THE DEVELOPMENT OF THOUGHT IN THE POETRY OF ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

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BY

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C O N T E N T S

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Fifty years ago, the title of a monograph announcing serious study of the thought of Algernon Charles Swinburne as revealed by his poetry would probably have provoked a smile in even the most tolerant reader. Young Swinburne had shot like a meteor through the calmness of the Victorian sky. His genius as a lyrist was everywhere conceded but, save in the minds of his own particular circle of friends, the London reveller of a few years previous was granted little credit for any earnest thought in connection with the problems of social, political or religious philosophy. His inspiration was scornfully said to be "derivative", gained entirely from literature; he was denied the capacity for introspection and his poetry embodied only melodious insincerity.

But the half century since that time has brought us the later works of the modern laureate of liberty; the bonds of reticence which discountenance certain phases of discussion during the life of any poet, have commenced to

be broken in this instance by Swinburne's death in 1909; the publication of several biographies and volumes of his letters has marked the fostering of an interest by serious students which is still on the increase. With the revelations of the years has arisen not only a less partisan and more appreciative public but a keener realization that the facetious critics of another age had erred in stigmatizing Swinburne as "transcendently superficial", that he not only possessed an "internal centre" but had imbued much of his poetry with a hitherto unappreciated depth of thought and that the poet of musical "shallowness" had evolved an attitude towards those questions which have puzzled the deepest thinkers of all time, a philosophy of life, of which the steps of development and transition are definitely traceable in his work.

It is an established truth that the contemporary verdict on art of any type is rarely accurate in the light of the verdict of time. The unbiased judgment of history can only be given when local and immediate prejudices have been surmounted and sufficient study given to co-incident standards and conditions in comparison with the authoritative background of time.

Particularly true is this in the case of Algernon Swinburne. Contemporary opinion, startled by the excesses of "Poems and Ballads", immediately branded Swinburne as a violent amorist. Too many retained that opinion as their only judgment and the verdict persisted and was bequeathed to the present generation. Swinburne's poetry comprised for them only over-sensualism and mastery of metre. The children who had been brought up in the strictness of Victorian households to expect a chilling hush at the name of Swinburne carried, without investigation into its authenticity, the prejudice which engendered it into manhood and womanhood and into an age where ethical standards have changed.

But we must not be lured into a discussion of the ethical revolt before its proper place in this treatise. Its significance at this juncture lies in the fact that the poet who appeared to the Victorian public a denunciatory apostle of paganism and revolt against the traditions which the Tennysonian era held dear was considered by it incapable of positive constructive virtue in his work. If we disregard a virulence of journalistic attack, now only amusing, we still have left from the maelstrom of criticism two repeated concepts - a recognition of metrical virtuosity and a denial

of intellectual content.

That such a feeling was not merely the product of sensational journalistic morality, not merely an extreme of denunciatory eloquence carried on the frothy crest of verbal intoxication, is evident from the calm verdict offered by some of those who were most sympathetic and willing to admire. In the light of the revelation which the passing years have given to conscientious students, one can only feel that with such critics too much attention has been paid to "Poems and Ballads" and not enough to "Songs before Sunrise", too much concentrated interest has been evinced in Swinburne, the Dionysian reveller,and not enough in Swinburne, the lyric apostle of Freedom.

In the discussion of the poet's work as divorced from consideration of his startling personality we find such an eminent commentator as Coventry Patmore saying that there seemed to be a disproportion between his power of saying things and the things he had to say. One read of him as "entirely a derivative poet", as"transcendently superficial" and as a utilizer of "second-hand and enfeebled and excited matter". As late as 1895, we find W.J. Dawson dogmatically pronouncing that

> "Swinburne never was and never will be a thinker. We always feel that

> "he has no message, that his very vehemence is a weakness and that his seeming power of words conceals an actual feebleness of thought."

And we smile rather broadly at the critic who attributes Swinburne's fame to Tennyson's and Browning's faults in decreeing that

> "Mr. Swinburne may thank Mr. Tennyson's imperfections and Mr. Browning's shortcomings for the reception he has met with; for, let me hasten to say that had a really great adequate poet been alive Mr. Swinburne would have failed to attract much attention."

Of this charge of lack of originality as a basis for criticism of his thought, there seems little justification. When the poet can be found who is not "derivative" in some sense of the word, a new era will have commenced. Insofar as Swinburne used for inspiration the gleaning ground of the cumulative history and literature of ancient, medieval and modern times, in such measure was Swinburne and any other bard who consults the same sources a "derivative" poet. The singer who was perhaps the greatest scholar of all our English verse makers gained untold inspiration from "the glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome", from the dramatic skill of the Elizabethan playwrights, from the wide horizons of the sea which was

his second mother, from the hatred of tyranny, religious or political, extant in his world, from a worship of humanity whose objects ranged from the babies and children around him to the intellectual giants of his day - the celebrant of such themes could hardly avoid the term "derivative". Neither could Wordsworth consulting Nature for his inspiration, the romantic poets influenced by the more tangible forms of the "Weltschmerz" movement, Shakespeare, Chaucer and any number of others escape the epithet. The word is used as a reproach by hostile reviewers to imply an almost total lack of originality in thought. Swinburne is said to absorb and negate but not construct. How then does one overlook such positive constructions as the definitely evolved androtheistic creed of "Hertha" and the "Hymn of Man" and the vast concept of the illimitable republic which forms the idealistic text for "Songs before Sunrise"? To the singer of the cause of Freedom can the charge of lack of originality be applied no more than to any poet who, alive to those peculiar influences of past and present which strike a sympathetic note in his individual nature, absorbs certain impressions and, after a process of thought and treatment which represents the reflection of his nature, gives to the world that finished work which evolving from the original,

external germ is now stamped indelibly with the impress of the poet's particular genius. The companion of the last thirty years of Swinburne's life, Theodore Watts Dunton, felt the insult to his friend's intellectual power and said,

> * "People always speak of his poetry as if it were lacking in intellectual fibre. That is quite untrue - look, for instance, at a poem like "Hertha" - but twenty-five years must elapse before the intellectual side of his work will be appreciated."

Not yet two decades have elapsed since his demise but the intervening time has marked a steady acceleration of consideration and study of the poet. The end of the century seems to have witnessed the end of some of the more violent prejudices and we discover the Quarterly Review in October, 1905, - the same organ which had spoken of Swinburne in April, 1872, as employing "stage effects" and "having an absence of genuine conviction" now striking the keynote of the time in saying

> "The documents tha t he contributed that seemed so r evolutionary then, his poetic tracts to convert the pious, his ballads to excite evil passions, his bombs thrown into the fool's paradise of the day - have long lost all their offensive quality, lost all, we may say, but that which their artistic quality gave to them."

* Hake and Rickett: "Life of Watts Dunton"

It is significant to note that by far the great majority of recent critics, while realizing the peculiarities of the "music maker", recognize his essential genius and designate those traits which were uppermost in the mind of the Victorian critic as the frequent but unimportant accompaniment of that genius.

With the broader viewpoint has come the realization that Swinburne is not a poet of "sound without sense". The more serious students have advanced the theory that the poet's marvellous skill in one phase of his art - technical construction - tricked the nineteenth century critics into believing that there was no depth beyond. It is pointed out that the accusation is not an unusual one for unsympathetic critics against poetry where the charm of sound is exceptionally strong. So excellent a critic as Mr. John Drinkwater points out that

> "Popular misjudgment after his death with its usual certainty reported him as a poet deficient in thought but possessed of an almost unparalleled mastery of language..... Swinburne had as much thought as most poets, as much perhaps as a poet should have ... but the metrical music after a time dulls our faculty, even our desire for apprehending thought."

Swinburne himself said in answer to the suggestion that poetry was merely a musical exercise that

> "except to such ears as should always be closed against poetry, there is no music in verse which has not in it sufficient fulness and ripeness of meaning, sufficient adequacy of emotion of of thought, to abide the analysis of any other than the purblind scrutiny of prepossession or the squint-eyed inspection of malignity."

It is perhaps the constant deviation from the norm in Swinburne which has been responsible in large degree for the insidious and not infrequent whisper of insincerity. It is not difficult to understand how a superficial observation of the man and his work might give rise in a hostile mind to the cry of "poseur". Revolt against many of the creeds and objects which Victorian England held dear and allegiances, which seemed strange to the nineteenth century Englishmen marked him out as a "peculiarity" amongst men. The charge of literary insincerity seemed logical in such an age against a personality comprising such a mass of apparent contradictions. The English aristocrat was conspicuously democratic. The staunch English patriot trumpeted to the world the cause of Italy, France and the oppressed nations. The ardent republican was tolerant of

an English monarchy. The agnostic and reviler of established faith,as a boy of fifteen was in "ecstasies" of religious adoration. The blind hero-worshipper of three exile republicans of three different nationalities - Hugo, Landor and Mazzini - could either"damn with faint praise" or revile the gods of English respectability. The poet of the sea in all its phases had hardly ever been out of sight of land. The fiery rebel, who could unload contumely on his literary antagonists could celebrate the simple appeal of old men and babes with singular tenderness. The visionary who was capable of the loftiest thoughts of the"immeasureable" Republic of man could deliver a scathing denunciation of the Boers. He who was incapable of normal sexual experience could startle the world by the sensuality of his verse. He,who could pen scurrilous verse and letters which even now do not permit publication, publicly condemned the obscenity of Zola. To the British mind which sought virtue only in the common mould of conventional respectability, he was more than "queer". The question arose, "How much of his profession does he mean?" The extremist always runs the gauntlet of investigation into his sincerity and Swinburne proved no exception to the rule.

Not only by his flaunting the flag of revolt in the face of British prudery, theology and politics but by his personal characteristics was he a bizarre figure in the public eye. Even his personal appearance, which was in keeping with the abnormality of genius, suggested to the casual observer an attempt at effect. His biographer and friend of long-standing comments on the oddity of appearance of the poet thus,

> "The physical conditions which accompany and affect what we call genius are obscure and have hitherto attracted little but empirical notice. It is impossible not to see that the absolutely normal man or woman, as we describe normality, is very rarely indeed an inventor, or a seer, or even a person of remarkable mental energy. The bulk of what are called entirely "healthy"people add nothing to the sum of human achievement, and it is not the average navvy who makes a Darwin nor the typical daughter of the plow who develops into an Elizabeth Barrett Browning. There are probably few professional men who offer a more insidious attack upon all that in the past has made life variegated and interesting than the school of robust and old-fashioned physicians who theorise on eccentricity, on variations of the type, as necessarily evil and obviously to be stamped out, if possible, by the State. The more closely we study extremely, slender resources of evidence, the lives of great men of imagination and

action since the beginning of the world, the more clearly we ought to recognize that a reduction of all the types to one stolid uniformity of what is called "health" would have the effect of depriving humanity of precisely those individuals who have added most to the beauty and variety of human existence.

"These reflections are natural in looking back on the constitution of Swinburne, which I believe to have been one of the most extraordinary that have been observed in our time. In the days when I watched him closely I found myself constantly startled by the physical problem: What place has this singular being in the 'genus homo'? ..... The world is familiar from portraits and still better from caricatures, with his unique appearance. He was short, with sloping shoulders from which rose a long and slender neck, surmounted by a very large head. The cranium seemed to be out of all proportion to the rest of the structure. His spine was rigid, and though he often bowed the heaviness of his head, "lasso papavera collo" he seemed never to bend his back. Except in consequence of a certain physical weakness which probably may, in more philosophical days, come to be accounted for and palliated - except when suffering from this external cause, he seemed immune from all the maladies that pursue mankind.

"He was more a hypertrophied intelligence than a man. His vast brain seemed to weigh down and give solidity to a frame otherwise as light as thistledown, a body almost as immaterial as that of a fairy.

"No physiologist who studied the corporeal condition of Swinburne could avoid observing the violent elevation of spirits to which he was constantly subject. The slightest emotional excitement, of anger or pleasure, or admiration, sent him into a state which could scarcely be

called anything but convulsive. I was never able to persuade myself whether the extraordinary spasmodic action of the arms and legs which accompanied these paroxysms was the result of nature or habit. It was violent and it was long continued but I never saw that it produced fatigue. It gradually subsided into a graceful and smiling calm, sometimes even into somnolence, out of which however a provocative remark would instantly call up again the surprising spasm of the geyser."

In addition to his physical peculiarities, his verbal expressions of thought as well as his transcripts of them in the form of letters show us an extremist both in his allegiances and his animosities. He loved and hated with equal fevour. His diction on Blake is singularly applicable to himself:

> "Ready even in a too fervent manner to accept, to praise, to believe in worth and return thanks for it, he will have no man or thing impede or divert him, either for love's sake or for hate's."

With the finely tuned temperament of a nervous genius, there was no seeking of the middle course, no worship of the mean. Concerning the objects which merited his animosity, he made no admission of any virtue; of those which gained his friendship, he made no admission of any wrong. Excursions of thought which went beyond reason to rhapsody in the praise of friends or their work, added weight to the charge of literary dissembling. He prostrated himself before his Hugo

his Landor and his Mazzini with a subjection which failed to strike an understanding note in his audience. The artist who flew in the face of all that conventional England held dear was considered to be attempting a "succes de scandale" rather than one of merit and, with doubtful sincerity, to be making protestations which were to bring not so much immediate fame for his metrical mastery as notoriety for his radical thought.

Perhaps the most satisfying answer to the question of artistic truth in Swinburne is the perusal of those unintentional autobiographies published within the last decade - his letters. The man himself is revealed in his personal correspondence as a virtuoso whose sincerity of conviction and utterance is unimpeachable. In thoughtful consideration of his words and deeds, we realize that rather than guard against excess in the expounding of his creeds, he encouraged it. His utterances are in many cases marked by an extravagance which, while detracting no whit from the sincerity of the underlying principle, was employed with more fervour and violence than were compatible with his evident purpose. It was a perverse, impish strain in him which, with the realization that the enunciation of his rebellious proclivities had shocked the public, took pleasure

in emphasizing and heightening that shock in as great degree as the whim of the moment inspired in him. This element of mischief even in connection with work he deeply admired must never be overlooked. No better example of this can be found than in that curious collection of parodies "Heptalogia or the Seven Against Sense" where he brilliantly satirizes the salient characteristics of a number of those for whom he had hearty respect. Not the least of these was Algernon Swinburne but there is an unusual modesty in the inclusion of that clever counterfeit of his own poetry, "Nephelidia". The nonsense song is particularly interesting to the student of Swinburne as evidence of the personal recognition by the poet of those peculiarities in his poetry which were patent to his public. The tricks of style, the verbal effusion and even main tendencies of his more serious thought are well parodied in the following fragment,

> "Life is the murk and monotonous music of
> memory melodiously mute as it may be,
> While the hope in the heart of a hero is
> bruised by the breach of men's rapiers resigned
> to the rod;
> Made meek as a mother whose bosom-beats bound
> with the bliss-bringing bulk of a balm-breathing baby
> As they grope through the graveyard of creeds,
> under skies growing green at a groan for the grim-
> ness of God.

Blank is the book of his bounty beholden of old, and its binding is blacker than bluer;
Out of blue into black is the scheme of the skies and their dews are the wine of the bloodshed of things;
Till the darkling desire of delight shall be free as a fawn that is freed from the fangs that pursue her,
Till the heart-beats of hell shall be hushed by a hymn from the hunt that has harried the kennel of kings."

* Welby points out that the poet's frequent ribaldry, his jesting at sacred things were usually attempts to play up to his audience and the Pre-Raphaelite circle with which he was early associated cultivated a "sort of schoolboy impropriety". Swinburne was alwaysimmediately sensitive to his environment. Too often his scathing personal denunciation reminds one of the less happy.passages of Milton's controversial prose. Too often he fulfils the verdict of the criticaster, Buchanan, who labelled him "a little mad boy letting off squibs". His vehemence of invective once aroused startled his audiences. A chance remark in favour of one of his aversions would call forth a flow of vituperative eloquence which,as Mrs. Watts Dunton said,"issued from his mouth like flames from a burning chimney". Here, at least,was a white heat of conviction that would repel any attack of insincerity. Testimony of his consciousness of

* Welby: "A Study of Swinburne"

this verbal excess, of his definite disregard of authority and convention is found in a passage from Gosse which says

> * "The friends of Algernon Charles Swinburne were amply aware that so far from avoiding all possibilities of offence, he was prepared to turn the pudic snows of Mrs.Grundy's countenance to scarlet and they had observed a certain impish gusto in his anticipation of so doing. He was even impatient to invade the Respectabilities in their woodbine bower and to make their flesh creep while he did so. In comparison with the crudities and the audacities which are nowadays poured out upon our indifference the particular mutinies of Swinburne's lyrics may appear to be mild and almost anodyne. But the age was not accustomed to expression of sensuous or of heterodox opinion..... He had to use his hitherto unpublished words, 'a touch of Byronic ambition to be thought an eminent and terrible enemy to the decorous life and respectable fashion of the world;' and as in Byron's case, there was mingled with a sincere scorn and horror of hyprocrisy a boyish and valuable affectation of audacity and excess. He admitted that it was a pleasure to him to flutter the Philistines in Gath."

