PR
5523
B87
1914

Cornell University Library

FROM THE INCOME OF THE
FISKE ENDOWMENT FUND
THE BEQUEST OF
Willard Fiske
Librarian of the University 1868-1883
1905

A.298062 13|V|15

3184

NOV 6 - 1945 DEC 1 3 '79

FEB ... DEC 10 '87

Dec 13'47

JUN 2 8 1954 H S

MAR 1 9 1958 K R

JUL 1 5 1992

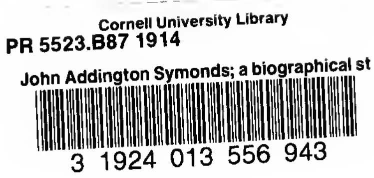
APR 3 0 2003

JAN 2 1960 G Z

APR 2 8 1960 D W

Pd 5/7/60

dCt 8-31-74 JP


Cornell University Library
PR 5523.B87 1914
John Addington Symonds; a biographical st
3 1924 013 556 943
olin

JOHN ADDINGTON SYMONDS

BY VAN WYCK BROOKS

JOHN ADDINGTON SYMONDS

THE WINE OF THE PURITANS

A Study of Present-Day America

THE MALADY OF THE IDEAL

JOHN ADDINGTON SYMONDS

A BIOGRAPHICAL STUDY

BY

VAN WYCK BROOKS

NEW YORK
MITCHELL KENNERLEY
MCMXIV

E.V.
ERB

14/15

Copyright 1914 by
Mitchell Kennerley

PR
5523
B87
1914

A.298062

Press of J. J. Little & Ives Company
East Twenty-fourth Street
New York

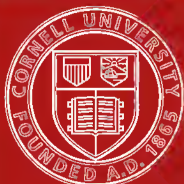
TO

MAXWELL EVARTS PERKINS

AND

LOUISE SAUNDERS PERKINS

from their affectionate friend



Cornell University Library

The original of this book is in
the Cornell University Library.

There are no known copyright restrictions in
the United States on the use of the text.

http://www.archive.org/details/cu31924013556943

PREFACE

NINETEEN years have now passed since the death of Symonds. During that period no study of his life and work has appeared except the original Biography, compiled from his *Autobiography,* letters, and diaries, by his friend, Mr. Horatio F. Brown, the well-known author of *Life on the Lagoons* and other works dealing with Venice. Meanwhile his reputation remains substantially unaltered in the fields covered by his writings, and he continues to hold a special and an honorable place in late Victorian literature. No English critic indeed is more universally known among popular students of culture, both in England and America. "There has, in our time," wrote William Sharp, in the year of Symonds' death, "been no mind more sensitive to beauty, and that not only in one or even in two, but in all the arts—in nature to an exceptional

degree, and in human life and human nature to a degree still rarer." And Frederic Harrison, in an essay which remains the most satisfactory summing-up of the man, says of Symonds: "He has a wider and more erudite familiarity with the whole field of modern literature and art than had either Ruskin or Matthew Arnold. Indeed we may fairly assume that none of his contemporaries has been so profoundly saturated at once with classical poetry, Italian and Elizabethan literature, and modern poetry, English, French, and German. Though Symonds had certainly not the literary charm of Ruskin, or Matthew Arnold, perhaps of one or two others among his contemporaries, he had no admitted superior as a critic in learning or in judgment."

But although his writings are known everywhere and by all, the man is known very slightly. And the man was, as his friend Robert Louis Stevenson said, "a far more interesting thing than any of his books." Only a handful of his closest friends ever guessed the peculiar spiritual tragedy which accompanied the development of a life in so many

ways outwardly tragic. As it is chronicled in his private memoranda it presents the only really close parallel to the more familiar tragedy of Amiel which is recorded in English literature. Psychologically the case of Symonds has a unique interest.

Aside from Mr. Brown's work, the literary material bearing directly on Symonds is curiously meagre. The publications of his daughter Mrs. Vaughn have proved helpful to me, as also the various essays, reviews, notices, or memorials by Frederic Harrison, Professor Dowden, Walter Pater, William Sharp, Mr. Hall Caine, Churton Collins, and Professor Villari. I have also made liberal use of the *Life and Letters of Jowett,* the *Letters* of Robert Louis Stevenson, and Mr. Horace Traubel's great work, *With Walt Whitman in Camden.* Dr. Symonds' *Miscellanies* contributed to form my view of Symonds' father. Aside from these sources, almost all the writings of Symonds himself are surprisingly autobiographical to anyone who reads them with some previous knowledge of the man.

Few readers of Symonds may realize the

obligation they are under to Mr. H. F. Brown, his literary executor, who has devoted years of entirely disinterested, patient, affectionate labor, as biographer and as editor, to the memory and fame of his friend. I wish here to record my own grateful sense of this indebtedness.

CONTENTS

Chapter I

A BOY AT CLIFTON

Page 1

Birth of Symonds at Bristol, 5 October, 1840—His grandmother Sykes—Puritan ancestry—His father's character—Relation between father and son—His mother—Lonely childhood—Susceptibility to trances—Clifton Hill House—Early studies in art—The Greek spirit—His suppressed character and morbid reserve—At Harrow School—Discovers Plato.

Chapter II

OXFORD: JOWETT

Page 28

Symonds enters Balliol College—Jowett's character—Influence of Jowett upon Symonds—Spiritual condition of Oxford—First meeting with Jowett—Professor Conington—Æsthetic studies—Poor health—Jenny Lind—Wins the Newdigate Prize—Tours on the Continent—His early style—Ill effects of his Oxford training—Lewes's *Life of Goethe*—*L'Amour de l'Impossible*—Comparison of Symonds with Amiel.

CHAPTER III

YOUTH: WANDERINGS

Page 52

State of mind on leaving college—Study of Venetian painting—Confusion of creative and critical faculties—Attitude toward music—Effects of introspection—Elected Fellow of Magdalen—Wins the Chancellor's Prize with an essay on the Renaissance—Breakdown in health—An idyllic episode in Switzerland—With T. H. Green—Richard Congreve and Positivism—A dark interval in London—Henry Sidgwick—Marriage—The question of a vocation—First reading of Whitman—Consultation with Jowett—Translates Zeller—Renaissance Studies—Woolner—Speculations on Handel—Resolution to enter criticism—Attacked by tuberculosis—Confused inner life—Speculative crisis at Cannes—Struggle between doubt and faith—A final release.

CHAPTER IV

AT CLIFTON: LITERATURE

Page 84

Settlement at Clifton—Lectures at Clifton College—Effect on his career—Death of Dr. Symonds—*Introduction to Dante*—Begins *The Renaissance*—Pater's review—Symonds and Pater—Symonds and Swinburne—*Greek Poets*—Symonds's attitude toward scholarship—Style—*Italian Sketches*—Want of sociological imagi-

nation—Seeing without feeling—The passion for the picturesque—The peril of culture—Revises Mallock's *New Republic*—A physical crisis—Effect on his character—Goes to Davos—Convalescence—*Many Moods*—Symonds as a poet—The *Life of Shelley*—Symonds and Shelley.

CHAPTER V

DAVOS: "THE RENAISSANCE": "ANIMI FIGURA"

Page 121

Davos in 1877—Symonds and Davos—The Buols—Settlement in Davos—Letter on Sanitary Reform—Am Hof—*The Renaissance in Italy*—Symonds and Gibbon—Historical method—Want of passivity—Confusion of objective and subjective—Nature of Symonds's scholarship—Mark Pattison—Scholarship and style—Faulty proportions of *The Renaissance*—A critical creed—Friendship of Symonds and Stevenson—"Opalstein"—*Animi Figura*—Attempts to conceal self-revelation—The story of Symonds's inner life—*Wine, Women, and Song*—Its relation to his other books—His theory of translation.

CHAPTER VI

SWISS LIFE: WHITMAN

Page 156

Isolation—A modern Ovid—Swiss gaiety—Symonds's enjoyment of peasant life—His knowledge of Graubünden—Whitman's *Calamus*—Symonds and Platonism—Symonds on Whitman—Friendship of Symonds and

Whitman—Whitman's atitude toward Symonds—*Shakspeare's Predecessors*—The theory of the *milieu*—Churton Collins on Symonds's style—A series of calamities—Pessimism and happiness—Davos life—The cosmic enthusiasm—Henry Sidgwick's diary—Loses heart in literature—His attitude toward poverty—A philanthropic campaign—His literary earnings—A productive year—The *Life of Sidney*—The *Life of Jonson*—Translation of Cellini—Cellini and the Renaissance—Significance of Cellini—Encouraging letters from Jowett.

CHAPTER VII

LAST YEARS: DEATH

Page 188

Carlo Gozzi—Activities in Davos—An impressive winter—*Autobiography*—*Essays Speculative and Suggestive*—Symonds as a thinker—Recklessness of Health—Self-effectuation—The *Life of Michael Angelo*—Growth of his critical method—Later relations with Jowett—Breakdown in health—Premonitions of death—The final journey—Last illness and death of Symonds—Burial in Rome—Jowett's epitaph.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

Page 210

Physiological basis of Symonds's work—Religion his chief subject of thought—Scepticism and stoicism—

Position on leaving college—Goethe and scientific pantheism—Greek and Christian ethics—Three utterances expressing his position—Symonds and evolution—Possibility of a new religion—Whitman—Mental reservation from the "cosmic enthusiasm"—Definitions of deity—Dualism of Symonds's mind—Sentiment of the Alps—The sense of "greatness"—Basis of Symonds's criticism—Matthew Arnold—Modernity of Symonds's basic principle—The optimism of science—His fundamental defects—Relative position among his contemporaries.

JOHN ADDINGTON SYMONDS

Chapter I

A BOY AT CLIFTON

JOHN ADDINGTON SYMONDS was born at Bristol on the 5th of October, 1840. The first eleven years of his life were passed in a gloomy old house, facing a city square, heavily respectable and associated to the end of his days with nightmare terrors and a troop of depressing relations.

The general spirit of these relations seems to be summed up in his grim old grandmother Sykes, in whose house, gloomier even than his father's, he spent many a fearful night. Of this lady and her following we have a fine portrait in the grandson's *Autobiography*. By nature distant and aristocratic, she had been converted to an evangelical sect and found herself, as a person of substance and quality, the acquiescent prey of a swarm of ill-con-

ditioned gospellers. "She delighted in the Lamentations of Jeremiah, the minatory chapters of the prophets, and the Apocalypse. In a deep, sonorous voice, starting with a groan and rising to a quaver, she used to chant forth those lugubrious verses, which began or ended with, 'Thus saith the Lord.' I remember hearing nothing of the Gospel, or the love of Christ for the whole human race. . . . She concentrated her attention on the message to the chosen people, with a tacit assumption that all who lived outside the Plymouth fold were children of wrath. . . . Heavy teas, like those described by Dickens, were of frequent occurrence, after which the Chadband of the evening discoursed at a considerable length. Then followed prayers, in the course of which a particularly repulsive pharmaceutical chemist from Broad Mead uplifted his nasal voice in petition to the Almighty, which too often, alas, degenerated into glorifications of the Plymouth sect at Bristol, and objurgations on the perversity of other religious bodies. My grandmother came in for her due share of fulsome flattery, under the attributes of De-

borah or Dorcas. My father was compared to Naaman, who refused to bathe in Jordan—Jordan being Bethesda, or the meeting house of the Plymouth Brethren." Pious old ladies before and since have delighted in being thus imposed upon, and I speak of this lady at length only because she throws out in strong relief that "dissidence of dissent and Protestantism of the Protestant religion" which enveloped Symonds' early childhood. One other point in connection with her is worthy of note, —her passion for flowers, which no end of Lamentations could interfere with, and which appears to have been a family trait.

The other side of the house indeed was more enlightened, and Symonds traces with some care the evolution of his father's family out of a like dissenting gloom in which for two centuries they had piously submerged themselves. There was a tradition of gentle-born Symondses in some remote past, a Knight of the Garter in Edward III's time, and of one Elizabeth Symonds, heiress of Pyrton, who became the wife of John Hampden. But

these vain memorials had been rudely scorned by the intervening generations.

Medicine, meanwhile, had become the family vocation, in which two of its members came to something like eminence before the advent of Symonds' own father. These were the critic's great-great-uncle, Dr. John Addington of Bristol, a racy old-fashioned radical of the school of Hume; and his grandfather, Dr. John Symonds, pharmacopula to the University of Oxford, who in his old age retired to Clifton and taught the boy his first Latin. "Remaining a Dissenter he became in mature life what may best be described as a Christian Stoic. He was a good Latin scholar, and wrote voluminous diaries and meditations in the style of Seneca. . . . A severe uncompromising sense of duty, a grim incapability of any transactions with the world, marked my grandfather out as the lineal and loyal descendant of his Puritan ancestors. These moral qualities were transmitted to my father. In my father they became transfigured and spiritualized. The advanced ground reached by my father was the soil in which I grew up.

These three generations of men—my grandfather, my father and myself—correspond to the succession of Æschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, to the transition from early pointed Gothic, through Decorated, to Flamboyant architecture. *Medio tutissimus ibis.* The middle term of such series is always superior to the first, and vastly superior to the third. How immeasurably superior my father was to me—as a man, as a character, as a social being, as a mind—I feel, but I cannot express."

This very unhumorous though modest summary is fairly suggestive, especially in the third term of each series, for unquestionably Symonds was something of a Euripides as regards all that may be called Sophoclean, and also without doubt there was something flamboyant about him. But I am half inclined to suggest a third series, and to compare the succession to that of Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, and Saint Augustine, the mundane moralist, the spiritualized moralist, and the spiritualist who has relegated morals to the social plane and who illustrates the more ethereal tragedy of the soul. There was nothing Roman about

Symonds, everything Christian or Greek. The stubborn will, the stoical persistence which he afterwards developed were devoted to the cause, not of duty but of self-effectuation, and, although these qualities were without doubt inherited from his Puritan forebears, their aim and motive were not properly stoical.

I have said that his father was, relatively, a kind of Marcus Aurelius. Perhaps I may add that the attitude of the father toward the son was like what might have been the attitude of Marcus Aurelius to Christianity if he had seen it in any more essential aspect than as a political menace. He was one of those men who seem to be perfect except for the lack of a certain something—not exactly love, or tenderness, or sympathy, for Dr. Symonds possessed all these—but that special kind of enlightenment by which one is perpetually "born again." Certainly Dr. Symonds never could have been born again. He was far too dignified, and too substantial; the place he filled in the world was far too definite. Virtue and man he measured on classic lines. "Temperament" was the one thing that did not exist for

him. It is therefore the mark of great nobility either in father or son, or both, that the son entertained toward the father such an extravagant devotion. Symonds' later devotion to Marcus Aurelius was perhaps a reminiscence of this relation.

Dr. Symonds was in all ways a notable person; the most famous doctor of his day in the West of England, an infinitely hard-working, patient, careful, generous man; liberal in politics at the expense of his early professional standing in conservative parts; one of the first to embrace Darwinism, as he had been one of the first to admire Shelley. He had removed in 1831 from Oxford, his birthplace, to Bristol; and had become a great figure in the town and college, intimate with Francis Newman, Carlyle's John Sterling and all others of note—a vastly acquisitive, laborious mind which very soon set itself to work, between hours, at ethnology and Egyptian antiquities, military science and the history of warfare, the topography of Greece, "the mathematical laws of musical proportion on which he believed beauty in all objects to be based," Italian and Greek

art, sculpture, painting, engraving, the collecting of books and filling of portfolios—beside the most profound studies in medicine of all branches, economics, public hygiene, psychology and general science. He wrote also, and rose each morning for two hours of composition before breakfast. His *Miscellanies,* published in the year of his death, include a number of original and translated poems, marked, as his son says in the Introduction, "by correctness of expression, distinctness of idea, precision of form, elevation of sentiment, harmony and serenity of intellect." In the evening he would read aloud to his children from well-chosen English classics, of whom, as the years passed, Milton came more and more to be his favorite. Even his holidays were a laborious delight, undertaken in a spirit of almost pious responsibility. In summer he would often take his family to the Continent, where by travelling at night the greatest possible time was left free for study and sightseeing. "The habit of constant labor which he had acquired in thirty years of hard professional work could not be thrown off. The

holiday itself became a source of exhaustion; nor was it surprising that the summers in which he stayed at home proved, according to his own confession, less fatiguing than those in which he took a tour." Mill's *Political Economy,* or some such book, he carried in his bag for study on the trains, "while the rare half-hours of idleness in wayside inns and railway stations were often devoted to the reading aloud of Milton or Tennyson,"—an admirably wretched habit, by the way, which descended to his son. Becoming interested in the principles of beauty, upon which he wrote an essay, he "set himself to observe the nature of sounds in harmony and discord, to interrogate the monochord, to describe ellipses, to construct diagrams, and to calculate numbers. . . . The bent of his mind was classical, its most prominent features were firmness, solidity, and soundness. . . . His taste was sound and healthy. . . . He disliked the style of Dante because of its repulsiveness and want of form." For similar reasons he disliked Balzac, Victor Hugo, and Goethe. Raphael he admired, and Tennyson's elegance. "Form he

greatly preferred to color. . . . Owing to this delicacy of taste he disliked emphatic writing and extravagant incidents in works of fiction." He took no interest in such memoirs as those of Cellini or Rousseau, "because the revelation of excessive or ill-ordered passions grieved him." His religious philosophy too was clear-cut and simple, as may be seen from a kind of *credo* taken from a private letter of his forty-fifth year, which is printed in his *Miscellanies:* "God is the centre of the moral as of the physical world. It has pleased Him to place our souls, like the starry spheres, in orbits that are governed by centripetal and centrifugal forces: the former draw us toward Him; the latter propel us through those scenes of outward life where our work and our duty lie. Moved too centripetally, we become ascetic or fanatical. Carried away too centrifugally, it is well if we do not fly off at a tangent into chaos, or to the devil, the lord of that domain of lost intelligences."

Nothing could be more interesting than to speculate on the relation between this father and the kind of son he had, so essentially dif-

ferent yet with so many elements in common. Symonds, all his life, struggled to reach some such equilibrium as that expressed so calmly and assuredly in his father's creed. And all the passionate enthusiasms of the son lie there, embryonic, in the father's point of view—in his pathetically mechanical straining toward poetry and art, his laborious grasp of modern culture, his insatiable curiosity. There exist those eminent qualities which by the nature of things the son could not attain, accuracy and solidity of equipment in facts, pure taste, patience, calmness, strength. One observes again the profound antinomy in other points —the father classical, the son romantic; the father a worshipper of form, the son a worshipper of color; the father in close touch with life and loving in literature precisely that which is remote from life, the son living in literature and straining to find in literature that which is closest to life; the father instinctively unfamiliar with art, struggling by logic, by hard work, by patient investigation for what can properly be grasped only by intuition; the son, as it were, blossoming as the re-

sult of this toilsome preparation in the father and losing thereby all that calmness and strength the father so certainly possessed; a relationship so infinitely pathetic, and yet so easily grasped by the analogy of everyday life in epochs of quick social transition, between fathers and sons when fathers are close-allied to the social order and sons are children of the muses.

The first eleven years of Symonds' life, I have said, were unlovely enough. His mother died when he was four years old and he could recall nothing of her but "a pale face, a pink silk bonnet, and beautiful yellow hair," the morning of her funeral, and her grave. "My father never spoke to me much about her," he says, "and only gave me a piece of her hair." She must have been made of lighter, brighter clay than the rest, a delicate creature overstrained. Three of her children died, and Symonds without doubt inherited from her his neurotic temperament. There were three sisters left to populate the nursery, which was lively enough when the sun was up, but filled with terrors after dark by the tales of two dis-

mal old nurses, one of whom would stick her needle into the little boy's pillow to frighten him into sleep, while the other, Mrs. Leaker, was a kind of gypsy sibyl conversant with spells, phantoms, and haunted castles. No wonder Symonds was early persuaded "that the devil lived near the doormat in a dark corner of the passage . . . that he appeared to me there under the shape of a black shadow scurrying about upon the ground, with the faintest indication of a swiftly whirling tail." For a long time he believed that under his bed lay a coffin with a corpse in it, which was always on the point of rising up and throwing a sheet over him. He dreamed constantly of a disconnected finger that crept into the room crooking its joints. Fancies of this kind were stimulated by a collection of German murder tales, which greatly impressed him, and by a series of magazine articles on spectral illusions. Gastric fever had contributed to make him a nervous invalid from birth; weak, puny, morbidly timid and suspicious. Until he was a grown man he believed he filled everyone with repugnance.

Apart from these things, all notable in their effect on his later life, two or three facts and incidents of his early childhood seem to me significant. Very early indeed traits of the artist appear. He mentions in his *Autobiography* the pediment of the front door in Berkeley Square. "I had a particular affection for this pediment. It had style." Flowers too he loved and distinguished. He took long country walks with his grandfather, who told him the names of plants. Here one traces the beginning of that astonishing knowledge of botany of which he makes such effective use in his writings. At the same period he began to fall into a peculiar kind of trance, which he describes thus:

"It consisted in a gradual but swiftly progressive obliteration of space, time, sensation, and the multitudinous factors of experience which seem to qualify what we are pleased to call ourself. In proportion as these conditions of ordinary consciousness were subtracted, the sense of an underlying or essential consciousness acquired intensity. At last nothing remained but a pure, absolute, abstract self.

The universe became without form and void of content. . . . The apprehension of a coming dissolution, the grim conviction that this state was the last state of conscious self, the sense that I had followed the last thread of being to the verge of the abyss, and had arrived at demonstration of eternal Maya or illusion, stirred or seemed to stir me up again. The return to ordinary conditions of sentient existence began by my first recovering the power of touch, and then by the gradual though rapid influx of familiar impressions and diurnal interests. . . . Often have I asked myself with anguish, on waking from that formless state of denuded, keenly sentient being, which is the unreality?—the trance of fiery, vacant, apprehensive, sceptical self from which I issue, or these surrounding phenomena and habits which veil that inner self and build a self of flesh-and-blood conventionality?"

Is it possible that mystical experience of this kind prevents us from feeling that phenomena have any very serious finality? This mysticism in his nature may have been one of the elements which interfered with Symonds'

special integrity as scholar and historian. It is enough to say here that the confusion of mundane and visionary values created in him a kind of natural duplicity. The distinction between "what we call true and what we call false" was learned by him artificially. One day he came home from school telling how he had been set upon by robbers; though the robbers were entirely real to him, his father convinced him that he must not confuse day-dreams with literal experience. Thus he learned "the all-importance of veracity—the duty and the practical utility of standing on a common ground of fact with average men and women in affairs of life." It may be recalled that Shelley even after his marriage was subject to hallucinations of precisely the same kind, which have caused endless confusion to his biographers.

