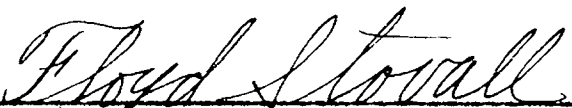



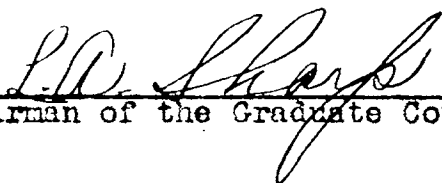
A STUDY OF THE POETRY OF EMILY DICKINSON

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A STUDY OF THE POETRY OF EMILY DICKINSON

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FOREWORD

This discussion purports to be an original study of the poetry of Emily Dickinson, a study based chiefly on the poems themselves and not on a digest of critical views and opinions. Since the biography by Martha Dickinson Bianchi seems to be the most authoritative, that source has been drawn upon chiefly for the biographical section. The review of one of the latest volumes, Unpublished Poems of Emily Dickinson, is given in a separate chapter in order that it may supplement and accentuate the findings of the first six chapters. Another reason for giving this volume a separate chapter is to set forth its significant contribution of a group of poems referring to the death of her lover and to the barrier between them.

The books and periodicals mentioned in the bibliography were read chiefly for purposes of checking and verification and not for a background against which to build the study proper. Certain information gained from these sources, however, may well be used to introduce the study of the poems themselves. First of all, let it be noted that there are no infallible sources of material concerning the most important facts of Emily Dickinson's life. Even Josephine Pollitt's book, Emily Dickinson: the Human Background of Her Poetry,

has been shown to contain certain discrepancies.¹

It is the purpose of this foreword to give certain facts about the different editions of her poetry and to tell something of the reception of her poems by the reading public at various stages. A brief analysis of some important phases of her personal life and a brief digest of certain critical material are included, also, by way of introduction.

Apparently only three of Emily Dickinson's poems were printed during her lifetime. The Springfield Republican printed one of her poems referred to as a "Valentine Extravaganza" on February 26, 1852. This poem was printed from a copy that had been given to J. G. Holland. Then on February 14, 1866, the same paper printed her poem, "A narrow fellow in the grass," under the title "The Snake." Her third poem published during her lifetime was included in Helen Hunt Jackson's A Masque of Poets, one of the volumes of the "No Name Series," published in the year 1878.²

After her death, three series of Emily Dickinson's poems, selected and arranged by Mabel Loomis Todd and Thomas Wentworth Higginson, were published in the years 1890, 1891, and 1896. Mr. Higginson wrote the introduction to the first series, and Mrs. Todd wrote the introduction to the second

¹Mary A. Bennett, "Note on Josephine Pollitt's 'Emily Dickinson: the Human Background of Her Poetry,'" American Literature, II (1930), 283-286.

²Harry Hayden Clark, Major American Poets, p. 893.

series. The third series seems to have been published without the assistance of Mr. Higginson. About four hundred fifty poems were included in these first three volumes. The Single Hound: Poems of a Lifetime was the next edition of her poems to be published. It was edited by Martha Dickinson Bianchi and published in the year 1914. This edition included one hundred forty-seven additional poems. In 1924 came the next edition of Emily Dickinson's poems under the title of The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson. This edition was also edited by Martha Dickinson Bianchi. Further Poems of Emily Dickinson was published in 1929, edited with introduction by M. D. Bianchi and Alfred Leete Hampson. This edition contained one hundred seventy-five poems not previously published. In 1930 Mrs. Bianchi and Mr. Hampson brought out the Centenary Edition to observe the centenary celebration of her birth year. This edition includes all the poems published up to the date of issue. It has the title The Poems of Emily Dickinson. The same two editors brought out Unpublished Poems of Emily Dickinson in 1935. It contains one hundred thirty-one poems not included in the Centenary Edition.³ Conrad Aiken brought out a special English edition in 1924 called Selected Poems of Emily Dickinson. Poems for Youth, edited by Alfred Leete

³Since I have completed this study, I have been informed that a new edition of the poems is now out.

Hampson, with foreword by May Lamberton Becker and illustrations by George and Doris Hauman, was published in 1934. It is the first important selection made from Emily Dickinson's poems for a special group of people. "Unpublished Poems of Emily Dickinson," published in the New England Quarterly in April, 1932, includes six poems sent to Mr. Higginson for criticism between the years 1862 and 1875.⁴

Besides the poems mentioned in the preceding paragraph, some mention should be made of the different publications of her letters. Two volumes of Letters of Emily Dickinson were published by Mabel Loomis Todd in 1894. A new and enlarged edition of this same work was published in New York in 1931. Two other books containing some of her letters have been published by her niece, Martha Dickinson Bianchi. One of these, published in 1932, is called Emily Dickinson Face to Face: Unpublished Letters, with Notes and Reminiscences; the other, published in 1924, is The Life and Letters of Emily Dickinson. All these works, both poems and letters, are described in the bibliography compiled by A. L. Hampson and published in the year 1930 with the title Emily Dickinson: a Bibliography.⁵

That her poems were at first well-received is shown by the fact that by 1900 over fifteen thousand copies of her

⁴Clark, Major American Poets, p. 894.

⁵W. F. Taylor, A History of American Letters, pp. 553-554.

works had been sold. This popularity was to be of short duration, however, since from 1897 to 1909, she seems to have disappeared from print. By 1912 she was classed in the Forum with two other "forgotten poetesses." Fewer than six hundred copies of The Single Hound were published.⁶ Just how complete this oblivion was by the year 1921 may be judged by the fact that in that year the combined sales of all her various editions of poems amounted to but two hundred and fourteen copies.⁷

Although her following was not great before 1924, she was read by a select few, whose interest grew steadily enough for one critic to make the following statement: "From the time of the publication of The Single Hound (1914), interest in Emily Dickinson grew steadily until in 1924 it was great enough to justify the publication of a volume of collected poems."⁸ One writer suggests that the reason the interest in the volume of 1914 was not greater is that "no volume of poems by a forgotten poet could be heard over the noise of the World War." He also accounts for "the oscillations of her popular repute" by saying that it followed "the superficial oscillations of popular taste." Before 1900 she was accepted

⁶P. H. Boynton, Literature and American Life, p. 690.

⁷Martha Dickinson Bianchi, Emily Dickinson Face to Face, pp. ix-x.

⁸Anna Mary Wells, "Early Criticism of Emily Dickinson," American Literature, I (1929), p. 258.

with the writers of "trioletts, villanelles, rondels, rondeaus";⁹ consequently, until 1900 discussion of her poetry in the magazines was "fairly plentiful."¹⁰

Although appreciation of The Single Hound was great enough to impel Amy Lowell to say that it was worth the other volumes put together,¹¹ a fresh demand did not arise for her writings until the advent of several large printings on both sides of the Atlantic of the Life and Letters, which was published in 1924. Interest was so great that the edition of poems published in that year sold rapidly: in fact, more than five thousand volumes were sold within a few months.¹²

The edition of 1929 was brought out after a thorough search of the papers and letters of three generations of Dickinsons, a search which resulted in the finding of poems omitted before the volume called Further Poems. Martha Dickinson Bianchi says that the critics were amazingly unanimous as to the value of this particular edition. She quotes the Saturday Review of Literature as saying that it was "Emily Dickinson's most beautiful and, from every standpoint, most important book." Perhaps the critical consensus of this time

⁹p. H. Boynton, Literature and American Life, p. 699.

¹⁰Anna Mary Wells, "Early Criticism of Emily Dickinson," American Literature, I (1929), p. 257.

¹¹Martha Dickinson Bianchi, Emily Dickinson Face to Face, p. xi.

¹²p. H. Boynton, Literature and American Life, p. 690.

is expressed by the New York Times in the statement, quoted by Mrs. Bianchi, that this particular edition placed "Emily Dickinson indubitably and permanently among the enduring poets of the English speaking race."¹³

Martha Dickinson Bianchi states further that six large trade editions and one handsome de luxe edition came out in the short time of six months. She quotes Louis Untermeyer as saying that the poems of this edition are "extraordinary as biography, magnificent as literature."¹⁴ The final proof of the popularity of the 1929 edition is found in the following quotation from Mrs. Bianchi's same book.

The Further Poems of Emily Dickinson appeared second on the list of 'best-sellers' (non-fiction) in the New York Herald Tribune 'Books,' April 7, 1929, and again April 14, and was also included in the list for May 5.¹⁵

The popularity of the 1929 edition set the stage "for the centenary year and the flood of books and articles which attested to the fact that Emily Dickinson was unforgettable."¹⁶ So well is her work known today that she is included not only in all college texts of American literature but also in high school texts. One recent high school text gives the following critical comment:

¹³Martha Dickinson Bianchi, Emily Dickinson Face to Face, pp. xvii-xviii.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. xviii.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. xix.

¹⁶P. H. Boynton, Literature and American Life, pp. 690-691.

At present a chorus of praise for her work is going up on both sides of the Atlantic. For instance, in his essay introducing her to English readers, Conrad Aiken called her poetry "perhaps the finest by a woman in the English language." Another English critic quoted that sentence with the enthusiastic comment, "I quarrel only with his 'perhaps.'" Other admirers consider her the greatest woman poet since Sappho. In the first enthusiasm at discovering the charm of her poetry, such praise is natural but perhaps slightly overstated. It seems entirely safe to say, however, that she will always rank as one of America's greatest women poets.¹⁷

As to the reception of her letters now and in former times, I quote the following comment from American Literature:

An unsigned review of the volume of letters in The Nation for December, 1894, epitomized the two attitudes toward her which even now divide critics. The reviewer asked whether "these letters are a precious legacy of genius for which we have to thank the scrupulous industry of Mrs. Todd and the generosity of Miss Lavinia Dickinson," or the "abnormal expression of a woman abnormal almost to the point of disease." The answer, he says, "involves an endless controversy about standards of taste."¹⁸

Alfred Kreyborg compares her with Blake in her "dynamic mysticism," and hails her as "the first and best of American woman poets." He admits all her faults but says, "In a world so full of perfect poets, let us have at least one irresistibly imperfect."¹⁹ Macgregor Jenkins remarks upon the depth to which her poetry penetrates. He says that her shortest poems are often the most profound in thought and that her commonest

¹⁷T. P. Cross, Reed Smith, and E. C. Stauffer, American Writers, p. 579.

¹⁸Anna Mary Wells, "Early Criticism of Emily Dickinson," American Literature, I (1929), p. 256.

¹⁹A. F. Kreyborg, A History of American Poetry, pp. 201-205.

statement is often the one most full of meaning. He attributes this depth of feeling to a profound understanding of "the human elements in the baffling equation of life," but admits that part of it may result from a "long and patient building up of literary technique." As to her so-called obscurity, he says that "the vastness of the thought she wished to express defied, sometimes, the limits of her cryptic pen."²⁰ He states further:

The world is fortunate that she has left it a priceless legacy in her poems. They should be read with reverent sympathy. No truth or beauty will be found in them for the reader who regards them as the exotic and morbid utterance of a saddened recluse. Their transcendent quality lies in the fact that they interpret for us a life so near the verities that we are tempted to regard it as beyond the pale of common humanity.²¹

Mr. Jenkins says also that although it is for her poetry that she will be remembered, "other phases of her beautiful and sympathetic character are vastly important and the world is in danger of overlooking them." He attributes her achieving artistic greatness to the fact that she was "fundamentally human and sympathetic with everyday human life and experience."²² She loved all things that she touched and handled. The flowers, the birds, her home, her garden, her friends, the children she knew--all these were part of an organic whole. Even the

²⁰Macgregor Jenkins, Emily Dickinson Friend and Neighbor, pp. 115-116.

²¹Ibid., pp. 149-150.

²²Ibid., p. 97.

cats washing themselves in the sunshine and the bobolinks and butterflies of the fields were "fellow residents of Amherst and kin to her in her world behind the hedge." She "had created for herself a spiritual solar system in which she lived and everything in it was important and full of meaning."²³ Gamaliel Bradford says that God was not anything tangible to her, but that He made "the vague, unquiet futility of common life" bearable to "her restless and inquiring spirit."²⁴

Professor Whicher warns the readers of Emily Dickinson's poetry against trying to make her life "fit the pattern" suggested by her poems. He says that the poet herself "protested that she was not to be identified with the speaker in the first person of her verses."²⁵ However, most critics consider her love affair the central experience of her life. As to her using it for poetic purposes, Miss Taggard says:

In order to give it extended reality, to solidify and ramify what was left, Emily began to write about her love. The weight of years fossilized the few facts: so little had happened that she dwelt on each morsel with lonely harrowing detail. Emily grew into a miser gloating over a secret treasure. She confessed herself

²³ibid., pp. 135-136.

²⁴Gamaliel Bradford, "Emily Dickinson," Portraits of American Women, p. 233.

²⁵G. F. Whicher, "Emily Dickinson's Earliest Friend," American Literature, VI (1934), p. 3.

strictly, lest a grain be lost. She grew impatient of any speech or attitude except the gaunt lovely honesty of great solitude.²⁶

In this great solitude letters were her only intercourse with the outside world. One critic has said that "letters were to Emily the doorbell she could answer, who answered none, the hand she could take, who took none, the face she could see in the full light of lamps, who saw none, in her later years, to decipher."²⁷

Professor Boynton points out that perhaps it was this solitary existence and "the consciousness of not writing for immediate publication" that made her heedless of certain matters of form. Since she was interested mainly in thought content, she chose "a few simple forms and was chiefly attentive to rhythms and stanzaic patterns."²⁸ Nineteenth-century criticism seems to have placed the emphasis on this intellectual content and not on the melody of her verse or on its unorthodox qualities. However, one critic, writing in The Atlantic Monthly in 1892, said that he could find no excuse for her "impossible rhyme, involved significance, and

²⁶Genevieve Taggard, Life and Mind of Emily Dickinson, p. 299.

²⁷Virginia Moore, "Emily Dickinson," Distinguished Women Writers, pp. 152-153.

²⁸P. H. Boynton, Literature and American Life, p. 697.

incoherence and shapelessness."²⁹ The best defense of her unorthodox use of words is summed up in the following statement by G. B. Sherrer: "She insisted that her choice and order of words were completely satisfying to her sense of expression and therefore were the right and inevitable symbols of her thought."³⁰

It will be seen from this brief digest of critical opinion that the critics are, to use the words of Mrs. Bianchi, "amazingly unanimous" in praising her work and in explaining away or tolerating any fault of technique. Justification of their high praise, I believe, will be found in the study which follows.

²⁹Quoted by Anna Mary Wells in "Early Criticisms of Emily Dickinson," American Literature, I (1929), pp. 253-254.

³⁰"Study of Unusual Verb Constructions in the Poems of Emily Dickinson," American Literature, VII (1935), pp. 37-46.

CHAPTER I
BIOGRAPHICAL

Amy Lowell has said that there is very little to tell about Emily Dickinson's life and that, in a sense, she had no life except that of the imagination.¹ True as that statement is, still the few external facts to which we have access serve as a foundation upon which may be seen to rest the major aspects of her whole poetical structure; consequently, the findings of this chapter will serve as a basic network upon which will be woven the various chapters of this study.

Emily Norcross Dickinson was born December 11, 1830, in Amherst, Massachusetts. She had a sister named Lavinia and a brother named Austin, both younger than she. Even as a child, Emily was very fond of all the members of her family; and as she grew older, she felt bound to them by a closer tie than is customary in most families. At a very early age she manifested her feeling of oneness with nature. She delighted to go berrying and chestnutting, not so much for the purpose of obtaining the fruit and nuts as for the excitement of being in the woods. The finding of a bird's nest, the search for eggs in the big family barn, and the picking of daffodils under the apple trees in the family orchard were some of the innocent pleasures that she had during a

¹Amy Lowell, Poetry and Poets, p. 89.

sheltered, happy childhood.²

Very early she manifested a rather precocious mentality. At fourteen she had already become interested in the politics of the day and was an ardent Whig enthusiast. No village happening was too insignificant to escape her notice. She found time for hours of practice at her beloved piano and liked immensely her singing school lessons. The collecting of specimens of all kinds of wild flowers was a favorite pastime. She learned to embroider book marks and mottoes. In her teens she enjoyed memorizing the rather sentimental favorite poems of the time, such as "The Grave of Bonaparte," "Lancer's Quickstep," and "Maiden, Weep No More." Cooking was one of her accomplishments, although she left most of the kitchen work to her more practical-minded sister, Lavinia. Letter writing was always a delight to her, a pastime into which she put much of the details of her happy home life. Her Christmas presents were always described with minute care to her close friends, and her occasional visits to places of historical interest like Bunker Hill were the subjects of lengthy letters to her favored correspondent of the time.³ Josephine Pollitt says that she was always "social rather than domestic."⁴

²Martha Dickinson Bianchi, The Life and Letters of Emily Dickinson, pp. 12-16.

³Ibid., pp. 17-18.

⁴Emily Dickinson, p. 38.

Algebra, Euclid, ecclesiastical history, and arithmetic were some of the subjects that she had to study to prepare for entrance to South Hadley Seminary, where she matriculated in the fall of 1847. Her puritan father saw to it that she had all the customary fundamentals of the education of the day, and she always reacted favorably to the suggestions of her teachers. Her rather wistful delight in the mystery of life manifested itself in her awe of the things she found in books as well as in the joy that she found in the things of the natural world. Although her childhood seems to have been spent in a perfectly conventional manner, still her mode of expression was always individual. Her niece says of the letters which Emily wrote in her girlhood, "Something of the later dissenting Emily is foreshadowed in every gesture of her early mind."⁵

It is interesting to note that the main purpose of South Hadley Seminary was to provide wives for the foreign missionaries of the time. The entrance requirements were rather severe because of the many pupils seeking admittance. Emily passed her examinations quite successfully, although not without considerable nervous strain. She did her share of the domestic work at the seminary, as every girl was required to do. This she seemed to enjoy doing, because she liked the

⁵Bianchi, The Life and Letters of Emily Dickinson, pp. 19-21.

efforts of her teachers and associates to make the seminary a united, happy family. Chemistry and physiology she found interesting, but her real success came with her beginning English composition the second term of her stay. Her compositions were always original and picturesque in style. Rhetoric and astronomy also received due attention. The rules of the seminary were rather severe--severe enough, it seems to the modern mind, to curb and repress every natural impulse of youth.⁶

One incident that happened during the year at South Hadley shows her rugged integrity of character even at that early age. The head teacher announced that Christmas Day was to be a day of fasting and meditation. All the girls of the school except Emily and her roommate indicated their willingness to spend the day thus by rising to their feet. After a severe lecture for this lack of piety in her two charges, the teacher then said that if any pupil cared to indicate a desire to spend the day in any other fashion, she would do so by rising. Emily alone stood up. She then took the stage home, much to the dismay of her family; but matters were arranged, and she was allowed to return to the seminary.⁷ Josephine Pollitt comments upon the incident as follows:

Henceforward, though she was not quite certain to

⁶Ibid., pp. 22-25.

