Chapter V

The Letters of George Herbert: New Light On Personality

The letters of George Herbert, though small in number, reveal to us certain attributes of his personality which must be recognised for the purpose of this work. Only seventeen of his letters, written in English, are available. In addition, we have his will. Together they put before the reader the kind of man that Herbert was.

A major portion of each letter is taken up by the formal and florid style of its salutation and farewell according to the practice then prevailing. Still, there is enough in them to show the mind and temperament of the man, particularly in relation to the events and situations of his life as well as those of his friends and relatives.

The traits of Herbert's personality which emerge from the letters, and the will, are not exactly those seen in his poetry, at least not all of them. Of special emphasis here are his loving concern for his ailing mother and sick sister, the destitute nieces, his closeness to Sir John Danvers and Nicholas Ferrar, and his thoughtful concern for his servants and the poor parishioners, and the like. In the paragraphs that follow, it is proposed to examine a selection of his letters which will reveal to us some hitherto undiscovered traits of his personality.

The following account, given by Rev. F.E. Hutchinson, will
acquaint the reader with the number and other particulars of Herbert's letters:

"The nineteen letters (including two written in Latin) fall into two main groups and represent only particular periods of Herbert's life. After the fragment of a letter written in his 17th year there are nine belonging to his Cambridge time, written between the ages of 24 and 27, then the letter to his mother in her sickness, written in his 30th year, and, after a gap of eight years, eight letters written at Bemerton. There is no clearer evidence of the development of his character than the difference between the Cambridge and the Bemerton letters."

It is necessary to add here that of the letters received by Herbert, there is none available, except a formal dedication addressed by Francis Bacon.

Herbert's earliest known letter is the one addressed to his mother on the New Year's Day of 1610. It was with this letter that Herbert had enclosed his two sonnets to her as a present on the New Year. In this letter, Herbert referred to his sickness some time earlier, and said:

"But I fear the heat of my late 'Ague' hath dried up those springs, by which Scholars say, the Muses use to take up their habitations. However, I need not their help, to reprove the vanity of those many Love-poems, that are daily writ and consecrated to 'Venus'; nor to bewail that so few are writ, that look towards 'God' and 'Heaven'."

Even in the seventeenth century, there were many who continued to share the ancient belief that no poetic work was likely to be successful unless blessed by the Muse, who was supposed to
inhabit the imaginary springs of inspiration. In the above letter, we see Herbert's rejection of the Muse as mere illusion. It also shows his self-confidence when he says that he does not require the help of the Muse to reprove either the vanity of love-poems written in large number in his time, or the paucity of devotional songs.

Continuing, Herbert says:

"For my own part, my meaning (dear Mother) is in these Sonnets, to declare my resolution to be, that my poor Abilities in 'Poetry', shall be all, and ever consecrated to God's glory."

For a seventeen year old boy, this resolution is indeed uncommon. It shows the early maturity of Herbert's mind and outlook. It also proves the force of his conviction for we know that he remained true to this declaration made at an acutely impressionable age.

Among the letters, there is one addressed to his young stepfather, Sir John Danvers. It bears no date, but, in all probability, it was written in 1618. At two points of this letter, we find two distinct traits of the writer emerging. One of the qualities is seen in these lines:

"And therefore let it be sufficient for me, that the same heart, which you have won long since, is still true to you, and hath nothing else to answer your infinite kindnesses, but a constancy of obedience."

Herbert is here addressing his stepfather with genuine warmth of affection. Although Sir John Danvers married his widow mother not long ago, there is no trace of rancour or resentment
in his attitude towards the former. It is already mentioned in this work that Edward Herbert did not take kindly to his stepfather, and their relations remained always strained. The contrast between the two attitudes shows George Herbert's tolerant and understanding nature.

The second trait is couched in these words:

"... only hereafter I will take heed how I propose my desires unto you, since I find you so willing to yield to my requests; for, since your favours come a Horse-back, there is reason, that my desires should go a-foot."

Herbert, ever agreeable in disposition, here first thanks his stepfather for his gift of a horse, and then, perhaps taking the cue from the proverb: 'Diseases come a horse-backe, and returne on foot', conveys his good humour to the giver. It shows, contrary to popular impression, that Herbert was full of wit.

