

An Early Quaker Poet:  
Mary (Southworth) Mollineux, d.1696

**T**HOUGH Mary Mollineux, whose *Fruits of retirement: or, miscellaneous poems, moral and divine* went into six editions in the course of the eighteenth century, cannot on any grounds be reckoned among the great or even the good writers of poetry, yet her life and the fact that she chose to express chiefly in verse her attitude to religious and moral questions, and to sustain her friends with advice and teaching on such questions, make her a not uninteresting figure.

The events of her life are given in the three Testimonies (by her cousin Frances Owen, by a friend Tryal Rider, and by her husband Henry Mollineux) prefixed to her poems and prose letters, published in 1702 after her death under the title *Fruits of retirement*.<sup>1</sup>

Mary Southworth was born in 1652 or thereabouts.<sup>2</sup> Where she was brought up is not stated in the accounts of her life, but it would appear that Lancashire was her native county. A prose *Epistle to her kinswoman F.R.*, printed before the poems, is dated from Warrington, the 3d of the 10th month 1678, and in 1684 she was one of a number of persons imprisoned for attending Meetings at the house of James Wright in Warrington. Several *Epistles*, addressed to F.R. are dated from Lancaster Castle in July and August of that year.

For an account of Mary Southworth's upbringing, we are indebted to her cousin Frances Owen. (Mary Southworth's mother and Frances Owen's father were sister and brother.) Each was an only child, and although Mary was older and "of different Principles, in matters of Religion, at that time (Being one call'd a Quaker)", a close friendship existed between them. Mary's wise and affectionate influence eventually led to Frances's conviction.

<sup>1</sup> Octavo. pp. [xl], 174, [1]. The preliminary matter includes, besides the three Testimonies (sig.A2a-B4a), Verses by Henry Mollineux, in remembrance of M.M. (sig.B4b-B6b), an account of her "Discourse" with the Bishop of Chester (sig.B7a-C1b), 68 lines of verse (unsigned) addressed To the Reader (sig.C2a-C3a), and a list of contents (sig.C3b-C4b). At the end of the volume (pp. 173-4) are verses *Upon Silence*, "written by another hand", signed W.A. There follow 2 pages of advertisements for books printed and sold by T. Sowle, 1702.

<sup>2</sup> Her age at her death in 1696 is given in *Piety promoted, the second part* (London, T. Sowle, 1702), page 53, as 44 years.

There is little information about Mary Southworth's parents, except for the statement that her father taught her Latin and Greek; but it is possible that the poem *An Elegy* (pp. 102-6)<sup>1</sup>, written in 1682, may refer to her own parents<sup>2</sup>

Ah, he is gone, who was a Father dear  
Unto his Off-spring, with a tender Eye,  
Waiting for good; tho' seemingly severe,  
When careless Crimes enforc'd Severity . . .

The poem goes on to describe the effect of paternal love on his *children's* hearts, although Mary is said in the Testimony of Frances Owen to have been an only child. It is hinted that the father had early in life seen "the empty Vanity/Of Rome's seducing Soul-Idolatry" and that in spite of much generosity and kindness from a relation, he resisted the urgings by that relation that he should "dye a Catholick" and remained faithful to the "sacred Precepts of the blessed Truth" which he had learned in his youth. Mary states in the poem that his widow survived him for some time, and endured some trials and sorrows, but remained a widow, "A second Lóve she never entertain'd."

It is not stated in the accounts of her life whether either of Mary Southworth's parents became Friends, but if the *Elegy* does refer to them it seems likely that they were among George Fox's earliest followers. Frances Owen states that Mary herself "was one who loved the Blessed Truth (and they who walked according to it) from a Child, being early Convinced thereof." The Testimony by Henry Mollineux corroborates this: "She was Convinced of the Way of Truth in her Youth, by the Light, or inward Appearance, of Christ in her Heart." It is possible that the Robert Southworth who was on trial in London in 1684, with others, for "unlawful Assembly" may have been a relation, but there is no evidence for this. Robert Southworth was committed to Newgate and was a prisoner for more than five months.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> References are to pages in *Fruits*, 1702.

<sup>2</sup> Mary Southworth's parents are not mentioned on the certificate of her marriage to Henry Mollineux, 10 April 1685 (P.R.O. RG6/1420, fol. 58), nor in the entry in the Digested Copy of the Registers of Marriages for 1652-1807 in the Friends' Meeting House, Mount Street, Manchester, nor in the records of Hardshaw West M.M., which may indicate that they had died. The Hardshaw West M.M. records include entry for burial at Penketh of Alice Southworth, widow, of Warrington, died 10 July 1681, who may possibly have been Mary Southworth's mother. (Information from Charles Griffith, custodian of the records of Hardshaw West M.M.)

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Besse, *Sufferings*, 1753, i. 465, 470.

In 1684 Mary Southworth was attending Meetings in Warrington. Besse lists her name among some twenty-five persons who were committed to Lancaster prison in that year, "having been taken in religious Meetings at the House of James Wright in Warrington."<sup>1</sup> In Lancaster Castle Mary Southworth first became acquainted with Henry Mollineux, although, as Henry Mollineux says, "we had seen each other before." Henry Mollineux too was a prisoner, "for being at peaceable Religious Meetings of the People called Quakers."<sup>2</sup> "In which Imprisonment", Henry Mollineux goes on to say, "I believed that she should be my Wife; but never intended to express any thing thereof, whilst we were both Prisoners there; and after she was released, I saw her, and was in company with her several times, before I expressed any thing of my Concern to take her to be my Wife; several considerable Men having before attempted to prevail with her on that account."<sup>3</sup>

In spite of the other "considerable Men" Henry Mollineux had his way, and they were married at Penketh, Lancashire, 10 April 1685. In the Register of Marriages Mary Southworth was entered as "Spinster, of Warrington," and Henry Mollineux is described as "Yeoman, of Lidiat, Lancs.", both of Hardshaw East Monthly Meeting.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Besse, *Sufferings*, i. 327-9. See also B. Nightingale, *Early stages of the Quaker movement in Lancashire*, 1921, pp. 44 and 160.

