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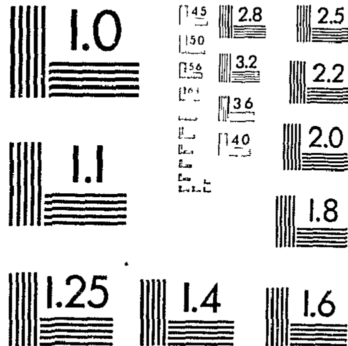

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A SPIRITUAL ODYSSEY:

SKEPTICISM AND BELIEF

IN THE LIFE OF LIONEL JOHNSON

by

© Richard Marchand

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies,

Dalhousie University,

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

September 1987

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ISBN 0-315-49667-3

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by Richard Marchand

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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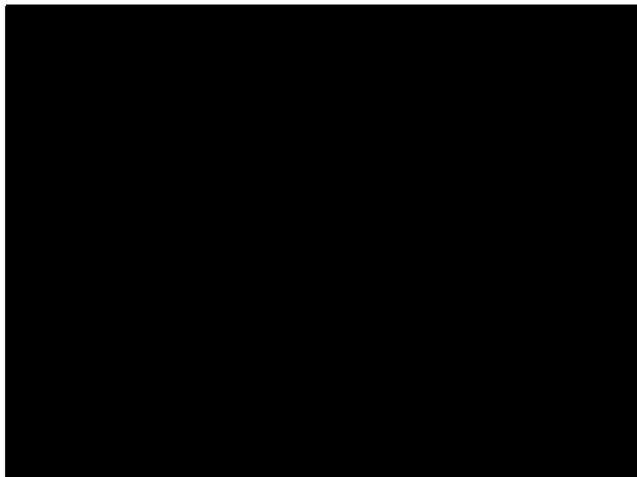

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Degree: Ph.D. Convocation February Year: 1988

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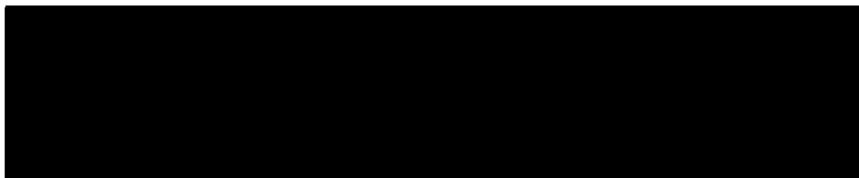

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TO MY PARENTS

FOR THEIR ALWAYS TIMELY ENCOURAGEMENT

AND LOVING SUPPORT

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ABSTRACT

The temptation to think of Lionel Johnson as "decadent" is usually too great to be resisted. This dissertation attempts to prove that in one important aspect, his intense search for spiritual truth, Johnson escapes that category. As the first four chapters show, he began his search very early with a strongly libertarian and antinomian point of view. In quick succession, he espoused theosophical Buddhism, latitudinarian Christianity and Paterian "impressionism". But a careful examination of his early correspondence shows that these explorations grew primarily from an elemental skepticism against which there fought an equally strong desire to believe. Chapter V shows that in the poetry produced from 1887 onward, his spiritual search focussed on Roman Catholicism to which he had first been drawn by his love of beauty in ritual. This movement was followed by the intellectual acceptance of Catholic dogma noticeable in poems like "Men of Assisi" and "Men of Aquino". In Chapter VI, we see how his acceptance of Catholicism gave him a short-lived serenity during which he produced much of his most distinctive poetry. But as Johnson reveals in the anguish of "The Dark Angel", this serenity had begun to dissolve in 1893. Thereafter, he attempted to overcome his doubts of his own salvation through the practice of an asceticism which shut him off from family and friends alike, as well as from poetry itself which no longer seemed of primary importance. As we see in "To the Saints", one of his last poems, he retreated into a world in which he sought, unsuccessfully, to conquer his own nature, a task thwarted by his alcoholism and his possible homosexuality.

INTRODUCTION

In the Nineties of the last century a group of writers emerged who have survived in literary history and in the popular imagination under the general heading of *decadent*. It is an epithet that exercised its power even over those who survived the period. W.B. Yeats, for example, when he turned back in memory, chose to focus on those elements which seemed central to the age he had known -- alcohol, religion, madness and death -- as we see in the introduction to his edition of *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse* (1936):

> Then in 1900 everybody got down off his stilts; henceforth nobody drank absinthe with his black coffee; nobody went mad; nobody committed suicide; nobody joined the Catholic church; or if they did I have forgotten.[1]

Yeats's memory, selective as all memories must be, had accepted the popular myth.

Any study of Lionel Johnson must begin with the recognition that he presents to us the images that most commonly characterize the age. We see a great talent lost irrevocably as a result of personal tragedy, a tragedy which like so many in the Nineties had its roots in personal

weakness, in indulgence (as alcoholism was called) and in spiritual exhaustion. He became a convert to Roman Catholicism as the decade began; while preferring whiskey, he was known to drink absinthe; and he died a young man shortly after the century ended. His friends included Ernest Dowson, Aubrey Beardsley, Oscar Wilde, John Gray, Count Stenbock, and others who were and are commonly called decadent. He was a student of Walter Pater's at Oxford, and held the works of that author in high reverence. In his book-lined study at 20 Fitzroy Street, in chambers whose walls were papered in brown wrapping paper and whose windows were hung in grey corduroy, Johnson seemed to place himself firmly among those who, in the Nineties, advocated a way of life in which interest in the unusual and perhaps even in the bizarre was paramount. And even his insomnia, which drove him nightly to investigate London's darkened streets, singled him out as one who had absorbed, and perhaps acted on, the ethos commonly attributed to the decadents.[2]

Two early memorials in verse, which have since become well know, reinforced this image. Yeats's lines in his poem "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory", although kind in their remembrance and in their recognition of Johnson's importance for the author, recalled Johnson's alcoholism in an allusion to his "Mystic and Cavalier".

> Lionel Johnson comes the first to mind,
> That loved his learning better than mankind,
> Though courteous to the worst; much falling he
> Brooded upon sanctity

Till all his Greek and Latin learning seemed
A long blast upon the horn that brought
A little nearer to his thought
A measureless consummation that he dreamed.[3]

Yeats's reference was echoed in Ezra Pound's "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley", where we find reputation and rumor joined into one voice which both judges and palliates its judgement. The "he" is probably Victor Plarr.

For two hours he talked of Gallifet;
Of Dowson; of the Rhymers' Club;
Told me how Johnson (Lionel) died
By falling from a high stool in a pub . . .

But showed no trace of alcohol
At the autopsy, privately performed--
Tissue preserved--the pure mind
Arose toward Newman as the whiskey warmed.[4]

Pound had earlier been kinder in his edition of Johnson's poetry. His words then had called attention to a poetry "full of definite statement" without the Nineties' characteristics of "muzziness" or "softness", and he had written of a man who was both committed to his art and intelligent in his criticism.[5]

But in the intervening years most critics have found it easier to regard Johnson simply as one of the more competent members of a group usually held to be at the centre of the Nineties decadence. He too had been caught in the dilemma that confronted the poets of the age as heirs not only to an over-ripe late-nineteenth-century Romanticism but to the breakdown of moral values which characterized the age. Thus historical surveys of the period by such critics as William York Tindall,[6] Joseph Warren Beach,[7] Samuel

C. Chew and Richard D. Altick[8] all place Johnson within the framework of the decadence and in some manner may be said to dismiss him thereby. In studies of the period by Osbert Burdett[9] and Holbrook Jackson,[10] Johnson is one of many whose life-style led to an early death. Closer to our own day, Frank Kermode, in Romantic Image, presents a Johnson seen through Yeats's eyes as "a necessary part of the myth; he had the archetypal longing for action, and he demonstrates the despair of the artist who does not win his daily victory; he suffered, as Huysmans suffered, for the sins of society."[11] Harold Bloom, in Yeats, also presents Johnson in Yeatsian terms, as one whose personal myth proved inadequate, even though he praises Johnson and calls "The Dark Angel" "much the best poem written in English during the Nineties."[12] Still more recently, G.K. Clifton's dissertation, "Lost in Light": A Study of Lionel Johnson's Poetry (1978), the only full-scale study of Johnson's poetry, makes extensive use of the same approach. He feels that "Yeats's terms ["artist" and "saint"] provide a valuable framework for examining Johnson's central conflict".[13] But to use Yeats's suppositions is to accept his basic premise in which Johnson is essentially a decadent. The result of such critical efforts has therefore been to support Johnson's inclusion in the group of poets generally held to be decadent.

Thus, despite critics like Derek Stanford who, in

his anthology Poetry of the Nineties,[14] refuses to place Johnson among the decadents, others as recent as R.K.R. Thornton in The Decadent Dilemma (1983) concede that the passage of almost one hundred years has not greatly changed our outlook. "If Dowson is the poet most frequently cited as the typical decadent, Lionel Johnson is usually second on the list",[15] and although he does not himself wholly accept this conclusion, Thornton still finds in Johnson and in his work a striking example of what he calls the "decadent dilemma". We also see this inclusion of Johnson among the decadents in one of the more substantial contributions to the critical literature on the subject of Johnson and his poetry, Barbara Charlesworth's Dark Passages: The Decadent Consciousness in Victorian Literature.[16]

A less judgemental critical approach is to be found in Arthur Patrick's University of Paris dissertation, Lionel Johnson: Poète et Critique, published in 1939. Because Patrick was able to interview family and friends of Johnson and to consult letters and manuscripts which have since disappeared, this book remains the definitive source for biographical material. It is usefully complemented by Ian Fletcher's lengthy introduction to the second edition of The Collected Poems of Lionel Johnson[17] published in 1985. Not particularly critical but essential is Reverend Raymond Roseliep's unpublished dissertation, Some Letters of Lionel Johnson[18] in which he edits that portion of Johnson's

correspondence which falls between 1885 and 1898. The short introduction does little more than place the letters in the proper context but the dissertation is invaluable for the notes Roseliep so generously provides.

Of particular interest to me have been those commentators who deal with Johnson's religious attitudes and beliefs, and more particularly with his Catholicism. Some, like Bernard Bergonzi in his book The Turn of the Century (1973), speak with a certain condescension not only of Johnson's alcoholism but also of his "speculations in doctrinal niceties".[19] Others, like Graham Hough in The Last Romantic, see Johnson as a kind of "Gerard Manley Hopkins gone wrong",[20] although by this comparison Hough at least concedes the intensity of Johnson's experience. Specifically Roman Catholic studies such as Calvert Alexander's The Catholic Literary Revival err in the other direction and frequently provide no more than a pietistic gloss of the poetry.[21] G.K. Clifton's dissertation, because it is a full-scale study, inevitably touches on the religious aspects of Johnson's poetry. He comes to the conclusion that, "To put it in general terms, Johnson often saw art and religion as an opposition that could be resolved only by the one negating the other", and that throughout his life his goal was to finish "a corpus giving full assent to Catholic dogma."[22] Clifton sees the result as "a polarity between light . . . and darkness", the one associated with

"the vehicle for man's conversion described by Newman's Catholicism" and the other "with his desire to write poetry."[23] I am not, however, convinced by his argument. Of interest in another direction are Ian Fletcher's comments in his introduction to the collected poems which emphasize his belief that Johnson sought too often to live on the level of illumination, an impossibility with which he could not reconcile himself. Fletcher believes "The Dark Angel" to be "a confrontation with the dark other self"[24] and "about Augustinianism and its horror".[25] In his article "Johnson's Dark Angel", he rightly notes that the theology of the piece is neither consistent nor wholly Catholic.[26] A more recent article, "The Religious Thought of Lionel Johnson" by Gary H. Paterson, does attempt to break away from period stereotypes, and Paterson is one of the few authors who devotes more than a few sentences to Johnson's early thought. However, his aim in examining Johnson's early letters (in _Some Winchester Letters_) is quite limited. He wishes to give an overview of Johnson as "the most intellectually precise [of Nineties converts] in his religious attitudes".[27] But the overview, completed in a dozen pages, is necessarily superficial.

Johnson's early letters are in fact deserving of a detailed consideration, for they are not only a treasury of late-nineteenth century ideas and attitudes, but also give us Johnson's early thought on the issues that were to

consume his time and energy for the rest of his life. Although some critics like Paterson, for example, have touched on this material, none has systematically examined it in relation to his later life and work. Most are satisfied with a comment on the general tenor of the correspondence. Thus Charlesworth,[28] in her chapter on Johnson, is content to tell us little more than that he "moved very quickly from Buddhism into Shelleyan Platonism, Emersonian Transcendentalism, Whitmanesque Humanism--what you will".[29] But in so doing she neglects much, for the letters permit us a clear glimpse into Johnson's spiritual life in its beginnings, and ultimately contribute to a greater understanding both of the many changes in his spiritual life and of the factors which made the changes unavoidable. Cursory treatment of the letters leaves us unprepared for the variety of ways in which, as an adolescent, he responded to contemporary thought, or for the ways in which that thought changed him, his art, and his attitude toward that art. It is this responsiveness which allows his early letters, in the words of the Hispano-American philosopher, George Santayana, to throw "a good deal of light on what we all were in the 1880's".[30]

I hope also to use a more rigorous critical approach with respect to the poetry. I would like to avoid the unfortunate consequences of the critical technique, legitimate in itself, in which texts from different periods

in the poet's life are juxtaposed in order to arrive at or reinforce conclusions about his life and work. However, in Johnson's case, merely to quote several separate pieces, as some are content to do, in order to corroborate an assertion or to emphasize a paradox is a disservice if it is done without reference to the time at which each passage was written. Johnson himself chose to date his poems, and the critic who ignores those dates does so at his peril. Clifton, for example, chooses to use "A Descant Upon the Litany of Loretto" (1885), an apprentice piece written when Johnson was eighteen, as a key to Johnson's attitudes toward art and religion,[31] without adequately allowing for the date at which it was written. Nor does he note, in citing "The Precept of Silence" (1893) and "Mystic and Cavalier" (1889) together, that not only months and years but Johnson's entry into the Roman Catholic Church separate the two.[32] Logic forbids the presumption of so simple a continuity in Johnson's attitudes, thoughts and beliefs. Indeed, with careful study, the uniformity of idea and belief which many critics have presumed to exist soon dissolves into a kaleidoscopic variety at whose centre a struggle of the greatest interest manifests itself.

A study of Johnson's spiritual journey with its many turnings must therefore begin with a careful assessment of his earliest beliefs and ideas against the background of the age in which he lived, followed by a careful analysis of

his poetry, in order to show how these interests were transformed by a personal alchemy into the intensely felt concerns that dominate his later years. Yet in beginning with Johnson's strongly biographical early letters I do not propose to write either a life of the poet or to attempt an examination of his poetry as a whole. My goal is more limited and more specific. While searching into both his life and work, I will enquire into the spiritual development of a man who came finally to certain convictions on spiritual matters and who acted in accordance with those convictions. To do so, I will use his writings both critical and poetic, as well as his letters, in a critical structure which will allow me to present, against the background of his age, the image of one who was indeed driven to pursue an elusive ideal, but an ideal which was, in the context of the period, notably singular. I hope thereby to free Johnson from the monochromatic and two-dimensional treatment which he and his work have received and to throw a more satisfactory light upon the workings of a mind which even after a hundred years must hold the attention of anyone interested in the major spiritual issues of the late nineteenth century.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

[1]W.B. Yeats, ed., The Oxford Book of Modern Verse (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), xi.

[2]Arthur W. Patrick, Lionel Johnson: Poète et Critique (Paris: Librairie L. Rodstein, 1939), 25-37, passim.

[3]W.B. Yeats, Collected Poems (London: Macmillan, 1933), 149.

[4]Ezra Pound, Selected Poems, ed. with intro. by T.S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1948), 177.

[5]Lionel Johnson, The Poetical Works, ed. with preface by Ezra Pound (London: Elkin Mathews, 1916), viii.

[6]William York Tindall, Forces in Modern English Literature: 1885-1956 (New York: Vintage, 1956), 9-10.

[7]Joseph Warren Beach, English Literature of the Nineteenth and the Early Twentieth Centuries (New York: Collier Books, 1950), 203.

[8]Samuel C. Chew and Richard D. Altick, The Nineteenth Century and After (New York: Appleton-Century-Croft, 1967), 1535.

[9]Osbert Burdett, The Beardsley Period (London: John Lane The Bodley Head, 1925).

[10]Holbrook Jackson, The Eighteen Nineties (London: Grand Richards, 1913).

[11]Frank Kermode, Romantic Image (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957), 41.

[12]Harold Bloom, Yeats (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 46.

[13]G.K. Clifton, "Lost in Light": A Study of Lionel Johnson's Poetry (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of California at Irvine, 1978), viii.

[14]Derek Stanford, ed, Poetry of the Nineties: A Biographical Anthology (London: John Baker, 1965).

[15]R.K.R. Thornton, The Decadent Dilemma (London: Edward Arnold, 1983), 108. This dilemma consists of the inability to balance the worldly and the ascetic demands in one's daily life. In an earlier generation (Hoxie Neale Fairchild, The Romantic Quest, 1931) this was called the descendental-transcendental conflict.

[16]Dark Passages: The Decadent Consciousness in Victorian Literature (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1965). See Chapter V, 81-95. See also Patrick (12-14) and Clifton (102, 117). Clifton in half a dozen lines and Patrick in as many paragraphs each note the "youthful" tendencies of their subject but do little more. The best of these short accounts is to be found in Fletcher's introduction to his second edition of Johnson's Collected Poems (New York: Garland Publishing, 1982). Gary Paterson (see below) attempts to trace the recurrent themes to be found in these early letters though he too is necessarily superficial in the eight pages he devotes to their consideration.

[17]Lionel Johnson, Collected Poems, second and revised edition, ed. Ian Fletcher (New York: Garland Publishing, 1982). Hereinafter referred to as CP.

[18]Reverend Raymond Roseliep, Some Letters of Lionel Johnson (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 1954).

[19]Bernard Bergonzi, The Turn of the Century: Essays on Victorian and Modern Literature (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1973), 30.

[20]Graham Hough, The Last Romantic (London: Methuen, 1947), 212.

[21]Calvert Alexander, The Catholic Literary Revival (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Co., 1935). See also Patrick Braybrooke, Some Victorian Catholics: Their Art and Outlook (Freeport: Books for Library Press, 1966) for a similarly sectarian viewpoint.

[22]Op. cit., viii.

[23]Ibid.

[24]CP, lxv.

[25]Ibid., lxvi.

[26]Ian Fletcher, "Johnson's Dark Angel" in Interpretations, ed. John Wain (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1955), 153-178.

[27]Gary H. Paterson, "The Religious Thought of Lionel Johnson", The Antigonish Review, 13 (1973), 95-109.

[28]Charlesworth, Chapter II.

[29]Ibid., 84.

[30]George Santayana, Letters (New York: Harper, 1948), 242.

[31]Clifton, Chapter 2, passim.

[32]Ibid., 76.

CHAPTER I

THE SKEPTICISM OF CHILDHOOD: "I NEVER BELIEVED"

The Johnson family seems to have presented, in the tumultuous Victorian world of England in the 1860's, the staid and well-kept appearance so dear to its middle-class contemporaries. The family's roots were in Cornwall and in Ireland, where the Johnsons had lived for several hundred years, and from whence they had returned to England in the late eighteenth century.[1] The Irish 'situation' had probably had its effect in shaping the family's preference for military service, since it was, in the words of the youngest son, Lionel, a military family: "I have hardly a relative, living or dead, who is or was not in the army."[2] Lionel's father was a retired captain, his favorite uncle a general in charge of military instruction for the British army, and his two elder brothers would, in their turn, go into this substitute for a family business. They lived in the forests of Windsor in an area called Cranborne Chase, and it was perhaps appropriate, given this proximity to Windsor, that the family should have shown itself to be strongly conservative and conventionally religious in the

Anglo-Catholic mode which, as Patrick observes, was "rigoureusement observés." Both his parents have remained shadowy figures, possessors of a "dry piety", as Fletcher calls it, which seems to have irritated Johnson throughout his adolescence. Patrick adds very little except to say, "A la vérité, ce n'était pas un milieu intellectual."[3]

Lionel Pigot Johnson, the last of the family's four children, was born on March 17, 1867. He was a sickly child, given to colds and bronchitis which in turn led to insomnia, and, because of his continuing health problems, he was educated at home before entering a small private school at the age of ten. Both his susceptibility to illness and his small stature (he eventually grew to be five feet, three inches tall) reinforced the isolation natural to a child who was six years younger than his nearest sibling and at least eight years younger than either of his brothers. Yet despite, or perhaps because of, this isolation he very early showed a strong literary predilection. In a letter to a friend written in 1884, he spoke of this early tendency: "My earliest [tragedy] was [written] at the age of eight and began in Purgatory."[4] By the age of thirteen, and his entry into St. Mary of Winton (Winchester) College, he was a confirmed poetaster and reader.

The Winchester College of his day proved curiously welcoming to the small boy. In a generation when the cult of sports had begun to dominate the great public schools of

England, he seems always to have been allowed to go his own way, although his nickname, "Little Bloody", suggests that he was not without resources with which to defend himself. H.A.L. Fisher, who attended Winchester College at the same time, later wrote of Johnson in some autobiographical notes.

> He was a diminutive, ethereal creature, with a pallid beautiful face, an omnivorous reader, quite remote from the ordinary interests of the school and indeed contemptuous of them, but passionately enamoured of the beauties of Winchester. A certain aura surrounded him for he was reputed to be a Buddhist, to have read all the books in the school library, and to drink eau de cologne for his amusement.[5]

Johnson remained diminutive throughout his life although his taste for eau de cologne is unsubstantiated. There were rumours, however, revealed by Patrick, that he had already acquired a taste for whiskey. But his contempt for sports which Fisher mentions was clearly displayed when he became editor of the school newspaper. There, he substituted literary material, much of it written by himself, for some of the more usual sports items, although he never found the courage to eliminate the many articles on cricket. His own preferred activity was cross-country walking and his long walks through the English countryside could cover as many as twenty miles a day, miles filled with the beauties of rural England which became the subject of much of his later poetry.

His precociousness seems also to have stood Johnson in good stead with the masters of the school, and

among these, he found the emotional support he claims not to have found at home. In a poem entitled "Winchester" (1889) written three years after leaving school, he expressed himself rhapsodically on the subject.

> To the dearest!
> Ah, to thee!
> Hast thou not in all to me
> Mother, more than mother, been?
> . . . .
> Two years have I lived, still thine;
> Lost, thy presence! gone, that shrine,
> Where six years, what years! were mine.
> Music is the thought of thee,
> Fragrance, all my memory.[6]

He ends the poem with equal extravagance: "Mother mine, loved Winchester!" The poem makes plain his debt to the school for the emotional support it had provided, for it was, as he wrote in another tribute of the same name,

> A place of friends! a place of books!
> A place of good things olden!
> With these delights, the years were golden;
> And life wore sunny looks,
> They fled at last:
> But to that past
> Am I in all beholden.[7]

He loved too the great heritage of town and college which would stay with him even after his days in Oxford so that he could write, as he continued his second tribute:

> The mountainous *Cathedral* gray;
> *College*, so fairly towered;
> And *Wolvesey* ruins ivy-bowered;
> And *West Gate*, far away;
> Silent and still,
> To gaze our fill,
> By memory overpowered!

But it had not been merely Winchester College that he had loved, or the great cathedral two minutes walk from the

school. The love he bore the school was inextricably mingled with his love for the "country sweet", as he called it, of rural Hampshire.

Rare photographs from this period -- Johnson disliked being photographed -- show a serious lad whose face carries only the shadow of a smile. Although he was then at least sixteen he still looked a boy of thirteen. There is an erectness in the posture without stiffness that gives an impression of self-control, and perhaps a desire to distance himself from others, an impression borne out by his own letters and by the testimony of those who knew him.[8] His friends would always credit him with a genius for friendship, but the isolation he had experienced in his family had become a part of him and even the discovery of students with whom he shared interests was insufficient to break the pattern which had settled around him. Only in his letters could he express the emotions he felt. To a friend he wrote, "You were very good to me at Oxford: and marvelously refused to be frozen and chilled by the iciness of my calm self-sufficing";[9] and elsewhere, ". . . speech is to me almost impossible together with bodily presence -- speech is weak and shamefaced -- but in absence words are all things."[10] And although "loneliness [was] a little lonely at times",[11] he could still exclaim, "I often wish I would be deaf and blind, and live inwardly!"[12] It was an isolation that reimposed itself in the last dreadful years of his

life when he closed his door to all comers, friend and family alike.

Yet if Johnson's emotional development seemed somehow to have been restricted, he disclaimed intellectual restrictions of any kind, and in his letters we find a boy whose interests ranged over a tremendous territory. The earliest of the letters we possess date from 1883[13] when Johnson was sixteen, and while demonstrating a fluency and a surety that is rare in one so young, they also show the absorptive capacity of a teenager attempting to cope with the changing ideas and philosophies presented by the age in which he lived. From an amazingly wide-ranging list of authors[14] he garnered a variety of ideas, philosophies, and religious doctrines that are resoundingly heterodox even from the most liberal point of view. In a small way he signalled the decline of high Victorianism both in philosophy and in religion that had begun to reveal itself in the latitudinarianism of the sixties. The conservatism of the age was breeding its own antithesis and even the young or perhaps especially the young felt the charms of that antithesis, and in the rashness of his youth Johnson demonstrated a willingness to grapple with problems that had laid low many a wilier Victorian.

The curve of discovery that Johnson followed drew him from the northern forests of Swedenborgianism--"At one period of my life I called myself a Swedenborgian, very few

people know how wonderfully great a man he was"[15]--into the midst of the religious debate that characterized the latter half of the nineteenth century in England. At times his appetite seemed limited only by the nature of the text at hand which in its immediacy had gained ascendancy. In this we see the natural volatility which often characterizes adolescence: an indiscriminating susceptibility to new ideas that perceives in newness the virtues of enlightenment. In an age when the established order was forced to confront a variety of challenges to its orthodoxy, he too feasted on these new ideas, although his tastes were also, curiously, those of the antiquarian. He became a collector of ideas and attitudes, both old and new, and in both cases, only the extremes seemed to satisfy. He seemed to feel none of the restraints one would commonly assume to exist in a child who had grown up in a strongly conservative and religious family and who attended a conservative school. The popular works of the decade, such as those of Matthew Arnold,[16] calling for the reform of Christianity, or even poetic bestsellers such as Edwin Arnold's Light of Asia[17] which introduced its Victorian readers to Buddha and Buddhism, Johnson embraced with equal fervor, perhaps because both could be equally provocative. We can only guess why he embraced with such avidity doctrines of so consistent a heterodoxy at such an early age, but perhaps like so many adolescents he felt misunderstood by his family

and thus imagined himself driven to seek his values elsewhere. The variety of heterodox ideas he entertained did, however, prove destructive of whatever Christian orthodoxy Johnson might have possessed. But perhaps most importantly, even at so early an age he already carried a heavy burden, mentions of which echo throughout his early correspondence. It was at the age of sixteen that he wrote to a friend, "As a child I never believed."[18] This skepticism made these voyages of exploration almost a game that satisfied without seeming to change anything permanently.

This radical skepticism had, for Johnson, an ever-widening impact. In an age when religion was woven throughout the fabric of daily life, mere heterodoxy did not present an insurmountable problem. Doubts of Christ's divinity, as expressed for example in a poem Johnson wrote in his early twenties called "A Burden of Easter Vigil" (1888), were still within the frontiers of Christianity. In doubting the Resurrection he simply became one of those who sought to demythologize Christianity and for whom the miraculous in Christianity was irrelevant to one's acceptance of the validity of Christianity as a moral code. But never to believe was to become an 'infidel' and truly to separate oneself from society. The rejection of belief at so early an age tells us that skepticism had already become Johnson's habitual mode of thought, and in the early letters we find the consequences.

These wide-ranging investigations and the effects could not go unnoticed either at home or at school. As Fisher's note indicates, the degree of Johnson's heterodoxy was common knowledge at the school and not unnaturally the object of some concern to his elders in both milieus. However, their attempts to limit these explorations were doomed to failure, as Johnson made plain in a letter written by parental command to break his friendship (temporarily) with the instigator of his researches into theosophy and Buddhism, Frank Russell:

> My father, acting on letters from the doctor, has forbidden me to correspond with you, and requests you to abstain from writing to me. The people of Winchester have no real knowledge of our thoughts, and insist upon the 'unhealthiness' of such religious discussion. Well, of course, at home I can't thoroughly explain myself, and so I can only submit in silence. Don't suppose that our friendship is in any way broken though it is thwarted by others with good intentions. You see, my father simply talks of Theosophists as a "pack of idiotic fools", and thinks our having views of our own sheer nonsense.[19]

A father's objections are rarely germane to a son's interests, and his father's objections in this case were more likely to spur him on. "He [wrote Johnson of his father] cannot understand what I feel, and I cannot explain and dissect my soul."[20] He simply turned to other correspondents who, if they did not share Russell's interest in Buddhism and theosophy, did share some of the critical attitudes toward establishment Christianity. To these two, Charles Sayle and J.H. Badley,[21] he expounded his

ideas, sometimes circumspectly, more often boldly, hoping perhaps for the understanding which he felt his family could not extend. His letters in the next two years on the subject of his beliefs, of his plans for the Church of England, of his anti-dogmatism, of his sacerdotal intentions or of his aesthetic delights tell us of an adolescent on a voyage through the heterodoxies of an age. There were other passions, that for Wales, for example, the power of whose Celtic culture, history and geography would influence much of his later work; that for the English countryside; and that for poetry. But for the moment, movements in religions and beliefs had, for him, an extraordinary attraction, and he tackled them in his letters with the facile confidence of the precocious adolescent who thinks it possible to change the world. Nor did he yet consider his skepticism anything more than a necessary adjunct of this search, first into Buddhism and the occult, and then, more generally, into the possibility of the reconstruction of Western Christianity, an extravagant ambition he shared with many who like him had tasted the messianism that hung invitingly in the air of Victorian England.

NOTES

CHAPTER I

[1]Patrick, Chapter I, _passim_. This is still the best source for biographical material.

[2]Roseliep, letter to David James O'Donoghue, June, 1893, 137.

[3]Patrick, 9.

[4]_Some Winchester Letters_ (London, 1922), 89. This collection was published anonymously and then withdrawn from circulation on complaints from the family (Patrick, 9). We now know that the editor was Francis, Earl Russell, known as 'Frank' to Johnson, and a good friend of his, as well as an elder brother to Bertrand Russell. Frank was one of the recipients of Johnson's letters and was referred to as "A" in the volume. The other recipients of the letters, "B" and "C" were respectively J.H. Badley and Charles Sayle, the latter eventually a clergyman and minor poet. Hereinafter to be known as SWL.

[5]Roseliep, 134.

[6]CP, 4.

[7]CP, 177-178. This stanza and that quoted below are two of seventy stanzas in this tribute!

[8]See Louise Imogen Guiney. "We saw Lionel Johnson yesterday. He is a calm Virgilian young person, small and silent, with a knowing sidelong smile, pleasant as a bookish fay's. He is _not_ noticeably human, even as you diagnosed it." Letter to Herbert E. Clarke, 26 August 1895, in _Letters_ (New York: Harper, 1926).

[9]SWL, April, 1885. No precise date given.

[10]SWL, 23 December 1884.

[11]SWL, April, 1884. No precise date given.

[12]SWL, 27 March 1884.

[13]Earlier letters which might conceivably have survived disappeared in the early 1950's when an Oxford student borrowed them from Johnson's sister. They were never returned. CP, 361.

[14]Among the authors mentioned we find Shelley, Browning, Tennyson, Samuel Johnson, Addison, Walt Whitman, the great poets and dramatists of Greece and Rome, particularly Plato and Aeschylus, medieval religious writers, Matthew Arnold, Pater, Edwin Arnold, Swedenborg, Comte and a variety of others.

[15]SWL, 25 November 1883. When he made this statement Johnson was sixteen!

[16]In the seventies Arnold published three works on religion, _Paul and Protestantism_ (1870), _Literature and Dogma_ (1873), and _Last Essays on Church and Religion_ (1877). All were attempts to reshape Christianity.

[17]First published in 1879, the work quickly became a bestseller. See below, Chapter II.

[18]SWL, 21 October 1883.

[19]SWL, 30 December 1883. Russell, who himself edited these letters, could not refrain from comment: "The boy's parents were very narrow-minded and prejudiced Anglicans, to whom Buddhism was apparently indistinguishable from anti-Christ." (50)

[20]SWL, 23 February 1884.

[21]See Fletcher, xxvi. Little is known of Sayle and Badley, both of whom were of an age with Johnson, the one at Eton and the other at university. Fletcher identifies Sayle as "a great introducer, a homosexual and very minor poet." (xxx)

CHAPTER II

THE SEARCH FOR BELIEF:

ON THE ROAD TO INDIA

Given his deep interest in questions of religion and belief Lionel Johnson was, not surprisingly, caught in the "great changes", as John Stuart Mill called them in his Autobiography (1873), that had shaken the foundations of contemporary Christianity. Mill thought them changes "in the fundamental constitution of [mankind's] mode of thought."[1]

> The old opinions in religion, morals, and politics, are so much discredited in the more intellectual minds as to have lost the greater part of their efficacy for good, while they have still life enough in them to be a powerful obstacle to the growing up of any better opinions on those subjects. When the philosophic minds of the world can no longer believe its religion, or can only believe it with modifications amounting to an essential change of its character a transitional period commences, of weak convictions, paralysed intellects, and growing laxity of principle, which cannot terminate until a renovation has been effected in the basis of their belief leading to the elevation of some faith, whether religious or merely human, which they can really believe . . .[2]

Mill was not alone in assuming that the times gave evidence of a transition, and that Christianity was one of the old "discredited" opinions in the state of decline. Its

replacement with some other "mode of thought" was, many believed, near at hand. Some intellectuals, like Mill, wanted a quick end to the struggle and the emergence of atheism, but Mill saw that this was unlikely. As he said, "real belief in any religious doctrine is feeble and precarious, but the opinion of its necessity for moral and social purposes almost universal."[3] This belief in the "necessity of religion for moral and social purposes" continued despite the efforts of critics like Mill and, later, Leslie Stephen who were quick to demonstrate that morals and religion were not necessarily interdependent.[4] But as G.M. Young notes in his Portrait of an Age, the religious or deistic solution was the more ardently sought. "The human mind is still something of a troglodyte. Expelled from one falling cavern, the first thought is to find another."[5] Thus, although "real" belief was rare (in Mill's words, "The world would be astonished if it knew how great a proportion of its brightest ornaments . . . are completely skeptics in religion."[6]), those for whom Christianity had been the centre of existence were not satisfied by either the aggressive agnosticism or the atheism (or "infidelity" as it was often called) of late-Victorian intellectuals. Mill's solution did not satisfy those who saw Christianity's survival (and that of a mystically-based religion) as necessary, and they sought other solutions to the problem of this widely perceived need for change. Thus,

among those who sought a spiritual solution, Johnson's response as an adolescent astonishes only by its eclecticism.

Johnson would have been aware that one solution to the problem of the loss of direction in Christianity was to be found in the Broad Church movement which had already accepted a large degree of latitude in the beliefs of its adherents. This movement seemed, as the century continued, to gather strength from the very sources that had helped create the problem. The idea of "progress", so marked in the increasing scientific activity, and implicit in the notion of evolution, served, as A.O.J. Cockshut notes in Anglican Attitudes, to bolster the confidence of "the innovators and all those who put minimal interpretations on the Church's doctrines."[7] Here indeed was "progress". The scientific movement had helped make way for Christian liberalism, and Cardinal Newman's bane, anti-dogmatism.[8] In England this work had begun in earnest with the publication of Essays and Reviews in 1861, which had probed to the edges of Anglican and Christian orthodoxy, casting doubt, for example, on the concept of an everlasting hell.[9] This minimalization of church doctrines led eventually to plain anti-dogmatism which grew steadily stronger as the Eighties approached, although it had appeared a generation earlier, for example, in the work of Thomas Arnold, and was central to the religious essays of his son, Matthew. The anti-

dogmatic movement sought to emphasize those beliefs which could be supported by what its adherents thought to be 'reasonable' in the Bible, a mode of thought personified in Leslie Stephen's "sensible man".[10] This reliance on the reasonable replaced the reliance hitherto based on the element of miracle and mystery in Christianity. It was necessary, as Matthew Arnold argued in Literature and Dogma (1873), to demystify and de-mythologize the Bible, "to re-assure those who feel attachment to Christianity, [and] to the Bible . . . by insisting on the natural truth of Christianity",[11] or as one twentieth-century editor of this text comments, to read it anew "in its original natural light".[12] This exclusion of the miraculous, the extra-rational, or the 'poetic', as Arnold chose to call it, meant also the rejection of doctrines based on such elements. Those accretions of popular worship, called Aberglaube[13] by Arnold, such as prayers, rites, and other elements that bordered on superstition, should, he thought, be allowed to contribute to the Church but should not be permitted to determine doctrinal content. Rather the worshipper had to be made to understand that these "extra-rational" elements could act on and affect his consciousness only in the way that great poetry or art did. Thus the 'mystical' element of religion would be recognized as a kind of poetry and the other and seemingly greater issues of religion could then be reduced to mere issues of conduct.