Another letter to Sir John Danvers, dated March 18, 1618, gives us some important insight into the poet's personality. Explaining his need for books, Herbert wrote:

"I want books extremely; You know Sir, how I am now setting foot into Divinity, to lay the platform of my future life, and shall I then be fain always to borrow Books, and build on another's foundation? What Trades-man is there who will set up without his Tools?"

The above extract shows that Herbert had made up his mind to study divinity which, he reiterates, will be the foundation on which he wished to build his future life. It appears that he had already made up his mind to be a churchman, and wanted to equip himself adequately in advance for his future profession. This is
farther confirmed by what follows:

"Pardon my boldness Sir, it is a most serious case, nor can I write coldly in that, wherein consisteth the making good of my former education, of obeying that Spirit which hath guided me hitherto and of achieving my (I dare say) holy ends."

It is abundantly clear from the above that Herbert had already received the divine call, and considered the taking of orders as the natural culmination of his earlier studies. Elaborating further, he writes:

"it is true (God knows) I am weak, yet not so, but that every day, I may step one step towards my journey's end!"

Even as early as 1618, Herbert was determined not to let his ill health come in the way of his spiritual advancement. The above lines proved prophetic with regard to what happened to him in his later life. The important point here is Herbert's reference to his journey's end, which means priesthood.

The above extracts prove beyond doubt that Herbert had made up his mind for taking holy orders as early as 1618. They thus set aside the opinion of some that he became a churchman only after his worldly ambition, which he had nurtured since the early years of his life, proved futile.

Expressing concern about his poor health and paucity of funds, Herbert continues:

"Out of 'Lent' also, twice a Week, in 'Fridayes' and 'Saturdayes', I must do so, which yet sometimes I fast. Sometimes also I ride to 'New Market', and there lie a day or two for fresh Air; all which tend to avoiding of costlier matters, if I should fall
absolutely sick: I protest and vow, I even study Thrift, and yet I am scarce able with much ado to make one half years allowance, shake hands with the other:"

Herbert's fasting and rides to New Market served him two purposes: it took him out of the then sickly Cambridge climate, enabling him to save his health and also some money which he would, otherwise, have been compelled to spend on medicine; it also helped him to save on food. This proves him a man of strong determination and frugal habits.

Coming back to the question of buying books, he writes:

"And yet if a Book of four or five Shillings come in my way, I buy it, though I fast for it; Yea, sometimes of Ten Shillings: But, also Sir, what is that to those infinite Volumes of Divinity, which yet every day swell, and grow bigger."

The above lines show that his need for books on divinity was so urgent that he even fasted to procure of his own, whatever books he could. Summing up his case, he writes:

"Noble Sir, pardon my boldness, and consider but these three things. First, the Bulk of Divinity. Secondly, the time when I desire this (which is now, when I must lay the foundation of my whole life). Thirdly, what I desire, and to what end, not vain pleasures, nor to a vain end."

This passage is an example of the clarity of Herbert's thought. In three brief and precise sentences, he has presented his case. It also shows the peculiarity of Herbert's character as distinguished from that of other boys of his age: whereas they often pester their parents for money to spend on pleasure,
young Herbert is appealing to his stepfather for money to buy books of divinity for his spiritual promotion.

In 1618, in a letter to his younger brother Henry Herbert, then holidaying in France, George Herbert wrote this:

"You live in a brave nation, where, except you wink, you cannot but see many brave examples. Be covetous, then, of all good which you see in Frenchmen, whether it be in knowledge, or in fashion, or in words; for I would have you, even in speeches to observe so much, as when you meet with a witty French speech, try to speak the like in English: so shall you play a good merchant, by transporting French commodities to your own country."

George is here playing the Polonius, imparting wholesome advice to his brother for self-improvement so that he could shine in polite society. Indirectly, it shows his own eagerness for enlightenment, and good taste.

It was in this letter that George gave Henry the sound advice that one must be aware of his abilities, but not be unnecessarily vainglorious.

George added an interesting postscript to this letter:

"P.S. My brother is somewhat of the same temper, and perhaps a little more mild, but you will hardly perceive it."

Rebecca Warner thought that it perhaps alluded to Edmund Herbert's "warmth of temper". Her opinion is confirmed by Rev. F.E. Hutchinson when he says:

"Sir Edward, returning from the Low Countries, was in London from the beginning of 1618 until he left on 13 May 1619 to be ambassador in Paris..."
though suffering almost all the time from a quartan ague (Autobiography, p. 97), he was not yet cured of his quarrelsomeness and addiction to duelling."

