

this was because he was of all men I have ever known the most entirely lovable. But I must not trust myself to give full expression to the child-like charm of Swinburne. Moreover, this has been done by those who, although knowing him intimately during his residence at 'The Pines,' are not open to the charge of partiality. I may mention the late William Sharp (Fiona Macleod) in 'Papers Critical and Reminiscent,' edited by his wife, and published by Mr. Heinemann; Mr. James Douglas in his essay in 'Chambers's Cyclopædia of English Literature;' and the Welsh poet, Ernest Rhys, in his reminiscences of him in the 'Nineteenth Century and After,' for June 1909. Professor Saintsbury, in his remarks upon him in the 'Bookman' for June 1909, says, 'If there is anything (I do not think there *is*) for which I would give up the privilege of having read "Atalanta in Calydon" and "Poems and Ballads" when they came out, it would be the opportunity of beginning their author's poems at the recent end and reading them backwards, without knowledge of what was to come.' Nor must I forget the luminous article by Mrs. Louise Collier Willcox in the 'North American Review' for July 1909, called 'The Fortifying Principle in Swinburne.'

'In the first volume,' says that accomplished writer, 'he showed the futility of passion, the immortal agonies of a man who, knowing life to be an ascetic discipline, "desirous

of penitential pain, is damned to joyless pleasure." In the new volume he gave what he had to enlarge, to cheer, and to fortify. Almost the first thing we feel is that he offered no easy solaces, no ready comforts. To those who have once absorbed the philosophy of Browning, Mr. Swinburne offers the next step upward. Browning assured us, with every aspect of full conviction, that there should "never be one lost good"; that "evil is null, is nought, is silence implying sound"; that "what was good shall be good, with, for evil, so much good more"; "on earth the broken arcs; in heaven, a perfect round." Since it was impossible to close the eyes to the imperfections of this life, Browning accepted evil as a finite misconception, just our human, limited way of seeing the fragment instead of the whole; and the number of struggling and stumbling beings whom he set on their feet by his wide, courageous outlook, by his staunch promises of a future completion, by his hearty explanation that all the joy of growth and progress depended on a man's reach exceeding his grasp must never be underestimated or forgotten. Mr. Swinburne's offering was a different one. His poetic deliverance was far more spontaneous, more inspired, more perfect than Browning's.

Sir William Robertson Nicoll evidently considers that the later years of Swinburne's life were his most truly important period. For this is what he says in his study of him in the 'Contemporary Review' for May 1909:

'It is pleasant to think that this great man grew spiritually as the years passed. Life became to him not

the life of furious Titans and beneficent demigods, but the life of man. His heart became wider in his growing love of nature and of little children. More and more he looked out upon the world with enjoyment of all its simple good and compassion for its ill. He expanded in the serenities of friendship and affection, and his spirit became steadily more benign, elevated, and calm.'

It was during this later period of Swinburne's development that my intimacy with him, which began in 1872, grew closer with every succeeding year. And after death had robbed us and the world of the rarest spirit of his age—Dante Rossetti—the intimacy between Swinburne and me became, if possible, closer than ever.

I know well that it will take a generation or two before the real quality of the mass of Swinburne's writings is understood. As long as I live, I shall hear him spoken of by many as a mere sensual singer, and not as the enunciator of the great ideas expressed in his later meditative poems, such as 'By the North Sea.' With the exception of about a hundred lines in 'Poems and Ballads' his poetry is like that of no other poet for exalted enthusiasm and belief in the high destiny of man. The real student of his entire work would certainly say that there never was a great body of poetry less leavened with sensuousness, to say nothing of sensuality, than Swinburne's. The fact is that he

would have gained immensely as a popular poet if he had been able to warm the lines written in his riper years by as much sensuousness as Rossetti could pack into a single sonnet, as Tennyson could pack into a poem like 'Merlin and Vivien,' and as Browning could pack into certain poems of his.

And even as to some of his earlier writings, and the much-discussed question of their morality or immorality (which has lately been revived by Canon Mason), let it be remembered that, in a certain deep sense, nothing is immoral that is not cynical, and nothing is moral that is not earnest and enthusiastic. As I have said elsewhere, 'in the literatures of all civilisations enthusiasm has meant life, while cynicism has meant corruption and death.' It was the dry-rot of cynicism that invaded and killed at last the literature of Rome. And it is the dry-rot of cynicism that threatens to kill the literatures of the modern Western world.

## II

In order that the reader may fully realise Swinburne's nobility of temper, especially in his later years, it has been suggested to me that I should let the poet, in this little representative volume, speak for himself by giving a few extracts from the Dedicatory Epistle prefixed to the Collected Edition of his Poems and Dramas in eleven volumes. I have done this, and the extracts will be found in Appendix I.

As to Swinburne's place as a poet there is no need for me to enlarge upon that. He is acknowledged to be one of the greatest lyrists—if not the greatest—of the nineteenth century. Ruskin, who knew him intimately, thus spoke of him on a certain occasion :

‘He is infinitely above me in all knowledge and power, and I should no more think of advising or criticising him than of venturing to do it to Turner if he were alive again. He is simply one of the mightiest scholars of his age in Europe—knows Greek, Latin, and French as well as he knows English—can write splendid verse with equal ease in any of the four languages—knows nearly all the best literature of the four languages as well as I know—well—better than I know anything. And in power of imagination and understanding simply sweeps me away before him as a torrent does a pebble. I'm *righter* than he is—so are the lambs and the swallows, but they're not his match.’

I have only to add that the photogravure which faces the first page of the Selections represents Swinburne's favourite walk. For thirty years, whenever he was not at the sea-side, he could be seen there every morning in all weathers, wet or dry. I do not know that any previous poet is associated for so long a period with one particular locality as Swinburne is associated with Wimbledon Common.

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