⁷Ibid., pp. 25-26.

what purpose her life was tending, she knew what she must not, could not make of it. Not for her the way of the reformer, the uplifter, the doer of good. Throughout her girlhood, one impulse had been in the ascendancy. She would keep her free spirit unbound. Mt. Holyoke had shown her capacity for holding to a purpose.⁸

In May she was forced to leave school because of a severe cough, but she was able to return for the summer term. The next year she re-entered Amherst Academy, where she entered with zest into all the social life of the school. She was humorist of the comic column of her school paper and delighted her fellow pupils with her clever observations. Her impromptu stories were special favorites with her friends and often sent them off "into fits of laughter," according to her biographer. Often she appalled her elders by quoting the Bible and adapting it to various secular occasions. She never went back to South Hadley, as her father decided to keep her at home for a year under his own tutorship. Nothing out of the ordinary, as far as outward events go, happened during the next few years of her life.⁹

From the age of eighteen to twenty-three, her life was crowded with social activities and all the normal interests of young womanhood. The attending of lectures was very fashionable at that time. Emily heard such men as John Lord and Richard Dana. Besides lectures, there were the Wednesday

⁸Emily Dickinson, p. 51.

⁹Bianchi, The Life and Letters of Emily Dickinson, pp. 27-32.

evening prayer meetings, the Sewing Society meetings, and the protracted meetings in midwinter. Emily did not enjoy these religious activities of the church so much as she enjoyed the annual Cattle Show. The military music of that great occasion, the addresses by distinguished people, the big parade, the ploughing match, and the exhibition of horses all delighted her immensely. The social activities of Commencement Week were also an enjoyable part of her life at this period. She liked to see the Governor and his staff in uniforms and to hear the elegant quotations of classics. Even after she retired from all other social functions, she would occasionally leave her seclusion long enough to attend some Commencement function.¹⁰

While visiting in Philadelphia one spring, she fell in love with a man, presumably a married man, who evidently would have been the ideal mate for her if her high sense of duty had not forbidden her destroying another woman's happiness to gain her own. She quickly returned to her home and would not listen to the man's pleadings when he came to visit her in the absence of her father and mother. Although her niece does not reveal the identity of the man, she does state that he could not endure his usual routine of life for long after the break with Emily and that he took his wife and child to a distant city. Finally he died prematurely, never becoming reconciled

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 33-42.

to the loss of the presence of his loved one. Emily kept silent about the affair, and the only visible sign of its mighty influence was the picture that she kept in a heavy oval frame of gold hanging on the wall of her room. Once, however, she urged a friend to name a son after the man she loved and took great pleasure in calling the young boy by name. Her father's home became her sanctuary, and she began to refuse to see callers.¹¹ Louis Untermeyer points out that there are really four different theories as to the identity of the man: namely, the Taggard theory that he was George Gould, an Amherst undergraduate; the Pollitt theory that he was Edward Bissell Hunt, major in the United States army; the Bianchi theory that he was a minister, probably the Reverend Charles Wadsworth; and the Todd theory that there was actually no man at all but a dramatized sense of loss.¹²

For understanding she turned most to her brother's wife, the "Sister Sue" of her letters, who lived just across the lawn from her father's home. In Life and Letters we find quoted from the preface to the volume of her verse called The Single Hound this excellent description of her at the time:

It has been told often of her that she wore white exclusively. She had said herself in one of her letters

¹¹Ibid., pp. 46-48.

¹²"Thoughts after a Centenary," Saturday Review of Literature, VII (1931), 905-906.

to an inquisitive friend who had never yet seen her and importuned for a hint of her outward self,--that her eyes were the color of the sherry left in the glass by him to whom she wrote. Her hair was of that same warm bronze--chestnut hue that Titian immortalized, and she wore it parted on her brow and low in her neck, but always half covered by a velvet snood of the same tint. ... She had a dramatic way of throwing up her hands at the climax of a story, or one of her own flashes. It was entirely spontaneous; her spirit seemed merely playing through her body as the aurora borealis through the darkness of a summer night. ... Fascination was her element. She was not daily bread; she was star dust. Her solitude made her and was part of her.¹³

Her retirement from outside social activities and public appearances was gradual at first; finally all other visits except those to the home of her brother definitely ceased. Her flowers and her garden became her chief interests. Sometimes in winter she would sit up at night to keep her flowers from freezing. She had a conservatory that opened off the family dining room, a conservatory where she kept plants of unusual varieties, such as a rare lily, a resurrection calla, or a box of oxalis. Her brother's children, too, were a great delight to her. She was a child with them and stirred their young imaginations with her happy stories and her unusual interest in all the natural life about her. The animals at the huge barn charmed Emily; she observed daily the doings of the cows, horses, pigs, hens, and pigeons kept there.¹⁴

She sent many brief notes to her brother's family, notes

¹³Bianchi, The Life and Letters of Emily Dickinson, pp. 49-51.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 52-55.

that expressed her varying moods in every possible phase. To her brother's children she wrote, "Emily knows a man who drives a coach like a thimble and turns the wheel all day with his heel. His name is Bumble Bee!" To her brother's wife she wrote, "A fresh morning of life and its impregnable chances and the dew for you!" She often sent people quite humorous notes, like the following one sent to her nephew after he had been severely stung by a hornet: "Dear Ned--You know I never did like you in those 'yellow-jackets'!" Always the notes were brief, such as "Thanks, Sue, but not tonight. Further nights.--Emily."¹⁵

Her seclusion did not make her gloomy. The chosen few whom she entertained in her home found her a joyous companion. She often did all sorts of antics during some indoor games in the long winter evenings, and her improvised piano numbers always were a source of merriment. One of the latter she called "the Devil being particularly applauded." Emily's Sister Sue kept every piece of writing that Emily sent her over the long years, because she recognized Emily's genius.¹⁶

In 1862 there began her literary friendship with Colonel Thomas Wentworth Higginson. Until 1868 they knew each other only through their letters, since he never visited Amherst and she never left her home. Finally he did go to Amherst to

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 56-62.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 63-64.

visit her, and they became close friends until her death. Other friends of her later years were Helen Hunt Jackson and Maria Whitney. Some of her favorite authors were George Eliot, Tennyson, Browning, Plato, Poe, Keats, and Emerson.¹⁷

Her father's death in 1879 was a severe blow to her mind. Her faith in life and her sense of certainty were never quite recovered. The death of her mother and her youngest nephew, Gilbert, caused her to spend days of stricken silence. It was during this time of grief that she turned more and more to her work for consolation. She worked "to keep the awe away" and for "a bleak redeeming," and not for publication. She rarely left the house after the death of her father, although she still sustained her interest in plants. She always wore white and has been likened to a white moth flitting about among her flowers. Her timidity and the New England reserve of her family kept anybody from knowing much about her writing. She was left alone to write, select, and tie up her poems in packages.¹⁸

In June, 1884, she was stricken suddenly, as her father had been; and although she lived for two years more, she was never really well again. She was cared for by her sister and an Irish servant. During her illness she still sent the penciled notes to her Sister Sue. One of them read as follows:

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 71-80.

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 83-86.

"You must let me go first, Sue, because I live in the sea always now, and know the road." On May 16, 1836, she died. At the simple home funeral, Colonel Higginson read a poem of Emily Bronte's, the last poem that she wrote. Colonel Higginson told the group assembled that the poem on immortality was a favorite of Emily Dickinson, "who has just put it on--if she could ever have been said to have put it off." Laborers bore her white coffin on an improvised bier of boughs covered by a pall of blue sand-violets across the fields to the cemetery where her father and mother were buried. In the old mahogany bureau in her room were found her friends' letters and her poems in manuscripts. She asked that these be burned. Her family burned the letters, but they could not destroy her poems, because they knew that she had something to give to the world. Thus it was that only after the death of "this white-robed little poet-philosopher, mystic, flitting about the old house under the tall pines," were her poems published. Her brother's wife wrote the following words of appreciation after Emily's death:

To her, life was rich, and all aglow with God and immortality. With no creed, no formulated faith, hardly knowing the names of dogmas, she walked this life with the gentleness and reverence of old saints, with the firm step of martyrs who sing while they suffer. How better note the flight of this "soul of fire in a shell of pearl" than by her own words?

Morns like these, we parted;
Noons like these, she rose;

Fluttering first, then firmer,
To her fair repose.¹⁹

By way of summary, let us see how the facts stated in this chapter account, at least in part, for the poetic genius of Emily Dickinson. First of all, the family into which she was born was somewhat over-refined and over-civilized. Born with a natural sense of integrity, she very early in her life began to see the weaknesses and failings of the society of her time; this disillusionment led her to turn more and more to an unassuming simple life and to nature. Since she could not find in the society of her contemporaries the companionship which she sought, she gradually grew more and more to live in the world of the imagination. So surfeited was she with the religion and the philosophy of her parents, a religion and a philosophy that she could not accept, that she was forced to leave it and launch out for herself in order to maintain her native integrity of character.

Her unfortunate love affair proved a powerful force in her poetic life only in the sense that it is indicative of the frustration of her physical desires. Such repression of the physical creative force caused a heightened creative spiritual force. Since her natural physical desires had to be suppressed, she grew more and more to readjust her sense of values. Without the physical love and companionship of her beloved, the demands of society seemed frivolous, since

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 100-105.

certain conventions may be endured only with the need for companionship and love satisfied. The repression of her physical desires also caused her to be over-sensitive and to feel that she had nothing in common with most of the people around her. Hers was a life of renunciation--conscious renunciation; where around her could she find a kindred soul?

What was there left, then, for her? There was left the world of the spirit with all its mysteries of life, death, and the emotions. There was left the world of nature, nature as she found it in her own small world. There was the world of self-expression through her chosen medium. Since she felt that she had no kindred spirits to understand her writing, it is no wonder that she did not desire publication. She was not of the world in which she lived; naturally she could not write for that of which she was not a part. In matters of diction she became meticulous because in her solitude such matters assumed perhaps undue importance. In order to stay alive, the human spirit must feel the importance of some activities; if those activities are not those of making and providing physical comforts, then the making and providing of spiritual satisfaction looms greater in proportion, whether that spiritual satisfaction may come from the choice of exact words, the search after God, the evaluating of human emotions, or the contemplation of nature.

Since heredity and circumstances are the two physical forces that create human beings, and since the mysteries of

heredity are too great to be probed, it shall be the purpose of this study to show that her treatment of each of her major themes evolved from the circumstances that shaped her life.

CHAPTER II

DICTION

Readers are first attracted to Emily Dickinson's poetry by her apt use of words. She recognized their importance and experimented constantly to find the exact word to fit her style of expression. Perhaps the best way to show her recognition of the vital quality of words and their power to influence for good or evil would be to quote two of her concisely-worded short poems on the subject.

Could any mortal lip divine
The undeveloped freight
Of a delivered syllable,
'Twould crumble with the weight.¹

A word is dead
When it is said,
Some say.

I say it just
Begins to live
That day.²

Since she wrote only for the joy of self-expression and not for publication, she would naturally spend hours, if necessary, in finding the exact word to suit her idea. Something had to seem important to her, and circumstances had

¹M. D. Bianchi and A. L. Hampson, The Poems of Emily Dickinson, (Boston, 1929) p. 42. All references to the poems, unless otherwise stated, are to this volume.

²p. 45.

decreed that the something be of a mental or spiritual quality. She had a natural love of exact words inherited, perhaps, from scholarly forbears; it was natural, then, that she should turn to exact self-expression for a "bleak redeeming."

Her wealth of spiritual resources and her brilliant imagination required a style of equal force and charm. This style she acquired by practicing economy and exactness in her choice of words. Part of this practice consisted in the making of definitions. Although her most charming definitions are of things eternal, she also explains her conception of various human experiences and natural phenomena with a conciseness that equals and perhaps surpasses the characteristic terseness of her other poems.

Life is defined as "a brief campaign of sting and sweet"³ and as "this brief tragedy of flesh."⁴ Experience had taught her those definitions. Death is "the laying off an overcoat of clay"⁵ and "a wind with fingers" that goes through the garden of humanity making people drop "like petals from a rose."⁶ These definitions are peculiar in that they foreshadow her almost morbid speculations about death, the only agent that could possibly restore her

³p. 59.

⁵p. 170.

⁴p. 137.

⁶p. 178.

lover to her. Heaven is defined as follows:

Heaven is what I cannot reach!
The apple on the tree,
Provided it do hopeless hang,
That "heaven" is, to me.⁷

The hopelessness of her being with her lover in this world looks as a shadowy background for this definition of heaven.

One of her best definitions is that of eternity.

As if the sea should part
And show a further sea--
And that a further, and the three
But a presumption be
Of periods of seas
Unvisited of shores--
Themselves the verge of seas to be--
Eternity is these.⁸

Similarly she defines the word forever. It is composed of an infinite number of "Nows," with the months dissolving in further months and the years exhaling in years.⁹

Still more concisely worded is her definition of Hades. It is nothing more nor less than "the Phosphorous of God" that "all rogues shall have their part in."¹⁰ A poet she defines as follows:

This was a Poet--it is that
Distills amazing sense
From ordinary meanings,
And attars so immense
From the familiar species
That perished by the door,

⁷p. 42.

⁹p. 237.

⁸p. 374.

¹⁰p. 258.

We wonder it was not ourselves
Arrested it before.¹¹

Other spiritual things that she defines are faith, exhilaration, glory, hope, prayer, and fame. Faith is "the pierless bridge" joining the known and unseen and bearing the soul "as bold as it were rocked in steel."¹² So charming is the definition of exhilaration that it must be given entire:

Exhilaration is the Breeze
That lifts us from the ground,
And leaves us in another place
Whose statement is not found;
Returns us not, but after time
We soberly descend,
A little newer for the term
Upon enchanted ground.¹³

From the chapter on biography, it will be seen that hers was a vacillating spirit whose chief moment of exhilaration, perhaps, was the brief time that she spent with her lover.

Glory is "that bright tragic thing" that gives power for an instant to some unknown person and then gently replaces itself with oblivion.¹⁴ "Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul" and never stops singing in any ordinary storm.¹⁵ Again it is "a subtle glutton" that feeds upon lovely things and yet retains perfect abstinence, because "whatsoever is consumed, the same amounts

¹¹p. 281.

¹⁴p. 228.

¹²p. 341.

¹⁵p. 17.

¹³p. 225.

remain."¹⁶ Prayer is the implement by which men reach into the unknown and "fling their speech by means of it in God's ear." To complete the apparatus of prayer, God must hear the words of the petitioner.¹⁷ Fame is a "fickle food" of which men eat and die. One may eat only once of this "shifting palate."¹⁸ Thus we see that many of her words are ordinary household words embellished with a sort of halo thrown over them by the power of her vivid imagination and the force of her keen insight into the affairs of the world.

Various human experiences other than those already mentioned are defined. Perhaps the best definitions in this group are those of parting, remorse, renunciation, presentiment, melody, and experience itself. "Parting is all we know of heaven, and all we need of hell."¹⁹ "Remorse is memory awake." When one is in the throes of remorse, the past is set before him, and he is condemned to consider it over and over. Not even God can free one from its clutches.²⁰ "Renunciation is the choosing against itself, itself to justify unto itself."²¹ "Presentiment is that long shadow on the lawn indicative that

¹⁶p. 42.

¹⁹p. 45.

¹⁷p. 39.

²⁰p. 33.

¹⁸p. 223.

²¹p. 362.

suns go down."²² "The definition of melody is that definition is none."²³ Experience is "the angled road" over which the mind travels.²⁴

The best definitions of natural phenomena are those of nature, morning, sleep, winter, and a snake. At least four different statements are made in the definition of nature. She defines it as that which we see, that which we hear, as Heaven itself, and as "what we know" but cannot express.²⁵ Morning is defined by telling what it means to various people and objects. To the farmer it means milking time; to the Apennines it means dawn; to the lover it means just chance; to the beloved it means just revelation.²⁶ "Sleep is supposed to be the shutting of the eye," but it is really the path to eternity.²⁷ Winter is "the Revelations of the book whose Genesis is June."²⁸ "A snake is summer's treason, and guile is where it goes."²⁹ Perhaps the peculiar thing about all these aptly-worded definitions is the predominant note of her probing into spiritual experiences and her turning from man to nature for companionship.

The foregoing definitions show how Emily Dickinson experimented with words for the sheer joy of finding those that

²²p. 101.

²⁶p. 234.

²³p. 310.

²⁷p. 173.

²⁴p. 283.

²⁸p. 123.

²⁵p. 233.

²⁹p. 118.

were peculiarly her own. In her introduction to the Poems, Martha Lickinson Bianchi has this to say about her diction:

Emily's affair with words was her own. She read the dictionary. Nobody ever remembers seeing her consult it. Of all beings she was the most tacit, as of all beings she was the most regardless of, or exasperated by, detail. Even "too much of proof affronts belief" to her. Nothing was ever terse enough for her. Her spontaneity in words pries under accepted usage or sets fire to it. She endows the inanimate with an animate verb at will, speaks of the Sun "busy with majesty," or of the day after a tragedy that "unrolled as huge as yesterdays in pairs." ... She juggled with words as one might play with unset gems, more for sheer joy of them than adaptation to her own emergency, until one set at a peculiar angle of her line told her by a flash that it was hers.³⁰

Especially did she like to "juggle" the parts of speech, to give them unusual meanings, or to make them over entirely. A poignant adjective here and there would change the whole meaning of a sentence, she knew, and she never rested until she found exactly the right one for the thought she had in mind. The position of the adjective, too, was important, and potency of meaning was never sacrificed for the sake of clearness. For instance, she speaks of "some ancient brooch to match the grandmamma, staid sleeping there."³¹ Jehovah smiled, and saints showed their dimples upon finding that one so simple as to believe that she might have anything she asked for in prayer should still be extant.³² It seems to me unusual

³⁰pp. vi-vii.

³¹p. 10.

³²p. 21.

for her to use the adjective interdicted instead of using forbidden to describe the ground behind the hill near her home.³³ Another unusual construction is that in which she speaks of "the utmost" as a garment.³⁴ The thin cotton fabric known as dimity is used as an adjective to describe the convictions that some people have, people who are over-refined.³⁵ The adjective dimity gives a wholesome, homespun twist to the entire thought structure of the line and makes for effectiveness. Thus is the process often reversed in her poetry, and a noun is made into an adjective.

Time's "consummate plush" softens the woes of early childhood and makes them appear as nothing when compared with the "bleaker griefs" of later life.³⁶ The use of the adjective consummate in the sense of perfected expresses as a complement to the main idea the thought that time softens and heals all. The adjective mere is used uniquely in the poem that begins "Dear March, come in!" Since the arrival of March, trifles had looked "trivial" to her, and blame was

just as dear as praise
And praise as mere as blame.³⁷

Poignantly full of her deep sympathy for all life is the line that says it was magnanimous of the bird to sing unto the

33p. 42.

36p. 61.

34p. 46.

37p. 112.