Herbert's discreet reference to his elder brother's temper in this postscript shows the former to be a tactful person, as it is hardly noticeable that he is referring to a fault of behaviour in another person.

Herbert wrote another letter to Sir John Danvers in 1618 (date not mentioned) where he told him that a parcel of books had been procured for him by his brother Henry who was still then in France. This, too, was an appeal for money for buying books. A portion of the letter reads thus:

"... if any course could be taken of doubling my Annuity now, upon condition that I should surcease from all title to it, after I enter'd into a Benefice, I should be most glad to entertain it, and both pay for the surplusage of these Books, and for ever after cease my clamorous and greedy bookish requests. It is high time now that I should be no more a burden to you, since I can never answer what I have already received ..."

An entry of Sir Edward Herbert in his autobiography, regarding the annuity that George was getting, reads as follows:

"to gratify my mother, as well as those near me, I was voluntarily content to provide thus far, as to give my six brothers thirty pounds a niece yearly during their lives".

About the payments of the annuity, Rev. F.E. Hutchinson has this to add:
'In a letter dated 12 May 1615 from Lady Danvers to Sir Edward Herbert, then abroad, she writes ('Collections for Montgomeryshire', XX 85): 'Now for your Bailiffs I must tell you they have not yet payed your Brothers all their Annuities due to Midsom'er past, and but half due at Christmas past and no news of the rest ... it is ill for your Brothers, and very ill you have such officers.'

The extracts above make it clear that Herbert was not getting even his meagre annuity regularly.

In the second letter to Sir Danvers, as cited above, George was obviously appealing to his step-father to use his influence with the trustees of his (Herbert's) father's estate, to double his annuity. He, however, made it clear that he was prepared to forego any claim to the annuity altogether as soon as he could gain financial independence by accepting some office of the Church. This shows the man's sense of self-respect, and his decision to enter the Church. It has already been pointed out that such a resolve gives the lie to Herbert's detractors who said that in the name of buying books, Herbert was only fleecing Sir Danvers of his money.

Of Herbert's other letters to Sir John Danvers, mention has already been made (p.7) of those which he wrote in connection with the office of the orator at Cambridge which he had sought and secured. Without going over the details once again, it is sufficient to note that they show such tenacity of purpose and self-confidence as befit a young man harbouring legitimate ambition in his mind.
Herbert wrote a letter to his sick elder sister, Elizabeth, on 6 December 1620, in which he showed her much tender affection. The letter is reproduced in full:

"MOST DEAR SISTER,

Think not my silence forgetful; or, that my love is as dumb as my papers; though businesses may stop my hand, yet my heart, a much better member, is always with you; and which is more, with our good and gracious God, incessantly begging some ease of your pains, with that earnestness, that becomes your griefs, and my love. God who knows and sees this Writing, knows also that my soliciting him has been much, and my tears many for you; judge me then by those waters, and not by my ink, and then you shall justly value

Your most truly,
most heartily
affectionate Brother
and Servant
George Herbert *

This letter is truly revealing of Herbert's compassionate personality. Such tender concern, as shown by him to the suffering soul, makes life doubly worth living. It may be recalled here that George had once covered two hundred miles on horseback, interrupting his busy programme of work, to see his sister Frances at Lincolnshire, when she was ailing.

Herbert wrote his second and last letter to his mother in May 1622, after a gap of twelve years from the first, when she was seriously ill. It is a letter of considerable length, and some portion of it has been quoted by Walton and others; still,
it is necessary to deal with it in some detail, for it shows Herbert as a person in much clearer light.

It is learnt from Walton that Woodnot was the bearer of the letter to Lady Danvers who lived another five years. But her health was failing, and we find Herbert trying to allay her low spirits. This is how it begins:

"At my last parting from you, I was the better content because I was in hope I should my self carry all sickness out of your family; but, since I know I did not, and that your share continues, or rather increaseth, I wish earnestly that I were again with you: and, would quickly make good my wish but that my employment does fix me here."