<sup>2</sup> Testimony in *Fruits*, p.[xvi].

<sup>3</sup> *Fruits*, p.[xvi].

<sup>4</sup> Information supplied by Mavis McWatt from the Digested Copy of the Registers of Marriages for 1652-1807 of Lancashire Quarterly Meeting, kept at the Friends' Meeting House, Mount Street, Manchester, M2 5NS. The marriage certificate (PRO RG 6/1420, fol.58) was signed by 60 Friends as witnesses, nine of whose names appear in Joseph Besse's list of those who were prisoners in Lancaster Castle in 1684 at the same time as Mary Southworth (Besse, i. 327). Perhaps the best known was Roger Haydock (1644-1696 *DNB*) of Coppull, Lancs. who (like his brother John who died in Lancaster Gaol in 1719) was notable for the thousands of miles which he travelled in the ministry. Another witness, Richard Johnson had been imprisoned in 1663 & 1666 for tithes, prosecuted in 1674 for refusing to contribute to the repair of Ormskirk Church, and in 1685 spent 3 months in prison, being taken from a meeting at "Hartshaw" (Besse, i. 311, 317, 320, 329). One of Johnson's fellow prisoners in Lancaster Castle in 1663 was Richard Cubban (*or* Cubhan, d.1709), who also signed the marriage certificate. He and his wife Ann lived at Bickerstaffe; he suffered much persecution with great fortitude; when quieter times came his intractable nature brought him into conflict with the meeting and in the minutes of 1698 he is recorded as having "resisted the advice of the meeting"; he was later described as "a man of a very strong will, and very intent on having his own way, though all the Friends, and all the world besides, were opposed to him." (*JFHS*. 5 (1908), 104-9; Besse, i. 303, 305, 311, 320, 324, 327.)

In 1691 they were living at or near Ormskirk: in the account given by Henry Mollineux (*Fruits*, pp. [xxix–xxxiv]) of the “discourse” which his wife had with the Bishop of Chester, Dr. Stratford, in that year, it is stated that the Bishop was at Ormskirk “near our dwelling”. Later they were at Liverpool, and Mary Mollineux is described on the title-page of the first edition of *Fruits of retirement* (1702) as “late of Liverpool”.

They had two children, both boys; Othniel Mollineux was born 21.xi.1685, died 12.x.1732 and was buried at Bickerstaffe;<sup>1</sup> the younger son, Elleazor Mollineux, was born 28 February 1687<sup>2</sup> and died 2 September 1709 and was also buried at Bickerstaffe.<sup>3</sup> During her last illness Mary Mollineux spoke of her regret at leaving “her little Lads.” Henry Mollineux gives an account of her last illness, and their conversations, when she was beginning to feel ready to leave “outward things”, and when she begged him, speaking in Latin, not to be too much troubled on her behalf, “and she never spake in Latin, in this Illness, that I remember, except when Company was present, that she would speak only to me.” She died in the evening of 3 January, “without any Noise, Sigh, or Groan,”<sup>4</sup> and was buried at Bickerstaffe on 6 January 1695/6.<sup>5</sup>

#### CHARACTER

Henry Mollineux pays tribute to her steadfastness during the ten years of their married life, when they both suffered persecution “for the Testimony of Truth” and when Henry Mollineux was more than once imprisoned. She was punctual in performing whatever she undertook, “quick, discreet, and diligent in her Business”, and also most diligent “in attending the Assemblies of the People of God, called Quakers, with

<sup>1</sup> Like his father, Othniel Mollineux was the schoolmaster of Bickerstaffe; he married Margaret Barton, whose niece Anne Wolsey (1705–84) had a daughter Mary who married John Ecroyd of Edgend in 1779. See *Memorials of the families of Cropper, Cubham and Wolsey of Bickerstaffe, and of Winstanley of Winstanley*. Collected by N. Waterhouse. Liverpool, 1864.

<sup>2</sup> Hardshaw West M.M. records. Information from Charles Griffith.

<sup>3</sup> Digested Register of Burials, Q.M. Lancs, 1654–1824. (Friends’ Meeting House, Manchester.)

<sup>4</sup> *Fruits*, p.[xxii].

<sup>5</sup> Hardshaw West M.M. records: P.R.O. RG 6/1616A, fol. 329. Henry Mollineux died 16 January 1720, and was buried 18 January at Bickerstaffe. (P.R.O. RG 6/1616A fol. 340).

them, to meet in the Name, Power, Light and Spirit of the Lord." Henry's own words are a fitting epitaph to her life of devoted service

. . . her Life and Conversation was serious, innocent, sweet, and savoury; and she was very loving, diligent, tender-hearted, and kindly affectionate towards me, and our Children; and generally loving and tender towards all People, especially such as were in any Distress, Sickness, or Affliction, tho' never so poor.<sup>1</sup>

He goes on to say that she was anxious that no evil should "get a place in her Children, or in any with whom she was concerned", and she therefore frequently gave good advice and admonition "which many received in Love and Good Esteem of her." The kindly tone of her advice is evident in many of the prose letters as well as in the poems. All three of the printed Testimonies pay tribute to the genuine humility she displayed, in spite of her many gifts. In short, she was by common consent, as the writer of the verses "To the Reader" emphasises, "the Mistress of a Noble Mind."

Joseph Besse quotes Mary Southworth's "Meditations concerning our Imprisonment only for Conscience sake, 1684, in Lancaster Castle" as an example of "the pious Disposition, and sweet Frame of Mind wherein these Christian Sufferers endured their Confinement."<sup>2</sup>

She was evidently however not a person to sit down under adversity, for when Henry Mollineux and a neighbour were taken prisoner 18 February 1690/91 and taken to Lancaster Gaol, on a charge of not appearing at the Bishop's Court in Chester, in spite of the fact that they had not received any citation or due notice, Mary Mollineux went to see the Bishop, Dr. Stratford,<sup>3</sup> who was at Ormskirk in August 1691, and put the case before him. The Bishop accepted her account and agreed that the fault was with those who should have sent the summons. He said that if she would come to his house in Wigan, within two or three weeks, when he had conferred with his Chancellor, he would do any kindness in his power for her, if he could find a way to do it.

