

SUPPLEMENTAL NOTE BY THE EDITOR OF
THIS IMPRESSION

‘Time driveth onward fast,
And in a little while our lips are dumb.’

LET me take warning by these noble words of Tennyson: let me remember that I may never live to write my reminiscences of Swinburne, much as I desire to do so.

I will seize this opportunity of recording that it was four years and a half after the date of the above autobiographical letters to Stedman, and two years and a half before Rossetti's death, that Swinburne and I became house-mates at The Pines, Putney Hill. From this moment his connection with bohemian London ceased entirely.

He was now living *en famille* with me and my two sisters and a child, and then, after my marriage, with me and my wife. He always spoke of this change as the happiest event that had occurred in his life since his childish days in the bosom of his own family. After we had been living together for

three years he dedicated 'Tristram of Lyonesse' to me in this touching sonnet :

Spring speaks again, and all our woods are stirred,
 And all our wide glad wastes aflower around,
 That twice have heard keen April's clarion sound
 Since here we first together saw and heard
 Spring's light reverberate and reiterate word
 Shine forth and speak in season. Life stands crowned
 Here with the best one thing it ever found,
 As of my soul's best birthdays dawns the third.

There is a friend that as the wise man saith
 Cleaves closer than a brother: nor to me
 Hath time not shown, through days like waves at
 strife,
 This truth more sure than all things else but death,
 This pearl most perfect found in all the sea
 That washes toward your feet these waifs of life.

THE PINES,
April 1882.

Here we received, besides the members of his own family, and his cousin Mrs. Disney Leith, and her youngest daughter, very many friends. For he was fond of society, but it had to be what he called 'society of the right sort'—men and women of intellect and culture. Some of these have already recorded what they then saw of him. And many more will undoubtedly do so in the future. Gradually death removed many 'old familiar faces': these were

replaced by new and younger ones. When we lost the most loyal of all, Jowett, I remember our serious talk—I remember showing Swinburne a few words of mine which I hope I shall be pardoned for recalling here, for they affected him deeply :

One after one they go ; and glade and heath,
 Where once we waiked with them, and garden-bowers
 They made so dear, are haunted by the hours
 Once musical of those who sleep beneath ;
 One after one does Sorrow's every wreath
 Bind closer you and me with funeral flowers,
 And Love and Memory from each loss of ours
 Forge conquering glaives to quell the conqueror Death.

Among these younger friends I must specify one, Dr. Compton-Rickett (a writer of high repute, and a lecturer in connection with University Extension), who wrote the following brilliant pen-portrait of Swinburne in the *Pall Mall Gazette* of July 7, 1909 :

Some of the recent personal descriptions of Mr. Swinburne seem to have been inspired by Pellegrini's famous caricature and also by the outrageous stories told about him by De Maupassant, whom Mr. Swinburne once designated as a 'liar of the first magnitude.' Pellegrini's caricature wonderfully expresses the idea current forty years ago. Some of the recent notices, indeed, follow Pellegrini's caricature absolutely, and describe the poet as a sort of freak, with an enormous head set upon a very slender neck, with extremely sloping shoulders. As a matter of fact, every photograph of him entirely contradicts this. Mr. Swinburne's height was

five feet four and a half inches, and his limbs were quite unusually strong and muscular, as I have noticed when seeing him walk to Wimbledon. His head, as a whole, was but very little bigger than that of most men of his size, but it was his enormous dome of a forehead which made it seem so big. As to his abnormally thin neck, the Rossetti portrait of him—by far the best of any—shows that his neck was, if anything, decidedly too thick.

It happens that it is this very portrait by Rossetti which, at the request of Miss Isabel Swinburne, the poet's youngest and only surviving sister, I have reproduced as the frontispiece to the present volume. Miss Swinburne says that it is the only portrait of her brother which brings him back to her as he was when a young man.

Dr. Compton-Rickett goes on to say :

I have heard that Rossetti, like Ruskin and Burne-Jones, considered Swinburne very handsome, although rather too juvenile-looking for his age. Rossetti, indeed, proposed to him to sit for Sir Galahad. This proposition came to nothing, but he did succeed in securing him to sit for St. George in the St. George and Dragon cartoons for the Morris firm, and very beautiful cartoons they are. Rossetti frequently used Swinburne as a model.