35p. 58.

stone that was coming to take its life.³⁸ In addition to giving the necessary number of syllables, the word magnanimous is more suggestive than its synonym noble and creates a better effect. Her imagination runs riot when she thinks of some mitred afternoon when

simple you and I
Present our meek escutcheon
And claim the rank to die!³⁹

Mitred is rarely used in the sense of privileged, as it is used in this particular poem. Usually one has the feeling that no other adjective except the one she chose could possibly be adequate, as in her use of the adjective granite to describe the lip of one dead trying to thank one alive for giving his favorite robin a crumb.⁴⁰ I know of no other poet who would have described the inhabitants of Heaven as having mechlin frames like the moth.⁴¹ The use of mechlin for lace-like is, so far as I know, unique. So stimulating are her vivid adjectives that she enables us to see things in an unusual coloring and to remark with her,

How powerful the stimulus
Of an hermetic mind!⁴²

Equally vivid are her powerful verbs. She speaks of her little boat that toddled down the bay, only to be lost because of a greedy wave.⁴³ The word toddled is more consistent with

38p. 151.

39p. 157.

40p. 173.

41p. 181.

42p. 231.

43p. 13.

the size of her boat and the unsteadiness of its motion than an ordinary verb would have been. She uses the verb repudiate in an interesting way to suggest the withdrawal of the soul from the body when the light of the spirit has been sufficiently refined from the ores of the body.⁴⁴ Of a mirthful one she wonders what would happen "should the glee glaze."⁴⁵ This suggestion of the rigidity of death indicates her morbid interest in all the accoutrements of death. How could she have described the effect of a tempest better than to say that it mashed the air, while "a black hid heaven and earth from view"?⁴⁶ Once while she was writing a letter to her beloved, the old clock kept neighing "day."⁴⁷ She speaks of time as passing by saying that it gurgles on.⁴⁸ These last two verbs suggest the even tenor of her days, nearly all of them spent in placid domesticity. Instead of saying that one had died a year before, she says that he "went up a year this evening!"⁴⁹ This verb expresses her faith and her belief about the function of death, perhaps not so much her belief about the function of death as her hope as to what it might bring her. She uses for the verb called the interesting synonym denominated. To show its full effectiveness, I quote the entire stanza.

44p. 18.

47p. 140.

45p. 39.

48p. 187.

46p. 77.

49p. 190.

A throe upon the features,
 A hurry in the breath,
 An ecstasy of parting
Denominated "Death."⁵⁰

Denominated was chosen there for purposes of alliteration as well as for its more suggestive quality.

Her use of nouns perhaps can best be set forth by quoting such phrases as "convulsion playing round,"⁵¹ "the rusty ammunition of the past,"⁵² "an everywhere of silver,"⁵³ "passing pomposity,"⁵⁴ "how dreary marbles after playing Crown,"⁵⁵ "neighborhoods of pause,"⁵⁶ "prone to periphrasis,"⁵⁷ "could a Shrewd advise me,"⁵⁸ "the overtakelessness" of the dead,⁵⁹ and "a glee possesseth me."⁶⁰

Her exclamatory words are sometimes unusual, as when she says, "Glee, the great storm is over!"⁶¹ The past participle is used effectively in the following lines:

For heaven is a different thing
Conjectured, and waked sudden in,
 And might o'erwhelm me so!⁶²

50p. 193.

57p. 209.

51p. 20.

58p. 237.

52p. 57.

59p. 254.

53p. 78.

60p. 279.

54p. 87.

61p. 4.

55p. 163.

62p. 4.

56p. 193.

If a split infinitive suited her more than an undivided one, she did not hesitate to use it, as when she questions,

Have not each one of us the right
To stealthily belong?⁶³

She uses the infinitive to venerate in a significant way in giving a recipe for adding importance and respect to one's days. An ordinary day can be made to seem important if one thinks that it has the power to take away his life or to see his life end.⁶⁴ She uses to punctuate in the sense of to add color in the following lines:

The dying need but little, dear,--
A glass of water's all,
A flower's unobtrusive face
To punctuate the wall.⁶⁵

Although the use of the infinitive to punctuate in this particular sense seems a bit whimsical to associate with the serious subject of dying, still its very unusualness adds to the poetic quality of the verse.

I have heard it charged that her peculiar sentence arrangement often left her meaning obscure and her verse form rough and blunt. In answer to the latter charge, I quote her niece again, who says that

to regulate Emily would be to
quench her spark of heavenly fire. She wrote as she
talked: to one familiar with her speech the inflections
of her voice repeat themselves always in her poems.

63p. 48.

64p. 43.

65p. 208.

While the technically inclined find the dissection of her patterns absorbing, her poems belong to a vastly greater number who care only for their significance--their incredible quintessence--their dynamic power in the expression of what all feel "but have no art to say." For Emily was as universal as individual.⁶⁶

I do not find that the charge of recurrent obscurity of meaning can be justified. To the sympathetic reader of average intelligence, her meaning is usually entirely apparent. Occasionally one does find a poem with a puzzling passage. One example of such obscurity is found in the poem "She rose to his requirement." The theme of the poem is the wife's sacrificing her interests for those of her husband. The last two stanzas are as follows:

If aught she missed in her new day
Of amplitude, or awe,
Or first prospective, or the gold
In using wore away,

It lay unmentioned, as the sea
Develops pearl and weed,
But only to himself is known
The fathoms they abide.⁶⁷

The antecedent of the pronoun himself is a little troublesome. At first glance, one would think that it refers to the husband, but that construction is not logical. Then one sees that the antecedent of himself is the sea that develops both pearl and weed within its bosom but keeps secret their presence. A little patience and a little attention to detail will unravel

⁶⁶p. viii.

⁶⁷p. 136.

any such seeming difficulty.

She uses much figurative language. Quite frequently she deals in paradox, too, as in such statements as,

Much madness is divinest sense
To a discerning eye:
Much sense the starkest madness.⁶⁸

Such epigrams as "at least to know the worst is sweet" are numerous.⁶⁹ Her similes indicate the grandeur of her imagination.

The thought beneath so slight a film
Is more distinctly seen,--
As laces just reveal the surge,
Or mists the Apennine.⁷⁰

Death is like the insect
Menacing the tree
Competent to kill it,
But decoyed may be.⁷¹

A bird is of all beings
The likeliest to the dawn.⁷²

Longing is like the seed
That wrestles in the ground.⁷³

Metaphors receive their share of attention. Life is a still volcano:⁷⁴ Death is "the postponeless creature."⁷⁵

Perhaps her choice of words was influenced most by her

⁶⁸p. 7.

⁷²p. 284.

⁶⁹p. 4.

⁷³p. 363.

⁷⁰p. 21.

⁷⁴p. 292.

⁷¹p. 199.

⁷⁵p. 331.

not intending her poems for publication. She was content to find the words that suited the thoughts she had, the words that were consistent with her individual being. The following poem sets forth her reason for not wanting her poems published, at least not in her lifetime.

Publication is the auction
Of the mind of man,
Poverty be justifying
For so foul a thing.

Possibly,--but we would rather
From our garret go
White unto the White creator,
Than invest our snow.

Thought belongs to Him who gave it--
Then to him who bear
Its corporeal illustration.
Sell the Royal air
In the parcel,--be the merchant
Of the Heavenly Grace,
But reduce no human spirit
To disgrace of price!⁷⁶

It was seen in the chapter on biography that early in life Emily Dickinson resolved to keep her spirit free and to let her individual personality develop as it would. This resolution accounts, to some degree at least, for her individuality of style in the matter of the choice of words. Her life of solitude gave her ample time for experimenting with words to find the exact one she needed. Her natural integrity kept her from seeking the ornamental word instead of the one that would honestly express her thought. Her love of nature caused her to turn to it for many of her comparisons. Her

⁷⁶p. 277.

literary independence caused her to twist the laws of grammar to suit herself. Her frustrated love affair caused her to choose words that refer to death and things of the spirit, since her thoughts turned to the next world as the only hope, and that a slight one, of being reunited with her lover. Often she twists thoughts to the idea of death and the resurrection, and to such emotional experiences as renunciation. Her high spirit often led her to whimsicality and to light treatment of serious subjects. All these circumstantial influences colored the words she chose, since words are instruments of expressing thought and are fashioned by the weight that they carry.

CHAPTER III

RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY

Religion was the very passion of Emily Dickinson's being. The source of her religion is two-fold: the teachings of the church and the promptings of her individual spirit. She did not accept many of the literal teachings of the straight-laced Puritans; yet it seems to me that she took those same teachings and synchronized them with the life of the spirit within her. Hers was the true interpretation of religious symbols often taken too literally, I believe. Each Biblical teaching is animated with her sparkling imagination until it seems strange and unorthodox to coarser spirits. I do not believe that she would have admitted getting her basic religious ideas from the orthodox church, little rebel that she was, and yet the teachings of the church served as a nucleus around which she built her own happy framework. She knew that all was well with her spirit and felt the glory of some supreme experience; further than that she did not consider it necessary to be too analytical.

To substantiate these general statements about her religion, I shall first give some specific examples of her treatment of orthodox beliefs. Following these examples, I shall treat certain intuitive truths that she sets forth and discuss her beliefs concerning death, the great climax to all human

religious experiences.

She had the greatest of reverence for the Bible and shows a thorough familiarity with its great personages throughout her collected poems. I do not believe that she was a "fire and damnation" fundamentalist. I think she believed that the fear-inspiring passages of the Bible served their purposes in influencing a less civilized people to lean toward a more spiritual existence. That stage safely passed, a more figurative interpretation could lead to a still higher conception of things of the spirit. My chief evidence for this statement lies in the following poem:

We play at paste,
Till qualified for pearl,
Then drop the paste,
And deem ourself a fool.
The shapes, though, were similar,
And our new hands
Learned gen-tactics
Practicing sands.¹

In practicing the sands of a more literal interpretation of certain passages of the Bible, mankind has learned the gen-tactics of a higher spiritual existence.

To the characters of the Bible, she gave the same friendly understanding and sympathy that she showed toward all her contemporaries and toward all things of nature. Moses seems to be a favorite character with her. She first mentions him by saying that if we could stand with him and scan the landscape of "the other side," we should deem

¹p. 16.

superfluous many seemingly important human activities. This statement is climaxed with a fervent wish that she might stand in the great learned company of heaven some time.

Low amid that glad Belles Lettres
Grant that we may stand,
Stars, amid profound Galaxies,
At that grand "Right Hand"!²

Then she champions him in his failure to be permitted to enter the glories of Canaan. She says that she has always felt that he was wronged by being tantalized with the vision of Canaan and then forbidden to enter. Stephen and Paul suffered no such injury, because they suffered only death. She blames the children of Israel for his misfortune, states that she would have banished them if necessary and ushered Moses in full regalia into the promised land, and ends by saying,

Old Man of Nebo! Late as this
One Justice bleeds for thee!³

God was a personal friend of hers, a good understanding friend, as is shown by the following lines:

Perhaps the kingdom of Heaven's changed!
I hope the children there
Won't be new-fashioned when I come,
And laugh at me, and stare!

I hope the father in the skies
Will lift his little girl,--
Old-fashioned, naughty, everything,--
Over the stile of pearl!⁴

²p. 44.

³pp. 297-298.

⁴p. 77.

To the Father in the skies she turned in her grief because of losing her loved one. She shows this great intimacy with the Deity in a poem in which she tells Him that she does not bring Him her heart but the heart of one so imperial that she had not the strength to hold it. Since her own heart has grown too heavy to hold the heart of her loved one longer, she turns his heart over to God and wonders if He will find it too large, also.⁵

Another time she speaks of God as "our old neighbor" and says that His face will be greatly welcome when we are past the things of this world.⁶ She even grows a little bold in her intimacy by addressing God as "Papa above!" This intimate way of addressing the Deity may be justified somewhat by considering the nature of her petition. She is asking that God reserve a place in His kingdom for a mouse that has been overpowered by a cat. Surely, she thinks, the unfortunate one deserves to be permitted "to nibble all the day snug in seraphic cupboards."⁷

Her God was a God of mercy, too. He would surely understand all about human frailties.

Not what we did shall be the test
 When act and will are done,
 But what our Lord infers we would---
 Had we diviner been.⁸

⁵P. 150.

⁷Pp. 255-256.

⁶P. 171.

⁸P. 374.

For all His work she had great admiration. She observed the coming of night and the glory of the heavens and was prompted to say, "Father, You are punctual."⁹ She stood in awe of His power and majesty. Once she states, "For none see God and live."¹⁰ Again she observes:

All circumstances are the frame
In which His Face is set,
All Latitudes exist for His
Sufficient continent.¹¹

Her whole being yearned for the presence of the great God she worshipped. The following lines express for us all a great longing for the Heavenly Father:

We are the flower, Thou the sun!
Forgive us, if as days decline,
We nearer steal to Thee,--
Enamoured of the parting west,
The peace, the flight, the amethyst,
Night's possibility!¹²

She had great faith in Christ, too. She was sure that

Christ will explain each separate anguish
In the fair schoolroom of the sky.¹³

Although this comforting thought did not relieve her of the anguish that she felt, it did bring some small degree of comfort. Death is justified by the experience that Christ had with it. With great tenderness she says,

His sure feet preceding,
Tender Pioneer--
Base must be the cowards
Dare not venture now.¹⁴

9p. 242.	12p. 172.
10p. 271.	13p. 174.
11p. 271.	14pp. 329-330.

His patience and mercy were great magnets drawing her to
Him. Of His patience she says,

Just so, Jesus raps--He does not weary--
Last at the knocker and first at the bell.¹⁵

Of his mercy she felt sure.

The least
Is esteemed in Heaven
The chiefest.¹⁶

Frequently she petitioned the Christ as she petitioned
the Father. She asks the Saviour to crucify her lest she

should have had the joy
Without the fear to justify,--
The palm without the Calvary.¹⁷

If at times she prayed and did not seem to be sure that the
Christ was hearing her, she was greatly disturbed.

Thou stirrest earthquake in the South,
And maelstrom in the sea;
Say, Jesus Christ of Nazareth,
Hast thou no arm for me?¹⁸

Her human reliance upon the Saviour is found in the follow-
ing four lines:

Savior! I've no one else to tell
And so I trouble Thee,
I am the one forgot Thee so.
Dost Thou remember me?¹⁹

The prospects of the great resurrection fired her imagi-
nation and filled her with awe. Once she wrote to her Sister

15p. 269.

18p. 176.

16p. 300.

19p. 372.

17p. 25.

Sue,

I'm thinking on that other morn,
When Cerements let go,
And Creatures clad in Victory
Go up by two and two!²⁰

She thought of the great crowd of people that would be there
and asked,

What duplicate exist--
What parallel can be--
Of the stupendousness of this
To universe and me?²¹

What heaven would be like she was not completely sure; yet
she had faith that there would be a great balancing of ac-
counts there, for she said,

I reason that in heaven
Somehow, it will be even,
Some new equation given;
But what of that?²²

Once she let her imagination run riot about the splendors of
heaven. She imagined that it was a fairly small town lit
with ruby and "stiller than the fields at full dew." The
people there were moth-like creatures with "duties of gossa-
mer." Among "such unique society" she felt that she could
be "almost contented."²³

Her faith she defines as follows:

Faith is the pierless bridge
Supporting what we see
Unto the scene that we do not,

20p. 254.

22p. 167.

21p. 332.

23p. 181.

Too slender for the eye.²⁴

This faith enabled her to accept the world and her position in it. This acceptance and this faith are recorded in the following poem:

Our share of night to bear,
Our share of morning,
Our blank in bliss to fill,
Our blank in scorning.

Here a star, and there a star,
Some lose their way.
Here a mist, and there a mist,
Afterwards--day!²⁵

This same certainty is expressed in one of her best known poems, which I quote in full below:

I never saw a moor,
I never saw the sea;
Yet know I how the heather looks,
And what a wave must be.

I never spoke with God,
Nor visited in heaven;
Yet certain am I of the spot,
As if the chart were given.²⁶

Her faith is not only certain but of large magnitude. She states the size of her faith in the following lines:

My faith is larger than the hills,
So when the hills decay,
My faith must take the purple wheel
To show the Sun the way.²⁷

These last lines show her faith not only in God but also in the natural things that He created. The importance of faith to the life of the individual cannot be over-estimated. She

²⁴p. 341.

²⁶p. 163.

²⁵p. 3.

²⁷p. 305.

believed that faith is "inherited with life" and that if it is lost, "being's beggary." In her poem on this subject she states that the loss of an estate is not nearly so serious as the loss of faith, because an estate can be replenished and faith cannot.²⁸

Her statements about prayer are less happy. I account for the pessimistic notes about the uselessness of asking the Father for things by saying that perhaps it came from her inability to have the kind of life she so earnestly desired. There is nothing pessimistic, however, about her definition of prayer.

Prayer is the little implement
Through which men reach
Where presence is denied them.
They fling their speech

By means of it in God's ear;
If then he hear,
This sums the apparatus
Comprised in prayer.²⁹

In a rather whimsical poem she states her disillusionment about the effectiveness of prayer. Once she had believed that one might have anything he asked for the mere stipulation. She describes the result of a prayer she made. Jehovah smiled, and grave saints "showed their dimples" to think that one so simple as she should exist. She ends by saying,

²⁸p. 54.

²⁹p. 39.

But I, grown shrewder, scan the skies
 With a suspicious air,--
 As children, swindled for the first,
 All swindlers be, infer.³⁰

Again she voices more strongly her discontent because of
 unanswered prayer:

Of course I prayed--
 And did God care?
 He cared as much
 As on the air
 A bird had stamped her foot
 And cried, "Give me!"³¹

In the following lines she tells why she stopped praying:

I prayed at first--a little girl--
 Because they told me to,
 But stopped when qualified to guess
 How prayer would sound to me

If I supposed God looked around
 Each time my childish eye
 Fixed full and steady on His own
 In solemn honesty.³²

This ceasing to pray was not so much an unbelief in God's
 power and in His goodness as it was a growing certainty of
 the grandeur of His universe and His ability to manage with-
 out her humble suggestions.

She had a firm conviction of the dual nature of man,
 dual in the most orthodox sense. This recognition she voices
 in the following poem:

30pp. 20-21.

31p. 296.

32p. 297.

No rack can torture me,
 My soul's at liberty.
 Behind this mortal bone
 There knits a bolder one

You cannot prick with saw,
 Nor rend with scimitar.
 Two bodies therefore be;
 Bind one, and one will flee.³³

Of the two bodies, always for her the spiritual triumphed over the physical. In one poem she lists several kinds of spiritual triumphs. The first one is the triumph of faith over "that old imperator, Death." Then there is the triumph of long-affronted truth and the triumph of the person who has renounced temptation with "one eye upon the heaven renounced and one upon the rack." The greatest triumph of all comes to the person who can stand before Jehovah's bar and be acquitted of all iniquity.³⁴

A thorough discussion of her belief in immortality is not imperative here, since it is an integral part of her treatment of death; but perhaps it would be well to mention her belief in a personal immortality as a climax to the discussion of her belief in the dual nature of man and in the triumph of the spiritual man. She took into consideration all the philosophies and was forced to reach the conclusion which she ably expresses in the following poem:

This world is not conclusion;
 A sequel stands beyond,

³³p. 172.

³⁴p. 182.

Invisible, as music,
 But positive, as sound.
 It beckons and it baffles;
 Philosophies don't know,
 And through a riddle, at the last,
 Sagacity must go.
 To guess it puzzles scholars;
 To gain it, men have shown
 Contempt of generations,
 And Crucifixion known.³⁵

Her rugged honesty forbade her hedging about the question and enabled her to reach a conclusion which she put down for the satisfaction of her own soul, if not for publication.

