

# POEMS

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Poems by Algernon Charles Swinburne & Ernest Rhys

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**ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE & ERNEST RHYS**

# **POEMS**



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P O E M S

By ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

INTRODUCTION BY ERNEST RHYS



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### PUBLISHERS' NOTE

The publishers feel justified in issuing another anthology of selections from the poetical works of Algernon Charles Swinburne, for the very excellent reason, that there is no one volume, at present obtainable, in which the reader can get a real idea of all that is best of the many different phases of Swinburne's genius; of the poet who has been described as "the last of the Giants."

From the period of passionate expression, on through the poet's marvellous manifestation of the ancient Greek spirit, to the more recent phase of pure lyricism and romantic idealism, his genius at all times, possesses the qualities of greatness.

Each poem is printed complete and the text has been carefully compared with the authorized English edition of Swinburne's works.

The publishers wish to express their appreciation to Mr. T. R. Smith for his invaluable aid in compiling this anthology.

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## SWINBURNE'S POEMS.\*

\* \* \* \* \*

We are not old enough to recollect the sensation caused by the appearance of the 1866 "Poems and Ballads"; and those of us who first came under the spell when the "Song of Italy" and the "Songs before Sunrise" had had time to clear the air and add an extraordinary radiant humanity and an ideal cry for freedom to the poet's account, were, if anything, fortunate in being so far belated. Out of the last-named volume, and out of "Atalanta in Calydon," we had our measure of delight filled to overflowing, and gained our sense—one of the pleasantest that can fall to mortal man—of poetry alive and operative in our midst and making all the while for our deliverance—for the things that counted and the things we really cared about. It was so we read "Hertha":—

"I am in thee to save thee,  
As my soul in thee saith;  
Give thou as I gave thee,  
My life-blood and breath,  
Green leaves of thy labour, white flowers of thy thought, and  
red fruit of thy death."

There was a background of real events, too, to that lyric ecstasy; the Italian break for liberty, the names of Mazzini, Aurelio Saffi, and Garibaldi were still themes to stir the blood afresh. I remember, many years later, talking to Mme. Venturi in Chelsea about Mazzini and realising again how he and his cause had irradiated the hopes of the party of

\*This essay appeared in the *Fortnightly Review* for December, 1905, while Swinburne was alive.

youth all over Europe—yes, reflected a vivid ray or two into English politics as well as into the thoughts of the new young English poets who were immediately contemporary.

Mr. Swinburne had gone to Italy on leaving Oxford, and meeting Mazzini in London soon afterwards had got very near the head-spring of that revolt. He tells us that it was in fact his ode on the insurrection in Candia which drew from Mazzini a letter of appreciation and so led to the actual beginning of their personal intercourse. The poet's mother—Lady Jane Henrietta Ashburnham—had been educated in Florence; and Florentine and Italian associations, early and late, were threaded from the beginning into the texture of his early life. It is not being too fanciful, perhaps, to relate to the same associations Dante Gabriel Rossetti's following in Oxford, when Burne-Jones and Swinburne were among the followers. Afterwards the Rossetti influence became for a time paramount. It immensely affected the younger poet; possibly it taught him some new imaginative subtleties, although it could teach him nothing of that marvellous command of unsuspected cadences in which he already excelled. But beyond that one cannot help thinking that while Rossetti may not have played exactly the part of the pigmy-king, who invited Herla underground, his effect was in some ways rather akin to the stronger lure of Gautier and Baudelaire.

As the opening volume of this edition\* may help to recall, the original "Queen-Mother and Rosamund," a scarce book now, was dedicated to Rossetti. That was in 1860. Five years later "Atalanta in Calydon" was published, and still the public was but dully sensible of the new poet and his new music, "large-toned and sweet, and equal in lyric compass to every demand of his imaginative and dramatic idea." Then came the first "Poems and Ballads" volume; and the

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\* The Collected Edition in Six Volumes. London: Chatto and Windus. New York: Harper and Brothers.