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THE POETRY OF JONES VERY

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Marguerite Napoli

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This is to certify that the

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THE POETRY OF JONES VERY

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INTRODUCTION

During the past generation the general public, as well as the scholar whose interest lies in American literature, has rediscovered the nineteenth century writers Emily Dickinson, Herman Melville, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Henry James. Their literary reputations have been enhanced by a wealth of textural and critical works. With a revival of interest in these figures it is only natural that others of the era should gain more attention than they had received during the early years of the twentieth century. One of these men, Jones Very, is being considered now not only as a mystic and oddity of the Romantic Era but as a poet separate from the men of his age by his religious fervor and spiritual intensity.

Very, by the nature of his subject matter and his self-appointed dedication to conservative Christian ideas, will never have the popular acclaim that many other American writers gain. Lack of this mass appeal, however, cannot affect the importance and impressiveness of Very's religious sonnets.

To this date there have been very few articles and longer works devoted to Very's poetry, although more work has been done on the poet's life. Perhaps this can be explained by the fact that the scholar is discouraged by the dearth of supplementary sources of Very's works. There have been only three editions of the poet's works since 1839, and, in addition, his personal notes and correspondence were destroyed at the time of his death.

James Freeman Clarke says of Very's poetical position

Shakespeare tells us that the music of the spheres is unintelligable to us, because we are shut in by a muddy vesture of decay. Much of the best poetry is sung, unheard by men, for the same reason. But Very's poems "stand fixed and silent in the niche of time", waiting those who are able to receive them. Already they have been seen by many to occupy their own place in the great Temple of Song, and are likely to retain it.¹

For many years it seemed that Clarke's statement was to be exactly opposite to the actual consideration of Jones Very, poet. There were vague allusions to him as an acquaintance of Ralph Waldo Emerson or as a quaint madman who once was connected with Brook Farm. Few literary histories included his name and fewer anthologies considered his poetry. Until 1938 and the publication of Ivor Winters' Maule's Curse Very was looked upon as a minor Transcendentalist Savonarola. Winters' essay seems to have aroused some little interest in the poet and soon several critical articles appeared with effect that the public was once more able to form opinions of Very's poetry by reading him in small part in poetic anthologies.

That the poet was unlike any of his contemporaries is evident in even the sketchiest of surveys. It is not enough merely to state this opinion for Very's uniqueness merits further consideration. The major problem to be studied is the mystic shroud which clothes the writer's religious poetry. He has been compared to Blake and Vaughan and then classed directly with Emerson.

1. Jones Very, Poems and Essays, with biog. by James Freeman Clarke, and pref. by C. A. Bartol, New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1886, xxvi. All references to the poetry of Jones Very will be made from this volume for it contains the most complete collection of his works.

If Very's religious poems are to be studied, it is therefore necessary to reconstruct a theological framework on which to work. This can be done most easily by direct study of his lyrical expressions of his religious tenets. The interdependence that the poet placed upon religion and poetry can well be preserved in this manner.

Very's poetry and three essays written on poetic subjects can hardly be considered original, novel, or daring. His religious sonnets are very orthodox in tone: they are considerably more Puritan than Unitarian or Transcendental. There is apparently little doubt and much agreement on the sources for Very's sonnets. He himself was likened to David and Isaiah by Emerson. Very used Biblical material and scriptural quotation not only in the text of his work but also in the actual titles of his poems.

For Very there was no problem of moral or immoral behavior. He was so thoroughly convinced that the Christian ideal was set forth to him personally that all his poems, even those of a secular nature, reflect this idea. Very's religion was not that of a nineteenth century Romantic. His Puritan background was such that he retained the literal beliefs of that sect practically in toto.

It is the purpose of this study to show through analysis of the content of the poems of Jones Very that he was not a follower of the Transcendental school after the manner of Emerson and Thoreau but that he was an orthodox Christian of Puritan belief and heritage. In addition, Very's opinion that he was the messenger of God will be dealt with in terms of his mystical poetic expression. Very's use of the word "Nature" will be discussed in regard to his lyrical expressions of his religious convictions.

Biographical Notes

Unlike many of the literary men and theologians of his day Jones Very came from a Yankee sea-faring family with few intellectual pretensions. Very's father, also Jones Very, was a successful captain of a merchantman. During a voyage on a privateer in 1812, he was captured, ill-treated, and contracted the illness, tuberculosis, which caused his early death. It was then that Captain Jones Very went home to recuperate and rest. While he was recovering temporarily from his weaknesses he renewed social contacts with his cousin, Lydia Very, and gained her promise to marry him.

Lydia and Jones Very were married in Salem on the thirteenth of February, 1813. For the remaining weeks that the groom was ashore the young couple lived with the groom's father. The young woman bore her first child, a boy, not long after his father returned to his ship. The son, who was named after his father, was born on the twentieth of August the year of their marriage.²

Young Jones Very was destined to become a mariner under the guidance of both of his grandfathers. There was no one except Lydia Very who did not look forward to the child's adolescence and first voyage.

By the time young Jones was seven his mother, spending much time with him as well as with her other children, had sufficient influence over young Jones to guide him into more intellectual paths. Lydia Very combined her domestic chores with a profound interest in nature, writing poetry, and

2. William Irving Bartlett, Jones Very: Emerson's Brave Saint, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1942. pp. 4-7.

an outward zeal stemming from her strict Puritan upbringing.

As was inevitable, the parents of young Very came into direct opposition about his future by the year 1822. The next year Lydia Very found herself saying good-bye to both her husband and her elder son as they left Salem for the sea. As a devout woman she never questioned further her husband's decision for she felt that she had overstepped her place as wife and mother by her rebellion.

It was during this voyage that Captain Jones Very's arrested tubercular condition was irritated. After his return he shipped out, again with his son, but left his post before his ship left the United States and returned to his home in Salem. Naturally he took his eleven year old son with him. By Christmas, 1824, the sea faring father was dead.

After some difficulty over the Captain's will and a court suit brought by his father, Lydia Very turned back to her home, children, and garden. She put her older son in school and proceeded to redirect his life as well as formulate the lives of her other children.³

It was during these adolescent years that the boy's profound love of nature was developed to the degree that made him, later, a poet whose natural images were by far his best. He formed the habit of taking long solitary walks in the woods or down near the sea outside of Salem. He became familiar with all the local flowers and plants and developed a strong sympathy for birds and small animals who seemed to him quite helpless and at the mercy of humans who injured them or returned to the town carrying them along.

3. Ibid., pp. 16-20.

Jones Very never seemed much interested in his fellow students and their activities. He was quiet and retiring, yet had a few acquaintances with whom he walked occasionally and hunted for nuts and berries.

Very remained at school, a successful student until 1827, when he entered an auction room as a sort of general office boy. He was tall and well developed for his age and his perseverance was shown by his ability to stick to a job that he was not fitted for and did not like. The one consolation he had was that he was able to read many of the books that were put up for auction and was even able to buy a few.⁴

At this time he began to study for a more advanced education with a special tutor who prepared young men for Harvard and who had noticed Very at the auction house. Through the efforts of his teacher, the boy was asked to assist at Oliver's Latin School. In addition to helping other young boys to pass the entrance examinations to Harvard, Very was taught by Oliver and so completed his first and part of his second year college studies.⁵

During these years the Very family moved to another part of Salem. The house was situated near the North River and had a large garden and spacious grounds. It was here that Very wrote his first verse, inspired by nature and the reading of other poets.

Very's first works were published by the Salem Observer in 1833. Several nature poems and a longer effort on the evils of slavery were

4. Ibid., pp. 21-22.

5. William P. Andrews, "An Inspired Life", The Century Magazine, October 1, 1882, p. 856.

among those printed. His poems had a melancholy brought out by his profound observation of nature and a strong belief in the Puritan God.

The next year Very entered Harvard as a second term sophomore. One of his uncles provided the means and his tutor, Oviver, prepared him well enough to gain his admission. Going to Cambridge was for him a great step in freeing himself from the Family's sea-faring tradition. He was the first of his family to become trained for working with abstract tools.⁶

Jones Very was twenty years old when he entered Harvard. He felt that because he was somewhat older than his classmates he must subscribe to a more serious attitude and enter into his studies with more fervor than he normally would. At the same time he was expected to contribute to the Salem Observer. Very managed both tasks well enough to maintain a fine scholastic standard and write several nature inspired poems as well.⁷

It was at this time that the freshman and sophomore classes rebelled at administration policy and all but three members of the second class were expelled. Jones Very was one of these last, but only because he protested violently that the expulsion was not just in his own case. Later the school reversed the decision about Very and another student and asked them both to leave.

Very's verse did not seem to be affected by his leaving Harvard. That summer he submitted a number of poems to the local newspaper. The poet's studies of literature had done much to increase the depth and fortify the images of his own poetry.

6. Very, p. xxiii.

7. Bartlett, op. cit., p. 25.

At the end of the summer Very's college class was reinstated after all who wished to return were examined on abilities and character. Jones Very passed both tests and so entered his junior year. The last years in college were a combination of course study, religious pursuits, and the writing of verse. At this time he first exhibited the elect attitude and mysticism that later characterized his social intercourse.

Very was careful never to let his academic work suffer at the hands of his poetry. During his last year at Harvard he won several prizes and shared first place honors with one of his classmates.⁸

After Very received his B.A. degree he was not contented to leave his studies. He felt bound to continue his religious reading and contemplation. It was the only natural thing, he felt, to enter the Divinity School and, later, the ministry. In order to make the venture possible Very accepted a proffered tutorship in Greek.