It is not strange that one who dared live so completely a life of the spirit should be impatient of the shallow manifestations of spirituality upon the part of lesser souls. One does not wonder that she quit going to church. She tells us why in the following poem:

Some keep the Sabbath going to church;
 I keep it staying at home,
 With a bobolink for a chorister,
 And an orchard for a dome.

Some keep the Sabbath in surplice;
 I just wear my wings,
 And instead of tolling the bell for church,
 Our little sexton sings.

God preaches,--a noted clergyman--
 And the sermon is never long;
 So instead of getting to heaven at last,
 I'm going all along!³⁶

Her niece, Martha Dickinson Bianchi, says about her unorthodox beliefs, "Her aspect of Deity--as her intimation--was her

³⁵pp. 195-196.

³⁶p. 95.

own,--unique, peculiar, unimpaired by the brimstone theology of her day."³⁷ This statement is supported by the following poem:

The Bible is an antique volume
 Written by faded men,
 At the suggestion of Holy Spectres--
 Subjects--Bethlehem--
 Eden--the ancient Homestead--
 Satan--the Brigadier--
 Judas--the great Defaulter,
 David--the Troubadour.
 Sin--a distinguished Precipice
 Others must resist,
 Boys that "believe"
 Are very lonesome--
 Other boys are "lost".
 Had but the tale a warbling Teller
 All the boys would come--
 Orpheus's sermon captivated,
 It did not condemn.³⁸

Her treatment of death is unique. There is no doubt that her unhappy love affair and her consequent renunciation of marriage and other things that make for human happiness in this world made her look forward to the end of mortal existence and the beginning of immortality, an immortality in which she hoped to achieve some of the frustrated hopes of this world. Her looking upon death as an ecstatic experience came partly, too, from her complete acceptance of the natural things of existence and her happiness in all nature. Human life, so full of lovely experiences, could not be terminated by horror; instead the last experience would be the best ex-

³⁷p. x.

³⁸p. 259.

perience of all.

Throughout her poems she lists many of the characteristics of death. First of all, it is an ecstatic experience.

A wounded deer leaps highest,
I've heard the hunter tell;
'Tis but the ecstasy of death,
And then the brake is still.³⁹

She is awed by the fact that sometime such a simple person as she may "claim the rank to die."⁴⁰ This thought almost makes her envious of the dead, and she has "a wishfulness their far condition to occupy."⁴¹ In defining exultation, she best expresses the ecstasy of death.

Exultation is the going
Of an inland soul to sea,--
Past the houses, past the headlands,
Into deep eternity!

Bred as we, among the mountains,
Can the sailor understand
The divine intoxication
Of the first league out from land?⁴²

Such an ecstasy, then, is naturally much to be desired. In a poem in which she tells of the time she almost died, this desirability is indicated in the very first line, "Just lost when I was saved!" She says that she had just felt the "world go by" and had just "girt" herself for eternity when "breath blew back." On the other side she heard the disappointed tide receding, while she was left to feel cheated and haunted by "odd secrets of the line." She closes with the

³⁹p. 6.

⁴¹p. 207.

⁴⁰p. 157.

⁴²p. 180.

following lines:

Next time, to stay!
 Next time, the things to see
 By ear unheard,
 Unscrutinized by eye.

Next time, to tarry,
 While the ages steal,--
 Slow tramp the centuries,
 And the cycles wheel.⁴³

The mysteries that death has to disclose are also hinted at in a poem which she wrote about the dying. She says that she had seen a dying eye "run round and round a room" as if it were searching for something. Then it would become cloudy and obscure with fog "and then be soldered down." She closes by saying that "'twere blessed to have seen" what the dying eye saw.⁴⁴

Death keeps silent about himself, though.

Death the only one
 You cannot find out all about
 In his native town;
 Nobody knew his father.⁴⁵

This silence and mystery Death imparts to those whom he takes.

Members of the Invisible,
 Existing while we stare
 In leagueless opportunity
 O'er-take-less as the air.⁴⁶

The Heavens only smile at the questioning of mortals and sweep by our disappointed heads without deigning to utter a syllable.

⁴³pp. 40-41.

⁴⁵p. 280.

⁴⁴pp. 162-163.

⁴⁶p. 321.

Death comes in a dramatic fashion.

Departed to the judgment,
A mighty afternoon;
Great clouds like ushers leaning,
Creation looking on.⁴⁷

The soul has the audience of two worlds as it surrenders and cancels the flesh and begins the "bodiless." It passes to a place where ambition and affection cannot find it. "Leagues of Nowhere" lie between the soul and its old life. The following lines express strongly her belief that death is a good thing.

Yesterday undistinguished--
Eminent today.⁴⁸

She puts all the strangeness of death into the poem in which she describes the death of a woman of her neighborhood. All nature seemed different the night the woman died; even small things were italicized in the minds of the watchers.

It was a narrow time,
Too jostled were our souls to speak,
At length the notice came.

And we, we placed the hair,
And drew the head erect;
And then an awful leisure was,
Our faith to regulate.⁴⁹

Death is good and charitable.

Let down the bars, O Death!
The tired flocks come in

⁴⁷p. 158.

⁴⁸p. 261.

⁴⁹p. 165.

Whose bleating ceases to repeat,
 Whose wandering is done.
 Thine is the stillest night,
 Thine the securest fold;
 Too near thou art for seeking thee,
 Too tender to be told.⁵⁰

She says that "the thoughtful grave" encloses "some too fragile for winter winds" and tenderly tucks them "in from frost before their feet are cold." Death is so cautious and so considerate of those it takes that it does not expose "the treasures in her nest" to public curiosity.⁵¹

It is universal, too.

The lowliest career
 To the same pageant wends its way
 As that exalted here.

Every living soul can have at least one miracle, the one that comes when death "beckons spaciouly."⁵² That others have died before us, others whom we loved and trusted, enables us "the tranquiller to die."⁵³ The theme of the universality and the democracy of death is a favorite one with her.

Color, Caste, Denomination--
 These are Time's affair,
 Death's division classifying
 Does not know they are.

As in sleep--all here forgotten,
 Tenets put behind,
 Death's large democratic fingers
 Rub away the brand.⁵⁴

50pp. 174-175

53p. 198.

51p. 179

54p. 230.

52p. 183.

The lowliest of persons when touched by the "majesty of Death" is made fit for angels to receive in royal purple. Even an English lord would do well to lift his hat to "such a modest clay," since "the Lord of Lords" is unblushingly receiving it.⁵⁵ The grave does not stand "any higher" for heroes than for common men and does not come any nearer for the child than for the old man. "The beggar and his queen" are made equals by "this democrat."⁵⁶ Mankind should not "swagger," since a toad or a gnat also has the common right to the supremacy of death.⁵⁷

The finality and the changelessness of death are well expressed in the following poem:

All but Death can be adjusted;
 Dynasties repaired,
 Systems settled in their sockets,
 Centuries removed--

Wastes of lives resown with colors
 By superior springs,
 Death--unto itself exception--
 Is exempt from change.⁵⁸

With all these admirable characteristics, death must necessarily have some vital functions. Its primary function, according to Emily Dickinson, is to carry one home.

Though I get home how late, how late!
 So I get home, 'twill compensate.

The ecstasy of the home-going will be all the greater if she arrives after all the loved ones have begun to think that

⁵⁵pp. 189-190.

⁵⁷p. 217.

⁵⁶pp. 200-201.

⁵⁸p. 321.

she surely is not coming. The joy of the moment when her "unexpected knock" falls on the door could be brewed only "from decades of agony." The years for her are beguiled by thinking of just what she shall say when "the long-cheated" eyes shall turn to her from their place beside the hearth of home.⁵⁹

Death acts as a deliverer and comes at opportune times to relieve over-burdened hearts and minds. One poem tells of "a poor torn heart" that could no longer find pleasure in the lovely things of nature, such as sunsets, the coming of night, and the multitudes of constellations. The angels saw that "dusty heart" and "tenderly took it up from toil and carried it to God." Thus does death come at opportune times to gather "from the gales" the tired hearts and take them to "blue havens" where there are "sandals for the bare-foot."⁶⁰

Another of the functions of death is to bring triumph to those who have earned it. To those who "overcame most times" a uniform of snow and an ornament of palms are given; "the spangled gowns, a lesser rank of victors designate." Death makes defeat "an outgrown anguish" to those whose "panting ankles" barely gained the house "when night devoured the road." So narrow is the escape of some from the

⁵⁹p. 24.

⁶⁰pp. 24-25.

night that they can only stand whispering on the threshold of life; the word that they whisper is "Saved!"⁶¹

Its final function is to sublimate life. As one goes about his daily routine of living, his hope for the immortality that death brings refines and exalts his daily tasks.

'Tis an honorable thought,
And makes one lift one's hat,
As one encountered gentlefolk
Upon a daily street,

That we've immortal place,
Though pyramids decay,
And kingdoms, like the orchard,
Flit russetly away.⁶²

The things that death will buy for us are

Room,--Escape
From Circumstances,
And a Name.⁶³

Death has to be earned, however. The people who are now singing "Hallelujah" had to earn their happiness by "long years of practice"⁶⁴ before they

Dropped into the
Ether Acre!
Wearing the sod gown--
Bonnet of Everlasting laces--
Brooch frozen on!
Horses of blonde--
And coach of silver,
Baggage a strapped Pearl!
Journey of Down
And whip of Diamond--
Riding to meet the Earl!⁶⁵

61p. 194.

64p. 252.

62p. 198.

65p. 248.

63p. 248.

Believing that death performs all these happy functions for us, she could easily define it as "the laying off an overcoat of clay."⁶⁶

She was not so enamored of the prospect of death that she could not understand the natural human reaction to death. She realized that human beings are naturally reluctant to die and said that "not a beggar would accept" death "had he the power to spurn."⁶⁷ She understood all the human aspects of death, the struggling of the dying to live, the wondering if one will be missed, and the shock of suddenly meeting the end. She describes a drowning person

With eyes in death still begging raised,
And hands beseeching thrown.⁶⁸

At certain dawns and on certain nights she wondered if anybody would sigh "that such a little figure" should fall asleep too soundly "for chanticleer to wake it."⁶⁹ She knew the power of Fate to stop our lives.

We never know we go,--when we are going
We jest and shut the door;
Fate following behind us bolts it,
And we accost no more.⁷⁰

She knew, also, the pathos of those left behind. She said that the thing that hurt them worst was "the thinking how" the loved ones walked when they were alive or how they used

⁶⁶P. 170.

⁶⁹P. 186.

⁶⁷P. 162.

⁷⁰P. 214.

⁶⁸P. 168.

to perform their daily tasks. I quote the following poem to show that she had experienced the sorrow of losing loved ones.

How warm they were on such a day;
 You almost feel the date,
 So short way off it seems; and now,
 They're centuries from that.

How pleased they were at what you said;
 You try to touch that smile,
 And dip your fingers in the frost;
 When was it, can you tell,

Past bows and invitations,
 Past interview, and vow,
 Past what ourselves can estimate,--
 That makes the quick of woe!⁷¹

She knew all the accoutrements of death. In one poem she states that the way she knows that there has been a death in the house opposite is by noticing its "numb look." She goes on to describe the rustling in and out of the neighbors, the mechanical opening of a window, the flinging out of a mattress, the stiff visit of the minister, the visiting of the man of "the appalling trade," and finally the dark parade of "coaches and tassels."⁷²

For herself she seemed to sense the coming of death. She expresses this premonition in two different poems. The first one starts,

My cocoon tightens, colors tease,
 I'm feeling for the air;

⁷¹pp. 184-185.

⁷²pp. 213-214.

A dim capacity for wings
 Degrades the dress I wear.

She ends this poem by saying,

So I must baffle at the hint
 And cipher at the sign,
 And make much blunder, if at last
 I take the clew divine.⁷³

In another poem she says that she has not told her garden yet of her coming death; neither has she found strength to tell the bee. She must not tell her secret in the street, because people would wonder that she "should have the face to die." Neither must she tell the hillsides and the forests that she loves so.

Nor lisp it at the table,
 Nor heedless by the way
 Hint that within the riddle
 One will walk today!⁷⁴

In still another poem she tells of a premonition that another woman had of impending death. This woman was pervaded by a "tenderer industriousness" that was mistaken by her acquaintances as "a further force of life developed from within." The reason that she was busier was that she was busy finishing the things of life before her time should come.⁷⁵

In numerous poems she relates imaginary encounters with death. One of the outstanding ones begins as follows:

⁷³p. 159.

⁷⁴p. 178.

⁷⁵p. 188.

Because I could not stop for Death,
 He kindly stopped for me;
 The carriage held but just ourselves
 And Immortality.

She continues in this poem to describe the leisurely manner in which they drove and the things they passed on the journey. They passed the "school where children played," "the fields of gazing grain," and the setting sun. They paused for a moment before a "house that seemed a swelling of the ground."

Since then 'tis centuries; but each
 Feels shorter than the day
 I first surmised the horses' heads
 Were toward eternity.⁷⁶

In another whimsical little poem she imagines herself to be already in her grave and provoked because of one woman's saying continually that she is sorry because the complaining one had died. She wants to settle down to uninterrupted peace, but she fears another disturbance just when the grave and she shall have sobbed themselves to sleep.⁷⁷ Still more whimsical is the poem that begins "I heard a fly buzz when I died." "The eyes beside had wrung them dry," and she was gathering her last breaths to meet the King, when "there interposed a fly."

With blue, uncertain, stumbling buzz,
 Between the light and me;

⁷⁶pp. 168-169.

⁷⁷pp. 204-205.

And then windows failed, and then
I could not see to see.⁷⁸

Perhaps the most human of all the poems that deal with
imaginary deaths is the one that begins,

'Twas just this time last year I died.
I know I heard the corn,
When I was carried by the farms,--
It had the tassels on.

She describes all the things she felt and thought. She
thought how yellow the corn would be when it was carried to
the mill. This thought made her want to get out, but some-
thing prevented her. Then she thought just how red the ap-
ples would be at picking time and how the carts would bump
over the fields to take the pumpkins in. She wondered if she
would be missed at the Thanksgiving feast in her father's
home and how her empty stocking would look at Christmas time.
These last thoughts grieved her, and she quit them for the
more happy speculations as to how splendid it would be some
perfect year when her loved ones should come to her.⁷⁹

Her happy speculations as to the gifts that death would
bring her did not keep her from having a wholesome philoso-
phy of life. I think that she is partly indebted to Emerson
for the source of her philosophy. Professor Clark points
out seven ways in which her reactions are similar to Emer-
son's. First, she was indebted, as he was, "to the general

⁷⁸pp. 212-213.

⁷⁹p. 213.

ethical fruits of Puritanism." Second, she loved nature with the same intensity that he did. Third, she subordinated science to mystical illumination. Fourth, she recognized the value of all ethical guides. Fifth, she followed "Plato and Spenser and Emerson in transmuting physical love into divine love." Sixth, like Emerson, she was a "psychological poet of an interior life." Seventh, she believed in the identity of beauty and truth and in the principle that "literary art ought to be not an end in itself but an organic by-product of spiritual striving."⁸⁰ Professor Boynton comments on her indebtedness to Emerson as follows:

By temperament she must have been susceptible to his influence and, by experience, sympathetic to this other and more spectacular apostate from Calvinism. His volume of poems was given to her when she was nineteen; in that same year the book containing "Nature," "The American Scholar," and the "Divinity School Address" was published; and her brother and his wife, in the house at the other end of the path, were eager readers of the man who was more than once a guest there when he came lecturing to Amherst.⁸¹

Three short poems give the source of Emily Dickinson's philosophy as the intuitive truth of the transcendentalists.

This is my letter to the world,
That never wrote to me,--
The simple news that Nature told,
With tender majesty.⁸²

The second one has to do with the truth that each one may

⁸⁰Major American Poets, pp. 897-898.

⁸¹Literature and American Life, p. 696.

⁸²p. 2.

read in his conscience.

Belshazzar had a letter,--
 He never had but one;
 Belshazzar's correspondent
 Concluded and begun
 In that immortal copy
 The conscience of us all
 Can read without its glasses
 On revelation's wall.⁸³

Perhaps the third one is even more to the point.

Speech is a symptom of affection,
 And Silence one,
 The perfectest communication
 Is heard of none--
 Exists and its endorsement
 Is had within--
 Behold! said the Apostle,
 Yet had not seen.⁸⁴

So sure was the Apostle of the truths that had been revealed to him intuitively that he could cry "Behold" with all assurance, even if he had not yet seen with his natural eyes.

First of all, she believed in showing kindness and in giving sympathetic understanding to others. She believed that one should do everything he can to stop other hearts from breaking and to make life pleasant for others. This sympathy is to be shown to all life as well as to human life.⁸⁵

She had a great disdain for all show of pomp and for all hypocrisy. One short poem contains all her yearning for simplicity and naturalness.

⁸³p. 14.

⁸⁴p. 261.

⁸⁵p. 5.

I'm nobody! Who are you?
 Are you nobody, too?
 Then there's a pair of us--don't tell!
 They'd banish us, you know.

How dreary to be somebody!
 How public, like a frog
 To tell your name the livelong day
 To an admiring bog!⁸⁶

The cardinal virtues that she taught were courage, beauty and truth, contentment, honesty, self-dependence, and endurance. She taught courage to face the worst, because

This merit hath the worst,--
 It cannot be again.
 When Fate hath taunted last
 And thrown her furthest stone,
 The maimed may pause and breathe,
 And glance securely round.
 The deer invites no longer
 Than it eludes the hound.⁸⁷

She believed that the best way to fight fate was to accept it. She also taught courage for taking chances. In one poem she asks her soul if it must toss again. Her soul replies that

By just such a hazard
 Hundreds have lost, indeed,
 But tens have won an all.

She felt a certain glory in the uncertainty involved in taking chances, as is revealed by the following four lines:

Angels' breathless ballot
 Lingers to record thee;
 Imps in eager caucus
 Raffle for my soul.⁸⁸

86p. 15.

87p. 36.

88pp. 3-4.

She reasoned that if she happened to lose in going in for her chances, "breath is but breath." She also comforted herself by saying, "At least to know the worst is sweet."⁸⁹ In four other lines she has caught the gallantry of the soul's adventures.

Finite to fail, but infinite to venture.
For the one ship that struts the shore
Many's the gallant, overwhelmed creature
Nodding in navies nevermore.⁹⁰

She had the courage to stand up for her convictions and taught that others should have the same, because

A bone has obligations,
A being has the same;
A marrowless assembly
Is culpabler than shame.⁹¹

Her belief in beauty and truth is Keatsian. She says that she died for beauty and was scarce adjusted in the tomb until one who died for truth was placed in an adjoining grave. One of them remarked, "The two are one; we brethren are." So as kinsmen they talked and talked until the moss reached their lips and covered up their names.⁹²

She taught the virtue of contentment with life as one finds it, a contentment born of the enjoyment of all nature.

'Tis little I could care for pearls
Who own the ample sea;
Or brooches, when the Emperor
With rubies pelteth me;

⁸⁹p. 4.

⁹¹p. 57.

⁹⁰p. 52.

⁹²pp. 160-161.

