouring a seminary priest in his chambers at Lincoln's Inn, and died after a few weeks confinement of gaol fever. Soon afterwards Donne gave himself up to a close study of the points at issue between the two creeds, "surveyed and digested the whole body of divinity, controverted between ours and the Roman Church! (1) "I used no inordinate haste, nor precipitation in binding my conscience to any local religion. I had a longer work to do than many other men; for I was first to blot out certain impressions of the Roman religion, and to wrestle both against the examples and against the reasons, by which some hold was taken, and some anticipations early laid upon my conscience, both by persons who by nature had a power and superiority over my will, and others who by their learning and good life, seemed to me justly to claim an interest for the guiding and rectifying of mine understanding in these matters. And although I apprehended well enough, that this irresolution not only retarded my fortune, but also bred some scandal and endangered my spiritual reputation, by laying me open to many

1. Pseudo - Martyr - Preface
misinterpretations, yet all these respects did not transport me to any violent and sudden determination! Eventually he joined the Church of England.

In the next few years we find Donne attempting to satisfy his hunger for intense experience. "I would not that death should take me asleep. I would not have him merely seize me and only declare me to be dead, but win me, and overcome me. When I must shipwreck, I would do it in a sea where mine impotency might have some excuse, not in a sullen, weedy lake, where I could not have so much as exercise for my swimming". He flashes meteor-like from place to place, from one profession to another. For a time he is a soldier and sails with Essex to Cadiz and the Azores. He is a poet, a writer, not of the idle love sonnets then fashionable, but of harsh satires, broken music full of bitterness and aggressive realism. He is secretary to Sir Thomas Egerton, the Lord Keeper, until he falls passionately in love with his niece and marries her secretly without the consent of her relatives, for which fault he suffers imprisonment and the loss of his

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1. *Pseudo-Martyr* Preface
employment. He makes a profound study of the Civil and Canon Laws and writes for Thomas Morton in his controversy against the Roman Catholics. About this time (1607) he was offered a church benefice, but refused to enter Holy Orders and continued his attempts to find secular employment, by which he might maintain his wife and a growing family. Poverty and many other cares weighed heavily upon him. "Tis now spring, he writes in a letter, and all the pleasures of it displease me, every tree blossoms, and I wither: I grow older, and not better; my strength diminisheth, and my load grows heavier, and yet I would fain be or do something." (1) And in another place he gives a yet more gloomy picture of the state of his family. "There is not one person but myself well of my family: I have already lost half a child, and, with that mischance of hers, my wife has fallen into such a decomposure as would afflict her too extremely, but that the sickness of all her other children stupifies her, of one of which, in good faith, I have not much hope; and these meet with a fortune so ill-provided for physic, and such relief, that if God should ease us with burials, I know not how to perform that; but I

flatter myself with this hope, that I am dying too; for I cannot waste faster than by such griefs." In these straits he took refuge in the thought of suicide. "Whencever any affliction assails me, methinks I have the keys of my prison in mine own hand, and no remedy presents itself so soon to my heart, as mine own sword." 

Biathanatos. (b)

This confession appears in the preface to Biathanatos: a declaration of that paradox or thesis, that self-homicide is not so naturally sin, that it may never be otherwise. It was written probably in the years 1608-9 and was handed about in manuscript but not published until 1648, some years after the author's death. Its chief interest for us lies in the flood of light which it casts over the secrets of Donne's personality and temperament. To his morbid imagination all history teems with examples of men who have hastened to escape from the earthly sepulchre of their body. Greek philosophers, Roman warriors, Indian widows, Christian martyrs are all inspired by the same craving for death. The severity

of laws against self-homicide indicates not the enormity of the fault so much as the inclination of the people to it. With extraordinary subtility and closeness of argument he shows that suicide is not contrary to the law of God, and instances the martyrs who forsook this life for a better. Neither is it contrary to the law of nature, because by suicide we preserve our soul, the better part of our self. This latter, indeed, is his main argument, an argument which has been illustrated in our own time by R.L. Stevenson's story of Markheim. "If in a tempest we must cast out the most precious ware aboard, to save the lives of the passengers..... how much more may I, when I am weather beaten, and in danger of betraying that precious soul which God hath embarqued in me, put off this burdensome flesh, till his pleasure be that I shall resume it?" He meets the Platonic argument that a slave may not run away from his master by the answer that in death we run, not from, but, to God. His immense learning is indicated by the long list of "authors cited in this book", 172 names, many of them,

as for example, Metaphrastes and Schlusseiburgius, strange and unfamiliar to the modern ear, and by the patchwork of far-sought quotations which form much of the work. Yet though learned, even pedantic, he is never dull. The following short paragraph will illustrate the characteristics of his style. "Though I know, that the malicious prejudged man, and the lazy affectors of ignorance, will use the same calumnies and obtrectations toward me (for the voice and sound of the snake and goose is all one) yet because I thought, that as in the pool of Bethsaida, there was no health till the water troubled, so the best way to find the truth in this matter, was to debate and vex it, (for we must as well dispute de veritate as pro veritate). I abstained not for fear of misinterpretation from this undertaking! We notice the vivid touch about the snake and the goose, Donne's aristocratic scorn of the ignorant and his intellectual fearlessness. To the end of his days he was troubling pools of Bethsaida in the search for health. "Doubt wisely" he had written in an early satire -

"Doubt wisely; in strange way
To stand inquiring right, is not to stray;
To sleep, or run wrong, is, On a huge hill,

\[1\]

"Cragged, and steep, Truth stands, and he that will
Reach her, about must, and about must go;
And what the hills suddenness resists, win so;
Yet strive so, that before age, death's twilight, (1)
Thy soul rest, for none can work in that night."

No accepted custom is safe from his curious, probing
mind. He wonders why "the church in her hymns and
antiphones, doth often salute the nails and cross, with
epithets of sweetness, and thanks, but the spear which
pierced Christ when he was dead, it ever calls, dirum
mucronem". He is swift to suggest explanations for
apparently irrational traditions. "There is, perchance,
some mystic interpretation belonging to that canon which
allows clergymen to hunt; for they may do it by nets and
snares, but not by dogs; for clamour and bitings are
forbidden them". Many of Donne's most characteristic
traits are found in germ in this, his first book.
Considering the age in which he lives he is tolerant; he
will not reject an opinion merely because it is held by
the Anabaptists "for even a leprous man may have one hand
clean to take and give withal". He has a profound
reverence for the office of kingship. "Both Papists and

3. Ibid. p. 156.
4. Ibid. p. 162.
Puritans teach that a lawful king may become a tyrant, (which to my understanding cannot consist with the form and right of an inheritable monarchy). He is already morbidly introspective, and examines the workings of his own mind with the impartial interest of a scientist watching the movements of an insect under a microscope. He wonders why he finds himself so inclined to the doctrine of self homicide and hesitates "whether it be, because I had my first breeding and conversation with men of a suppressed and afflicted religion, accustomed to the despite of death, and hungry of an imagined martyrdom; or that the common enemy find that door worst locked against him in me; or that there be a perplexity and flexibility in the doctrine itself; or because my conscience ever assures me, that no rebellious grudging at God's gifts, nor other sinful concurrence accompanies these thoughts in me, or that a brave scorn, or that a faint cowardliness beget it". It is his belief that whatsoever is in our appetite good or bad, was first in our understanding true or false. Modern psychology would invert the

1. Biathanatos. p.120.
2. Ibid. p.18.
3. Ibid. p.28.
order. But of him it was true more than of most men, that he was ruled by intellect rather than emotion or passion. Already in this early work we find his love of medical images. He writes of cramps and tetrars, contorted sinews and stiff muscles. Already he is haunted by that fear which never left him all his life long, that "God often punishes a sinner much more severely, because others have been taken occasion of sinning by his fact". (1) "Wilt

"Wilt thou forgive that sin which I have won (2) Others to sin? and, made my sin their door?"

The book is a closely woven argument, clear, logical, at times vivid and interesting. Compared with the writings which were afterwards to come from Donne's pen it lacks beauty, eloquence, distinction of style.

The genesis of Donne's next book is thus described by Walton. "About this time there grew many disputes that concerned the oath of supremacy and allegiance, in which the king had appeared and engaged himself by his public writings now extant, and his Majesty discoursing with Mr. Donne concerning many of the reasons which are usually urged against the taking of those oaths, apprehended such a validity and clearness in his stating the questions, and his answers to them, that his Majesty commanded him to bestow some time in drawing the arguments into a method, and then to write his answers to them; and having done that, not to send but be his own messenger, and bring them to him. To this he presently and diligently applied himself, and within six weeks brought them to him under his own handwriting, as they be now printed; the book bearing the name of "Pseudo-Martyr", printed anno 1610." This may or may not be true. Six weeks seems scant allowance for the writing of such a learned work. In the dedication Donne seems anxious to recommend it to James rather than to be assured of his approval. The facts of
the case as far as we know them are that James wrote in
1607 "an apology for the Oath of Allegiance", which was
answered in the following year by the Jesuit Parsons.
Donne speaks in the preface of his "natural impatience
not to dig painfully in deep, and stony, and sullen
learnings", which shows the different standard of
scholarship in his and in our day. To us it is almost
unreadable because of its painful and laborious learning.
He maintains the power of the king to be greater than
that of the Pope, because the first is chosen by God, but
the latter only by cardinals. He ransacks past
history for instances of large titles given to kings
which they have resigned merely through modesty and not
because they have lost any of their ancient power. He
disputes the miraculous powers of the pope, but asserts
that "our kings cure disease by touch". He proclaims
in emphatic language the divine right of kings. "For God
animates every state with one power, as every man with one
soul: when therefore people concur in the desire of such
a king, they cannot contract nor limit his power". From
this it follows that disobedience to the king, or denial

2. Ibid. p. 34
3. Ibid. p. 172.
of his power, is treason. Donne indicates this with some gentleness. It is his purpose, not to irritate, but to persuade. "It becomes not me to say, that the Roman religion begets treason, but I may say, that within one generation it degenerates into it" (1) He then argues that the refusal to take the Oath of Allegiance is a question, not of religion, but of politics, and that those who are sent to England by the Pope to stir up rebellion and who suffer death in consequence, are no more martyrs than were the Spaniards who suffered shipwreck off the English coast in 1568. In the discussion of martyrdom we notice a distinct advance on the views of Biathanatos. He reiterates the statement already familiar to us from the earlier work that martyrdom is a kind of suicide and adds that it is the only kind acceptable to God. He shows that the honour paid to martyrs naturally inflames others to follow their example and that thus men rush on death without sufficient cause. It is characteristic of Donne that he accepts this phenomenon as natural. It is in no way surprising to him that all men should long for death. The Roman Catholics have encouraged such pseudo-martyrs

by teaching that those who voluntarily embrace death escape Purgatory and lay up stores of merit for themselves. Both doctrines to Donne seem fallacious. "All discourse of purgatory seems to me but the mythology of the Roman Church, and a moral application of pious and useful fables," he writes. No less incredible to him is the doctrine that we can earn merit by our works. Forgiveness of sins is a grace freely given by God, not a reward earned by men for their good deeds. Finally in a more manly strain than we have yet heard from him he asserts that "we are not sent into this world to suffer, but to do and to perform the offices of society, required by our several callings," and that though martyrdom be a virtue, yet it is worse than useless for men to sacrifice their lives for a worthless cause. The true martyrs are those who die either in defence of a moral truth, or to maintain the integrity of the Christian faith, or to succour the liberties of the Church.

Throughout this work we cannot but be struck by Donne's courtesy to his opponents. He refers to the Roman Catholic Church with respect and even with affection. "I am ever loth, to seem to abhor, or abstain from giving to

2. Ibid. Preface.
3. Ibid. p. 200.
that church, any such styles or titles, as she is pleased and delighted in, as long as by a pious interpretation thereof, her desire may thereby be satisfied in some measure, our churches not injured nor prejudiced, and the free spirit of God, which blows where it pleaseth, not tied nor imprisoned to any place or person." 

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In a very different spirit was composed Donne's next work, _Ignatius his Conclave_, a bitter directed against the Jesuits. It was printed first in Latin and afterwards in English in 1611, and cannot have been written much before that date, for it is based on the canonisation of Ignatius Loyola which took place in 1609, mentions _Sidérisus Nuncius_, the treatise of Galileo which told the world of his newly invented telescope, published in 1610, and refers to Kepler's _Dissertatio cum Nuncio Siderico_ which appeared in 1611. _Ignatius his Conclave: or His Inthronisation in a late election in Hell_: wherein many things are mingled by way of Satyr, concerning the disposition of Jesuits, The Creation of a New Hell, the Establishing of a Church in the Moone, is a very small book in spite of the length of its title and is dedicated to the two _Tetragrammaton_, protectors of the Pope's Consistory, and of the College of Sorbonne. The author is _wrapt into an ecstasy and in the twinkling of an eye sees all the rooms in hell open to his sight._

_Ignatius_ who had gone straight to hell had been considered very ignorant at first, but he had "learnt somewhat of
of his Jesuits, which daily came thither." (1) Various
great persons apply for admission into hell, Copernicus
on the ground that he was a great innovator, Paracelsus
because he practised butcheries and manglings of men,
Machiavelli because of his enormous and manifold crimes.
Ignatius, relating the horrible wickedness of the Popes,
has no difficulty in showing that the highest place in
Hell belongs of right to the Roman Catholics. This
speech of Ignatius is somewhat prolonged and wearisome
as the author admits himself with some humour. "Truely
I thought this oration of Ignatius very long: and I
began to think of my body which I had so long abandoned,
lest it should putrify, or grow mouldy, or be buried." (2)
It is finally decided that all the Jesuits should be trans-
ferred to the moon, there to establish a new hell. The
bitter mockery of this squib is exactly similar to the
mood which found expression in the Satires and which
hitherto had not been revealed in his prose. There is a
pretty verse at the end which describes how the author's
body was refreshed by the return of his soul

1. Ignatius his Conclave. p. 16.
2. Ibid. p. 90.
"As a flower wet with last nights dew, and then
Warmed with the new Sun, doth shake off again
All drowsiness, and raise his trembling crown,
Which crookedly did languish, and stoop down." (1)

This little book throws an interesting side-light on
Donne's enthusiasm for the scientific movements of his
day. He writes with evident knowledge of the work of
Galileo "who of late hath summoned the other worlds, the
stars to come nearer to him, and give him an account
of themselves", and of Kepler "who, as himself testifies
of himself, ever since Tycho Brahe's death, hath
received it into his care, that no new thing should be
done in heaven without his knowledge." (1)

1. Ignatius his Conclave. p.3.
Paradoxes, Problems, Essayes, Characters, to which is added a Book of Epigrams.

Here perhaps would be the best place to mention a certain little book of Paradoxes which appeared in a pirated edition in 1633, and in a more authorised shape in 1652. It is uncertain when they were written but they are certainly the work of Jack Donne rather than of Doctor Donne and had best be considered now before we pass to his theological writings. The younger Donne is unduly enthusiastic when he compares these effusions to spring flowers, to "primroses and violets of the spring which entertain us with more delight than the fruits of the autumn." And when he continues that here "we see David as well a ruddy youth and jolly shepherd as a grave king and holy prophet and perhaps he did as much with his pebble and sling then, as he did after with his whole army" we feel that he is raising hopes not to be realised by the work itself. The book is obviously the work of a young man. It is scornful, cynical, silly, sometimes clever but always in a crude, rather ugly fashion.

1. Paradoxes, etc., Preface.
That inconstancy is a virtue in women, that women ought to paint, that it is possible to find some virtue in some women, that old men are more fantastic than young, these are examples of paradoxes. The problems are in a similar vein, "Why do Puritans make long sermons?" They feel it their duty to preach on till their auditory wake." Why hath the common opinion afforded women souls is another problem. There follow one or two short characters "Of a Scot", "a Dunce", an essay of Valour and a collection of coarse epigrams probably not genuine. These trifles reveal the least pleasant side of Donne's character, his hardness and cynicism and the vulgarity of his attitude to women.
Meantime Donne was still seeking employment at court. He grounded his hopes on Somerset’s patronage, and to please the favourite took an active part in forwarding the divorce of Lady Essex. Donne’s mind was of a peculiarly labyrinthine nature. He was an enigma to himself while he lived and since his death has puzzled every critic who has tried to understand him.

"This twilight of two years, not past nor next, Some emblem is of me, or I of this, Who, meteor-like, of stuff and form perplex’d, Whose what, and where, in disputation is If I should call me anything, should miss." (1)

In later life he was ready to confess all his sins and weaknesses, yet he never seems to have blamed himself for his share in these divorce proceedings. It is probable that his restless, probing intellect burrowed out winding paths of escape. He seldom walked along the plain highway of common opinion.

Somerset however at this time was himself tottering on the verge of ruin and could do nothing to promote the fortunes of his dependants. James absolutely

refused to give Donne any but ecclesiastical preferment and so half unwillingly he took orders in 1614. In the weeks preceding his ordination he wrote Essays in Divinity, being several disquisitions, interwoven with meditations and prayers. They were not published until 1651, twenty years after his death, by his son. His root feeling seems to be that by entering the Church he is sacrificing his freedom of thought. He faces this difficulty and definitely accepts the limitations imposed by orthodoxy. "The Church hath wisely hedged us in so far, that all men may know, and cultivate, and manure their own part, and not adventure upon great reserved mysteries." (1) And again he argues with himself "When I remember that it was God which hid Moses's body, and the devil which laboured to reveal it, I use it thus, that there are some things which the author of light hides from us, and the prince of darkness strives to show to us; but with no other light, than his firebrands of contention, and curiosity." (2)

1. Essays in Divinity, p.7.
2. Ibid. p. 21.
He is weary of prolonged, abstract thought. Like a languishing patient who refuses to swallow the potion till he has examined the physician concerning the ingredients of the draught, he has meditated about life and has forgotten to live. (1) Slowly and deliberately as though the whole question were rather new to him he considers the authority of the Bible and decides that it is superior to Alcoran or Talmud. He debates with himself the necessity for a priesthood, and comes to the conclusion that though each man must be responsible for his own soul yet priests are necessary, even as each man is responsible for the care of his own body and yet refers to the physician for help and instruction. (2) He feels that as yet he is but an interloper, not a staple merchant among the other divines. (3) He meditates on the first few chapters of the Book of Genesis and though his words are cold he seems conscious of a sense of relief in escaping from "the wild forest" to take sanctuary in the pale of the church. He hopes that religion will become in time more luminous to him."Not that God grows, but faith doth." (4) His innermost self

2. Ibid. p. 156.
3. Ibid. p. 66.
4. Ibid. p. 43.
is revealed by the outbursts of prayer, passionate confessions of sin, piteous cries for forgiveness. "Thou hast set up many candlesticks; and kindled many lamps in me; but I have either blown them out, or carried them to guide me in and by forbidden ways. Thou hast given me a desire of knowledge, and some means to it, and some possession of it; and I have armed myself with thy weapons against thee. But let me, in despite of me, be of so much use to thy glory, that by thy mercy to my sin, other sinners may see how much sin thou canst pardon." "Thou hast delivered me, O God, from the Egypt of confidence and presumption, by interrupting my fortunes and intercepting my hopes; and from the Egypt of despair by contemplation of thine abundant treasures and my portion therein; from the Egypt of lust, by confining my affections; and from the monstrous and unnatural Egypt of painful and wearisome idleness, by the necessities of domestic and familiar cares and duties!