These lines express Herbert's deep concern for his mother's health. His pious hope that he had the power to carry all sickness out of her family sounds painful when we remember that Herbert himself was sick most of the time. The letter continues:

"In the meantime, I beseech you to be cheerful, and comfort your self in the God of all Comfort, who is not willing to behold any sorrow but for sin—what hath Affliction grievous in it more then for a moment? or why should our afflictions here, have so much power or boldness as to oppose the hope of our Joyes hereafter!—'Madam'! As the Earth is but a point in respect of the heavens, so are earthly Troubles compar'd to heavenly Joyes; therefore, if either Age or Sickness lead you to those Joyes? Consider what advantage you have over 'Youth' and 'Health', who are now so near those true comforts."

Keeping the religious nature of his ailing mother in mind, Herbert here wants her to derive comfort from the thoughts of
God. But far more important is Herbert's deeply spiritual attitude as manifest in these lines. His unwavering faith in divine dispensation has taught him to accept the ills of life with equanimity, and a spirit of resignation, and not to blow them out of proportions. The optimist in Herbert finds that sickness or old age are not unmitigated evils, for they ultimately lead the human soul to the source of eternal joy.

Hinting at the grim situations he himself had to face, Herbert continues:

"I have alwaies observ'd the thred of Life to be like other threds or skenes of silk, full of snarles and incumberances: Happy is he, whose bottom is wound up and laid ready for work in the New 'Jerusalem'."

Rev. Hutchinson, explaining the word "bottom" in the above lines, says that it stands for a skein or a ball of thread. He quotes Samuel Clarke from 'Scripture - Justification' to defend its usage: "It's high Time now to wind up my Bottoms."

Herbert is here giving sound spiritual advice to his mother when he says that every man's life is full of problems, but those alone who have full faith in God's Kingdom and are ever ready to move towards it, can be truly happy. He assures his mother of the bliss of the Kingdom of God, for she has lived a useful life:

"but you are freed from that fear, who have already abundantly discharg'd that part, having both ordered your Family, and so brought up your Children that they have attain'd to the years of Discretion, and competent Maintenance - So that now if they do not well the fault cannot be charg'd on you; whose Example and Care of them will justifie you both to the world and your own Conscience:"
The above extract shows Herbert as a thoughtful and affectionate son. He was able to appreciate his mother's sacrifices in bringing up all her children with utmost care. These words of sympathetic appreciation must have comforted the lady a great deal.

Categorising afflictions into three kinds i.e. of estate, of body, and of the mind or the soul, Herbert writes:

"For those of Estate? of what poor regard ought they to be, since if we had Riches we are commanded to give them away; so that the best use of them is, having not to have them."

These lines are written in Herbert's characteristic concise manner. He maintained that the best way of possessing riches was by practising detachment towards them:

Pointing out that the blessings of the Lord are always more readily available to the poor, Herbert maintains:

"I never find Blessed be the Rich; or, Blessed be the Noble; but 'Blessed be the Meek, and Blessed be the Poor, and, Blessed be the Mourners, for they shall be comforted'. — And yet, Oh God! most carry themselves so, as if they not only not desir'd but, even fear'd to be blessed."

Quoting the Bible, Herbert has very convincingly brought out here that God's blessings are mostly for the poor and the humble, and yet most people are vainly proud of their riches even if they mean a denial of the blessings of the Lord. We are here reminded of William James who called poverty an adornment of a saintly life, at all times and under all creeds. Herbert then wrote:
"And for afflictions of the Body, 'dear Madam', remember the holy Martyrs of God, how they have been burnt by thousands, and have endur'd such other Tortures, as the very mention of them might beget amazement; but, their Fierytryals have had an end: and yours (which praised be God are less) are not like to continue long."

Herbert wanted to lessen his mother's suffering by reminding her of the martyrs. The poet himself must have got relief from his own suffering by such remembrance.

Referring to the third type of afflictions, Herbert writes:

"Lastly, for those Afflictions of the soul, consider that God intends that to be as a 'sacred Temple' for himself to dwell in, and will not allow any room there for such an in-mate as Grief; or, allow that any sadness shall be his competitor. And above all, If any care of future things molest you? remember those admirable words of the Psalmist: 'Cast thy Care on the Lord and he shall nourish thee' (Psalm. 55) To which joyn that of St. Peter, 'Casting all your Care on the Lord, for he careth for you' (I Peter V. 7) — What an admirable thing is this, that God puts his shoulder to our burden; and, entertains our Care for us that we may the more quietly intend his service."

