The life of George Herbert has been a subject of unabated interest ever since his famous poetical work, 'The Temple', saw the light of the day in 1633. Several biographers since the time of Izaak Walton, the first man to have left behind an account of the poet, have made earnest attempts to present his life as fully as they could. But most of the accounts available so far are no better than mere chronological recountings of the events of the poet's life without any serious insight into the deeper layers of his personality. In this chapter, besides recapitulating briefly the broad outline of Herbert's life and education, it is intended to bring out, with appropriate emphasis, those aspects of his life and personality which have a direct bearing upon his poetry, but have been generally neglected so far. This is expected to facilitate an assessment, later in this work, of the relation of his poetry to his personality. For obvious reasons, only passing reference has been made to those details of the poet's life which have already been examined separately by other writers. The aspects of Herbert's life to be emphasized here include the influence of his mother, his relationship with his
wife and friends and contemporaries, and their influence upon
him, his achievement as an orator, his worldly ambition and
unrealised hopes and potentialities, his acceptance of holy
orders and priesthood, his love of music, and his almost life-
long sickness, and the like. Needless to say, the significance
of these aspects of the poet's life has not been recognised till
now. Also, it is important to have a look at his last days, for
that would show the serenity of mind and inner peace and final
contentment achieved by the poet-priest after years of privations
and disappointments.

Of the several lives of the poet, that by Walton was pub-
lished in 1670. It is an important work in that subsequent accounts
of Herbert's life have been mostly based upon it. But the work
has not been accepted without demur, for it has now been charged
with showing Herbert only as "a little less than a saint"(Edward
Herbert). David Novarr's 'The Making of Walton's Lives' (New York,
1958), has turned out to be a valuable corrective because it
puts the reader on guard against Walton's suspect biographical
practices. This work has proved to be of great help to the
students of Herbert as it throws new light on the poet, and does
not follow Walton's account blindly. Writing in Chapter X
entitled 'Almost Incredible Story of George Herbert', David Novarr
charges Walton for drawing upon 'The Country Parson' for his
material, and almost treating it like an autobiography. Novarr
draws the reader's attention to Herbert's statement that he had
resolved to set down the form and character of a true Pastor so
that he might have a mark to aim at, and states that it was
possibly on this that Walton based his account of Herbert's long stay in the Bemerton Church immediately after his ordination, presumably formulating specific priestly rules for himself, while his friends waited for him outside the church. While pointing out that Walton had tried to authenticate his statement as emanating straight from Mr. Woodnot, Novarr accuses Walton of having reconstructed this episode actually from 'The Temple'.

Novarr presses his charge further by stating that Walton's large dependence on the works of Herbert shows that he was particularly willing to lean upon ready material, but did not feel compelled to search for factual details except in rare instances, because the material already available was enough to support the impression he wished to convey.

According to Novarr, Walton was interested not merely in telling the story of Herbert's life but also in providing support, by using him as a prototype of the good parson, for his feeling that the Church was a worthy profession for a man of the highest family status, education and abilities as was George Herbert — a model for posterity to imitate.

George Herbert Palmer has summed up Walton's effort at biography in these words:

"In spite of some petty inaccuracies ... I believe that what Walton says is substantially true. But there is much which he does not say: and in general, his book should be judged rather as a piece of art than as even-handed history — in painting a glowing
picture an artist selects a point of view and to what is visible from that point, subordinates all else."²

One may recollect here Wordsworth's reference to Herbert as one of the orbs that turn "around meek Walton's heavenly memory".

A second full-scale life of Herbert was written by George C. Duykinck ('The Life of George Herbert', New York, 1858). It was well received, and a second reprint was brought out within the same year. Duykinck dealt chiefly with the chronological details of Herbert's life.

Rev. Alexander B. Grosart published his 'Complete Works in Verse and Prose of George Herbert' in three volumes (London 1874). It included a lengthy memorial introduction which was partly biographical and partly critical.

To Bishop John J. Daniell goes the credit of bringing out a fine biography called 'The Life of George Herbert of Bemerton' (London 1902). While collecting material for this book, Daniell had visited Salisbury, and was lucky to have obtained exact dates of Herbert's ordination and institution as a priest.

There are two other important works which include significant accounts of Herbert's life. One is by Canon Hutchinson, called 'The Works of George Herbert', first published in 1941, and the other, 'George Herbert: His Religion and Art' by J.H. Summers, published in 1954. Hutchinson's account, admirable for its conciseness, tone and perspective, has virtually become the basis
for all subsequent study of Herbert's life. Summers brought out some important information about Herbert's parliamentary service, and questioned a few of Walton's assertions about the poet's aspiration for courtly preferment as well as his interpretation of some of the poems as autonomous entities, all unrelated to the poet's life.

George Herbert was born at Montgomery Castle on the third day of April 1593. He was the fourth son of Sir Richard Herbert by his wife Magdalen, and was a brother of Edward, Lord of Cherbury, of Sir Henry Herbert, and of Thomas Herbert. His father died when he was only three and a half years old. As a child, he was educated at home under the care of his mother whose virtues he commemorated in verse later. He accompanied her to Oxford, where she kept house for four years for her eldest son, Edward. In his twelfth year, George was sent to Westminster School where he obtained a King's Scholarship in 1609. The King's Scholars were chosen from the four boys of at least a year's standing in the school, and the criteria for selection were the candidate's learning, character, and pecuniary circumstances. Herbert's selection for one of the scholarships that year proves his general proficiency as a young student.

The unrelenting regularity of life at school — the singing of Latin hymns in the early morning, and the mingling of studies with recurrent prayers and other religious rituals later in the day — must have laid the firm foundation of that love of order and discipline evident in his writings as well as in his later life.
Herbert matriculated from Trinity College, Cambridge, in December 1609, and graduated for his B.A. degree in 1612-13. In the order of seniority, which ranks the first twenty, Herbert stood second. Three years later he became an M.A., and this time he ranked ninth.

The then Master of Trinity College, Dean Nevile, had recognised the promise in Herbert who was elected a minor fellow in 1614, a major fellow in 1616, and 'Sublector Quartae Classics' in 1617. His accomplishments secured for him a high position in academic society, and attracted the notice of Lancelot Andrews, the Bishop of Winchester. Among the distinguished contemporaries that Herbert had at Cambridge, mention may be made of Milton, Herrick, Giles Fletcher, Jeremy Taylor, Thomas Adams, Fuller the historian, and Cromwell.

In 1618, Herbert was appointed one of the four Barnby Lecturers on St. Barnby Day. Herbert's work was to lecture in English on some classical authors. The same year he had an occasion to lecture on a speech delivered by King James I to both the houses of parliament. His treatment and analysis of the King's address was commended by John Hacket.

According to Walton, who had seen Herbert at least once, the poet was a man tall and straight of build but very thin. His disposition was cheerful, and his speech and bearing were those of a thoroughbred gentleman. He was able to get love and respect from all who knew him.
Herbert's income was still small, and he was unable to satisfy his desire to buy books. While appealing for more money to his stepfather, Sir John Danvers, he announced that he was making his choice of the study of divinity "to lay the foundation of his future life", and that he required many new books for the purpose. But soon afterwards, he left the study of divinity to become a candidate for the public oratorship at Cambridge (the finest place in the University, according to him). To get the job, he sought the support of Sir Francis Nethersole, the retiring orator, of his stepfather, of his kinsman - the Earl of Pembroke, and of Sir Benjamin Rudyard. His suit proved a success, and in October 1618 he was appointed deputy orator. On the retirement of Nethersole in January 1619, Herbert was formally installed the orator in his place.

The orator was required to write letters on behalf of the university. He was also called upon to welcome all national and foreign visitors to the university by delivering learned and ornate Latin speeches. He wore a gown of watered-silk and ranked immediately after the Doctors of Law and Medicine, taking precedence over all Masters of Art. He enjoyed a separate place of honour in public proceedings of the university, and walked by himself in processions. The right of being a 'Regent' (a resident teacher of the university) or a 'Non-Regent' (one who had formerly been a member of the teaching staff, but had ceased to teach) lay also within the orator's choice. Another prerogative was the right of presenting to noblemen of their sons the degree of Master of Arts without examination (a practice stopped since 1857). The
office of the orator was not merely ornamental. It was instituted as a practical means of securing the goodwill of influential persons by paying them compliments in elegant Latin whenever they visited the university. The orator's job thus demanded the courtier's gift of finesse, and fine scholarship, both of which Herbert had in good measure.

Herbert's duties as orator at Cambridge brought him in close contact with the court and influential courtiers of the time. He wrote an address to the Duke of Buckingham when the latter became a Marquis in 1619, and to Thomas Coventry on his appointment as Attorney General in 1620. He frequently attended King James I as the university's representative at New Market or Royston. He sent an effusively loyal letter of thanks to the king in May 1620, in acknowledgment of His Majesty's gift to the university of a copy of 'Basilicon Doron'. The adulation delighted the king who later observed to the Earl of Pembroke that Herbert was "the jewel of the university". Since then, Herbert was constantly at court and received marks of favour from several influential members. He also made the personal acquaintance of Francis Bacon, the Lord Chancellor.

