IX.

A FAMILY CHRONICLER

CHARLOTTE M. YONGE
In her criticism of Hannah More's "Strictures," Miss Yonge writes:

"Considering that the authoress believed herself a thorough churchwoman her views in the latter chapters of her book are curiously lacking in any references to church ordinances or the means of grace. She had said nothing which was not borne out by the Articles and the Liturgy. The point was what she had not said."

This criticism serves to mark the point of divergence between Evangelicalism and Anglo-Catholic revival of which Hannah More and Miss Yonge may be respectively regarded as typical exponents. The Anglo-Catholic revival or Oxford movement was to quote Paul Thureau-Dangin, a return to a less incomplete and more living Christianity. Newman characterises it as "the spiritual awakening of spiritual wants," signalising Scott and Coleridge among its literary influences. Its ethical note is well brought out by A. W. Church, "It laid stress," he writes, "on the exercise of an inner and unseen self-discipline, and the cultivation of the less interesting virtues of industry, humility, self-distrust, and obedience."

Miss Yonge is regarded as the greatest of all purely Anglo-Catholic novelists in the Victorian

2. English Catholic Revival in the 19th century, p.14
3. Apologia Pro Vita Sua, p.98
4. The Oxford Movement (1892)
The Anglo-Catholic revival coincided with Charlotte's most impressionable years, and the Rev. John Keble, the inspiring genius of the movement, was her spiritual guide. From the time that Keble prepared her for confirmation, to the day she died, the moving spring of her life was embodied in the motto: "Pro Ecclesia Dei." Both her grandfathers were clergymen. Sunday-school teaching and church building were the absorbing interests of her parents. Her father, a hero of the Peninsular War, had to give up his profession on his marriage with Miss Fanny Bargus. They married after an attachment of five years for Mrs. Bargus would not hear of her daughter marrying into a marching regiment. An only child for six years, Charlotte was the object of her parents' constant attention and solicitude. Their tender devotion to their child found it safer to err on the side of strictness. In "Mothers in Council" Charlotte sketches her "repressed" but "real" childhood.

"The only flat falsehood of those early days was so seriously treated that it is pain to me to remember it now. . . . Equivocating was shown to be equally heinous, the occasion of my being so taught being that my father detected me making a sort of accompaniment to the responses in church, instead of following the words. His displeasure at my thus acting a falsehood was not to be forgotten. Perfect truth and honour seem to me to have been the strongest of all my early impressions."

Recalling her father's "dank keen eyes" she says:

"To think of their beaming smile seems to recall my

greatest happiness, of their warning glance my chief
dread and shame." There was a complete oneness
between her parents and herself and "an atmosphere
of perfect loyalty between parents."

Except for her longing for a sister, no one, she
declares, had a happier or more joyous childhood.
Intended by nature to be left-handed, shy, and awk­ward under restraint, she was a high-spirited and
imaginative child. The companionship of her Devon
kindred brought out all the liveliness of her chara­
ceter. In the Preface to her "Scenes and Characters"
she writes: "An almost solitary child, it was
natural to dream of other children and their ways
and sports till they became almost realities." This
circumstance largely accounts for the extraordinary
reality of Charlotte Yonge's imaginative world in
which, according to E. M. Delafield, she rehearsed to
herself an "endless saga about family life."

With the appointment of Mr. Keble as vicar of
Hursley in 1836 came the chief spiritual influence
of Charlotte's life. Her works reflect the leading
ideas of "The Christian Year". She grew up, more­
over, in close intimacy with persons who exemplified
the finest traditions of aristocratic culture and
chivalric ideal: Lord Seston, Sir William Heathcote,
Dr. Moberley. On the death of Sir William

1. Ethel Romanes: Charlotte M. Yonge, p.16
2. Introduction to Charlotte Mary Yonge by Georgina Battiscombe
Heathcote she wrote to Miss H. Heathcote:

