

Henry Vaughan

Henry Vaughan was Welsh by birth and in a sense also by choice, associating himself with the *Silures*, the local Welsh tribe so called under the *Romans*. He was born in 1621, one of the twin sons of a small landowner of aristocratic descent, distantly related to the family of *George Herbert*. He was educated in *Wales* and at *Oxford*, but did not take a degree. Vaughan studied law in *London* and in 1642, at the outset of the Civil War, returned to *Wales* where he probably saw military service in the King's cause. He returned to *Wales* in 1642 and spent the rest of his life there. But as a Royalist and a member of the Church of England, he and his family were persecuted in minor ways under locally fierce Puritan authority.

These years were difficult, too, as a result of illness, financial worries and the death of a younger brother; it may have been this combination of circumstances that made the poet open to the two dominant influences of his later writing- the "holy life and verse" of *George Herbert*, which brought about what Vaughan called a religious conversion, and a growing understanding of and love for the wild beauty of the Welsh countryside.

Vaughan married and settled on his father's estate at *Newton* in 1646; his wife died in 1653 and he subsequently married her sister. The children of these two marriages quarreled about their inheritance and Vaughan became burdened with law suits among his family. Fortunately, his practice as a doctor (we do not know where he qualified) flourished, and he spent the last years living a quiet but busy life in his beloved countryside, where he died in 1695.

His first book, entitled *Poems*, was published in 1646. A second book of poems, *Olor Iscanus* (Latin for *Swan of Isca* or *Usk*, a river in *Wales*) appeared in 1651. Vaughan's religious poetry is to be found in *Silix Scintillans*, the first part of which appeared in 1650, and which was reissued, with additions, as the second part in 1655. Vaughan's last book, *Thalia Rediviva* (1678), is a miscellany of prose and verse.