Herbert undoubtedly hoped to follow the examples of Sir Robert Nauton and Sir Francis Nethersole, his predecessors in the office of the orator, and attain high preferment in the service of the state, but during his third oration, which he delivered on the return of the brideless Charles and Buckingham from Spain, he expressed himself more freely and at a greater length than in
any of his letters or other orations. Herbert knew fully well that Charles and Buckingham had returned home disappointed and were bent upon war. Yet he fearlessly extolled the blessings of peace and not the advantages of war. That day he was certainly not an orator who was pushing his case for preferment at court, but essentially a courageous man who stood up for peace and good sense.

The death of King James I and some of his other well-wishers about this time, and his suspicions of the wisdom of Buckingham's policies, led Herbert to reconsider his position. His earlier inclination towards the Church, implanted in his young mind probably by his mother, seems to have come to the fore at this stage of his life. To resolve his doubts whether to pursue "the painted pleasures of a court-life", or betake himself to the study of divinity, he withdrew himself to a friend's house in Kent. While he was still undecided, John Williams, Bishop of Lincoln, presented him the prebend of Layton Ecclesia in July 1626. The prebend was attached to an estate at Leighton Bromswold, Huntingdonshire, on which stood a dilapidated church once dedicated to the Blessed Virgin. Herbert was ordained a deacon at about this time.

Two miles from Leighton was Little Gidding, the home of Nicholas Ferrar, with whom Herbert had some acquaintance while both were students at Cambridge. Herbert offered to transfer the prebend to Ferrar, but the latter declined the offer, and urged Herbert to set to work to restore the ruined church. Herbert eagerly followed Ferrar's advice, but a sum of two thousand pounds was needed for the work. Still, with 'his meagre means' and
help from friends, he set about the work. On hearing about his decision, his mother summoned him to Chelsea, and warned him that with his weak body and empty purse, he should not take up the work. After a day's time for consideration, he begged his mother to allow him to be an undutiful son at the age of thirty-three, because he had taken a vow to God to rebuild that church. He appears to have presented his case to his mother so well that she agreed to become one of his benefactors for the re-building of the church, and also made William, the Earl of Pembroke, pay fifty pounds for the same. Herbert was able to get another fifty pounds from the Earl by writing to him a witty and persuasive letter. He secured help for the work also from the Duke of Lennox, his younger brother, Sir Henry Herbert, Nicholas Ferrar, and Arthur Woodnot, Ferrar's goldsmith-friend from London. Nicholas Ferrar also asked his brother, John Ferrar, to attend to the supervision of the work personally three times a week, and to provide the materials required. Barnabas Oley, in his account, says that at the end, a handsome and neat church was erected, and that was a source of joy to the parishioners, and was admired by all.

A.G. Hyde has rightly observed that it is significant that the first labour of the poet of the church, after deciding to enter into sacred orders, should have been the repair of its visible fabric.

According to J.H. Summers, the years 1626 to 1629 seem to have been the blackest in Herbert's life. Suffering constantly
from ill health, he was tormented also by a feeling of lack of purpose and meaning in life. He felt that all his academic achievements had been of no avail. He was disappointed as he found no outlet for putting his God-given abilities to use. But at this period of agony and doubt, it appears to have dawned on him that he was confusing God's glory with his own vanity which sought to fulfil itself by securing a high position in courtly circles. It is at this juncture that a sense of guilt also started showing its head, and Herbert started doubting whether he was worthy even of taking the priest's orders. He began to ask himself if he was prepared to accept priesthood because of a genuine desire to serve the Lord, or only as a solution to his worldly problems. For a man of Herbert's conscientiousness, this self-analysis revealed infinite possibilities of self-deception.  

He felt that the problem raging in his mind could be resolved only by a total submission to the Will of God. The self-centred pride which wished to take "the way that takes the town" (Herbert) must be firmly rejected; but equally firm must he be with the sense of unworthiness which was creeping in so strongly that it prevented all action. He felt that his strong sense of worthlessness stemmed from a continuing preoccupation with the 'self' which, carried to its logical conclusion, implied a distrust of God's grace. Subsequent events of Herbert's life, namely, his marriage, the acceptance of the benefice of Bemerton, and his ordination as a priest, were probably marks of submission to the Will of the Lord.

Owing partly to ill health, and partly to his attendance at court, Herbert had already delegated his duties of orator of
Cambridge to a deputy, Herbert Thorndike, and at the close of 1627 he resigned the post. Threatened with consumption, he spent the year 1628 at the house of his brother, Sir Henry Herbert, at Woodford, Essex. Early in 1629, he visited the Earl of Danby, the brother of his stepfather, at Dauntsey, Wiltshire. There he met, and fell in love with, a relative of his host — Jane Danvers, whose father Charles Danvers of Bainton had formed a high opinion of Herbert, to whom he reportedly wished to marry one of his daughters. The ascetic scholar and theologian, who had in his boyish verses scorned the physical beauty of women, was thus felicitously mated. His marriage to Jane Danvers took place at Edington, a small village near Bainton, on 5 March 1629, a few weeks before the completion of his thirty-sixth year.

In April 1630, Charles I, at the request of the Earl of Pembroke, presented Herbert the rectory of Fugglestone with Sermerton, Wiltshire. He was in doubt whether or not to accept the presentation. He went to Wilton to thank the Earl for his kindness. The Earl informed Bishop Laud, who was with the King at nearby Salisbury, about the hesitation on Herbert's part to accept the offer. Bishop Laud sent for Pembroke and Herbert immediately, and convinced the latter that it would be sinful to refuse the benefice.

Herbert was instituted in the rectory by John Davenant, Bishop of Salisbury, on 26 April 1630, and was ordained a priest on 19 September the same year. Herbert's life at Sermerton was characterised by a saint-like devotion to the duties of his office. He appears to have written his famous series of devotional poems at
Bemerton. He practised music in his leisure, and walked twice a week to Salisbury Cathedral to attend musical sessions there. He repaired the Bemerton Church and re-built the Parsonage attached to it. His friends and benefactors contributed generously towards the expenses, but he also spent two hundred pounds from his own meagre resources. Consumption soon asserted itself, and after an overall incumbency of a little less than three years, he died, and was buried beneath the altar of his church on 3 March 1633. He had no children, and left all his property to his wife, except some financial legacies and some books which he willed to Nicholas Ferrar and other friends.

One of the strongest influences on Herbert, till he took orders, appears to have been of his loving mother. She was a remarkable woman of the late Elizabethan and early Stuart period. In one of his Latin poems, Herbert has called her "Beauty's vision to the World, the glass of God". It is to John Donne that we owe the detailed account of Sunday evenings in the Herbert household when Mrs Magdalen Herbert gracefully closed the day with the cheerful singing of the Psalms in which all the members of her family gladly joined. She was also a sensible worldly woman. "Her house", says Donne, "was a court in conversation of the best." It was open to elegant people of literary and musical tastes, and the influence of such cultured company proved to be the best education for her children at their tender and impressionable age. Donne has paid immortal tribute to her comely beauty, her elegant yet sober dressing, her charity, and her grace as a woman and as a hostess. It was for Magdalen Herbert that Donne wrote the elegy known as
'The Autumnal' with the famous opening lines:

No Spring, nor Summer Beauty hath such grace,
As I have seen in an Autumnal face.

She was eight years older than Donne, and enjoyed a position of greater social security. She gave him help and encouragement whenever he needed it. He was newly married, and was finding it difficult to make both ends meet. Donne was particularly grateful to her, for she had put him and his family up in her house during the plague in London, and he repaid her with lasting friendship and devotion which he unabatedly expressed in his poems, sermons and letters. In one poem, he used the lovely phrase, "her warm redeeming hand", to express his gratitude.

From the evidence available, it is possible to surmise that George Herbert's mother did guide him in the choice of his vocation — firstly as an orator at the university, and later as a priest at Bemerton. From all accounts, including Donne's, Mrs Herbert was a very religious woman, and she must have held a high opinion of priesthood. It is quite possible that a religious aristocrat like Magdalen Herbert might have considered that an appointment at the court for her son would help, rather than hamper, his service to God and the Church. This is a point which the poet's biographers have missed altogether. The concept of statesman-ecclesiastic was already a proven one in Herbert's time. It was only due to a later attitude that worldly preferment was considered incompatible with service to the Church. It is quite possible that such an outlook
appealed to the Renaissance consciousness of those times. It is almost impossible at this distance of time to establish the reason for Herbert's taking orders immediately after his mother's death. Still, it may not be idle to guess that his great regard for his late-lamented mother prompted his apparently abrupt decision in 1627.

Looking back, we think of Magdalen Herbert as a woman of culture and intelligence, of courage and firmness of will, and of deep religious belief. She guided her son's devotion to the Church. Although soldiering was the traditional profession for the family, she could easily see that George had neither the physique nor the inclination for soldiering, and rightly did she groom him for a quiet academic career which ultimately ended in a country parsonage.

Herbert's great respect for his mother can also be seen in his unresisting submission to her will that he should not travel abroad. However, left to himself he would have very much liked to do so, like his elder brother, and a younger one, who had travelled in foreign parts extensively. On his mother's part, not till 1609, the year George entered the university, did she marry again so that she was able to watch lovingly over his development from his childhood to manhood.

