

Chapter XV -- Swinburne's Failure.

Algernon Swinburne was one of the greatest poets of the English Language, so far as poetic expression was concerned, but he lost his place and went down into the abyss because he advocated a new principle of life -- Naturalism. He asserted that Nature is sufficient to itself, that we should find our destiny in our career upon earth, shutting out the supernatural. He had the same principle as Ibsen, and like Ibsen he practiced it before he began to preach.

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Swinburne's poetic power was dimmed by the life he led before announcing his principles. Then he deliberately flung down the gauntlet to Christ, and announced that he would win the world back to its true course by restoring the worship of Venus. He asserted that men should be like the flowers of the field, the true types of Nature; and as other poets had sung the noble virtues of nature, courage, fidelity, etc., he took up the pleasures -- or vices.

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His sentences flow like the waves of the wind rather than the sea; they are beautiful, flexible, marvelous. But his publishers dared not print half of what he wrote. Nothing more obscene has ever been written than some of the emanations from his overheated brain. A great deal of his stuff was printed by the underground press.

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He was morally and intellectually rotten, and although he himself was shocked when he discovered it, he was singing for a congress of harlots. He received letter after letter from men who thanked him for giving their vices the sanction of poetry. After singing the praises of paganism for thirty years, he suddenly discovered in his own body that physical joys are not lasting, and he voices his despair in his poems. He speaks of his own physical decay and approaching death, and introduces the principle of pessimism.

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Although Swinburne was in a measure sincere in what he wrote, he did not see the evil results of his principle until it was too far advanced for him to draw back. He had fought with all his power, tenacity and elegance, and had pictured the pleasures of the sensual things of this life but his imitators discussed and still discuss other phases of nature.

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Zola took up an *ina pectoris*, smallpox, carbuncles, etc., and Walt Whitman, who had absolutely no sense of verse, declared everything in nature of equal importance. Although he never sang of the liver or kidneys (in public, at least), he took up man and went over him in detail, and did the same with woman, houses, fields, plains, etc. Dunces-like critics call his verses poetry, but the only difference between it and a tax list is that his verse is more varied. Thus was Swinburne degraded by the people he despised.

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The last blow was struck when Swinburne found Ella Wilcox among his imitators. Ella made herself famous by stealing a poem by Colonel Joyce, "Laugh and the World Laughs with you"; and with a subsidy from William Randolph Hearst she gave much mush to the world. Her famous quatrain,

"If I were a raindrop and you were a leaf,
I'd burst from the cloud above you,
And on your breast, I'd nestle and rest,
And love you, love you, love you."

was thus parodoxized by a critic:

If I were your hubby, and you were my wife,
You cunning darling dear, you
I do not think I'd leave pen and ink,
Near you, near you, near you.

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Swinburne's attempt at elegant paganism was an absolute failure. It's only result was to set loose a lot of dirt and filth in literature. When he died no one with a reputation to guard would dare say a good word for him.

Gleaned from the Survey.

"Each year I am drifting farther away from the Catholic Church, yet I would consider no other. The thought of losing the Faith startles me, still I do nothing to help myself. What is the best thing for me to do?"

Make a general confession -- not necessarily in specific detail, because your questionnaire shows that your previous confessions have been sincere, but a general review that will enable the confessor to prescribe a tonic. You have spiritual anemia. Cardinal Newman's sermon on "The Neglect of Divine Calls and Warnings" would do you a world of good.

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A good many similar questions are asked on the questionnaires returned. Don't wait for the Bulletin to answer them. Go to a priest at once and tell him what you have put down on paper.

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