It seems that Very, along with another faculty newcomer, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, caused much comment by the amount of interest and concern they showed in both the subject matter and in their respective students. Very not only helped his students with Greek but also discussed at length both his religious convictions and theirs.

In the spring of 1837 Very's demeanor became even more serious than it had been previously. Finally he let it be known that God had been revealed to him and had given him a message. Thereafter he was active in the pursuit of soul-saving among the Harvard undergraduates. By the end

8. Ibid., pp. 35-7.

of the year he had not only gained the respect of his associates and students but also had his 'mission revealed'.

When he returned to Salem, his first academic year finished, he found that the ideas of Unitarianism and Transcendentalism had seeped into the town. There was a great deal of intellectual activity led by a newcomer, Miss Elizabeth Peabody, lately of Concord. This ambitious young woman had been a student of Emerson and literary assistant to Channing and was acquainted with Bronson Alcott and Margaret Fuller.

Elizabeth Peabody came into contact with Jones Very through the Salem Lyceum where she had read some of his verse and was told of his poetic prowess and religious fervor. By forming acquaintanceships with his mother and sisters, Louisa and Frances, she was eventually able to meet the young mystic. By her enthusiasm and genuine criticisms she encouraged not only the writer, but also the friend. Very also met, through Miss Peabody, Nathaniel Hawthorne and soon cultivated the friendship to the point where they would talk together on long walks of their mutual literary interests.⁹

During the summer of 1837 Very felt an upsurge of creative ability and asked Elizabeth constantly for her advice and criticism. After reading one of his poems, "Nature", she was sure of Very's spiritual kinship with Emerson, who had published his own book of the same title the previous year.

When Very was persuaded to read an essay in December of that year at

9. Louise Hall Tharp, The Peabody Sisters of Boston, Boston: Little Brown, 1950. pp. 110-113.

a lecture given under the auspices of the Salem Lyceum, he was well received and charmed most listeners. Because of his appearance, Elizabeth wrote to Emerson and invited him to meet the exceptional young man. Emerson wrote to say that he was more than interested by the young poet and would be pleased to have him speak at the Concord Lyceum.

In April of 1838, during his second teaching year, Very walked from Cambridge to Concord to meet Emerson. The encounter was successful, for both men were young, sincere, and self-confident. Emerson was pleased with Very's ideas and later expressed a desire to Elizabeth Peabody to continue the friendship. Very truly amazed Emerson by his sincere devotion and the depth of his religious convictions.¹⁰

At the same time was being questioned about those same beliefs by his superiors at the Divinity School. His feeling of being 'elect' made many of his classmates and teachers urge him to modify his convictions. When Very refused, many intimated that he was insane.¹¹

Through all this Very had the close friendship of Emerson, as he considered Very to be inspired and sincere in his motives. Emerson could see that Very was one person who actually lived with his Oversoul.

Even though Very was able to rely on Emerson, his mind became so crowded that most people who knew him were sure he was on the brink of a complete nervous collapse. The climax came one day, when, in the midst of a Greek class he cried fervently, "Flee to the mountains, for the end of all things is at hand."¹²

10. Bartlett, op. cit., pp. 50-51.

11. Andrews, op. cit., p. 859.

12. Bartlett, op. cit., p. 50.

Very was asked to withdraw from Harvard and he returned home accusing the inhabitants of Salem of sinfulness. Many townspeople urged Very's mother to put him in an asylum, and under much pressure Lydia Very consented to do so. However, she was not forced to an ugly scene with her son for he agreed to enter the McLean Asylum voluntarily.

Before he entered he completed the second of his three essays on poetry and sent it to Emerson for approval and comment. In his letter he specifically announced that God had spoken to him on the subject matter and had given his consent to the writing.

Very's one month rest in the asylum apparently was spent in consoling the other inmates and in writing, for when he left several of the patients thanked him for spiritual uplifting and service to them. Very went home to Salem and was eventually able to reach a much calmer state of mind.¹³

Very had become more of a fanatic than ever on the subject of good and evil. He now applied his standards to his friends and stated that on first acquaintance he could discern the weak points of a person's character. When he had done this he proceeded to talk and to enlighten the person on his moral and ethical defects and to prescribe the cure for them. Many times, however, the subject didn't feel compelled to accept Very's charges and suggested changes. Even Emerson and his wife Lydian came under Very's inspection. In his journals Emerson wrote "Jones Very charmed us all by telling us he hates us all."¹⁴

13. Andrews, op. cit., p. 860.

14. All references to Emerson are taken from The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. by R. L. Rusk, New York: Columbia University, 1939.

To argue with Very was practically impossible. He was dogmatic, mystical, logical, and inspiredly insulting. Several clergymen in Salem bore the brunt of the attack during 1838 and, after arguing with Very, merely confirmed his theories that the movement of the churches and society was away from God.

Very soon left Emerson's circle for his home in Salem and busied himself in solitary collection of his poems and essays for publication. Since his personality was such that he did not encourage easy friendships he did the work alone. When he was finished, Emerson encouraged him and offered to aid him in the final editing of the work. It was at this time that Emerson decided that Very's religious fervor had stunted his social growth and had made him a dull man. Emerson continued to respect Very, but he could not follow his example of self-effacement and mystical rapture. Emerson, however, went to Boston to help his friend overcome the intricacies of publication. The book was published with some little acclaim in September, 1839.

Emerson sent a copy of the book to Thomas Carlyle, but his opinion of the book was never received. Two years later Emerson reviewed the book in the Dial and was quite generous in his praise.¹⁵

The printing of Poems and Essays seemed to convince Very's neighbors that he was sane after all. His family treated him with profound respect and sheltered him from the world by receiving all the discordant comments and opinions meant for him. Over the years Very began to be considered godly and saint-like. He did not altogether give up his friends from the

15. Ibid.

past. He continued to correspond and visit with Emerson, the Peabodys, and Hawthorne. He still sent poems to Emerson for criticism before their publication in newspapers and magazines.¹⁶

In 1842 Very began preaching and the next year received a license from the Cambridge Association. He was never ordained and referred to himself as a Channing Unitarian. Though he was offered the pulpit of several churches, he preferred to remain at home in Salem and preach as a guest speaker in other New England towns. He seemed to elaborate on the theme that spiritual reform was the cure for the ills of modern society and used slavery as an example of corruptness. Though Very's sermons have never been published, they have been collected in most part and are in the Andover Theological Seminary at Cambridge.¹⁷

Very, in spite of his short visits to neighboring towns, disliked travel and preferred to stay in Salem with his family. His brother, Washington, a preacher, too, had a private school there until his early death. Very's sisters remained in the family home.

Until 1867, Very lived with his now more outspoken mother and two volatile sisters, of whom Lydia Louisa was the more violent of the two. After his mother's death in that year, Very remained with his sisters, living a routine life of meditation, writing, and study. During the summers Very extended his nature walks and enjoyed talking with people, mainly children, whom he met.

Through the years he continued to write nature poems and enlarge his

16. Bartlett, op. cit., pp. 106-108.

17. Ibid., p. 114.

natural themes. He seemed to seek the company of people less and less over the years, but was glad to contribute verse for public occasions. In addition, several of his hymns were set to music and became popular in both New England and the British Isles. Requests came for another edition of his poems but Very ignored them. He did not publish a volume of his works again, though he was included in the anthologies of his day.

No public life interested Very after his mother's death and that of his brother. He began to live in the past, and by 1878 saw the deaths of practically all of his friends.

Two years later Very himself died and was buried on May eleventh, three days after his death. The funeral ceremony was simple and was attended by many of his neighbors and other townspeople as well as his sisters. Emerson and Elizabeth Peabody were his only surviving friends.¹⁸

18. Andrews, op. cit., p. 862.

The Scope of Jones Very's Poetry

In spite of the fact that Jones Very wrote over five hundred poems, there is small variety in the subject matter that he chose to put in verse form. Very was primarily interested in the relationship between man and his God through His creations.

Since Very believed he had been chosen to express the word of God in his living and writing, he wrote in a style that contains much of the mysticism of the personal revelation. His sonnets have been compared with those of a Vaughan, Donne, or Herbert, but none of these English mystics has the truly American Romantic spirit of the New England poet. Very was considered to be unique by his contemporaries and by himself. In many respects this is true.

The very quality that made him so far from the common run of Romantic poets was the one that separated him from society as a whole. Very found it difficult to resign himself to a world in which few lived according to Christian tenets exclusively.

In his poetry Very expressed his resentment by admonition and by suggesting possible methods of human reform. Since he was more of a militant Christian than either the Unitarians or the Transcendentalists, he can most accurately be compared with the Puritans. Many of his religious sonnets express Puritan doctrines even while they are couched in the natural images of a later time.

In the main, Very tried to express few ideas in his poems. For the most part he was interested in the perfectibility of the soul of man. He believed, after the manner of the Puritans, that this ultimate perfection

could be found only after complete submission of the will. For him, there was no world of judgement or choice. Truth was absolute. There was no room for doubt or debate. In fact, if possible, life was to be lived on the intuitional level.

Santayana, in his description of Emerson, inadvertently described Jones Very when he said

A puritan whose religion was all poetry, a poet whose only pleasure was thought, he showed in his life and personality the meagerness, the constraint, the frigid and conscious consecration which belonged to his ancestors, while his inmost spirit ranged abroad over the fields of Nature, gathering what ideas it might, and singing its little snatches of inspired song.¹⁹

Very's little snatches of inspired song, however, were written in stern manner and not at all in the way of a lyrical outburst. The labored rhyme that sometimes appeared in his hymns combined with his lack of poetic imagination makes Very's poetry generally dull, with few really brilliant passages to carry scores of ponderous lines. In spite of the great deal of mediocre work that Very did produce, he is one of the major poets of the nineteenth century.

