

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE: HIS WORK

A Sketch of His Career—Stir Created By His Early Poems—
A Graduate of Oxford—Some of His Famous Verse.

Algernon Charles Swinburne was the last leaf on the tree that bore the group of great Victorian poets. The judgment of the English-speaking world picked him for the post of Poet Laureate when Tennyson died. But his early works had not yet completely triumphed over British prejudice, and Alfred Austin was chosen in his stead amid a general chorus of derision. Swinburne was really a poet of a great poet.

Of late years he had done little creative work and had lived quietly in an eddy of the stream of activity which he once breathed with the most powerful of swimmers. He was born on April 5, 1837, in London so that at the time of his death he had just entered his seventy-third year.

Swinburne was the son of Admiral Charles Henry Swinburne and the daughter of the third Earl of Ashburnham. He was not a Londoner, though he happened to be born in London at a time when his family were making a brief visit to the metropolis. His father owned a beautiful place on the Isle of Wight, where the poet spent much of his boyhood.

Neither at Eton nor at Oxford did young Swinburne especially distinguish himself as a scholar, though he became known as an ardent student of things that interested him peculiarly. He went in 1856 to Balliol College, Oxford, where he speedily became intimate in a literary set that included such young men as John Addington Symonds, R. V. Dickey and James Bryce, the present British ambassador to the United States. He did not take a degree at Oxford, leaving that institution in 1860.

It was shortly after this that he published at his own expense his first volume of poetry, "The Queen Mother," and "Rosamund," two dramas in the Shakespearean style, thus early showing the influence of the Elizabethan dramatists which was destined so long to keep its hold upon him. He had before this made the acquaintance of such growing figures as Rossetti, Burne-Jones and William Morris. His appearance at this time seems to have made a vivid impression upon a number of beholders, who took the trouble to record it. Standing scarcely 5 feet 2 inches, he was slight of frame and lean of flesh. But there was a strange individuality about him. His complexion was startlingly pale, his throat slender, his features refined and his manner both dignified and proud.

Yet Swinburne had a sound constitution and led a vigorous life. He was a powerful swimmer and dearly loved a long walk, especially if it rained in torrents. To the last day of his life he scorned to carry an umbrella or to wear an overcoat, and it was only in the latest years of his age that he reconciled himself to wearing gloves, and then only in the bitterest winter weather.

His conversational powers were uncommon from his early youth and at Oxford he was noted for the keenness of his wit, though he never seems to have had much sense of humor. In his later years he is said to have been very fond of reading his own poetry. After he left Oxford he made a tour of the continent, forming the acquaintance of Walter Savage Landor, from whom he no doubt acquired certain of those republican sentiments which were supposed to have inspired "A Song in Time of Order." At a much later period in the poet's life a certain leaning toward republicanism appeared to find expression in a poem in which many persons thought they perceived an invitation to the nihilists to make away with the Czar of Russia. In the House of Commons this caused inquiry to be made as to whether the poet were to be prosecuted for inciting murder, to which the speaker replied that the House had "no control over the poet Swinburne."

The two plays which were the poet's first pretentious publication, made at a time just before he went to live at Chelsea with Rossetti and George Meredith, did not attract much attention, but his "Atalanta in Calydon," published four years later, made such a stir that he was hailed as a new poetical star of the first magnitude. It had certain faults of style which to the end were characteristic of the poet, but the critics, for all these faults, were quick to recognize the quality of the new writer.

Mary Queen of Scots, for years an inspiring figure to Swinburne, furnished the inspiration for "Chastelard," which followed "Atalanta." In "Chastelard" appeared the first symptoms of his poetical criticism, and it was the signal for a critical onslaught as violently condemnatory as the comment on "Atalanta" had been eulogistic. The poet vigorously defended himself, but for years the critical personal was considerable and the content personal gossip amazing. Meantime Swinburne published "Faustine" and "Dolores," and all England read them first and then committed them to memory and quoted them in season and out of season. The great was the shock when "Lais Veneris, and Other Poems and Ballads" appeared that the British publisher suppressed the first edition. There have been many editions since. It was about now that the poet went to London to live and passed much time with William Morris, Theodore Watts-Dunton, Whistler, Burne-Jones and Rossetti, coming thus strongly under the influence of the pre-Raphaelite movement. The long struggle for liberty then going on in Italy also excited his intense sympathy, and "A Song of Italy" and "Songs Before Sunrise" were the results.

