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ATTITUDES TOWARD DEATH AND
IMMORTALITY
IN MODERN AMERICAN VERSE

by

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PREFACE.

Because of the magnitude of the field chosen it was found necessary to confine this investigation, for the most part, to bound volumes of verse. Two hundred and twenty-six volumes of verse by present day American writers were examined. Among these are volumes by one hundred and forty-four individual authors, and twenty-four anthologies. The anthologies vary in the number of individual authors represented from five in "Some Imagist Poets" to one hundred and fourteen in "The Chicago Anthology" (Blandon and Mathison) and perhaps more in some of the Anthologies of Magazine Verse (William Stanley Braithwaite). As a conservative estimate, it seems probable that there have been considered poems from as many as three hundred present day American verse writers, although not all of these poems contained references to death or immortality.

I have attempted to include only such volumes as were first published after 1900. There are, however, several exceptions to this general procedure.

Poems or passages illustrative of the various points considered in this study have been cited with a full realization of the fact that, without an intimate knowledge of the character of the author, it is very difficult to determine just how much subjective thought and emotion and how much objective fancy have entered into the creation of a given poem.

3.

I must acknowledge a debt to Mr. Lawrence E. Nelson (A.M. The University of Kansas, 1921), from whose thesis, "The Influence of Christ in Recent American Verse", I received valuable help in the way of bibliography; and to Miss Annabel A. Garvey (A.M. The University of Kansas, 1914), whose study of "Conceptions of Death and Immortality in the English Monodies from 1485 to 1784" furnished many suggestions as to the method of approach in the present investigation.

I wish to thank the library officials of the University of Kansas for generous permission of access to the numerous books required for this study, and for the borrowing of a number of books from other libraries. Especially do I wish to thank Professor S. L. Whitcomb, under whose direction this investigation has been conducted, for much valuable assistance, and for the use of two volumes of his own poems.

Personally, I have found this study very interesting, and instructive as well. I have acquired a greatly enlarged knowledge of the vast field of modern American verse, and I hope that I may have contributed some information which will prove of benefit to others.

September 12, 1925.

E. L. W.

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INTRODUCTION.

I.

Whatever may be our attitude toward the question of immortality, what our belief concerning the possibilities and the probable nature of a continued existence after death, we may all look forward with certainty to the fact of dying. Of all the millions of men and women who have lived on the earth in the past, all (if we except two possible Biblical instances) have died and passed from the earth to be seen no more (if again we except the Biblical instances of several persons raised from the dead by miracle in the time of Christ). A stream of humanity has continued to enter upon the stage through the mysterious doors of Birth, and when their "three score years and ten", more or less, have been accomplished all have passed through the equally mysterious doors of Death.

"From the great deep to the great
deep he goes." 1

Yet in the hearts of a very large portion of the human race, from the most primitive savage to the most highly civilized person of today, there seems to be a something which whispers that death is not the end of all things.

1.-Tennyson, "The Passing of Arthur",
18A, p.378.

Tennyson, in the introductory section of "In Memoriam", says:-

Thou wilt not leave us in the dust:
 Thou madest man, he knows not why,
 He thinks he was not made to die;
 And thou hast made him; thou art just. 1

If we could have a strong enough faith in this justice of the Power that lies back of the universe, we might be better able to reconcile ourselves to the fact of death. But how few of us are able thus to extract the sting of pain when some loved one leaves us for

The undiscovered country from whose
 bourn
 No traveller returns. 2

Death must be accepted as inevitable. Physiologically, we know that it is the cessation of heart-beat and of other organic functions. Physically, it is the cessation of movement. Chemically, it is accompanied by decomposition of the elements which compose the body. Psychologically, it is apparently the severing of communication between the deceased and living individuals. (At least no very convincing evidence has been presented to prove the contrary.) Does the consciousness of the dead continue, and, if so, in what form? We cannot say. Throughout the ages men have asked with Job, "If a man die shall he live

11.

¹
again?" L. P. Jacks, Principal of Manchester College,
Oxford, in a recent little book, makes the statement that,
in his opinion, "this question of immortality forms the
background, sometimes unnoticed, often obscured, but always
present, to at least three-fourths of the philosophical
speculation that has taken place in the world, and to all
the great religions."² Yet for all our speculation, are we
any nearer to an ultimate solution of the question than was
Job? As Whitman has said in his quatrain, "Life and
Death":-

Two old simple problems ever intertwined,
Close home, elusive, present, baffled, grappled,
By each successive age insoluble, pass'd on,
To ours today--and we pass on the same. 3

II.

The subjects of death and immortality are among the
universal (or almost universal) themes of literature. They
are found in the very earliest literatures of which we have
record, and they continue to be found in the literature of
today. The Egyptian "Book of the Dead" dates from about
3000 B. C. According to the Egyptian belief, the souls of
the dead passed to the kingdom of Osiris. In the "Book of
the Dead" directions are given by which the soul might find
its way to this "region of the dead", together with various

1.-6A, Job 14:14.
2.-7A, p.89.

3.-21A, Vol.II, p.314.

charms and spells by which it might overcome the difficulties and dangers of the journey. "The Declaration of Innocence in the Judgment Hall of Osiris" is very similar in content to the Ten Commandments of the Hebrews. There are also elaborate funeral ceremonies set forth, and a description of the mummy chamber.

In the Assyrio-Babylonian epic of "Ishtar and Izdubar" ("Gilgamesh"), dating probably from about 2000 B. C., there is a belief manifested in a continued existence of the soul after death:-

For somewhere, though we die, we live again.
The soul departed shall in glory shine,
As burnished gold its form shall glow divine,
And Samas there shall grant to us new life. 1

A different conception appears in the following passage:-

And if we do not reach that spirit realm,
Where bodiless each soul may ages whelm
With joy unutterable; still we live,
With bodies new upon dear Earth, and give
Our newer life to children with our blood.
Or if these blessings we should miss; in wood,
Or glen, or garden, field, or emerald seas,
Our forms shall spring again; in such as these
We see around us throbbing with sweet life,
In trees or flowerets. 2

In the literature of Ancient India, the Vedas, and the two great epics--the "Mahabharata" and the "Ramayana"--death appears as "Yama, the King of Death, who parteth souls

from mortal frames", and a belief in the immortality of the soul is shown. The following stanzas are from "A Funeral Hymn" in the "Rig Veda":-

Yama showed to us the way!
The path that never fades away!
Our fathers by that path have gone
To the realms of setting sun!
And every being, after life's brief day,
Shall travel by the same eternal way!

.

Haste thee on thy unseen wing,
Flee to Yama, gracious king!
Meet our fathers who have gone,
Reap the virtues you have won!
Leave sins behind,--follow the setting sun,
Leave mortal shape,--a brighter form put on! 1
(Translation by Romesh Dutt)

It is in the Hebrew religion, especially as it later developed into Christianity, that the doctrine of immortality reached its highest development. But in the earlier stages of their religious evolution the Hebrews seem to have had no very definite or certain belief in immortality, and where there is evidence of such a belief there is nothing of the hope of the Christian Heaven. The Hebrew "sheol" is very much the counterpart of the later Greek "hades". It was supposed to be the abode of all the dead, both good and bad, with perhaps "degrees" of comfort or discomfort appropriate to the earthly life that had been

lived. At the time of the writing of the Book of Job (about 400 B. C.) there was evidently some doubt on the question of an existence after death. In that splendid fourteenth chapter, Job would like to find a reason for a belief in immortality in the continuance of the "life principle" in nature, but his despairing cry of doubt, "If a man die, shall he live again?" has been echoed down through the ages without an answer. In the time of Christ, the religious thought of the Jews was divided on the subject. The Sadducees did not believe in immortality and the possibility of a "resurrection", while the Pharisees held to such a belief.

In the teaching of Christ the doctrine of immortality assumed definite form. He taught as certainties "eternal life" through belief in Him, and eternal punishment for sin; and, until recent years, at least, these teachings have been accepted as fact by the Christian Church. "I go to prepare a place for you", He told His followers, "and if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again, and will receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."¹

The philosophic mind of the Hindus was able to conceive death as a possible and desirable release from the evils of earthly existence. To the "aesthetic" temperament of the

ancient Greeks death was a "jarring" element in the beauty of the world. In the minds of the Greeks of the Homeric period death was regarded as the passing of the soul to "gloomy hades", which was the abode of all the dead. The existence of the good and of the bad, however, was conceived to be different. The good found "peaceful sleep" and the "dreamless sweetness of accomplished toil"; the bad were sunk in remorse from the constant contemplation of their evil deeds. The Homeric period dates from approximately 1000 B. C.

The following quotations throw some light upon the Greek attitude toward death and the Hereafter some five hundred years after the Homeric period. The first passage is from Simonides' (556-469 B. C.) "Death Draweth on Apace":-

Naught among mortals can endure forever;
 Well spake the Chian bard that men like
 leaves
 Perish and pass away; but few endeavor
 To lay to heart the truth their ear
 receives. 1
 (Translation by Philip Stanhope Worsley)

Pindar (died 443 B. C.) in his second Olympic Ode, called "The Realm of the Dead", says:-

The day fast comes when all men must depart,
 And pay for present pride in future woes.

The deeds that frantic mortals do
 In this disordered nook of Jove's domain,
 All meet their meed; and there's a Judge
 below
 Whose hateful doom inflicts the inevitable
 pain. 1

(Translation by Abraham Moore)

The Greeks were, generally speaking, lovers of life, and no matter what their conception of the future life, death was ever a "dark" thing, as contrasted with the brightness of life. Yet, some four hundred years before Christ we find Socrates arguing for immortality against the skepticism of the sophists, in Plato's "Phaedo", and cheerfully drinking the hemlock.

To the practical mind of the Romans death was merely the necessary end of life. That they had a belief in a future life is shown by their conceptions of the Elysian Fields, where the sensual pleasures of life were to be continued, and of Tartarus, which was somewhat the counterpart of the Greek Hades. They were, however, more concerned with the enjoyment of this life than with any contemplation of the next. The spirit of the "carpe diem" of Horace seems to have been characteristic of the Roman temperament. The following quotations, showing something of the Roman attitude toward death, were selected from those included by Montaigne in his essay, "That to Study Philosophy is to Learn to Die" (Translated by Charles

Cotton):-

"We are all bound on one voyage; the lot of all sooner or later is to come out of the urn. All must to eternal exile sail away." 1 (Horace: Ode II, 3,25.)

.

"I will keep thee in fetters and chains, in custody of a surly keeper. A god will, when I ask him, set me free. This god I think is death. Death is the term of all things." 2 (Horace: Epode I, 16,76.)

.

"Why not depart from life as a seated guest from a feast?" 3 (Lucretius: III, 951.)

Mohammed gave the Arabs the hope of a paradise of such sensual enjoyment that death could not be other than a welcome transition thither.

The Persian philosophy of life and death is perhaps best summed up in such works as the "Rubaiyat" of Omar Khayyam, and the "Divan" of Hafiz. There is a hint of the spirit of these later works in the following lines from the "Shah Nameh":-

And human life, still hastening to a close,
Finds in the worthless dust its last repose.
For if removed by death, O say, to whom
Has ever been vouchsafed a different doom?
All are the prey of death--the crowned, the low,
And man, through life, the victim still of woe. 4

The following stanzas from the "Rubaiyat" (LXIII) of Omar

1.-11A, p.63.

2.-Ibid., p.73.

3.-Ibid., p.75.

4.-15A, p.115.

is almost an echo of the thought in the lines just quoted:-

Oh, threats of hell and Hopes of Paradise!
One thing at least is certain--This life flies;
One thing is certain and the rest is Lies:
The Flower that once has blown forever dies. 1

Such an attitude leads easily to the general spirit of "eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die" which pervades the whole poem, and is expressed in such stanzas as the following (XXIV):-

Ah, make the most of what we yet may spend,
Before we too into the Dust descend;
Dust unto Dust, and under Dust to lie,
Sans Wine, sans Song, sans Singer, and--
sans End! 2

During the dark ages following the invasions of the barbarian hordes, and the fall of the Roman Empire, men and women all over Europe continually set their minds on the next life as a promise of surcease from the wretchedness and misery of this. During this period there was a tendency toward a literal carrying out of Christ's teaching that his followers should renounce "the things of this world" and set their minds on things above. Great numbers went into monasteries, while others became hermits. Such a state of affairs naturally had a considerable influence upon the periods immediately following. The bondage of "otherworldliness", and of the Church which claimed to

possess the "keys" to the Kingdom of Heaven was not thrown off until the time of Luther and the Reformation.

In Dante's "Divine Comedy" we have the embodiment of the doctrines of medieval Catholicism concerning death and the future life, with its Hell, Purgatory and Paradise. In no other work of literature do we have such an adventure into the Beyond, and nowhere do we find the possible nature of the existence after death dealt with on such a stupendous plan. The torments of the damned in Hell, the "discipline" of those in Purgatory, the bliss of Paradise--all are set forth with vivid imagination and in great detail. It is, indeed, an epic of the future life. And this great work has no doubt had its influence, to a greater or lesser degree, upon the conceptions of immortality throughout the Christian world since that time. Or perhaps, rather, by presenting them in graphic detail to the imagination, it has strengthened the concepts of the "golden streets" and "fire and brimstone". These had their original basis in the acceptance of certain Bible passages in a strictly literal sense.

Since American literature had its origins more or less directly in the English, it will perhaps be well to make some mention of the treatment in English literature of the two subjects under discussion. Miss Annabel A. Garvey (A. M., The University of Kansas, 1914) has made a

study of "Conceptions of Death and Immortality in the English Monodies from 1485 to 1784". Some of the more important conceptions which Miss Garvey mentions are: (1) death as certain and awaiting all mankind; (2) death as the reclaiming of souls loaned from heaven; (3) death as hostile; (4) death as desirable; (5) death as a mental rather than a physical state; (6) some souls too good for earth, one reason for death; (7) figurative treatment of death; (8) imaginary description of heaven; (9) departed souls regarded as haunting spirits; (10) life perpetuated through fame; (11) continuation of life through progeny; (12) existence of souls before birth; and (13) relation of death to the body. A more detailed account of the results of this study cannot be given here.

Any adequate consideration of the subjects of death and immortality in English poetry from 1784 down to the opening of the twentieth century would involve a study of some length. It will be possible only to note a few of the important points. In many instances there were modifications of belief or attitude during the period of religious upheaval brought about by the scientific movement in the early and middle part of the nineteenth century, with some examples of open agnosticism in the latter quarter of the century.

We may consider here only three great English elegies of this period, as perhaps having been most widely read

and studied in this country, and for that reason being more likely to have influenced American poets of today.

How many American students have memorized that beautiful passage from Shelley's "Adonais":-

Peace, peace! he is not dead, he doth not
 sleep--
 He hath awakened from the dream of life--
 'Tis we who, lost in stormy visions, keep
 With phantoms an unprofitable strife
 And in mad trance strike with our spirit's
 knife
 Invulnerable nothings.

.

He hath outsoared the shadow of our night;
 Envy and calumny and hate and pain,
 And that unrest which men miscall delight,
 Can touch him not and torture not again; 1

The "In Memoriam" of Tennyson is the record of his grief at the death of his friend, Arthur Hallam, and of his spiritual struggle toward faith in God and a belief in immortality against the tide of doubt and skepticism of his time; a struggle which finally ends in a triumphant faith; so that at the end of his life the poet could pen that beautiful little lyric, "Crossing the Bar". We quote only the last stanza:-

For though from out our bourne of Time
 and Place
 The flood may bear me far,
 I hope to see my Pilot face to face
 When I have crossed the bar. 2

A study of the poetry of Matthew Arnold reveals him to be openly agnostic as to any "orthodox" belief in immortality. His "Thyrsis", the third of the great English elegies of the nineteenth century, was written on the death of his friend, Arthur Clough. The poem is an extended eulogy of Clough, with much beautiful description of the scenes around Oxford which he and Arnold had frequented together. It contains no evidence of any definite belief in immortality. There are some passages in other parts of Arnold's work, however, which suggest that he did believe in a kind of "conditional immortality"; that is, immortality for those souls who, by their earthly lives, have made themselves "indispensable" to the universe. The following lines are taken from "Rugby Chapel" written in memory of his father:-

O strong soul, by what shore
 Tarriest thou now? For that force,
 Surely, has not been left vain!
 Somewhere, surely, afar,
 In the sounding labor-house vast
 Of being, is practiced that strength,
 Zealous, beneficent, firm!

Yes, in some far-shining sphere,
 Conscious or not of the past,
 Still thou performest the word
 Of the Spirit in whom thou dost live--
 Prompt, unwearied, as here! 1

This idea of "conditional" immortality is still prevalent

at Oxford (and doubtless elsewhere) today, and is very plainly set forth in a lecture by Dr. L. P. Jacks,¹ "Immortality in a Living Universe" (Hibbert Lectures of 1923).

Arnold's lack of faith in traditional religious beliefs was replaced by a high idealism, which finds its counterpart in the "social service" idea of today, coming to be in many instances a substitute for religious belief.

Algeron Charles Swinburne may be mentioned as showing the extreme agnostic tendency, of which tendency Matthew Arnold represents a more conservative aspect. Swinburne's "Hymn to Proserpine" is virtually a prayer for complete annihilation after death.

Thus far it has been the purpose of the writer to trace briefly, but with as much continuity as possible, the trend of thought down through the ages concerning the subjects of this investigation. This has been done in order to gain something of a background against which to paint the conceptions of modern thought with respect to these two important themes as they appear in American poetry.

III.

Compared with the other major literatures of the

world, American literature covers but a short period of time,--scarcely more than three centuries in all. Hence it will perhaps not be out of place here to give something of a brief survey of it from the earliest beginnings, in regard to the treatments of the subjects of death and immortality.

There is little verse of any kind whatsoever in the early Colonial Period. Michael Wigglesworth's "The Day of Doom" is a versification in "jingling rhyme" of the Puritan conception of the final judgment at the end of the world. The following stanzas are typical:-

Both Sea and Land, at his command,
 their dead at once surrender:
 The Fire and Air constrained are
 also their dead to tender,
 The mighty word of this great Lord
 links Body and Soul together
 Both of the Just and the Unjust,
 to part no more forever.

The same translates, from mortal
 states to immortality,
 All that survive, and be alive,
 i'th' twinkling of an eye:
 That so they may abide for ay
 to endless weal or woe;
 Both the Penate and Reprobate
 are made to dy no more. 1

The "Elegy on the Death of Thomas Shepard" by Urian Oakes contains, perhaps, an expression of the general attitude of the time toward the subjects of death and

immortality, in such passages as these:-

----Death stopt
That water-course, his sorrows ending all.
He fears, he cares, he sighs, he weeps
no more:
He's past all storms, arriv'd at th' wished
shoar.

.

Oh! but inexorable Death attacks
The best of men, and promiscuous havoc
makes.

.