In June, 1851, Dr. Symonds moved his family to Clifton Hill House at Clifton, on the heights above Bristol. Now for the first time Symonds was able to expand. The house itself was beautiful—a fine Georgian mansion, built by an old merchant in the days of Bris-

tol's glory: an ancient, liberal house, with great windows that looked over the ridge of the hill, over the city with its wharves and ships and church-towers, over the river Avon to the hills and distant villages. A garden was laid out upon the slope, half wild again after so many years, planted symmetrically with stately elms and copper-beeches, tulip-trees and cypresses overgrown with climbing roses. "Two ponds, quaintly enclosed with wired railings, interrupted at proper intervals the slope of soft green turf. Each had a fountain in its midst, the one shaped like a classic urn, the other a Cupid seated on a dolphin and blowing a conch. When the gardener made the water rise for us from those fountains, it flashed in the sunlight, tinkled on the leaves and cups of floating lilies, and disturbed the dragon-flies and gold fish from their sleepy ways." The spacious, airy, lofty rooms, flooded with light and filled with fragrance from the garden, seemed a world of poetry to the boy after his dolorous years in the city square.

At Clifton he began to absorb the first im-

pressions of Greek and Italian poetry and art which became the basis of his later studies; turning over and over the contents of well-assorted portfolios and teaching himself to draw in desultory fashion after designs of Flaxman and engravings from Raphael. He seems to have been profoundly torpid, sluggish, half-awakened, still morbidly shy and given over to nightmares and sleep-walking. He describes himself as utterly wanting in will and application, impatient and visionary. His tutor was a kind of routine classicist, a dull conscientious man, incapable of striking fire in a boy. With him however Symonds began to read Greek and from this hour dates the formation of that Greek ideal of beauty which pursued him through life. Let me give the discovery in his own words: "With Mr. Knight I read a large part of the *Iliad.* When we came to the last books I found a passage which made me weep bitterly. It was the description of Hermes, going to meet Priam, disguised as a mortal . . . The Greek in me awoke to that simple, and yet so splendid vision of young manhood, 'In the

first budding of the down on lip and chin, when youth is at her loveliest.' The phrase had all Greek sculpture in it. The overpowering magic of masculine adolescence drew my tears forth. I had none to spare for Priam prostrate at the feet of his son's murderer; none for Andromache bidding a last farewell to Hector of the waving plumes. These personages touched my heart, and thrilled a tragic chord. But the disguised Hermes, in his prime and bloom of beauty, unlocked some deeper fountains of eternal longing in my soul." A passage in which the man and the artist stand plainly opposed already in their perpetual dualism. At the same time he discovered a photograph of the famous Cupid, the "Genius of the Vatican," over which he was wont to brood, somewhat to the discomfort of his father, who asked him "why he did not choose some other statue, a nymph or Hebe." This passion for adolescent masculine beauty, conceived in the true Greek spirit, was associated with trains of sympathy which first attracted him to Michael Angelo and to Walt Whitman, who was greatly perplexed by it, and led also

to certain crass misunderstandings that have hardly yet disconnected themselves from Symonds' name. It formed one of the chief strains in his extremely complex nature, qualified almost all his ideas, and made him one of the principals of the obscure neo-Platonic movement of the later nineteenth century. And in this early incident of Hermes we see it illustrating in the boy a passion for ideal beauty deeper than any passion he possessed for sentiment, for human situations, for life. Symonds indeed recognized at once the validity of the Greek spirit for us only as it is capable of what he calls "democratic" uses, "the divine spirit serving and loving in plain ways of pastoral toil." And he composed half-consciously, in daily walks to and from his tutor's house, a kind of endless unwritten poem on the theme of Apollo in exile, humbly tending the stables of Admetus.

One can easily see that the subtle danger confronting Symonds was that of dilettantism. Very early his sensibilities had been stimulated far beyond any equally developed power of surmounting them. He was already alive to

poetry, to painting, sculpture and music, to flowers, to historic states of mind, to nature in many aspects, to color at the expense of form, and to nuance more than color. Meanwhile his character remained nebulous, flaccid, irresolute. This state of affairs continued until he was past thirty, thanks to the grinding mill of respectable education he was put through. "So far as my father was concerned," he says, "I grew up in an atmosphere of moral tension, and came to regard work as the imperative duty imposed on human beings." Yes, but what kind of work? Nothing is more entirely certain than this idea of work, as a blind, wholesale, mechanical imposition of conscience artlessly harnessed on human nature, conceived as a sort of mass-wind, to confirm children of strong individuality in habits of essential idleness. For nothing is done to harmonize their work with their capacities. Especially was this true in the case of Symonds, a physically weak, nervous, susceptible boy, who worshipped assurance and force in others, and heroized precisely those who dealt most stupidly with him: a trait of real nobility

in itself which postponed and permanently warped his proper self-development. As we shall see, he fell out of the hands of his father only to fall into the hands of Jowett, with like results. Through all these years his fancy ran one course, undirected, uneducated, chaotic, helpless, while his outward life followed the usual rut: and all the powers that be restrained him, levelled him, coerced him, appealed to all that was dutiful in him, to produce one more English gentleman. Wanting in the sense of a distinct personal purpose which might have controlled his private activities, he merely retreated into a dim world of his own where he felt growing somehow a kind of defiant passion to become something, to be his own man, illustrious in some fashion; and he describes himself in a phrase whose aptness we shall come to see, as "impenetrably reserved in the depth of myself, rhetorically candid on the surface." That *rhetorical* candor, forced upon him thus early as the only means of externalizing himself in a social world so essentially unreal to him, became at last a permanent literary habit, which destroyed the value of his

writings from the point of view of enduring art. Before Symonds was fourteen his outward life and his inward life had each defined itself so sharply, with such mutual antagonism, as to destroy forever the possibility of that final coalescence between purpose and result, between content and form, between thought and style, from which true literature, true art ensues. He was a ready writer, a clever penman, a charming personality—but he remained impenetrably reserved. There was a profound Symonds which never got itself on paper: and it may be the shame of art or the glory of life that Symonds was thus unable to attain *artistic* sincerity as distinguished from *personal* sincerity. For artistic sincerity does, without doubt, consist precisely of getting the real self into art, of externalizing in forms the profoundest intuitions of the heart. Symonds was never an artist in the proper sense. His life was apart: and he was an admirable writer. Outwardly he was that high-spirited, entertaining, engaging person who was to write so many pleasant and valuable books—the Symonds his generation knew and which

all but his intimate friends supposed was the whole Symonds. But the tragedy underneath is the modern story we ought to do our best to unravel.

His father was too busy to direct his growth or to guess its peculiar nature, though he took him driving on his professional visits through the countryside and introduced him to the brilliant circle of friends who had been attracted by his growing fame, his character and talents. Symonds never ceased lamenting his morbid reticence at this period of opportunities. He considered himself an Ugly Duckling. Constantly reminding himself that a doctor had no social position, he was persuaded that his father's aristocratic friends treated him only with flattering condescension.

In the spring of 1854 he was sent to school at Harrow, after the machine tradition, to be made a man of. I hardly think it necessary to dwell on this dark lustrum so logically intervening between his father's tutelage and that of Jowett. "The situation," he says, "accentuated that double existence . . . . which was becoming habitual." He took the discipline

patiently and grew stubborner within. He kept repeating to himself, "Wait, wait. I will, I shall, I must." He dreamed of Clifton continually. Meanwhile his studies advanced, after his own heart and out of class. We find him preparing his Greek by means of an Italian Bible, wandering about the hills and meadows in springtime; falling passively into ritualism without any clear religious convictions; detesting games of competition, yet more of an athlete and more of a regular student than he chooses to admit; forming one notable friendship with a kindly, humble clergyman, Mr. Smith, with whom he learned masses of English poetry; writing poetry himself, two hundred lines in two hours on one occasion, and forming the habit of that "fatal facility" which dogged him to the end of his days; rebelling against Butler's *Analogy,* whose conclusive logic, parroted by rule, appeared to him by no means conclusive at all; winning a medal for excellence in studies and also for two years the headship of his house, where he exercised his cane in at least one righteous cause. Yet on the whole it was all a

dismal mistake based on a misunderstanding, for, as he says, his father had only sent him to Harrow because he had never guessed that he was "either emotional or passionate."

Just before the end of his final term he first really discovered Plato. The experience localizes itself in a certain moment, which I may describe in his own words. In London one evening, after the theatre, he had taken the book to bed with him. "It so happened that I stumbled on the *Phædrus.* I read on and on, till I reached the end. Then I began the *Symposium,* and the sun was shining on the shrubs outside the ground-floor in which I slept before I shut the book up. . . . Here in the *Phædrus* and the *Symposium* in the 'myth of the soul,' I discovered the revelation I had been waiting for, the consecration of a long-cherished idealism. It was just as though the voice of my own soul spoke to me through Plato. Harrow vanished into unreality. I had touched solid ground. Here was the poetry, the philosophy of my own enthusiasm, expressed with all the magic of unrivalled style. The study of Plato proved decisive for my

future. Coming at the moment when it did, it delivered me to a large extent from the torpid cynicism of my Harrow life, and controlled my thoughts for many years."

In the autumn of the same year, 1858, he entered Balliol College.

Chapter II

OXFORD: JOWETT

SYMONDS was a born hero-worshipper, and the adoration which hitherto had been bestowed on his father was now, for some years, to be bestowed equally on the Master of Balliol.

Jowett's two outstanding traits were practicality and scepticism, a scepticism always in the service of practicality. With an almost unlimited power and prestige, he stood at the crossways where so many young men had to pass on their way to maturity and, like a Socrates grown worldly-wise, reasoned away their vague dreams and overwhelmed them with feasibilities. He was a great doctor of the mundane, equipped with tonics and lotions for all the miasmas of youth. Few indeed are the poets, the dreamers, the artists who survived Jowett's treatment. "Poetry and that sort of

nonsense," he would say: and is reported to have found men of poetical temperament the greatest of his difficulties. He was one of those worldly men who seem to be justified by their inexorable sense of duty. "The only way in which a man can really rise in the world," he said, "is by doing good in it"—a sentiment the world will always endorse, the most popular of all sentiments indeed, because by offering to the spirit the sleeping-potion of usefulness it permits men to be unspiritual with a calm conscience. To Jowett, indeed, rising in the world was almost the sole and conclusive sign of having done good in the world; and he was as unmercifully insistent that all his young men should be successful as he was careless whether the best of them should be, in the right sense, victorious. So long as there have to be wholesale professions which ignore personality, public works, public persons, men like Jowett have their important place. They serve the majority, they reinforce the best elements in that rough amalgam we call society. It is only in relation to poetry, to art, to re-

ligion, that they seem to miss the point of life.

In these relations Jowett appears painfully external. He was just enough martyr to his religious beliefs to give piquant exception to the rule he illustrated. As regards the old metaphysical theology, as regards ritualism and dogma, he was one of the brightest liberators. But he did not fight with theology because it was the enemy of the soul, but because it was the enemy of society. Theology he rejected not because it interferes with religion, but with the world, and he could not see that between religion and the world there is any essential opposition. He rejected theology because it seemed to him just as fanciful as the vague aspirations of young men. To him reason was the supreme law because reason is the basis of the social contract, and he avoided the æsthetic and the spiritualistic because in some degree reason could not operate in them. One thing he retained stubbornly, his belief in a definite, personal God. With him it was a kind of foible which did not in the least interfere with an all-corroding scepti-

cism that doubted everything else and above all life. I think it is true that only men who in their heart of hearts doubt life believe so emphatically, so exclusively in society and its usages. Only those who are without faith in anything else believe seriously in "the world." And Jowett was such a profound sceptic that he found a very solid basis in things temporal. He believed so strongly in duty, in work, in government, in rank, system, form, the *fait accompli*, because he did not believe at all in life, in human nature, in the soul. "There was no clinch in his mind," said Goldwin Smith, "he would have doubted and kept other people doubting forever. Whatever was advanced, his first impulse was always to deny." And he adds, "I cannot help thinking that Jowett sought in translation a mental refuge." These sentences will prove important when we come to see his influence over Symonds. They show us the man placed as a teacher of Greek and philosophy in constant touch with speculative matters, bringing to them no emotional response, no human finality, and resorting always to a solid compromise, putting his ma-

terials to practical employment without any sense of their ideal value. To Jowett Plato meant politics, and politics meant the Parliament of England. With how much of a tender, hidden irony must Symonds have read that subtle parody of one of Jowett's sermons in Mr. Mallock's *New Republic,* a book which he himself was to revise in proof before its appearance—that sermon in which Christ is so fatuously reconciled with a world which contains no real sorrow, no real sin, in which the eye of faith discerns "the beautiful spectacle of good actually shining through evil . . . the well-being of the rich through the misery of the poor, and, again, the honest industry of the poor through the idleness of the rich": a sufficiently cheap faith which proclaims glibly the difficult truth proclaimed with equal glibness by Pope:

> "All nature is but art unknown to thee;
> All chance, direction which thou canst not see;
> All discord, harmony not understood;
> All partial evil, universal good."

I am speaking of Jowett from a rather celestial point of view, yet it is the point of

view that has to be emphasized to bring out his relation to a certain sort of pupil. Symonds had already heard much of work, of the necessity of achieving something in the orthodox way, of the prime necessity of utilizing all culture in action. The habit of hard work he had acquired, as also the fire in his own heart, made plain now that he was in no ultimate danger of shoddy dilettantism. A destiny of outward achievement was already marked out for him, which only his physical weakness could interfere with. But his personality had had no guidance. Within he was vague, impressionable, chaotic, ardent. His inner self was all for poetry, for creation; his outer circumstances more and more were bending him toward criticism, scholarship, "substantiality," toward everything that universities know how to deal with. This general tendency Jowett confirmed.

Not alone Jowett, of course, but Oxford altogether. Other Oxford poets, Clough especially, had broken their hearts with doubt and patched them up again with work. The real malady of Oxford was want of faith in life.

Wanting that, theology had provided them with something to believe in, and when at Oxford theology fell an appalling vacuum remained. Only by some such explanation can we grasp the significance of that "cosmic enthusiasm" which took such hold on the succeeding generation and made Walt Whitman the prophet of a new religion. Wherever life is at low ebb system flourishes. Therefore I find significance in the remark of Goldwin Smith in his *Memoirs,* that he could never get much from Emerson's writings because he could "find no system" in them. Goldwin Smith and his fellow-Oxonians of that day would have been puzzled by Nietzsche's aphorism that "the will to system is a lack of rectitude." Such minds are bound to believe that the lack of system in Emerson, or indeed in the Gospel, is only a weakness. That it is the essential condition of all illuminated thought, from the Analects of Confucius to *Sartor Resartus,* they could not have divined at all. The will to system built the Roman Empire, but that is all one can say of it except that it built the British Empire too. And Symonds, who

should have been in another world, was living among the kind of men who build empires.

His first meeting with Jowett, though it anticipated by a year the close and lifelong intimacy of master and pupil, is worth repeating in his own words. In the autumn of 1858, upon first enrolling at Balliol, Symonds bore a letter to the great man from his father, who had lately met him in Oxford. "I found him dozing in an armchair over a dying fire. His rooms were then in Fisher Buildings, looking out upon the Broad. It was a panelled room, with old-fashioned wooden mantel-piece. He roused himself, looked at the letter, looked at me, and said, half dreamily, 'I do not think I know your father.' Then, after an awkward pause, he rose, and added, 'Good-bye, Mr. Symonds.'" An inauspicious opening, certainly; but it appears that Jowett had a way of dreaming over the fire and was by habit short in manner and a silent man. To be invited to his breakfast parties was the most coveted honor in Oxford; yet nothing was said, Jowett "stared vacantly," everyone was awkward and unhappy—"the toast was heard

crunching under desperate jaws of youths exasperated by their helplessness and silence."

Before he came into close contact with Jowett, Symonds fell in with many of the older Oxford men then or subsequently famous: Goldwin Smith, Dean Stanley, Mark Pattison, his future brother-in-law T. H. Green, and Professor Conington. With the last of these he became almost immediately intimate.

Conington seems to have been a kind of intellectual bully, a hard man, who tasked Symonds unmercifully on the score of scholarship without having the least opinion of his powers. Here as elsewhere it was a case of incompatible temperaments, and as elsewhere Symonds exhibited his unhappy faculty for stumbling into the wrong hands. Conington knew and cared for nothing but literature, and in the strictly academic sense. Art, music, nature, philosophy, life he passed by. Beside the standard of human capacity set up in his mind, Symonds appeared a very wavering, ineffectual creature indeed, continually needing to be reminded of his inaccuracy, languor, and general vagueness. He criticised his pupil for

wanting force and distinction in style and for "shady fluency," and he was openly vexed when that pupil won the Newdigate Prize. Yet he never suggested any practicable way in which his faults could be overcome. While Symonds, already formulating the cosmic principle "Though He slay me, yet will I cleave to Him," in his turn no sooner learned that his old master was dead than he set about admirably editing his *Miscellanies*. That Conington's influence, however limited, was most helpful to him—and helpful because of its limitation, because it more or less clubbed him into form—is proved by his later statement that, while Jowett taught him to write, Conington taught him to see that "literature is something by itself, not part of an iridescent nebula, including all our cult for loveliness." Without doubt he was dealing, however stupidly, with a difficult case. "The association with Conington was almost wholly good," wrote Symonds in his *Autobiography*.

It was an atmosphere of criticism, and in a more and more critical spirit Symonds threw himself into æsthetic studies: Greek poets, Ro-

man history, music, Plato, St. Augustine, Goethe. Stirred to religious speculation by the reactionary sermons of Bishop Wilberforce, he fought bitterly against the sceptical tendency of his own mind. It seemed, he said, to "check the unity of thought and will, and certainly to impair the æsthetical enthusiasm." This latter proved curiously the case with him, and he discovered that his enjoyment of music became less spontaneous. "I analyze and try to enjoy more; I have fewer ideas and less delight in hearing." This he attributed to a weakened faith in the supernatural. It was really caused by the weakening of his emotional power through his excessive mental activity. It is worth noting incidentally that as his religious speculation became acute he turned his back on the æsthetics of religion which had drawn him passively into ritualism. Perpetual reading, writing, discussing, analyzing, criticising, comparing notes—all this he had in feverish abundance. He was constantly over-exerting himself, writing an essay a day, on subjects ranging from Swiss history—already one of his fields of interest—to the Criminal Respon-

sibility of Lunatics; as well as countless poems. His diary meanwhile contains recurring notes like this: "slept very ill—a night of overtaxed brain, and constant weary dreams. I must begin some strychnine, I feel so low," or "return of old cramped head feeling," or "curious talk of my want of sympathy, ambition, mad suicidal fancies." Body and brain racked and rushed, brought up against those hard, clear, successful intellects, he was running riot within. A profound nostalgia, deeper than homesickness—what he called *Seelensehnsucht*—possessed him. "The common defect of all æsthetics," he writes, "is that they raise a yearning which cannot be satisfied by themselves except in creation." He fluttered about the arts, drawn almost equally to all. For a time music overshadowed the rest in his enthusiasm, and he believed that with proper training he might ultimately find himself in musical expression. This tendency must have been stimulated by a visit to Clifton in 1862, where he found Jenny Lind spending some days in his father's house. In his diary he reported his conversations with her: "She com-

ments on the charm of having a definite line in life, an art to live for," and says much of the kind of poetry which is suitable for singing. "For singing we must have one feeling, one harmony, not a series of broken lights." So calm, intuitive, self-possessed—artist, not æsthetician—the image of all that Symonds had not yet found and would never quite find on his own horizon! One feels already that this universal æsthetic ferment of his must ultimately simmer down to criticism, that it is too much a "series of broken lights" to lead him into limited creation.

Of the suggestive events of his undergraduate life only a few can be selected here. Examined in the spring of 1859, he failed to conjugate correctly, tense by tense, the verbs ἐιμί and εἶμι, a notable fact in one who was to write what Frederic Harrison called the classical and authoritative account of Greek literature. It gives color to the statement made by him and by his critics that he was by nature inaccurate in rudiments. But it gives more color to the charge against examinations as a real test of knowledge in sensitive minds

which are easily confused, for as he said he would have had no readier command of the multiplication table. In the summer of that year he joined a reading party to the east coast, an experience repeated several times later in the Lakes and North Wales—just such reading parties, "bathing and reading and roaming", as Clough describes in the *Bothie:* Green sympathetically helping him in Plato, Conington spurring, piquing, prodding him in composition and language. And in the summer of 1860 he won the Newdigate Prize with his poem *The Escorial,* which he recited on June 20 in the Theatre. Conington, as I have said, was vexed by this occurrence, having been twice unsuccessful in the same competition. Matthew Arnold, the Professor of Poetry, chastened him with sound words which were to apply with considerable accuracy to all of Symonds' verse: that he had won "not because of his stylistic qualities, but because he had intellectually grasped the subject, and used its motives better and more rationally than his competitors."

Short tours to the Continent were frequent

throughout this period: in the autumn of 1860 through Belgium and again through Germany to Vienna, in the spring of 1861 to Paris and Amiens, and in the following June with his father to Switzerland and Italy,—his first visit to the home and studio of his later life. Every detail of these tours is noted in his diary, wild flowers, pictures, minute points in architecture. In Switzerland he found himself an agile climber and formed that comradely sympathy with Swiss peasants which proved the great motive of his after years. On the Mer de Glace his father took from his pocket a volume of the *Princess* and read "Come down, O maid, from yonder mountain height"—the good, busy father, always finding in Tennyson something to read aloud in appropriate places. The bent of his own mind is illustrated by his remarks on an Englishman in the train to Como, whose "cunning cold gray eyes, sharp pale face, fresh light hair and thin lips" made evident that he had studied physical science exclusively. To Symonds, who had already begun to form for Switzerland that passion which led him to say subse-

quently, and with literal truth, "the Alps are my religion", he seems to have appeared as Tyndall appears in the famous remark, "At sunrise we came among the Alps; they were of sandstone, stratified very regularly." In Ruskin alone, I think, do we find the two points of view—the religious and the geological—united in any eminent degree.