Or gold, who am the Prince of Mines;
 Or diamonds, when I see
 A diadem to fit a dome
 Continual crowning me.⁹³

So much did she like rugged honesty and so many times did she fail to find it in others that she was moved to cry out that she liked a look of agony because she knew that it at least was not feigned. "Men do not sham convulsion," although they sham many other things. For that reason, she could like

The beads upon the forehead
 By homely anguish strung.⁹⁴

Miss Pollitt comments upon her disillusionment in others as follows:

At about this time Emily seems also to have been disillusioned in some of her friendships. Here and there one had failed her in whom she had put her trust. ... Such experiences were particularly harsh for one of Emily's affectionate and introspective nature. She began instinctively to come to anchor in her home.⁹⁵

Her honesty manifested itself another time when after praising the gifts that death could bring, she was compelled to add:

How gifts of Life
 With Death's gifts will compare
 We know not--
 For the rates stop Here.⁹⁶

She encouraged a fierce endurance of all the blows of Fate, an endurance that would, in the end, win recognition.

⁹³p. 41.

⁹⁵Emily Dickinson, pp. 76-77.

⁹⁴Pp. 161-162.

⁹⁶Poems, p. xii.

To advance this idea, she told about a man who refused to drop when Fate slew him and impaled him on her fiercest stakes. Instead he "neutralized them all." Finally after she had stung him, "sapped his firm advance," and otherwise had done her worst to him, all to no avail, Fate was forced to recognize him as a superior man.⁹⁷ Thus in eight short lines she gives a powerful lesson in both endurance and self-dependence.

Other lessons that she teaches about human adjustments to circumstances are the law of compensation, the uses of adversity, the triumph of mind over matter, the power and glory of renunciation, the folly of fear, and the effect of time. The law of compensation, a compensation given by a merciful Providence, is stated in the following superb lines:

Not one by Heaven defrauded stay,
Although He seem to steal,
He restitutes in some sweet way
Secreted in His will.⁹⁸

In other words, Providence turns our losses into gains by replacing the things that we lost by better gifts.

She dwells at length on the uses of adversity.

Water is taught by thirst;
Land, by the oceans passed;
Transport, by throe;
Peace, by its battles told;
Love, by memorial mould;
Birds, by the snow.⁹⁹

⁹⁷Pp. 51-52.

⁹⁸p. 252.

⁹⁹p. 215.

In a reference to her unhappy love affair, she says that if she could have had perfect earthly happiness, she "should have had the joy without the fear to justify."¹⁰⁰ In another poem she expresses this same idea by saying that dark hours, although they do not fit for earth, "drill silently for heaven."¹⁰¹ For the most part her references to the uses of adversity are purely impersonal, but we know that she did have "to learn the transport by the pain,"¹⁰² because once she was moved to say,

If pain for peace prepares,
Lo the 'Augustan' years
Our feet await.¹⁰³

As for the merit of renunciation, she would have us believe that

The banquet of abstemiousness
Surpasses that of wine.

She says that people who never wanted for anything have never known the "maddest joy."¹⁰⁴ The practice of renunciation on the part of one soul may produce "purer good" for those whom the soul loves. This idea is advanced in the following lines:

I fit for them,
I seek the dark till I am thorough fit.
The labor is a solemn one,

¹⁰⁰pp. 25-26.

¹⁰³p. 251.

¹⁰¹p. 58

¹⁰⁴p. 58.

¹⁰²p. 37.

With this sufficient sweet--
 That abstinence as mine produce
 A purer good for them,
 If I succeed,--
 If not, I had
 The transport of the Aim.¹⁰⁵

She teaches the folly of fear by asking of what should one be afraid. Certainly one should not be afraid of death. Life should not be feared, because it would be an odd thing to fear a thing that "comprehendeth" one "in one or more existences at Deity's decree." One should no more fear the resurrection than the east is afraid to trust the morning. With these possibilities eradicated, there is nothing left to fear, according to her logic.¹⁰⁶

And finally, she sets forth a unique idea about the effect of time.

They say that "time assuages,"--
 Time never did assuage;
 An actual suffering strengthens,
 As sinews do, with age.

Time is a test for trouble,
 But not a remedy.
 If such it prove, it prove too
 There was no malady.¹⁰⁷

Thus we see that many of her religious views were orthodox or based upon orthodox teachings and highly embellished with her vivid imagination, that her conception

¹⁰⁵P. 251.

¹⁰⁶P. 167.

¹⁰⁷P. 196.

of the Deity and the Christ was that they were Beings of love as well as power, that she believed in the resurrection of the dead and the immortality of the soul, and that the dual nature of man was accepted by her as a cardinal principle of her religious philosophy. She believed that death is good because it sets human beings free from trouble and brings compensations for all indignities suffered here on earth. She believed that the human soul could receive truth independent of the senses and that each can receive enough truth intuitively to govern his life successfully. The cardinal principles of her philosophy as to things other than spiritual matters were that life should be lived with courage and fortitude and that one should keep his spirit free of all things that would injure its moral soundness. In the light of the facts found in the chapter on biography, we see that these philosophical principles were taught her by her own experiences in the field of the renunciation of the pleasures of the body.

CHAPTER IV

NATURE

Emily Dickinson was at one with Emerson and Whitman in her view of nature. She felt herself to be a part of a great cosmic whole, a whole made up of all natural things, both animate and inanimate. All plant and animal life and all phenomena of the seasons delighted her; they seemed given for her special enjoyment. Part of this unusual delight in nature came, no doubt, from the rather lonely life which she lived. Her life was never filled with the complexities of existence that we have today, and as she gradually withdrew from all social activities, she naturally grew to depend more and more upon nature's offerings as a substitute for human companionship. The following lines give her own definition of nature:

Nature is what we see,
The Hill, the Afternoon--
Squirrel, Eclipse, the Bumble-bee,
May--Nature is Heaven.

Nature is what we hear,
The Bobolink, the Sea--
Thunder, the Cricket--
May,--Nature is Harmony.

Nature is what we know
But have no art to say,
So impotent our wisdom is
To Her simplicity.¹

¹p. 233.

She speaks of Nature as a mother, too, a mother that smiles at "many a whim of her eccentric family."² Again she voices the maternal aspect of nature by writing:

Nature, the gentlest mother,
 Impatient of no child,
 The feeblest or the waywardest,--
 Her admonition mild

In forest and the hill
 By traveller is heard,
 Restraining rampant squirrel
 Or too impetuous bird.

To her, Nature's conversation was very fair on "a summer afternoon"; evening, too, felt her influence calling to prayer "the minutest cricket" and "the most unworthy flower." At night with infinite care and affection she puts "her golden finger on her lip" and "wills silence everywhere."³

All plant life held her special attention and admiration, but flowers seemed to delight her most of all. The following lines give her ideas about the uses of flowers:

My nosegays are for captives;
 Din, long-expectant eyes,
 Fingers denied the plucking,
 Patient till paradise.

To such, if they should whisper
 Of morning and the moor,
 They bear no other errand,
 And I, no other prayer.⁴

To the members of her brother's family and to other friends

²p. 309.

³p. 65.

⁴p. 64.

of hers she often sent her choicest flowers, sometimes accompanied by a poem about them.

Nature, the gentle mother, looks after the flowers with the same care that she bestows upon human beings. Emily imagined that Nature tucked all the flowers into tiny beds during the long winter. She even visited Nature and saw the beds of daisy, iris, aster, anemone, batschia, daffodil, epigea, and rhodora. Some had not gone quite to sleep, and Mother Nature was kept busy rocking many tiny cradles and humming "the quaintest lullaby that ever rocked a child." Finally the mother turned from her little charges and told Emily that it was their bed-time and that "the bumble-bees will wake them when April woods are red."⁵ This comparison of flowers to children is also expressed in the following poem:

As children bid the guest good-night,
And then reluctant turn,
My flowers raise their pretty lips,
Then put their nightgowns on.

As children caper when they wake,
Merry that it is morn,
My flowers from a hundred cribs
Will peep, and prance again.⁶

She uses specific flowers in various ways. Sometimes she compares them to phenomena of the human spirit. A rare opportunity she missed was compared with "unsuspected

⁵pp. 70-71.

⁶p. 102.

violets" lying low within the fields not far away from passing "striving fingers" that do not suspect their whereabouts.⁷

So much pleasure did the daffodils in "their yellow gown" give her that she says she feared the sudden joy of their coming each spring. Their coming always gave her a joy that was foreign to her because of the long months of doing without them.⁸ The color of yellow gave her a very special delight because of its rarity. Once she wrote of it:

Nature rarer uses yellow
Than another hue;
Saves she all of that for sunsets,--
Prodigal of blue,

Spending scarlet like a woman,
Yellow she affords
Only scantily and selectly,
Like a lover's words.⁹

Her fondness for the color yellow made the daffodils special favorites of hers.

The leaves she compares to women interchanging "sagacious confidence, somewhat of nods, and somewhat of portentous inference." Both the leaves as they whisper together and the women as they hold their conferences enjoin to secrecy, "inviolable compact to notoriety."¹⁰

She envied the grass because it "so little has to do." It only has to entertain the bees and butterflies, "stir all

⁷p. 5.

⁹p. 83.

⁸p. 73.

¹⁰p. 83.

day to pretty tunes the breezes fetch along," "hold the sunshine in its lap and bow to everything," and "thread the dews all night."

And even when it dies, to pass
In odors so divine,
As lowly spices gone to sleep,
Or amulets of pine.

And then to dwell in sovereign barns,
And dream the days away,--
The grass so little has to do,
I wish I were a hay!¹¹

This same whimsical mood is found in her poem about a rose.

A sepal, petal, and a thorn ✓
Upon a common summer's morn,
A flash of dew, a bee or two,
A breeze
A caper in the trees,--
And I'm a rose!¹²

With a tulip she sent the following little poem to a friend.

She slept beneath the tree
Remembered but by me.
I touched her cradle mute;
She recognized the foot,
Put on her carmine suit,--
And see!¹³

Thus we see that the flowers are personified in all her references. She felt herself simply to be another one of Nature's children of no greater importance, relatively speaking, than any other one of the atoms of creation.

11p. 97.

12p. 114.

13p. 110.

The mushroom she singled out as "the elf of plants." In a place where it was not to be seen the evening before, suddenly some morning the mushroom appears "in a truffled hut." She says that it is "vegetation's juggler" and that it "doth like a bubble antedate and like a bubble hie." Finally she is convinced that

Had nature any outcast face,
 Could she a son contemn,
 Had nature an Iscariot,
 That mushroom--it is him.¹⁴

She seemed to love the trees more than any other plants because they satisfied "an awe that men must slake in wilderness." She liked the austerity of the hemlock as it stood "upon a marge of snow." It was the nature of the hemlock to thrive on cold, and the "gnash of northern winds" was "sweetest nutriment to him."¹⁵ The pine tree was "just a sea with a stem." The ships that came its way were the jays and the squirrels. She inferred that its commerce must have been that of spice, "from the odors borne." The first two lines of the last stanza are characteristic of her general view of nature:

Was the Pine at my window a "Fellow"
 Of the Royal infinity?¹⁶

All animals, birds, and insects, as well as the plants,

¹⁴p. 80.

¹⁵p. 108.

¹⁶pp. 309-310.

were, to her, a part of the great whole. It is a bit odd that the animals she writes most about in her poems are snakes, rats, mice, and frogs, rather repulsive creatures to most people. The little poem in which she asks the Heavenly Father to reserve a mansion within His Kingdom for a mouse which has been overpowered by a cat is characteristic of the intense sympathy that she felt for all living creatures.¹⁷ Of the rat she has to say,

The rat is the concisest tenant.
He pays no rent,--
Repudiates the obligation,
On schemes intent.

Balking our wit
To sound or circumvent,
Hate cannot harm
A foe so reticent.¹⁸

This "transport of cordiality" that she felt for most living creatures she could not extend to the "narrow fellow" that rides within the grass. She mentions the occasional contacts that she has had with the snake, the seeing him running through the grass, the mistaking him for a whiplash, and the feeling of "zero at the bone" that these encounters always gave her.¹⁹

Perhaps the birds gave her more pleasure than any other group of Nature's children. She liked the joyfulness that

¹⁷Pp. 255-256.

¹⁸p. 84.

¹⁹p. 79.

they radiated in song. Of the sudden song of one "little weather-worn" bird, she wrote

God bless his suddenness,

 With gay delight he goes
 To some superior tree
 Without a single leaf,
 And shouts for joy to nobody
 But his seraphic self!²⁰

She liked their seeming to be grateful for the crumbs given them. Once after she had fed a bird, it started a brilliant song nearby. Of this experience she wrote,

'Twas as Space sat signing
 To herself and Man.
 'Twas the winged Beggar
 Afterward I learned,
 To her benefactor
 Paying gratitude.²¹

She liked to watch their quick little movements. She saw one that "bit an angle-worm in halves," ate him raw, "drank a dew from a convenient grass," and then looked about for danger, his eyes like "frightened beads." Then, she says,

cautious,
 I offered him a crumb,
 And he unrolled his feathers
 And rowed him softer home

 Than oars divide the ocean,
 Too silver for a seam,
 Or butterflies, off banks of noon,
 Leap, plashless, as they swim.²²

20p. 69.

21p. 317.

22pp. 78-79.

The song of the robins in the early spring gave her so much pleasure that she spoke of dreading the first robin because of the exquisite delightful pain that its song would give to her.²³

Of the oriole she says that he is so "drunk with badi-nage divine" and so dazzling that he is often mistaken for a gold mine coming suddenly from nowhere. She says that he is like a whole pageant of "ballads and of bards."²⁴

Nowhere does she better express her feeling of kinship with all natural things than when she closes her description of the jay with the following lines:

His character is a tonic,
His future a dispute;
Unfair an immortality
That leaves this neighbor out.

She describes the jay as being both neighbor and warrior and praises his hardihood in being intimate with the snow and braving cold February winds to pillow "his daring head in pungent evergreens. She wonders what "unknown, refreshing things" constitute the contents of his larder, "terse and militant."²⁵ She decides that the word brigadier describes him best as he sits "confident and straight" as a magistrate of great executive power, never permitting inclement March weather to keep him from preserving his attitude "bold as a Bailiff's hymn."²⁶

²³p. 73.

²⁵pp. 92-93.

²⁴pp. 72-73.

²⁶p. 245.

She gives a concise description of a woodpecker in four short lines:

His bill an auger is,
His head, a cap and frill.
He laboreth at every tree,--
A worm his utmost goal.²⁷

The eccentric creature, the bat, interests her. She speaks of his wrinkled wings, wonders that no song "pervades" his lips, wonders from what "astute abode" he came, shudders at the power of his "malevolence auspiciously withheld," and concludes that his eccentricities do not keep him from giving to "his adroit creator" his prayer of praise.²⁸

The beginning of all insect life was a marvel to her. Once she sent a cocoon to her little nephew and with it the following lines:

Drab habitation of whom?
Tabernacle or tomb,
Or dome of worm,
Or porch of gnome,
Or some elf's catacomb?²⁹

The caterpillar she described as "a fuzzy fellow without feet." The caterpillar stage she called the "secret of the butterfly."³⁰

She wondered at the way a butterfly flies apparently aimlessly about.

Without design, that I could trace,
Except to stay abroad

²⁷p. 117.

²⁹p. 121.

²⁸pp. 119-120.

³⁰p. 308.

On miscellaneous enterprise
The clovers understood.

Over the hay field where both men and bees labored diligent-
ly, the butterfly flew idly along and "disdained them."³¹
In one poem she tells about two butterflies that

went out at noon
And waltzed above a stream.³²

She thought that the many frivolous aspects of a butterfly's
life caused him to get little sympathy.

The circumspect are certain
That he is dissolute.
Had he the homely scutcheon of modest Industry,
'Twere fitter certifying for Immortality.³³

She had sympathy and understanding for the spider, who
did his sewing at night "without a light."³⁴ She believed
that his artistry had never been appreciated; certainly it
had never been usefully employed, though "every broom and
Bridget" would certify to his "surpassing merit." For this
neglect and lack of appreciation she was genuinely sorry
and told the fellow,

Neglected son of genius,
I take thee by the hand.³⁵

Of all insects, though, the bee was her favorite. She
describes him as follows:

31p. 68.

34p. 81.

32p. 75.

35p. 115.

33p. 236.

His feet are shod with gauze,
 His helmet is of gold;
 His breast, a single onyx
 With chrysoprase, inlaid.³⁶

She liked the way a bee would invite a school-boy to a race
 and then "dip, evade, tease" until finally he tired and
 sailed off "to the royal clouds."³⁷ His democracy was a
 source of inspiration.

The pedigree of honey
 Does not concern the bee;
 A clover, any time, to him
 Is aristocracy.³⁸

She was sure that this dissolute fellow would go on being

First at the vat and
 Latest at the vine

until one day he would drink not only his sweetest cup but
 also his last cup and by a "humming Coroner" be pronounced
 "found dead of nectar."³⁹

She described the coming and going of the seasons as
 "a route of evanescence with a revolving wheel."⁴⁰ She
 liked to refer to the seasons with such poetic names as "the
 white of the year" or "the green of the year."⁴¹ Each sea-
 son had some gift for her, and its coming was a never-fail-
 ing source of delight. The coming of spring is heralded by
 an altered look about the hills" and "an added strut in

36p. 100.

39p. 308.

37p. 16.

40p. 74.

38p. 95.

41p. 203.

ohanticleer." When it arrives, she calls it the annual
reply to Nicodemus's mystery.⁴² Further commenting on the
effect of spring's coming upon human beings, she says,

A color stands abroad
On solitary hills
That science cannot overtake,
But human nature feels.⁴³

Each year she seemed the first to sense its coming, and even
though the neighbors did not suspect, she knew that there
would be "orchard, and buttercup, and bird in such a little
while."⁴⁴ Even though she had seen many springs, she said
that she always felt that after they were gone, they might
not come again.⁴⁵ Six lines express all the glory that
spring held for her:

A little madness in the Spring
Is wholesome even for a King,
But God be with the Clown,
Who ponders this tremendous scene--
This whole experiment of green,
As if it were his own!⁴⁶

The summer brought to her "a subtle, shimmering grace"
that she often feared would be too much for her.

A something in a summer's day,
As slow her flambeaux burn away,
Which solemnizes me.

A something in a summer's noon,--
An azure depth, a wordless tune,
Transcending ecstasy.

⁴²pp. 69-70

⁴⁵p. 311.

⁴³p. 110.

⁴⁶p. 235.

⁴⁴p. 111.

And still within a summer's night
 A something so transporting bright,
 I clap my hands to see.⁴⁷

"Summer passes," she said, "as imperceptibly as grief."

The closing lines of one of her poems on the ending of summer reveal the joy that she always found in that season:

And thus, without a wing,
 Or service of a keel,
 Our summer made her light escape
 Into the beautiful.⁴⁸

Another poem describes the passing of summer as an actual death. The bobolink attended the funeral, and an aged bee gave the funeral address. She closes thus:

We trust that she was willing,--
 We ask that we may be.
 Summer, sister, seraph,
 Let us go with thee!

In the name of the bee
 And of the butterfly
 And of the breeze, amen!⁴⁹

Autumn she describes as a "few prosaic days."⁵⁰ The brilliant colors of the autumn leaves were to her redeeming features of an otherwise dull time. She says that Autumn once overlooked her knitting and told her that he had dyes that "could dishonor a flamingo."⁵¹ So strongly did she feel that she was one of nature's children, too, that she attempted to be in tune during the autumn season by putting

⁴⁷Pp. 98-99.