Farewell, dear Shepard! Thou art gone before,
Made free of Heaven, where thou shalt sing
loud hymns
Of high triumphant praises ever more,
In the sweet quire of saints and seraphims. 1

Philip Freneau is the most representative and the only outstanding poet of the Revolutionary Period. In him we find a considerable departure from the old Puritan attitudes and conceptions shown in the quotations just noted. The thought in the following stanza from "The House of Night" seems to be somewhat allied with the scientific attitude of more recent times:-

What is this Death, ye deep read sophists, say?
Death is no more than one unceasing change;
New forms arise, while other forms decay,
Yet all is Life throughout creation's range. 2

The following stanza from the same poem expresses a belief in a life after death, as well as a hint of the Platonic

thought of an existence of the soul somewhere before this life--the thought set forth by Wordsworth in his "Ode on the Intimations of Immortality":-

Too nearly join'd to sickness, toils, and pains,
 (Perhaps for former crimes imprison'd here)
 True to itself the immortal soul remains,
 And seeks new mansions in the starry sphere 1

The Wordsworthian conception finds expression also in "The
 2
 Sexton's Sermon".

In "The Jamaica Funeral" the poet seems impressed with the brevity of life, and with the need of enjoying it while we may,--an attitude which finds many echoes among modern poets:-

A few short years, at best, will bound our span,
 Wretched and few, the Hebrew exile said;
 Live while you may, be jovial while you can,
 Death as a debt to nature must be paid. 3

In the period of American literature known as the First National Period, William Cullen Bryant is the first poet whom we need to consider. Bryant is, as it were, the forerunner of the so-called "American Classics", (Longfellow, Whittier, and Lowell). It is in "Thanatopsis" that he has expressed his attitude toward death most clearly:-

So shalt thou rest, and what if thou withdraw
 In silence from the living, and no friend

1.-131, p.238.

2.-141, p.123.

3.-Ibid., p.246

Take note of thy departure? All that breathe
Will share thy destiny.

.

So live that when thy summons comes to join
The innumerable caravan, which moves
To that mysterious realm, where each shall take
His chamber in the silent halls of death;
Thou go not, like the quarry-slayer at night,
Scourged to his dungeon, but sustained and
soothed
By an unfaltering trust, approach thy grave
Like one who wraps the drapery of his couch
About him, and lies down to pleasant dreams. 1

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow possessed a simple,
child-like faith in God which precluded any speculation as
to the nature of the future life, but he was positive in his
belief in immortality. Even when death touched him most
closely his faith in a God "who doeth all things well" did
not waver. In "The Two Angels" he says:-

Angels of Life and Death alike are his;
Without his leave they pass no threshold
o'er;
Who, then, would wish or dare, believing
this,
Against his messengers to shut the door? 2

His whole attitude is beautifully summed up in the
following stanzas from the poem called "Resignation"
written on the death of his child:-

There is no Death! What seems so is transition;
This life of mortal breath
Is but a suburb of the life elysian,
Whose portal we call Death.

She is not dead,--the child of our affection,--
 But gone unto that school
 Where she no longer needs our poor protection,
 And Christ himself doth rule. 1

A similar attitude appears in "The Reaper and the Flowers". 2

John Greenleaf Whittier, with his sturdy Quaker faith,
 regards death and immortality in much the same light as
 does Longfellow. Note these lines from "Snow-Bound":-

Yet Love will dream, and Faith will trust,
 (Since he who knows our need is just),
 That somehow, somewhere, meet we must.
 Alas, for him who never sees
 The stars shine through his cypress trees!
 Who, hopeless, lays his dead away,
 Nor looks to see the breaking day
 Across the mournful marble play!
 Who hath not learned in hours of faith,
 The truth to flesh and sense unknown,
 That Life is ever lord of Death,
 And Love can never lose its own! 3

The following stanzas from "The Eternal Goodness" are also
 expressive:-

I know not what the future hath
 Of marvel or surprise,
 Assured alone that life and death
 His mercy underlies.

.

I know not where His islands lift
 Their fronded palms in air;
 I only know I cannot drift
 Beyond His love and care. 4

Other poems in which Whittier reveals his attitude toward

1.-9A, p.107.
 2.-Ibid., p.13.

3.-22A, p.288.
 4.-Ibid., p.319.

death and the future life are "Follen"¹ and "To My Friend
on the Death of His Sister".²

In James Russell Lowell there is a departure from this simple, childlike faith, and acceptance of death as for the best in spite of personal grief. There is, however, still a manifest belief in immortality. The following stanza is from an "Elegy on the Death of Dr. Channing":-

What wars, what martyrdoms, what cries, may
 come,
Thou knowest not, nor I; but God will lead
The prodigal soul from want and sorrow home,
And Eden ope her gates to Adam's seed. 3

In this stanza from "A Legend of Brittany" we find an attitude toward death characteristic of the modern period, as will be noted later:-

"O Rest, to weary hearts thou art most dear!
O Silence, after life's bewildering din,
Thou art most welcome, whether in the sear
Days of our age thou comest, or we win
Thy poppy-wreath in youth! then wherefore here
Linger I yet, once free to enter in
At that wished gate which gentle Death doth
 ope
Into the boundless realm of strength and hope?" 4

The idea of death as a desirable end to worldly care is very common among twentieth century poets, but the thought of suicide is rarely sanctioned.

When death touched Lowell personally, we find a note

1.-22A, p.97.
2.-Ibid., p.138.

3.-10A, p.104.
4.-Ibid., p.37.

of the more natural rebellion against death. In "After the Burial" he says:-

Console if you will, I can bear it;
'Tis a well-meant alms of breath;
But not all the preaching since Adam
Has made Death other than Death. 1

One other figure of this period we would mention, and that is Edgar Allan Poe. It is not surprising, when we consider the unhappy career of this poet, that he should look upon life as a thing of evil, and that he should regard death as a welcome promise of release. In "The Conqueror Worm"² we have a bitter condemnation of the "tragedy 'Man'", whose hero is the "Conqueror Worm". In "For Annie" he says:-

Thank Heaven! the crisis--
The danger is past,
And the lingering illness
Is over at last--
And the fever called "Living"
Is conquered at last. 3

Poe does not give us any very definite statement of his attitude toward immortality. The following lines from "The Raven" would seem to indicate a position of doubt:-

Tell this soul with sorrow laden if,
within the distant Aidenn,
It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom
the angels name Lenore:

.

Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore". 4

1.-10A, p.308.
2.-10A, p.36.

3.-Ibid., p.74.
4.-Ibid., p.12.

A poem like "To One in Paradise"¹ seems to show at least a vague belief in a life after death.

Death, preferably the death of a beautiful woman, was regarded by Poe as the poetic subject par excellence, and furnishes the inspiration for some of his best poems. To the two mentioned above may be added "Lenore"² and "Annabel Lee"³.

With the exception of Poe and Bryant, the poets mentioned for the First National Period lived well into the Second National Period (or the period since the Civil War), of which the "terminus ad quem" has been fixed by the present writer as 1900 for purposes of division from the more strictly modern period. The one additional figure to be considered in the Second National Period is Walt Whitman, in many ways the "advance guard" of the later modern period.

Whitman does not fear death. Indeed he courts it with soft words and pleasing phrases. In his elegy on the death of Lincoln, "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" he says:-

Come lovely and soothing death,
Undulate round the world, serenely
arriving, arriving,
In the day, in the night, to all, to
each,
Sooner or later delicate Death.

.

1.-16A, p.31.
2.-Ibid., p.21.

3.-Ibid., p.80.

Approach strong Deliveress,
 When it is so, when thou hast taken
 them,
 I joyously sing the dead,
 Lost in the loving floating ocean of
 thee,
 Laved in the flood of thy bliss O
 death. 1

Again in "Whispers of Heavenly Death":-

Whispers of heavenly death murmur'd I hear,
 Labial gossip of night, sibilant chorals
 Footsteps gently ascending, mystical breezes
 wafted soft and low,
 Ripples of unseen rivers, tides of a current
 flowing, forever flowing. 2

Other poems of a similar tenor are "Night on the Prairies",³
 "As They Draw to a Close",⁴ and "Death's Valley".⁵ Perhaps
 Whitman's association with death, as a nurse during the
 Civil War, may have had an effect upon his attitude.

Whitman presages the modern period in the vivid and
 realistic description of such scenes as the following, and
 in the questioning doubt of the future which is expressed:-

Of the veil'd tableau--women gather'd
 together on deck, pale, heroic, waiting
 the moment that draws so close--O the
 moment!
 A huge sob--a few bubbles--the white foam
 spiriting up--and the women are gone,
 Sinking there while the passionless wet
 flows on--and I now pondering, Are those
 women indeed gone?
 Are souls drown'd and destroy'd so?
 Is only matter triumphant? 6

1.-12A, p.598.

2.-21A, Vol.II, p.221-2.

3.-Ibid., p.231-32.

4.-Ibid., Vol.II, p.284.

5.-Ibid., Vol.III, p.35, 36.

6.-Ibid., Vol.II, p.233.

The selection just quoted is from the poem called "Thought". Whitman's attitude toward immortality is perhaps more clearly shown in the following lines from "Assurances":-

I do not doubt that the passionately-wept
 deaths of young men are provided for, and
 that the deaths of young women and the
 deaths of little children are provided
 for,
 (Do you think life was so well provided for,
 and Death, the purgort of all Life, is not
 well provided for?) .

.

I do not think life provides for all and
 for Time and Space, but I believe Heavenly
 Death provides for all. 1

IV.

Almost contemporary with Whitman (indeed living over much of the same period), but writing, for the most part, at a slightly later date, is a group of poets of considerable importance. Most of these men lived into the first decade of the twentieth century, and perhaps did some writing up to the time of their death. But the greater part of their work was completed before 1900, or even before 1890. If an author wrote both prose and verse, his verse production may have ended in the '80s or before, while he continued to write prose for a decade and a half beyond the 1900 mark. For purposes of chronological accuracy, the poets included

in this study who died in old age just at the close of the nineteenth century or within the first decade of the twentieth have been separated from the main group of modern American poets and considered as "border line figures". Richard Hovey, who died in 1900, but who, at the time of his death, was less than fifty years of age, and in the full tide of his production, has been included in the main group, chiefly because of his work in collaboration with Bliss Carman in the "Songs of Vagabondia".

There is no outstanding difference of attitude toward the subjects of this investigation which would set apart the figures of this group from the more modern group of American poets, unless it would be, in some instances, a greater number of references to death and immortality. Time and space forbade as detailed an examination of the works of these authors as of the works of those of the main group. The "border line figures" to be considered are Edmund Clarence Stedman, Thomas Bailey Aldrich, Richard Watson Gilder, "Joaquin" Miller, John B. Tabb, Eugene Field, Will Carleton, Louise Chandler Moulton, Maurice Thompson, and William Dean Howells.

Stedman's characteristic attitude toward death and the hereafter is one of question and doubt, as in "Darkness and the Shadow":-

And is the grave so darkly deep,
So hopeless, as it seems in sleep?
Can our sweet selves the coffin hold

So dumb within its crumbling mould?
 And is the shroud so darz and drear
 A garb,--the noisome worm so near? 1

At times, however, he seems quite sure of his belief in immortality, and in "The Old Admiral" he expresses his conception of the existence of the soul after death:-

His spirit has a second birth,
 an unknown, grander life;--
 All of him that was earth
 Lies mute and cold,
 Like a wrinkled sheath and old
 Thrown off forever from the
 shimmering blade
 That has good entrance made
 Upon some distant, glorious
 strife. 2

The atmosphere of question and doubt prevails in "Ubi Sunt
 Qui Ante Nos?"³ and in "The Undiscovered Country".⁴

Aldrich regarded death as horrible, a thing of dread,
 if we may judge by these lines from "Wyndham Towers":-

And screened behind a painted hanging cloth
 Of coiled gold serpents ready to make spring,
 Ignoble Death stood, his convulsive hand
 Grasping a rapier part way down the blade
 To deal the blow with deadly-jewelled hilt--
 Black Death, turned white with horror of himself. 5

In his "Monody on the Death of Wendell Phillips" he says:-

One by one they go
 Into the unknown dark-- 6

1.-186, p.461.

2.-Ibid., p.162.

3.-Ibid., p.180.

4.-Ibid., p.465.

5.-4, p.34.

6.-Ibid., p.85.

In "The Bells at Midnight",¹ written at the time of the assassination of President Garfield, there is an allusion to classical conception of death as occasioned by the Fates.

With regard to immortality, Aldrich has the same doubtful and questioning attitude as Stedman. Both poets wrote on "The Undiscovered Country". The following lines are from Aldrich's poem of that title:-

Shall we indeed behold them, thine and mine,
Whose going hence made black the noonday sun?--
Strange is it that across the narrow night
They fling us not some token, or make sign
That all beyond is not Oblivion. 2

A similar questioning attitude is expressed in the poem "At a Grave".³ In "Threnody"⁴ there is something of the idea of immortality gained by good works.

Richard Watson Gilder has set forth his conception of death and immortality clearly and at some length in the poem "Non Sine Dolore":-

Down o'er the vibrant strings,
That thrill, and mean, and mourn,
 and glisten,
The Master draws his bow.

.

Life is the downward stroke; the
 upward Life;
Death but the pause between.

.

1.-4, p.69.

2.-Ibid., p.160.

3.-Ibid., p.134.

4.-Ibid., p.116.

Ah, who could face the abyss
 That plunges steep athwart each
 human breath?
 If the new birth of Death
 Meant only more of Life as mortals
 know it,
 What priestly balm, what song of
 highest poet,
 Could heal one sentient soul's
 immitigable pain?

.

O ye of little faith,
 Shall, then, the spirit prove craven,
 And Death's divine deliverance but
 give
 A summer rest and haven?
 By all most noble in us, by the
 light that streams
 Into our waking dreams,
 Ah, we know what Life is, let us
 live!
 Clearer and freer, who shall doubt? 1

In a sonnet, "Call Me Not Dead", he says,

Call me not dead when I, indeed, have gone
 Into the company of the everliving
 High and most glorious poets! Let
 thanksgiving
 Rather be made. 2

Other poems which express this same attitude of faith and
 ³
 hope are "The Soul", "On the Death of a Great Man", and
 ⁴
 ⁵
 "The Freed Spirit". In his sonnet, "Love and Death" Gilder
 voices an idea which is found more or less frequently among
 more modern poets and which is given special consideration

1.-79, pp.181-182. 4.-Ibid., p.207.
 2.-Ibid., p.66. 5.-Ibid., p.69.
 3.-Ibid., p.61.

in another place in this study:-

Who love can never die! 1

Death has no fears for John B. (Father) Tabb. In one poem he calls death "My Messmate":-

Thy fear thee, brother Death,
That sharest breath by breath,
This brimming life of mine?
Each draught that I resign
Into thy chalice flows.
Comrades of old are we. 2

The following little figurative poem called "The Gossip" is in similar vein:-

So near me dwells my neighbor Death
That e'en what Silence pondereth
He catches word for word,
And promises some future day,
To visit me upon his way,
And tell me what he heard. 3

This same "intimate" attitude appears also in "My Photograph",
"The Tollmen" and "Shmber Song". In a quatrain called
"Death" he says of death,

So sweet to tired mortality the night
of life's laborious day. 7

Immortality seems to have been a thing taken for granted by Tabb. Perhaps his Roman Catholic faith partly accounts

1.-79, p.63.
2.-190, p.9.
3.-Ibid., p.18.

4.-191, p.30.
5.-190, p.19.
6.-Ibid., p.29.
7.-Ibid., p.146.

for this. That he believed in a continued existence after death we would gather from such hints as we find in "The Gossip" quoted above, "Earth's Tribute",¹ and "Immortality",² but there is no speculation as to the probable nature of our future state.

Eugene Field, had he lived out his normal span of life, would have belonged to the modern group proper. But since he died in 1895 he has been considered in this group. A characteristic conception of death found in his poetry is that of death as sleep, as in "The Divine Lullaby",³ and "A Brook Song".⁴ In "The Singing in God's Acre"⁵ the dead are conceived as sleeping, as they await the coming of the "glorious day".

A belief in immortality is expressed in "New Year's Eve",⁶ "Fisherman Jim's Kids",⁷ and "Grandma's Prayer". In the latter poem there is a repetition of the idea of continued usefulness found in Gilder's "Non Sine Dolore" quoted previously:-

I pray that, risen from the dead,
I may in glory stand--
A crown perhaps upon my head,
But a needle in my hand. 8

9

"Dibbins' Ghost" is a sprightly utilization of the idea of a spirit's return to earth.

1.-191, p.86.
2.-190, p.66.
3.-70, p.31.
4.-Ibid., p.324.
5.-Ibid., p.138.

6.-Ibid., p.189.
7.-Ibid., p.314.
8.-Ibid., p.250.
9.-Ibid., p.88.

"Joaquin" Miller's attitude toward death is set forth in the following lines from "Walker in Nicaragua":-

For life is but a beggar's lie,
And as for death, I grin at it;
I do not care one whiff or whit
Whether it be or that or this. 1

Death is regarded as desirable in these lines from "Even So":-

Death is delightful: after death
Breaks in the dawn of perfect day,
Let question he who will.

.

Death is delightful. Death is dawn. 2

Two other poems in a similar vein are "A Christmas Eve in Cuba"³ and "The River of Rest"⁴.

In regard to the future life Miller was doubtful. In "The Lost Regiment" he says:-

But nothing was found but death that day,
And possibly God. 5

The same questioning attitude appears in these lines from "Dawn at San Diego":-

But list! his soul--his soul is where?
In hell! In hell! But where is hell? 6

1.-130, p.48.

2.-Ibid., pp.162,163.

3.-131, p.147.

4.-Ibid., p.174.

5.-Ibid., p.140

6.-130, p.231.

Will Carleton has expressed his attitude toward death and immortality most clearly in "The Little Sleeper",¹ where the former is regarded as sleep and rest after worldly care. The soul goes "back to heaven" to be an "angel". In "Cover Them Over"² also death is regarded as sleep, and a belief in a future life is expressed. In the "Death of the Richest Man"³ death is considered as ordained by God.

Louise Chandler Moulton seems to have been continually oppressed by the thought of death. Her attitude is for the most part one of continual questioning. Sometimes there is a figurative reference to death, as in the poem called "Waiting" where "King Death" is pictured as a sea captain who

. . . steers
Toward a far off land. 4

Her characteristic attitude toward death is seen in such poems as "There" and "Like a Child".⁵ The lines quoted below are taken from the latter poem:-

The kisses of Death are cold, and they
turn his lips to stone.
Out of the warm, bright world the man
goes all alone.
Do angels wait for him there, over the
soundless sea?

1.-30, p.123.
2.-Ibid., p.63.
3.-Ibid., p.159.

4.-135, p.21.
5.-Ibid., p.95.