I have a mind in this place to quote from his diary the description of a mountain storm witnessed on his return to England. It illustrates his feeling for natural scenery, his earliest sentiment for the Alps, and the degree to which, at this period, all his lines of thought converged in music. It illustrates too his early style and his gift for highly colored prose:

"*Friday, August 2 (1861).*—Conington and I walked through Redland to the Sea Walls and home by the observatory. There we watched a great thunder cloud, which for majesty of shape, size and color surpassed the Alps. Its change and progress was like a symphony. Far away, from west to north it stretched; above the channel the summits were of the pearliest white; domes and peaks,

on which the sunlight rested; its middle was of light ethereal blue, like the base of Monte Rosa, but its feet were indigo, and a tawny fringe of angry red was driven, mixed with wind and tempest, all along the van. First it towered in simple beauty, transfigured with the sunlight that sat upon it, pouring bands of glory down its chasms, and shooting in broad columns on the trees and rocks and downs—ever changing with the changing wind and scudding fleecy sands, fleeces that ran before the armaments of thunder. Soon this aspect altered; more and more of the blue sky was hidden as the masses rose—the cerulean blue was changed to deepest purple, and the indigo to sullen black. The wind swept furiously, the cloud came onward in a crescent, the sun was darkened, and scarcely flamed upon the topmost edges, and in a breath the gust of wind and rain were dashed upon us. For a moment all was dark and the landscape blurred, the vivid greens and delicately pencilled outlines of the hills were gone, the wind howled restlessly. But this again changed. The cloud had broken with its own fury. Like

a squadron that rides upon the foeman's guns and sweeps them off, and then returns scattered and decimated to its camp, so this ponderous mass of thunder-cloud was tattered, rent, and dissipated by the fury of its onset —its domes were ragged, and beneath its feet shone streaks of lurid sky, on which the jagged tops of the firs and beeches trembled. Now came the last movement of the symphony —all the landscape was grey, but clear, and full of watery sunlight. An exhaustion like that of a child fallen asleep from crying seemed to hold the winds and woods and distant plain. All was calm, but the broken clouds went sailing on overhead, dizzy with their own confusion, and, as it were, a ground swell of its passion still rocked the upper air. We turned and went homeward. In this symphony, or sonata, call it which you like, there were three distinct movements—an Adagio, an Allegro, a Presto, and a Minuet. It should have been written in D flat, and no passage should have been free from agitation. But the first part should have most beauty. It should contain the germinal idea of the whole

in a tremulous thought constantly recurring, and superinduced upon an air of calm majestic sublimity, which should be the basis of the movement. This agitation should gradually usurp the place of the calm air in the second movement. In the third it should reign supreme—all mere beauty should be lost in the tempestuous passion. In the last the calm air of the first movement should return, but shorn of any superfluous ornament, sad and melancholy, and often troubled by faint echoes of the central spasm."

Meditations like this, more successful in lesser fragments, make one feel that in time Symonds might have produced one lasting book, a purely personal book. Had it not been for circumstances which tossed him back and forth between his inner self and the outer world—dragging from him works which are neither quite true to fact not yet quite true to the poet's consciousness, he might have left such a permanent book as the *Opium Confessions* or Amiel's *Journal.* This kind of production however meant nothing to Jowett and

Conington, and Symonds took their word for it.

At Oxford his intellect had been rushed far ahead of anything the total man could support. It was ten years before the rest of him could grow up to his precocious ability, before there was any coalescence between brain and nerves. It may be doubted whether he ever shook off, even in his last, most human, active period in Switzerland, the burden of satiety that results from such excesses of æsthetic stimulation. His emotional nature was baffled. He was in a state of anarchy. Work, duty, cerebration had not been properly related to his insistent need of self-expression. "I could mention men," he says, "who might have been musicians or painters, but who wasted their time at Oxford in aimless strumming on the piano, or silly sketching, because there was no career of industry provided for them. They served the curriculum badly. Their natural talents found no strengthening exercise. . . . With this latter sort I can class myself. I went philandering around music, heraldry, the fine arts, and literary studies ruled

by sentiment. I wrote weak poetry. I dreamed in ante-chapels. I mooned in canoes along the banks of the Cherwell, or among yellow water-lilies at Godstow. . . . But in all these things I got no grasp on any serious business."

The practicality and the scepticism of Jowett were, in short, precisely those qualities to which Symonds ought not to have been subjected. Impracticality, properly guided, and faith, in himself and in life, he needed. It was impossible to make a good routine man of him, but it was highly possible to turn him out a wretched member of that modern race which has been shipwrecked on the arts. Æsthetic stimulation had made some sort of expression an actual physiological need, while his training had not provided him with strength, faculty, or direction. In his diary he notes the "brooding self-analysis without creation" that afflicts him. And in another passage (September 29, 1861) *à propos* of Lewes's *Life of Goethe,* he pictures the exact condition of his mind.

"Reading this life teaches me how much of

a poet's soul a man may have without being a poet, what high yearnings may plague him without his ever satisfying them, what a vast appreciation and desire may exist where there is no expression or formative will. And in all these cases the force is wanting, power is absent, spontaneity is torpid. Susceptibility to beauty, capabilities of acute pain and pleasure, strong æsthetical emotions, these do not constitute a poet, though a poet must have them. . . . Power, all-pervading power, pushing the soul into activity beyond receptive susceptibility, covering all deficiency by concentrating itself on the passion of the moment—this makes the difference between the man of genius and the dilettante driveller."

An age that is, or has been, interested in such characters as that of Amiel should note well how they are produced, for Symonds is the closest of all English equivalents of Amiel. Intellectual and emotional sophistication, poetry bottled up and fermenting in minds that lack vitality—this produces that *amour de l'impossible* with all its chimeras and in-

visible hippogriffs, just as, according to Victor Hugo, the Apocalypse sprang from a pent-up virginity. The difference between Amiel and Symonds is mainly a difference of will. Incapable of that prolonged and chronic tension which brought the malady of Amiel to such exquisite heights and has made it immortal, Symonds was capable of compromise with the ideal. In the very passage from which I have just quoted he goes on to say: "A man may have the susceptibilities of genius without any of its creative power; but if he has an atom of talent he cannot be without practical energy." This indicates his readiness to accept a makeshift. It is true that Symonds, to the end of his days, pursued the Absolute with a hopeless passion. That alone is a mark of ill-health; for men who find themselves live gladly in the relative, and the greatest philosophers content themselves with a working-plan. Symonds himself in later years discovered a working-plan, which enabled him to live with assurance and to produce an immense quantity of adequate work. But his life as man of

letters was, I think, really incidental. It was the expression of his natural energy, the satisfaction of his impulse for style, the unburdening of his tangible knowledge. His real self was always hidden, essentially unexpressed.

CHAPTER III

YOUTH: WANDERINGS

WHEN Symonds took his degree on June 22, 1862, he was truly, as he described himself five years later, "like a sphere in contact at all points with nature, poetry, painting, philosophy, music, passion, yet without a motive force within it." A far-sighted reader might see in this very situation the personal *tabula rasa* upon which ultimately criticism would appear. But the lack of a motive force did not proceed from any tranquillity within. Five years had yet to pass before the mischievous ferment of Oxford reached its agonizing climax, and five more before the heated brain settled down to productive activity. His first book was published in 1872; but from 1867 onward he began to see more and more clearly the possibility of a rational existence. The ten years 1862-1871 may there-

fore be considered his period of probation. In the first of these years he left college, in the last his father died; and the death of his good father, as we shall see, brought him permanently to his feet. The crisis of 1867, midway between these two events, marks the end of his exclusively intellectual period. Thereafter, at first weakly and lamely, but with growing assurance and power, he made his peace with life.

It is my belief that the five years of Symonds' life during which he reaped the whirlwind of Oxford æstheticism form, as told in his letters and diaries, the most appalling record of its kind in English literature. But in the midst of the whirlwind and almost unknown to himself the critic was quite surely beginning his true education, gathering his materials, shaking down his impressions, forming his method. During these chaotic years the main lines of his after life were determined.

A tour through northern Italy aroused in a much more definite way than heretofore his interest in painting. The Venetian school espe-

cially captivated him because of its preoccupation with life. Returning in August to Clifton, he began a book of private studies, labelled *Art and Literature,* with an essay on the characteristics of Venetian art. He was beginning to feel his way into the theory of the *milieu,* which was to underlie all his critical writings. Music continued to occupy him. After a performance of Haydn's *Creation* at Gloucester we find him associating it with his Biblical and Platonic studies and trying to establish a theoretical relation between music and the other arts. But here, as in all his speculations, there is a significant conflict of motives. "It illustrates," as his biographer, Mr. Brown, says, "the governing qualities of Symonds' personality, acute sensibility and intense intellectual activity; he felt profoundly through his æsthetic sensibility, but his intellectual vigor would not let him rest there; he desired to know as well as to feel. . . . As it was, the internal clash and conflict of two such powerful appetites inside a delicate frame were wearing and grinding the man to powder." True criticism is not a second best, not,

as it is often supposed, a compromise in theory on the part of men who cannot succeed in practice. It is a wholly different function, the intellectual study of origins and relations. It regards the work of art, not as a record personal to the critic, but as a specimen to be investigated dispassionately, intellectually, in its relation both to art and to life. The difficulty with Symonds at this period was that he could not disentangle the objective and the subjective. He felt every work of art as a poet, and at the same time could not refrain from analyzing it. For this reason neither the one impulse nor the other could function properly. "I am discontented," he wrote, "because I do not feel myself a poet, and do not see why I should not be one." To the choruses and oratorios of Handel, Haydn, Mendelssohn, he brought the touchstone, not of a *rationale* of music, but of his own feverish religious difficulties; or rather the two were perilously intertwined. To quote Mr. Brown once more: "The situation seems clear enough; in one region emotion and intellect are at war, in the other thought and action. Emotions generate

a passion, an appetite; intellect analyzes the emotions into thoughts; thought is unsatisfying to the appetite which emotion has created, and that appetite demands the translation of the thought into action, but health and conscience bar the way." In those really penetrating sentences we have the whole story of Symonds—that complex remained with him to the last. And although it ultimately resolved itself partially in action when he had gained a semblance of health and discovered types of action from which he was not debarred by conscience, he never quite shook off the deadlock inherent in his nature. "It is one of the most terrible results of introspection," he wrote now, "that I find the weakness, vicious tendencies, morbid sensibilities, and discontent deepened and intensified by all that I have learned in study and by all that I have lost in faith. Old realities have become shadows, but these shadows still torment me. There is a restlessness of passion, an unending want of what can never be, that seem the peculiar Nemesis of a scholar's life. . . . I hear the great world of fact and action roaring for-

ever around me unintelligibly; my own sphere is one of phantoms, and my own battle a mere sciomachy. Thoughts and words are the men and things I deal with; but they are direful realities, full of suasions to passion, and maddening with impossible visions of beauty. This constant contact with the intangible results, in a word, in the state of Faust." Along with this runs the unceasing undertone of bodily ailment: "My scalp is sore and my bones tingle"; "my head is full of neuralgic pains, my eyes feel boiled and are regular centres of agony, to move which is to set two instruments of torture in motion"; "a strained feeling in my head."

At the end of October, 1862, he was unanimously elected Fellow of Magdalen, and on the first of November he went into residence. The episode of his fellowship was brief and unhappy. We hear of his having a little group of six pupils in philosophy and, what is more significant, beginning a systematic study of the Renaissance, which resulted presently in his winning the Chancellor's Prize with an essay on that subject. A former friend ma-

liciously sought to prove a charge against his character. The charge was a complete fiasco; but in his overstrained condition it naturally increased his morbid shyness, rendering anything like an easy friendship with the other Fellows impossible, and served mainly in precipitating his final collapse. This seems to have occurred in April. He awoke one morning after an unusually frightful dream with the feeling that "something serious had happened to his brain." And indeed so it proved. Thereafter for three years he was unable to use either eyes or brain for severe study. What effect this had on the ultimate work of a mind naturally weak in its grasp of rudiments and constantly impressionable may be imagined by anyone who has formed an idea of Symonds' place in English criticism. During the spring of this year he struggled as well as he could to complete his prize essay, which was finally recited before the Prince and Princess of Wales. It was the closing event of his Oxford career.

On June 25 Dr. Symonds sent him to Switzerland. This Alpine summer was a kind

of pastoral interlude—the only really poetical episode in Symonds' vexed life. Mürren was for some time his headquarters. Thither came one day an English family, Mr. Frederick North, member of Parliament for Hastings, with his two daughters. The elder was Miss Marianne North, the flower-painter, whose collection of sketches from rare tropical plants was housed after her death in a special building at Kew. The younger, Catherine, was described by Symonds in his diary at the time as "dark and thin and slight, nervous and full of fun and intellectual acumen." And he adds, "Alpine inns are favorable places for hatching acquaintance and gaining insight into character." The Norths went away at the end of a week, but Symonds had formed an impression which he was very soon to translate into action. Another girl, meanwhile, had taken his fancy as the special genius of the place and the embodiment of all its shining suggestions. He calls her "Mlle R— E—, daughter of a jeweller in Thun." She was a friend of the innkeeper at Mürren, and she helped him in the care of his guests. She wore

a charming Bernese costume, and after the evening work was done she would sit with the other girls on the balcony and they would all sing together. For her each morning he picked bouquets of Alpine flowers, "climbing daily higher and higher up the mountains as the summer flowers retreated, until at last there were few left but white lilac crocuses and deep blue harebells." She was the subject of many sonnets; but when she found that Symonds had come back again to Mürren purposely to see her she kept shyly apart, not understanding "what all this meant." She consented however to stand sponsor with him at the christening of a little daughter of one of the guides. At the christening too was T. H. Green of Oxford, his future brother-in-law, fresh from Heidelberg, his head swimming with German metaphysics and poetry. With Green he passed a week at the little wooden inn of Uetliberg, above Zurich, writing and studying at little beer-tables set beneath the beech-trees, whose opening branches revealed the far view below. Some of the poetry of this true *wanderjahr* I find in an entry of August

22, which resembles in a striking way a characteristic passage of Maurice de Guérin:

"At nine this morning the sun shone out. We walked together in the deep snow, which lay thick upon those late autumn flowers. They, poor things, revived immediately beneath the genial warmth, and lifted their pretty heads from wells of melting snow-wreaths. The whole world seemed to feel returning spring. Birds floated in dense squadrons overhead, whirling and wheeling on the edges of the clouds, which kept rising and dispersing in the eager air above the valley. Far away the mists rolled like sad thoughts that dissolve in tears."

But the relief and happiness of this Alpine episode was destined to be short. After a few weeks in England, where he was received full fellow at Magdalen, he set out for Italy racked with neuralgia and unable to read or write after dark. In Florence he had many conversations with Richard Congreve, the English representative of Positivism in its religious aspect. Symonds, whose faith in a personal God had been grievously shaken, and whose faith

in humanity was gaining strength, could yet find no foothold in the dogmatic religion of Humanity, because he could not conceive collective man as possessing personality or consciousness, and the essence of religion seemed to him a personal relationship between the individual and the Whole. This need of a personality animating the universe he never shook off; later it modified, or tinged, his acceptance of Spencerism, and it is significant to see it emerging thus early, at the moment when his secular worship of humanity was on the point of blossoming forth. Unable to use eyes or brain for serious study, he was thrown upon more sensuous resources, and in Florence and Rome he gathered quantities of direct and invaluable experience from pictures and buildings. At Naples the old nostalgia for the impossible awoke again, and the careless, joyous, idle existence of the Italians came over him as a kind of condemnation. "The world is wide, wide, wide; and what we struggle for, ten thousand happy souls in one fair bay have never dreamed of."

In March, 1864, he returned to London and

took lodgings with his old Oxford friend A. O. Rutson at 7, Half Moon Street. Five months passed, aimlessly. He could neither sleep nor work, and the nervous need of incessant activity preyed upon him. He wrote a few brief articles for the *Saturday Review* and took what exercise he could, rowing and riding. Subjected to an extremely painful treatment of his eyes, he sat on one chair with his feet upon another, in a dark room, unable to read or to bear the light. London with its noise and heat and the desolation of loneliness brought him dreams of Mürren and of the family he had met there. He formed a quick resolution, called upon Mr. North, and in August joined the latter's family on the Continent. On the 10th of November he was married to Catherine North at St. Clement's Church, Hastings. Early in 1865 he returned with his wife to London and settled in lodgings at 13, Albion Street.

Symonds was now approaching twenty-five. The desire to devote himself to literature had formed itself gradually and more and more surely in his mind. Already he had fallen

into the three lines of study which were to occupy him chiefly as a man of letters—Greek poetry, the Renaissance, and the Elizabethan Drama. But the literary purpose was not to be finally confirmed for another five years. The true artist, it is said, will doubt himself to the end of his days but will never doubt his vocation. Symonds doubted both, and it was only natural. For he still believed more in Jowett and his father than in himself: his father doubted gravely that a man of his extreme fragility could spare enough energy from mere living to achieve anything of solid worth in literature, while Jowett's cautious encouragement was vitiated by his incurable doubt of everything. His education had undone faith, and his broken health seemed to stand in the way of hope. At the same time he was one of those men who cannot stand still. The wheels of his life went on grinding, grinding, and when they could not find grist without they ground themselves. This condition became acutely critical in the summer of 1865. He had set up lawyer's chambers to give his activity an ostensible object and went on with

his Elizabethan studies. But his physical condition rather grew worse—eyes and brain almost paralyzed, the smallest excitement shattering his whole system. "For a few hours," he wrote, "my heart has beat, my senses have received impressions, my brain has coined from them vigorous ideas. But vengeance follows after this rejoicing. Crack go nerves and brain, and thought and sense and fancy die." And close following the physical comes the spiritual condition: "To emulate others nobler than myself is my desire. But I cannot get beyond, create, originate, win heaven by prayers and faith, have trust in God, and concentrate myself upon an end of action. . . . Literature, with these eyes and brain? What can I do? What learn? How teach? How acquire materials? How think? How write calmly, equably, judicially, vigorously, eloquently for years, until a mighty work stands up to say, 'This man has lived. Take notice, men, this man had nerves unstrung, blear eyes, a faltering gait, a stammering tongue, and yet he added day by day labor to labor, and achieved his end!' "

In the midst of this, however, two powerful restorative influences were taking hold upon him—his wife and Walt Whitman. His wife certainly calmed his nervous excitability and made his life gradually more rational and human. And his discovery of Whitman's writings began to act upon his moral nature as a strong tonic. In the Cambridge rooms of his friend Frederic Myers, in the autumn of this year, he first heard read aloud passages from *Leaves of Grass*. "I can well remember," he says in his *Study of Whitman*, "the effect of his (Myers') sonorous voice rolling out sentence after sentence, sending electric thrills through the very marrow of my mind." The reading began with the words "Long I thought knowledge alone would suffice me," and one might well pause on these words, so profoundly symbolic of this moment in Symonds' life. Knowledge, or in the larger sense all that is implied in the word "cerebration," had occupied him almost exclusively. His health and education had almost prevented him from living, in the wide sense, at all. His brain had whirled on regardless of nerves and

body, struggling to grasp the absolute, the infinite, the impossible. And Whitman, with his lusty contempt for purely intellectual processes, his robust sweep of realities, and the mystical cosmic sense which held the world in solution, came over the young student like a wave of sea-water, invigorating, refreshing, smoothing out the heated brain, re-stringing the nerves, and giving him a new point of departure, in some degree at least serene, hopeful, assured. It was to be some years still before he could profit very tangibly from Whitman's message, but for the moment it brought him through a dark passage and proved an antidote that cleared him forever of Jowett's power.

To Jowett he had written about this time, begging his advice in the choice of a vocation and stating his belief that although the literary life was and had always been his main desire he realized that his bent was neither for the purely artistic nor the purely philosophic in letters. "The point seems to have been reached," he wrote, "at which I must definitely renounce writing, or make it the sole business

of my life." Jowett replied, asking him to run down and have a talk with him at Oxford. The Master was cautiously encouraging. He had already expressed his opinion that Symonds had it in him to become eminent in literature. Now he added makeweights to that opinion, urging him to finish his legal studies and get called to the Bar, to keep his eye on politics as a solid possibility to fall back upon and to translate Zeller's history of Aristotelianism. I cannot help adding that, when during the conversation the question of de Musset's tragic career came up, Jowett's comment was: "Men should keep their minds to duty." The whole abyss of Jowett's ineptitude lies in that sentence and that context. And I may here anticipate a little the fortunes of Zeller's Aristotelianism. In a Symonds letter of 1867 occurs the sentence: "Zeller, that paradox of my unequal existence, keeps on his caterpillar pace from day to day. The slow muddy river of translated speech indeed stagnates now and then, forming into noisome pools and eddying in slime about perplexing boulders. Yet voluminously thick it oozes on." And again at a

later point, in the *Autobiography*: "Much time was wasted upon a translation of Zeller's history of Aristotle and the Aristotelian school. This I undertook at Jowett's suggestion. Jowett, I may say in passing, had a singular way of setting his friends to do work undoubtedly useful, but for which they are not suited. To make me translate Zeller, instead of Cellini or Boccaccio, was nothing short of a *gaucherie*. I found it intolerably irksome. I did it abominably ill. It retarded the recovery of my eyesight, and when it was done I abandoned it as worthless." I pursue the development of this little episode because it illustrates the Master's more than venial failure as regards the pupil, the pupil's dogged devotion to the Master's will, and most important of all the pupil's final sense of liberation from that will.

For Jowett's advice, accepted as to Zeller, was negligible in the main. Symonds was rapidly determining his own future. With his wife he was reading works on Michael Angelo and the Renaissance—"I want to keep my mind on that part of European history," he wrote in a letter. Visiting Clifton

in August he found Woolner the sculptor making a bust of his father. Woolner with his clear vocation, his vigor and single-mindedness in art, impressed him deeply, just as Jenny Lind had formerly done. "Woolner," he noted in his diary, "likes people to keep to their trade and not to meddle. He has a profound contempt for Jowett's meddling criticism." The gulf dividing artistic sensibility from artistic power occupied his mind, but not quite with the old feeling of impotence. Woolner, the stout-fibred and opinionated sculptor, could yet compass the miracle of art; and after hearing *Israel in Egypt* he ponders on such a man as Handel, greedy, coarse and garrulous in conversation, according to his biographer, fond of beer, without passions and without one intellectual taste, who could yet "express the feelings of mighty nations, and speak with the voice of angels more effectually than even Milton." Symonds, we may note, had the characteristic English enthusiasm for Handel. Throughout this period his diaries are filled with specula-

tions on the nature of artists: one can see already that he was a born biographer.

Speculations of this kind led him to the conclusion that he was not, and could not become, an originating artist himself. We find him noting, on November 30, 1865, an important date in relation to his ultimate career, his intention to fit himself "for being a good *vulgariseur.*" The one trait he could depend upon was irrepressible energy, a kind of energy which filled up every hour left vacant by bodily ailment, weak eyes and treacherous brain,—even those perhaps which might better have been filled with passive reflection. If he could not be a poet he could at least set himself, by industrious, persistent, effectual work, to learn the craft of letters. He could let the muses shift for themselves. And indeed for Symonds this determination, baffled as it was for some time to be, was highly essential. The mere semi-physical exercise of putting together words and sentences was needed by him as a tonic, and to his dogged perseverance in this, often against medical orders, he attributed his prolonged life.

But now, when he had taken his resolve, a fresh disaster befell. His father, examining him on Christmas eve, discovered that the apex of the left lung was gravely affected. By the strange displacement of energy which often occurs in tubercular cases, the new trouble no sooner asserted itself than the old brain-weakness began to abate. The fresh evil, so much more serious as regards his outward life, enabled him to live more intensely and more successfully within. He became definitely happier and more capable of prolonged study. But this again was a new main tendency which did not for some time exhibit noticeable results.