The critics of his time have made the amusing mistake of allying these verbal incontinences with insincerity. The error is manifest. It was an over-bold and reckless assertion of his sincerity rather than any lack of it. Where principle was concerned, where honesty of thought was required there can be little question of integrity. We are

* Gosse: "Life of Swinburne" p. 137

forced to agree with the critic* who says

> "He traces a thousand patterns and calls a thousand tunes. Some turn of imagination may tomorrow order a new speech of which today he has no intimation and this without violating his fixed basis of faith..... It is almost impossible to find a word in the whole of his work that does violence to his creed or is in any way a denial of himself..... Whatever the poet may lack and yet keep his kingdom it cannot be truth. Swinburne meant what he said, spoke it not in self-deception mistaking acceptance for understanding but from deep spiritual conviction or he was not a poet. I have written amiss if I have left any doubt as to my opinion concerning the integrity of Swinburne's utterance. He drifted too often into the shallows of his faith but where there is least spiritual movement in his work it still answers surely, however faintly, to the tides of the great sea beyond."

Although a minute inspection of his letters and his poems reveals many extravagances, yet at no time can he be found to have been tricked into any denial of those convictions which he vehemently proclaimed. As he said himself in one of his most serious defences of his art, the dedication to the collected edition of his poetry, in referring to "Songs before Sunrise", and the statement is applicable to his work in toto,

> "It should be superfluous to say that there is no touch of dramatic personification or or imaginary emotion. The writer of "Songs Before Sunrise" from the first line to the

* John Drinkwater: "Swinburne, An Estimate"

last, wrote simply in submissive obedience to Sir Philip Sidney's precept - 'Look in thine heart, and write'."

As M. Reul says

"Parfois il s'explique après coup, et l'on connait alors que sa révolte est profonde, sincère et désintéressée, qu'elle ne procède pas d'un orgueil romantique mais du respect, de l'amour des idées."

It is only when a sincere persuasion has been attained as to the presence of intellectual content and as to the integrity of conviction in Swinburne despite frequent excess, that this monograph as a serious study of poetic thought and development has been given justification. With a hope of barriers removed from the approach to a study of the trends of the poet's mind, can we find some single path which will make our access easy?

The exterior revelation of that inward personal creed produced the mass of seeming paradoxes in his loves and hates which we have mentioned above. In such a tangled undergrowth of apparent contradiction and inconsistency is there no common stem which can be uncovered and traced to its root as the artistic conviction from which all these offshoots sprang? Where can we find the intellectual base which nourished the peculiar issues

of the music master's genius?

Such a core of inspiration is a requisite to preserve any prosecuting poet from charges of aimless and wide-spread iconoclasm. Too often there has been recog-nition of the force of negation in Swinburne without any ack-nowledgment of an incentive of positive nature to save his genius from the crimination of directionless attack. The implication has been "All destruction and no construction." Consideration has too often failed of realization that, while Swinburne is the apostle of revolt, behind that pure rebellion is a poet with one positive all-embracing inspiration and one internal centre. - He is the herald of liberty, the spokesman of the free.

That exalted passion he pursued with typical fervour through the seventy one years of his life. It was not liberty in the narrower sense but a Freedom whose ramifications extended from indulgence in sensual expression to the conception of an illimitable and impossible Republic of Man. To it we can directly relate many of his allegiances. His eroticism has connection with it from a desire for freedom of sensual thought and the conviction that the "cramping confines" of Victorian morality gave room for insufficient frankness. His denuncia-tion of priests and the organisms of the established churches

arose from a desire for freedom of religious conceptions such as his own. His political creed extolled the liberty of man to such a degree that his voice was heard as a trumpet-call of freedom in the cause of countries not his own. Perhaps a large portion of his life - long reverence for the three great French, English and Italian exiles originated or was strengthened by the oppression which forbade them the privilege of their native lands. Much of his unending adoration for the sea arose from the openness of its "sacred spaces" - the lack of restriction, the apparent limitlessness and freedom for which it always remained a symbol to him.

The same elevated note of absolute liberty of thought is sustained through all the manifold pages of a prolific writer, recurring again and again through his successive volumes of poetry, his plays, his prose essays and criticisms. But its most pronounced and characteristic form achieves expression in the social, political and religious aspects of his thought - comprehensive divisions which will form the subject of more minute consideration.

As an alternative title to this dissertation, "Swinburne, Eroticist, Republican and Androtheist" might be worthy of more than passing examination, for these three phases of thought either provide the subject matter or supply the tone

to by far the greatest part of his poetry. These constitute the inclusive tenets through which the process of transition in the poet's thought can be traced. Investigation of these aspects in the steps of their succession provides a chronological history of the man and his work. The exposition of thought reveals itself in the present case to be surprisingly biographical. The boy who swam with zest and ability in the cove at East Dene and rode fearlessly over the Bonchurch countryside passed through the storied corner of the library at Eton to the broadening influence of that group of impassioned young iconoclasts who formed "Old Mortality" and to the beginning of that behign friendship with Jowett, future Master of Balliol. The period of hectic years in the metropolis followed. His strange figure in company with the Pre-Raphaelites - Dionysian excesses - periods of vague restlessness - the leap to fame with "Atalanta in Calydon" as a precursor and "Poems and Ballads" establishing him in the public eye as "lyric lord of love" - pronounced eroticism, fruit of youth and a life of revel.

The inspiration changed and the poet of sensual liberty under the tutelage of Mazzini rose to a higher plane as the poet of political liberty. The allegiance shifted from dead loves to living causes. The hopes of Mazzini

and the Italian republicans became the hopes of Swinburne and "Songs before Sunrise", the volume "truly himself" appeared. The Bacchanalian revel took its toll from his health and only the salutary influence of a Watts-Dunton gave England thirty years longer of the life of its most musical poet - a life of which the ramifications brought development and changes of thought in definitely traceable steps. He was a different man in the later years but with some flame of republicanism, agnosticism and belief in the Divinity of Man burning without the fury of the younger years. The excesses and the recklessness of pronouncement had softened into a change which was far removed from the earlier certainty and dogmatism.

Yet though the firmness of the rebellious conviction of youth became somewhat modified by the mellowing influence of age, the same sincerity of conviction followed to the grave of the "laureate of liberty, sweet singer of the sea."

CHAPTER II

EROTION

It is an interesting fancy to conjecture that had Algermon Swinburne suffered his first collected volume of poetry to lie among the dusty manuscripts at Putney for sixty years after the originally intended date of publication until some trusted legatee brought forth in 1927 an anonymous volume entitled "Poems and Ballads", a voluminous mass of biting journalistic sarcasm and a veritable maelstrom of public indignation would have been saved the world. One cannot imagine the blasé critics of this age of individual and little licensed expression becoming hysterically violent in their reproof of the excess of amorous thought and expression in "Poems and Ballads". The volume would call forth, let us hope, paeans of praise over the haunting melodies of its "Dolores," its "Anactoria," its "Triumph of Time," and, as a minor note, evoke dispassionate remarks on the excess of "amorous pedantry" displayed in the hedonistic poetry of what must be a youthful genius.

But the idyllic calm of a mid-Victorian England of 1866 could not reflect as sane an attitude. *One who had first hand knowledge sums up the situation:

> "As we read Poems and Ballads today, it is difficult to reconstruct the social order into which they intruded like a bomb-shell. So far as could be perceived at the time, the 'sixties formed the most quiescent, the most sedate, perhaps the least effective and efficient period in our national poetry.... Propriety had prevailed and British poetry had become a beautifully guarded park, in which, over smoothly shaven lawns, where gentle herds of fallow-deer were grazing, thrushes sang very discreetly from the boughs of ancestral trees and where there was not a single object to be seen or heard which, could offer the very smallest discomfort to the feelings of the most refined mid-Victorian gentlewoman. Into this quiet park to the infinite alarm of the fallow-deer, a young Bacchus was now preparing to burst, in the company of a troop of Maenads and to the accompaniment of cymbals and clattering kettle-drums".

But the tendency of the time had been supplemented before this occasion to make a perfect stage setting for a startling debut. Out of an immediate period of poetic stagnation two years before, in an age which was ripe for being "schoked" as the Paris papers said, had blazed Swinburne's great

*Gosse: Life of Swinburne p.135

"Atalanta in Calydon" with its metrical cadences, its magnificent choruses and its defiant raillery against "the supreme evil, God." Ruskin had written of it "the grandest thing ever done by a youth - though he is a Demoniac youth." And although the circulation of "Atalanta in Calydon" was not as large as often reported, the circles of literary discussion in London buzzed with talk of the new poetry. The Pre-Raphaelite circle which sponsored him began to whisper of a new volume from the same source which would startle the world.

Accordingly, when "Poems and Ballads" did appear, the spark which had been generated in the subcurrent of gossip in the salons of London burst into a raging flame of hostile abuse with little praise from any quarter save the poet's immediate friends. The keynote was struck by Morley in the now famous "Saturday Review" article of August 4, 1866, which influenced criticism for the next thirty years and in which Swinburne was spoken of as "an unclean fiery imp from the pit", as the "libidinous laureate of a pack of satyrs" and the general tone of the collection as reflecting "the feverish carnality of a schoolboy over the dirtiest passages in Lempriere". We find subsequent critics speaking of "poetic pornography", that "poems like Laus Veneris, and Dolores and Fragoletta and

others are really only a poetic and highly elaborated form of catervauling", as "the recondite rawings of an artificer of impotent emotions". It was said "No mature man of pure life can read these poems without revulsion". The poetry *

> "tended to exalt the worse passions of man over the better and to become such an irritant to the base in man as would in many cases excite people unwholesomely and perhaps aid in opening the gates for the full torrent of animal appetites that are so tremendous in their fury when once liberated."

In such a storm of violence was there not an authoritative voice which at least condoned the work? Lord Lytton confessed that the beauty of diction and mastership of craft in melodies had so dazzled him that he really did not see the naughtiness till pointed out.

Perhaps the most valued opinion of any critic in England at that time was that of Ruskin who had already labelled the poetry of the Demoniac youth as "fine". Early in 1866 Ruskin had written Swinburne

> "I have the Mss. all right. I like them so much but there are redundancies yet which you can prune - in some - not in "Faustine"! which made me all hot like fire. It's glorious with the devil's finger in it."

*Buxton Forman: "Our Living Poets."

He and Palgrave had accepted Swinburne's paganism with "frankness." When urged to denounce Swinburne he wrote,

> "He is infinitely above me in all knowledge and power and I should no more think of advising him or criticizing him than of venturing to do it to Turner if he were alive again,.... I'm <u>righter</u> than he is - so are the lambs and swallows but they're not his match."

He wrote to Swinburne himself shortly after the publication of the book:

> "For the matter of it I consent to much - I regret much - I blame or reject nothing. I should as soon think of finding fault with you as with a thunder cloud or a nightshade blossom. All I can say of you or them is that God made you and that you are very wonderful and beautiful. There is assuredly something wrong with you - awful in proportion to the great power it effects."

Burne-Jones, Whistler and Lady Trevelyan had been in favour of publication. Meredith expressed the need for caution in a letter to Swinburne:

> "As to the Poems .... if they are not as yet in the press do be careful of getting your reputation firmly grounded. For I have heard 'low mutterings' from the lion of British prudery; and I, who love your verse, would play savagely with a knife among the proofs for the sake of your fame; and because I want to see you take the first place, as you may, if you will."

"Mutterings" certainly were heard and as might be expected only incited the rebellious Swinburne to greater displays of bravado.

The proponent of "the roses and raptures of vice" in preference to "the lilies and languors of virtue" knew that his amorous verse would evoke comment but probably doubted that the storm of his brewing would reach such proportions. That its reception should arouse such a storm of Puritanic protest must have pleased him immensely and whetted that spirit of mockery of conventionalities into a desire for the production of some work which should shock such natures more rather than less. Aside from consideration of the motives or sources which inspired "Poems and Ballads," we find a definite desire to make the flesh of Mrs. Grundy creep, - a "desire to shock the public by making it a sharer of his imaginative sensual experiences, - sometimes merely an impish desire to shock, sometimes a serious passion for sensual liberty."

The impish part of that desire is most evident in his letters. A good example is that to Burton in January, 1867 in which he states his ambition.

> "I have in hand a scheme of mixed verse and prose - a sort of etude a la Balzac plus the poetry - which

> I flatter myself will be more offensive and objectionable to Britannia than anything I have yet done. You see, I have now a character to keep up and, by the grace of Cotytto, I will endeavour not to come short of it - at least in my writings."

Sufficient insight into the quality of companionship which Burton offered may be gained when we find Swinburne speaking later of receiving from him renewed congratulations on his success "in bruising the head of British virtue."

Investigation of the sources of inspiration for Swinburne's "erotic esotery," as one facetious critic called it, leads us through a maze of dimly-lighted eccentric by-paths some of which we enter with a reluctance only overcome by desire for achievement of the goal of complete understanding beyond.

Primarily, the disregard of convention the summons to a calling where revolt was to be the watchword was instilled in him by a belief in the lawlessness of his ancestry. His grandfather, Sir John Swinburne, he stated to be an extreme politician and a discarder of his early Catholicism. It is certain that this extraordinary old man incited the youthful Algernon with stirring tales of rebellious ancestry to a belief that defiance of convention was a justifiable outgrowth

from a race which boldly upheld its doctrines in the face of general disapproval. We find this feeling reflected in a letter to Stedman where he says

> * "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 idylls for clergymen and young ladies to read out in chapels and drawing-rooms."

To such a youth there came to be something inherently repulsive about a Christian deity who demanded sacrifice and a relinquishing of pleasure. The Gods who were warm and beautiful, the pagan deities of the Greeks held more appeal for him than an austere and cold Christian God. The early alliance with the pagan deities which populate "Poems and Ballads" and the sensuousness which is the core of the volume is ably explained by Lafcadio Hearn who says

> "Many persons are apt to mistake artistic feeling for vicious feeling and a spirit of revolt against conventions for a general hatred of moral law.... It is just about the time when a young man's passions are strongest that the story of Greek life is suddenly expounded to him and you must remember that the aesthetic faculty is primarily based upon the sensuous life. Now in Swinburne's case we have an abnormal aesthetic and scholarly faculty brought into contact with

*Gosse and Wise: "Letters" p. 204

> these influences at a very early age and the result must have been to that young mind like the shock of an earthquake."

The environment ofadolescence and youth promoted a tendency toward an expression of thought and deed which was not to gain its sanction from "general approval." The Swinburne who ignominiously left Oxford to avoid expulsion was a much more sophisticated product than the Eton graduate who had entered it. The constant devouring of the literary fruits of five languages, the long intimate discussions of "Old Mortality," the not altogether beneficial influence of his maturer friend, Nichol had encouraged the rebelliousness ingrained in his blood. He had been introduced to Rossetti, Morris and Burne-Jones who were painting the Oxford Union and it was to this Brotherhood that Swinburne on his father's allowance soon attached himself in London.

Swinburne's life in London especially during its latter phases was as irregular as the eccentricities of his genius. During the years from 1860 to 1865 he spent most of the time with the Rossettis, Jones and Morris - a company which did little to curb the rebel muse of the youth who supplicated "Our Lady of Pain" to "come down and redeem us from virtue."

His great Greek tragedy "Atalanta in Calydon" was closely followed by the first of his Mary Stuart trilogy of plays "Chastelard." His fame was already assured and "Chastelard," with a certain unusual emphasis on the power of passion, presaged the luxury of love that was to startle the world in 1866 with the appearance of "Poems and Ballads." The interest and encouragement of his own circle concerning his love poetry and the open adoration of some of his listeners stimulated the poet to further extravagance. One reads of an incident when to an audience of newer and younger admirers he recited "Dolores" and "under the influence of the poem, of the flute-like voice, of the strange, convulsive gestures, of the rapt face, the wonderful eyes, the fiery halo of hair, they sank to their knees in worship." The incident is suggestive of the Cambridge undergraduates who, in fervour of tribute, joined hands and marched along shouting "Dolores" or "A Song of Revolution" and the burning of a volume of "Poems and Ballads" with the other fireworks on the Fifth of November.

The early publication of "Laus Veneris" after a reading of Fitzgerald's "Omar Khayam" was, he says himself, "more an experiment to test the public taste - and forbearance - than anything else." And then, with a resounding crash which fright-

ened his publisher into temporary withdrawal, came his paraphrase of passion, Poems and Ballads: Part 1.

It has too often been the noxious custom of deprecating critics and a morbidly curious public to subordinate, or at least qualify, their interest in the art of a genius, in the enduring qualities of his work, to the eccentricities of his person. The durable property of a great poet - the merit of the work by which he has become known - is obscured by the "human interest" consideration which is every journalist's stock-in-trade. Particularly so is this the case when the great poet, novelist, essayist or producer of any type has led at any time during his earthly sojourn an existence which differs in any degree from that norm of "respectability" with which a superficially virtuous public wishes to ally its great leaders of thought and action.

Keenly aware of this tendency and desiring to preserve from the sensational mob any intimate details which might be distorted into spectres of material detraction from his greatness, his biographer and the friends to whom we owe most of our information regarding the life of Swinburne have carefully veiled from the unhallowed gaze the excesses of those London years of his life - years filled too often with "fugitive things not good to treasure".