George Herbert wrote a series of poems on his mother, 'Emoriae Matris Sacrum', fourteen of which are in Latin and five in Greek. Those were printed together with John Donne's funeral sermon. Margaret Bottrall laments that Herbert did not write about his
mother in English which, she feels, would have been his poetry "springing from the love of a human creature." He perhaps felt that Latin and Greek were better suited to express elegiac solemnity than English. It may also be that the poet had resolved that all his English poetry would be addressed only to God and would pertain exclusively to matters affecting his soul. All the same, his elegiac poems in Latin and Greek, besides recollecting the personal qualities of Mrs Herbert as a cultured, magnanimous and graceful woman, also show his dependence on her. In one poem (translated by Mr Blunden), he declares:

Thou wast my root, my solid rock, and I
A Polypus, held tight and safe thereby;
Not only the dark sisters cut thy thread;
Their shears touched me, and I with thee seem dead.

The first verse is a clear recognition of the mother's abiding influence shaping the son's spiritual and intellectual personality.

The question of his father's influence does not naturally arise for he died when Herbert was a mere child. But he appears to have got along well with his stepfather, Sir John Danvers, who was by age more like an elder brother than a father image. Sir Danvers proved to be quite friendly towards George, who also confided in him trustingly in his letters. This is quite surprising, because having loved his mother so deeply, he should have been naturally jealous of his stepfather. But his acceptance of Sir Danvers and the easy relationship with him shows that he had a truly ripe and understanding mind. This attitude contrasts sharply with that of his elder brother, Edward, who purposely omitted any mention of
Sir Danvers in his autobiography, perhaps as a display of resentment.

Herbert's relationship with Edward, senior to him by ten years, was not very close, for the latter had spent much of his early life abroad. It is also possible that Edward did not spend much time in his mother's home, after her re-marriage, because of his animosity against his young stepfather.

According to Margaret Bottrall, skill in versification, love of music, and an interest in botany were common to both the brothers, George and Edward, but temperamentally one was the opposite of the other. Edward was dashing, quarrelsome, conceited and boastful. Though he showed signs of originality as a philosopher, and was also a talented metaphysical poet, he was not serious about his writings, and regarded them merely as products of his leisure. Herbert, on the other hand, was humble, deeply religious, and was very earnest about his literary labour. As Margaret Bottrall has pointed out, perhaps the most fitting memorial to George Herbert is the one written a decade or so after his death by Edward Herbert in his autobiography (Ed. C.H. Herford. Montgomery-shire, 1928). It reads:

"My brother George was so excellent a scholar, that he was made the Publick Orator of the University of Cambridge, some of whose English works are extant, who tho' they be rare in their kind, yet are far short of expressing those perfections he had in the Greek or Latin tongue ... : his life was most holy and exemplary,
in so much that about Salisbury where he lived benificed for many years, he was little less than sainted ... he was not exempt from passion and choler, being infirmities to which all our race is subject, but they excepted, without reproach in his actions." 5

From George Herbert's letters and frequent visits to his younger brother, Sir Henry Herbert, it appears that they were on particularly friendly terms. George stayed with Henry at Woodford in 1626, apparently for the best part of the year.

George Herbert had deep love for all his three sisters. He rode two hundred miles from Cambridge to Lincolnshire to visit his ailing sister, Frances. He wrote and sent greetings to Elizabeth when she was sick, and showed the most sensitive consideration for Margaret's three orphaned daughters whom he took in as members of his own family at Bemerton, although with his meagre means they must have been a burden upon him. Both Edward and Henry were better placed than George, but neither of them came forward to accept the responsibility of looking after the three orphaned nieces.

Herbert's marriage to Jane Danvers was a carefully considered step, as it did not hamper but helped Herbert's devotion to the Lord. In 'The Country Parson', Herbert has laid down specific rules for the priest's marriage and the choice of a wife. Though he felt that the priest should preferably remain single, yet if the temper of his body and the circumstances of his life so required, the country parson should marry, for that way it would be easier for him to converse with the women in the congregation without evoking
the wrath of suspicious menfolk of the country. And the choice of
the wife should be made by the parson rather by his ear than by
his eye, meaning that he should look for qualities like humility,
softness of speech, and amiable disposition rather than beauty,
riches and honour. Thus it appears that in sharp contrast to John
Donne, who had married impetuously, Herbert chose his wife with
judicious care.

From all available records, Jane Danvers appears to have
been a well-bred and cultured woman. She was a devout person her­
self, and proved to be of great help to her husband in his priestly
duties.

In the last part of Chapter IX and in Chapter X of 'The
Country Parson', Herbert has maintained that a parson's wife, like
Eve, should reach God through her husband. She must engage herself
in good work, and play a separate but important role in the parish,
specially towards the care of the sick and the poor. She should
also run the household, look after the children, and train the
servants. These ideas were expressed by Herbert after he had been
married for three years, and, therefore, they can be supposed to
convey some of the qualities of the woman he married, and an idea
of the relationship that must have existed between them.

A.G. Hyde maintains that the picture of Herbert's life at
Bemerton would not be complete without the pleasing presence of
Jane Herbert, who was always ready to forgo the privileges of her
birth, and claimed no precedence in her husband's parish excepting
what was her legitimate due. Hyde has further stated that she
proved to be an admirable helpmate to the devoted pastor and became a cheerful almoner of his charities — a tenth penny of his tithe and a tenth part of his corn, her benefactions usually taking the form of shoes and blankets for the deserving among the parishioners.

Helen C. White brings out a very significant point when she states that though Jane Danvers has won the commendation of almost all biographers of George Herbert, she never appears to have entered the deeper consciousness of her husband from where his verse found expression. But it should not be forgotten that Herbert had almost vowed that the medium of his poetry would never be used for any other being except God. He did not allow himself to break this rule even in the case of his mother. As far as his wife is concerned, references to the Parson's wife in 'The Country Parson' can surely be taken as his tribute to Jane Danvers herself, if she needed any.

After Herbert's death, Jane Danvers continued to be his widow for almost six years, after which she married Sir Robert Cook of Highnam House, Gloucestershire. She was Sir Robert's wife for about seven years, and remained his widow for nearly fifteen years. She had preserved many of George Herbert's private writings which she possibly intended to make public, but those were burnt when Highnam House was razed by the rebel forces and so were lost to posterity. A library of books Herbert had deposited, with a chain affixed to the volumes, in a room in Montgomery Castle, also met with a similar fate.
Of the several courtiers that Herbert had for his friends and patrons, the Earl of Pembroke was perhaps the most influential. He was Herbert's kinsman, and was at that time Lord Chamberlain to the King. Walton relates how the Earl spoke out in favour of his cousin, saying that he loved him more for his learning and virtue than for the closeness of connection with his family. The King is reported to have smiled and said that with the Earl's concurrence, he might love Herbert equally.

A few others who were useful to Herbert in various ways include Lodowick Stuart - the Duke of Lennox, James Hamilton - the Second Marquis of Hamilton, and the Duke of Buckingham who was elected Chancellor of the Cambridge University in 1626, but was brutally assassinated by the rebels in 1628. In fact, it was Buckingham's high-handedness and stark favouritism in filling court appointments, added to his autocratic handling of the affairs of the Virginia Company, that may have finally turned Herbert's mind against the "tinsel of court life".

Perhaps the most distinguished contemporary, with whom Herbert came in contact during the performance of his duties as orator, was Francis Bacon, who had been appointed Councillor Extraordinary to Queen Elizabeth in 1590. Bacon was a man of science and a man of letters. He was appointed Lord Chancellor and Baron Verulam and Viscount St. Albans in 1616. Herbert wrote two public letters to Bacon in his capacity as orator, and a short Latin poem after Bacon's death in 1626. He had thanked Bacon for a gift to the university of his 'Instauratio', and had written complimentary Latin verses.
on it in his private capacity. He translated into Latin part of "The Advancement of Learning", having as his coadjutors Ben Jonson and Hobbes. Herbert's relationship with Bacon was, thus, on a literary plane, and they appear to have had more in common than has been generally recognised so far. Bacon dedicated to Herbert, his "very dear friend", his English translation of some of the Psalms of David, "in recognition of the pains that it pleased (Herbert) to take about some of (Bacon's) writings". In this dedication he paid a handsome tribute to Herbert when he wrote that he could not have made a better choice (for the dedication) in so far as divinity and poetry were concerned. The poems and letters which Herbert addressed to Bacon are also complimentary, and show his deep knowledge of the latter's works. While writing about Bacon in his poem, 'In Honorem Verulamij', he addressed him as the "prince of theories", "the high priest of truth", "the pine tree of profundity and grace", "the literary Brutus", and "the axe of error". Even if we consider that these words were unduly encomiastic, and formed part of the ornamental style written in an age of easy flattery, it will be difficult to deny that Herbert must have held Bacon in high esteem.

Herbert made a deep impression on the renowned Bishop, Dr Lancelot Andrewes, whom he considered to be his spiritual father. He had sent the Bishop useful aphorisms in a letter written in Greek. Walton has it recorded that the Bishop liked them so much that he carried Herbert's letter on his person and showed it to various scholars with pride and satisfaction. The Bishop was perhaps the most learned theologian of his time, a prelate of rare
qualities of the head and the heart, and was so appealing a preacher that he was called *an angel in the pulpit*. Herbert's frequent visits to the Bishop of Winchester gave him an insight into the dignified manner in which the latter had conducted his services. Andrewes's services, though called Popish by some rigid puritans of the day, were known for their form and adornment though, unlike Laud, he chose not to force the rituals at public services. Herbert's insistence on regularity, decency, and form, in the conduct of the duties of a priest, laid down by him in 'The Country Parson', must have been influenced a great deal by Bishop Andrewes.