On February 24, 1866, he set out for the Riviera. At Mentone he set seriously to work mastering Italian, of which he had had since Harrow days only a convenient knowledge, pressing through Dante, Boccaccio, and Ariosto, writing the first of his Greek studies—that on Empedocles, struggling to purge his style of purple patches and to grasp more incisively the truth about men, works, places. A stay in Switzerland on the way home brought

back all his old dreams of poetry. He was growing more rapidly than he knew, but the growth was leading him inexorably away from what he chiefly longed for. In August he returned with his wife to 47, Norfolk Square, where ten months before his eldest daughter Janet had been born. His complex and scattered sympathies were gradually shaking down to a more settled programme; and it already appeared how much of that programme was to be occupied with the Renaissance and its relations. With Jowett, on a flying visit to Oxford, we find him considering the idea of a History of the Renaissance in England, which he never relinquished and to which he contributed in his dramatic studies and his lives of Sidney and Jonson.

Another journey through France, made necessary by an attack of pneumonia and aggravated brain-congestion, followed at the end of May, 1867. His journal at this time is exceptionally full and illuminating: his varied sympathies begin to assume forms characteristic of his later complex though reasonably coherent point of view. He longs continually

for the Alps, obscurely divining that among them he would eventually find health and strength. At Bayeux he finds, in the midst of his architectural studies, that there is a greater monotony among cathedrals than among mountains, and he adds significantly, "Nature increases, art diminishes, as we grow older." Passing strangers—the theme of more than one of his published poems—haunt him with the mysterious fascination of unknown and unknowable destinies. "I hate the sophistication of my existence," he writes, "the being penned up in a cage of archæology and literary picture-making." He is tormented with a sense of idleness and wasted youth: the need of constant reaction, activity, recording of impressions grows upon him. He pours himself out in letters, in diaries, notes, essays, poems. Everything that enters his brain tortures him until it is recast and thrown forth again. He seems to repeat feverishly over and over those appalling words of Marvell:

> "And ever at my back I hear
> Time's winged chariot hurrying near."

A morbid fear of stopping, waiting, letting go possesses him. He cannot content himself that life, trusted a little, in its own mysterious, blundering, compulsive way, fulfils itself after a fashion which is from the beginning, in each case, inevitable. No disciple of Goethe was ever more fitted to profit by Goethe's paradox, *Was man in der Jugend begehrt hat man im Alter die Fülle;* that the life committed to nature works itself out mechanically, while the individual in becoming as disinterested as nature views himself with all the cold indifference of nature, passing through his seasons inexorably as the year and indestructibly as the wind: and takes a kind of artistic delight in the inevitableness of nature's fulfilment of him. Some such faith as this—the really scientific *morale,* so vitally needful, was beginning to take form in him, fluctuating, vague, unaccountable, but of ever-increasing strength. "No one is happy," he says, "who has not a deep, firm faith in some ideal far beyond this world, in some law of majesty, beauty, goodness, harmony, superior to the apparent meanness, ugliness, evil discord of the present

dispensation. . . . Those who are not 'tenoned and mortised' upon something indestructible must be rendered wretched by the changefulness and barrenness of daily life." Doubt and faith, agitation and calm, intellect and emotion were struggling to gain the mastery: and the struggle was to continue until it reached its culmination in the great crisis so soon to follow.

After this exhausting fortnight he returned to Hastings and London, where presently another daughter was born. The summer weeks were still more exhausting; brightened, however, by the close friendship he now formed with Henry Sidgwick. His diary and letters become extravagantly rhetorical and incoherent, though often acutely and awfully vivid. How truly the virus of Amiel had poisoned his heart may be seen from one passage: "I seem to enter into a kind of Nirvana, thinking of mutability and youth that flows away—until the senses slip off one by one, and thoughts slumber, and the conscious soul at last stands naked and alone, environed by eternal silence and everlasting nothingness. It

is the glacial region of the soul, the death of all that warms or makes to move, the absolute indifference to pain or pleasure, of what is or what is not. From it I bring no message—none at least that can be said in words—but such a message as makes one feel what are the solitudes of the womb and of the grave. No doubt this state is—of the nerves—morbid; but what does it not reveal to me of the uncolored, universal I?"

Symonds was now passing through the bitterest, blackest season of his life. The *maladie de l'idéal,* the demon of speculation, the thirst for the absolute had to play itself out before it was possible for him to strike the C-major of this life, before the invigorating earthiness of Whitman and the soothing calm of Goethe could prevail with him.

The crisis came during a second tour in France, whither he had repaired with his family at the opening of September. At Mélun during a sleepless night he wrote the most impassioned of his poems, *An Improvisation on the Violin.* It is a dramatic monologue, the soliloquy of Beethoven during the performance

of what appears to be the C-minor symphony or an improvisation based upon it. "The victory and majesty of the soul are wrought out of its defeats and humiliations," he had written of this symphony only two weeks before. And in the poem and this context is exhibited the intensely personal and subjective nature of his attitude toward music, toward all the arts indeed. Nothing could illustrate more accurately his incapacity as yet for rational criticism. It seems to substantiate the theory that artistic expression literally springs from disease—a kind of blood-letting, as Goethe conceived it. For Symonds perpetually speaks of the relief he finds in writing out his miseries on paper. He clings to his pen as a shipwrecked man clings to a spar.

On October 24 he arrived at Cannes. There were assembled some of his most brilliant friends, among them Jenny Lind, Henry Sidgwick, and Edward Lear, author of the *Book of Nonsense.* Lear was busily occupied, at this ironical moment, making rhymes and pictures with little Janet Symonds; among them the immortal *Owl and the Pussycat* who

went to sea in a beautiful pea-green boat. Neuralgia, worn-out nerves, increased lung-disturbances, shattered eyesight, digestive disorder, and a sprained ankle made such consolations ludicrously impossible to Symonds. His difficulties suddenly came to a head and he passed through a kind of insanity. "All the evil humors which were fermenting in my petty state of man," he says in his *Autobiography,* "poignant and depressing memories of past troubles, physical maladies of nerve-substance and lung-tissue, decompositions of habitual creeds, sentimental vapors, doubts about the existence of a moral basis to human life, thwarted intellectual activity, ambitions rudely checked by impotence—all these miserable factors of a wretched inner life, masked by appearances, the worse for me for being treated by the outside world as mere accidents of illness in a well-to-do and idle citizen, boiled up in a kind of devil's caldron during those last weeks at Cannes and made existence hell." And again: "The last night I spent at Cannes was the worst of my whole life. I lay awake motionless, my soul stagnant, feeling what is

meant by spiritual blackness and darkness. If it should last forever? As I lay, a tightening approached my heart. It came nearer, the grasp grew firmer, I was cold and lifeless in the clutch of a great agony." Such without doubt is the state that in sensational natures precedes "conversion."

Inscrutable and intangible as this crisis may appear, its intense reality is made plain by its very tangible effect upon his life from this time forward. Nothing more surely proves how really fortunate a man Symonds was than that he was capable of this purging crisis. Many men have lived—Amiel their chief exemplar—nursing the maladies that afflicted Symonds, standing, as Hegel says of the modern artist, in the midst of this reflecting world and its relations and unable by any act of will to withdraw from it. The dim and voiceless pain of the overcultivated mind which has lost its power of self-command creates a special limbo of lost souls. To the mind which has identified itself with Maya, which has accustomed itself to the universal reality, phenomena possess only a wraithlike existence,

men and women are shadows projected on a mist. Yet life with all its passions remains, life which has lost its faculty of katharsis, which cannot purge itself through action, which cannot satisfy its own fundamental demands, which is dead without being disembodied. This is what occurs when, in psychological language, the motor activity has been wholly supplanted by the sensory, when the will has been fretted away by the imagination. This tendency in Symonds was brought up sharply. All the unhealthy, unguided, chaotic stirrings of his youth could not prevail finally against his truly amazing power of rebound. His original faculty for pure artistic creation, as I see it, had been very early swamped. Three things had caused this: his lack of the sheer physical power of self-assertion, the æsthetic studies which had dissipated it and diluted it with speculation, and the obtuse compunction-philosophy of his father and Jowett. All these combined, acting either as positive or negative agencies, had turned him from art into æsthetics. The speculative element of æsthetics had gradually pursued its course,

draining the imagination, the nerves, the will until it had reached its logical climax and put the last question to life. To this question there is no intellectual reply. Life itself can reply by continuing to roll on. The soul can reply by submitting blindly or enthusiastically to life. But for a few weeks it seemed to Symonds that he lacked the power of submission to life—because the springs of his own life were sapped. He had become for the moment pure intellect, and intellect had reached its barrier. Nerves and emotions appeared to be in abeyance. In reality they were in a state of hideous tension and, being so, he *felt* all the agony of the position which he seemed only to *know*. It was, however, impossible for Symonds to lose his mind. He possessed very deep and strong recuperative powers whose existence he had never guessed, and these presently asserted themselves. It became quickly evident how much wiser nature is than the doubting brain. The total man surmounted the erring part—quietly, without warning. And Symonds was no sooner on his feet again than he found himself in possession of some-

thing he had never possessed before—faith in life. The sceptical, the speculative, the analytical mind never left him, but it was never again to interfere with a robust sense of life in its totality, life which is more than cerebration—faith in the universe, in humanity, and in himself. "I emerged at last," he says, "into stoical acceptance of my place in the world, combined with epicurean indulgence. Together, these two motives restored me to comparative health, gave me religion, and enabled me, in spite of broken nerves and diseased lungs, to do what I have done in literature. I am certain of this fact, and I regard the utter blackness of despair at Cannes as the midnight in which there lay a budding spiritual morrow."

His life was like a book broken in the back, which falls into two parts.

Chapter IV

AT CLIFTON: LITERATURE

IN the very midst of his ordeal at Cannes Symonds did not hesitate in his studies. We find him reading Richardson, Balzac, and Heine's letters, plodding on with Zeller, and projecting a sort of original version of Hegel's *Æsthetics.* The journey proceeded through Corsica and Italy where Symonds, busy and curious with renewed energy and life, resumed the study of Italian and wrote his essays on Aristophanes, Ariosto and Tasso. In November he took his family to Clifton, engaging a house quite near his old home, where on January 15, 1869, his daughter Margaret was born.

Symonds was now eager for action, and for a time his activity took a social form. Clifton College had recently been founded, largely through the instrumentality of his father, and

he arranged presently to give lectures on Greek Literature to the Sixth Form, which he extended also to ladies' classes in Bristol. This work I fancy was of great importance to his chosen career of *vulgariseur.* For the first time he learned the demands of an audience—the kind of audience to which, perhaps against his dearest wishes, the greatest part of his writings have appealed and will appeal. For it must be remembered that this well-known apostle of culture to the majority mistrusted and disliked all the sentimentalities of culture, such as are not truly acclimated to the natural self. However, he was now required to find his level. Desultory, fragmentary, agitated piece-work was no longer in the old way possible. He was forced to study the art of presentation and to get his material into shape. That the answering pull, the concrete presence of listeners was exhilarating to him is evident from the fact that his first books were the direct outcome of these lectures. Whether, as he maintained, he lacked the art of lecturing or not, it is significant that he wrote in a letter of this time: "My emotions

are less occupied and my imagination more exercised." The introspective habit was rapidly falling away, and he was consequently giving himself more generously to life. Some of his pupils have recorded the profound influence upon them of his great power in dialectics, his own tenacity of aim, and his wonderful sympathy with young men. He lectured once a week at the college, continuing the work talking and reading aloud in his own library. "Get subjects outside yourself, he used to say, if you wish to show that you are strong; and if you intend to be a poet, you must begin and end with strength." So writes one pupil in a memorial notice of 1893. It exhibits pathetically the eagerness with which Symonds was himself endeavoring to get outside himself and to find strength. He was rapidly assuming the position of public responsibility which later became him so well at Davos. All this fell in with the scheme his father had formed for him, with so many affectionate, mistaken, postponed hopes. And now that kindly, repressive influence was to be removed. On February 25, 1871, Dr. Symonds died.

His father's death was a profound shock; yet Symonds almost immediately realized, with chagrin, how liberating a shock it was. It came at the moment when he had at last prepared himself for work, and it enabled him to carry out that work in his own way. "It is true," he says in his *Autobiography,* "that the independence I now acquired added a decided stimulus to my mental growth. My father had been so revered and so implicitly obeyed by me that his strong personal influence kept me in something like childish subjection. I did nothing without consulting him, and when I was unable to repress those parts of my nature with which he could not sympathize, I resorted to subterfuge, half-measures, and concealments. Left without him, I had to act for myself, and insensibly I became more manly." And again, "I doubt whether I could have written as freely, and published as spontaneously, as I have done, had I been conscious of his criticism." *Pietas* was the one strictly Roman virtue that Symonds possessed. It is a virtue which, in some conditions, becomes the mother of many vices.

With his wife and three daughters he now moved into his boyhood home, Clifton Hill House, and presently began to assume his father's place in the responsibilities of the town. He was elected to the Clifton College Council, served as secretary to an Invalid Ladies' Home, and was one of the founders of Bristol University. He gathered together a volume of *Miscellanies* by Dr. Symonds and edited the *Remains* of Conington, who had also died. In 1872 he published his first book, *An Introduction to the Study of Dante.* This was prepared from lectures given at Clifton College and in Exeter: it forms an appropriate opening to the long series of his publications dealing with the Renaissance.

The idea of a monumental work on that subject had been brewing since the latter part of 1870. His friend Frederic Myers, with whom he had first read Whitman, had proposed a collaboration, which fell through; and Symonds, doubtful and hesitant, determined to proceed alone. "My heart bleeds," he wrote, "to think of my own incapacity for a great work. I must not think of it, for the thought

paralyzes." Nevertheless, in February, 1871, the month of his father's death, we find him furiously at work upon the first chapter, a rapid survey of the whole of Italian life and history before Dante. This chapter seems to be the second and a part of the first in the volume called *The Age of the Despots.* Other trains of thought were also taking form. A long series of articles had been passing through the magazines: those on *Ravenna, Orvieto, Christmas in Rome, Ajaccio,* and many others, rewritten from his journals of travel; as well as Greek studies on *The Gnomic Poets, Empedocles, The Idyllists,* etc., some of which had been given as lectures at Clifton College. These appeared presently in book form, *Studies of the Greek Poets* in 1873 and *Sketches in Italy and Greece* in 1874. And at about this time John Morley, much taken with his Greek studies, invited him to form a connection as regular contributor to *The Fortnightly Review,* which he maintained during the rest of his life.

To support his health and restrain him from excessive study the Continental tours continued

regularly. In 1872 he was again in Switzerland, and in the spring of 1873 he went with his wife to Greece. Athens, he notes, "is pure light"; and his essay on Athens became an elaboration of this phrase. Later in the same year he visited Malta, Tunis, Sicily, and Italy again, busily collecting material for his great work. "I read chronicles and histories and biographies on the very spot where the events happened, and make notes for future use which have the juice of life in them."

In 1875 the first volume of *The Renaissance in Italy* appeared, dealing with the socio-political aspect of the period. In his *Autobiography* Symonds deplores the declamatory tone which obstinately remained in the book after it was rewritten from his lectures. He doubts whether he could ever have launched his treacherous brain on so huge an enterprise had he not taken the first step by lecturing. Walter Pater, reviewing this first volume in *The Academy*, wrote: "The book presents a brilliant picture of its subject. . . . As is the writer's subject so is his style—energetic, flexible, eloquent, full of various illustrations,

keeping the attention of the reader always on the alert. . . . The imagination in historical composition works most legitimately when it approaches dramatic effects. In this volume there is a high degree of the dramatic; here all is objective, and the writer is hardly seen behind his work." To this hearty praise he adds one significant qualification—the absence of reserve: "I note the absence of this reserve in many turns of expression, in the choice sometimes of detail and metaphor."

Between Symonds and Pater, I may mention at this point, there was a strange want of sympathy. Pater habitually referred with a kind of pitying contempt to his fellow-Platonist as "poor Symonds." Symonds, writing in 1885 of *Marius,* shrinks from "approaching Pater's style, which has a peculiarly disagreeable effect upon my nerves—like the presence of a civet-cat"; and again, in 1890, "I tried Pater's *Appreciations* to-day, and found myself wandering about among the 'precious' sentences, just as though I had lost myself in a sugar-cane plantation." No one, I dare say, could have been so acutely annoyed

by Pater's style who was not himself on the perilous edge of preciosity. This was indeed somewhat the case with Symonds, who was often preserved from preciosity only by the other extreme of half heedless improvisation. It is a little sadly notable to find the two best contemporary workers in a field so largely identical, so irreconcilable in temperament. Perhaps the field itself was to blame. At any rate, the gods of material progress may be amused to find the Greek spirit reincarnated so incompatible with itself, as if the modern Hellenist could remain himself only in the midst of barbarians.

As with Pater, so with Swinburne. Symonds invariably wrote of Swinburne with the respect proper to a great poet. Of *Bothwell* he said, "I do not think anything greater has been produced in our age. . . . It seems to me the most virile exercise of the poetic power in combination with historic accuracy that our literature of this century can show." But elsewhere and of another poem he adds, "He does not attend to the projection of his thought enough, but splashes it out as if he

were upsetting a bucket." What Swinburne thought of Symonds may be gathered from one of the wickedest and most unjust of all his wicked and unjust criticisms. In his recollections of Jowett he writes of "such renascent blossoms of the Italian renascence as the Platonic amorist of blue-breeched gondoliers who is now in Aretino's bosom. The cult of the Calamus, as expounded by Mr. Addington Symonds to his fellow-Calamites, would have found no acceptance or tolerance with the translator of Plato." What Jowett really thought of Symonds we know well. Truly there is something catlike about modern pagans.

The second series of *Studies of the Greek Poets* followed rapidly. On these two volumes, the most luxuriant of all his writings, I should like to pause. "Some will always be found, under the conditions of this double culture," Symonds had said, "to whom Greece is a lost fatherland, and who, passing through life with the *mal du pays* of that irrecoverable land upon them, may be compared to visionaries, spending their nights in golden dreams and the

days in common duties." Only a man like Symonds, perplexed by a thousand cross-currents of thought, thwarted from the pure poetical faculty, could feel as a revelation that majesty of the early philosophers, that fire and sweetness of the early poets. The world has squandered since their day genius beyond measure; but they remain, immortal names, pure and clear as drops of wine embossing cups of crystal. Why? Because they are the immemorial prototypes, the inventors of all that usage and slovenly debasement have brought to us in the form of platitude. They lived when platitude was young and the dew of early morning lay shining on the first and simplest thoughts of men. They discovered those "happy thoughts" which are the points of departure for all speculation. It is hard for us to conceive the day when the idea that "not-being has no existence" could, in itself alone, fill the whole life of a philosopher, when he could become victorious and majestic through the discovery of it, when so simple a notion could buoy up a man of gigantic intellectual powers, satisfy him, enable him to

look back upon a well-filled and exuberant life and bring him, as it brought Parmenides, the reverence of the greatest thinkers of his world. That is why the simplicity of the ancients is so hard for us to understand. We cannot grasp how pregnant that simplicity was—we who grasp Goethe, Dante, and Shakespeare and even then feel unsatisfied, and unexpressed. Happy is the man who, in our day, can find a thought larger than himself! He alone is capable of moral culture. But not among the early philosophers alone do we find that pregnant simplicity by which a little thing can greatly fulfil a life. In all ages of childhood and poetry we find it—in our own Shakespearean age when Gabriel Harvey, the Cambridge scholar, expressed as his ultimate wish to have it written upon his grave that he had "fostered hexameters on English soil." No scholar could have had less of the sophistication of scholarship than is there expressed. In reflections like these, in the passion of opposites, we find the true nature of such eclectic affinities as those of Symonds with the Greeks and the Elizabethans.

Symonds' attitude toward scholarship seems to me indicated in his chapter on mythology. He there states carefully the seven main philological explanations of the origin of myths, and parries each in favor of a vaguer explanation. He seems to feel that to get at the true origin of myths one has to be a poet. And indeed in the last analysis one can grasp such a thing only by a sympathetic understanding of childhood; so that the method of approach becomes rather psychological than philological. Behind all study there lies a mystery, and the origins of things can be grasped only by clairvoyance. What is true of the origins of things human is true in a similar way of their definitions. One may stumble about endlessly among scientific definitions of the epic; then one comes upon Shelley's definition as the "summing-up of the spiritual life of an age for the age that follows," and at once a flood of light falls over everything. Science could not have arrived at that definition. Why? Because it is only suggestive and personal, not abstract and final. A hundred poets might have stated it in as many

different ways and each way would have had a higher finality in it than exact scholarship could achieve. This of course is only to say that science provides a method, that it does not pretend to penetrate essences, that the true truth is the poet's. There are two kinds of truth: ideal truth and practical truth—truth by divination and truth by logic, and both, alas! are mutually scornful. What must the logical historian think of Carlyle's *French Revolution?* And, on the other hand, what would Ruskin have said of the art-criticism of Mr. Bernhard Berenson? That is the everlasting dualism between the prophet of an ideal order and the interpreter of the *fait accompli.* Symonds, with his divided heart, is an example of the soul astray between two worlds. His scholarship is never quite of the orthodox kind. It is restless scholarship, seeking always to do what only poetry can do, to become poetry; scholarship not merely as humanism but as mysticism. I do not wish to emphasize this too much—it is only a touch, which does not seriously vitiate the practical solidity of his work. But it is the kind of

thing which, had it been done more courageously, conclusively, whole-heartedly, would have ruined Symonds' work as scientific presentation and might have lifted it out of the scientific class altogether into the region of truly poetical interpretation. That perilous method results frequently in mere unsoundness of thought; occasionally it results in such work as Carlyle's *French Revolution,* wherein the lack of practical truth is counterbalanced by a personality that makes it a piece of high fantasy.

In the *Greek Poets* I think Symonds produced something more like a work of genius than he ever again achieved. The book is vibrant with golden pictures and bright phrases, such as this: "The sweetness of the songs of Phrynichus has reached us like the echo of a bird's voice in a traveller's narrative." It cannot be denied that the style is often overstudied and more often recklessly overblown. But who that loves beauty in words and rebels against our too unstudied and too sable English prose, and prose of scholarship especially, can

regret a passage like this on Sappho and her sister poets for all its tricks of rhetoric?

"All the luxuries and elegancies of life which that climate and the rich valleys of Lesbos could afford were at their disposal; exquisite gardens, where the rose and hyacinth spread perfume; river-beds ablaze with the oleander and wild pomegranate; olive groves and fountains, where the cyclamen and violet flowered with feathery maiden-hair; pine-tree-shadowed coves, where they might bathe in the calm of a tideless sea; fruits such as only the southern sun and sea-wind can mature; marble cliffs, starred with jonquil and anemone in spring, aromatic with myrtle and lentisk and samphire and wild-rosemary through all the months; nightingales that sang in May; temples dim with dusky gold and bright with ivory; statues and frescoes of heroic forms. In such scenes as these the Lesbian poets lived, and thought of love."

Passages like this, modulated in tone and key to a whole pageant world of scenes and characters, and all as blossoms of severe learning, corroborate Frederic Harrison's opinion

that "Symonds was certainly far more widely and profoundly versed in Greek poetry than any Englishman who in our day has analyzed it for the general reader. And it is plain that no scholar of his eminence has been master of a style so fascinating and eloquent."