But in a work of this nature embracing a sympathetic attempt to trace the origins and transitions of a poet's thought through all its phases, investigation into every chapter of his life which has a definite bearing on that thought can hardly be avoided. The art in Swinburne's case cannot be divorced from the man. One seeks the relationship of the thought of the lyrics to the thought of the man and one is forced into a scrutiny of those troubled metropolitan years which could produce so brilliantly pagan a masterpiece as "Poems and Ballads", so exalted a tone as that of "Songs before Sunrise" and which before his prime had laid at death's door through excess the most gifted poet of the time. In consideration of the volume, one asks,

> "Where was the pedantry of passion, with which "Poems and Ballads" is saturated acquired? Why is the accent on the sadness and bitterness of love?"

It is significant that the solitary romance of Swinburne's life should occur at the commencement of the poet's London sojourn and it is unfortunate in the light of subsequent Bohemian excesses that it met with crushing reverse. In 1862 he met Sir John Simon and his wife, both of whom were friends of Ruskin and "young Swinburne" became a frequent visitor at the Simon domain. The frequency of the visits was perhaps attributable more to the charms of their niece, Jane Faulkner,

more commonly known as "Boo", than to affection for the elderly couple. The vivacious girl was kind to the poet. She gave him flowers, played and sang to him and Swinburne received an impression of encouragement which was probably not seriously intended. The poet suddenly on one occasion declared his love for her and, possibly as much from nervousness as any other feeling, the girlmbroke into laughter. Swinburne was deeply hurt at the refusal and gave immediate and ample evidence of his displeasure in characteristic fashion.

The lyrics of rejected lovers have swelled the masterpieces of world poetry in large proportion and no inconsiderable station must be awarded Swinburne's "The Triumph of Time", written while "the infinite pity and pain" were with him, in Northumberland whither he had flown after his rejection.

Not only for its marvellous verse but for its autobiographical quality is the poem noteworthy. Swinburne told Gosse that the lyric represented with the exactest fidelity the emotions which passed through his mind when the anger died down. It is the story of the only occasion on which the poet ever gave evidence of the ability to experience a love of the highest type which would combine both mental and physical aspects and which did not, as the "loves of love" in most of the "Poems and Ballads" did, depend solely on the appeal to

the senses. He turns to his mother the sea for solace in the immortal stanzas

"I will go back to the great sweet mother
Mother and lover of men, the sea.
I will go down to her, I and none other
Close with her, kiss her and mix her with me;
Cling to her, strive with her, hold her fast:
O fair white mother, in days long past
Born without sister born without brother
Set forth my soul as thy soul is free.

"I shall sleep, and move with the moving ships
Change as the winds change veer in the tide;
My lips will feast on the foam of thy lips
I shall rise with thy rising, with thee subside;
Sleep and not know if she be, if she were
Filled full with life to the eyes and hair
As a rose is fulfilled to the roseleaf tips
With splendid summer and perfume and pride."

And the prophecy of the future years of recklessness with the pity and pain of what might have been

"I shall go my ways, tread out my measure
Fill the days of my daily breath
With fugitive things not good to treasure
Do as the world doth, say as it saith
But if we had loved each other - O sweet
Had you felt, lying under the palms of your feet
The heart of my heart, beating harder with pleasure
To feel you tread it to dust and death -

"Ah had I not taken my life up and given
All that life gives and the years let go
The wine and the honey, the balm and leaven
The dreams reared high and the hopes brought low?
Come life, come death, not a word be said;
Should I lose you living and vex you dead?
I never shall tell you on earth, and in heaven
If I cry to you then will you hear or know?"

The rebuff must have caused acute pain to a nature so sensitive and the reaction in his personal life was one of excess. From this time on we notice a gradual sinking down the scale until the physical crisis of 1879 was reached.

In a discussion of the eroticism of the thought in the "lovers' litany", as one critic called "Poems and Ballads", the question arises as to how much of the amorous frenzy of Swinburne's volume of passion corresponds with his personal experience. It is an unconventional query but one which immediately concerns the matter of this treatise, one which was a favourite of the critics of his day and one which he himself considered sufficiently important to answer years later in his dedication to his collected poems.

> "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 the 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."

* One reviewer points out that "we should need to be God's spies to distinguish with any confidence, between what came to him out of his physically limited but very curious experience and what came to him in dreams or after reading Catullus, Gauthier, Baudelaire and his half, but only half, ironically admired Justin."

Much import has been given by scoffing critics to Swinburne's relations with the Jewish actress, Adah Isaacs Menken, and the influence she is supposed to have had in inspiring some of the effusions of "Poems and Ballads".

Because of diverging records, the circumstances of the birth of this accomplished and much-married lady are veiled in considerable mystery. One source says that she was of Irish descent; another, the child of a Spanish Jew and a French mother. Her birthplace was near New Orleans in the United States. Embarked on a stage career, she married at seventeen a Jewish musician, Alexander Isaacs Menken. Considerable trafficking in husbands ensued since before her death in Paris at the age of thirty-three she had possessed five legal husbands. She understood five languages and, in addition to her other capabilities, her

* Welby : "A Study of Swinburne"

beautiful figure and daring as a horsewoman won a name for her in the production of "Mazeppa" in London. After asking the advice of Swinburne, whom she had met through Thomson, the poet's secretary, she published a small volume of her own verse "Infelicia". The charge of influence on many of the poems of Swinburne's 1866 volume bears little weight since she first came to London in 1864 and most of the poems in which her influence is claimed were written by that time.

It is now certain that in the poet's relations with the actress, Swinburne was more pursued than pursuing. He appreciated her interest in him - an interest which carried with it high flattery - wrote in her album, looked over her poems, had his picture taken with her and expressed keen regret at her death, but as far as any great intimacy with the adventuress was concerned, although he made no general denial, he emphatically convinced his friends that no such relationship existed. Welby says

> "The terms in which he corrected error on the point would have been appreciated by the public which applauded Restoration comedy; they are difficult to reproduce, even with prudent omissions, for the public to-day. The general tone of these denials may,however, be surmised from a

> condensed paraphrase of one of them, in which he hinted that other than distant relations with her would have been disagreeable to him as intimacy with the lady then occupying the highest position in the country."

It is interesting to note the comment of those critics who attempt to analyze the effusion of "Poems and Ballads". Oliver Elton says the erotion is "cerebral, musical, verbal, a frenzy of brain and tongue. The poet merely talks about desire and chatters of sin." The Edinburgh Review of April 1890 states

> "The erotic poems of the first series are mere scenes in a land of dreams."

Stedman remarks that it is a fancy of the mind preliminary to the vigour of healthy passion. Edward Thomas comments

> "There is less love in it than love of love, more passionateness than passion yet, in another sense it is all love and all passion, pure and absolute love and passion that have found 'no object worth their constancy' and so have poured themselves out on light loves, dead women, women that never were alive except in books and 'daughter of dreams'"

Strong in "Religion in Literature" states

> "The 'Venus and Adonis' does not prove Shakespeare's early manhood to have been swallowed up in sensuality any more than the 'Laus Veneris' of Swinburne proved him to be a youthful reprobate."

These opinions are singularly interesting because in presenting the comment of a number of critics who have probably not had access to the private papers of Swinburne, they express a general belief that the poet's love frenzy is not the product of experience, not the reflection of healthy passion but a cerebral excitement in a man whose life was not necessarily immoral. This searching in the dark, however, can only result in conjecture.

In quest of knowledge as to the proportion of Swinburne's erotic poems which represent empirical knowledge on the part of the poet, one is forced to rely on those commentators who, of the small privileged number who have had access to his private papers, have been unable to avoid in their own works reflection of the opinions gained in research.

Passages such as the following are found in the two most resent studies of Swinburne - that of Mr.Harold Nicholson in the "English Men of Letters" series which, while rather daring in its thesis, is excellent in its scholarship; and that second study of Swinburne by T. Earle Welby, a serious student of the poet for thirty years.

> "The peculiar immaturity, not to say unreality of his own sexual experience too often tempted him to diverge upon the tangent of sadism."

In proclaiming how greatly success went to the head of the Bohemian Swinburne, he would "boast triumphantly of the variety and deep red colour of his vices - vices which he was pathetically incapable of practising."

> "It may be noted perhaps that the best of these poems of passion are inspired either by art or literature. Swinburne's direct sexual experience was, to say the least, no very potent nor pregnant impulse".

Welby tells us that "he who was incapacitated for love in action" was "imaginatively one of our supreme amorists..... His mouth was the mouth of one in whom sexual competence never matched sensual desire."

The inference is obvious and the sources reliable. One is tempted to suggest that the nature of the "experience" Swinburne suggests in his "Dedication" was particularly limited and that he was nearer to accuracy when in his beautiful dedication to Burne Jones he spoke of his loves as "daughters of dreams and of stories".

Even such second-hand and scanty data invites a theory of relation of Swinburne's perfervid eroticism to interpretation under the tenets of behaviour suggested by

Dr. Freud, Dr. Masoch or the Count de Sade. The theory is far from outrageous or foreign to the clinics of abnormal psychology that physical repression, experienced through inability or peculiarity of sexual experience, often results in a more fervent mental expression of the urge. The inhibition of the physical results in peculiar power and intensity of sensual imagination. The possibility of a physiological reason for the erotic thought of "Poems and Ballads" justifies any attention paid to the intimate phases of the poet's life. Only students of psycho-therapy could ably explain all the ramifications which the foiled natural impulse would generate in the bard. Perhaps he realized it himself when he says in his autobiographical "Thalassius" that he is

"A fosterling and a fugitive on earth
Sleepless of soul as wind or wave or fire
A manchild with an ungrown God's desire."

That his kindly commentators did their work well is evident from the fact that in a search of over seventy references, only an half dozen seemed to be aware of any physical abnormalities in the poet's nature and these refused to make public their knowledge. One found vague references to "debilitating irregularities" and Bacchanalian excesses" which though of good intent served only as provocation to

the serious and not morbidly curious student. It was not until last year that one of the few competent and sympathetic critics, T. Earle Welby, realizing that continued innuendoes served only to inflame the curious mind to an exaggerated inference which would overshoot the truth, that the present age of philosophical frankness possessed a more balanced sense of values, that the personal hurt which unnecessary revelation, no matter how truthful, could bring to the dead bard's closest friends and relatives had been removed by the passage of almost two decades, dared to call a spade a spade, or at least a garden implement. With a happy compromise between Victorian obscurity and a brutal frankness which the most scurrilous of Swinburne's verse and letters might have prompted, the two studies of the poet published in the past two years, both marked by depth of insight and accuracy of observation, have answered the questions of many a puzzled student as to the motivation of "Poems and Ballads" and the outburst of wrath on their appearance.

A certain portion of the hostility of the righteous towards his work during the period of the poet's younger days arose from observation of "mad Swinburne".

They watched the eccentric figure with eyes which asked "Is this poetry the work of a degenerate roue?" The appearance of the poet, as we have seen, lent strength to such theorizing of unsympathetic critics.

The truth indicates that Swinburne possessed the nervous organism of genius and with it what is also too often found as accompaniment, the aberrations and excesses attributed to unnatural brilliance. Conjecture has been in most cases of this kind the companion of accuracy and the epithets of "dipsomaniac", "epileptic" and "sexual pervert" whispered in those years of wild London excitement were at fault only in the degree of severity indicated.

It has been suggested that the excesses of thought of "Poems and Ballads" were due to the roseate creations of brandy and that the poet wrote his most passionate effusions under its influence. That occasional flashes of equally brilliant verse came with the sobriety of Putney days and that the exalted tone and concentrated thought of "Songs before Sunrise" were conceived in the same period of alcoholic indulgence as "Poems and Ballads" would seem to disprove the theories of such shallow critics. It was the fault of a peculiarly immediate physical reaction to the

least stimulant that gave Swinburne the name of being a heavy drinker. The characterization was hardly accurate for the highly-tuned nervous system needed little artificial stimulation to throw it into excitability of speech and action.

> * Constitutionally, incapable of carrying more then a glass of light wine, Swinburne was apt, without anything that for the normal man would have approached excess to become a speaker whose enthusiasms might be referred to Bacchus rather than Apollo."

The London haunts as time grew on became stranger and stranger. Swinburne was more and more weighed down with a sense that he was not as other men. He felt that he was unable to share in the "happy days or else to die" and had "sold life and life's love for song". There became apparent another peculiar phase of aberration in his nature which, since it sheds a light on some of the bitterness of certain poems of his first collected volume, merits our attention.

> ** Drink or rather Swinburne's exceptional incapacity for it accounted for much. There were other causes for languor, dejection, feverish excitement. There was that in him which could find no natural satisfaction. It was not merely in the spirit in which he had joined the Cannibal Club that he went to

* Welby: "A Study of Swinburne"
** Welby: "A Study of Swinburne"

certain resorts, not merely in the spirit in which he had written "The Cannibal Catechism" that he returned at intervals from 1862-1881 to his epic of flagellation, the unpublished and of course quite unpublishable composition entitled "The Flogging Block". Interest in this subject had been shown as early as 1859 in his Fletcherian comedy "Laugh and Lie Down" in which one character Frank is so frequently under the scourge; raptures over birching appear in work so late as "The Sisters" 1892.

> The matter is not one into which I desire to enter: students of a certain department of human behaviour will readily deduce what is implied by the persistence of this interest, harmless as the references to it in Swinburne's published works are. Who shall say that if the brandy and the myrtles and the birch twigs had not been so accessible, he would have experienced this dejection?"

That inversion of the normal human instinct had intellectual attraction for such an abnormal poet is showm by the subject matter of such poems as "Fragoletta" and "Hermaphroditus" in "Poems and Ballads".

What was the character of the love which Swinburne rhapsodized in his famous first volume? Except for that impulse whose rejection inspired "The Triumph of Time", it was a feeling very remote from that frank and exalted emotion which the Anglo-Saxon mind designates "Love". In Swinburne too often "Lust says I am Love". He shows a Hellenic love of the beauty of the human form and returns in his first

poetry to "rites and symbols which cloak the fierce primitive impulse of man".

After "The Triumph of Time" love becomes merely a fleeting attraction to Swinburne's mentality - here today and gone tomorrow. He seems to have determined to discard the mental or intellectual phase and regard only physical passion as love. Therefore, its transitoriness in his poetry must be regarded as the impermanence of fitful passion. He expresses this in verses taken from the unpublished novel, "Lesbia Brandon",

> "Combien de temps, dis, la belle
> Dis, veux-tu m'être fidèle?
> Pour une nuit, pour un jour,
> Mon amour.
>
> L'amour nous flatte et nous touche
> Du doigt, de l'oeil, de la bouche
> Pour un jour, pour une nuit,
> Et s'en fuit" -

and again

> * "A month or twain to live on honeycomb
> Is pleasant but one tires of scented time."

In a letter to Joseph Knight in 1875 after having written "Love laid his sleepless head" he said

> "in an age where all other lyrists, Tennyson to Rossetti go in (metrically) for constancy and eternity of attachment and reunion in future lives, etc., etc. I limit love honestly and candidly to twenty-four hours."

* "Before Parting" - "Poems and Ballads" I

Its impermanence seemed unavoidable and almost desirable to him. In "At Parting" he says

"Now let him pass and the myrtles make way for us ;
Love can but last in us here at its height
For a day and a night" -

But the main tone of the remarkable volume is one of the pain and satiety of physical love. In 1862 the poet had turned critic to contribute to the Spectator a review of Beaudelaire's "Fleurs du Mal". From the eccentricities of this great French poet, Swinburne took a certain amount of that despair and anguish of love which inspires such poems as "Dolores", Fragoletta" and "Anactoria". That his satiety was only of the imagination is proved by his ability to discard it under the inspiration of the higher cause that his "third apostle", Mazzini, was to provide.

Emotional poetry had always previously been decorous but, if hardly that, we find little which is repulsive in "Poems and Ballads". It is an intoxication of sex "of such stuff as dreams are made of", but there is no smut. What might have proved offensive in cold and formal prose is exalted by the marvellous melody of verse into a poetry whose greatness can only excite admiration and wonder. He, himself, asks "Where is there an unclean detail? Where

an obscene allusion?" Some of the attackers of "Poems and Ballads" should notice that the poet abhorred the idea of placing before the public anything savouring of "nastiness" or obscenity and he indulged in a scathing denunciation of Zola on that score.

Up to this point,we have discussed what really become the inconsequential phases of the poet's erotism. It was poetry of youth written for youth with the feverish intensity engendered by abnormalities in the poet's nature. We have seen in his early verse exemplifications of four types of love - the mother love of Althaea for Meleager, a type of love which, it is too seldom realized, was moulded into melody at the same time that many of the passionate ballads were composed - the normal human emotion for Jane Faulkner, personal and probably combining more of the mental than physical - the emphasis on physical love for its own sake as in "Laus Veneris" and "Dolores" and the discussion of abnormal loves in "Fragoletta" and "Hermaphroditus". It is only of the latter two that we hear in connection with the poet's song for only in them did the poet deviate from the accepted norm of English conventionality and therefore set himself apart from the rest - a poet

to be denounced in violent invective as he said himself "by the prurient prudery and the virulent virtue of pressmen and prostitutes."

Was there not a core to all this aimless effusion? Can it not be related in its more serious phases to the great central incentive which motivated the thought of the poet? The answer is embodied in his own defence, "Notes on Poems and Reviews". That there was any central purpose, that the poet could even dare to put forth a justification of his art, that he even considered it an art, had never occurred to the public which now perused a careful and logical "apologia".