As to Swinburne's deafness, Dr. Compton-Rickett remarks :

When he got a visitor up into his study, to show him his books, the deafness was really almost imperceptible. Mr. Marion Crawford, who visited him after I did (and

whose novels Mr. Swinburne greatly admired), used to say that he almost forgot Swinburne was deaf in about five minutes.

During all this time Swinburne and I took our annual holidays together, all of which delightful trips he has celebrated in the well-known group of ballades in which the 'friend' addressed is myself. These excursions, as I have mentioned in the Preface, consisted mainly of visits for swimming purposes to various places on the English coast, or to the Channel Islands. For he who had at one time been so Gallic in his tastes had got to love England with an intensity such as I have never seen equalled, except perhaps in the case of George Borrow. His only visit to the Continent during his residence at The Pines was in company with me in 1882, when, at the invitation of Victor Hugo, we went to Paris in order to see the revival after fifty years of *Le Roi s'amuse*. And a very enjoyable time he had, to be sure, as visitors to The Pines who heard him talk about it for years will remember.

In 1903 Swinburne had a serious attack of pneumonia, and was attended by Sir Thomas Barlow, who had been called in by Swinburne's friend and medical man, Mr. Edwin White, of Putney. This illness no doubt somewhat weakened him physically, but had no effect whatever upon the ebullience of his animal spirits, and certainly none upon his genius, as his superb little drama, 'The Duke of Gandia,' amply proves.

In 1909 he had another and much severer attack of pneumonia which rapidly developed into double pneumonia. Mr. White evidently took a serious view of the case from the first, for he sent at once for Sir Thomas Barlow and two nurses. Sir Thomas Barlow, however, was away on the Continent. Mr. White then called in Sir Douglas Powell.

Swinburne succumbed to this attack on April 10.

At the time of Swinburne's death I was confined to my bed by a very serious illness. This was why I could not attend the funeral.

Swinburne, by an arrangement of long standing, was interred in the enclosure belonging to his family, in Bonchurch graveyard, in the Isle of Wight, where his tomb was erected in consonance with a scheme of burial for the entire family which had been devised by his revered father. Had it been possible, I, for my part, should have liked for so great a poet a distinctive monument with a distinctive inscription. But being a stranger in blood, I had no voice in the matter. I had proposed erecting a marble column with the following inscription :

Algernon Charles Swinburne, the Immortal Poet and Beloved Man who wrote 'Atalanta in Calydon,' lies here by the sea he loved, amidst the kindred he loved.

*And fear the song too taught him ; fear to be
Worthless the dear love of the wind and sea
That bred him fearless, like a sea-mew reared
In rocks of man's foot feared.*

The lines are from his autobiographical poem 'Thalassius.' They depict his splendid courage and refer to the incident of his climbing the cliff. But the father's scheme of the family monuments was held to be sacred—not to be disturbed. And unfortunately I found that there was no room in the crowded little graveyard to place at some other spot the monument suggested by me. I was much disappointed at this.

After Swinburne's death, I, as his housemate, got many letters full of admiration and appreciation of his genius and of his fine character. But I was too ill to reply to them. There is one which I cannot resist the temptation of quoting now because the writer of this letter was George Meredith :

BOX HILL, DORKING,
April 13, 1909.

MY DEAR THEODORE,

THE blow was heavy on me. I had such confidence in his powers of recovery. The end has come! That brain of the vivid illumination is extinct. I can hardly realize it when I revolve the many times when at the starting of an idea the whole town was instantly ablaze with electric light. Song was his natural voice. He was the greatest of our lyrical poets—of the world's, I could say, considering what a language he had to wield. But if I feel the loss of

him as a part of our life torn away, how keenly must the stroke fall on you—and at a time of prostration from illness! Happily you have a wife for support and consolation. That helps to comfort me in my dire distress of mind on behalf of your stricken household, which I see beneath the shadow. I will hire a motor and be with you when I know that you are in better health, and we can talk. My respects to your wife.

GEORGE MEREDITH.

The sounds of that motor were, alas! never heard at The Pines, except in the fever-dreams that were then upon me. Soon after writing this letter England's great novelist was stricken with his last illness. On Sunday, May 16, 1909, he was taken ill, and on the following Tuesday he too was dead.

T. W-D.