In his lifetime he wrote only three prose pieces. They were essays on Shakespeare and epic poetry but contained some of the ideas that are repeated again and again in his many poems. By examining them in connection with the verse, it is easier to see that Very's idea of his own election was not merely a poetic affectation.

In dealing with Jones Very it is not enough to cite several sonnets

19. George Santayana, Interpretations of Poetry and Religion, New York: Scribners, 1900, p. 75.

and one poem with a religious theme. He must be considered from his own major delineations of himself.

A most important consideration to be studied is his personal concept of himself as a mystic and his subsequent reputation as a religious mystic. It is this particular aspect of his writings that is the best known to the common reader.

In addition to his highly emotional mystical poetry, Very wrote many religious sonnets whose thematic sources are taken directly from the Bible. These poems present a more orthodox side of the poet. His theological training here is more important than his personal revelation. These are the most simple of all his poems because they present applications of familiar Bible stories and verses. It can be said that these are Very's sermons in verse.

Jones Very did not limit himself to writing solely in direct religious style. He was too much interested in natural phenomena and dedicated himself to a thorough study and enjoyment of the beauties of nature. The sonnets and longer poems written of the scenes of his native Salem are simple and sincere. They have almost the trusting naiveté of a child. In all of nature Very saw God, not only as a benevolent deity, but also as an avenging Creator.

The least important poems of Jones Very and the least known are his political verses. At the time of the Civil War he devoted much thought to the moral aspects of the slavery question and wrote several poems expressing his outrage at the slave owners. As he considered this question, the ethics of government began to interest him and he further pursued his

Christian line of reasoning by writing a series of sonnets on the Reconstruction Era.

Other than the poems on these themes, Very wrote little else. There are several poems written to his mother and on the death of his brother, Washington, as well as a few early attempts concerning his school life but they cannot be considered typical of Very. It is not strange though to find that Very has neglected to write of the intimate details of his life. His dedication to Christian intuitive experience stopped the writing of any poetry not connected with his particular interest.

Very's importance as a poet is not that he wrote beautifully and lyrically. It is rather that he was a link between the Puritan writers and the Romantic school, though not from a chronological aspect. He welded together the earlier theology with a mystical vision of God and Nature. His poems are more readable than those of Emerson, but contain similar emphasis on natural image.

Very's Mysticism

After Jones Very became convinced in 1837 that he was selected by God to bring his message to men, he wrote often that he was the spokesman of God. His own religious experience convinced him of the concept of immediate revelation.

In order that more men might experience this feeling, Very advised in his essay on Shakespeare

To become natural, to find again that Paradise which he has lost, man must be born again; he must learn that the true exercise of his own will is only in listening to the voice, which is ever walking in the garden, but of which he is afraid and hides himself. In the words of him who came not to do his own will, as we humble ourselves and become as little children, our minds will no longer be at variance with the world without them, but only a brighter image than nature can be of the creation of both; the true soil will be conscious expression of nature.²⁰

Very did not express his mystical religious experience by preaching or prophesying but by turning more and more to writing of his newly acquired affinity with God. He stated that God personally guided him in his writings and inspired all his thoughts.

When Emerson offered to aid him in preparing his manuscript for the 1839 edition for the publishers Very wrote:

I am glad at last to transmit what has been told me of Shakespeare. You hear not mine own words, but the teachings of the holy ghost.²¹

What he wrote, he believed, 'came' to him and was not the product of his own mind. The voice of God spoke through him, and he was but the medium

20. Very, op. cit., p. 51.

21. George Willis Cooke, Poets of Transcendentalism, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1903, p. 11.

of His expression. He said of what he had written, "I value these verses, not because they are mine, but because they are not."²²

Emerson was fully convinced that Very had had an experience beyond the normal idea of a relationship with God. Though he himself recommended such communion with a higher power, he never experienced it, and because of this he conceived a great respect for Very as an inspired man.

Very professed to be a Unitarian, but was such only in the respect that that church evolved in point of time from the Puritan. His devout Christianity kept him from being a Transcendentalist and he was dogmatically insistent on his Christianity. In one respect Very was similar to the Quakers, for he agreed with their doctrine of submission of the will to the Divine Will. Carrying this one step further, Very also believed that the private will was eliminated from the life of the devout. The Puritan mystic, Jonathan Edwards, held the same certainty of personal contact with God, but he stipulated that the submission of the will was inevitable.

Very saw only the action of the will acceptable in the sight of God as the surrender of that will to the Higher Power. Edwards, like Very, saw only one acceptable doctrine in the eyes of God, only he held that the sole expression of devotion was found in the idea of predestination.²³

The separation of the flesh and the spirit was inevitable to Very after his exultation. He felt that his God did not approve of surrender to emotion and He had established an ethical standard not in keeping with the unified Emersonian concept of body and spirit.

22. Ibid., p. 12.

23. Frank Hugh Foster, History of New England Theology, Chicago: University of Chicago, chap. 11.

The Transcendentalists regarded Very with amazement when he actually practised his idea of the total submission of the will.

Very regarded thought other than directed by the spirit as sin. His violent experience had made him believe that truth is absolute, and any pondering of questions was against the dictates of God. Once, in conversation with Emerson, he said of Emerson's idea that truth is relative:

When I was in Concord I tried to say that you were right also; but the Spirit said you were not right. It is just as if I should say, It is not morning, but the Morning says it is morning.²⁴

Very realized that most people would have difficulty understanding his spiritual communion with God. He says that it was rather like imperfect audibility for the worldly person to communicate with him. This condition was highly displeasing to him, and he dedicated a sonnet to explaining the phenomenon:

But now you hear us talk as strangers, met
Above the room wherein you lie abed;
A word perhaps loud spoken you may get,
Or hear our feet when heavily we tread;
But he who speaks or him who's spoken to,
Must both remain as strangers still to you.²⁵

Very felt that there could be no direct meeting between the common man who resides in the lower chamber and him in the upper room. He was unable to see that the lower room was not necessarily dark and doorless and that improvement after the Emersonian mode was possible.

A great appreciation of the poems with mystic expression is impossible unless the reader is sympathetic with Very's religious point of view. They

24. Ivor Winters, Maule's Curse, Norfolk: New Directions, 1938, p. 134.

25. "Yourself", p. 116, 119-114.

merely seem the product of a demented mind. His moments of poetic rapture are balanced by a strage humility. However, in one of the more famous sonnets, "Thy Brother's Blood", he shows the violent egocentrism he conceived after he was 'chosen' to sit among the company of the wise.

I have no brother. They who meet me now
Offer a hand with their own wills defiled,
And, while they wear a smooth unwrinkled brow,
Know not that Truth can never be beguiled.
Go wash the hand that still betrays thy guilt;-
Before the Spirit's gaze what stain can hide?
Abel's red blood upon the earth is spilt,
And by thy tongue it cannot be denied,
I hear not with the ear,- the heart doth tell
Its secret deeds to me untold before;
Go, all its hidden plunder quickly sell,
Then shalt thou cleanse thee from thy brother's gore
Then shall I take thy gift;- that bloody stain
Shall not be seen upon thy hand again.²⁶

Clearly this sonnet refers to Very's personal experience and not to any statement of ideal. The feeling in this poem is so great that the question of sanity might well arise. If it is possible to state a recognizable series of words about an emotional experience, Very has done it.

Very, like many other mystics, found it necessary to clarify his message in the terms most understood, so he turned to the type of image he appreciated, those of nature. In the touchingly beautiful lines

The fairest day that ever yet has shone,
Will be when thou the day within shalt see;
The fairest rose that ever yet has blown,
When thou the flower thou lookest on shalt be.²⁷

Many times he used natural images to solidify his nonverbal emotional experiences for all time. Because the translating of emotion to words is

26. "Thy Brother's Blood", p. 87.

27. "The Lost", p. 101-11. 1-4.

often the downfall of poets, Very's verses only approximate the feeling he was trying to convey.

By definition the mystical experience is beyond words. In the Christian tradition, the emotion is shrouded in analogy. Portions of the Bible itself were the first interpreted series of emotional experiences. The analogies used to interpret the Song of Solomon are an illustration of this point. Very, too, takes portions of the scriptures for images and literally enlarges the mystical effect they already have.

Very read carefully the life of Christ and took from it many subjects for poems. It was always the marvelous aspect of Christ's living that appealed to Very. He was interested in the stories of the miracles that Christ performed. These were a proof to him that the Divine Spirit, guiding a perfect human being, could appear on earth and communicate with man.

Very never had a second personal revelation. For him it was not necessary, as he had been given the perfect plan for living. His sonnets with a mystic aura do not seek the perfect life. They attempt to describe it and prescribe it for all. Even though Very achieved comparative calm, he had a longing for beatitude, or true identity with God. In the poem, "The Lost", Very obscurely, but strongly appeals for beatitude. The emotional luminescence of the lines clears the cloudy verbal expression to produce one of the finest examples of American spiritual poetry in existence.