The unending journeys back and forth were making of the fugitive from ill-health, in spite of his citizenlike position at home, a kind of scholar-gypsy. The second volume of *The Renaissance* feverishly went forward, at first in Switzerland and then for some months of 1876 at San Remo, wherever in hotels or casual inns a writing-table and a free hour could be had. "I worked furiously, recklessly, at this period," he writes, "devouring books upon Italian history, art, scholarship, and literature, writing continually, and pushing one volume forward while another was going through the press." The travel sketches also proceeded between whiles, filled with exquisite pages of color and scraps of history, biography, criticism, picturesque word-painting.

These papers, collected finally in three volumes which now bear the general title

Sketches and Studies in Italy and Greece, are so many chips from the workshop where the weightier books were being laboriously put together. They bring us behind the scenes, and show us the anxious travellings to and fro of the quick-eyed scholar in search of the past. They are full of informal autobiography, and provide for us the ever-shifting, kaleidoscopic background, shimmering and iridescent, of his complex outer life. They are Symonds' *Reisebilder,* and yet with a very significant difference from those of Heine. F. Harrison acutely remarks that these sketches are records of things seen rather than of things felt. That I think is true, and Symonds was a victim of our modern passion for the picturesque. With all his intense feeling for individual men and women, his passion for comradeship, his cosmopolitan sympathies, he remains always a sublimated tourist; unlike Heine and unlike Byron, to whom ancient monuments, lovely scenes, and all the grandeur of the past exist primarily as stimulants to modern liberty. Heine's sketches are the most exquisite that have ever been written about Italy, yet Heine

never treats any phase of history or of art as an end in itself. Had he travelled in Italy in the days when Symonds was travelling there we feel that he would have had a great deal to say about Mazzini and Garibaldi and Cavour. But Symonds never once that I can recall appears to have any sense of the "Third Italy." He never refers to Mazzini except in one or two historical passages of *The Renaissance.* Of all the throbbing modern life of the nation, social, religious, political, of all that *is* Italy, he is almost as oblivious as the holiday tripper. The very years during which he was busily passing in and out of Italy, with eager, open eyes, were the years of Italy's greatest crisis. Yet the solitary published reference in his diary to any sense of great occurrences is a tell-tale entry of 1862. He was in Milan, and the people had been stirred to a demonstration against the Franco-Austrian Government by a speech of Garibaldi. Four hundred were taken prisoners under his hotel window; and he observes, "I often wondered what a demonstration meant. This is a pretty and picturesque specimen."

This amazing sociological insensibility might be consistent in an artist; in a historian it is, to say the least, singular. And it is all the more singular when we recall the sympathy of Symonds with historic liberators like Savonarola and Campanella. Human evolution, the liberation of men was indeed an animating principle of his entire critical and religious philosophy. Are we forced to conclude then that his major sympathies were in fact purely literary? His life at Davos seems to belie that, but the self-conscious pursuit of the picturesque is perilous to the most genuine types of intellectual integrity.

Certainly this tourist attitude toward Italy, as a kind of museum filled only with beautiful dead things, gives a false perspective even to his *magnum opus*. Professor Villari remarked that he seems occasionally to forget that the Renaissance was only a single period of Italian literature and art, only one episode in a long evolution which has not yet worked itself out. He follows too rashly the historical method of Taine in treating the traits of the Italians exhibited in that epoch as essential and perma-

nent rather than temporary and evolving. Even Ruskin, so fundamentally wanting in sympathy with the spirit of the Renaissance, brings to it a truer vision, because he thinks of it always as an episode—however mistaken he may be as regards the quality and value of that episode—in human history. Without doubt Symonds was so intensely occupied with the golden age itself that he neglected some of its wider aspects and ignored the modern Italy with which it has so vital a connection. The truth of this contention will be evident, I think, to anyone who reads his informal essays in their proper relation, as preliminary or subsidiary sketches for his formal work. A historian of old Italy so blind to young Italy must necessarily be wanting somewhat in the truest historical vision. For here the Italian people are used mainly as an adjunct to the picturesque, just as in his rather deplorable essay *In the Key of Blue* (which led Swinburne brutally to characterize Symonds as the "Platonic amorist of blue-breeched gondoliers") he represents his gondolier Antonio posed in various lights and with various back-

grounds to bring out the aspects of a color. There preëminently we have the record of a thing seen rather than of a thing felt—the painter is at work rather than the poet. But no one can read his *Autobiography* without realizing how the poet was struggling in him all this time to assert itself. It is one of the deepest facts of his pathological condition that he could never summon up the sufficient vitality to feel what he saw, to be the poet that he wished to be. He seems to echo the words of Coleridge, in his *Ode to Dejection:*

> "I see them all so excellently fair,
> I see, not feel, how beautiful they are!"

And again:

> "I may not hope from outward forms to win
> The passion and the life, whose fountains are within."

Just this insufficient vitality gave an element of truth to the harsh assertion of one of his reviewers, that his poems were "the vocabulary of passion served up cold." Symonds well knew what it is to be a poet; he knew the difference between pure emotional power and

the nervous power he possessed. The reviewers of his poetry rather wantonly told the truth, which has to be emphasized about his essays. For Symonds, who maintained as his first principle that life is more than art, failed here in the application of it. For him in Italy life is wholly submerged beneath art; with the exception of the people of Venice, with whom later he came into close, friendly contact, his Italians have no life above their overwhelming past.

Symonds provides so bright an illustration of that morbid passion for the picturesque which afflicted the world at the close of the nineteenth century, that I feel I should say more of it here. He describes the impulse in his *Autumn Wanderings:* "Why is it that Italian beauty does not leave the spirit so untroubled as an Alpine scene? Why do we here desire the flower of some emergent feeling to grow from the air, or from the soil, or from humanity to greet us? This sense of want evoked from southern beauty is perhaps the antique mythopoeic yearning. But in our perplexed life it takes another form, and seems

the longing for emotion, ever fleeting, ever new, unrealized, unreal, insatiable." This pictures an obscure, iridescent state of mind which must have haunted even the most casual tourist in an Italy saturated with old passions that seem struggling to revive in us as we stand among the memorials of them. We cannot suppress these "echoes of an antenatal dream." In places where life has been lived so fully death seems to lose its finality. Numberless ghosts beset the traveller clamoring to regain their old life in his life. One feels oneself actually a cloud of many witnesses, a composite of some phantom horde. One becomes the passive agent through which old histories reenact themselves—congregations of the dead, jealous of our trivial flesh and blood, struggle within us to find once again their wonted space and time. Symonds in one of his Venetian sketches describes himself as trying at the Lido to focus the spirit of it, when suddenly an immense, swarthy swimmer leaped from the sea, like an incarnate Triton. Thereupon he observes: "I have always held that in our modern life the only real equivalent for

the antique mythopoeic sense—that sense which enabled the Hellenic race to figure for themselves the powers of earth and air . . . under the forms of living human beings, is supplied by the appearance at some felicitous moment of a man or woman who impersonates for our imagination the essence of the beauty that environs us." But one is rarely fortunate to find satisfaction of this kind. The Circe of travel in our day is the accumulation, beyond our own power of recuperative integrity, of these impressions which demand an embodiment they cannot have except in creative imaginations. Culture provides us with a sympathetic knowledge of countless historic lives and points of view, which only robust personalities can subdue to themselves. The peril of culture lies in its tendency to sap one's own firm and present actuality, and vicarious experience is not at all the same thing as real experience. Symonds felt this, and he expresses it in his reflection: "Passion, nerve and sinew, eating and drinking, even money-getting, the coarsest forms of activity, come, in my reckoning, before culture."

The *Sketches* contain some of his most beautiful writing, and I may not pass them by without giving an example of it. One must note, however, in the passage I have chosen, a certain heaviness of effect which is due to a characteristic abuse of the adjective and the want of a certain vigor of reserve which comes with tranquil recollection. It is to illustrate not only this, but Symonds' perpetual consciousness of it, his own consciousness of having passed beyond art, the alternate swing of his pendulum between rhapsody and journalism, that I have added the final sentence of qualification. It is a picture of Amalfi:

"Over the whole busy scene rise the gray hills, soaring into blueness of air-distance, terreted here and there with ruined castles, capped with particolored campanili and white convents, and tufted through their whole height with the orange and the emerald of the great tree-spurge, and with the live gold of the blossoming broom. It is difficult to say when this picture is most beautiful—whether in the early morning, when the boats are coming back from their night-toil upon the sea, and along

the headlands in the fresh light lie swathes of fleecy mist, betokening a still, hot day—or at noontide, when the houses on the hill stand, tinted pink and yellow, shadowless like gems, and the great caruba-trees above the tangles of vines and figs are blots upon the steady glare—or at sunset, when violet and rose, reflected from the eastern sky, make all these terraces and peaks translucent with a wondrous glow. The best of all, perhaps, is night, with a full moon hanging high overhead. Who shall describe the silhouettes of boats upon the shore or sleeping on the misty sea? On the horizon lies a dusky film of brownish golden haze, between the moon and the glimmering water; and here and there a lamp or candle burns with a deep red. Then is the time to take a boat and row upon the bay, or better, to swim out into the waves and trouble the reflections from the steady stars. The mountains, clear and calm, with light-irradiated chasms and hard shadows cast upon the rock, soar up above a city built of alabaster, or sea-foam, or summer clouds. The whole is white and wonderful; no similes suggest an analogue

for the lustre, solid and transparent, of Amalfi nestling in moonlight between the gray-blue sea and lucid hills. Stars stand on all the peaks, and twinkle, or keep gliding, as the boat moves, down the craggy sides. Stars are mirrored on the marble of the sea, until one knows not whether the oar has struck sparks from a star image or has scattered diamonds of phosphorescent brine.

"All this reads like a rhapsody, but indeed it is difficult not to be rhapsodical when a May night of Amalfi is in the memory, with the echo of rich baritone voices chanting Neapolitan songs to a mandoline."

The second volume of his great work, on the Revival of Learning, appeared in 1876, and the third volume on the Fine Arts went forward during the summer in Switzerland. We find him working at the Riederalp, in company with his friend H. G. Dakyns and Oscar Browning, "at feverish speed, in the midst of damp fogs that crept into our rooms through chinks in the log-built walls." Mr. Browning, in his *Memoirs,* recalls that large packets of proof sheets would arrive each morning on the

breakfast table. These proofs were of *The New Republic,* which Symonds was revising for Mr. Mallock. Early in 1877, whilst he was lecturing on the Medici in the draughty theatre of the Royal Institution, he caught a severe cold, which passed into bronchitis. Dr. Beddoe of Clifton (to whom *The Renaissance* was dedicated) found that his left lung was in a dangerous condition. Dispatched for Greece, Symonds stopped in Lombardy and as ever went recklessly on with his studies. The malady grew worse and, realizing that a disaster was impending, he hurried back to Clifton. The next day a severe hemorrhage befell.

Recovery was not believable. Supposing it to be the end, Symonds put his affairs in order and then quietly went on with what comparatively simple work his condition rendered possible. This was a translation of the sonnets of Campanella and Michael Angelo, already begun before the attack and finished shortly afterward in Switzerland. The account of this all but mortal crisis in his *Autobiography* is unusually touching, and he says that when

finally after weeks of calm resignation to death life returned to him he seemed to have been born again. "The struggle for mere life had now absorbed and superseded the struggle for what I sought in life. . . . I was a child in the hands of something divine, to which I responded with an infinite gratitude." These sentences are immediately followed by his own account of his religious development and final position. The tendency launched by his former mental crisis was now confirmed by his physical crisis at Clifton. His private struggle was now largely replaced by an eager delight in the whole of life.

His English days were now, though he was not yet aware of it, permanently ended. By Sir William Jenner's advice he made arrangements to spend the coming winter in a dahabieh on the Nile, passing a few weeks in the High Alps as a preliminary tonic. As it happened, his sister Charlotte and her husband Professor T. H. Green were staying at Davos Platz. Enthusiastic letters about the place attracted Symonds thither; and on August 7, 1877, he

arrived in the mountain village which was destined for the rest of his life to be his home. He was taken in hand by Dr. Ruedi, who found that his case required strict treatment. For three weeks he sat motionless in the sunlight, and was then permitted to lie in a hammock slung between pine-trees in the wood. "I lay watching the squirrels leap from pine to pine over my head and the clouds sail through the quiet places of the sky—listening to my wife's reading of Boswell's *Johnson*—noticing the children play, turning now and then a couplet in my translation of Michael Angelo's sonnets. I was not fit for work. Nature went healthily to sleep in me, and the first sign of convalescence was a slow dim sense of reawakening mental energy, very different from the feverish and fretful activity of the past years." At the end of a month he was allowed a little exercise, driving first and then, more and more ambitiously, climbing. As all went hopefully he determined to ignore his English doctor's advice and take the risk of giving up the Egyptian plan. Sir William Jenner, informed of this decision, replied, "If you like

to leave your vile body to the Davos doctors, that is your affair; I have warned you." He had in fact warned him that a fresh cold would mean the end. Certainly one motive actuating Symonds was the desire for an at least temporary abiding-place. Reviewing his life he found that in all the twenty-three years since he had gone to school at Harrow he had never passed more than three consecutive months in one place. Though he did not for three more years relinquish hopes of returning eventually to Clifton, he resolved now to stay where he was, and stubbornly set pen and brain in motion again. The first fruits of this renewed activity were the published *Sonnets of Michael Angelo and Campanella,* his first book of poems, *Many Moods,* and the *Life of Shelley* for the *English Men of Letters* series.

Many Moods was dedicated to his friend Roden Noel, of whom he speaks habitually in his writings as one of the major Victorian poets, the only worthy heir of the cosmic enthusiasm of Shelley, Wordsworth, and Goethe. It is a collection of travel-scenes, tales in

rhyme, meditative sonnets, and songs, many of them in learned metres. A considerable number deal with aspects of Platonic love. They are essentially scholar-poems, and if they do not rise into the first order it is because they do not spring convincingly from direct experience of life—the central human emotions are over-subtilized and refracted through the prism of culture. Nor have they the power of precipitating the quintessential in remote moods which marks the somewhat similar work of Arnold and Clough. They suffer at every point from Symonds' usual fault of wordiness, his incapacity to seize quickly and victoriously upon bright moments of emotion and fancy, and his excessive use of unvitalized ornamentation. Still, it is impossible to ignore, in this volume and its successor, *New and Old* (1880), his really astonishing faculty in descriptive poetry. What he could do in calling up natural scenery, settings, barbaric pageants may be seen from *The Valley of Vain Desires* and the opening pages of *Odatis and Zariadres:*

. . . "Now the tread
Of elephants with vine leaves garlanded
Went crushing blossoms with huge feet; their gray
Lithe trunks were curled to snuff the scents of May,
And on their castled backs and shoulders vast
Flamed cressets; on the live coals negroes cast
Spices of myrrh and frankincense, and boys
Like naked Cupids made a merry noise
Swinging from flank and dewlap, showering spray
Of cakes and comfits from gilt quivers gay.
Next came the priests, intoning as they went
Praises and prayers—their dusky foreheads bent
Beneath the weight of mitres stiff with gems;
And on their breasts and on the broidered hems
Of their loose raiment glittered runes that none
Might read, so far ago in ages gone
By men whose very memories are flown
Were those strange legends wrought in tongues unknown.
Behind them followed oxen white as snow,
Large-limbed, with meek eyes wild and round and slow;
Lowing they went, and girls beside them held
Red rosewreaths on their necks and shoulders belled
With golden bubbles."

Yet this is less the work of a poet than of a student of Italian painting. Of all the poems in the two volumes the most inevitably touched seems to me that called *To Rhodocleia,* the

last two lines of which are adapted from a Greek epigram of Rufinus:

> "To thee whose name and fame are of roses,
> Fair Rhodocleia, this wreath from me
> Shall speak of youth when the bloom uncloses,
> And speak of death and the days to be.
>
> Here in narcissus the rathe rain-lover,
> And here are wavering wind-flowers frail,
> And here are roses that wreathe and cover
> The foreheads of men by love made pale;
>
> Violets blue as the veins that wander
> O'er breasts we love when we dream Love true,
> And lilies that laugh to the sunlight yonder
> On meadows drenched with the morning dew.
>
> But when this crown on thy brow reposes,
> Learn from the blossoms, and be not vain;
> For time fades thee, as he fades the roses;
> Nor they nor thou may revive again."

I think this would not be out of place in Johnson-Cory's exquisite *Ionica.*

Of the Shelley book little need be said except so far as its subject throws light on Symonds himself. It is merely a competent abstract of previous records, like most of those

in the series to which it belongs. What its publisher thought of it may be seen from a letter of Alexander Macmillan, November 22, 1878: "I like your book very much and think it makes the clearest and simplest complete presentation of the man we have. . . . I cannot help being gratified that we have had the honor of publishing what is on the whole the best, completest, and most rational account of so noble, beautiful, if also very erratic and perplexing, a character." There is something suggestive in the writing of this life of Shelley just at the moment when his own poetry was first being published. Shelley had been from earliest childhood one of the men to whose writings he had submitted himself with "slow, dumb inhibition." With his own ruling passion for poetry he must have learned from Shelley, whose life was one long uninterrupted purgation through love, how impossible it is to be a poet when one's life is not poetical. He must have observed what a small part was played by taste in Shelley's education; devouring trashy novels, political economy, promiscuous science —literature being only incidental with him,

life appearing everywhere in the rough. That was the training, so unlike his own, cautious, respectable, directed by Jowett, overweighted with æsthetics, which went to the making of a poet of whom Symonds says: "A genuine liking for *Prometheus Unbound* may be reckoned the touchstone of a man's capacity for understanding lyric poetry." One recalls his remark at the close of his own Oxford career: "The fault of my education as a preparation for literature was that it was exclusively literary." We do only what we are, and we are what life has made us.

Chapter V

DAVOS: THE RENAISSANCE: ANIMI FIGURA

DAVOS in 1877 was different indeed from the Davos of to-day. An ancient village with seven centuries of history, it had been, till 1799, when it was incorporated in the Swiss Republic, a political centre of the Graubünden or Gray League. Then at last its main families, who held titles of nobility from France, Germany, and Austria and had provided governors, field-marshals, podestas, and ambassadors to most of the courts and armies of Europe, relapsed into the condition of hardy peasants and frugal specimens of the mountain democracy: farmers, vintners, herdsmen, innkeepers with immemorial pedigrees. Of its old grandeur not a trace remained, except indeed the Rathhaus, the white church with towering spire, and a few panelled rooms and family portraits in some of the substantial

scattered farmhouses. In 1862 the local physician published in a German medical review his observations of the fact that tuberculosis was unknown in the valley, while Davosers who had contracted the disease in foreign parts made speedy cures on their return. A well-known German doctor, himself gravely afflicted, resolved to make the experiment, rash enough in those days when consumption was coddled in close rooms. This Dr. Unger, entirely cured himself, in a few years turned the forgotten village into what we know as an approved health-station. It was at first known almost exclusively to Germans. Its ultimate fame among English and Americans was due more to the presence and activity of Symonds than to any other cause. In course of time his position there became almost patriarchal—so far as that word may be used of an invalid artist dwelling among true patriarchs. Patriarch he was however by virtue of his reputation, his growing family, the money that he spent with such wise care, the sympathy, half brotherly, half fatherly, which he extended to the natives of the place,

and the genial spirit of advertisement in which he spread abroad the fame of the valley, its robust life, its work and sports, its wines, and its inns.

The first close friendship he formed among the Davosers was with Christian Buol, younger brother of Herr Buol, the innkeeper, who became a sort of guide, servant, and companion to him. Few noble houses of Europe are so illustrious in their ancestry as this peasant clan. Their cousins were Counts in Austria and Freiherrs of the German Empire and they retained a patent of nobility conferred upon them by Henri IV of France. The head of the clan, Herr Buol of the inn, could assemble on New Year's eve his wife and his mother, five brothers out of nine with four sisters, and could seat below the salt a host of porters, maids, serving-folk. Truly a subject for Sir Walter Scott. The continued prosperity of the house was due to the wisdom, tact, and power of Symonds. As often happens when an old and simple village is suddenly transformed into a fashionable resort, the original inhabitants are deprived by shrewd

promoters from sharing in the commercial benefit. Symonds, who knew the world very well, insensibly became the wise and helpful middleman between the two populations. He made a detailed study of the situation, throwing the weight of his influence on the side of the peasants and scheming in every possible way to place them in control. In a business-like way he advanced enough money to the Buols to place them abreast of the incoming capital. His disinterested skill, thus displayed so tactfully and successfully in a delicate cause, quickened his hold on Davos life, and he became the friend and counsellor of the whole village. Meanwhile he moved his family into a suite of rooms at the Hotel Buol, which continued to be his home for three years and until his own house was built.

Thriving so vigorously under his new conditions that he was able, at the close of the first winter, to take rough daylong jaunts through the snow in open sledges, he did not give up hope of returning to Clifton. We find him writing in February, 1878, to Edmund Gosse that he meditates "sending for a cartload of

books in order to go on with *The Renaissance.*" That year was interrupted by two journeys into Italy, in April, when the invalid colony was turned adrift by the doctors to avoid the intermediate conditions of melting snow, and in the autumn; and this became a part of his yearly routine. The prospect of a second winter, with its monotony, its imprisoned isolation, and almost excessive quickening of the spirit, was not easy; yet in November he wrote, "I will still take the tree of beauty and shake the apples on my head."

The opening of 1879 found him issuing his twelfth book. In spite of renewed ill-health and hours of pain more terrible than he had ever endured, the year was a very active one. Between February and November he wrote, in their first draft, the entire two volumes on Italian Literature which form the fourth and fifth of *The Renaissance.* He also prepared American editions of the *Greek Poets* and the *Italian Sketches,* and revised the *Age of the Despots.* It was with the plan already formed of building a house at Davos and making it perhaps a permanent home that he returned to

England in the early summer of 1880. The unfavorable report on his health of the London doctors now at last confirmed this prospect, and he resolved to make the final break with England. He went back to Clifton, dismantled his old home, prepared it for sale, and heaped a great bonfire in the garden with his own papers and depressing family archives. "It was rather pretty," he observes, "to see Catherine and my four children all engaged in tearing up the letters of a lifetime." Then, with feelings not unlike those of Adam and Eve in the last lines of *Paradise Lost,* sadly but with a consoling resolution, he returned to Switzerland. He was now exactly forty years old.

Settling for a permanent stay in the autumn of 1880, Symonds began his new life with accustomed energy. An enthusiastic magazine article, *Davos in Winter,* which had more effect probably than any other influence in establishing the Anglo-American colony, was now followed by a letter to *The Pall Mall Gazette* calling attention to the urgent need of sanitary reforms in the place. This letter

was reprinted in three principal French and German newspapers, and brought down upon him the fury of the village authorities. Symonds had foreseen the perils that were bound to come, and have come, with a swift-increasing population of invalids. His prompt action led to a complete overhauling of the town's drainage, and after the first ill-will had blown over it established his position as a disinterested, energetic citizen and confirmed in Davos the career of public usefulness which had been cut short at Clifton. Having discharged this message he set about building his new home, Am Hof, a kind of glorified châlet, with high-pitched roof covered with zinc plates to shed the snow. Into this, at the end of two years, the family moved on September 25, 1882.

