

Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941)

She was born at Wolverhampton on December 6, 1875, the only child of (Sir) Arthur Underhill, barrister, and a bencher of Lincoln's Inn, by his wife, Alice Lucy, younger daughter of Moses Ironmonger, justice of the peace of Wolverhampton.



She was educated at home and later went to King's College for Women, London, where she read history and botany. She also became a first-class bookbinder. During her girlhood and the greater part of her married life her holidays were spent yachting, both her father and her husband being enthusiastic yachtsmen. From 1898 to 1913 she went abroad every spring and came to know and love the artistic treasures of France and Italy. Evelyn began writing before she was sixteen and her first publication, *A Bar-Lamb's Ballad Book*, of humorous verse concerned with the law, appeared in 1902. In 1907 she married Hubert Stuart Moore, a barrister, whom she had known since childhood. They had many interests in common in country life and country lore, and in a love of cats. She shared her husband's interest in wood and metal work and made many of the designs which he carried out.

The year of her marriage witnessed her final conversion to the Christian faith, although not yet to Anglicanism, for her attraction was then towards Rome. But the outbreak of the modernist storm in the same year made it seem to her that the demands of Rome postulated a surrender of her intellectual honour. Through her first important book, *Mysticism* (1911), she made the acquaintance of Baron Friedrich von Hugel to whom "under God," she wrote, "I owe...my whole spiritual life." Ten years later she formally put herself under his spiritual direction and she remained his pupil until his death in 1925. From the time of her conversion Evelyn Underhill's life consisted of various forms of religious work. She was fond of quoting St. Teresa's saying that "to give Our Lord a perfect service Martha and Mary must combine." Her mornings were given to writing and her afternoons to visiting the poor and to the spiritual direction of souls. As she grew older the work of spiritual direction increased until it finally became her chief interest, but it was not until 1921 that she solved her own problem and became a practising member of the Anglican communion. In 1924 she began to conduct retreats, and a number of her books consist of the work prepared for these conferences. Her other publications include three novels, two books of verse, a number of works on philosophy and religion. She also wrote reviews and special articles for the *Spectator* (of which she was for some years the theological editor.) In 1921 she gave the Upton lectures on religion at Manchester College, Oxford, later published under the title *The Life of the Spirit and the Life of Today* (1922). While working on *Worship* (1936), written for the Library of Constructive Theology, she became deeply interested in the Greek Orthodox Church and joined the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius.

During World War I (1914-1918) Evelyn Underhill worked at the Admiralty in the naval intelligence (Africa) department, but her views changed and in 1939 she found herself a Christian pacifist. She joined the Anglican Pacifist Fellowship and wrote for it an uncompromising pamphlet, *The Church and War* (1940).

Evelyn had a vivid, lively personality with a keen sense of humour and great lightness of touch. As befitted a good Incarnationalist she was interested in every side of life and had a passion for efficiency in everything she undertook. In her dealings with people, and especially with her pupils, she was always a little shy, having a great hatred, as she said, of "pushing souls about." This love of souls coupled with the determination to help them to grow at God's pace and not at their own or hers, won her the love and trust of all who went to her for help.

She died in 1941 at Hampstead on June 15th and is remembered in the Anglican Calendar on that day.