<sup>1</sup> *Fruits*, pp. [xvi-xvii].

<sup>2</sup> Besse, *Sufferings*, i, pp. 327-9.

<sup>3</sup> Nicholas Stratford (1633-1707), Fellow of Trinity College, Oxford, 1656; bishop of Chester, 1689-1707, and Rector of Wigan, Lancs.; noted for his tolerance of dissenters. *DNB*; Foster, *Alumni Oxonienses*, Early ser. iv. 1434; Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, I. IV. 173.

On her visit to the Bishop's house at Wigan, 24 August 1691, Mary Mollineux had a long discussion with the Bishop on why the two men refused to pay the "Church-leys", in which he was at a loss to answer her arguments, and was sufficiently impressed to tell the Chancellor's Deputy, "I pray you, Mr. Prescott,<sup>1</sup> if you can find out any way, that they may put in their Appearance, that they may have their Liberty, let it be done; and do what kindness you can for them."

The two interviews with the Bishop in 1691 are related by Henry Mollineux in an account "touching some Discourse that (upon occasion) she had with Doctor Stratford (so called) Bishop of the Diocess of Cheshire and Lancashire, &c. Given forth and attested by my kinsman Henry Mollineux, who was there present."<sup>2</sup> After the Bishop's departure Mary Mollineux was engaged in a dispute about religion with "one Entwistle,<sup>3</sup> the Bishop's Chaplain, so called", who was accompanied by his brother Entwistle,<sup>4</sup> a lawyer, and another priest, and by the Bishop's daughter; after about half an hour, the chaplain "was so taken and confounded in his own Arguments, that his Mouth was stopped; which his Brother, the Lawyer, seeing, as it were to excuse him, said to him, *I wonder you should trouble your self to Discourse with that Woman! she hath so much Learning, it makes her mad.*"

Unfortunately it was not long before Henry Mollineux was in prison again, through the endeavours of the parish priest, who was determined to get his tithes. On that occasion Mary Mollineux was inspired to describe the priest in Latin verses:

Crudelisq; rapax, cupidus, sine jure, Sacerdos  
Nummos, non animas, curat, egetq; cupit

<sup>1</sup> Probably Henry Prescott, b. Upholland, Lancs., son of Thomas, gent., admitted Trinity College, Dublin, 1675, aged 25; LL.B. 1682; incorporated at Oxford 1687; later, of Chester (registrar 1720). G. D. Burtchall & T. U. Sadleir, *Alumni Dublinenses*, 1935, p. 681; Foster, *Al. Oxon.*, Early ser. iii. 1199; Venn, *Al. Cantab.*, I. iv. 173.

<sup>2</sup> *Fruits*, pp. [xxix-xxxiv]. The kinsman was perhaps Henry Mollineux of Maghull, d. 3 Oct. 1696, buried at Bickerstaffe (Hardshaw West M.M.). Edmond Mollineux, son of Henry & Elizabeth Mollineux, of Maghull died 18. vii. 1695. Edmond, Henry and Robert Mollineux signed the Mollineux/Southworth marriage certificate in 1685.

<sup>3</sup> Edmund Entwistle (d. 1707), of Ormskirk, chaplain to Dr. Stratford, bp of Chester, and canon of Chester, 1691. (Foster, *Al. Oxon.*, Early ser. ii, 463.)

<sup>4</sup> Richard Entwistle, of Ormskirk; brother of Edmund; bar.-at-law, of Gray's Inn, 1675. (Foster, *Al. Oxon.*, Early ser. ii, 463.)

which Henry Mollineux translated:

The cruel Priest, fierce, covetous, unjust,  
For money, not for Souls, doth cark and lust

adding "And so, in getting us into Prison again, the Priest obtained his Point; but he missed of his Prey, and never got it."

Henry Mollineux speaks of the "loving, sweet, and sensible Epistles" which his wife sent to him when he was in prison, and of the cheerfulness and patience with which she endured their trials, putting her trust in the Lord, "and he preserved her."

#### EDUCATION

Mary Southworth had a better education than women generally received at the time. According to her cousin Frances Owen

She was one who, in her Childhood, was much afflicted with weak Eyes, which made her unfit for the usual Employment of Girls; and being of a large Natural Capacity, quick, witty, and studiously inclined, her Father brought her up to more Learning, than is commonly bestowed on our Sex; in which she became so good a Proficient, that she well understood the *Latin Tongue*, fluently discoursed in it; and made a considerable progress in *Greek* also; wrote several *Hands* well; was a good Arithmetician . . . had a good understanding of Physick and Chyrurgery, the Nature of Plants, Herbs, and Minerals . . .<sup>1</sup>

Despite Frances Owen's emphasis on Mary Mollineux's proficiency in Latin and Greek, it is her writings in English which are of interest. Henry Mollineux quotes a few short poems in Latin, with translations by himself, but they are competent rather than inspiring.

One detects a slight apologetic note in Frances Owen's explanation that Mary Southworth owed her education to the fact of the weakness of the eyes; yet there was no need for any apologia for a woman writer in Quaker circles—Joseph Smith's *Descriptive catalogue of Friends' books* lists no fewer than 84 Quaker women writers of the second half of the seventeenth century. Outstanding among these were Margaret Fell, who published some 25 works between 1655

<sup>1</sup> *Fruits*, pp. [vii–viii].

and 1677; and Dorothy White of Weymouth who sounded an alarm and uttered many a warning to the rulers of the country, and words of comfort and consolation to all "sufferers", in numerous small pamphlets between 1659 and 1684. A modern writer points out that "Testimonies to deceased Friends, Warnings, Lamentations and Prophecies, Invitations and Visitations of Love figure largely among the tracts of women writers."<sup>1</sup>

Mary Mollineux's poems and epistles were of a different stamp. She did not write controversial pamphlets. Her education and experience did not lead her towards controversy, though when her husband was imprisoned she was willing to confront the Bishop of Chester with her views on tithes and support them by references to the Bible. Otherwise she left the handling of controversy to her husband.