But by far the strongest personal influence on Herbert, after taking orders, was that of Nicholas Ferrar, thanks to whom alone 'The Temple' saw the light of the day. It was to Nicholas Ferrar that George Herbert sent his manuscript of the English poems in his dying hour, to get them either published or destroyed as his friend deemed fit. Had Nicholas Ferrar failed to appreciate the spiritual and poetic depth of Herbert's poems, George Herbert today would have been no more than a mere name in literary history instead of the truly devout poet that he is known to be.

Herbert's relationship with Ferrar began to grow close ever since the latter had offered his generous help to the former in the reconstruction of the church at Huntingdonshire in 1626 or thereabouts. They styled each other *most entire friends and brothers*. But they seem to have met only once in later years. Herbert's absorption in religious life owes a great deal to Ferrar's influence.
Nicholas Ferrar, renowned for the establishment of the retreat at Little Gidding, had deep spiritual stirrings in his early childhood. His brother John has left an account of the intensity of religious disquiet felt by young Nicholas. We are told how once he left his bed in the middle of the night, and lay sobbing on the lawn in deep grief because he did not really know if God existed, and how to serve Him if He did. It was only after his copious tears had washed away the anguish of his heart that he was able to find some relief in bed. It is said that from that day onwards, Nicholas Ferrar experienced, more and more, the blissful presence of God, and resolved to serve Him to the best of his capabilities. Quite expectedly, Nicholas Ferrar chose a deeply religious course of life. In June 1626, he was ordained a deacon in Westminster Abbey by Bishop Laud. Ferrar remained a deacon for the rest of his life, refusing to accept priesthood because he most humbly felt that he was not worthy of any higher ecclesiastical office. He established a religious retreat at the oratory at Little Gidding solely for his large number of relatives and friends who cared to join it. According to A.G. Hyde, Little Gidding was a rare combination of "a school for learning and manners", of "training in domestic chores and crafts", "a dispensary and almhouse" and, most of all, "a place of cheerfulness and calm content". Little Gidding gave rise to opposing reactions in later times. Some people like De Quincey admired it while some others like Carlyle condemned it outright. T.S. Eliot's idealization of the ancient holy retreat as the place 'where prayer has been valid' is truly admirable. A.G. Hyde adds that no vows were required for membership, that
the rendering of voluntary service was a regular feature, marriage was encouraged rather than deprecated, and no more austerities were imposed than compliance with a daily round of devotional prayers and secular tasks. The diet was frugal and neat, and life contained simple pleasures like music and warm fires.

Peter Peckard has recorded an entry from 'Little Gidding Diary' which gives a fair idea of the high esteem and deep love that Nicholas Ferrar and other inmates of the place had had for George Herbert. Peckard has reproduced the entry as under:

"On Friday (date not mentioned) Mr Mapletoft brought us word that Mr Herbert was said to be past hope of recovery, which was very grieved news to us, and so much the more so, being altogether unexpected. We presently therefore made our publick supplication for his health in the words, and manner following:

'O most mighty God, and merciful Father, we most humbly beseech thee, if it be thy good pleasure, to continue to us that singular benefit which thou hast given us in the friendship of thy servant, our dear brother, who now lieth on the bed of sickness. Let him abide with us yet awhile, for the furtherance of our faith. We have indeed deserved by our ingratitude, not only the loss of him, but whatever other opportunities thou hast given us for the attainment of our salvation, but thy mercies are above all thy works. In consideration whereof we prostrate ourselves in all humble earnestness, beseeching thee, if so it may seem good to thy divine Majesty that thou wilt hear us in this, who hast heard us in all the rest, and that thou wilt bring him back again from the gates of death: that he may live to thy honour, and our comfort. Lord, thou hast willed that our delights should be in the Saints on earth, and in such as excell in virtue — how then should we not be afflicted, and
mourn when thou takest them away from us! Thou hast
made him a great help, and the furtherance of the
best things among us, how then can we but esteem the
loss of him, a chastisement from thy displeasure! O
Lord, we beseech thee that it may not be so: we
beseech thee, if it be thy good pleasure, restore unto
us our dear brother, by restoring to him his health:
so will we praise and magnify thy name, and mercy with
a song of thanks giving. Hear us, O Lord, for thy dear
son's sake, Jesus Christ our Saviour, Amen'.

A close study of the lives of Ferrar and Herbert show that
there are curious similarities in their patterns. Both were very
intelligent scholars, and had the family backgrounds and the capa-
bilities necessary for making a success of their secular careers,
Herbert being keen on becoming a Secretary of State, and Nicholas
Ferrar wanting to establish and perhaps head a prosperous Christian
colony under the aegis of the Virginia Company. Both of them
turned towards religious employment after being thoroughly dis-
illusioned in their pursuit of worldly ambitions. Each had
achieved, at the end of his life, peace and fulfilment in his own
way of religious worship. Each seems to have influenced the other
deeply, possibly because they understood and valued each other's
advice. Herbert advised Ferrar to take up and continue the daily
system of prayers, and Ferrar in turn persuaded Herbert to re-
structure the Leighton Church. Herbert wanted to exchange his
parish at Bemerton for one near Little Gidding valuing "Mr Ferrar's
near neighbourhood more than any living". Ferrar submitted his
translations of Valdesso, Lessius and Carbo to Herbert who wrote
the Preface and Notes to the 'Divine Considerations of Valdesso'.
It was, therefore, a proper culmination of their close relationship.
that Herbert sent the manuscript of 'The Temple' most trustingly to Nicholas Ferrar.

Most critics of George Herbert have taken it for granted that John Donne's influence upon Herbert was fairly considerable, mainly because Herbert had come in personal contact with Donne in Magdalen Herbert's home. He proved a sympathetic friend to Herbert on several occasions. Although Herbert followed the 'metaphysical' style while writing his English poems, Donne's influence on the manner and content of his poems is definitely not as marked as made out by some critics. Actually, Donne was closer to Magdalen Herbert and Edward Herbert, the latter being Donne's father-in-law's ward, than to George Herbert who was twenty years his junior. It can be said with some certainty that George Herbert must have read and heard Donne's poems in his mother's place, but he never borrowed from them. In his 'In Sacrum Anchoram Piscatoris', Herbert spoke of Donne as the deeply religious and eloquent Dean of St. Paul's, and not as a great poet. But Donne, on his part, held Herbert in considerable esteem, and at the time of his death sent him his personal seal with an 'anchor-cross' engraved on it.

Margaret Bottrall has pointed out that George Herbert had, in common with Donne, the ability to apply his complete intelligence, reason, and sensibility simultaneously to his experiences while expressing them in the form of a poem. Herbert's debt to Donne in this is definitely there, but it is only of a general nature.

The very fact that George Herbert turned out to be an entirely different person and a different poet from Donne, goes to show that
the latter's influence upon him was not deep. Donne was a dramatic not only in his poetry but also in his life, particularly as a deliverer of lucid sermons at St. Paul's. His commissioning of a self-portrait before his death, and sitting for the same draped in a white sheet, stand in sharp contrast to Herbert's characteristic humility and self-effacing manners which he showed all his life and particularly at the time of his death.

Herbert has been charged with worldly ambition by a large number of critics since his time till now. It is argued that his exertion of all available influence and "working the heads" to obtain the oratorship of the university of Cambridge while he was a reader in rhetoric, points to his zeal for secular betterment at court. He has been accused of using the post of the orator to push his fortunes with the King and the court. The letters he wrote as the orator and the orations he delivered on a few occasions of ceremony, have come in for criticism. Also, his general conduct, while in office as orator, has earned him from his critics the opprobrium of servility and self-seeking. Here, however, it should be remembered that those were times of formal greetings and dedications, and the compliments offered were florid and extravagant. Also, King James and some of the nobles for whom the letters were written, loomed much larger in the eyes of their contemporaries than they do now to us. In the letters or the orations of Herbert, there is no art but dexterity of presentation, and some elegance of sentiment. It should also be kept in mind that they were prepared and delivered for a particular kind of audience and they followed a certain established style. As such, it is unfair to
heap accusations unwittingly on the man who wrote them.

Marchette Chute, in her book,'Two Gentlemen' (London,1960, stressess the fact that Herbert was a student of divinity at Cambridge, and is not prepared to believe that he ever had any outright political aspirations. According to Helen C. White, there was not an iota of doubt that the ultimate destination of Herbert was the taking of holy orders. She cites as her evidence Herbert's letter to Sir John Danvers (6 October 1619) stating that preferment at Cambridge will not divert him too much from divinity. Mark Taylor's insinuation, as expressed in his Introduction to 'The Soul in Paraphrase' (Mouton,1974), that Herbert extracted money from Danvers on the plea of buying books on theology, but with the actual intention of loosening the latter's purse-strings, is far from fair to the poet's character, and cannot be taken seriously.

It cannot, however, be denied that Herbert was ambitious for the highly coveted post of the orator at Cambridge. He was then a young man wanting to step on the first rung of the ladder to success. Two of his predecessors in office had risen to the post of Secretary of State. In addition, Herbert had been able to please King James I also, by praising an oration by the King as superior to whatever Greek or Roman hirelails might have ventured. Herbert had the requisite qualifications for the post, and it is only natural that he hoped to fill it. His temperament and classical accomplishments specially fitted him to be an orator.