But that he had a definite creed is undoubted. It was the old "art for art's sake" creed which he was forced to discard after the Jowett-Mazzini conspiracy but that it served as a guiding principle during this period is evident from the reflection of its rays in his "Notes". It was probably Baudelaire who gave tangible form to the uncompounded tenets of Swinburne's mind saying "The poet's business is to write verse and by no means to redeem the age and remould society". Didacticism was foreign to art in the formulated Swinburne creed and therefore every possible opportunity should be seized to war against it. As usual, Swinburne's

"warring" took the form of excess and often we feel that much of the unnecessary extravagance is from the love of excess for its own sake. But since by excess he was achieving his purpose of throwing a monkey-wrench into the monotonously regular performance of the machinery of British prudery why, he argued, curb that fine frenzy which made his poetry different from that of the day?

In "Notes on Poems and Reviews", written the year after "Poems and Ballads" were published, he firmly struck this note. After lavish scorn of his critics, questioning of their purity of thought rather than his, he showed that he considered the principles of artistic enjoyment differed with the differing readers and,since he was attracted by the fulness of life rather than its restrictions, the art of the grown man possessed greater appeal for him than the art of the cloister. He made no pretence of writing "food for female infancy". There were"moral milkmen enough". He professed to deal "neither in poison nor in pap" but wished his poetry to be taken as a protest against "the idyllic and tender optimism of Tennyson" and the hypocritical prudery of the age in which he lived. True to his Baudelairian creed, he said that the most important question the whole discussion had aroused was "whether or not the first

and last requisite of art was to give no offence."

Herein lies the strength of his position and here we see clearly the relation of these early excursions of thought to that primal impulse which motivated his whole career. Here we find revolt and desire for liberty - revolt against the artistic and ethical creeds of the day and desire for liberty of individual thought.

We have seen that prompted by the traditions of revolt in his ancestry, incited by the rebellious pronouncements of his Oxford associates and the so-called "fleshliness" of his Pre-Raphaelite friends, the natural tendencies of a youthful mind were given encouragement by frank adoration of his erotic poetry by small but admiring groups of supporters. The emphasis on fleshly feverishness at this stage of his life was probably psychologically inspired by his incompetence for normal human experience. Repelled from the only true love that was his, he slipped down into a period of indulgence which possessed more of turbulence than vice, a stage which matters little to the appreciation of the consummate art and immortal melody of "Poems and Ballads" but which accounts for perverse interest in certain abnormal trends of thought. He gave a shocked

English public a classic of the impermanence, the anguish and the satiety of passion and, attacked by the hostile reviewers of the day, ably defended sensual liberty of thought, evinced an artistic creed unsuspected by an unsympathetic public and fought with joy in his onset to release his age from the shackles of British hypocrisy and prudery.

Revolt and the zeal for freedom was soon to transcent the stifling circles of British social conventions, to rise beyond engagements with the violences of insular critics to a warfare of life duration against world tyranny, to climb from the desire for freedom of the erotic and exotic fancies of youth to a preaching of universal liberty and the illimitable republic of Man.

CHAPTER III

REPUBLICANISM

It has too seldom been realized in the study of Swinburne's thought that his higher political conceptions bear a relation so close to his religious thought that the line of separation is almost indistinct. The echo of a public opinion which branded Swinburne with the accusation that he entertained only an absence of religious thought and a denial of all forms of established religion can in no way disturb the realization attained after closer search that the poet possessed a definite depth of religious conviction and a positive creed which gains its highest revelation in some few of his so-called "political" poems.

But, since both his religious and political attitudes reveal two distinct phases with the higher conception of each closely linked to the more exalted thought of the other, the facility of exposition of this monograph will be assisted by undertaking the study of those phases successively rather than simultaneously. In an investigation

of his political deliberations we find his ultimate goal mounting from a tangible confederacy in a concrete and perceptible world to a visionary concept of an ideal Republic of Man. In the study of his attitude toward religion we discover a transcending of the purely negative denunciation of existing creeds to a positive conceit of the worship of Man. A definite alliance exists between his positive religious doctrine and his visionary political thought. Only the negative and tangible aspects were visible to the superficial observation of the public, and, accordingly, we have been too often given a picture of Swinburne true in its characterization of the poet as vehement prosecutor and destroyer but almost entirely deficient in portrayal of him as creator and prophet. He is given credit only for the casting down of old idols and not for the erection of new. Because his positive political and religious sympathies outsoared the practicality of his negative thought and entered into a sphere far removed from the immediate comprehension of the man in the street, their existence was not recognized and Swinburne became simply the directionless iconoclast.

With reference to the political attitude of the poet, what have been called the tangible and material objects of his expression must be considered primarily. These were the allegiances and prejudices which he retained for the duration of his life and which took the form of denunciation of European political oppression and an exhortation to republican freedom of existing peoples which represented only the desire for earthly realization of that political paradise of his mind which inspired the highest poetry of "Songs before Sunrise".

After 1865 and the publication of "Poems and Ballads" came troublous years for Swinburne and worried years for those of his friends who knew what pure metal was obscured by the frothy scum of dissipation and excess. Probably aggravated by intemperance, those strange epileptiform fits which shocked all witnesses and, curiously enough, after the agony of the instant had passed, seemed to be of immediate benefit to the poet, visited Swinburne more and more frequently. The history of these years is a story of intermittent retreat from London to the countryside with its capacity for effecting quick recuperation and then the return to the metropolis and another

period of turbidity. The Admiral, his father, confessed to Miss Bird, daughter of Algernon's doctor in London, "God has endowed my son with genius but He has not vouchsafed to grant him self-control."

It is to the ingenuity of Jowett perhaps more than to any other factor that the world may give credit for the inspiration which produced "Songs before Sunrise". Insufficient credit seems to have been given to the Master of Balliol, student of men, who figured so largely outside the spotlight and even behind the scenes as Swinburne's prompter. Few of the poet's friends witnessed his peculiarities with as kindly tolerance as did his life-long advisor. It was in the latter capacity that Swinburne knew him. With his marked prejudice against Oxford he repeatedly said that the Master of Balliol was oficially a stranger to him but Mr. Jowett an honoured and life-long friend. It was Jowett who said when there was fear that Swinburne might be "sent down" that Balliol would thereby "make itself as ridiculous as University had made itself about Shelley." The Master, while indulgently amused at Swinburne's violence of opinion was appreciative of the

inherent genius of this brilliant pupil of his and he used constant tact and diplomacy in a beneficial influence over the poet. His early recognition of merit in his young friend is found in his keen summary - " a very brilliant youth, it's all youth."

And the "youth" in Swinburne, added to the down-hill tendency of an environment to which he was too plastic and a physical debility which was becoming more and more pronounced, intimated that since the poet seemed unable to arouse himself from this turmoil his friends must do it for him.

Accordingly, in March 1867 Jowett gathered together a council of friends one evening at the house of George Howard with the express purpose of discussing "what could be done <u>with</u> and <u>for</u> Algernon". It was one of those meetings, familiar to literary history, which was destined to be far-reaching in its ultimate effect. To the meeting came Guiseppe Mazzini who, long before the actual touch of hand or word of personal encouragement had become a treasured reality to the youthful republican,had occupied a pedestal as one of the three foremost idols of Swinburne's hero-worship.

Mazzini, who had been brought to the gathering by Karl Blind, was told of the wayward genius of the poet who worshipped him from afar and of the problem facing the meeting. He was shown the "Ode on the Insurrection in Candia", written in response to a definite appeal by supporters of the insurrectionaries, and realizing that such an eloquent voice might be used as valuable instrument for the furtherance of Italian liberty he promised to take "intellectual charge" of him.

He wrote Swinburne a letter expressing admiration for the "Ode" and Swinburne, little suspecting any intrigue, went into ecstasies of delight Karl Blind then brought him to Mazzini's rooms and Swinburne says in his own account of the meeting,

> "I did as I always thought I should and really meant not to do if I could help - went down on my knees and kissed his hand."

He read to the patient Mazzini the lengthy "Song of Italy" which he had just written and described the result in a letter the next morning -

> "I unworthly spent much of last night sitting at my beloved Chief's feet. He was angelically good to me. I read him my Italian poem all through and he accepted it in words I can't

Gosse: Life of Swinburne p.166

> "trust myself to write down.... Today I am rather exhausted and out of sorts. Il y a bien de quoi. There's a tradition in the Talmud that when Moses came down from Sinai he was drunken with the kisses of the lips of God."

Jowett's instinct had been correct and when Mazzini urged him to use his powers in the advancement of the cause of republican Italy, the young poet was won from worship of his pagan goddesses,from the myrtle and the rose, to the voicing of a hope that was to be not only national but universal. Mazzini said that there must be no more of this "love frenzy". So ended Swinburne's public parade of eroticism and thus was born "Songs before Sunrise".

The old artistic creed of "art for art's sake" had to be abandoned - not without some misgivings - and Mazzini persuaded him that "art for life's sake" should be his true criterion. Accordingly, we find the Swinburne who had denied the right of art to convey any ethical message save that of its own beauty, devoting himself to and allying his art with a cause where he should "set the trumpet" to his lips "and blow" for democracy and humanitarian principle.

Republican allegiance in Swinburne commenced at an early age. His "triumviate" of "semi-Gods" were Hugo, Landor and Mazzini, all three "repuclicans," all three exiles,

all three representing the different countries in which his greatest interest lay. His prodigious early reading had a marked influence and he had a very complete republicanism of literary derivation founded on the writings of Milton, Shelley, Landor and Mazzini long before he went to Oxford. Prompted by his reading of Hugo he had decided at Eton that Napoleon III was worthy of his most pronounced dislike and "Les Chatiments" in particular found a responsive note in his republican sympathies.

Oxford and "Old Mortality" added fuel to the flame With so much of the continent of Europe interested in republican movement, it had become a vital subject for discussion amongst the undergraduates of the day. At Oxford, Swinburne came to conceive of republicanism as a synonym for liberty. This conviction must be kept in mind in the study of all his consequent poetry.

There was unanimous dislike of Napoleon III in "Old Mortality" byt Swinburne eclipsed the rest in vehemence and violence of condemnation. In this attitude and his sympathy for republicanism he was encouraged by the example of Nichol who, in addition to loathing Napoleon III, was a worshipper of Mazzini

The Society of the Friends of Italy had been re-organized in England with Landor as one of its members. The preaching of Mazzini, Garibaldi and Kossuth had stirred England into passive sympathy with Italy and a desire for her liberation from the Austrian yoke. Mazzini's call to such a cause was powerful in its appeal and long before Swinburne met the great Italian exile, he had sympathized with his doctrine. Yet he had not derived any sense of being called to a cause and his sympathy except in his "Song of Italy" was given no lyric outlet, until Mazzini's personal inspiration summoned him to discipleship. Swinburne had a picture of the Italian liberator hung in a prominent place in his room and, at times, even went to the extent of performing rites of worship before it. The portrait was soon to be joined by that of the "fanatical Carbonaro", Orsini who won his position in Swinburne's gallery by virtue of his attempt to assassinate Napoleon III and who inspired the poet to expound at length on the virtues of tyrannicide. In the "Undergraduate Papers", the unsuccessful organ of "Old Mortality", he published among other things, as he humorously declared to T. Wise in the year of his death, "A

terrific onslaught on the French Empire and its clerical supporters which must no doubt have contributed in no inconsiderable degree to bring about its ultimate collapse".

The poet's interest in that land which has been the foster father of much of England's literary greatness - Italy - was no sudden accession to humour a growing republican conviction. He claimed to have read the "Orlando Furioso" long before he had heard of the "Faerie Queen". But it was not only the literary tradition between the two countries which excited his sympathy. His mother Lady Jane Ashburnham had gained her education in Florence and spent a large part of her life in that city and in other parts of Italy. She awakened Swinburne's love for Italy and taught the boy Italian at an unusually early age. Soon after leaving Eton the boy Algernon met a Signora Annunziata Fronduti who discovered that he had a passion for Italian poetry and therefore read to him by the hour while Swinburne would sit "gazing into space absolutely transfigured and absorbed by the magic and music of the classic Italian"verse." His visit to Landor in Italy in 1864 made his allegiance closer to the country with which the association of Keats, Shelley and the Brownings

had helped to predetermine his love. In a garden at Fiesole "vociferous with nightingales" as he said, he wrote "Itylus" and Siena, "lady loveliest of my loves" inspired the poem of that name.

The fact that many of the "Songs before Sunrise" in their feverish agitation for revolt in Italy were more applicable to the Italy of 1848 than of 1866-7, that the expressed ideals and generalizations were in many cases out of key with existing conditions in Italy, that Mazzini had almost ceased to be such an active power in Italy as the brush of Swinburne painted him and that the final unification of Italy did not come through a republic with Rome as the capital but by means of a Cavour and a Victor Emmanuel detracts no whit from the exalted zeal which inspired the composer of "Songs before Sunrise" or from the loftiness of tone which infuses those songs of revolution.

He was anxious to avoid any verdict of posterity which might indicate that his poetry was merely the translation into verse of Mazzini's pronouncements. He pointed out that he had possessed a definite republicanism of the brand of Mazzini long before he met the great Italian. Over thirty years after their publication we find Swinburne in

his "Dedicatory Epistle" to his collected poems saying of "Songs before Sunrise".

"They do not pretend and they were never intended to be merely metrical echoes or translations into lyric verse of another man's doctrine. Mazzini was no more a Pope or a Dictator than I was a parasite or a papist. Dictation and inspiration are rather different things. These poems and others which followed or preceded them in print were inspired by such faith as is born of devotion and reverence: not by such faith, if faith it may be called, as is synonymous with servility or compatible with prostration of an object or wavering spirit and a submissive or dethroned intelligence."

He continues by quoting as proof that he did not merely "copy", the fact that, although he had intense admiration for Hugo and Mazzini, he could not adopt their "sublime and purified theology."

In his debilitated condition, the vigour and industry with which he worked at the book for his "Chief" was so exhausting that it brought on a serious epileptic attack and he was dispatched by his doctor to a villa near Etretat for recuperation. Here occurred that incident where Swinburne, always a strong swimmer, was swept out to sea by

the tide and saved, when he was at the limit of his endurance, only by the fortunate appearance of a fishing vessel. It is strongly indicative of the intensity of his new zeal and desire to be "thought well of" by the "Chief" that on this occasion instead of conjuring up the kaleidoscopic personal review which is usually supposed to appear before the mind of a drowning man, Swinburne, as he later confided, only experienced a reflection of satisfaction that his republican poems were nearly ready for the press and that Mazzini would "be pleased with him".

His characteristic letter to Thomas Purnell of March 4th, 1871, reveals this same eagerness to be proficient in service.

> "... As soon as my brains and fingers - both hard at work - can manage, out it (Songs before Sunrise) shall and must come here this season - if only because it is infiltrated and permeated with Mazzini - and I see this day and yesterday the beginning of one of the periodical evacuations of menstruous and monstrous obloquy from the British press on the solar track of his name and I should like my best book to appear lovingly and humbly laid at his feet just when the mangy mongrels of British journalism were yelping behind his heels."

An analysis of the volume itself reveals few poems which can be narrowly applied to national events in Italy.

The most important references of this nature are in "Super Flumina Babylons", "Song of the Standard", "A Year's Burden", "Mentana: First Anniversary" and "The Halt Before Rome" in which poem reference is made to the premature prophecy of his former "Song of Italy"

"Is it so that the sword is broken,
Our sword, that was halfway drawn?
Is it so, that the light was a spark
That the bird we hailed as the lark
Sang in her sleep in the dark,
And the song we took for a token
Bore false witness of dawn?"

In minor degree, the republican fervour which was given such ardent expression in espousing the Italian cause also embraced that of France. Swinburne, who spoke French fluently and even wrote good French verse, gained his literary inspiration in that language from Hugo primarily, and a selection of writers of which the most prominent were Baudelaire, Gauthier, de Banville and de Saint Victor. He was accustomed to speak with a certain amount of pride of what since appears a rather hazy French ancestry and in January, 1876, we find him writing to Stephané, Mallarmé in the following manner:

"J'ai toujours senti que les liens de race
et de reconnaissance qui rattachent à la
France les rejetons d'un famille autrefois
proscrite par nos guerres civiles, qui a
deux fois et pendant des générations entières
trouvé en elle une nouvelle mère-patrie, me
donnaient le droit de réclamer ma part de joie
ou de doleur dans toutes ses gloires et dans
tous ses malheurs."

The bitterness against Napoleon III which reached extravagant heights of vituperation did not cease even with the miserable death of that monarch and Swinburne wrote mocking sonnets on the "Saviour of Society". In the "Descent into Hell" he says

"... our hearts give thanks .....
That we have lived to say, "The dog is dead".

The protest against this post-mortem bitterness was so great that he wrote his "Apologia", which may suitably stand as his defence for the excesses of much of his poetry.

"If wrath embitter the sweet mouth of song
And make the sunlight fire before the eyes
That would drink draughts of peace from the
unsoiled skies
The wrongdoing is not ours, but ours the worry
Who hear too loud on earth and see too long
The grief that dies not with the groan that dies
Till the strong bitterness of pity cries
Within us, that our anger should be strong."