This gratitude grew with every year of life that remained to him. He had found his true vocation late

2. Ibid. p. 166.
(he was over forty when he was ordained) and he was aware that but for the king's persistence he might never have found it at all. In 1624, when he dedicated his Book of Devotions to Prince Charles he spoke of his second birth at his entrance into the ministry. "Your Highness' royal father vouchsafed me his hand, not only to sustain me in it, but to lead me to it", and again, in his sickness, when he thanks God for the kindness of the king in sending him his own physician, he adds, "But this his assistance to my bodily health, thou knowest, O God, and so do some divers of thine honourable servants know, is but the twilight of that day, wherein thou, through him, hath shined upon me before; but the echo of that voice, whereby thou, through him, hast spoke to me before; then, when he, first of any man conceived a hope, that I might be of some use in the church, and descended to an intimation, to a persuasion, almost to a solicitation, that I would embrace that calling."

As we study Donne's spiritual development we see in epitome what was happening in large in the national mind. "Passion in large measure transferred itself from literature to the affairs of politics and religion" (1) writes Dowden of the English nation. So Donne, who had been a poet in his youth, entered the church in middle age, and hardly ever wrote verse after. He was feverishly anxious to put the past aside and make haste along the new path he had chosen.

"That which I should have begun
In my youth's morning, now late must be done;
And I as giddy travellers must do,
Which stray or sleep all day, and having lost
Light and strength, dark and tired must then ride post."

"The poet in Donne did not cease to exist, but his ardour, his imagination, his delight in what is strange and wonderful, his tears, his smiles, his erudition, his intellectual ingenuities, were all placed at the service of one whose desire was that he might die in the pulpit! (2) From this time forth he was a preacher and nothing but a preacher and the works that remain to us are all sermons. It is difficult for the modern mind to conceive of a poet-

1. Dowden. Puritan and Anglican.
preacher, so completely has the pulpit ceased to be a source of intellectual or spiritual enlightenment. The language of the 17th century is not our language, nor its thoughts our thoughts. The fire which once animated these theological questions has long since died out and left the embers dull and cold. But the sermons of John Donne are of perennial interest, apart from their metaphysics, because of the extraordinary fascination of the personality they reveal, and because of the beauty of the language in which they are written. Although we must traverse arid wastes of bygone controversy, wrapped in the dim twilight of theological speculation, we are rewarded at times by thunderclaps of sonorous eloquence, by lightning flashes of phrase or metaphor, which illuminate for a moment in vivid detail something of the quaint picturesqueness of an age far removed from our own. As we turn over the pages of these sermons we watch the weary traveller at night-fall pushing on through the darkness, glad when he sees outlined against the fading sunset sky the grim figure of the gallows, because it tells him that he is approaching some great city. (1)
As he draws near to the outskirts and plunges into the maze of narrow, ill-paved, unlighted streets, he quickens his fearful steps, for these suburbs are the haunt of disorderly, covetous men who congregate there to spoil defenceless passengers. The darkness deepens, and in the heart of the city "the adulterer, whose eye waits for the twilight, goes forth, and casts his eye upon forbidden houses", but when he would enter, he sees a 'Lord, have mercy upon us' scrawled upon the door, a dread sign which warns him that those within lie sick of the plague, and suddenly chill and trembling he reels away in horror. We see the unclean man waking at midnight to hear the passing bell; to his shuddering, excited imagination it seems his own knell, and above the thumping of his heart he hears a voice 'Fool, this night they shall fetch away thy soul'. The night passes and sleepers are awakened in the early dawn by the sad and doleful bellman. Later, the frosty air is shivered by the clang of cheerful street music, but the day ushered in thus merrily is full of melancholy sights.

1. LXXX. Sermons. p. 753.
2. LXXX. Sermons. p. 12.
3. Ibid. p. 12.
4. XXVI. Sermons. p. 205.
A cart rattles over the cobbled stones, carrying the white faced thief from Newgate to Tyburn, from prison to the place of execution. A poor creature, covered with loathsome sores, asks alms of a well-dressed merchant, who chides him into silence and passes on; the disappointed beggar turns aside and "whispers still to God". Very little escaped the keen observant eyes of Donne, poet and satirist.

"He glanced o'er books on stalls with half an eye, And fly leaf ballads on the vendor's string, And broad-edge bold print posters by the wall. He took such cognisance of men and things, If any beat a horse, you felt he saw; If any cursed a woman, he took note." (3)

He had watched the hoarse ballad mongers bawling their pamphlets, stuffed full of forged rumours about the latest Jesuit plots or Catholic victory in the Netherlands. He may have known at one of the universities the beggared scholar, who afterwards withered in an obscure garret, having studied from his youth up, and grown blind and mad in the mathematics; mathematics then being a much suspected subject,"most people regarding it as spells and its professors as limbs of the devil". In his Lincoln's Inn days he had

2. LXXX Sermons. p. 414.
3. Browning. "How it strikes a Contemporany"
4. Fifty Sermons, p. 147.
5. LXXX Sermons. p. 95.
had remarked with a satirical smile the restless jury, impatient of more evidence, ready to condemn any man, anxious only to be released in time for dinner, or the suitor coming in forma paupervs to trouble the court and importune the judge more than greater causes (2) or greater persons.

Donne had seen many sides of life. He had been at sea in storms and tempests when sailors cut down decks and galleries and tear up cabins and cast them overboard to ease the ship, and even hack away the mast, though without it the vessel cannot sail. (3) He had been at court, where the swaggering pirate, newly returned from a voyage of plunder, laden with spoils torn from the unfortunate Indian, was haunting the antechamber of a royal favourite and offering bribes for a pardon. (4) He had lived most of his now life in London and these sermons are impregnated with the sounds and smells of the great city. We are never far from London Bridge and the Thames, Westminster Courts and Smithfield cattlemarkets. There is the apothecary's shop where one

1. LXXX Sermons. p. 135.
2. LXXX Sermons. p. 783.
4. LXXX Sermons. p. 96.
may buy poisonous drugs. Within, the old chemist, half-wizard, half-astrologer, is compounding "a sovereign treacle of vipers and other poisons". The pompous physician, no whit more scientific, hurries along the street on his way to apply pigeons to a sick man's head.

We hear of many quaint superstitions which are evidently believed in alike by the learned preacher and his credulous flock. They make no doubt of the barbarous and inhuman custom of the Jews, who are always provided with the blood of some Christian, so that they may anoint the corpse of any that dies amongst them, and thus effect an entrance into the Christian heaven by guile. They are not quite sure that Paracelsus could not have made man in a limbed or furnace. So Sir Thomas Browne, a generation later, was ready to undertake to produce a violet again from its own ashes. Donne evidently credits the story "delivered by a very pious man, and of the truth whereby he seems to be very well assured" of Conrad the priest, whose fingers, after celebrating the sacrament, gave forth such light that

1. Fifty Sermons. p. 143.
2. Book of Devotions.
4. LXXX Sermons. p. 64.
he could read all night "as well as by so many candles!"
He doubts not that it is the true winding sheet of Christ
which is preserved in Savoy. Floating islands, which moved across the face of the waters, so that a man
might sow in one place and reap in another, were common
mariners' stories of the time, but there is a curious
mediaeval flavour particularly characteristic of Donne
in the description of the deaf adder stopping her ears,
by laying one close to the ground and covering the other
with her tail, a realistic picture which might have been
taken from a contemporary bestiary, or a Dürer foreground.
The inexplicable mystery of moral evil which stalks
through the world, blighting whatever it touches with a
ghastly disease, was for Donne no mere abstraction, not
even a fallen angel of light, but a grotesque bodily devil,
ingen black, breathing out red flames, like an old monkish
picture, or like the vice of a miracle play. In
Biathanatos, after discussing an apparition of the devil
in disguise, he adds with much simplicity that "those
rules which are delivered ordinarily to know him by, are
apparently false, which are a difference in his hands or

1. LXXX Sermons, p. 81.
2. LXXX Sermons, p. 466 246.
3. Fifty Sermons, p. 466.
feet, or some notable deformity by horns, or a tail.\footnote{1}

Death is a more shadowy figure, but in the imagination of a generation, which brooded on the grave with passionate intensity and depth of melancholy, he is clothed upon with a presence which is almost bodily. It is a figure of speech when the poet writes of death as "but a groom

Which \underbar{brings} a taper to the outward room!"

It is something more than a figure when the sick divine in expostulation with his Creator says that "Death is an old man's door, he appears, and tells him so, and death is at a young man's back, and says nothing,"\footnote{2} and when, as he \underline{lies} sheepless, listening to the bell tolling for the dead, he sees the curtains shake in the wind, and quotes the words of Jeremiah "Death is some into our windows" we feel that Death has become a personal, albeit a shadowy presence.

The age had reverted in some measure to mediaeval superstitions. It was self-conscious, introspective, decadent, In Donne this melancholy autumnal spirit finds its most intense expression.

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\item Biathanatos. p. 144.
\item Book of Devotions.
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We have no record of Donne's earliest sermons. Tradition has it that the first was delivered at St Catherine's, a half-ruined parish church in the village of Paddington. He is believed to have preached several times in the neighbourhood of London, but these sermons were probably never written down. Almost immediately after his ordination he was appointed chaplain to the king, and remained until his death court preacher, first to James I, and afterwards to Charles I. As he assumed the priest's office thus late in life, his theological views were already fixed and his manner of expressing those views matured; we can trace little or no development in thought or style. It will therefore be most convenient to consider the sermons, not in chronological order, especially as the majority of them are undated, but to examine the different ways in which Donne addressed himself to his different congregations.

The sermons were not published, with the exception of a few preached on special occasions, until after his death. They appeared then in three instalments, the LXXX Sermons in 1640, the Fifty Sermons in 1649, and the XXVI Sermons in 1661.
Donne, with his usual insight, recognised that he ran a risk of losing his independence of thought by becoming a court preacher. "Birds that are kept in cages may learn some notes, which they should never have sung in the woods or fields; but yet they may forget their natural notes too. Preachers that bind themselves always to cities and courts, and great auditories, may learn new notes; they may become occasional preachers, and make the emergent affairs of the time, their text, and the humours of the hearers their Bible; but they may lose their natural notes, both the simplicity, and the boldness that belongs to the preaching of the Gospel: both their power upon low understandings to raise them, and upon high affections to humble them." (1)

In his attitude to the government, in his reverence for the person of the king, in his hatred of lawlessness and sedition, in his view of the proper relations between Church and state, Donne is an exponent of the loyal High Church party. Kingship is to him the ideal form of rule. "A religious king is the image of God, and a religious court is a copy of the communion of saints". (2)

2. XXVI Sermons p. 29.
he writes, and in another place bids his congregation be glad that heaven is a kingdom. With extreme fervour he preaches against resistance to the magistrates and lawful authority. "Resist it not, caluminate it not, suspect it not!" Private men must not interfere in public questions. The king is accountable to God alone, not to his ministers, nor his people, not to neighbouring states and rulers. "Subjects are to look upon the faults of princes, with the spectacles of obedience, and reverence, to their place and persons; little and dark spectacles, and so their faults, and errors are to appear little and excusable to them."

He gives us a graphic picture of the doubt and confusion which followed the death of Elizabeth, when "every one of you in the city was running up and down like ants with their eggs bigger than themselves, every man with his bags, to seek where to hide them safely," and refers always to her successor in terms of the most unfeigned admiration and almost affection. "The learnedest king, that any age hath produced, our incomparable King James!"

1. Fifty Sermons. p. 20.124
3. Ibid. p. 315.
5. XXVI Sermons. p. 351.
"that peacemaker of all the Christian world", who desired to still all strife both on the battlefield and in the pulpit, has a very loyal supporter in his chaplain. Donne bids the people thank God for the devoutness of their sovereign and for his prolonged stay in England far from his native land. He has no doubt that the king is, and ought to be, the head of the church. The church is the body and speaks not; it is for the head, the sovereign, to declare to us "those things whereby we are to be ordained." No one may resist the authority of the prince, who has been endowed with full powers by the Almighty, and is his representative here on earth. The king is king of men, not of bodies only but of souls too; he is therefore supreme in ecclesiastical as in secular matters. Because the tables of the Jewish law, the ark and the temple were committed to the guardianship of the kings of Judah, therefore the kings of England have the right to regulate the services of the church. The argument sounds oddly in our ears, but it was probably convincing to the audience which heard it first.

1. Sermon on King's Instructions to Preachers.
2. Ibid.
3. LXX Sermons p. 698.
In 1622 Donne preached at Paul's Cross in defence of James's recently issued instructions to preachers. The purpose of these instructions was to check preachers who aimed "to display their ignorance in meddling with civil matters, or in rude and indecent reviling of persons", and to revive the practice of Sunday afternoon catechising "that the people might be seasoned in all the heads of the Protestant religion!"

In his flattery of the king Donne sometimes approaches dangerously near to blasphemy. When he says that "the spirit of the Lord, he who is the breath of our nostrils, moves upon the waters, by his royal and warlike navy at sea, and by the breath and influence of his providence throughout the land," he is referring, not to the third person of the Trinity, but to the son of Mary, Queen of Scots. Modern readers, accustomed to a less ecstatic form of address to public personages might be a little repelled by the exclamation, "How glorious is God, as he looks out amongst us thro' the king!" Such was the manner of speech common at the time, and if Donne does not

1. Sermon preached on XV verse of XX ch. of Judges.
3. Fifty Sermons. p. 422.
depart from the accepted custom, neither does he indulge in more exaggerated expressions than others. With regard to James I., it is evident that Donne felt for him a genuine respect and affection. The funeral sermon which he preached over the body of the dead king is singularly restrained and has occasional touches of real pathos.

Donne's relation to the enigmatic and reserved Charles I. would appear to have been a much less personal one. We know from his letters that he was in some trepidation before his first sermon to the young king on April 3rd, 1625. "This morning I have received a signification from my Lord Chamberlain, that his Majesty hath commanded tomorrow's sermon at St James's" he writes to Sir Robert Ker, and in another note next day, he refuses the knight's invitation to dinner, evidently feeling too troubled and excited for social converse. "After the sermon, I will steal into my coach home, and pray that my good purpose may be well accepted, and my defects graciously pardoned. Amen."

The chaplain seldom refers to the new king in his sermons, but in one place he chivalrously defends Henrietta Maria from the enemies who attacked her as a papist. "Very religious kings may have had wives, that may have retained some tincture, some impressions of

error, which they may have sucked in their infancy, from another church, and yet would be loath those wives should be publicly traduced to be heretics, or passionately proclaimed to be idolaters (1) for all that!

Though Donne adopted the custom of the day in his language to the king, we find no trace of servility in his attitude to the nobility. He is no false prophet speaking pleasant things. "Things of sweetness and of delight grow not in my ground, but simples rather and medicinable herbs", he says of himself with truth. He is unsparing in his denunciations of the vices of the rich, those with whom "Jupiter that comes in a shower of gold outweighs Jehovah that comes in a shower of water". In memorable phrase he describes the "insatiable whirlpool of the covetous mind". He would have these nobles remember how many poor seek long and painfully and in vain for the honours and wealth which they have won so lightly and abuse so recklessly. With unsparing insistence on an unpleasant truth, he bids them consider their real worthlessness. "Consider advisedly, and confess ingenuously, whether you have men, not known many times, more industrious than ever you

1. Fifty Sermons. p. 236.
were, and yet never attained to the glory of your wealth? many wiser then ever you were, and yet never attained to your place in the government of state? and valianter than ever you were, that never came to have your command in the wars. Material possessions are but ours for the time. We find them here in the world when we come, and we leave them behind again when we depart. They become ours for a time by accident, by the chance of our birth, by a freak of fortune. And to things that are but found, what is our title? If we restore not what we find, -in the eyes of the law we are robbers. We are but stewards for others. The world loads us with unearned, unmerited benefits all our lives long, and it is our task, as far as may be, to repay the debt, at least in part, and not to clamour for more favours. We hold our riches in trust for God, and in this sense, the poor are God. "Hast thou not fortune enough", he asks in indignation," to let fall some crumbs upon him that starves? hast thou not favour enough to shed some beams upon him that is frozen in disgrace?" It is the teaching of a later poet.

1. XXVI Sermons. p. 385.
2. LXXX Sermons. p. 711.
"A bond at birth is forged; a debt doth lie
Immortal on mortality. It grows -
By vast rebound it grows, unceasing growth;
Gift upon gift, alms upon alms, upreared,
From man, from God, from nature, till the soul
At that so huge indulgence stands amazed.
Leave not, my soul, the unfoughten field, nor leave
Thy debts dishonoured, nor thy place desert
Without due service rendered." (1)

Donne had been a suitor for court favour long enough to know the heart-breaking weariness which comes of oft-repeated rebuffs, the loss of independence and sense of personal degradation which befall the place-seeker, the petty meannesses and crooked courses into which ambition almost inevitably leads. He emphasises the warnings against ambition by a simile, startling in its vivid-ness. "The danger is, that we cannot go upward directly; if we have a stair, to go any height, it must be a winding stair: it is a compassing, a circumventing, to rise: a ladder is a straight engine of itself, yet if we will rise by that, it must be set aslope." (2)

With outspoken directness he reminds these richly dressed nobles of their real poverty, that they wear their estates on their backs and have brought their lands into the city to convert them into changers' bills.

2. LXXX Sermons. p. 714.
Yet this fearless preacher is by no means the same unsympathetic observer; he shows rather the same artistic and psychological pleasure, which we observe in the author of Volpone and the Alchemist, a certain zest in bringing to the light the irritable humours of the parsimonious father, who fears that his heir may purchase land or buy a title with his painfully acquired money, the incorrigible vanity of women, who immured in convents far from the eye of men, yet paint their faces, the foibles of the self-made citizen, who boasts like Jacob "with this staff I came over Jordan" and then proceeds to enumerate what he has since gained concluding with pride "and now have I gotten two bands." There was in Donne's day what we now regard as an exaggerated respect for wealth and rank and office, and we find in these sermons no trace of that war between classes which now resounds through all our literature, no trace either of that passionate pity for the poor which is the key to much of what is finest in modern thought. Donne holds the simple, dignified creed that every man has been placed in his station in life by the direct will of an all-seeing

1. XXVI Sermons. p. 143.
and all-wise Providence and that it is his duty, like the ambassador of an earthly monarch, to maintain himself worthily in it. The very word "station" is characteristic. The classes are divided by a wide gulf, and the separation made clear to the eye at once by the difference of dress. It is easy to see what suggested the following comparison to the preacher's mind, as he brooded on eternity and the fragility of human life, with his eye on the gay clothes of his noble congregation, grouped before him in beautiful, gorgeous masses of colour. "Methusalem, with all his hundreds of years, was but a mushroom of a nights growth, to this day, and all the four monarchies, with all their thousands of years, and all the powerful kings, and all the beautiful queens of this world, were but as a bed of flowers, some gathered at six, some at seven, some at eight, all in one morning, in respect of this day." (1)

Following a plan which we shall find to be habitual with him, he adapts his language, perhaps from a half-conscious sense of artistic fitness, to his hearers and uses metaphors taken from the life of camps and courts.