Arnold's work gives an excellent insight into the rational anti-dogmatism that had grown out of the work of Hennell, Strauss and Feuerbach, and of the scientific spirit, much of it of German origin, that had come to dominate many aspects of this debate. Because there could be no proof for dogmas supported by faith, there could be no certainty. And the prestige that dogma lost, relativism acquired. "There can be no surer proof", Arnold wrote in his Preface to the first edition of Literature and Dogma, "of a narrow and ill-instructed mind, than to think and uphold that what a man takes to be truth on religious matters is always to be proclaimed. Our truth on these matters, and likewise the error of others, is something so relative, that the good and harm likely to be done by speaking ought always to be taken into account."[14]

But this rational anti-dogmatism and religious relativity did not preclude a recognition, as in Arnold's case, of the need for the Church as an institution and for worship generally, although Arnold's books had completed to his satisfaction the work of the century in its flight from dogma. These had, however, taken him, in practical terms, only one step away from Leslie Stephen's religion of the rational man,[15] which was no religion at all in any sense of the term. Still, Arnold strove to retain the poetic aspect he had isolated as acceptable, his justification for such a retention being, perhaps naturally, psychological and

aesthetic rather than doctrinal. Thus the Bible and the institutional religion built around it continued to be "all-important".[16] Indeed, to "put some other construction on the Bible than this [dogmatic] theology puts, to find some other basis for the Bible than this theology finds, [was] indispensible if we would have the Bible reach people."[17] Arnold felt, therefore, that, in order to do its job, the Church must reject the dogmatic, the "unverifiable assumption . . . such as received theology necessitates."[18] In seeking these reforms neither Arnold nor the other anti-dogmatists were perhaps aware of their own "unverifiable assumption" concerning the need to rescue Christianity from the miraculous and the dogma that element seemed to support. If some of the reformers had succumbed to that new gospel of the age, the spirit of progress, others were simply caught, like Leslie Stephen in the next generation, in the age's urge to be scientific, in the need to verify truths as one might verify the composition of water. Those who rejected these attitudes and for whom religion had without doubt been revealed, saw their position suffer an eclipse so total that even in the popular literature of the day the movement from the dogmatic was celebrated.

As Mrs. Humphrey Ward (Arnold's niece) discovered on the publication of Robert Elsmere in 1887, theses like those advanced by Arnold had considerable potency for the public in general. With this novel, she precipitated a

debate that drew, among others, William Gladstone into contention over the novel's central idea; for Robert Elsmere, its protagonist, moves from traditional religion to a rejection of dogmatic Christianity. He then seeks to 're-conceive' Christ. As A.O.J. Cockshut points out, in Robert Elsmere's re-conceived Christianity, "there is nothing original . . . It is merely Christianity with certain ideas, such as the Incarnation, sacraments and miracles, left out."[19] After Elsmere rejects dogmatic Christianity, he creates a "new brotherhood", whose objectives are social rather than religious.[20] This change is, in the novel, a reflection of Elsmere's own early determination to serve an urban rather than a rural parish, and perhaps indirectly reflects concerns prevalent in Mrs. Ward's circle of friends at Oxford. Certainly the great popularity of this novel revealed the extent to which such ideas agitated and interested, if not converted, Victorian audiences, and indicated how much these ideas had permeated the popular consciousness.[21] Arnold's theological essays of the '70's had given way to the popular novels of the '80's, and to the articles of journalists like Leslie Stephen who took the ideas of weightier minds and, translating them with a leaven of simplification, brought them before a wider public.

There were, of course, questing souls who moved outside the bounds of Christian sectarianism altogether. For these, the search for TRUTH (always written in capitals)

as drawn from the totality of man's religious and intellectual experience served as the central principle. In the words of Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, the Russian-American spiritualist and the mother of Theosophy, TRUTH was "high-seated upon its rock of adamant, . . . alone, eternal and supreme."[22] These searchers, W.B. Yeats among them, saw in Christianity only one more aspect, again in Madame Blavatsky's words, of "the mere ephemera of the world's day."[23] And so these adventurers of the human spirit sought comfort farther afield in the more esoteric religions and philosophies of the Far East. Like Madame Blavatsky,[24] they were willing to combine aspects of Christianity with the "old science", as they called the ancient spiritual discoveries of Babylon and India. For A.P. Sinnett, a colleague of Madame Blavatsky, "The wisdom of the ancient world -- science and religion combined, physics and metaphysics combined -- was a reality, and it still survives."[25] Father Rosenkreutz and Swedenborg acquired new standing, as did the ancient Egyptians, Babylonians, and Caldians, although the fertile fields of India, with Buddhism and Hinduism, provided the greatest number of ideas. These appeals to a mystical ideal repudiated in no uncertain terms contemporary attempts to remove mystery and miracle from the heart of religion.[26] But in agreement with the Broad Church and anti-dogmatists generally, these searchers, too, looked with distrust and distaste upon the great theological systems

Christians had built for themselves. Madame Blavatsky voiced the sentiment in her work, Isis Unveiled. "An analysis of religious beliefs in general, this volume is in particular directed against theological Christianity, the chief opponent of free thought. It contains not a word against the pure teachings of Jesus, but unsparingly denounces their debasement into pernicious ecclesiastical systems that are ruinous to man's faith in his immortality and his God, and subversive of all moral restraint."[27]

The alternative Madame Blavatsky offered was revealed in Sinnett's Esoteric Buddhism (1883) in which the reader discovers little about Buddhism but much about the 'pure teachings'[28] of theosophical cosmology.[29] Its roots lay for the most part in Madame Blavatsky's fertile imagination. As in his first book, The Occult World, for which Esoteric Buddhism served as a continuation, Sinnett had given little more than a detailed history of Madame Blavatsky's abilities and her powers over certain types of manifestations, -- the transportation of physical objects around the world, the receipt of letters from adepts in Tibet without benefit of postmen, the materialization of roses -- manifestations which, when Yeats had become Madame Blavatsky's faithful disciple, he found particularly enthralling.[30] Although both Sinnett and Madame Blavatsky were eventually received into the Buddhist fold,[31] they were neither of them fluent in any of the ideas essential to

Buddhism beyond the basic tenets of the faith, and neither offered the serious student of Buddhism, such as Johnson might have wished to be, any great insight into that creed.[32] But in an age when few knew anything of such matters, much could be promised without fear of discovery. Sinnett's mis-information notwithstanding, the books achieved a popularity which calls attention to the late-Victorian thirst for the 'esoteric'. It was a thirst growing from the sense of loss associated with the triumph of modern science and the de-mythologization of religion, although there was as well the sense of betrayal associated with the belief that Christianity had been allowed to degenerate and to fall from the pure ideals which had presided at its foundation, ideals destroyed by the great dogmatic and organizational structures still in evidence.

Like those of Madame Blavatsky, the searches of Lionel Johnson had begun in an aversion to dogma and a distrust of dogmatic structures. These attitudes, as well as his belief in the degeneration of Christianity and its falling away from its original "pure teachings", had led his searches beyond western and Christian beliefs. He had already studied Swedenborg but it was to Buddhism as defined by the Theosophists that he was drawn in his first substantial excursion outside Christianity. He was first drawn thither by his friend, Frank Russell, and by a curious bestseller of the day, Edwin Arnold's Light of Asia (1879),

a poeticized life of Gautama, Buddhism's founder.[33] Its immense popularity[34] carried it to Winchester College, from whence in 1883 Johnson wrote to Russell: "Have you read Edwin Arnold's Light of Asia? I am reading it now with inexpressible delight."[35] Whether his delight was with the spiritual discoveries he made in the poem or with the poetic value of the work is not clear. What the letter does make clear is Johnson's openness to beliefs distinctly on the fringe of Victorian thought. At that moment, his suscepti-bility to such thoughts meant only the acquisition of an exotic reputation within the school. Later it would have a much greater personal importance as he groped toward a plan (wildly extravagant in its final shape) to reform Chris-tianity in England.

Johnson thought himself one of "young England's rising generation in search of a creed"[36] and with all the furious energy of an adolescent he took the search seriously. Like so many of his peers, he felt consciously the need to sweep the ground clean. He proclaimed, quite unlike Madame Blavatsky, and very like the relativistic Arnold, that "I have come more or less to the conclusion that there is no absolute, universal Truth."[37] He thus undercut the axioms of Christianity and justified his own exploration of Buddhism as revealed in Sinnett and Edwin Arnold. Such an examination might, he intimated, reveal truths yet unperceived by western man. This was an impor-

tant consideration, since every man must, he felt, "make his Truth himself",[38] and adolescent though he was, he had accepted the challenge to make that Truth.

But Johnson was not immediately taken with what he read on the subject in Sinnett's Esoteric Buddhism.

> I am too essentially Western to appreciate Buddhism, it is true . . . I have an idea that religion must vary under various circumstances; [but] let the East keep its lofty ideal, and the West a simpler Christianity . . . I have nothing to say against the religion of Buddha: it is an extremely noble one; but, as I said before, it repels me, chills me. I would rather be a Roman Catholic.[39]

He dropped this extremely dismissive attitude quickly, however, for two days later he wrote, "I have been hardly just toward Buddhism! the chapter on Nirvana is too transcendentally grand not to be a real true ideal. But [he asked] is it practical?"[40] The criticism centred on a curiously mundane point: Could religion insist upon an unremitting effort to transcend the earthly, to the exclusion of the practical life? "Buddhism may do for a few; but is it possible for people who like myself, must work to get their living in one way or another?"[41] He was aware, however, of the greater issues involved in the Buddhist demand that man eliminate all earthly desires from his nature. But so plainly difficult a demand as the complete divorce from the senses stood squarely in the way of his acceptance of Buddhism's central revelation. Yet somehow even these major difficulties melted as he came to under-

stand the idea of transmigration, the long succession of incarnations by which the individual moved toward or away from Nirvana in proportion to the efficacy of his renunciation of the life of the senses and its accompanying desires. For Buddhists, a show of weakness in this unremitting battle did not mean disaster, and a less than perfect pursuit of the transcendental still rewarded the individual in proportion to his perseverance in attempts to achieve his goal. As Johnson saw it, "Those who cannot overcome the natural tendencies of their natures in this life will be strengthened in the next life."[42]

A kind of Augustinian cunning thus enters into Johnson's calculations. A man could permit himself to enjoy earthly delights while putting off until some future incarnation the sacrifices necessary to reach his heavenly goal. Like the young St. Augustine, Johnson wished to avoid the choices that would separate him from the pleasures, innocent and otherwise, of the world. Thus although Johnson could not finally avoid the conflict between his yearning for transcendence and the natural desire to be a participant in the world,[43] Buddhism, through its acceptance of earthly delights, offered him hope that he could somehow circumvent that conflict. At least that was what he understood. "It [_Light of Asia_] made things clear. In its noble versified version of Buddha's first sermon it distinctly states that the ultimate perfection can be reached, _even by those who_

cling to earthly ties, after a longer succession of trials and transmigrations; this is what I wanted."[44] What he "wanted" was reassurance that his views on the compatibility of the physical and the spiritual were fundamentally sound, and that those Christian doctrines which stressed the sinfulness of fallen man and the contamination that earthly ties brought with them were not really to be held by the "best minds". As he wrote in the next sentence, "I think Christ must have meant this by his teaching which is almost the same as Buddha's."[45] Even then he could not stop himself from reaching toward certainties in the question: "I am certain that [Buddha] in his own mind and words meant that the grand, spiritual ideals and aims should be attainable by all."[46] Although we cannot overlook Johnson's own belief that all men should be happy, the personal note here is very strong, and we quickly discern a young man attempting to deal with some very personal fears and concerns about sin and damnation.

Thus Johnson was drawn to this faith by the comforting, non-judgmental neutrality, the indiscriminate compassion, and the seeming amorality of Buddhism. These qualities offered comfort to anyone who sought to avoid the strictures of "rabid" Protestantism (as he called it) which seemed to threaten Johnson's love of earthly delights even after he had rejected it.[47] On the other hand, Buddhism offered the doctrine of good works with the bonus of an

infinite number of opportunities in which to do these works. "[Buddhism's] special nobility seems to me to be this: that whereas orthodox Christians can go on in a slip-shod way, trusting to deathbed repentance and priestly absolutions, in buddhism, . . . every act is a cause: every step in life, every thought and word and deed is of the utmost importance. This strikes me as the supreme height of moral grandeur."[48] He wanted no room left for the mysteries of providence <u>or</u> for gifts of faith, and he thought it especially important that no one be lost for one bad deed or, for that matter, saved for one good one. All his desires in these matters seemed answered, and he wrote to Russell, "I have no longer any doubts as to its truth."[49] Buddhism seemed now the anchor of his existence, and, his earlier cries to the contrary, he had begun to believe or at least to espouse a single body of beliefs.

Johnson's new security seemed to rest in its most substantial sense on this plan of inevitable salvation which did not preclude or interfere unnecessarily with one's enjoyment of earthly pleasures. This conclusion reinforced those he had previously reached about Christianity, "the real, not unorthodox, Christianity as the Broad Churchmen hold it, [which] teaches that punishment is in limited degrees, and cannot be eternal."[50] The disingenuous "not unorthodox" could have referred, among others, to the theology of F.J. Maurice who had, in the early fifties, been

dismissed from his Chair of Theology in King's College, London, for expounding just such a doctrine.[51] Yet even though not "unorthodox", Johnson's views had long since given slip to the Thirty-nine Articles.

Now clear in what he thought, indeed, sure in what Buddha (and Christ) had thought, Johnson began, in a curious way, to proselytize. H. A. L. Fisher's comment, quoted earlier, as to the presence of a putative Buddhist in the school, lends support to Johnson's own words in the letter of 30 November 1883, in which he speaks of having begun "trying to explain things to a few people."[52] He had already begun to write sonnets (none surviving) on Buddha which he felt different from his other poetic efforts in being "not of any value, except as real expressions of personal feeling",[53] a not inconsiderable concession to his own feelings that he routinely denied to those of others who sought his advice on the art of poetry. He had also begun to read several other works on Buddhism and to urge Russell to found a group which, under the aegis of the Theosophical Society, would "simply offer anyone a chance of examining the truth of Buddhism if only from the intellectual point of view."[54] This tentative evangelizing was not, however, destined to last very long, and, curiously, the end of the experiment came through his own actions. "Yesterday, in an essay for the Doctor [his tutor] . . . I dragged in a tolerably clear statement of Buddhism, expressing my

personal views on the subject: I expect to be sat upon accordingly."[55] And he was. By the Christmas holidays, the school authorities had recommended to his parents that his correspondence with Frank Russell be stopped. His parents so requested, and he acceded to their request. Had he subconsciously wished to end his studies of Buddhism or, more simply, had he sought the honourable office of martyr? In either case, the temporary separation from Russell's energetic correspondence dampened his own impulses in that direction and he would never again discover the same interest in the pursuit of Buddhism's grand vision.

But the end did not come before Johnson's studies in the field had had their effect. His rudimentary study in comparative religion had begun with an appreciation of the most basic principles: "The Gospel of Buddha and Christ does teach a universal love, a tender sympathy for all men."[56] Several days later, he wrote,

> I have spent some time in carefully comparing the doctrines of Buddha with the teachings of Christ: they almost coincide, allowing for local differences of time and occasion. . . . I almost believe Christ was a re-incarnation of Buddha; at least I see little reason against it.[57]

His conclusions were, needless to say, theologically disputable, but they serve to show us the degree of interpenetration of ideas that Johnson was willing to tolerate. Thereafter, his skill at discovering similarities would admit of no limits and he found Buddhism everywhere. It appeared in the sermons of the school's headmaster: "He

unconsciously preached pure Buddhism."[58] He discovered it in the early plays of Aeschylus: "Hellenically presented Buddhism. Aeschylus was inspired."[59] And finally, in early November, he wrote that he was "absolutely confirmed in my Buddhism by reading Plato",[60] after which he opined that "The number of people who profess Buddhism astonishes me."[61] No doubt it would have astonished them as well.

These statements, although bordering on the flippant, do give indications of the process Johnson had undergone. His unsystematic attempt at a study in comparative religion focusing on the similarities between the two led him to discount the major differences between Christianity and Buddhism. However, to someone who did not believe in dogmas in the first place, the differences that existed, such as Christianity's acceptance of justification by faith as opposed to Buddhism's dependence on good works, *were* irrelevant. As well, we see insinuating itself into his mind the still unformed, although obviously delectable, notion that the central themes of religion retain their effectiveness even when separated from those elements that had hitherto seemed essential to that effectiveness. In effect, he came to see religions as storehouses of ideas common to all, as containers of those truths that were, in some sense, and given man's nature, demonstrably valid over time and across great distances. Although he did not quote Voltaire, Johnson nonetheless had Voltaire's thought in

mind: if [Christ] had not existed, man would have had to invent him. Thus Christianity, like Buddhism, was only another of man's attempts to arrive at a possible *modus vivendi* for himself as he tried to come to terms with his own desire to transcend this world and its perceived evil and face his own powerlessness in the context of that challenge. But just as surely, by isolating those tenets which did not travel well, Johnson seemed to have confirmation of his own doubts about such Christian doctrines as justification and eternal damnation, a great discovery for one who found in such doctrines an illogical, or at least an unacceptable, conclusion. In contrast he appreciated the comfort offered by Buddhism's doctrine of re-incarnation with its idea of inevitable transcendence. Johnson found in this doctrine a satisfactory emphasis upon the moral responsibility of the individual with a corresponding devaluing of priestly mediation. He also found in Buddhism a religion willing to accord sensual experience a place in man's life even when the objective of the worshipper was ever to escape its influence. These comforts the doctrines of Christianity did not afford the individual, although Johnson was willing to concede that Christian doctrines were not to be forgotten since Christianity, like Buddhism, was one more aspect of human spirituality.[62]

Johnson's comparative studies ultimately gave support to the idea that just as fundamental spiritual

beliefs could be separated from the churches which had given them birth, so too, the moral principles usually assumed to have grown from those dogmas were in fact independent of church and dogma.[63] Thus Buddhists could prize western or Christian virtues without in any way being acquainted with the doctrinal teachings that supposedly gave them authority. To Johnson the amateur church re-constructionalist, the argument then moved on to a logical conclusion of still greater interest. If between church and dogma, and between dogma and morality, no organic link existed, then dogma depended not on the inevitability that theological history and development seemed to predicate but on the whim of the church-goer. A church, perhaps an ideal church, need be nothing more than the sum of the beliefs of its members, and only the limits of their complacency need circumscribe that which might be included. It was then, perhaps, that the seeds were sewn for his new "church".

Following the curtailment of Johnson's correspondence with Russell, references to Buddhism and theosophy for the most part disappear. His plans for his "missionary work" in conjunction with Russell also disappear, although the abrupt break did not end his general questioning of religious principles of which his delving into Buddhism had been only a part. For the present he contented himself with a fascinated acceptance of the idea that the resurrection of Christ was probably the deed of an adept or Mahatma, and

then barely stretching himself, he suggested that he could "almost believe Christ was a re-incarnation of Buddha."[64]

This willingness to accept the proposition that two bodies of thought hitherto considered mutually exclusive were in fact aspects of a single spiritual reality, marked the first stage of movement in Johnson's spiritual life. He continued to feel, paradoxically, since he was so unsure of its existence, that he was striving toward Truth, and that it was necessary to continue to strive "earnestly . . . after the light which lighteth every man coming into the world",[65] for the pursuit of such a goal constituted, he felt, "the highest life possible for me and such as I."[66] It was this quest which led him, perhaps forgetting his earlier objections to such terms in relation to Buddhism, to call himself "Idealist, Spiritualist, Transcendentalist."[67] He was not to be deterred by the loss of a friendly and sympathetic correspondent, and although Buddhism never surfaced again as a major influence, it had begun a process that was perhaps more long-lasting than even Johnson himself suspected. Yet the obvious sincerity with which Johnson espoused these deviations from Christian orthodoxy suggests that the _soi disant_ 'skeptic' was not entirely uninfluenced by great dogmas of Christian theology and in particular by those aspects he called "rabid" protestantism. His willingness to pursue any avenue of escape leads us to the conclusion that the problems arising from a belief in dogmas like

justification and perpetual damnation were more personal than he might consciously have been willing to concede. He had first looked at Christianity with a need to doubt and this had led him to Buddhism. But paradoxically, he felt that he had, in his espousal of Buddhism, opened the door for the defeat of skepticism and the victory of belief, or at least for the pursuit of belief. Earlier he had said, "I never believed". Yet as he wrote to Russell in one of his last letters on Buddhism, "to get any belief at all implies a gradual ascent in belief, irresistibly."[68] The logic that allowed him to speak of an irresistible ascent to belief was questionable. But he seems to have decided that belief itself was a goal worth the energy he might expend in its pursuit. However, it remained to be decided whether his skepticism could indeed be defeated and his character changed as substantially as he seemed to desire.

NOTES

CHAPTER II

[1]John Stuart Mill, _Autobiography_, Introduction by Currin V. Schields (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1957), 153.

[2]_Ibid._, 173.

[3]Mill, 46.

[4]Leslie Stephens, _An Agnostic's Apology and Other Essays_ (London: John Murray, 1903). The earliest of these essays dates from 1876.

[5]G.M. Young, _Portrait of an Age_ (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), 109.

[6]Mill, 30.

[7]A.O.J. Cockshut, _Anglican Attitudes: A Study of Victorian Religious Controversies_ (London: Collins, 1959), 36.

[8]But as Leslie Stephens noted, even Newman was willing to use evolutionary principles in his _Grammar of Assent_ (1869).

[9]Maurice, the Anglican theologian, was dismissed in 1854, from the Chair of Theology at King's College, in London, for holding this view.

[10]See "The Religion of All Sensible Men", _op. cit._

[11]Matthew Arnold, _Literature and Dogma_, edited and abridged by James C. Livingston (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1970), 2.

[12]_Ibid._, xvii.

[13]*Ibid.*, 49-69. The importance of the "poetry" of religion was obvious to the young Yeats. In his *Autobiographies*, he writes of the founding of the Hermetic Society in Dublin in 1885: "I had, when we first made our society, proposed for our consideration that whatever the great poets had affirmed in their finest moments was the nearest we could come to an authoritative religion, and that their mythology, their spirits of water and wind were but literal truth." (111)

[14]Arnold, 5.

[15]Stephen's religion was simply a code of conduct, a Boy Scout manual for the sophisticated, based on the values of an English gentleman. See *An Agnostic's Apology, passim*.

[16]Arnold, 7.

[17]*Ibid.*, 9.

[18]*Ibid.*

[19]Cockshut, 31. The quotation continues, "one theological idea was dropped overboard and hardly noticed: that was original sin."

[20]Mrs. Humphrey Ward, *Robert Elsmere*, edited with an introduction by Clyde de L. Ryals (Lincoln: Nebraska Press, 1967), 496.

[21]But if the coming death of Christianity as a result of the new scientific attitude focussed for some, on the criticism of the miraculous in the Bible, for others the new sciences and their discoveries presented quite another kind of challenge, though without reducing that element of criticism. Marie Corelli's protagonist, Heliobas, in her *Romance of Two Worlds* (London: Robert Bentley and Son, 1890), first published in 1885, demonstrates just such an integration as he recounts to his lady disciple, the novel's narrator, how both heaven and earth and every creature in those worlds, are maintained by their inner electrical resources. This "electrical creed" Miss Corelli seems to have advanced seriously as a solution to the problem she

perceived in the separation of science and religion, and she recounts in an appendix (424-442) to the second edition (1887) how her novel has saved many from the void of "scientific atheism". This solution had an affinity with Mrs. Ward's and those other earlier efforts in that it too sought to de-mythologize, de-mystify, and de-dogmatize Christianity. It too was "completely borne out by the New Testament" (xiii), and sought to unite all men through a return to the earlier simplicity, looking to "a new Apostle of Christ" who, it was hoped would arise to "preach His grandly simple message anew." (xix)

[22]Helena Petrovna Blavatsk *Isis Unveiled* (Pasadena: The Theosophical University Press, 1972), Vol. II, Part II, iii.

[23]*Ibid.*

[24]See Gertrude Marvin Williams, *Priestess of the Occult: Madame Blavatsky* (New York: Fred A. Knopf, 1946), in which Mrs. Williams portrays Madame Blavatsky as a woman forced to make her own way in the world after a disastrous marriage. She stumbled into the money-making possibilities of the occult and thereafter made it her career.

[25]A.P. Sinnett, *The Occult World* (London: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1969), 3-4. It was originally published in 1881.

[26]We need only look at Yeats's early experiments as he describes them in his autobiographical notes. See *Autobiographies*.

[27]Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, Vol. II, iv.

[28]Curiously, this desire to reaching toward an early purity was equally important in the study of Buddhism, as Henri de Lubac points out in his analysis of H.S. Olcott's *Buddhism* (Olcott was another of Madame Blavatsky's collaborators) in which Olcott attempts a presentation of Buddhism as it was *before* the Indians had begun to tinker with it. Original Buddhism was now revealed to Olcott by a key that had been given him by a Tibetan monk. *La Rencontre du Bouddhisme et de l'Occident* (Paris: Editions Montaigne,

1952), 209. Sinnett in The Occult World, goes even further back in time, quoting from Isis Unveiled to make himself clear: "When we use the word Buddhism, we do not mean to imply by it either the exoteric Buddhism instituted by the followers of Gautama Buddha, or the modern Buddhistic religion, but the secret philosophy of Sakyamuni, which in its essence, is certainly identical with the ancient wisdom-religion of the sanctuary--the pre-Vedic Brahmanism. The schism of Zoroaster, as it is called, is a direct proof of it." (143)

[29]Mrs. Williams comments: ". . . shortly after Sinnett's return to London [in 1883], he had published a second book, Esoteric Buddhism, which presented the Theosophical cosmology as outlined in the letters from Mahatmas [Sinnett's Tibetan informants]. Heavier reading than The Occult World, it did not run through many editions, but it was seized upon eagerly by the 'serious thinkers.'" (217)

[30]Yeats encountered Esoteric Buddhism in 1885 (Joseph Hone, W.B. Yeats (London: Macmillan, 1965), 47. But he was already involved with theosophists, and by 1889, having moved to London, was visiting Madame Blavatsky every six weeks for conversation and consultations. At an earlier date in Dublin he had offered Sinnett's book to a student who was planning to go to the South Seas as a missionary. After reading the book, the student "came out an esoteric Buddhist. He wrote to the missionaries withdrawing his letter and offered himself to the Theosophical Society as a Chela." Autobiographies, 112.

[31]Mrs. Williams describes in detail Sinnett's and Madame Blavatsky's activities when, eventually, they made it to India. See chapters 12-16.

[32]Of Sinnett, Henri de Lubac wrote, "En fait de Bouddhisme, ses connaissances étaient banales", and of Esoteric Buddhism, "Le Bouddhisme qu'ils enseignent constitue aussi bien le fond du brahamanisme et de toutes les autres religions du monde. C'est une science secrète, à base de cosmogonie . . . Maintenant, grâce à Sinnett, tous les secrets s'étalent au grand jour. Chacun peut connaître tous les rouages de la machine compliquée de l'univers." (212)

[33]The popularity of the work gives an insight into the innocuous nature of his offering. The work itself is distinctly neo-Keatsian, with luxuriant descriptions of exotic scenes in the manner of "The Eve of St. Agnes". A later note will show the Christian influence, that is, the series of parallels in which Arnold indulges, whether consciously or not, in order to render acceptable the life and thoughts of one who was in the estimation of Johnson's father (and no doubt many others as well), "anti-Christ".

[34]According to de Lubac, there had been, by 1930, more than fifty editions in London and one hundred in the United States. Appreciative readers included Mahatma Gandhi and A.K. Coomaraswamy, a Buddhist scholar of note. (209)

[35]SWL, 16 October 1883.

[36]SWL, 16 October 1883. This had become a cliche by the eighties. One can turn to Froude's comments on Carlyle's experience in the thirties as a description of the situation in almost archetypal terms. (my italics)

> There had come upon him the trial which *in these days* awaits every man of high intellectual gifts and noble nature on their first actual acquaintance with human things--the question, far deeper than any mere political one, What is this world then, what is this human life, over which a just God is said to preside, but of whose presence of whose providence so few signs are visible?

James Anthony Froude, *Life of Carlyle*, ed. John Clubbe (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1979), 118.

[37]SWL, 16 October 1883.

[38]*Ibid*.

[39]SWL, 14 October 1883.

[40]SWL, 16 October 1883.

[41]SWL, 18 October 1883.

[42]SWL, 21 October 1883.

[43]See Hoxie Neale Fairchild, The Romantic Quest (Philadelphia: Albert Saifer, 1931), 141, where he calls descendentalism "the downward-looking and realistic element in romanticism." This he contrasts with the transcendental urges also typical of the romantic poet.

[44]SWL, 18 October 1883. This is the second of two letters written the same day. My italics.

[45]Ibid.

[46]Ibid.

[47]"Rabid" Protestantism consisted of what might loosely be called Calvinistic attitudes and doctrines.

[48]SWL, 22 October 1883.

[49]SWL, 21 October 1883.

[50]SWL, 18 October 1883.

[51]Horton Davies, Worship and Theology in England: From Newman to Martineau 1850-1900 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 198.

[52]SWL, 30 November 1883.

[53]SWL, 20 November 1883.

[54]SWL, 30 November 1883. He mentions two works, Arthur Little's Popular Life of Buddha, to which I have found no reference elsewhere, and Rhys David's Hibbert lectures on Buddhism. David was a respected scholar of the day.

[55]SWL, 2 November 1883.

[56]SWL, 18 October 1883.

[57]SWL, 21 October 1883.

[58]SWL, 13 November 1883.

[59]SWL, 30 November 1883.

[60]SWL, 2 November 1883.

[61]SWL, 20 December 1883.

[62]Johnson was not the only one who sought to show that links existed between Christianity and Buddhism. Edwin Arnold presents as Christ-like a Buddha as possible, even to faint redemptorist echoes which historians generally call a later addition to Buddhist theology prominent in Mahayana lore. His sacrifice is the refusal of immediate Nirvana consequent upon his enlightenment: "a thousand million more / Saved by this sacrifice I offer now." (99) We see Buddha carrying a lamb, speaking of "my sheep" (128); we see his temptation before his mission by the great vices personified; and we hear of his talk of love at the heart of the law. Nor was Arnold the only author who sought thus to render Buddhism palatable to a western audience.

[63]See Leslie Stephen, An Agnostic's Apology, for a lucid and complete discussion from a similar point of view.

[64]SWL, 21 October 1883.

[65]SWL, 11 February 1884.

[66]Ibid.

[67]SWL, 18 February 1884.

[68]SWL, 30 April 1884.

CHAPTER III

THE DREAM OF YOUTH:

THE REFORM OF CHRISTIANITY AND AFTER

Johnson's study of Buddhism was only one manifestation of the spiritual and intellectual odyssey that he shared with so many others, and like his fellow searchers he seemed to accept Matthew Arnold's own "unverifiable assumption" about the imminent and inevitable decline and perhaps disappearance of Christianity. Nor did he question this proposition's corollary which assumed the necessity for radical change in the Church. He had only to look around, seemingly, to verify this for himself. Thus, although his study of Buddhism and Madame Blavatsky's explanations of the mysteries of ancient Tibet gradually assumed secondary importance, he continued his scrutiny of those elements in the contemporary religious scene which had earlier provoked Arnold's latitudinarianism. He looked particularly at those aspects of religious life in England which called forth in his own mind an emphasis similar to Arnold's on the reconception of Christianity and the overthrow of dogma.

With an exaggerated sense of confidence, Johnson set about, in those early letters to his friends,[1] the task

of sketching what amounted to nothing less than a programme of reform for the established Church. The negative evidence he had garnered, in his comparison of Buddhism and Christianity, as to the failings of Christian dogma generally, was added to in a more direct examination of the Church of England. He thought he knew why the established Church had failed (of its failure there seemed no doubt), "because it talks of sin and not of love",[2] and he thought he saw what the Church should be doing, teaching "a universal love, a tender sympathy for all men".[3] He also saw how rarely this was done and the unlikelihood that the "dotards", as he called the priests of the established Church, were about to accommodate themselves, in their "rotten old pulpits",[4] to the changes that were so obviously necessary. He still believed, as had Arnold, that "the Church, perverted, protesting, reactionary, the Church [was] still the main witness of the truth as it is in Christ."[5] Like Arnold, he felt that Christ's simple message had been obscured by the accretions of dogma and usage (Arnold's <u>Aberglaube</u>), but even more, he felt that the attention of the worshippers had been misdirected into a concern for dogma and dogmatic purity. The "bondage of dogma",[6] as he called it in an early letter, had to be broken and "the devil of orthodoxy"[7] exorcised. The institutions of orthodoxy, so much taken up by their "God-manufacture",[8] had to be brought to realize the power for good that lay in their grasp, "the countless

influences of the pulpit and the altar, all potent against the devil in even feeble hands."[9] But in order to bring these influences to bear, the Church would have to change, and without hesitation Johnson pronounced himself confident in his ability to sketch out the "more sensible and higher doctrines"[10] that were needed in order to achieve this change.

Johnson's "more sensible" solutions to the problem of the Church's ineffectiveness were marked by a steady and seemingly unconscious movement away from the transcendental position in religious criticism. He had stated bluntly that he had found Buddhism's exalted ideals impractical. In the same way Christianity's other-worldly concerns had now become, for him, of secondary importance. "Mere life, mere life," he wrote, "that is enough: not the thought alone, not the various work not the pleasures alone: but the mere reality of common existence. That solves all the questions: is it possible to hate or be jealous, to teach or to injure, when I can reject no one and no thing? Brotherhood is God."[11] The discovery of God in the idea of a universal brotherhood was an idea present in the writings of Plato, Shelley, Hugo, and many others, (all "saints" in his constellation of heroes). It was therefore fit to occupy so central a position.[12] Like Mrs. Ward, Johnson saw the need to direct each man's attention to the good of his fellow, although he was less than taken with humanity as a

collectivity, of which he later wrote, "Humanity is a sham", adding, "but poor sinning men and women are no shams."[13] Just as when he espoused reincarnation and the universality of transcendence in Buddhism, he now saw the need for a doctrine whereby all poor sinners might be saved.

However, Johnson's thoughts were moving in other directions as well. Johnson's assertion that his "sensible" doctrines could solve "all questions" was simply absurd. But it is clear that, for him, his beliefs, particularly that in the idea of Brotherhood as God, were far-reaching in their implications. Even though the idea of a school boy, Johnson's decision to support man's total involvement in the "mere reality of common existence" and his belief in the necessity of openness to reality in all its diversity made excellent sense. His "sensible" doctrines were meant to counterbalance the contemporary emphasis on dogma and its corollary, the Victorian insistence on absolute morality in daily life. But they also moved him beyond concepts of good and evil. His new view of human existence in which nothing was "common or unclean", and where the individual could reject "no one and no thing", perhaps even more than the ideal of a brotherhood of love for sinners, contributed to his distrust of dogma and dogmatic attitudes and practices, and of all that was absolute in morality and in religion.

Johnson's disquiet had no doubt grown from that

native skepticism which had its roots in his earliest years when he "found one of [his] chief pleasures in secretly pulling to pieces the Bible."[14] That action later seemed to him a fit characterization of his attitude toward religion as he knew it. As he had written to Frank Russell, "you are wrong in supposing that I ever believed the old creeds", and, as if to emphasize his certainty on the point, he continued, "as a child I never believed: my mind is essentially skeptical."[15] It was this skepticism, rising from among the shredded Bibles, which had paved the way for Buddhism as well as his paradoxical hope in the principles of love and brotherhood, and it required little encouragement for him to go on to challenge the great orthodox Christian doctrines. But when he attempted to replace these doctrines, Johnson was forced to confront both the Christ in Christianity and the Hebrew God of its Judaic heritage. Need religion be theocentric and trinitarian? Uncertainty on his part and unwillingness to offend his correspondents precluded for a time any effort to provide a well-focussed definition of Godhead, and his first strategy was to avoid the effort completely. "I hate definition as a meanness toward the Infinite",[16] he wrote when plainly hard pressed to respond on the issue. But he could not hide for long his clearly non-anthropomorphic deity. In May of 1884, by which time Buddhism was well behind him, he wrote of his disbelief "perhaps" in "a personal God", although he added, "I believe

in Jesus."[17] To the most open-minded of his correspondents, Frank Russell, he had earlier spoken more plainly of the death of his belief even in the divinity of Christ: "My Christ is gone, and I cannot find another, or even the old one."[18] Much later, he wrote, this time to Badley, that Christ was "but a dead Man" although still "the one completion of mankind . . . a perfect man [and] all God."[19] He could not even bring himself to exclude the possibility of a pantheistic vision of the universe: "I think that the world itself, nature, will do for me to worship if I can't find a God.[20] He did not believe in closing any doors.

But in a curious way, and half tongue-in-cheek, Johnson had found a God, and was moving to establish and clarify his own vision. His idea of God necessarily grew from what remained after the rejection of those supernatural qualities which orthodox theologies emphasized. Johnson's rejection of the miraculous, in the tradition of Hennell and Strauss, insured a God of more 'human' proportions. He could write facetiously, "I don't worship God, I worship myself sometimes."[21] But later, more seriously, he exclaimed: "No! I have not found my God in your sense [presumably the evangelical sense of personal encounter] for I never lost him: never doubted him: by 'him' I mean, facts and thoughts and persons and possibilities, not I, but part of me."[22] Johnson is obviously attempting to deflect his opponent's arguments by resorting to vehemence. But the

statement is still clear in its willingness to dispute the evangelical, anthropomorphic vision of God, if only in that elevation represented by the use of capitals which Johnson, with his repetition of "him", rather pointedly neglects. Two months earlier he had relied on a similar facetious tone to provide a defence, and then too, he had offered a curious clarification of his concept of God. "Ah, is Christ God? or is Frederic Harrison [the noted positivist and atheist]? or am I truly the only God allowed to myself: I will accept any of them, if only I can live by him."[23] Clearly, despite elements of obfuscation in his letters, Johnson had arrived at some conclusions. He had replaced the conventional picture of the Christian deity with something quite different, something in f-ct much more human. Johnson's reference to God as "facts and thoughts and persons and possibilities, not I, but part of me" was not entirely, or simply, the artistic liberty of the casual letter writer that it might have appeared at first view. His ideals of brotherhood and universal love and his distrust of Positivism's "humanity" allowed him quite simply to concentrate on the God-like potentialities of the individual. He had written the truth: barring the claims of Frederic Harrison, he was indeed "God".