The second of the Mary Stuart plays, "Bothwell," he published in 1874 and the previously offended critics gave it a large measure of the approval they had withheld from many of his lyrics. In "Bothwell" there was exhibited much of the Greek spirit that had marked the earlier "Atalanta." About this time he turned his attention to prose and published a critical study of Shakespeare, together with an essay on William Blake, "Songs of Springtime" came next, followed by "Mary Stuart," the third of the trilogy dealing with the unfortunate queen of Scots. There followed the long narrative poem called "Tristram of Lyonesse," "The Century of Roundels," "A Midsummer Holiday," a collection of ballads, a tragic poem of the Venice of the Middle Ages called "Marino Faliero," and another tragedy "Locusts." A number of prose works came late in the poet's life, among them being a novel called "Love's Cross Currents," 1905, which did not excite much comment. His last years Swinburne passed at Putney, where he lived with the friend of his youth, the critic, Theodore Watts-Dunton.

Many traditions exist of the poet's eccentricities. He was exceedingly nervous and quick tempered; more over his singular lack of a sense of humor occasionally betrayed him into absurd performances, and he excited much merriment by his extraordinary behavior on the occasion of a public dinner to which he brought a footstool, upon which he insisted on sitting literally at the feet of Robert Browning.

On another occasion, perhaps the most extraordinary of all, the poet went to a dinner at the London Arts Club. It appears that when he desired to depart he couldn't find his hat and became so angry that he made an attack on the cloak room, flinging the hats of everybody else upon the floor and dancing on them. There subsequently appeared in a comic paper a parody of Swinburne's manner, relating this episode. It took the form of a drama, the members of the club forming the dramatic personae and the poet himself appearing as the chorus. At the climax the members of the club chanted:

As forests with tempests that
From the hat racks our hats are torn down,
The Englishman's house is his castle,
The Englishman's hat is his crown.

Poems on nature bulk large in the work of Swinburne. Of these perhaps the chorus from "Atalanta," generally known as "The Hounds of Spring," is the one best known.

When the hounds of spring are on
winters' traces
The mother of months in meadow
or plain
Fills the shadows and windy places
With hisp of leaves and ripple of rain;

And the brown bright nightingale
Is half assuaged for thy lips,
For the Thracian ships and the
foreign flags,
The tongueless vigil and all the pain.

Come with bows bent and with empty
quivers,
Maiden most perfect, lady of light,
With a noise of winds and many rivers,
With a clamor of waters, and with
might;
Bind on thy sandals, O thou most fleet,
Over the splendor and speed of thy
feet
For the faint east quickens, the wan
west shivers
Round the feet of the day and the
feet of the night.

Where shall we find her, how shall we
sing to her,
Fold our hands round her knees and
climb?
Oh, that man's heart were as fire and
could spring to her,
Fire or the strength of the streams
that spring!
For the stars and the winds are unto
her
As rainment, as songs of the harp
player;
For the risen stars and the fallen cling
to her,
And the south-west wind and the
west wind sing.

For winter's rains and ruins are over,
And all the season of snows and
sins;
The days dividing lover and lover,
The light that loses, the night that
wins;
And time remembered in grief forgotten,
And frosts are slain and flowers be-
gotten,
And in green underwood and cover
Blossom by blossom the spring
begins.

The full streams feed on flower of
rushes,
Ripe grasses trammel a travelling
foot,
The faint fresh flame of the young
year flushes
From leaf to flower and flower to
fruit;

And fruit and leaf are as gold and
fire,
And the oat is heard above the lyre,
And the hoofed heel of a satyr crushes
The chestnut husk at the chestnut
root.

And Pan by noon and Bacchus by
night,
Fleetest of foot than the fleet foot
kid,
Follows with dancing and fills with
delight

The Maenad and the Baccarad;
And soft as the lips that laugh and
hide,
The laughing leaves of the trees
divide,
And screen from seeing and leave in
sight

The god pursuing, the maiden fled,
The ivy falls with the Bacchanal's hair,
Over her eyebrows, shading her eyes,
The wild vine slipping down leaves
bare

Her bright breast shortening into
sight,
The wild vine slips with the weight
of its leaves,
But the buried ivy catches and cleaves
To the limbs that glitter, the feet that
flee.

The wolf that follows, the fawn that
flees,
Of later poems none has been more
popular than "A Forsaken Garden,"
from which these lines are taken:

Here there was laughing of old, there
was weeping
Haply of lovers none ever will know.

Redmond Gives a Warning

Says Irish Vote Will Be Cast
Against Liberal Party If It
Does Not Declare for Home
Rule in the Next Election.

Mr. John Redmond, M. P., and Mr. T. P. O'Connor, M. P., addressed a very large meeting in the Hippodrome, Liverpool, the other day. A resolution was carried urging that the national cause depended upon the united co-operation of the party, the people, and the leaders, demanding that the acceptance of the national struggle, and "hailing with the utmost joy the fact that the reign of dissolution is brought to an end by Mr. O'Brien's acceptance of the policy of the nation against the policy."