1. LXXX Sermons. p. 748.
The Jesuits, who cast dishonour on the canonical books of the Bible, by making their own traditions of equal value, are like kings, who, wishing to degrade some order of honour, bestow it on unworthy and ignoble persons. He bids his congregation not be discouraged in trouble, when God takes others into garrison, and leaves them still struggling on the field of battle. God scatters not his blessings indiscriminately, as princes do money at coronations and triumphs, neither does he damn us before we sin, like a gamester who should curse and swear before beginning to lose. Men must take pains to pray, as the favourites of princes and great personages labour to have private conference with the king; they must notground their requests on their own merit, for from persons of lower to those of higher rank, a petition for a due debt is an affront. Donne knows these courtiers well, their complacency in knowledge and shame of ignorance, which makes them buy libraries if only for ornament, their superstitious belief in the enormous wealth of London citizens, "as we say, it is the middle men raise the subsidy, not the great men."

With this same purpose of suitting his teaching to the needs of his flock, Donne seldom argues against the doctrines of the Puritans, referring to them only in occasional phrases of contempt as "rotten boughs,
gangrened limbs, fragmentary chips." Puritanism met
with no favour at court. But Roman Catholicism was
more fashionable, and against this enemy Donne directed
his whole battery of intellectual ingenuity. He has
nothing but rebuke for those who enquire too deeply
into the beliefs of that communion". "This is curiosity
in us, and it is so in you, if when you have sufficient
means of salvation preached to you in that religion wherein
you were baptised, you enquire too much, too much trouble
yourself with the religion of those, from whose
superstitions you are already by God's goodness rescued:
remember that he who desired to fill himself with the
husks, was the Prodigal" (1) Almost all these sermons
are stirred by an undercurrent of controversy: some of
them are directed altogether against the Catholic position.
On the first page of his first sermon at court, the one
preached before the Queen at Greenwich on April 30th,1615,
we find the expression of his irritation against those
who break the secular laws of a country, wilfully
thrusting themselves into danger and provoking the
magistrate, and then regard their just punishment as a
martyrdom. Nothing is so difficult to bear with patience

1. XXVI Sermons. p. 320.
as the pose of martyrdom in those whom we think are simply foolish and misguided, or worse. For Donne it was especially difficult. Many of his friends and relatives were still Roman Catholics. He had been bred in that faith and after he had left it, must often have been galled and irritated by the spectacle of those he loved enduring unnecessary suffering. Yet he is no vulgar convert, anxious to prove by his zeal against his former co-religionists, that he has altogether abjured the errors of his first faith. He is distinguished to the end of his days by an unusual gentleness in controversy. He ever deprecated the rash use of the word heretic, and maintained that the Romish, Anglican and reformed Churches were all beams of one sun. In a letter to Sir Robert Ker in 1627, Donne writes "My tenets are always for the preservation of the religion I was born in." When he adopted the Anglican form of faith it did not seem to him that he was leaving one church for another, but rather that he was cleaving to that section of the Catholic church which was most free of error. The English Established Church was the direct

descendant of the early Christian communities. He looked back to the Fathers for guidance and inspiration. The papists had strayed from the true path by following wandering fires, admitting superstitions and idolatries which were alien to the pure spirit of the faith they had inherited. But Donne never doubted that the English was the daughter of the Roman church, and the object of his criticism was not to undermine the ancient fabric, but to restore it to its former stability and beauty by removing the useless superstructures added to the original foundation.

We have referred before to his careful study of the Roman Catholic position. Izaak Walton relates, in his life of Donne, that "about the nineteenth year of his age, he, being then unresolved what religion to adhere to, and considering how much it concerned his soul to choose the most orthodox, did therefore, (though his youth and health promised him a long life) to rectify all scruples that might concern that, presently lay aside all study of the law, and of all other sciences that might give him a denomination, and began seriously to survey and consider the body of divinity, as it was then controverted betwixt the Reformed and the Roman Church". The fact of this earnest study is evident, though the date is generally
believed to be later than that assigned by Walton, for the works of Bellarmine, which Donne is said to have annotated, did not appear till 1593.

His three books, Biathanatos, Pseudo-Martyr and Ignatius his Conclave, all display an intimate knowledge of church history, particularly of the writings of the early Fathers, and a masterly grip of the complexities of the Roman Catholic and Reformed creeds. Though he wrote as a layman these works are theological in tendency. When he took orders therefore he was already well-trained and well-armed for combat with this heresy, and shows an extraordinary and not always quite justifiable ingenuity in turning the words of the Bible against the practices of the Roman Church.

Donne's learning is immense, but it needs a scholar to judge of the extent of another scholar's attainments. We can only quote his own statement that he had been "diverted by the worst voluptuousness, which is an hydroptic, immoderate desire of human learning and languages", and point out his intimate knowledge of the Fathers, (he continually refers to Tertullian, Augustine, Ambrose, Clement, Ignatius, Isidore, Origen, Cyril, Gregory and many others), and of contemporary continental writers on theological

subjects. It was an age of scholarship. Milton's learning is proverbial. Sir Thomas Browne understood no less than six ancient languages, beside the "jargon and patois of several provinces", and was too a doctor of medicine, a philosopher, an astronomer, and a naturalist. Jeremy Taylor and Burton seem to have read everything that had been written before their day. Yet though learned they are singularly uncritical. The statements of the historian, the fables of the poet are used by them without discrimination. Donne too is weighed down by much learning and his thought is almost choked sometimes by his erudition, yet he shows more power of criticism than most of his contemporaries. His passionate sincerity is a guide which leads him aright through many pedantic mazes and philosophical bogs. His keen intellect cuts like a sharp sword through ambiguities which puzzle weaker heads. A quotation from a Father is often an argument or an illustration in his sermons, but he does not accept the authority of these saints as infallible, nor hurl disjointed fragments from them at his congregation as if they were so many proofs. But it cannot be denied that his course is often impeded by too much learning. If we may compare him for a moment in this
respect with his great successor, Jeremy Taylor, we must admit that in both divines masses of learning stand like huge boulders in the stream of their eloquence. Taylor's speech flows on clear, shallow, beautiful, like a mountain brook, bubbling over the boulders, colouring them with the rich hues of his imagination, softening the sharpness of their outline, but leaving them unmoved. The rocks are no part of the stream; they are the additions which give it beauty; without them the brook would be tame and dull as a meadow ditch. With Donne the aim and the result are different. He is trying not to please, but to convince. His eloquence is rather to be compared to a lava stream, boiling up red-hot from the depths of his experience, carrying along with it masses of molten metal and rock. It moves with immense force and is bright with precious minerals which are mixed with the ore, but as it cools, it tends to become sluggish, until finally, the fire departs from it and leaves an arid waste of crumbling stone.

To the modern reader the Roman Catholic controversy presents such a desolate and barren wilderness, and we can hardly believe that it was ever animated by a living fire, but doubtless the preacher's ingenious arguments against the upholders of the Pope's authority aroused a
pleasureable interest in those who heard them. It is impossible here to enter into this region of Donne's thought. To do so adequately would require great and specialised learning and the results would fill a volume. Many of his arguments have now become hackneyed through much repetition. We may notice however even here his tolerance and fairness of mind. He inveighs against the doctrine of transubstantiation, the idolatry of bread and wine, but he is careful to admit, every time he mentions the subject, that only the vulgar believe this, and that the priests are blameworthy only in so far as they do not preach against the popular superstition. Over and over again does he dwell on the evil of intolerance. "He that may have been in the right opinion, may sooner miss heaven, than he that was in the wrong, if he come uncharitably to condemn or condemn the other". Many of his arguments against the Pope are purely political. He deprecates the sending out of ambassadors from the Pope to exhaust the treasures and alienate the subjects of foreign kings, and asks whence he obtained the power to judge and depose kings in criminal causes, and to give away to others their civil

1. LXXX Sermons, p. 203.
inheritances. When the Pope gave away the English crown to Philip of Spain he took the speediest way of separating England from the Roman allegiance. Roman Catholicism was still of course a political danger. Henry IV. of France had been assassinated by Ravaillac in 1610, and William of Orange by Gérard in 1584. The murder of the sixty thousand Waldenses in one day, the depopulation of South France and the Low Countries, the innumerable deaths in the Inquisition of those who "found no way from Egypt but by the Red Sea" were still fresh in men's minds. Donne condemns the Pope for not deciding how far the secular laws of temporal princes bind the consciences of the subject, and so leaving the road open for all manner of rebellion, a thing abhorrent to law-abiding, faithful subjects, who cordially detested those who suffered "for schism in pretence of zeal", for treason in pretence of religion". He points out the unreason of the final law in these matters being hidden in a cupboard, instead of being put plainly on a shelf, that is, being enclosed in the bosom of the Pope and not printed plain for all to see in the Bible; he speaks of the absurdity of services in Latin for the

1. XXVI Sermons. p. 8.
unlearned; mocks at 'ridiculous and histrionical ceremonies'; fulminates against uncertain relics and superstitious charms, expounds the wickedness of selling licenses for sin, and the thanklessness of neglecting to pay back what we owe to the world by hiding ourselves in an idle monastery. "When God had made Adam and Eve in paradise, God did not place Adam in a monastery on one side, and Eve in a nunnery on the other, and so a river between them." (1) He makes short work of revelations and apparitions and other hysterical phenomena. "They arise from the earth, from ourselves, from our own melancholy, and pride, or our too much homeliness and familiarity in our accesses, and conversation with God, or a facility in believing, or an often dreaming the same thing." (2) He blames the Roman Catholics for encouraging these so called visions and miracles, as in the case of St Brigid, for taking away "liberty of meats and liberty of marriage" from their priests, for adding their bulls and traditions to the canonical books of the Bible, for giving church benefices to children, and so bringing about the inadequate maintenance of the officiating priest and the consequent poor instruction of the people.

1. Fifty Sermons. p. 16.
2. " " p. 201.
He protests against the worship of saints and of the Virgin, holding it absurd to believe that she was sinlessly conceived, though he accepts without question the immaculate conception of Christ. But in all this he never forgets a certain courtesy and wideness which marks him off altogether from the class of fervid controversialists. He admits that the Reformation has improved the discipline of the Roman Church and raised the standard of preaching and education among the priests, and when he rebukes them for heresy he often contrives to include Protestants in the same condemnation.

Donne is thus in complete sympathy with the church policy advocated later by the strenuous Land. He maintained the position of the Church of England as the direct descendant of the early Christian Communities, upholding the traditions of the Fathers, protesting against the innovations of Romanism and Calvinism. As an Arminian he supported the doctrine of free will, and exhibit a profound reverence for the monarch and a firm belief in the miraculous powers given by God to kings.
In October 1616 Donne was elected Reader by the Masters of the Bench of Lincoln's Inn, an office which involved the preaching of some fifty sermons each year, on "every Sabbath day in the term, both forenoon and afternoon, and once the Sabbath days before and after every term, and on the Grand Days every forenoon". Of these sermons there remain only fifteen which we know certainly to have been delivered to the Benchers. They are short, eminently clear and graceful in expression; in them the preacher has avoided technical theological subtilties, and speaks as if to intelligent men of the world.

There are no poor in this congregation; here are gay young students who think it "a melancholic thing, still to stand in fear of hell; a sordid, a yeomanly thing, still to be ploughing and weeding and worming a conscience", here are ambitious, scheming lawyers, who multiply riches with labour, and painfully bleed them out to buy a new office or title; here are grave fathers of families, owners of substantial estates and well-stocked wine-cellar, who have sons at the universities, sons whom they fear to trust abroad, lest

they should be snared by the papists; here are stern judges who read savage acts of Parliament, and are but little affected by the recital of the heavy punishments to be inflicted on transgressors, and yet, brought face to face with a particular prisoner at the bar, shrink from passing the sentence which condemns him that day to be no man, remembering that the breath which must be suffocated and strangled with a halter was inspired by God, that those limbs which must be cut into quarters or torn with horses were "a cabinet for that precious jewel, the image of God", that that body, which must be chained to a stake and turned to ashes, was a consecrated temple of the Holy Ghost.

Donne himself had been a law-student at Lincoln's Inn in his youth, and he saw in the congregation which faced him week after week, many a familiar, friendly face. We catch a certain confidential note in the preacher's voice. He explains why he likes the Psalms and the Epistles of St. Paul better than the rest of the Bible; they are poems and letters, forms of literature to which he is most accustomed. He tells a story of his travels, and the

1. XXVI Sermons. p. 316.
3. " " p. 159.
record is precious, for direct autobiographical statements are rare in the sermons. "Lying at Aix, he says, at Aguisgrasse, a well-known town in Germany, and fixing there some time, for the benefit of those baths, I found myself in a house which was divided into many families, and indeed so large, as it might have been a little parish, or at least, a great limb of a great one; but it was of no parish for when I asked who lay over my head, they told me a family of Anabaptists; and who over theirs? another family of Anabaptists; and another family of Anabaptists over theirs; and the whole house was a nest of these boxes; several artificers, all Anabaptists; I asked in what room they met, for the exercise of their religion; I was told they never met: for, though they were all Anabaptists, yet for some collateral differences, they detested one another, and though many of them were near in blood, and alliance to one another; yet the son would excommunicate the father, in the room above him, and the nephew the uncle. As St John is said to have quitted that bath, into which Cerinthus the heretic came, so did I this house (1)."

Yet though he speaks as a friend among friends without any trace of sacerdotal aloofness, he does not shrink from a bold denunciation of the failings common in the legal

1. Fifty Sermons, p. 183.
profession. Is there "no being a lawyer, without client serving the passions of the Christ? "he asks in scornful indignation. It was no easy task for the man, whose own not too edifying youth had been passed in that very place, to preach to his former companions of vices they had practiced together. Yet that he found the courage to do so without flinching, adds a peculiar intensity to his words. A man newly plucked from the stake, with the scars on his flesh and the smell of the fire about his clothes, may speak with authority of the pain of the burning. "A fair day shoots arrows of visits, and comedies and conversation, and so we go abroad; and a foul day day shoots arrows of gaming, or chambering, and wantonness, and so we stay at home". It had been his life once; it was their life, the life of many of them, now. He is urgent in his appeal that they should not employ their counsel to seduce and mislead the men, their authority to intimidate and affright men, their powerfulness of speech to ensnare and entangle men. Let not that hand, which has been guilty of "extortion or undeserved fees", hope to sign a conveyance to fasten his inheritance upon his children.

Donne's own legal knowledge was extensive. In his

1. Fifty Sermons. p. 158.
2. " " p. 88.
first book, Biathanatos, he had revealed a complete mastery of civil and canon law. The habit of using legal metaphors was always one of the most marked characteristics of his style. The New Testament is a conveyance, a will in which an estate is bequested to us. To solicit God for heaven before repentance of sins is to call for sobs before being discharged. Sir William Cokayne, who sickened in London, and was carried away to die "was served with the process here in the city, but his cause was heard in the country."

It was natural that this habit should become more pronounced in the Lincoln Inn sermons, for it was the language most familiar to speaker and hearers. God is the judge and lawgiver. He rules all the earth so that there is no appeal from his judgment to that of any other court.

(1) Christ is the advocate who pleads for us in heaven; he has shed his blood in "value satisfactory" for our sins, he presents our evidence "written in his blood, sealed in his wounds" We must admit no saint or martyr to be "joint-tenant with God". The peace and glory, which the departed saints now enjoy, will be ours hereafter; it "belongs to us in reversion". We are "usufructuaries of God's blessings" but he is proprietary.

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1. Fifty Sermons. p. 97.
We must beware of coming to communion unprepared; "even in spiritual riches, it is an unthrifty thing, to anticipate your monies, to receive your rents, before they are due." When Donne bids farewell to his friends at going into Germany, he expresses the hope that they may meet again in heaven "where all clients shall retain but one counsellor, our advocate Jesus Christ, nor present him any other fee but his own blood, and yet every client have a judgment on his side." Sure of ready comprehension and sympathy he can speak of "such vermin as informers", of that outward beauty of the skin, which is as vellum or parchment to condemn us at the last, and of a sentence in the Star Chamber, which deprives a man of his ear, and a month's close prison, which takes away his flesh, as a foreshadowing of that sentence of Death, which shall condemn our body to be altogether destroyed by worms. Donne was appointed reader in 1616, and his wife died the following year, yet we find in these sermons comparatively little meditation on death. It is the thought of death which weighs upon the preacher, that

1. Fifty Sermons. p. 97.
2. XXVI. Sermons. p. 281.
4. " " p. 117.
faggot of stolen sticks which loads him in this life and shall burn him in the next. (1) Gosse believes that in the winter after the death of his wife Donne "became converted in the intense and incandescent sense. At that juncture, under special conditions, and at the age of forty four, he dedicated himself anew to God with a peculiar violence of devotion, and witnessed the day-spring of a sudden light in his soul." (2)

It is perhaps presumptuous to dispute the verdict of a scholar, an authority on Donne and his spiritual development, but there seems reason to believe that this dayspring did not dawn until later, until 1619, when Donne went into Germany, and weary of himself, his sins and sorrows, in a poem of exquisite poignancy, he sealed a bill of divorce to all his former loves and ambitions, and gave himself up, a dedicated sacrifice to the will of his Creator.

"I sacrifice this island unto thee; And all whom there I love, and who love me; When I have put thy seas 'twixt them and me, Put thou thy seas betwixt my sins and thee. As the tree's sap doth seek the root below In winter, in my winter now I go, Where none but thee, the eternal root Of true love, I may know." (3)

1. Fifty Sermons. p. 189.
In Donne's case such questions are more than usually difficult to decide, because in so few instances do we know the exact dates when the sermons and the poems were written. It is perhaps a mere matter of terminology. Are we to say that the dayspring dawned in Christian's soul when he was tormented with fear because he knew that he was dwelling in the City of Destruction, or at the hilltop when the burden rolled from his shoulders, and he gave three leaps for joy and went on singing? The fact remains that in these years 1616-1619 Donne knows little or nothing of that peace which passeth understanding. The burden is still on his back. He is sick in soul and body. He has a terrible fear that the punishment of vice may be the becoming more vicious, and the inevitable result of that the plunging into further wickedness, till the enchained soul is dragged by its own weight to eternal torture in the fiery caves of hell. The persistence of physical disease terrifies him. "We can scarce express the number, scarce sound the names of the diseases of man's body; six thousand year hath scarce taught us what they are, how they affect us, how they shall be cured in us...... They stick so to us, as that they pass by inheritance, and last more generations in families than the inheritance itself does; and when
no land, no manor, when no title, no honour descends upon
the heir, the gout or the stone descends upon him." (1)

Three times does he preach on the text "Mine iniquities
are gone over my head, as a heavy burden, they are too
heavy for me". The other texts are similar in spirit.

"Woe unto the world because of offences." "Thine
arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore". "There
is no soundness in my flesh, because of thine anger, neither
is there any rest in my bones, because of my sin"

The burden of his cry is that he has blinded his own eyes and
is now in utter darkness. "We have wearied ourselves in
the ways of wickedness". In the 1619 sermon we hear for
the first time a new note, as he bids farewell, perhaps
for ever, to his friends in words very similar to those
of the poem quoted above. He is too exhausted to struggle
more. The Hound of Heaven has overtaken him at last.
Henceforth he will speak with the assured voice of one who

"Throws himself on God
And unperplexed, seeking, shall find Him". (2)

When Donne bade farewell to his friends at Lincoln's
Inn, and set out in the train of the Earl of Doncaster on
an embassy to Bohemia, he believed himself to be dying,
and feared that he might never return to England. There is

1. Fifty Sermons. p. 158.
a solemn note in his letters. "I am going out of the kingdom, he writes, and perchance out of the world." 