He goes, as he came, all helpless, to a
 new world's mystery--
 Like a child. 1

She seems to have been unable to gain much comfort from her speculations on the possibilities of the future after death. This earthly life was more sweet to her than any doubtful life beyond the grave. In "Their Candles Are All Out" she says:-

And yet I think, from that deep rest below,
 They would be glad to rise and love and weep;
 Once more the thankless harvest field to reap,
 Of human joy and pain,--life's whole to know. 2

Another sonnet "After Death" ³ expresses this same idea. Fear of death is manifested in "In Extremis". ⁴ Other poems referring to death or immortality (or both) are "Question", ⁵ "In Mid-Ocean", ⁶ and "When I Wander Away With Death". ⁷

The poetic works of Maurice Thompson and of William Dean Howells do not loom large in comparison with their prose. In the volume of "Poems" by Thompson we find little that may be construed as expressing an attitude toward death or immortality. In "A Prelude" ⁸ his aspirations seem not to reach beyond "pushing up daisies" by adding a little organic matter to the soil. In "Persephone" his ambitions reach a little higher, and a vague belief in immortality is expressed.

1.-135, p.82.
 2.-Ibid., p.141.
 3.-Ibid., p.189.
 4.-Ibid., p.298.

5.-Ibid., p.87.
 6.-Ibid., p.237.
 7.-Ibid., p.324.
 8.-200, p.57.

Come, touch me with thy cool and soothing
 palm,
 Lull me to measureless sleep, ineffable calm,
 And bear me to thy garden in the west,
 Beyond whose ever-clouded confine lies
 A sweet illimitable paradise! 1

2

"The Final Thought" has apparently the Christian conception of life through Christ.

William Dean Howells is a lover of life, and he sees nothing desirable in death. His philosophy of life and death is perhaps summed up in the poem "If":-

Yes, death is at the bottom of the cup,
 And every one that lives must drink it up;
 And yet between the sparkle at the top
 And the black lees where lurks that bitter
 drop,
 There swims enough good liquor, Heaven knows,
 To ease our hearts of all their other woes. 3

His attitude toward the future life is one of question.
 The following lines are from "The Bewildered Guest":-

A sound of shrieks and sobs, that strikes our
 joys
 Dumb in our breasts; and then some one is gone.
 They say we meet him. None knows where or when.
 We know we shall not meet him here again. 4

The same questioning attitude appears also in "From
 Generation to Generation", "Hope", and "Sphinx".

Other poets might be included in this group of

- 1.-200, p.123.
- 2.-Ibid., p.159.
- 3.-94, (XIII).
- 4.-Ibid., (V).

- 5.-Ibid., (IV).
- 6.-Ibid., (XVII).
- 7.-Ibid., (XXIX).

"border-line figures", but time and space forbid that we carry this part of the study further. Those who have been considered may be regarded as representative, I think.

CHAPTER I.

ATTITUDES TOWARD, AND CONCEPTIONS OF, DEATH.

In this chapter it is the purpose of the writer to consider a number of attitudes toward, and conceptions of, death which have been expressed by American poets of very recent times. The attempt has been made to make this consideration as all-embracing as possible, and yet reduce the number of separate sections to a minimum. In the examination of so vast an amount of material it is altogether possible that some definite attitudes or conceptions may have been overlooked, although not intentionally.

Death as General and Unavoidable.---The attitude expressed in this connection is usually one of matter of fact acceptance. All must die! Why worry about it? Indeed the certainty of death seems to be so much taken for granted that many modern poets do not take the trouble to mention it. Some of those who voice this idea of the general mortality of mankind merely as a fact to be accepted without comment are Louis Untermeyer, James Whitcomb Riley, Paul Laurence Dunbar, William Winter, John Hall Wheelock, Arthur Chapman, Alice Brown, Selden L. Whitcomb, and Bliss Carman.

Such plain, bare statements as this from Louis Untermeyer are not often found:-

The selfsame night awaits us all;
The road of Death all mortals tread. 1

The following lines from Riley's "Hymn of Faith", with the philosophizing tone are more characteristic of the modern attitude:-

Death comes alike to ev'ry man
That ever was born on earth;
Then let us do the best we can
To live for all life's worth. 2

Other poems referring to death as inevitable are "The
Appointed Hour"³ by Selden L. Whitcomb, "The Ordeal"⁴ by
William Winter, "The Sorrowful Masquerade"⁵ by John Hall
Wheelock, and "En Avant"⁶ by George D. Skinner.

In connection with the attitude noted above may be considered a number of passages lamenting this common mortality of all flesh. Passages of this type are of more common occurrence than those just considered. The following lines from "La Vie" by Alfred A. Cowles are a typical expression of this attitude:-

How brief the spell that holds us here!
A little hope, a little fear;
A little love, a little light,
A wish outworn, and then--goodnight. 7

Or these lines from "An Autumnal Dirge" by Selden L.

- | | |
|---|----------------|
| 1.-"The Ghost of Archytas"--205, p.141. | |
| 2.-160, p.30. | 5.-215, p.12. |
| 3.-217, p.36. | 6.-151, p.169. |
| 4.-223, p.60. | 7.-49, p.94. |

Whitcomb:-

Soon, too soon, the earthly frame
Fades from sight. 1

The same idea is expressed by this author in "Songs Before
Death". 2

The lines below are from "A Shred of Kelp" by Sam
Walter Foss:-

What is our life in the on-rushing sweep
Of the great current? Ah, the sea is wide
And one man's life is very small, ah
me!-- 3

A similar melancholy note is in the following lines from a
"Sonnet" by Horace Spencer Fiske:-

"To-day for me, to-morrow death for you."
As if through Yorick's lips dead Shakespeare
spoke
Again, there rise the sickening words that
choke
Our aspiration and our wills subdue. 4

Other poets who seem to be "oppressed" by a sense of
the brevity of life are Henry H. Knibbs in "Nothing to Do
But Go" 5, Max Ehrmann in "Thou That Art Idle Born", Walt
Mason in "Not Worth While", 7 John Hall Wheelock in "Plaint", 8
Julia C. R. Dorr in "In Rock Creek Cemetery", 9 George
Santayana in "Athletic Ode", 10 George Lansing Raymond in

1.-217, p.50.
2.-Ibid., p.73.
3.-74, p.221.
4.-10, p.149.
5.-104, p.51.

6.-65, p.195.
7.-117, p.147.
8.-215, p.38.
9.-61, p.17.
10.-171, p.186.

"Our Lives Are Vapors",¹ Harry Kemp in "Hasten, Clasp
 Maiden Life",² and Edwin Markham in "A Harvest Song" and
 "The Waning Lamp".⁴

A contrasting attitude is expressed in the following
 lines from "Thanks" by Louis Untermeyer:-

Thank God for this bright frailty of Life,
 The lyric briefness of its reckless spring;
 Thank God for all the swift adventuring,
 The bold uncertainty, the rousing strife. 5

Death As Hostile.---Under this head it has been the
 purpose of the writer to include not only such references
 as express plainly the idea of the hostility of death, but
 also those which treat of death as the "lord of life", or
 which express a fear of death, since both of these ideas
 seem to be closely connected with that of hostility. This
 conception of death as hostile to man seems not to be
 common among the writers considered in this study.

Gustav Melby in "The Sibyl's Prophecy" calls death⁶
 "the last grim foe"; Mildred McFaden in "An Easter Carol"⁷
 speaks of "the monster, Death". In "A Girl's Songs" by
 Mary Carolyn Davies we find the following unusual
 figurative expression of the fear of death:-

. . . . the fear of dying pricks
 Like a pin God holds, and he
 Stabs my brain with it gleefully. 8

1.-153, p.315.
 2.-99, p.22.
 3.-113, p.117.
 4.-Ibid., p.82.

5.-204, p.17.
 6.-126, p.99.
 7.-124, p.45.
 8.-15, p.37.

Ethan Allen Hurst in "Our Tryst"¹ speaks of "cruel Death's sad, heartless reign!" In "The Great Cities" by Henry Van Dyke we find these lines:-

Beside every ant-hill I behold a monster
crouching:
This is the ant-lion Death;
He thrusteth forth his tongue and the people
perish. 2

Other poems in which death is regarded as hostile, or a thing to be feared, are "The Wind in the Hemlocks"³ and "Fear"⁴ by Sara Teasdale, "Foreboding"⁵ by Esther Clark Hill, "Presage"⁶ by Scharmel Iris, "The Monarch"⁷ by Lloyd Mifflin, "The Masters"⁸ by Paul Laurence Dunbar, and "O My Love Lenore"⁹ by Fannie Stearns Davis.

Death As Desirable.--By many writers death is represented as a desirable cessation from the labors and cares of life. Indeed, if the number of illustrative passages can be taken as an index, this is one of the most common of modern attitudes. Not nearly all of these passages can be noted here. In many instances death is conceived as sleep and rest which await us at the end of life. Frank L. Stanton in "The Last Inn" says:-

This is the inn that I
Have dreamed of all my days;
I enter--close the door--good-by!
And the world may go its ways.

1.-95, p.134.
2.-209, p.368.
3.-194, p.142.
4.-195, p.84.
5.-90, p.10.

6.-10, p.98.
7.-129, p.82.
8.-83, p.288.
9.-57, p.100.

The soft, cool shadows round me creep;
I lay me down to rest--to sleep. 1

That Edgar Lee Masters, with his rather pessimistic attitude toward life, should be found among the poets who regard death as desirable is not surprising. In "The Letter" he asks,

What does one gain by living? What by dying
Is lost worth having? 2

The following lines from "The Vale of Shadows" by Clinton Scollard also set forth the desirability of death:-

And never a word does one man speak,
Each in his narrow bed,
For this is the Vale of Long Release,
This is the Vale of the Lasting Peace,
Where wars, and the rumors of wars, shall
cease,
The valley of the dead. 3

Walt Mason, in "The End of the Road", says,

. for Death, when all
is said and done, is but the dusk, at set
of sun, the interval of rest. 4

and Richard H. McCartney, in "A Land of Sweet Desire",

Shall not sweet Death disclose
Vision more fair than this
Of earth I then shall miss. 5

Carl Sandburg refers to death as sleep in his "Illinois

1.-185, p.164.

2.-15, p.88.

3.-54, p.227.

4.-110, p.80.

5.-123, p.27.

¹Farmer" and "Southern Pacific". ²Helen Keller in "The Song
³of the Stone Wall" speaks of death as "sweet". Will
 Chamberlain in "A Quaternion" expresses thus the idea of
 death as desirable:-

Death is a lily-arbored door, a quiet keep,
 A chamber with white curtains draping low,
 A bold divide where never melts the snow;
 Yet 'tis a loving and a lovely sleep.
 Vigil of the inverted plume, thy tyranny
 Is but a gladsome privilege in mask-- ⁴

The same idea is expressed in his "Humanity and the Sea". ⁵

Other quotations might be selected from "The Rose" by ⁶
 Ella Higginson, "Is It Long?" by Strickland Gillilan, "Out
⁷There" by Grant McGee, "Going Home" by Clarence Buckmaster ⁹
⁸Bolmer, "Little David" ¹⁰by James Whitcomb Riley, "I Lean" ¹¹
 by Witter Bynner, "The Great Carousal" ¹²by Louis Untermeyer,
¹³"Life" by Alice Brown, "Our Lost" ¹⁴and "Peace" ¹⁵by
 Margaret Sangster, "Poppies" ¹⁶by Bliss Carman, "A Rhyme of
¹⁷Death's Inn" by Lizette W. Reese, and "The New Platonist" ¹⁸
 by Cuthbert Wright.

"The Good Die Young".--We sometimes hear this
 expression in common speech today. Only one reference to

- 1.-168, p.18.
- 2.-Ibid., p.53.
- 3.-98, p.25.
- 4.-42, p.89.
- 5.-Ibid., p.94.
- 6.-89, p.17.
- 7.-80, p.124.
- 8.-125, p.27.
- 9.-11, p.52.

- 10.-160, p.159.
- 11.-29, p.68.
- 12.-204, p.12.
- 13.-24, p.106.
- 14.-170, p.115.
- 15.-Ibid., p.134.
- 16.-33, p.81.
- 17.-154, p.29.
- 18.-13, p.28.

this conception of death was found in the entire study.

Walt Mason has a poem entitled "The Good Die Young":-

The good and useful men depart too soon
on death's dark trip; . . . too quickly
they turn up their toes and slumber in the
tomb. 1

Christian Conceptions and Attitudes.--(1) Death as the return of the soul to God, or the reclaiming of souls loaned from heaven, is a conception sometimes found. In a poem called "The Cowboy's Lament" we find,

. the spirit had left him
And gone to its Giver.--The cowboy was dead. 2

and in "Baby Bruce" by Gustav Melby,

What heaven gave, again it took-- 3

The same idea appears in the following stanza from a poem called simply "Lines" by Mildred McFaden:-

Her soul caught the music of heavenly
chimes,
Of cherubim wooing her back to their
climes;
A spirit voice whispered: "Come home,
gentle one,
Thy earth-work is finished, thy mission
is done!" 4

Other examples are found in "The Universal Route"⁵ and "Song

1.-117, p.172.
2.-202, p.43.
3.-126, p.119.

4.-124, p.27.
5.-220, p.95.

of the Spirit"¹ by Ella Wheeler Wilcox, "Unto God"² by Leroy Titus Weeks, "Heaven"³ by Conde Benoist Pallen, "The Singing Man"⁴ by Josephine Preston Peabody (Mrs. Marks), and "Miriam, 'Loved of God'"⁵ by Corinne Roosevelt Robinson.

(2) Another conception closely allied to the one just considered is that which regards death as ordained by God, as in "The Prodigal" by Louise Ayres Garnett:-

God has such a splendid way
Of tempting beauty out of clay,

.

And, by and by, of letting death
Draw into space our thread of
breath. 6

and in "For a Child Convalescent" by Percy Mac Kays:-

Mighty God,
Thou in grace
That didst Death deter: 7

This attitude is found also in "Forfeit"⁸ by Corinne Roosevelt Robinson, "'In Manus Tuas, Domine'"⁹ by Julia C. R. Dorr, "The Appointed Hour"¹⁰ by Selden L. Whitcomb, "The Gardener"¹¹ by Willard Wattles, and "The Fun of Living"¹² by Strickland Gillilan.

(3) The Christian conception of death as associated

1.-220, p.39.
2.-214, p.125.
3.-141, p.95.
4.-144, p.11.
5.-186, p.16.
6.-18, p.11.

7.-112, p.173.
8.-186, p.15.
9.-81, p.92.
10.-217, p.36.
11.-211, p.97.
12.-80, p.89.

with sin, in the sense of "eternal death", seems to have little place in the thought of modern American poets. It is implied rather than expressed in the poem called "No!"¹ by Fred Emerson Brooks. In "Washington Hospital" by Edgar Lee Masters the following line occurs:-

Death comes from Sin--what plainer
truth than this? 2

No other references were found.

(4) The idea of the triumph of Christ over death is found, but rather infrequently. In "The Annunciation" Joyce Kilmer says,

Her mortal flesh bears Him
who conquers death. 3

In her "Canticle of the Babe" Josephine Preston Peabody (Mrs. Marks) sings:-

Behold thy conqueror, Death! 4

The same thought is expressed by Conde Benoist Pallen in "Amaranthus"

For he hath risen, Lord and King of Death! 5

Other instances are found in "The Creative Word"⁶ by Edward C. Farnsworth, "The Gospel of Mark"⁷ by Edgar Lee Masters,

1.-22, pp.44-45.
2.-121, p.164.
3.-101, p.146.
4.-144, p.67.

5.-141, p.65.
6.-68a, p.50.
7.-53, p.170.

"Silence"¹ by Virginia Biddle, and "An Easter Litany"² by R. W. Gilbert.

Classical Conceptions of Death.--Instances in which death is accounted for by reference to the Greek myth of the Three Fates, and allusions to Charon, the grim ferryman of hades, are not very numerous. The following lines are from a "Ballade by the Fire" by Edwin Arlington Robinson:-

But then, what though the mystic Three
Around me ply their merry trade?--
And Charon soon may carry me
Across the gloomy Stygian glade?-- 3

Again in "Captain Craig" by the same author we find:-

Clotho, Lachesis, Atropos, Faint-hued
They seem, but with a faintness never-fading,
Unblurred by gloom, unshattered by the sun,
Still with eternal color, colorless,
They move and they remain. The while I write
These very words I see them,--Atropos,
Lachesis, Clotho; and the last is laughing.
When Clotho laughs, Atropos rattles her shears. 4

Bliss Carman in "The Bahaman" exclaims,

What care I who keeps the ferry,
Whether Charon or Cunard! 5

Other allusions to Charon are found in "Pulvis et Umbra"⁶
and "A Modern Eclogue"⁷ by the same author.

1.-16, p.108.
2.-78, p.14.
3.-167, p.77.
4.-Ibid., p.129.

5.-34, p.15.
6.-31, p.61.
7.-38, p.47.

Yet other uses of these classical conceptions of death are found in "Atropos"¹ by John Myers O'Hara, "Ideal² Passion" by George E. Woodberry, and "A New Life"³ by Miguel Arce.

Closely connected with the references to the Fates and to Charon are a few instances where death is accounted for by reference to the angel Azrael. Robert G. Welsh has a poem called "Azrael" from which we quote only a few lines:-

His wings are gray and trailing,
Azrael, Angel of Death.
And yet the souls that Azrael brings
Across the dark and cold,
Look up beneath those folded wings,
And find them lined with gold. 4

Other instances of this conception of death are found in "The Idiot"⁵ by Edgar Lee Masters, and "The Seekers"⁶ by Clinton Scollard.

Death in Relation to the Life Lived.-- (1) There is a tendency among some writers for the attitude expressed toward death to vary according to the life that an individual has lived. For example, death is usually regarded as a not unwelcome or undesirable end for a successful life, as in a "Sonnet" (XXIX) by R. W. Gilbert:-

1.-162, p.213.
2.-226, p.186.
3.-58, p.60.

4.-161, pp.167-8.
5.-119, p.66.
6.-175, p.11.

May, Death, I said, hold back a while and
wait,
You grow too forward, you are overbold;

.

When all my purposes have been fulfilled,
Why then, good neighbor Death, I am thine own,
My day is done, my cup of life is spilled. 1

Walt Mason in "Looking Forward" says:-

Ah, well, I've had my share of fun,
I've lived and loved and shut the door;
And when this little journey's done,
I'll go to rest without a roar. 2

Other examples of this philosophy of life and death are
found in "The Farewell" by Gustav Melby, "A Colophon"
by Bliss Carman, "The Night Before" by Corinne R. Robinson,
"The Harbinger" by William Winter, and "Cowpuncher
Philosophy" by Arthur Chapman.

(2) On the other hand, for an unfinished life or a
life which has been one of frustrated hopes, death is
considered a tragedy. "The Song of the Unsuccessful" by
Richard Burton is an exemplification of this attitude:-

We wonder if this can be really the close,
Life's fever cooled by death's trance;
And we cry, though it seem to our dearest
foes,
"God, give us another chance!" 3

Other illustrations are seen in "Another Chance" by Henry

1.-78, p.175.
2.-117, p.120
3.-126, p.118.
4.-35, pp.23-24.
5.-166, p.45.

6.-223, p.95.
7.-43, p.19.
8.-161, p.112.
9.-209, p.102.

Van Dyke, "Life"¹ by Madison Cawein, "Friend Death"² by R.
W. Gilbert, and "The Recluse"³ by Fannie Stearns Davis.