The proclamation of the French Republic on the 4th of September, 1870, was greeted by Swinburne as the long-looked for realization of his hopes and within two days he dashed off

his long and only moderately successful "Ode on the Proclamation of the French Republic" with such profuse invocations as

"O loved so much so long,
O smitten with such wrong,
O purged at last and perfect without spot or stain
Light of the light of man
Reborn republican
At last, O first Republic, hailed in heaven again!"

The storied past of Greece was a never-ending source of inspiration for the poet and he was constantly urging the Greece of his own day to remember that glory in her nineteenth century struggles for freedom. His love for the decendant of ancient Hellas is revealed in his "Song for the Centenary of Walter Savage Landor", "Ode on the Insurrection in Candia", "The Eve of Revolution" "The Litany of Nations" and "Athens: An Ode".

Germany, the English aristocrat never ceased to view with repugnance and mistrust. The thinly-veiled imperialism of the German military spirit was always frowned on by the poet who spoke of her as "Strong Germany girdled in guile" and "beside whose forest hidden fountains slept freedom armed. Again, in sounding a note of warning to England in "The Word for the Nation" he expresses the fear

that

"Let the German touch hands with the Gaul
And the fortress of England must fall."

The wealth of romantic tradition in the sea discoveries of Spain attracted Swinburne's imagination but the persecutions of the Inquisition lingered in his memory and prevented sympathy with the land whose

"... sins and sons through sinless lands dispersed
With red flame shod
Made accurst the name of man, and thrice accursed
The name of God."

Austria, as oppressor of Italy and the "stainless" republic of Switzerland, was an object of revulsion to him and we find him speaking of the "plume-plucked Austrian vulture heads twin crested." Russia as the upholder of Czarism was subject to vilification by Swinburne in his "Ballad of Bulgarie", in the "White Czar", and in "Rizpah". Despite the softening influences of the fleeting years, in "Russia: An Ode 1890", there comes an outburst of righteous indignation at the atrocities revealed in the conduct of the Russian government in connection with their prisons in Siberia. His only sympathy with anything that pertained to the country was with the Nihilist party and, while evincing his love of children, the following extract from a letter to

Mrs. Ionides in January 1883 reveals his attitude towards the country of Czars:

> "If you will come and see me I will show you the most successful photograph of a beautiful child that I ever saw - the daughter of a Russian princess by birth and a nihilist by profession - as perhaps I need not have added for I flatter myself that when I mention any Russian as a personal friend it can scarcely be requisite to specify which party in the empire has the honour of that Russian's adherence."

In letters to Stedman and Walt Whitman in America, when national and international topics are discussed, he shows an appreciation of the great Republic of the New World as a wholesome attempt to approach the liberty of the ideal republic. Insofar as it drew near to that conception, to that extent did he and his comrades - "us of the Republican party in Europe who are struggling to win what you have won" - show affinity to the United States of America.

From a superficial study of Swinburne, the charge of inconsistency in his political opinions might seem to have some justification The English aristocrat whose republicanism was so boisterous has in his writings little expression of denunciation for English monarchy. He who attributed to the agencies of priests and kings all the wrongs

of the world, had only a fervour of patriotism which approached Jingoism for his own land of constitutional monarchy. Although we find constant evidence of disapproval of monarchy in the abstract and violent condemnation of sundry contemporary and past monarchs of every type yet for Victoria he had only respect and in 1887 even celebrated her Jubilee with a loyal poem and honoured "the blameless Queen" in "The Commonweal". He boiled over with anger when a Russian writer insulted her and showed a sympathetic interest in her son, Prince Leopold. In respecting the verdict of his republican friends at Oxford who considered Leopold* "a thoroughly nice boy, modest, simple and gentle, devoted to books and poetry, without pretence or affectation" he expressed appreciation of the Prince's attempt to meet him on one occasion when Swinburne was visiting Jowett at Oxford. That he had a great respect for the persons of this boy and his mother is shown in his refusal to have any connection with journalistic abuse of their persons. He wrote Purnell in February 1877,

> "I should at once decline to be concerned with anything in the nature of a satirical journal, especially if there was any breath or hint in the matter of any such connection as you mention, in earnest or in fun, for satirical or for social purposes, with the name or shadow of the name of any 'scion of royalty'".

* Letter to Purnell, February 7, 1877.

In only one poem of "Songs before Sunrise", "Perinde ac Cadaver" is reference made to England's failure to embrace republicanism. Even then the defence is suggested that the institution of monarchy in England is harmless. He says

> "Have we not queens without stings
> Scotched princes and fangless kings?
>
> We have filed the teeth of the snake
> Monarchy, how should it bite?"

Sufficient confirmation exists for the belief that at heart he was a Jacobite and resented a sovereignty, if there must be one, which was Hanoverian in origin. In addition to his evident attraction to Mary Stuart he showed a leaning to Jacobitism, as a means to an end, and would have welcomed a second Restoration because the proclamation of a Commonwealth in England would "certainly" have followed it within thirty years. "We could not have stood their rule for longer than that and they would have been set packing again a third time for good and all and the monarchial scheme with them!" It was in such a manner that he explained it to Louis LeBlanc and supplemented his Republicanism by Jacobitism.

He was little inclined to advocate a change from the existing order of things in England. His denunciation of the

House of Lords in "Vos Deos Laudamus" was chiefly vexation at the lack of foresight of a journalist who declared that Tennyson, in joining that house and accepting the tendered peerage, could not confer more honour than he had received.

As an exponent of ultra-liberal and republican thought Swinburne was asked by the Reform League in 1867 to enter Parliament. While the poet was pleased he had no ambition for a public life of this nature and wisely asked Mazzini for advice. Mazzini instructed him to refuse the offer saying that his highest service could be given by other methods and Swinburne was thereupon vastly relieved.

His love of his native land was diminished not at all by his interest in the troubles of continental nations. His patriotism burnt with a white unwavering flame of intensity. But he was impatient that the England of storied might should be at the head of the movement which should liberate the world for an era of republican prosperity. He was grieved to think that his own land should not be the leader in this, as in all other, ennobled movements. "Songs before Sunrise" written in the heat of his Italianate enthusiasms contains a number of poems in which he invokes sleeping England to arise and spring to the aid of the oppressed

nations. This takes perhaps its most positive form in "Perinde ac Cadaver" where Liberty, always a republican votary, exhorts England thus:

"O Cromwell's mother, O breast
That suckled Milton! thy name
That was beautiful then, that was blest,
Is it wholly discrowned and deprest,
Trodden under by sloth into shame?"

Turn thee, awaken, arise,
With the 'light that is risen in the lands,
With the change of the fresh-coloured skies;
Set thine eyes on mine eyes
Lay thy hands in my hands."

The charge that commercial prosperity is too much in the van of England's ambition is found in the chiding in "The Halt Before Rome" where he speaks of

"England that bore up the weight
Once of men's freedom, a freight
Holy, but heavy to carry
For hands overflowing with gold."

The poet was constantly stimulated in his republican tendencies by the realization that Landor, Shelley, Milton and a number of the great figures of English literature held republican sympathies. It is the England of Milton which is constantly exhorted to rise.(1)

"By those eyes blinded and that heavenly head
And the secluded soul adorable,
O Milton's land what ails thee to be dead?
xx xxxxxxxxxx xx xxxx

(1) "Eve of Revolution"

"And Shelley's heart and Landor's mind
Lit thee with latter watch-fires; why
Wilt thou be blind?

O known and unknown fountain-heads that fill
Our dear life-springs of England.' O bright race
Of streams and waters that bear witness still
To the earth her sons were made of! O fair face
Of England watched of eyes death cannot kill
How should the soul that lit you for a space
Fall through sick weakness of a broken will
To the dead cold damnation of disgrace?"

A similar feeling is evident in "A Marching Song" and again in "The Litany of Nations" where England says to its mother, Liberty,

"I am she that was and was not of thy chosen
Free and not free;
She that fed thy springs, till now her
Springs are frozen;
Yet I am she.

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By the star that Milton's soul for
Shelley's lighted
Whose rays insphere us;
By the beacon-bright Republic far-off sighted
O mother, hear us."

But although Swinburne chided his country at times for her lack of positive participation in the affairs of Europe, although he protested against those British institutions which he considered to militate against freedom, his love for her and pride in her was unbounded. Disloyalty was

unthinkable for Swinburne. His "Appeal to England", a verse pamphlet of 1867, was rather a recommendation of mercy for the Manchester Fenians than sympathy with their cause. No better example of his abhorrence of anything that savoured of sedition can be quoted than the instance when the ambassador of a projected Irish republic, after suggesting that Swinburne write a seditious ode, retreated hastily before one of those torrents of scurrilous eloquence which issued from Swinburne when he became extraordinarily excited. Again, the main thesis of his tract "On Liberty and Loyalty" was the sentiment that liberty of thought in national affairs did not imply disloyalty and that both qualities could be allied.

The mellowing influence of years, which, though not pronounced in Swinburne, is noticeable in some degree, had the effect of subduing the keenness of his republican ardour and of confirming the intensity of his patriotism. The Italy for whose republican freedom he had sung with all his voice had found stability and unity under a form of government other than that which he had advocated. The cause of Mazzini and Garibaldi had yielded to that of Victor Emmanuel and Cavour. Landor, the republican, had become

reconciled to the new order but Swinburne decided that there was probably more freedom in England. Gosse is the authority for stating that Watts-Dunton and the influence of the constant political discussion at the dinner-table at Putney was responsible for a "volte face" in the poet's political opinions after 1879 when he rescued Swinburne from a degrading death. Mrs. Watts-Dunton destroys the theory that only great national events excited Swinburne's interest in these days. She says

> "Readers of S's poetry know that for a poet, he was exceptionally interested in politics. They might think however that his interest depended on sudden excitements inflaming his patriotism or republicanism. On the contrary he was steadily interested in the political affairs of the world and discussed them daily with my husband."

While out of the prolixity of his later writings one can still find definite echoes of republican sentiment sufficient to discount any stories of a severe change remote from a nature which hated retraction of any type, yet it is certain that much of the more youthful vehemence of his republicanism disappeared. The old passion for the freedom of captive nations still existed but the republican note is submerged in the fervour of patriotism for his native land,

whose freedom, even though under a monarchy, was his pride. He speaks of the English people as a people that "never at heart was not inly free". His abhorrence of any attempt at disloyalty or disunion was clearly demonstrated in his "Dedicatory Epistle" written less than ten years before he died in which he said "the most grinding and crushing tyranny of a convention, a directory or a despot is less incompatible with republican faith than the fissiparous democracy of disunionists or communalists".

It was this burning patriotism which led him into immediate denunciation of the Boers on the occasion of their uprising and which provoked an abuse of a people whom the early Swinburne, holding to the tenets of his clear faith in Liberty for the oppressed, should have upheld. As Drinkwater says, "He read into his country's cause a virtue that was not there in fact and in doing so committed a grave intellectual blunder". But Swinburne considered that the Boers were already under a beneficial supervision, that of British freedom and protection and therefore that these men were traitors - "dogs agape with jaws afoam" - and called on England to strike and strike home.

When Tennyson died, speculation included the name of Swinburne as the next Poet Laureate. Queen Victoria is reported to have said "I hear that Mr. Swinburne is the best poet in my dominions". Gladstone, for whom for some time Swinburne had nursed a violent dislike, probably pointed out the incongruity of having a republican poet as the national bard and the offer was not made. Swinburne saw the obvious impossibility of an appointment despite the fact that he merited it through reputation and skill and kept a dignified silence. It is probable that he would have welcomed the offer of the honour only in order to have the satisfaction of firmly refusing it.

But the knowledge that he was not the nationally constituted singer of his country deterred him in no way from the publication of poems in its praise and in celebration of events of national significance. The Victoria Jubilee, the Boer uprising, the deaths of Tennyson, Browning and several minor poets were occasions of public odes from his pen.

In almost every volume of his collected verse is a reflection of that worship of his native land - a patriotism whose intensity reached its height in "Astrophel" in "England: An Ode" and "The Armanda". He strikes the middle path of

national feeling between two other poets of his century. He has the inherent patriotism of a Tennyson but less of the insularity of that great master of verse. He has the innate sympathy for oppressed peoples and the cosmopolitanism of a Byron - but more worship of the land of his birth than that unhappy kindred, apostle of Freedom.

His pride in Britain's prowess on the sea - his "great sweet mother" - and England's gift to the world of a succession of great poets was unbounded. No more convincing proof of the intensity and purity of his love for his motherland is needed than the occasion when in answer to Lady Ritchie's question "What would you give for England?" he replied simply and earnestly, "I would give my life."

It is not in the concrete allusions to contemporary events, not in the condemnation of the political offenders of the day nor in the appeal for opposition to existing oppression that Swinburne attains to the highest level of constructive thought. It is not in the Mazzini-inspired cause of Italian freedom that the poet achieved the peak of merit in his political verse but rather in a transcendence of mind from the actual to the visionary, from the

tangible to the intangible, from reality to rhapsody. It is not acquired in preaching the cause of Frenchman, Italian or Greek but that of universal Man - not of a particular State but of a universal combination of States - the immeasurable Republic.

That it was a far cry from the dominions of the intellectual realm which govern the warm sensuality of youth to the altruistic concept of universal political freedom was realized by no one more acutely than Swinburne himself. The "roses and raptures" of "Dolores" had been cast aside for the call of the "beacon-bright republic far-off sighted" of "A Litany of Nations"; the hedonism of "Poems and Ballads" had succumbed to the stern summons to the common duty of man; the myrtle and the rose has been thrown aside for "the sword of a song".

The story of the regeneration is told in one of the greatest confessional lyrics of our tongue, the "Prelude" to "Songs before Sunrise" and the same theme is implicit in his other great autobiographical poem "Thalassius". The satiety which the senshal ferment of youth engenders is told in the great opening stanzas:

"Between the bud and the blown flower
Youth talked with joy and grief an hour,
With footless joy and wingless grief
And twin-born faith and disbelief
Who share the seasons to devour;
And long ere these made up their sheaf
Felt the winds round him shake and shower
The rose-red and the blood-red leaf,
Delight whose germ grew never grain
And passion dyed in its own pain.

Then comes the answer to the summons of freedom -

"Then he stood up, and trod to dust
Fear and desire mistrust and trust,
And dreams of bitter sleep and sweet,
And bound for sandals on his feet
Knowledge and patience of what must
And what things may be, in the heat
And cold of years that rot and rust
And alter, and his spirit's meat
Was freedom and his staff was wrought
Of strength, and his cloak woven of thought.

For what has he whose will sees clear
To do with doubt and faith and fear,
Swift hopes and slow despondencies?
His heart is equal with the sea's
And with the sea-wind's and his ear
Is level to the speech of these,
And his soul communes and takes cheer
With the actual earth's equalities,
Air, light, and night, hills, winds and streams
And seeks not strength from strengthless dreams."

There is no condemnation of the early mood but an acute realization that

Pleasure slumberless and pale
And passion with rejected veil
Pass ... .

They are only momentary and the claims on a servant of Liberty eternal.

"Yet between death and life are hours
To flush with love and hide in flowers,
What profit save in these"? men cry;
Ah, see, between soft earth and sky,
What only good things here are ours!"
They say, "what better wouldst thou try,
What sweeter sing of? or what powers
Serve, that will give thee ere thou die
More joy to sing and be less sad,
More heart to play and grow more glad?

'Play then and sing; we too have played
We, likewise, in that subtle shade.
We too have twisted through our hair
Such tendrils as the wild Loves wear,
And heard what mirth the Maenads made,
Till the wind blew our garlands bare
And left their roses disarrayed,
And smote the summer with strange air,
And disengirdled and discrowned
The limbs and locks that vine-wreaths bound."

Finally the pledge is given to good works for all mankind.

"A little time we gain from time
To set our seasons in some chime,
For harsh or sweet or loud or low,
With seasons played out long ago
And souls that in their time and prime
Took part with summer or with snow,
Lived abject lives out or sublime,
And had their chance of seed to sow
For service or disservice done
To those dead days and this their son."

"A little time that we may fill
Or with such good works or such ill
As loose the bonds or make them strong
Wherein all manhood suffers wrong
By rose-hung river and light-foot rill
There are who rest not; who think long
Till they discern as from a hill
At the sun's hour of morning song,
Known of souls only, and those souls free,
The sacred spaces of the sea."

To the temporary exclusion of even his dearly beloved England he was now a votary in the service of the "serene Republic of a world made white".

The ten years from 1870 to 1880 witnessed the publication of two volumes which contain Swinburne's most elevated political conviction - "Songs before Sunrise" and his classic tragedy "Erechtheus". The great illimitable State of the higher comprehension in "Songs before Sunrise" was to be achieved and maintained only by a standard of citizenship such as that which is offered by the Athenian citizens of "Erechtheus" to their city. In few works of English literature have the sacred duties of citizenship been so loftily extolled. No better answer than reference to this play can be given to the charge of negativism and latent anarchy directed by some against the poet.

The Athens of the play is considered the supreme embodiment of ennobled citizenship. The state of Athens

of the fifth century before Christ appeared to Swinburne to approach his ideal Republic more closely than any other ancient or modern institution.