⁵⁰p. 91.

⁴⁸p. 89.

⁵¹p. 317.

⁴⁹p. 90.

on a gay trinket or two.⁵²

Winter days she thought of as "the days that Reindeer love."⁵³ During those days nothing plays but the apple "snug in the cellar."⁵⁴ And in the winter, too, "a certain slant of light" oppressed her.

There's a certain slant of light,
On winter afternoons,
That oppresses, like the weight
Of cathedral tunes.

Heavenly hurt it gives us;
We can find no scar,
But internal difference
Where the meanings are.⁵⁵

Miss Pollitt says that "Emily shrank from the New England chill and yearned for a life of perpetual summer-time."⁵⁶

She thought of the months as the twelve that performed a wonderful rotation.⁵⁷ Perhaps she welcomed March more than any other visiting month, since it brought springtime. For her March was always "the month of expectation" that was filled with "the things we do not know," delightful things that made "pompous joy" betray her whenever she would "sham becoming firmness."⁵⁸ Of April she wrote,

I can't tell you, but you feel it--
Nor can you tell me,

⁵²p. 107.

⁵³p. 246.

⁵⁴p. 245.

⁵⁵p. 108.

⁵⁶Josephine Pollitt, Emily Dickinson, p. 46.

⁵⁷p. 85.

⁵⁸p. 239.

Saints with vanished slate and pencil
Solve our April day.

Sweeter than a vanished Frolic
From a vanished Green!
Swifter than the hoofs of Horsemen
Round a Hedge of Dream!⁵⁹

Her only significant mention of the month of May is to ask,
"Had nobody a pang lest on a face so beautiful he might not
look again?"⁶⁰ To express her great desire to see her
lover she says that she would give the month of June.

You know who June is?
I'd give her,
Roses a day from Zanzibar,
And lily tubes like wells;
Bees by the furlong,
Straits of blue
Navies of butterflies sail through,
And dappled cowslip dells.⁶¹

November was the month that left the leaves scattered
around.⁶²

The great miracles of day and night awed her as she
watched their daily recurrence.

Of this is Day composed--
A morning and a noon,
A Revelry unspeakable
And then a gay Unknown.⁶³

When this "gay unknown" was done, she eagerly awaited the
dawn, too.

⁵⁹p. 235.

⁶²p. 141.

⁶⁰p. 311.

⁶³p. 241.

⁶¹pp. 353-354.

Not knowing when the dawn will come
 I open every door;
 Or has it feathers like a bird,
 Or billows like a shore?⁶⁴

When day finally came, she said that "it sprang before the hills like hindered rubies" and "the sunrise shook from fold" the royal purple "like breadths of topaz."⁶⁵ She liked to think of all the things that morning meant to different people. To the farmer, it meant milking; to the Apennines, it meant dawn; to the lover, it meant just Chance; to epicures, it meant breakfast; and "to faint-going eyes," it meant "their lapse from sighing."⁶⁶

In writing of the sunset, she said, "The largest fire ever known occurs each afternoon."⁶⁷

The Sun went down--
 No man looked on,
 The Earth and I alone
 Were present at the majesty;
 He triumphed and went on.⁶⁸

Immediately after sunset

The twilight stood as strangers do
 With hat in hand, polite and new,
 To stay as if, or go.

Then "a small dusk" came upon the village, and presently it was dark.⁶⁹

The night brought the gift of moon and stars to her.

⁶⁴p. 113.

⁶⁷p. 238.

⁶⁵p. 66.

⁶⁸p. 303.

⁶⁶p. 234.

⁶⁹p. 121.

She disliked the attempt of science to classify the stars. This dislike is whimsically expressed in the following lines:

Arcturus is his other name--
I'd rather call him star!
It's so unkind of science
To go and interfere!⁷⁰

Moonlight she describes as "an everywhere of silver."⁷¹ She liked to think of the power of the moon over the sea.

The moon is distant from the sea,
And yet with amber hands
She leads him, docile as a boy,
Along appointed sands.⁷²

She addresses midnight as follows:

You are not so fair, Midnight--
I chose Day,
But please take a little Girl
He turned away!⁷³

In another poem she wrote about the fears that come with night and the magnitude that trouble can assume at that time. When day comes, she says that we always

wonder we could care
For that old faded midnight
That frightened but an hour.⁷⁴

She wrote of many other natural phenomena; for example, the mountains, winds, rainbows, shadows, dew, prairies, wells, snow, rain, lightning, thunder, storms, and stone.

⁷⁰p. 78.

⁷³p. 380.

⁷¹p. 78.

⁷⁴p. 11.

⁷²p. 143.

Always they were great mysteries to her. This mystery she expresses in the following lines:

But nature is a stranger yet;
The ones that cite her most
Have never passed her haunted house,
Nor simplified her ghost.⁷⁵

Always, as in the case of the star, she liked to speak in a whimsical, disdainful manner of the attempts of science to classify.

I pull a flower from the woods,--
A monster with a glass
Computes the stamens in a breath,
And has her in a class.⁷⁶

I have never read a better description of a mountain than the one she gives in the following lines:

The mountain sat upon the plain
In his eternal chair,
His observation omnifold,
His inquest everywhere.

The seasons prayed around his knees,
Like children round a sire:
Grandfather of the days is he,
Of dawn the ancestor.⁷⁷

The wind she described as "a tired man" who knocked at her door and came in for a flitting visit. She found him to be "a rapid, footless guest," with no "bone to bind him" and "with speech "like the push of numerous humming-birds at once."⁷⁸

In another poem she says that the wind works like

⁷⁵P. 116.

⁷⁷P. 103.

⁷⁶P. 77.

⁷⁸Pp. 82-83.

a hand
Whose fingers comb the sky,
Then quiver down, with tufts of tune.⁷⁹

She describes the fierceness of certain winds by saying that they "drew off like hungry dogs defeated of a bone."⁸⁰ The duties of the wind she enumerates as follows:

The Duties of the Wind are few--
To cast the Ships at sea,
Establish March,
The Floods escort,
And usher Liberty.⁸¹

A rainbow to her was more convincing than philosophy.⁸² For her the shadows walked like men and women upon the hills, bowing here and there to neighbors of their own.⁸³ A dew "sufficed itself" when it had satisfied a leaf.⁸⁴ The ingredients of a prairie were a clover, a bee, and a revery, of which three the revery was most important.⁸⁵ When she looked into a well, she thought of the mystery that pervaded the water that lived so far away that it was frightening.⁸⁶ A stone with its "elemental coat of brown" seemed happy and free of care as it fulfilled "absolute decree in casual simplicity."⁸⁷

⁷⁹p. 105.

⁸⁴p. 117.

⁸⁰p. 239.

⁸⁵p. 116.

⁸¹p. 239.

⁸⁶p. 115.

⁸²p. 305.

⁸⁷p. 83.

⁸³p. 236.

The mysteries of the atmosphere interested her immensely. She goes into detail to enumerate the different things accomplished by the snow as "it sifts from leaden sieves."⁸⁸ Of the joy of watching the rain fall, she wrote:

A drop fell on the apple tree,
Another on the roof;
A half a dozen kissed the eaves,
And made the gables laugh.

A few went out to help the brook,
That went to help the sea.
Myself conjectured, Were they pearls,
What necklaces could be!⁸⁹

She describes the lightning as first showing a "yellow beak and then a livid claw."⁹⁰ Thunder sounded to her as "if the streets were running."⁹¹ A storm she describes as follows:

An awful tempest mashed the air,
The clouds were gaunt and few;
A black, as of a spectre's cloak,
Hid heaven and earth from view.

The creatures chuckled on the roofs
And whistled in the air,
And shook their fists and gnashed their teeth,
And swung their frenzied hair.

The morning lit, the birds arose;
The monster's faded eyes
Turned slowly to his native coast,
And peace was Paradise!⁹²

These bad days of nature she excuses by saying that

⁸⁸pp. 91-92.

⁹¹p. 84.

⁸⁹p. 98.

⁹²pp. 77-78.

⁹⁰p. 85.

Nature, like us, is sometimes caught
Without her diadem.⁹³

By way of summary, it may be noted that she accepted all nature as a part of a cosmic whole and found great delight in all natural objects because they belonged to the same big plan of which she was a tiny part. From the material of the first chapter, it will be noted that she was fond of nature even as a child and that this love grew as she gradually withdrew from human society. The plants, the animals, the seasons, the months, day and night, and other natural phenomena became to her personified beings to whom she could talk and pour out the longings of her lonely heart.

⁹³p. 107.

CHAPTER V
HUMAN NATURE

No one could manifest the sympathetic interest in all the things of nature mentioned in the preceding chapter and not be intensely interested in human nature too.

The show is not the show,
But they that go.
Menagerie to me
My neighbor be.
Fair play--
Both went to see.¹

Again she writes, "Experiment to me is every one I meet." She wanted the people with whom she came in contact to have some deeper significance than a mere plausible appearance. She expresses this desire in a poem in which she compares the person without force of character to an empty nut. Both might have a pleasing outward appearance and yet be without significance within.²

Perhaps the one thing about human beings that interested her most was their emotional problems. She states the magnitude of the emotions in the following four lines:

It's such a little thing to weep,
So short a thing to sigh;
And yet by trades the size of these
We men and women die!³

Her comments on the similarity of grief and joy are interest-

¹p. 23.

²p. 27.

³p. 43.

ing. Perhaps the emotions themselves are not similar, but she says that often their effects are similar.

Flags are a brave sight,
But no true eye
Ever went by one
Steadily.

Music's triumphant,
But a fine ear
Aches with delight
The drums to hear.⁴

She could wade whole pools of grief because she was used to that, but "the least push of joy" made her tip drunkenly. This paradoxical state of feeling led her to conclude that,

Power is only pain,
Stranded, through discipline,
Till weights will hang.
Give balm to giants,
And they'll wilt, like men.
Give Himmaleh,--
They'll carry him!⁵

In another poem she speaks of the superhuman strength that grief and pain bring. She says that a load does not seem impossible to carry until after it is put down and the superhuman has withdrawn.⁶

She stresses the futility of such emotions as anger and enmity. The following short poem is a good sermon against those negative forces:

⁴p. 342.

⁵p. 19.

⁶p. 342.

Mine enemy is growing old,--
 I have at last revenge.
 The palate of the hate departs;
 If any would revenge,--

Let him be quick, the viand flits,
 It is a faded meat.
 Anger as soon as fed is dead;
 'Tis starving makes it fat.⁷

She defines remorse, another negative force, as "memory awake." When one suffers from remorse, there is a presence of departed acts all about one, and the past is "set down before the soul and lighted with a match." It is cureless, too, and cannot even be healed by God, because it is His institution, "the complement of hell."⁸

Speaking of suspense and dread, she says that the fear of anything is much greater and worse than the thing itself. All human nature shares this belief with her, a belief well-expressed in the following lines:

'Tis harder knowing it is due,
 Than knowing it is here.⁹

She knew the emotion of patriotism, too. She says that her country need not change her gown as far as she is concerned, for "her triple suit" still looks good to her. She even jibes a bit at Great Britain by saying that the reason that country disapproves of "the stars" is that

There's something in their attitude
 That taunts her bayonet.¹⁰

⁷p. 33.

⁹p. 46.

⁸p. 33.

¹⁰p. 28.

Her knowledge of the emotions of the human heart came from observing the experiences of others as well as from her own experiences. In a brief, exquisite poem she tells how the experiences of others may help us to carry on in time of stress. When we read how others strove, we become stronger. When we read how others renounced, we are less afraid of our own renunciations.

Read then of faith
That shone above the fagot;
Clear strains of hymn
The river could not drown;
Brave names of men
And celestial women,
Passed out of record
Into renown.¹¹

By measuring the griefs of others "with analytic eyes" to see whether they compared with her own or not, she learned the feeling of brotherhood that suffering can bring. She would often look at other people who were enduring trouble of some kind and

wonder if it hurts to live
And if they have to try,
And whether, could they choose between,
They would not rather die.¹²

Though she could not always guess the magnitude of the cross that another was bearing, still it always gave her comfort to know that she was not the only one who had grief.

She found cheer from contact with light-hearted people.

¹¹p. 11.

¹²pp. 52-53.

Once a "heart not so heavy" as hers passed her window singing "a careless snatch" with all abandon. It cheered her in her loneliness, and she expressed the hope that he would stroll by her window again the following night.¹³

Not always could she find such a gallant spirit among her acquaintances.

A shady friend for torrid days
Is easier to find
Than one of higher temperature
For frigid hour of mind.

After the statement of the lines just quoted, she next inquired into philosophy to find who is to blame for "broad-cloth breasts" being firmer than those of "organdy." She could find no answer and therefore had to conclude that "the tapestries of paradise so notelessly are made!"¹⁴

This lack of gallant spirits perhaps causes the restraint which the soul exercises in selecting its society. When that society has been selected, Emily Dickinson points out that it often shuts the door and refuses to take notice of other petitioners, although they come in chariots and be of royal blood. I think she refers to her own love affair when she says,

I've known her from an ample nation
Choose one;

¹³Pp. 34-35.

¹⁴p. 29.

Then close the valves of her attention
Like stone.¹⁵

Another personal reference may be detected in her poem about the restraint of great souls that feel "ill at ease in minor company." The perfect poise that smaller souls display in the presence of others she compares to the arrogance of the summer gnat as he sails along all "unconscious that his single sail does not comprise the sky."¹⁶

She knew, too, that even great souls are comparatively insignificant. She said that the best way she knew to "reduce our mortal consequence" was to remember that we should be nothing "a period from hence."¹⁷ Even our agony should not be counted too important, for

After a hundred years
Nobody knows the place,--
Agony, that enacted there,
Motionless as peace.¹⁸

She noticed one particularly odd thing about our relationships with others.

We miss a kinsman more
Then warranted to see
Than when withheld by oceans
From possibility.

A furlong than a league
Inflicts a pricklier pain--
Till we, who smiled at Pyrenees,
Of parishes complain!¹⁹

15p. 8.

18p. 195.

16p. 282.

19p. 282.

17p. 226.

This poem shows that she understood well all the little inconsistencies that go to make up human nature.

Such knowledge made her tolerant of the faults of others, but there was one type of person that she could not tolerate, and that was the one who is thoughtlessly and carelessly cruel. All her contempt for the cruel, selfish person is found in the following lines:

She dealt her pretty words like blades,
As glittering they shone,
And every one unbared a nerve
Or wantoned with a bone.

She never deemed she hurt,
That is not steel's affair;
A vulgar grimace in the flesh
How ill the creatures bear!

To ache is human, not polite;
The film upon the eye
Mortality's old custom--
Just locking up to die.²⁰

In all her relationships with others she learned a vast amount about the various experiences of human nature in all its folly, its pathos, and its joy. In her poems that deal with these phases of human life, she did not content herself with observation alone but gave to others the benefit of the things she had learned. For instance, she tells us in four short lines how to enliven the routine of a monotonous existence.

To make routine a stimulus,
Remember it can cease--

Capacity to terminate
Is a specific grace.²¹

On the subject of the folly of human nature, she observed that we often fail to appreciate good things until they depart, that we have an insatiate yearning for forbidden fruit, that we are always ready to see illusions, and that distance never fails to enchant us. The first of these qualities she learned from her own bitter experience of losing "a daily bliss" that she had viewed with indifference until she saw it begin to stir and take flight "around a crag." Then she learned "its sweetness right."²² On the subject of forbidden fruit, she remarked that the tint she could not take was always the best and that "the moments of dominion that happen on the Soul" only occasionally unfit it for the enjoyment of soberer moments.²³ On illusions she offers the observation that we often think we see that which we hope for; then she closes with the following lament:

How many the fictitious shores
Before the harbor lie.²⁴

Speaking of the readiness of the human mind to be enchanted by distance, she offers the following comment:

The mountain at a given distance
In amber lies;

²¹p. 292.

²³p. 303.

²²pp. 54-55.

²⁴p. 35.

Approached, the amber flits a little,--
And that's the skies.²⁵

More strongly put is the description that she gives of the significance which a starving man attaches to food, only to find that "partaken, it relieves indeed, but proves us that spices fly in the receipt" and that "it was the distance was savory."²⁶

Some of the pathetic things of human nature that she emphasizes are man's reluctance to die, the solemnity he feels when finishing a task, however trivial, his inability to express his thoughts, his too frequent disillusionment, and his having to suffer defeat and pain. All of man's reluctance to die is found in the following concise statement:

The Maker's cordial visage,
However good to see,
Is shunned, we must admit it,
Like an adversity.

This same poem sets forth the pathos of man's reluctance to die in one brief stroke: "Drowning is not so pitiful as the attempt to rise."²⁷ Children first learn the solemnity of finishing things in leaving their play "among the garrets" or in completing the joys of some holiday. Later they learn what it means to leave their homes, and still

²⁵p. 23.

²⁶p. 34.

²⁷p. 43.

later they know the solemnity of finishing their earthly journey.²⁸

The elusiveness of human thoughts she learned probably from her own experience in writing. She expresses their evasive quality thus:

I felt a cleavage in my mind
As if my brain had split;
I tried to match it, seam by seam,
But could not make them fit.

The thought behind I strove to join
Unto the thought before,
But sequence unravelled out of reach
Like balls upon a floor.²⁹

In another poem she tells about the familiar quality of a vague, fleeting thought that went up her mind that day. She was quite sure that she had met the thought before, but where or how she could not tell, since it stayed only long enough to remind her of its familiarity.³⁰

Still another lamentable phase of human experience is the process of disillusionment that every child has to face as he grows older. She speaks of the child's new faith and likens it to "the sunrise on fresh eyes."³¹ Then she summarizes the whole process of disillusionment in eight short lines:

The heart asks pleasure first,
And then, excuse from pain;

²⁸p. 197.

³⁰p. 23.

²⁹p. 49.

³¹p. 286.

And then, those little anodynes
That deaden suffering;

And then, to go to sleep;
And then, if it should be
The will of its Inquisitor,
The liberty to die.³²

In a poem beginning "My portion is defeat to-day," she summarizes all the human accoutrements of defeat. It is a "paler luck than victory;" "drums don't follow" people who have suffered defeat. Other things that it means are "chips of blank in boyish eyes," "piles of solid moan," and "shreds of prayer and death's surprise."³³ Her sympathy ran out to all who had suffered defeat, either physical or spiritual, and for them she made the following wish:

We trust, in plumed procession,
For such the angels go,
Rank after rank, with even feet
And uniforms of snow.³⁴

Her sympathy for the defeated is beautifully expressed in the following lines:

Not one of all the purple host
Who took the flag to-day
Can tell the definition,
So clear, of victory,

As he, defeated, dying,
On whose forbidden ear
The distant strains of triumph
Break, agonized and clear.³⁵

Genevieve Taggard writes about this poem the following

³²p. 6.

³⁴p. 11.

³³p. 340.