Writing to his brother, Henry, when the latter was in France, Herbert expressed his belief that a person must have a good conceit
of his wit, that is, he should be proud, not in a foolish manner when there is no cause for it, but by setting a just price on his qualities. He maintained that only a man of poor spirit undervalued himself. But inordinate ambition was considered by him to be a common and insidious temptation, and all his life he was on his guard against it.

Herbert was a person endowed with all the qualities required for doing well in the world of his day, and he was fully aware of it. Still, he has been censured by certain biographers like Barnabas Oley for not making the best use of his potentialities.

The sudden death of three of Herbert's well-wishers was a serious setback to his worldly prospects. Lodowick — Duke of Richmond, died in 1623, and James—Marquis of Hamilton, died in 1625, followed by King James a few days later. There being none left to espouse his cause for courtly assignments, Herbert retired to the country to review in solitude the future course of his life.

After these developments, it is quite unlikely that Herbert continued to cherish any hope of courtly preferment as ascribed to him by Walton. As already mentioned, in his oration for Prince Charles, on the latter's return from Spain, he had made an impassioned plea for peace, knowing fully well that the young mettlesome prince had anything but peace in mind at that time. A man with Herbert's sensibility definitely knew what compliments and what type of ideas were expected of him in that oration, and it is generally believed that he burnt all bridges that may still have
been left for his public career by putting across such a strong appeal for peace in his oration. At about this time, Herbert stood for election to Parliament for the seat which had been held by his stepfather earlier. The glamour of public life does not appear to have been the reason for his decision. Bacon's fall from grace in politics, which had started with a parliamentary inquiry in 1621, must have been too fresh in Herbert's mind for him to have any illusions about a political career. Also, his opinion of the parliament was not at all high; for he clearly stated in 'The Country Parson' that there was "no school to a Parliament".

It is quite unlikely that George Herbert looked forward to attending the first parliament of King Charles (held from 18 June to 21 August 1625), particularly as his brother, Sir Edward Herbert, had been recalled from Paris. When the parliament met, it resulted in unprecedented military and diplomatic impasses. The session was doomed because of the arrogant and inept attitudes of both Charles and Buckingham. The latter was busy selling to the highest bidders those public offices which had not already been filled by his followers. By the end of the session, it became quite evident that the court or the parliament was no place for men of honesty and integrity. This session ratified the dissolution of the Virginia Company, and that changed the course of Nicholas Ferrar's life as well.

It was perhaps after this session of parliament that Herbert, as already stated (n.9), removed himself to a friend's house in Kent to ponder over his future, and resolved to enter into sacred
orders. This might possibly be the result of his failure to get some employment at court for which he had waited for seven long years. It appears more likely, however, that he now saw the incompatibility between public service and religious pursuits. Herbert's conclusion that "Perhaps great places and thy praise do not so well agree" ('Submission') seems to have been drawn from his own experience.

A.G. Hyde has expressed the opinion that during the last months of 1624 itself, Herbert was turning his back on worldly ambition including service in Parliament, Walton's elaborate exclamation of the death of "all of Mr Herbert's court-hopes" following the death of King James in 1625, has been rejected as inaccurate by Hyde who believes that Herbert had decided to follow the expected course of taking orders after completing his studies in divinity some months earlier. He adds that Herbert's entry into Parliament was possibly to fill up the family seat at a time when no other male member was available to do so. In fact, the "School of Parliament" may have helped Herbert to see clearly that the future of his life did not lie in that direction.

A document which has come to light only in the opening years of this century in the Lincolnshire archives, shows that Herbert had applied to the Archbishop of Canterbury for permission to be ordained immediately at the convenience of John Williams, Bishop of Lincoln, instead of waiting for the laid down period of one year. Hyde points out that Herbert put this application during the time when he was on leave for six months from the oratorship at Cambridge,
and while he was waiting to attend the second session of parliament. Obviously, this piece of information establishes the fact that Herbert had resolved to take orders in 1624 itself, and had no desire to attend to his duties as orator, or as a member of parliament. John Williams helped Herbert at this stage by persuading the Archbishop of Canterbury to issue a dispensation dated 3 November 1624 permitting Herbert to be ordained deacon at any time. The important point to note in this whole episode is that all this happened much before the death of Herbert's well-wishers.

Herbert's mother, who had been the mainstay of his life and career, died in 1627. Herbert asked for leave of absence from Cambridge, handing over the duties of the orator to his deputy. He did not return to academic life again, and resigned his post in 1628. He was succeeded by Robert Creichton, to whom Herbert wrote an interesting letter of advice regarding the duties of the orator.

Having abandoned his efforts at reconciling earthly preferment with heavenly greatness, Herbert turned with full attention to the chief problem being faced by a spiritual seeker of his times, namely, that of uniting in life the religious teaching of the Reformation and the aesthetic approach of the Renaissance, and he appears to have evolved a satisfactory solution.

On his return from Kent to London in 1626, when Herbert told one of his acquaintances about his decision to take holy orders, the latter is said to have persuaded him to reconsider it, stating that it was too mean an employment and too far below Herbert's birth and abilities. According to Walton's account, Herbert replied
to his adviser thus:

"It hath been formerly adjudged that the domestic servants of the King of Heaven should be of the noblest families on earth; and though the iniquity of the late times have made clergymen meanly valued, and the sacred name of Priest contemptible, yet I will labour to make it honourable by consecrating all my learning and all my poor abilities, to advance the glory of that God, that gave them, knowing that I can never do too much for Him that hath done so much for me as to make me a Christian. And I will labour to be like my Saviour, by making humility lovely in the eyes of all men, and by following the merciful and meek example of my dear Jesus."

This statement reveals the essence of the spirit of humility and devotion which is perhaps the most outstanding element of Herbert's personality.

Herbert's reply reminds us of Donne who, after taking orders, exclaimed to a Mr Tilman: "Why doth the foolish world scorn that profession whose joyes passe speech? Why do they think unfit that Gentry should joyne faculties with it?" Though Herbert had expressed very clearly to his friend his intention to take orders, there appeared to be some wavering in his mind. This was primarily due to a genuine feeling of unworthiness on his part for taking up the sacred job of a priest, but it has been wrongly ascribed by some critics to his reluctance to part with hopes of worldly preferment. About this time, his patrons at the court were removed by death, and it was no longer necessary to take a decision about taking up employment at court. It was rather a blessing in disguise for
Herbert. Some other events also seemed to have compelled him to take an early decision: for some time, a plague was raging in London and her suburbs, and the need for spiritual guidance for the common man who panicked, was more urgently felt. The example of Donne's renunciation of the world, and his acceptance of orders must also have had its influence upon Herbert. It can be safely surmised that he may have even discussed his problem with Donne who had himself a little earlier faced a similar dilemma. His mother, who had always guided him towards priesthood, was now in failing health, and suffered frequent attacks of melancholy. She must have also implored him to make up his mind and take holy orders quickly.

In the later half of 1629, about three months after Herbert's marriage to Jane Danvers, Philip — the Earl of Pembroke, (William having died a little earlier), requested King Charles to bestow upon George Herbert the Rectory of Fugglestone with Bemerton which had some short time ago fallen vacant when Dr Walter Curll was made Bishop of Bath and Wells. The King agreed, saying that he had no objections at all if Herbert would accept the offer. Considering that Herbert was already questioning his worth for the high office of priesthood, this unexpected offer, and the responsibility involved in it, must have subjected the sensitive poet to further agony. It is said that he prayed for divine guidance, fasted, and considered the offer for more than a month while undergoing "such spiritual conflicts as none can think but only those that have endured them". (Walton)

In April 1630, Woodnot visited Herbert, and finding him happily married and in good health, took him to the seat of the Earl of
Pembroke at Wilton. There Bishop Laud was also present, and he appears to have urged Herbert to take orders as a priest immediately. According to Walton, a tailor was summoned from Salisbury for making the canonicals for Herbert overnight, and the very next day (26 April 1630), George Herbert was made a priest by Dr Davenant, the Bishop of the diocese.

Helen C. White says that there is no reason for us to doubt Walton's story that Herbert was able to overcome his vacillation in taking orders as a priest only on the persuasion of Bishop Laud.

From all available evidence, it can be said with some certainty that Herbert did not have an impetuous or passionate past, like Donne's, to atone for. But, as Helen C. White also states, his high estimation of the type of life a priest should lead, might have made a truly modest man, like himself, rather perplexed. In addition, he also felt that the moral demands of priesthood might be very exacting and beyond his capabilities. So it was only when the Earl of Pembroke, Woodnot, and Bishop Laud together pressed upon him, that he agreed to take a positive decision in this regard.16

J.H. Summers has pointed out that the taking of orders was no sudden conversion (Like Donne's) for George Herbert. Right from his seventeenth year, he had shown marked inclination towards a religious life. His declaration to his stepfather in 1618, that he was "setting foot into divinity, to lay the foundation for his future life," has already been mentioned. Still, even against this religious background, he was also taking part in secular happenings.
around him. He was writing of court gossip to Sir Robert Harley, of French wit and fashion to his brother Henry, and was also composing a Latin religious poem, 'In Natales et Pascha Concurrentes'. According to Summers, during the years of his famous orations i.e. during 1623 and 1624 when Herbert * enjoyed his gentle humor for cloaths and court-like company, and seldom looked towards Cambridge unless the King was there* (Walton), he was writing his most devout Latin poetry. Summers points out that before Herbert was ordained a priest in 1630, he was already one of England's greatest living religious poets (63 of his 164 poems appear to have no reference to priesthood). Whatever Herbert's ambition during those years, Summers believes that the same did not compel him to neglect religion. 17

How Herbert behaved at the moment of his induction is now well-known. He prostrated himself in the chapel, praying intensely, and perhaps framing rules for the future conduct of his priesthood, while his friends waited outside. Thus he appears to have finally turned away from the world of ambition and worldly preferment to the service of Jesus Christ and the Church.