He sets his house in order. He leaves instructions with Sir Robert Ker as to the disposal of Biathanatos. "Reserve it for me if I live, and if I die, I only forbid it the press and the fire; publish it not, but yet burn it not." 

He left England in May 1619 and was absent a year and a half.

There remain to us as a record of this journey three sermons. The one preached before the Prince and Princess Palatine in June is chiefly of interest because of the beauty and melody of the passage, which describes the departure of a human soul from this world to the next. It was a subject which never failed to inspire the melancholy divine. "Behold, thy salvation cometh" he quotes, and continues, "behold it, now, when thou canst behold nothing else: the sun is setting to thee, and that for ever; thy houses and furnitures, thy gardens and orchards, thy titles and offices, thy wife and children are departing from thee, and that for ever; a cloud of faintness is come over thine eyes, and a cloud of sorrow over all theirs; when his hand that loves thee best hangs tremulously over thee to close thine eyes; ecce Salvator tunc venit, behold then a new light, thy Saviour's hand shall open thine eyes,

2. " " " " " " " " " " " " " P. 124.
and in his light thou shalt see light; and thus shalt see,
that though in the eyes of men thou lie upon that bed, as
a statue on a tomb, yet in the eyes of God, thou standest
as a colossus, one foot in one, another in another land;
one foot in the grave, but the other in heaven; one hand
in the womb of the earth, and the other in Abraham's
bosom." So Donne himself stands ever on the brink
of the river of death, with his gaze on the further shore,
like those shades of whom Vergil writes:

Stabant orantes prumi transmittere cursum
Tendebantque manus ripore ulterioris amore.

We know that his preaching made a deep impression on
the mind of the ill-fated Electress. Writing a few years
later, in 1624, to thank Donne for a copy of his Devotions,
she referred to the delight and edification with which she
had heard him deliver the messages of God.

On the return journey, Donne preached at the Hague. We
have this sermon in an expanded form, as we learn from
the note prefixed by the author to the printed copy. "At
the Hague, Dec. 19th, 1619, I preached upon this text.
Since, in my sickness at Abrey-hatch, in Essex, 1630,
revising my short notes of that sermon, I digested them
into these two."

It is probable that none of the sermons were delivered
in the exact form that has come down to us, for Donne spoke
extempore. Written sermons were not tolerated in that age; James I prohibited the practice in the University of Cambridge. It was of the essential nature of a sermon that it should be spoken. Donne, defending homilies from contempt, says "it is but the name that scandalises...... if some of these were spoken, and not read, and so exhibited in the name of a sermon, they would like them well enough". Donne appears to have prepared these orations with great care and to have delivered them from short notes. Afterwards he committed them to writing. That this was his practice we learn from his letters. In one he refers to the copy of a sermon which of commandment I did write after the preaching," and in another place he complains of the difficulty of remembering one which had been delivered sometime before.

In this Hague sermon there is a good instance of his extraordinary power of working out a comparison to the furthest ramifications and most minute details. He describes the world as a sea. Both are subject to storms. Both are as deep in calm, as in tempest; a man may drown in prosperity as well as in adversity. Both are fathomless to our plummets, but we have faith that both are

bounded and upheld by the wisdom of the Almighty. The sea ebbs and flows, we know not why; men fall into sickness and poverty and sadness and cannot understand God's judgments. In the sea is water for all, but it is salt, and the more we drink, the more we thirst; the world has enough material supplies for all, but the more we have, the more insatiable grows our desire. In the sea greater fish devour the less; so among men. Fish, defiled with mud, have no hands to cleanse themselves, but must wait for the current of waters; men sin and cannot regain their innocence till the Holy Ghost sends the waters of repentance. The sea is no place of habitation, but a path from one port to another; this world is but a passage to eternity. Every ship in the sea must have some part under water; men must be partly immersed in worldly business. The part of the vessel by which it moves is above water; man draws near to heaven by meditations which lift him above the world. The devil fishes for the souls of men with painful hooks and alluring baits. Christ uses a net, the corks of which are the mercies of God to float the troubled soul above the waters of affliction. A net is knotty thing, and so the Scriptures are full of tangles and perplexities; but the net is a
symbol of union and so the Scriptures make for brotherhood among men. A net is large and cumbersome when thrown out upon the waters, but folded up it lies on a man's arm with ease; the Scriptures are incomprehensible and full of difficulty if spread upon philosophy and metaphysics, but let a man draw them to his heart as a rule of life and they will be easily borne.

The prolonged ingenuity of this is remarkable and we can imagine the keen pleasure with which it was followed by a seventeenth century audience, men who loved wit of this particular nature. We notice too, Donne's almost invariable custom of adapting his imagery to his hearers. The Dutch had been a seafaring people from time immemorial.

There are in Donne's writings many examples of these prolonged comparisons. In a sermon on the text, "As for my flock, they eat that, which ye have trodden with your feet", the preacher passes under condemnation in turn the sheep who prefer hay in the fold to grass in the field, that is, the schismatics who pray in private and avoid public service, those who poison the grass with the unwholesome dew of hysterical legends, those who dig up the
grass to plant rare and beautiful flowers of secular learning, those who trample down the grass in ignorance like boars, and those who hide it under a covering of traditions, like moles scattering earth over the field.

Donne seldom falls into a mixture of metaphors, though sometimes his literal application of Scriptural figures of speech leads to grotesque results. The language of the East as we have it in the Bible is primarily symbolic, not pictorial. The prophetic visions of Ezekiel, the strange, many headed, many horned beasts of Revelations, the God whose likeness is as the appearance of fire, "from the appearance of his loins even downward, fire; and from his loin's even upward, as the appearance of brightness, as the colour of amber," the Messiah standing in the midst of the seven candlesticks, with a sharp two edged sword in his mouth, these things are full of meaning, instinct with grandeur and imaginative beauty, but they cannot be treated as mere pictures. No one, not even Blake, has been able to illustrate the Bible. We hear of the jealous spirit of an infuriated God coming in the shape of a wasp to hiss his people into destruction with a sense of fear, as though the light were already darkened by the shadow of his wings,
but a picture of a wasp would be without power or meaning. So sometimes we feel that Donne, in removing fragments of ancient poetry into a modern setting, is spoiling their beauty and making them grotesque. Long use and wont has reconciled us to the image of a marriage feast as a symbol of the unspeakable joy which shall accompany the union of the soul with God. We are accustomed also to the phrase "the marriage of the Lamb", but there is a repellent strangeness in Donne's addition of fish to this supper, fish served, as food, and fish sitting round the table as guests.

Donne returned from Germany in December 1620 "with his sorrows moderated and his health improved", and a year later, in February 1622, he resigned his lectureship at Lincoln's Inn for the reason recorded in the minute book of the Council, "Mr Doctor Donne, being lately advanced by the King's Majesty to the Deanery of Paul's, by reason whereof he cannot conveniently supply the place of a public preacher of God's word in this house, as formerly he have done."

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1. LXXX Sermons. p. 737.
Donne had been elected Dean of St Paul's in the preceding autumn, on November 19th, 1621, and his first sermon in the cathedral was preached on the Christmas Day of that year. As Dean he had to preach on the great festivals, Christmas Day, Easter Sunday, Whit Sunday. As one of the thirty prebendaries of the cathedral he had to preach on Whit Monday, and to make the five psalms, from 62 to 66, his special subject of meditation.

So far Donne had spoken at court, in noblemen's houses, on special occasions, before small cultured audiences; now for the first time he was face to face with a large citizen congregation. The new Dean was essentially aristocratic, a lover of beauty and order. One of his first acts on coming to St Paul's was to repair the ancient private chapel attached to the Deanery. He disliked the noise and unruly behaviour of his new congregation. He was out of sympathy with the Puritan tendencies of London.

We have dealt already with Donne's attitude to the Roman Catholic faith. His dislike of the Puritans was much more deeply rooted, a question more of temperament than of doctrine. So far indeed the controversy had hardly spread to beliefs; it was concerned mainly with
ceremonies and Church government. But the whole Puritan attitude to life was repugnant to Donne. To him this world was a harmony ringing with divine music, shot through and through with heavenly beauty. He was not sure that we ought, even if we could, to destroy a whole species of noxious vipers, because they too are a link in the divine order of creation. To him, poet as he was, this world was in a very real sense the symbol of another. The body and soul are different aspects of the same reality. By discipline of the one we purify the other. We eat and drink to the glory of God. Donne disapproved of the Romish sacrament as a vulgar miracle, but it was yet a miracle to him that bread and wine are transformed by the Chemistry of the body into thought and action, and so in actual fact, change from material to spiritual, from bread to God. Ceremonies and sacraments were to him a means of imaginative and religious expression. "Beloved, he says in his first sermon at St Paul's, outward things apparel God; and since God was content to take a body, let not us leave him naked nor ragged." (2) "He that undervalues outward things, in the religious service of God, though he begin at ceremonial and ritual things, will come

1. Fifty Sermons. p. 104.
quickly to call sacraments but outward things, and
sermons, and public prayers, but outward things." (1)
He would have been in substantial agreement with Sir
Thomas Browne in the next quotation, who, Protestant as
he was, confesses, "I could never hear an Ave Mary
bell without an elevation;...... at a solemn procession
I have wept abundantly." (2) As that "tavern music,
which makes one man merry, another mad" roused in Browne
"a deep fit of devotion, and a profound contemplation of
the First Composer", so to Donne "every worm and weed
is an abridgment of all".

His poet instinct was revolted by the morose gloom
of these precisians. "As venemous herbs delight in the
shade, so a sullen retiring argues a murmuring and
venemous disposition." (3) He knew better than they
the anguish of separation from God, the mystery of pain
and loneliness, the desolation of bitter sorrow; but for
this sullen gloom, this "roten-herted sinne", this "sluggy
slombringe, which maketh a man be hevy and dul, in body
and in soule", he had nothing but scorn. Chaucer had said
of such, "Soothly, he that despeireth him is lyk the
coward championn recreant, that sieth creant withoute nede.
Allas! Allas! nedeles is he recreant and nedeles despeired.

Cætes, the mercy of god is evere redy to every penitent, and is aboven alle hise werkes". (1) So Donne bids them remember the tenderness of God, warns them that those who have not learned to rejoice on earth, will not be able to rejoice in heaven, and in a passage of singular beauty, reminds them that "The Wise-men of the East, by a less light, found a greater, by a star, they found the Son of Glory, Christ Jesus: but by darkness, nothing: by the beams of comfort in this life, we come to the body of the sun, by the rivers, to the ocean, by the cheefulness of heart here, to the brightness, to the fulness of joy hereafter. For, beloved, salvation itself being so often presented to us in the names of glory, and of joy, we cannot think that the way to that glory is a sordid life affected here, an obscure, a beggarly, a negligent abandoning of all ways of preferment, or riches, or estimation in this world, for the glory of heaven shines down in these beams hither; neither can men think, that the way to the joys of heaven, is a joyless severeness, a rigid austerity; for as God loves a cheerful giver, so he loves a cheerful taker, that takes hold of his mercies and his comforts with a cheerful heart, not only without grudging, that they are no more, but without jealousy or suspicion that they are not so much,

or not enough." (1) "Howling is the noise of hell, singing the voice of heaven; sadness the damp of hell, rejoicing the serenity of heaven. And he that hath not this joy here, lacks one of the best pieces of his evidence for the joys of heaven." 

His scholarly instincts were aroused in antagonism to the ignorance of these sectaries who "cannot call upon God out of the depth, except it be in a conventicle in a cellar, nor acknowledge that God is higher than the highest, except it be in a conventicle in a garret." (3) He resents the intrusion of the unlearned into matters of divinity. In the sermon at the Hague to which we have already referred, he speaks with some bitterness of those who cast their nets into the sea because they are not fishers. Commending the Dutch law which forbids ecclesiastics to farm, or buy and sell in markets, he wishes it were also provided that farmers and buyers and sellers might not be divines, and might be hindered by law from their continual talk "of "election and reprobation, and whom, and when, and how, and why God hath chosen, or cast away." (4) He frequently warns his hearers

1. LXXX Sermons. p. 382.
2. LXXX Sermons. p. 672.
against the dangers and difficulties of half-knowledge; and points out the pitfalls which lurk in the path of one who attempts an investigation of disputed questions. A man may for example read that St Augustine prayed for the soul of his dead mother, and ignorant of his later most bitter repentance, may fall himself into a similar infirmity. It is not safe to embrace theological studies unless one can make them the business and purpose of a life time.

The Calvinist doctrine of predestination, that creed which was to become as it were the rallying cry of the Puritan party, was particularly repugnant to Donne. Human existence on any theory is so sad that he cannot repress at times the fervid ejaculation. "How mercifully hath God proceeded with men, in making this life short". All his hopes are centred in the life to come. There his aching, hungry heart will be satisfied, and his restless self-tormenting intellect at peace. Without this hope he could not live. He lacked the iron will, the stern courage, the Stoical resignation and blunted sensibilities essential to one who would hold such a creed and preserve his reason. The spectacle of men wilfully saddening their already gloomy lives by such

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1. Fifty Sermons. p. 80.
beliefs roused in him storms of resentment mingled with

ditty, a complex emotion similar to that he had felt in

pprence of the self-inflicted martyrdom of the English

Roman Catholics. "Intricated, entangled conscience!

he writes. God tells thee of a judgment, because thou
didst not do the works of mercy, not feed, not clothe

the poor: for those were enjoined thee by a law: but he

never tells thee of any judgment therefore, because

thy name was written in a dark book of Death, never

unclasped, never opened unto thee in thy life. He says

unto thee lovingly, and indulgently, Fear not, for it is

God's good pleasure to give you the kingdom; but he never

says to the wickedest in the world, Live in fear, die

in anxiety, in suspicion and suspension for his

displeasure: a displeasure conceived against you, before

you were sinners, before you were men, hath thrown you

out of that kingdom into utter darkness". His

reason rebels against the doctrine of irresistible

peace, that influence from the power of the Almighty

which draws a man, whether he will or not, to an eternity

of perfect happiness. "Christ beats his drum, but does

not press men: Christ is served with voluntarîes". is

his summary reputation.

1. XXVI Sermons. p. 39.

2. " " p. 114.
The extempore prayer of the Puritans is also distasteful to him, partly because of that love of harmonious style, which in his own words, is the music some men love best, and partly because of his dislike of confusion and disorder and unpremeditated, ill-considered doctrines. He uses the Platonic language of God making the world according to a pattern or idea, and draws the conclusion that we should do nothing that concerns the service of God, without careful thought and preparation, "preconceptions and pre-deliberations".

In those days when the Established Church was a political institution and attendance at church was enforced by law, dissent in religion led inevitably to disaffection in politics. As in the case of the Roman Catholics, so now with the Puritans, it is this aspect of non-conformity which seems see to Donne most serious and blameworthy. Those who meet to pray in private conventicles may intend no sedition at first, but believing that such exercises are necessary to their salvation, they soon come to argue that the state which hinders that worship treats them with harshness and injustice. Thus these schismatics, shut up in humble cellars, shake the pillar of church and state, as "vapours confined in vaults, engender earthquakes." (1)

1. XXVI Sermons. p. 301.
Donne has the most unfeigned contempt for the unnecessary clamour and exaggerated enthusiasm of these new sects. In a passage which is curiously suggestive of George Fox's progress through the streets of Lichfield, crying out woe upon the bloody city, and which would certainly be interpreted as a reference to the famous Quaker if dates made it possible, he shows clearly what would have been his attitude to that event. Micah, he tells us, "was no suspicious man out of his singularity." "This prophet was no upstart, no sudden, no transitory man, to pass through the streets with a Vae, Vae, Woe, Woe unto this city, and no more". He was irritated at their over-eagerness about trifles, their lack of a sense of proportion. It was impossible for him to wax very warlike in debate, for the points at issue seemed so infinitely unimportant to one who, gazing beyond these temporal fields of controversy, beheld a vast background of shadowy mountains, where his soul rested in meditative peace and passionate awe.

Donne had nothing of the reformation in him. He had no sympathy with those who would change the established order in church or state. The Puritans could not rest until they had expressed their inner austerity by a corresponding outward simplicity of life, a rigorous
exclusion of non-essentials, a bare church-service, a rigid legal code. To Donne, on the other hand, the drama being enacted within his own soul was of such absorbing interest that he could spare but scant attention for mundane matters. In fact his conception of religion is primarily selfish. Every man is sent into this world to save his own soul, and that work he must accomplish though the rest of the universe perish. The intensity of Saint Paul's missionary zeal which made him willing to be separated from Christ if by so suffering he might save his brethren, the passionate prayer of Moses on behalf of his people, "Pardon them, or blot my name out of thy book", seemed to Donne merely an "undigested vehemence of love", an "excess and inordinateness". He was better than his creed. He laboured earnestly to save the souls of others. But he was not the stuff of which reformers are made. He could never have descended like Milton into the dusty arena of public life to battle for a more ideal government or for better social conditions.

Yet, in spite of this partial aloofness from the interests of his middle-class congregation, we have no reason to doubt the popularity of the new Dean from the outset. In the words of Izaak Walton, he was "a

preacher in earnest, weeping sometimes for his auditory, sometimes with them, always preaching to himself like an angel from a cloud, but in none; carrying some, as St Paul was, to heaven in holy raptures, and enticing others by a sacred art and courtship to amend their lives; here picturing a vice as as to make it ugly to those that practised it, and a virtue so as to make it beloved, even by those that loved it not; and all this with a most particular grace, and an inexpressible addition of comeliness." Leaving on one side his personal beauty and powerful speech, we see here the real grounds of his influence, and fame, the manifest earnestness and sincerity, which "showed his own heart was possessed with those very thoughts and joys that he laboured to distil into others". In another connection Donne speaks of the two qualities which are necessary to make a man a credible witness; first, he must have direct knowledge of the facts to which he is a witness, and secondly, he must have the reputation of honesty, that his testimony may be believed. He himself fulfilled both these conditions. He knew the pleasantness of sin, like the prophets book, honey in the mouth and gall in the belly, and the horror of succeeding remorse. The Christ whom he preached was
no dim, distant historical figure, but his own son, whom, like the Virgin Mary, he had brought to birth in a soul which "acknowledgeth itself to have been a sink of uncleanness, a tabernacle, a synagogue of Satan, (1) and the fame of his learning and the holiness and austerity of his life had already become widely known. Even now, after the lapse of three centuries, we are carried away at times by the power of his flight, and lifted up on his wings above the regions of earth. It is difficult to estimate the effect of this eloquence on those who heard it first in a living voice. It was an emotional, impressionable age. Donne speaks in one place of the hardened sinner, who is moved to tears by the preacher's words, but forgets his warnings when he goes away from the church. Now we should consider that sinner, not hardened, but hyper-sensitive indeed, who should weep at a sermon.

The whole congregation, we might say with equal truth, the whole nation, was inspired by the same religion, a vital faith which satisfied its reason and stirred its deepest emotions. All men accepted without question the same symbolism. Much of the sadness and melancholy of later thought springs, not from irreligion

1. Erm LXXX Sermons. p. 22.
and lack of poetic feeling, but from the inability to express that poetry in any symbol. The old mythologies are dead, and there is nothing to replace them. Wordsworth, wishing he could be a pagan suckled in some creed outworn", rather than be left desolate in a world from which the divine had fled, voiced the prayer of many. The springs bubble up still in every human breast, but the old water-courses are choked up, and new ones not yet channelled, so the water, instead of rushing clear and lively between known banks, lies stagnant in unwholesome pools and cannot find an outlet.