"I could not help, when they said I made clergy and good men seem real, almost murmuring that my good men were not ideals, but I had really known their equals (and superiors) in reality— I am sure your father was one of those in my mind." 1

Miss Yonge's favourite quotation was: "Character is the joint product of Nature and Nurture". All the influences that were brought to bear upon her early life contributed to making her one of the truest interpreters of the Victorian family, hallowed as it was by tradition and sanctified by religion. Her life was all of a piece and she never broke away from the traditions of her childhood. The type of religion as exemplified in her works is best expressed in Kebic's lines:

"The trivial round, the common task,
Would furnish all we ought to ask;
Room to deny ourselves; a road
To bring us, daily, nearer God."

"Scenes and Characters", one of her earliest literary efforts was produced under two impulses: dreams of her solitary childhood and the need for a class of books more religious than the Edgeworths, and less Calvinistic than the Sherwood style. The heroes and heroines arrange themselves so as to work out a principle that feeling, unguided and unrestrained, soon becomes mere selfishness; while simple endeavour to fulfil each immediate claim of duty may lead to the acts of self devotion.

Lilial Mohun the heroine of the tale in reaction

1. Quoted, Christabel Coleridge, op. cit. p. 304
2. The Christian Year Morning.
against what she regards as the never-relaxing principle of duty which guides her elder sister decides to act upon her new-found principle of love. After Eleanor, the eldest sister has married, Emily attempts to run the household on Lily's principles. Reading of Scott's novels, for instance, earlier regulated, is now freely indulged by Lily to the neglect of her daily occupations. This occasions the following dialogue with her father:—

"I am afraid, papa," said Lily, "the truth is, that my head has been so full of Goodstock for the last few days, that I could do nothing."

"And before that?"

"The Bride of Lammermoor." "And last week?"

"Waverley." "Oh, papa, I am afraid you must be very angry with me."

"No, no, Lily, not yet," said Mr. Mohun, "I do not think you quite know what an intoxicating draught you had got hold of; I should have cautioned you. Your negligence has not yet been a serious fault, though remember, that it becomes so after warning."

"Then," said Lily, "I will just finish Feveril at once, and get it out of my head, and read no more of the dear books," and she gave a deep sigh.

"Lily would take the temperance pledge, on condition that she might finish her bottle at a draught," said Mr. Mohun. 1

Lily's principle of love, confusing mere feeling with Christianity, leads her from one temptation to another, with consequences as ruinous to her character as to the happiness of others. It is fearful to contemplate that her neglect should involve the innocent little Ada in a serious fireworks accident.

1. Id. Ch. 11
and occasion the death of her favourite Sunday scholar. Ultimately, she sees the fallacy of her theory and Easter marks the day of her repentance and amendment.

There are some autobiographical touches in the portrait of Phyllis, with her highly pitched voice, a round, merry face and her stiff straight brown hair. Called, "not the neat-handed" by her sisters and Miss Tomboy by the maids, terribly awkward when under constraint, but swift and ready at her ease, full of high spirits which frequently get her into scrapes, she remains the 'Honest Phyl' though meeting with the same neglect and temptations as her younger sister Ada. She is saved by her guileless simplicity and humility. No flattery would make her believe herself beautiful, agreeable, or clever. In Charlotte Yonge's own case, her parents' strict training had proved her against flattery. "Once venturing to ask," writes Miss Yonge, "if I was pretty, I was answered that all young animals, young pigs and all, were pretty." In one incident Phyllis affords us a remarkable example of her rigorous self-discipline and reverential spirit. She is stung by a wasp in the church, and is just about to put her foot on it when she recollects where she is. Though her arm smartes and swells, she lets no sign of her intense pain escape her throughout the service. In both its central episode, the consecration of church and

1. Mothers in Council, Vol. XII, p. 19. 2. Scenes and Characters Ch. IX
and its heroine Elizabeth Woodbourne, "Abbey Church" (1844) embodies Charlotte Yonge's aspirations and enthusiasms. In her single-minded devotion to the new church, excitable, impetuous, and violent Lizzie has grown more gentle, more fit to govern herself than most girls of sixteen. Yet still her character is lacking in self-control. In her zeal for self-improvement she is intolerant of what she calls waste of time in gossip and hypocritical talk of the drawing room, but is unable to resist the temptation of attending lectures at the Mechanics' Institute.