Herbert's words to Arthur Woodnot on the night of his induction are full of significance, for they record the finality of his turning away from the tinsel of the world:

"I now look back upon my aspiring thoughts and think myself more happy than I had attained what then I so ambitiously thirsted for: And, I can now behold the Court with an impartial eye, and see plainly, that it is made up of 'Fraud', and 'Titles', and 'Flattery',
and many other such empty, imaginary painted pleasures; pleasures that are so empty, as not to satisfy when they are enjoyed; but in God and His Service, is a fullness of all joy and pleasure, and no satiety... and I will always contemn my birth, or any title or dignity that can be conferred upon me, when I shall compare them with my title of being a Priest, and serving at the Altar of Jesus, my Master."

Herbert's parish extended from Fisherton Anger in the East to Wilton House, the seat of the Earl of Pembroke, in the West. On the North of the grounds of Wilton House stood the Church of Fuggles-tone St. Peter, and the dual rectory also included the chapel of Bemerton St. Andrew, across the road from Bemerton Rectory. The church was of thirteenth century vintage, while the chapel was possibly constructed in the fourteenth century.

With typical zeal, Herbert immediately set about the task of repairing the chapel and rebuilding his rectory, almost completely, as it had not been lived in for some time, and was in a poor state of disuse. He also got some repairs done to the church at Fuggles-tone, to which the Bemerton church was a chapel-of-ease. After repairing the Bemerton church and his rectory, Herbert got the following words engraved in the hall of the rectory:

To My Successor

If thou chance far to find
A new house to thy mind,
And built without thy cost;
Be good to the poor,
As God gives thee store,
And then my labour's not lost.
The topic of his first sermon was: 'Keep Thy Heart With All Diligence'. It was taken from one of Solomon's 'Proverbs'. The sermon itself was delivered by him in the florid style of an orator, perhaps keeping Donne's sermons at St. Paul's Cathedral as a model. During the first sermon, he laid down several holy rules to be followed. However, at the end, he promised the rural congregation that thereafter his sermons would be simple and easy to follow. During the rest of his services, he went over the whole sequence of daily, weekly, and yearly devotions, all set forth in the Anglican system, most meticulously. In addition to this, at the canonical hours of ten and four, he, along with his wife and nieces and servants, would appear at the prayers in the chapel, a practice which attracted a large number of his parishioners to the church. To press home this point, Walton paints the verbal picture of the farmers putting down their ploughs on hearing the churchbell in the fields, saying their prayer there only, and then continuing with their work.

Herbert's life as the Priest of Bemerton is full of many interesting events that throw ample light on various aspects of his character. He was full of love and charity for his parishioners, particularly the poor and the needy among them. While he and his wife were still at Bainton, he used to walk to Bemerton to undertake the repair of the church. Izaak Walton has recorded that once, while he was thus busy with the work, an old woman from his parish approached him most hesitatingly to tell him about some of her difficulties. Herbert treated her with such kindness and patience, and held her hand and called her his "dear good mother" so lovingly that, though in some fear, she was able to unburden herself to
him. He assured her that nothing would give him greater pleasure than to help her as best as he could. He also gave her some money and sent her home, happy and contented. On his return to Bainton, he narrated the details of this meeting to his wife, who, being the kind woman that she was, was also touched, and next day itself she procured a set of blankets and sent them to the poor old woman with the assurance that she would herself get acquainted with her before long.

Izaak Walton says that Herbert set no limit to his charity, nor did he ever turn his face from anyone in want, specially his poor neighbours. He would go to the noorest of them, amprise himself of their wants, and relieve them cheerfully of their woes, and thank God for enabling him to do so. When he was advised by a friend to be more frugal on account of his wife and nieces, he stated that charity was the best Christian virtue and that his wife was well provided for. Herbert stated that the tithes and other church-dues were a gift of God, and that he was thankful to Him that he was able to return the same to Him by distributing them among some of His needy children, who bore the stamp of "Jesus, My Master."19.

Besides his love and charity towards his parishioners, the courtesy and civility shown to people whom he met casually left a deep impression upon them. Walton has recorded three instances of his meeting people in his walks to Salisbury. The first instance shows how Herbert met a gentleman from Salisbury and asked him about his faith in God and the Church, fully knowing that the latter
did not belong to his own parish. But the very polite manner of
asking the questions deeply moved the gentleman. Herbert told him
that proper attention must be paid to sermons so that one does
not remain like a fish in salt water, remaining fresh and unaffec-
ted by it. His advice to the gentleman also included rules for
practical piety, conveyed in such a loving manner that the gen-
tleman from then onwards used to meet him and escort him often
during his walks to Salisbury or back to Bemerton. This gentleman
was alive at the time Walton's book was written (1670), and the
author can be expected to have verified the story before publish-
ing it.

The second instance relates how Herbert once met a minister
of a church of the neighbourhood. After exchanging pleasantries,
Herbert expressed his opinion that for the moral standard of the
laity to improve, it was very important that the clergy them-
selves followed all the laid down fasts and prayers including
those for the Ember-week, and that their personal example of high
morality was the best way to bring about a reformation in the
manners of the common man.

The third instance narrates how, during one of his walks to
attend a weekly music-session at Salisbury, Herbert came across
a poor horseman whose horse had slipped and fallen with the load.
Herbert immediately took off his canonical coat, and helped the
poor man in first unloading, and then re-loading the horse. He
also gave him some money to feed himself and his horse (for which
Walton calls him a good Samaritan). When Herbert joined the
session, his friends were surprised to see him in soiled clothes, which was most unlike his usual neatly dressed self. He told them of what had happened on the way. When one of those present commented that Herbert had demeaned himself by indulging in a dirty employment like that, Herbert spiritedly replied that he had acted in full accordance with his conscience which told him that he must practise what he preached, and must help at all costs those who were in distress. He added that should such an occasion arise everyday, he would not be found wanting in doing a similar service every time.

These incidents clearly show the deep love and holy charity that Herbert had for his fellow beings, particularly for those who were poor or in distress. They also bring out Herbert's unwavering courage of conviction. He would not hold himself back by standing on false formality when an occasion arose for him to translate his belief into practice.

At the age of thirty-seven, Herbert found himself the head of his household consisting of himself, his wife Jane, his three nieces, four maid-servants, and two men-servants. He appears to have found peace and tranquillity at last — having attained the employment of God which he appears to have pined for in the early years. Judged by the immense popularity he enjoyed among his contemporaries and members of his parish, and the reputation he has enjoyed since his day to ours, he must have attained his ideal of living a full life — a life dedicated to the service of God and man. It can safely be said that he must have come pretty close to the ideals and rules set forth by himself in 'The Country Parson'. He also
succeeded in commending his ministry to the simple people of his parish during the period of less than three years that Fate had ordained him to live as a country priest.

Trying to account for the great popularity of Herbert's brief ministry which has become one of the most memorable in the history of the Anglican Church, Helen.C.White says that the physical accomplishments like the restoration of the church, the renovation of the vicarage, and the calling up of almost three hundred members of his parish to the devout practice of church liturgy, were quite notable by themselves. But she hastens to add that no less impressive was the record of his literary achievements like the completion of the manuscripts of 'The Temple', 'The Country Parson', and other works about which, however, his parishioners knew nothing. She has pointed out that all this was done by Herbert while he was not keeping good health, was maintaining a large household, and was also attending to other obligations of the family most willingly.

Helen.C.White has opined that much more than the physical achievements, it is the spirit with which he exercised a modest and unpretentious ministry that endeared Herbert to all who came in contact with him. She has pointed out that those were the years when religious controversies over matters concerning the church government and church practices were rife, years that saw the decline of true spiritual endeavours in the midst of rampant ecclesiastical strife. It is to his greater glory that notwithstanding the uncongenial atmosphere prevailing, Herbert was able to establish his peaceful and peace-giving ministry among his rural parishioners.
From all available evidence, it is seen that Herbert, because of his inherent and unmistakable goodness of heart, was loved and respected by all. Many charges have been levelled against Walton for beatifying Herbert too enthusiastically, but evidences of Ferrar, Oley and others clearly confirm the beauty of Herbert's character and his immense popularity.

Summing up her assessment of the last years of Herbert's life, Helen C. White observed that they proved an accomplishment of a purpose, the achievement of a quest, and the rounding out of a life-long experience. She stated that it was during this period of priesthood at Bemerton that Herbert found the meaning of his life, the answer to the imperfections, and the satiety for the intense hunger of his soul, in God. But he was not content to rest on the mere contemplation of God and His glory. He strove relentlessly to draw near God, to live in the most intimate relationship with Him. It is this essentially mystical aspiration that, according to this critic, gives Herbert's ministry its distinctive character, and accounts for the peculiar effect it had upon all who came in contact with it either by actual experience during Herbert's time, or by report.