Very wrote, too, on the converse theme of the achievement of salvation. In the sonnet, "The Hand and Foot", he first states that man has an initial choice, but in concluding says:

Wherever bound, yet thou art ever free;
 The path of Him, whose perfect law of love
 Bids spheres and atoms in just order move.²⁸

Very expounded this theory not only in his sonnets but in his essays, too. His concept of total will-lessness as the means of salvation is expressed again when he says:

Our own souls must be rendered a fit medium
 Of those spiritual conflicts we are listening
 to in the breaths of others; else, some of the
 sounds which would otherwise come clear and
 distinct will fall faint and unmeaning, and others
 will be entirely lost to our spiritual world.

It is not necessary to cite numbers of poems to illustrate this idea of Very. They would be repetitive and nothing more, as Very considered this concept the motivating and only important one of his life, present and future. He was limited in expression of his religious experience and wrote only small quantities of better than average verses.

When Very did feel that he could communicate to those who did not understand the reasons for his way of life, he wrote his finest poems. Though not particularly interested in an audience, he felt as if his mission was being fulfilled when others could gain cognizance of his thoughts. The poems that he himself thought of as the simplest expressions of his union with God are the most obscure, though honestly beautiful, of all his verse.

In addition to his doctrines of submission of the will, Very believed that he was able to tell a pure soul from a worldly one. Emerson once wrote of him:

28. "The Hand and Foot", p. 128, ll. 12-14.

29. Very, op. cit., p. 49.

When Jones Very was in Concord, he had said to me:
 'I always felt when I heard you speak, or read your
 writings that you saw the truth better than others;
 yet I felt that your spirit was not quite right. It
 was as if a vein of cold air blew across me'.

In the conversation that followed this remark, Emerson tried to explain that he was not insincere in his preachings, but that he lived by them to a lesser extent than Very did by his. They were the ideal, not the actuality. After much discussion, Very conceded that he might possibly be right, but that he knew that Emerson's life was not guided directly by the Father.³⁰

Very did not always write about things that the reader could not understand. Much of his writing was that of an orthodox Christian. As a devotional writer, Very presented some of the finest lyric poetry with traditional background and theology.

Because the mystical element in the thought of Jones Very did not extend to all of his poems, the more traditional verses will be discussed in the next section.

30. Emerson, op. cit., vol. p. .

Very as an Orthodox Christian

Another aspect of the religious life of Jones Very to be examined is his avowed orthodox Christianity. With his Puritan home background and his Harvard training, he was thoroughly familiar with the scriptures and the application of them to the everyday life of the individual.

According to the Bible the Christian ideal is something which is heard and seen. Its embodiment is the life of Jesus and the Scriptures are the proof of the acts of Christ. Jones Very did not dare to consider himself on the same plane of beatification as Jesus, but rather considered himself a brother to Christ, the man. Very's attitude to God was always one of humility, and his wish and conviction that he be a child of God was expressed in his poetry.

Very is the true antithesis of the material man. He took not only the moral lessons from the Bible, but also followed to the letter the teachings of Jesus in his actual living. It is very difficult to separate the life of Very from his poems for the man was so much the Christian poet that he believed relationship with God colored all his writings.

In addition to the mystical outpourings of the inspired soul, Very wrote many simple poems of devotion which are obviously sincere and express the innate humility of the Very not inspired by his mystical experience. It is rather hard to reconcile the two different attitudes of the poet toward man and God. First, under the influence of his mystical thought, Very states that the soul has no aim in life but to become identified with God and that God has elected him to carry a message. In this

mood he also says that there is no need for those who are not pure of soul to try to achieve beatitude, for it is impossible. Then, influenced by the teachings of Christ he becomes less austere and advises that man can become one with God by observation of natural phenomena and by following the Christly virtues.

Very, in his expression of his election, differed from the Biblical use of the term greatly. He felt that he, though he was not a great man of any sort, had been selected. In the tradition of the Old Testament the men who were personally appealed to by God were not solitary individuals. They were the leaders of a people with the responsibility of the national good in their hands. Very speaks in his political poems of the fate of the nation in the hands of the ungodly much after the manner of the prophets of the Old Testament but he is not in the position of power to act on the situation.

Very followed the Puritan concept of the selection of the individual for beatification, though he did not use textual examples expressing the Old Testament idea.

The poem "Enoch" tells the story of the patriarch who was inspired by God and thus could have been the inspiration of the Israelites. Through the ignorance of the common man a more worldly leader was listened to instead, and the people missed the message of God.³¹

One of the most conventional of the religious sonnets of Jones Very is "The Weary and Heavy Laden". In this poem man is urged to turn to God for rest and relief from trouble. Christ in his resurrection had proved there was a rest for the soul, so man need not wonder any more.

31. "Enoch", p. 75.

Very exhorts the universe to celebrate the redemption of man and the eternal life prepared for him by Christ.³²

Very was an ardent believer in a life after death. Many of his verses take the subject as their theme. One of the most lyrical and sincere of these is "The Will". The first four lines are as simple a statement of Very's belief as can be found

Help me in Christ to learn to do thy will,
That I may have from him eternal life;
And here on earth Thy perfect love fulfill,
Then home return victorious from the strike.³³

Very never doubted the existence of a heaven. He professed to know the type of uplifting activity carried on there. He writes that the temper of the place is joyousness and the persons there engage in speaking God's truth always. Very becomes quite exalted in the concluding lines of the poem "Heaven" and gives a blessing, from God, that such a place can exist for those who follow the tenets of God.

In order to achieve heaven, Very says, a person must be resurrected. He writes of the day when this will be achieved in this rather Blake-like poem filled with the feeling of alternate joy and morbid detail. He shows that there will be no sorrow; it will be forever forgotten in the midst of the recognition of the soul and the feeling of being new-born.³⁴

The greatest evil man can encounter to deter him from eventual salvation, says Very, is fear. This fear of the Lord has given rise to the

32. "The Weary and Heavy Laden", p. 101, ll. 2-14.

33. "The Will", p. 104, ll. 1-4.

34. "Heaven", p. 105.

great Babylons of the modern world. If man is at all discerning he can see that the fear-ridden life must give way to the repentance needed on the 'day of secrets'.³⁵

Another sonnet on the same subject is titled "John", after the cousin and baptizer of Christ. Here Very says that the unbeliever sometimes comes to scoff at the plainness of the creed of Christ, but stays to hear the words in the same manner that the curious individual went to stare at the wildy dressed and ill kempt John the Baptist and stayed to be converted by that great evangelist.³⁶

Very never became a powerful speaker, and cannot be called an evangelist in any common sense of the word. He never had the personal contacts nor the interest to argue with those he considered unworthy and unwilling to change to his way of life. He felt that it was not his calling to convert others. He was too much interested in studying the 'perfect' way of life. However, by the writing of verse that was quite popular in his day and hymns that are sung even now, he has disseminated his ideas of the moral life more than he had supposed.

By living according to the virtues of Christ and writing of their effect on man, Very has given the reader his personal view of the Christian ideal. He felt that he was not humble enough in the face of the humility of Christ and wrote a devotional prayer asking for the lowliest mien in meeting the Lord, for he had achieved a peace of mind and soul and did not wish to lose it by an overbearing attitude.³⁷

35. "Terror", p. 110.

36. "John", p. 110.

37. "Humility", p. 111.

In addition to humility, Very wrote of a second Christian virtue, compassion. By citing several parables he shows that Christ's ultimate goal was to exemplify the basic sympathy of man. Very believed that true compassion can come only from God. Since God had 'chosen' the poet he is able to come close to the Biblical example of compassion. In the following lines he takes the second of the Beatitudes of Jesus and elaborates on it. He speaks of compassion thus:

As once He gave unto His dearest friends
That should abide with them, and ne'er depart;
Oh! that earth's sorrowing children all might know
The heavenly Gift the Savior doth bestow.³⁸

Since the compassion of the human is inexorably tied with eternal life, Very seeks to prove that only the compassionate can achieve the beauties of Heaven.

The next Christian virtue that Very deals with is reverence. Very felt that the age in which he lived was too bound by material gain and scientific progress to consider the past and the teachings of the Bible. He suggests that the remedy for the lack of spiritual contemplation is an added reverence for the things of the past. He felt sure that the 'wisdom of old, "The Sacred Page",' can give an added spiritual confidence to the man of his time. There would be less doubt as to the immediate future of the individual.

Very explained further that reverence toward God is like worshipping at an altar. If the priest is interested more in the things of the world, he is defiling his place of worship. If reverence is lost, or even obscured,

38. "Blessed Are They That Mourn, For They Shall Be Comforted", p. 225, ll. 11-14.

contact with the things of the spirit is also lost. He asks that God come quickly to inspire men to their natural state.³⁹

Very was also interested in the Christly concept of justice. He sermonizes in one of his sonnets on the tests for determining the justice of the self. Does the individual follow the commandment of Jesus to love his neighbor? Does he seek to control selfishness and conduct his business in such a manner that on the day of judgment he will not be found wanting? If so, he says, man may sleep with ease in the knowledge that he has fulfilled one of God's major demands.⁴⁰

Truth, too, can be found by man by searching the word of God, the Bible. In this book, says the poet, are the answers to all the questions men can ask on their origins and purposes for living. If a person seeks to find the righteous model for his life he need look no farther than the Gospels and the Book of Acts. Nothing is hidden in the Scriptures. Philosophies that teach that man can never know the answers to questions contain only the unsatisfactory balm of the unthinking mind. Knowledge reached its acme with the writing of the Scriptures and all other solutions are vain.⁴¹

Very speaks always with great force, convinced that truth is absolute. Christ proved to him the moral part of the fineness of the teachings of God. His personal experience proved the remainder in emotional conviction. The coming of a perfect life for all is imminent,

39. "The Altar", p. 257.