Given the range of opinion that found voice in the many sects of the period, there was nothing particularly untenable in Johnson's pronouncements. But we are of course

dealing with the writings of a school boy, even if one sensitive to the world of ideas in which he found himself. In some sense he typified a certain kind of Victorian explorer who imperturbably set out to acquaint himself with a new continent. Though he would have spurned the comparison, he had, like Comte, decided to reform religion so that it might better serve man, and, strange to say, his ideas were intrinsically as sound as those of Comte. Comte, however, chose to propogate his revolutionary ideas. Johnson did not. However, he still felt it necessary to continue his explorations.

Johnson's 'deification' of the individual involved first a recognition of the unity of the human condition, and an acceptance of the necessity for each man to participate in all facets of existence in order to be happy.[24] Sensuality, the bugbear of Victorian society, had now to be accepted, nay respected, and even protected because Johnson felt that it had been and was continually being corrupted by the very morality which had been established, one had to suppose, to prevent its misuse.[25] Now, sensuality had to be removed from under the mantle of morality so that it could once again become a valid part of man's life. "I have", he wrote, "such perfect sympathy with all forms of life and thought, and nothing really is repulsive to me."[26] As he wrote to Russell (having succeeded in resuming their correspondence) in September of 1884,

> I think . . . that the stress and play of life and emotion here [on earth] is perfect in wisdom; "Good will somehow be the goal of ill; that's what all the blessed evil's for"; ugliness, pain; these are the serene notes struck from the organ soul of God; nay, are God. To create beautiful things where poor ugliness was; to seal kisses where Society's pariah-brand gloomed; is not this God? And you strive and battle against God, and do not win your desires. I tell you, be happy, for that is to know God; be sinful, for that is to feel God; be all things, for that is to be God.[27]

Existence itself participated in the divinity of the Godhead, and although one strove to create beauty out of ugliness, awareness of both contributed to awareness of 'God'. 'God' was manifest every day to each man in all his actions and sentiments and feelings. 'God' was the world and man's experience of the world, and the spirit of change in the world, that is, the tendency to good and beauty in the world. But 'God' was nonethless also real in evil and ugliness. For this reason man could embrace any experience and still enter into holiness. "Men", wrote Johnson, "shall be told that they may be sensualists, liars, cowards, worldlings, even vestrymen, and yet men as high as Christ. My Church may reek with the fumes of wine and cigars, and ring with the cries of gambling hells and brothels. [I want to] make men who are immoral, trivial, careless, believe that the world is holy by their presence."[28] He had chosen a difficult gospel to propagate in the world of late-Victorian England.

Johnson's assumptions about the inter-involvement of this 'God' and His creation as he described it involved

nothing less than the destruction of all the old moral structures that had grown from and through dogmatic Christianity. A new morality had therefore to make its appearance. "I could kneel at the feet of all the 'sins'," he wrote, "and ask their blessing because I do not know why or wherefore I should condemn them."[29] When the more timid of his correspondents apparently asked whether he had forgotten the meaning of evil, he left behind his earlier hesitancy with the declaration that "I do not know the word 'morality' or the word 'immorality'."[30] The God of his fathers was no more; the morality of his fathers was no more. To these he opposed his own axioms: "There is no hell: no sin: no anthropomorphism: no evil: no unclean_iness: all [is] love."[31] There could be no greater challenge to orthodox notions of morality and religion, and for his contemporaries, no part of this vision could have been redeemed by the cry that "all [is] love". Only in the imagination of its adolescent creator could this vision of universal love conquer all.

Curiously, the practical side of "living by" the God of his choice did entail, for Johnson, recourse to Christianity as it existed, although neither as God-centred, nor as heaven-centred. There were, of course, no miracles in Johnson's refurbished Christianity. Instead he chose as his religious centre, or rather as his point of reference, a set of teachings which happened to be those of Jesus Christ.

He could exclaim, "Christ Lives!"[32] But it was life only insofar as it was given Him by His words. Like the views he attributed to Shelley, Johnson "believed in Christianity: by which [he meant] the story of the Gospels, as a literature of practical didacticism".[33] The Christ he accepted had died, and might or might not have risen on the third day. Even in rising He might have been a reincarnated Buddha, or an 'adept' in Madame Blavatsky's understanding of the word.[34] But he was most of all a teacher, one of a long line, whose fate and words most certainly could not be drawn into arguments about atonement or justification.[35] "I believe in Jesus: He may be dead: but not His words or life: they are deathless."[36] Only a week later, and with his statements obviously under attack, he explained his earlier comments but qualified their more extreme implications.

> Christ [is] the one completion of humanity, being the most human in his divinity and, observe, Christ is pure man, all man, essential man: full of warm life and love, a perfect man: but all God, the thought raised to the glories of ecstatic passion of love and true Godhead by the force of "<u>Burning</u> fires of love": God in essence, man in substance, perfect God, perfect man. Is that orthodox? or only true? I think I am no heretic.[37]

The emphasis on the "<u>Burning</u> fires of love", calling to mind the language of the mystics, could not, however, overcome the divorce he here intimated (and often expressed) between Christ the man and Christ the God, the one found by Johnson in words and deeds as history had recorded them, and the

other separated from the real world by theology as expressed in dogmas -- in short, by the discredited element of miracle. Johnson believed in Christ as human teacher, and in the statement of his belief announced the intention to see his world in human terms. Just as Buddha had taught a moral order, so too had Christ, and as far as Johnson was concerned, these two _men_ had taught more or less the same things. Johnson's world view had no room for justification or atonement, and the prayers commonly offered to the Deity he saw simply as giving a personal comfort because there was no one to hear them.[38] In the new order, love was everything, and man approached the Godhead in proportion as he allowed that love to flood his being. In effect, man became the centre, became God.

Here was change indeed. In thus dispensing with Christianity's anthropomorphic God, in renouncing the system of rewards and punishments upon which Christianity seemed so firmly built, and in eliminating the Judeo-Christian emphasis upon the covenant and mediation, Johnson effectively dismissed God the Father from the centre of the universe. In rejecting the concept of an infinitely caring God who would want to intervene in time, he eliminated Christ's mission insofar as it might be the culmination of God's mercy and His plan for man's salvation. Finally, in emphasizing the teachings rather than the Teacher, he effectively eliminated any pretensions to a unique role for

the Christian Church in history. These conclusions were not, however, broadcast to the world. They remained the secret of Johnson and his correspondents, for he still kept in mind his determination to be an Anglican priest. But perhaps most important for his own future was the way in which he had begun, very literally, to clear the decks. His conclusions indicated, if nothing else, his determination to build his own belief structure, if structure there had to be.

In the meantime he did not seek to remove all dogma out of hand from Christianity. With more than a touch of adolescent arrogance, he had begun his explorations by commenting to Russell: "Why do people want dogmas, and refuse to live without abstruse creeds? and why do they want to know everything, when they are quite as happy in reverent ignorance? I never felt the want of definite creeds, or of an anthropomorphic Savior; I don't understand the need for them."[39] But he was rarely so determinedly logical. Rather, dogmas tended either to survive or be rejected in his scheme of reconstruction as they appealed to his sense of justice, or to his sense of beauty, or most curiously, to his desire for religious peace. Indeed, it was to satisfy those unwilling to accept "dogmatic ignorance", and to end, at least in part, the curious bickering which resulted, that Johnson sought to neutralize the conflict which grew from this seemingly irrational need for

dogma. The first great pillar of his new "church" had been universal love and brotherhood. He now proposed a second, a "gospel of tolerance and laisser aller",[40] which was the ultimate challenge to orthodoxy because it eliminated any distinction between orthodoxy and heresy. It was the doctrine of live and let live. Johnson felt that only when man became completely tolerant of his neighbour's opinions in religious matters would the threat of doctrinal conflict and divisiveness disappear. His own belief in the validity of all genuine religious experience made the conclusion seem logical and simply an extension of his ideas on universal love and brotherhood; for where men loved, they could not harm. We can see, in his continual arguments in support of his point of view, both Badley's and Sayle's unwillingness to accept so complete a degree of toleration and Johnson's inability to understand their objections to a 'gospel' that satisfied so completely the needs of mankind. From his rebuttals we can infer that they diagnosed his attitude as simple indifference, not merely to dogma, but, in combination with his beliefs concerning God and Jesus, to the moral standards which had grown from dogma. Inevitably, they seemed to have felt that a new morality, or more horrid yet, an amorality, must accompany his new dogma of no dogma. And although they knew of Johnson's wholehearted acceptance of certain Christian elements and of his frequent attendance at service and communion within the Church of England, they

must still have felt they had reason to fear for his future as a Christian, a not unnatural fear given the nature of the letters they had received.

Johnson's correspondents no doubt thought their fears justified when, in August of 1884, Johnson first wrote of yet another advance in his thinking, "my gospel of commonplace",[41] which he set beside that of tolerance and *laisser aller*, for it drew together all the strands of his thought, including his concept of man's innate godliness, and did indeed complete the thrust toward a new morality. To the extent that he wished to systematize his conclusions about this new morality, Johnson felt permitted (by the absence of hell, sin, anthropomorphism, evil, and uncleanliness) to speak of love as the single great animating principle which would bring men together. Therefore, he accepted with equanimity the absence of moral imperatives of whatever sort. "Quincunque vult," wrote Johnson, echoing St. Augustine, "I believe [this] dogma",[42] neglecting, however, to add St. Augustine's command to "love God". Already his statements about kneeling "at the feet of all the sins" implied carrying the all-powerful role of this love to disturbing lengths. But now he signalled a final break with the old world of religion in his statement that he could "do no wrong for [he knew] not what wrong [was]",[43] abolishing thereby all the moral expressions of approval or disapproval growing from the old imperatives. In his 'new'

world, love was the only arbiter and loving relationships the only reality. Yet, although he saw no need of words like morality and immorality, and saint and sinner, he still felt a need to characterize realities of a negative sort insofar as his new system permitted such characterizations. It was no doubt his growing interest in art which led him to use the vocabulary of aesthetics in place of that of conventional morality and to see those human acts habitually considered moral as no more than "artistic aspects of life".[44] He felt the aesthetic standards he thus brought into play to be broader than mere morality as a basis for judgement. "A bad painting: a starving family: a false note:" he wrote, "all wrong, equally wrong, all springing from the same causes, all to be remedied, protested against. Love: love every one and all things, laugh at bad things".[45] He condemned whatever marred the aesthetic whole even when society was involved and although the inconsistencies of his statement are manifest (Does aestheticism call upon us to feed the poor? Can love remedy a bad painting?) Johnson's conclusion remained: it was not in conventional morality or in conventional religion that man discovered the way, the truth, and the life. Aestheticism, "the gospel of emotion waking as an artistic morality",[46] was a more reasonable basis for judgement.

It is impossible to speak of the extent to which Johnson actually used an aesthetic morality as the basis for

his actions, or whether he even tried to do so. What we do know is that his behavior as a student was everything it should have been. Patrick tells us of prizes won: the English Literature Prize in 1883; in 1885, the English and Historical Essay Prizes as well as the English Verse Medal and a scholarship to New College, Oxford.[47] During those years he acted in succession as Prefect of Chapel, of School, and of Library, and he was a member of a committee in charge of the school's Mission at Landport, Portsmith, a mission, Fletcher tells us, "in the charge of a very advanced Anglo-Catholic clergyman".[48] He became editor of the school newspaper and increased its literary content, although mostly with his own work. And in his moments of relaxation, he developed "a propensity for smoking a clay pipe and sitting up all night, talking."[49] Only Herbert Fisher's comments about Johnson's Buddhism and his drinking of "eau de cologne for his amusement" carry the faintest trace of the unconventional. Thus Johnson's speculations would seem to have been completely divorced from the realities of his life at school. But that did not make them any less important. He had obviously thought a good deal about aestheticism and in his own mind it _had_ become a more reasonable basis for judgement.

Johnson's desire to avoid the conventional was probably one reason for his wish to prove "the inferiority of morality to art."[50] But once having accepted aesthetic

standards as the basis for his moral breakthrough, everything else seemed to fall into place. How calmly he allowed art to replace morality, and artistic instinct to replace conscience! ". . . when I meet with a question of morals, [my answer] to the question [is] not 'what does my conscience tell me I should do?' but 'by doing what, would [my] artistic instinct be satisfied? what does the moment tell [me] it requires for itself?'"[51] In this new synthesis he side-stepped neatly the old conflict of transcendental and descendental, as the two now became inextricably entwined. But the synthesis also drew him away from his avowed task of church reconstruction. In a letter to Russell he wrote, "it is more in creating that one sees the truth of my gospel of commonplace and <u>laisser aller</u>; when I catch an exact cadence for my line, or find a subtle alliteration, or succeed in presenting a character, I know that morality is non-existent."[52] Thus even as he asserted that all his speculations remained within the bounds of his "gospel", he gave clear indications that the direction in which, perhaps unconsciously, he had begun to move was that which would take him away from religion altogether and into the world of art.

The extent to which Johnson refused to recognize the implications of these speculations, as well as his loss of contact with the real world, showed most acutely in his continuing desire for ordination into the Anglican

priesthood, after which he hoped like a true revolutionary to use his pulpit to propagate his own gospels. To that end he proposed to accept a set of compromises that were at the least peculiar:

> . . . I see an ancient Church professing Christ as her Head with certain practical government and articled faith: with Shelley for polestar and Whitman for pilot I accept Bishop's tithes (a hard stumbling block), 39 Articles, even Lord Penzance [a civil judge appointed by cabinet to arbitrate theological disputes]: believing in none of these things, caring for none, if you throw them at me as facts: but thankfully taking home as painful yearnings after light these well nigh vulgarities and refusing to set the world's trivialities as rocks of offence in my own way.[53]

This willingness to sacrifice his personal integrity led his friends to brand his behavior as Jesuitical. He met the charges on very simple grounds: "I lie, that love may abound. Too hard for you, is it? you will not swear falsely, you will not lie? But I, your brother, will do that, for Jesus' sake, for yours and for all men's . . . Are not my lying and my Jesuitry the quintessence of Truth?"[54] This reasoning hardly appeased his questioning friends, who demanded consistency, if nothing else, and got the opposite. "When the Incarnation is helpful," he answered, "I will preach It! When It alarms I will pass It by: when It disgusts I will deny It. Wouldn't you, to help your brothers?"[55] While vividly making his point, Johnson could not reasonably have expected others to value as highly as he did the strange consistency with which he pursued the welfare of the individual.

However, Johnson's inconsistency in matters of dogma did no more than emphasize the evolving artistic nature of his "church" into which he sought to incorporate the unpredictability he saw as essential to creation in the arts. Like a work of art in action, his "church" would be always evolving, always a work-in-progress, and never a museum piece. In a letter written in August of 1884, he presented his vision.

> And my Church work will be the same [as that of artists]; the reading of antiquated, picturesque prayers; the preaching [of] heresies to one's brothers; the whole system of Church order would be merely acts of independent creation; true, not absolutely free acts; but free, so far as I am able to use freedom, which point I have settled to my own satisfaction.[56]

Given the nature of the artistic license he meant to use (and he stated outright, "I do not give up my freedom [in becoming a priest]"), his "church" promised never to be finished, or even clearly sketched.

But in having settled it to his own satisfaction Johnson hardly brought into play the sense of the practical he had called upon in his earlier examination of Buddhism. His desire to preach "my own crotchets",[57] as he called them, could not possibly have been achieved except for a very short time in the conventional atmosphere of Victorian England and in a church that was, moreover, as A.O.J. Cockshut notes in Anglican Attitudes,[58] more determined than ever to exercise control over its internal affairs. What would the established Church have made of a man who could

write of himself, "I am naturally by birth devoid of so-called conscience and moral instinct"? It was too much to assume that any institution would ever allow him to pursue what he thought of as his mission to the world. With a similar free spirit, and more particularly with a lack of belief in the Thirty-Nine Articles, Walter Pater had been denied entry into the Anglican priesthood in the sixties even though he too had been willing to swear to the validity of the Articles.[59]

Although without "so-called conscience and moral instinct", Johnson did possess the integrity essential to the creation of art. How much more likely, then, and more appropriate that he should find himself drawn into the world of art and poetry, a world without the elaborate panoply of the religious quest. Indeed, the emotional and spiritual satisfactions he had taken from his involvement in religious reform were slowly being replaced by those he found as a poet. "I can find in my art", he wrote, "if I may so call it, the most intense comfort."[60] And later, in the same letter, "The mysterious fascination of poetry is wonderful: to throw oneself out of oneself into one's inner self seems, and is, absolutely a passion with me."[61] In poetry he found both a substitute for the "delights of theology",[62] now somewhat faded, and an escape from its disappointments, because "poetry has no relation to morality nor theology nor theosophy, but is for itself."[63] More and more, the

"delights" of theology were being replaced by a "delight in the structure of a sonnet or villanelle, [or] the cadence of a verse."[64] By April of 1885, he was writing that there was "nothing on earth . . . equally sovereign with poetry."[65] Here indeed was escape from the "endless region of faith and doubt", in which he had found "life becom[ing] weary of itself."[66] He now sought the "higher, more dignified way", a way entirely different from that which had led him to contemplate the reform of the English Church and the rescue of his fellow man, a way that took him instead into a world of beauty. The words of another day when he anticipated the rise of faith, 'irresistibly', seemed no longer to have meaning. But after having embraced an antinomianism of the kind Pater characterized as the "spirit of rebellion and revolt against the moral and religious ideas of the time",[67] and having done so even as he tried to build his "church", he now sought structure and belief in another milieu where the resurgence of religious faith seemed unimportant. This time, faith's irresistible rise, to which he had looked forward so eagerly, was easily held in abeyance as he followed the "higher, more dignified way" into the world of art and beauty. Little in his new and antinomian "church" with its laisser alle approach had been able, finally, to call into being a world in which he might escape the endless debates in the "region of faith and doubt". For the security he wanted he turned to art. Beauty at least, and

good art, he could know. About beauty there could be no doubts at all.

NOTES

CHAPTER III

[1]The correspondents to whom he wrote determined in considerable measure the subject matter that Johnson dealt with in each letter. In his letters to Frank Russell, all was Buddhism and Theosophy. But to Badley, whose interests were obviously more orthodox, or at least more Christian, nothing Buddhist appears. Thus while in the last three months of 1883 he plotted his Buddhist activities with Russell, he saw no problem in writing to Badley about the Church of England, using knowledge he gained in one study to advance his arguments in the other. The letters echo each other, for the criticisms were the same even if the degree of daring he used to express them was not. Russell tolerated, nay, seemed to elicit, but Badley contradicted, his more curious speculations. The third correspondence, with Charles Sayle, was situated somewhere between these two extremes.

[2]SWL, 19 May 1884.

[3]SWL, 16 October 1884.

[4]SWL, 7 October 1883.

[5]SWL, 26 May 1884.

[6]SWL, 7 October 1883.

[7]SWL, 18 February 1884.

[8]SWL, 4 May 1884.

[9]SWL, 10 May 1884.

[10]SWL, 7 October 1883.

[11]SWL, April 1884. No specific date given. We have here further examples of his eccentric punctuation

[12]"I should not think much," he wrote, "of a religion that had no . . . universal brotherhood." This brotherhood seemed at times very like Comte's Religion of Humanity, but Johnson rejected Positivism with little hesitation. "Positivism I regard as the height of absurdity." (7 October 1883). Echoes of Walt Whitman's "democracy" will be noted later.

[13]SWL, 4 May 1884.

[14]SWL, 26 April 1884.

[15]SWL, 21 October 1883.

[16]SWL, 19 May 1884.

[17]SWL, 10 May 1884.

[18]SWL, 16 October 1883.

[19]SWL, 19 May 1884.

[20]SWL, 16 October 1883.

[21]SWL, 22 March 1884.

[22]SWL, 19 May 1884.

[23]SWL, 18 February 1884.

[24]In concluding an argument on the subject he had written, "it remains the fact that I ought to be happy." (SWL, 16 October 1883) In the argument he takes himself as a representative of mankind.

[25]He comments interestingly, "Sensuality" what is it unless the expression of the mind instead of the spirit? . . . it leads to ruin of the body and grossness: alas, Yes! but not till morality has spurned it and trampled it." SWL, 4 May 1884.

[26]SWL, 10 May 1884.

[27]SWL, 14 September 1884.

[28]SWL, 18 February 1884.

[29]SWL, 4 May 1884.

[30]SWL, 20 August 1884.

[31]SWL, 19 May 1884.

[32]SWL, 24 May 1884.

[33]SWL, 26 June 1884.

[34]". . . Christ rose the third day, to assure his disciples: For he was a Mahatma, adept, brother". To Madame Blavatsky an adept was one who had mastered the natural powers of the body and of the earth and so was able to accomplish what to ordinary eyes would seem miraculous.

[35]"And why is Jesus's death insisted upon, and his life ignored?" SWL, 27 March 1884.

[36]SWL, 10 May 1884.

[37]SWL, 19 May 1884.

[38]"It is not irrational to pray: don't you see that we are very weak, and circumstances very strong, and no communication between the two? ergo, pray: not that your prayer is heard by anyone or thing: but it is a comfort

just as music is." SWL, 22 March 1884. Buddhism, of course, has no deity and may have influenced him accordingly.

[39]SWL, 7 October 1883. To underline the disdain that grew from his strong sense of the irrelevance of dogma, he would later write, "Oh, yes! I could be a Baptist, a Romanist, an Anglican, a Mormon, with almost equal faith." (19 May 1884) He did not pause to say what would make them less than equal.

[40]SWL, August, 1884. No specific date given.

[41]SWL, 20 August 1884.

[42]SWL, 9 September 1884.

[43]SWL, 20 August 1884.

[44]There were other shifts in the period from traditional thinking. A.O.J. Cockshut, in _Anglican Attitudes_, writes that even "_Robert Elsmere_ tacitly assumes, and in this it is a fair guide to much progressive thought of the time, that ignorance, not sin, is the cause of evil in human beings." (31)

[45]SWL, 13 May 1884.

[46]SWL, 10 May 1884.

[47]Patrick, 12.

[48]CP, xxiii.

[49]_Ibid_.

[50]SWL, 7 July 1884.

[51]SWL, 20 August 1884. Any pointed use of the word "moment" in this period suggests the thought of Walter Pater. Although Johnson did not mention The Renaissance, he had certainly read Pater's work, and the later letters reveal this influence even more strongly.

[52]SWL, 28 August 1884.

[53]SWL, 14 August 1884. How cheerfully he forgives the confusion within the Established Church while characterizing it as "painful yearnings after the light!" This process he called "sacrificing my prejudices". Civil court decisions had, in any case, done much to undermine the authority of the Thirty-nine Articles during the sixties and seventies.

[54]SWL, 9 September 1884.

[55]SWL, 4 September 1884. Johnson's epistolary style allows for considerable ideosyncratic liberties, usually in punctuation but also in capitalization. Here the capitalization is used as a kind of ironic emphasis. A propos of the contradictions, it was Walt Whitman, whose work Johnson became acquainted with at this period, who wrote in the fifty-first part of "Song of Myself", "Do I contradict myself? / Very well then I contradict myself." (sic)

[56]SWL, 28 August 1884.

[57]SWL, 14 August 1884.

[58]Chapter IV, passim.

[59]Michael Levey, The Case of Walter Pater (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), Chapter III. See particularly p. 75.

[60]SWL, 18 February 1884.

[61]Ibid.

[62]SWL, 27 March 1884.

[63]SWL, 9 December 1884.

[64]SWL, January, 1885. No specific date given.

[65]SWL, April, 1885. No specific date given.

[66]SWL, 4 April 1885.

[67]Walter Pater, The Renaissance (New York: Mentor, 1959), 31.

CHAPTER IV

THE IMPRESSIONIST AT WORK:

PATER AND THE "MOMENT"

Though it is conjecture to speak of a point where the transfer of interest took place, there can be no doubt that by mid-1884, Johnson's concerns were with art and an "artistic" approach to morality and religion. He could logically move in no other direction, and although the arts were for him but one more aspect of those activities that made men "holy", the concentration on those interests could not help but displace the centrality he had earlier reserved for his thoughts on more traditional religious reform. Thus, despite his continuing interest in theology, and in those flights of theological fancy which he now called, reveal-ingly, his "'artistic' views"[1], he could not have been unaware of the degree to which the growth of such interests moved him away, whether he would or no, from theology. Such interest in an artistic approach to religion showed itself most curiously in his new approval of Roman Catholicism and its practices. Yet not even his interest in Catholicism could obscure his movement toward a view of the world in which religion and religious thought had become aspects, and

aspects only, of a larger perception. The construction of his own "church", his ultimate goal, had become more and more a mere intellectual exercise, and even though he might have been still strong in his need for a remedy for his skepticism, any increased receptiveness on his part to organized systems of belief such as Catholicism grew not from the emotional needs that were the result of his unbelief (although these needs might have appeared at any moment), but from the demands and needs of a newly acquired artistic and aesthetic world view.

Johnson's new world view was not without certain philosophical difficulties, even for an adolescent. His early leanings, as he had written to Russell, were in support of the idea that man must embrace his own physicality, his "lower life"[2], allowing it indeed an ascendancy. "I have always been trying to find a philosophy of the soul and sense which would unite the two, the result always being the subjugation of the former." This Wildean touch of soul submitting to sense changed as he continued, "of course, I see how utterly mistaken I was and how infinitely harder I have made it to break the ties of the latter and free my spirit altogether." However, this desire for the triumph of the spirit did not promise to end the conflict. As he was willing to concede,

> . . . I know so well by personal experience, though you might not think it, how hard the struggle after spirituality is. I often, even now, feel that my aspirations are not enough of a

> reality to have a permanent influence: I know their truth and grandeur, in the abstract, and all the while find myself drifting along at pleasure: almost content to have it so.[3]

He had of course sensed a basic human dilemma and, given his earlier materialistic preferences, his determination to aspire to the "Unseen", as he called the goal of his transcendental aspirations, was central to this conflict. "I will, despite love trying to shelter materialism, I will aspire to the Unseen."[4] Yet such aspirations and his dedication to transcendentalism[5] did not, indeed could not, silence the materialistic yearnings that he had come more and more to consider a necessary and vivid part of his experience and existence, even if, as he later wrote to Frank Russell, "I don't think that either you or I deliberately live the lower life."[6] The recognition of this duality did not stop him from attempting to establish a veneer of unity over the contradiction he saw existing between this kind of physicality and spirituality, a unity which, in these kinds of situations, linguistic legerdemain sometimes permits us: "I feel, as all must feel who believe in spirituality, an intense love of beauty in all its forms."[7] "All its forms" included, one must assume, the physical as well as the spiritual, but his conclusion that to be spiritual one had ultimately to love the physically beautiful, would not disappear, and the literal sanctification of the physical that he sought would, in its implications, brood uneasily over the "church" which even yet he

wished to bring into existence, notwithstanding his assertion that forms of physical existence served as no more than stepping stones to some form of transcendence.

As we have seen, an immediate consequence of Johnson's wish to sanctify "the lower life" in a balanced integration of the physical and the spiritual was his rejection of the concept of sin. This he accompanied with the desire to rescue sensuality. "Sensuality:" he wrote, "what is it unless the expression of the _mind_ instead of the _spirit_? . . . it leads to ruin of body and grossness of spirit: alas, yes! but not till morality had spurned it and trampled it."[8] In becoming the subject of intellectual curiosity, sensual experience could no longer be part of man's natural existence; but this loss had taken place only after morality had condemned the use of that sensual experience as a road to transcendence. Sensuality as an expression of the spirit, one has to presume, would mean an experience growing from love, which would then sanctify the experience. Johnson felt that by its universality, sensuality proclaimed its legitimacy as a crucial aspect of human existence, and he could not consent to "spurn" or "trample" it. Another approach had to be possible and, in his desire to strike a new balance between reprobation and acceptance, he insisted upon a kind of moral neutrality in relation to sensuality itself. It was a neutrality that was foreign certainly to friends like Badley who obviously accepted the

dictates of an absolute morality. Yet Johnson thought it achievable: "I do not love sensuality: I do not hate it; I do not love purity: I do not hate it; I regard both as artistic aspects of life."[9] For his friends, so obvious a repudiation of the absolutes in Victorian morality, encompassing as it did Johnson's willingness to separate morality from spirituality and to abolish sin, was no doubt provocative enough.

Yet it was not Johnson's rejection of absolutes which signalled a revolution in his thought so much as his advocacy of a point of view permitting him to call certain elements mere "artistic aspects of life" which most men thought of as moral. Certainly it was a revolution in Victorian terms, a revolution after which it would no longer be possible to see the love of the sensual as an impediment to transcendence. Rather, Johnson now felt that mankind had to engage the sensual in order to achieve transcendence. To emphasize the acceptability of sensuality as well as asceticism, each in its proper place, he declared, "I cannot violate my own nature."[10] He had begun by wanting his "church", the creation of his reforming intellect, to serve as "a living protest against materialism."[11] But as he became more and more aware of the importance of the sensual and of its manifestations as the "beautiful", he entered a new arena of struggle, and he saw finally the need to embrace the one, and to "strive and struggle against

ugliness", the antithesis of the other.[12] There thus began, as the year (1884) advanced, a movement from a desire for an unreachable spirituality to an appreciation of the sensual accompanied by a marked turning away, at least in theory, from the conventional morality of Victorianism. More particularly, he turned from the institutionalized asceticism of the evangelicals who had, he felt, dispensed with beauty in worship. Their refusal to accept beauty in that context was only one more sign of the sterility of their "Protestantism".[13] He began to contrast this attitude toward the physical world with that found in Roman Catholicism. And even if an interest in the integration of the sensual into legitimate human spiritual experience was not particularly Catholic, in Catholicism he found at least an appreciation of beauty in worship which permitted him to consider religion too as one more of the "artistic aspects of life."

Johnson's drift toward Roman Catholicism is difficult to explain except in the context of his new aesthetic approach to the world of religion, for in his naivete or perhaps in his insouciance as to the acceptability of his basic doctrine of laisser aller, he took his new moral aestheticism with him. His divorce from contemporary Roman Catholic theological trends could not more clearly be highlighted than in this ignorance, for his ideas were no more acceptable to Catholics than they were to Protestants.

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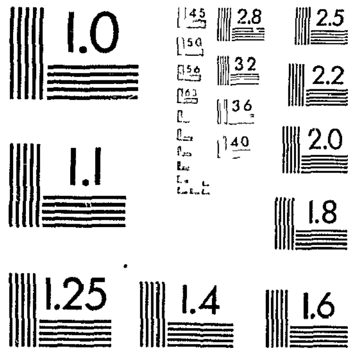


Yet his perennial dismissal of dogma dispensed, for the moment, with any personal tension that might normally have arisen from his movement in the direction of Catholicism. He still longed for his own "church", the "imagined Hesperid island", so that his increasingly recurrent references to Catholic beliefs or practices were still, in the spring of 1884, the remarks of a dilettante who was expressing an appreciation, often aesthetic, of an interesting artistic creation, a creation he admired first of all for its beauty. If Protestantism tolerated the ugliness against which he fought, Catholicism did not, and in the campaign against the one lay the seeds of a growing appreciation of, and interest in, the other.

Johnson's earliest references to Catholicism in his Winchester letters had been in disparaging remarks in which he more than implied his preference for Buddhism. His strong anti-dogmatism, with its distrust of the great intellectual structures such as that which supported Roman Catholicism, guaranteed that he could not approach Catholicism without much hesitation. But what must seem curious to the reader is the ease with which, during that spring of 1884, he began so quickly to relent in his opposition to Rome. The evidence of this turning comes in his re-telling, in May of that year, of incidents such as the episode of the rosary, "given me by a dying Romanist cousin [unidentified], whose last words were, 'you will use it in Paradise, if not

before that'."[14] He had since, he said, worn it out of sight, but he clearly held it in high esteem, for as he wrote, only partly tongue-in-cheek, "I know as no one else can the value of such 'superstition'."[15] This remark with its laboured paradox seemed to express a desire on his part to re-establish his standing as a skeptic while at the same time giving proper value to a picturesque element sanctified by centuries of usage. However, his interest seemed, some weeks later in June, to rise to a new level, or so he intimated, in his description of a dream. "I was a priest of Rome, alone before the altar: and the chancel roof seemed to burst apart, and a chain of flowers swung down to me out of the blue, and as I tried to climb I woke."[16] On the first level, the dream presents a picture of wish fulfillment: he had achieved his oft-repeated desire to enter the priesthood; only in this case, an increasingly positive attitude toward Catholicism had redirected that wish into a Roman Catholic setting. As well, such an easy and so obviously blessed a death might have had its attractions for this lad of seventeen who had probably begun to appreciate some of the difficulties involved in coping with the problems of adulthood. The dream did, however, presuppose the approval of the Highest of Judges both of Johnson's desire for priesthood and of his explorations in Christian belief, although it must have been unclear to the waking mind of the boy how these explorations might lead to a Roman

altar. But the approval implied in the provocative command to "expound!", with which, in the letter, he finished his short tale of a dream, indicated at least the direction in which he felt himself travelling. Certainly the attractive reality of altars and flowers, all so vividly a part of his own "Hesperid church", could be found in full measure only in one contemporary reality. It was this Catholicism, then, that he began to approach --religion at its most public and most dramatic.[17]

Influenced perhaps by his reading of the Tractarians or more likely by the popularly-held ideas that surrounded the term 'Tractarian', or perhaps even by the Reverend R. W. R. Dolling's high church services at the school mission, Johnson had, in his dream, isolated elements of worship that exercised a continuing attraction for him. Together these elements constituted a church in which, just possibly, orthopraxy might serve as an adequate substitute for orthodoxy. Certainly such a church could take its place aesthetically in his poetic landscape, as it did in "The Church of a Dream" (perhaps the same dream?) some six years later. A certain voluptuousness betrays the poet's interest, even then, not in the dogma but in the details of Catholic worship.

> Only one ancient priest offers the Sacrifice,
> Murmuring holy Latin immemorial:
> Swaying with tremulous hands the old censer full
> of spice,
> In gray, sweet incense clouds; blue, sweet clouds
> mystical:

> To him, in place of men, for he is old, suffice
> Melancholy remembrances and vesperal.[18]

What interests finally in the dream is the intervention of reality ("I woke"), as by this intervention he is prevented from completing his upward course and his attainment of glory.

Although hardly more Catholic in spirit than he had been, Johnson began in mid-1884 to look more apprais-ingly at the Church of Rome. Some weeks earlier in May he had written, "I did think of Rome: I am not sure yet!"[19] The provocative hints with the insinuating exclamation mark allow only one interpretation. Yet the attraction of Rome for this self-proclaimed libertarian and antinomian was clearly not in the doctrinal sphere. What had made the difference was the distastefulness of certain aspects of "Protestantism", its general poverty of drama and imagery and its repression of sensuality in common worship. This poverty he could forget in a church that welcomed flowers and rosaries and where God could extend earthly chains of flowers to the celebrant.

Logically, however, Johnson's libertarianism and antinomianism consorted badly with his increasing approval of Catholicism. In dreams, perhaps, he might wear the robes of a priest of Rome, but in post-Vatican I England, even so great a convert as Newman, although recently made a cardinal, had been substantially ignored by both the British and Roman hierarchies because of the taint of former

connections. How strange, therefore, that the young Johnson should, even from so great a distance, contemplate entry into the Roman Catholic Church, given the assortment of baggage he proposed to take with him. Perhaps in a kind of day dream he chose simply to close his eyes to the problem. But even if his total disregard of dogma made such a position logical, that kind of logic could not remove the real tensions that must inevitably come to exist between his aestheticism and Catholicism's well-defined theological demands, and neither "modern" times nor philosophical enlightenment on his part could bring the two any closer. Logically, too, since he had begun from a position in which adherence to dogmatic structures seemed impossible, his gradual approach to Roman Catholicism did not betray any intention on his part to embrace its dogmas. "I can conceive of no religion which can equally satisfy me and a converted coal-heaver",[20] he wrote, stating one rationale for the creation of his own "church". But his own contradictory stances demonstrated that any system would be irksome in the extreme. The dilemma that had eventually to emerge from such contradictions did not, in his case, become a conscious one. In turning to Catholicism he simply demonstrated that the syncretic had given way to the idiosyncratic.

For the moment, Johnson sought only the liturgy and rituals, the music and beauty of Catholicism. Only thus

could his increasing interest in Catholicism progress in tandem with the outrageously un-Catholic views of his "temple of Liberty of the Children of God."[21] But even relative to his own "church", his friends' efforts to call attention to his inconsistencies did no more than provoke homilies on the virtues of inconsistency. Johnson's struggle was to believe in anything, and having outlined a set of beliefs for his "church" in which, finally, he felt comfortable, he was naturally unwilling to give them up simply to accommodate the demands of a system like Catholicism whose outer face he might admire but for whose doctrines he could not foresee a need. Johnson simply concerned himself with religious praxis and was happiest and most satisfied in the world of Matthew Arnold's *Aberglaube*, that is, the church as created by its members through the ages and as expressed in rituals. "I almost think," he had written, "true lives impossible without a kind of ceremonial creed."[22] Divorced as it was from the rigorous demands of theology, *Aberglaube* signalled a different sense of proportion, in the eternal dilemma concerning the balance between spiritual austerity and joy in ritual, different, that is, from the proportion demanded in "roundhead" Protestantism.[23] Although he had begun by emphasizing that his sentiments and needs and those of a coal heaver could not be the same, he still recognized that *Aberglaube* satisfied the descendental and transcendental needs of both. How were

people to be "caught", he wrote, but "by the power of beauty and love visible in ecclesiastical tailoring, if you will, and priestly haberdashery."[24] Like Ruskin, he had great respect for those who could thus interweave the descendental and the transcendental in order to move others effectively toward spiritual goals although, like the "Unseen", these goals are never made clear. Others too could and would be caught, as he in his dreams had been caught, on a figurative chain of flowers.