Herbert suffered from ill health almost all his life. As already observed, though he came of a family of soldiers, his delicate health made him unfit to follow in the martial footsteps of his father and grandfather. It is doubtful whether his failing health during the last three years of his life would have enabled him to achieve much in the secular life of the court even if he had joined it.
During his early college days, Herbert appears to have been afflicted by a malarial complaint which forced him to ride from Cambridge to Newmarket frequently for fresh air. This 'ague' often affected him with serious discomfort.

In a letter to his mother dated 29 May 1622, Herbert says: "For myself - dear Mother, I alwaies fear'd sickness more than death because sickness has made me unable to perform those offices for which I came into the world." He obviously refers to his apprehension of the possible ill effects of his poor health on his worldly employment. It appears that he had been gravely ill earlier in the year. Joseph Mead writing 'Home News' from Christ's College on 16 February 1622 first mentioned the death of the junior proctor, and later added: "our orator also they say will not escape being at death's dore".

Herbert suffered from a kind of 'quotidian ague' — as his fever was then called — in early 1628. He decided that a change of place and climate would do him good; so he went to Woodford in Essex, to the residence of his younger brother, Sir Henry Herbert. He stayed there for almost a year, and cured himself by a strict dietary regimen by abstaining himself from drink and meat. He was cured of his fever, but symptoms of consumption and rheum began to develop.

Herbert decided in 1629 to subject himself to another change of climate and place to counteract the oncoming consumption. He now went to Dauntsey in Wiltshire, the seat of the Earl of Danby, Lord Danvers, who was the elder brother of Herbert's stepfather.
Lord Danvers made suitable arrangement for Herbert's stay in his own house. Here, by complete relaxation, proper diet and moderate exercise, Herbert was cured a great deal. It was here, when he had adequately improved his health, that he took two important decisions; to marry, and to take holy orders.

Even after his marriage, and entry into priesthood, his health continued to be a cause of worry. But, despite his failing health, he devoted himself most diligently to his priestly duties, and also wrote a large number of poems and articles, not neglecting his duties of a householder either, till his death in 1633.

George Herbert was not the only member of his family to suffer from prolonged sickness. His eldest sister, Elizabeth, whom he refers to as "my dear sick sister" in many letters, was also a consumptive. To get proper medical care, she lived with their mother in London while her husband and children lived in Wales. Though she suffered for fourteen years or so, she outlived George by almost a year.

Illness has been the bane of many artists and saints, and they have reacted differently to it. From Walton's account, we can conclude that Herbert's attitude to his physical agony was one of rare fortitude, and submission to God's Will. Throughout his life, he bore the cross of sickness like a good Christian, and though at times he cried out in obvious pain to God, to be relieved of it, he accepted it as a dispensation of the Lord and bore it most gracefully. We are told that even during the sharpest fits of ill health, Herbert would often say: "Lord, abate my great affliction, or increase my patience;
but Lord— I repine not; I am dumb, Lord, before thee, because thou dost it. This shows a marked sense of Christian discipline on the sufferer's part.

Herbert's reference to his illness in his poetry is most touching:

No scrue, no piercer can
Into a piece of timber work and winde
As God's afflictions into man,
When he a fortune hath design'd. ('Confession', p.126)

Herbert had a deep love of music, and he found it elevating to listen to and take part in the musical chantings. He was also a good player of the lute himself. When he was at Westminster School, he and his schoolmates spent the Wednesday and Friday afternoons, from two to three, in learning music from the choir-master of the school. Later, in his poetry, he referred to music as the "Heaven of heavens" and "Sweetest of sweets". His love for choir-music seems to have developed during his school days. Music was also an organic part of the daily life in his mother's household where psalms were chanted in unison by Mrs Herbert and her children. Edward and George were accomplished lutanists, and George played the viol as well. It is quite likely that the other members of the family also played some musical instruments. Many renowned musicians of the day visited the Herberths, and it is possible that they played music for the family, and that helped to develop the children's love of music.

Even after becoming the Priest of Bemerton, music was Herbert's chief recreation. During this period he composed hymns and anthems
which he set to music. He is known to have sung them also, accompany-
ing the singing on his lute or viol. Though he preferred soli-
tude, and was given to retirement, he walked twice every week to
Salisbury to attend the cathedral services there because they had
very good choir-singing. He also took active part in private music
sessions at Salisbury. Herbert has called prayer and cathedral
music his "Heaven upon Earth". It seems that music was his only
recreation with the help of which he was able to forget his agonies
and pains.

A certain gentleman who once saw Herbert at Daintsey where
he was recuperating, remembered him as having "a very good hand
on the lute". The harmony and peace prevailing at Dauntsey must
have encouraged Herbert to set his poems to music.

It has been said that Herbert was not unlike a lute himself,
being delicate and difficult to tune. It is interesting to note
that quite a number of his poems show his deep understanding and
love of music. Some of his musical poems are sung during church
services even today. He has often used the image of an untuned
instrument while referring to himself.

Herbert's last days were lived with the same grace and piety
with which he lived most of his earlier life. A detailed account
of his last days is available, and it shows the man in total sub-
mission to God's Will and in harmony with himself. He continued to
be diligent about the performance of his duties until he was almost
overtaken by consumption. Grown very weak, he confined himself to
his house or the chapel, and, later, when he could not even read the
prayers properly, he appointed Mr Bostock, who was the curate of the Fugglestone church, to read the prayers in his church.

Nicholas Ferrar sent Edmond Duncan to see Herbert and enquire after his health a month or so before he was to pass away. Herbert was lying in bed when Duncan arrived, but raised himself, and seeing Duncan dressed in canonical robes, requested him to pray with him the beloved prayer of his faith (the Church of England), telling him that no other prayer was quite as dear to him. Duncan was deeply touched with Herbert's piety. Five days later when Duncan saw Herbert again, the latter told him to convey to Ferrar that though he knew that he was on the brink of death, he was merged in the Will of the Lord, and that he had his complete attention fixed on Him as he waited to pass on to the region of bliss with patience and hope. He asked Duncan to deliver his book of poems to his "dear brother Ferrar", and to tell him that he would find there a picture of the many spiritual conflicts that had passed between God and his soul, before he learnt to subject his will to the Will of the Lord. He desired that Ferrar should read the book, and publish the same only if he thought that the work might be of some advantage to some poor soul, trying to proceed along the difficult spiritual path. Otherwise, Ferrar should burn the book as Herbert truly thought that he and the volume of poems were "less than the least of God's mercies". Duncan took the manuscript back to little Gidding, and Nicholas Ferrar read it with profound excitement. His brother said that it was "many and many a time read over, and embraced and kissed again and again". The next step was to get it published, and Ferrar set about this with
usual efficient vigour. The copy which was prepared for the licensors was almost a work of art in itself, done in expensive paper in folio size, the lines set within a frame ruled in red.

Herbert was visited by his friends from the clergy, and they prayed for him. His wife and the two nieces (Dorothy, the eldest, having died before him) attended on him constantly. It was to Arthur Woodnot that Herbert opened his heart when he said:

"I now look back upon the pleasures of my life past, and see the content I have taken in beauty, in wit, and music, and pleasant conversation. These are now all past me like a dream, or as a shadow that returneth not, and are now all become dead to me, or I to them, and I see that as my father's generation hath done before me, so I also shall now suddenly (with Job) make my bed also in the dark; and I praise God I am prepared for it; and I praise Him that I am not to learn patience now I stand in such need of it, and that I have practised mortification, and endeavoured to die daily that I might not die eternally; and my hope is that I shall shortly leave this valley of tears, and be free from all fevers and pains; and, which will be a more happy condition, I shall be free from sin, and all the temptations and anxieties that attend it; and this being past, I shall dwell in the New Jerusalem - dwell there with men made perfect; dwell where these eyes shall see my Master and Saviour, Jesus, and with him see my dear mother, and all my relations and friends. But I must die, or not come to that happy place. And this is my content, that I am going daily towards it; and that every day which I live hath taken a part of my appointed time from me; and that I shall live the less time for having lived this and the day past."
This reads like a kind of dialogue with the self of one full of spiritual longings, and should be reckoned as poetry welling out of the depths of the heart of a truly devout soul yearning to merge with the Supreme Being.

From the available records, it is known that on Sunday before his death, he sat up in his bed and asked for his lute and said:

My God, My God
My music shall find thee,
And every string,
Shall have his attribute to sing.

He then tuned the lute, played on it and sang:

The Sundays of man's life;
Threaded together on time's String,
Make bracelets to adorn the Wife
Of the eternal glorious King.
On Sundays heaven's door stands open:
blessings are plentiful and ripe,
More plentiful than hope.

On the day he was to die, his wife noticed that he was breathing with difficulty. On enquiry, he answered that he had passed a conflict with his last enemy, and had overcome it by the merits of his Master, Jesus. On seeing that his wife and nieces were weeping, Herbert requested them to go to the next room and let him die peacefully. He then requested Mr Bostock to open the cupboard and take out his Will. Handing over the Will to Arthur Woodnot, whom he had appointed its sole executor, he obtained a promise from him that he would execute the Will properly and would see that his wife and nieces would not be troubled on this account.
Then, he said: "I am now ready to die." Then he prayed to God thus: "Lord, forsake me not, now my strength faileth me, but grant me mercy for the merits of my Jesus And now, Lord—Lord, now receive my soul." With these pious words he breathed his last in the presence of Mr Bostock and Mr Woodnot.