In the play, when the Thracian multitudes seriously threaten the city, an oracle decrees that the only way in which the city can be saved is by the sacrifice of Cthonia, daughter of Erechtheus and Praxithea. The virginal Cthonia is descended from the earth for which she is to be sacrificed. The innocent victim deems it glorious to die for her city and give her girl's blood to "knit the joints" and "knead the stones" of its firm walls and prevent disaster to the state.

The sacrifice is made and consequently Erechtheus wins in battle with the invader but is struck by lightning in the hour of triumph. Pallas Athena descends to comfort the bereaved Praxithea who replies

"There is no grief
Great as the joy to be made one in will
With him that is the heart and rule of life."

"Erechtheus" presents Swinburne's exemplification of the ideal of citizenship which is demanded for the universal republic of "Songs before "Sunrise" - an ideal of subservience of the individual to the cause of freedom for all. And with each individual of that ideal state presented as the type rather

than the separate entity - with each citizen the embodiment of Swinburne's doctrine of the divinity of Man, we have a vision of the poet's perfect State - his working model of "the Parliament of Man, the Federation of the World".

It was through the concept of a palpable union of the nations of the world into a vast Federation which should become a universal republic that Swinburne soared to the vision of the illimitable Republic.

The union of republics of a "bloodless and bondless" world was to have its centre in a "CapitolianRome" freed of priests and kings and freed of a Papacy which Swinburne abhorred. In "The Eve of Revolution" he invokes his own country to

> "Build up our Republic state by state
> England with France and France with Spain
> And Spain with sovereign Italy strike hands and reign."

Similar expression is found in "A Watch in the Night", "The Litany of Nations", "Quia Multum Amavit" and "A Marching Song" more pronouncedly than in any of the pther verse of "Songs before Sunrise".

The artificer of impotent emotions" had been the spokesman of the present in his urging of freedom for existing oppressions, he had delved into the past to picture Athens as the approximation to his ideal State and the exemplification

of the nobility of citizenship and he pressed into the infinity of the future with his aspiration for a vague republic whose existence reality could never admit. His contemplation of the struggles for freedom among existing nations stimulated in his procreative mind the concept of grander republics - primarily, a union of the powers of an actual world and then, transcending reality, the vast and immeasurable Republic of Man.

Welby by a happy simile points out that this republic bears to the ordinary concrete republic of the material world "such a relation as the Kingdom of God might bear to an ordinary kingdom." All earthly republics are mere "images in little" of that perfect State of Swinburne's creation.

Here is the concept for which striving after attainment brings no reward and in whose service there is no honorarium save realixation of duty done. There can be no finality, "no guerdon but only to grow."

It is his utmost conception of Liberty, the worship of which provides the central core for all his thought. With Swinburne the word is something more than a trite and restricted watchword; it is uttered with almost religious veneration. Too great realization of this cannot be made; for the harnessing of the mood of defiance in Swinburne to that main and

central purpose changes what was mere rebellious frenzy into a purposeful passion which inspired his highest emotional and intellectual expression. He worships Liberty, and performs and exhorts the performance of rites of sacrifice to it which are comparable through their purity and intensity only to the sacraments of a follower of accepted religion. Man's obligation to Man is as noble in its consecration to service as the most solemn vows of nun and monk.

As will be presently noted, Swinburne's positive religion did not permit of a controlling force outside the universe and predicated the divinity of Man - not "each man of all men" but "the fruit of the whole". It is necessary to grasp this concept to gain an adequate comprehension of the supremacy of Swinburne's Republic. Where Man in collective form represents divinity, the State of which the duties of citizenship are performed by Man must be of an exalted type.

The zeal for Liberty which is both cause and result of his imaginative Republic is the supreme virtue in man. Without it he cannot advance the cause of the universe. Since there is no external guiding force, Man is his own master and on him the common obligation of duty in the cause

of Liberty rests heavily. Creeds which prevent abject devotion to this cause must be denounced. A reflection of this conviction is found in a letter to Stedman where he comments that the classic divinities were much better than the Christian deities for patriotic purposes.

He hymns the sorrow of the rejection of Liberty in "Mater Dolorosa" and the joy in service to her in "Mater Triumphalis". It is a philosophy of life which is implicit in "Songs before Sunrise" but whose text is stated most clearly in such poems as "Hertha", Genesis" and the"Hymn of Man". In "Hertha" whose intensity of religious as well as political thought will necessitate further consideration in the next chapter, Swinburne visualizes Liberty as the soul of Man. The old theologies are done away with by the force of truth.

"Truth slays and forgives
But to you .....
This new thing it gives
Even love, the beloved Republic that feeds
upon freedom and lives.

For truth only is living
Truth only is whole,
And the love of his giving
Man's polestar and pole;
Man pulse of my centre, and fruit of my body
and seed of my soul.

"One birth of my bosom;
One beam of mine eye;
One topmost blossom
That scales the sky;
Man, equal and one with me, man that is made
of me, man that is I."

He visions a land where (1)

"..... all chains are undone;
Day there seems but as night;
Spirit and sense are as one
In the light not of star nor of sun;
Liberty there is the light."

And liberty here was "the light" for Swinburne. He had cast aside Hedonism for service, he had thrown off "such tendrils as the wild Loves wear". He had been won from the chanting of sensual love by the salutory influence of designing friends to the service of a more chaste muse - humanity in its struggle for freedom. He had given the world a valuable volume of verse which contained not only a lofty commentary on the oppressions of his time but a political and religious creed - which preached Liberty and the immeasurable Republic of Man with a fervour that turned youthful rebelliousness into humanitarian idealism. Of these verses he said truly in his "Epilogue"

"One thought they have, even love; one light,
Truth, that keeps clear the sun by night;
One chord, of faith as of a lyre;
One heat, of hope as of a fire;
One heart, one music and one might,
One flame, one altar, and one choir."

(1) "Tenebrae"

He had passed from negation to positivity, from bitter iconoclasm to purposeful construction. He had given ample proof that the early sensuality and satiety had been merely a superficial aspect of a nature which could abandon it when the call to service was heard. To those who were nearest to a complete appreciation of his greatest collection of political and religious verse and of the essential greatness of the poet, there was little need of his own dictum:

> Other books are books; "Songs before Sunrise" is myself."

CHAPTER IV

ANDROTHEISM

Swinburne has repeatedly been called an "anti-religionist". In such degree as the term "anti-Monarchist" or "anarchist" would fail to describe the political creed of Swinburne in the light of that positive Republicanism whose expression was the significant theme in his attitude towards national affairs, to that extent would the terms "atheist" and "agnostic" which have been almost universally used in the declaration of the poet's religious attitude fail to define in adequate measure the conviction of faith of the poet. It is perhaps too true that the negative and denunciatory aspect of Swinburne's religious belief occupies much more space in his speech and writings than the enunciation of a positive creed, but that that creed did exist is all too frequently overlooked by prejudiced critics whose righteous indignation boils over in arraignment of the poet who uttered such blasphemies against conventional faith. That Swinburne did evolve and profess a belief which he

adhered to with all the zeal of a loyal convert, upon investigation cannot be denied. As his political creed can be summed up by a positive designation such as the term "Republican" so the poet's religious creed can be suitably denoted by the words "androtheism"or "pananthropism" - an unwavering faith in the Divinity of Man.

In this age of psychological charting one might be able with some degree of accuracy to trace the history of religious thought of the poet on a suitable graph which would interpret his development in terms of attitude to established religion. A rising curve would represent the development from careful early Christian training by his religious family to a peak where he indulged in "ecstasies" of religious adoration and prepared for a life of service in the ministry of that faith. Then, in the Oxford days, comes a rapid drop to a lowest level where "turbid Nihilism" marked the depth of paganism. The evolved personal religion of "Songs before Sunrise" would elevate the curve to a degree much higher than that of the mere violent denial of "Poems and Ballads". Finally, in the face of considerable argument arising from conjecture on the part of both protagonists, the writer would trace in the years of the poet's old age

a gradual rise to a point, which, though far below the high peak of adolescence, reaches a level higher than any since the fall from complete and ecstatic faith.

The home environment of the boy Swinburne was conducive to devout and unquestioning worship in the manner of the established religion of his country. The Swinburnes were Anglican in denomination and so inclined to High Church doctrines and exercises that Swinburne afterwards declared that he had been brought up quasi-Catholic. In Gosse's "Life" we find that

> "Into the religious exercises of Sunday he entered even "passionately" and when it was his turn to read the Bible aloud or make a reply from the Catechism those who listened early remarked how beautifully he did it. In particular his mother insisted, and there was no need for her to urge on so ardent a pupil, that her eldest son should acquire an extended knowledge of the Holy Scriptures. This acquaintance with the text of the Bible he retained to the end of his life, and he was accustomed to be emphatic about the advantage he had received from the beauty of its language."

His mother also supervised his theological studies and Swinburne inwardly believed that he was intended for the Church. At the age of seventeen he conceived a strong desire to enter the Army but after consideration his parents refused permission and for the balance of the time between

leaving Eton and entering Oxford he commenced a routine of studying theology under a tutor with the ultimate intention of taking Holy Orders.

That his worship was that of a fervent Communicant at this time is attested by the poet's own comment. He says

> * "Having been as child and boy brought up a quasi-Catholic of course I went in for that as passionately as for other things e.g. well-nigh to unaffected and unashamed ecstasies of adoration when receiving the sacrament."

It is problematical at just what stage of Swinburne's Oxford career he finally renounced his faith. We find unquestioning trust shown in the poem "Dies Irae" written at Oxford but whose date is doubtful and published posthumously. He asks for intercession at the Judgment Day where he addresses the Saviour -

> " .. when shame and pain were sorest
> For my love the cross thou borest
> For my love the thorn-plait worest.
>
> By that pain that overbore thee
> By those tears thou weptest for me
> Leave me strength to stand before thee.
>
> Thou whom I have loved solely
> Thou whom I have loved wholly,
> Leave me place among the holy!"

*Letter to Stedman Feb. 21,1875

In the "Ode to Mazzini" probably written in the spring of 1857 near the end of Swinburne's first year at Oxford the note of orthodoxy and belief is repeated though not without a hint of doubt as to His willingness to intervene in the cause of Mazzini and Italy.

"We keep our trust tho' all things fail us -
Tho' Time nor baffled Hope avail us,
We keep our faith - God liveth and is love."

And in the final lines a reference to a concrete and living God

Hearest thou
Italia? tho' deaf sloth hath sealed thine ears
The world has heard thy children - and God hears."

In the "Queen Mother", one of Swinburne's two undergraduate dramas which were not published until 1860, is the praise of a God who controls the rain and the sun with his hand. Again in "The Death of Sir John Franklin", the second poem which Swinburne unsuccessfully submitted for the Newdigate Poetry prize, orthodox reference to God's grace and "heaven" is made. He speaks of the heroes who perished on the Franklin expedition as

"These whom God's grace calling them one by one,
In unknown ways did patiently remove,
To have new heaven and earth, new air and sun."

But, if not yet evident in his poetry, the influences which were undermining the poet's early faith were very active. Perhaps the rudest jar to his "credo" was given by the

aggressive agnosticism of his free-thinking friend, John Nichol. The atmosphere of rebellion of his own circle and of "Old Mortality" in particular was little conducive to orthodoxy either in political or religious opinion. He developed a defiant neglect of morning chapel for which he was on at least one occasion "gated". After leaving Oxford he was seldom found inside of a church except to oblige his mother when visiting her.

Illustrative of Swinburne's growing disregard for anything savouring of Christianity is the incident of the "Old Mortality" meeting where T.H. Green read a paper on the development of Christian dogma. In looking up from his paper once he "nearly burst out laughing at the sight of Swinburne whose face wore an expression of unutterable ennui and naif astonishment that men whom he respected could take interest in such a subject. *

With the culmination of Swinburne's Oxford career, as he said himself, in "a total and scandalous failure", a period of almost ten years of arraignment of clericalism commenced before any positive creed was given expression. The decade 1860-70 saw the poet entertaining a Nihilism of religious belief which was marked only by varying degrees

* Gosse: "Life" p. 40

of turbidity.

In perhaps the best known sustained work of the poet, his great classical tragedy "Atalanta in Calydon" there is revealed a defiant arraignment of Fate and a classic pessimism which denies existence for freedom of the will. A bitter rebellion against a deity aruel in his exactions - "the supreme evil, God" - is the theme of several of the manificent choruses. Classic mythology is used to veil a cry of revolt from Swinburne against the submission of man not only to the Gods of Greece but to the religion of his own day. The tragedy of man's lack of power before inexorable destiny in the shape of a vengeful God brings forth the cry

> "Because thou art over all who are over us;
> Because thy name is life and our name death;
> Because thou art cruel and men are piteous,
> And our hands labour and thine hand scattereth;
> ....
> All we are against thee, against thee, O God
> most high."

The "beautiful paganism" of "Poems and Ballads" is foreign to the spirit of restraint which Christianity imposes on its subjects. The poet in this volume scorns both the threats of eternal punishment for indulgence and the promise of eternal reward for privation in this life. Since death for him is "the end of all, the poppied sleep", the fulness

of enjoyment of this life has a more justifiable appeal to the hedonist than the self-sacrifice demanded by the Christian dieties. Such is the theme of one of the outstanding poems of the volume, "The Hymn to Proserpine". The protagonist is a pagan Roman who sees with sorrow the religion of the Galilean declared the national religion to the rejection of the divinities of the old Greek world. These divinities are more beautiful and attractive than the uninviting new Gods of the Christian faith who lack beauty and warm humanity. The Virgin Mary for him suffers in contrast with Venus. That this was the echo of Swinburne's own thought is revealed by the letter to Stedman where he says that the Hebrew divinities of Christianity do not appeal to him as much as those of Hellas. "Poems and Ballads" embraces many references to pagan gods and goddesses, - Proserpina, Dolores, our Lady of Pain", "the noble and nude and antique", Venus, of whom

"Alas, Lord surely thou art great and fair;
But lo her wonderfully woven hair! "

in "Laus Veneris" expresses his desertion of ascetic worship for the pleasure she offers.

In tracing the development of his thought one notices that as it matures, these figures occupy smaller and smaller

place in his imagery. As Sir Alfred Lyall says

> "He draws much less profusely upon the classic mythology for symbols and figures of divinities whose diaphanous robes are ill-suited to our northern climate and Puritanic traditions."

In "Poems and Ballads" one finds a variety of religious mood and attitude representative of the years of indeterminate thought in which the volume was composed - moods varying from that of worship of "Our Lady of Pain" to the devotional conventionality of "St. Dorothy". But in most of the references to "God" or "the gods", there is a sense of hopelessness of struggle and a tinge if not a definite pronouncement of the wrath and might of vengeful Deity - a theological attitude Miltonic in its conception of severity. The lot of man is unhappy not because of any fault or feebleness of the individual but because of the malevolence of the Supreme Powers. This tone is reflected in "A Litany", in "Anactoria" where he asks, "Why hath he made us?", in "A Lamentation" -

> "Man's fate is a blood-red fruit
> And the mighty gods have their fill
> And relax not the rein or the rod."

and in "Felise" -

> "For none shall move the most high gods,
> Who are most sad, being cruel; none
> Shall break or take away the rods
> Wherewith they scourge us, not as one
> That smites a son."

The poem of Hugo sums up the sadness of the earlier poems and God is labelled as "the chance central of circumstance " Which "still makes him exile who will not be slave. The God who made men is remote from them and they know not whether he cares for their destiny. Their only knowledge is that his oppressive decrees are supreme.

In the five years between the publication of "Poems and Ballads" in 1866 and the delayed publication of "Songs before Sunrise" in 1871, Swinburne's religious thought underwent a marked fermenting and clarifying process from which it emerged in "Songs before Sunrise" with two definitely conceived resolves - the arraignment of existing religions and the formulation of a positive and personal creed.

As the same volume which witnesses the vilification of Napoleon III also contains the concept of the indivisible republic, so it embodies not only denunciation of established clericalism but the conviction of the collective divinity of Man.

This period commences a flat negation of all recognized duties. It involves an emphatic denial of all theological systems and of Christianity in particular.

It must be noted in consideration of Swinburne's rebellion against Christianity that his attitude was not

that of the man who, prematurely prejudiced, writes antagonistically of a creed of whose tenets he has not adequate knowledge. Swinburne's early adherence to the creed he now denounced and his thorough acquaintance with the Bible and the religious doctrines of the established church render him more a religious controversialist than a biased fanatic.

He retained his thorough knowledge of the text of the Bible until his death and he freely acknowledged the great benefit he had derived from the beauty of its language. In his poetry he was constantly in debt to the beautiful verbal graces of the Bible, the Anglican Prayer Book and the Anglican Catechism. Such phrases as *

> "Glory to Man in the Highest! for Man is the Master of things!"

and

> "By the crimes of thine hands unforgiven they beseech thee to hear them, O Lord"

and in the "Epilogue"

> "... who said .....
>
> "Let there be Rome" - and there was Rome."

are direct conversions to his own interests of the poetical resources of the religion which he attacks. In "A Litany of Nations" the supplications of the Anglican Litany are

applied to the nations of Europe. Wirh musical precision he closes "Quia Multum Amavit" with

> "Therefore thy sins, which are many, are
> forgiven thee
> Because thou hast loved much."

At one time* he refers to the "all but inspired language of the Church Catechism. In the same year he writes Watts-Dunton again revealing the closeness of his Biblical study and his desire to escape any charge of "ignorant" prejudice.

