

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I

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*Extracts from the Dedicatory Epistle prefixed to the
Collected edition of Swinburne's Poems and Dramas
in eleven volumes.*

‘ TO THEODORE WATTS-DUNTON

‘ To my best and dearest friend I dedicate the first collected edition of my poems, and to him I address what I have to say on the occasion.

‘ It is now thirty-six years since my first volume of miscellaneous verse, lyrical and dramatic and elegiac and generally heterogeneous, had as quaint a reception and as singular a fortune as I have ever heard or read of. For its author the most amusing and satisfying result of the clatter aroused by it was the deep diversion of collating and comparing the variously inaccurate verdicts of the scornful or mournful censors who insisted on regarding all the studies of passion or sensation attempted or achieved in it as either confessions of positive fact or excursions of absolute

fancy. There are photographs from life in the book ; and there are sketches from imagination. Some which keen-sighted criticism has dismissed with a smile as ideal or imaginary were as real and actual as they well could be : others which have been taken for obvious transcripts from memory were utterly fantastic or dramatic. If the two kinds cannot be distinguished, it is surely rather a credit than a discredit to an artist whose medium or material has more in common with a musician's than with a sculptor's. Friendly and kindly critics, English and foreign, have detected ignorance of the subject in poems taken straight from the life, and have protested that they could not believe me were I to swear that poems entirely or mainly fanciful were not faithful expressions or transcriptions of the writer's actual experience and personal emotion.

.....

' In my next work it should be superfluous to say that there is no touch of dramatic impersonation or imaginary emotion. The writer of " Songs before Sunrise," from the first line to the last, wrote simply in submissive obedience to Sir Philip Sidney's precept—" Look in thine heart, and write." The dedication of these poems, and the fact that the dedication was accepted, must be sufficient evidence of this.

.....

' You know that I never pretended to see eye to eye with my illustrious friends and masters, Victor Hugo and Giuseppe Mazzini, in regard to the positive and

passionate confidence of their sublime and purified theology. Our betters ought to know better than we : they would be the last to wish that we should pretend to their knowledge, or assume a certitude which is theirs and is not ours. But on one point we surely cannot but be at one with them : that the spirit and the letter of all other than savage and barbarous religions are irreconcilably at variance, and that prayer or homage addressed to an image of our own or of other men's making, be that image avowedly material or conventionally spiritual, is the affirmation of idolatry with all its attendant atrocities, and the negation of all belief, all reverence, and all love, due to the noblest object of human worship that humanity can realise or conceive.

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‘ It is nothing to me that what I write should find immediate or general acceptance : it is much to know that on the whole it has won for me the right to address this dedication and inscribe this edition to you.

‘ ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE.’

APPENDIX II

[See page v]

Extracts from Swinburne's Letters to Clarence Stedman, dated Holmwood, Henley-on-Thames, February 20 and 21, 1875.

My father, Admiral Swinburne, is the second son of Sir John Swinburne, a person whose life would be better worth writing than mine.

[Here follows Swinburne's brilliant description of his grandfather as a personal friend of Mirabeau, which now appears in the illustrative notes to Swinburne's book, 'Charles Dickens.']

He said that Mirabeau as far excelled, as a companion and a talker, one other man as that other man did all men else he had ever known in his life, of any kind or station; the man thus distancing all the world beside and distanced as immeasurably by Mirabeau alone, was Wilkes. This I always remembered with interest, and I thought it would interest you; considering how many famous and splendid persons an able and active public man must have seen and

known, who all but completes his century, and whose clearness and activity of mind never fail him to his last hour. An ancestress of his (*i.e.* a Lady Swinburne) bore thirty children to one husband: people thronged about her carriage in the streets to see the living and thriving mother of thirty sons and daughters. I think you will allow that when this race chose at last to produce a poet, it would have been at least remarkable if he had been content to write nothing but hymns and idyls for clergymen and young ladies to read out in chapels and drawing-rooms. My mother is daughter of (the late) Earl of Ashburnham, whose family, though one of them was the closest follower of Charles I. to his death, afterwards held sensibly aloof from the cause of the later Stuarts, and increased in wealth and titles (there *was* a Swinburne peerage, but it has been dormant or forfeit since the thirteenth or fourteenth century).