Donne had none of this paralysing doubt to contend against, either in himself or in others. The bases of belief were firmly established, needing no proof. Knowing that he and his hearers were at one, he could give the rein to his rhetoric. "The first condition of effective oratory is given in the words 'this man speaketh with authority'". (1) English preachers, in the 17th century, possessed this secret.

Donne had one point of union with the Puritans, in that he accepted without reserve their method of interpreting the words of the Bible. The authority of their infallible Pope removed, Protestants stayed tottering

1. Leslie Stephen. English Thought, in the 18th Century. vol. 2. ch.XII.
minds on the infallibility of the written word. In a sermon preached at St Paul's on Christmas Day, 1621, Donne states his own view with much clearness. This world, a work of such complexity, must have had a creator. It is inconceivable that a work of so much majesty should be deserted by its maker and left to chance. If the creator still sustains his work by a watchful providence then praise and worship are due to him from men. Man cannot worship aright without a revelation of God's will in the matter. To be permanent this will of God must be written. We have such a written Revelation in the Scriptures and to them therefore our uttermost obedience is due. Every word has been inspired by the Holy Ghost, dictated by the Almighty to his secretaries the prophets and apostles. Fable, history, poetry, prophecy, philosophy, all alike is capable of a literal interpretation. Lyrical outbursts addressed by an Eastern king to his bride are taken to express the relation of Christ to the Church of England. Everything is capable too of an allegorical interpretation. The Holy Ghost for example is often spoken of in the figure of a dove. The dove couples, is not alone; therefore men must beware of singular, schismatical opinions.

1. Fifty Sermons, p. 325.
2. LXXX Sermons, p. 177.
The seventeenth century divines had no conception of morality as a changing, developing thing. When the Jehovah of the Old Testament is unjust, unmerciful, revengeful or arbitrary (and Donne is far too honest to shut his eyes to these facts) they did not understand that a primitive, savage people were making a God after their own image. "Many things which we call sin, and evil have been done by the commandment of God, by Abraham and the Israelites in their departing from Egypt", writes Donne in Biathanatos, and is driven to the ingenious \( \sin \) defence "so that this evil is not in the nature of the thing, nor in the nature of the whole harmony of the world, and therefore is no law of nature, but in violating, or omitting a commandment: all is obedience or disobedience.\( ^{(1)} \) In fact, he post-dates the whole Bible and assumes that the Noah and Balaam, Jael and Samson of the Scriptures were mentally and morally at the same stage of evolution as the courtiers of Whitehall and the citizens of London in the reign of the first Stuart.

Another reason for Donne's popularity may have been his melancholy and morbidity. In his first sermon at

1. Biathanatos. p. 36.
St Paul's, one preached on Xmas Day, he dwells little
on the joyfulness of the feast they are met to celebrate,
but much on the awfulness of sin and hell. The mass of
the people have in most periods of the world's history
preferred tragedy to comedy. It is a de-seated instinct
in human nature which accounts for the continued
popularity of the melodrama, the never-failing crowd round
a street accident, for the fact that Byron who sang of
pessimism was more widely read than Keats who sang of
beauty, that the false pathos of Little Nell won for
Dickens more readers than the humour of the Micawbers. This
instinct was abundantly satisfied by a preacher who could
never remember that

Bones, nerves and veins, and flesh, are covered in
By the opaque transparency of skin, (1)
Precisely that we should not see within,
who, even at a marriage festival, could ask with morbid
curiosity, "where be all the splinters of that bone, which
a shot hath shivered and scattered in the air? Where be
all the atoms of that flesh, which a corrosive hath eat
away, or a consumption hath breathed, and exhaled away
from our arms, and other limbs? In what wrinkle, in what
furrow, in what bowel of the earth, lie all the grains of

1. James Thomson - Philosophy.
the ashes of a body burnt a thousand years since? In what corner, in what ventricle of the sea, lies all the jelly of a body drowned in the general flood?"  

This is not to suggest for a moment that Donne's sadness was in the least degree dramatic or insincere, but it accounts partly for the zest with which London flocked to hear him. There is today a class of men and women who read with shameful pleasure the accounts of exhumed corpses in the daily newspapers, and who take their children to see waxwork exhibitions of notorious criminals. These were the people in Donne's day who hung upon his words as he described the horrors of sin "this corruption, not a green paleness, not a yellow jaundice, not a blue lividness, not a black morphew upon our skin, not a bony leanness, not a sweaty faintness, not an ungracious decrepitness upon our body, but a destruction, a destruction to both."  

Neither is this instinct necessarily ignoble; it may find its satisfaction in the worship of one who was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.  

The utter sincerity of Donne's thought is reflected in the vivid realism of his language, a manner of speech which must have contributed in no small degree to the delight of his congregation. What did shopkeepers from

1. Fifty Sermons, p. 3. (Preached at marriage of Lady Mary daughter of the Earl of Bridgwater)  
Cheapside know or care about Pyrrhus and Xerxes, the poverty of Epaminondas, the drunkenness of Alexander, herds of Calabrian cattle, meadows through which the pleasant Liris glides, the ten children of Cornelia, the ten ploughs of Titus, Lycurgus the law-giver and Aristides the Just, the labours of Hercules and the piety of Eneas? And yet these are the illustrations which recur again and again in contemporary authors. In Donne there is a complete and most refreshing absence of classical allusions. It is not until we look into other sermons of the time that we understand what a startling innovation this must have seemed. To turn from them to Donne is to leave a dim library for the fresh air and cheerful bustle of a London street. To desert God for paltry ambitions, he explains, is like leaving a gallery of curious masterpieces to thrust among the crowd at a village fair to gaze upon sixpenny pictures and three-farthling prints. God is like a watering can; he scatters his blessings widely through many small channels. Christ is a cloak; we put him on and he covers our sins with his righteousness, as a hat covers the head, or a glove the hand. The light of God's love quenches the

1. Fifty Sermons. p. 256.
2. " " p. 51.
evil fires of lust and ambition as the fire in the chimney grows pale and out of countenance when the sun shines upon it.

Christ is like a looking glass "A crystal glass will not show a man his face, except it be steeled, except it be darkened on the back side: Christ as he was a pure crystal glass, as he was God, had not been a glass for us, to have seen ourselves in, except he had been steeled, darkened with our human nature." The Trinity has been likened to many things, but never, until Donne wrote, to a dough cake.

These comparisons, odd and quaint as they sound to us, were introduced in all reverence and seriousness, to make a difficult subject more easy of comprehension. There is in Donne no pandering to his audience, no attempt to raise a smile, or tickle the ears of the groundlings. His language is vivid and racy but he is never in any sense a democratic or popular speaker. His thought is profound, his logic most subtle, his argument close woven. There can be no doubt that the mass of the people in the early seventeenth century was of a stronger mental fibre than in our own day. They were capable of prolonged intellectual effort. They would sit for six hours to see a performance

1. XXVI Sermons. p. 374.
of Hamlet, almost without scenery, or stand for two and a half hours in the rain at Paul's Cross to hear the famous Dean. Often the poor would stand, even in the cathedral itself. They "cannot have seats in churches, whenever they come; they must stay, they must stand, they must thrust", and yet they endured all comforts cheerfully for the sake of hearing the sermon. Nowadays popular audiences can be pleased only thro' the eye. They flock to picture houses, to pantomimes, to elaborately-staged melodrama. In Donne's day the people could be reached through their ears and minds. They were musical and loved the eloquence of an harmonious style. They were poetical and listened with delight to long passages of blank verse. They had the vivid imagination of children and could make-believe without elaborate machinery. They could piece out imperfections with their thoughts, and a few 'most vile and ragged foils' were enough to set their minds at work and raise a vision of the hosts at Agincourt. They were logical too and demanded close analysis and rigid sequence of thought. There was no separation then, at least no wide gulf, between literature and contemporary life, poets and people. The literature of the time is therefore

1. Fifty Sermons. p. 418.
thrillingly alive; it was offered to the people in play or sermon, not from the forge of the creator's mind; it was not printed until afterwards. Now there is no such intimate connection between reality and the interpretation of it. Men of letters are a class apart and they write, not for the people, but for each other. Both suffer by the separation. Poets have become sentimental poseurs, flowers without roots. The people are sunk in dreary apathy, soil without blossoms.

The congregation which assembled week by week at St Paul's must have been one to call out the best from any preacher. Its very noise and turbulence were due to keen interest. It was the custom to applaud a good argument in church as much as a good speech at the théâtre. Donne grudges the time wasted by these interruptions; "these often periodical murmurings and noises which you make when the preacher concludes any point...... these impertinent interjections swallow up one quarter of his hour".

Church going was not only a custom. Those who failed to attend incurred the penalties of the law, as well as the "censures and observations of neighbours". Such familiarity with sermons bred criticism, a criticism which Donne's preaching was well able to sustain. Every sermon

1. Fifty Sermons, p. 371.
is planned on a careful logical basis and Donne calls attention to his scheme as he passes from point to point.

The sermon preached on Xmas Day 1625, is an example of an argument where the analogy is pushed to an even grotesque extreme. The text is from Galatians, ch 4. verses 4 and 5, "But when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." After an introduction on the thought 'who shall declare his generation' and the difficulty of forming any conception of eternity, the preacher divides his subject into three parts:

A. The time of Christ's coming.
B. The manner of his coming.
C. The purpose of his coming.

There is a minor introduction to A, contrasting the sadness of human births with the coming of Christ in the fulness of time. A. is then subdivided into three parts:

A. (a) the fulness of time to the Jews. The fulfilment of the prophecies that Christ should be born under the rule of Rome, before Jerusalem was destroyed, in Bethlehem, the son of a virgin.

(b) the fulness of time to the Gentiles. The following of the star by the wise men, Herod's slaughter of the innocents. The attempt of Vespasian and Domitian to destroy the posterity of David. The rise of the false Messiah. The cessation of oracles.
(c) The fulness of time to ourselves.
   1. in nature.
   2. in grace.
   3. in glory.

The manner of his coming is divided into two parts:

B. (a) Christ was born of a woman, resigning the powerfulness of his birth as son of God. He was born of a woman accused of unchastity and so will be born in our souls which have lost their innocence by marrying strange sins.

(b) Christ was born under the law.
   1. the law of Moses.
   2. the law of the Romans.
   3. the law of God.

The purpose of his coming is subdivided into two:

C. (a) He came to redeem all who are under the law of natural religion e.g. Job, Naaman and the widow of Sarepta. He bought all the world as a man buys slaves, paying a price to the former owner.

(b) He came to adopt sons. According to the Roman law he that would adopt sons must have no sons already. He must be one who might naturally have children. He must be older than the adopted son. He must be of higher rank than those he adopts. He must adopt sons, not cousins or brothers or other relations. God fulfils all these conditions and so may legally adopt men.

There follows a peroration concerning those who are chosen for adoption.

Many of the St Paul's sermons are preached on the occasion of church festivals, and are mainly doctrinal.
There are some though of more particular interest. In November 1622 Donne preached to the honourable company of the Virginian Plantation, a sermon full of hope and the spirit of adventure. We seem to hear a younger and happier Donne, the soldier who sailed with Essex, as he speaks of England, the suburbs of the old world and the bridge to the new. The expedition will redeem many a wretch from the jaws of death, saving him from the hands of the executioner, redeem many an idle person from a wasted life at home. It will prove a school for mariners, a breeding place for commodities, teach the ways of civility to the wild Indians, and the ways of Christianity to poor heathen. He exhorts the adventurers, merchants and gentlemen, to keep peace among themselves and work side by side in amity. Such dissensions among the crews were a constant source of danger in those days, when the authority of the captain was ill-defined. Drake faced the difficulty at St. Julian, when he put his friend to an ignominious death, and afterwards issued his famous instructions, that he would have the gentleman to pull with the mariner and the mariner with the gentleman. Donne speaks of the inevitable difficulties and discouragements of such undertakings supported only by private purses and private influence, bids
them remember that they are actors on the same stage with the heroic apostles of old, reminds them that they are fellow labourers together with God, who himself for man's sake played the tailor in Eden, the shipwright before the flood, the carpenter in Nazareth, and exhorts them to be missionaries as well as traders, "O, if you could once bring a catechism to be as good ware amongst them as a bugle, as a knife, as a hatchet: O, if you would be as ready to hearken at the return of a ship, how many Indians were converted to Christ Jesus, as what fees, or drugs, or dyes that ship had brought".

In April 1623 Donne preached before his old friends, the Benchers of Lincoln's Inn, on the consecration of their new chapel. In the October of the same year he preached on the occasion of the Serjeants' Feast at the Temple.

It was now nine years since Donne had entered upon the strenuous life of preaching, and during these years he had taxed his strength to the uttermost. He had never been at any time robust. The death of his wife in 1617 had plunged him into a desolation of grief from which he never quite recovered. Without her help he had to bring up a family of young children. Domestic cares, the austerity of his life, the burden of continual study (according to

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Walton he left behind him "the resul tance of 1400 authors, most of them abridged and analysed with his own hand"; the excitement of delivering orations before large and critical assemblies, all these causes probably combined to bring on that dangerous sickness which attacked him in 1624 and "inclined him to a consumption". It lasted long and for some time kept him out of the pulpit.
On his recovery Donne published a small Book of Devotions, "a book, writes Walton, that may not unfitly be called a Sacred Picture of Spiritual ecstasies, occasioned and applicable to the emergencies of that sickness, which book, being a composition of meditations, disquisitions and prayers, he writ on his sick-bed; herein imitating the holy Patriarchs, who were wont to build their altars in that place where they had received their blessings." On every day of his illness he wrote a Meditation on human life, an Expostulation or argument with God, and a Prayer, upon the special occasion. As we read we find ourselves admitted into the most shrine of this proud, reserved soul. His brain afire with fever, he lies alone in the darkened room, deserted by all except the physicians, who come themselves with reluctance, fearing lest he be stricken with some infectious plague. The terror of loneliness grips him with relentless clutch "O my God, it is the leper, that thou hast condemned to live alone; have I such a leprosy in my soul, that I must die alone?" He turns himself to God and pours out his anguished soul in feverish prayers and ejaculations. The disease works upon him with alarming swiftness; his knees become strengthless, his appetite dull and desireless;
the fever pours him out 'like lead, like iron, like brass melted in a furnace'; an overwhelming weakness slackens his sinews, casting strange fetters on his feet, unseen manacles on his helpless hands; the thin sheets are the iron doors of a prison. 'While his body lies thus weak and helpless, the raging fever excites his brain to an unnatural pitch of activity; strange thoughts and fancies whirl through his mind, mingled with snatches of Hebrew poetry; there is an endless succession of grotesque images flashing out of the darkness of his melancholy, as the firelight flickers and leaps on the darkened walls of his room. He compares his aching, burning body to a little world shaken by earthquakes, disturbed by thunders and lightenings and sudden darkness. Again, his veins are rivers, his sinews veins of mines, the muscles are hills and the bones quarries of stones; thoughts like fierce giants stride from rock to rock, from east to west; diseases and sicknesses crawl and sting like serpents and vipers, malignant worms and caterpillars. It is a magnificent, ghastly picture, worthy of Blake. His bed is a grave and he remembers fearful stories of anchorites that barked themselves up in hollow trees, and immured
themselves in hollow walls. It is an altar, and he, lying helpless, is the sacrifice, waiting to be consumed with fever heats. When the sickness breaks out in spots he takes it as a sign that his sacrifice is not accepted, and, terrified of his own uncleanness, groans out the text for ever on his lips "If I wash myself with snow-water, mine own clothes shall make me abominable."

Tossing restless on his bed, the feathers are sharp as thorns to him, and he prays, "O my God, who madest thyself a light in a bush, in the midst of these brambles and thorns of a sharp sickness, appear unto me so." The disease gains on him insensibly, and the whole universe seems to sicken. The heavens have had a dropsy and drowned the world. The dog-star breathes infection and poisons mankind. He knows that he will never be free from corruption as long as he remains "in this great hospital, this sick, diseaseful world, in this leprous house, this flesh of mine". Man's body is a ruinous farm, ready every day to fall down, overspread with weeds and decay, needing constant repair and never secure; he is made of rotten earth, and "that wherein so many Absoloms take so much pride, is but a bush growing upon that turf of earth".

The physicians apply pigeons to — his head to draw
away the vapours, and he considers what they may be, meditating on the infectious fumes of Etna, the fiery smoke of ovens, the suffocating, strangling damp of mines, the whispering, calumniating breath of envy. They tell him that these vapours arise from his own melancholy, thoughtfulness and much study, and he wonders how far he is responsible, and thinks of others who have been their own executioners, beating out their brains against the walls of their prison, eating the fire out of the chimney, crushing their throats between their knees.

The physicians are afraid and try to disguise their fear. The sharp sighted patient sees the more clearly because they would conceal it from him, and at once his whirling fancy is full of memories of the fears of mankind. He remembers Ishbosheth, who could not speak in his own defence because he was afraid before Abner, the terror of Job before God, the young lions who lack and suffer hunger and are in dread of famine, Herod who feared the righteousness of John, and Adam who trembled at the wrath of God, the early Christians who met in fear behind closed doors, the cowards who deserted Gideon's army in the day of battle, the men who fear cats and the
men who fear poison, those who tremble at war and "the sound of drums, trumpets and shot, which seek to drown the last cries of men," those who shudder at the thought of the burning lake and the second death.

The physicians consult together, and the patient, left alone, thinks of those who be sick and find none to help, of those who lie neglected in woeful straw till the sexton comes to bury them, of those who wait their turn in hospitals, like dying fish stranded on the sand, and waiting for the tide, of those who fall on the flint of the streets, and breathe their last under the eyes of passengers harder than flint.

It is all extraordinarily dramatic and vivid. The doctor comes every day, growing more and more anxious as time passes till he confesses that he would like to have others joined with him. The king sends his own physician. They question the patient, "they have seen me and heard me, arraigned me in these fetters, and received the evidence; I have cut up mine own anatomy, dissected myself". Then they consult together, and prescribe strange mediaeval remedies.

From the time when Donne took to his bed, and friends, waking at midnight, wondered how he did, and rising in the
morni?g, came to ask if he were still alive, until he tottered up again, weak as Lazarus when he was called out of the tomb, warned by anxious physicians of the fearful danger of relapsing, we see him more clearly perhaps than those faithful servants who never neglected or wearied of him in his sickness. They saw him gaunt and weak, propped up in the great curtained bed, writing his prayers and expostulations, unable to eat, unable to sleep, fretted by the clang of the bells in the steeple near by. We see him thus, but in addition we see his very soul "bedded and bedrid, buried and putrified in the practice of sin" as it seemed to him in his agony of remorse. His soul was sick as well as his body, the one with a cold melancholy, the other with a hot fever. The memory of the sins of his youth rushes upon him like a dangerous flood. He acted sins then faster than he can speak them now. Everything reminds him of the unforgotten past. The unforgettable past. His eyes are attracted to the glowing fire, and instantly the thought comes, "all health is but the fuel, and all strength but the bellows of sin". The snake-like form of the devil terrifies him. If he went upright he would not be so fearful and loathsome. Those who are tempted of him, become in time like him, crawling on the earth, eating dust all the
days of their life. He is in an agony as he remembers his former vileness. He is unclean through and through, eaten up by a putrid cancer of sin. How shall he ever come to appear before God. Death is near at hand. His own hollow voice reminds him that death lies in his bosom. Night after night he lies sleepless. The bells in the cathedral near by, more insistent than ordnance or the many belfrys of Bruges, toll faint and intermittent, for the sick, perhaps for him, then clang out loud and strong to warn him that another soul has gone out into the dark. His bed curtains shake in the wind, and it seems to his excited imagination that the dead twitch them as they pass and whisper that he is soon to follow.