(3) Here also may be considered attitudes toward the death of youth, which is usually regarded as a tragedy, "Too bad!--And so young!" we have heard by the grave of youth numerous times. Grace Fallow Norton, in a poem "On Seeing Young Soldiers in London", expresses this attitude:-

But I craved Heaven for them, for them!
Let there be Paradise!
They go to die ere they have lived, their
youth within their eyes. 4

So also does Sam Walter Foss in "On the Door-Knob":-

Death's hand is like a brother's hand when
stretched toward one that's old,

.

But to warm youth his heavy hand is very,
very cold:-
The white crape on the door-knob is darker
than the black. 5

Joyce Kilmer's attitude toward the death of youth as expressed in the following lines from "The Clouded Sun" written in memory of Alan Seegar is something of a departure from the traditional one, and is doubtless the result, in part at least, of the World War influence:-

Far happier he, who, young and full of pride

1.-41, p.55.
2.-78, p.77.
3.-57, p.21.

4.-139, p.79.
5.-73, p.133.

And radiant with the glory of the sun,
Leaves earth before his singing time is done.
All wounds of Time the graveyard flowers hide,
His beauty lives, as fresh, as when he died. 1

The willingness of youth to die is the theme of the following lines from "The Seventh Vial" by Willard Wattles:-

Youth is ready to lay down
Strength of foot and body brown,
Glow of eye and red of lip,
Supple knee and clinging hip,
Sting of health and gracious breath,
All to weave a crown for Death. 2

3

This idea appears also in "Out of the Fog" by Dana Burnet.

The Mystery of Death.---In this age of scientific investigation and explanation it is natural that the unexplainable mystery of death should find expression in the works of some of the poets of the period. The lines quoted below are from a poem entitled "Death" by Edmund Deacon Peterson:-

Impenetrable pall beyond the brink,
Is there no star through thy profound to blink
With kindly ray to show to man the link
'Tween this world and the next? . . . 4

Frank Dempster Sherman in a quatrain called "Knowledge" says:-

For all Philosophy may teach,
Only so far can Knowledge reach:
All that we know from breath to breath
Is Life and its great question--Death. 5

1.-101, p.256.
2.-15, p.168.
3.-26, p.142.

4.-147, p.59.
5.-178, p.98.

Helen Keller in "The Song of the Stone Wall"¹ speaks of the "yearning mystery of death".

Other poets who seem to have been impressed by the mystery of death are Edgar Lee Masters in "Silence",² Brooks More in "Celestial Signs",³ Ethan Allen Hurst in "Mortality's Response",⁴ Julia C. R. Dorr in "Three Songs",⁵ George Sterling in "Omnia Exeunt in Mysterium",⁶ Edwin Markham in "One Life, One Law",⁷ Lloyd Hiffelin in "The Black Portals",⁸ Henry Van Dyke in "New Year's Eve",⁹ and Paul Laurence Dunbar in "The Mystery".¹⁰

Along with the attitude toward death as mysterious may be considered the conception of death as the revealer of the mystery of this life and of the life beyond the grave, as in "The Great Adventure" by William Kimberly Palmer:-

So, he who far had traveled
Upon this wondrous sphere,
Has now the dream unraveled
That often haunted here. 11

and in "The Rubicon" by William Winter:-

And generous Death will show me all
That now he hides;
And, lucid in that second birth,
I shall discern

1.-98, p.27.
2.-13, p.177.
3.-16, p.160.
4.-95, p.103.
5.-61, p.5.
6.-189, p.95.

7.-113, p.100.
8.-129, p.71.
9.-209, pp.119-20.
10.-63, p.17.
11.-142, p.79.

What all the sages of the earth
Have died to learn. 1

"The Undertone"², also by William Winter, has a hint of the same idea. Other examples are found in "What If I Grow Old and Gray?"³ by Fannie Stearns Davis, "Faith"⁴ by Wilfrid Earl Chase, "The Mystic Sea"⁵ by Paul Laurence Dunbar, and "Solution"⁶ by Corinne R. Robinson.

Relation of Death to the Body.--It is always with something of awe that we look upon the face of the dead. The calm of the dead is almost proverbial. Little expression of this impression of death was found, however, in this study. George E. Woodberry in a sonnet, "R. N.", says:-

Beautiful in thy death thou liest down,
Sweet younger comrade of my happier
days; 7

The following stanza is taken from "The Dead" by Dana Burnet:-

The dead they sleep so deep,
The dead they lie so still,
I wonder that another man
May look on them and kill. 8

Edgar Lee Masters has a poem on "The Sorrow of Dead Faces".⁹

Amy Lowell calmly presents to our imagination such gruesome pictures of the dead as the following from "In A

1.-223, p.293.
2.-Ibid., p.41.
3.-57, p.34.
4.-44, (no page)
5.-63, p.92.

6.-106, p.49.
7.-226, p.234.
8.-26, p.42.
9.-119, p.116.

Castle":-

On the velvet coverlet lie two bodies,
stripped and fair in the cold grey air.
Drip--hiss--fall the blood-drops, for the
bleeding never stops. The bodies lie
quietly. At each side of the bed, on the
floor, is a head. A man's on this side,
a woman's on that, and the red blood
oozes along the rush mat. 1

The descriptions in "Clear With Light Variable Winds"² and
"The Cross-Roads"³ by the same author are a little less
horrible, but are equally devoid of all emotional reaction
on the part of Miss Lowell.

Horror of Sudden Death.--Usually we attach a particular
horror to sudden death, as in the case of death by disaster
or violence, but there seems to be no expression of this
idea by American poets of today. Only two references to
sudden death were found. The following stanza from "John
Davidson" by Walter Conrad Arensburg expresses no definite
attitude:-

O, not for him the shore crepuscular,
The waning house, the slow obscurity;
For him the sudden setting of a star---
He has gone out like light upon the sea. 4

Ella Higginson in "Undaunted" expresses a desire for sudden
death:-

1.-111, p.176. 3.-110, p.115.
2.-Ibid., pp.162-3. 4.-5, p.36.

Ah, to ride out on such a wind as this,
 Gripped to Death's breast, upon his
 pallid steed,
 Without an instant's warning or farewell! 1

Suicide.--The clearest expression of a definite attitude toward suicide found is that set forth in "To a Young Post Who Killed Himself" by Joyce Kilmer:-

When you had played with life a space
 And made it drink and lust and sing,
 You flung it back into God's face
 And thought you did a noble thing.

.

But hark to what the earthworms say
 Who share with you your muddy haven:
 "The fight was on--you ran away.
 You are a coward and a craven." 2

This represents, I think, the generally accepted Christian viewpoint.

Edwin Arlington Robinson seems almost to sanction suicide in the following lines from "The Man Against the Sky":-

If there be nothing after now,
 And we be nothing anyhow,
 And we know that,--why live?
 'Twere sure but weaklings' vain
 distress
 To suffer dungeons where so many
 doors
 Will open on the cold eternal
 shores
 That look sheer down.

To the dark tideless floods of
 Nothingness
 Where all who know may drown. 1

George Sterling, in a sonnet "To One Self-Slain"²
 offers no condemnation of the action. A cold, heartless
 attitude of disapproval is objectively expressed by Amy
 Lowell in "The Cross-Roads".³ Suicide is treated by her in
 "The Shadow"⁴ and in "Clear with Light Variable Winds"⁵ also,
 but no attitude is expressed in either of these. Edwin
 Markham seems to adhere to the "traditional" point of
 view in "The Suicide"⁶ in which he regards self-destruction
 as a useless attempt to escape from the griefs and cares
 of life.

Imaginary Sensations of Death.--In the Atlantic
Monthly for February, 1924, there is an article of some
 length entitled "Death as a Dream Experience", in which the
 author dreamed that he was eaten by a tiger, and as a
 disembodied spirit beheld the remains of his half-devoured
 body. He described his "existence" after death as follows:-

-----I next became aware of being still existent
 in a most peculiar state. I seemed to be situated
 in the air above the level of the tops of the lower
 trees. I had no bodily form whatsoever, but was
 simply a state of awareness existing in the
 atmosphere. Occasionally my position in the air
 changed instantaneously without reference to any
 volition of my own. My movements seemed to me to

1.-167, p.69.
 2.-189, p.109.
 3.-116, p.113.

4.-111, p.222.
 5.-Ibid., p.162.
 6.-114, p.44.

be like those of the flitting lights which one occasionally sees over swamps. I was immediately interested in this peculiar experience, and wondered what had happened. Then I became aware of a portion of a skull, a piece of human thigh-bone, and scattered remnants of parts of a human body lying on the ground below me.

The attack of the tiger came back to my memory 1

I find no such detailed account in the field of modern American poetry. There are, however, several more or less "near approaches". One of these is "New Dead" by Charles G. D. Roberts:-

Ah, now I know why stirs
No more my breath!
My mouth is stopt with dust,
My dream was death.

Where is this seed of self
I clutch to hold?
Will it dissolve with me
Into the mold?

It slips,--ah, let me sleep,
Worn, worn, outworn!
So to be strong when I
Arise, new born. 2

The following lines from "Erastus Wilson" by Edgar Lee Masters are characteristic of that author's individual methods of expression:-

And I clambered out of the trench and ran,
Thinking of nothing but where the bullet
Would get me, right through the heart, or
where;

and whether I'd have a second to know,
 Or say a prayer or something.
 Thud! and my breast was turned to stone----
 "Good mornin' Jesus!" 1

"In Covington Chance", also by Masters, the death
 experience is conceived thus:-

I sat up in the strength of sudden terror,
 Preparing to fight him
 But he fell on me like a drift of cloud or
 smoke,
 Darkness! starred by the point of a silver
 dagger--
 A little pain--that's all! 2

Other poems which deal with imaginary sensations of death
 are "The Ship of Stars" by Robert P. Coffin, "Beatrice"
 by Sara Teasdale, and "How Hank Died" by Ben King.

Death As a Leveling Agent.--Several poets have
 considered the "democracy" of death in its visitation of
 all men regardless of worldly place or social rank. Such
 an expression is quite in keeping with the democratic
 ideas of Edwin Markham. In "Our Deathless Dead" he speaks
 of

The ever-circling Destinies that must
 Mix king and clown into one rabble dust. 6

The same idea is expressed in his "All Men's Inn". So also

1.-122, p.63.
 2.-Ibid., p.244.
 3.-151, p.64.
 4.-195, p.20.

5.-102, p.23.
 6.-114, p.37.
 7.-Ibid., p.48.

in "The Sexton's Inn" by Walt Mason:-

The inn has no Bridal chamber, no suites
for the famed or great; the guests, when
they go to slumber, are all of the same
estate; . . . A sheet for the proud and
haughty, a sheet for the beggar guest; a
sheet for the blooming maiden--a sheet for
us all, and rest! 1

Other illustrations of this conception of death are found
in "King for a Day"² by Alfred A. Cowles, "Access to God"³
by Selden L. Whitcomb, "The New Rubaiyat"⁴ by Conde Benoist
Pallen, "Spring Summons"⁵ by Louis Untermeyer, "Black Death"⁶
by Harry Kemp, and "Hymn to the Dead"⁷ by Edgar Lee Masters.

Unusual Personal Attitudes and Conceptions.--The
various attitudes toward, and conceptions of, death which
have been considered thus far have been those which, for
the most part, have prevailed long before the beginning of
the twentieth century. In the present section, under the
title of unusual personal attitudes and conceptions,
are to be considered such expressions as have seemed
sufficiently distinctive not to be considered under any
other head, but to merit consideration in a separate
section. It is in this connection that we come in contact
with the peculiarly modern attitudes or conceptions with
respect to the subject of death. The attempt has been

1.-110, p.49.
2.-49, p.75.
3.-216, p.89.
4.-141, p.7.

5.-205, p.132.
6.-99, p.21.
7.-121, p.5.

made, whether or not at all times successful, to leave out of the present discussion all references which are strictly figurative in character, even though they might be considered as unusual conceptions, since references of this type will be considered in a later chapter especially devoted to the subject of figurative conceptions of death.

Sara Teasdale is among the most individualistic of modern American poets and one of the most modern in her attitude toward death. The following stanzas from "In a Burying Ground" carry an air of nonchalance which is somewhat characteristic of the present century:-

This is the spot where I shall lie
 When life has had enough of me,
 These are the grasses that will blow
 Above me like a living sea.

These gay old lilies will not shrink
 To draw their life from death of
 mine,
 And I will give my body's fire
 To make blue flowers on this vine. 1

Other expressions of Miss Teasdale's personal attitude toward death are found in "The Lamp", "I Shall Not Care", "June Night", and "Since There Is No Escape".

Another individual expression of attitude toward death is seen in John G. Neihardt's "When I Have Gone Weird Ways":-

1.-196, p.51.
 2.-222, p.29.
 3.-196, p.24.

4.-194, p.102.
 5.-Ibid., p.67.

When I have finished with this episode,
Left the hard, uphill road,
And gone weird ways to seek another load,
Oh, friends, regret me not, nor weep for me,
Child of Infinity!

Nor dig a grave, nor rear for me a tomb
To say with lying writ: "Here in the gloom
He who loved bigness takes a narrow room,
Content to pillow here his weary head,
For he is dead." 1

Ella Wheeler Wilcox takes the subject of death lightly
in "Fate and I":-

Death? 'Tis such a little thing--
Scarcely worth the mentioning.

What has death to do with me,
Save to set my spirit free? 2

Louis Untermeyer in a "Funeral Hymn" gives us an
individual conception of death rather than an attitude
toward it:-

When Life's gay courage fails at last,
And I grow worse than old--
Though Death puts out my fiery heart,
I never shall grow cold.

For warm in earth's green covering,
And warmly I shall lie,
Wrapped in the winding-sheets of air
And the great, blue folds of say! 3

Walt Mason does not wish to live too long. In a poem
called "Living Too Long" he says:-

1.-181, p.155.
2.-220, p.82.

3.-204, p.142.

I do not wish to draw my breath until
the papers say that Death has passed me
up for keeps; when I am tired I want to
die and in my cozy casket lie as one who
calmly sleeps. 1

Bliss Carman in "Resignation"² voices the same thought.

Individual personal attitudes or conceptions are
expressed also in "The Sultan's Palace"³ by Alan Seegar,
"The Blue Symphony"⁴ by John G. Fletcher, "It's Got To Be"⁵
by James Whitcomb Riley, "The Certain Victory"⁶ by S. E.
Kisor, "The Right To Die"⁷ by Paul Laurence Dunbar, "The
Lords of Pain"⁸ by George Sterling, "The Clouded Sun"⁹ by
Joyce Kilmer, "The Dead Folk"¹⁰ by Fannie Stearns Davis,
"We Dead"¹¹ by James Oppenheim, and "When I Am Dead and
Sister to the Dust"¹² by Elsa Barker.

Love and Death.--In the closing section of this
chapter, it has seemed proper to devote some space to such
conceptions of the relation of these two great facts of
human life as are expressed in modern American poetry.
Sixteen of the poets whose works have been examined for the
main part of this study speak of Love and Death together in
some connection. In some instances, however, no definite
idea of their relation is expressed. The most common

1.-117, pp.162-3.
2.-36, pp.53-4.
3.-176, p.61.
4.-179, p.38.
5.-159, p.356.
6.-103, p.223.

7.-63, p.94.
8.-188, p.35.
9.-101, p.256.
10.-50, p.28.
11.-206, p.266.
12.-161, p.77.

conception is that of Love as the victor over Death.

William Herbert Carruth in "O Grave, Where Is Thy Victory?" embodies this victory of love over death in the resurrection of Christ:-

But Love was there, the lord of Life and Death,
And held the importunate enemy at bay;
Yet when his work was done, all peacefully
As dawn grows day, Life yielded up his breath,
Surrendering to the vanquished enemy,
And took Love's hand in his and went away. 1

It seems possible that the origin of this conception of the triumph of love over death may have been the result of a personification of the self-sacrificing love of Christ, who died for the sins of the world, but afterward rose from the dead. Whatever its origin, the conception has come to be associated with Love in the abstract sense, as in "From the Grave" by Ella Wheeler Wilcox:-

But now I know that there is no killing
A thing like Love, for it laughs at Death. 2

Another expression of the relation between love and death is found in "Daphnis" by Anne Elizabeth Cheney:-

"O Shade, phantasmal Death!
Why lurkest thou in shadowy places
dark, unseen,
To breathe thine icy breath on me?
Thou canst not chill a heart that
loves!" 3

George L. Woodberry in "The North Shore Watch" says,

Love, too, abides, and smiles at savage
death. 1

Conde Benoist Pallen seems not entirely sure of the triumph of love over death, and has a long poem called "Love and Death" written after the manner of Tennyson's "Two Voices". In the end he finds the victory of Love in the victory of Christ on the Cross.

Jane Burr in "The Oracle Speaks" avers the triumph of death over love:-

Love, you joyous splendid thing
With your royal purple wing,
With your jasmine-flowered breath:
Know the end of you is death! 3

Other poets who have written of Love and Death in some connection are Alfred A. Cowles in "Oblivion", William Rose Benet in "The Shadowed Road", John Vance Cheney in a quatrain called "But Once", Vance Thompson in "Immortality", Bliss Carman in "When Guelder Roses Bloom", Alan Seegar in "Introduction and Conclusion of a Long Poem", Joyce Kilmer in "The Clouded Sun", Kendall Banning in "Unconquered", and Willard Wattles in "Come With Me".

1.-224, p.221.
2.-141, p.41ff.
3.-27, p.25.
4.-49, p.8.
5.-9, p.40.
6.-46, p.167.

7.-201, p.15.
8.-31, pp.46-47.
9.-176, p.167.
10.-101, p.250.
11.-10, p.170.
12.-211, p.5.

CHAPTER II.

SOCIAL ASPECTS OF DEATH.

Expressions of Grief for the Dead.---A very large number of poems by modern American writers could be listed for which the death of some loved relative or friend, or the death of some public figure has furnished the inspiration, and in which the poet laments the passing and extols the virtues of the one dead. Of course not all of the poems of this type could be noted in this study and not all of those noted can be mentioned here.

Some of the poems which were read are: "Monody for Augustin Daly"¹ and "Louis"² by William Winter, "Samuel Langhorne Clemens"³ by Wilbur Nesbit, "The Dead Leader"⁴ by Charles Edward Russell, "King Edward"⁵ and "Rev. Asa Dalton, D. D."⁶ by Edward Clarence Farnsworth, "Edith Cavell"⁷ and "Picquart"⁸ by George E. Woodberry, "Conductor Sammy"⁹ and "John Maynard"¹⁰ by Fred Emerson Brooks, "Bayard Taylor"¹¹ and "Mercedes"¹² by Margaret E. Sangster, and "The Wife's Grave"¹³ by Selden L. Whitecomb.

- 1.-223, p.238.
- 2.-Ibid., p.261.
- 3.-10, p.113.
- 4.-Ibid., p.107.
- 5.-68, p.70.
- 6.-Ibid., p.73.
- 7.-226, p.196.

- 8.-Ibid., p.244.
- 9.-22, p.167.
- 10.-21, p.148.
- 11.-170, p.183.
- 12.-Ibid., p.200.
- 13.-216, p.27.