It is popularly believed that a person's depth of devotion can be known only at the time of his death. Herbert's death is a lesson in equanimity, and submission to the Will of God. During his last moments, he was thinking of the Lord, and asking Him to redeem his soul for the merits of Jesus—thus exemplifying rare humility. It is pertinent to recall here the last hours of John Donne. The Dean had commissioned an artist to make his portrait while he posed for it in only a piece of bed-linen thrown round his shoulders. Though his piety and depth of devotion to God during the later part of his life cannot be questioned, yet the passion in Donne seems to have been alive till the very end. Herbert's death, by contrast, was an ideal one where the long-suffering devotee appealed to the Lord not to forsake him during the last moments as He had stood by him throughout his life full of 'fevers and pains', and died peacefully and humbly. It is not surprising, then, that Izaak Walton, while describing this poignant scene, prays for such a death for himself.

As mentioned earlier, Herbert was buried beneath the altar of his own church, and was covered with a grave-stone without any inscription or epitaph as per his wishes.
George Herbert lived for a short span of time, but he lived so deeply and intensely that the record of his emotions, his prayers, his anguish, his moments of despair and also his moments of sunshine, all of them beautifully studded in his poems, have become a source of inspiration and exhilaration to many a student of religious English poetry.

The account given above will throw some light on the personality of George Herbert. Two things here emerge distinctly: Herbert was very much a man of this world, a man of flesh and blood, and engaged himself in normal worldly pursuits of happiness and well-being. Contrary to popular belief, Herbert did not preach renunciation or ascetic self-denial, but at the same time he did not allow himself to be tainted by the passions and turmoils of his earthly existence. In a sense, he lived the life of a swan — always floating on water but never submerging, its feathers always unsod and dry. That indicates detachment. The other thing to note is the depth of sincerity and piety of his heart. Between his precept and practice, there was no gap, so that it is no exaggeration to say that all his words and actions were a part of his prayer. He lived and behaved as the willing instrument of the Lord, carrying out His Will as the priest of His Church. In the truest sense, therefore, he, like Jesus, was the shepherd of his people. His attitude to life and things was one of total resignation to the Will of God. His poetry is a record of this attitude, a reflector of his personality. The two are really one. As the reader can easily see, in Herbert's poetry, as in his life, there is a total annihilation of the self. In life, the Lord was his strength and
in Him did he put his entire trust. The same sense of unwavering faith in divine dispensation is also the hallmark of his poetry.

II

It will not be out of place to refer briefly at this point to the works of George Herbert. Besides the Latin poems contributed by him to the Cambridge collections, the only other poems which were published during his lifetime were the verses in Latin and Greek written in the memory of his mother. These, called 'Parentalia', were appended to Dr Donne's special funeral sermon written for Herbert's mother.

As regards the manuscript of the English poems sent to Nicholas Ferrar, it is known that Ferrar did not waste time in applying to the Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University for the license for its publication. The Vice-Chancellor hesitated on the ground that two lines in one of the poems ('The Church Militant') alluded somewhat contemptuously to the migration of religion from England to America. But the objection was soon withdrawn. The volume was entitled 'The Temple - Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations'. Except the opening poem and the closing one, entitled 'The Church Porch' and 'The Church Militant' respectively, almost all the other pieces are brief. It appears that some of his English poems were in circulation in manuscript even before his death, for it is clear from all available evidence that Herbert was fairly well-known as a poet during his lifetime. It cannot be
ascertained which of his poems were known while he was still alive, but judging by its tone and technique, 'The Church Militant' seems to have been written when the poet was at Cambridge, and it was perhaps known to quite a few of his circle.

The earliest edition of 'The Temple', which probably appeared within three weeks of Herbert's death, bears no date on the title-page. It was apparently printed for private circulation only. The first public edition bears the year 1633. A second edition was issued the same year. The success of the book was almost inevitable. It concerned a subject, man's relationship to God, about which Englishmen cared deeply, and it was written with an honesty that spoke to the heart. Most of its readers were probably not interested in poetry. Some of them by that time were in direct conflict with the Church that Herbert loved. But a Presbyterian like Thomas Hall, with only five books of poetry in his large library, valued 'The Temple' among them, for Herbert spoke from a level of experience in which Christians knew no divisions. Quick reprints followed in 1641, 1656, 1667, 1703 and 1709. There were no editions printed for the next ninety years.

Herbert also translated into verse eight psalms which are signed 'GH' in John Playford's 'Psalms and Hymns' (London 1671). Walton in his 'Life of Herbert' printed two sonnets written by the poet: one on the tomb of Lord Danvers of Dauntsey, and the other on the picture of Sir John Danvers, his stepfather's father. A poem called 'A Paradox', in the Rawlinson manuscript, and a poetic address to the Queen of Bohemia in Brittanus, were first printed by Dr Grosart.
The spate of modern editions started in 1799 when 'The Temple' was printed at Bristol by and for R. Edwards, together with Walton's 'Life' and Christopher Harvey's 'The Synagogue'. Two quick editions by Edwards followed in 1806 and 1809. William Pickering edited and published the first collected 'Works of George Herbert', in 1835-36 (Vol. II - 'Poems' appeared in 1835, and Vol. I - 'Life and Remains' appeared in 1836). The 1835 edition of 'Poems' included, besides 'The Temple' and 'The Synagogue', most of Herbert's Latin poems, and also Coleridge's 'Notes'. The next important modern edition was Grosart's, which made use of the Williams Manuscript ('Complete Works in Verse and Prose of George Herbert', 3 volumes, London 1874). Next followed George Herbert Palmer's 'The English Works of George Herbert' (3 volumes, 1905; revised 1907; reissued 1915). Palmer's introductory essay and commentary have proved very useful in the correct interpretation of many obscurities and allusions of Herbert's poetry. This work was also the first serious attempt to categorise Herbert's poems into various groups and sub-groups. An edition of 'The Temple' printed from the manuscript in the Bodleian Library by the Nonesuch Press appeared in 1927.

The most complete and excellent collection of all Herbert's English and Latin works, including his letters, has been brought out by Rev. F. E. Hutchinson ('The Works of George Herbert', Oxford University Press, 1941). It includes a valuable introduction, relevant biographical data, and a superb commentary on the poems and their style. This edition has surpassed all previous ones of
Herbert's works and commentaries thereon. As such, it has become an invaluable guide to all students of Herbert since the time of its publication.

'The Country Parson' (also called 'The Priest to The Temple'), Herbert's only other important work, was in the hands of Duncan and Woodnot since the time of Herbert's death, but, for reasons not known, it was not published till 1652. It was included in a publication called 'Herbert's Remains, or, Sundry Pieces of that Sweet singer of the Temple, Mr George Herbert, Now Exposed to Publick Light'. Besides 'A Priest to The Temple', this book included a 'Prefactory View of the Life of Mr Geo. Herbert', which was acknowledged by Barnabas Oley to have been written by him.

George Herbert translated Lessius's Latin version of Luigi Cornardo's 'Traktate de la Vita Sobria', called 'Hygiesticon', at the request of Bacon, and sent a copy of it to Ferrar at Little Gidding. Herbert's copy was called 'A Treatise of Temperance and Sobriety'. It was first published at the Cambridge University Press in 1634.

Ferrar sent him a work of Valdesso's which he had translated into English from an Italian version of the Spanish original. Ferrar, it appears, had some doubts whether Valdesso's views would be acceptable to the authorities of the Church of England. Herbert wrote extensive notes for the book. Dr Thomas Jackson, who examined the work on behalf of the Vice-Chancellor, was quite upset with some of the views. It was finally issued by the University printers in 1638, some months after Ferrar's death. It is said that the notes
and annotations of Herbert weighed in favour of the permission accorded by Dr Jackson as he is reported to have said that those mitigated the offensiveness of some views.

George Herbert collected one thousand and ten proverbs from French, Spanish and Italian sources, and translated them into English. They first appeared, under the title 'Outlandish Proverbs Selected by Mr G.H.', in 1640 in a compilation called 'Witt's Recreation'. The selection and translation of these proverbs and maxims show that Herbert spent considerable time and effort on them. He had a natural flair for proverbial wisdom which is reflected in his poetry as well as in prose. For Herbert, the work was perhaps a labour of love to which his younger brother, Henry, who also was interested in proverbs, must have contributed.

In F.E. Hutchinson's Oxford edition of Herbert's poetical works, three orations and seventeen letters, written during Herbert's period of office as the orator at Cambridge, are included. Two Latin letters—one written to Bishop Lancelot Andrewes, and the other to Herbert's successor, Robert Creighton, also find their place there. Till date, nineteen of Herbert's letters are available. The credit for preserving the letters goes to Walton, for he dug out and printed eleven of Herbert's letters in the various editions of his biography. Herbert's letters fall into two groups, those written at Cambridge, and others written later from Bemerton. From these, certain aspects of his personality and, more particularly, the change that took place in him when he became the priest of Bemerton, can be easily made out.