The lapse of three centuries has not dulled the almost intolerable poignancy of these agonised self-revelations. He was saved from utter despair partly by religious faith and partly by the restlessness of his fevered mind. These thoughts of terror could not hold him long. He breaks off to wonder why the Levites in the Jewish temple might not perform offices for the dead, or why David knew that the messenger brought good news because he came alone. The whole book is a wonderful piece of autobiography and gives a
startlingly dramatic history of the course of his sickness.

The state of mind discovered in these lonely prayers and meditations is perhaps morbid, but it is Donne's prevalent mood. His body was often prostrated by attacks of fierce pain, his soul by fevers of remorseful despair; neither in sickness nor in health does he ever forget those early years when he had abandoned himself with all the intensity of a passionate nature to the delights of sensual love. The savage realism of his early poems need not be accepted as autobiography in the literal sense, but the cruel cynicism of The Apparition, The Indifferent, Community and many other verses reveal a mood of profound dissatisfaction and self-loathing. "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil" had been the cry of the ancient prophet, "their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust". For many years Donne had wandered without aim or guiding star and when he realised that he was far astray the bitterness of spirit that resulted was neither sorrow nor repentance, but rather the utter desolation experienced by the wise king who made him great works and builded houses, planted

1. Isaiah. V.
vineyards and gardens and orchards, gathered silver and
gold and musical instruments, gave his eyes whatsoever
they desired and withheld not his heart from any joy.
"Behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and
there was no profit under the sun". From this misery
death seemed the only refuge. We hear Donne's very
voice in the words of Cyprian quoted in Biathanatos."The
walls and the roof shake and would'st thou not go out?
Thou art tired in a pilgrimage, and would'st thou not
go home?"

In later years, as we have already seen, Donne attained
to some measure of peace. In the sermons the spiritual
storm is stilled, but there remain signs of the late
uproar in the wreckage along the sands, some of it
waste wood, some of it precious treasure cast up by the
deep. It is very seldom that Donne speaks directly of his
own sins and sufferings, though there is one such
reference in a Whitsunday sermon preached at St Pauls.
In this he confesses "I sinned upon the strength of my
youth, and God devised a means to reclaim me, an
enfeebling sickness. I relapsed after my recovery, and
God devised a means, an irrecoverable, a helpless
consumption to reclaim me," But in spite of his

1. LXXX Sermons. p. 311.
habitual silence concerning the past, he never forgets it and the result is "a mood in which the memory of bygone earthly delights blends inextricably with the present fervour of devotion, and which to a fancy resembling his own might suggest a temple of Aphrodite or Dionysus turned into a Christian Church, and served by the same priest as of old, with complete loyalty to his new faith, but with undying consciousness of the past."

In this respect Donne's sermons can only be paralleled only by the confessions of St Augustine, where we find a similar combination, bitter recollections of early licentiousness, keen analysis of a particularly subtle kind, an absorbing interest in metaphysical and philosophical problems, a complete surrender of the whole nature to that God who made us for himself, and keeps our hearts restless till they find their rest in Him, and a use of the language of earthly love to express the rapture of the union of the soul with God.

1. Saintsbury.
Donne: Vicar of St Dunstan's. (2)

There remain to us seven sermons preached by Donne at St Dunstan's in the West, where he was appointed Vicar in 1624. In the first of these, that curious composition in which he marries himself to the church, the widow of his dead brother, we remark an unusual homelessness of style and language, as though the preacher were trying to bring himself down to his hearers' intellectual level. With solemn earnestness he assumes the responsibilities of his charge. "The sins of this parish will lie upon my shoulders". He pictures himself waking at midnight to hear the bell tolling in the steeple for a passing soul, and to ask himself what he has done for the instructing and rectifying of that man's conscience now on its way to appear before the bar of the supreme judge. He reflects on his pastoral duties; he is to baptise the children, instruct the ignorant, be provided with balsams for the spiritually diseased, strengthen the weak knees, comfort the dying; and it is apparent that he looks forward to the prospect with much fatherly pride and great joy in his new powers. Until now he has been merely the eloquent

preacher, speaking in many pulpits, but without a pastoral charge of his own. This parish belongs to him in a way that no other has ever done. It is his care to provide "the parish be not oppressed with heavy extortions, nor the pastor defrauded with unjust subtraction, nor the patron damned by usurpations, nor the ordinary neglected by disobediences." We catch this note of fatherly pride even more distinctly in the second sermon, when he chooses the text "Come, ye children, and hearken unto me, and I will teach you the fear of the Lord", and begins benignly, "we will divide the text between us; to you one, to us appertains the other part."

In the course of these seven sermons the congregation becomes dimly visible to us. We gather that the new vicar, widely famous for his eloquence and holiness, was more popular than he liked, and that the good citizens crowded to hear him "as to an entertainment, a show, a spectacle," for they are warned not to be "over-affectionately transported with an opinion of any one person." Puritanism lifts its head here as in the cathedral near by. The malcontents come to church for fear of fines, but they "wink at the ornaments and stop

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1. Fifty Sermons, p. 429.
their ears at the music", and keep on their hats during the reading of prayers and lessons, for which incivility they are roundly rebuked by their vicar. Indeed, throughout these sermons we have abundant evidence that forms are still unsettled and are a perpetual subject of irritation. There are some who refuse to kneel; "there come some persons to this church, and persons of example to many that come with them, of whom, I never saw master nor servant kneel, at his coming into this church, or at any part of divine service."...... God stands in the congregation, and wilt thou sit; sit and never kneel." So he had indignantly addressed a congregation at St Paul's. And again he complains of the rudeness of those who wear their hats in church though the preacher is bareheaded. "In no church of Christendom but ours, doth the preacher preach uncovered. And for all this good, and humble, and reverend example, cannot we keep you uncovered till the text be read".

To return to St Dunstan's. Prosperous merchants, whose days are spent in money-getting, form a large

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2. LXXX Sermons. p. 75.
3. LXXX Sermons. p. 693.
part of the church. Their worldly cares, their crafty bargains, their diggings into other men's estates, their hedgings in of debts, their planting of children in great alliances, their usury and racking of tenants, all their weaknesses are remarked by the observant eye and reproving tongue of the Dean. Though they feed the poor at Christmas and endow almshouses, and at their death leave money for the building of hospitals, let them not hope by such acts of piety to atone for their deviations from the straight course in business relations. Such is the tenour of his preaching.

He draws his comparisons and figures of speech from the circumstances of the life best known to them. He knows that the interest of the trading classes in taxation is perennially fresh and refers often to the last subsidy. He mentions the daughters who work samplers at home, and the little sons who write over and practice copies, the proud parents who go to a public spectacle carrying their child with them, and, though he cannot understand what he sees, they are as glad for him to see it as they are to see it themselves. Donne's talk is full of these homely domestic details, of being caught in the rain without a cloak, of the trouble caused by a
pervasive servant, of unswept houses where cobwebs hang about the walls and dust lies piled up in dark corners. It is clear that the wife holds but a subordinate position in these Jacobean households. She is her husband's helper, and must possess the virtues of sobriety and taciturnity and the like, but "wit, learning, eloquence, music, memory, cunning, and such, these make her never the fitter." It is at a marriage sermon that Donne gives utterance to this theory and adds that the husband must not in any sense depend on her, for she is "but a help; and nobody values his staff as he does his legs." The power of the head of the house over wife and child is almost absolute. "Thou hast a power in thy wife, in thy children, in thy servants, and canst do what thou wilt with them at any time," says the preacher to the men of his congregation. Children kneel to ask a blessing of their parents. Servants and apprentices form a part of the family, and the master is held responsible for their religious as well as their material well-being. In return, as Donne notices, servants attend upon their masters with more reverence in England than in any other country.

Yet

Yet Donne's effort to attain simplicity is at most a

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1. Fifty Sermons. p. 15.
matter of language. His logical subtility and metaphysical ingenuity remain the same. If the poor of the parish, in anticipation of the dole, attended the sermon preached "upon the commemoration of a parishioner, a benefactor to that parish" they cannot have understood much of the doctrine offered for their edification.

On one point Donne was in absolute accord with his congregation. Born himself of merchant stock, the son of a London iron-monger, he had inherited the honourable traditions of that class, a hatred of debt and slothfulness in business. The proverb, "A slothful man is brother to him that is a great waster" is ever on his lips. His bitterest invectives are reserved for those "idle, discoursing men, men of no calling, of no profession...... men that suck the sweet of the earth, and the sweat of other men; men that pay the state nothing in doing the offices of mutual society, and embracing particular vocations, men that make themselves but pipes to receive and convey and vent rumours; men that do not spend time, but wear time, they trade not, they plough not, they preach not, they plead not." (1) He noticed among the wealthier tradesmen a disposition to bring up their sons in too much tenderness and

1. Sermon up XV verse of the XX ch. of Book of Judges p. 25.
idleness at home, and he reiterates again and again that the father's former labours are no excuse for the son's present uselessness. Give your son a trade, he urges, "Put a book, put a sword, put a ship, put a plough, put a trade, put a course of life, a calling, into his hand; and put something into his head, the wisdom, and discretion, and understanding of a serpent, necessary for those courses and callings". The idle slip through life like a flash of lightning and leave no mark behind them, and "thou passest out of the world, as thy hand passes out of a basin of water, which may be somewhat the fouler for thy washing in it, but retains no other impression of thy having been there".

Those long years of enforced idleness and heart-crushing poverty were still a bitter recollection to the now prosperous and famous dean, years when he had waited at Somerset's door pleading in vain for employment. He had no enthusiasm for poverty. It is better to leave the parish to one's children, than one's children to the parish, he had once remarked with caustic humour.

Perhaps the most impressive of these St Dunstan sermons is the one preached after a visitation of the

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1. Alford's ed., of Sermons. No CXLI. (passage not in folio)
2. XXVI Sermons. p. 207
3. LXXX Sermons. p. 728.
plague in 1625. It presents with horrible intensity the recklessness and despair which accompanied the deadly infection, so that many died, according to Donne's cruel theology, body and soul together, swallowing physical and moral poison at one gulp "like Judas' sop, death dipt and soaked in sin. Men whose lust carried them into the jaws of infection in lewd houses, and seeking one sore perished with another; men whose rapine and covetousness broke into houses, and seeking the wardrobes of others, found their own winding sheets, in the infection of that house where they stole their own death; men who sought no other way to divert sadness, but strong drink in riotous houses, and there drank up David's cup of malediction, the cup of condemned men, of death, in the infection of that place. For these men, that died in their sins, that sinned in their dying, that sought and hunted after death so sinfully, we have little comfort of such men, in the phrase of this text, they were dead; for they are dead still: as Moses said of the Egyptians, I am afraid we must say of these men, "we shall see them no more for ever." (1) A harsh and pitiless condemnation. There is at times in Donne a merciless strain which glints for

1. XXVI Sermons. p. 294.
a moment like a half-concealed weapon and then is hidden again. It had been edged perhaps by long study of the Hebraic scriptures. It is partly the unconscious cruelty of the artist who, intent on making life comprehensible and intense to himself, lifts the veil from those experiences which shrinking humanity prefers to keep covered with a shroud. In this very sermon, the purpose of which was to pour comfort into the aching wounds of those newly deprived of loved friends, he dwells on the circumstance that "in this lamentable calamity, the dead were buried, and thrown up again before they were resolved to dust, to make room for more." It must have tortured some there to remember that "every puff of wind within these walls, may blow the father into the son's eyes, or the wife into her husband's."

From this time forth Donne's thoughts seem to turn more and more to death and the grave. Old friends were dropping round him. In 1627 he preached a sermon of commemoration of the Lady Danvers. Illness increased upon him and it was clear that he had not much longer to live. Walton alone can fitly tell the tale of his last days. "Before that month (Jan. 1631) ended, he

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1. XXVI Sermons. p. 296.
was appointed to preach upon his old constant day, the first Friday in Lent: he had notice of it, and had in his sickness so prepared for that employment, that as he had long thirsted for it, so he resolved his weakness should not hinder his journey; he came therefore to London some few days before his appointed day of preaching. At his coming thither, many of his friends — who with sorrow saw his sickness had left him but so much flesh as did only cover his bones — doubted his strength to perform that task, and did therefore dissuade him from undertaking it, assuring him, however, it was like to shorten his life: but he passionately denied their requests, saying: "He would not doubt that that God, who in so many weaknesses had assisted him with an unexpected strength, would now withdraw it in his last employment; professing a holy ambition to perform that sacred work." And when, to the amazement of some beholders, he appeared in the pulpit, many of them thought he presented himself not to preach mortification by a living voice, but mortality by a decayed body, and a dying face. And doubtless many did secretly ask that question in Ezekiel "Do these bones live? or can that soul organise that tongue to speak
so long time as the sand in that glass will move
towards its centre, and measure out an hour of this
dying man's unspent life? Doubtless it cannot. And
yet, after some faint pauses in his zealous prayer,
his strong desires enabled his weak body to discharge
his memory of his preconceived meditations, which were
of dying; the text being, "To God the Lord belong the
issues from death". Many that then saw his tears, and
heard his faint and hollow voice, profess they
thought the text prophetically chosen, and that Dr Donne
had preached his own funeral sermon.

Being full of joy that God had enabled him to perform
this desired duty, he hastened to his house; out of
which he never moved, till, like St Stephen, "he was
carried by devout men to his grave."

This sermon was published afterwards under the title
of "Death's Duel: or a Consolation to the soul against
the dying life and living death of the body". It is a
wonderfully impressive utterance from "the jaws and
teeth of death," from the lips of that "whirlpool, the
grave".(1) And yet, considered as the last recorded
words of a Christian priest, it seems strangely
lacking in hope. Christianity professes to have

conquered death; Christians profess a certain belief in a resurrection. Yet these are Donne's chilling reflections. "This whole world is but an universal churchyard, but our common grave; and the life and notion that the greatest persons have in it, is but as the shaking of buried bodies in their grave, by an earthquake. That which we call life, is but Hebdomada Mortium, a week of death, seven days, seven periods of our life spent in dying, a dying seven times over, and there is an end." Man's nature is deeper, more elemental than any creed. No creed has yet been found which satisfies it. Donne accepted the Christian faith with all his mind, without reserve. But there were in his nature stronger forces than he knew or could control. In the hour of death they surged up within him. Whatever he might say with his tongue, his whole soul was sick with terror, fear of death and corruption. We shudder as we read his last eloquent sentences, full of haunting dread and passionate weeping. "For us that die now and sleep in the state of the dead, we must all pass the posthumous death, this death after death, nay this death after burial, this dissolution after dissolution, this death of corruption and putrefaction,

1. Death's Duell. p. 11.
of vermiculation and incineration, of dissolution and dispersion in and from the grave, when these bodies that have been the children of royal parents, and the parents of royal children, must say with Job, Corruption thou art my father, and to the worm, thou art my mother and sister. Miserable riddle, when the same worm must be my mother and my sister and myself. Miserable incest, when I must be married to my mother and sister, and be both father and mother to my own mother and sister, beget and bear that worm which is all that miserable penury; when my mouth shall be filled with dust, and the worm shall feed, and feed sweetly upon me, when the ambitious man shall have no satisfaction, if the poorest alive tread upon him, nor the poorest receive any contentment in being made equal to princes, for they shall be equal but in dust. One dieth at his full strength, being wholly at ease, and man in quiet, and another dies in the bitterness of his soul, and never eats with pleasure, but they lie down alike in the dust, and the worm covers them."

Walton gives a more orthodox picture in the beautiful, simple, sentences which tell of Donne's last days. "He lay fifteen days earnestly expecting his

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1. Death's Duell, pp. 20, 21.
hourly change; and in the last hour of his last day, as his body melted away, and vapoured into spirit, his soul having, I verily believe, some revelation of the beautiful vision, he said, "I were miserable if I might not die!" and after those words, closed many periods of his faint breath by saying often, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done." His speech, which had long been his ready and faithful servant, left him not till the last minute of his life, and then forsook him, not to serve another master — for who speaks like him — but died before him; for that it was then become useless to him that now conversed with God on earth as angels are said to do in heaven, only by thoughts and looks. Being speechless, and seeing heaven by that illumination by which he saw it, as he did, as St Stephen, "look steadfastly into it, till he saw the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God His Father," and being satisfied with this blessed sight, as his soul ascended and his last breath departed from him, he closed his own eyes, and then disposed his own hands and body into such a posture as required not the least alteration by those that came to shroud him.

Thus variable, thus virtuous was the life, thus excellent, thus exemplary was the death of this memorable man".
Donne the Man.

In one of his essays, Hazlitt gives an account of an evening's conversation in Lamb's rooms at the Temple. Talk had fallen upon persons one would wish to have seen, writers who "dealt in dark hints and doubtful oracles", whose books are riddles, and they themselves extricable, inscrutable. One of the mysterious personages suggested was Doctor Donne. His personality is indeed an enigma which his works do little to elucidate. He gives us elaborate analyses of his mental or spiritual condition and we accept them, and yet seem no nearer a solution of the problem. How can we reconcile these different selves which are revealed to us in turn? There is the "fullblooded, secularly-minded man, a seeker after honour and money, not over scrupulous in suing for the favour of the great; a bold adventurer, too eager for advancement to boggle at trifles; a friend of Essex so long as he lasted, but leaving him when his companionship and patronage became dangerous; courting the vile Somerset when his star was in the ascendant, and all but implicated in some of the darkest episodes of his career; needy and covetous, burdened with an increasing family, and suggesting that funerals would bring him relief if he
could find money to pay for them; then under pressure
from the King taking upon him the vows of priesthood, and
becoming a court divine. On the other hand there is
the saint, the ascetic, whose picture has been drawn by
Walton. It is not merely that Donne passed from a youth
of vice to an old age of virtue. These diverse elements
subsisted side by side in his nature, never wholly
reconciled. As we read the sermons, for example, a
shadowy figure shapes itself before us, abused in penitence
absorbed in prayer. Then suddenly a chance phrase or turn
of expression, makes us conscious of another shadowy
figure, sharp cynical, satirical, mocking at the first. Not
that he is insincere, but he is manysided, complex.