The year 1881 saw the publication of the fourth and fifth volumes of *The Renaissance in Italy*. The work was now complete, for the two final volumes on the *Catholic Reaction* (1886)—in many ways the ablest of all—seem to have been an afterthought. In its original plan *The Renaissance* was to have comprised

probably only three volumes. The general idea that it was to discuss all the aspects of the period—politics, social conditions, fine arts, literature, scholarship, religion—had been assumed from the beginning. But this general idea was not, properly speaking, animated with any great coherent vision of the whole. From this vital defect the work without question suffers. It is a colossal patchwork, based on elements entirely adequate in themselves, but executed in a casual fashion such as probably no other equally ambitious work has ever been subjected to. It is not, of course, intended to be a continuous narrative. Each volume or pair of volumes is complete in itself and sums up independently the special phase which forms its subject. In this way, and in the fact that it consists of a series of bright pictures, it resembles the *Main Currents* of George Brandes.

The Renaissance, as we have seen, was the main subject of Symonds' study from Oxford days. It was the theme of his Chancellor's Prize essay in 1865. But for many years he wavered in his choice of schemes between the Renaissance in Italy and the Renaissance in

England. He always felt that the spiritual connection between those two countries at that period was closer than between any others, English and Italian poetry being, as he said, twin sisters; and he found in the English drama and Italian painting the two most perfect instances of his theory of evolution in art. The history of the English Renaissance was never carried out, although *Shakspere's Predecessors* should be regarded as an introductory volume, complete in itself, while the lives of Sidney and Jonson may be taken as further fragments of the same long-projected scheme. To the history of the Italian Renaissance, using that word in its wide sense, he contributed in seven complete works in addition to the *magnum opus*. Chronologically by subject these works are: *Wine, Women and Song,* ballads of the wandering students in whom, at the breaking-up of the Middle Ages, the new spirit first blossomed; the *Introduction to Dante* and the study of *Boccaccio,* the *Life of Michael Angelo,* the *Sonnets of Michael Angelo and Campanella,* and the translation of Cellini's *Memoirs,* to which may be added

the *Memoirs* of Gozzi, the dregs and lees of the Renaissance spirit in the eighteenth century. Taken together then, the fourteen volumes, with countless isolated essays and poems, represent a close study in all its stages of that parabola which, in Symonds' favorite metaphor, describes the ascent and descent of a nation's spiritual evolution.

Although almost every phase of this long evolution is discussed with impartial sympathy, and many of its moments are brilliantly presented, this great mass of writings was not, as I have said, animated with any great coherent vision of the whole. *The Renaissance in Italy* is a work of almost the same compass as Gibbon's *Decline and Fall.* But the very name of Gibbon suggests the essential weakness of Symonds as a historian. Gibbon's was a passive mind—a mind which for long years could lie fallow, open to influences, inhibitive, capable of long and silent absorption, untroubled by the *furor scribendi.* His history was the subject of an almost unbroken meditation and silent labor through twenty-four years, unfolding itself out of an obscure but inflexible

purpose, minutely prepared before he ever put pen to paper. Cotter Morrison tells of the "calm stretches of thorough and contented work, which have left their marks on the *Decline and Fall.* One of its charms is a constant good humor and complacency; not a sign is visible that the writer is pressed for time, or wants to get his performance out of hand; but, on the contrary, a calm lingering over details, sprightly asides in the notes, which the least hurry would have suppressed or passed by, and a general impression conveyed of thorough enjoyment in the immensity of the labor." It is all this which made him what Lamartine describes in the phrase "an empty corridor through which the wind passes," the self-unconscious vessel from which classic works are distilled. A comparison with Gibbon serves admirably to throw into relief the method of Symonds. That method is described in an entry of 1866, which closes with a reference to the true method, so impossible to him. "When engaged on a subject," he says, "it is good to throw off casual jottings and short essays, *infimæ species,* as it were,

in the order of composition. These ought, however, to be frequently inspected, so that their results may be wrought into unity; in time a number of preliminary syntheses, *media axiomata,* would thus be gained, and all lead up to the organic view. This, at least, is the idea of my method. Another way would be to keep all in solution in the mind until the final process of crystallization. No doubt this would be the most vigorous and artistic way." It is easy to see that this idea of "preliminary syntheses" in a large work is essentially a vicious one; for, as a result, the organic view springs from a combination of almost accidental points discovered in composition. Artistic truth is itself a whole, which is not composed of partial truths.

The comparison of methods leads inevitably to the comparison of lives and characters. Gibbon could never have produced his work had he not been a strong-fibred, single-minded, complacent, sedentary man, in health and circumstances which permitted him to remain for long periods in one place—had he not been, in short, everything that Symonds was not.

With Symonds the "still air of delightful studies" was broken by all the breezes of Europe. His nature was almost infinitely resonant, thrilled by all the cross-vibrations of a complex age. He was neurotic, dissatisfied, fretfully active, the theatre of a lifelong and frantic battle between ambition and disease. With time and death at his heels he poured out book after book in the fearful hope of depositing some record of his having lived. The "well-ripened fruit of wise delay" could never spring from such a withered bough. Much of his life, moreover, was passed in intellectual isolation, a very different thing from intellectual solitude. Quick journeys back and forth, when over and over again his life was a mere hazard, enabled him to catch frequently the spirit of works and men with a poignant and almost terrible intensity where he could not remain to gather the more material substance. Snatching life himself he snatched always at history; and the world became the mirror of his own soul, like him troubled, iridescent, racing against inscrutable, overwhelming forces, dominated by a few calm and

majestic intellects, Goethe, Marcus Aurelius, Plato. Only men who feel, as Symonds felt, the interminable flux of things, who see the sky with its freight of worlds wheeling inexorably on, can so adore the few fixed stars of the human firmament.

Moreover, Symonds was far more of a writer than a thinker. I have already quoted his incisive statement that he was "impenetrably reserved in the depth of himself, rhetorically candid on the surface," and I have referred to Pater's comment that the *Age of the Despots* was wanting in reserve. It must have struck readers generally that his critical writings, and especially his travel-essays, are so far from reserved as to be even garrulous. The outward circumstances of his life are repeated again and again, almost flaunted, in such works as *Our Life in the Swiss Highlands.* His passion for mere words was continually running away with him. He enjoyed, required as a physical tonic, the sheer manual labor of writing. What he called "the impossible problem of style" was with him the problem of winning restraint. Preparing his

Introduction to the Study of Dante for a second edition in 1890, he wrote in the preface, "I have altered many turns of phrase which seemed to me deficient in sobriety or dubious in taste." He labored incessantly to prune and chasten his overblown, luxuriant manner. He speaks somewhere of Politian's "special qualities of fluency and emptiness of content," and his natural affinity with just these qualities is proved by the abundance of translations he has made from Politian and by the fact that precisely these translations are of all that he made surpassingly excellent. Politian, the gay scholar, the fluent, facile poet, found in Symonds his inevitable interpreter. It is plain from all this that Symonds, like shy people who talk too much through fear of themselves, used literature as a refuge from self. "Heaven knows how difficult I find it to keep my mind healthy when I am not working," he writes in a letter of 1873, which recalls the complaint of Sainte-Beuve: "I eat my heart out when I am not up to the neck in work." And in a letter of 1867 he says, "We must make the machine of the brain go. It does

not do to let it stop. Whatever happens, energize." How far did this sheer pathological necessity of turning out written words interfere with, determine the quality of his work? It produced twenty-five substantial volumes in the space of fourteen years, but it certainly prevented the composition of any one immortal paragraph.

This is really the heart of the problem. The lack of that final, absolute touch in any of his writings is due, I think, to the confusion and intertwining of the subjective and the objective—the impenetrable reserve and the rhetorical candor. True literature strikes a middle term, where self and theme coalesce. In poems, essays, subjective work theme is harmoniously submerged in personality, just as in really great histories and biographies personality is harmoniously submerged in theme. Symonds, not in his biographies, not in his *magnum opus,* reaches this point; certainly not in his poems or essays. He is not quite the true historian, the true biographer, who finds satisfaction in a just view of objects. In all his pseudo-objective books the history of the

man or the epoch is, one feels, continually being utilized, restlessly, half-consciously, in place of strictly creative work, to test the point of view of its author. As a corollary, in his subjective work, his poems, his personal essays, one feels that the author is trying to get away from himself, to submerge himself in objects. He cannot find himself because he cannot lose himself. Hence this morbid shyness—getting himself by a kind of blunder into the foreground of his objective themes and on the other hand failing to subdue objects to himself: neither the literature of knowledge nor yet the literature of power, but always a fatal mixture of both.

Symonds felt that settling in Switzerland "put an end to his becoming a scholar in the exact sense." In reality nature had made that decision long before. Working through many anxious years when he could snatch the opportunity, a fortnight now among the Perugia archives, a hasty visit in England, composing in draughty village hotels, with treacherous eyesight, perpetually on guard against physical collapse, he could be only what he called a

"literary *viveur.*" At the same time, considering himself rather an artist than a scholar, he believed that he was justified in producing sympathetic studies where the paraphernalia of scholarship were inadequate. Mark Pattison, the grim don, finding him at work on *The Renaissance* in a hotel room at Davos, observed, "Of course, you cannot be thinking of writing a book here." To what was, under the circumstances, a particularly supercilious insult, Symonds replied: "Certainly I am; since I write for my distraction and pastime, I intend to make the best of my resources, and I hold that a great deal of nonsense is talked about the scholar's vocation; men who might have written excellent books are sterilized by starting with fastidious conceits." It was not with any personal venom, we may believe, but the expression of that clash of irreconcilable temperaments and aims which may here be read between the lines, that led Symonds later to hold up Mark Pattison as an awful example of the slovenly prose of English scholarship. Both were entirely right, according to the lights of each. Exact scholarship at any price

was the aim of Pattison: the art of letters to Symonds was the great matter. Yet where matters of scholarship were at stake the situation is itself the most illuminating kind of criticism. Symonds had no continuous access to any libraries but his own, and he had not certainly the kind of memory which enabled Macaulay (when he wished to do so) to turn out extensive and accurate masses of fact on shipboard or in foreign lands without the aid of a single book. Circumstances of this kind made his efforts more laborious and his results less substantial than is conventionally the case, and he was probably right when he said, "Few writers, I take it, have undergone such preparatory labor as I am obliged to go through."

So it is not surprising that *The Renaissance in Italy* presents no calm sweep, no truly coherent vision, and a perspective which the most elementary student can see is at fault. Frederic Harrison observes that it contains hardly a word about the Science of the Renaissance, the great progress then made in astronomy, surgery, mechanics, geography, botany, medicine. The names of Columbus, Galileo, Car-

dano are barely mentioned. The proportions are gravely at fault. Cellini receives a special chapter because his life illustrates the period: yet Leonardo, whose character is far more significantly typical, occupies only fourteen pages and a few scattered references, Titian and Tintoretto together hardly half that number, while Signorelli has fifteen pages, or five more than Raphael. These proportions, instead of being architectural in the right way, are whimsically personal. Cellini, for mainly extra-artistic reasons, was a special favorite of Symonds; while Signorelli appealed to him unduly as a precursor of his hero Michael Angelo.

In the thirteenth chapter of the seventh volume—that on the Eclectic painters of Bologna—occurs the well-known passage wherein Symonds sums up his critical creed. This passage, I may observe, was taken as a kind of text, in his *Criticism and Fiction*, by William Dean Howells, who there remarks that the solid ground taken by Symonds is "not essentially different from that of Burke's *Essay on the Sublime and the Beautiful.*" After com-

menting on the revolutions of taste which have marked the history of æsthetics and which in particular have brought so low the idols of Sir Joshua Reynolds, he goes on:

"Our hope with regard to the unity of taste in the future then is, that all sentimental or academic seekings after the ideal having been abandoned, momentary theories founded upon idiosyncratic or temporary partialities exploded, and nothing accepted but what is solid and positive, the scientific spirit shall make men progressively more and more conscious of those *bleibende Verhältnisse,* more and more capable of living in the whole; also, that in proportion as we gain a firmer hold upon our own place in the world, we shall come to comprehend with more instinctive certitude what is simple, natural, and honest, welcoming with gladness all artistic products that exhibit these qualities. The perception of the enlightened man will then be the task of a healthy person who has made himself acquainted with the laws of evolution in art and in society, and is able to test the excellence of work in any stage from immaturity to decadence by discerning

what there is of truth, sincerity, and natural vigor in it."

This passage recalls his earlier statement in the *Greek Poets* that "no one should delude us into thinking that true culture does not come from the impassioned study of everything, however eccentric and at variance with our own mode of life, that is truly great." These two passages, widely separated in date, may then be taken as the permanent standpoint upon which he based his critical writings. It is notable to find so complex and over-subtle a character emerging upon ground so simple and, however true, so commonplace. Yet, rightly felt, such commonplace is of the true revolutionary kind.

A book which, to illustrate the character of Symonds, ought to be read in connection with *The Renaissance* is *Animi Figura,* published in 1882. But before I speak of this I must resume the preliminary circumstances.

During the previous winter Robert Louis Stevenson had come to Davos, bearing with him a letter of introduction from Edmund Gosse. In Davos he remained two winters,

living next door to Symonds—"at the foot of my Hill Difficulty." This friendship of two invalids, prolonged in letters till death in adjoining years, was charming, without, I judge, being wholly sympathetic. Stevenson found Symonds "a far better and more interesting thing than any of his books," and Symonds nicknamed Stevenson the *Sprite,* "most fantastic but most human." Just how far Symonds understood and just how far he failed to understand the special genius of Stevenson may be guessed from his suggestion that the latter should undertake a translation of the *Characters* of Theophrastus. It was never carried out, but the suggestion is characteristic of Symonds and not wholly inept as regards Stevenson. Another literary emblem of their friendship missed fire in later years when Stevenson wrote and sent Symonds a very pretty fanciful bit of prose designed for a dedicatory letter of his book of *South Sea Sketches:* for some reason when the book appeared the letter did not appear with it. Cordial enough the friendship undoubtedly was between two men who so loved everything that is gay and were

as well such ardent followers of Whitman. Under the name of "Opalstein," in his essay *Talk and Talkers,* Stevenson has left an impression of his friend's iridescent hidden fire. In this picture of the "troubled and poetic talk of Opalstein" we have a sidelight on Symonds which no other record gives with equal vividness:

"His various and exotic knowledge, complete though unready sympathies, and fine, full, discriminative flow of language fit him out to be the best of talkers; so perhaps he is with some, not *quite* with me—*proxime accessit,* I should say. He sings the praises of the earth and the arts, flowers and jewels, wine and music, in a moonlight, serenading manner, as to the light guitar; even wisdom comes from his tongue like singing; no one is, indeed, more tuneful in the upper notes. But even while he sings the song of the sirens, he still hearkens to the barking of the sphinx. Jarring Byronic notes interrupt the flow of his Horatian humors. His mirth has something of the tragedy of the world for its perpetual background; and he feasts like Don Giovanni to a double or-

chestra, one lightly sounding for the dance, one pealing Beethoven in the distance. He is not truly reconciled either with life or with himself; and this instant war in his members sometimes divides the man's attention. He does not always, not often, frankly surrender himself in conversation. He brings into the talk other things than those which he expresses; you are conscious that he keeps his eye on something else, that he does not shake off the world, nor quite forget himself. Hence arise occasional disappointments; even an occasional unfairness for his companions, who find themselves one day giving too much, and the next, when they are way out of season, giving perhaps too little."

The two elements recorded here of Symonds—the cryptic and the serenading—are connected with Stevenson in two publications. It was at his suggestion and heartened by his bright praise that Symonds collected his metaphysical sonnets into the little book *Animi Figura,* the most quintessential—and, as it may be called, the nerve-centre—of all his writings. Just as we have seen that *The Renaissance,*

and indeed all his other books, display the "rhetorical candor" of his nature, so this book displays that other quality of "impenetrable reserve." In this Portrait of a Mind (the title too, borrowed from the *Agricola* of Tacitus, was a suggestion of Stevenson's) he tries for once to delineate the true truth about himself; yet, having resolved to unveil the sphinx of his own nature, he seems to turn back hesitating, and in the preface his impenetrable reserve makes a final, desperate stand. There addressing students of sonnet-literature (not the poet's world, observe) he says it will be readily understood that he is not offering a piece of accurate self-delineation, and again that the sonnet-writer "shuns the direct outpouring of individual joys and griefs by veiling these in a complicated, artificial, stationary structure." Then having drawn attention from himself he launches into a technical discussion of his use of sonnets in a sequence so framed that the context in every case is necessary to the comprehension of the individual strophe. This he considered to establish a new precedent in the English sonnet-tradition, and I believe it

was so taken with some shakings of the head by Mr. Hall Caine, who in those days was versed in matters of the kind. The point is not a grave one; but it provided Symonds with an ingenious decoy-shelter and made it possible for his soul to pass muster as an experiment in versification. The truth is, after due allowance for this rebuff to the inquisitive, that the book formed as accurate a piece of self-portraiture as an introspective man could produce: for it must be a truism that the best self-portraits—for example, those of Cellini and Gibbon—have been produced by men who were not introspective at all, were indeed so hardily objective that they could view themselves as objects.

The mind here presented, he says, is that of an artist whose sensibilities are stronger than his creative faculty, a speculative mind. "The craving for solitude which possesses the man after vain attempts to realize his earlier ideal, gives places to a conviction of sin and failure, inseparable from over-confident application of ethical theories to actual life." The only issue for such a mind appears to be "self-subor-

dination to moral law. But the problem of solving human difficulties by communion with the divine idea is complicated in our age. The whole series ends, therefore, with the soul's debate upon the fundamental question of man's place in the universe." After this pregnant little sketch it seems unwise to go too far into detail. The hundred and forty sonnets are divided into groups, some of a single sonnet, one comprising as many as twenty-two. *The Innovators* discusses the pro and con of "swerving from the way of kindly custom"; *Ygdrasil,* life's eternal subversion of system; *Personality,* the impotence of men to reach out of themselves and really grasp one another; *The Passing Stranger,* a Platonic theme which occurs repeatedly in Symonds' other poems and essays; *Paths of Life,* the relation between lasting and passing loves; *Debate on Self,* the power of sin to awaken life in the soul, the power of courage to subdue sin to the soul, the power of good deeds over fate; *Pro and Con,* the faculty of courage and good deeds, however powerless before appetite, to rally by freely testing love which

purges lust; *Eros and Anteros,* the seduction of love, the pain of selfish love, the longing for spiritual love; *L'Amour de l'Impossible,* a theme characteristic of Symonds, which may be summed up in the Greek proverb, "To desire impossibilities is a sickness of the soul"; *Intellectual Isolation,* the opportunity of the soul in solitude and its self-insufficiency; *Self-Condemnation,* the soul humbled in weakness seeking God and hearing his voice without being able to find him; *Amends,* the soul craving the good, finding itself in debt to sin, yet steadfastly resolving to strive upward; *Versöhnung,* the soul needing God and preparing to find him by forgetting the past and chastening itself; *An Old Gordian Knot,* the soul seeing that the former gods were only Brocken-images of itself, questioning, though without an answer, whether the sun which cast the images may not be God indeed; *On the Sacro Monte,* the death of gods and faiths, the endurance of God and the soul; *The Thought of Death,*

> "Will not the large life of the universe
> Fulfill its children?"

and the cosmic principle, "Though He slay me yet will I cleave to Him"; *Mystery of Mysteries,* the necessity of rejecting all suggested explanations of life, and of enduring in dumb trust with hope.

As an example I select the fifth sonnet in the group *Intellectual Isolation,* not perhaps the best but certainly one of the most characteristic:

"It is the center of the soul that ails:
We carry with us our own heart's disease;
And, craving the impossible, we freeze
The lively rills of love that never fails.
What faith, what hope will lend the spirit sails
To waft her with a light spray-scattering breeze
From this Calypso isle of Phantasies,
Self-sought, self-gendered, where the daylight pales?
Where wandering visions of foregone desires
Pursue her sleepless on a stony strand;
Instead of stars the bleak and baleful fires
Of vexed imagination, quivering spires
That have nor rest nor substance, light the land,
Paced by lean hungry men, a ghostly band!"

I have dwelt at length upon this little book because it really tells the story of Symonds' inner life, indicated even by the brief phrases

into which I have been obliged to compress it. It is indeed the real Symonds, hidden from his generation. Although many of the problems handled in it are discussed more philosophically in his prose writings, notably the *Study of Whitman* and the *Essays Speculative and Suggestive,* he appears in these sonnets as a spiritual force, in distinction from a man of letters; and the fortunes of the book suggest how little he was able to impress himself, in that aspect, upon the world. It never passed into a second edition. Nor was Symonds urgent; for, as he wrote on the title-page of *Many Moods,* adapting a phrase of Whitman, "The song is to the singer, and comes back most to him." Two years after its publication in 1882, he wrote to William Sharp: "I have had it in my mind to continue the theme of *Animi Figura,* and to attempt to show how a character which has reached apparent failure in moral and spiritual matters may reconstruct a life's philosophy and find sufficient sources of energy and health." The attempt was never made, and one doubts if it could have been more conclu-

sive. For *Animi Figura* seems to show the inevitable extent of his mental reservation from the cosmic enthusiasm.

A book more appropriately connected with Stevenson, to whom it was dedicated, was *Wine, Women, and Song* (1884). This was a collection of Goliardic ballads from the *Carmina Burana* and other sources, strung together by a prose commentary. "They celebrate," he says, "the eternal presence of mirth-making powers in hearts of men." Profound sympathy had Symonds, himself a kind of scholar-gypsy, with these vagabond students of the Middle Ages: perhaps he felt how much truer a poet's education was theirs than his at Jowett's Oxford. They at any rate were the prototypes of our modern insatiable seekers of picturesque adventure—the open road, gay loves and poetry they had, and they were not afflicted with archæology. Above all they had life abundantly.

This mediæval anthology bears a definite relation to all of Symonds' writings. In one way it serves as a kind of introduction to his many books on the Renaissance, for it pictures

the first breaking up of the Ages of Faith, the first stirring of the revived antique feeling about the world and conduct. Moreover it strongly resembles in spirit the Elizabethan song-books of which Symonds wrote so much; and again, in its "truth to vulgar human nature" it illustrates that favorite doctrine of his that life is more than literature, which drew him to the Elizabethan drama, to Cellini, and to Whitman. Symonds was always fascinated, as only a reserved, fastidious, intellectual man can be, by life in its rude, sheer, vulgar actuality. How precisely he found in these songs, or put into them, the Elizabethan spirit may be seen from a single example:

"If she could love me when I love,
I would not then exchange with Jove:
Ah! might I clasp her once, and drain
Her lips as thirsty flowers drink rain!
With death to meet, his welcome greet, from life retreat, I were full fain!
Heigh! full fain, I were full fain,
Could I such joy, such wealth of pleasure gain!"