³⁵p. 3.

comment:

Here, as always in her work, is a genius for dramatizing the self, giving it heroic tests and combats, keeping it lithe, making it live in a stoic universe, in as definite and lawful a pattern as the mind of man has been able to invent. The Puritan soul, which had a very dull time of it with the Puritans of small imagination, found in Emily Dickinson a poet capable of assigning it a resplendent role, as strenuous as the clash of life and death.³⁶

She was not so much interested in the sensation of pain itself as in the "formal feeling" that comes afterwards. This sensation is caused by the nerves sitting "ceremonious like tombs" and the "stiff heart" too stunned by the cessation of great pain to resume normal activity at once. During this period the "feet go around in a wooden way," and everything is seen in such a mist that afterwards one remembers this "hour of lead" only "as freezing persons recollect the snow."³⁷

Her knowledge of human experience was not confined to the foolish and the pathetic. She knew the joy of living, the joy of "the soul's superior instants." Moments like these she defined as

Eternity's disclosure
To favorites, a few,
Of the Colossal substance
Of immortality.³⁸

³⁶Life and Mind of Emily Dickinson, p. 148.

³⁷p. 365.

³⁸Pp. 232-233.

Her joy in nature and the common things of life was so great that she referred to herself as an "inebriate of air" and a "debauchee of dew."³⁹ So great was her joy in living that she could find no words to express it, but she consoled herself for her lack of fluency by saying,

If I could tell how glad I was,
I should not be so glad.⁴⁰

In the following lines she recognizes the joy and the blessing of having work to do:

I tie my hat, I crease my shawl,
Life's little duties do
Precisely as the very least
Were infinite to me.

I put new blossoms in the glass,
And throw the old away;
I push a petal from my gown
That anchored there,--I weigh

The time 'twill be till six o'clock,
I have so much to do--
And get existence some way back,
Stopped, struck, my ticking through.⁴¹

One of the most satisfying human experiences that she knew was the joy that good books bring. She thanked these "kinsmen of the shelf" for the pleasure that they gave her.⁴² She found special enchantment in reading an old book, "a precious, mouldering pleasure."⁴³ Books were to

³⁹p. 12.

⁴²p. 35.

⁴⁰p. 267.

⁴³pp. 6-7.

⁴¹p. 368.

her a chariot for the spirit.

There is no frigate like a book
To take us lands away,
Nor any coursers like a page
Of prancing poetry.

This traverse may the poorest take
Without oppress of toll;
How frugal is the chariot
That bears a human soul!⁴⁴

Thus we see that in the lonely, leisurely life that Emily Dickinson lived she had plenty of time to analyze her own emotions and the emotions of others. Her natural sense of integrity caused her to persevere until she reached a satisfactory conclusion about any human relationship that she set out to analyze. All her human contacts were magnified somewhat by the extremely lonely life that she lived: little kindnesses and little hurts both loomed larger because of her infrequent contact with others. Because she had suffered herself, she had sympathy for all living things; and because she was capable of feeling sorrow very deeply, she also had rare moments of ecstasy when the pendulum swung to the other extreme. All human experiences were her laboratory equipment for experimenting with the various activities of the human soul.

⁴⁴p. 46.

CHAPTER VI
LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP

Emily Dickinson defines love as follows:

That Love is all there is,
Is all we know of Love;
It is enough, the freight should be
Proportioned to the groove.¹

Love is anterior to life,
Posterior to death,
Initial of creation, and
Exponent of breath.²

In the chapter on biography, mention was made of the fact that she fell in love with a man whom she could not marry and that as a result she renounced all future chances of another love affair and marriage. Naturally the coming of a great love like hers and the renunciation of the hope of its earthly fulfillment would have a great influence on the life of one so sensitively attuned to all experiences as was Emily Dickinson. Her unique treatment of death grew out of the hope that it would reunite her and her lover for all eternity. This hope taught her the word immortality, which occurs so frequently throughout her poems. In one poem addressed to her absent lover, she told him that the "farthest degree" of hope in her heart was that she might "dwell timidly" with him in some "distant heaven."³

¹p. 262.

²p. 146.

³p. 128.

Not always was she certain that this hope would be fulfilled. The following lines express the sting of taunting uncertainty:

If certain, when this life was out,
That yours and mine should be,
I'd toss it yonder like a rind,
And taste eternity.

But now, all ignorant of the length
Of time's uncertain wing,
It goads me, like the goblin bee,
That will not state its sting.⁴

Many lines, like the following, express a growing certainty of such reunion:

Sufficient troth that we shall rise--
Deposed, at length, the grave--
To that new marriage, justified
Through Calvaries of Love!⁵

These last hopeful lines came after mention of the last hours she spent with her lover. She goes further to say that she will know no death unless she is dispelled finally and completely from her lover and that she has no ties binding her to the world to come except the tie of her love.⁶

She comforted herself about the long, lonely hours that she would have to spend in this world by trying to believe that this life is "just the primer to a life unopened." Following this brave statement, she grows rather wistful

⁴p. 129.

⁵p. 134.

⁶p. 137.

about how she would not ask to advance further if she could have the companionship here of the one she loved.⁷

She liked to dwell on the time when her lover should come for her and together they should "journey to the day." On the way they would tell each other how they "sang to keep the dark away."⁸

Think of it, lover! I and thee
Permitted face to face to be;
After a life, a death we'll say,--
For death was that, and this is thee.⁹

This "missing all" prevented her from "missing minor things."¹⁰ Thus was her whole earthly vision affected by her renunciation, and she learned to interpret all things in their relationship to it. Take, for example, her definition of distance.

Distance is not the realm of Fox,
Nor by relay as Bird;
Abated, Distance is until
Thyself, Beloved!¹¹

Time did not abate the pain of her deprivation, the reason being that the renunciation was so great that it left her no world upon which to build. She herself referred to her parting with her lover as the loss of an entire world.

I lost a world the other day.
Has anybody found?
You'll know it by the row of stars
Around its forehead bound.

7p. 166.

10p. 228.

8p. 206.

11p. 265.

9p. 212.

A rich man might not notice it;
 Yet to my frugal eye
 Of more esteem than ducats,
 Oh, find it, sir, for me!¹²

The reason her loss was so complete was that she regarded herself as truly married to her lover as if she had had a church ceremony. As the wife, then, of one man, there was no room for any other in her life. The evidence of this belief on her part is found in the following lines:

Title divine is mine
 The Wife without
 The Sign.
 Acute degree
 Conferred on me--
 Empress of Calvary.¹³

Her naturally optimistic mind strove desperately for some reason for her loss. Her faith was one source of comfort, as is seen from the content of the following lines:

I shall know why, when time is over,
 And I have ceased to wonder why;
 Christ will explain each separate anguish
 In the fair schoolroom of the sky.

He will tell me what Peter promised,
 And I, for wonder at his woe,
 I shall forget the drop of anguish
 That scalds me now, that scalds me now.¹⁴

She found comfort, too, in thinking that perhaps she should be fitter to be the wife of her loved one because of "the long hindrance." Perhaps each passing year would bestow

¹²p. 173.

¹³p. 154.

¹⁴p. 174.

some fair trait upon her until she should be "fairest of the earth." Then the waiting would give her time to "anticipate his gaze" when first he should see her in her new glory. Her one concern was that she should not be so changed that he would sigh for "the Real One" that he had loved. Upon this point, though, her mind is set at rest by the thought that love would "array" her right so that she should be "perfect in his sight." If the waiting would make him perceive in her "an excellenter youth," then she would gain through loss and "through grief obtain the beauty that reward him best."¹⁵

There is one poem that makes us wonder if as time went on she did not lose some of her hope and optimism along the way. It is the poem beginning "A prison gets to be a friend." In this poem she states that after years of prison "the cheek of Liberty" gets to seem less real than the "companion steel." This poem closes with the following significant lines:

The narrow round, the stint,
 The slow exchange of hope
 For something passiver,--content
 Too steep for looking up,
 The liberty we knew
 Avoided like a dream,
 Too wide for any night but Heaven,
 If that indeed redeem.¹⁶

¹⁵p. 276.

¹⁶p. 285.

If she did gradually lose her hope, she did not lose her constancy, a quality concisely expressed in the following lines:

Alter? When the hills do.
Falter? When the sun
Question if his glory
Be the perfect one.

Surfeit? When the daffodil
Doth of the dew:
Even as herself, O friend!
I will of you!¹⁷

In another poem she vows that she will be constant until the time "when sense from spirit files away." When her "brief tragedy of flesh" should be ended, when all figures should "show their royal front," and when all mists should be "carved away," she knew that there would still be for her the one "atom" that she "preferred to all the lists of clay."¹⁸

She never ceased to envy all the natural things that had the privilege of coming in contact with her beloved. The seas upon which he sailed, the spokes of wheels that carried him over land, the "speechless hills" that looked upon him as he traveled, the nests of sparrows that dotted "his distant eaves," the fly upon his window pane, the leaves outside his window, the light that woke him each morning, and the bell that announced noon to him--all these

¹⁷p. 127.

¹⁸p. 137.

she envied because of their nearness to his presence.¹⁹

Some of her most exquisite love poems are those addressed directly to her lover. Perhaps the favorite of all these might well be the following lines:

Wild nights! Wild nights!
Were I with thee,
Wild nights should be
Our luxury!

Futile the winds
To a heart in port,--
Done with the compass,
Done with the chart.

Rowing in Eden!
Ah! the sea!
Might I but moor
Tonight in thee!²⁰

In another poem she tells him that where he is will always be home for her, whether that place be "Cashmere or Calvary." What he does will always be her delight, and even bondage would be acceptable as sweet imprisonment if she could be with him. She climaxes this message of undying love as follows:

Where Thou art not is Woe--
Though bands of spices blow,
What Thou do'st not--Despair--
Though Gabriel praise me, Sir!²¹

In still another poem addressed to her absent lover, she speaks of herself as a river running to him, who is the sea.

¹⁹p. 153.

²⁰p. 141.

²¹pp. 355-356.

She promises to "fetch him brooks from spotted nooks" and concludes with four words a little jarring because of their resemblance to modern slang:

Say, sea,
Take me!²²

The most tender of all this group of poems is the following one:

When roses cease to bloom, dear,
And violets are done,
When bumble-bees in solemn flight
Have passed beyond the sun,

The hand that paused to gather
Upon this summer's day
Will idle lie, in Auburn,--
Then take my flower, pray!²³

All these poems addressed to her lover make us wonder if she ever received letters from him. I am sure that she did, because in one poem she tells the manner in which she reads a particular letter. She said that she always locked the door of her room first and then pushed it with her fingers to be sure that the lock held fast. Then in the most remote corner of her room she would take her letter and "softly pick its lock." Then glancing about to be sure that not even a mouse was intruding, she would "peruse how infinite" she was to somebody and "sigh for lack of heaven."²⁴

²²p. 131.

²³p. 147.

²⁴p. 140.

Miss Taggard relates the story of Emily's receiving secret letters from George Gould through Deacon Luke Sweetser, who would give the letters to Maggie, the Irish servant, to be delivered without "Miss Vinnie's" knowledge.²⁵

The majority of her love poems have a distinctly personal note, and yet she did treat in quite a general manner various phases of the problem of love between the sexes. Before the awakening of passion she says that

Our lives are Swiss,--
So still, so cool;

but some "odd afternoon" the curtain is lifted, and we look "farther on," even to the Italy that "stands the other side."²⁶ For her, however, there are the "solemn Alps" to keep her from the sunshine of the presence of her beloved one. Thus we see that even though she starts out on an impersonal note, she usually mentions her own love affair in some way before she finishes. She gives an impersonal description of two lovers together. She says that the girl's bodice is rising and falling and "her pretty speech, like drunken men," is staggering pitifully. Her fingers are fumbling at her needle-work, and one wonders the reason for her agitation until one sees just opposite her a lad whose speech is also going "like the drunkard" and whose vest is

²⁵Genevieve Taggard, Life and Mind of Emily Dickinson, pp. 136-137.

²⁶Pp. 55-56.

also dancing "to the immortal tune." She finishes the story by saying that finally "those two troubled little clocks" merged into one.²⁷

She could not remain impersonal, though, on the subjects of the humility of love, its transforming power, and its ultimate consecration in marriage. As the tides are content to follow the dictation of the moon, so was she willing to be obedient to the least command that the eyes of her lover imposed upon her.²⁸ Her own worthiness was all her doubt, and her one care was lest she prove "insufficient for his beloved need."²⁹ Ever since the day that he touched her and she "groped upon his breast," she had been a different person, breathing "a superior air" and brushing "a royal gown." Even her "gypsy face" had been transfigured "to tenderer renown."³⁰ As for the vows of marriage, she thought the "till death" very narrow loving, and favored vows for all eternity.³¹ True marriage would consist of her being permitted

Forever at his side to walk
The smaller of the two,
Brain of his brain, blood of his blood,
Two lives, one Being, now.

Forever of his fate to taste,
If grief, the largest part--

²⁷pp. 142-143.

³⁰pp. 151-152.

²⁸pp. 143-144.

³¹p. 371.

²⁹p. 145.

If joy, to put my piece away
For that beloved heart.³²

Knowing her great capacity for love, one does not wonder about the quality of her friendship. Amy Lowell comments upon the intensity of her friendships as follows: "Those few people whom she admitted to her friendship were loved with the terrible and morbid exaggeration of the profoundly lonely."³³ Recluse that she was in her later years, her heart often warmed toward people that she saw in passing. She describes one such occasion in the poem beginning, "A door just opened on a street." Inside the open door she saw "an instant's width of warmth." The sudden closing of the door brought to her a sense of double desolation.³⁴ On this subject of friendship, she once found occasion to write:

Are friends delight or pain?
Could bounty but remain
Riches were good.

But if they only stay
Bolder to fly away,
Riches are sad.³⁵

One poem tells of an early friendship with another girl, with whom she liked to talk "fond and late" about all sub-

³²p. 352.

³³poetry and Poets, p. 89.

³⁴p. 51.

³⁵p. 51.

jects under the sun, with perhaps the exception of the grave. The two "handled destinies as cool" as if God himself were "a quiet party" to their authority. Their fondest speculations were upon their future lives when they should be from "girls to women softly raised."³⁶

Her dearest friend was her Sister Sue, her brother's wife. This sister that dwelt "a hedge away" was different from the members of Emily's own family; she sang "a different tune," one that had brought happiness to Emily "up and down the hills" over all the long miles "from childhood." After having known her brother's wife for many years, Emily still found enchantment in her presence, an enchantment expressed in the following lines:

I split the dew but took the morn,
I chose this single star
From out the wide night's numbers,
Sue--forevermore!³⁷

The tender quality of her friendship manifests itself in the little gems of poems that she wrote to send along to some friend with some simple gift, often a flower or two or perhaps a bit of pine. I quote the four of these that I consider best. The first three were sent with flowers.

I pay in satin cash--
You did not state your price,
A petal for a paragraph
Is near as I can guess.³⁸

³⁶p. 325.

³⁷p. 222.

³⁸p. 312.

Defrauded I
 A butterfly--
 The lawful heir--
 For thee.³⁹

All the letters I can write
 Are not fair as this,
 Syllables of velvet,
 Sentences of plush,
 Depths of ruby, undrained,
 Hid, lip, for thee--
 Play it were a humming bird
 And just sipped me!⁴⁰

A feather from the whippoorwill
 That everlasting sings,
 Whose galleries are sunrise,
 Whose stanzas are the spring,
 Whose emerald nest the ages spin
 With mellow murmuring thread,
 Whose beryl egg what schoolboys hunt
 In 'recess' overhead!⁴¹

By way of summary, I do not believe it would be exaggerating to say that the greatest single influence on her life was her unhappy love affair. It colored all the rest of her life with melancholy and a longing for death. She used it for poetic purposes; yet we know that she suffered greatly from her renunciation because of the sincerity of the lines that she wrote about it. The sentimental world of thought in which she lived permitted her to be morbid about her one experience with love. Perhaps if she had

³⁹p. 313.

⁴⁰p. 316.

⁴¹p. 377.

lived in this century, she would not have permitted one experience to ruin her chances of meeting somebody else whom she could love and with whom she might have a happy married life. One must take into account the intensity with which she always did things and with which she always felt any emotion before branding her faithfulness to her one love affair as unnecessarily morbid. The suffering that the renunciation of her lover caused ~~her~~ deepened her sympathy for all life, and the lonely life that it influenced her to lead caused her to magnify all out of proportion the few friendships that she permitted herself. In considering these morbid aspects of her treatment of love and friendship, one must not forget that the splendid quality of all her personal love and friendship transcends all idle speculations as to the cause of their intensity.

CHAPTER VII

A REVIEW OF "UNPUBLISHED POEMS"

The "Unpublished Poems of Emily Dickinson" is a sort of lesser complement to the Centenary Edition of "The Poems of Emily Dickinson." It is divided into four parts, each designated by a simple arabic numeral; the discerning reader, however, soon notes that these divisions are meant to correspond to the first four sections of her Complete Poems and might well be similarly named "Life," "Nature," "Love," and "Time and Eternity." Its value consists not in any addition to her poetic stature, but in the pleasure that one hundred and thirty-one more of her poems can give. The only significant contribution that this volume makes is a group of poems referring to the death of her lover, mention of which is not definitely made in her other volume.

Perhaps the whole tenor of these recently published poems is a bit more philosophical than that of the other poems, if such could be. Certainly much space is devoted to the observation of general philosophical truths. For purposes of discussion, I shall divide the poems of this volume into five sections: general philosophical poems, poems of experiences that elevate the spirit, poems of experiences that obscure its joy, poems of nature, and love poems. I find correct the statement made on the inside front cover of the book: "Many of the poems in this collection are un-

questionably the equal of Emily Dickinson's best work, although this is not true of all."

The poems in the first group refuse to be sorted into certain categories; they are general, as the name of my first classification implies. I shall mention briefly some of the most significant truths found in this section. First of all, death does not come to those who deliberately invite it. To drive this statement home, Emily Dickinson tells of a man "who fought like those who've nought to lose." Since for him "to live was doom," he invited death in every bold way possible, only to obtain the following result:

His comrades shifted like the flakes
When gusts reverse the snow;
But he remained alive because
Of vehemence to die!¹

Knowing this elusive quality of death did not keep her from thinking of the gifts that it might bring. She hoped that it would take her "heart that broke so long" to a place where "hound cannot overtake the hare" and where no school-boy may "rob the next tenderness builded there."²

There is a use, too, for every anguish suffered by the human spirit. There has to be "a woe" and "a loss or so" for the purpose of bending "the eye best beauty's way." The

¹H. D. Bianchi and A. L. Leete, Unpublished Poems of Emily Dickinson, p. 6. All the references in this chapter are to this volume.

²p. 131.

price we pay in anguish is in proportion to the ecstasy we receive. "Our Lord thought no extravagance to pay--a Cross!"³ Anguish might well be looked upon as a kind of schooling if we believe that this life is our "brief term to qualify."⁴ Emily Dickinson speaks of this life as merely

An hour in Chrysalis to pass,
Then gay above receding grass
A Butterfly to go!
A moment to interrogate,
Then wiser than a "Surrogate"
The universe to know!⁵

This optimism enabled her finally to believe that her renunciation of her lover might have been best for her, after all. She reached this conclusion as follows:

I am not used to hope:
It might intrude upon--
Its sweet parade blaspheme the place
Ordained to suffering.