It may be that this inscrutability was not altogether
unconscious. It had been his advice to Sir Henry Wotton:

"In the world's sea, do not like cork sleep
Upon the water's face; nor in the deep
Sink like a lead without a line; but as
Fishes glide, leaving no print where they pass
Nor making found; so closely thy course go,
Let men dispute, whether thou breathe, or no." (2)

All that he did was touched with this element of self-
consciousness. He is always acting. The elaborate
preparations for the funeral, the putting on of the shroud,
tied with knots at his head and feet, that the drawing

1. Donne and his Contemporaries. Quarterly Review, vol. 132
might be taken for his monument, all indicate the workings of a mind which could not be simple, at rest from itself. He is intensely introspective. One part of him may be feeling intensely; the other part holds aloof, watchful, critical. He is acutely sensitive, too, to the effect of his actions on other people. He refers again and again to the difficulty of preaching before a mixed congregation, and is evidently easily diverted from his train of thought by noises denoting weariness or inattention. "For many times, one part of our auditory understands us not, when we have done, and so they are weary; and another part understands us before we begun, and so they are weary," he complains. Of eager, imaginative temperament, farsighted profound, subtle, he could not be bound by the narrow divisions of warring sects. Thus he laid himself open to criticism, a criticism which jarred on his irritable nerves. "Let a man be zealous, fervent in reprobation of sin, and then flies out an arrow, that gives him the wound of a Puritan. Let a man be zealous of the house of God, and say anything by way of moderation, for the repairing of the ruins of that house, and making up the differences of the Church of God, and there flies out an arrow that gives him the wound of a Papist." He had

1. LXXX Sermons. p. 128.
2. Fifty Sermons. p. 156.
become a divine late in life, without an apparent vocation, solely at the royal command, and probably was regarded with no very favourable eyes by those of his clerical brethren who remembered his stormy youth or envied his rapid promotion. The following paragraph seems to suggest that Donne had run the gauntlet of spiteful calumniators. "We must preach in the mountain, and preach in the plain too; preach to the learned, and preach to the simple too; preach to the court, and preach to the country too. Only when we preach in the mountain, they in the plain must not calumniate us, and say, This man goes up to Jerusalem, he will be heard by none but princes, and great persons, as though it were out of affectation, and not in discharge of our duty, that we do preach there: and when we preach on the plain, they of the mountain must not say, This man may serve for a mean auditory, for a simple congregation, for a country church, as though the fitting of ourselves to the capacity and the edification of such persons, were out of ignorance, or laziness, or not a performance of our duties, as well as the other." (1)

Donne never recovered from the effects of his turbid youth and disappointed manhood. The freshness of his

1. LXXX Sermons. p. 115.
soul was gone, its vigour impaired. His age was outwardly peaceful, but he was like one who leaves a hot, crowded room for the quiet darkness of a garden; he stands in the midst of cool freshness, but his head yet whirls with confused dizziness. Or he is like one rising from a bed of sickness, recovered indeed, but uncertain of his strength, easily agitated and depressed. He had worn himself out emotionally. He has fever fits of devotion, but they are followed by agues of doubt. He sees or seems to see the Beatific Vision, and then it disappears, clouded by a breath of scepticism. In youth he had been inconstant in love, and had prided himself on it with a young man's insolence. But Nemesis overtook him and in age found he could not control his emotions, could not steady them without painful struggle.

"Oh, to vex me, contraries meet in one:
Inconstancy unnaturally hath begot
A constant habit; that when I would not
I change in vows; and in devotion
As humourous is my contrition
As my profane love, and as soon forget:
As riddlingly distempered, cold and hot,
As praying, as mute; as infinite, as none.
I durst not view heaven yesterday; and today
In prayers, and flattering speeches I court God:
To-morrow I quake with true fear of his rod.
So my devout fits come and go away,
Like a fantastic ague; save that here
Those are my best days, then I shake with fear." (1)

This shaking with fear is another sign of weakness. He is morbidly, abjectly terrified of sin, of disease, of death.
Donne's acute psychological analysis is perhaps best shown when he is diagnosing the state of sin. It is a subject on which he can never be long silent, and it is with extraordinary truth and reality of presentment that he pictures the perverseness of a heart, wholly set to do evil. He describes the approach of temptation. The devil looks through the window of our eye and knocks at the door of our ear; we receive into our fancy images of sensual pleasure and dwell on them with delight. Or perhaps the devil roams the streets seeking whom he may devour, and finding a weakling, throws him to the ground by a sudden thrust. (To Donne Satan is not only the spirit of evil, but a real person). He speaks in one place of "Satan without us, sin within us" showing that he regarded them as quite separate forces). Then he describes the growth of sin in our hearts. We rock it and tumble it in our fancies, swathe it and cover it with pretences and excuses. Then the babe grows. Sin is become habitual. The devil is needed no longer; we are become our own tempters, and "should be ambitious, though we were in a hospital; and licentious, though we were in a wilderness; and voluptuous, though in a famine". The strangeness of man becoming his own tempter haunts Donne.

1. LXXX Sermons, p. 144.
2. XXVI. Sermons, p. 90.
as he recurs to the subject again and again. We become not only a herd of swine, but of swine possessed with devils. Swiftly we grow hardened and obdurate, incapable of repentance. Our heart is full of evil and there is no room for a cure, as in a full stomach there is no room for physic. We seek restlessly from sin to sin, finding satisfaction nowhere, but afraid to stop in our distracted pursuit. The heart, continually palpitating, cannot be cured of a wound, because it will not be still to receive a remedy; neither can the "various and vagabond" heart of the wicked be found. "If he enquire for his heart, at that chamber where he remembers it was yesterday, in lascivious and lustful purposes, he shall hear that it went from thence to some riotous feasting, from thence to some blasphemous gaming, after, to some malicious consultation of entangling one, and supplanting another; and he shall never trace it so close, as to drive it home". (1) With equal intensity of vision he describes the difficulty of repentance for such a man. If he seeks a way of return, the path will be overgrown with tangled thickets, the door will be fast shut and he will lose courage and turn back to continue on the downward path. The preacher is

1. XXVI Sermons p.36.
inspired by an almost prophetic fury as he enumerates the many sorrows there shall be to the wicked. Let them learn from him as he had learned from the bitter teachings of experience, that no remorse can make the past as though it had not been. His life had been a fair garden, and he had crawled over it, dragon-like, leaving a hideous trail of ruin. Nothing could bring to life again the fair things he had crushed and spoiled. Though he should wash with snow water, yet his own clothes would make him foul again. The clothes are the flesh, from which there is no escape. There shall be no end of plagues to the evil man. He breaks out into a piteous beseeching that God would preserve him from the last and worst plague. "Punish me, O Lord, with all thy scourges, with poverty, with sickness, with dishonour, with loss of parents, and children, but with that rod of wire, with that scorpion, to punish sin with sin, Lord scourge me not, for then how shall I enter into thy rest" But no prayer can avert the bitter painful memories of the wicked, even if he put away his old course of life. The following paragraph has the sad ring of

1. LXXX. Sermons p.624.
autobiography. "If we consider further, the manifold topics, and places, from which the sorrows of the wicked arise, that every inch of their ground is overgrown with that venomous weed, that every place, and every part of time, and every person buds out a particular occasion of sorrow to him, that he can come into no chamber, but he remembers, in such a place as this, I sinned thus, that he cannot hear a clock strike, but he remembers, at this hour I sinned thus, that he cannot converse with few persons, but he remembers, with such a person I sinned thus, and if he dare go no further than to himself, he can look scarcely upon any limb of his body, but in that he sees some infirmity, or some deformity, that he imputes to some sin, and must say, by this sin, this is thus: when he can open the Bible in no place, but if he meet a judgment, he must say, Vindicata mihi! This judgment belongs to me; and if he meet a mercy, he must say, Quid mihi? What have I to do to take this mercy into my mouth? In this deluge of occasions of sorrow, I must not say with God to Abraham, look up to heaven, and number the stars,(for this man cannot look up to heaven) but I must say, continue thy dejected look, and look down to the earth, thy earth, and number the grains of dust there, and
the sorrows of the wicked are more than they. Many are the sorrows; and as the word as naturally denotes, great; great sorrows are upon the wicked."

The preacher ransacks heaven and earth for comparisons to express the awfulness of sin, the terrible plight of the hardened sinner. Sin is a dye which stains the beauty of the soul, a weapon to wound and blight it, a fire to burn it to a dead cinder, a whirlpool to drown and suck it to the depths. It is an enemy which lodges with us till sickness or some other officer of God come to dispossess him. It is a serpent which, nourished and warmed, stings and disperses poison. The little fault which makes way for the greater is a child thrust through a window to open the door to a gang of fierce robbers. The sin which a man wins others to sin is followed by a multiplied misery, like seeing one's own deformity reflected in a hundred mirrors. Sin is the weight which sank the world under water in the flood, and shall press the soul into the fire of hell. This weight benumbs and stupefies him that bears it, so that he is unaware of his own burden. Donne frequently returns to this last point, emphasising the fact that a man does not realise the enormity of his own wickedness until he is seized with remorse. The confirmed

1. LXXX Sermons. p. 631.
evil-doer is like one in the depths of the sea who is pressed in on all sides by the water, but does not feel the weight; if he should attempt to reach the land, he would be overwhelmed by the weight of his own dripping clothes and of even a bucketful of sea water. Or he is like one lying contented in mud and slime, cloaking his vices by kind names, till, as the sun sends its scorching rays to the Nile banks and transforms the wriggling mud into separate, definite creatures, the light of grace shines upon his heart and he sees that what he called pleasure is adultery, and what he named frugality is the demon of covetousness.

The comparison which occurs most frequently in these sermons is that between physical and spiritual disease. Sin is a burning fever, a wasting consumption, a horrible leprosy; and Donne speaks like a physician of plasters and panaceas for the soul, balsams and syrups, cooling juleps and warming cordials. The sinner is infectious, contaminated; he should shrink from approaching the sacrament lest he corrupt the bread and poison the wine. This conception of sin as disease opens the way for that morbid brooding on repulsive physical details which we have already noticed as a distinctive feature of the age.
More than on sin, more than on disease, do Donne's thoughts dwell continuously on death. This is the worst and last disease. This is the final punishment of sin. As we have already seen, Donne's first book was concerned altogether with the subject of death. In later life he retracted the view expressed in Diathanatos. "My body is my prison; and I would be so obedient to the law, as not to break prison; I would not hasten my death by starving, or mortifying this body," he reads in 1626. Life is not merely a parenthesis, which may be omitted as well as not. The future depends on it; on every minute of this earthly existence hang millions of years of happiness or torture. "Be it but a sojourn, yet thou art bound to it for a time; though thou sigh with David, Haec mihi,quia prolongatus incolatus, woe is me that I sojourn so long here, though the miseries of thy life make thy life seem long, yet thou must stay out that time, which he, who took thee in, appointed, and by no practice, no not so much as by a deliberate wish, or unconditional prayer, seek to be delivered of it. No man dies innocently, that dies by his own hand, or by his own haste. We may not do it, never."

1. LXXX Sermons. p. 36.
2. Fifty Sermons. p. 80.
Yet it is by duty that man is held to the earth, not inclination. The devout man should walk in ashes, in the meditation of his own death and in the contemplation of the death of the saints. He should step into his bed each night as into his grave, as though his sheets were shrouds and his eyes had been closed by his executors. "Doth not man die even in his birth?" he asks in a passage of wonderful eloquence. "The breaking of prison is death, and what is our birth but a breaking of prison? As soon as we were clothed by God, our very apparel was an emblem of death. In the skins of dead beasts, he covered the skins of dying men. As soon as God set us on work, our very occupation was an emblem of death; it was to dig the earth; not to dig pitfalls for other men, but graves for ourselves. Hath any man here forgot today, that yesterday is dead? and the bell tolls for today, and will ring out anon; and for as much of every one of us, as appertains to this day. Quotidie morimur, et tamen nos esse aeternos putamus, says St Hieroine; we die every day, and we die all the day long; and because we are not absolutely dead, we call that an eternity, an eternity of dying: and is there comfort in that state? why, that is the state of hell itself, eternal dying, and not dead."
Many philosophers have taught that life should be a meditation on death, that only by dying to things temporal can we live to things eternal, and so forth. The morbidity of Donne's mind shows in this that for him death means the grave, the place of worms and corruption. The noblest religions of mankind have united in teaching that death is either a dreamless sleep, annihilation, or a departure to some other, possibly better, state of existence. Donne believed in the Christian doctrine of the resurrection, but the diseased tendency of his nature was stronger than his creed. He loves to burrow underground like a mole, to creep into vaults and graves, to lift the lids of coffins and pry into the secrets of decomposition. He writes of the sharpheaded worms, till they almost crawl over the page, and of the dust into which they shall turn till we choke as we read. He shows a deep interest in the funeral rites of other nations and in several passages (as Professor Churton Collins has noted) anticipates Browne's Urn-Burial. "Some nations burnt their dead, there the fire is the grave; some_drained their dead; there the sea is the grave; and some hung them up upon trees, and there the air is their grave: some nations eat their dead themselves, and some maintained dogs to eat the dead; and so they called those dogs, Canes Sepulchrales,
sempulchral dogs, so those men were sempulchral men, those men and those dogs were graves." 

He has a most curious sense of the importance of burial in consecrated ground, and though he reasons with himself and appeals to the justice of the Almighty, yet he is not quite convinced that those drowned at sea or devoured by wolves in the waste are perfectly assured of a happy resurrection. "It is some discontinuance of the communion of saints; if I may not be buried with the saints of God." Those who neglect the respect and duty belonging to the bodies of the dead and deny them comely and decent funerals are transgressors against the temple of the Holy Ghost as much as those who mifeil their own bodies with licentiousness. Let not the body be defrauded of convenient burial, for the image of God was housed in it and will return to it again. This is the reason for his scrupulous regard to funeral solemnities. He held the theory of the resurrection of the body in its crudest form.

Paul had likened the resurrection of the body to a sowing of grain; the seed sown dies but produces new grain. Donne's view is even less intelligible than this. The earthly body which decays and is scattered to the winds

1. LXXX Sermons. p. 198.
2. Ibid.
will be reunited and revivified. The Almighty at the last day will gather up the dust of his chosen as a merchant adds pence to pence, when he makes up his accounts in the evening. (1) Donne had therefore to meet a class of difficulties which are summed up in the old question, as if a fish eat a man, and another man eats the fish, how shall both men rise again. It is a relic of that mediaevalism from which he never quite freed himself. Enough has been said on this subject, but it is tempting to quote one more passage, partly because of its beauty, and partly because Coleridge liked it and singled it out for praise. Donne is considering once more the fate of the dust into which man shall be changed. "The ashes of an oak in the chimney, are no epitaph of that oak, to tell me how high or how large that was; it tells me not what flocks it sheltered while it stood, nor what men it hurt when it fell. The dust of great persons' graves is speechless too, it says nothing, it distinguishes nothing: as soon the dust of a wretch whom thou wouldest not, as of a prince whom thou couldest not look upon, will trouble thine eyes, if the wind blow it thither; and when a whirlwind hath blown the dust of the church-yard into the church, and the man sweeps out the dust of the church into the church-yard, who will undertake to sift those dusts again, and to pronounce, This is the Patrician, this is the noble flour, and this the yeomanly, this the plebeian bran." (2)
The intense melancholy of Donne's nature has been already noted. It may be that this was fostered in him by a study of the Spanish mystics. The caste of his mind is curiously like theirs. German mystics cast away dogma, but the Spanish thinkers, in fear of the inquisition, kept it and forced their mysticism into the mould of the Christian theology. So Donne combined philosophical speculation, Platonic theory and spiritual ecstasy with a complete acceptance of the creed of the English church. The biographer of Saint Teresa, writing of the reign of Philip II, concludes, "The prevailing note of the period is one of helplessness and despair. It would seem as if the grinning devils, griffins, and unholy monsters carved by the mediaeval stone cutters, crawling slimily amidst the vine-leaves and trefoil of a capital, had become incarnated in man's mind, and driven him mad with their fantastic terrors. The world had become a strange and evil phantasmagoria of shadows".

Donne is very mediaeval in some respects. He dreaded the hidden passions of man's nature, perhaps because they had proved too strong for his own control, and preaches repression rather than self-expression. It is difficult to realise sometimes that he is a contemporary of

Shakespeare. To his intense, narrowed nature, the world presents itself much as it did to Bunyan. Men are conceived in sin; they live in hunger and fear. All their lives long the anger of God hangs over their heads in a cloud of arrows. It needs the special grace of God to "erect and settle a tottering, a dejected soul, an overthrown, a bruised, a broken, a trodden, a ground, a battered, an evaporated, an annihilated spirit." In all these sermons we find no trace of enthusiasm for the great heroes of history, no word of praise for the quiet honesty and kindness, the patient endurance of everyday men and women. The human heart is to him wholly evil, and human life wholly wretched. With an ingenuity eminently characteristic of him he argues that because three of the four names, by which man is most often called in the Scriptures, signify misery, therefore it is three to one against any man that he is miserable. "Man is called Adam, that is earth; earth that lies underfoot and is trodden of all, earth that is red, blushing for guilt, earth that will change into dust at the last and be moved with a shovel; he is called also Ish, that is, a noise; he comes crying into the world and goes crying out, he is but a voice, a melancholic man but a groaning, a sportful man
but a song, an active man but a trumpet, a mighty man, but a thunderclap; his third name is Enoch, which is oblivion, and his last Ghebar, which has some taste of power, and yet this man too hath seen affliction by the rod of God's wrath."

He paints for us in lurid colours many haunting pictures of death-beds, when the dying man lies shaken with palsy or fever, everlasting darkness prefigured by the present dimness of his eyes, the everlasting gnashing in the present chattering of his teeth, the everlasting worm in the present gnawings of his agonised body and anguished soul. It is fitting that man should fear death. A peaceful dying is a mark not of courage but of stupidity and sloth. We must remember that even Christ had a strong sense of the bitter agony of the cross; "Death made the lion of Judah to roar."

The God whom Donne worships is primarily the God of comfort. The contemplation of the tender consolations of an all merciful Father calls forth the most exquisite music of his prose. God "brought light out of darkness, not out of a lesser light; he can bring the summer out of winter, though thou have no spring; though in the ways of fortune, or understanding, or conscience, thou have been benighted till now, wintred and frozen, clouded and eclipsed,
damped and benumbed, smothered and stupified till now, now God comes to thee, not as in the dawning of the day, not as in the bud of the spring, but as the sun at noon, to illustrate all shadows, as the sheaves in harvest, to fill all penuries." (1) The depth of his misery and self-abasement is counterbalanced by the height of his joy and peace. Life to him was almost impossible without some object on which he could lavish the intense affectionateness of his nature. When he turned to religion it was to devote himself to the worship of an unseen Person with the same fervour and passionateness which most men spend in earthly lives and friendships.

The irreligion of the stupid and insensitive called forth his deepest compassion. Anything is better than mere materialism and self-satisfaction. "Idolatry is better than atheism and superstition than profaneness." (2) Indeed he does not believe that there is such a thing as an atheist. "Poor intricated soul! he writes pitifully, riddling, perplexed, labyrinthical soul! thou could'st not say, that thou believest not in God, if there were no God; thou could'st not believe in God, if there were no God; if there were no God, thou could'st not speak, thou could'st not think, not a word, not a thought, no not against God.... Be as confident as thou canst, in company, for company is

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2. LXXX Sermons. p. 69.
the atheists' sanctuary..... I respite thee but a few hours, but six hours, but till midnight. Wake then; and then dark, and alone, hear God ask thee then, remember that I asked thee now, Is there a God? and if thou darest, say no."