I think we should not be surprised to find that in Ben Jonson.

I find in the book a passage where Symonds gives his theory of translation, and as it is possible that he will live longer as a translator than as an original writer, as his translations are acknowledged by all to be among the best in the language, it is well to quote what he has to say:

"It has always been my creed that a good translation should resemble a plaster cast; the English being *plaqué* upon the original, so as to reproduce its exact form, although it cannot convey the effects of bronze or marble, which belong to the material of the work of art. But this method has not always seemed to me the most desirable for rendering poems, an eminent quality of which is facility and spontaneity. In order to obtain that quality in our language the form has occasionally to be sacrificed. . . . I am frequently enticed to repeat experiments, which afterward I regard in the light of failures. What allures me first is the pleasure of passing into that intimate familiarity with art which only a copyist or translator enjoys. I am next impelled by the desire to fix the attention of readers on things

which I admire, and which are possibly beyond their scope of view. Last comes that *ignis fatuus* of the hope, forever renewed, if forever disappointed, that some addition may be made in this way to the wealth of English poetry."

This passage gives not only his theory of translation, but the reasons why that art so repeatedly attracted him. Between the lines we read the whole history of a baffled and congested poet and the philosophy of what he himself called a *vulgariseur.*

CHAPTER VI

SWISS LIFE: WHITMAN

ONLY during the first four or five years in Davos did Symonds maintain the comparative exuberance of health that succeeded his collapse. It was indeed, as he said, a wonderful Indian summer, a ripe autumn, rich in fruit; but an autumn none the less declining appreciably towards the end. He felt most keenly the isolation from intellectual company and from adequate libraries. Knowing that he was out of the world's current, he imagined that all the rest of his generation was forging far beyond him. Achievements that look small enough in the world where achievements are common were magnified out of all proportion to Symonds in his retreat. The reviewers appeared to neglect or slight him or, as they sometimes did, to take shameful advantages of him. He tried to convince himself that for

him literature was only a pastime; in reality, feeling that he had gained no foothold, he was made more sensitive by isolation and solitude. Naturally, under these circumstances, he strove pathetically to be, and to be considered, one of the advance guard in criticism. Feeling himself left behind, dropped outside, he became more and more attentive to modern thought, on which, except in a general way, he had no very instinctive grasp.

On one side of his nature he was very like Ovid: and his exile from the world of gaiety was like Ovid's exile on the Euxine. Deprived of the keener and more intimate wit of cities, he consoled himself with the Gothic wit of the mountains. He was the ringleader at many a village festival. He loved light music, and there was no greater connoisseur, in Switzerland or Italy, of all the friendly *vins du pays.* "I supped with Cator last night," he writes. "A zither and guitar player—two men—came afterwards to make music for us. We had up the two Christians and S——, drank enormous quantities of old wine, sang, laughed, danced, and made a most uproarious noise until 2 A. M.

Then the two Christians and I descended on one toboggan in a dense snow-storm. It was quite dark, and drifty beyond description. I sprained my left side in the groin a little." His friend Mr. Brown recalls an evening when Herr Buol the innkeeper bade farewell to some friends with a patriarchal supper: after which the whole party, including Symonds, descended to the cellars and each one strode a tun of Veltliner, candle in hand, and sped the parting guests.

The fascination of rude and heartily active life led him to choose, even for study, the smoke-room of the inn, crowded as it was with burly working-men. He loved to sit in the stables, in the dim candlelight, smoking his pipe and talking with the herdsmen when the day's work was done. He would go tobogganing alone at midnight and in all weathers. He loved the falling snow, the smell of hay, the slow-breathing cattle.

He was the friend of half the Swiss hotel-porters in Europe, knew their fathers and brothers at home and all the circumstances of their lives, so sympathetically indeed that he

wrote in their behalf what strikes me as a most deplorable defence of the tipping system. Probably no foreigner has ever known the Graubünden as he knew it, historically, geographically, industrially, and humanly; and one of his long-cherished schemes was to write a history of the canton. He studied the climate, and wrote voluminously on all the various kinds of avalanches and the history of memorable avalanches. And just as he had been led into this profound sympathy with the Davos peasantry, so now he began to study the living Italians. During the spring journey to Venice of 1881 he formed a friendship with Angelo Fusatto the gondolier, the faithful servant and companion who was with him when he died. Through Angelo he came to know with an equal intimacy the familiar, water-side life of Venice, which he describes in *The Gondolier's Wedding* and other sketches. He certainly did not have the faculty, for instance, of Stevenson, for communicating life of this kind in literature. He was too much the curious student, possibly, with a touch of social conventionality; but there is no doubt of the

reality of his fellow-feeling in all such adventures.

All this came about at the first through Christian Buol. Christian enabled him to bring into practice those ideas of comradeship and democracy which had first drawn him to Whitman. For Whitman had stirred him chiefly at first and through many years by that indefinite Platonic poem *Calamus,* the love of comrades. The subject is extremely complex in relation to a man like Symonds; yet perhaps I can do something towards unravelling it. It is clear that Whitman draws a distinct line between "adhesiveness," or the love of man for man, and "amativeness," or the love of the sexes. The sentiment, or rather passion, which he tries to adumbrate is something more spiritual than sexual affection. This "manly attachment," this "athletic love" is friendship raised to a higher power and conceived as the welding force of human democracy: a chivalrous enthusiasm like that of soldiers fighting in common for a great cause. At the same time one feels that there was about Whitman something "soft," a something associated with his

notion of intimacy that strikes a false note. This again is an extremely complex psychological point, and the question must remain at present *de gustibus.* I wish only to indicate a very human mental reservation from what everyone must recognize in candor as a truly sublime idea. It is enough to say that the Platonic idea, which has lately been a good deal flourished about, assumed in Whitman a sentimental form, and that with Symonds it was primarily artistic. How obscure, how undefined in both men the impulse was may be judged from Whitman's complaint that for twenty years in letters Symonds had been pestering and catechising him on the meaning of *Calamus.* "My first instinct about all that Symonds writes," he said to Horace Traubel, "is violently reactionary—is strong and brutal for no, no, no. Then the thought intervenes that I maybe do not know all my own meanings." Plainly it could not be reduced to the dialectical form of the *Charmides;* and as plainly, dim as it is, it cannot be ignored. It takes us back to Symonds' childhood when, to the discomfort of his father, he preferred to

fall in love with an engraving of the *Genius of the Vatican* rather than with "some nymph or Hebe." It accompanied him through life in his passion for the æsthetic aspect of sports. It formed the motive of a large number of poems, many of which were published (*Callicrates,* for instance, a copy of which he sent to Whitman). It drew him uneasily to the subject of Antinous, that beautiful, equivocal boy, an emperor's Ganymede. In his essay on Athens he tests it by the theory of the *milieu.* It plays its part in his physical repulsion from the style of Pater ("like the presence of a civet-cat") and again where he speaks, in a letter of 1878, of "something in the personality of Keats, some sort of semi-physical aroma wafted from it, which I cannot endure." The corollary of this physical repulsion, which is always a mark of neurotic people, is found in his essay on *Swiss Athletic Sports,* where he quotes the remark of one of the athletes, *à propos* of the brotherliness of gymnasts: "That is because we come into physical contact with one another. You only learn to love men whose bodies you have touched and handled."

Symonds' comment on this is, "True as I believe this remark to be, and wide-reaching in its possibilities of application, I somehow did not expect it from the lips of an Alpine peasant."

This question belongs to the mysterious depths of æsthetic psychology. I must only add that it controlled Symonds in almost every issue, that it led him into Greek studies, attracted him to Whitman and the Davos peasantry, and certainly explains his lifelong enthusiasm for Michael Angelo, the supreme artist of the adolescent masculine body. And in any case it provides us with a superb specimen of that philosophy according to which the soul with all its aspirations and activities is explained by physiology.

The friendship of Symonds and Whitman, though they never met, lasted continuously for nearly thirty years until the death of Whitman in 1892. Of Whitman's influence on Symonds' life I have already spoken and shall have occasion to speak later. Of the nature of his work, in Symonds' view, perhaps I may quote an eloquent though somewhat inflated passage

from the *Study of Whitman,* published on the day Symonds died, which illustrates alike his power and misuse of words:

"He is Behemoth, wallowing in primeval jungles, bathing at fountain-heads of mighty rivers, crushing the bamboos and the cane-brakes under him, bellowing and exulting in the torrid air. He is a gigantic elk or buffalo, trampling the grasses of the wilderness, tracking his mate with irresistible energy. He is an immense tree, a kind of Ygdrasil, stretching its roots down into the bowels of the world, and unfolding its magic boughs through all the space of the heavens. His poems are even as the rings in a majestic oak or pine. He is the circumambient air, in which float shadowy shapes, rise mirage-towers and palm-groves; we try to clasp their visionary forms; they vanish into ether. He is the globe itself; all seas, lands, forests, climates, storms, snows, sunshines, rains of universal earth. He is all nations, cities, languages, religions, arts, creeds, thoughts, emotions. He is the beginning and the grit of these things, not their endings, lees, and dregs. Then he comes to us as lover, con-

soler, physician, nurse, most tender, fatherly, sustaining those about to die, lifting the children, and stretching out his arms to the young men. What the world has he absorbs. For him there is no schism in the universe, no force opposed to God or capable of thwarting Him, no evil ineradicable by the soul, no limit set on human aspiration. Vice and disease he rebukes and pities. They are tainted, defective, miserable; yet not to be screamed at; rather to be cured and healed. He knows that purity is best, and health is best. But he also shows that what false modesty accounted unclean is the cleanest and the healthiest of all. In his return to nature he does not select inanimate nature or single out the savage state. He takes man first, as the height and head of things; and after man the whole tract that human feet can traverse or human thought explore. Cities, arts, occupations, manufactures, have a larger place in his poetry than rivers or prairies; for these are nearer to man, more important to his destiny and education. He is the poet of fact, of the real, of what exists, of the last true, positive, and sole ontology."

In this book and in his essay on *Democratic Art* are summed up Symonds' views on Whitman as a gigantic spiritual force.

Whitman in his turn was deeply devoted to Symonds. His first real recognition came from a few English and Irish scholars, and there is no doubt that he felt not only grateful but flattered. The great man was, in fact, absurdly and naïvely vain. He enjoyed the exuberant praise of men, so-called of culture, who seemed to have a kind of divine right to speak of him in the same breath with Homer and Dante. He did not stop to consider whether they themselves were little or big, so long as they satisfied him as crown-makers and weavers of laurel for him. One finds his attitude toward Symonds, as it is now revealed in that truly great work, the greatest biographical work in American literature, *With Walt Whitman in Camden,* in all ways wholly and humanly delicious. Some of the things he said to Horace Traubel are in clear, disinterested praise of his friend; others illustrate his unconscionable habit of self-advertisement and his utilitarian view of disciples; all exhibit the

American dialect and aroma of the man, as strong and pervasive as the Scottish dialect and aroma of Carlyle. In some cases the three are intermingled, as here:

"Symonds surely has style—do you notice? His simplest notes are graceful—hang about sweetly after they are done—seem to be heart-beats. I am very fond of Symonds—often regret that we have never met: he is one of my real evidences; is loyal, unqualifying—never seems ashamed—never draws back—never seems to be asking himself, Have I made a mistake in this Walt Whitman? . . . Symonds has got into our crowd in spite of his culture; I tell you we don't give away places in our crowd easy—a man has to sweat to get in."

And again:

"Symonds is a royal good fellow—he comes along without qualifications; just happens into the temple and takes his place."

And again when, as it appears, Professor Dowden's first enthusiasm seemed to be letting up a little:

"Symonds is a persistent fire; he never quails or lowers his colors."

Symonds, who did not consider his admiration for Whitman in the light of propaganda, was a little nettled by just this aspect of the matter; but he had the good sense to overlook it. And indeed Whitman, who viewed his own cult almost as a disinterested worshipper, could return compliments in his own queer way:

"Symonds could crowd all the literary fellows off the stage for delicacy—directness—of pure literary expression; yes, honest expression. Symonds is cultivated enough to break—bred to the last atom—overbred; yet he has remained human, a man, in spite of all."

"Symonds is a craftsman of the first water—pure as crystal—fine, fine, fine—dangerously near the superfine in his weaker moments."

And how he felt toward Symonds personally may be gathered from the following:

"I am always strangely moved by a letter from Symonds; it makes the day, it makes many days, sacred."

"He is surely a wonderful man—a rare, cleaned-up man—a white-souled, heroic char-

acter. I have had my own troubles—but Symonds is the noblest of us all."

"On the whole I do not regret that I never got to Europe, but occasionally it comes over me that Symonds is alive—that we have never met; then I want to drop everything and start at once."

And in one other passage he seems to assign Symonds the chief seat in what he called the temple:

"I suppose Symonds must always be first; his loyalty takes such an ardent personal form; it has not the literary tang, except incidentally. . . . With Symonds everything is down—we are face to face."

In 1883 appeared *Shakspere's Predecessors in the English Drama.* Between 1862 and 1865, before definitely resolving to enter literature, he had begun as a private exercise a history of the Elizabethan drama. He did not abandon the scheme for many years, and seems to have intended to incorporate the work in that history of the English Renaissance which we find him discussing as late as 1870 with Jowett, who urged him to undertake it in a

severely historical spirit. A mass of material was collected and many written essays and fragments were stored away in his "desolation box"; out of which at intervals came his life of *Jonson,* his General Introduction to the *Mermaid Series* (1887), and his introductions to the Mermaid editions of *Heywood* and *Webster and Tourneur* (1888). Feeling that he was improperly prepared and cut off from sources of adequate investigation, he hesitated to enter a field where so many eminent scholars were at work. And he would probably never have resumed these early studies had he not been urged to do so by his nephew St. Loe Strachey in 1882, at a time when his Italian studies were practically finished.

The Elizabethan drama attracted Symonds first through his favorite paradox that it was strongly anti-literary. Like Cellini's *Memoirs* it was a native, uncultivated growth, produced in sympathy with the whole people, democratic. Secondly, it appealed to his critical sense as one of the few examples in the history of art of a complete, organic whole, a spontaneous illustration of a people's growth,

unhampered by academies or by ecclesiastical censorship—a free record of racial evolution. *Shakspere's Predecessors* is therefore perhaps the best example of Symonds' critical philosophy, as that is indicated in his *Essays Speculative and Suggestive.* His attempt was to apply in England the method of Taine—"the steady determination to regard all subjects of enquiry from the point of view of development." At the same time he found in Taine "a something inconsistent with the subtlety of nature"—something not quite pragmatic, as we should say. He believed that English criticism would run little danger of carrying method and logic too far, little danger of running to excess in the uncongenial task of "shifting the centre of gravity from men as personalities to men as exponents of their race and age." The Carlylean idea of great men, so much more characteristic of English criticism, would provide a sufficient makeweight to prevent that. In the English drama, like the Greek sculpture, like Italian painting, he found one of those truly national types of art "which have occupied the serious

attention of whole peoples for considerable periods," and which thus enabled him to apply admirably the test of the *milieu.*

The style of this book was a great affliction to Churton Collins, who made it the object of a stately anathema in *The Quarterly Review.* He found in it "every indication of precipitous haste, a style which where it differs from the style of extemporary journalism differs for the worse—florid, yet commonplace; full of impurities; inordinately, nay, incredibly, diffuse and pleonastic; a narrative clogged with endless repetitions, without symmetry, without proportion." Among the guilty phrases which he attributes to the school of Swinburne is Symonds' characterization of one play as "an asp, short, ash-colored, poison-fanged, blunt-headed, abrupt in movement, hissing and wriggling through the sands of human misery." But how can it be asserted that Symonds was in any way a follower of Swinburne? Phrases like this are, after all, matters of temperament. They are not classical; but they are far more consonant with the Elizabethan manner and the most nervous, native English

than is the style approved by Collins. And they confirm the oft-suggested affinity between Elizabethan and Victorian literature.

Throughout the year 1881 he had suffered from a more than usual depression, crushing fatigue, and morbid restlessness. This was explained by a visit to England in May, 1882. Before leaving Davos he wrote, "My life seems to have become suddenly hollow, and I do not know what is hanging over me." In London he was examined by Dr. Clark and Dr. Williams, both of whom independently pronounced that the right lung was now actively affected as well as the left and had been so for at least a year. It was a deadly blow to all his hopes and expectations, for he had reasoned himself through all difficulties in the belief that Davos was gradually curing his disease. Other trials befell. In March, 1882, his dear friend and brother-in-law Professor Green died. His sister Lady Strachey died. His daughter Janet fell ill, more and more hopelessly. Davos had lost its novelty and the allurement of promised health. Isolation preyed upon him, and he felt the pathological

nature of that access of youthful spirits which accompanied the progress of his disease. Davos, he told a friend, made him "quarrelsome and conceited." Constant attacks of fever kept him shut up in his bedroom with ice-bags on his head. But energy and courage—themselves without doubt symptoms and effects of his malady—never failed him. "I want to tell you," he writes out of the depth of his miseries, "that my theory of existence is to sustain the spiritual, the energetic, the rejoicing element in self alive, as the one great duty to the world, the one function for which a man was framed"; and he brings to mind Branwell Brontë, who died upright on his feet. He took to reading James Thomson, whose absolutely rayless pessimism satisfied his own black broodings. Yet it is noticeable that he breaks off a letter on Thomson to tell about the international toboggan race which is occurring at Davos and for which he wishes to provide a cup: £15 is to be the cost of it, and he desires a solid, old-fashioned college tankard.

Often he would join a singing-party of

young and old men, or would go driving with his family for days together among the mountain villages. At home the routine of work occupied him till two or three in the morning. Sitting in his study, with its carpet chair and the cast of Cellini's Perseus upright on the serpentine stove, he was ready at all hours for a smoke and talk with the Davos natives, whose counsellor he was. Late at night he would go tobogganing in the moonlight or walk, dreaming and speculating, along the shore of the frozen lake and among the pines. The air of the Alps induced more and more constantly in his thought that mystical cosmic enthusiasm which was to him the divine idea. "We crave to lose self," he writes, "or to realize it all by merging it. We want to burn indefinitely, infinitely, illimitably, everlastingly upwards. There are potentialities in all of us of which we are aware, which we need to bring into this incandescence." That spiritual mood certainly is very closely allied to the hectic stimulation of tuberculosis. Everywhere in Symonds the mental, moral, and physical spring from a transparently common source:

there is not, as in so many men, a deceptive separation of faculties. In the same way are to be explained those outbreaks of high spirits during which he was the Horace of so many peasant wine-festivals—mirth-making as Horace and a good deal more hilarious. How exotically braced his vitality was may be gathered from his habits of mountain climbing. One night he walked by moonlight up the Schwartzhorn, reaching the top just before dawn: nor was this expedition exceptional.

His isolation was broken by a diary of news and reflections, dispatched each month by Henry Sidgwick, which brought him word of the stirring intellectual world of England. Yet this only confirmed his own sense of having no niche, no remembered place among his contemporaries. He consoled himself by feeling that he had risen above literature and had thereby become a more integral and contributory part in the sheer life-force. "I have thrown off ambition and abandoned literature," he writes on Christmas day, 1884. . . . "I am so very stupid, so proved thricefold stupid by my acknowledged and obvious fail-

ure in the work I chose, that I cannot give the least rational account of what I expect from this Future. Only I will not take from its hands what I have asked from the past—literary success and literary hearing. I demand from the Future something finer, something that concerns the naked soul." And again: "I am weary of things that seem to me so infinitely nugatory, face to face with mere human suffering. And so far as any energy is left in me, I strive now to spend my force (of will, and thought, and purse) in smoothing paths for happier people than myself. I have many opportunities here."

Of these opportunities he made the most. Feeling, with some misgivings, however, that his large family of daughters made it necessary for him to keep intact his inherited capital, he reduced his personal expenses to a minimum and made a practice of devoting all the proceeds of his literary work and everything else that could be spared from his other income to the welfare of Davos and his friends there. He certainly lacked the sociological imagination; he knew nothing of economics and seems

never to have realized the true bearings of wealth. He did not grasp anything beyond a personal campaign; but this he carried out with admirable science and unselfishness. It gave him an incentive to work when every other incentive failed him, and the skill and energy involved in schemes of practical affection invigorated him. He concocted all sorts of ingenious measures to bring about, impersonally and secretly, a balance of opportunity between himself and those who were poorer than he: studying private cases where men could be helped to develop their proper faculties and circumventing by all sorts of diplomatic wiles the obstacles of conventional pride. His attitude toward poverty and himself in relation to poverty exhibits in its best aspect—both of heart and head—the old-fashioned philanthropic idea.

Yet for a comparatively popular writer his earnings were not large. At the end of 1885, when he had arranged to publish the *Catholic Reaction,* he estimated that his total returns for the seven volumes of *The Renaissance in Italy* amounted only to £1100, the remunera-

tion for eleven years of steady, devoted labor; at least half of which had gone into books and traveling expenses without which the work would have been impossible. Although this income was, of course, largely supplemented from his other books and articles—mainly, no doubt, those which cost him the least time and effort—it remains that £50 a year had been his average receipts from a work which had involved his best energies, which had been the fruit of many unremunerative years of study, and was undoubtedly a popular classic in its line.

The year 1886 was the most productive in all Symonds' career as man of letters. He published the two final volumes of *The Renaissance;* translated the whole of Cellini's *Memoirs;* wrote his life of *Sidney* for the *English Men of Letters,* his life of *Jonson* for the *English Worthies,* and his article on Tasso for the *Encyclopædia Britannica;* and edited Sir Thomas Browne and *Selections from Jonson.* Most of this was merely the quick and sufficiently competent work of an expert in a single literary period, who could

patch together in very short order an adequate monograph or popular edition. He had covered the ground many times before. Yet, with any but a pure hack-writer, the choice of themes is never accidental—it is in itself highly characteristic; and in Sidney and Jonson we may find special affinities with Symonds which, with numerous others elsewhere, in the aggregate determined his general major sympathy with the Renaissance.

It is not fanciful to see how naturally he was drawn to Sir Philip Sidney—"the very essence of congruity," as Wotton said—when his own soul had been for so many years the very quintessence of incongruity. And remembering his favorite doctrine that life is more than literature and his own powerlessness to subdue the *furor scribendi*, we may fancy with what half-envious satisfaction he recalled Fulke Greville's opinion of his comrade that "his end was not writing, even while he wrote." So when he observes: "The whole tenor of Sidney's career proves his determination to subordinate self-culture of every kind to the ruling purpose of useful public ac-

tion"—when he writes this we know that he was putting on paper the cherished ideal of his own, which Davos partially enabled him to realize.