Her cousin Anne, no less enthusiastic than she, but in whom her mother has instilled patience and self-control, expresses herself thus:

"As to waste of time," said Anne, 'perhaps it is most usefully employed in what is so irksome as you find being in company. Mamma has always wished me to remember that acquiring knowledge may after all be a selfish gratification and many things ought to be attended first,' and added: 'knowledge is profitable for nothing without charity.'

'Charity, yes,' said Elizabeth, 'but Christian love is a very different thing from drawing room civility.'

'Not very different from bearing and forbearing as Helen said,' answered Anne.

The Heir of Redclyffe (1858) has little direct bearing on early religious training as such; none the less it merits a brief consideration. For in this book, more than in any other, J. W. Mackail writes, may be traced the religious ideals and social...

1. Abbey Church or Self-Control or Self-Conceit, Ch. VI
enthusiasms which were stirring in the years between the decline of Tractarianism and the Crimean War. It held up a pattern here in Guy Morville with his over-strained conscientiousness, his chivalrous courtesy, his pure and sincere effort after self-conquest and his eagerness for all social reforms. Dean Church has pointed out that even more than a theological reform, the Oxford Movement was a protest against the loose unreality of ordinary religious morality. R.H. Froude's journals afford ample evidence of this moral earnestness and of secretly training oneself in submission to the law and will of God. Here is an entry of October 26th, 1864:

"I am always trying to persuade myself that I endeavour to be better than other people. Dizzingly self-complacently thoughts have kept continually obtruding themselves upon me, on the score of my little abstinences. Only I must prescribe to myself some exercises that I really dislike, that I may feel my weakness."

In an entry of March 4th, 1867, we read:

"...Or if by no other means I can be preserved from arrogance, bow me down again, O Lord, and let Thy storms pass over me...."

By similar self-chastening and inward battle Guy conquers the weaknesses of his character and the ancestral doom. This he accomplishes by no sudden leap, but by practising self-discipline in his daily life. When he complains of leading too smooth a life with the Edmonstones, Mrs. Edmonstones says:

"there is nothing that has no temptation in it, but I should think the rule is plain. If a duty such as that of living among us for the present and making yourself moderately agreeable involves temptations, they must be met and

2. Id. p.66
battled from within. In the same way, your position in society, with all its duties would not be laid aside because it is full of trial. Those who do such things are faint-hearted and fail in trust in Him, who fixed this station, and finds room for them to deny themselves in the trivial round and common task." 1

Thus viewed, all objects in life, beauty of nature, love, assume a sacramental character as instruments to "Fit us for perfect Rest above". To Guy sitting on a rock, absorbed in the plan of vengeance the sunset recalls him to his truer and better self: "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath." Regarding himself as yet unproved and undeserving of trust he asks Mrs. Edmonstone if he should hope for Amy's hand and if it is wrong that an earthly incentive to persevere should have power which sometimes seems greater than the true one. "There is the best and strongest ground of all for trusting you," said she. "If you spoke of keeping right only for Amy's sake, then I might fear, but when she is second there is confidence indeed." 5

Finally, Guy achieves the supreme sanctification of his life by laying it down for his enemy. Miss Meynell ascribes the immense contemporary popularity of the book to its having a spirituality that other popular fiction lacked. And Miss Coleridge writes: "Trying to be very good was made interesting and romantic to thousands of good girls." 5

"Heartsease" (1854) exemplifies one of Miss

1. The Heir of Redclyffe Ch. IV  2. The Christian Year
2. The Heir of Redclyffe, Ch.XII  4. Introduction to Everyman's Edit.
Yonge's favourite principles that by the grace of baptism, by leaving them to healthy action of mind and body, by her simple religious teaching, a mother can do more for her children than any amount of governessing, doctoring, or forcing systems can ever do.