Yet such beauty was not simply "haberdashery", because, for Johnson, beauty had a significance beyond its simple physical attractiveness. He was, as we have seen, secure in the knowledge that beauty was necessary to life itself, that it was in fact one aspect of the means offered to man to achieve transcendence. Therefore, its use in ritual could be called neither distracting nor useless. He could write with certainty, "I love all services from Roman Catholic down to Little Bethel",[25] but he was least satisfied with those which held earthly delight and the sensual at arm's length. In speaking of "the power of beauty and love visible" he sought a recognition of sensual beauty as a legitimate participant in the service of spiritual goals. Like Ruskin, whose introduction to "the whole meaning and end of medieval church splendor"[26] had been a revelation, Johnson saw the "beautiful" in "beautiful Catholicism" as integral to worship. From Mold, the town in Northern Wales

where his family spent some years, Johnson wrote an Easter letter to Russell:

> At present I am recovering from the effects of experiencing the lovely Passion Week in Mold, in cold, shivering air, with no smallest savor of beautiful Catholicism to make the divinity of the Passion a delight: dull, cheerless routine of unimpassioned, uninspired services; no light and color and solemnity of ritual: and my soul is too weak to live without these.[27]

The "light", "colour" and "solemnity" were not only at the heart of ritual, but, as he had come to believe, were the experience of worship itself, since to raise the worshipper in the aesthetic sense was also to exalt him spiritually. This he perceived, rightly or wrongly, to be implicit in "beautiful Catholicism". His queries as to its truth aside, the Passion in its divinity was not to be neglected, and its importance could be properly accented only by recourse to "delight" in its presentation.

To link beauty, as Johnson had, with "love visible" accorded beauty a particularly powerful role, and he had no doubt that such "love visible" might, like the chain of flowers in his dream, lead to "God". His concern for "the power of beauty and love visible in priestly tailoring", also touched the heart of his new self-assumed mandate to banish ugliness from the human condition. Here, as elsewhere in human experience, he sought to avoid the ugliness in religious ceremony which Victorians had so passively accepted. Taken as a whole, his understanding of the needs of man meant that he came close, for example, to

subordinating the theological event of the Passion of Our Lord in the Mass to a delight in its presentation, or rather he believed that an understanding of the one was incomplete or impossible without the heightening embellishment of the other. Without these examples of beauty his soul and all men's souls could not properly "love", while they could easily do so without benefit of dogma. Beauty, then, became the *desideratum*, the 'good' of his rudimentary system, and its goal.

Johnson was hardly systematic in this subordination of religious questions and moral issues to aesthetic considerations. In the informality of the letters, he often rhapsodized as he maintained that, given his doctrine of *laisser aller*, there was no reason why the sacred and the profane should not share equally and fundamentally in the foundation of his "church". Certainly by August of 1884 he felt comfortable enough to make clearer the profound religious consequences of such a conclusion, although we must again remind ourselves that we are dealing with the fabulous constructs of a schoolboy. If, as he had earlier contended, to be quintessentially man was to become "God", then the quintessential human experience, the experience of beauty, was the finest of all roads to that goal, and beauty, he had decided, was best approached through the medium of art. It followed, then, that art and beauty were kinds of sacraments indispensable to man, and that the

aesthetic experience was essentially religious in nature. "When I absorb the soul and love of a picture," he wrote, "I worship: when I bring another to it I perform the priest's office."[28] We find, on returning to his letter of April 26, 1884, when he first advanced the proposition that purity and sensuality were mere "artistic aspects of life", a more substantial pledge to this "holy" aestheticism.

> 'But,' you will say, 'in real earnest life you must take a side.' True: and I ask myself how I ought to walk: I am answered in the words of a poetess, 'where thy own footsteps would be leading.' When I am in town they lead to the National Gallery and the Albert Hall; when in my own room to turning poetaster; when I meet with a question of morals, to the question not 'What does my conscience tell me I should do?' but, 'By doing what, would your artistic instinct be satisfied? What does the moment tell you it requires for itself?'[29]

This new, and for Johnson, compelling moral view which substituted one's natural inclinations--"where thy own footsteps would be leading"--for conventional morality was governed in its deliberations (in so far as it was not simply personal whim) by aesthetic considerations alone. This "artistic instinct", about whose nature we can arrive at only the most general principles, established the pursuit of beauty through artistic and personal pleasure as eminently acceptable, perhaps even essential. But even in a world in which Wilde and Huysmans had engaged in _épater les bourgeois_, or perhaps especially in such a world, these heresies were unacceptable and Johnson knew it. "Show all this to N. [unidentified]", he wrote in the same letter,

"and he will say it is all nonsense, [that] I am a sham, [that] I am simply immoral and don't like confessing it, in words [and] so veil it with words."[30] "Simple immorality" was indeed the label such attitudes would attract until the attitudes themselves vanished (at least in their public manifestations), along with the movement they had engendered, following the revenge of an outraged bourgeoisie in the trial and conviction of Oscar Wilde.

Yet it is interesting to look more closely at this strange mixture of aestheticism and religion that Johnson had so casually advanced. His emphasis upon the religious and sacramental aspect of art, and the subsidiary creation of the new priesthood of the arts and of the beautiful, signalled first the acceptance of the importance of beauty in man's life, and the need to treat seriously the sensual manifestations of beauty. Grace, if one allows oneself the liberty of using that term, came into being in the presence of created and perfected beauty from and through perception, although the grace of salvation did not seem the objective which Johnson foresaw for this act. Rather he seemed to posit, in this absorption of the "soul and love of a picture", an essentially psychological or emotional state, an expansion of the soul culminating in a kind of transcendent state in which one's being was opened to a kind of love and beauty of Platonic dimensions, so that like Christ, one became "all man" and in the process "all God". It was thus

Johnson 'worshipped'. A work of art served both as the object of one's perception and as the pathway in man's passage from the mundane to the transcendental. Aesthetics, the science of the perception of beauty, defined the conditions of passage and so set the standards for action in life itself.

Such developments in Johnson's thought show clearly how much more insistent the ethos of art had become in his attempts to eradicate the gulf that conventional Protestant wisdom declared to exist between art and aesthetics on one side, and religion and theology on the other. In the leap from love of the "church beautiful" to an appreciation of, and immersion in, aesthetics or an aesthetic view of life, Johnson allowed himself, in his desire for "light and colour and solemnity of ritual", the belief that even in response to problems such as those involved in church reform, an aesthetic approach was necessary. It seemed irrelevant to Johnson that, in so defining his beliefs, he opened another chasm between himself and anything Christian. In ceasing to function simply as the study of beauty, aesthetics had become his world view, particularly in opposition to the demands that he saw as central to "Roundhead Protestantism". "I mean," he wrote, "does not the world seem content to own the inferiority of morality to art whilst praising it where art is not?"[31] In its superiority, the world of art and aesthetics would, if given the chance,

reshape religion and morality and finally change the conventional attitudes that dominated Victorian public morality.

But if art, according to Johnson, encapsulated the quintessence of human experience, there still remained that aspect which every man and woman had to deal with, the sensual experience of daily life. Here too, he sought to remove the shackles of religiously imposed morality. This liberation which we can, with good reason, call Whitmanesque, had been foreshadowed in his earlier desire to kneel before the 'sins'. In his descendentalism, Johnson could not tolerate the quasi-Manichean isolation of good from evil, by which the one was isolated in the spiritual world and the other in the physical. This dividing of man's experience had characterized evangelical theology and had resulted in the isolation of men from their physicality, an isolation most grotesque in the Victorian delicacy that led to the use of circumlocutions in the most innocuous situations. Johnson saw the world as beautiful and therefore as good: it was, he felt, man himself who had created the Christian catalogue of sins. He noted in the writings of the American poet, Walt Whitman, whose work was then becoming available to the British public,[32] an insistence with which he agreed on the need to re-examine the concept of sin. Whether Whitman added to Johnson's arsenal of ideas on the subject or merely clarified them can never be clear.

In any case, Whitman, like Johnson, inveighed against the use of a moral terminology to divide the sinners from the "good" people of the community since such easy condemnations allowed men to forget the universal nature of sin. For Whitman and Johnson this universality precluded the use of judgmental structures. In August of 1884 Johnson recommended to Russell certain lines from Whitman that had obviously made a strong impression on him.

> You prostitutes flaunting over the trottoirs
> or obscene in your rooms,
> Who am I that I should call you more obscene
> than myself?
> . . . .
> Beneath this face that appears as impassive
> hell's tides continually run.
> Lusts and wickedness are acceptable to me,
> I walk with delinquents with passionate love,
> I feel I am of them -- I belong to those
> convicts and prostitutes myself,
> And henceforth I will not deny them - for
> how can I deny myself?[33]

Johnson's own conclusion had been that "Whitman takes this world and shows that nothing is common or unclean; not even uncleanliness."[34] He was now convinced, as Whitman had been, both of the equality of men in sinfulness and of the misuse of such concepts as 'sin', 'immorality', and 'uncleanliness' in relation to human activity. The composite nature of man, partaking as it did of both the spiritual and the physical, meant that man was not so much fallible or corruptible as simply human. To argue against the full exercise of each nature was in some sense to argue against the integrity of creation. Difficulties entered in only

when man attempted to deal with evil (as he perceived it) through the creation of a narrowly based, theologically derived language that stigmatized natural behavior. Thus man's 'uncleanliness' was the product of the language by which he categorized his infirmities. Like Whitman, Johnson wished to destroy that language, and to use some other in its place. That "other" language he found in aesthetics, even though in so doing he could not but offend the people he wanted to help. He hoped thus to achieve his objective, the destruction of a rigid, religiously-imposed morality, but his vision was more estimable for the clarity with which it pierced the veil of hypocrisy which Victorian England had drawn around itself than for its contact with reality. He was dreaming to the full the revolutionary dreams of youth.

Johnson's rejection of the sharply defined imperatives of traditional morality enabled him to write, apropos of his activities, that Whitman and Shelley were pilot and polestar in the construction of his new "church",[35] the one "saint" of the body and the other "saint" of the spirit; but it was the recognition of "the assertion of the body"[36] which grew to dominate. The recognition of the beauty of man's physicality reinforced, on the one hand, his desire for the sensual Church of flowers and music, and, on the other, his desire that all modes of behavior be seen as containing possibilities of happiness and holiness through their contribution to the

completeness of man's experience. The liberation of the senses in the aesthetic act ended, therefore, in a spiritual and physical life strongly bound to sensory experience, with the accent falling naturally on the 'impression' derived therefrom. This emphasis did not necessarily lead in the direction of Huysmans' Des Esseintes or Wilde's Dorian Gray whose motivation involved less the search for beauty or love than stimulation, and about which Johnson wrote a friend: "never eat lotus, lotus is poison",[37] a warning against aestheticism in its more bizarre forms. It was rather a liberation of sensual perception in the Paterian mode, aimed at a proper appreciation of the tableaux in the National Gallery that he had mentioned in his letter of April 26, in whose presence one could absorb the "soul and love of a picture". This kind of "love visible" was approachable only through the senses. As he wrote, "I realize to myself an infinity of love in listening to true music, in seeing true paintings, [and in] reading true poetry",[38] for beauty was the true "spiritual food",[39] and the way by which he gathered it was through observation of nature, art, poetry, high ritual and even "in watching other people's characters"[40]--in short, in a series of impressions. He had become, as he wrote in the same month, "an 'impressionist' in life."[41]

Johnson rarely mentioned Pater and his work, although his letters quickly lead us to conclude that he had

read Pater's essays in The Renaissance. Johnson's careful emphasis as he declared, "I am an 'impressionist' in life" pointed to an awareness of the implications of the statement. It was a declaration of his entry into the world of Walter Pater where "impressions, unstable, flickering, [and] inconsistent", existing for a "single moment" only, impressions "gone while we try to apprehend [them]" were squarely at the centre of man's life. Pater's idea of burning "with this hard, gemlike flame", which announced vividly the need to be "forever curiously testing new opinions and courting new impressions"[42], had begun to touch him in a way that he had been touched by no other contemporary philosophy. Whereas earlier his investigation into Paterian "impressionism",[43] for so it was, had been secondary to his researches into religion, it now began, in late 1884, to escape the limits which had formerly held it within certain bounds. Through what one must assume to have been that interest in "impressionism", he began to hint in the spring and summer of 1885 that an appreciation of the sensual was all that man could know. As he wrote, "You don't know very much outside yourself."[44] The logic behind his argument on the need to eliminate barriers to sensual experience had been based on the idea that men must first know themselves before they could really know what lay beyond themselves. But he had now a variation on that theme, a variation which, in eliminating the possibility of man's knowing anything but

himself, signalled his participation in the movement that may be said, in the wake of Pater's work, to have dominated fine arts criticism in the seventies and eighties. It was also the last leg we find chronicled in The Winchester Letters of the spiritual odyssey in which Johnson had become engaged.

Johnson's road to Paterian "impressionism" had been prepared in part by the simplicity of the doctrinal aspects of his gospels that had rejected completely the need for complicated theology. On the one hand, this simplicity had led unsuspectingly to a concept of religion as a social and cultural agency, which through its generalized emotional content, its colour and its rituals, and in general its power over what he called "chaos",[45] was meant to soothe man's troubled emotions without concerning itself with attempts to impose any but the most general moral standards. Johnson seemed to reserve for religion a placebo-like role in a relativistic world. Indeed, Johnson's gospel of toleration supported the kind of relativism essential to Pater's ideas. On the other hand, the psychological liberation he sought, with its insistence upon the positive aspects of universal love, was in itself insufficient to replace the theologically-supported moral standards of old except in the most generalized manner. Moreover Johnson's "church" willingly accepted the fragmentation in belief which in Pater's work was said to characterize the age. But

while this idea had led Pater to a position in which the individual experience and the fleeting impression were central, for Johnson there was, despite his repeated emphasis on love, no such clarity of position. As he would write in September of 1884, "I don't know what I believe."[46] He was himself aware that beyond his principles of love, toleration and brotherhood, nothing was allowed to exist without contradiction in his own mind; so that, on the whole, the theological simplicity in which he prided himself degenerated into intellectual imprecision. Had he wished to oppose Pater's ideas, which he might perhaps have thought insufficiently transcendental, he would have had neither the base from which to fight nor the weapons which would have enabled him to do so. Like the adolescent Dorian Gray who succumbs to the fascinating outpourings of Lord Henry Wotton, Johnson had no constraints, certainly no theological constraints (despite his pursuit of religious goals where Pater had expressed none) which could have slowed his approach to, or his absorption of, this new understanding of the world's reality.

But Johnson can hardly be said to have wanted to oppose Pater's ideas. It was, in fact, quite the contrary since there were aspects of Pater's "impressionism" to which Johnson could respond both quickly and positively. He found very important the license this new philosophy gave to his intense preoccupation with physical beauty and, by

extension, to his desire to approach beauty through the medium of art. Since beauty, art, and religious sentiment had acquired, in his own mind, an interrelationship which we have already seen in his references to painting, music and poetry and which was striking in its completeness, "impressionism" simply added a seal of legitimacy to that union. It gave an air of necessity to his leanings toward art, although it could hardly sanction the religious connotations that were part of Johnson's own framework of ideas. Pater's words about the "awful brevity" of life, and his demand that we "[gather] all we are into one desperate effort to see and touch", were wholly secular, the objective being simply "the poetic passion, the desire of beauty."[47] These made perception at its finest the ultimate human experience. In this Johnson agreed, and he no doubt thought himself one of Pater's "children of the world" whose search for "a quickened sense of life" was to be found "in art and song". And Pater's implicit faith that art at least could recapture and transmit experience through the "thick wall of personality" found resonance in Johnson's own beliefs.

Most importantly, "impressionism" lent a coherence to the rapidly changing flow of ideas in his own mind. It provided, if not an intellectual structure (Pater had strongly rejected any kind of philosophical structure), at least a philosophical pre-disposition which accepted without indifference his intense love of beauty and his descenden-

talism. It was not unnatural that, in embracing impressionist attitudes, Johnson should have accepted most eagerly those elements which touched on preoccupations and tendencies that had lacked only a clearer articulation in his own mind. But ultimately this new philosophy allowed him to make better sense both of the world in which he lived and of his own life in that world. Not unnaturally, with the still fluid personal belief-structure of the adolescent, he displayed, in his acceptance of Pater's "impressionism", many of the characteristics that he had displayed in his interest in and initial acceptance of Buddhism -- his selectivity, for example, and his willingness to permit contradictions to continue to exist. He continued to approach nature, for instance, "in an ecstasy of worship".[48] But in his acceptance of "impressionism" he encountered few of the esoteric difficulties that he had had to contend with in Buddhism. Universal love, the abiding principle of an earlier time, without being forgotten, had given way to a love of beauty in the triumph of the descendental. Thus those principles that had momentarily drawn upon Christian theology, were now built into a new structure constructed in all its visible manifestations of Paterian timber.

Whether consciously or not, Johnson was thus engaged in a philosophical process that carried him further and further from Christianity and even from his "church". But this increasing separation had finally less to do with

religion and its ethical system than with an adolescent search for a unified and total, hence ethically honest, philosophy for living. Like so many of his own age, he deprecated the private evasions which were so much a part of Victorian behavior and argued for a new honesty. His allegiance to "impressionism" was part of that movement toward honesty, an honesty which he wrote of acting upon with the enthusiasm of youth and sometimes even with a perverse delight. He found himself powerfully drawn to the persona of the sensual explorer, and in an odd way, he touched for a moment the debate surrounding Pater's "Conclusion" to The Renaissance by exploring the kinds of attitudes that many Victorians believed and feared to be the consequence of Pater's ideas. The Paterian concern with the "moment", the need "to burn always with this, hard gemlike flame," and the duty of the individual "to be forever curiously testing new options and courting new impressions",[49] seems to have had a real impact on Johnson. For Victorians like Johnson's parents, talk of "great passions" and "quickened, multiplied consciousness" must have seemed no more than an incitement to "curious", and in all probability, immoral practices, and it was to answer the fears of such people that Pater suppressed his "Conclusion" in 1877. Although strictly speculative (as far as it is possible to determine), Johnson's investigations came close to justifying such action. In his belief in the importance of

impressions, he pursued his desire for "artistic pleasure" with such vigor that he reduced Pater's ideas to the absurd.

This movement toward the absurd led Johnson not merely to contemplate "artistic pleasure" in relation to his encounters with art and his "church", but also to situations which do not in themselves seem instinct with artistic or any other kind of pleasure. What pleasure was there to be gained from speculation on the loss of a friend,[50] or on a friend's death, or one's own death? "If you were to die soon what would I experience, what sensation? . . . it would drift into a Rossettian sonnet . . . always I shall keep the sense of loss and a pure delight of real sorrow . . . And when I die, even then the same pleasure of impression will be with me: for all else is uncertain."[51] For Johnson, Paterian curiosity seemed to stamp such experiences as legitimate fare for exploration and perhaps as activities conducive to that "passion" which was one of the goals Pater considered desirable. But here Johnson has clearly allowed a macabre curiosity to dominate, and while he believed in the uncertainty of everything except impressions, his pose in these letters is too exotic, too aware of an audience. Even Des Esseintes found the approach of death, with its neurasthenic complications, too unpleasant for him to feel himself privileged in its contemplation. But in this passage, which comes near the end of the Winchester collection of letters, with the author still a lad of eighteen, we

do see most vividly the Paterian concern with the individual impression. Did he dismiss art thereby, content with the implicit tautology (against which Pater must have fought) of attempting to communicate when one believes communication impossible? Did he dismiss what had earlier seemed so important -- the idealism of brotherhood and love, whose basis lay mysteriously in the certainty of love and the communication of that love? Obviously, from the general import of the letters, he did not. The fascinated curiosity that allowed him to examine such extremes did not interfere with, or impinge upon, the reality, even in uncertainty, of the communication he realized in his reaction to a painting or to music, and in his willingness to bring others to those works. Love, at least, and beauty could be transmitted through Pater's "thick wall of personality".[52] Otherwise there could be no reason to function as an artist or poet, as he so wished to do.

Yet, as a result of this fascinated curiosity, and driven no doubt by natural adolescent rebelliousness in opposition to the religious temper of his family and the times, Johnson moved, under the aegis of Pater, away from the world of religion, in which his powerlessness became ever clearer, toward the contrastingly informed and informing world of art. By May of 1885 he could write of his "visioned Hesperid island [his "church"], never to be realized".[53] It was a movement paralleled in his concurrent

desire for a religion reconciled to the love of the sensual in the beauty of worship, a church full of "beautiful Catholicism". In retrospect, it is easy to see the extent to which such desires meant that his concern for worldly beauty, the stuff of his impressions, was heightened and increased. His Catholicism, insofar as it existed, was only one facet of the artistic concerns that his aesthetic approach to morality and religion had introduced. Nor did his excursions into aestheticism and "impressionism" and the delight he took in juxtaposing antagonistic ideas or bodies of ideas provoke the kinds of tensions which might have been expected. The elasticity and detachment of youth and the espousal of a personal creed that strove precisely to reconcile opposites served its purpose. Six years later, in 1891, he would look back at himself and write of a young man who, having succumbed to the "delights" of aestheticism became the "cultured fawn".

> Take a young man, who had brains as a boy, and teach him to disbelieve everything that his elders believe in matters of thought, and to reject everything that seems true to himself in matters of sentiment. He need not be at all revolutionary; most clever youths for mere experience's sake will discard their natural or acquired convictions. He will then, since he is intelligent and bright, want something to replace his early notions. . . . according to the circumstances of the case, our youth will be bored to death by the nothingness of everything. You must supply him with the choicest delicacies, and feed him upon the finest rarities. And what so choice as a graceful affectation, or so fine as a surprising paradox? So you cast about for these two, and at once you see that many excellent affectations and paradoxes have had their day. A treasured

> melancholy of the German moonlight sort, a rapt enthusiasm in the Byronic style, a romantic eccentricity after the French fashion of 1830, a "frank, fierce," sensuousness *à la jeunesse Swinburnienne*; our youth might flourish them in the face of society all at once, without receiving a single invitation to private views or suppers of the elect.[54]

In many ways he was writing of his own youth when aestheticism, "a tender patronage of Catholicism" and a belief that "beauty [was] beatific" had shaped his own response to art and life. By 1891, he could describe this adolescent as "a feeble and a foolish beast." But there had been reasons for his allegiance to the philosophy of the age. More importantly, his attempt to reach toward a commitment of sorts in his espousal of "impressionism" ultimately signalled a commitment to the necessity of a personal belief. He had earlier noted, in speaking of Buddhism, that belief in something was better than no belief at all. And even if his "church", that "beautiful city of music and lights and flowers and incense and Leaves of Grass",[55] was doomed never to appear, he had at least begun to see the value of a coherent set of beliefs. It was a feeling that would not die even in Pater's world of flux, and its survival would allow him to move from an intense concern for the Paterian world of sensation into the even more intriguing and ultimately more rewarding world of dogma.

NOTES

CHAPTER IV

[1]SWL, 13 November 1884.

[2]SWL, 20 December 1883.

[3]SWL, 20 December 1883.

[4]SWL, 23 February 1884. But he never made clear the nature of the "Unseen".

[5]Giving way to enthusiasm he exclaimed, "I am an Idealist, Spiritualist, Transcendentalist." SWL, 18 February 1884.

[6]SWL, 20 December 1883.

[7]SWL, 11 February 1884. And later, "beauty means the fusion of spirit and sense." 14 August 1884.

[8]SWL, 4 May 1884.

[9]SWL, 26 April 1884.

[10]SWL, April, 1884. No specific date given.

[11]SWL, 10 May 1884.

[12]SWL, 4 May 1884.

[13]On 26 June 1884, he wrote, "I hate politics as I do Protestantism."

[14]SWL, 19 May 1884.

[15]*Ibid*.

[16]SWL, 6 June 1884.

[17]On August 14 he wrote of his own "church" as "preeminently, a public setting forth of beautiful acts and emotions."

[18]CP, 98.

[19]SWL, 10 May 1884. Fletcher informs us: "He later told . . . how at the age of fifteen he had presented himself to the local Catholic priest . . . and asked if he could be received into the Church." The priest sent him back to the school. CP, xxix.

[20]SWL, 16 October 1883.

[21]SWL, 7 July 1884.

[22]SWL, 22 March 1884.

[23]As Ruskin named it in *Praeterita*, calling to mind the enmity between Cromwell's puritanism and King Charles' high Anglicanism: "I am a Protestant Cavalier, not Protestant Roundhead." (203.)

[24]SWL, 20 August 1884.

[25]SWL, 1 March 1884.

[26]Ruskin, *Praeterita*, 203. Ruskin applauded the use of ceremonials in a number of passages in his autobiography.

[27]SWL, 6 April 1885.

[28]SWL, 26 April 1884.

[29] _Ibid_.

[30] _Ibid_.

[31] SWL, 7 July 1884. It was a position he did not choose to defend in a public forum. As Oscar Wilde was to discover some years later, in the cross-examination performed by Sir Edward Carson, the world is not as accepting of revolutionary thought as casual revolutionaries would like it to be.

[32] Justin Kaplan, _Walt Whitman: A Life_ (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1980). See Chapter 15, pp. 303-328.

[33] Walt Whitman, _Leaves of Grass_ (New York: Signet Classics, 1954), 305-306. Johnson also recommended "Song of Myself", parts 24 and 48, and "Native Moments". In each of these, certain passages leap to the eye because of the echoes which are detectable in Johnson's own words. The following will serve as examples.

> I believe in the flesh and the appetites,
> Seeing, hearing, feeling, are miracles, and
> Every part and tag of me is a miracle.
> "Song of Myself", Part 24
>
> I have said that the soul is not more than the body,
> And I have said that the body is not more than the soul,
> And nothing, not God is greater to one than one's self is...
> "Song of Myself", Part 48
>
> Native moments--when you come upon me--as you are here now,
> Give me now libidinous joys only,
> Give me the drench of my passions, give me life coarse and rank
> . . . .
> Oh you shunn'd persons, I at least do not shun you,
> I come forthwith in your midst, I will be your poet,
> I will be more to you than to any of the rest.
> "Native Moments"

[34] SWL, 14 August 1884.

[35] *Ibid*.

[36] SWL, 21 July 1884.

[37] SWL, 10 May 1884.

[38] SWL, 11 February 1884.

[39] SWL, 16 October 1884.

[40] *Ibid*.

[41] SWL, April 1885. No specific date given.

[42] Pater, 157-58.

[43] In our time, the term *impressionism* has been reserved as a name to designate a French art movement and its off-shoots, whose theoretical basis is not directly linked to Pater's ideas. This has made it difficult to use the term in any other context. However, the logic of calling a philosophy dealing with impressions, impressionism, is very strong, and I shall do so. But I shall also use quotation marks to indicate the special usage. In support of the decision to use the term I cite Ruth Z. Temple who in an essay entitled "'The Ivory Tower' as Lighthouse", gives the following aside: "I think a rather good case might be made out for impressionism as the general label of the new arts and criticism from the 1870's on." *Edwardians and Late Victorians*, Ed. Richard Ellmann (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 35.

[44] SWL, 4 May 1884.

[45] SWL, November 1884. No precise date given.

[46] SWL, 2 September 1884.

[47]*The Renaissance*, 156-159.

[48]Roseliep, 24 August 1886.

[49]Pater, 156-159.

[50]SWL, 24 April 1884.

[51]SWL, April, 1885. No specific date given. The year's distance between the two letters had no more than confirmed his opinions.

[52]Pater, 157. The sentence continues, "through which no real voice has ever pierced on its way to us, or from us to that which we can only conjecture to be without."

[53]SWL, 31 May 1885.

[54]Karl Beckson, ed., *Aesthetes and Decadents of the 1890's: An Anthology of British Poetry and Prose*, (New York: Vintage, 1966), 110-111.

[55]SWL, 31 May 1885.

CHAPTER V

FROM OXFORD TO ROME:

THE JOURNEY FROM DOUBT TO DOGMA

I

The great changes that had taken place during Johnson's school years were prelude to still greater changes as he made his way from the cloistered atmosphere of Winchester to the more open air of Oxford University. His destination was New College, a traditional goal of bright Winchester boys and the college to which he had earlier won a scholarship. Patrick notes that the aristocratic atmosphere of New College was precisely what Johnson would have wished it to be,[1] and there can be no doubt that Oxford proved as congenial (except for the examinations called Greats) as Winchester had been. His activities at Oxford were few, but, as Alex Waugh tells us, Johnson impressed his fellow students from the very beginning.

> Both in figure and in demeanour he was singularly unlike the ordinary public school product. He sat back against the dark oak-panelling, awaiting the inevitable "Prince of Wales's cutlets," with his arms folded across his breast, and his gaze fixed upon the opposite wall. His amazing youthfulness arrested the imagination; he looked more like the head boy of a Preparatory School than the Oxford scholar which his voluminous robe proclaimed him.

> He affected, all through his Oxford days, a double-breasted coat, with wide lappels [sic], which, with his big-sleeved flowing gown, gave him the appearance of being absolutely enveloped in his clothes; he spoke sparingly, and rarely looked at his neighbour when he did speak.[2]

He had already the reputation of having had "articles accepted in the magazines", and of being able "to write Latin verse as easily as English, and to read Plato and Aeschylus for pleasure." He was, notes Waugh, "the first natural bookman that we had ever been privileged to meet. Certainly he was the first man of my own age that I had ever encountered who picked his words, and talked with any sense of form."[3]

Much of the information about Johnson's university career comes to us through the medium of rumour. We hear curiously little of his work with tutors like Spooner, and less of his meetings with Pater. We hear instead of his insomnia, which resulted "in the habit of letting himself out of College in the small hours, to the imminent peril of his University career."[4] Or we hear of his mysterious behaviour: "it was whispered that Johnson was the catechumen of strange religious rites which he celebrated in his rooms facing Holywell."[5] No doubt Johnson contributed to this reputation by his behaviour, and perhaps even by the way in which he furnished his room. Santayana records that in his room there was "conspicuous on a centre table a jug of Glengarry whiskey between two open books: Les Fleurs du Mal and Leaves of Grass. Two large portraits hung on the

wall: Cardinal Newman and Cardinal Wiseman."[6] Johnson had already chosen those elements -- whiskey, art and Roman Catholicism -- which would dominate his life. Santayana goes on to confirm that Johnson had lost none of his interest in religion.

> He had rooms at the top of the new buildings overlooking Hollywell. Over the roofs of the low houses opposite, the trees of the Parks were visible in places, as well as the country beyond: and pointing to the distant horizon Lionel Johnson said sadly: "Everything above that line is right, everything below it is wrong." These were almost the first words he spoke to me, and they formed an admirable preface to a religious conversation.[7]

What they discussed goes unrecorded.

There were, of course, other Oxford friendships. He became particularly friendly with Arthur Galton, an ex-Roman Catholic priest who was now an ardent Anglican. Fletcher thinks him a decisive influence. It was Galton, "a friend of Arnold and an enthusiast for the eighteenth century and the latin classics", who taught Johnson his mannered punctuation and who introduced him to the Century Guild Circle and its magazine, _The Century Guild Hobby Horse_, in which Johnson's work first began to appear before the general public.[8] But the degree to which Galton and others influenced him directly, during these years at Oxford, must remain a matter for conjecture. Patrick, the most comprehensive of his biographers, in attempting to come to terms with these years, also mentions the influence of Johnson's readings in eighteenth century literature and of

his introduction, through Galton, into the London circle grouped around <u>The Century Guild Hobby Horse</u>. But Patrick sees little of importance in these influences. "Ainsi, il ne semblerait guère que Johnson eût subi à Oxford, des influences vraiment nouvelles. Ses tendences étaient déjà nettement marquées lors de son arrivée." He extends this thesis even to Pater's influence: "De même dans son amitié la plus significative de toutes, peut-être, pour Walter Pater."[9] This seems unlikely, but no doubt Patrick declined to go any further because of the lack of evidence on which to base any hypothesis.

Of Johnson's personal life at Oxford we must again be content with rumors, this time of homosexual friends, but no hard evidence exists, although during this period he wrote at least one piece of homoerotica, "A Dream of Youth".

> With faces bright, as ruddy corn,
> Touched by the sunlight of the morn;
> With rippling hair; and gleaming eyes,
> Wherein a sea of passion lies;
> Hair waving back, and eyes that gleam
> With deep delight of dream on dream:
> With full lips, curving into song;
> With shapely limbs, upright and strong:
> The youths on holy service throng.[10]

Fletcher speaks of a reference to the "love that has no name" in a poem he calls "In Praise of Youth".[11] However, no such title is given in the collected poems and I must conclude that he is, in fact, referring to "A Dream of Youth", and in all probability, to the following lines.

> Their passion kindles such fair flame,
> As from divine Achilles came:

> A vehement ardour thrills their breasts,
> And beauty's benediction rests
> On earth, and on earth's goodliest guests.[12]

Certainly, in an age when Freud's theories were as yet unformulated, the influence of the sub-conscious on one's expression was not so closely monitored. At school he had written to Charles Sayle: "You cannot understand the extent of your gift of yourself [a photograph!] -- to me it means worlds of memory and association: I can turn to you now as to a Madonna."[13] I think there can be no doubt that Johnson was strongly attracted, at least during his school years, to young men of his acquaintance. However, it is only at third hand that we hear of a possible love affair he might have had. Fletcher quotes from a letter sent him by Percy Colson in which Colson "informed me that Alfred Douglas used to boast that he had slept with Johnson on a number of occasions."[14] The egregious Lord Alfred is not, however, the best of sources. All in all, the evidence leads Fletcher to conclude that "his inclinations were toward _l'amour de l'impossible_ and that from the time of his going down from Oxford those seem to have been rigidly repressed."[15] Of those "inclinations", Patrick, in an age of greater delicacy, says nothing.[16] A review of the evidence can, I think, only suggest without bringing us any closer to an answer, although Johnson was certainly full of the cult of 'friendship', that ambiguous term which covers every degree of love. Some years later he wrote in its

praise.

> King David! we too love with thee
> Dear lovers' faces,
> Infinite friendships, golden graces:
> Hearts Passionate, as the full and stirring sea.[17]

But, given his personal coldness in the presence of even his closest friends (his reaction to Russell, which we saw earlier, is a good example) would seem to rule out any 'improper' relationship. Johnson's personal life will, in all probability, remain a closed book.

II

If Johnson's scholarly life continued as before, in one major area there were great changes in the making. In the letters Johnson wrote between 1885 and 1888, we find both movement in the focus of his interest and a dramatic change in the approaches he espoused to dogma and religion. From a near total capitulation first to Newman's enemy, public opinion, in his religion-building, and then to "impressionism" and the moral view to which it had given birth, Johnson moved to a position diametrically opposed to both. In so doing, he travelled from his self-built theology, which had embraced libertarian and antinomian ideas, toward a prescriptive morality and a church whose dogmatic inflexibility had recently been confirmed in the great Vatican Council of 1870 proclaiming papal infallibility. In less than four years, then, this libertarian ex-buddhist impressionist had become a believing and practicing, although as yet unbaptised, Roman Catholic, rejecting his own "church" and its accompanying unfocussed and inconsistent approach to religion, and embracing dogma and structure in belief. Such a move on his part had not been altogether unforeseen, since there had existed an earlier, if highly aesthetic, bias in favor of Catholicism. But less foreseeable was the new and strongly intellectual voice

which revealed itself in an increasing use of logic, and so favorably seconded movement in the direction in which he was already moving. This new high seriousness and the maturity that accompanied it rejected, almost in the Biblical sense, the 'toys' of the boy. Although he still hesitated on the threshold of Roman Catholicism, his entry into the rigorously logical scholastic world in which he had now begun to feel comfortable signalled the creation of a critical wall between old and new; and his acceptance first of the principle of dogma and then of the dogmas themselves and the structures that they supported, constituted effectively a complete turning away from the essential constructs of his own past.

Johnson's rapprochement with Roman Catholic principles was not, however, his avowed goal in 1885. We need only recall the 'Credo' with which Some Winchester Letters ends: "I believe in the Communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sins, the assertion of the body, and the love everlasting."[18] His letters did not, in the several years thereafter, show any particular concern with the shortcomings of his newly-espoused "impressionism", nor with what Newman might have called the intrusion of reason in morals and religion. We do see a continuing and appreciative response to Roman Catholicism from an aesthetic viewpoint. In a letter to his good friend, Campbell Dodgson in 1886, he wrote of these pleasures. A pointed reference to Pater and

his Essays on the Renaissance indicated clearly that Johnson still held to the philosophies of the previous year.