The writings of Henry Mollineux are in marked contrast to those of his wife. His *Popery exposed by its own authors* (1718) was an answer to accusations made against Friends by James Watmough of Blackroad, Lancashire and his "abettor" Matthew Hall, both "Papists", and a defence of the writings of Francis Howgill against charges made by Watmough. The volume contains a three-page list of authors and persons mentioned in the treatise, a list which includes Arnaldus de Villanova, Augustine, R. Barclay, Cardinal Bellarmine, Eusebius, Gregory the Great, Jerome, the "Rhemists Translation", Stapleton, and many others. One cannot suppose that he had read all these works. Indeed, in the preface to the reader of his *Antichrist unveiled* (written in prison in Lancaster Castle, and printed in 1695) Henry Mollineux lays more emphasis on the spirit of Truth in a man's heart than on scholarly learning:

And if thou Reason, saying, Ah! But I am Unlearned, and how should I understand, or know the Truth? For there are many great Scholars and Men Learned in Latin, Greek and Hebrew, and yet one sort of them preacheth one Doctrine, and others other Doctrines, and therefore how should I know which is the Truth? I answer that thou mayest be as capable to know the Truth, as if thou understood Latin, and Greek, and Hebrew; for the Manifestation of the Spirit of Truth in thy own Heart, that reproveth for Sin, is sufficient to teach thee to know the Truth, if thou believest in it, and be truly willing to obey it.

<sup>1</sup> Unsigned article "Women writers among Friends of the seventeenth century and later." *J.F.H.S.*, X (1913), pp. 93-96.

These words might well stand for the viewpoint of Mary Mollineux, particularly in her later and more mature poems, when she had moved away from the accounts of Old Testament events of the early poems, towards more personal contacts with those who came to her for advice and support.

#### FRUITS OF RETIREMENT

The manuscript of the Poems was received by Friends at Second Day Morning Meeting, 21.ii.1701. On 23.xii.1701 John Tomkins reported that it had been read through by the Friends appointed and agreed to be printed. John Tomkins was asked to see it through the press.<sup>1</sup>

The poems were first printed by Tace Sowle under the title *Fruits of retirement: or, miscellaneous poems, moral and divine. Being some contemplations, letters, &c. written on variety of subjects and occasions . . . To which is prefixed, some account of the author* (London. 1702).

The Birkbeck Library's copy of the first edition is inscribed "Ann Owen Ex Dono P. [?] O.", an inscription which one is tempted to think may have been written by some member of the family of Frances Owen, the writer of one of the Testimonies (dated: Rigate, the 20th of the Third Month 1701) in the volume.

Joseph Smith<sup>2</sup> records five more editions of *Fruits of retirement*; he gives no imprint for the second edition of which he had apparently not seen a copy; the third (1720) and fourth (1739) editions were also issued by the Sowle firm. A fifth edition (1761) was published by Luke Hinde who had worked as a junior partner with Tace (Sowle) Raylton and who, after her death in 1749, carried on the business as the main publisher for Friends. The sixth (and apparently the last) edition of *Fruits of retirement* was printed in 1772 by Mary, the widow of Luke Hinde. The edition of 1772 is a much more attractive and better printed volume than that of 1702. Three editions were also issued in America, all in Philadelphia.<sup>3</sup> The poems of Mary Mollineux, therefore, were

<sup>1</sup> Minutes of the Second days morning meeting in London, 3rd book (28. viii. 1700 to 29. viii. 1711), pp. 21, 59, 61. (Friends House Library).

<sup>2</sup> J. Smith, *Descriptive catalogue of Friends' books*, ii, p. 181.

<sup>3</sup> Samuel Keimer, 1729; Andrew Bradford, 1730; Joseph Crukshank, 1783. (Charles R. Hildeburn, *A century of printing. The issues of the press in Pennsylvania, 1685-1784*, Philadelphia. 2 vols. (1885-6), nos. 373, 407, 4320.)

current for over three quarters of a century, although this continuing esteem was more probably a tribute to their moral teaching than to their merits as poetry.

The poems appear to be arranged in chronological order, although by no means all of them are dated. Those which are dated range between 1663 and 1691.

During her lifetime Mary Mollineux did not feel free to publish her poems. Her friend Tryal Rider whose Testimony is prefixed to the work, writes "I have more to testify than I shall commit to Writing, having had intimate Acquaintance and Fellowship with her above sixteen Years" and points out her reserve about her talents and her disinclination to put forward "her Gifts to the public Censure, without weighty Consideration; so that she would not cast her Pearls before Swine . . . I remember, that several Years ago, when she was a single Woman, upon the perusal of some Copies of her Verses which she gave me, I felt such Unity of Spirit with them, that I said, I thought they might be of service, if made publick in print; but she was not then free that her name should be exposed; she not seeking Praise amongst Men, but to communicate the Exercise of peculiar Gifts amongst her near Friends and Acquaintance." Tryal Rider's opinion was that after her death "it would be very ungrateful to her Memory, and also a wronging of others, to keep such worthy Things unpublished." Henry Mollineux states in his Testimony that although she did not wish to commit her poems to public view in her lifetime, "yet she had nothing against the publishing thereof afterwards." He himself was "desirous and concerned" to publish them, in order that many more people might receive benefit from them, since "her Words, Writings and Conversation, were acceptable, prevalent, and serviceable to the Invitation, Convincement, Strengthening and Encouragement of some to seek after the Lord, and his blessed Way and Truth, inwardly revealed, and to be revealed; wherein many have found great Satisfaction and Cause of Rejoicing."

Such a plain statement of the aim and object of publication was in line with the contemporary Quaker custom of informing readers in prefatory material of the lives and service of the writers. The classic instance of statement of aims is contained in William Penn's preface to *The written Gospel labours of John Whitehead* (1703).