The two psalms quoted in the above portion: might have been sung in the Herbert household by his mother and the children together at bedtime. Here also he does a splendid service to his mother by reminding her of the two psalms and imploring her to cast the burden of her sickness and worries on the Lord. This indicates his kindly filial obligation towards his mother.

Herbert closes this letter with a joyful note when he quotes St. Paul:
"To conclude, let me commend only one place more to you (Philip 4.4) St. Paul saith there: 'Rejoice in the Lord alwaies, and again I say rejoice'. He doubles it to take away the scruple of those that might say, what shall we rejoice in afflictions? Yes, I say again rejoice; so that it is not left to us to rejoice or not rejoice: but, whatsoever befals us we must alwaies, at all times rejoice in the Lord, who taketh care for us: and, it follows in the next verse: Let your moderation appear to all men, the Lord is at hand: be careful for nothing. What can be said more comfortably? Trouble not your selves, God is at hand to deliver us from all, or, in all."

In the above extract, Herbert has admirably put forward the plea for finding happiness in God, under all circumstances. His interest in theology was much more than merely academic. It served him a practical purpose.

That Herbert practised these precepts in his own life is now well-known. The closing lines of the above extract must have brought Herbert's mother kind assurance of divine grace. To us they show Herbert as a thoughtful and compassionate son. The very fact that Herbert had time to write this unique letter shows how deeply he felt for his ailing mother. This also shows his intense participation in life and things around.

The letter also shows that over the years, Herbert's faith in God and His dispensations was greatly increasing. His deep interest in matters spiritual is proved by his explanations of the psalms quoted by him in the letter.

George wrote a letter to his brother, Sir Henry Herbert, in the autumn of 1630, presumably after he had become the priest.
of the parish of Bemerton, concerning provision to be made for
the three orphaned daughters of their sister Margaret who died
young, her husband having pre-deceased her. Commenting on the
contents of the letter, Rev. Hutchinson writes:

"Herbert's second sister Margaret married in 1606
John Vaughan, son and heir of Owen Vaughan, of
Liwydiarth, Montgomeryshire. Sir Francis New port,
writing in 1615, from Lyton, Shropshire, to Sir
Edward Herbert, tells him: 'Mye syster y'r mother
is confident to take a journey into these ots this
somer, the rather I think because yo'r brother
Vaugh'n is dead' (Coll. Montg. XX. 87). As Vaughan
had daughters only, the estate passed to heirs male
(ibid. vii. 135). His widow died on 14 Aug. 1623 at
Llanerfyl, Montgomeryshire, and was buried among
her kinsfolk in Montgomery Church. By her will (ibid.
xxi. 243-4) she left the residue of her property
in equal parts to her three daughters, Dorothy,
Magdalen, and Catharine, and assigned the rights of
wardship to her brother Edward. This letter shows
that Edward had been urging George, now that he had
a home of his own, to adopt one of the nieces, and
that George, with great discernment, had agreed to
take two or none. He had accordingly received the
two elder nieces at Bemerton. There remained the
youngest: George had asked Henry to have her, but
is now willing to have her as well, although his
finances are at present low."

Referring to Henry's offer of taking the youngest niece,
George wrote:

"I will tell you what I wrote to our eldest brother,
when he urged one upon me, and but one, and that at
my choice. I wrote to him that I would have both or
neither; and that upon this ground, because they were
to come into an unknown country, tender in knowledge, sense, and age, and knew none but one who could be no company to them. Therefore I considered that if one only came, the comfort intended would prove a discomfort. Since then I have seen the fruit of my observation, for they have lived so lovingly, lying, eating, walking, praying, working, still together, that I take a comfort therein; "

Although George did not have any children of his own, the above lines give us a fair idea of the paternal tenderness of heart that he had for children. Though the responsibility of looking after the girls was given by their dying mother to her eldest brother, Sir Edward Herbert, probably because he was the best placed among the brothers, it was only George who could feel the need for the two elder sisters to be together. So he accepted their charge in spite of his meagre resources, particularly after he had spent much of his own for the repairs of the Bemerton Church and the Rectory attached to it. For him, however, the satisfaction of seeing the two orphaned nieces living, 'so lovingly together', more than compensated for his sacrifice. This is truly indicative of the man's deep sensibility.