> But at least I visited the Catholic churches that my soul loveth--the Carmelites, who make the most magnificent music: the Jesuits in Farm Street, . . . the Oratory, etc. With the prospect of Calvinist Ebenezers and Little Bethels up in the high hills [of northern Wales], and the book of Nature (a phrase that should be penalized) instead of the breviary, I 'abandon myself to the intoxication of the moment'.[19]

Johnson's use of italics shows his willingness not only to acknowledge the source of his point of view but also to pay tribute to an influence still vividly present in his life. The "magnificent music" and the "breviary" as aspects of "the intoxication of the moment" continued to be at the centre of what his "soul" loved. If changes were taking place beneath the surface, there was nothing as yet, in 1886, in either his prose or his poetry, to contradict his earlier stands. He continued, if not to build his own "church", at least to regard Catholicism from that "impressionistic" point of view which as late as 1888 could find expression in his letters: "London is chilling, and I haunt warm incensed churches: the priests have beautiful golden vestments, the altar is lillied, the whole thing gently soothes."[20]

Johnson's "impressionism" during these years concerned itself more frequently with the "Book of Nature" than with the "breviary". His long walks through the countryside of southern England and northern Wales had

spread before him a beauty that favoured the growth of "impressionism" in its concentration on discrete moments of beauty in time. But like Magic (in "Magic", 1887), he too began anew to contemplate "things of an eternal fashion" and "the mystery and dignity / Of everlasting verity".[21] The opposition that his continuing love of beauty might have offered to Roman Catholicism gradually evaporated in his movement toward a church whose acceptance of the idea of immanence[22] as a legitimate part of the search for transcendence did away with any false opposition between the Holy and the Beautiful. And by 1890, when he would come to write the sonnet "Bagley Wood", his awakening concern for "things of an eternal fashion" would actually influence his view of nature. He could then make the perception of beauty and the passion of that perception a kind of test to determine the presence of innocence and purity and the absence of shame. But by then dreaded morality had entered in and Johnson felt anew the weight of sins that earlier he had tried to banish from his own "church".

Yet even in the absence of specifically religious references in his early poetry,[23] Johnson began to express views in the letters which, without rejecting his earlier attitudes toward religion and dogma generally, seemed to reach toward the embrace of other points of view. By 1887, his letters spoke more clearly of his growing appreciation of, and immersion in, Roman Catholicism. After the loss, in

February of that year, of an opportunity to visit Rome, he wrote of being "so well disposed toward the Roman claims",[24] a statement that carried him beyond the position of even a sometime Anglican and pointed to a strongly positive attitude not only toward the trappings of Catholicism, as he had come to know it, but to the church's teachings. From this period onward, we no longer encounter speculation on his earlier antinomian and libertarian "church" in the extant letters. What thoughts on Catholicism there were became increasingly serious, and he even began to advocate his new interests in the family circle. It was in that family circle that he came to the defence of the Jesuits against the "protestant petulance" of Arthur Benson. To Campbell Dodgson he wrote: "Our nearest neighbors here are leaving: and the dear Jesuits are taking the place, to the infinite horror of my people and the parson. I am looking forward greatly to them."[25] So rarely in this period are the Jesuits called "dear" that one is tempted to search, but vainly, for a hint of irony. Even allowing for an exaggeration of the "horror of my people and the parson", such fraternizing with those commonly held to be the "enemy" cannot have been accepted with equanimity by his conventional family.

Johnson must have made good use of such encounters with Catholics, for by 1888 his letters began to vibrate not with the theologies of the fringe, as they had five years

earlier, but with a more measured comparison of Anglican and Catholic dogmas, to the detriment of the former. This change first made itself known, curiously, in a comparison of the attitude of each church to the concept of dogma itself. The great Lambeth Conference of October, 1888, no doubt much in the news, gave him opportunities to reveal, almost in passing, how far he had come in three years. Again he wrote to Dodgson: "Did you see the subject discussed at the Congress--'the adaptation of the Creeds to modern needs'? what a Church."[26] Since a desire for just such an adaptation had been his own theme for many a year, he would seem to have been hard on the Anglican prelates. He even condescended to write some doggerel on the subject.

> Some seven score Bishops late at Lambeth sat,
> Grey-whiskered and respectable debaters:
> Each had on head a well-strung, curly hat;
> And each wore gaiters.
>
> And when these prelates at their talk had been
> Long time, they made yet longer proclamation,
> Saying: "These creeds are childish! both Nicene
> And Athanasian.
>
> True, they were written by the Holy Ghost;
> So, to re-write them were perhaps a pity.
> Refer we their revision to a most
> Select Committee!
>
> In ten years' time we wise Pan Anglicans
> Once more around this Anglo Catholic table
> Will meet, to prove God's word more weak than
> man's
> His truth less stable."[27]

Given that the Holy Ghost's authorship had never bothered him before, we must conclude that whatever had struck down his own liberalism had done so with such thoroughness that

he now felt it possible to ridicule the very aims that three years earlier had been his own. And in the poetry he chose to preserve we see other respectful references to Christian dogma, as in the third section of "Lucretius" written in 1887.

> In thy predestined, purgatory place,
> . . . .
> What think'st thou of the Vision and the Fate,
> Wherewith the Christ makes all thine outcries
> vain?[28]

Whether the "place" is Purgatory or simply purgatorial is not made clear. What is clear is the earnestness with which Johnson approaches the subject, although, in his letters, he was not above advancing even more belittling estimates of Anglican proceedings. "And dare you face the Pusey House? [he wrote to Dodgson] The dear things have been preaching such extraordinary sermons lately: The upshot is: 'very likely we are not the real thing; certainly Rome is, but after all, perhaps we are quite like enough to the real thing, to get along as we are.' such folly."[29] The savage sarcasm serves only to underline Johnson's willingness by this time to be seen not only as having left behind the extreme beliefs of his youth, with which Dodgson, a friend since his days at Winchester, would have been familiar, but also as having separated himself from Anglo-Catholicism. About this time, he reported to Dodgson a conversation he had had with Fr. Gordon, the Superior of the Brompton Oratory. "He hoped, I was'nt [sic] an Anglo-Catholic. I

answered him, No: if anything, a monochromous hedonist."[30] But indeed the days of his hedonism were over and he had already taken a firm position in support of Roman Catholicism.

How firm that position had become was made plain in a letter dated August 30, 1888, also to Dodgson, in which Johnson quietly and quickly dismissed Anglican claims to membership in a Catholic, or in the Catholic, Church.

> Can you say that the supremacy of Rome is not attested always, everywhere, by all? don't you see, that if you are to renounce the whole evidence of saints, and doctors, and churches, and fathers, all of primitive times, upon the authority of Rome--if you may do that, don't you see that you may equally reject the Trinity, or Real Presence? both of which grew up into prominence very gradually, amid opposition? Oh, Newman has said it a thousand times: "the father who teaches you the Incarnation, teaches you Intercession of Saints . . . I repeat, the Roman Supremacy is one of faith, of discipline; it is a dogma second only to the Holy Eucharist . . . You must discover a new theory: the "consensus" of primitive Christendom is Ultramontane, Papal, Roman . . . Give me your creed, with its basis and sanction: I will prove to you, that you must either add to it the "corruption of Rome", or renounce your appeal to primitive authority altogether, or boldly proclaim your right of private judgement to pick and choose among the dogmas of the Apostles and Doctors.[31]

One notes with interest his new mania for logical consistency, now the basis rather than the antithesis of truth. Yet this attempt to buttress persuasion with logic, unknown in his early letters, does not preclude the presence of the controversialist who had written the earlier letters. He has, however, lost the dilettantish air characteristic of

those early years. Instead we discern an intelligence of some maturity, using the tools of that maturity in an attempt to convince. Although Johnson had not yet come to understand that the use of logic is not necessarily to one's advantage in religious controversy, he uses his words with a sincerity and conviction which his correspondents were no longer likely to call into question.

But it is the argument itself that reserves for us the greatest surprises, first, in that it makes official his complete rejection of his old ideas, and second, in that plainly, it is written from the standpoint of someone who considers himself a virtual Roman Catholic. He had come to discover, contrary to Pater's axioms, that beliefs did manifest themselves in systems. But more, in his acceptance of specific dogmas which he believed to belong to "the Roman Supremacy", he made clearer his own belief in his new world view. To conclude that the eminence of the Roman Supremacy was "one of faith" and "of living truth", and that there remained a dependence on these as expressed in Catholicism and its structures, was to anticipate one's allegiance to those truths. No doubt "the whole evidence" did attest to the institution of the papacy as "a dogma second only to the Holy Eucharist", but it could only do so for someone already a Catholic (or soon to be so) since it presupposed belief in the Church's dogmas. Such beliefs led, for Johnson, to belief in the papacy under whose aegis they had grown, and

faith in the papacy led to belief in the dogmas that it, the papacy, had fostered. It was a circular argument, but, just as obviously, it was one with considerable force for Johnson. So, concluded the argument, there remained one system only in Christendom which had value; for, said Johnson, "the 'consensus' of primitive Christendom [was] Ultramontane, Papal, [and] Roman."

In place of the quest for transcendental verities formerly so important, he now accepted the demands of a great intellectual structure and the need for conformity implicit therein. No longer was religion an artistic process, or a continuous, creative endeavor flowing from the spontaneous interplay of minister and lay participant. His aesthetic view of religion dissolved with his acceptance of scholasticism, and his aesthetic fascination with Catholicism's ritual began to recede with the coming of these new realizations. He had become aware of the new complexity of the interaction of the natural world with the supernatural, a relationship in which all aspects were touched in some way by the force of God's message. And it was _God_ whose message man had received. There was no more talk of Buddha's reincarnation as Christ, and God the Son now re-entered Johnson's world with magnified force.

Johnson's thirst for transcendence was now channelled by the dictates of an organization that had nearly two thousand years of experience in dealing with the

transcendental aspirations of man. So powerful a tool as St. Benedict's Rule had in some sense already touched him, as we see in "Our Lady of the Snows" (1887) in which he defended the ideal of the Benedictine Rule from the attack of Robert Louis Stevenson, who, in a poem also called "Our Lady of the Snows", cast doubt on the value of such a vocation. Stevenson characterized the monastic dwellers as "Aloof, unhelpful, and unkind", but saved his greatest disapproval for their retreat from the world, which rendered them useless, and frustrated the will of God ("our cheerful General"!).

> In deeds, in deeds, he [God] takes delight;
> The plough, the spear, the laden barks,
> The field, the founded city, marks;
> . . . .
> Those he approves that ply the trade,
> That rock the child, that wed the maid,
> . . . .
> But ye? -- O ye who linger still
> Here in your fortress on the hill,
> With placid face, with tranquil breath,
> The unsought volunteers of death,
> Our cheerful General on high
> With careless looks may pass you by.[32]

Johnson, however, strongly argued for the value of the monastic ideal, drawing arguments both from a dogmatic and doctrinal context and from his own obvious fascination with a particular way of life. The speaker is one of the sisters.

> Far from the world, far from delight,
> Distinguishing not day from night;
> Vowed to one sacrifice of all
> The happy things, that men befall;
> Pleading one sacrifice, before
> Whom sun and sea and wind adore;

Far from earth's comfort, far away,
We cry to God, we cry and pray
For men, who have the common day.
. . . .
while you despise
Our lonely years, our mournful cries:
You are the happier for our prayer;
The guerdon of our souls you share.
. . . .
We play our solitary part;
. . . .
And sad at heart, for sorrows and sin,
We wondered, where might help begin.
And on our wonder came God's choice,
A sudden light, a clarion voice,
Clearing the dark, and sounding clear:
And we obeyed: behold us, here!
In prison bound, but with your chains:
Sufferers, but of alien pains.
. . . .
Through vigils of the painful night,
Our spirits with your tempters fight:
For you, for you, we live alone,
Where no joy comes, where cold winds moan:
Nor friends have we, nor have we foes;
Our Queen is of the lonely snows.[33]

Although Johnson hardly expresses anything like an apprecia-tion of the joys possible in the monastic existence (his 'sister' is rather too devoid of the essential joy that the Benedictine Rule can procure), he is sure that the prayerful struggle of the religious life benefits all those in whose midst it is lived. His affirmation of the virtues of the monastic life has also the effect of affirming the histori-cal system within which it has grown, just as Stevenson's condemnation had intimated rejection of that system and its attitudes toward the life of man in the world. In his nun, Johnson saw one who had, in playing her "solitary part", transcended personal needs, and although such was not the transcendence he as yet sought for himself , still he valued

this kind of effort in the battle to achieve spiritual goals.

The effort to achieve these spiritual goals meant not only commitment of a spiritual objective but also adherence to a particular spiritual path. However, despite his strong leanings, Johnson had yet to decide his formal relationship to Roman Catholicism. In the following year, 1888, when he again approached the subject of commitment in "To a Passionist", he began to give signs of a decision in the offing. But chameleon-like, the persona he employs in the poem changes as he writes. Sometimes he is simply a member of a generation facing spiritual crisis who is brought face to face with that crisis by the nature of the commitment of the Passionist Father. But more frequently he is a co-religionist, a Catholic, but in waiting, who looks for the first time into the marvelous world of commitment, a world whose value he is willing to accept as valid, but into which, for the moment, he cannot enter. Yet as one who has decided, in all seriousness, to approach this wonderful world, the poet seeks to prove that such a commitment is possible by formulating an argument aimed at the defeat of what seems a personal skepticism. Here Johnson's voice comes through clearly to the reader. Both persona and poet _want_ to believe the miraculous nature of the event at Calvary, and build arguments accordingly. All these voices coincide in the poem's applause of the Passionist Father who

now perceives, says the poet, the true relationship between reality and appearance in the world (its "eternal sorrow" and the fact of "good and evil"), realities which demand a particular response from those who are able to perceive them.

> Clad in a vestment wrought with passion-flowers;
> Celebrant of one Passion; called by name
> Passionist: is thy world, one world with ours?
> Thine, a like heart? Thy very soul, the same?
>
> Thou pleadest an eternal sorrow: we
> Praise the still changing beauty of this earth.
> Passionate good and evil, thou dost see:
> Our eyes behold the dreams of death and birth.
>
> We love the joys of men: we love the dawn,
> Red with the sun, and with the pure dew pearled.
> Thy stern soul feels, after the sun withdrawn,
> How much pain goes to perfecting the world.
>
> Canst thou be right? Is thine the very truth?
> Stands then our life in so forlorn a state?
> Nay, but thou wrongest us: thou wrong'st our
> youth,
> Who dost our happiness compassionate.
>
> And yet! and yet! O royal Calvary!
> When divine sorrow triumphed through years past:
> Could ages bow before mere memory?
> Those passion-flowers must blossom, to the last.
>
> Purple they bloom, the splendour of a king:
> Crimson they bleed, the sacrament of Death:
> About our thrones and pleasaunces they cling,
> Where guilty eyes read, what each blossom saith.[34]

Certainly the poet feels that he must respond to the same imperatives since he too is Christian, and, at least in spirit, Catholic. But he also feels the tensions that arise between a realization of the ephermeral and deceptive nature of this world and a love of that same deceptive world. As the poem ends, the poet accepts both, the pleasures of the

world and the guilt that must come with an enjoyment of those pleasures. Yet by implication he focuses our attention on what he perceives to be the only adequate response to the fact of "Calvary", the priestly vocation. The "guilty eyes" of the final line accept that, yes, the 'world' of the Passionist is truly "one world with ours" and that, in consequence, our sacrifice must be one with his. The one moment when the poet seeks to break free from such a conclusion ("Nay, but thou wrongst us") is quickly smothered in the knowledge of "Calvary". Christ's sacrifice, the central 'fact' in man's existence and in the history of the world, opens to man the possibility of redemption, and with redemption, the necessity to recognize sin and its consequences. There is, therefore, guilt in falling short of that final commitment, and men like the Passionist Father bear such powerful witness to these truths that even the poet, in the midst of his "powers and pleasaunces", is aware of his guilt in pursuing them, although he is also aware that a dismissal of a life outside the priesthood is not appropriate. There is, in consequence, a certain vacillation. But despite his fleeting protests to the contrary, his final imagery of blood and death points to a theology that calls upon every man to accept his share of blame for the final Sacrifice and to act accordingly. Although youth may have (or at least claim) a dispensation to taste and to enjoy, the poet delivers a severe judgement upon himself, a

judgement that creates a lasting tension which must inevitably compromise his own enjoyment of the world.

But the introspection of "To a Passionist", with its revelations of building tensions, was one facet only of his complex response to what was, after all, a complex issue: the relationship between God and man and between man and his world, with the Church in the role of mediator. The happy inertia in the face of theological problems which had earlier been his could no longer suffice. Moreover, the recognition that his response to Catholicism's higher demands contained its share of tensions suggests that the smooth passage through doubt to belief he indicated indirectly in his letters was not as smooth as the letters implied. He knew that he could never divorce himself from the world of the senses. He also knew that the Roman Catholic Church did not call upon him to do so. But his own predilection for exploring the fringes of an issue, as well as his own familiarity with figures like St. Francis of Assisi, told him that happiness in the Lord could call upon the individual to act as the Passionist Father had acted. The tension which attended such exploration was not conducive to moderate goals, and it may have been this tension which finally extinguished the modest desire he had had of pursuing a mission both literary and theological, a mission he saw exemplified in the career of Matthew Arnold but which for him was now no longer possible in the way that he had

imagined it.

Yet even so, Johnson's move in the direction of Rome promised more than it precluded and he seemed by 1888 to have achieved a degree of belief consistent with the theology he found reason to advocate. However, he continued to experience tensions more crucial even than those he revealed in "To a Passionist". These were tensions whose presence in several poems might finally lead us to question whether, given his dependence on logic in his acceptance of Catholic theology, he could necessarily follow his intellectual acceptance of principles by the kind of spiritual commitment that would extinguish his persistent doubts. Catholic theologians refer to this intellectual acceptance of principles following "a conscious, deliberate act of process" as "dogmatic assent".[35] But could such a "dogmatic assent" finally overcome his own nature? "You are wrong", he had once written, "in supposing that I ever believed in the old creeds: as a child I never believed and my mind is essentially skeptical."[36] Unfortunately for Johnson, this intellectual recognition of what Catholic theologians see as "the one true Church founded by Christ on the Rock that is Peter as the normal means through which men are intended by God to come to salvation",[37] grand as it was, seemed to leave untouched the emotional needs of his nature. Catholic theological belief accepts that a "religious experience may and generally does follow in the wake

of dogmatic assent" but that this experience was "not the first thing or the whole of man's justification."[38] Yet, was Johnson capable of the emotional opening to the beliefs he had chosen? In his letters, he gave no evidence that the transition to Catholicism had been any more difficult than that into, and out of, Buddhism. But in his poetry we begin to glimpse an attempt to come to terms with the skepticism which, in his own words, prevented belief even in his childhood and still could be brought to contend with the acceptance that had become his. It was not, finally, the nature of individual dogmas which strained his credulity but the nature of belief itself; it was not what lay at the core of Protestantism or Catholicism that created these difficulties, but what lay at the core of his own character.

Johnson's earlier commitment to the truth as he perceived it in Buddhism had been transient and evanescent, although it had nonetheless seemed to reveal, in the process of conversion to Buddhism, a key to the defeat of religious doubt: "to get any belief at all implies a gradual assent in belief, irresistibly."[39] He seemed thus to assume that belief itself was not antecedent to but simultaneous with one's endeavors to understand, and that by habitual exercise, by engaging to believe and achieving elements of belief, one's capacity for belief was increased and improved. In his letters, certainly, he did not speak of intuitive leaps such as those involved in Newman's "illative

sense".[40] Rather, he marshalled historical data and logic to make his points, and his dogmatic assent at each level marked after a fashion the stages of his belief. But the question remained whether he could go beyond the acceptance of intellectual principles to give an unconditional affective assent, an emotional and psychological "everlasting yea", so that belief was consistent, durable and sustaining.

The question must remain in our mind because in the poetry from 1887 onward, the reader begins to observe an obscure struggle in which he sees revealed a concern with issues of doubt and "infidelity". The poet uses the "I" of the personal confession. While it must always be a matter for conjecture how many of the statements of this "I" are direct expressions of Johnson's tensions, the tensions that are revealed in this poetry would have been natural in someone struggling with the great religious issues the poetry touches upon. Perhaps it was only thus, in the formalizing and distancing structures of poetry, that so isolated a nature as Johnson's plainly was could begin to express what lay so weightily on both heart and mind. In any case we come upon revelations in the poetry that lead us without difficulty to conclude that Johnson felt his newest beliefs under attack from that principle which he had earlier recognized as central to his own character, his skepticism. Thus, his dogmatic assent, which, at this distance in time, would appear to have been strong enough to

propel him into the act of conversion, did not do so, and his hesitancy points to a reason of some force. His skepticism might have been that reason. Not yet for him the demands of Newman's "simple Catholicism".

Now, there were not inconsiderable worldly impediments or, as Catholic theologians might call them, considerations of prudence, in the way of conversion, even granted a sincere acceptance of Catholic dogma.[41] He still lived, figuratively speaking, under his father's roof, and until he established himself in his literary career in London, as he would in 1890, he was to remain dependent. Yet, although Johnson chose to remain technically in the Anglican fold, a careful reading of three works dated between 1887 and 1889 ("Vigils", "A Burden of Easter Vigils", and "The Darkness") leads us to speculate that simple family politics were not the only impediment to change, and that, indeed, the private man was at odds with the public persona. As he was to note some years later in an article entitled "The Soul of Sacred Poetry",[42] no one could write sincerely about such subjects except from a strong sense of their seriousness, and his poetic words on the problem of doubt and unbelief, in the feeling of sincerity they transmit, tell of the seriousness with which he must have contemplated the problem of his own doubts.

In one poem in particular, "Vigils"[43] (1887), perhaps the most autobiographical of the earlier works, he

isolated for consideration the problem of whether, finally, it was possible for him to believe. As a poem, "Vigils" suffers from obscurities of syntax and image, and a somewhat fragmented structure. Its form unclear, its themes succumbing to ambiguity, its grammar broken and its meaning hidden in elision, the poem shows us a poet who is obviously in conflict with himself. Since even at this early date Johnson was, at the least, competent as a poetic craftsman, I am persuaded that his customary poetic aplomb was destroyed by his having touched an undercurrent of conflict I was not ordinarily driven to examine, and that from the poetic confusion, we can infer a struggle between a desire to produce, with proper distancing, a work of art, and a compulsion to examine in personal terms his own dilemma. In the permitted breakdown of formal demands, the poet betrays the man, and the poetry itself reveals to us the struggles of its maker.

In its title, the poem points to a time or times of waiting, nights spent not in sleep but in wakeful anticipation or in fearful insomnia. This title little prepares us for the early themes of the poem. These themes Johnson makes scant effort to unify, neither the first (a tribute to poetry and meditation) to the second (the discovery of philosophic doubt) nor these two with the central allegory that gives us the defeat of faith, although all arrive at a kind of apotheosis or at least a vindication

in the final tableau which presents the poet's vigil on the threshold of the Church of Rome. His opening declaration of allegiance is to music, music "wistful", "memorial", "melancholy", and "augural", and to silence.

> Song and silence ever be
> All the grace, life bring to me:
> Song well winged with sunrise fire;
> Silence holy and entire:
> Silence of a marble sea,
> Song of an immortal lyre.
>
> Take my thanks, who profferest
> Wistful song and musical:
> Melodies memorial,
> Melancholy, augural:
> Meaning, that Old World is best:
> Ours, a witless palimpsest.
>
> Not cool glades of Fontainebleau
> Hold the secret; not French plains,
> Crowned with monumental fanes;
> Not the Flemish waters' flow:
> Light the fair days come, light go:
> But the mystery remains.

Words like "marble" and "lyre" call to mind the classical world of antiquity, the "Old World" of which we are a "witless" copy, and we might reasonably expect an elegiac tribute for that "Old World" to follow. But we are instead led into a world of mystery and secrets. Neither the creations of the Renaissance represented in the gardens of Fontainebleau, nor the great cathedrals of the plains of Northern France, nor the humanly-controlled flow of waters for which the Low Countries are so famous can give us the answer to the mystery. Thus, it is not in understanding the Gothic, the Renaissance, or the mechanically-minded Modern Age that we can solve the mystery or arrive at the secret

which may be that which surrounds the power of song and silence. Nor does the progress of days bring enlightenment. Song and silence are for all ages and bring to the poet what these monuments to man's intelligence or inventive energy cannot.

But the days of his youth take the poet past this mystery to Oxford University, where, "beneath the carven spires", the many aspects of philosophy contend with each other in a *Walpurgisnacht* atmosphere.

> Here, beneath the carven spires,
> We have dreams, revolts, desires:
> Here each ancient, haunted Hall
> Holds its Brocken carnival;
> Where Philosophy attires
> All her forms, to suit us all.
>
> In a ring her witches crowd:
> Faces passionate and proud,
> Luring eyes and voices loud:
> *Death ends life: And life is death:*
> *Man is dust: The soul a breath*:
> *Who knows aught*? Each fair Lie saith.

The contending philosophies are characterized as "Lies" from the mouths of witches, whose twisted beliefs the poet carefully italicizes. But superimposed on this image of the perpetual conflict of ideas, we find the overtones of a witches' bacchanal overseen by Mephistopheles himself. Like a scene from Goethe's *Faust*, all is confusion. Each voice presents its own version of reality and together they characterize the contentious Oxford scene. Ideas battling with each other are united nonetheless in their perception that man knows nothing and can know nothing in such matters.

Yet the poet, in characterizing these voices as liars, affirms, although indirectly, that man can and must seek the truth. He is aware of the nature of these voices, but fears their impact in the world, for Mephistopheles, the devil himself, is come into their midst to direct their progress through the world.

> Master of the revel rout,
> Flaunts him Mephistopheles:
> Leading up, to where he sees
> Faith, alone and ill at ease,
> Many a winning, light-foot Doubt:
> Knows each other: dance it out!
>
> Ah, the whirling, bacchant dance!
> Then no more Faith's crystal glance
> Pierces the benighted skies:
> Then, for her inheritance,
> Hath she but each dream, that lies
> Dying in her wildered eyes.

The ellipsis in these lines is excessive as if the poet meant to defeat our efforts to understand, and we are barely able to visualize the struggle. Yet it is clear that in this "dance", "Faith", wholly disadvantaged and facing the mob of Doubts "alone" and "ill at ease", must contend with a variety of foes of active disposition. Of the struggle itself we learn nothing except by inference from the vaguely bacchanalian overtones. Each of the opponents certainly knows the other, and the "dance" is not new. The image suggests that a certain formality or ritual surrounds the encounter, like that involved in the re-enactment of battle. Like a dance, it is often repeated, for "Faith" has encountered just such a group on other occasions in many ages and

in the lives of many men, and both have survived. We learn on this occasion that "Faith" is, in the poet's image, felled, dimmed and bewildered. "Faith" can do nothing, and the poet, who also endures this loss, must inevitably find himself among those whose hearts are "breaking" and "fearful".

> Breaking hearts! For you the lark
> Cries at morn: for you the deep
> Silence deepens in the dark,
> When invisible angels mark
> Your tired eyes, that burn and weep,
> Hardly wearied into sleep.
>
> Fearful hearts! For you all song
> Sighs, and laughs, and soars: for you
> Low-preluding winds prolong
> Meditative music through
> Twilight: till for you there throng
> Calm stars, unprofaned and true.

Given Johnson's chronic insomnia, the image of the first stanza is poignant, for when others sleep, the poet and all those who suffer so, must struggle in the deepening silence and darkness, their minds a battlefield on which unfolds anew the confrontation. However, the poet's pain at the implied defeat of "Faith" and the fear that results are soothed by song. The "calm stars" are both real and metaphorical, unchanging physically and symbols of an unchanging nature that is a background to man's activities. They are beautiful and unprofaned (perhaps because untouched by man's desires or activities), and true, because they are unchanging and ever present, partaking of none of the moral ambiguities which are at the centre of man's activities.

They are beyond the reach of Mephistopheles and his underlings, and safe from even their contamination. In "song" then, in poetry, and in the beauties of nature with its essential purity and stability, comes the healing after the struggle. Both are untouched by moral ambiguities (unlike their fate in "The Dark Angel") and serve as sanctuaries after the storm, although they too must give way before the ultimate sanctuary, God Himself and His Church. It is with this somewhat tenuous link that the poet takes us from the defeat of "Faith" to the threshold of new life in the most literal and positive sense, for after every defeat, "Faith" is reborn. But this rebirth is shaped in the crucible of waiting; here too, what is past is prologue.

The final section of the poem reveals that although the poet has seen "Faith" bested, his faith as well as the faith of others, it is perhaps because "Faith" has been bested that he is led to the company of Mary and Jesus. Here is the sanctuary he has sought, a new dispensation beyond art and nature in the same way that the "Song of Mary" and the "silence of ecstasy" are beyond their mundane counterparts. The experience which in an earlier aesthetic or impressionistic mood would itself have been the goal, is now the medium through which we discover other, greater realities which transcend the merely worldly. Only the conditional "when" ("When I find Him") disturbs the apotheosis, showing that if "Faith" always arises to fight again,

so too do the doubts that contend with her. Yet even this note dissolves in the general chorus that follows, when the poet approaches the true Church in transcendent music. There, he sees those who like him have "strayed". But these now form a celestial choir, a choir whose members have acknowledged the claims of Rome, although the poet remains separated from them because he has not himself acknowledged, as these have, an allegiance to "royal Rome".

> Song and silence ever be
> All the grace, life bring to me:
> Song of Mary, mighty Mother;
> Song of whom she bare, my Brother:
> Silence of an ecstasy,
> When I find Him, and none other.
>
> Song thou sendest, singing fair:
> But what music past compare
> That must be when, gathered home,
> Poor strayed children kneel in prayer:
> Confessors of Christendom
> Unto thee, O royal Rome!
>
> Silence all is mine alone
> Now, before the altar throne
> Darkling, waiting, happier thus,
> Till the night watches be gone.
> Holy Aloysius!
> Holy Mother! pray for us.

Silent before the darkling altar he waits and is happier thus, although waiting is all he does, and wait he must until the night-watches, the hours of darkness, be gone. How substantial or disturbing these hours spent in darkness are, we are not given to know, except that he calls upon the saints and the Mother of God for intercession on his behalf. The silence is not yet that of the "silence of an ecstasy". That will come only when "I find Him", but the poet is

willing to wait for the light.

In the rough balancing between his despair at the triumph of doubt (temporary, it must be conjectured), and the hope of the coming light, we have perhaps the best picture of Johnson's inner state, his will to believe and the doubts of his success, his recognition of his eventual goal and his realization that he is not yet in a state capable of its attainment. He is silent, but attentively silent, before the true altar, waiting through the hours of doubt and calling on the heavenly powers to aid him. He must be content with the hope of waiting, even though, as with Pater's Marius, there is, simultaneous with the anticipation, a hint of doubt that hangs in the air. In February of the next year, his friend, Mabel S. Dalton, wrote to Johnson: "I am glad that you are not hurrying to any decision about Rome, as you were, I think, inclined to do a year ago."[44] He would wait for God to draw him into the vortex of belief.

In the following year (1888) at a time when he gave ample testimony in his letters to the progress in his journey to Rome, Johnson could still call faith and doubt into contention. As in "Vigils", "A Burden of Easter Vigil" gives us Doubt and Faith once again in battle, although the poem begins with the paradox of agreement between the two.

Awhile meet Doubt and Faith:
For either sigheth and saith,
That He is dead
To-day: the linen cloths cover His head,
That hath, at last whereon to rest; a rocky bed.[45]

The one in challenge (Doubt) and the other in anticipation (Faith), accept the physical death of Christ. The poet's conclusion to the poem is more complex than his simple premise might lead us to expect.

This only can be said:
He loved us all; is dead;
May rise again.
<u>But if He rise not?</u> Over the far main,
The sun of glory falls indeed; the stars are plain.

The initial emphasis ("this only can be said") is on the theology of sentiment ("he loved us all")[46] that had dominated his own earlier conclusions, but now Johnson is interested in making a point that earlier, certainly, would not have carried so great a weight. In the last facile pun ("The sun of glory"), he calls attention to the extent to which reality would be drained of value if God the Son and His sacrifice had not taken place, if Jesus had not then shown Himself master over matter. The "plain" stars of the 'Christ-less' universe are a sign of its devalued state. Where, we might ask, is the beauty that the poet had so worshipped in his early years, and where the dominance which that beauty had then maintained in his thoughts? Again we witness the result of great changes in the poet's soul, for the pun ("sun") signals the complete dismissal of "impressionism" as his dominant belief system. Neither then nor

later did Johnson lose that total love for the world's beauties everywhere evident in his poetry but with these few lines, he shows his new realization that, underlining his impressions, there must be a substratum of spiritual reality giving meaning to the physical world, a spiritual reality that is Christian and that demands to be the focus of man's awareness.

All in all, these poems suggest a world whose meaning is poised on a knife edge, with doubt on the one side and on the other, faith. I think we must accept that Johnson desired a world instinct with meaning, if only to avoid a sky full of "plain" stars. Indeed those "plain" stars would mark not only the devitalization of existence but also the dismissal of an eschatological destiny. God once dismissed, man's glory and the glories of nature are also dismissed. Beauty, that had earlier served Johnson as ceremony and priest, as grace and redemption, was no longer in itself sufficient. Implicit also in his conclusion was an acknowledgement of the reverse of that devaluation, the existence of God's glory in His work. "Impressionism" could not co-exist with the Catholic acceptance of the belief that God is knowable through His works, and the presence of one belief assumed the absence of the other. Yet even so, with "A Burden of Easter Vigil", as with "Vigils", there is no final resolution of his doubts and we must assume that he took them with him into the future.

The subject of religious doubt found its place in one more poem in this period, in a sombre work written in 1889 and called, appropriately, "The Darkness". In this work the poet, speaking in the first person, begins where he ended in "Vigils", alone, before the altar of God. Now, however, he no longer asks for prayers from the saints. Now, he prays in desperation to God Himself.

> Master of spirits! hear me: King of Souls!
> I kneel before Thine altar, the long night,
> Besieging Thee with penetrable prayers;
> And all I ask, light from the Face of God.[47]

The emotional swings of the poem, claims and counter-claims, all conspire to give a somewhat hysteric and histrionic tone to the poem, dulling the reader's sense of the poet's involvement. However, the general themes of the poem, with their emphasis upon a thirst for relief from doubt, the desire for peace in spiritual matters, and the wish to escape the "darkness" even through an escape into death are developments of ideas implicit in "Vigils". "Vigils" had ended without a final resolution of his doubts but the mood had been one of patient and confident expectancy. Again he offers prayers as he did then, but now "mercy" is his cry in imagery that brings to mind the 'dark night of the soul'.

> Now, when my prayers upon Thine altar lie,
> When Thy dark anger is too hard for me:
> Through vision of Thyself, through flying fire,
> Have mercy, and give light, and stablish me!

But the dominant note is his own desperation as he tries to cope with the absence of God in his life.

> But from my doubt comes only doubt of light:
> Disloyalty, that trembles to despair.

He is aware of his need as at no other time and he is more than ever sure that his very existence depends on its fulfillment. He defies his doubts with compulsive repetition.

> Thou from the still throne of thy tabernacle
> Wilt come to me in glory, O Lord God!
> Thou wilt, I doubt Thee not . . .

The Godless universe is a barren land and unbearable: this he had come to know too well. And without God's help he can do nothing. Yet where is that God when he is needed? "Thy darkness Thou hast given me enough," writes the poet, "Now give me light!" In "Vigils" he waited patiently for the approach of God; now he rages at the delay.

These three poems together suggest that there had not been and probably could not be an easy road to the kind of faith and commitment Johnson sought. In their autobiographical elements they dispute the image he projected in the letters he wrote in the same period of a man who has embraced, seemingly without difficulty, the structures against which he had fought for so long. Instead they give evidence that the transition from doubt to dogmatic assent those letters describe had had its moments of discontinuity and probably of intense anguish. They give finally the picture of someone aware of the possibility that faith might ultimately be defeated or, more perilously, might never be established. Could someone who had drifted into, and just

as easily out of, Buddhism, spiritualism and "impressionism" securely establish himself in Roman Catholicism? His period of instruction before entry into the Church would have clarified orthodox dogma, but of this period we know little. Moreover, could someone who had so often depended on and felt rewarded by a skepticism he thought basic to his character change that character and open himself to emotions of an opposite nature? And having changed, could he then make secure the defeat of doubt? In June of 1891 he gave proof of an important kind that such things were possible with his acceptance of baptism into the Roman Catholic Church, a pledge before a God he now accepted, to the completeness of the faith. By then, the poignant cries for belief which he had earlier loosed were no longer in the air, but whether they were no longer present would only be decided with the passage of time. This confirmation of a commitment could not, however, change the past which, Johnson would needs remember whenever he had to contend with the ground of his own being, his innermost self.

NOTES

CHAPTER V

[1]Patrick, 16.

[2]Arthur Waugh, Tradition and Change (London: Chapman and Hall, 1919), 92.

[3]*Ibid.*, 92-94.

[4]*Ibid.*, 93.

[5]*Ibid.*

[6]Santayana, 55.

[7]*Ibid.*, 54-55.

[8]CP, xxxii-xxxiii.

[9]Patrick, 19.

[10]CP, 43.

[11]CP, xxxvi.

[12]CP, 44-45.

[13]SWL, January, 1885. No specific date given.

[14]CP, xxxvi.

[15]CP, xxxvi.

[16]See Chapter III, 16-24.

[17]CP, "De Amicitia", 103. The poem is dated 1894.

[18]SWL, 21 July 1885.

[19]Roseliep,, 24 August 1886. In his famous "Conclusion", Pater makes use of the words moment and moments no fewer that ten times. The following is a good example: "Not to discriminate every moment some passionate attitude in those about us, and in the very brilliancy of their gifts some tragic dividing of forces on their ways, is, on this short day of frost and sun, to sleep before evening."

[20]Roseliep, April, 1888. No specific date given.

[21]CP, 133.

[22]My reference is primarily to ontological immanence as defined by The New Catholic Encyclopedia (Vol. 7) in which immanence is seen as a belief in which "everything is intrinsic to everything else, [so] that all elements of the real rigorously imply all other elements and actually constitute only one reality." At its extreme, this can lead to pantheism but there is another meaning which "allows for God's presence within the world while maintaining His Transcendence." 386.