Luella M. Wright advances the theory, in her *Literature and education in early Quakerism*,<sup>1</sup> that "the leaders of the second generation of Friends differed from their predecessors in their fuller consciousness that they had become the makers of Quaker literature, and that they shared with one another the responsibility of shaping it to the needs of the group," and emphasises that by the beginning of the eighteenth century the Society of Friends had "passed from the stage of enthusiastic pioneer work to that of developing quietistic traits, inherent nevertheless in the basic beliefs and practices of Friends." Seen from this point of view, it is probable that the instinct which prevented Mary Mollineux from publishing her poems and letters at an earlier date was right; she was not among the fiery souls who could not rest until they had convinced the world of the truth of Quaker beliefs, although she had been willing to suffer imprisonment for them; and she was not equipped to enter the debate with other churches, as Henry Mollineux did. When Henry Mollineux agreed in 1702 to the publication of her works, the time was ripe, in a way that it had not been before, for giving to the world the *Fruits of retirement*, an apt title for the bulk of her low-keyed epistles, meditations, contemplations and so on, all of an improving nature, with emphasis on the homely domestic virtues, a message of kindness and affection, friendly advice on behaviour given to friends and relations, nothing which could offend the generation which embraced conservatism and quietism. The writing of meditations, verse, and advisory epistles was the natural outcome, among the early Friends, of their desire to demonstrate the workaday aspect of their gospel of the inner light, and as Luella M. Wright puts it, "to awaken their age to a firm belief that Christianity could be practical, and living in this world a spiritual experience."<sup>2</sup>

Though not fiery, Mary Mollineux was persistent, as may be seen from the numerous epistles, in prose and verse, to "Cousin F.R."<sup>3</sup> who was attracted to Friends, and attended

<sup>1</sup> Luella M. Wright, "Literature and education in early Quakerism", *University of Iowa studies. N.S. No. 244. Humanistic studies. Vol. V, no. 2.* 1933.

<sup>2</sup> Luella M. Wright, *The literary life of the early Friends* (New York, 1932), p. 10. See also Evelyn Noble Armitage, *The Quaker poets of Great Britain and Ireland*. London (1896), pp. 206-9, where the poems are described as "brimful of the quaint tenderness and mystical passion which are so characteristic of the writings . . . of the early Quakers."

<sup>3</sup> Possibly the Frances Ridge who signed the Mollineux/Southworth marriage certificate in 1685.

Meetings, but apparently needed a good deal of encouragement to counteract the influence of others who pulled in a different and more worldly direction. In the first *Epistle* (in prose) in the volume (pp. 1-3), written in 1678, Mary writes, "my Heart is concerned for thee, really desiring thy temporal and Eternal Welfare: I should be glad indeed to be made instrumental for thy Satisfaction, in Doubts or Scruples; but, alas! Words or Arguments cannot, without the powerful Influence of the living Eternal Word in thy own Heart, resolve or disannul the Consultations and Reasonings of this kind, that may inwardly arise, or be by others suggested, unto thee." She goes on to explain the three Quaker usages which appear to be a stumbling block, beginning with the use of "Thou", which some people are deterred from using by a slavish fear of men, "Yet I desire not to invite thee to a bare Formality, &c. for until thou art convinced in thy own Mind . . . it signifies little." She argues that the names of days and months as commonly used are "contrary to Scripture", and that outward Sacraments "indeed are outward only, and Shadows; but the Substance being come, they flee away."

In another *Epistle* of the same year (1678) she expresses her pleasure at hearing that F.R. has been to a Meeting and has heard "M. Worrel"<sup>1</sup> and her hope that the effect will not soon be erased, "I do dearly desire thee, not to prolong thy Servitude in Egypt's Land, the Land of Darkness."

Many of the epistles to F.R. are in verse, a number of them dated 1678, enjoining humility, simplicity, and seriousness, the putting away of vanity and childish sports and "Time-beguiling Play". The letters to Cousin F.R. occur throughout the volume, and express great affection and pleasure at receiving letters after "tedious Silence", and sometimes chagrin at losing touch for long periods. F.R. does not appear to have been a very faithful correspondent, and also appears to have been strongly tempted by some prospect of riches (perhaps a proposal of marriage?). *The Conclusion of a Letter to F.R.* advises (p. 133)

<sup>1</sup> M. Worrel: Perhaps Mary Warrell (d. 1722, bur. at Bristol), daughter of Robert Warrell of Middlewich, Cheshire; active in Bristol in 1699 and visited Ireland in the same year; married (1) in 1683, Thomas Whitehead of Bruton, Somerset, clothier (d.1691); (2) in 1693, Peter Young of Bristol, soapmaker (d.1713); Bristol Record Society, xxvi (1971), p. 222.

Ne'er let the Prospect of so great Estate  
 Dazzle those Eyes, which I presum'd of late,  
 Could from on high, with brave Disdain, look down  
 On this World's fading Glory . . .  
 . . . if we grasp at Riches that are vain,  
 Then how is our Religion strong and plain?

The poems addressed to Cousin F.R. form a fair sample of the "advice poems" to friends and relations, of which there are 29 or so in the collection; there are 24 poems entitled "Contemplation" or "Meditation" and 10 on biblical themes, mainly from the Old Testament.

#### MARY MOLLINEUX AS A WRITER

Frances Owen, writing her *Testimony* in 1701, thus describes the writings of Mary Mollineux:

And tho' Verse is not so commonly used in Divine Subjects, as Prose, and but too much abused by the extravagant Wits of the Age; yet she, like a Skilful Chymist, had learned to separate the Purer Spirits, and more Refined Parts of Poetry, from the Earthly, Worthless Dross; and made use of her Gift, rather to Convince and Prevail upon the Mind, to affect and raise the Soul upon Wings of Divine Contemplation, than to please the airy Fancy with Strains of Wit, and Unprofitable Invention; which she was ever careful to avoid.