Various attitudes of question and doubt, hope, despair, and grief are found. The modern tendency, if there is one marked enough to note, is to speak less of grief and of the probable faring of the dead beyond the grave, and more of their virtues and of the problems of life still confronting the living, as in Winter's "Monody for Augustin Daly". Of course in the case of a loved one who has died there is the expression of deep and sincere personal grief as in Professor Whitcomb's "The Wife's Grave", and in Winter's "Louis".

The Coffin-Maker, the Undertaker, Etc.--A number of poems are found in which one or another of the various "social agents" in connection with death is mentioned, with sometimes an expression of attitude on the part of the author. Carl Sandburg in "Broken-Faced Gargoyles" speaks of

An undertaker with a
raw wind-bitten face and
a dance in his feet. 1

Walt Mason has a poem with a somewhat satirical tone on "The Undertaker":-

When life is done the
undertaker comes along and gets
us, and tucks us neatly in our
little beds. He comes to
show us that the cost of living
cuts little ice beside the cost
of death. 2

And the poet imagines that the "cheerful man" is desirous of asking him why he "hangs on" so long.

Stephen Vincent Benet has a very individual reaction to mortuary parlors in his poem of that title. Since the poem is not long it is quoted here entire:-

The smooth unobtrusive walls say "Hush!"
 in a voice of honey and meal,
 The refined and comforting chairs protest
 that sorrow may be genteel,
 They are all hiding the dead away, they
 are huddling them off to forget,----
 --I would rather scoop a hole in the sand
 till my hands ran blood and sweat,
 I would rather raise my friend on a pyre
 for the lightening to do its will,
 I would sooner leave my dead to the dogs
 --they are happy over their kill--
 Than to bring them here to this oily place
 to lie like a numbered sheaf!
 --This servant's quiet can have no room
 for my racked and horrible grief--
 The windows smile with the smiles of
 masks, the curtains are specters
 walking,
 And Death, the obsequious gentleman, comes
 rubbing black gloves and talking! 1

The manufacture of coffins furnishes a subject for
 Amy Lowell in "The Hammers"². Conrad Aiken has a poem
 entitled "Will You Step Into My Grave, Sir?" in which the
 grave-digger speaks:-

Will you step into my grave, sir?
 said the digger to the dead.
 You will find it quite as restful,
 sir, as any human bed. 3

1.-222, pp.436-7.
 2.-110, p.214.

3.-17, p.189.

The Funeral Service and Expressions of Mourning.--

Carl Sandburg has a very individual attitude toward funeral rites in his little poem called "Finish":-

Death comes once, let it be easy.
Ring one bell for me once, let it go
at that.
Or ring no bell at all, better yet.

Sing one song if I die.
Sing John Brown's Body or Shout All
Over God's Heaven.
Or sing nothing at all, better yet.

Death comes once, let it be easy. 1

Cale Young Rice has the same thought in "A Death Song",² although it is less individually expressed. Indeed the expressions of attitude toward these subjects which are found are for the most part of this "modern", reactionary type. (Carolyn C. Wilson's "The Funeral" deals with the subject of burial to be discussed in the following section.)

Walt Mason in "Post Mortem Honors" remarks that

You'd rather have some kindness while
you tread this vale of tears, than have
your dust lamented o'er for fifty million
years. 3

Ella Wheeler Wilcox expresses an attitude similar to this⁴ in "Mockery".

In "Octaves" Edwin Arlington Robinson expresses

1.-189, p.266.
2.-157, p.344.

3.-116, p.67.
4.-219, p.153.

himself on the subject of mourning thus:-

And when the dead man goes it seems to me
'Twere better for us all to do away
With weeping, and be glad that he is gone. 1

Other poems which deal with the funeral or with expressions of mourning are "Change"² by Jitter Bynner, "Little White Hearse"³, by Dana Burnet, "The Queen's Last Ride"⁴ by Ella Wheeler Wilcox, "The Last Ride"⁵ by May Frink Converse, "When the Hearse Comes Back"⁶ by James Whitcomb Riley, and "Grave Matters"⁷ by Ben King.

The Disposition of the Body.--One has only to use his powers of observation to discover that in the world about us a "decent burial" for the dead is considered essential. Burial of the dead is practiced by all civilized nations today. This insistence on the burial rite dates back to the time of the ancient Egyptians. So careful were they of the bodies of their dead, at least among the upper classes, that some of those bodies are preserved even to this day, after the lapse of several thousand years. Among the ancient Greeks, to be refused burial was one of the worst calamities which could befall a man. In Sophocles' play, "Antigone", the heroine incurs the death penalty rather than allow her brother to remain without the rite

1.-107, p.103.
2.-28, p.59.
3.-26, p.128.
4.-220, p.19.

5.-48, p.32.
6.-159, p.83.
7.-102, p.231.

of burial, which had been forbidden by the king.

The Hebrews of Biblical days placed considerable emphasis on burial, and the Bible has doubtless had its influence on Christian nations in the shaping of the attitude on this subject. Especially, the doctrine of the resurrection of the body, universally taught in the earlier days of Christianity and still insisted upon by many theologians, has been a potent factor. Burial is the accepted method of disposing of the body of the dead, and the large majority of modern poets do not mention the matter. The few expressions of attitude which are found are mostly reactions against the "traditional" practice.

In "The Cattleman's Burial" by Harry Kemp a desire for a "regular" burial is implied:-

----"I'm glad it isn't me
Not 'as to lie so lonesome at the
bottom o' the sea." 1

"The Hermit of the Dunes" (Fannie Stearns Davis) shows an attitude exactly opposite:-

I shall not lie in any grave
Beneath a toppling lichened stone.
When I grow weariest, the wave
And turning tide shall have their own. 2

Zoe Akins in "The Wanderer" thinks

That it will be a piteous thing

In one small grave to lie. 1

John Hall Wheelock in "Spring" has the following unusual thought:-

Build me a tomb when I am dead,
But leave a window free
That I may watch the swallow's flight
And spring come back to me. 2

A lonely burial is regarded as a tragedy in Stephen Vincent Benet's poem "Lonely Burial" and in "The Dying Cowboy",³ an anonymous selection in N. Howard Thorp's⁴ collection of "Songs of the Cowboys", while John G. Fletcher in "Golden Symphony" avows:-

In the bosom of the desert
I will lie at the last. 5

Bliss Carman wishes to be "Dust of the Street".⁶ Carolyn C. Wilson in "The Funeral" expresses herself on the subject of burial thus:-

When I am dead
Lay me not straightly in a lidded bed,
A dark cell, satin walled,
(Satin has always set my nerves on
edge.)

.

Although
If I should be elected
To be vivisected,

- | | |
|----------------|---------------|
| 1.-162, p.52. | 4.-202, p.63. |
| 2.-132, p.356. | 5.-72, p.49. |
| 3.-162, p.164. | 6.-35, p.27. |

thus:-

Burn my body,
Disperse me in many beds. 1

The Epitaph.--The epitaph is another social expression concerning death which may be considered here. On the tomb-stones in some of the old New England cemeteries, I am told, one finds such "reminders" to the living as these:-

Death is a debt to nature due;
As I have paid it, so must you. 2

Stranger pause, as you pass by,
As you are now so once was I;
As I am now, so you must be.
Prepare to die, and follow me. 3

Compare with these this "modern" "Epitaph" by Marjorie Allen Seiffert:-

A man lies here
Who took sport seriously,
Forgetting life.
His soul, like a lost ball,
Lies happy as a field mouse,
Or a cricket,
In the long grass. 4

Another "Epitaph" by Louise Driscoll is slightly less "modern" in tone:-

- 1.-29, p.99. 4.-15, p.240.
2. & 3.-As reported by Prof. S. L.
Whitcomb, University of Kansas.

Here lies the flesh that held
 The spirit prisoner--
 A caged thing that rebelled,
 Forced to subminister;
 Broken it had to be;
 To set its captive free. 1

Edgar Lee Masters has perhaps done the most of any modern American poet with the epitaph as a literary form. The poems of "The Spoon River Anthology" and "The New Spoon River" are conceived as "epitaphs" on the tomb-stones of those "sleeping on the hill", in which the life history of each individual is graphically set forth in varying detail.

In another volume, Masters has a poem called "Epitaph for Us".² Other epitaphs noted in this study were an "Epitaph for a Sailor Buried Ashore"³ by Charles G. D. Roberts, "Mister Keazle's Epitaph",⁴ a humorous treatment by Holman F. Day, and three "Epitaphs" by Countess P. Cullen from the December, 1924, number of Harper's Magazine. One of these last, called "For a Cynic" is as follows:-

Birth is a crime
 All men commit;
 Life gives us time
 To atone for it;
 Death ends the rhyme
 As the end of it. 5

1.-15, p.244.
 2.-121, p.112.
 3.-85a, p.27.

3.-165, p.31.
 4.-59, pp.67-8.

CHAPTER III.

FIGURATIVE CONCEPTIONS OF DEATH.

The figurative representation of death is rather characteristic of modern American verse writers. It has been a little difficult sometimes to distinguish between figurative passages and those references which were considered under the head of "Individual Conceptions of Death" in Chapter I. There has been a question in some instances also as to the classification of the passages included within this chapter, when, for example, a "personification" of death may also be an "individual figurative conception". Since the number of definite personifications is not as numerous as the individual figurative conceptions, the former have been considered together irrespective of any connection with the latter. There are many more instances of unusual figurative conceptions than can be considered or even mentioned in this chapter without the inclusion of any cases possibly overlapping another topic.

Various Personifications of Death.--By many poets death is conceived as a "person". A conception which is more or less conventional is that of death as a "reaper". Willard Wattles speaks of "the scythe of Death, the reaper". ("An Ode for a New Christmas")¹ Walt Mason

1.--211, p.18.

conceives "the harvester death" as "abroad for his sheaves".
 ("The Tornado")¹

By some poets death is considered as an hostile personage. Edgar Lee Masters in "Covington Chance" apostrophizes death as

Assassin! Relentless Fiend! 2

and Paul Laurence Dunbar in "On the Death of W. C." as

Thou arrant robber, Death! 3

Anne Elizabeth Cheney speaks of "the tyrant Death".
 ("Althos-Olympus")⁴

Others have the opposite conception of death as a lover. George E. Woodberry speaks of "dark lover, Death".
 ("A Day at Castrogiovanni")⁵ Margaret Widdemer calls death "the Last Lover". ("The Dark Cavalier")⁶ In "The Stranger"⁷ Arthur Guiterman imagines death as a strange youth who comes to the house of a maid and with whom she falls in love. Maxwell Bodenheim's conception in "The Camp-Follower" is a repulsive one:-

About us were soldiers--hordes of scarlet
 women, stupidly, smilingly giving
 up their bodies
 To a putrid-lipped, chuckling lover--Death. 8

1.-117, p.16.
 2.-122, p.244.
 3.-63, p.284.
 4.-45, p.34.

5.-225, p.85.
 6.-218, p.77.
 7.-83, p.268.
 8.-54, p.29.

Edwin Markham refers to death as "the King of Players".
 ("Wail of the Wandering Dead"); Edgar Lee Masters, as¹
 "death the dicer". ("Ernest Snively")² Witter Bynner's "I
 Gamble"³ has this conception also. In "The Gray Inn" by⁴
 Clinton Scollard Death has "a box of shaken dice".

Death is referred to as "a gentle welcome guest" by⁵
 William Winter in "The Harbinger". To Ethel Louise Cox⁶
 death is "my friend". ("Death") Other "personifications"
 which are found are "the grim old shark", ("Flying Fish: An
 Ode" by Charles W. Stork);⁷ "Knight of the Sable Feather",
 ("Knights-Errent" by S. M. M. (?));⁸ "Special Agent Death",
 ("The Postmaster" by Robert J. Burdette);⁹ "a Captain I must
 ship with", ("Noons of Poppy" by Bliss Carman);¹⁰ "the shadow
 boatswain" (Carman: "The Shadow Boatswain"¹¹); "the herder"
 ("Wings" by Herman Hagedorn);¹² "the ploughman" ("The Last
 Furrow" by Edwin Markham);¹³ "the patrolman" ("The Helping
 Hand" by Edgar Lee Masters);¹⁴ "the pale critic" ("A
 Sculptor" by Ella Wheeler Wilcox);¹⁵ "King Death" ("The
 Last Inn" by Frank L. Stanton);¹⁶ and "the ant-lion Death"
 ("The Great Cities" by Henry Van Dyke).¹⁷

Colloquial Figurative Allusions to Death.--There are

1.-113, p.25.
 2.-122, p.156.
 3.-29, p.46.
 4.-174, p.3.
 5.-223, p.95.
 6.-51, p.140.
 7.-15, p.221.
 8.-16, p.93.
 9.-25, p.101.

10.-31, p.93.
 11.-Ibid., p.98.
 12.-85, p.15.
 13.-113, p.47.
 14.-119, p.120.
 15.-219, p.119.
 16.-185, p.184.
 17.-209, p.308.

a number of colloquial expressions for death which are figurative in character. Some of these are found occasionally in the American verse of today. The cowboy conception of death as "the Great Divide" or "crossing the Great Divide" is found in a number of poems in the collections of cowboy verse by John A. Lomax and H. Howard Thorp. One poem (by J. H. Foley) is called "Crossing the Divide".¹ "A Cowboy's Prayer"² and "Whiskey Bill"³ also present death in this particular figure. Walt Mason refers to this conception in his "The Venerable Excuse",⁴ and Harriet Monroe in "Mountain Song".⁵

Another colloquial expression for death is "to cash in". This is found several times also. Harry Kemp's "Cashing In"⁶ is one instance. "Partners"⁷ by Berton Braloy, "The Lawyers Know Too Much"⁸ by Carl Sandburg, and "After the Grave"⁹ by Walt Mason also contain allusions to this conception of death.

Walt Mason utilizes one other colloquial expression for death in "The Good Die Young":-

. . . too quickly they turn
up their toes and slumber in the tomb. 10

Unusual Figurative Conceptions.--There is a very

- | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1.-202, p.55. | 6.-99, p.75. |
| 2.-Ibid., p.48. | 7.-107, p.101. |
| 3.-107, p.145. | 8.-109, p.85. |
| 4.-110, p.52. | 9.-110, p.93. |
| 5.-222, p.340. | 10.-117, p.173. |

large number of figurative references to death which might be considered under this head. One of the most unusual of all of these is found in Maxwell Bodenheim's "Death":-

I shall walk down the road.
 I shall turn and feel upon my feet
 The kisses of death like scented rain.
 For death is a black slave with little
 silver birds
 Perched in a sleeping wreath upon his
 head.
 He will tell me, his voice like jewels
 Dropped into a satin bag,
 How he has tiptoed after me down the
 road,
 His heart made a dark whirlpool with
 longing for me.
 Then he will graze me with his hands;
 And I shall be one of the sleeping
 silver birds
 Between the cold waves of his hair, as
 he tiptoes on. . . . 1

Another very unusual conception is seen in the following passage from "Songs of Deliverance" by Orrick Johns:-

The strong lover goes not to his bride save
 when he would people his land with sons;
 Then I, too, I go not to Death, save it be for
 the labor greater than all others.
 I shall break her with my laughter;
 I shall complete her. . . .
 Only then shall Death be when I die! 2

Charles Wharton Stork is not satisfied with one figure, but weaves several together in "Death-Divination":-

Death is like moonlight in a lofty wood,
 That pours pale magic through the
 shadowy leaves;

'Tis like the web that some old perfume
weaves
In a dim, lonely room where memories brood;

.

Death is like all sweet, sense-enfolding things,
That lift us in a dream-delicious trance
Beyond the flickering good and ill of chance;
But most is Death like Music's buoyant wings;
That bear the soul, a willing Ganymede,
Where joys on joys, forevermore succeed. 1

Mahlon L. Fisher does this also in his sonnet, "Afterwards":-

. . . death is only answerings and replies,
The chiming of a bell which no one hears,
The casual slanting of a half-spent sun,
The soft recessional of noise and coil,
That coveted something time nor age can spoil;
I know it is a fabric finely spun
Between the stars and dark; to seize and keep,
Such glad romances as we read in sleep. 2

Carl Sandburg has three very interesting figures
referring to death in "Death Snips Proud Men":-

. death snips proud men on the
nose, throws a pair of dice and says: Read'em
and weep. .

Death sends a radiogram every day: When I want
you I'll drop in--and then one day he comes
with a master-key and lets himself in and
says: We'll go now.

Death is a nurse mother with big arms: 'Twont
hurt you at all; it's your time now; you just
need a long sleep, child; what have you had
anyhow better than sleep? 3

Willard Wattles alludes thus figuratively to death in

"The Bells of Death"

Even now I hear the jingling bells of Death
Riding his camel through the silent sand.
Nearer and ever nearer-- 1

In "Swimmers" Louis Untermeyer sings of

Life, an adventure perilous and gay--
And death, a long and vivid holiday. 2

3

In "William Shakespeare" Untermeyer speaks of "the canker,
Death" which destroys the flower of life.

Henry A. Beers pictures death as "The Rising of the
Curtain"⁴ at the opening of a play. John G. Fletcher in
the "White Symphony" says,

Each day is a gaunt grey rock,
And death is the last of them all. 5

6

In the "Red Symphony" he refers to death as the "rolling
to port" of "the ship of my soul".

Lloyd Mifflin in a sonnet, "And When at Last the
Portals Loom"⁷, speaks of drinking "Death's drowsy wine".
Carrie Collins Reed has a similar thought in "Memories
after Death":-

Death beckoned me. His smile benign,
His face in beauty as a star

1.-211, p.34.
2.-13, p.171.
3.-205, p.13.
4.-7, p.123.

5.-72, p.00.
6.-Ibid., p.81.
7.-128, p.48.

Entranced my soul--I drank his wine
Of peace and followed him afar. 1

A number of figurative references to death are found in "The New Rubaiyat" by Conde Benoist Pallen. In one place the author says,

And you and Death are drawing to the tryst. 2

Another figure is seen in the following stanza:-

TODAY but borrows what TOMORROW lends
And pays to YESTERDAY what now it spends,
And dector still with nothing of its own
A bankrupt in the hands of Death it ends. 3

Bliss Carman in "The Pensioners"⁴ refers to death as "a shudder of the soul".

No more quotations can be included here. Many other poems might be mentioned which contain figurative representations of death. Among these are "Tom Beatty",⁵ "Yank Sword",⁶ "The Room of Mirrors",⁷ and "The Door" all by⁸ Edgar Lee Masters; "All of Us"⁹ by Strickland Gillilan; "The Reapers"¹⁰ by Wallace Irwin; "The Fountain"¹¹ by Leroy Titus Weeks; "Chords"¹² by Meredith Nicholson; "The Outer Gate"¹³ by Nora May French; "Fatherland"¹⁴ by Olive Tilford Dargan;

1.-10, p.153.
2.-141, p.9.
3.-Ibid., p.10.
4.-31, p.33.
5.-118, p.155.
6.-122, p.68.
7.-120, p.175.

8.-119, p.121.
9.-80, p.81.
10.-90, p.27.
11.-214, p.127.
12.-138, p.13.
13.-101, p.170.
14.-15, p.12.