Violet, embittered by her husband's unkind absence grieves over her prematurely born and suffering baby and almost grudges the happiness and sunshine that all the other young things - lambs, and birds, and all - seem to enjoy. Her husband's brother recalling the child's christening tries to reassure her.

"We cannot tell what he may need. We are sure all he undergoes is sent by One who loves him better than even you can do, who may be disciplining him for future life, and fitting him for brighter glory and certainly giving him a share in the cross that has saved him."

Theodora the hoch-baseltes Mädchen learns the much-needed lesson that the way to subdue a child's obstinacy is not by setting her own against it. For you could "gar her greet" but you could not "gar her know". She sees how by gentle coaxing Mr. Fotheringham softens her Sunday-scholar and makes her sorry. It was a home-thrust at Theodora's pride. There is a touch of pious sentimentality in the portrait of the delicate little Johnnie explaining the parable of the Good Shepherd to his convalescent father, reduced to real contrition by a dangerous illness. Johnnie, is however, offset by the pert Helen, his younger sister, whom her unhappy father over hears-saying:

1. *Heartsease*. Part II, Ch. II
"I wish paps would never get well!"

"Helen, Helen, how can you?" pleaded her mother's voice.

"He is so much good-natured when he is ill,"
was Helen's defence.

Miss Yonge calls "Daisy Chain" (1856) a family chronicle - a domestic record of home events, large and small, during those years of early life when the character is chiefly formed. To show whether aspirations are truly upwards and founded in lowliness and to trace their effects on youthful natures is the governing idea of the tale. But as elsewhere, the characters refuse to serve as mere vehicles of this idea and take up a life of their own.

The book opens on a pleasant scene. Mrs. May is explaining to her large family the Gospel on the taking the lowest place. This strikes the keynote of the story. The mother has greater anxiety for her brilliant Norman and clever Ethel than for her placid and slow-brained Richard who has failed at Oxford. Their talent and success, she dreads, might be their snares, unless all idea of self is eliminated by an inner discipline. When her eldest daughter Margaret confesses that Richard is first in her affection, she considers it too as a form of self-seeking. Early in the story, however, a fatal accident deprives the children of their mother's guiding hand. With the eldest daughter also invalided for life, the task of religious training is rendered all the more difficult.

1.Id. Part III, Ch.X
for the May family and calls forth greater effort after self-discipline. Our interest is centred in Ethel's character. In a letter to her sister, Mrs. May has written about Ethel's odd foibles, her harum-scarum nature, quick temper, uncouth manners, and heedlessness of all but one absorbing object, namely, the regeneration of Cocksmoor. Though keeping abreast of her brother in alcaics and algebra, Ethel herself complains of her deficiency in little neatnesses. As her father humorously puts it, she has two left hands. But these manifest defects in occasioning a discipline prove the best thing for her character and keep her high things from being all romance. On the necessity of self-discipline in daily life, Miss Yonge is as insistent in this novel as elsewhere. Dr. May is telling his children the story of David:

"So, Tom and Blanche," he concluded, "can you tell me how we may be like the shepherd boy, David?"

"There aren't any giants now," said Tom.

"Wrong is a giant," said his little sister.

"Right, my white May-flower and what then?"

"We are to fight," said Tom.

"Yes and mind, the giant with all his armour be some great thing we have to do; but what did David begin with, when he was younger?"

"The lion and the bear."

"Aye, and minding his sheep. Perhaps little things, now you are little children, may be like the lion, and the bear — so kill them off get rid of them - cure yourself of whining or dawdling or whatever it be, and mind your sheep well, and if you do, you will not find it near so hard to deal with your great giant struggle when it comes." 1

Impatient idealism is discountenanced as being

1. *Daisy Chain.* Part I. Ch.X
inconsistent with true humility. Meta, allowed every luxury and indulgence feels drawn to the May family by their culture and idealisms. She fears that she lives too happy and bright a life.