That the compassionate George could not help expressing his concern also for the third unfortunate niece, Catherine, is clear from the following:

"It is true there is a third sister, whom to receive were the greatest charitie of all, for she is youngest, and least looked unto; having none to doe it but her school-mistresse, and you know what those mercenary creatures are. Neither hath she any to repair unto at good times, as Christmas ... ."
This anxiety for a little forlorn niece is further indicative of George Herbert's deeply loving nature. Festivals like Christmas are occasions of eager expectancy for children, and to know that Herbert had this consideration in mind when he thought of his poor little niece, must indeed be gratifying to all. His comment on the mercenary nature of a school-mistress reminds us of a line in 'The Church Porch' in which he reproaches those parents who, to get over the trouble of looking after their children each day, send them to schools abroad: "Some ship them over, and the thing is done". Continuing the subject, George writes:

"If you could think of taking her, as once you did surely it were a great good deed, and I would have her conveyed to you. But I judge you not: do that which GOD shall put into your hart, and the LORD bless all your purposes to his glory. Yet, truly if you take her not, I am thinking to do it, even beyond my strength; especially at this time, being more beggarly now than I have been these many years, as having spent two hundred pounds in building; which to me that have nothing yet, is very much."

But this fervent plea fell on deaf ears, for Henry did not, in the long run, accept the charge of little Catherine. His heartless indifference contrasts sharply with George's warm disposition.

The second line of the above extract hints at George's lurking suspicion that Henry might not, after all, accept the charge of the niece. Yet, as the same line shows, there was no feeling of bitterness in George's mind against his brother. This proves that George as a man was truly of the forgiving kind. It was not in his nature to grumble.
Commenting on Henry's observation that a relative who is brought up often proves thankless to the benefactor later in life, George wrote:

"Yet I care not; I forget all things, so I may do them good who want it. So I doe my part to them, lett them think of me what they will or can. I have another judge to whom I stand or fall. If I should regard such things, it were in another's power to defeat my charity, and evill shold be stronger than good: but difficulties are so farr from cooling Christians, that they whett them."

It is indeed a remarkable passage, for this utterence of a sincere soul is, in essence, a declaration of faith. It is also an affirmation of Herbert's noble selflessness — one of the chief attributes of his personality. He has shown, in the first place, a sense of detachment which is a virtue so difficult to cultivate. In other words, here is a decision for action to be performed without any hope of reward. Herbert seems to have resolved to carry out most faithfully the Lord's injunction to Arjuna (in 'the Gita') that action alone should be a person's concern, never its fruit. It shows that even in the matter of action most avidly done, Herbert maintained a kind of ascetic self-denial with regard to its result. Secondly, Herbert's concern for the orphaned niece was so strong that he placed her well-being above every other consideration. He will not heed the world's reproof, but will be led by the courage of his own honest conviction against all odds. This implies self-confidence. And, lastly, the passage is one more instance of Herbert's surrender to the Lord, for He is his only Judge.
Expressing his constant care for the welfare of the desolate girl, Herbert wrote:

"Truly it grieves me to think of the child, how destitute she is, and that in this necessary time of education. For the time of breeding is the time of doing children good; and not as many who think they have done fairly, if they leave them a good portion after their decease. But take this rule and it is an outlandish one, which I commend to you as being now a father, 'the best-bredd child hath the best portion'."

This shows Herbert's farsight and a perfect sanity of judgment. The proverb in the last line of the extract is also found listed as 'Outlandish Proverb 953' in Herbert's collection in a slightly different form: 'The best bred have the best portion'. Herbert seems to have used the proverb keeping in mind the interest both he and Henry had shared in the collection of outlandish proverbs.

Rebecca Warner has praised the letter as 'a masterpiece of artful composition, exercised in a most praiseworthy cause', and also accepted it as a proof of Herbert's 'feeling, discretion, and deep knowledge of the human heart'. In fine, then, the whole affair of his accepting the charge of the nieces is an uncommon exercise in voluntary sacrifice and practical charity.

Keeping in view the close relationship that Herbert had with Nicholas Ferrar, it was likely that quite a few letters must have been exchanged between them. But, unfortunately, only two personal letters written by Herbert to Ferrar are available. In addition, there is a letter sent with his 'Briefe Notes on
Valdesso's Considerations' to Ferrar in the latter's capacity as translator of Valdesso's book. Here, only one of the two personal letters is being considered, because, in the other letter, Herbert only thanked Ferrar on behalf of Leighton and for the advice and assistance offered by Ferrar for the repair of the church.