40. "The Just", p. 246.

41. "The Search For Truth Not Vain", p. 236.

and the ideal of Heaven can be achieved by all.⁴²

The poet also believed strongly in the existence of angels. He believed that when a worthy man needed help desperately, one of "God's messengers" would come to help him. He gives as an example a man of the fields who cannot harvest his grain and says that God will help him by sending an angel to show him the way to succeed.⁴³ In his description of the realm of heaven he states:

The holy city doth to earth descend;
To all alike its light is freely given,
And men and angels do their voices blend.⁴⁴

He cites the story of Jacob wrestling the angel and concludes his poem with the idea that the angel brought a message to Jacob, as he could to all men, and then returned to his home, Heaven.⁴⁵

Jones Very wrote, too, a verse narrative of the history of the Puritans in a series of sonnets, thirty-seven in number. They contain a chronological account of the Puritans from the time they left England until their church was well established in this country. Very's first poem of the series, "The Calling", discussed the reason the Puritans left England. He says they were driven to leave Britain because their austere purity and their higher level of spiritual intelligence made them misunderstood by the common people of that country. They are portrayed as suffering martyrs who left under the smile of God.

42. "Home and Heaven", p. 239.

43. "The City of God", p. 11. 10-12.

44. "The Reapers Are The Angels", p. 245.

45. "Jacob Wrestling With The Angel", p. 293.

As they left, they blessed all the Christians who remained behind, even those who professed faith in the tenets of the Church of England. Conscience made them sure of the safety of their mission and trust in God stamped out any remaining fears.

The long crossing is described simple and with almost prosaic style. The beauties of the land they found are sung of in several sonnets and are compared to those of Paradise. The Puritans are nature lovers and see God's truth in his creations. Slowly the building of Salem begins and Very carries himself in flight of fancy into the homes of the devout. He sees the finest kind of social intercourse based on the teachings of Christ. Very states that this is but a preview of the life to come and that the happiness the Puritan has is but a sample of the joy man will know in Heaven.

From this he turns to an examination of the church and its form of worship. He shows Puritans singing hymns and being enlightened by their preacher, Higginson, on the favors God grants to man. Their church is founded on the word of God and that word is truth, a single creed for all men. It was under the influence of the Word that they defied the authority of government and king to establish their small Paradise.

Very departs from his usual stand on belief in the Bible by saying that the colonists did not respect merely the words of Scripture as were written, but interpreted them by the spirit of the Lord behind them. He cites this practise as the motivating factor for the progress of the nation until the time he lived. The Puritans saw new depths of truth out in the wilderness where the worldliness of England was not with them.

To Very the community was in accordance with the Christian ideal for it provided the religious influence on school and government. With the building of other colonies the Puritan life was expanded for the good of all. The enlightenment of the Indians was accomplished and the 'Freedom' of religion was given to all who came under the Puritan gaze.

Very concludes his sonnet cycle with praise of a man raised in the Puritan heritage. He gives credit to the Puritans for their adherence to the laws of God as set down in the Bible and says that they have helped the human race to achieve the millenium of peace and love.⁴⁶

Jones Very was interested not only in the Puritan heritage but also in the life and works of John Woolman, the Quaker, who fulfilled all of Very's expectations of Christian virtue. He is praised for his mercy and feeling for the suffering soul. It is not all in vain, says Very, as the results of all Woolman's goodness are seen everywhere. He again uses the image of reaping a harvest to show the immensity of the preacher's work.⁴⁷

The Old Testament leader, Moses, is also the subject for three of Very's sonnets. He is another example of the life God has decreed, and he has experienced, Very pointed out, a direct contact with his God in an emotional meeting similar to Very's own. If God told Very he was elect, then He also told Moses that his people were the chosen of God.⁴⁸

46. "The Puritans", p. 207-225.

47. "John Woolman", p. 234.

48. "Moses In Infancy", "Moses at the Bush", "Moses As a Leader of the People", p. 242-243.

On the whole Very's religious poetry does not have themes other than those mentioned. He was not inclined to interpret the Scriptures himself, and his poems are not much else than rendering of the common ideas and incidents found in the Bible. Even if Very's sermons are never published, his sonnet will take their place.

The lyric simplicity of the mystical poems is carried through to those religious verses he wrote with direct reference to the Bible, but they lose the beauty of image and imagination found in his more obscure poems of his personal revelation. The thematic barrenness of his poems makes them difficult to read in quantity and the lack of lyric beauty of many of them tends to keep them unread.

There is no doubt that these are the writings of a sincere Christian. He shows again and again his staunch purpose in living a Godlike life after the manner of Jesus and his one belief in the imminence of God.

The Biblical Sources
for the
Poetry of Jones Very

Perhaps the most interesting phase of the study of the works of Jones Very is the consideration of the passages from the Bible that are the sources for many of the religious sonnets and hymns. These verses and parables are generally those familiar to any person who has been brought up in the conventional Protestant Sunday School of the evangelical sects.

There has been no attempt in this study to estimate the relative number of Old and New Testament passages or to seek Very's personal favorites among the poems. Many of the poems of Very which have indirect Biblical allusions have been omitted.

The following pages are merely a listing of a number of the poems of Jones Very with their source verses or chapter headings beside them. They represent the basic assumptions of Very in his own religious life and in his creative work.

As was his literary bent, Very sought many references from the natural images found in the Old Testament and united these with his own natural experiences to produce such poems as "Hath The Rain A Father", "The Day Begins To Dawn", and "The Latter Rain". Though the titles are taken directly from the Bible, Very uses his own interpretations to make these poems more than mere paraphrases.

Very wrote, too, of a number of the stories that were told by Jesus, as he felt that they had importance in the life of man by showing him examples of Christian virtue. Some of the sonnets included in this section which have parables as their sources are "The Prodigal", "The

Laborer", "The Lost", and "The Widow". These poems take the New Testament verses and add a moral lesson for Very's readers which is not found in the original passages.

Because Very was assured of the mystical experience as part of his mission, he was very much interested in the prophetic and mystical books of the Bible. In general the strength and power of the Old Testament prophets inspired him more than the prophecies found in the latter part of the New Testament. He quoted Isaiah and Job directly and also wrote a great deal of the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies in the four Gospels.

Very was just as much concerned with the future of mankind as the mystic John and is interested in the concept of the The New Advent of Christ. The verses he uses when he describes the rise of a new Jerusalem are found in the Book of Revelations. He expands the Biblical idea and simplifies the mystical images so that the ordinary Christian reader can catch some of the contagion of the emotional exuberance of salvation.

Very's definite conception of a visible heaven is greatly substantiated by Biblical allusions, which he uses to show his readers the boundaries and requirements of heaven. He points out the New Testament verses and stories that tell of the Last Judgment and gives his own ideas regarding the passing of the last hours on earth.

The most definite belief of Very, that of Christ's direct communication with God, has its inception in the Biblical verses that Very quotes in the sonnets which deal directly with Christ. "I Am The Way", "The Light of Life", and "They That in the Savior Sleep" are all sonnets which have their sources in the life of Christ.

On the whole Very used popular and familiar Biblical passages to illustrate his ideas and clarify his strongest beliefs. In the cross-section of the religious sonnets listed in the following section, the well-known Sermon on the Mount, the story of David and Goliath, and the life of Moses are used as inspiration for the sonnets of the poet. These poems which have widely known subjects are well-constructed and are easy to read because Very wrote in a style similar to the beautiful simplicity of the King James version of the Bible.

One of the poems mentioned in the following section is an excellent paraphrase of the twenty-third Psalm. This sonnet, "Hymn", is one of a series of paraphrases on the Psalms written by different poets of the nineteenth century. In the appendices of the Authorized Version of the Bible published in 1850, this poem, as well as the others of the series, is reproduced.

Generally speaking, Very wrote most of his sonnets with Biblical sources as if he were writing sermons. He picked out a text and then wrote a poem as a rather brief explanation of the more difficult passages or wrote an interpretation of the more familiar verses.

There are many of the poems of Very that are not listed in the following section which take their inspiration from Biblical concepts and the lives of both Old and New Testament heroes. This sampling is merely a listing of the outright usage of the Bible as a primary source for the poetry of Jones Very.

The poet considered the Bible as the guidebook to a holy and

virtuous life. It is important therefore, to view some of the passages he used as source material for his writings because these verses contain in some measure a key to the mind and creative work of Jones Very.

Biblical Sources for Some
of Jones Very's Sonnets

The Ark

Make thee an ark of gopher wood; rooms shalt thou
make in the ark, and shalt pitch it within and
without with pitch.
Genesis 6: 14.

The Latter Rain

That I will give you the rain of your land in his
due season, the first rain and the latter rain,
that thou mayst gather in thy corn, and thy wine,
and thine oil.
Deuteronomy 11: 14.

The Trees of Life

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the spirit
saith unto the churches; to him that overcometh
will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is
in the midst of the Paradise of God.
Revelations 2: 7.

Who Hath Ears To Hear Let Him Hear

He who hath ears to hear, let him hear.
Matthew 11: 15.

Forgive My Trespasses

The Lord's Prayer
Matthew 6: 9-13.

The Cross

And he bearing his cross went forth into a place called the place of the skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha.
John 19: 17.

Alas, That Faith Is Wanting Now

Nevertheless when the Son of Man cometh, shall he find faith on earth.
Luke 18: 8.

I Am The Way

I am the Way, the Truth, and the Light. No man cometh unto the father but by me.
John 14: 6.

The Light of Life

John 14: 6.