> "I have twice read through for the first time conscientiously with great care and studious collation of texts, the whole of St.Paul's epistles - a part of Holy Writ in which I never before had made myself a thorough proficient. His immediate personal influence I think I now thoroughly understand but am still perplexed by the survival and transmission of it in such a degree as to overshadow not only that of the other apostles but that of Christ himself... ...
>
> ..... my own previous views as to the religion of which he was the real founder (as surely as Columbus was the discoverer of the continent which takes its name from Amerigo) and Christ merely the godfather are on the whole confirmed by this study, it will have to be allowed. I flatter myself that only prejudiced ignorance - for of deliberate lying insolence I take no account - can or will ever accuse me of ignorant prejudice on the subject."

Protest against a cruel and vengeful Deity developed in "Songs before Sunrise" into either vilification or uncertainty

*Letter to Watts-Dunton, Oct.8,1882.

of existance of that Deity. In "A Watch in the Night" the High Priest says

"If the God of my faith be a liar
Who is it that I shall trust?"

In "On the Downs" to the question

"Is there no God or end at all,
No light to lighten and no rod
To chasten men? Is there no God?"

the answer comes

"There is no God, O son
If thou be none."

The terrific arraignment in the "Hymn of Man" reaches an extreme in its rejection of the Deity.

"O thou that wast God, is it thou?
. . . . . .
By the children, that asked at thy throne of
the priests that were fat with thine hire
For bread, and thou gavest a stone; for light
and thou madest them fire;
. . . . . .
Thou has fleshed on the souls that believed
thee the fang of the death-worm fear,
With anguish of dreams to deceive them
whose faith cries out in thine ear.
But the scourges of doubt and repentance
that fell on the soul at thy rod
Thou art judged, O judge, and the sentence
is gone forth against thee, O God."

And the final displacement of God by the universal spirit of Man

"Shall God then die as the beasts die? Who
is it hath broken his rod?
O God, Lord God of thy priests, rise up and
show thyself God.

By thy name that in hell-fire was written
and burned at the point of thy sword,
Thou art smitten, thou God, thou art
smitten; thy death is upon thee, O Lord.
And the love-song of earth as thou diest
resounds through the wind of her wings
Glory to Man in the Highest! for Man is the
master of things."

He came to completely reject admission of any motive force, any controlling factor outside of the world. A personal God external to the universe was a figment of the human brain and could in no sense be granted actuality. In writing to Morley on April 11th, 1873 he echoed this feeling and showed delight in the sympathetic utterances of Arnold.

"What do you think of Arnold's "Literature and Dogma?" I am personally delighted that a critic hitherto regarded as to safe and moderate a free thinker, when compared with "such as this republican", should, while dwelling so warmly on the value and significance of the Bible, have so distinctly repudiated that objectionable "Person", the moral and intelligent governor of the universe."

It was the corruption of clericalism which called forth Swinburne's greatest violence toward established religion. He had a distinct hatred of most of the earthly and earthy officials into whose care the exercise of Christianity was entrusted. As strongly as towards monarchy did the clergy command his marked disfavour. Priests and

kings were grouped together in his mind as the root of all evil in the world.

The greatest fury of his attack was centred on the Roman Catholic church, which too often in his denunciation stands for the whole of Christianity. He resented what he considered were the aspiration for temporal power of that church and its leader as well as its persecutions in the days of the Inquisition and he took great joy in calling the pontiff at Rome, "Pope Pius Iscariot." That he could recognize merit in some of the saints of that church, however, is evident in his note on St. Catherine, (although be it noted that her religious devoutness is only tolerated because of her patriotic fervour) *

> "Cleared of all the refuse rubbish of thaumaturgy, her life would deserve a chronicler who should do justice at once to the ardour of her religious imagination and to a thing far rarer and more precious - the strength and breath of patriotic thought and devotion which sent this girl across the Alps to seek the living symbol of Italian hope and unity, and bring it back by force of simple appeal in the name of God and of the country. By the light of those solid and actual qualities which ensure to her no ignoble place on the noble roll of Italian women who have deserved well of Italy, the record of her visions and ecstasies may be read without contemptuous intolerance of hysterical disease. The rapturous visionary and passionate ascetic was in plain matters of this earth as pure and practical a heroine as Joan of Arc."

* Notes on "Songs before Sunrise".

The charge that he had merely absorbed the doctrines of Mazzini in Songs before Sunrise and put the actual gleanings grom his leader's tongue into verse was stoutly denied by Swinburne. He insisted that "Mazzini was no dictator" and that "dictation and inspiration are different things." In wishing to escape the insinuation that he blindly followed Hugo and the Italian republican he quoted as evidence the fact that he did not agree with "the positive and passionate confidence of their sublime and purified theology."

Yet, in one respect, Swinburne's religious attitude reflects a Mazzinistic hue. Neither "Chief" nor disciple reveals a belief in the divinity of the founder of Christianity and still they have a profound admiration for Christ the man. Insofar as Christ represented the highest type of man that ever existed he exacted allegiance from Swinburne since, though not divine, Jesus becomes the earthly personification of the collective Divinity of Man. *The positive creed of the exaltation of Man inspires a reverence for the Nazarene who approached most nearly a tangible likeness of Swinburne's theoretical Man. Even in that impeachment of Christianity "Before a Crucifix" he pays tribute to the sacrificed Christ. -

*Dedication to collected poems.

"O sacred head, O desecrate
O labour wounded feet and hands,
O blood poured forth in pledge to fate
Of nameless lives in divers lands,

'O son of man, beneath man's feet
Cast down, O common face of man
Whereon all blows and buffets meet
O royal, O republican,
Face of the people bruised and dumb
And longing till thy kingdom come!"

His resentment of the futility of the sacrifice of such a perfect nature is shown in his ironic reference to Easter as the time when "the Christian world is again singing hallelujahs over 'the sacrifice of God to God's own wrath' as Shelley defines the means of the redemption of mankind."

That Christ represented to Swinburne the embodiment of virtue is revealed in many of his tributed to other people. He spoke of Charlotte Bronte's "Christ-like long-suffering and compassion" and he flattered Mazzini by calling him "a very Christ not degraded into Deity." Referring to a previous allusion to one of his other heros - Hugo - as "Christ-like".

Swinburne wrote to Lord Morley on May 17th 1880.

> "Christ-like I think at least as applicable to the author of "l'Art d'être Grandpère" as to any other secular admirer of the child-living Socialist of Galilee whose human nature is so dear to Hugo."

Letter to Lord Morley, March 12th 1875.

When Napoleon III, who had been sincerely designated in France, the "Saviour of Society," had sunk into his grave, Swinburne published two sonnets of doubtful taste under the title "The Descent into Hell" and was reproached by Rossetti for the use of the term of address which he said had hitherto been applicable only to Christ. Swinburne hastened to reply that the epithet had not been of his creation. He protested with "horror" at the blasphemy uttered towards the name and memory or tradition of Christ by the men who in gratitude for the support given the church by Louis Bonaparte bestowed on the most infamous of all public criminals this name, till then reserved for one whom they professed to worship as God, of "Saviour" and "Messiah." He stated that he could only have offended "those to whom the name of Christ and all memories connected with it are hateful and those to whom the name of Bonaparte and all memories connected with it are not. I belong to neither class."

Swinburne at one time even designated himself "a kind of Christian" and explains his whole theological position in a memorable letter to Stedman on February 21st 1876.

> "As my Anti-theism has been so much babbled -about perhaps I may say here what I really do think on religious matters. I always felt

by instinct and perceived by reason that no man could conceive of a personal God except by crude superstition or else by true supernatural revelation; that a natural God was the absurdest of all human figments; because no man could by other than apocalyptic menas, ie. by other means than a violation of the laws and order of nature - conceive of any other sort of Divine person than man with a difference - man with some qualities intensified and some qualities suppressed, man with the good in him exaggerated and the evil excised. This I say, I have always seen and avowed since my mind was ripe enough to think freely. Now, of course, this is the exact definition of every god that has ever been worshipped under any revelation. Men give Him the qualities they prefer in themselves or about them. But we, who worship no material incarnation of any qualities, may worship the Divine humanity, the ideal of human perfection and aspiration without worshipping any god, any person, any fetish at all. Therefore I might call myself if I wished a kind of Christian. (that is taking the semi-legendary Christ as type ofhuman aspiration and perfection and supposing (if you like) that Jesus may have been the highest and purest sample of man on record) of the Church of Blake and Shelley, but assuredly in no sense a Theist. Perhaps you will think this is only lcarified Nihilism but at least it is no longer turbid."

In the exposition of Swinburne's positive creed, the student is confronted during the period of Songs before Sunrise with a hoziness of evolution, a lack of concreteness that does not entirely disappear with the advent of "Hertha" and the "Hymn of Man". In "Hertha," super-imposed on a pantheistic conception akin to that of Emerson's "over-soul," is the doctrine

of the Divinity of Man. Hertha is the world-soul from which God and man have sprung. The death-knell of a controlling force outside the unverise is sounded and the supremacy of Man begins.

"A creed is a rod
And a crown is of night;
But this thing is God
To be man with thy might,

And even more explicit is this theme in the "Hymn of Man" which was written "During the Session in Rome of the Oecumenical Council" Mazzini in 1870 addressing this gathering said that "whatever its members intended by it, the Council would proclaim thedeath of a religion and therefore the inevitable and not distant advent of another," He himself had desired a Council - "one that should meet for the purpose of religiously interrogating the pulsations of the heart of Collective Humanity - that is the people's." Swinburne's poem announcing the death of Christian deism and the birth of the Religion of Man would seem a logical outgrowth of this proclamation.

We find a clear rejection of external divinity for Man, the Master of Things,

"Thou and I and he are not gods made men for a span
But God, if a God there be, is the substance of
men which is man,
We men, the multiform features of man whatsoever we be,

> Recreate him of whom we are creatures, and
> all we only are he.
> Not each man of all men is God, but God is
> the fruit of the whole;
> Indivisible spirit and blood, indiscernible
> body from soul."

Man, "the fruit of the whole," becomes the director of the universe and in this conception divine. Divinity becoming inherent in the universe rejects any external deity. It leaves to Christianity no supreme deity but only an approach in the near perfection of manhood in Christ to a tangible example of the divinity which is Man, the soul of Men. Possibility is refused the human brain to conceive a God except in man's likeness - Man subordinated and exalted, his bad points eradicated and good qualities stressed. When this conception has been attained it becomes mental vision of the ideal man.

It was a religious doctrine which, as stated above, cannot be divorced from the political aspect. It preaches a political doctrine of service for the benefit of Man - co-operation of men in civic or national life for the good of mankind. The "republic" then becomes almost a spiritual concept and the fullness of its freedom a religious requisite. Anything which wars against that freedom must be eradicated. Thus, established religious which prevent the identification of man with the pervice of Humanity must be attached. This provides the

explanation of much of Swinburne's violence in the impeachment of conventional clericalism. Lack of co-operation in working towards the self-realization of man which is prevalent in the existing religions of the world is to be vehemently denounced as thwarting the only sublime purpose operative in the world - the divinity of Man. Freedom is the first essential to this Religion of Humanity.

The Christian concept of God is the centre of Mazzini's system although he forgoes belief in the divinity of Christ. The law of God becomes the law of life. Swinburne's inability to accept this gives him a new sense of interpretation of Mazzini's calls to service. For Mazzini Humanity was the Interpreter of God; for Swinburne Humanity is God. Mazzini's "city of God" becomes for Swinburne "God." It is a philosophy closely akin to that of Comte.

With the supposition that death is the end of all which the poet almost certainly entertained at this time, the life which he contemplates becomes tremendously important; it is a completely rounded-off experience between a life and a death. It makes man on this world working without any sense of future reward such as the Christian heaven a nobler creature. He works only with the ultimate aim of service to Humanity as

a member of the immeasurable Republic and his "only guerdon" is to give his all toward growing nearer to that goal which can never be attained. The individual disappears when his work is done but man lives on[1] "Men perish but man shall endure."

Liberty is visioned as the soul of Man

[2]"Freedom we call it, for holier
Name of the soul there is none"

and with Liberty as the soul of Humanity it is given a supremacy over all. Since God is the creation of man's brain; man is greater than God. Man's soul is higher than man and therefore the soul of Man, Liberty, becomes supreme. -[3]

"I am that which began;
Out of me the years roll;
Out of me God and man;
I am equal and whole
God changes and man, and the form of them bodily;
I am the soul."

The consideration of what lay beyond the barrier of death always found a prominent place in Swinburne's more serious thought. As there is a definite traceable progress in the singer's doctrinal thought up to the time of the commencement of the Putney retirement, so one can point out several changes of position in his attitude towards the question of immortality.

(1) "Hymn of Man" (2) "To Walt Whitman in America"
(3) "Hertha".

The fervour of the boyish religious exercises had been accompanied by a belief in the conventionally conceived life after death fostered by the doctrine of his church. The preservation of personality after the departure from this world wascredited in his trust in a region of eternal happiness and perpetuity of personal existence. Commencing with the wavering faith of the Oxford years came a gradual change in his vision of the life after death and for the major part of his life we find continual conjecture and a variety of moods concerning this question. "Atalanta in Calydon" reflects a mood where the poet has assimilated the classic spirit and his Meleager refers to the life after death as a time when we shall.

"move among shadows a shadow
And wail by impassable streams."

He says to Atalanta, his love,

"without sin done
I am gone down to the empty weary house
Where no flesh is not beauty nor swift eyes
Nor sound of mouth nor might of hands and feet"

The Chorus in the great stanzas "Before the beginning of years"

refers to man

"In his heart is a blind desire,
In his eyes foreknowledge of death;
He weaves and is clothed with derision;
Sows and he shall not reap;
His life is a watch or a vision
Between a sleep and a sleep."

At one time before the publication of Poems and Ballads-the poet reveals a marked interest in the theory of Transmigration of Souls. In his letter to Seymour Kirkup of August 11th, 1864, he writes

> "I was much struck by the passage in your last letter to me where you speak of the theory of Transmigration. Whether or not it be affirmed or denied by spirits I know that it has always appeared to me a very probable article of faith. I certainly do not remember having been another man before my birth into this present life but I have often felt that I have been once upon a time a cat and worried by a dog."

But the sentiment did not appear as a serious doctrinal belief.

The early conviction of transference of definite personality to a life after death becomes lost before the advent of Poems and Ballads and the general tone of that collection is not only of pagan satiety but of a denial of any experience beyond death. Death becomes "the end of all, the poppied sleep." And this theory of oblivion, of eternal sleep is demonstrated again and again with dogmatism and assurance throughout the volume.

"Ilicet" reveals a pessimism depressing in its assurance of the finality of death. Perhaps even more certain is the tone of "The Garden of Proserpine" with its affirmation

of eternal sleep as a relief from the cares of the world -

"From too much love of living
From hope and fear set free
We thank with brief thanksgiving
Whatever gods may be
That no life lives for ever;
That dead men rise up never;"

The "Hymn to Proserpine" closes with

"There is no God found stronger than
death; and death is a sleep.

The rejected lover of "The Triumph of Time" goes back to his "great sweet mother and lover of men, the sea" where he will "sleep and move with the moving ships and not know if she be, if she were."

"Songs before Sunrise" marked the commencement in the poet's life of an era which was to wage extended warfare against the early dogmatism which denied the possibility of another life. Although the "Prelude" speaks of death as "the red, vast void of sunset", and "the equal waters of the dead", there is revealed less certainty and therefore less frequency in occurrence of negation of continuance after death. In a number of poems of this volume, the poet gives evidence of having paid considerable attention to a pantheistic conception of immortality where the influence of man lives on and is diffused in the world which he has just left. In "Tiresias",

such a conception is found where the individual is "made one with Nature," where the dead are "no more wrapped about with bitter dreams" but talk "with the stars and with the winds and streams and with the inevitable years." He speaks of winning "a royal place and honour in the dead land where ghosts draw breath." It is a pantheism that has a later echo when Iseult in "Tristram of Lyonesse" thinks that there would be some joy in death to be "lost in the sun's light and the all-girdling sea." In "Genesis" we read

> "As a man before was from his birth
> So shall a man be after among the dead."

In February, 1874, he wrote Stedman

> "Browning has some of Landor's unpublished Mss. that he has promised to show me some day, of which one must be especially interesting an "Imaginary Conversation" on the personal immortality of the soul between themselves and two other friends, in which the interlocutors take up different grounds for attack or defence of a doctrine of a future state. As I have not seen it I cannot say what sides are taken by what interlocuters; but of course I presume that Browning is not made to forsake the support of his cherished dogma. Landor, himself, I know from his own lips, had no belief or opinion whatever on the subject, "was sure of one thing", he said; "that whatever was to come was best - the right thing or the thing that ought to come"; I think I may say that he would have agreed with me that any matter so utterly incognizable is one on which it is equally unreasonable to have or wish to have an opinion."

Four years later, he commented on Jowett's essay on Immortality in the following manner -

> "I have read the Master's essay on Immortality with admiration - especially of its inconclusive conclusion."

But as the poet's personal graveyard became larger and larger with the passing years, he refused to believe that the personality of his friends, if not perservering as a definite entity, would not have continuance as an influence in some other sphere. This feeling took the form of expressed hope, though with no inspiring confidence in that hope. His collection of memorial poems grew larger and induced him to allow breadth of conjecture. He drew farther away from the desire that the question of immortality of the soul should be "an utterly incognizable matter" on which "it is equally unreasonable to have or wish to have an opinion."

