

Evelyn Underhill, 1941.

The only child of a prominent barrister and his wife, Evelyn Underhill was born in Wolverhampton, England, on December 6, 1875, and grew up in London. She was educated there and in a girls' school in Folkestone, where she was confirmed in the Church of England. She had little other formal religious training, but her spiritual curiosity was naturally lively, and she read widely, developing quite early a deep appreciation for mysticism. At sixteen, she began a life-long devotion to writing.

Evelyn had few childhood companions, but one of them, Hubert Stuart Moore, she eventually married. Other friends, made later, included such famous persons as Laurence Housman, Maurice Hewlett, and Sarah Bernhardt. Closest of all were Ethel Ross Barker, a devout Roman Catholic, and Baron Friedrich von Hügel, with whom she formed a strong spiritual bond. He became her director in matters mystical. In the 1890's, Evelyn began annual visits to the continent of Europe, and especially to Italy. There she became influenced by the paintings of the Italian masters and by the Roman Catholic Church. She spent nearly fifteen years wrestling painfully with the idea of converting to Roman Catholicism, but decided in the end that it was not for her.

In 1921, Evelyn Underhill became reconciled to her Anglican roots, while remaining what she called a "Catholic Christian." She continued with her life of reading, writing, meditation, and prayer. She had already published her first great spiritual work, *Mysticism*. This was followed by many other books, culminating in her most widely read and studied book, *Worship* (1937).

Evelyn Underhill's most valuable contribution to spiritual literature must surely be her conviction that the mystical life is not only open to a saintly few, but to anyone who cares to nurture it and weave it into everyday experience, and also (at the time, a startling idea) that modern psychological theories and discoveries, far from hindering or negating spirituality, can actually enhance and transform it.

Evelyn Underhill's writings proved appealing to many, resulting in a large international circle of friends and disciples, making her much in demand as a lecturer and retreat director. She died, at age 65, in London on June 15, 1941.

June 15, A Great Cloud of Witnesses and Lesser Feasts and Fasts

O God, Origin, Sustainer, and End of all creatures: Grant that your Church, taught by your servant Evelyn Underhill, guarded evermore by your power, and guided by your Spirit into the light of truth, may continually offer to you all glory and thanksgiving, and attain with your saints to the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have promised us by our Savior Jesus Christ; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, now and for ever. Amen.