Hymn- They That In the Savior Sleep

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with them.
I Thessalonians 4: 14.

The Rest of the Righteous

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for their's is the kingdom of heaven.
Matthew 5: 10.

Ye Gave Me No Meat

For I was hungered and ye gave me meat: I was
thirsty and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger
and ye took me in.
Matthew 25: 35.

The Prodigal

The Parable of the Prodigal Son
Luke 15: 11 ff.

The Meek

Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the
earth.
Matthew 5: 5.

The Laborer

The Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard
Matthew 20: 1-16.

Relief

And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him
that is athirst come. And whoever will, let him
take the water of life freely.
Revelation 22: 17.

Fear Not

Fear not; for they that are with us are more than
they that are with them.
II Kings 6: 16.

Knowledge and Truth

And out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food; the tree of life in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.
Genesis 2: 9.

Hath The Rain A Father

Hath the rain a father? Or who hath begotten the dew?
Job 38: 28.

The Day Begins to Dawn

While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.
Genesis 8: 22.

Justification by Faith

And he saw it bare record, and his record is true and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe.
John 19: 35.

One Generation Passeth Away

One generation passeth away and another cometh but the earth abideth forever.
Ecclesiastes 1: 4.

Christ's Capture in the Garden

Related in John 18: 19-21.

Jacob Wrestling with the Angel

Related in Genesis 32: 24 ff.

Hymn

Paraphrase of Psalm Twenty-Three.

Be Still

Be still and know that I am God.
Psalm 44: 10.

Come Suddenly, O Lord

Take Ye heed, watch and pray for ye know
not when the time is.
Mark 13: 13.

Not Tears Alone

And God shall wipe away all tears from their
eyes.
Revelations 21: 4.

Lead Me To the Rock That Is Higher Than I

Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.
Psalm 61: 2.

The Snare

Revelations 22: 17.

The Creation

Genesis 1.

The Yoke

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I
am meek and lowly of heart and ye shall find
rest unto your soul.
For my yoke is easy and my burden light.
Matthew 11: 29-30.

The Path of Peace

Psalm Twenty-Three.

'Tis Finished

He said, It is finished, and he bowed his head
and gave up the ghost.
John 19: 30.

The Task

Then delivered he him therefore unto them to be
crucified. And they took Jesus and led him
away.
And he bearing the cross went forth....
John 19: 16-17.

The Warrior

The bondage of the Jews in Egypt
Exodus 14.

My Father's House

Jesus went into the temple, and began to cast
out them who sold and bought in the temple, and
overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and
the seats of them that sold doves.
Mark 11: 15.

Blessed Are They That Mourn For They Shall Be Comforted

Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Matthew 5: 4.

The Widow

The Widow's Mite.

Luke 21: 1 ff.

He Was Acquainted With Grief

He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrow and acquainted with grief and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised and we esteemed him not.

Isaiah 53: 3.

Goliath

And David put his hand in his bag and took thence a stone and slang it; and smote the Philistine in his forehead, that the stone sunk into his forehead; and he fell upon his face to the earth.

I Samuel 17: 49.

The New Jerusalem (I)

And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of Heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

Revelation 21: 2.

The New Jerusalem (II)

Revelation 21: 2.

I Am The Way

John 14: 6.

What Of the Night?

Watchman, what of the night?
The watchman said, the morning cometh
and also the night; if ye would enquire,
enquire ye: return: come.
Isaiah 21: 11-12.

This Mortal Shall Put on Immortality

We shall be changed in a moment, in the twinkling
of an eye, at the sound of the last trump; for
the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be
raised and we shall be changed.
For this corruptible shall have put on incorruption
and this mortal shall have put on immortality.
I Corinthians 15: 52-53.

My Church

And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter,
and upon this rock I will build my church; and
the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.
Matthew 16: 18.

The Mustard Seed

The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard
seed, which man took and sowed in his field.
Which indeed is the least of all seeds, but when
it is grown it is the greatest among herbs and be-
cometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and
lodge in the branches thereof.
Matthew 13: 31-32.

So Is Everyone Who Is Born Of The Spirit

Verily, Verily, I say unto thee, Except a man
be born of water and the spirit, he cannot enter
into the kingdom of God.
John 3: 4.

I Am the Bread of Life

I am the bread of life; he that cometh to me
shall never hunger; and he that believeth in
me shall never thirst.
John 6: 32.

Kind Words

The parable of the Good Samaritan
Luke 10: 30-37.

The Wolf and the Lamb Shall Feed Together

The wolf and the lamb shall feed together
and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock
and dust shall be the serpents meal. They
shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy
mountains.
Isaiah 65: 25.

Obedience

Mark 6: 15-22.

Behold, He Is At Hand That Doth Betray Me

The capture of Jesus in Gethsemene.
Mark 14: 41-45.

The Still Small Voice

And after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord
was not in the fire, and after the fire, a still
small voice.
I Kings 19: 12.

Come Unto Me

Come unto me and rest all ye that labor and
are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.
Matthew 11: 28.

Flee To The Mountains

Then let them that are in Judea flee to the
mountains; and let them which are in the midst
of it depart out; and let not them that are
in the countries enter thereinto. For these
be the days of vengeance, that all things which
are written may be fulfilled.
Luke 21: 21.

Blessed Are They That Mourn

Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be
comforted.
Matthew 5: 4.

The Weary and Heavy Laden

Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy
laden, and I will give you rest.
Matthew 11: 28.

The Lost

The Parable of the Prodigal Son
Luke 15: 3-7.

The Nature Poems

The most read of all Very's poems are those whose subject matter and images are drawn from nature. They are simple and honest and contain much of the appealing side of Very's personality.

The first of his poems that appeared was one with this subject matter. It was published during the year 1833, when Very was nineteen, in the Salem Observer. The beginning lines are indicative of his later power:

The earth is parched with heat, flowers droop and die
The clouds of dust fly whirling through the sky;
The cattle lowing seek the friendly shade,
By lofty rock or some dark forest made.⁴⁹

These lines are similar to those of the English writers Cowper and Gray in mood and form, but they lack the exposition and concentrated explanation that is found in the poetry of the Englishmen. Very merely presents a scene without using the image for any purpose.

During his early years Very experimented with other forms than the heroic couplet for the nature verse he wrote. His farewell to Salem as he prepared to leave for Harvard showed his first signs of poetic promise. Written in blank verse, they indicate Very's deep feeling for the familiar scenes around him:

The yellow
Leaves at my return perhaps will rustle
In the autumnal blast, or winter's snows
May hide my wandering path; still will I trace
It out; for there's no winter in my love
For thee, no age but death. Amid the snows
Of age 'twill like the evergreen appear
As fresh as in my vernal prime.⁵⁰

49. "Nature", p. 69, ll. 1-4.

50. "Haunts of My Youth Farewell", p. , ll. 1-8.

Here Very uses the image for the first of many times. The later religious ecstasy that characterizes his verse is missing. Clearly Very seems to be more successful in this verse form than with the heroic couplet.

Very did not feel merely a pleasurable sensation in viewing nature in his long walks. He considered her a living teacher for mankind. By the examples of beauty seen in the butterfly and the seashell, man can make his life easier. It was painful for him to see any creature die or become maimed. To him it was unnecessary for them to be caged or stuffed in the interests of science.⁵¹

The common sights in Very's neighborhood were often the subjects for his poems. He had a delight in the ordinary sparrow and the yellow violet he found in his sister's garden. Changes in the weather were always amazing and he wrote many verses on rain, snowfall, and the appearance of the sky. Since Very was early a shy person and then later did not care much for common social intercourse, most of his affection and tenderness were expressed in his nature poems.

Nature is Very's love. His greatest power is in interpreting natural phenomena. The smallest sparrow becomes an object of sympathy and pity during a winter's snow in "Our Native Sparrows". The only way they can be saved, Very says, is through the watchful love of God who will see that they are taken care of.

51. "Nature A Living Teacher", p. 361.

Very felt that the greatest teaching of nature was that of love for one's fellow creatures. He does not ignore the storms and floods, but rather says that they are present for the good of man under God's larger plan. Very comes to this conclusion in reading the Scriptures wherein it is said "God is love". His assurance that nature bears this idea out makes him pass lightly over the more awe-inspiring aspects of natural phenomena to concentrate on the familiar and friendly.⁵²

Practically every form of natural creation near his home passed under the pen of Very. He was interested in the fall blooming of the sumac, the columbine and the pond lily, the fair clouds of morning and the evening star. His delight was rather like that of a young child who brings dandelion tops to his teacher.

With regard to the scientific study of botany and meteorology, Very wrote "Wiser were men of old Who could each change with wonder, faith, behold". It seemed going beyond the scope of the scientist to try to predict the vagaries of nature. Though Very had a respect for men of progress and technical training he felt that God was the only predictor.⁵³

Nature's purpose as the teacher of man was made ever more clear to the poet when he observed the small phenomenon of moss growing on a tree. He marvelled at each 'leaf' of moss and reflected on the microscopic forms that God's creation had taken. The fact that moss grows

52. "Nature Teaches Only Love", p. 367.