Donne's attitude to life, to this world and the next, is Hebraic. He resembles Ezekiel in his depth and mysteriousness. He is inspired not by love of his fellow men, but by fear of his Creator, and lives, not to hasten the coming of the kingdom of heaven, but to please the Great Taskmaster. He longs not to perfect the world, but to escape from it. Yet he is not altogether uninfluenced by the Platonism, widely spread among the thinking classes in his day. It may be that everything has life, even the stones. It does not seem an unreasonable belief that the whole world should be animated by one soul and be an entire living creature. The world is a glass in which we see God, an instrument perfectly in tune, a divine harmony. God made the world after a preconceived pattern. "Of all things in heaven, and earth, but of himself, God had an idea, a pattern in himself, before he made it!" Platonist too is his strange theory of the

1. LXXX Sermons. p. 486.
2. LXXX Sermons. p. 69.
4. XXVI Sermons. p. 19
5. LXXX Sermons. p. 668.
Donne the Writer.

In his earlier books Donne writes like a lawyer. He is crabbed, overburdened with quotations. He accumulates instances one upon another without order or method. His style never rises into eloquence, except in the rare passages where he forgets his learning and allows himself to be stirred by emotion as he looks back to the days of his childhood or forward to the hour of his death. The great merit of Biathanatos and Pseudo Martyr, from a literary point of view, is the clearness and logical subtlety of the argument. Donne scarcely ever thinks in a straight line. He loves a winding road, but whatever its turns and twists he never loses sight of the goal. When we turn to the sermons we find that the lawyer has become an orator, that is, he is now primarily a speaker and not a writer. Readers may follow an intricate discussion with pleasure, but an audience demands vivid pictures, arresting phrases, enthusiasm and emotion. The sermons are built up on a foundation of hard logic, because Donne's mind was so fashioned that he could not think hazily, but the foundation is kept well out of sight and does not disturb the aesthetic enjoyment of those who are concerned only with the beautiful proportions of the building.
The habit of excessive quotation from the classics has been abandoned, and the few Latin phrases which still remain are followed in all cases by an English equivalent. Donne has fallen into the speaker's trick of repeating words and expressions, so that if the hearer coughs or turns aside occasionally he misses nothing. Describing the promise made to Simeon that he should see Christ before he did, Donne writes "and actually, and really, substantially, essentially, bodily, presentally, personally he does see him." Or again- "God may endow me, improve me, exalt me, enable me, qualify me with faculties fit for this service." So too he multiplies figures of speech in the manner of a teacher, so that one at least may wing its way into the comprehension of his hearers. "When God commanded Moses to go into Egypt, this was a rock in his sea, and a remora upon his ship, a hill in his way, and a snake in his path." He cannot leave a point until he has brought forward an almost overwhelming number of instances. He illustrates the scorn that cuts deeper than a sword by the sufferings of Job who was made a byword, of Samson who had to make merry before the Philistines, of the Israelites who in their heaviness had to sing songs in a strange land, of Christ who endured the mockery of the kneeling soldiers, of

1. LXXX Sermons. p. 29.
2. " " p. 40.
3. " " p. 43.
the Reformed Church which suffers the taunts of Europe.

These illustrations are never hackneyed or dull. "He had an invincible repugnance to the commonplace." A passionate, almost irritable desire, to break through the clinging veil of unessentials, and pierce to the reality behind, is the distinctive feature of his mind and style. Much learning had quickened, not stupefied his intelligence. As we have seen he discarded classical similes and parallels and turned to the life of his own time. He does not seem to search painfully for illustrations. Rather, they tumble out, one after another, exhibiting his wide and varied knowledge of contemporary science, astronomy and astrology, medicine and physics, things legal and things nautical. It is noteworthy that the only literary man of the age with whom we know Donne had intimate dealings was Ben Jonson, the great satirist and realist. These metaphors are utterly original, instinct with thought, often elaborately ingenious, sometimes ludicrously inappropriate. "Money being put in a basin, is seen at a further distance, if there be water in the basin, than if it be empty" from which we learn the spiritual truth that "our most precious devotions receive an addition, a multiplication by holy tears." Faith is a candle

2. LXXX Sermons. p. 162.
which gives light to men, reasons are the lanthorn which
protect that candle from the wind of doubt. The earth
is warmer after sunset than before sunrise; therefore our
zeal should be more earnest than their's who lived before
the coming of the Messiah. "They are but hollow places,
that return echoes, last syllables: it is but a hollowness
of heart to answer God at last." The soul which has
succumbed to temptation and is intent to accomplish its
evil desire, has virtually sinned before the act, as a man
who casts himself from a steeple, may be said to have
killed himself, though he is not actually dead till he
strike the ground. Again, the descent of a man into
wickedness is like the fall of a coin into a river. At
first there is a splash; the tender conscience hears the
sound of its fall; afterwards man and money sink deep, silent,
and unperceived. Gold that is beat out into thin leaf cannot
be coined, nor made current money; so the heathen divided
the true God into so many false divinities that they
scattered and lost Him altogether. The sails of a ship
when they are spread and swollen, and the direction in
which the ship moves, show the wind, which in itself is an
invisible thing; so a man's actions and the trend of his

1. LXXX Sermons. p. 205.
2. XXVI Sermons. p. 195.
3. Fifty Sermons. p. 11.
4. XXVI. Sermons. p. 308.
life reveal the unseen spirit within him. (1)

These figures are remarkable often for their beauty and their vividness. They show a close observation of the phenomena of everyday experience. Nothing indeed escapes Donne's eye. He notices that torches seem greater in a misty night because of the fog, that they are easier to light if they have once been kindled and then dashed out, that cold, dead water brought to a fire bubbles and dances in the vessel, that "if in a clean glass water be stirred and troubled, though it may conceive a little light \( \frac{\text{th}}{\text{th}} \), yet it contracts no foulness in that clean glass." (2) He has the keen senses, the watchful interest of a scientist. But he has also a "thinking heart". These things are like shells, rich of colour, quaint of shape, farfetched from strange shores. But they are washed through and through by the waves of his thought, and if we listen we hear echoes of the roaring of that sea whence they were brought. He never adds a simile merely for the sake of ornament. It is also an addition to his argument. The peaceful death of the righteous is compared to the printing of a picture on a sheet of paper. It is the work of a minute. But many months were required for the graving of the copper. So the man was cutting it out line

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1. LXXX Sermons. p. 33.
2. LXXX Sermons. p. 155.
by line all his life long, the public actions forming the
lights and the private the shadows.

Sometimes these analogies are so far fetched as to become absurd. So for example in the following where Donne likens the rebuke of sin to the fishing of whales. "The mark is great enough; one can scarce miss hitting; but if there be not searoom and line enough, and a dexterity in letting out that line, he that hath fixed his harping iron in the whale, endangers himself and his boat; God hath made us fishers of men; and when we have struck a whale, touched the conscience of any person, which thought himself above rebukes, and increpation, it struggles, and strives, and as much as it can, endeavours to draw fishers and boat, the man and his fortune, into contempt and danger. But if God tie a sickness, or any other calamity, to the end of the line, that will wind up this whale again to the boat, bring back this rebellious sinner better advised, to the mouth of the minister." God is both spinner and tailor; he winds us off the skein that he may weave us into the whole piece, and cuts the whole piece into fragments that he may make us up into a garment.

Such is the nature of Donne's illustrations. He is not

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1. XXVI Sermons. p. 218.
a naturalist and though he lived in the country many years, he is singularly indifferent to trees and clouds, birds and flowers. In one place a casual reference seems to show that he regarded the fields as beneath the serious attention of a religious man. "He that hath a cause to be heard, will not go to Smithfield, nor he that hath cattle to try and sell, to Westminster; he that hath bargains to make, or news to tell, should not come to do that at church; nor he that hath prayers to make, walk in the fields for his devotions." It is the art of man which interests him, not natures, "the art of God". The plank in the floor which creaks under the foot, stiff pumps which will give no water unless a little be thrown down them first, the mariner's compass, the astronomer's telescope, trains of gunpowder which will carry fire into a city, clocks that whirr before they strike, these are the objects which attract his attention.

He employs this same curious ingenuity of intellect in the interpretation of the Scriptures with results that are always fresh and sometimes grotesque. God is equally satisfied with the sacrifice of turtles that live solitarily or pigeons that live sociably; therefore the active and the contemplative life are both well-pleasing to Him. The light in the Jewish tabernacle had to be supplied

1. LXX Sermons. p. 35.
by olive oil, not by tallow because the ox has horns, nor by wax because the bee has a sting. Angels have wings but in his dream Jacob saw them ascending and descending by means of a ladder, which shows that we must be content to approach God by degrees.

The best criticism of this "metaphysical" style was written by Doctor Johnson in his Life of Cowley. He admits that if the writers of this school "frequently threw away their wit upon false conceits, they likewise sometimes struck out unexpected truth: if their conceits were far-fetched, they were often worth the carriage. To write upon their plan, it was at least necessary to read and think. No man could be born a metaphysical poet, nor assume the dignity of a writer, by descriptions copied from descriptions, by imitations borrowed from imitations, by traditional imagery and hereditary similes." He denies them pathos and sublimity, (in both of which Donne excelled) but grants them wit "a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike.... The most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together; nature and art are ransacked for illustrations, comparisons, and allusions; their learning instructs and their subtility surprises." One of Johnson's objections to this manner of writing was the obscurity and cramped form of the verse into which these "slender conceits
and laboured particularities" were packed. This was true in some measure even of Donne's poetry, but in prose, where his thoughts are freed from the Shackles of rhyme and metre, his style is singularly clear and vivid. The quaint analogies and quibbles flash out one after another, glittering like diamond dust, to use de Quincey's famous comparison.

The solemnity of his subject prevents Donne in the sermons from descending to the puns common in the works of his followers. It is true that he puns on the word Sun. "Man is but a vapour; but a glorious and a blessed vapour, when he is attracted, and caught up by this Sun, the son of Man." (1) And when he is declaring the horrors of war he points out the similarity of sound between militia and malitia. But instances of this kind are rare indeed.

Doctor Warburton, in a note in his edition of Shakespeare writes "Then as to the jingles, and play on words, let us but look into the sermons of Dr Donne (the wittiest man of that age), and we shall find them full of this vein". On which Coleridge comments: "I have, and that most carefully, read Dr Donne's Sermons, and find none of these jingles. The great art of an orator - to make whatever he talks of appear of importance - this, indeed, Donne has effected with consummate skill." (2)

1. LXXX Sermons. p. 264.
2. LXXX Sermons. p. 146.
Donne was himself an acute observer of the beauty of style in the writings of others. He speaks with enthusiasm of "Tertullian, a man of adventurous language", and of the "musical and harmonious cadences of St Bernard", and with contempt of those vainglorious and ostentatious preachers who, "having made a pie of plums, without meat, offer it to sale in every market, and having made an oration of flowers and figures and phrases without strength, sing it over in every pulpit." He speaks often of the beauty of the Old Testament Scriptures, and a criticism which he makes of the writings of the Hebrew prophets might with equal truth be applied to himself. "As the prophets, and the other secretaries of the Holy Ghost, in penning the books of Scriptures, do for the most part retain, and express in their writings some impressions, and some air of their former professions; those that had been bred in courts and cities, those that had been shepherds and herdsmen, those that had been fishers, and so of the rest; ever inserting into their writings some phrases, some metaphors, some allusions, taken from that profession which they had exercised before; so that soul, that hath been transported upon any particular worldly pleasure, when it is entirely turned upon God, and the contemplation of his all-

1. LXX Sermons. p. 289.
2. LXXXI Sermons. p. 6.
sufficiency and abundance, doth find in God fit subject, and just occasion to exercise the same affection piously, and religiously, which had before so sinfully transported, and possessed it." (1) Donne had been "sinfully transported and possessed" by sensual passions, and he, like Solomon and St Augustine, uses the language of earthly love to express the rapture of the union of the soul with God. This rather ecstatic fashion of speech which repels us in Crashaw, and in a less degree in Donne, was due probably to their acquaintance with Roman Catholic writers and particularly with the Spanish mystics. Donne, we know, had read Saint Theresa and Saint John of the Cross, Luis Vives, tutor to Katharine of Aragon, afterwards a professor at Oxford, had introduced there the study of the Spanish mystics, and inaugurated a movement in favour of Spanish thought which was at its height during Donne's stay in Oxford. Donne was a profound Spanish scholar always. Writing in 1623 to Buckingham, who was travelling in Spain with Prince Charles, he speaks of his own studies. "Most honoured Lord- I can thus far make myself believe that I am where your Lordship is, in Spain; that, in my poor library, where indeed I am, I can turn mine eye towards no shelf, in any profession, from the mistress of my youth, Poetry, to the wife of mine

1. XXVI Sermons. p. 257.
age, Divinity, but that I meet more authors of that nation
than of any other". But compared with Crashaw it is
rarely that Donne jars on our calmer taste. Crashaw
is often swept off his feet by ecstatic raptures and then
sinks into luxuries of mere feeling. Donne has the power
of self-criticism and never loses it even when he is
burning with enthusiasm. His "naked thinking heart" saves
him from meaningless, fulsome language.

But it is neither vivid phrase, nor far-sought simile,
nor curious subtlety of thought which gives to Donne's prose
its strange haunting charm. Through it soars a mysterious,
melancholy music like the sound of the wind in "ruined
choirs where late the sweet birds sang." This autumnal
fragrance of sound is the revelation of the personality of
the writer. Every word is steeped in emotion, dyed in the
vats of his own experience. The mournful, rhythmical
cadences have the powerful suggestiveness of great music. We
feel the unexpressed, inexpressible sadness of one who has
come to the evening of his day; the sermons are gorgeous with
the rich hues of sunset and chill with the gloom of
approaching night. "Behind every image, every ostensible
thought of his, there are vistas and backgrounds of other
thoughts dimly vanishing, with glimmer in them here and

there, into the depths of the final enigmas of life and soul. Passion and meditation, the two avenues into this region of doubt and dread, are tried by Donne.... and of each he has the key. Nor, as he walks in them with eager or solemn tread, are light and music wanting, the light the most unearthly that ever played round a poet's head, the music not the least heavenly that he ever caught and transmitted to his readers."

The beauty of his composition and rhythm can be shown only by quotation. From a sermon on the Nativity comes this comparison of God to a circle. "One of the most convenient hieroglyphics of God is a circle, and a circle is endless; whom God loves, he loves to the end; and not only to their end, to their death, but to his end, and his end is, that he might love them still. His hailstones and his thunderbolts, and his showers of blood, (emblems and instruments of his judgments,) fall down in a direct line, and affect and strike some one person or place; his sun, and moon, and stars, (emblems and instruments of his blessings,) move circularly, and communicate themselves to all. His church is his chariot; in that he moves more gloriously than in the sun; as much more as his begotten Son exceeds his created sun, and his son of glory and of his right hand,

the sun of the firmament; and this church, his chariot, moves in that communicable motion circularly; it began in the east, it came to us, and is passing now, shining out now in the farthest west." (1) It would be difficult to praise adequately the concentration, the perfect symmetry of this passage. The mere workmanship of the paragraph, the fitting together of the antitheses, the rigid exclusion of all but the essential features mark the skilled artist.

The harmony and rhythm of the following are even more beautiful. "Saul falls to the earth; so far; but he falls no lower. God brings his servants to a great lowness here; but he brings upon no man a perverse sense, or a distrustful suspicion of falling lower hereafter; His hand strikes us to the earth, by way of humiliation; but it is not His hand, that strikes us into hell, by way of desperation. Will you tell me, that you have observed and studied God's way upon you all your life, and out of that can conclude what God means to do with you after this life. That God took away your parents in your infancy, and left you orphans then, that he hath crossed you in all your labours in your calling, ever since, that he hath opened you to dishonours, and calumnies, and misinterpretations, in things well intended by you, that

he hath multiplied sicknesses upon you, and given you thereby an assurance of a miserable, and a short life, of few, and evil days; nay, that he hath suffered you to fall into sins, that you yourselves have hated, and to continue in sins, that you yourselves have been weary of, to relapse into sins, that you yourselves have repented; and will you conclude out of this, that God hath no good purpose upon you, that if ever he had meant to do you good, he would never have gone thus far, in heapimg of evils upon you? Upon what dost thou ground this? Upon thyself? Because thou shouldest not deal thus with any man, whom thou meanest well to? How poor, how narrow, how impious a measure of God, is this, that he must do, as thou would'st do, if thou wert God! God hath not made a week, without a Sabbath; no temptation without an issue; God inflicts no calamity, no cloud, no eclipse, without light, to see ease in it, if the patient will look upon that which God hath done to him, in other cases, or to that which God hath done to others, at other times. Saul fell to the ground, but he fell no lower; God brings us to humiliation, but not to desperation." Here we have waves of melody, leaping and falling in perfect rhythm, rolling to the shore with

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1. LXXX Sermons. p. 464.
liquid ease, the one cadence flowing into the next without splash or noise.

In this next (and last) passage we see Donne's eloquence at its finest. The storm of passion rises, clouds gather in the darkened sky, fierce winds drive on the tempestous waves, and through the roar and tumult of the elements is heard a piercing cry of sadness, the desolate wail of one well nigh shipwrecked. "That God should let my soul fall out of his hand, into a bottomless pit, and roll an unremovable stone upon it, and leave it to that which it finds there (and it shall find that there, which it never imagined, till it came thither) and never think more of that soul, never have more to do with it. That of that providence of God, that studies the life of every weed, and worm, and ant, and spider, and toad, and viper, there should never, never beam flow out upon me; that that God, who looked upon me, when I was nothing, and called me when I was not, as though I had been, out of the womb and depth of darkness, will not look upon me now, when, though a miserable, and banished, and a damned creature, yet I am his creature still, and contribute something to his glory, even in my damnation; that that God, who hath often looked upon me in my foulest uncleanness, and when
I had shut out the eye of the day, the sun, and the eye of the night, the taper, and the eyes of all the world, with curtains and windows, and doors, did yet see me, and see me in mercy, by making me see that he saw me, and sometimes brought me to a present remorse, and (for that time) to a forbearing of that sin, should so turn himself from me, to his glorious saints and angels, as that no saint nor angel, nor Christ Jesus himself, should ever pray him to look towards me, never remember him, that such a soul there is; that that God who hath so often said to my soul, Quare moriris. "Why wilt thou die? and so often sworn to my soul, Vivit Dominus, as the Lord liveth, I would not have thee die, but live, will neither let me die, nor let me live, but die an everlasting life, and live an everlasting death; that that God, who, when he could not get into me, by standing, and knocking, by his ordinary means of entering, by his word, his mercies, hath applied his judgments, and hath shaked the house, this body, with agues and palsies, and set this house on fire, with fevers and calentures, and frightened the master of the house, my soul, with horrors, and heavy apprehensions, and so made an entrance into me; that that God should frustrate all his own purposes and practices upon me, and leave me, and cast me
away, as though I had cost him nothing, that this God
at last, should let this soul go away, as a smoke,
as a vapour, as a bubble, and that then this soul cannot
be a smoke, a vapour, nor a bubble, but must lie in
darkness, as long as the Lord of light is light itself,
and never spark of that light reach to my soul; what Tophet
is not paradise, what brimstone is not amber, what gnashing
is not a comfort, what gnawing of the worm is not a tickling,
what torment is not a marriage bed to this
damnation, to be secluded eternally, eternally, eternally
from the sight of God?"

Here is the "last sublimation of dialectical
subtlety and address with the most impassioned majesty."
Here is "the fervent and gloomy sublimity of Ezekiel
or Aeschylus."

It is difficult, almost impossible, for us, born
into another creed and generation, to understand fully
donne's passionate self-revelations. He is often like
one possessed, speaking words in an unknown tongue. We
wonder at the beauty of the sound, we are stirred by the
sight of his emotion, and yet but imperfectly comprehend
the force which animates him, the message he struggles
to express.

From him we take our last word of apology. "He that
brings any collateral respect to prayers, loses the
the benefit of the prayers of the congregation; and he that brings that to a sermon, loses the blessing of God's ordinance in the sermon: he hears but the logic or the rhetoric, or the ethic, or the poetry of the sermon, but the sermon of the sermon he hears not."
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