[23]One rare early example is "A Descant Upon the Litany of Loretto" (1885). In the persona of one of the singers of the litany, the poet depicts a visit to Loretto which, beginning with the songs of Nightingales, ends finally in a rhapsodic echo of the litany itself. Even though the poem presents Christian doctrine in a Roman Catholic setting, its Keatsian beginning echoes too clearly the "impressionist" attitudes Johnson reveals in the letters of the period, and its formulistic approach to doctrine, softened only in the more personalized final appeal to Mary ("Ah, Mary! lead us home), contrasts strongly with the religious poetry he wrote after 1890. Finally, because the work is contemporaneous with his distinctly uncatholic credo, it must, I think, be dismissed as a statement of belief in Roman Catholicism.

[24]Roseliep, 3 January 1888.

[25]Roseliep, 24 July 1889.

[26]Roseliep, October, 1888.

[27]Roseliep, 71-72.

[28]CP, 59.

[29]Roseliep, 22 September 1889.

[30]Roseliep, 15 April 1889.

[31]Roseliep, 30 August 1888.

[32]Robert Louis Stevenson, *Underwood*, ed., Janet Adam Smith (London: Rupert Hart-Davies, 1950), 132.

[33]CP, 75-76.

[34]CP, 54

[35]*The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, IV, 287.

[36]SWL, 21 October 1883.

[37]*The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, IV, 289.

[38]*Ibid.*

[39]SWL, 30 November 1883.

[40]*Grammar of Assent*. Chapter Nine is entitled "The Illative Sense".

[41]*The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, IV, 290.

[42]Lionel Johnson, Post Liminium: Essays and Critical Papers, edited with an introduction by Thomas Whittemore (London: Elkin Mathews, 1921), 112-120.

[43]CP, 64-65.

[44]Unpublished letter in a specially prepared edition of Ireland and Other Poems in the Winchester College collection of Wiccamica. It is bound between pages 102 and 103. By the kind permission of the Warden and Fellows of Winchester College, with special thanks to Fellows librarian, Paul Yeats-Edwards, and Wiccamica librarian, Second Master, James Sabben-Clare.

[45]CP, 10. There is, of course, room for honest doubt. Carlyle makes the case well in Sartor Resartus (London: Everyman's Library, 1908), 122. He notes, in reference to Teufelsdrockh's doubts, that "perhaps at no era of his life was he more decisively the Servant of Goodness, the Servant of God, than even now when doubting God's existence." Yet, it is Carlyle's conclusion that "for man's well-being, faith is properly the one thing needful."

[46]This was the belief that Christ's love would ultimately carry us beyond any need for involvement with dogma.

CHAPTER VI

FROM TRIUMPH TO DESOLATION:

THE SEARCH FOR SAINTHOOD

Johnson completed his Oxford career in 1890, "going down with a First in _Literae Humaniores_".[1] The examinations had been a close thing, for "not only did his hieroglyphic handwriting mitigate against him, but certain of the examiners at his _viva voce_ were determined to humble him."[2] Soon thereafter, he moved to 20 Fitzroy Street, London, an address on the edge of Bloomsbury. The building in which he stayed was a kind of gathering place for the circle that had formed around _The Century Guild Hobby Horse_. Indeed the address had, as Fletcher tells us, an early "Bloomsbury" air.

> The Settlement [as the building was called] became the focus of many activities, bringing together personalities from very different contexts: Stewart Headlam, known as 'the heresiarch', was High Anglican clergyman, Fabian socialist, founder of the Stage and Church Guild and editor of _The Church Reformer_ to which Johnson from time to time contributed. Arnold Dolmetsch, with the encouragement of Horne, gave his first concerts of ancient music there; meetings of poets and readings were frequent from 1889 to 1891 and those fused with gatherings of poets from Trinity College, Dublin, to form the Rhymers' Club. Sickert, Walter Crane, Wilde, Arthur Symons, and a little later, Roger Fry and Augustus John, to say

> nothing of Solomon and Stenbock, most of the representative figures of the decade could at one time or another be found at 20 Fitzroy Street.[3]

It was in this setting that Johnson began his career as journalist, and as he made his way into the greater world of London he very early tasted success. But of greater importance, ultimately, was Johnson's movement in another direction.

After the struggle of the late '80's we have seen chronicled in his poetry, Johnson set himself firmly on the road to Rome, and the year 1890 served as prelude not only to his baptism into Roman Catholicism but also to a period in which the spiritual *angst* of the previous years seemed almost to disappear. This did not mean that the material for substantial conflict did not continue to exist; rather, the enthusiasm with which he embraced his new life quieted and quelled for a time the battles that had grown from his skepticism. Even so, it was unlikely that this doubt, hitherto so much a part of his nature, would quietly dwindle into nothing, nor was it possible that he could dispense so easily with the "impressionism" that it had sanctioned. However great the forces he strove to embrace and which in turn embraced him, it was perhaps too much to ask that his own nature might be so completely subdued. Indeed the re-appearance in 1893 of those negative energies which he had thought to have left behind would seem, in retrospect, to have been inevitable, the quiet of the truce broken even as

the last traces of "impressionism" dissolved in what seemed a rejection of the life of the senses. Yet 1890 did still mark a watershed after which none of his attitudes and emotions would be the same, not even the skepticism that seemed so peculiarly a part of his nature. In the long term these changes contrived to undermine whatever personal sense of justification he had acquired and added an almost unrelieved darkness to the last years of his life. But in the short term the changes were marked by the appearance of joy, a joy to which his poetry bears witness, and in that joy he found the "affective consent" he had sought so energetically.

There was still, of course, capacity for conflict in a character that had repudiated and then sought belief in religion. His own measured existence and the manner in which he conducted himself before his friends spoke vividly of a personality that held both religious and personal "enthusiasm" at a distance. Yet his earlier letters and poetry make clear with equal vividness his need for "passion", so that his championing of the attitudes of Dr. Johnson, whom he eulogized in poetry and prose, did not preclude his equally fervent embrace of St. Francis of Assisi. In time, Johnson recognized a conflict between bodies of ideas which might be loosely categorized as Classical and Christian, but which were no more than the old conflict of transcendental and descendental metamorphosed.

But his love for each led him to attempt, in the companion poems "Men of Assisi" and "Men of Aquino" for example, to reach toward a synthesis. His love of classicism had been a guide in the very structure of his habits, and this love felt the impact of a strengthening Catholicism which found inherent weaknesses in precepts drawn from mere intellectual effort. The comparison of the two, which he had attempted in another, earlier poem, "Lucretius", spoke clearly of the passing of "Philosophy" (pagan thought) as a living entity, and by extension, highlighted the vacuum at the centre of pagan tradition: "for Philosophy within her bowers / Falls faint, and sick to death. Therefore Lucretius dies." Lucretius' death in the context of a tradition which promised sc little after death, emphasized the superiority of the new (Christian) order. In the third section of this poem of three sections, and the earliest (1887), he made even sharper the incompatibility of the two traditions.

> In thy predestined, purgatory place,
> . . . .
> What think'st thou of the Vision and the Fate,
> Wherewith the Christ makes all thine outcries
> vain?
> Art learning Christ through sweet and bitter pain,
> Lucretius?[4]

Lucretius' "predestined" place is purgatorial in its pain, not in its promise, and his fate highlights the gulf between the Classical and the Christian orders. However, the contrast to be found between the two orders in section III of the poem is not so telling as that found in section I.

It is a sonnet in alexandrines, dated 1890, which with its imagery of night, fear and madness speaks of a darker emotional ground. By its vividness in showing the fearful power of death when man has no heavenly goal, and by its emphasis upon the philosopher's "deathless death" -- the image would reappear in the final stanzas of "The Dark Angel" -- in a universe buffeted endlessly by the powers of nature (for Lucretius, despite his virtue, becomes mere "atoms" drifting through time), the poet signals the end of one dispensation and the beginning of another.

The companion poems "Men of Assisi" and "Men of Aquino", both dated 1890, arrive at the same conclusion. Here are no awesome images of nature's power, however, or of man's helplessness. Both poems present instead the final dispensation wherein man performs his ultimate function as a member of the mystical Body of Christ. By his comparison of Propertius with St. Francis, and of Juvenal with St. Thomas Aquinas, Johnson makes clear the weakness of one tradition, even though he is careful to show how attractive it is, in relation to the supernatural strengths of the other. The "spring roses" hung round the head of Propertius have disappeared, while the crown of thorns[5] which St. Francis bore has become a crown of "Paradise roses" and "Mary lilies" because "Thy sister, Death, hurt not thy roses." Even so, the earlier tradition has value and Propertius too brings something to us.

While suns and stars of summer shine,
Thy passionate music thrills through us:
Hail to thee, hail! we crown thee, thus.[6]

Man "crowns" Propertius with his appreciation of moments of earthly joy, since Propertius comes to us, if we may echo Pater, offering only the pleasures of the moment. But we turn to St. Francis when we face other challenges. To him we cry, "pray for us", because only he can offer what we so desperately seek, aid from the Fountainhead of all spiritual help. It is to St. Francis that Johnson, though yet unbaptised, directs his steps. Although the poet has not dismissed Propertius entirely, still he is aware of the ways in which Propertius must fail him, and in rejecting Propertius, the poet also rejects, indirectly, the allures of philosophers like Pater.

The contrast in the second of the companion poems between the Classical and the Christian orders is even sharper because it grows from an appreciation on Johnson's part of the structures of Roman Catholicism rather than of the eccentricities of one holy man. Juvenal is the classical representative Johnson sets against St. Thomas Aquinas, and he (Juvenal) is praised for his "scorn sublime" against "The wicked splendours of old time." Yet despite that just rage, "Pride and lust keep still their prime", for even so great a voice as that of Juvenal will leave unaffected the world which it condemns. On the other hand, St. Thomas Aquinas, as master of the "'holy' science"

(theology), going forth "armed for Rome's way", can do what Juvenal cannot. Man by himself must fail; with God to help him he cannot. "Using God's voice," the poet concludes "they listened then." For where Juvenal could only call our attention to the destructiveness of a certain kind of behaviour, St. Thomas can direct our eyes to heaven, and to the "heavenly laws". In discovering "truth" and in building the structures that "Rank upon rank, in stately wise; / Rank upon rank in ordered rows" climb even unto heaven, St. Thomas can bring change to man and help him in his quest for salvation. The editor of the Collected Poetry, Ian Fletcher, notes "a vague reconciliation between Pagan and Christian admirations"[7] in these poems, but the reconciliation is very vague indeed and the ultimate effect, as in "Lucretius", is to call attention to the all-too-apparent gap between the two bodies of thought. Johnson's comparison of the two only makes more evident the irremediable differences between the traditions, the first of which can only call for destruction, but the second of which succors and elevates the human spirit.

Johnson's strong sense of belonging to a new dispensation, despite his unbaptised state, is made unmistakable in "Adventus Domini", a Latin poem also dated 1890, and printed immediately before the companion poems in his first volume of poetry. The poem (here in Fletcher's translation) acclaims the Incarnation of Christ and the

salvation of man. "With cherubim and seraphim the King descends: Leaving the Heaven of Heavens for our salvation. Our God deserts Angels and Archangels, That the law of death may not stand forever. / Thou pitying one, Thou Christ compassionate! Thou, who only savest us sinners, that the Heavens may rejoice, that death may die, come Thou with Angels and Archangels."[8] And the central preoccupations of the poem, the coming of Christ, the salvation of poor sinning man, and the death of death, are echoed in another Latin work, "In Honorem B.V.M. Winton Martyrumque Wiccamicorum" (1890), where he cries to the martyrs, "Through the blood of the Crucified, Through the humble life of the Mother: show us the glory of the Mother, And the royalty of the Crucified."[9] Allowing perhaps an insight into one reason for his growing Catholicism, the poet seeks not judgement but salvation, and his appeal is to Mary, to "Lead us in the way of peace! . . . Be Refuge and Gateway to Heaven." In popular Catholic theology, or Catholicism's Aberglaube, as Arnold would call it, Mary, with the abundant compassion of a mother, helps the sinner to circumvent God's judgement. It was this compassion that Johnson sought and not judgement.

Yet the sense of ease Johnson felt with Christian and Catholic truths did not preclude a continuing interest in and a continued awareness of principles that had hitherto strongly shaped his own being. The "impressionism" which,

theologically, he had had to reject for the sake of his renewed belief in a set of Christian doctrines, could not entirely disappear, even if he now saw that his fleeting perceptions of the world could no longer be valued in and for themselves. The result could be the awkward ambivalence we see, for instance, in the sonnet "Bagley Wood" which he wrote in 1890. In the sonnet, a sensuously imagistic octave is followed by a sestet in which the poet sees the sensory stimuli as pure in themselves, with an existence independent of man's perception of them. Man, however, brings a moral element into the scene, a "shame" he cannot escape except in innocent exaltation.

> The night is full of stars, full of magnificence:
> Nightingales hold the wood, and fragrance loads
> the dark.
> Behold, what fires august, what lights eternal!
> Hark,
> What passionate music poured in passionate love's
> defence!
> Breathe but the wafting wind's nocturnal
> frankincense!
> Only to feel this night's great heart, only to
> mark
> The splendours and the glooms, brings back the
> patriarch,
> Who on Chaldaean wastes found God through
> reverence.
>
> Could we but live at will upon this perfect
> height,
> Could we but always keep the passion of this
> peace,
> Could we but face unshamed the look of this
> pure light,
> Could we but win earth's heart, and give desire
> release:
> Then were we all divine, and then were ours by
> right
> These stars, these nightingales, these scents:
> then shame would cease.[10]

The cry of the sestet is suitably ambiguous. The reader must decide whether the poet wishes him to believe that the ability to remain "At this perfect height" is to be taken to be a consequence of divinity or whether he must assume that the divine state flows from man's perfected perceptions. Nor are we informed how man can bring about an "unshamed" vision. Curiously, he seems to accept that we can "win earth's heart", that we can conquer and perhaps assimilate the essence of created reality as if, like Abraham the patriarch, who on Chaldaean soil "found God" through "reverence", we too could discover the face of God in a waste of stars. Thus, in this poem the "impressionistic" experience is still in every way desirable, although because of man's nature, it is often beyond his reach in its purest form. Johnson, like Adam in the Garden of Eden, had begun to discover the dark side of his nature. Yet it is still the beauties of Earth with which Johnson must deal, both as shameful mortal and as transcendent "divine", so that we are led to infer that this "divine" state is accessible to man on earth. It is "these stars, these nightingales, these scents" which would become man's by right, as if somehow the beauties of earth were of value and importance even to those who had transcended earthly limitations. Still, vestiges of his "impressionism" remained. Indeed it would make a later appearance even as he pledged himself, in his Catholic baptism, to stricter observance of principles of doctrine.

Johnson's baptism took place on June 21, 1891 (St. Alban's day), when he stood before Father William Lockhart in the church of St. Etheldreda, described by Patrick as "récemment arraché aux vicissitudes de trois siècles et affectée au culte romain."[11] After the ceremony he announced the news to Campbell Dodgson in a letter: "I was today received into the Church by Father Lockhart." He gave no other explanation for the event which Dodgson must have expected, although he added in a postscript, "If you meet, or write to, any one who knows me, please mention it." The letter, dated June 22, was no doubt written in the small hours of the morning when his chronic insomnia drove him to his writing desk, but he had time as well that day to write a short poem of four quatrains, "Pax Christi". Its title seemed to proclaim his new-found peace in Christ, but in fact, the poem embroidered a curious variation on an earlier theme. On this special day, Johnson was not swept into a consideration of his soul. Instead he concentrated on his relationship to the beauties of this world.

> Night has her Stars and Day his Sun: they pass,
> Stars of the Night! it fades, Sun of the Day!
> Soft rose leaves lie upon the beaten grass,
> Till the wind whirl them, with itself, away.
>
> Eyes have their fill of light: in every voice
> Lives its own music: but the dear light pales,
> The golden music perishes. What choice,
> What choice is ours, but tears? For the world
> fails.
>
> O Sun and Stars! O glory of the rose!
> O eyes of light, voices of music! I
> Have mourned, because all beauty fails, and goes

> Quickly away: and the whole world must die.
>
> Yet, Sun and Stars! Yet, glory of the rose!
> Yet, eyes of light, voices of music! I
> Know, that from mortal to immortal goes
> Beauty: in triumph can the whole world die.[12]

"Impressionism", in its intense preoccupation with beauty as it is revealed in time, accepted as inevitable the continuous destruction of that beauty, and Pater made a virtue of necessity in calling upon his readers to concentrate on "every moment" as it offered some impression finer than the others. It was indeed the brevity of these impressions which gave a kind of entrancing charm to these moments, a charm which the poet discovers even in the "eyes" and "voices" of those dear to him who have died. Like all other impressions these too must disappear, and the observer loses them forever, for after death, "the dear light pales, / The golden music perishes". Art can help to preserve such moments but the multitudinous changes that nature throws before the eyes of man can never be encompassed in the selective efforts of artists. All too sadly, therefore, the beauty of the world, destroyed daily, is lost to him forever. "The whole world must die", exclaims the poet. But he <u>now</u> knows that beauty too is translated into immortality. Thus the poet need no longer mourn the death of the physical world.

> I
> Know that from mortal to immortal goes
> Beauty: in triumph can the whole world die.

The enjambment of the last three lines reinforces the poet's

thematic accents. "I / Know", he writes, thereby allowing the stress to fall heavily on the fact of his knowledge, which we may infer to be secure, as the poet's future is secure, because of the immortality of beauty. This then is the peace of Christ or, more exactly, in Christ is the peace of beauty. The second enjambment, "from mortal to immortal goes / Beauty", reinforces the conclusion arising from the first. The isolation by stress and punctuation of the word "Beauty" allows a purposeful ambiguity which permits him to intimate that the beauty he speaks of participates both in the natural and in the supernatural worlds. Beauty exists simultaneously in the material and in the ideal orders. In its vagueness the poet's conclusion also suggests that beauty will continue as a "platonic" reality, if we use that much-abused term in its loose, popular sense. But Johnson had studied Plato[13] and such looseness of thought would ordinarily be uncharacteristic. However, it is possible that, as he moved from the old order to the new, he experienced a natural confusion which did not permit him to clarify any more precisely his thoughts on the subject. With the poem before us we can at least say that, for the poet, man dies in triumph because he dies in the peace of knowing that beauty is somehow rendered immortal. But despite the title of the poem these ideas are only vaguely linked to a Christian after-life.

The beauty Johnson speaks of is obviously the

beauty of the Paterian "moment". Yet by what manner these discrete moments in time are translated into a heavenly existence we are not given to know. Whether a platonic operation intervenes by which the attention of man moves from the particular to the general, so that we then experience only "the glory of the rose", or, as the poem seems sometimes to imply, whether "all beauty" is somehow preserved in a state akin to that by which man experiences it on earth, the reader cannot decide. The poet's ambiguity, purposeful or not, does, however, permit him to impose a somewhat dubious ideal unity upon the diverse strands of his thought. More importantly, perhaps, his ambiguity permits him to avoid confrontation between the dogmas he accepted with his baptism and the "impressionism" which, despite his new intellectual development, continued to rank among his preoccupations. In any case, the poem announces his movement from preference for one body of ideas toward another in a new dispensation and in that sense is quite properly a baptismal poem.

Johnson had of course made a choice of some consequence when he chose to be baptised, as he demonstrated in his activities over the following months and years. In December he wrote to Dodgson,

> My chief new employments and recreations are of a Catholic kind. I have turned lecturer in general in all the Catholic societies in London and the adjacent districts. Twice have I held forth to Irish audiences upon the Gordon Riots, at the Dominicans in Hampstead and elsewhere: and I am

> becoming notorious in that capacity. Wild Protestants deny my statements, and insult my person: and in calming a controversial mob I have few equals. Then I take classes in literature at a sort of Catholic Toynbee Hall, over the water in Southwark: Tennyson and Dante.[14]

His earlier thoughts on his possible entry into the priesthood were rapidly receding, although as late as October of 1892 he could speak of "vaguely contemplat[ing] taking orders";[15] but as time passed, only in the ever more frequent bouts of dipsomania did he fantasize a future before the altar. His drinking was not as yet uncontrolled or uncontrollable, but there is no doubt that his consumption had begun to increase. If he sometimes drank absinthe, he more frequently chose whiskey. As Yeats tells us, "He suffered from insomnia, and some doctor, while he was still at the University, had recommended alcohol, and he had, in a vain hope of sleep, increased the amount". Later, Yeats would become aware that Johnson "drank a great deal too much."[16] But for now Johnson's drinking did not interfere with an assiduous attention to his religious obligations that at the least spoke strongly of his religious intentions. Patrick notes, "on accuse parfois Johnson d'un manque de sincérité dans sa vie religieuse: sa conversion n'aurait été qu'un geste d'un esthète, une pose artistique . . . Nous pourrions affirmer que sa foi apporta à sa vie tout ce qu'elle avait d'ordre et d'unité."[17] Whether his conversion did bring order and unity to his life can be debated, but the separate testimony of friends like Yeats[18]

and Victor Plarr[19] point to his strong attachment to the practice of his religion.

Johnson did succeed in attaining at least one part of his childhood dream, that of following in the footsteps of Matthew Arnold in a literary career as a critic. He had come to London intent on becoming both critic and poet. He now found himself, at the beginning of his life as a Catholic, working in both disciplines. In 1891, he helped to found the informal Rhymers' Club whose objective, loosely speaking, was to advance the work of poets of his generation. For established men like Oscar Wilde the meetings had few charms, but for Johnson and his new friend, W. B. Yeats, their charms were considerable even if the criticism was too friendly to be of much value.[20] Johnson was, by common consent, the theologian of the group, and willing to expound the works of the Church Fathers or the doctrines of the Catholic Church at the slightest encouragement.[21] And encouragement there may have been since some members of the club, including Wilde, Dowson, Beardsley and Grey, would eventually become Roman Catholic; while other members, like Yeats were struggling with their own spiritual aspirations.

Both the year of his conversion and the following year constituted a period of tremendous output in which Johnson prepared a book of poetry, wrote one of criticism (the first on Thomas Hardy's novels), and completed many articles and reviews.[22] The sheer volume of work made

difficult even the social correspondence in which he delighted, so that he told Dodgson in December of 1891 that he must expect fewer letters in the future because of the amount of work still to be completed. This flood of words from his pen had an understandable effect upon his introspection: there was simply no time for it. And his prose output also limited the time he could spend on his poetry. As we see in Fletcher's edition of the collected poems, only nine works were completed in 1892. As a recent convert Johnson no doubt felt called upon to exercise his poetic talents, as he had his talents as a lecturer, on behalf of his new beliefs, and so several of these are of specifically sectarian interest.[23] It was, in a sense, one more means, along with Sunday-school teaching, by which he vindicated his faith.

Even so, the few excursions into the more complex world, the private world of the individual and his God, show a continuing development in Johnson's emotional involvement in Catholicism.[24] "Visions", written over a two-year period (1892-93) leads the reader on a Dantesque tour of Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven. This modest imitation is theologically orthodox, but with more than a hint of an emerging world view which is already puritanical. Those who are in Hell are "The builders of their doom"; the Lord in His compassion must, therefore, chastise us to save us.

> Now Christ compassionate!
> Now, bruise me with thy rod:

Lest I be mine own fate,
And kill the Love of God.[25]

Every man must die to himself ("Lest I be mine own fate") if he wishes to avoid Hell. Purgatory too is the land of pain, but "happy pain" where "sweet" fires embrace the "red-stained soul". Glancing back to earth the poet sees an "impious ground" surrounded by "passionate flames impure" upon which man must simply "endure", before attaining (by way of Purgatory) his true home, Paradise. In this spiritual journey heavenward the poet sees himself as the least of the least.

But I, too fresh from the white fire,
Humble the dreams of all desire:
Nay! let me shine afar,
Who am Heaven's faintest star.

Upon the eternal borders let
My still too fearful soul be set:
There wait the will of God,
A loving period.

Closer I dare not come, nor see
The Face of Him, who died for me.
Child! thou shalt dwell apart:
But in My Sacred Heart.[26]

It is a becoming modesty which echoes that of George Herbert. Both Herbert and Vaughan were among his favorite poets in this period.

Yet perhaps the most interesting work of 1892 comes in eight lines we find at the centre of "Cadgwith", another of his poems in three parts, which give evidence of a more substantial transformation.

My windows open to the autumn night,
In vain I watched for sleep to visit me:

> How should sleep dull mine ears, and dim my sight,
> Who saw the stars, and listened to the sea?
>
> Ah, how the City of our God is fair!
> If, without sea, and starless though it be,
> For joy of the majestic beauty there,
> Men shall not miss the stars, nor mourn the sea.[27]

The poem marks a moment for Johnson when he sees for the first time the possibility of a beauty so transcendent that those standards of earthly beauty which have hitherto held sway in his own mind (the stars and the sea) would neither be missed nor mourned. Finally, then, Johnson has moved beyond "Pax Christi" and, perhaps, the last lingering influence of "impressionism". Here indeed we find a heavenly peace that promises more than man can have known.

"Cadgwith" is also important in that it serves to characterize the months and years (1891-93) immediately following Johnson's baptism when he felt most secure in his faith. The poetry of these months ("Pax Christi", "Cadgwith", "The Petition", "Visions") projects a calm that is only occasionally punctuated with petitions for general succour. It was a joyful period in which the ecstasy he wrote of constituted finally the emotional embrace he had so much desired. Finally, he had achieved an innocent awe before the religious truths which had become more and more a part of his emotional make-up. However, these years were also the quiet before the conflict. A crisis of an intensity equal to that which he had faced in the attainment of his belief awaited him.

As prelude to that coming crisis, his skepticism toward religion became a skepticism which Johnson now directed towards his ability to carry through to a successful conclusion the commitment he had made to fight the good fight. "I KNOW you", he wrote in "The Precept of Silence", a poem of 1893,

> I KNOW you: solitary griefs,
> Desolate passions, aching hours!
> I know you: tremulous beliefs,
> Agonized hopes, and ashen flowers!
>
> The winds are sometimes sad to me;
> The starry spaces, full of fear:
> Mine is the sorrow of the sea,
> And mine the sigh of places drear.
>
> Some players upon plaintive strings
> Publish their wistfulness abroad:
> I have not spoken of these things,
> Save to one man, and unto God.[28]

The revelations are too general to allow us anything more than a glimpse into a fiery cauldron of his emotions but in the final lines of the poem the poet lets the reader know how keenly these agonies have troubled him. Certainly in the years leading up to the time in which the poem was written he had known just such emotions, "solitary griefs" in the death of friends and more recently in the death of his father; "aching hours" in his insomnia and overburdened mind and heart and in his losing battle with alcohol; and "desolate passions", in his self-avowed inability to reach out to others. The desolation in the poem is perhaps most touching in the deformation he sees in nature itself which, in a prelude to darker insights, has

become "sad", "full of fear", "drear", and a place of "sorrow".

That his knowledge reaches no less surely to "tremulous beliefs, agonized hopes, and ashen flowers" must strike the reader as a tremendous reversal after the quiet confidence we find in the poetry of the preceding years. These trembling beliefs recall the doubts of "Vigils", already six years in the past, while the tortured hopes hint at more recent disappointments, hopes of a start in a new life, a life perhaps of service before the Lord. And the flowers call to mind the passion flowers of a few years earlier whose blooms represented the finest in commitment and the most splendid of personal choices, but which now, like the Edenic apple, carried knowledge but also bitter exile.

The most curious contradiction comes not in the conceptual irony of vowed silence and revelation but in the juxtaposition of the strong words of the first stanza ("griefs", "desolate passions", etc.) with the expressions that frame the irony: "strings" that are "plaintive" and offerings that are "wistful". The sentiments with which he opens the poem are not of the sort generally considered plaintive or full of wistfulness. Instead, in their power these suggest imagery he had not used since "Mystic and Cavalier" with its *soupçon* of "le poète maudit", a figure known to Johnson through his readings of the French symbol-

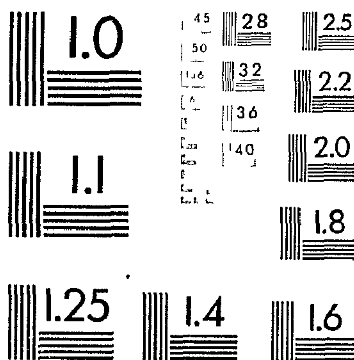
ists. "Go from me:" the poet cried then, "I am one of those, who fall." But Johnson had come a long way in his art from the obviously dramatic frame of the earlier poem, whose imagery of obscure battles mutes any sense we might get of a personal struggle. In the earlier poem the apparatus distanced the core of meaning from Johnson himself, as did the fatalism that dominated the poem in a kind of Calvinistic nightmare. The source of damnation then was appropriately veiled: "after warfare in a mounting gloom, / I rest in clouds of doom."[29] And we were told only of the inevitability of his fate -- "The end is set: / Though the end be not yet." This calculated obscurity gave to the piece the dramatic air of a stage action. But more importantly, there was no sense, in the earlier poem, of an integrated structure of belief within which the action took place. If the Cavalier felt damned, it was through some inexplicable mechanism, which having accomplished its purpose left the victim to the waiting forces of evil.

> Seek with thine eyes to pierce this crystal
> sphere:
> Canst read a fate there, prosperous and clear?
> Only the mists, only the weeping clouds:
> Dimness, and airy shrouds.
>
> Beneath, what angels are at work? What powers
> Prepare the secret of the fatal hours?
> See! the mists tremble, and the clouds are
> stirred:
> When comes the calling word?
>
> The clouds are breaking from the crystal ball,
> Breaking and clearing: and I look to fall.
> When the cold winds and airs of portent sweep,
> My spirit may have sleep.

O rich and sounding voices of the air!
Interpreters and prophets of despair:
Priests of a fearful sacrament! I come,
To make with you mine home.

The cavalier was powerless to battle against the evil forces with any expectation of victory, and the reader is not encouraged to see anything other than the despair of the condemned cavalier. In "The Precept of Silence", the elimination of so distinctive and so artificial a persona brings the reader face to face with an exposition of spiritual difficulties in a specific context. As a result the later poem resonates with an emotion which we sense to be very close to that felt by the poet, and it is an emotion which contradicts the tenor of everything that he had written in the previous three years. Again his inner life was succumbing to change.

Of the state of Johnson's convictions in what might be called a year of crises, 1893, we have a reasonably good record. In a review he published in December of 1893 we see that he felt his faith to be flourishing and well established, at least in so far as he displayed it to public view. The book he reviewed, The Religion of a Literary Man by Richard Le Gallienne,[30] sounds amazingly like the Johnson of Some Winchester Letters, and Johnson's remarks on Le Gallienne's major ideas, although for the most part dismissive, are not as dismissive as his ultramontanism might have led him to be. Le Gallienne was, like Johnson, a new member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of London literary society, although not without a certain personal ambition that expressed itself in a presumption which allowed him at the age of twenty-nine to attempt to write a credo for modern man.

In his book, Le Gallienne uses his graceful prose to speak generally of the arbitrary nature of religion, of the transcience of creeds, and of the wide latitude in belief that he sees as essential to religion in the modern age. "The Trinity, the Atonement, Infant Baptism, Baptismal Regeneration, the Immortality of the Soul, the Life Hereafter -- these and many other dogmas are now seen to be matters of symbolism or personal intuition . . . In short, we have accomplished the inestimable separation of theology and religion. Our religion no longer stands or falls by the Hebrew Bible."[31] He lauds the "Relative Spirit", since matters of religion are "merely relative to certain conditions, as fashions in dress, and peculiarities in national manners are relative",[32] and for him the consequences of the spread of this relative spirit are clear. "Before [its] breath . . . the icy conventions and prejudices of mankind melt away as frost in the sun, and the liberated souls of men and women laugh and are glad in the joyous development of their natures as God made them."[33] His principal task, however, is to speak of Christ the idealist, whose "tragic fate" it was "ever to be misunderstood", and whose gospel, meant for this world and not for

the next, was one of "uncompromising communism". For Le Gallienne, Christ was a master synthesizer of all the old religious intuitions, the dissemination of whose ideas organized religion had retarded. Yet, even then, Christ betrayed his own limitations, for we are told that "a book [such] as Whitman's Leaves of Grass is more helpful than the New Testament -- for it includes more."[34]

Johnson calls the book "an excellently honest book", not only mingling "mysticism unmethodical" with "'sanctified common sense'", but also the work of a man "averse from the dogmatic, the scholastic and . . . the severely logical."[35] He dislikes Le Gallienne's sweeping generalizations, for instance on the uselessness of the Christian ministry when history gives us many examples to the contrary. He also dislikes Le Gallienne's unwillingness to think hard and consistently about his subject. His breaking off in a "whimsical flourish" Johnson compares to interpolating triolets and villanelles "into Euclid and the Thirty-nine Articles."[36] In a curious echo of Le Gallienne's own assertion, Johnson likens the book's spirit to "the better spirit of Whitman", and concludes peculiarly that Mr. Le Gallienne's religion is "good enough", when obviously he thinks it not good enough at all.

Johnson's chief concern is Le Gallienne's unwillingness to accept the principle of dogma, and to emphasize the extent to which he finds this aversion to the dogmatic

unacceptable he quotes Leslie Stephen that "to be a christian in any real sense, you must start from a dogma of the most tremendous kind, and an undogmatic creed is as senseless as a statue without shape or a picture without colour. Unsectarian [for reputedly Christian sects] means unchristian."[37] Johnson also quotes Newman: "Christianity is faith; faith implies a doctrine; a doctrine, propositions; propositions, yes or no; yes or no, differences."[38] Take away dogma, Johnson writes, and you are left with "a precarious theism and a morality quickened by theism".[39] He makes clear that "The 'essence' of Christianity is not any 'morality' taught by Christ with some infinitely gracious and loving authority . . . The 'essence' of Christianity lay in the revelation of a Divine personality entering into new relations with men: in the faith that this man was not God-like, or demigod, nor divinely inspired, but God."[40] And so he gives a clear picture of how completely he has rejected the indifferent trifling of an earlier day. In his intimation that his own experience of religion has now been "taken to heart and soul", he contrives, as if in a secret postscript to his early letters, to ask pardon for his earlier derelictions.

> In the vast riches of Catholic theology there is nothing, not the most dryly technical of propositions, but is alive, and can appeal to the emotions and affections. It is, after all, a shallow and nasty thought, that to most Christians of dogmatic communions their theologies and creeds are dreary and unreal things: only inexperience of a dogmatic religion, <u>taken to heart and soul</u>,

could affirm it.[41]

His condemnation of that earlier stage in his history is now complete. Indeed he goes out of his way, remembering perhaps those early letters, to call the "religion of art" foolish, and he congratulates the author on a book that "stoutly sets its face against pestilent modern affectations of artistic license and personal licentiousness, against the claim to be 'unmoral' and the pretense of being blase."[42]

Johnson is aware of Le Gallienne's shortcomings, of the "'popular superficiality of treatment, when he touches, not with the least irreverence, yet with an easy assurance, upon questions which have imposed upon many men years of spiritual agony and mental labour."[43] But in stating so obvious a conclusion, Johnson is also touching on his own situation. This must be particularly so when later he writes of his preference for the "religion" of that other "literary man", St. Augustine in his Confessions. For Johnson, these Confessions "tell how he [St. Augustine] passed from an airy and elegant rhetoric into 'conventional Christianity', and even became a 'dogmatic theologian' of the first order: a process, so far at least as the first part [is concerned], made by countless others, under his guidance and illumination."[44] We are safe, I think, in presuming a willingness in Johnson's own mind to discern in this process a likeness to the process which he himself had undergone. He too had passed into 'conventional Christ-

ianity ". The article, which we must remember was written for publication in December of 1893, that is, two and a half years after his baptism and at about the same time as the composition of "The Dark Angel", gives us a precise assessment of the distance he had travelled intellectually from the "airy and elegant rhetoric" of his own past.

The year 1893 bore witness not only to the intellectual clarity of his rebuttal of Le Gallienne's ideas and to the ragged passion of "The Precept of Silence", but to a time in which Johnson's poetry revealed the joys of his commitment to his faith. The joys arising from Johnson's emotional commitment appear most openly in several of the latin poems he wrote during that year. In "Dominica in Palmis", for example, he speaks in an indisputably Catholic voice to the victorious Christ: "Victor dead on the cross: Make us to contemplate only Thee, who alone art worthy to be loved, Victor, standing in light."[45] It is a prayer which must strike the reader as sincere, as must its final invocation which brings Mary into his ken and allows her to share the final triumph in an apotheosis as Queen of Heaven: "Through the fearful passion of Calvary, ever to be mourned With the sorrowful Mary: O Good Shepherd! True victor! Let us see Thee, triumphing with Thy Mother incoronate."[46] The target of his invocation is Christ the Shepherd whose sole care is the welfare of each member of His flock, and Mary, the traditional protector of sinners, is by His side.

The triumph of each is the triumph of the sinner because it is the sinner's salvation that is the triumph of Christ and Mary. This focus upon Christ Triumphant does not appear in the other of the Latin poems written in 1893, although the sinner again presses his case upon the attention of his Saviour. In "Corona Crucis", Johnson reveals his thoughts on the Christian way of life, calling it "a bitter Way", and "a difficult life", in a recognition that Christianity is, in its demands, more difficult than other ways of life, although he is quick to note that it is also "a Way of delight, [and] a pure Truth".[47] And the balance between the difficulties a Christian must face -- "The sad heart faints amid the shadows: / From where will the asked for light shine on me?" -- and the awaited triumph in "a distant land of light" is still strongly in favour of the triumphal completion of man's destiny.[48] Although aware of the hard road he must follow, the sinner is still confident in an end of which there can be no doubt. In "Iesu Cor", another of the Latin poems, he continues confident: "Let the end of my sin be the end too of Thy pain: Let my heart know Thee only."[49] The author of this poetry had come to know the comfort of religion.