"Ah! my dear," said Dr. May, 'the rugged path and dark valley will come in His own fit time. Depend upon it, the good Shepherd is giving what is best for you in the green meadow!" 1

To build a church and a school in the heathenish Cocksmoor is the one great object before Ethel. But great things, she is reminded, cannot be good until they stand on a sure foundation of little things. By inspiring them to self-sacrifice and self-discipline and giving force and unity to their efforts the Cocksmoor church elevates the whole family. Ethel who at the beginning is a harum-scarum girl has later developed a character of remarkable power. Her mother's sister who has earlier been informed of Ethel's foibles and heedlessness now pays the following tribute:

"There is so much soul in the least thing she does as if she could not be indifferent for a moment." 2

The religion as taught and practised in the May household wears no melancholy hue, has nothing mystical about it, is not drawn into metaphysical speculations and discussions of doctrines. Its spirit

1,Id. Part I, Ch.XXVI
2,Id. Part II, Ch.XXIV
is in keeping with Keble's teaching, who had warned Charlotte Yonge against too much talk and discussion of church matters, especially doctrines. It is a severely practical and unemotional religion, irradiating with its heavenly grace home affections, and "simple fulfilment of everyday duties in our homely round". To Norman perplexed by controversies at Oxford the thought of his home brings back peace, and his doubt melts like a bad dream, for as Ethel said: "Our dear home has made the truth our joy, our union."

"Hopes and Fears" (1860) touches upon the danger of fostering precocious piety on the one hand, and forcing the intellect on the other. In the education of her wards Owen and Lucilla, Honora Charlécote is led away by her excessive idealism and the devotional turn of Owen to overdo articles of faith and observances. Outgrowing her personal influence and spiritual authority the children drift apart from her in religious doubt or in a spirit of contradiction. On the other hand, the governess, Miss Fennimore, herself rationalist and of sceptical habit, trains her pupil to reason only, concerning herself, as she says, with the moral and intellectual not the religious being. She looks upon Bertha with her good disposition and good abilities as a fair subject for her experiment. However, Bertha's romantic escapade and serious illness bring home to Miss Fennimore the defects of her own character and

1. Charlotte Yonge: Musings over the 'Christian Year' and Lyra Innocentium
2. Daisy Chain Part II, Ch. XVI
and system. Dr. Martyn, after his inspection of
Bertha, exclaims:

"That's a first-rate governess! Exactly so! An educational hot-bed. Why can't they let girls dress dolls and trundle hoops as they used to do? — To hear that poor child blundering algebra in her sleep might be a caution to mothers."

Serious as the consequences of an over-intellectual discipline are, Miss Fennimore blames herself still more for her failure to instil devotional principles, for having guided the hands of the watch and having left the mainspring untouched. In this respect Miss Charlote's influence and training are shown to be infinitely superior. Even at the worst the higher, purer, standard that had been impressed upon her wards saved them from lower depths. Conscious of her mistakes, Miss Charlote discusses with the Rev. Robert Fulmort the difficulty of dealing with cases of precocious piety.

"Then what could you do with such a child as my Owen, if it were all to come over again? His aspirations were often so beautiful that I could not but reverence them greatly; and I cannot now believe that they were prompted by aught but innocence and baptismal grace!"

"Looking back," said Robert, "I believe they were genuine and came from the heart. No; such a devotional turn should be treated with deep reverence and tenderness; but the expression had better be almost repressed and the test of conduct enforced, though without loading the conscience with details not of general application, and sometimes impracticable under other circumstances."