¹"The Secret" by Frederick Faust; "Edwin Arlington Robinson"²
by Edwin C. Ranok; "When Death Has Lost the Key"³ by Kenneth
Slade Alling; "April on the Battlefields"⁴ by Leonora Speyer;
and "Oblivion"⁵ and "Hostelry"⁶ by Witter Bynner.

Other Figurative Conceptions.--There are other
references to death which are figurative in character, and
yet are not strictly included in any of the groups thus far
discussed. Bliss Carman in "Outbound"⁷ pictures death as
the embarking upon a sea voyage. So also does Will
Chamberlain in "Humanity and the Sea".⁸ Leroy Titus Weeks
conceives death as the end of a voyage in "My Ship Comes In".⁹
To Ella Wheeler Wilcox in "If I Should Die"¹⁰ death is "that
ebbing tide which has no flow".

In "A Cowboy's Musings" Arthur Chapman likens death to
the cowboy's horse which unwittingly steps upon a nest of
young birds:--

So mebbe this here Death that compasses our end
Is just some blunderin' critter that goes by,
Like my old hoss, and never does intend
To make us die. 11

Percy MacKaye in "As Ripples Widen Where the Stone Is
Cast" says,

- | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1.-16, p.232. | 7.-31, p.110. |
| 2.-17, p.140. | 8.-42, p.94. |
| 3.-58, p.80. | 9.-214, p.03. |
| 4.-10, p.120. | 10.-219, p.100. |
| 5.-28, p.108. | 11.-43, p.14. |
| 6.-Ibid., p.01. | |

As ripples widen where the stone is cast,
 So we do wane toward the banks of death;
 As dips the summer grass before the breath
 Of the west wind, so lightly we are passed: 1

Paul Laurence Dunbar speaks of death in "Frederick
 Douglas" thus:-

A spirit brave has passed beyond the mists
 And vapors that obscure the sun of life. 2

In "Grayboard and Goldenhair"³ John G. Neihardt calls
 death "a wrestler with the strangling grip".

Figurative conceptions of death occur also in "When
 the Tide Goes Out"⁴ by Joseph C. Lincoln, "Outworn"⁵ by
 Shaemas O'Sheel, "Life Said to Death"⁶ by Percy MacKaye,,
 "Harmed by the Soft Sicilian Skies"⁷ by Alfred A. Cowles,
 and "Recrimination"⁸ by Ella Wheeler Wilcox.

1.-112, p.184.
 2.-63, p.6.
 3.-137, p.16.
 4.-105, p.170.

5.-140, p.58.
 6.-112, p.137.
 7.-49, p.2.
 8.-220, p.29.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SUBJECT OF IMMORTALITY IN MODERN AMERICAN VERSE.

In regard to the subject of immortality there seems to be a general atmosphere of questioning and doubt in the verse of the present day. Many writers seem to disregard it entirely.

Author's Note: There is a seeming tendency in our modern life to live wholly in the present with apparently no thought of any life beyond the grave. Even in religious circles the "golden streets and pearly gates" of heaven and the "fiery torments" of hell have become almost things of the past, so far as any outward expression is concerned, and with the passing of these concrete images have come vagueness and doubt, or positive disbelief in any life after death.

The idea of "service" is being emphasized until in some people "social service" has become a substitute for religion. The spirit of this movement is very well set forth in the following lines from Paul Laurence Dunbar's poem "Religion":-

Take up your arms, come out with me,
 Let Heav'n alone; humanity
 Needs more and Heaven less from thee.
 With pity for mankind look 'round;
 Help them to rise--and Heaven is found. 1

In its ideal form this is "applied Christianity". Divorced from religious belief it is merely philanthropy. If there is a belief in immortality it is left in the background, either disregarded or tacitly assumed. The present study in modern American verse has, I think I may say, been confirmatory of the observations just made. I have noted such expressions on the subject of immortality as I have found, and have tried to consider them in an impartial and unbiased manner.

Although a very large number of references to immortality are found, many are vague and indefinite, and no very great number are strongly positive in their statement of a clear belief in a life beyond the grave.

The attitude of questioning and doubt in its more "hopeful" phase appears in the following lines from "Flying Fish: An Ode" by Charles Wharton Stork:-

And I who ask,--have I a certain sign
That these poor flights (which seemingly
 exalt
My soul into an element more fine)
Prove me immortal? Reason stops at fault.
But still by hope I'm led;
And I'll but hope the more, if hope be all,
Nor shall e'en Death appall! 1

Sara Teasdale in "When Death Is Over" is a little doubtful in this verse:-

If there is any life when death is over. 2

Ethan Allen Hurst in "The Old Plantation" asks.

"Will the Soul of Man, likewise, go on
for aye?" 3

Arthur Davidson Ficke shows despair in these lines from
"The Happy Princess":-

Our hopes and singing musical
Give no long comfort, though we cling

1.-15, p.222.
2.-18, p.43.

3.-95, p.141.

To faith, and rouse our hearts to sing
 As if from heaven the soul might view
 On earth its visions lived anew;
 Forgetting that it all is vain,
 And death gives nothing back again. 1

To Jane Burr "heaven's a guess" ("Mettle").² Harriet Monroe
 in "Mountain Song" exclaims:-

Ah, shall I find? and shall I know? 3

and Selden L. Whitcomb in "Ascutney" wonders:-

Is one whose praying mingled with my own
 So watching me, beyond the bounds of earth? 4

Other illustrations of this general attitude might be
 quoted from "The Setting",⁵ "Darkness"⁶ and "The Testimony of
 the Suns"⁷ by George Sterling, "At Ise"⁸ by Arthur Davison
 Ficke, "Star of Achievement"⁹ and "The Snail and I"¹⁰ by Cale
 Young Rice, "Near the Precipice"¹¹ by Leroy Titus Weeks,
 "Beyond"¹² by Kendall Banning, "The Doubt"¹³ by Florence
 Kiper Frank, and "The Divine Fantasy"¹⁴ by John Hall Wheelock.

A few poets allude to the "inner voice" of the soul as
 a proof of immortality, in an effort to strengthen their
 belief against the general spirit of doubt. Edmund Deacon
 Peterson in "Sleeps She a Space?" says:-

- | | |
|-----------------|-------------------|
| 1.-69, p.47. | 8.-69, p.100. |
| 2.-27, p.18. | 9.-156, pp.16-17. |
| 3.-222, p.340. | 10.-Ibid., p.349. |
| 4.-216, p.84. | 11.-214, p.164. |
| 5.-189, p.123. | 12.-10, p.133. |
| 6.-188, p.131. | 13.-Ibid., p.37. |
| 7.-Ibid., p.72. | 14.-215, p.86. |

But there's a voice in thy own breast,
Oh, man, thou canst not help but hear. 1

and he goes on:-

Hath God from his high Heaven come down
And made by His compelling voice
Martyrs of saints, and all for naught?--
And martyred seers from bloody choice? 2

Clarence Buckmaster Bolmer has a slightly different
conception of this "voice of an immortal soul" in "Beyond
the Blue":-

A voice is ever calling
From far beyond the blue;
It is The Heavenly Father
Appealing there to you. 3

The "inner voice" speaks to Bliss Carman in "Non Omnis
Moriar":-

There is a part of me that knows,
Beneath incertitude and fear,
I shall not perish when I pass
Beyond mortality's frontier; 4

Edwin Markham says in "Infinite Depths":-

. . .into the silent depths of every heart,
The Eternal throws its awful shadow-form. 5

6
and in "The Man With the Hoe" he speaks of feeling "the
passion of eternity".

1.-147, pp.75.
2.-Ibid., p.76.
3.-11, p.11.

4.-38, p.10.
5.-113, p.43.
6.-Ibid., p.16.

Esther Clark Hill has voiced the idea of the "inner voice" in "The Land Beyond the Valley"¹. Paul Laurence Dunbar in "Theology" says:-

There is a heaven, for ever, day by day,
The upward longing of my soul doth tell
me so. 2

Cale Young Rice in "With Omar" speaks of

". that quenchless Soul within us
hid,
Which cries, 'Feed--feed me not on Wine
alone
For to Immortal Banquets I am bid.'" 3

Among some psychologists today there is a tendency to explain soul (mind or consciousness, whatever they may call that something within us that insists that I am I) as a "function" of the physiological brain. This "function" is thought to cease with the cessation of the brain to operate and its eventual decay after death. Biologists and physiologists tend to regard man merely as an animal--an organism composed of cells, which has passed through an endless series of stages of development to its present state. This materialistic tendency finds little echo among modern American poets. The nearest approach to a "subjective" expression of it which I find is the following passage from "Edwin Arlington Robinson" by Edwin C. Ranck:-

1.-90, p.23.
2.-63, p.106.

3.-157, p.377.

God may be in his heaven; I don't know,
 But we are dust of destiny, no more.
 And when the winds of passion cease to
 blow
 Like dust we settle down upon the floor,
 And then the housemaid comes into the room
 And drives us forth with deft and busy
 broom. 1

Several definite "objective" statements of this materialistic
 tendency are found, notably in "Before--And Then" by²
 Strickland Gillilan, "Israel Gobini" by Edgar Lee Masters,³
 and "The Way to Paradise" by Richard A. McCartney.⁴

Existence of Souls Before Birth.--Wordsworth in his
 "Ode on the Intimations of Immortality From the Recollections
 of Early Childhood" conceives the Soul as having had an
 individual existence before this life.

The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
 Hath elsewhere had its setting,
 And cometh from afar. 5

This thought finds an occasional echo in modern American
 verse. There seems to be a suggestion of it in Bliss
 Carman's "The Dancers of the Field":-

For I remembered like a dream
 How ages since my spirit flamed
 To wear their guise and dance with
 them. 6

⁷
 Witter Bynner's "Ruins" contains a hint of this idea also.

- | | |
|---------------------|---------------|
| 1.-17, p.140. | 5.-34, p.335. |
| 2.-80, p.149. | 6.-33, p.75. |
| 3.-122, p.304. | 7.-29, p.76. |
| 4.-123, pp.112-113. | |

Alfred A. Cowles in "La Joie fait Peur" says:-

I know that death is but a call
Back to the place from whence we
came; 1

The idea of an existence of some kind before this life
is expressed also in "Voices at the Veil"² and "Argosies"³ by
Cale Young Rice and "The Unborn"⁴ by Fannie Stearns Davis.

Belief in Personal Immortality.---A large number of
instances were found in which belief in a continued life of
the individual after death is expressed. Often there is
some conception of the nature of that future existence
given also, but sometimes there is merely the statement (or
even just a hint) of a belief in personal immortality. Not
all of the illustrative passages can be considered here.

Bliss Carman is among the poets who seem certain of
their belief in a personal existence after death in which
we shall meet and recognize our loved ones who have "gone
before". One expression of that belief is seen in "After
School":-

And there beside the open door,
In a large country dim and cool,
Her waiting smile shall hear at last,
"Mother, I am come home from school." 5

John Vance Cheney in "By and By" seems sure that

1.-49, p.78.

2.-150, pp.110-117.

3.-Ibid., p.449.

4.-57, p.49.

5.-33, p.137.

At last, somewhere, some happy day,
The bliss will round us lie. 1

Mary Baker Eddy in "The Valley Cemetery" sings of

My loved ones in glory still waiting
for me. 2

Belief in a continued individual existence after death
is expressed also in "Golden Days" and "At Rest" by Clarence
Buckmaster Bolmer. The stanza below is from the latter
poem:-

But remember she still loves thee
Better now than e'er before,
And her spirit watches o'er thee
From that sweet and holy shore. 4

A glimpse of Henry Van Dyke's belief in immortality is
seen in "Hide and Seek" and in "Rendezvous". The following
lines are from the last named poem:-

A thousand accidents control
Our meeting here. Clasp hand in hand,
And swear to meet me in that land
Where friends hold converse soul to soul. 6

Other illustrations might be given from "The Winter
Fights at Home" and "The Light Keeper" by Joseph W.
Lincoln, "In the Life Beyond" by George Lansing Raymond,
"Somewhere, Some Day" by Sara Beaumont Kennedy, "De Ribber

- | | |
|----------------|------------------|
| 1.-46, p.5. | 6.-Ibid., p.314. |
| 2.-64, p.17. | 7.-105, p.155. |
| 3.-11, p.53. | 8.-Ibid., p.167. |
| 4.-Ibid., p.5. | 9.-153, p.205. |
| 5.-209, p.319. | 10.-100, p.35. |

¹ob Life" by Ben King, "Ships Returning Home" by Max Ehrmann,
²
³"The Great Adventure" by William Kimberly Palmer, "The
⁴Lonely Old Fellow" by Edgar A. Guest, "Good Cheer" by
⁵
⁶Wilfrid Earl Chase, "After Death" by Ethel Louise Cox,
⁷"Friend Soul" by Robert H. Schauffler and "Humanity and the
⁸Sea" by Will Chamberlain.

Eternal Life Through Christ.--The Christian conception
 of eternal life through Christ appears in modern American
 verse, but not very frequently. Less than a score of
 references to this conception of immortality were noted in
 the entire study. One of the clearest expressions of
 Christian trust is found in "I Am So Glad to Trust in Him"
 by Ethan Allen Hurst:-

I trust in Him as my alternative,
 To whom my soul and life I gladly give.
 He gave me more--He died that I might
 live! ⁹

and another in Joyce Kilmer's "Pennies":-

What is the key to Everlasting Life?
 A blood-stained Cross. ¹⁰

Grace Fallow Norton in "Debts" says:-

To Jesus yield your life (he gave his for you.) ¹¹

- | | |
|--------------------|-----------------|
| 1.-102, p.123. | 7.-172, p.23. |
| 2.-65, p.40. | 8.-42, p.94. |
| 3.-142, p.79. | 9.-95, p.115. |
| 4.-82, p.83. | 10.-101, p.179. |
| 5.-44, (no paging) | 11.-139, p.44. |
| 6.-51, p.153. | |

Mildred McFaden in "An Easter Carol" sings:-

For immortality is yours,
 "The Lord is risen"--rejoice! rejoice! 1

Other poets who refer to this conception of immortality
 are Edward Clarence Farnsworth ("The Creative Word"), Harriet
 Monroe ("The Thief on the Cross"), Edgar Lee Masters ("The
 Gospel of Mark"), Ben King ("Gittin' Inter Shape"), Conde
 Benoist Pallen ("Amaranthus"), Robert Haven Schauffler
 ("Earth's Easter"), Richard McCartney ("The Home For
 Evermore") and ("Behold in Clouds of Glory"), and Bliss
 Carman ("From an Old Ritual").

Cosmic Immortality.--There is a school of thinkers who
 conceive of immortality as a reabsorption of the Soul of man
 into an Over-Soul (the Infinite) with loss of all individual
personality. "Lost in the Infinite!" an acquaintance of the
 writer has exclaimed, almost with rapture. This line of
 thought has had some vogue in the philosophical world during
 the later nineteenth and during the present century in the
 philosophy of Bergson, and has received acceptance from some
 Christian teachers.

In Bergson's "Stream of Life" the individual
 consciousness (or Soul) is, as it were, a ripple on the

1.-124, p.45.

2.-38a, p.50.

3.-53, p.124.

4.-Ibid., p.170.

5.-102, p.3.

6.-141, p.65.

7.-162, p.170.

8.-123, p.66.

9.-Ibid., p.77.

10.-33, p.68.

surface, which, having spent its force, subsides to the level of the "stream" and is lost. Emerson's idea of the Over-Soul is the conception of a similar type of mind. Such an immortality makes little appeal to the average individual. One must be somewhat philosophically inclined to see any choice between "absorption into the Infinite" with loss of individuality, and the blank oblivion of the grave which the materialist assures us is the end of life. Perhaps because poets are seldom philosophers in the strictest sense, this conception of "cosmic immortality" is rare in the field of our investigation. There is some doubt in the mind of the present writer as to whether the interpretations of the passages noted are, in all cases, the ones intended by the authors. The following passage from "The Dying Pantheist" (Henry A. Beers) might be a versification of Bergsonian philosophy, almost, though perhaps it was not so intended by the author:-

But I, who lie upon this bed
 In mortal anguish--what am I?
 A wave that rises with a breath
 Above the infinite watery plain,
 To foam and sparkle in the sun
 A moment ere it sink again. 1

This conception of cosmic immortality seems to be a characteristic one with Witter Bynner. The "cosmic

immortality" which he desires seems to be rather an absorption in Nature than in a Spiritual Being. In a poem called "Enough" he says:-

And then myself to enter in and be
With hill and field and root, part of
the breeze,
Moss for a violet, sap of the trees:
Enough of will, enough of destiny. 1

There are hints of this same idea in "The God", "The Wave"²
and "I Vanish"⁴ by the same author. Another expression is
found in the poem "Avila"⁵ by the poet-philosopher, George
Santayana. Edgar Lee Masters in "My Light With Yours" says,

When the dead world slowly spinning
Drifts and falls through the void--
My light with yours
In the Light of Lights forever! 6

Other less definite expressions of the "cosmic"
conception of immortality are seen in "Growth"⁷ (Robert H.
Schauffler), "The Parable of the Leaven"⁸ (Edward Clarence
Farnsworth), "The Tidings to Olaf"⁹ (Bliss Carman), "The
Rhythm"¹⁰ and "The Mighty Mother"¹¹ (George E. Woodberry),
"The Poet Considers Those Who Know Not Their Souls"¹²
(Shaemas O'Sheel), "The Great Buddha of Kanakura to the

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1.-28, p.69. | 7.-172, p.47. |
| 2.-29, p.99. | 8.-68, p.58. |
| 3.-Ibid., p.4. | 9.-32, p.80. |
| 4.-Ibid., p.69. | 10.-225, p.97. |
| 5.-171, p.98. | 11.-224, p.124. |
| 6.-120, p.196. (& 15, p.117.) | 12.-140, p.59. |

¹
Sphinx" (Cale Young Rice:; "The Sultan's Palace" (Alan ²
³
Seegar), and "Death" (John Vance Cheney).

Immortality through Fame.--Another conception of immortality which is found occasionally among modern verse writers is that of the immortality of fame achieved through work done in life. The following stanzas from Louis Untermeyer's "Half in Earnest" illustrate the idea I wish to convey:-

The flight of ages, the parade of years,
Will gently pass me by;
For buried though I be, I cannot die--
I shall escape the death-bed's final fears.

Fresh with each generation's lavish praise
My work and I shall grow
Until at last the world of men will know
The living magic of these deathless lays. 4

Lizette V. Reese has a quatrain called "Immortality" which shows this conception of immortality through fame from a slightly different angle:-

Battles nor songs can from oblivion save,
But Fame upon a white deed loves to build;
From out that cup of water Sidney gave,
Not one drop has been spilled. 5

Herman Hagedorn in "Epitaph" speaks thus:-

His days, his deeds stand shining round him
now.

1.-157, p.307.
2.-176, p.61.
3.-40, p.175.

4.-205, p.150.
5.-155, p.27.