Yet the most important poetry Johnson wrote in 1893 undermines this impression by giving us the image of someone in a kind of awe in the face of evil. And by repeating the images found in "The Precept of Silence", the

poet highlights the seriousness of the problem under consideration. But what must first strike the reader is the transformation of Mephistopheles, the distant troublemaker of "Vigils", into an omnipresent embodiment of evil who now stands astride the world, against whose powers man seems hopelessly to battle. More, the poet sees in this figure of evil not only a powerful arbiter of fate but a master of seduction. How seductive this figure can be we discover in "Satanus", another Latin poem of 1893. In it he describes Satan's role in man's destiny. With a touch of black irony, the poet, with one work (ECCE), evokes the image of a more loving power, but it is with the prince of Hell, his kingdom and powers that we are made familiar.

> ECCE! Princeps inferorum,
> Rex veneficus amorum
> Vilium et mortiferorum,
> Ecce! regnat Lucifer:
> Animis qui dominatur,
> Quibus caelum spoliatur;
> Qui malignus bona fatur,
> Cor corrumpens suaviter.[50]

The principal concern of the poet is Satan's ability to corrupt the hearts of men as he steals into them by indirections, on "the voices of dissimulated laughter" ("Voces simulati risus") and "the pathetic effort toward joy" ("nicus / Flexibilis laetitae"). Vice "glistens" ("Vitium splendescit"), and the heart is caught, "wither[ing] at last, through delicious sins" ("Per peccata dulcia"), "the carnalities of Hell" ("Vuluptate Avernali"), and the "honeyed vices" ("Mellita vitia") that Satan has at his

command. Satan's power is commensurate with the value of the final rewards promised by Christ, and man must expect a great trial before great rewards. The powers Satan wields must, in consequence, be little less (although at the same time infinitely less) than Christ's, at least in men's eyes. The heart in Satan's grip must "vainly search" ("frustra moerens") for that which will bring release. The final line of the poem gives a clear estimate both of the strengths and of the weaknesses of the infernal kingdom. Says the King of Hell to his Kingdom, "I will give you victims" ("Dabo vobis victimas"), but this generosity will end with the end of time.

It is, however, in the fascination of the "glistening" vice and the "delicious sins" that the poet shows most clearly his new view of Satan. In his fascination with Satan's strength the poet betrays the real tension that every sinner must face and resolve, if he would be saved, between the greater but, alas, more distant good of heaven, and the immediate sensory gratification that Satan offers in sin. It is in the minutes and hours of man's sensory existence that Satan's manipulations manifest themselves and man must prepare himself accordingly for the battle. Inevitably this view of the great battle effaces for the reader the memory of Johnson's earlier euphoria, for in "Satanus" and then in "The Dark Angel" he explores the dark side of the Christian life. The tantalizing ambiguities the

poet explores in both poems make clear the irrevocable changes in his view of the world, and if the poems present an inquiry into the conditions under which the spiritual life of Everyman must unfold, they must ultimately interest us in the context of this study more as the chronicles of an individual caught in the throes of a great battle against his own spiritual extinction.

As the most frequently anthologized and the best of Johnson's poems, "The Dark Angel" has received much critical comment, and the usual trend of that comment has been to see the Dark Angel as a projection of Johnson's particular spiritual or psychological difficulties. Critics are least helpful when they use a shot-gun approach as in a note to be found in the Oxford anthology, Victorian Prose and Poetry, co-edited by Harold Bloom, a note in which we read that the Dark Angel is a composite of "Satan, Johnson's shadow self, his homosexuality, his idol Shelley, . . . and his other idol Pater."[51] Such a position would, I think, be difficult to defend. In his Yeats, Bloom chooses, more modestly, to speak of the Dark Angel as a daimon. He feels that "redemption can come only by a triumph over the daimon."[52] In the best discussion of the poem, Ian Fletcher begins with the following assumption: "it is clear that the Dark Angel must be a part of Johnson's psyche; not something which can in the last analysis be distinguished from it."[53] The poem is thus a closed system, for this Dark

Angel is not the devil of theology but the "other self". This, I think, is the issue. The critic must decide whether the poem emerges simply from Johnson's spiritual preoccupations, or whether it is a statement about reality, no matter how distorted that reality, in which every man must take an interest. The issue depends a good deal on an acceptance and an understanding of Johnson's particular theological interests. Are they, as Bloom contends, "eminently orthodox",[54] or with Charlesworth, must we see the poem as "a change from Manichean to Neoplatonic theology"?[55] "The Devil of theology is limited"[56] says Fletcher, and bids us look elsewhere for the villain. Clifton is, I think, nearest the mark in believing Johnson's concept of evil "in the mainstream of Catholic thought."[57]

Quite simply, there are valid theological grounds for Johnson's stand even if the totality with which reality is desecrated in the poem reaches back to an earlier vision in Christianity. But it is a world which, at the very least, was familiar to the Church Fathers.

> The world in which they [contemporaries of St. Augustine] lived was situated 'in the lowest depths of the universe', a tiny pocket of disorder beneath the harmonious stars. This world was ruled by hostile 'powers', above all, by the 'Lord of this world', the Devil. The Christian, therefore, found himself committed to a wrestling-match, an agon. the ring was clearly defined: it was the 'world', the mundus. The enemy was specific and external to him, the Devil, his angels and their human agents. The 'training' provided by his church had equipped the christian for the due reward of victory in any competition -- a 'crown', in the next world.[58]

It would follow then, that the ubiquity of evil in the poem indicates, in some sense, Johnson's thorough understanding of the situation in which he finds himself and his realization of the corresponding difficulties in getting out "alive". Johnson had come some distance from the days when he had proclaimed: "There is no hell: no sin: no anthropomorphism: no evil: no uncleanliness." Since then, he had accepted and come to believe in the existence of all three. Indeed, even in the early days of his search, although he might proclaim the irrelevance of an anthropomorphic deity, he had not finally escaped a belief in eternal damnation. That, at least, had remained of the "rabid Protestantism" he had earlier rejected. His baptism into Roman Catholicism had provided a release from this early tension, and I think he felt safe in the bosom of the Church. We learn as much in an early letter from a friend, Mrs. de Paravicini: "You have a vision of the Church as "the solution of all difficulties". Is not that rather subjective?"[59] But that feeling of security had now been overthrown. In 1893, something seemed to intervene and reawaken in him a sense of the presence of evil in the world. Or rather, aware as he must always have been that evil existed -- his readings of the Church Fathers would have assured him on that point -- he felt once again vulnerable in its presence. The poem not only confirms this but brings full circle his sense of emotional vulnerability

which had probably begun in his childhood when, as the solitary child in a house of "dry piety", he had perhaps attempted to destroy the Destroyer by shredding the family Bible.

But then we come to a second question: why should Johnson have felt it necessary to react in the way he did at this particular moment? If we reach beyond the world of the poem in order to find reasons for so strong a sense of the presence of evil in the world, we can find at least the basis for conjecture. Of one problem we are well informed. His drinking had been increasing at such a rate as to worry friends like Yeats and it is possible that by 1893 he had come finally to recognize that his habit was out of control. In a letter which may have been written the following year, we catch a glimpse into his condition.

> My dear Mackmurdo,
> I am exceedingly distressed by your letter, though I fully recognize your just cause of complaint. But may I ask for a further trial, upon the condition that I take the pledge at once--which I should have done long ago--and that upon giving the least disturbance, I go. Also, I promise to have no drink in my rooms even for friends. As long as it depends upon my own will, I am quite hopeless: but the pledge is different. I once took it, temporarily, for a month, and kept it rigidly: and should have taken it for good and all, but for falling ill. If you will consent to this, it will be the greatest of kindnesses. . . . I can't tell you how sorry I should be to leave the house where I have lived for five years and had so many friends. Medically speaking, I am not hopelessly given up to drink: it is easy for me to abstain altogether, though very hard to be moderate. At home and elsewhere, where I am not my own master, I drink nothing: it will be quite as easy here, with the pledge. I will be leaving

> town fairly soon, which will be best for me. If you will give me this last chance, I and my people will be more indebted to you than I can say.[60]

The consequences of this recognition would have shaken his own world profoundly. To Yeats he had often repeated, "Life is ritual". How devastating, therefore, would it have been for him to realize, in a kind of dark epiphany, the consequences of his addiction, for ritual is impossible in the chaos of alcoholism. The result might have been a tremendous darkening of his world, and the poem would have been no more than a true reflection of that world. But as the careful choice of verb tenses above indicates, there is no direct evidence to prove that such indeed was the case.

It is also possible to conceive of a situation in which Johnson found himself confronted with the awakening of his sexuality in the love for another man. In a comment about Tess in his volume on Hardy, he actually makes a case in favour of man's "appetite for joy".

> After all, men and women are helpless before that 'appetite for joy,' which rules all creation, and is far too strong to be controlled by disquisitions about social rites and customs: its full force cannot be checked by creeds, but only paltered with and winked at by wisdom: it leads, at worst, in Lovelaces's phrase, to "a transitory evil, an evil which a mere church-form makes none."[61]

Yet although this love might not, in and of itself, have been a sin, Yeats remembers that when Johnson was in his cups, his "theology conceded nothing to human weakness."[62] If Yeats is to be believed, he had even spoken approvingly

of "some church father who freed himself from sexual passion by a surgical operation."[63] He was not kind to others who erred, as we find in his sonnet, "The Destroyer of a Soul", aimed, we are told, at Oscar Wilde, to whom Johnson had introduced Lord Alfred Douglas.[64] The sonnet suggests that as early as 1892 he saw all too clearly the nature of Wilde's relationship with Lord Alfred. It also indicates the degree to which he felt he had to oppose so opprobrious a sin. Indeed, his embrace of Catholicism must have placed uncomfortable pressures even on the idealized "friendships" that were so much a part of his life. The "necesssary hate" he avowed toward Wilde was just that: theologically he could do no other. But theological necessity does not make for personal ease and the turmoil which would have resulted from the conflict between his religious needs and his physical needs might very well have been sufficient to darken his world to the extent that we find it in the poem. However, there is absolutely no evidence for this line of reasoning, and we are again left with mere conjecture.[65]

We are thus forced to return to the poem itself, not, however, as a closed world in which Johnson rehearses his personal grievances but as an open world with a basis in theological reality and with a real devil, even if, to some, the nineteenth century "had made the devil an awkward figure to take seriously as a universal immoral agent."[66]

Dark Angel, with thine aching lust
To rid the world of penitence:

Malicious Angel, who still dost
My soul such subtile violence!

Because of thee, no thought, no thing,
Abides for me undesecrate:
Dark Angel, ever on the wing,
Who never reachest me too late!

When music sounds, then changest thou
Its silvery to a sultry fire:
Nor will thine envious heart allow
Delight untortured by desire.

Through thee, the gracious Muses turn
To Furies, O mine Enemy!
And all the things of beauty burn
With flames of evil ecstasy.

Because of thee, the land of dreams
Becomes a gathering place of fears:
Until tormented slumber seems
One vehemence of useless tears.

When sunlight glows upon the flowers,
Or ripples down the dancing sea:
Thou, with thy troop of passionate powers,
Beleaguerest, bewilderest, me.

Within the breath of autumn woods,
Within the winter silences:
Thy venomous spirit stirs and broods,
O Master of impieties!

The ardour of red flames is thine,
And thine the steely soul of ice:
Thou poisonest the fair design
Of nature, with unfair device.

Apples of ashes, golden bright;
Waters of bitterness, how sweet!
O banquet of a foul delight,
Prepared by thee, dark Paraclete!

Thou art the whisper in the gloom,
The hinting tone, the haunting laugh:
Thou art the adorner of my tomb,
The minstrel of mine epitaph.[67]

The voice of the poem chronicles the successful insinuations of this "dark Paraclete" as the intermediary between man and

Darkness itself, who, in counterfeit of the true Paraclete, brings to man what is needful. However, what he brings is that which is needful for man's destruction. Man's fear of evil and that "deathless death" is circumvented in two ways: by giving evil the appearance of good ("Apples of ashes, golden bright; Waters of bitterness, how sweet!"), and by corrupting man's perception of whatever is good and beautiful ("all the things of beauty burn / With flames of evil ecstasy."). By such means, "the fair design of nature" is poisoned, and all human experience rendered suspect. Although man may be tempted to rail against the desecration of all that he holds dear, he cannot truly condemn the desecration because it is part of the order of things: it "is what God saith." Yet he must fight, and he begins by calling upon the "Holy Name" before which every knee on earth, under the earth and in Heaven must bend.

> I fight thee, in the Holy Name!
> Yet, what thou dost, is what God saith:
> Tempter! should I escape thy flame,
> Thou wilt have helped my soul from Death:
>
> The second Death, that never dies,
> That cannot die, when time is dead:
> Live Death, wherein the lost soul cries,
> Eternally uncomforted.
>
> Dark Angel, with thine aching lust!
> Of two defeats, of two despairs:
> Less dread, a change to drifting dust,
> Than thine eternity of cares.
>
> Do what thou wilt, thou shalt not so,
> Dark Angel! triumph over me:
> Lonely, unto the Lone I go;
> Divine, to the Divinity.

Although he must accommodate himself to God's test, he is obviously not pleased with the plan even though victory will earn him an eternity in Heaven. But it is the prospect of the annihilation of all that is of worth in the individual and the resulting "second Death" (before which even an eternity as mere drifting atoms would be preferable) which galvanizes the speaker in his battle with the Dark Angel. The final invocation gives us a measure of his confidence in his own salvation, but, as confident as this repudiation of Satan is, it is rooted in the instability of the human character and situation. The ultimate tension must be that no matter how confident man is of salvation he is always prey to Satan's designs and therefore susceptible to that other Death. In this, the persona of the poem shares a fate common to all men.

But even man's confidence can be twisted into something which Satan can use against him. When the poet declares that he at least will not fall before the machinations of the evil one, he states a belief which no man can hold with certainty. Yet he feels that he must do so if the resources of the Devil are as he portrays them. In the conflict between the poet's vehemence of belief in the certainty of his own salvation and the dark passion that drives Satan to extend corruption into all aspects of human existence, there arises a dilemma which cannot be simply resolved. The passion for salvation which aids him toward

his objective may present Satan with opportunities to insinuate his own designs into the spiritual life of the individual. "The ardour of red flame is thine", says the poet, without pausing to distinguish between the varieties of passion over which he concedes power to Satan. He must therefore bear in mind, when he counters Satan's passion with his own, the fundamental truth that passion is a two-edged sword every man must wield without guarantee of safety. Yet he nonetheless seeks, in the "Holy Name", to counter Satan's passion with his own, and he succeeds for the moment in believing that he has done so. However, a certain shrillness of tone confesses that the poet is all too aware of his own vulnerability in the face of Satan's strengths. Everything from thought to music, from poetry to repose, from nature to the seasons, from human appetites to human contact itself, falls under his corrupting touch. In so saying, Johnson does not, I think, assert that art and music and nature have been untimely ripped from man's reach because of Satan's desecration of the sensory experience. It is simply the recognition that if man wishes to save himself, he must not look to the things of this world for help. His struggle must be to avoid the devilish traps which will be a part of man's experience in the world.

In the shrill confidence of Johnson's words -- "Do what thou wilt" -- we hear a cry that seems bred of a personal desperation. He is most certainly not alone in the

theological sense; he could not be so and win, although the words may accurately describe his perception of the situation. Yet, as a conclusion to the poem, the shrillness is almost justified, for the poet's early stanzas project so powerful an emotional insight into the ways of evil that only thereby can he maintain a kind of balance between the powers of Light and Darkness. The poet does not, in the end, question heavenly dispensations, but he is all too aware of the yawning pit at his feet. Did he remember, I wonder, his outburst as an eighteen-year-old, that all the best authorities now concurred in the opinion that so merciful a God would not permit eternal damnation? It is Yeats who remembered him saying with energy, again when intoxicated, "I wish those people who deny the eternity of punishment could realize their unspeakable vulgarity."[68] The fears he had not expressed at the age of eighteen, of Hell and the role of evil in the annihilation of the individual, he now had more reason to entertain. He was to remain haunted, as in his youth, by "the anguish of the pit", as he called it in "To Passions", III (1894), although by the time he wrote the later poem, he had lost much of the energy with which he had earlier cried out against the Dark Angel. He could not then summon even the shrill confidence that had earlier been his, as all was submerged in a desperation that had about it the signs of defeat.

How distant must have seemed his "impressionism".

Beauty, earlier the source of grace, had now become the plaything of Satan, used to lead men to their destruction. "Because of thee," writes the poet, "no thought, no thing, / Abides for me undesecrate." Pater's idea of an existence built on individual perceptions in a very personal and closed universe could not survive this vision of a reality dominated by Satan's evil energies, although curiously, like the Paterian world, it too was closed, except for man's ability to reach through penitence to God. It is perhaps Johnson's embrace of this particular vision (attributable in part to St. Augustine's theological writings with which he had become more and more familiar) that makes the poem "personal", though not in the sense that Harold Bloom uses the word when he calls it a "purely personal history".[69] The poem does present a particular mixture of emotion and thought that allows the reader insight into Johnson's _Weltanschauung_ at this time. But as his theology acquires an Augustinian flavour, it claims "impressionism" only as a secondary victim, for the final effect is to darken the entire ground of Johnson's existence, and we begin slowly to see reasons for the manner in which his references to passion are so generalized.

Even in the years of joy, Johnson had been quick to recognize that Christianity insisted upon a narrow path through the world. He had then called it "a bitter way". There _may_ have been a 'dark epiphany' in 1893, which

startled him into a perception of the world's evil, but what seems more likely is that the breakdown in his life had made all too clear the nature of the struggle for redemption in which he was engaged and had highlighted the negative rather than the positive aspects of worldly (in the several meanings of the word) existence as he had come to see it. Here we can call to mind his early years when he had, perhaps unconsciously, sought principles of good to counter-balance the principle of evil he saw active in the world. Then, his own feeling had been one of vulnerability to eternal damnation. His conversion had quieted that feeling, but with the increasing sense of his own vulnerability to the machinations of Evil, he had good reason to see the world as the realm of the devil. No doubt his life had fallen apart, but the impact of that failure had been to make him sense profoundly the fragility of the link between himself and his God.

Thus "The Dark Angel" marks the final step in his spiritual odyssey, the recognition that any interference in the pursuit of his goal -- heavenly rest among the saints -- had somehow to be eliminated, and that among those things to be eliminated were his emotions. From these, as we see in his fulminations against the passions, he now began a with-drawal. However, as the poetry makes clear, he could not escape so easily.

> Darker than death, fiercer than fire,
> Hatefuller than the heart of Hell:

I know thee, O mine own desire!
I know not mine own self so well.

Passion, imperious insolent,
Thou that destroyest me! oh, slay
Me now, or leave me to repent:
I weary of thy lingering way.[70]

Built around words like "desire" and "passion", the poem must inevitably puzzle the reader. His word choice shows too clearly the extent to which Johnson handicaps himself in his writing both because he does not attempt to infuse the old with something new and because he prefers an abstract vocabulary. Gerard Manley Hopkins, in attempting to deal with a situation in which he too had no wish to bare his own troubles in any detail, still contrived so to charge the structures he made use of that we barely notice how general the nature of his communication is. But then, Hopkins fought against the darkness; Johnson retreats into an emotional neutrality. Can Johnson mean to condemn desire and passion in one all-embracing gesture? In "The Dark Angel" we saw that the passions originating in art, nature and even in human relationships were subject to Satan and therefore tainted. The only passion worthy of the Christian was that for God. Johnson's conclusion then is clear: he must spend his life casting off all but the passion for God even if the struggle has become an "ever-present agony" ("To Passions" I) from which he can rest only in the immediacy of the rites of the Church. There, the air grows sweet, as in the first "Ash Wednesday" (1893), for example,

where his passions succumb to the soothing influence of the most powerful of symbols, the Cross.

> Ashen cross traced on brow!
> Iron cross hid in breast!
> Have power, bring patience, now:
> Bid passion be at rest.
> . . . .
> Here is the healing place,
> And here the place of peace:
> Sorrow is sweet with grace
> Here, and here sin hath cease.[71]

Only literally in a church's sanctuary was it possible to feel at rest and believe in the efficacy of repentence, for only there would he find neither the provocative sensual experience of the everyday world nor that minor demon, alcohol. As Johnson had said in "Corona Crucis", "Hard [was] the holy war, and hard the Way." What aid might be within his reach he began to seek, as we see in "To My Patrons" (1893).

> Thy spear rent Christ, when dead for me He lay:
> My sin rends Christ, though never one save He
> Perfectly loves me, comforts me. Then pray,
> Longinus Saint! the Crucified, for me.
>
> Hard is the holy war, and hard the way:
> At rest with ancient victors would I be.
> O faith's first glory from our England! pray,
> Saint Alban! to the Lord of Hosts, for me.[72]

Johnson obviously now thought himself in the midst of a deadly struggle, a struggle for "rest with ancient victors", although defeat is very clearly in the air as he addresses the generalized passions that seek so persistently to destroy him.

> Thou fool! for if thou have thy way with me,
> Thou wilt be still the same: but victor, I

Should make some fair perfection out of thee,
And reach the starry Heaven of Heavens thereby.

But thou preferrest the dark joy of Hell,
Triumphant over me drawn down to it?
Thou fool! My lost soul ever more would tell
Thy folly, and the anguish of the pit.[73]

One of the consequences for Johnson of this new burden is the tendency for the wistfulness of "The Precept of Silence" to turn into the devastating languor we find in "To Passions", a languor which when joined to his vocal self-hatred is disquieting in its intensity. Thus, in "To Passions", I, we see man both hunted and haunted, who has caught more than a hint of the Blaise Pascal Johnson was to describe in a review in 1897 when he quoted Pascal: "La maladie est l'état naturel des chrétiens."[74] Pascal's Jansenism, itself a kind of dark joy, seemed to possess an appropriateness for Johnson that increased with the growing power of his own dark thoughts. Three years before that review his thoughts could find among their number Pascal's own "splendid self-contempt", as he would then call it, "[his] scourging of the 'hateful I'."[75]

That hate, and that, and that again,
Easy and simple are to bear:
My hatred of myself is pain
Beyond my tolerable share.

Comfort and joy, I have not claimed:
I ask no vast felicity.
But of myself to live ashamed
Is ever present agony.

O haunting thoughts, awhile away!
O brooding memories, go sleep!
Give me one hour of every day:
Yours be the rest to vex and keep.[76]

Again we are faced with the ambiguity of "haunting thoughts" and "brooding memories", but of one thing there can be no doubt: if Johnson is writing of himself, and I think we must accept that he is, then his life had become unbearable in the way that Hopkins's must have been at the end. But we have here neither an attempt to turn personal emotions into literature nor Hopkins's splendid imaginative response to the crisis. It is perhaps in reaction to this life that he chose the oblivion of alcohol, a choice he acknowledged in "Vinum Daemonum". It is a poem in which he delineates the nature of the sanctuary any man could turn to if he wished.

> Only one sting, and then but joy:
> One pang of fire, and thou art free.
> Then, what thou wilt, thou canst destroy:
> Save only me!
>
> Triumph in tumult of thy lust:
> Wanton in passion of thy will:
> Cry Peace! to conscience, and it must
> At last be still.
>
> I am the Prince of this World: I
> Command the flames, command the fires.
> Mine are the draughts, that satisfy
> This world's desires.
>
> Thy longing leans across the brink:
> Ah, the brave thirst within thine eyes!
> For there is that within this drink,
> Which never dies.[77]

"Cry Peace! to conscience", writes the poet, "and it must at last be still." Our knowledge of his life at this time adds weight to the conclusion that he had finally found a sanctuary which did not depend on the sacrifices he felt forced to make in pusuit of his eternal destiny. "Only one

sting", sings the wine (or whisky) and there follows joy and freedom. All response is deadened and all remorse and shame forgotten as we bow before an ally of that other Prince of the World. Even though Christ remained, for Johnson, Him "at Whose word depart / Sorrows and hates, home to Hell's waste and wild",[78] his quest must have suffered, as the retreat into alcohol proved an easy escape from the stress he associated with the estate of being a Christian.

Yet alcohol had not perhaps been the only thing to loose into Johnson's life the forces for disorder and destruction. As he notes in "A Proselyte" (1894), it was possible for the act of becoming a Christian to overturn even the most orderly existence.

> Heart of magnificent desire:
> O equal of the lordly sun!
> Since thou hast cast on me thy fire,
> My cloistral peace, so hardly won,
>   Breaks from its trance:
>   One glance
> From thee hast all its joy undone.
>
> Of lonely quiet was my dream;
> Day gliding into fellow day,
> With the mere motion of a stream:
> But now in vehement disarray
>   Go time and thought,
>   Distraught
> With passion kindled at thy ray.
>
> Heart of tumultuary might,
> O greater than the mountain flame,
> That leaps upon the fearful night!
> On me thy devastation came,
>   Sudden and swift;
>   A gift
> Of joyous torment without name.
>
> Thy spirit stings my spirit: thou
> Takest by storm and ecstasy

The cloister of my soul. And now,
With ardour that is agony,
I do thy will;
Yet still
Hear voices of calm memory.[79]

Impelled toward belief by the Holy Ghost, "equal of the lordly sun" (a pun he had used before), the "I" of the poem cannot deny the possibility of a blissful vision of the future. But he feels as if his nature cannot accomodate the spiritual fire he finds his own. The resulting ecstasy obviously has its compensations, but to embrace the demands which accompany it lays a heavy burden on his soul and sorely tries his will. With God's presence (in the influence of the Holy Ghost), these changes are constructively disruptive, the joy and ecstasy compensating for the losses which he has to endure. But in the absence of God, the fragmenting which the personality had undergone can no longer be creatively sustained and has become simple disorder, a state in which he finds it very difficult to live. If Johnson is speaking of his own experience, and again the poetry presents a striking parallel to his own life, then he has indeed suffered for his faith.

But Johnson no longer wrote much about ecstasy. All now seemed agony, particularly when it concerned the doubts he had begun to hold of his own election. They bore an uncomfortable resemblemce to his ancient skepticism. Yet, as before, Mother Church came to his rescue. Even as Johnson felt himself slip into the disbelief that might have

led to despair he found in Catholicism a resource whereby the agonies of doubt could be prelude to, nay, were essential to, the perfecting of the human spirit: the mystical experience. Unresponsive and cold though his soul might be, he must not despair even when despair seemed the only possibility, for this was but preliminary to the great reward of God's favour. This "dark night of the soul" promised, even in its anguish, rewards for those who waited patiently. He had only to be as tenacious for good as his adversary was for evil. Three years later his article on Pascal (1897) would speak of Pascal's need for "prostrate self-abasement", a state "in which 'imbecile nature' is bidden to keep silent, and 'impotent reason' to humble itself. All of which is simple, logical, orthodox Christianity: the necessary attitudes of man in the presence of the ultimate mysteries in the ante-chamber of realities."[80] He pursued that goal relentlessly now, silencing when he could "imbecile nature" and humbling "impotent reason". He had no need of reason (because alone it could do nothing) as he clung to the last great possibility that he too might one day be among the chosen. He seems to have decided that nothing remained but to pursue his goal with the "intense devouring energy of soul and spirit" that characterized Pascal in his *Pensées*.

That Johnson actively contemplated these attitudes we learn in "To a Spanish Friend", a poem written in 1894

and addressed to his friend, George Santayana, whom Johnson exhorts to return to Mother Church. In a poem of harrowing single-mindedness, he describes what he must have conceived to be his own path. It is a frightening vision of a lonely man whose only hope is in living on the edge of despair.

> Seraph Saint, Teresa burns
> Before God, and burning turns
> To the Furnace, whence she learns
> How the Sun of love is lit:
> She the Sunflower following it.
> A fair ardour infinite:
> Fire, for which the cold soul yearns!
>
> Clad in everlasting fire,
> Flame of one long, lone desire,
> Surely thou too shalt aspire
> Up by Carmel's bitter road:
> Love thy goal and love thy goad.
> Love thy lightness and thy load,
> Love thy rose and love thy briar.
>
> Leave the false light, leave the vain:
> Lose thyself in Night again,
> Night divine of perfect pain.
> Lose thyself, and find thy God.
> Through a prostrate period:
> Bruise thee with an iron rod;
> Suffer, till thyself be slain.
>
> Fly thou from the dazzling sky,
> For it lights the downward way:
> In the sacred Darkness pray,
> Till prayer cease, or seem to thee
> Agony of ecstasy:
> Dead to all men, dear to me,
> Live as saints and die as they.
>
> Stones and thorns shall tear and sting.
> Each stern step its passion bring,
> On the Way of Perfecting,
> On the Fourfold Way of Prayer:
> Heed not, though joy fill the air;
> Heed not, though it breathe despair:
> In the city thou shalt sing.
>
> Without hope and without fear,
> Keep thyself from thyself clear:

> In the secret seventh sphere
> Of thy soul's hid Castle, thou
> At the King's white throne shalt bow:
> Light of Light shall kiss thy brow,
> And all darkness disappear.[81]

The cumulative impact of the imagery must be to emphasize the extent to which the quest for sanctuary near "the King's white throne" begins in an ability to sustain, and to choose to sustain, endless pain and suffering, and to become, in Pascal's sense of the term, a Christian, that is, one who had "no possibility of being happy, except through the joy of sorrow and the delight of abnegation."[82] We cannot, I think, escape the conclusion that the "cold soul" yearning for fire is Johnson's, as it is Johnson who seeks to "lose [him]self and find [his] God / Through a prostrate period", and that it is his will to "Suffer, till thyself be slain" and be thus "Dead to all men", even though he ostensibly proffers the advice to Santayana. For Johnson, "Each stern step" does indeed "its passion bring, / On the Way to Perfecting", although he sees even this passion inevitably diffused into an emotional neutrality, perhaps even into a passivity which would allow him some escape from his own pain-filled existence. This was the "Way" Johnson had finally chosen, and, if he suffered, it was for the reward which he saw as inevitable. His continued suffering could only render more ineffable the final vision.

But if Roman Catholicism provided Johnson with the means whereby he might make of his skepticism something

positive, and had indeed given him a gift with the potential to sustain him in his worst moments, at the same time, it provided an ideal so exalted that he must certainly fail to attain it. This is the tragedy which contrived by degrees to bring about a rough equilibrium of nothings in his emotional life.

> Heed not, though joy fill the air;
> Heed not, though it breathe despair:
> . . . .
> Without hope and without fear,
> Keep thyself from thyself clear: . . .

He no doubt hoped that the human suffering which resulted from the rejection of so much in the world, and which had begun to weigh so heavily upon his mind, would disappear into this emotional vacuum. But in consequence there was little joy and perhaps too much that savoured of despair in his world, and, perhaps above all, the black sanctuary of "Vinum Daemonum" to which he might apply when all else failed.

The years that followed the turbulent period of 1893-94 were years of illness and alcoholism. We read in a letter from Selwyn Image of paralysis and pain in late 1894: "I am desperately sorry to hear you are feeling no better . . . You mention the horrid word paralysis: but that surely it can't be, or you wouldn't have such atrocious pain."[83] This "illness" was quite possibly the result of the first of a series of strokes, the most massive of which would kill him some seven years later. Four years earlier,

Michael Field had seen Johnson at a Pater lecture, "a learned snowdrop"[84] in the front row. But by 1898 the deterioration was evident to everyone. Stopforth Brooke would describe Johnson, aged thirty-one, as "mournful and decaying. Both [he and Miss O'Brien] are young, but Johnson is also very old. A small dark withered man."[85] His physical decline was accompanied by a gradual retreat from mankind. As Yeats wrote, "at last one called to find his outer door shut, the milk on the doorstep sour."[86] And if Johnson had lacked the will in 1893 to refrain from indulgence, thereafter, he lacked the desire. To Yeats, who had implored him to shake off his infirmity, he is reported to have replied: "I do not want to be cured", and "In ten years I shall be penniless and shabby, and borrow half-crowns from friends."[87] He did not have ten years. He had entered a very private world, in which the "phantasmagoria", as Yeats called his imaginary dialogues with Newman, Gladstone, and others, quotations from which leavened his conversation,[88] were only another sign of a world in which people had become unimportant. Once open to all comers, particularly at night, his door was now closed to friends and family members alike. There, in the grip of a habit he could not choose to break, and engaged in a spiritual battle he waged ever more weakly, he must have finally welcomed death as a kindness, for rarely during those last years did the darkness break to admit the cool and saving grace of

God's light. In the gentle Christmas "Carols" of 1895 and 1896, Johnson still saw, in the efficacy of the Sacrifice, the assurance that man would see heaven. And as he expected to receive so did he wish to give: Irish patriot that he was, he called upon the Irish martyrs who had suffered at the hands of Cromwell to offer "pardoning praise" to their destroyer.[89] More frequently than formerly his poetry contained petitions to the saints and to Mary, favourite object of his prayers. But even in these pleas the spiritual desolation is evident.

> Let thy soul's grace steal gently over ours.
> Send on us dew and rain,
> That we may bloom again,
> Nor wither in the dry and parching dust.
> . . . .
> Ah, let thy graces be
> Sown in our dark hearts! We
> Would make our hearts gardens for thy sweet care;
> Watered from wells of Paradise, and sweet
> With balm winds flowing from the Mercy Seat,
> And full of heavenly air.[90]

His appeals now begin to acquire a formulistic air, with imagery drawn from standard Christian literature, and we no longer sense the burning union of his personal concerns with the ready-to-hand images he chooses to use. To do so would have meant a return to the real world, and the naked face of his fears and doubts. Having turned to "Vinum Daemonum" to quiet his conscience, he had not now the will to struggle, as he had once struggled, against the dark.

Only the world of the senses had its old impact, and, perhaps because of this we read of the necessity to

contain it. The poem "Before the Cloister", calls, in an echo of Pascal, for the return of "sorrow", so that the "surging joy" of life might not "drown" the speaker to the detriment of her heavenly objective.

> Sorrow, O sister Sorrow, O mine own!
> Whither away hast flown?
> Without thee, fiery is the flowery earth,
> A flaming dance of mirth,
> A marvel of wild music: I grow frail
> Amid the perfumed gale,
> The rushing of desires to meet delights.
> . . . .
> Come, Sorrow! lest in surging joy I drown.
> To lose both Cross and Crown.[91]

When he had first met Santayana in Oxford he had pointed to the horizon. "Everything above that line is right", he had said, "everything below it is wrong."[92] But it was not so. Even as he withdrew from them, worldly delights wrung from him a reluctant commendation. In "To a Belgian Friend" (1898), written on the occasion of a friend's ordination, we read:

> I give you praise: give me your better prayers.
> The nothingness, which you have flung away,
> To me seems full of fond delightful cares,
> Visions, and dangers of a crowded day.[93]

Johnson could, like Pascal, look upon this earth as "the ante-chamber of realities",[94] but his profound appreciation of natural beauty, and even of the "fond delightful cares, / Visions, and dangers of the crowded day", forbade so uncompromising an attitude toward the genuine joys which surged up spontaneously in their presence. And it was this strong alloy of earthiness, even as his life approached its

end, which seemed to prevent the act of will that he saw as necessary in order to attain his transcendental goal. Yet perhaps in the end that struggle too disappeared in the haze of the whisky fumes.

The rejection of the sensual world, which could bring him such joy, became but one more means by which Johnson exhibited his determination to pursue the "Way". It was the kind of commitment he saw in "Mother Ann" (Ann Lee, the foundress of the Shaker communities), who had chosen to succumb to her passion for God and nothing else. The word _white_, with its suggestion of spiritual purity, which he had found both in Pater's _Marius_ and in Vaughan's poetry, indicates his approbation.

> White were the ardours of thy soul, O wan Ann Lee!
> Thou spirit of fine fire for every storm to shake!
> They shook indeed the quivering flame, yet could not make
> Its passionate light expire, but only make it flee:
> Over the vast, the murmuring, the embittered sea,
> Driven, it gleamed: no agonies availed to break
> That burning heart, so hot for heavenly passion's sake;
> The heart, that beat, and burned, and agonized, in thee![95]

For the orthodox Catholic in Johnson, Ann Lee was, of course, "astray"; nevertheless, in her passion for God, she was, like St. Francis of Assisi, an "altar flame" who would ultimately claim the prayers of "Mother Mary, star of the Morning". Her passion for God had carried her through.

Johnson's own passion for holiness seemed to fade into bewilderment as he fell into the life of a recluse,

hardly accessible even to editors like Lewis Hind of *The Academy* who were still willing to print the critical contributions which retained the old lucidity and stylishness.[96] The isolation he had chosen lent a poignancy to the appeals for clemency which he made in poems like "De Profundis", crying anew from the "depths" that he had come to know so well.

> My broken music wanders in the night,
> Faints, and finds no delight:
> White Angels! take of it one piteous tone,
> And mix it with your own!
> Then, as He feels your chanting flow less clear,
> He will but say: *I hear*
> *The sorrow of My child on earth!* and send
> Some fair, celestial friend,
> One of yourselves, to help me: and you will,
> Choirs of the Holy Hill,
> Help me, who walk in darkness, far away
> From your enduring day:
> Who have the wilderness for home, till morn
> Break, and my day be born;
> And on the Mount of Myrrh burn golden white
> Light from the Light of Light.[97]

The tone and the imagery of "De Profundis" (1897), unlike the savageness of those we find in "The Darkness" which he had written eight years earlier, do not move us except in their sweetness. The raw agony is past and only a resignation remains, disembodied in its gentle persistence.

There would be one final glimpse into the spiritual odyssey that had been Johnson's. At century's end, and as he slowly recovered from a probable cerebral hemorrhage that had left him a touch of paralysis, Johnson began once again to write poetry in what must have been a personal cry for mercy. However, sensing the absence of God, he

addresses himself instead to the saints. Rarely printed, this poem must be cited in full.