The words might be used as the religious poet's answer to Dr. Johnson's argument that the essence of true poetry was "invention", that such novelty was out of place in religion, and that "contemplative piety" or intercourse between God and the human soul cannot be poetical.

Edward Grubb writing on "The early Quakers" (chapter iv, *Cambridge history of English literature*, vol. 8, 1912, p. 102) discussing the large mass of writings by early Friends and the organization which enabled it to be put into circulation, acknowledges that "Of all this vast output, there is not much that could possibly, by its intrinsic qualities, find any permanent place in English literature; its chief interest now is for the curious student of religious history."

It is undoubtedly true that a good deal of religious verse is conspicuously feeble and commonplace, and the reason may lie partly in the gap between the loftiness of the themes and the poet's equipment which is not always equal to the task of expressing them. In some poets and hymn writers there may

even be an underlying assumption that high moral aims should disarm criticism concerning poetical merit. In a recent book<sup>1</sup> Helen Gardner defines religious poetry as that which treats of revelation and of man's response to revelation, and states that if we "demand fresh personal experience spontaneously felt and expressed with the appearance of spontaneity" then religion will be felt to inhibit poetry. She contends that the poet who writes as a religious man is a committed person, and he is asking the reader to accept truths and values which are not his individual discoveries.

The early Quakers however, felt that the revelation of Truth and of the inner light *was* their individual discovery, which illuminated the whole of life. Much of the prose writing of Fox and Penn and others reflects the power of this inspiration and the truth of the feelings expressed.

The Quaker movement was but one part of a more general ferment of religious ideas in the seventeenth century, and there was a remarkable wealth of poetry expressing in many different ways religious experience, sentiments and attitudes. When Mary Southworth was growing up, Marvell, Traherne and Vaughan were still alive, and so was Milton, whose name and work must have been familiar to very many Friends; Richard Crashaw had died a year or so before Mary Southworth's birth, and George Herbert some twenty years earlier.

Yet it is with Herbert that now and then Mary Mollineux's poems seem to have an affinity, and there is an occasional harking back to what George Macdonald called "the oddity of the visual fancy" of the metaphysical poets.<sup>2</sup>

In the poem *On the sight of a skull*, Mary Mollineux reflects on the inevitability of the body being reduced again to dust

Then shall those Eyes, those Christal Eyes of thine  
Which now, like Sparkling Diamonds, do shine;  
Their little Chambers circular forsake  
And them to Essence more obscure betake;  
The tender Funnel of thy Nose, must thence  
Corroded be, and lose its Smelling Sense (p. 25)

Such "oddities" do not occur very often, and there is sometimes more than oddity to bring Herbert to mind. There

<sup>1</sup> Helen Gardner, *Religion and literature* (London, 1971), pp. 121-195, on "Religious poetry".

<sup>2</sup> George Macdonald, *England's antiphon* [n.d.], p. 185, in which the author is discussing George Herbert's "The Pulley".

are one or two short lyrics, akin to hymns, which would not be out of place in any anthology of the seventeenth century, as *Another Meditation*:

Oh! If my Mind  
 Should be inclin'd,  
 This would Increase my Fear:  
 Lord, from above,  
 Thou God of Love,  
 Reveal thy Counsel near;  
 That I may know,  
 That I may do  
 Thy Ever-Blessed Will:  
 Ah, thine alone,  
 And not mine own,  
 Great King! Do thou fulfil. (p. 166)

#### MEDITATIVE AND CONTEMPLATIVE POEMS

In his *Religious trends in English poetry*, Hoxie Neale Fairchild quotes twenty lines on "Contemplation" from the poem *On Barclay's Apology for the Quakers* by Matthew Green (1696–1737) who was much attracted to Friends, and argues that the lines suggest how readily, "in the absence of any firm belief in the divine reality of the Inner Light," "retreat" and "contemplation" might lose all Christian significance and collapse into a loose pre-romantic reverie, where as Green says "impulses rustle through the mind."<sup>1</sup>

Mary Mollineux shows no such tendency towards uncharted reverie; she is concerned with the love of God and the help which it brings to those in distress, and her meditations are always linked with the need to pursue a line of conduct which is in harmony with "Truth" and to turn aside from the temptations which oppress her

Alas, when my distressed Mind,  
 Through secret drawings, is inclin'd,  
*Great King!* to wait on thee;  
 O how the subtil Enemy  
 Presents fond Fancies, to entice aside  
 My Heart from true Stability;  
 So to despise true lasting Joys,  
 And entertain vain transitory Toys,  
 Which ne'er can satiate the Soul, when try'd.  
 (pp. 71–2. *Meditations in trouble.*)

<sup>1</sup> Hoxie Neale Fairchild, *Religious trends in English poetry*. Vol. I (1700–1740), New York, 1939, pp. 348–9.

It must not be forgotten that Mary Mollineux's troubles and "exercises" were not light; she herself suffered imprisonment in 1684, and after her marriage her husband Henry Mollineux was imprisoned more than once for tithes. The *Meditations concerning our Imprisonment Only for Conscience sake, 1684, in Lancaster Castle* reveals the strength of conviction which enabled the early Friends to resist the "rage" of those who attacked them "because we cannot Bow/Unto their vain Traditions, since we know/The Blessed Truth . . . (p. 125). The power of God sustained them even in prison

Here are we with the hidden Manna fed,  
Tho' with Transgressors we be numbered:  
Here can we Prospects from our Tower survey,  
With much more Innocent Delight, than they  
That range at large . . . (pp. 123-4)

This theme runs through nearly all of the poems, including those written to friends or relations in need of advice. Her thoughts always related conviction to daily life, and although a number of the poems purport to be on abstract subjects such as truth, charity, friendship, modesty and chastity, or happiness, the abstractions are generally seen as closely linked to a Christian's daily life, as in the poem *On Charity*

What a sumblime,<sup>1</sup> celestial Mystery,  
Is couch'd in this obscure Name, *Charity!*  
So frequent in the Mouths of most, but known  
To few, save in the empty sound alone;  
Else it would teach us how to Sympathize  
One with another in Infirmities. (p. 32)

There is an occasional touch of humour, as in the poem *Of a Happy Life*, in which she describes the man who enjoys health and moderate wealth and has a contented mind which enables him to find solace in any circumstances

And what's more Happy, yet more Strange!  
He's always ready for a Change. (p. 141)

## NATURE

In her Testimony Frances Owen says that Mary Mollineux had studied the nature of plants, herbs and minerals, and

<sup>1</sup> *Sic*. Corrected in the 3rd and later editions.

delighted in the study of nature "and to admire the great God of Nature, in the various Operations of his Power and Goodness."