Against such guards what power hast thou,
O Death? 1

Immortality through fame is referred to also in "After
Us" (Walt Mason), "At Phaedra's Tomb" and "On Burial Hill"
(Bliss Carman), "Aeschylus" (Cale Young Rice), "James
Whitcomb Riley" (May Frink Converse), and "Gayheart" (Dana
Burnet).

Social Immortality.--The conception of "social
immortality", of which George Eliot was a noted exponent,
has but small place in the field of this investigation.
Only four references were noted in the entire study. Selden
L. Whitcomb seems to have something of this idea in "An
Easter Creed":--

I believe in the emigrant dying alone,
Lost from the caravan crossing the
plains;
I believe in the mansion his grandchildren
own
He lives and attains. 8

George Santayana in a "College Drinking Song" sings:-

When we are asleep beneath grey stone,
Our children's lives shall repeat our own,
For the light remains though the days be
flown. 9

In "Youth's Immortality" (also by Santayana) the idea of

1.-86, p.126.
2.-117, p.67.
3.-32, p.63.
4.-35, p.41.
5.-156, p.56.

6.-48, p.46.
7.-26, p.106.
8.-217, p.61.
9.-171, p.108.

social immortality appears without any mention of individual offspring:-

When Death gathers up our ashes
And our sorry shades depart,
Lo, Life's flame, rekindled, flashes
From another mortal heart,
And Death turns about, derided
By the Life he would deride. 1

Edgar Lee Masters seems to have a hint of this latter conception in his "Hymn to the Dead".

So do the spirits of those departed
Enrich our soil of life
With delights, wisdoms, purest hopes,
And shapes of beauty. 2

Conditional (or Acquired) Immortality.--Matthew Arnold in one of his sonnets and in "Rugby Chapel" and "Empedocles on Aetna" has the conception of a kind of "conditional" immortality. That is, he seems to have believed that only those individuals who have, by their earthly lives, made themselves "indispensable" to the universe would achieve immortality. A few modern American poets allude to a similar conception of immortality. In "The Village Atheist" Edgar Lee Masters says:-

Immortality is not a gift,
Immortality is an achievement;
And only those who strive mightily
Shall possess it. 3

1.-171, p.233.
2.-121, p.8.

3.-118, p.250.

No other direct statements were found. There is a hint of the same idea in "Joseph Dixon"¹ (also by Masters). "Life"² by Leroy Titus seeks, "What of the Morning"³ by Glenn Ward Dresback, and "Maktoob"⁴ and "Liebestod"⁵ by Alan Seegar suggest that these poets are inclined toward a belief in "conditional immortality".

Reincarnation.--The idea of reincarnation, so prominent in Hindu philosophy and religion, is found in a few instances in modern American verse. Whether this the result of the infusion of Hindu thought in recent years I cannot say. It seems at least possible that such may be the case.

Reincarnation and the conception of "cosmic immortality" are easily connected, and the two ideas occur together in "The Dying Pantheist" of Henry A Beers. The stanza below follows the one quoted on page 103:-

The eternal undulation runs:
A man I die: perchance to be,
Next life a white-throat on the wind,
A daffodil on Temple's lee. 6

7

Cale Young Rice in "Voices at the Veil" expresses a conception of "reincarnation" of the souls of those who have died in other individuals at birth. In "Godspeed" (by

1.-118, p.202.
2.-214, p.110.
3.-62, p.75.
4.-176, p.142.

5.-Ibid., p.159.
6.-7, p.116.
7.-156, p.116.

Jane Belfield), a dialogue between the soul and the body at death, the body speaks thus:-

. I go from whence I came,
Perchance to bloom again, or if required,
When time is ripe, to house another soul. 1

Edgar Lee Masters speaks of "the next incarnation" in "Warren Swinburne",² but it is a difficult matter to judge the amount of "subjectivity" which enters into the objective form of the "Spoon River" epitaphs.

William Alexander Percy seems to have something of the idea of reincarnation in his "Poppy Fields":-

And would it not be proud romance
Falling in some obscure advance
To rise, a poppy-field of France? 3

Return of the Dead to Earth.--(1) The most common conception in this connection is that of "ghosts" or haunting spirits. Sam Walter Foss has a poem called "The Ghost of John Gear". The following lines are illustrative of the general plan of the poem:-

In his coffin-bed John Gear lay dead,
But John Gear's ghost stood near;
And the clergyman talked at the funeral,
And the ghost bent low to hear: 4

Other poets who make use of the "ghost" conception (or the idea of the spirits of the dead returning to earth and

1.-12, p.141.
2.-122, p.211.

3.-16, p.22.
4.-74, p.13.

existing near the living) are Fred Emerson Brooks ("The Skeleton"¹ and "The Ghost of an Old Continental"²), Harry Kemp ("The Ride"³), Joyce Kilmer ("Dave Lily"⁴), John V. A. Weaver ("Ghost"⁵), Mary Baker Eddy ("Lines on Visiting Pine Grove Cemetery"⁶), Richard D. McCartney ("A Soldiers' Cemetery in the Forest"⁷), Herman Hagedorn ("The Ghost"⁸), and Vachel Lindsay ("What the Ghost of the Gambler Said"⁹ and "Abraham Lincoln Walks at Midnight"¹⁰).

(2) Several singular conceptions of "returned spirit" existence were found. One of these is Vance Thompson's "In Broadway":-

I walk in Broadway to and fro
 With the taciturn ghost of Edgar Poe.
 Girls idle for us when the lights
 Are red on the pavements there o' nights.

.

But we mock them, pacing to and fro--
 I and the ghost of Edgar Poe. 11

Vachel Lindsay has the conception of "Ghosts in Love":-

"Tell me, where do ghosts in love
 Find their bridal veils?"

.

From the tree of Memory.
 'Tis there the ghosts that fall in
 love

- | | |
|------------------|------------------|
| 1.-21, p.102. | 7.-123, p.126. |
| 2.-Ibid., p.162. | 8.-11a, p.23. |
| 3.-99, p.9. | 9.-106, p.246. |
| 4.-101, p.225. | 10.-Ibid., p.53. |
| 5.-213, p.13. | 11.-201, p.41. |
| 6.-64, p.67. | |

Find their bridal veils." 1

Perhaps the most singular of all is the conception found in Harry Kemp's "He Did Not Know":-

He did not know that he was dead;
He walked along the crowded street,
Smiled, tipped his hat, nodded his head
To his friends he chanced to meet.

.

Then he remembered that black night
And the great shell-burst, wide and red,
The sudden plunging into light;
And knew that he was dead. 2

(3) The modern cult of spiritualism has in recent years been receiving considerable notice. It has received the indorsement of a number of apparently serious-minded men and women, although its findings have received no credence in the scientific world, and many so-called "mediums" have been shown to be merely clever "fakers". Some of the most "convincing" claims of communication with the spirit world occurred during the World War. But the added impetus which spiritualism received at that time seems not to have been mirrored in the verse of the period to any extent. Four references represent the findings of this study on the subject. Wallace Irwin has a satirical treatment in a humorous vein in "The Nail of a Veary Spook":-

"My duty is to answer calls

For many mediums,
 To nightly visit public halls
 To tumble chairs and tap on walls
 And play on horns and drums,

"To enter seances and meet
 With folks I do not know,
 And when my business they entreat,
 In spectral whispers to repeat,
 'I am your brother Jo!' 1

George Santayana treats the subject satirically also in
 "The Poetic Medium".² "Zilpah Marsh"³ by Edgar Lee Masters
 is the "epitaph" of a spiritualistic "medium". "The
 Poltergeist"⁴ by Harry Kemp is another poem concerned with
 spiritualism.

Conceptions of the Future Life.--(1) Extended
 descriptions of heaven or hell, such as we find in Dante
 and Milton, are not found in the American verse of today.
 Indeed there are no "attempts" at a description worthy of
 the name. The traditional heaven, with its golden streets
 and pearly gates, its crystal sea, its white-robed
 inhabitants with their harps and crowns, living in eternal
 bliss in the fellowship of God and the angels, appears not
 in any one detailed picture, but rather in a considerable
 number of allusions (or references) to one or more of these
 "traditional" ideas in connection with the future abode of
 the soul.

In "A Woman's Desire"⁵ (R. W. Gilbert) heaven is a

1.-96, p.35.
 2.-171, p.199.
 3.-118, p.254.

4.-99, p.83.
 5.-78, p.83.

place where one goes to meet his friends "beside the crystal sea", in "a garment all of white". Margaret E. Sangster in "The Old Church" speaks of

. . . . the city whose walls are jasper,
whose streets are paved with gold. 1

²
In "Our Lost" she alludes to heaven as our "home o'er the river of rest". This conception of heaven as the desired haven after the dark voyage of death appears also in "Peace"³ (Mrs. Sangster), "I Saw An Angel Standing in the Sun"⁴ (William Rose Benet), "A Song of Hope"⁵ (Frank L. Stanton) and "The Unknown Shore"⁶ (Cale Young Rice). The conception of heaven as the "home" of the soul is found also in "An Old Man's Musing"⁷ (Frank L. Stanton).

Wilfrid Earl Chase ("Good Cheer") speaks of heaven as a place where

. ye shall live again, all free
From malady; shall know eternal joys
That nothing, nothing, nothing can withhold,
Shall see God face to face; shall thank him
from
Your hearts for every hideous hour spent here
In this retreat. 8

A whimsical childish reaction to the traditional conception of heaven is found in the following stanzas from "Heaven" by Josephine Dodge Daskam (Mrs. Bacon):-

- | | |
|------------------|-------------------|
| 1.-170, p.157. | 5.-184, p.153. |
| 2.-Ibid., p.115. | 6.-150, p.100. |
| 3.-Ibid., p.134. | 7.-184, p.15. |
| 4.-9, p.38. | 8.-44, (no page). |

She says that when we all have died
We'll walk in white there (then she cried)
All free from sorrow, sin and care--
But I'm not sure I'd like it there.

She cannot tell me what we'll do,
I couldn't sing the whole day through:
The angels might not care to play,
Or else I might n't like their way. 1

In "Melchizedek Jones's Modern Thanksgiving" (Sam
Walter Foss),

The spirit of Melchizedek Jones roamed through
the fields of light,
Walked o'er the City's golden stones by rivers
of delight; 2

George L. Raymond in "Staking All" conceives heaven as

. a region far above our own,
Where all souls live for one and one for all,
And each finds full companionship with God. 3

Joyce Kilmer in "Roofs" sings of

. a Golden Town where
golden houses are. 4

Other poems in which there are allusions to
"conventional" aspects of heaven are "A Plantation Ditty"⁵
and "The Old Pine Box"⁶ (Frank L. Stanton), "Road Song"⁷
(Josephine Preston Peabody (Mrs. Marks)), "Jim" (Joseph
C. Lincoln), "Harps in Heaven"⁹ (Vachel Lindsay), and
"The Man from New York State"¹⁰ (S. E. Kiser).

- | | |
|----------------|--------------------|
| 1.-55, p.60. | 6.-185, p.51. |
| 2.-74, p.87. | 7.-143, p.15. |
| 3.-153, p.279. | 8.-105, p.187. |
| 4.-101, p.121. | 9.-106, p.286. |
| 5.-183, p.176. | 10.-103, pp.74-75. |

There are not as many descriptions of (or allusions to) hell as there are of heaven. Most modern poets seem to be able to get along very well without a hell in their conceptions of the future existence of the soul. There is, however, one instance in which the poet's imagination of hell exceeds in elaborateness any description of the conventional heaven found. This is "The Hell-Bound Train", one of the poems in the collection of "Songs of the Cowboys" by N. Howard Thorp. The following stanzas are typical of the entire poem:-

A Texas cowboy lay down on a car room floor,
 Having drunk so much he could drink no more;
 So he fell asleep with a troubled brain
 To dream that he rode on a hell-bound train.

.

While the train rushed on at an awful pace,
 The sulphurous fumes scorched their hands and
 face;
 Wider and wider the country grew,
 As faster and faster the engine flew.

Louder and louder the thunder crashed,
 And brighter and brighter the lightening flashed;
 Hotter and hotter the air became,
 Till the clothes were burnt from each quivering
 frame.

And out of the distance there arose a yell,
 "Ha, ha", said the Devil, "we're nearing hell!"
 Then, oh, how the passengers shrieked with pain,
 And begged the Devil to stop the train. 1

Vachel Lindsay's hell in these lines from "The Congo"

is the old-fashioned kind:-

Listen to the yell of Leopold's ghost
 Burning in Hell for his hand-maimed
 host.
 Hear how the demons chuckle and yell
 Cutting his hands off, down in Hell. 1

Hell is "the Hot Place" to Holman F. Day in "The Stock in
 the Tie-Up".²

(2) The ideas of reward and punishment, and of a final
 judgment are usually found in connection with "traditional"
 conceptions of heaven and hell. In all of the references
 to hell just noted above, the idea of punishment for evil
 done in this earthly life is outstanding. Other instances
 are seen in "Uncle Nathan's Motion" (Hixon Waterman) and
 "The Outlaw" (Richard Hovey).³
⁴

The "modern" attitude toward hell and eternal
 punishment is given objective expression in Edgar Lee
 Masters' "Hagard Pihlblad":-

Listen, you infidels and pantheists,
 And maudlin sentimentalists,
 Talking a God of love;
 And saying that man, as bad as he is,
 Would never create eternal hell,
 So how could a God of love do so,
 And doom to eternal punishment
 The wretched children of men? 5

The conception of heaven as a place of reward for

1.-106, p.180; 207, p.100.
 2.-59, p.37.
 3.-210, p.149.

4.-36, p.41.
 5.-122, p.236.

righteous living is less often openly expressed than the conception of eternal punishment for the wicked. In the references to heaven which have been considered it is implied or taken for granted as a part of the "traditional" heaven, if it is present. A few poets, however, allude definitely to the idea of reward. In "Macdowell; An Elegy"¹ Shuemas O'Sheel mentions "peace and reward" as a part of his conception of heaven. In R. N. Gilbert's "The Sentinel" the warder at heaven's gate questions:-

"What is your trade, and what have you
made
To merit a home on high?" 2

Edmund Deacon Peterson ("In Dreams As 'Twere, Life Passes By") says:

We are aware that we proceed

.

Unto what goal we chose of two,--
If false to Hell; to Heaven if true. 3

Only a few allusions to a "final judgment" were found. Strange as it may seem, the most definite (and conventional) expressions with reference to the Judgment Day appear in the literature of the cowboys. In the "primitive" mind of the cowboy the conception in all the poems noted is that of a "last great round-up". One poem is entitled "The Great

1.-140, p.88.
2.-78, p.26.

3.-147, p.57.

Round-Up". We quote the following lines:-

Yet I trust, in the last great round-up,
When the riders shall cut the big herd,
That the cowboys shall be represented
In the earmark and brand of the Lord;
To be shipped to the bright mystic regions
Over there in green pastures to lie,
And led by the crystal still waters,
In that home of the sweet by and by. 1

Other illustrations showing a similar thought might be
quoted from "The Cowboy at Church",² "The Cowboy's Dream"³
and "Cowboy's Salvation Song".⁴

Clinton Scollard in "The Vale of Shadows"⁵ speaks of a
"reckoning day" for those who were responsible for the
outbreak of the world war. Leroy Titus Weeks, just
mentions "the Judgment Day" in "All 'At's Out's in Free".⁶

(3) As in the consideration of the subject of death,
so with the conceptions of immortality, there are a number
of references which may be classed as "individual
conceptions". Certain modern verse writers seem to reserve
the right to construct their own "heaven", and (in rare
instances), hell, although usually in these peculiarly
modern expressions hell has no place.

The following passage from Walt Mason's "The Better
Land" has a flavor both modern and American:-

There is a better world, they say,

1.-202, p.77.

2.-Ibid., p.33.

3.-Ibid., p.41.

4.-39, p.31.

5.-54, pp.227-8.

6.-214, p.34.

where tears and woe are done away;
 there shining hosts in fields sublime
 are playing baseball all the time,
 and there (where no one ever sins)
 the home team nearly always wins. 1

Roy Helton, in "Outcasts in Beulah Land", gives us one of the most extensive "adventures" into the future life found in modern American verse. The following stanzas will give a hint of the general tenor of the poem, which is of some length:-

There is a barren meadow in this land--
 A gaunt plain, little known to Revelation,
 On whose bleak stones Death's awestruck
 thousands stand
 Uneasily awaiting God's damnation:
 Until, when many days still find them so,
 Their consciences recover and off they go.

.

A few there were both shocked and reverent,
 But on the whole the mortals still seemed
 mortal:
 The same old human passions still unbent:
 Pride in Death's presence--pride beyond
 Death's portal:
 The minute's difference small change had
 made:
 The bold were calm--the timid wept and
 prayed. 2

Edgar Lee Masters has an unusual, though not very definite, conception of heaven in "Heaven Is But the Hour":-

Heaven is but the hour
 Of the planting of the flower.
 But heaven is the blossom to be,
 Of the one Reality.

And heaven cannot undo the once sown
 ground,
 But heaven is love in the pursuing,
 And in the memory of having found.----- 1

2

Paul Laurence Dunbar, in "A Banjo Song", thinks that it would be "more home-like" to have some banjo music mingled with the heavenly harps.

Vachel Lindsay has given us several very individual conceptions of heaven. His "General William Booth Enters Heaven" is too well known to need discussion. The picture in the following lines is a curious mixture of the "traditional" heaven and an American city on a parade day:-

And when Booth halted at the curb for prayer
 He saw his Master thro' the flag-filled air.
 Christ came gently with a robe and crown
 For Booth, the soldier, while the throng knelt
 down.
 He saw King Jesus. They were face to face,
 And he knelt a-weeping in that holy place. 3

Time and space forbid that we should quote from "The
 4
 Celestial Circus" and "How I Walked Alone in the Jungles
 5
 of Heaven".

The old Norse conception of the reward of the brave who have died in battle is referred to by Herman Hagedorn in "The Last Faring":-

He dreams of the feasts of Valhalla, the
 mead and the meat,

1.-120, p.81.
 2.-63, p.21.
 3.-106, pp.124-5.

4.-Ibid., p.285.
 5.-Ibid., p.330.

And battles without number. 1

The imagination of Charles Hanson Towne is more rational than that of some poets, in his attempt to describe the future state of existence in "Beyond the Stars":-

Three days I heard them grieve when I
lay dead,

.

I heard them whisper in the quiet room.
I longed to open then my sealed eyes,
and tell them of the glory that was mine
There was no darkness where my spirit
flew,
There was no night beyond the teeming
world.
Their April was like winter where I
roamed;
Their flowers were like stones where now
I fared. 2

Sara Teasdale, who was mentioned as one of the most individual of modern American poets in her attitude toward death, is equally individual in her desires for the future life and her conceptions of immortality. In "The Wine" she says:-

The rest may die--but is there not
Some shining strange escape for me
Who sought in Beauty the bright wine
Of immortality? 3

The idea of immortality through Beauty is seen also in "The

1.-85, p.31.
2.-132, pp.346-7.

3.-194, p.71.