The "poppied sleep" theme disappeared and questioning commenced where assurance had previously existed. In "On the Verge" he asks

> "who knows if death indeed have life or
> life have death for goal?
> Day nor night can tell us, nor may seas
> declare nor skies unroll
> What has been from everlasting, or if
> ought shall always be
> Silence answering only strikes response
> reverberate on the soul
> From the shore that hath no shore beyond
> it set in all the sea."

He began to indulge in the hope that the great men of his personal and literary acquaintance would meet after death, that Tennyson would meet Shakespeare, that Aurelio Saffi would enter "the wider world of men that is not ours" where Dante and Mazzini already were. He mentioned Browning at his death as having "awakened out of life wherein we sleep." The dead are addressed "if ought thou know where now thou art". He expressed a hope for P. B. Marston that "haply" the dead look down from "afar above."

It was such a relationship of the individual to the life after death which allied him to a hope. In his memorial poem on John William Inchbold he says

> "Peace, rest and sleep are all we know of death,
> And all we dream of comfort; yet for thee,
> Whose breath of light was bright and strenuous breath
> We think the change is other than we see."

The implicit faith of Mazzini and Hugo and the certainty of Watts-Danton in a future state inspired a wish that he too might have such confidence. He wrote to his mother in 1885

> "When I think of his intense earnestness of faith in a future life and a better world than this, and remember how fervently Mazzini always urged upon all who loved him the necessity of that belief and the certainty of its actual truth, I feel very deeply that they must have

been right or at least that they should have been - however deep and difficult the mystery which was so clear and transparent to their inspired and exalted minds may seem to such as mine. They ought to have known, if any man ever did: andif they were right, I, whose love and devotion they requited with such kindness as I never could have really deserved shall (somehow) see them again."

And in a later letter to her -

> "It is so beautiful and delightful to think of "being together when this life is over," as you say, and of seeing things no longer "in a glass darkly," but all who have ever tried to do a little bit of what they thought right being brought together - if what they thought right was not absolutely wicked and shocking like the beliefs of persecutors - and understanding and loving each other, that I sometimes feel as if it ought hardly to be talked about."

On the occasion of a cousin's death he made a momentary avowal of belief in a letter to his eldest sister:

> "As for the poor fellow, no one who has any trust in a future and better life - as I have - can imagine that the change is not a blessing far beyond any poor human words or fancies."

The vicissitudes of time had produced a changed Swinburne. The personal dejection and misery of London life had given way to the salutary, if subduing influence of No. 2 The Pines, Putney. The encouragement of coarser natures to violence in revolt had been replaced by the supervision of the

tactful Watts-Dunton. The death of the poet's father, of Mazzini and of an increasingly large list of friends had encouraged the gravity of his thought. The haven of quiet with "Walter" where regularity was the watchword and the interests were almost wholly literary had a markedly quiescent effect on the poet's character.

The dawn of European freedom for which he had sung in Songs before Sunrise had failed to break and its reflected glow only aroused in Swinburne a patriotism greater in its intensity than ever before. The indivisible republic slipped into the mistiness of the exuberant conceptions of youth.

The raging fire of revolt had been quelled by the changes of the years into a "wistful" flame of sadness. The poet's later religious attitude is one which, while retaining his exalted faith in Man, loses the virulence of his attack on established religions and climbs higher and higher, as his life's end draws near, in its respect for the religious conception of youth, although to his death he is unable to re-accept it or avow any type of Theism.

But the bitterness of denunciation is past and with the mellowing influence of the changing years, there is found at times, in the prolixity of his later work an orthodox usage of conventional Christian terms and a tone of mildness utterly

foreign to his poetry written before his prime. He no longer is dogmatic. His attitude is one of doubt rather than denial and the words "if" and "haply" are in frequent use.

His study of the Bible and reverence for it are evidenced by his suggestion to Watts,

> "The marginal commentary (of the Edward VI New Testament) is very edifying, democratic and Calvinistic (as perhaps you may be aware if ever your studies have lain in this truly blessed and improving direction."

One could hardly picture the Swinburne of 1865

changing upon objection the second line of the following three

> "Watch the ravens flock to feast
> Dark as robe or creed of priest
> Black as night is black"

to

> "Dense as round a death-struck beast."

and adding

> "Let me say that nothing could give me more pain than to know that I had given cause of offence to any Roman Catholic loyalist."

But he still objected to many of the doctrines of the Anglican church and less than five years before his death politely refused to sponsor the baptism of his cousin's baby. The ensuing letter is self-explanatory: *

* Letter to Ed. Dowden April 1893.

"Dec. 7, 1904

Dear Cousin Sermonda,

I am delighted to hear of the advent of an adorable person whose feet I long to kiss and greatly honoured by the proposal that I should stand sponsor to an angel from heaven.

Only, you see, as that is very truly my view of a new-born baby it would be impossible for me to take any part, direct or indirect in a religious ceremony which represents it as "a child of wrath" - words which seem to me the most horrible of all blasphemies - standing in need of human intervention to transmute it into "a child of grace." I fear I must shock, but I trust I may not offend you by the avowal of an opinion which I have often enough and plainly put forward in public.

x x x x x x

If only the ceremony were secular, it would be to me the very greatest pleasure as well as honour to take any part in welcoming the arrival on earth of a baby in whose eyes (I always think and maintain) we see all that we ever can see here of heaven."

It was in connection with this adoration of little children that we find the nearest approach to a casting off of doubt in immortality. In references to children in his poetry he used the conventional machinery of the Christian creed with its angelic host and "heaven". In "A Baby's Death" he speaks of the "little soul" taking flight with heaven again for goal. To another child he exclaims "O child, what news from heaven?" Of a third, "heaven" had "yearned" for it

"till angels hailed him there angel by name." He says of another

"If such be the kingdom of heaven
-It must be heaven indeed."

It would be ungenerous to think that his elegies of departed friends and beloved children had led him into extravagance of expression foreign to his creed.

Greater absence of extremes in his religious thought and the replacement of denunciation and dogmatism by a variation of milder attitudes ranging from questioning almost to belief characterize his later poetry. Approach to conventional conception is found in "Thalassius", his autobiography, in "After Nine Years" where he says of Mazzini

"The shadows fallen of years are nine
-Since heaven grew seven times more divine
With thy soul entering",

in the deep optimism for man in "The Altar of Righteousness", in the graver notes of "In the Bay", "Plus Ultra", "By the North Sea" and "After Sunset". "In Memory of Aurelio Saffi" speaks of the departed Italian as experiencing "the deathless life of death which earth calls heaven" and

"the wider world of men that is not ours
-Receives a soul whose life on earth was light."

The characteristic extremes of his high strung nature and the peculiar quality of his genius had been corroborated by

another testimony of his passion for freedom - his personal manifestation of liberty in religious thought. He had swung from the extreme of abject devotion of a boy communicant of the Anglican creed to bitter arraignment of all existing religions and a fervent denial of the conventional deities. From the extreme of negation had been evolved the thesis of a positive creed to which he adhered until his death - the Divinity of Man. Although he almost certainly attained before his death to a belief in the perpetuation of individual influence after death, if not of personality in a conventional heaven, the mellowing influence of the passing years, only alleviated the bitterness of abuse of other religions and their administrators and did nothing to destroy the firmness of conviction in his own religious faith. Significant evidence of the unqualified purity of his personal conviction and adequate answer to those troubled Christians who would paint Swinburne a septuagenarian convert, since greatness in any man is only commensurable to them with the degree of his homage to established religion, is the revelation that the very last lines he wrote were an "appeal to eternal justice" to decide which deserved chastisement more - God as the maker of man or man as the maker of God. Some time previous to this he had exacted a promise from Watts-Dunton that the mockery of a Christian

burial be not permitted.

He passed peacefully away on April 10th, 1909, after a short pneumonia attack and was buried in the beautiful churchyard at Bonchurch, Isle of Wight, within a stone's throw of the home where he had spent some of the happiest days of his eventful life. The earthly remains of him who had worshipped with passionate adoration his "great sweet mother, the sea" and in "Ex Voto" had supplicated

> "But when my time shall be,
> O mother, O my sea,
> Alive or dead take me,
> Me too, my mother

rest within sound of her waves. She had been for him the eternal symbol of Liberty, the talisman of life, and the music of her waves chants an eternal requiem beside her laureate's grave.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Page after page in the 'seventies was filled with vain speculation as to the ultimate niche which Algernon Charles Swinburne and his muse would occupy in the spacious halls of English literary history. The verdict of the dying century was probably less accurate than that of the critics of the past two decades and it is reasonable to expect that the estimate of the present will undergo further change before assuming the official tone of the dictum of time. The secret of alteration in point of view lies in the fact that contemporary or near-contemporary judgment is too often unconsciously influenced by the human equation. In this case, memories and visions of Swinburne the Man tinge the critical attitude towards Swinburne the Poet. Few poets have exerted such a marked personal influence on those with whom they came in contact.

What were the significant personal characteristics of this genius who shot across the Mid-Victorian sky which set him apart from the mass and supplemented the influence of his work by that of his multiform personality? He bore little

impression of the common mould and his seventy-two years of life represented a curious and prolonged conflict of revolt and submission. He was only conventional in embodying the personal unconventionalities attributed to genius. He scorned the "via media" and was as vehement in his loves as he was in his hates.

His loves were many and fervent. They were formed not only in the living world about him but in the vast realm of literary history. As a youth he loved the wild rides at Capheaton and the caress of the sea at Bonchurch. In the sanctuary of his youthful mind he erected three idols who were to hold his allegiance until only treasured memories remained as a reminder of his worship of Mazzini, Hugo and Landor. To pass in swift review into a constantly enlarging treasure box of associations were to be Nichol, Jowett, the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood, the one true love Jane Faulkner, the flattering association with the adventuress Adah Isaacs Menken, and the minor lights of that London life which gave place to the salutary guardianship of thirty years duration of a Watts-Dunton. Then, in retirement, loves of literature of old men and of babes.

His hates were perhaps as numerous and up to his prime,

at least as fervent. Napoleon III, the Pope, Gladstone, the criticaster Robert Buchanan, and "Dunce" Furnwall, were representative objects of recurrent and eloquent abuse.

With a nature which encouraged adequate display of allegiances and dislikes, Swinburne the Man could hardly avoid deep impression on every audience with which he came in personal contact. Argument on any vital subject would loose from this bundle of nervous energy a flow of recondite eloquence which subdued his listeners into spellbound attention. More than the mere music of "Dolores" went into the half worship of that gathering which sank to its knees before the elocutionary fervour of a young poet who embodied the idiosyncrasies as well as the supreme gifts of genius.

Too much of the biased opinion of his time was inspired by mental image of the long-haired, large-headed little figure which in the 'seventies frequented some of the queerest haunts of London. The extremes of vituperation which excesses sometimes engendered militated against any sympathetic appreciation of the finer thoughts and happier hours of a great English melodist. It is with an allowance for those oddities which seem to be the natural accompaniment of extraordinary artistic ability that we must form our estimate of Swinburne

the Man. Despite two decades of the septuagenarian's life marked by a profligacy with "sublime compensations," despite the brandy, the epilepsy and the abnormalities, the poet never lacked the greatness of an English gentleman.

And that that period of despondent dissipation could be effectually abandoned for the rigidity of the Putney life without recurrences of the old weaknesses shows how superficial a part those excesses played in a nature which could discard them for the serenities of a literary existence in the Watts-Dunton menage. The commentators of time have the Swinburne of Putney as well as the Swinburne of Great James Street to remember but to the writers of the days of the poet's existence, the fiery young rebel who held his small following tense by conversational brilliance or distressed it by personal eccentricities is refused divorce from Swinburne the great poet of literary history.

Swinburne the student in his loves and hates of literature displays less extravagance in generosity towards his allegiances and less violence in the condemnation of his antipathies. In this sphere the the objects of his dislike only earned neglect, while those of his sympathies received the careful attention of a thorough student and omniverous reader.

Few of our poets show such fecundity of subject and versatility of genius. The writer of literary plays such as "Chastelard", "Mary Stuart" and the prodigious "Bothwell", of two classical tragedies of the excellence of "Atalanta in Calydon", of poetic narratives such as "Tristram of Lyonesse", of national, religious, and love poetry over a period of fifty years, of one novel, of studious prose appreciations in a succession from that of the Greek and Roman classics through the Elizabethan playwrights to the generous appraisals of his own associates, and of poetry and letters expressed in Greek, Latin, French and Italian was pundit as well as poet.

Can he be given a position in close relation to any of the outstanding movements of English literature? Too much emphasis has been laid in the past on the extent of Swinburne's association with what has become known as the Pre-Raphaelite movement. His frequent association with the Rossettis, Morris, and Burne-Jones from the time that he met them in the Oxford Union did not entail the adoption of any of their poetic methods. His personal objection to inclusion in the classification is expressed in a lengthy postcript to a letter to John Nichol on April 2nd, 1876, where he said the term Pre-Raphaelite is "in no sense applicable" to anything he had written since he was an

undergraduate. Although highly appreciative of the art of Morris and Rossetti, he could not understand what principle of classification allied his art with theirs. The only "bond of community" between them was that of personal intimacy. He said

> "Tennyson, Browning and Arnold might -just as reasonably be bracketed together (how they would swear, all three!) under the heading Post-Wordsworthian School."

It was customary in the heyday of his fame to consider Swinburne as the herald of a new era in literature rather than the relic of an old movement. Certainly he was far from being in key with the literary influences of his time. The burning ardour of the revolutionary poets of the early part of the century had vanished from literary tradition with the death of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, and Byron. Industrial progress and continued peace had lulled the country into a sense of quiet security and self-complacency which had its reflection in the literary pulse of the nation in mildness and respectability. Indecorum and irreverence were foreign to the age. The startling attack on tradition by Swinburne presaged for the younger poets a new age and a new school.

But the passing of years has failed to reveal any worthy successor or imitator either in thought or metrical

virtuosity and we realize more and more that Swinburne's place is really that of the last sentinel of that romantic rebellion which opened his century. He is the spiritual successor of Shelley and the number of personal characteristics similar or identical in the two poets is singularly surprising. Swinburne himself realized the closeness of his relationship to Shelley and in writing to his sister on Nov. 25th, 1902, he remarked

> "I am writing a short memoir of Shelley and reviews of his works for Chamber's Encyclopedia .... I must say it is too funny - not to say uncanny - how much there is in common between us two: born in exactly the same class sent to Eton - at exactly the same age cast out of Oxford - the only difference being that I was not formally but informally expelled - and holding and preaching the same general views in the poems which made us famous."

Both were well-born, both, from the Eton days, radicals, both were enemies of Christianity, both republican and both the enemies of convention and prejudice of every type.

Swinburne succeeded to the Romantic tradition amongst the English poets by his interest in democracy, in the devotion of self to the interest of Man, by the unchecked ardour of his erotic poetry, by his interest in the masterpieces of classic art, by his passion for nature and especial regard for the "Sacred spaces of the sea," by his disregard for the conventions

of the age and by his following the diffused glow of that lamp of Liberty which lit the tortuous path of his checkered career.

The more serious thought of man can usually be classified into attitudes toward his social, political, and religious environment. It has been the attempt of this monograph to reveal the alliance in the mind of Swinburne between these three phases of thought and his ever-present yearning for Freedom. The history of thought in any man must be to a large extent his autobiography and, in Swinburne's case, the mental attitude was usually synchronous with the complexity or tranquillity of his life. In this attempt at relation and exposition, the spot-light has of necessity been focussed with intensity on the crowded years, and the more gradual changes of less eventful times have only been sufficiently indicated for the purpose of such a dissertation.

It has been the writer's enterprise to correct certain ill-founded but all too general impressions of the poet and, in contradiction of certain sections of opinion, to reveal an artistry sincere in expression and motivated by one central conviction - a longing for liberty. The longing found utterance in the sensual thought of youth which stopped, probably not so much, as he explained to M. Reul long afterward, "because the impulse ceased" as because a stronger impulse replaced it - a

conviction of political freedom which varied from extremes of denunciation to those of idealistic intellectual creation. The political construction of thought in its higher realms could suffer little separation from an evolution of personal religious creed adhered to with the fervour of a doctrinal zealot.

The attempt has been made to gain a closer appreciation of positive virtues of mental attitude in the poet without foolish denial of the prevalent vehemences in the negative phases of his thought. Only wilful ignorance would deny the existence of needless excess in Swinburne; yet, only bigotry would allow knowledge of that excess to detract from appreciation of the sublimity of his higher sentiments.

One poetic merit which even his rabid assailants concede to him has here found no place for discussion. Few will question the lyrical quality of Swinburne's poetic voice - a metrical mastery of melody rarely if ever equalled in our tongue. The inimitable power of song has been granted to the composer and now may there be allied in more widespread esteem of the poet of whom Tennyson said "He is a reed through which everything blows into music" a denial of the charge of "sound without sense" and a realization that the music maker had a

message to accompany his lyric virtuosity. He gave forth something beyond the mere wild glory of random notes; he sang a full-throated and impassioned song of the universal liberty of Man.

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