The letter under consideration was written by Herbert in March 1632 when he had been a priest for two years. He greets his friend as "My Exceeding Dear Brother", proving, thereby, his warm regards for him. In contrast, the civility shown to Henry Herbert who was greeted merely as "Brother" or "Dear Bro" sounds rather cold, if a little familiar. The subject of the letter relates mostly to the re-building of the church as advised by Ferrar, and to details of funds being raised for the purpose.

Referring to an apology which Ferrar appears to have tendered for giving his friend some advice, perhaps unsought, in one of his letters to which the letter under review seems to be a reply, Herbert wrote:

"I refuse not advice from the meanest, that creeps upon God's earth, no not tho' the advice step so far, as to be reproof: much less can I disesteem it from you, whom I esteem to be God's faithful and diligent Servant, not considering you any other ways, as neyther I my self desire to be considered."

Herbert's reply is indicative as much of his inherent humility as the value he set upon the friendship of a person like Ferrar. Additionally, it reiterates Herbert's desire to be known only as a diligent servant of the Lord.
Herbert's will was prepared with great care. He had appointed Woodnot its executor, and Sir John Danvers its overseer. According to Hutchinson, the date of the will came to be known through a letter written by Woodnot to Ferrar a few days after Herbert's death. He was supposed to have made his will on the Monday before he died, i.e., on 25 February 1633. Woodnot called the preparation of the will "the most imperfect act" that Herbert ever did because "I shall not need to say more then this. He hath made me his executor." It was not unusual to appoint an overseer to supervise and assist the executor, and Herbert named his stepfather for this purpose. The witnesses were one of Herbert's curates, and one of his servants. Hutchinson adds that Dorothy Vaughan, the eldest of the three nieces for whom Herbert provided a home at Bemerton, predeceased him by about six months. The legacies to relations and servants, from Dorothy's will, had mostly been discharged by Herbert before his death, except for the principal sums due to the two surviving nieces, to whom Herbert left his own share also.11

Herbert left all his property, movable and immovable, to his wife Jane as per the first few lines of his will. The first portion of it reads:

"First there is seven hundred pounds in Mr Thomas Lawleys hands a merchant of London which fell to me by the death of my deare Neece Mrs Dorothy Vaughan whereof two hundred pounds belongs to my two Neeces that survive and the rest unto myself, this whole sum of five hundred pounds I bequeath unto my Neeces equally to be devided betweene them excepting some legacies of my deceased Neece which are to be paid out of it unto some whose names shalbe annexed unto this bill."
The point to note here is that although Herbert never had enough to maintain himself and his family, particularly after his nieces joined his household, he had not at all touched his share of the three hundred pounds left to him by Dorothy when she died. It is gratifying to find that to his two surviving nieces, Herbert was as thoughtful and loving in death as he was in life, for he very generously bequeathed his share from Dorothy's will also for them.

Herbert bequeathed "twenty pounds unto the poore of this parish to be devided according to my deare wives discretion". This is a measure of his affection for his parishioners. It is not the amount, which was small, but the sentiment behind this kind gesture that deserves consideration.

Herbert also willed that one valuable book of theology each, and a half year's advance wages should be given to both his curates, Mr Hays and Mr Dostock. He provided in his will for his men-servants and maidservants as well:

"I leave to my servant Elizabeth her dubble wages given her, three pounds more besides that which is due to her, to Ann I leave thirty shillings: to Margaret twenty shillings: To William twenty Nobles, To John twentie shillings, all these are over and above their wages, To Sara thirteene shillings foure pence."

Herbert's gifts to his servants tell us of his liberality and thoughtfulness towards them.

Herbert appended a bill of legacies left by Dorothy, and instructions on their disposal. Then he left instructions that his stationer in London, Mr Stephens, should submit, presumably
to the executor of the will, an account of sums due to (Herbert).
The last two lines of the bill, being of interest, are quoted:

"if there be any body els that owe me any
thing else of old debt I forgive them."

This, perhaps, was his last act of goodwill. It is, in a way, reminiscent of Socrates who, moments before his death, remembered that he owed a cock to Asclepios, and asked Criton to "pay it without fail".

In the light of the traits of Herbert's personality as emerging from his letters and from his will, the following words of Walton sound indeed true and sincere:

"Thus he lived, and thus he died, like a saint, unspotted of the world, full of alms-deed, full of humility, and all the examples of a virtuous life."