1 Hopes and Fears; Part II. Ch. 21
2. Id. Chap. XXXIII, pp. 562, 563.
In "Hopes and Pears" Miss Yonge has handled the relations between young and old with her large and wise humanity and her sympathetic understanding. Bertha's adventure is lightly passed over, and the disillusionment of youth and idealism of age are treated with imaginative insight. Her growing concern for social amelioration informs her reference to the children of a London parish school. Miss Charlcote finds it a hard work to make the little cockneys who have never seen a single ear of wheat, enter into Joseph's dreams.

Felix Underwood of "The Pillars of the House" is the fine flower of religious training as typified in Miss Yonge's works.

As the eldest of thirteen children, his father's death throws upon him the responsibility of a struggling family. To eke out the family finances he renounces his intention to take Holy Orders, abandons his education and apprentices himself to a bookseller. To the sick lad Fernando, fresh from the scene of deadly warfare with the Red Indians, the example of Felix's self-denial is a new revelation of the power of religion: "Is it really," he asks Felix, "what makes you go and slave away at that old boss's of yours?" "Why, that's necessity - my duty," said Felix, and added: "All that is ought comes from God first and last."

1. Id. Part I, Ch. I
2. The Pillars of the House, Vol. I, Ch. VI
It is perhaps this conception so closely resembling "Dharma" in Hinduism that may have impressed the Hindu student whose reading of "The Pillars of the House", Miss Yonge learnt, led to his conversion to Christianity.

In their realism "The Stokesley Secret" and "Countess Kate" afford a striking contrast to the moral and religious stories of Miss Yonge's own and earlier times. Miss Yonge's works are, to a large extent, religious in character, but they are so in their spirit and atmosphere and not by any direct exposition or preaching. Her children are not overdrawn types of piety or wickedness, but individual and perfectly human. She said she always thought that Farrar's boys who always died as soon as they began to be good were very immoral. Her "Countess Kate" is a fine study in child character. An awkward, boisterous and imaginative child, she dreams of rank and riches, of playing the lady bountiful. Her wishes are suddenly realised, but her disillusionment is extreme at the change from her little parsonage home, the scene of love, reverence, gratitude and a thousand little acts of kindness and self-denial to her life with Lady Barbara, full of restraints and "fashionable falsehoods". The trials of the new situation, however, bring out her real character and chasten her into a less conceited and more contrite girl. Miss Yonge's high-spirited girls often express their instinctive

1. Coleridge, op.cit., p.337
need for the influence and authority of a strict but affectionate father or brother. Kate admits that her friend's papa is more funny and good-natured than Uncle Wardour but adds: "I shouldn't like him so well for a papa. I don't think he would punish so well."

Having suffered for her headstrong folly and conceit Rachel believes that she should have been much better if she had had either father or brother to keep her in order.

Bessie in "The Stokesley Secret" with her refined tastes might find it very trying to be teased and held cheap by her turbulent brothers and sisters. As an only child with parents more in sympathy with her she might have been happy. But her little hardships, acts of self-denial, which are a part of necessary discipline in a large family would, Miss Yonge holds, help to make Bessie the stronger, steadier, more useful woman, instead of living in fancies.

The underlying seriousness of purpose and earnestness of spirit that characterise Charlotte Yonge are not found incompatible with the happy, hearty childhood that romps in and out of her pages. Play-acting in "The Pillars of the House", the game of hide-and-seek in the Stokesley garden, Countess Kate playing Hermione or the Arab Sheikh, picnics and paper-games, provide plenty of scope to youthful spirits for their exuberance and playful fun. Till

1.Countess Kate, Ch. VII 2.The Clever Woman of the Family, p. 436
the end Charlotte Yonge retained her genial interest in young people. Referring to King Arthur's Round Table and the Quest of the Sangreal, Dr. May observes: "It's not one youth in a hundred that if he is moderate enough to stop with what satisfied our - my - generation has anything in him. Tying them down to our Round Rable does no good at all."

The same spirit informs her chapter "Going in" in "Womankind" (1877) Her ideal is "the happy union of fervent old age and youth serene", which is symbolised by our grey old Gothic buildings mantled by their green creepers."

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