> Will you not tell me, what it is to be
> A Saint, O Saints, whom I may never see:
> For what is common unto you and me?
>
> Man's flesh was yours once, as it still is mine;
> But you lived loyal to the Law Divine:
> I am not even the lowest of your line.
>
> Pleasing yourselves to you was ever pain;
> Mortification, ecstasy and gain;
> Your joy, to make your dearest passions vain.
>
> I have no part in such celestial things:
> Visions I have, but not the actual wings
> That lifted, sped you, to the heavenly springs:
>
> Whence you drank daily draughts of living grace,
> And, mirrored there, caught glances of God's Face,
> And glimpses of the glorious Holy Place.
>
> You found your fullest freedom in restraint:
> A weakling slave, my spirit, frail and faint:
> Oh, rare is the strong secret of the Saint!
>
> White were you, Saints! oh, white and passing
> white!
> And you the darkness of the sacred night
> Led ever upward to the perfect Light.
>
> To me the glory of the living day
> Is gladness, mixed with moments of dismay:
> I cannot, cannot, tread your sterner way.
>
> White Saints, who never your white souls
> disgraced,
> Nor, for the trial of God's love, effaced
> Him from your vision, nor one hour displaced
>
> Him from His sure enthronement in your hearts:
> Teach me to play your painful happy parts;
> Teach me your perilous and perfect arts!
>
> Give me your love of love and of desire:
> Ah, for your beautiful consuming fire!
> I linger on the lowlands: lift me higher!
>
> Born into life, busy with life, as I,
> Were you, white Saints, who were not loath to die:

I cling to life; thinking on death, I sigh.

But whence, great Saints, this greatest
difference,
That I to mine own self do violence
Of sin, but yours was of obedience?

You could do all, through Christ your
strengthener;
Christ was of your own selves the Vanquisher:
Am I not also Christ's petitioner?

Freedom and weakness in my will I know:
Ah, is it malice, conscious and aglow,
That into paths of death persuades me so?

Not malice, loathliest of loathly things!
Oh, let it not be malice, that thus brings
My soul within the shadow of death's wings!

Said I, that I have knowledge of my will?
False! false! Blind born, blind I continue
still:
I do not know myself, only mine ill.

Here upon earth a many loves I know, --
Of friends, and of a country wed to woe;
Of the high Muses; of wild wind, pure snow;

Of heartening sun, exhilarating sea:
And yet the lowliest sinner well may be
Heir to a station towering over me.

Fear had you, holy fear: you often knew
Trembling; remembering, chosen are but few:
Often upon your souls there fell no dew.

The desert, dry with dereliction, felt
Often your footsteps: came no fire to melt
The numbing ice wherein your spirits dwelt.

And yet, indomitably you endured;
In deeps of darkness, yet of light assured;
Invincible your trust, serene, secured.

Kyrie eleison lived upon your lips;
Constant, your terror of the soul's eclipse,
And dooming of the dread Apocalypse.

Oh, could it be? Oh, royal Love! could I,
Far from yourselves, yet in your kingdom, vie
With you in endless chaunt to the Most High?

> Oh, could it be? Is God so good as this,
> that even I at last might reach your bliss,
> And kiss the Son with no betraying kiss?[98]

Christianity had been for him, if we accept the evidence of "The Proselyte", a descent into the irrational, where vehemence was preferable to calm, disarray to order, and torment (even if joyous) to joy itself. He had accepted that the cloister of his soul be filled with storm, ecstasy and an ardour that was agony. As a result the life of scholarly quiet, which he had dreamed of, was fled beyond recall. He had accepted all of this because Christ called upon man to espouse the wisdom of irrationality: one had to lose one's life in order to save it. Man was thus undone as a prelude to his re-creation in the love of God. For Johnson, as for all men, there were impediments to this re-creation, temptations, and fragments of the old dreams that might momentarily carry him away, but he strove valiantly to maintain himself on the path to his goal. Even when he felt that Christ had absented Himself, Johnson continued confident of his final goal. But he had come to feel himself sorely tried. Unlike the saints, he has "[clung] to life"; "thinking on death" he has not rejoiced. Yet despite his acceptance of responsibility for his fate, the poem shows him puzzled, sometimes petulant, and even possessed of a sense of betrayal. "Am I not also Christ's petitioner?" he cries. But quick to account for his fate, he speaks of a basic weakness of will by which he has allowed that will to

work against his best interests. How acutely he feels this weakness we can see in the most poignant lines of the poem. "Said I, that I have knowledge of my will? / False! false! Blind born, blind I continue still: / I do not know myself, only mine ill." He has had passions in the good sense ("Here upon earth a many loves I know"), but these have not led him to God and he has been unable to emulate those individuals who have allowed only the passion for God into their lives. Now, he must ask for endurance, till he too is lifted out of the "deeps of darkness", and for instruction: "Teach me to play your painful happy parts; / Teach me your perilous and perfect arts!" Their example and their fate is his assurance that one day he too may rise above his sins into the comforting presence of God.

"To the Saints" makes clear the extent to which it was possible for Johnson to depend on the Church to provide the means to deal with his doubt and anguish in a positive way. He repeated, as much to himself perhaps, as to others, that he believed, and the intellectual affirmations of his belief, like that with which he ends "To the Saints", are echoed in "Vita Venturi Saeculi" (1902), a poem of contemplation which focuses on the Second Coming and man's future in Eden.

> What, though there be dark perjurers, who swear
> To precepts of dark despair?
> The world still tremblingly toward God returns,
> And ardently, and yearns
> Godward, and knows Him for the First and Last,
> And Future and all Past;

Knows Him the Innumerable and the One
Endless and Unbegun.[99]

Yet this acceptance of doctrine brought little to one who waited in the desolation of spiritual darkness. He had once quoted Pascal on the Catholic Church: "who can withhold credence and adoration from so divine a light?"[100] But even this "light" was not able now to provide everything that Johnson needed, and that failure no doubt played its part in his finding in alcohol something more than a drug to defeat his insomnia. From the arrogance of his youth when he had attempted to build his own "church", to his need "to be up and doing or suffering"[101] he had always sought the "light", the faith that in lieu of certainty would make life bearable. "I turn to man, and have hope: [he had written then] but not certainty. . . . all being for the best, certainty is undesireable: then I must have faith."[102] But that faith was essential; for given "a future of haze and doubt" he had felt that "suicide [was] a painfully logical act."[103] Yet at the same time he was aware of something that might limit the strength and depth of that faith: "I don't want to believe more than I feel."[104] This feeling, or, as we have already called it, this affective consent did come in the first flow of his Catholicism. Yet his nature was not destined to be easily, or to be long subdued, and it is well to recall his earlier declaration to Russell: "You are wrong in supposing that I ever believed in the old creeds: as a child I never believed: My mind is essentially

skeptical: so much so that disbelief of anything other people tell me, or that I cannot see or prove, is sometimes a horrible mania."[105] The hydra of skepticism once set aside, he had advanced joyfully into the faith that promised so much after the famine of his youth. But after the crisis of 1893, affective consent seemed no longer his and he entered a time of profound testing in a haze of doubt. Only the resources of Roman Catholic doctrine stood between him and an elemental despair. The promise that this new darkness too might pass, and the belief that the doubts which threatened to overmaster him might serve as steps to greater faith, gradually became essential to his spiritual being. In 1884 he had written, "I do not want reason: I do not want argument: I want more light."[106] Then, he had sought light of the kind that his spiritual mentor, Cardinal Newman, had treasured. Now, more than ever, he needed that light, and reassurance that the path he had imagined was indeed his way to the Kingdom of Light. His cry in "To the Saints" revealed that he was still the seeker and that the agony of waiting in the dark had still to continue.

The end came suddenly, after a long period of bad health and drinking, and at the end of a year of what Johnson himself called "enforced idleness", bed rest no doubt necessitated by another in his series of strokes. Using the inquest proceedings, Fletcher constructs the following account of his last days.

> On Monday, 29 September, the laundress knocked at his door and asked him if he wanted anything. "He looked", she tells us in her evidence, "very ill." The obvious point is that he was ill before he fell. About nine in the evening he dressed and walked a few yards along Fleet Street to the Green Dragon. "He came in", says the barman, "looking very ill. He went to sit in a chair and in trying to do so he fell slightly on his head." The bones of the skull were fragile and a fracture of the skull resulted. Unconscious, he lingered on in St. Bartholomew's Hospital until the small hours of 4 October 1902, when he died, Extreme Unction having been administered by his friend, Fr. Dawson. The post-mortem found death to be due to a ruptured vessel, not a fractured skull.[107]

His rooms were found to be in a state of chaos, and the books Johnson had once so meticulously cared for were discovered randomly stacked in dusty piles. His brother, charged with the duties of executor, called in a number of booksellers and assigned the collection to their tender mercies. Following a modest funeral, Johnson was buried in St. Mary's Catholic Cemetery at Kensal Green.

NOTES

CHAPTER VI

[1]CP, xxxix.

[2]Roseliep, 9.

[3]CP, xxxix.

[4]CP, 58.

[5]This is one manifestation of the stigmata, of which St. Francis is the first recorded bearer.

[6]CP, 55.

[7]CP, 294.

[8]CP, 294. For these Latin poems, I use Ian Fletcher's translations rather than the Latin texts which I here place, and will henceforth place, in footnote.

Et cherubim et seraphim descendit Rex:
Caelos caelorum linquit salvaturus nos.
Deserit, ne per saecula stet mortis lex,
Angelos Deus noster et Archangelos.

Tu, miserator! Tu, Christe misericors!
Tu, peccatores nos qui solus redimis:
Ut caeli gaudeant, ut moriatur mors,
Veni cum Angelis et cum Archangelis!
CP, 54-55.

[9]CP, 311.
Per Crucifixi Sanguinem,
Per vitam Matris humilem:
Monstrate Matris gloriam,
Et Crucifixi regiam.
CP, 114.

[10]CP, 50.

[11]Patrick, 40.

[12]CP, 148.

[13]Johnson studied Plato and Platonism under Pater at Oxford. See his review of Pater's Plato and Platonism in Post Liminium, pp.1-42.

[14]Roseliep, 117.

[15]Roseliep, 125.

[16]Autobiographies, 274. Le Gallienne speaks of an evening with Johnson during which "he made a remark which makes me smile as I write, for it was very '1890'. 'I hope you drink absinthe, Le Gallienne,' he said, 'for I have nothing else to offer you.'" Le Gallienne then tells of the mystique of absinthe and ends: "So it was with a pleasant shudder that I watched it cloud in our glasses, as I drank it for the first time, there alone with Lionel Johnson, in the small hours, in a room paradoxically monkish in its scholarly austerity, with a beautiful monstrance on the mantelpiece and a silver crucifix on the wall." The Romantic '90's (London: G. P. Putnam's sons, 1926), 142-43.

[17]Patrick, 41. "Critics have sometimes accused Johnson of a lack of religious sincerity, assuming that his conversion was simply an aesthetic gesture, an artistic pose . . . We can affirm that his faith brought to his life everything that it had of order and unity." My translation.

[18]Yeats, Autobiographies, 387.

[19]Victor Plarr, Ernest Dowson (London: Elkin Mathews, 1914), 30.

[20]For the best contemporary account of the Rhymers' Club see W.B. Yeats, Autobiographies, Part V, passim. See particularly 370.

[21]Ibid, 274.

[22]Patrick, 64. Periodicals to which he contributed that year included *The Anti-Jacobin*, *The Pall Mall Gazette*, *The Academy*, and *The Century Guild Hobby Horse*. Later recipients of his work included *The Illustrated London News*, *The Speaker*, *The Daily Chronicle*, *The Spirit Lamp*, *The Westminster Gazette*, *The Fortnightly Review*, *The Yellow Book*, *The Sketch*, *The Outlook*, and *The Weekly Register*.

[23]In "To Leo XIII", for example, he praises Leo as a good Catholic should and ends with a proper 'new Catholic' appeal:

Leo! God grant this thing:
Might some, so proud to be
Children of England, bring
Thine England back to thee!
CP, 63.

[24]In several poems such as "Cadgwith" and "The Petition", he gives signs of strengthening devotion to the Virgin Mary.

[25]CP, 61.

[26]CP, 62.

[27]CP, 60.

[28]CP. 17.

[29]CP, 24-25.

[30]Subtitled *Religio Scriptoris*, the book grew from a series of weekly columns published by Le Gallienne and elaborated for publication. Le Gallienne may, however, have had other claims on Johnson's kindness, both as a fellow member of the Rhymers' Club and as a literary collaborator in *Bits of Old Chelsea*, 1894.

[31]Le Gallienne, 14.

[32]Le Gallienne, 15. Sin and evil he permits to continue to exist although he also allows "a dip in good gross earth" (whatever that may have meant to a late Victorian). This is as opposed to his definition of sin, "the living by the lower instead of the higher side of our natures."

[33]*Ibid*.

[34]Le Gallienne, 80. At the centre of his *Religio Scriptoris* he sets the commandment "Love God and love one another." He does not, however, care for modern decadence with its lust, savagery, and bad manners. "Modern doubt" he cannot abide, and the cure is simply "to 'think' less and feel more" (107). It follows then that "The Great dogmas of the religion of the future will be Love, Beauty, Purity, and Strength -- and the artist will be its priest." (83) Both Le Gallienne and Johnson had obviously read many of the same books in their youth.

[35]Lionel Johnson, *Reviews and Critical Papers* (London: Elkin Mathews, 1921), 97. The review was originally published in *The Academy*, 2 December 1893.

[36]*Reviews*, 106. He had not hitherto shown so much respect for the thirty-nine Articles.

[37]*Reviews*, 98. Stephen did not foresee the emergence of modern art.

[38]*Reviews*, 100.

[39]*Reviews*, 101.

[40]*Ibid*.

[41]*Reviews*, 107. My italics.

[42]*Reviews*, 108. Clear evidence of his attitudes toward decadents is to be found in his essay "The Cultured Fawn", published in 1891, in which he describes and damns the decadent figure in contemporary literature and society.

See Chapter IV above. In The Art of Thomas Hardy he comments:

> It is a sick and haggard literature, this literature of throbbing nerves and of subtle sensations; a literature, in which clearness is lost in mists, that cloud the brain; and simplicity is exchanged for fantastic ingenuities. Emotions become entangled with the consciousness of them: and after-thoughts or impressions, laboured analysis of facile presentations, usurp the place of that older workmanship, which followed nature under the guidance of art. (2-3)

[43]Reviews, 102.

[44]Reviews, 108.

[45]CP, 327.
Victor mortuus in cruce:
Fac nos solum contemplari
Te, qui dolus es amari
Dignus, victor stans in luce.
CP, 165.

[46]CP, 327.
Per Calvariae tremendam
Passionem, semper flendam
cum Maria desolata:
Pastor bone! Victor vere!
Triumphantem da videre
Te, cum Matre coronata.
CP, 165.

[47]CP, 290.
Via amara Tu, Veritas dura,
Vita difficulis, tremende Deus!
Deliciarum Via, Veritas pura,
Vita vitarum Tu, et amor meus!
CP, 51.

[48]CP, 290.
Deficit inter tenebras cor triste:
Unde fulgebit mihi lux petita?
CP, 51.

[49]CP, 323.
Cor! peccati mei fiat
Et doloris Tui finis.
Meum cor Te solum sciat.
CP, 156.

[50]CP, 122. "Behold! The Prince of Hell, Venomous King of cheap and Death-bearing love, Lo! Lucifer reigns: He who rules over souls, Of whom Heaven is plundered; He who speaks good with ill intention, Corrupting the heart with sweetness." Fletcher's translation continues: "He offers fruits; there are ashes in them: He offers flowers full of thorns: Death is the purpose of his life: The cross his resting place. How tormented shall he appear there, And thus shall he remain! How many bitternesses Shall that death have! / How fair amid the roses Flourishes the lovely rose of youth! When lo! comes the ruinous shape of infamy: the cruel faces appear. The voices of dissimulated laughter; And vain the pathetic effort Towards joy. / As vice glistens the more, So the soul is tarnished more; And the heart withers at last, Through delicious sins. Rejoicing the Prince of the world of evil Uses poisons of such kind, Carnalities of Hell; O honeyed vices! / The Prince of this world rejoices Beholding the soul confounded; He delights to watch The death-throe of the heart. The gasping heart, at point of death, Seeks vain things, vainly searching: The flames clinging to the soul torture The most disconsolate heart. / The Rector of glooms rejoices To sacrifice the bitter heart; The King delights to sate the avid sisters And indulge their fury. Alas! the Kingdom of Hell, Saith the King, shall not endure for ever; but until the Heavenly Kingdom come, I will give you victims."
CP, 313-314.

[51]Harold Bloom and Lionel Trilling, eds., _Victorian Prose and Poetry_ (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 720.

[52]Harold Bloom, _Yeats_ (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 47.

[53]_Op. cit._, 156.

[54]_Yeats_, 47.

[55]_Op. cit._, 91.

[56] Ibid., 15.

[57] Op. cit., 138.

[58] Peter Brown, Augustine of Hippo (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), 244.

[59] An unpublished letter in the collection of Winchester College, dated 8 August 1889. Published by kind permission of Winchester College. The letter is to be found in a copy of Poems prepared by Campbell Dodgson who, having taken both first editions of Johnson's poetry apart, inserted letters from people to whom individual poems had been dedicated at the appropriate pages and then had the books re-bound. This letter is bound between pages 78 and 79.

[60] CP, liii.

[61] Lionel Johnson, The Art of Thomas Hardy (London: John Lane The Bodley Head, 1923), 232-33.

[62] Autobiographies, 274.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Lord Alfred Douglas, Autobiography (London: Martin Secker, 1929), 57-58.

[65] In the second edition of the Collected Poems, Ian Fletcher revises his earlier opinion that Johnson had been a practicing homosexual, and I concur with his revised judgement. (xiii) It seems unlikely that, given his self-proclaimed coldness toward the physical presence of others, he would have entered into even the most fleeting of such relationships. See also Brian Reade's Sexual Heretics (New York: Coward and McCann, 1970), 39, and Derek Stanford, Three Poets of the Rhymers' Club (Cheadle: Fyfield Books, 1974), 19-20, for opinions on Johnson's sexuality. There is medical evidence that the consumption of alcohol at an early age (and Patrick states that Johnson may have begun to drink in his early teens) may result in a reduced libido. Interference with liver function reduces levels of the male

hormone and excessive indulgence can actually result in a shrinking of the testicles. If such were the case with Johnson (and there are rumours that the autopsy revealed something referred to as undeveloped genitalia) it is unlikely that his libido would have remained unaffected. But this is true conjecture in the very un-literary field of medical science.

[66]Fletcher, "Lionel Johnson: The Dark Angel", 173.

[67]CP, 52-53.

[68]Autobiographies, 275.

[69]Yeats, 46.

[70]CP, 137.

[71]CP, 76. A second poem of the same name was to be written in 1900 in memory of Ernest Dowson.

[72]CP, 69.

[73]CP, 138.

[74]Lionel Johnson, Post Liminium (London: Elkin Mathews, 1911), 158. Pascal (1623-62) was the foremost defender of Jansenism, a calvinistic manifestation within the Roman Catholic Church. Bishop Cornelius Jansen (1585-1638), whose writings greatly influenced Pascal, supported a strongly Augustinian position in the face of what he considered a slide toward Pelagianism, and in consequence, he stressed the impediments to election rather than its ease of attainment.

[75]Post Liminium, 157. It was to Pascal that Johnson applied his favorite phrase, "Cor ad cor loquitur", as if it was thus that Pascal spoke to him.

[76]CP, 137.

[77]CP, 152.

[78]CP, "Ireland", 98.

[79]CP, 83.

[80]*Post Liminium*, 156. In another late article, "Savonarola", Johnson sees the reformer as a sensitive man misunderstood.

[81]CP, 68-69.

[82]*Post Liminium*, 156.

[83]This unpublished letter is to be found in the specially prepared edition of *Ireland and Other Poems* in the Winchester College collection, bound between pages 104 and 105.

[84]B.L., Add MS. 46778. This journal was kept in 1890 by "Michael Field", that is, Katherine Bradley and her niece, Eith Cooper, who wrote under that pseudonym.

[85]CP, lvii.

[86]*Autobiographies*, 381.

[87]*Ibid*, 382.

[88]*Ibid*, 377.

[89]CP, "Cromwell", 140.

[90]CP, "Our Lady of the May", 110-111.

[91]CP, "Before the Cloister", 150-151.

[92]*Op.cit.*, 54.

[93]CP, 217.

[94]*Post Liminium*, 156.

[95]CP, 169.

[96]See CP, lviii.

[97]CP, 150.

[98]CP, 222-224.

[99]CP, 227.

[100]*Post Liminium*, 159.

[101]SWL, 23 February 1884.

[102]*Ibid*.

[103]SWL, 18 February 1884.

[104]SWL, 2 September 1884.

[105]SWL, 21 October 1883.

[106]*Ibid*.

[107]CP, lviii.

CONCLUSION

If Lionel Johnson is presented most vividly in Yeats's "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory", the dedication of Yeats's second volume of poetry, The Rose (1893), which calls attention to Johnson's influence as poet, critic and friend, is the kinder remembrance. It speaks more positively of the poet who had, in the mastering of the art of poetry, in Yeats's words, "[given] us of his triumph", a triumph which Johnson himself believed to be, again in Yeats's words, "a study and achievement of the intellect."[1] Yet despite Yeats's respect for Johnson's achievement, he still felt this "triumph" somehow lacking in those elements he (Yeats) held most dear. As he wrote to his father in 1910, "His [Johnson's] theory [of poetry] was . . . impersonality [Yeats's damning word] so far as he had any [,] I should say." What becomes evident in re-reading the letter is Yeats's perception that Johnson's "theory" ran counter to the prevailing feeling among Rhymers' Club members that poetry should be passionately personal, "that [as Yeats put it] a man should express his life and do this without shame or fear."[2] Yeats thought that instead of choosing to explore his emotions, Johnson had preferred to eschew much that a personal poetry demanded, and had chosen instead to

anchor his poetry in the qualities that Yeats thought of as intellectual, qualities he catalogued in his references to Johnson's work in his Autobiographies: "intellectual clearness", "hard energy", "Marmorian' verse", "achievement of the intellect", "stern by nature, strong by intellect".[3] These were not the qualities he himself sought or admired. Unfortunately, in allowing his attention to be caught by these qualities in Johnson's poetry he tended to overlook the legitimate achievements which went beyond such simple characterizations. What Yeats seems to ignore was the way in which Johnson's "impersonality" constituted his most spectacular and most personal triumph through the creation of a mask as thorough and as effective as any Yeats had created for himself. Yeats ultimately failed to note that Johnson had succeeded in uniting that "study and achievement of the intellect" with the passionate ground of his character.

It was in the years when Yeats believed this "impersonality" to be dominant, in the early nineties, that Johnson achieved works that convince by their embodiment of a combination of intellectual strength and passionate candour. It was then, when finally he had succeeded in uniting his intellectual and emotional energies with his belief in a Christian world view, that Johnson came most thoroughly to control his creative resources. In the years of this synergetic union (1890-94) his work was as good as

any in the decade. In "Mystic and Cavalier", "Men of Assisi", "Men of Aquino", in "The Precept of Silence", "Ash Wednesday", and, above all, in "The Dark Angel", he demonstrated the fruitful union of craft and passion. Verse outside of this charmed circle, such as "To Morfydd", a poem inspired by his love of Celtic lore, or "In England", a poem filled with his passion for the English countryside, or "By the Statue of King Charles at Charing Cross", a poem suffused with tragedy bound in a studied movement of verse, do not have the same impact because they are fundamentally more casual, although even they were products of his new energy and purpose.

Johnson's achievement extended even in the direction of his critical works, which in their excellence and volume caused his fellow writers to think him a critic who happened incidentally to write very good poetry. The editor of an early collection, Thomas Whittemore, recapitulates with great kindness, but also considerable truth, Johnson's strengths.

> The young critic's every utterance is remarkable for its individual native balance; its fearlessness; its patience and courtesy under stress; its unfailing mental hospitality; its sweet old-fashioned scholarship, full of "ease and pleasantness, and quiet mirth;" for which he himself calls in another "an almost Latin clearness and weight:" the charming arresting word of one who lives chiefly in the spirit, above the fogs of human prejudice, with "the best that has been thought and said in the world."[4]

He is a critic whose judgement we learn quickly to trust and

even after a hundred years he can interest us in a work or author. In an essay, "O Rare George Borrow", published in 1899, for example, his enthusiasm for the immediacy of Borrow's experience and enjoyment of the world - "What he saw, did, said, or heard",[5] - sends the twentieth century reader back to a work he feels must be tasted. In a more substantial work, The Art of Thomas Hardy, written in 1892 he approaches the most controversial novelist of the days. In a modern assessment of the work, Linda C. Dowling notes: "Succeeding generations of critics have for the most part agreed with Gosse, commending the book for its early elevation of Hardy to the English literary pantheon and appropriating its insights so often they have become the commonplace of Hardy Criticism."[6] He seeks to place Hardy's novels in the main stream of "moral art". This art he contrasts with much of contemporary literature which he characterizes as "a sick and haggard literature, this literature of throbbing nerves and of subtile sensations; a literature, in which clearness is lost in mists, that cloud the brain; and simplicity is exchanged for fantastic ingenuities."[7] Hardy is in the mainstream because he has done what an artist must do; he has disengaged "from the conflict and the turmoil of life the interior virtue, the informing truth, which compose the fine spirit of its age".[8] And Johnson uses the example of Hardy to build his idea of the range of literature: "I can think of nothing, so beyond

hope deformed, so past endurance dreadful, but art could show it to me, humanized, and brought within the pale of beauty."[9] Johnson's words are those of a young man (he was twenty-five when he wrote the book) but he did not modify his views on Hardy or on art as he grew older. In an essay six years later he still applauds Hardy's "moral" art and his "impassioned and beautiful since ity".[10] His judgements were rarely harsh but many (on Hardy Kipling and Robert Louis Stevenson, for example) retain value. In the more private criticisms written for Katherine Tynan, for example, and quoted by Ezra Pound in the introduction to his edition of Johnson's poetry,[11] we see an activ nd vigilant mind, even though by that time lodged in a sick body, using the best literary standards as the basis for his judgements.

But the continuance of his achievement in poetry and criticism depended on a precarious balance between Johnson's recognition of the needs of his art and the needs of his spiritual life. That balance once destroyed, his grasp on the excellence he had achieved would necessarily slacken. And in the end that balance could not but be destroyed. His drive toward the establishment of his belief, which had begun by galvanizing all of his intellectual and emotional energies in pursuit of a joyful goal, ended by subordinating all else to his need to retain faith in that goal. Thereafter, he had little energy for anything else, and the eventual darkness of his quest stole what

light and strength there remained. Even his passion for his own salvation came eventually to be buried in the emotional neutrality that we see so painfully articulated in "To a Spanish Friend". Thenceforth, overburdened with the emotions of failure, Johnson refused to react as, for example, Gerard Manley Hopkins had reacted, to what he believed to be God's withdrawal. Unlike Hopkins, Johnson was unable to find in his desolation the impetus and energy for a renewed creativity.

The result of this emotional neutrality was a devitalization of the essential rhythms of his poetry and a devaluation of the subject matter of his work generally. Thus, in his later work, we feel thrown into the undigested emotion that literature draws upon rather than into literature itself, and an emotion that was bodied forth in imagery too familiar to engage the reader. One senses, in that loss of vitality, a reason for his gradual abandonment of poetry in the last six years of his life. Its intensity, once the gift of his religious energies, had been extinguished, and he himself left in a state perilously close to vacancy and apathy, as all seemed to become a part of the great renunciation that lay at the heart of his new quest.

Johnson was not unaware of the extent to which his art and his life had been affected by Catholic theology, although whether he was as aware of the consequent devaluation of his art in the final stages of that influence we

would find it hard to decide. When he writes on the subject of renunciation to Imogene Guiney on March 30, 1898, he gives a glimpse, in speaking of the entry of his friend Aubrey Beardsley, into the Roman Catholic Church, of what might have been his own thought. " . . . his conversion was a spiritual work, and not an half-insincere aesthetic act of change, not a sort of emotional experience or experiment . . . He withdrew himself from certain valued intimacies, which he felt incompatible with his faith: that implies much, in these days when artists so largely claim exemption, in the name of art, from laws and rules of life."[12] One senses, in his judgement of Beardsley's actions in withdrawing from that which he felt "incompatible with his faith", the logic behind his own actions. But Beardsley's renunciation had come in his "death agony";[13] Johnson's had a gradual growth through half his adult life.

Yet it is this passion for renunciation which lends such clarity to Johnson's life and to his spiritual odyssey. Beginning in the "impressionism" of the 'eighties, continuing in the joyful Catholicism of the early 'nineties, and concluding in the darkening of that Catholicism in Augustinian shadows, he had, unlike his peers, attempted to reach beyond the popular theological superficialities of the day toward an essential spirituality, and although it might be pretentious to speak of a 'cosmic spiritual dimension"[14] to Johnson's poetry, yet we must recognize that he was one

of the very few literary personalities in the age who, having become aware of certain spiritual realities, and having accepted them, had changed his life accordingly. Yeats might, as Frank Kermode writes in Romantic Image, "admiringly [credit] Johnson with Axel's attitude--'He had renounced the world and built up a twilight world instead'",[15] but in fact, instead of living in a twilight world, Johnson lived in a world of amazing clarity. That "Unity of Being" which Yeats so fervently sought and whose attainment in Johnson's case he thought impossible, his friend had indeed attained, and in a manner Yeats might have envied. But Johnson's nature, in combination with his physical debility and his alcoholism, would not allow him to preserve that unity. The vitiation of his art followed inexorably.

However, before that vitiation had taken place his achievements had been sufficient to insure him a place in the canon of minor poets. To Yeats, he had been the better craftsman, upon whom he had leaned for encouragement and advice, and whose services in the cause of Irish literature Yeats recognized with alacrity. It was Johnson who had, in his advocacy of the highest literary standards, balanced Yeats's patriotic enthusiasm. But beyond that, Johnson had given his own generation and the generation that followed the example of an artist devoted to his craft, one who worked determinedly at its mastery and whose poetry showed

at its best a clarity of line and a simplicity of image and diction that contrasted sharply with the turgid products more characteristic of the age. Louise Imogen Guiney comments: "His non-professional conception of the function of a man of letters . . . amounted to this: that he was glad to be a bond-slave to his own discipline; that there should be no limit to the constraints and the labour self-imposed; that in pursuit of the best, he would never count cost, never lower a pennon, never bow the knee to Baal."[16] He used the models best approved by tradition, pausing to master only the Alexandrine from foreign fields, and demonstrated in the use of those traditional forms, particularly in that of the octosyllabic quatrain, a considerable skill. "The Dark Angel" and "By the Statue of King Charles at Charing Cross" are the best known of his works in this form, but others, such as "Cadgwith", for example, should catch our eye.

> I, living with delight
> This rich autumnal day,
> Mark the gulls' curving flight
> Across the black-girt bay.
>
> And the sea's working men,
> The fisher-folk, I mark
> Haul down their boats, and then
> Launch for the deep sea dark.
>
> Far out the strange ships go:
> Their broad sails flashing red
> As flame, or white as snow:
> The ships, as David said.
>
> Winds rush and waters roll:
> Their strength, their beauty, brings
> Into mine heart the whole

Magnificence of things:

That men are counted worth
A part upon this sea,
A part upon this earth,
Exalts and heartens me.

Ah, Glaucus, soul of man!
Encrusted by each tide,
That, since the seas began,
Hath surged against thy side:

Encumbering thee with weed,
And tangle of the wave!
Yet canst thou rise at need,
And thy strong beauty save!

Tides of the world in vain
Desire to vanquish thee:
Prostrate, thou canst again
Rise, lord of earth and sea:

Rise, lord of sea and earth,
And winds, and starry night.
Thine is the greater birth
And origin of light.[17]

If he disfigures his effort, at least in our eyes, by his willingness to accept inversions, static vocabulary, rhetorical repetitions and generalizations (the poem opens: "Man is a shadow's dream! / Opulent Pindar saith:", etc), his 'sins' are those of his own time, a time of change in which the exhaustion of one age had not yet given way to the renewing energies of another. We should call to mind before we condemn his faults, the work of Watson, Newbolt, and the later Swinburne, of which one example will suffice.

And the sun smote the clouds and slew,
And from the sun the sea's breath blew,
  And white waves laughed and turned and fled
The long green heaving sea-field through,
  and on them overhead
    The sky burnt red.

Like a furled flag that wind sets free,
On the swift summer-coloured sea
  Shook out the red lines of the light
The life sun's standard, blown to lee
  Across the live sea's white
    And green delight.

And with divine triumphant awe
My spirit moved within me saw,
  With burning passion of stretched eyes,
Clear as the light's own firstborn law,
  In windless wastes of skies
    Time's deep dawn rise.[18]

These lines give us some indication of Johnson's contrasting "old fashioned kind of precision".[19] Would he have changed and renewed his style had he survived a healthy man? Pound believes so, and we have at least the example of Johnson's friend, Yeats, who, had he died in his thirty-sixth year, would have ranked, with Johnson, as but one more representative of an era in which minor talents seemed the rule. He would have been celebrated as the poet of "The Lake Isle of Innisfree", a fate he would have hated.

It was Ezra Pound, another devoted poetic craftsman, who, in an introduction to the first collected edition of Johnson's poetry published in 1916, called attention to Johnson's precision. As Pound wrote, "no one has written purer Imagisme than he had, in the line 'Clear lie the fields and fade into blue air.' It has a beauty like the Chinese."[20] In his introduction Pound proposed to honour one who was "never florid", whose poetry resembled "small slabs of ivory, neatly combined and contrived."[21] Above all, he saw Johnson as one who had "respected his art."[22]

It was an art which was able to intrigue, as in "To Morfydd" for example.

> A VOICE on the winds,
> A voice by the waters,
>   Wanders and cries:
> Oh! what are the winds?
> And what are the waters?
>   Mine are your eyes![23]

But, after 1893, in becoming less concerned with his art and more concerned with his spiritual well-being, Johnson let fall one great crusade for the sake of another.

Johnson's tragedy was not the tragedy typical of his age, an age we often think of as characterized by a break-down of moral fibre, or even the tragedy that his friend, Yeats, saw in retrospect. We would do Johnson an injustice in simply chronicling the dissolution of an individual caught in a private and futile struggle if we do not recognize that, for him, this struggle was the only possible course. As much as we might deprecate the waste that his darkened vision thrust upon him and the agony that resulted, there was a kind of inevitability to the pattern. From the beginning, he had recognized it as the only pattern within which a man could reasonably be expected to engage himself. If his quest for sainthood and for the sanctuary which such a state might have provided seemed finally not to have been attained, at least he always believed that the quest was possible, and to the end he maintained faith with that quest, a quest that from childhood had in one way or another shaped his life and art.

NOTES

CONCLUSION

[1]W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies* (London: Macmillan, 1955), 311.

[2]W.B. Yeats, *Letters*, ed. Allan Wade (London: Rupert Hart-Davies, 1954), 543.

[3]*Autobiographies*, "The Tragic Generation", passim.

[4]*Post Liminium*, viii.

[5]*Ibid*, 202. The review is entitled "O Rare George Borrow" and was first published in *The Outlook*, April 1, 1899.

[6]Linda C. Dowling, "Pursuing Antithesis: Lionel Johnson on Hardy", *English Language Notes*, 12 (1975), 287.

[7]Lionel Johnson, *The Art of Thomas Hardy* (London: John Lane, 1923), 2. The book was written in the summer of 1892 and first published in 1894.

[8]*Ibid*, 12.

[9]*Ibid*, 13.

[10]*Post Liminium*, 142. The essay was published in *The Academy*, November 12, 1898.

[11]Op. cit., ix-xiii.

[12]Quoted in Roseliep, 189.

[13]Stanley Weintraub, *Beardsley* (New York: George Braziller, 1967), 243. Johnson had no doubt heard of, and approved, Beardsley's final letter written only days before

his death.

Jesus is our Lord and Judge
Dear Friend
I implore you to destroy all copies of Lysistrata and bad drawings. Show this to Pollitt and conjure him to do the same. By all that is holy--all obscene drawings.

The letter was meant for Leonard Smithers, a publisher of 'advanced' literature; the prints were not destroyed.

[14]Dwight Eddins, Yeats: The Nineteenth Century Matrix (The University of Alabama Press, 1971), 97.

[15]Kermode, 24.

[16]Some Poems of Lionel Johnson. Newly Selected with an Introduction by Louise Imogen Guiney (London: Elkin Mathews, 1912), 12. The text of the introduction had originally been published in The Atlantic Monthly in December 1902.

[17]CP, "Cadgwith", 59-60. This is the first of three parts.

[18]Algernon C. Swinburne, Poems and Prose edited, with an introduction, by Richard Church, (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1940), 218-219.

[19]Op. cit., v. Patrick gives us one example of his craft at work in stanza eleven of "The Dark Angel". The first draft reads:

I fight thee, in the Holy Name!
And yet I know thou dost God's will:
Tempter! should I escape thy flame,
Thou wilt have saved my soul from ill.

This became:

I fight thee, in the Holy Name!
Yet, what thou dost, is what God saith:
Tempter! should I escape thy flame,
Thou wilt have helped my soul from Death.

In this example, Johnson improves the energy of his verse by substituting "helped" for "saved" and "ill" with "death". In another example -- "When sunlight glows upon the flowers, / Or gleams upon the dancing sea" -- Johnson again improves his word choice:

When sunlight gleams upon the flowers,

Or ripples down the dancing sea . . .
(221)

[20]*Ibid.*, vii.

[21]*Ibid.*, ix.

[22]*Ibid.*

[23]CP, 6.

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