The poems seem to show that this interest was in the manifestation of the power of God shown in the works of nature, rather than in the natural world itself; there are virtually no first hand descriptions of the natural world based on observation. The tone is set in a line in the poem *Of the Rainbow* (pp. 95-6) "Doth not each Herb proclaim a Deity?". The sight of a rainbow, "this curious Semi-circle, deck'd/ With such pure undy'd Colours," and of all the other wonders of the heavens serves to "proclaim/a Power divine."

References to pruning, and to the need for rain to refresh plants and trees, in the poem *On a Fruitless Fig-tree* (pp. 16-17) are used to point a moral, and those people who resign themselves to the will of God are "Trees of Righteousness" and "fertile Plants."

In *A Parable to Cousin F.R.* (pp. 112-113) a lily growing in a secluded garden is viewed as the type of innocence, tempted by worldliness in the shape of a Scarlet Poppy, courted with "fine Accademick Phrases", and eventually persuaded to venture outside the enclosed garden, and beyond the safety of the walls which symbolise salvation. Such a parable is characteristic of Mary Mollineux's approach, and the poem shows her powers to better advantage than do some of the "Bible stories."

#### BIBLICAL SUBJECTS

Mary Mollineux was well versed in the Bible, and at least ten of the poems deal with biblical subjects, mainly Old Testament stories. It is interesting to note that the stories which had most appeal for her are those in which the power of God against evil men is made manifest, and there are poems on Daniel, on Elijah, and on the Three Holy Children. It must be confessed that Mary Mollineux did not excel at narrative, and the events tend to move rather sluggishly, and with too much parenthesis, as in the story of Elijah. The ravens supplied him with bread,

And for his Drink, Brook *Cherith* did supply  
With Water; which, for want of Rain, grown dry,  
Unto Zarephta, by Command, he came,  
Where a poor Widow (tho' to entertain

A Guest, but meanly furnish'd) did receive  
 The Prophet; and, through Faith, she freely gave  
 Part of her small, her almost wasted Store,  
 Which she had thought a little time before  
 To dress for her, and for her Son, thereby  
 To be refresh'd, and shortly after Dye;  
 Not knowing of so strange Increase, until  
 The holy Man, that knew the Heav'nly Will,  
 Did, by Divine Authority, proclaim,  
 That till the Lord was pleas'd to send down Rain  
 (Which then with-held, for the Iniquity  
 That did abound, had brought th'Extremity  
 Of Dearth and Famine) her small Stock of Meal,  
 And little Cruise of Oyl, should never fail (p. 85)

Such poems are merely exercises, the metre uninteresting and the narrative uninspired.

### DICTION

As might be expected Mary Mollineux displays more originality of expression and power over words and phrases in the contemplative and meditative poems and the "letters" to friends and relations than in the poems on biblical subjects, where the words and images tend to echo the Bible version.

Mary Mollineux did not of course wish to use words for any decorative effect, but mainly as tools, to achieve the moral effect at which she was aiming; poetic ornament is never aimed at, yet the choice of verse rather than prose to a certain extent leads to the use of more art and of attention to sound than she perhaps realised, and the occasional vivid phrase, like "gold-hungry seamen"<sup>1</sup> (p. 117) stands out on the page, in marked contrast to the numerous abstract nouns which make little impact on the reader.

Some of the forms of words which Mary Mollineux uses would not be admissible in writing today, although they are sometimes heard in unlettered speech, as in "O How Stupendious are thy Wonders, Lord" (p. 95) or "a heinous Crime" (p. 160).<sup>2</sup> In fact she has a partiality for long words, and for words which are not common, if they suit her purpose, as in "O thou that to the Blind restored Sight, / Capacitating<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In the 3rd and subsequent editions this has been altered to "Cold hungry seamen."

<sup>2</sup> Perhaps the printer was at fault; but the lines remain unaltered in the 6th edition.

<sup>3</sup> O.E.D. gives 1657 as the earliest date for the appearance of the word.

to behold the Light" (p. 24); or the word "console" for console, and the poetical form "bereaven" for bereaved. Certain words are particular favourites: "durable" for instance occurs often, pointing the contrast between the enduring Truth and frivolous vain "deluding Toys."

Contemporary Quaker readers were not looking for poetic ornament, and would not perhaps have approved of the use of proper names simply for their sound and musical effect. Mary Mollineux used names only in a factual way, as in the Bible narratives, or, as with "Shiloh" and "Sion" to represent important elements of Christian beliefs.

Many of the earlier poems, particularly the biblical stories, are marred by clumsy expression, confusing and puzzling inversion; but when Mary Mollineux writes plainly and with simplicity, one can understand why her poetry continued to be read.

In *An Epistle to Cousin E.S.* (undated but grouped with poems of 1678) she recommends E.S. to "subdue all peevish Passion" and listen calmly to advice

Then let this Counsel find a place in thee;  
Stoop low to Truth, and learn Humility:  
This thou was once acquainted with; beware,  
Lest Strangeness interpose, and learn to fear. (p. 53)

The use of the phrase "stoop to Truth" recalls Pope's well-known lines in the *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* (published in 1735) where he wishes it put down to his credit

That not in fancy's maze he wandr'd long,  
But stooped to Truth, and moralised his song.<sup>1</sup>

Mary Mollineux uses a variation of the phrase in a poem to F.R. (1678) in which she urges the need for improving the time and treasuring righteousness

O Come! Consider, let all Vanity  
Stoop to Concerns of such Importancy. (p. 49)

<sup>1</sup> The editor of the Twickenham edition of Pope's works (*Poems*, vol. IV (1939), p. 341) appends a note to the effect that the poet "stoops" to Truth as a falcon is said to "stoop" to its prey, and compares Sir John Denham's address to his Muse in the poem "The progress of learning" (*Poems and translations, with the Sophy*, 1668, p. 171): "Now stoop with dis-inchanted wings to Truth." It is not easy to think of Mary Mollineux using a metaphor from falconry, and one wonders if Pope's editor was perhaps making heavy weather of what may have been merely a figurative use of the word "stoop" in the sense of bowing to a superior authority.