It might be easier
To fail with land in sight
Than gain my blue peninsula--
To perish--of delight.⁶

Other truths concern themselves with various properties of the human heart. Always the human spirit will consume itself if it is not fed with love. It is like a lamp wick that burns the oil as long as the oil lasts and then begins the process of self-consumption.⁷ It is given strength through the mere facing of trouble. When the poet bravely

³p. 25.

⁶p. 102.

⁴p. 35.

⁷p. 17.

⁵p. 57.

touched her "reversed Universe," it slid back in place.⁸ Certainty of the time when trouble shall end gives a man strength to carry his load. He will "ache contented on" if the ages of his trouble are stated "to a cypher" and every day mark his progress toward release by "notching the fall of the even Sun."⁹ The heart's remembered unpleasantness will grow dimmer as the years advance. Even the Deluge that "swept the World away" is now remembered only as a legend.¹⁰ The human spirit requires adventure if it is to thrive.

Each consciousness must emigrate
And lose its neighbor once.¹¹

It also has the property of becoming "immortal friends" with kindred spirits among personal acquaintances or people known only by the fruits of their mind. The poet says of the latter group:

Bereavement in their death to feel
Whom we have never seen,
A vital kinsmanship impart
Our soul and theirs, between.¹²

Its eyes may be blinded to beauty by clouds of grief. All the attractions of summer, the birds, the bees, the flowers, could not break one year the grief-sealed door of the poet's heart.

⁸p. 23.

¹¹p. 115.

⁹p. 22.

¹²p. 118.

¹⁰p. 42.

The summer grace for notice strove,
 Remote her best array;
 The heart to stimulate the eye
 Refused too utterly.¹³

And finally, the human spirit may be transformed by the power of beauty. A sunset can make one oblivious to such things as territory, circumference, and decay; its "amber revelation" can exhilarate our "solemn features" and make them fit for the inspection of Omnipotence.¹⁴

One especially timely philosophical truth that she sets forth is the uselessness of war. Triumph in war lasts only until the cessation of the drums. Then the "finished faces" make the victors hate glory and wish for the purer state of the defeated. To sensitive souls at least the following comment is true:

Could Prospect taste of Retrospect
 The tyrannies of man
 Were tenderer, diviner
 The Transitive toward.¹⁵

Three other generalities are emphasized; namely, "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he," dreams are better than realities, and a great love always brings humility. As for the first one, the poet is sure that "the Outer from the Inner derives its magnitude." This is surely true just as "the fine unvarying axis" of the wheel is the part of

¹³p. 49.

¹⁴p. 50.

¹⁵p. 3.

most importance, although the "spokes spin more conspicuous and fling the dust the while."¹⁶ We are assured that dreams are better than many realities in a poem the keynote lines of which are listed below:

Sweeter the sunrising robins
Never gladdened tree,
Than a solid dawn confronting,
Leading to no day.¹⁷

The humility and great constancy of a profound love manifest themselves in the poem in which she asks her lover to be sure to summon her when he is dying. She wants to perform all the last devoted services for him and remain with him when all others have turned away.¹⁸

One might well ask, "What was the source of all these truths she so forcibly propounds?" She herself gives the answer as follows:

By intuition mightiest things
Assert themselves, and not by terms.¹⁹

Thus again we see her indebtedness to Emerson and the transcendentalists.

Faith is one of the supreme experiences that elevate the soul. She would have us "trust in the Unexpected." It was faith that led Columbus to "an apparition baptized America." The experience of Thomas, who doubted the resurrection of the Savior, is cited to emphasize that the best

¹⁶p. 69.

¹⁸pp. 90-91.

¹⁷p. 77.

¹⁹p. 83.

kind of faith is that which makes sight unnecessary.²⁰ She gives as her reason for believing in immortality that "so much of Heaven has gone from Earth that there must be a Heaven." She was not going to be like the mole who had to have proved to him that there was a sky; she thought that it would be unbecoming of her to urge exact location.²¹ It was best, after all, to let "God possess the secret."²² She thought that she could have faith in Him because of the way in which he tempers the winds that blow upon us. He sends delirium to divert "the wretch for whom the scaffold neighs," and He does not let us "know the stroke" until we are "past the pain."²³

Other evidences of the goodness of God are that He rewards courage and sends us rare souls for inspiration. In advocating courage, the poet says that if our nerve deny us, then we should "go above our nerve." If our souls know wavering instants, then we should "lift the Flesh door" and rise above earthliness into realms of purer "oxygen."²⁴ In describing one rare, inspiring soul, she rather deploras the lack of gallant spirits and says that even a "gnat's minutest fan" is all that is necessary to "obliterate a tract of citizen." The rare, strong soul that she describ-

²⁰p. 74.

²³p. 79.

²¹p. 5.

²⁴p. 12.

²²p. 149.

ed was "lit with a finer phosphor" and required "a power of renowned cold" to quench it.²⁵

For true satisfaction of the spirit she recommends getting acquainted with one's own personality and the cultivating of poetry and the arts. As for the first recommendation, she promises that "never for society one shall seek in vain who his own acquaintance cultivate."²⁶ In the following lines she pays a high tribute to all poets and artists:

The Martyr Poets did not tell,
But wrought their pang in syllable,--
That when their mortal fame be numb
Their mortal fate encourage some.

The Martyr Painters never spoke,
Bequeathing rather to their work,--
That when their conscious fingers cease
Some seek in Art the Art of Peace.²⁷

The power of poetry to transform the spirit is set forth in the poem in which she tells her own personal reaction to the poetry of Elizabeth Barrett Browning. A "very lunacy of light" swept over her, and "bees became as butterflies" and "butterflies as moons." Even "the days to mighty metres stept." She says that she "could not have defined the change" but thinks that it must have been "conversion of the mind."²⁸ She was mystified as to the power of music, but knew that its power was sure.

25p. 4.

27p. 26.

26p. 37.

28p. 39.

I've heard an organ talk sometimes
 In a cathedral aisle
 And understood no word it said,
 Yet held my breath the while

And risen up and gone away
 A more Bernardine girl,
 Yet knew not what was done to me
 In that old hallowed aisle.²⁹

Superior moments like the one that resulted from the organ song are the gifts of Heaven, "a grant of the Divine" to be used "as stimulants in cases of despair or stupor." When these "heavenly moments" withdraw, they leave "the dazzled Soul in her unfurnished room."³⁰ This exhilaration comes from within; "there can no Outer wine so royally intoxicating as that diviner brand."³¹ Once when Gabriel had told to her "the royal syllable," she wrote these lines:

No wilderness can be
 Where this attendeth me;
 No desert noon,
 No fear of frost to come
 Haunt the perennial bloom,
 But certain June!³²

This volume tells the other side of the story, too. She knew such experiences as loneliness, dread, adversity of the spirit, horror of days and fears by night, the anguish of a heavy burden, the fear of living, and even periods of living death. She defines loneliness by saying that it is like standing in a cavern's mouth "widths out of

²⁹P. 38.

³¹P. 21.

³⁰P. 20.

³²P. 27.

the sun."³³ The sensation of dread she was too brave to countenance. She said that it was but "the whizzing before the ball" and that it would be silenced "when the ball enters."³⁴

She knew the uses of adversity. "A tooth upon our peace" is but "to vitalize the Grace."

The Heaven hath a Hell
Itself to signalize.³⁵

"By measuring the Grave" one has "the ethereal gain" of "measuring the sun."³⁶ A nature exists only when it is struggling.³⁷ An agony procures for one "a nearness to Tremendousness."³⁸ After a day of horror, she wrote that the strings of her soul were snapped and "her bow to atoms blown." Then came another day as huge in horror "as Yesterday in pairs."³⁹ She suffered "the fear that cometh by night," for she wrote

To whom the mornings stand for nights,
What must the midnights be!⁴⁰

In fact, sometimes she said that her heavy burden was like a weight "with needles in the pounds" to accentuate its torture.⁴¹ The fear of living often came upon her, and she

33p. 7.

38p. 148.

34p. 10.

39p. 13.

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36p. 44.

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37p. 80.

was afraid "to own a body" and afraid "to own a soul." She said that to own a body and a soul is to own "profound, precarious property." It amazed her that at birth we should all become "duke in a moment of deathlessness."⁴²

All this suffering gave her a sense of brotherhood with all mankind.

No man can understand
But he that hath endured
The dissolution in himself.⁴³

Once her heart was so grieved that all the glory of mid-summer could not arouse it to interest. Then there came the day when summer herself began to mourn "her frosts"; thenceforth she and summer dwelt together, their compact "a wordless sympathy."⁴⁴ Thus it was that she learned "the worthiness of suffering."⁴⁵

She did her best to see good in her renunciation of her lover. On this subject she addressed the following lines to her lover:

Late--when I take my place in Summer,
But I shall sing a fuller tune;
Vespers are sweeter than Matins, Signor--
Morning, only the seed of Noon.⁴⁶

Again she says that if some glad time her "exploring hands" do "chance sovereign on a mine," then surely

⁴²p. 19.

⁴⁵p. 144.

⁴³p. 143.

⁴⁶p. 32.

⁴⁴p. 49.

How fitter they will be for want
 Enlightening so well!
 I know not which--desire or grant--
 Be wholly beautiful!⁴⁷

The Son of God himself taught renunciation by example, and "flavors of that old Crucifixion" justify the road taken by "His faint confederates." I think she has reference to her own great renunciation in the following lines:

To put this world down like a bundle
 And walk away
 Requires energy--possible agony;
 'Tis the scarlet Way

Trodden with straight renunciation
 By the Son of God.⁴⁸

The nature poems in this volume offer nothing new. There is the same characteristic personification of natural objects. Mountains stoop to talk to a brave daisy.⁴⁹ The coming of night is described as the undressing and retiring of Day personified as a woman. She takes off gold garters and purple petticoats and retires without a care, being "too near to God to pray" and "too near to Heaven to fear."⁵⁰ Jack Frost, "a visitor in March," comes "just before the sun" and "influences flowers" till they are as rigid as glass.⁵¹ The months are personified as people professing ignorance as to the whereabouts of the gifts of months other

47p. 68.

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49p. 66.

than themselves. Only the "year" can give the exact location of the various gifts.⁵²

There is a good new description of sunrise and sunset, a description couched in more concise terms than ever.

A Slash of Blue, a sweep of Gray!
Some Scarlet patches on the way
Compose an evening sky!
A little Purple slipped between,
Some Ruby trousers hurried on,
A wave of Gold, and Bank of Day,--
This just makes out the morning sky!⁵³

Also there is a reference to the conservatory in which she grew flowers in winter. It is found in the following lines:

When diamonds are a legend,
And diadems a tale,
I brooch and earrings for myself
Do sow, and raise for sale.⁵⁴

Some gift verses written to be sent with flowers are found on pages fifty-nine and sixty-three inclusive, but they do not equal those found in the other volume. These and one more poem about a butterfly (a favorite insect with her) just about complete the offering of this section of the book. The best lines from this last poem tell how the butterfly dangled in the air "like a mote suspended," seemingly uncertain whether or not to return to the earth.⁵⁵

The love poems in this volume contain the same story

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of her love and renunciation, her hope that immortality would restore her lover to her, her belief in the everlasting quality of love and its transforming power, her constancy and her willingness to acknowledge male supremacy, and her envy of even the natural things that had the privilege of being near her lover. There are two direct references to the barrier between her and her lover and several references to his death.

The happiness and joy that she knew in the presence of her lover is described as giving her "wings of body" and causing her to deal "a word of gold" to every creature that she met. Then came the day that she lost him, a day when her riches "suddenly shrank" and she had to go back to the old discarded garment of sack cloth, missing sorely her "moment of brocade" and her "drop of India."⁵⁶ After that day her spirit "sickened ever afterward for whatsoe'er it saw" when it had been permitted to look briefly through Paradise's "sweet door ajar."⁵⁷ She had a strong hope that eternity would restore her lover to her, although that hope often failed to give her much comfort. Of her intermittent impatience she wrote:

It feels like poverty
An earldom out of sight to hold,
An income in the air.

⁵⁶pp. 98-99.

⁵⁷p. 122.

Possession has a sweeter chink
Unto a miser's ear.⁵⁸

Feeling this impatience and uncertainty, she often grew weary of this existence, weary after "the manner of the children" who do not know that they themselves are the noisy playthings that they cannot discard.⁵⁹ This weariness did not ever dim her great love, though. She tells her lover that when she comes to die, to the very last human expression her eyes will be full of her love for him.⁶⁰ It is no wonder, then, that her answer to the question of male supremacy was expressed as follows:

The answer of the Sea unto
The motion of the Moon,
Herself adjust her tides unto,--
Could I do else with mine?⁶¹

She loved him so much that she envied the news-boys who passed his door, the carts that passed through his street, Morning's bold face that stared in at his window, the least fly upon his window pane, the houses on each side of his, and the coals that burned in his fireplace.⁶²

One direct reference to the barrier between her and her lover is found in the poem in which she says that he was wrenched away from her by Decalogues.⁶³ The other is found in the following lines:

⁵⁸p. 120.

⁶¹p. 95.

⁵⁹p. 117.

⁶²p. 104.

⁶⁰p. 110.

⁶³p. 101.

But, Moon and Star,
 Though you're very far,
 There is One--further than you,--
 He is more than Firmament from me,
 So I can never go!⁶⁴

Three different poems refer definitely to the death of her lover, the last two of which I quote in full:

If he dissolve--then there is nothing more,
 Eclipse at midnight--it was dark before!

Sunset at Easter--blindness on the dawn,
 Faint Star of Bethlehem gone down!⁶⁵

Put up my lute--what of my music!
 Since the sole ear I cared to charm
 Passive as granite laps my music,
 Sobbing will suit as well as psalm!

Would but the Memnon of the desert
 Teach me the strain that vanquished him
 When he surrendered to the Sunrise--
 Maybe that would awaken them!⁶⁶

Thus we see that all the material found in "Unpublished Poems" accentuates and summarizes the material of the previous chapters.

64p. 94.

65p. 108.

66p. 140.

CHAPTER VIII

SUMMARIES AND CONCLUSIONS

Very little is known about the outward events of Emily Dickinson's life because of its simplicity and uneventfulness. She was fond of nature all her life, and the fondness increased with the years. She did all the conventional things that a young girl of her time was supposed to do; yet she seemed to realize the futility of many of the social customs of the nineteenth century. She was modern in that she sought to divest her life of all pretense and adhere only to the convincingly sincere.

Perhaps it was her sense of not being at one with the age in which she lived as much as the unhappy termination of her love affair that caused her to retire from all social activities and to live the life of a recluse. It seems that she was only following the direction of her sincere inclinations in retiring from society and that she was not deliberately trying to make a mystery. I do not believe that it ever occurred to her that she appeared to be dramatizing herself in an unusual fashion. She merely went quietly on her way, living her life as best she could and keeping her spirit free of all insincere conventionalities. Since she had inherited the love of writing from scholarly forbears, she naturally turned to it as a means of self expression and a means of relieving her loneliness. Since she felt that

she was not of the age in which she lived, she did not want her poems published for a generation that would not understand them; hence she gave orders that her poems should be burned after her death.

This desire to express herself through poetry came partly, if not largely, from a heightened creative spiritual force resulting from the repression of her physical creative force in the renunciation of all thought of marriage after her unhappy experience with love. Such repression caused her to be over-sensitive and to magnify certain ideas all out of proportion to their importance. She turned all her forces toward such activities as the choice of exact words, the search after knowledge of God and immortality, the evaluating of the various phases of human emotions, and the contemplation of nature. Thus it was that her major themes evolved from the circumstances that shaped her life.

Her exactness came largely as a result of her desire to represent each thing exactly as she found it to be. Her whimsical ideas had to be expressed, then, in words that suited her individual personality. She was highly introspective and defined all things in the light of her individual reaction to them and in the light of her individual personality. For example, her discussions of such matters as renunciation, human love, and the various aspects of nature are

colored with her own personal experiences so much that they cannot be taken as general observations on the subjects or even as unprejudiced data. Her disregard for convention is shown in the matter of her twisting the common usages of grammar to suit her individual style.

It was seen in the first chapter that early in life Emily Dickinson resolved to keep her spirit free of outside influences and let it develop according to the principles of intuitive truth. Perhaps this resolution of hers accounts in some measure for her individual style of writing as well as for the individuality of her philosophy and religion.

Honest interpretation of the intuitive truth which she received would not permit her to accept the conventionalities of the church of her parents and her friends. She took such foundation from it as she could and built her own structure. The result was a religion that satisfied her own personal desires. The cardinal principles of her religion were a belief in the goodness of God, the goodness of life, and the necessity for personal immortality if individuals were to be compensated for indignities of the spirit suffered here. She needed a God to take interest in all the affairs of her daily life; consequently she talked with a God that would listen as she unburdened her spirit. She needed to believe in the splendors of heaven; consequently she let her imagination run riot in the anticipation of its

glories. So intensely spiritual was she that it was but natural for her to accept the dual nature of man in its most orthodox sense. So curious was she about death and all its possibilities that she permitted herself to be morbidly fascinated with all its aspects. So strong was her belief in the innate goodness of life that she reached the conclusion that death, the final experience of mortal life, must be the supreme ecstasy.

The main virtues that she taught were courage, beauty, truth, contentment, honesty, self-dependence, and endurance. Other lessons that she taught about human adjustments to circumstances are the law of compensation, the uses of adversity, the triumph of mind over matter, the power and glory of renunciation, the folly of fear, and the effect of time. In the light of the facts that are known about her life, we see that all these philosophical principles were taught her by her own experiences and by observation of the experiences of the few friends that she permitted herself to have.

Another source of truth and inspiration for her was the delight she felt in observing the various moods of nature at different times of the year. She was sure of all natural phenomena; always she could depend upon the flowers, the trees, the birds, and the seasons to be constant in their manifestations. Whenever she was bewildered with a great sense of insecurity, she could turn to nature for

comfort, since she herself was one of its component parts.

Since she herself had so many emotional problems, as was natural to one of her ascetic habits, it was inevitable that she speculate widely upon the different emotions common to all mankind. Grief, joy, anger, enmity, remorse, suspense, dread, patriotism, pain--all these are the subjects of her probings into the fields of human nature. Because she had felt them all herself, she had sympathy for all mankind because of its susceptibility to the whole range of emotions. She observed so well and so widely that she knew the workings of the human mind and soul and was adept at seeing a motive behind every action.

Her disposition was naturally loving and friendly; consequently her observations on love and friendship carry weight. The reader feels that she knows whereof she speaks when she sets forth the power of a great love to mold one's life and when she teaches by example the nobility of friendship. She found that love is the greatest thing in the life of any individual and expressed this conclusion in terms which no reader feels inclined to dispute. Her loyalty to the one she loved shaped the course of her life; what argument more could one make for the power of a great love? She lived her poems before she wrote them; perhaps this fact accounts for their simple, direct, vivid style.

The force of her treatment of her major themes--those of life, nature, love, time, and eternity--comes partly

from her constancy of purpose. All her poems are consistent in the matter of the ideas that they set forth. To clarify her own thinking and to satisfy her yearning for self expression, she interpreted for her own personal benefit life as she saw it; such an honest presentation of ideas, unhampered by the usual bid for popular favor, is not only intensely refreshing but also forcefully convincing.

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