So much for family history; which may be a stupid matter, but to write about my personality is to me yet more so. My life has been eventless and monotonous; like other boys of my class, I was five years at school at Eton, four years at college at Oxford; I never cared for any pursuit, sport, or study as a youngster, except poetry, riding, and swimming; and, though as a boy my verses were bad enough, I believe I may say I was far from bad at the two latter. Also, being bred by the sea, I was a good cragsman, and am

vain to this day of having scaled a well-known cliff on the South Coast ; ever before and ever since reputed to be inaccessible. Perhaps I may be forgiven for referring to such puerilities, having read (in cuttings from more than one American journal) bitterly contemptuous remarks on my physical debility and puny proportions. I am much afraid this looks like an echo of poor great Byron's notorious and very natural soreness about his personal defect ; but, really, if I were actually of powerless or deformed body I am certain I should not care though all men (and women) on earth knew and remarked on it. I write all this rubbish because I really don't know what to tell you about myself, and having begun to egotize I go on in pure stupidity. I suppose you do not require a Rousseau-like record of my experiences in spiritual or material emotions ; and knowing as you do the dates and sequence of my published books you know every event of my life. (Note.—The order of composition is not always that of publication. 'Atalanta' was begun the very day after I had given the last touch to 'Chastelard.')

February 21.

Here I left off last night, being very tired and feeling myself getting stupid. I see I have already done much more than answer such of your questions as I could ; and as you have induced me for the very first time in my life to write about myself, I am tempted,

considering that I have probably been more be-written and belied than any man since Byron, to pour myself out to a sincere (distant) friend a little more, telling any small thing that may come into my head to mention.

I have heard that Goethe, Victor Hugo, and myself were all born in the same condition—all but dead, and certainly not expected to live an hour. Yet I grew up a healthy boy enough and fond of the open air, though slightly built, and have never had a serious touch of illness in my life. As for the sea, its salt *must* have been in my blood before I was born. I can remember no earlier enjoyment than being held up naked in my father's arms and brandished between his hands, then shot like a stone from a sling through the air, shouting and laughing with delight, head foremost into the coming wave—which could only have been the pleasure of a very little fellow. I remember being afraid of other things, but never of the sea. But this is enough of infancy; only it shows the *truth* of my endless passionate returns to the sea in all my verse.

To make a long leap—for to be egotistic one must be desultory, and jump from little-boyhood into young-manhood—I was about to tell you last night that I had once an opening into that public life which alone (I think) authorizes public curiosity into the details of a man's biography. Several years ago the Reform League (a body of extreme reformers not now

extant, I believe, but of some note and power for a time) solicited me to sit in Parliament (offering to insure my seat and pay all expenses) as representative of more advanced democratic or republican opinions than were represented there. Now, I never in my life felt any ambition for any work or fame but a poet's (except, indeed, while yet a boy, for a soldier's, but my father resolutely stamped that out *); and I appealed to the man I most loved and revered on earth (Mazzini being then luckily in London) to know if he thought it was my duty to forgo my own likings on the chance of being of truer use to the cause, and Mazzini told me I need not—I was doing my natural kind of service as it was, and in Parliament I should, of course, be wasting my time and strength for a year on the chance of being of service by one's speech or vote on some great and remote occasion. I never was more relieved in my life than when I felt I could dismiss the application with a wholly clear conscience. (I have seen a report of this in print, but not quite accurate.)

[The letter then goes on to formulate the poet's doctrines upon theological matters, which, though very interesting and important, would scarcely find a fitting place here. They will be given elsewhere.]

* Mrs. Disney Leith, in her beautiful account of Swinburne's early life, corroborates all that Swinburne here says about his father's strenuous opposition to his ambition for a soldier's career.—*Ed.*

When I tell you that I never was in France, or Italy for more than a few weeks together, and that not more than three or four times in my life, and never was out of England at all till I was eighteen, I think I shall have told you about all you want to know, and answered your questions about as well as I can. . . .

Ever yours faithfully,

A. C. SWINBURNE.