Mr. Redmond, who had an enthusiastic reception on rising to reply, said he was gratified as he always was, to be in Liverpool.

"I am happy to be able to say to you that I believe that the bill for Home Rule in Ireland is at an end, and that in the immediate future the Irish party, absolutely united in itself, will be able to speak for an absolutely united Ireland in the House of Commons and in the country." (Loud cheers.)

Mr. Birrell's Bill.
Mr. Redmond went on to say that the immediate need for the moment was the land bill of Mr. Birrell. The bill would, if amended in certain leading features, make the land act of Mr. Wyndham work, which was what was chiefly wanted in the congested districts of Ireland. The bill would afford the only possible means of stopping emigration, by enabling the people to earn a decent living in their own land. He had no doubt that the bill would pass into law. But they had to deal with the Irish landlords and the House of Lords, who had always in the past proved themselves not only hostile but stupid to the last degree from the point of view of their own interest. (Hear, hear.) If this bill did not pass, many a fine land would console themselves with the reflection that the state of things would become insupportable, and perhaps in that way the consummation of their political aspiration might be hastened. But let him say for himself that he would not deprecate the creation of such a disorder in Ireland, though it might hasten by a few months or years the fruition of their political desire. He trusted that Irish landlords and the House of Lords would be wise enough to make terms with the Irish people in passing this bill.

The Government and Home Rule.
"I am anxious," he remarked, "that this bill should pass, but with that in mind, in my judgment, the sooner had a general election, the better. The action of the present Government

whose eyes went seaward a hundred
leagues.
Years ago.

Heart handfast in heart as they stood,
"Look thither."
Did he whisper? "Look forth from
the flowers to the sea;
For the foam flowers endure when the
blossoms wither
And men that love lightly may die—
but we?"

And the same wind sang and the same
pleading, whistled,
And over the garden's last petals
were shed,
In the lips that had whispered, the eyes
that had lightened,
Love was dead.

Or, they loved their life through, and
then went whither?
And were one to the end—but what
end, who knows?
Love deep as the sea as a rose must
wither.

As the rose-red seaweed that mocks
the rose,
Shall the dead take thought for the
dead, to love them?
What love was ever as deep as a
grave?

They are loveless now as the grass
above them,
Or the wave.

All are at one now, roses and lovers.
Not known of the cliffs and the
waves.
Not a breath of the time that has been
hovers
In the air now soft with a summer
to be.

Not a breath shall there sweeten the
seasons hereafter
Of the flowers or the lovers that
laugh now, or weep.

When the wind is free now of
weeping or laughter,
We shall sleep.

on the question of home rule for Ireland has been a deep disappointment to the Irish people. (Hear, hear.) The extraordinary situation exists that in the House of Commons there is a majority declared in the division lobby of nearly 200 men in favor of home rule, and yet the Government will not introduce a home rule bill, saying they are precluded from doing so by the pledge of some of their members. (Oh, oh.) Instead of wasting their time on four futile education bills and a Licensing bill, which divided even their own party, they had boldly put home rule at the front of their programme, my own belief is that their position would be stronger today than it is now. We have to take care of it that, so far as it rests at any rate in our power, what occurred at the last general election shall not occur again. I see certain signs that what I may call the Liberal League members of the Liberal party are gathering their forces and endeavoring to secure the passage of the bill that party. Let me say this emphatically and clearly that unless the Liberal leaders put home rule in their programme at the next general election it will be our duty to advise every son of Ireland in Great Britain to cast his vote against the Liberal candidate. (Cheers.) With regard to the agricultural laborers' question practically settled, the checks are clear for home rule. I have got to say, however, and I venture to say it now in the name not only of my colleagues of the Irish party, but in the name of the Irishmen of Great Britain and Ireland—that the future will witness bitter uncompromising opposition at the polls and in the House of Commons to the Liberal or Radical, Socialist or Tory, which does not make home rule a leading item in its practical legislative programme. (Loud cheers.)

Mr. T. P. O'Connor said Mr. Redmond did not dwell on the topic which was uppermost in the minds of the Irish people—the question of the will of the Irish people. (Hear, hear.) No doubt many of them read the statement with natural and proper sorrow for a man who had had so glorious a record in the past. (Hear, hear.) Another split such as they had seen in the past would be the most appalling of blunders. (Cheers.) Therefore, when they heard that that discussion had been brought to an end by Mr. O'Brien's submission to the will of the Irish people—(Hear, hear.) No doubt many of them read the statement with natural and proper sorrow for a man who had had so glorious a record in the past. (Hear, hear.) Another split such as they had seen in the past would be the most appalling of blunders. (Cheers.) Therefore, when they heard that that discussion had been brought to an end by Mr. O'Brien's submission to the will of the Irish people—(Hear, hear.) 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