53. "The Meteorologists", p. 359.

under the snow and on the rock was a marvel to him. Was this not evidence of the Creator enough to satisfy even the most doubting scientist and religious sceptic? Not only were the impressive forests and mountains made but also things hardly visible to the human eye. It is the barely noticed details that convince Very that God has created a universe so complete that man may live always in the reflected glory of it.⁵⁴

Expanding this theme more, he writes of the northern lights. They are unexplainable- or were in his day - by the methods of science. It is vain, he says, to seek their origins. Man must just wonder at the brilliance. However, Very did not present a solution to the problem, as was his usual custom. He merely says:

A light whose mystery allures
The thoughtful, musing mind,
And leads it on in wonder, awe,
The hidden cause to find.⁵⁵

Very went on to say that man cannot expect to find clearcut lessons in nature. He must interpret what he sees in the light of his moral and Christian background. The sights and sounds about him are perpetually present. The changing seasons show the life eternal and the blossomings of spring the beauties of the soul of man. A worldly mind will see nothing in the surroundings about it, but the mind alert to the small sights will see a reiteration of the purpose of life. The soul sometimes forgetful will be reminded by "insect's hum, or song of bird".⁵⁶

54. "The Moss and Its Teachings", p. 411.

55. "The Zodiacal Light", p. 412, ll. 21-24.

56. "Interpreting Nature", p. 418.

The poet points out that the familiarity of a scene can often dull its beauties. As an example he writes of the experience of a person born in a tropical climate experiencing winter for the first time. First the desolation and the dying of the flowers in the fall, then the longer nights and frost, and finally the white beauty of winter are shown. Through all of this, he maintains, the man will have faith that a rebirth of foliage will come as he has seen it always in his own land.⁵⁷

The changes in the seasons always held a great fascination for Jones Very. He felt that with every succeeding change nature was in sympathy with man. The fact that winter was milder every succeeding year was an indication that man was becoming more the creature of God he was originally intended to be. In fancy he saw a new Eden appearing eventually in the North. He quotes astronomers in general for his sources and almost seriously toys with the idea of a perpetual spring. The fantasy comes to an abrupt end when Very returns to his own reality and sees man even more corrupt than he had before his brief flight of fancy. The pleasing prospect is, he says, snatched from him forever and he is left only with his hope.⁵⁸

Leaving the prospects of the future he returns a bit sadly, but always with comfort, to the flowers he loved so well. Lydia Very cultivated within her son the ability to appreciate even the most common bloom. Some of his loveliest nature lyrics sing of garden flowers and blossoms

57. "Man's First Experience of Winter", p. 419.

58. "Change in the Seasons", p. 424.

He has come upon while walking. One of the most touching of his poems is "The Nodding Meadow-Lily", wherein he writes

How came this modest lily fair
 In this lone meadow here to grow,
 When other meadows far around
 Can no such beautiful treasure show?

Has it from some fair centre come
 Where such flowers do most abound;
 Brought by the winds or flowing streams,
 And here a soil congenial found?

Or did it spring spontaneous here,
 When earth brought forth each plant and tree?
 Was this the Eden of its race?
 Can Science solve the mystery?

He who the soil could ready make,
 And for each seed a place prepare,
 Could here transplant from far they germ,
 Or here create and for it care,-

Here, or in meadow like to this
 Though far away thy golden flowers
 First opened to the light of day,
 The pride of summer's sultry hours.

Enough for me thy flowers to find,
 Admire their form and matchless grace,
 And own His love, who thus has given
 Peculiar beauty to the place.

Here is Very's outlook on nature, God, and science. The commonplace is the extraordinary in light of the Creation. The simplicity, though not the language, is found in many of the poems of another New England mystic, Emily Dickinson. Here again Very is the child of God in awe of the mystery of nature.

Another of the mysteries of nature is explored when Very discusses in a sonnet a 'strange visitant', a comet he saw one night while walking. He wonders as to its origins and its awesome aspect. A comparison with

an armed warrior is drawn and its tail is seen as a mighty sword. With its passing out of sight, Very can conclude no more than that it has given pleasure to him and is another example of the strength of God.

The less fearsome aspects of nature were dealt with much more than those of greater splendor. The loneliest scenes of autumn in New England are pictured again and again. Numerous flowers are named and described.

As Very's ideas concerning nature were so limited and his enthusiasm so high, the only thing that keeps the nature poems from becoming trite is his unworldly sincerity. The general feeling of these verses is one of trust and wonder. Nowhere has Very written of natural phenomena with elaborate descriptiveness. Very remained consistent in his humble Christianity.

The Political Poems

In the years immediately preceding the Civil War Very became interested in the slavery question. Though he was never a militant abolitionist he was sympathetic with the cause. Inspired by the idea that men were created free by the Lord he wrote:

Then what are human laws, on parchment writ,
Fastening on Man's free limbs the heavy chain,
Interpreted by learned jurist's wit,-
Laws born of pride of birth, and lust of gain,-
To those eternal laws, of God's decree,
Forever sounding forth that Man is Free!⁵⁹

Very was indignant at the behavior of Congress and let it be known that speeches were not the way to remedy the condition of slavery in the South. His respect for the law, if he considered it contrary to Christian teaching, was small, as is indicated by the quotation above. He never openly defied the law after the manner of his friend Thoreau, but wrote in another of his poems discussing an argument held in Congress on the slavery question

Fools! that, when things of high import concern
Their country's glory and the human race,
They will not from their times a lesson learn,
But bring dishonor on their name and place.⁶⁰

It was important to him that personal glory be sacrificed for the good of the whole. With his concept of the will-lessness of man, Very considered personal gain, particularly about a moral question, against the teachings of God. He laments the loss of honesty in the government in his sonnet "The Age Changeful and Worldly" and says that through the

59. "Freedom National, Slavery Sectional", p. 443, ll. 9-14.

60. "On The Late Disgraceful Scene In Congress", p. 441, ll. 1-4

ages empires have fallen because of personal greed and a lack of high purpose. Very did not look at the problem of power in politics from any point of view except that of a theologian. In order that any action might be taken to eradicate slavery, Very felt that glory must be superseded by high purpose.⁶¹

Very felt that only through the freedom of the slaves could come unity, physical and spiritual, in this country, and that action was the only way to solve the problem. The words Freedom and Union were not merely names for abstractions but were concrete things. In order for the country founded in freedom to continue in that way men must work for the good of the whole land. Very believed that working for the interests of all, whether privately or in government, was the way to gain freedom and avoid war.⁶²

Very was convinced that the main help for the cause of freeing the slaves would come from the churchmen. They had the most opportunity to educate both those who were to be freed and their congregations. With the Christian backgrounds they possessed they were the ideal examples for men to follow.

The abolition of serfdom in Russia was the subject of one of Very's longer poems. Here he describes freedom as 'knowledge', happiness to seek', and lauds the Czar for his recognition of the end of serfdom. Very

61. Lord, from our hearts pluck up each noxious weed,
And in their places sow a heavenly seed.

"The Age Changeful and Worldly",
p. 443, ll. 13-14.

62. "Freedom and Union", p. 444, ll. 1-8.

points out that only in a country that is free is man capable of carrying out the plans of God and actually gaining full maturity. It is this wish that he hopes will carry over to the slavery problem in the United States.⁶³

As a last point in his poetic campaign to ban slavery Very states that even nature is sympathetic with the cause of freedom. He feels a certain nuance of change in the climate and a sadder aspect in the natural cycle.⁶⁴ By the time Very wrote this poem, however, the first stages of the Civil War had already passed.

In another poem on the same subject, Very uses the image of a tree to represent liberty. A disease, war, mars the beauty and usefulness of the tree. Ultimately the tree will be destroyed by internal decay.⁶⁵

Very expresses in poetry the concept of Liberty which Henry George spoke of later when he said:

Liberty is the source, the mother, the necessary condition. She is to virtue what light is to color; to wealth what sunshine is to grain; to knowledge what eyes are to sight....Where liberty rises, there virtue grows, wealth increases, knowledge expands, invention multiplies human powers and in strength and spirit the freer nation rises among her neighbors as Saul amid his brethren-taller and fairer.⁶⁶

To Very the rights of man were more important than the rights of government and nationality. In a pessimistic mood he wrote of a nation

63. "The Abolition of Serfdom In Russia", p. 453.

64. "Nature's Sympathy With Freedom", p. 447, ll. 1-8.

65. "The Tree of Liberty", p. 451.

66. Henry George, Progress and Poverty.

becoming deprived by greed and avarice as well as lust for power. In particular he attacked the individual states for their near-sighted attitude with regard to the common good. He looked and found that public and private property were being destroyed by mobs. The Civil War was the antithesis of all that a man could respect in himself, according to Very, and represented outright madness. It seemed to him that the destruction of the nation was at hand. Even though he was in sympathy with the abolition cause, the economic issues of the war did not interest Very in the least. To him war was unnecessary and evil.⁶⁷

The only other political interest Very held was in the Reconstruction Era. In a series of six sonnets on the period Very reiterates his faith that God is the only true director of any rebuilding. The first poem expresses thanks that the end of the war has come. In it Very speaks once more of the politician dedicated to the common good and not to glory. He says that the people will instinctively follow God's direction if they are not interfered with.

Later in the series Very states that reconstruction should include education for all, justice, temperance, and civil liberty. If all these things are made possible, then, Very thinks, a national unity of purpose can be achieved to make the country great. The great statesmen of the land have a great deal of the responsibility and therefore must stay always within the teachings of Jesus. For Very, the reconstruction era could only come by this means, for a mere outer change would do nothing to cleanse the corrupted spirit.

67. "Sonnets on Reconstruction", pp. 455-458.