## METRE

The poems as a whole show a fair variety of verse form and metre; the most common is the rhyming couplet (and sometimes triplet) of four feet, used in all the longer poems; it tends to be clumsy, sluggish and pedestrian, particularly when an involved narrative is attempted, as in the account of Elijah quoted above.

Mary Mollineux was more successful in her shorter poems, in which the verse forms are more varied, and the words and sentiments direct and plain, as in *Contemplation*, written in 1678,

The time that is employ'd  
 In holy Meditation  
 Of thy Prevailing Love,  
 Engaging from above  
 The upright Heart, (wherein it is enjoyed)  
 In humble Fear, and sacred Admiration,  
 Is best Improv'd; for this indeed doth tend  
 To true Content and Peace, World without end.  
(p. 44)

A poem written in the following year (1679) *Concerning Trials* also strikes a genuine note:

Alas, How hard a thing  
 It is to bring  
 Into a true Subjection, Flesh and Blood,  
 Quietly to entertain  
 (And not complain)  
 Those Exercises that attend for Good! (p. 73)

Such poems justify Mary Mollineux's choice of verse rather than prose as a vehicle for her message.

## INFELICITIES

It cannot be denied that the poems as a whole are marred by many infelicities.

Inversion is not always a bad thing and may be necessary to bring the important aspect of a line or lines into prominence:

The King of Kings, the Great Eternal One,  
 Sent from his Bosom his Beloved Son,  
 Lost Man to seek . . . (p. 12)

but it is a device to be used with care. Unfortunately Mary Mollineux was quite unrestrained in this direction; awkward

inversions abound, tending sometimes to confuse the sense, as in one of the Meditations: "Nor shall Worm *Jacob's* Seed for Want complain" (p. 82) with its unfortunate echo of "thou worm Jacob" of Isaiah 41.14; or in the lines

Yet those that would these Sheep annoy,  
Let them for certain know,  
They shall not, if such them destroy,  
Long unrewarded go. (p. 22)

Sometimes the metre is ruined for the sake of getting a suitable rhyming word at the end of a line, as in

Which me into Temptation thus hath brought,  
That I (instead of Wisdom) Folly sought. (p. 10)

In addition, the indiscriminating use of "do" and "did" tends to weaken the impact of too many lines, as in

Though *Zion* sit in Misery,  
And do in Ashes mourn,  
And all her foes, as they pass by,  
Do her deride and scorn . . . (p. 21)

or the beginning of *An Epistle to M.R.*, "This Opportunity did me invite . . ." (p. 99).

There are occasions when Mary Mollineux descends to truly Wordsworthian bathos, as for instance in the poem on Daniel, in which God

Muzzled the Lions Mouths, with a Command  
Of Abstinence; and whisper'd in their Ear  
Such Dread, that they durst not approach to tear  
The *Angel-guarded* Prey; but still must wait,  
Though Hunger-bit, for other courser Meat. (p. 121)

or in *A Meditation* on God's defence of Sion

Then shall *Jerusalem* be known to be  
The bright, but tender Apple of his Eye;  
And all that touch her, to afflict or grieve her,  
Shall feel a Fiery Dart struck through their Liver.  
(p. 29)

There are a number of examples of phrases which are simply unfortunate, changes in usage having destroyed for the modern reader any possibility of responding to the

original sense, as in the lines "Man came to know / Sad Disappointments . . ." (p. 9) and the reference to God's promise to save "Perishing Mankind" (p. 10) in the first poem in the volume, *Of the Fall of Man*. It must be remembered however that this was written in 1663 when the author was about twelve. A similar example occurs in a poem *On the Fruitless Fig-Tree*, written in 1666,

. . . we, of our selves, so Barren be,  
And oft more Fruitless than that Blooming Tree  
(p. 16)

Another blemish is the frequent use of the apostrophe to shorten a word or words, to satisfy the exigencies of the metre; perhaps the most blatant example is in an early poem (1665) *On God's Love* which relates how God sent his Son

Lost Man to seek, and to restore ag'in,  
From the most vile Captivity of Sin. (p. 12)

To abbreviate thus may be legitimate now and then, but Mary Mollineux overdoes it, and we find "T'obey", "T'accuse", "Th'Immortal Soul", "vult'rous" and similar usages, and even the almost unpronounceable "T'surround", although this latter may even be acceptable in provincial usage.

#### CONCLUSION

The modern reader may well be discouraged by the undoubted clumsiness of much of the verse, and may perhaps feel that Mary Mollineux would have done well to confine her advice to prose. But the small circle of her contemporaries who read the poems in manuscript and were the recipients of her "epistles" must have been moved by the sincerity of her concern for "Truth", and the demand which kept the published volume *Fruits of retirement* in print throughout the greater part of the eighteenth century is evidence of the fact that her message and the form in which it was expressed were still valid for a great many readers.

The last word on Mary Mollineux may fittingly be left with her cousin Frances Owen<sup>1</sup>

"And tho' living Testimonies to the Truth are numerous, yet few extant in Verse, which hath an harmonious delightful

<sup>1</sup> Testimony in *Fruits*, p. [xii].

Faculty in it, that influences the Minds of some more than Prose, especially young People, and is more apt to imprint itself in the Memory: Therefore her Subject being divine, and so sensibly and solidly managed; as it hath been of Service to those few who have had the perusal of it, so, I hope, will be attended with a general Benefit."

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