¹ Voice". In "On the Dunes" and "If Death Is Kind" ² Miss Teasdale signifies a desire for return to her beloved earth after death. The following stanza is from the last named poem:-

Perhaps if Death is kind, and there can be
 returning,
 We will come back to earth some fragrant
 night,
 And take these lanes to find the sea, and
 bending
 Breathe the same honeysuckle, low and
 white. ³

There is a hint of this same idea in "Since There Is No
⁴ Escape". In a poem called "In the End" she expects that,

All that could never be said,
 All that could never be done,
 Wait for us at last
 Somewhere back of the sun; ⁵

Some writers express a desire to enjoy their immortality here on earth, with no thought of any existence "beyond the stars". The most outstanding expression of this desire for immortality on earth is Brian Hooker's sonnet, "Idolatry":-

If God should say: "From all my power to bless
 Choose thine own heaven where the soul shall be
 Fired with white joy, or drowned in a sweet sea
 Of everlasting calm forgetfulness."
 I should make answer: "Lord, earth's images
 Of heaven are fairer; therefore leave me free--
 Make me immortal in mortality--
 Thou hast no more to give; grant me no less." ⁶

1.-194, p.20.

2.-Ibid., p.100.

3.-Ibid., p.108.

4.-Ibid., p.07.

5.-Ibid., p.120.

6.-91, p.68.

It is found also in "The Last of His People"¹ by Henry A. Beers, and there is a hint of it in K. W. Gilbert's "The New"².

John Vance Cheney is not entirely sure of a sorrow free life of bliss in heaven, if we may judge from his quatrain, "Here and Hereafter":-

A voice oft speaks and saith,
 "Shall sorrow leave thee at the gate of death?
 Heaven's stars illumine earth's night;
 Why not earth-shadows dim the Hills of Light?"³

The cowboy's conception of a heavenly "range" for the souls of cowboys to ride in the next world finds expression in "Riders of the Stars"⁴ by Henry M. Knibbs, "The Ol' Cow Hawse"⁵ by E. A. Brinninstool, and the anonymous "Just A-Ridin'"⁶.

Many more poems containing unusual individual conceptions of immortality were noted. Space can be given here for the mention of only a few of the more outstanding ones:--"The Live Conscience"⁷ (Harry Kemp), "Here and Hereafter"⁸ (Vance Thompson), "The Cry of the Drowned"⁹ (Ella Higginson), "When My Wife Dies"¹⁰ (Negro Folk Rhyme), "Uncle Eph's Heaven"¹¹ (Fred Emerson Brooks), "Blind Jack"¹² (Edgar Lee Masters), "Resurgam"¹³ (Alan Seegar), "Resurrection"¹⁴

1.-7, p.49.
 2.-78, p.30.
 3.-46, p.167.
 4.-107, p.19.
 5.-Ibid., p.105.
 6.-Ibid., p.188.
 7.-99, pp.23-24.

8.-201, p.42.
 9.-89, p.73.
 10.-192, p.26.
 11.-21, p.12.
 12.-118, p.76.
 13.-176, p.101.
 14.-171, p.125ff.

(George Santayana), "The Cross-Roads"¹ (Amy Lowell), "The
Dead Are Not Asleep"² (Richard H. McCartney), "Resurrection"³
(Herman Hagedorn), and "Broken-Faced Gargoyles"⁴ (Carl
Sandburg).

Lack of Desire for Immortality.--A few references were
found in which the authors seem to regard immortality as not
to be desired. Whether these represent merely the expression
of a passing mood, or a permanent personal attitude can
scarcely be ascertained.

Edwin Markham is one of the extreme "lovers of earth".
In "Earth is Enough" he says:-

We men of Earth have here the stuff
Of Paradise--we have enough.
We need no other stones to build
The stairs into the Unfulfilled--
No other ivory for the doors--
No other marble for the floors--
No other cedar for the beam
And dome of man's immortal dream. 5

Gamaliel Bradford in "Things of Clay" thinks

Life is so extremely brittle,
Who would think of more? 6

Amy Lowell seems to crave annihilation in the lines from
"The Last Quarter of the Moon":-

I crave to be lost like a wind blown flame
Pushed into nothingness by a breath,

1.-110, pp.119-20.
2.-123, p.88.
3.-47, p.238.

4.-169, p.68.
5.-115, p.116.
6.-16, p.149.

and quench in a wreath
Of engulfing death
This fight for God, or this devil's game. 1

Grace Fallow Norton is another poet who seemingly has no belief in, or desire for, immortality. In "On Seeing Young Soldiers in London" she says:-

I have no Heaven for myself. My heart
is heaven here.
To unfold, to fade--it is enough, earth
and a dream so dear. 2

Witter Bynner in "The Arrow" is somewhat bored at the thought of eternal life, and in "The Resurrection of the Body" ⁴ seems to express disbelief in immortality. In "The Dying Decadent" ⁵ (Louis Untermeyer) eternal life is regarded as an ill. Edgar Lee Masters in "Wallace Ferguson" ⁶ accepts immortality as a possibility, but has no desire for a continuation of the earthly consciousness. John Bunker, in "Saints' Gold" thinks that

In man's own breast he bears his
Heaven or Hell. 7

1.-111, p.68.
2.-139, p.79.
3.-29, p.70.
4.-17, p.190.

5.-204, p.139.
6.-118, p.235.
7.-16, p.80.

CHAPTER V.

THE SUBJECTS OF DEATH AND IMMORTALITY IN THE
AMERICAN VERSE OF THE WORLD WAR.

At the beginning of this study it seemed probable that the verse of the World War might furnish an abundance of material. It must be confessed that the actual findings have been somewhat disappointing.

Nobleness of Dying for a Great Cause.--always the soldier has been honored and praised for his bravery, for his spirit of self-sacrifice, and the noblest of all deaths has been to die for one's fatherland in the defense of a great cause. This glorification of death naturally found some expression in the verse of the World War, but fewer references were found than might have been expected. One of the clearest expressions concerning the "glorious" death of the soldier is contained in Wallace Stevens' "In Battle":-

Death's nobility again
Beautified the simplest men.
Fallen Winkle felt the pride
Of Agamemnon
When he died. 1

Alan Seegar in his "Ode in Memory of the American Volunteers
Fallen in France" lauds the chance that

Gave them that grand occasion to excel,
That chance to live the life most free from
stain

And that rare privilege of dying well. 1

Lloyd Mifflin's "Peace to the Brave" is another definite expression of this attitude toward death for a great cause:-

If some, perchance, were of a lowly station,
They are ennobled beyond mortal breath;
Co-equal with the proudest of the nation,--
Made eminent by Death.

O'er those who die for Fame there rests a
beauty
Dimmed by the human craving for renown;
But on these patriot brows, the angel Duty,
Enwreathed her purest crown. 2

William A. Percy in "A Volunteer's Grave" says:-

Yet what have all the centuries
Of purpose, pain, and joy
Bequeathed us lovelier to recall
Than this dead boy? 3

Grace Fallow Norton in "On Seeing Young Soldiers in London" expresses her attitude thus:

. . . they have Heaven as they die,
knowing they die so well, 4

Other illustrations of this attitude toward those who died in the World War might be quoted from "The Vivandiere"⁵ (William Rose Benet), "O Glorious France"⁶ (Edgar Lee Masters), "The Players"⁷ (Francis Bickley) and "Prince Charlie"⁸ (Josephine Preston Peabody (Mrs. Marks)).

1.-176, p.171.
2.-127, p.51.
3.-17, p.166.
4.-139, p.79.

5.-8, p.52.
6.-47, p.35.
7.-Ibid., p.240.
8.-143, p.100.

Louis Untermeyer in "Two Funerals"¹ contrasts the "glorious death" of a soldier killed in battle with the ignominious crucifixion of Christ after his wonderful life.

There seems to be almost a note of sarcasm for the "glorious death" conception in the following lines from "Fireman O'Rafferty" by Joseph C. Lincoln:-

And he'll not be a hero, for, you see, he
 didn't fall
 On some blood-spattered battle field, slain
 by a rifle ball;
 But maybe, on the other side, on God's great
 roll of fame,
 Plain Fireman Mike O'Rafferty 'll be counted
 just the same. 2

Immortality and Heavenly Bliss Assured for Our Dead.--

Closely connected with the idea of the glorious death of the soldier is that of immortality and assured heavenly reward for our soldiers who are slain in battle. Perhaps this may, in part, be a survival of the old Norse Valhalla of the glorious dead, and in part a survival of the attitude in the days of the crusaders, when absolution from all sins was granted by the Pope to all who enlisted in the holy wars. The stanza below is quoted from "Our Heroes" by William Kimberly Palmer:-

The Seasons in procession glide--
 They wait the trump on high,
 When Heaven its gates shall open wide,
 Who dared for Truth to die. 3

1.-204, p.111.
 2.-105, p.180.

3.-142, p.51.

The same thought is expressed in these lines to "A.S.K."

(by H.M.H.):—

Oh, do not mourn for him, he heard his
country's call,
And answering, gave all he had to give;
Yet though they die, they live;
Not dead at all
Those who obeyed that call. 1

James Church Alvord in "Drum Taps to Heaven" has this unique conception:—

Peter at Heaven's Gate wearied of the game.
('Twas old folks, old folks, shivering up
the stair),
Spindle-shanks, wheezings, sparse and
grizzled hair
When whooping, thundering, boys by millions
came;

.

"Brave boys," he laughed, "we'll have some
life in Heaven!" 2

Margaret Widdemer's "The Old Road to Paradise" is another poem on the theme of glorious immortality for the soldier dying on the battle-field. We quote the following stanza:—

Out out on the wet battlefields,
Few the roadways wind,
One to grief, one to death
No road that's kind--
The old road to Paradise
Plain it is to find! 3

Still other instances of the use of this thought are found in "Rouge Bouquet"¹ (Joyce Kilmer), "The Fallen"² (John Vance Cheney), "Silence"³ (Virginia Biddle), "The Conscript"⁴ (Alberta Vickeridge), "The Lonely Legion"⁵ (Alice Brown) and "The War Song of Gamelbar"⁶ (Bliss Carman). The two latter, however, are not products of the World War period.

The Souls of the Enemy Consigned to Hell.---There is little expression of attitude with respect to the dead of the enemy. Only one reference was noted, and in this the author cheerfully consigns the soul of "Fritz" to the domain of Satan, as it has been customary to do with one's enemies since the beginning of Christian warfare. Berton Braley, in "The Destroyer Men", sings blithely:-

Then a true shot hits and it's "Good-bye,
Fritz"--
His future address is Hell! 7

Conceptions and Attitudes of the Soldiers in the Trenches.---During the war there existed among some of the soldiers, at least, a sort of "fatalism". If "Fritz" did not have a bullet "with their name on it" they were as safe going "over the top" as they were in a dugout, while if the Boche "had their number" they were sure to be killed, and no amount of care could prevent it. No expression of

1.-101, p.105.
2.-40, p.52.
3.-16, p.108.
4.-54, p.275.

5.-24, p.125.
6.-35, p.40.
7.-20, p.80.

such a fatalistic attitude was found in this study.

Although "gone west" was the common expression of the man in the trench for death, only one reference to this conception was noted in all the war verse examined for this study. This is in "Over the Top" by Berton Braley:-

----and if I 'go west' just
tell the folks for me-- 1

However "glorious" the life (and death) of a soldier may seem to the man "looking on", the matter wears an aspect very much less "heroic" to the man in uniform. The following lines from "The Patriot" by Henry H. Knibbs are a truer statement of the attitude of the soldier in the trench or falling in "No Man's Land" than Grace Fallow Norton's "they have Heaven as they die, knowing they die so well".

. . . . One day a Hauser bullet potted
Johnny slick and clean,
He doubled up. I helped to bring him in.

.

He never thought of glory and he never
said a word
Like you hear some fellas spoutin' in a
rhyme;
He just lay ca'm and cheerful, and the
last thing that I heard
Was, "I guess, old pal, I'm through with
doin' time." 2

The following sarcastic lines are from Richard Butler
¹
 Glaenzer's "Sure It's Fun":-

God, it's fun to be a soldier! Oh, it's
 fun, fun, fun,
 To lie out still and easy when your
 day's sport's done;
 With not a thing to worry for, nor
 anything to hurry for;
 Not hungry, thirsty, tired, but a hero
 much-admired,
 Just dead, dead, dead, like Jack and
 Bill and Fred!
 Fun?--Sure, it's fun, just the finest
 ever, son! ²

Edgar Lee Masters, in "Ike Sass", has these lines:

And up from the grave I send this word
 To the boys in the days to come:
 When you hear the bugles, and hear the
 preachers,
 and God is talked, and Death is flouted,
 Don't let them fool you, for all of the
 noise
 Is the growl of hungry guts! ³

Other War Poems.--A few poems were found which do not
 contain expressions of attitude toward death and immortality
 in the strictest sense, but in which the poet has seen, not
 the glorious side of war, but rather the horror of it and
 the terrible sacrifice of life--such poems as "He Went For
 a Soldier" by Ruth Comfort Mitchell from which the following
 lines are taken:-

1.-Note--Richard B. Glaenzer is possibly an English poet
 rather than an American.

2.-54, p.113.

3.-122, p.147.

See where he lies--or a ghastly part of
 him--
 While life is oozing out:
 There are loathsome things he sees
 a-crawling there;
 There are hoarse-voiced crows he hears
 a-calling there,
 Eager for the foul feast spread for them--
 Billy the Soldier Boy! 1

Henry Dumont's quatrain, "War", may be noted here also:-

A clash of arms, and death; a hush
 On horrors of which death is least.
 Soon dying ears shall hear the rush
 Of vultures crowding to the feast. 2

Tom English has written a poem to the rhythm of that most beautiful of all bugle calls, which, in addition to being a signal for "lights out" every night, is always blown over the grave of a dead soldier.--"Taps":-

The rifles blaze three rounds,
 His comrades stand about,
 And o'er a soldier's grave a
 bugle sounds
 His last "Lights Out":-
 To thy rest--
 To thy rest--
 To thy rest--
 'Neath the sod--
 Soldier rest. 3

"The Metal Checks" by Louise Driscoll is a poem in dramatic form in which a "bearer" brings a sack of "metal checks" representing slain soldiers to the "counter" (Death). As the checks are poured out for counting the

counter says:-

Pour them out on the table here.
 Clickety--clickety--clack!
 For every button a man went out,
 And who shall call him back?
 Clickety--clickety--clack!

.

That was a man a month ago;
 He could see and feel and know.
 Then, into his throat there sped
 A bit of lead.
 Blood was salt in his mouth; he fell
 And lay amid the battle wreck.
 Nothing was left but this metal check--
 And a wife and child, perhaps. 1

2

"Verdun--Victory" by Richard H. McCartney deals not with the 'glorious victory', but the great sacrifice of life which it cost.

Of course there are many other poems by modern American authors which had their origin in the World War atmosphere. These have been omitted from the discussion here because, although connected more or less indirectly with the subjects of this investigation, they could scarcely be included under any of the heads considered.

CHAPTER VI.

CONCLUSION.

This investigation was suggested by a similar study made by Miss Annabel Garvey (A.M., The University of Kansas, 1914) of the English monodies between 1485 and 1784, and owes its final undertaking to a question in the mind of the writer as to just what effect the modern ultra-scientific spirit has had upon the two great and almost universal subjects of literature--death and immortality. As has no doubt been observed, this study has not been limited to "monodies", but has endeavored to embrace as many definite references as possible to the subjects death and immortality from the entire field of modern American verse exclusive of the drama. It may be mentioned in passing that the strict "monody" is a comparatively rare type in the field investigated. Those monodies which are found often deal more with the virtues of the dead and the problems of the living than with conceptions of death and immortality. In the broader field, however, many references were found, though a large number of these were "incidental" in poems not strictly devoted to the subject of death or of immortality.

Nothing strikingly new was discovered. The attitudes and conceptions found by Miss Garvey are found, in large part, in modern American verse, though in a much smaller

proportion in comparison with the number of poems examined. The more strictly modern treatments are those which have been considered under the head of "unusual individual conceptions and attitudes" (both with respect to the subject of death and that of immortality, and in the chapter on "figurative conceptions").

What, then, is the conclusion of the matter? Death must be accepted as the inevitable end of life, whether we will or not. --But is the belief in immortality passing? If we may judge from the expressions found in the verse of modern American poets, there are scarcely sufficient grounds for an answer in the affirmative. There is much evidence that the belief in immortality is far from universally accepted; however, many modern poets do believe in a some kind of life after death. A large number assume an attitude of question and doubt, while a few express themselves as not desirous of being immortal.

But the Christian conceptions of immortal bliss as a reward for righteous living on earth, and conditioned by a belief in Jesus Christ as the Savior of the world, and of eternal damnation for the souls of the wicked, have a very small place in the vast field of modern American verse.

In spite of his agnosticism with respect to orthodox religious belief, Matthew Arnold maintained a high idealism. But not many modern poets express the attitude of Arnold in his sonnet, "The Better Part":-

"Hath man no second life?--Pitch this one high!
 Sits there no judge in Heaven, our sins to see?--
 More strictly, then, the inward judge obey!
 Was Christ a man like us? Ah! let us try
 If we then, too, can be such men as he!" 1

In this study five poets were discovered who have voiced the idea of a similar high idealism for this life as a "substitute" (or as a "compensation") for a doubtful immortality: Dana Burnet in the "Dedication" to his volume of "Poems":-

A little while to pass within the throng,
 To dream, to toil, to weep, to love, to die--
 And then the silence and the closing Song,
 And no more of the riddle that was I!

.

Yet who in this brief passing finds despair,
 Denies the certain God within his breast?
 Life has a crown for every man to wear,
 Though 'tis a thing of moments at the best. 2

George E. Woodberry in "The North Shore Watch":-

Yet may the soul pitch her adventure high,
 With beauty, and with love impassioned, though
 we die. 3

Edgar Lee Masters in "Davis Matlock":-

Well, I say to live it out like a god,
 Sure of immortal life, though you are in
 doubt,
 Is the way to live it.
 If that doesn't make God proud of you,

1.-1A, p.260.

3.-224, p.207.

2.-26, (Dedication).

Then God is nothing but gravitation,
Or sleep is the golden goal. 1

William Winter in "At Arlington":-

But were this all,--were hope with being
ended,
In these dark cells that shrine our
sacred dead,
Were all our prayers and tears in vain
expended,
Our passion, labor, faith forever sped;

Who would not yet,--all selfish impulse
spurning--
Live for mankind, and triumph with the
just!
Who from the field of honor backward
turning,
Would trail a sullied ensign in the dust! 2

and Edith M. Thomas in "The Inverted Torch" (LXIV):-

Thanks for belief-in-life, Life's one
great stay. 3

There seems to be a hint of this same thought in James
Whitcomb Riley's "A Hymn of Faith" also.⁴

There may come a time when such a philosophy of life
will "work" satisfactorily. No doubt many individuals do
practice such a philosophy now. But many more do not.
Many can seemingly be satisfied with a selfish enjoyment
of the pleasures of this life, with apparently no thought
of any future existence, but such a course is scarcely
conductive to the highest moral development.

1.-118, p.231.
2.-223, p.131.

3.-197, p.85.
4.-160, p.30.

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