During one election Very became aroused at the sight of a ballot box placed on the altar of a church in Salem. If, says Very, the purpose of the voting was to revow the pursuit of liberty, the position of the box would not have been unseemly. As was the case, he states, the election asked the people to choose men who were interested in personal glory. He goes to great length to point out the misuses of freedom and the wrath they inspire in him.⁶⁸

On the whole the poems of Very on political subjects seem naive and rather childlike. His devotion to the Christian life would, of course, limit the understanding of the petty quarrels and the machinations of Congress and the other branches of the government. His ideals made it impossible for him to accept any rule unless it was, to him, divinely inspired.

The verses on politics are simple and straight-forward. There are no mystic predictions or religious exhortations. Very states directly his few ideas with great sincerity and expects agreement from the reader. It is not as if he were making an appeal for one cause or another. He is confident that he has stated the only solutions for the problems at hand.

After the beginning of the reconstruction years, Very returned to writing his peaceful nature sonnets. He had arisen to the call of the country and was genuinely happy to state his solutions and warnings about liberty, unity, the misuse of power, and building a nation under God.

68. "Voting In An Old Church", p. 462.

From the point of view of a theologian, the poems of Very have much to recommend them. They are truly in the spirit of Christian teaching. From the point of view of a politician, though, it seems that they show a very sketchy knowledge of an interest in government as it is.

Critical Opinion of
Jones Very's Poetry

To the present time Jones Very has received little acclaim from the critics. In fact, his work is most often ignored and he is relatively anonymous. During his own day, however, he received more consideration and perhaps even a little publicity through the sponsorship and critical patronage of Ralph Waldo Emerson.

The first published opinion of the 1839 edition of Essays and Poems was found in the July issue of the 1841 volume of the Dial, the Transcendental magazine. The review's author was Very's great friend Emerson, and he says of the book:

--- all these verses bear the unquestionable stamp of grandeur. They are the breathings of a certain entranced devotion, which one would say, should be received with affection and sympathizing curiosity by all men, as if no recent writer had so much to show them of what is most their own. They are as sincere a litany as the Hebrew songs of David or Isaiah, and only less than they, because indebted to the Hebrew muse for their tone and genius.⁶⁹

Here Very has succeeded in gaining a follower who understands his 'mission' from God. In addition to mentioning the more obvious merits of the religious volume, Emerson also gently spoke of the more conventional side of the poet when he said

These sonnets have little range of topics.... but, whilst they flow with great sweetness, they have the sublime unity of the Decalogue or the Code of Menu, and if as monotonous, yet are they as pure as the sounds of surrounding Nature.⁷⁰

69. R. W. Emerson, "Book Review of Essays and Poems" by Jones Very", The Dial, July, 1841, p. 553.

70. Ibid.

Emerson here has found the main reason that Very did not have more common readers and avid partisans. Pure they may be and also holy, but if they were a little dull and boring to the learned Emerson, the friend of Very, how did they strike other more plain and unassuming folk?

At the time of the publication of Essays and Poems there was little else but the review of Emerson to indicate that even one copy was seen by the press and the critics. When Very died, however, more space and time were devoted to his writings by the periodicals. This was only a natural event, for by 1882 he had received more than a local fame by his saintly, if eccentric, living and his numerous sermons in New England towns.

At the time of his death an article devoted to his life and works appeared in the Century Magazine. It stated that the poet was important more for his Christian life than his poems. Very was correct, the author stated, when he said in his poetry that man had lost the insight to live as a Christian. Very's verses, he said, were nothing more than a fine reflection of a finer man. The sonnets were written from the depth of a serene soul, the only flaw of which was its obsession with its connection with God. This article did not deal in any detail with the ideas that Very attempted to put out to the people. It merely accepted him for a divine who wrote poetry and lived an ascetic life.⁷¹

Within the next six months another article appeared in American periodical literature which had a more critical bias, as it appeared

71. op. cit., pp. 859-862.

soon after the publication of the 1883 edition of Very's poetry. This edition was compiled by William P. Andrews, whose eulogy of Very had appeared in the Century. In this critique of the 1883 edition two or three original points were brought up regarding Very's verses. Here is discussed the opinion of Hawthorne that Very lacked the one essential quality of success, a sense of the ridiculous. The reviewer examines the idea and seconds it with the comment that he feels Very is incapable of considering anything that has not to do with spiritual necessity. The most appealing quality of the work of Very is said to be his spontaneity and this word is used in another sense to identify and characterize the poet. If Very was an impromptu poet, the article goes on to say, it did not necessarily make him a great or good one. His work could be characterized by his unity of purpose, too. The reviewer says that Very had but one thought -immanence of God-, one emotion -the Spirit might be witnessed and confessed,- and one interest -men should be enlightened.⁷²

After the appearance of this review, Very was ignored for fifty years. Even the publication of the third edition of his poems in 1886 was slighted and attracted no attention whatsoever. In the year 1932, however, the first of the modern articles about Jones Very appeared. In a book by Gamaliel Bradford, Very is discussed at length both as a poet and a Christian. He is said to be a mediocre, if educated, essayist, and not much better as a poet, except when he is dealing with the thing most familiar to him, nature.⁷³

72. "Jones Very", The Atlantic Monthly, LII (July, 1883), p. 132.

73. Gamaliel Bradford, Biography of the Human Heart, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1932, pp. 198-200.

In addition to this, Bradford says Emerson's opinion of Very's poetry seems very valid, for he is not important for imagery and thought but for identification with and pure adoration of nature. He repeats Emerson's idea of Very's Orientalism and agrees that the Old Testament prophets can be compared most closely with the nineteenth century poet.

Carrying the criticism of Emerson a step farther, Bradford states that Very's mysticism is not the same brand as that of George Herbert, but is rather more like that of the "Divine Race" of German and Italian mystics of the thirteenth century. These men, too, were repulsive to the men of their age.

Very is defined by Bradford as the antithesis of material man. The poet is said to be average in content, but so excellent in inspiration as to be adoringly dull.⁷⁴

After Bradford's consideration of the poet there were several articles written by Yvor Winters and William Irving Bartlett, as well as one critical biography by the latter author.

To this date Jones Very is still a minor dust-covered figure of the nineteenth century Romantic period as far as most critics are concerned. Perhaps the current revival of certain American authors and their works will include some of the sonnets of Jones Very so that the American public will be able to view one of the most remarkable men of the last or any Christian century.

74. Ibid., pp. 196-202.

Conclusion

On the whole Jones Very was a poet who was merely average in his lyrical prowess, but who was certainly unusual for his claim that he had experienced an emotional meeting with God. This mystical element of his personal religion permeated some of his devout poetry but did not completely encompass all of his writing. His more common strong Puritan background formed the foundation for many of his sonnets and hymns. It was this more conventional side of himself that Very showed to his readers through his poetry. He chose many familiar Biblical references for subject matter for his verses. In addition to using direct scriptural references, Very used natural images to strengthen his religious beliefs.

This study has dealt with these few facets in the whole of Very's works. The material presented does not attempt to interpret the mystical poems or to compare them with any other works of poets similar to Very in emotional experience. It is merely a compendium of the ideas of a moral Puritan who happened to be a poet born a century later than most of his kind.

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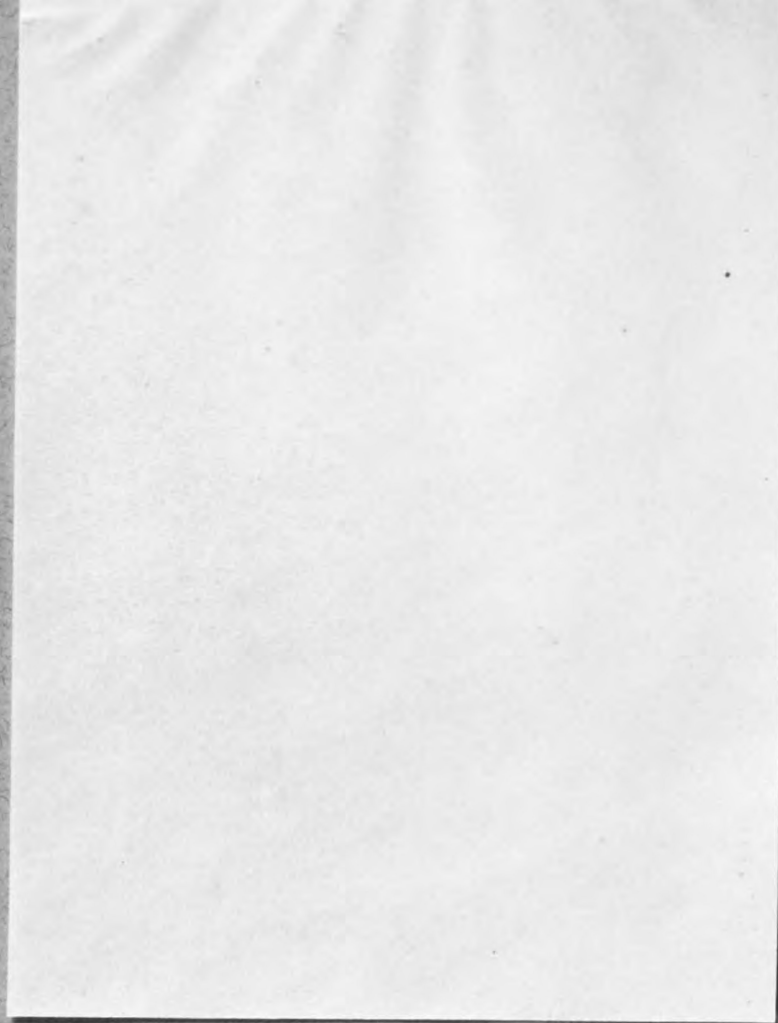
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