So, also, in Ben Jonson he found a man freighted with learning who could breathe and exert beneath it the free will of his personality, who could be monumentally a scholar and yet remain essentially an artist. And when he says, "It would not be impossible, I think, to regard Jonson's genius as originally of the romantic order, overlaid and diverted from its spontaneous bias by a scholar's education, and by definite theories of the poet's task, deliberately adopted and tenaciously adhered to in middle life"—we can see again that he writes with one eye on his own career. It is this kind of slip, or hazard, or half-confession which makes the critical writings of Symonds never quite passionlessly, objectively true, and always abundantly autobiographical. Incidentally his admiration for Jonson leads him into a very unjust comparison with Dryden. A "parasite of public caprice . . . impudently confessing his mean and servile aims" is not

the whole truth about the author of that questionable line, "To please the people ought to be the poet's aim." It is worth noting as the only radically and deliberately unfair criticism I have found anywhere in his writings.

The translation of Cellini was more important. It is probably the most popular of all Symonds' works; and work of his it is by virtue of its style. Here he had to reproduce the "heedless animated talk" of a racy character, ignorant of literature, often ungrammatical, but invariably sharp-witted, humorous, lively, direct. Symonds has made an English classic of the book which Goethe naturalized in German and Comte thought worthy as a human document of a place in the Positivist Library. The style of his version has all the nervous vitality, the motherwit, the native idiom of the great Elizabethan translations: it is a masterpiece of literary archæology, electrically alive. The labor spent in close intimacy with this book, coinciding with his own increasing sense of actuality, his ever-growing delight in human nature, had its effect on all his later work. To it I trace, for

instance, the realism and vigor of his *Autobiography,* written three years later and regarded by him as the most successful of his writings. And indeed almost all that he produced in later life had in style some of that homely strength which is the genius of native English prose.

To Symonds Cellini was a sort of human touchstone for the Renaissance—a man who expressed in action the whole age, its paganism, its brutality, its piety, its superstition, its sensibility, its curiosity, its passion for beauty. He lived "in the Whole," and thus fulfilled at least that third of Goethe's maxim which is the most inaccessible to modern complex men. The place that this translation holds among Symonds' Renaissance studies is indicated by a passage from his own Introduction to it: "It is the first book which a student of the Renaissance should handle in order to obtain the right direction for his more minute researches. It is the last book to which he should return at the close of his exploratory voyages. At the commencement he will find it invaluable for placing him at the exactly

proper point of view. At the end he will find it no less invaluable for testing and verifying the conclusions he has drawn from various sources and a wide circumference of learning. . . . His *Memoirs* enable us to comprehend how those rarer products of the Italian genius at a certain point of evolution were related to the common stuff of human nature in the race at large." This indicates the importance and charm of the book to Symonds. And there were more personal reasons to be explained by that peculiar admiration of Symonds for everything directly opposite to himself. Cellini was objective and external, healthy, natural, free from introspection and incapable of brooding, a lover of form rather than color, a hater of "that accursed music," a man of action.

May it not also be said that, like all true artists, Cellini was an ideal man? Transgressing every moral law, he erred only in relation to the social background—and it is the task of society, not of the individual, to provide the proper background: living in the ideal society Cellini would have responded with equal ful-

ness, *mutatis mutandis,* to ideal conditions, since he was one of those men who accept life unreservedly as they find it. The important thing to remember, and the thing which makes all-expressive human nature always ideal, is, that it can with spiritual—or, in Cellini's case, artistic—integrity accept life whole-heartedly and glorify it. That ideal faculty of the individual is society's chief earnest, society's chief incentive to provide the proper background. And if, as John Stuart Mill says, the peril which threatens the world is a deficiency of personal impulses and preferences, then it is easy to understand why the *Memoirs* of this immortal ruffian was regarded by Goethe and Comte as among the few all-important human records.

It is astonishing to find Symonds amid the overwhelming work of this year—eight volumes, either seen through the press, written, edited, or translated—still energetically climbing, exploring, traveling. In September he made a tour of several days with his wife through the Lower Engadine and the Splügen. But the strain had been too great. His

eyes gave way, he fell into another period of depression, his old habits of speculation and introspection came back, aggravated by his want of power to work. And in the midst of all this distress his eldest daughter Janet died, on April 7, 1887. Only a month before he had written to Henry Sidgwick, "a sublime system of ethics seems to me capable of being based upon that hope of extinction." And now at this critical moment he seemed able to prove for himself that love does not require the "bribe of immortality."

During these years his old master Jowett had been in constant touch with him, spurring him on in letters and occasionally visiting him in his solitude. On March 2 he writes:

"I was very glad to hear that you thought of having a period of retirement from literature and of rest and thought before you publish again. It is the only way to gain strength and escape from mannerism. You have great stores of knowledge and a wonderful facility and grace of style. But I want you to write something stronger and better, and in which the desire to get at the truth is more distinctly

expressed. You told me once that some words of mine produced a great impression on your 'green, untutored youth.' Let me add, what I am equally convinced of, that you may not only 'rise to eminence'—that is already accomplished—but that you have natural gifts which would place you among the first of English contemporary writers, if you studied carefully how to use them."

And a letter of March 30 contains this sentence:

"I have no doubt that if you could concentrate yourself and have a couple of years' average health, you might leave a name that would not be forgotten in literature."

Jowett, it may be said, had accepted as well as given advice, for it was through Symonds that he was led to undertake the four years' task of revising his *Plato*.

Chapter VII

LAST YEARS: DEATH

THE period of retirement from literature was more apparent than real. Symonds for two years published no fresh book, but the more inglorious phase of his craft went on as usual. After a brief spring visit in England he returned in July, 1887, to the drudgery of the Cellini proofs, a five months' labor, at the same time reducing to system his æsthetic principles in a series of papers that were subsequently published as *Essays Speculative and Suggestive.* And an autumn visit to Venice, coinciding with the great success of his Cellini, determined him to translate the *Memoirs* of Count Carlo Gozzi, the eighteenth century Venetian playwright.

Gozzi continued to occupy him through 1888, with ever-diminishing enthusiasm. His heart was never in it, he said. In a moment

of light fascination he had engaged himself to the year-long company of the Venetians in their most corrupt, glittering, tawdry period with, for daily converse, what he calls "an odd unsympathetic bastard between Don Quixote and a pettifogging attorney": certainly a disillusioning postscript to his Renaissance studies.

Although it became presently evident as the year wore on that the physical basis of his life was very gradually beginning to ebb away, he grew nervously and in human intercourse more and more active. He received visits from Jowett and his old friends Arthur Sidgwick, H. G. Dakyns, and Horatio F. Brown. His correspondence had enormously increased with his growing fame and had brought him into touch especially with the younger generation of English men of letters, with scholars in Italy, France, and Germany, and with the circle of Whitman's admirers in America. As President of the Davos *Turnverein* he was all-responsible middleman between the natives and the foreign colony. He had already contributed much to the building of a gymna-

sium, and in 1889 he offered to give 10,000 francs to clear it of debt and place it in the hands of the commune, reserving to the *Turnverein* the right of special use. It was only after a general meeting of the communal assembly and many intricate negotiations that the burghers were prevailed upon to accept it. "I never got rid of £400 with more diplomacy," said Symonds. In the summer of 1888 he was chosen as one of the three delegates from the University of Oxford to the eleventh centenary of the University of Bologna. "With me," he writes, "life burns ever more intense, as my real strength wanes and my days decrease. It seems to me sometimes awful—the pace at which I live in feeling—inversely to the pace at which myself is ebbing to annihilation. . . . I never seem to have lived until quite lately."

During the winter of 1887-88 the snow fell in the Highlands in quantities exceeding all recorded seasons. Six hundred avalanches fell, thirteen lives were lost, one hundred and seventy-two buildings wrecked. Symonds, who, like Cowper, had an "awful admiration"

for great storms, was deeply stirred by the experience. He had come, as he said, to "love the sternest things in life best," and storms, he wrote two years later, are "the kind of things which do the soul good: like most of the disturbances of nature." In a season like this he felt the culmination of that intensity of upper mountain air, that sense of abiding universal relations to which his own shattered mind had moored itself. His impressions of the winter and of his thrilling journey southward to Venice with his daughter Margaret through the whirling April snow are told in his essay, *Snow, Frost, Storm, and Avalanche.* Driving over thirty feet of snow they could touch the telegraph wires. All traces of the road were obliterated. "Now we must trust to the horse," observed the postillion; "if he misses, it is over with us." Even the sledge bells had been left behind lest their faintest tinkling should dislodge an avalanche. In Venice they settled in an apartment which Symonds had engaged for a term of years in the house of H. F. Brown. How much he enjoyed his visits in Venice, full of amusing

adventures among the water-dwelling folk with whose ways he had become familiar by long training among corresponding types in Switzerland, may be seen from his Venetian sketches. As a man he was certainly much more at home in scenes of this kind than as a writer. The free gaiety, the sensuous charm of Italian life showed him how starved he had been on certain sides in his icebound retreat and how much his feverish brain-activity had resulted from the congestion of a naturally expansive nature.

In March, 1889, he began to write his *Autobiography*. This work, which covered minutely his early years and analyzed his later intellectual progress, has never been completely published, although it forms the groundwork of the great biography by H. F. Brown. Certainly it strikes a tone almost consistently dark, and one of his closest friends maintained that he had given an "entirely wrong account of himself" and that the lovable, bright, gay, enthusiastic man known to his friends in conversation did not appear at all. Symonds himself lamented that one can

appear so differently to others than to oneself. Without doubt he succeeded in presenting faithfully the image in his own mirror: only the social phase was lacking—all that is called up in company. And it is a question whether, in so complex a nature, it may be said with more truth that happiness or unhappiness was the predominating fact. The *Autobiography,* considered by him the most successful of his writings, is notable for concrete attention to fact, cool deduction, calm, direct, unwavering style, and general objectivity.

These traits of strength are apparent also in the *Essays Speculative and Suggestive,* issued in 1890. "This," he wrote in a letter, "is in many ways the most important book I have written for publication." And again: "I am interested in this book more than I have been in any other." It was natural, for he had put on record his reasoned convictions in all the lines of thought which had occupied his life—philosophy, religion, criticism, art, style. He regarded it as the fruit of a long and conscious self-discipline towards wisdom, during which he had ruthlessly cut away personal am-

bition and liberated himself from the bondage of words. For once he stood before the public with mind unveiled, as a sheer thinker, not a man of letters. It is a revelation almost equally of strength and weakness—strong as an earnest of the man's power of self-conquest and sincerity of principle, weak as an absolute contribution to thought. For the eminence of Symonds is based upon certain extra-intellectual qualities, sympathy, style, impressionableness; and as often happens when these are shorn away or reduced to their lowest common factor, the result is commonplace. Symonds was primarily an artist, and few artists, when all the glamour of the soul falls from them, can contribute anything very serious to pure thought. So here: although he believed he was breaking fresh ground, it was fresh mainly as regards himself; and although he considered some of his deductions almost recklessly in advance of his time, there must be few readers to whom they are not elaborate truisms. It is certainly a truism that the philosophy of evolution instead of routing the religious aspirations of men has reanimated

our spiritual and spiritualized our physical life as dogmatic theology never did; a truism that science and religion are mutually explanatory; that natural law, by involving all the functions of man, quickens the soul as no imagined law could ever do which appealed only to one or two functions; that our sense of identity with nature elevates our view of nature rather than lowers respect for ourselves; that private aspiration gains from its coalescence with social duty; a truism that art, morality, language have to be explained on biological principles, and that age and race largely determine works and men; that great works remain dominant because of their grasp of abiding relations, their hold on the perennial aspirations of men; a truism that Realism and Idealism instead of being antagonistic are both inevitable phases of any work of art. These are all truisms of the synthetic philosophy: the important matter being personal, that Symonds arrived at them not by intellectual acceptance alone, but by the labor and suffering of a lifetime, and held them as convictions of experience. That fact alone elevates the

truism into a human document, and places the essays, defective in bright ideas and redundant in illustration as they are, high among his writings. I should point especially to the paper on *National Style* as one of the most suggestive, learned, and eloquent of English essays. For the understanding of Symonds himself the essays on the *Philosophy of Evolution, Nature Myths and Allegories, Landscape,* and *Notes on Theism* are indispensable. Of the book in general Frederic Harrison observes: "For grasp of thought, directness, sureness of judgment, the *Essays* of 1890 seem to me the most solid things that Symonds has left." No doubt: but certainly not the most characteristic and therefore not the most admirable as literature. They show the steady growth of his mind toward externality and impersonal thought, and they speak from a happier and more contented life. But Symonds was essentially an artist, and a thinker only incidentally.

As time went on and his malady left him with less and less hope he became extremely reckless of his health. Over and over again

he sprained his ankles by heedless impetuosity; once he did so in scrambling over the ice-coated tree-trunks after a bout of wood-cutting. He would spend days and nights in peasant huts, washing at the pump—once when it was so cold that even a vial of quinine and sulphuric acid froze in his bedroom. He never missed a gymnastic meet, and would often clear the course and time the racers, dining and making merry and driving home at midnight in an open sledge against the icy glacial wind. "To-day," he writes to Mr. Gosse, "I started with my girls and our toboggans, and ran a course of four miles, crashing at lightning speed over the ice and snow. We did the journey in about eleven minutes, and I came in breathless, dead-beat, almost fainting. Then home in the railway, with open windows and a mad crew of young men and maidens excited by this thrilling exercise." . . . "Not a cure for bronchitis," he observes.

Under conditions of this kind the disease in his lungs was constantly fanned and the fuel was rapidly burning up. Only his brain

was calmer, clearer, stronger than ever. Life had taken its last seat there and gathered force for a few vigorous efforts. Never had his work been so substantial.

The constant aim which had buoyed him up for so many years found expression in a characteristic letter to Mr. Brown (July 2, 1891): "You know how little I seek after fame, and how little I value the fame of famous men. You also know how much I value self-effectuation; how I deeply feel it to be the duty of a man to make the best of himself, to use his talents, to make his very defects serve as talents, and to be something for God's sake who made him. In other words, to play his own note in the universal symphony. We have not to ask whether other people will be affected by our written views of this or that; though, for my part, I find now, with every day I live, that my written views have had a wide and penetrating influence where often least expected. That is no affair of mine, any more than of a sunflower to be yellow, or a butterfly to flutter. The point for us is to bring all parts of ourselves into vital correla-

tion, so that we shall think nothing, write nothing, love nothing, but in relation to the central personality—the bringing of which into prominence is what is our destiny and duty in this short life. And my conclusion is that, in this one life, given to us on earth, it is the man's duty, as recompense to God who placed him here, or Nature, Mother of us all—and the man's highest pleasure, as a potent individuality—to bring all factors of his being into correspondence for the presentation of himself in something. Whether the world regards that final self-presentation of the man or not seems to me just no matter. As Jenny Lind once said to me, 'I sing to God,' so, I say, let us sing to God. And for this end let us not allow ourselves to be submerged in passion, or our love to lapse in grubbery; but let us be human beings, horribly imperfect certainly, living for the best effectuation of themselves which they find possible. If all men and women lived like this, the symphony of humanity would be a splendid thing to listen to." Magnificently true and memorable

words, which indicate the unwavering aim, individual and social, of his vexed life.

At the suggestion of two different publishers he undertook a small book on Boccaccio, which was carried through with little effort, and his great *Life of Michael Angelo.* The latter work occupied almost the whole of the years 1891-92. He approached it not only with a lifelong and profound sympathy with its subject, but with more patient and laborious research probably than he had ever specifically bestowed on any previous work; and he brought to it all the broad experience, the calmness and strength acquired in his later and more impersonal years. The archives of the Casa Buonarroti in Florence had been thrown open on Michael Angelo's fourth centenary in 1875; and Symonds was the first student to utilize the voluminous correspondence, manuscripts, notes, and other papers in a great enterprise. His method of treatment is appropriately austere. How very far he had traveled in criticism may be gathered from his chapter on the Sistine frescoes, where in former years he would have revelled in sub-

jective interpretation, after the fashion of Michelet, indulging in rapturous soliloquy over their hidden meanings. Here as elsewhere he searches dispassionately in a purely artistic spirit, no longer with any of the spirit of literature. Similarly in writing of the Medici tombs he casts aside the more congenial, modern, Rodinesque notion, that the blocked-out forms were deliberately left unfinished to gain through their vagueness, as "sentimental, not scientific criticism." At the same time, as a student of Plato and a translator of Michael Angelo's sonnets, he measured everything by the spiritual touchstone of the master's mind. Like Æschylus, like Goethe, like Whitman, Michael Angelo appealed to him as a superb tonic force, which "arrests, quickens, stings, purges, and stirs to uneasy self-examination."

The *Life of Michael Angelo* involved, of course, journeys to Florence and Rome and through the Casentino, in the company of his Venetian servant Angelo. The condition of his nerves, largely from overwork, seems to have kept him in a state of constant irritabil-

ity; and he complains of the repellent, heartless, prosaic Apennines and the "twangle, wrangle, jangle" of the southern folk. Twice he dreamed of Jowett: "the deepest, strangest dreams, in which he came to me, and was quite glorified, and spoke to me so sweetly and kindly—as though he understood some ancient wrong he had not fathomed in me before, and blessed me and made me feel that this and all else would be right. . . . These two dreams have haunted me with a sense of atonement and softness." When he reached Rome he found a letter from his sister, Mrs. Green, who was nursing the old man at Balliol: he was very ill and, as it seemed, near death, though he was to live long enough to write the inscription for Symonds' grave. Jowett in later years had become infinitely more tender and sympathetic, and his biographers remark that he had come to feel the need of fusing intellect with emotion. The "inexorable mentor" who could give his friends no rest while any defect remained unreproved appears sweet-souled indeed in his letters to Charlotte Symonds, who was his god-daughter. "What

a temple of peaceful industry!" he writes, early in 1892, "in which father and mother and you and Madge are all writing books. The world will not contain the books that are written in that house."

In the autumn of 1891 Symonds' practice was to write from 9:30 to 12:30 in the morning, to sleep two hours in the afternoon, dine at 6:30, and then resume work from 8 in the evening till 1 or 2 in the morning. His daughter Margaret served as his amanuensis. In this way *Michael Angelo* was finished by December. It left him exhausted. Throughout 1892 he struggled on, attacked by influenza and constant fainting fits, and feeling, as he observed, threadbare. "I am writing in my study on a cold morning, before the sun has climbed the Jacobshorn. Out there—in the void infinite, the unexplored, intangible—what is to become of a soul so untamably young in its old ruined body, consuming its last drop of vital oil with the flame of beauty?" With Margaret Symonds he published *Our Life in the Swiss Highlands*. The great success of his *Michael Angelo* cheered

him. His chief work during the year was the *Study of Whitman,* suggested by the poet's death in March. In the summer he made his farewell visit to England. He knew now that he had but a short time to live, and he was haunted by premonitions of death:

"Last Sunday night I was lying awake, thinking of death, desiring death; when, lost in this sombre mood, to me the bedroom was at a moment filled with music—the 'Lontan lontano,' from Boito's *Mefistofele,* together with its harp accompaniment . . . 'Lontan lontano' has not yet left my auditory sense—stays behind all other sensations—seems to indicate a vague and infinite, yet very near . . ."

This was written on February 22, 1893, only a few days before his departure from Davos on that final journey which has been described in the now celebrated narrative by Margaret Symonds, Mrs. Vaughn. From this narrative, so minutely circumstantial, so tender, vivid and pathetic, I can only condense the final record.

Symonds with his daughter left Davos in the middle of March and passed a few days

in Venice, where he was occupied with his Whitman proofs. There Angelo joined them. On March 21 they travelled by express to Bari. Spending a day at Taranto, Symonds busied himself with a pickaxe, rooting up and packing a great number of anemone and iris bulbs for a friend in the North. In the evening he joined the natives in a rough pizzica dance. Then they travelled northward to Salerno. They had one splendid day at Pæstum, where Symonds tried to work out some theory of his about the roofing of the temples. They drove to Amalfi and thence to Naples, a visit of five days. Their mornings were passed in the museum. They ascended Vesuvius, where Symonds observed that Michael Angelo must have studied his figures for the *Last Judgment* from the writhing lava upon the slopes. Heedless of the damp chill, he spent hours in the crypts of the churches, fascinated by the southern architecture, which was unfamiliar to him.

From Naples, early in April, they journeyed to Rome. The silver wedding of the King and Queen was approaching and the

city was in an uproar of preparation. So crowded were all the hotels that only after considerable delay did they procure rooms on the fifth storey of the Hotel d'Italia. They found many friends in Rome, and accepted a number of invitations. Symonds' conversation was unusually brilliant, his mind intensely active and buoyant. He went the round of the galleries, drove along the Appian Way, to the Palatine and the Trastevere Gardens. It was very warm; the sun blazed overhead, and the flowers ran riot everywhere. Symonds explored the ruins, adventurous and happy.

On Sunday, the 16th, he was especially animated, and took an almost childish delight in certain effects of wisteria and yellow-berried ivy. That evening he felt ill and went to bed at once upon returning to the hotel. There was much influenza in Rome, and he had been recklessly imprudent. The next morning his throat suggested diphtheria. He received a visit from his old school friend, Mr. Corbett, but he felt very tired and suffered from difficulty in breathing. In the afternoon his mind wandered a little. In the evening the

doctor talked to him about his books, and, turning to his daughter, remarked jestingly, "Your father is already immortal." The damp Roman night air made it increasingly difficult for him to breathe. He seemed to know that his end was approaching. On Tuesday, the 18th, he wrote a brief letter to his wife, who had fallen ill at Venice and could not come. His throat was too swollen to admit food or drink. He asked for a little book of texts which had been his mother's and in which from childhood he had read every day. In the afternoon an English nun came in to nurse him. He talked without intermission to himself. His daughter observes that he seemed to be wandering back through the thoughts, not the experience of his old life. The heat was excessive, and the city was in a tumult.

On Wednesday, April 19th, it was evident that pneumonia had settled in both lungs and was gradually paralyzing them and the heart. He continued to talk incessantly to himself, but in a very faint voice. His face grew suddenly much younger, and in the last hour his

expression was almost that of a boy. He died quietly and peacefully, at the end of exhaustion. It was the middle of a cloudless day. Outside, in the blazing sunlight, the festivities went on tumultuously. In the evening the air was filled with the noise of music and salutes and brightened with innumerable fireworks.

The first one to bring flowers to the deathroom was the hotel porter, a Graubünden peasant, who came with Roman lilacs for the friend of his people. They were followed by numerous wreaths, sent by strangers who knew Symonds through his books. In England, the same day, his *Study of Walt Whitman* was published.

A little plot was procured for him in the Protestant Cemetery, close to the grave of Shelley. At three o'clock on Thursday morning his body was carried across the city and deposited at dawn in the mortuary chapel. The funeral took place at four o'clock on Saturday afternoon. It was a day of splendid sunshine; the grass was full of April flowers and the birds sang in the cypress trees.

The epitaph was written by Jowett, so soon to follow his old pupil in death; and on the gravestone it is followed by the prayer of Cleanthes the Stoic, in the version of Symonds himself.

Infra Jacet
JOHANNES ADDINGTON SYMONDS
vir luminibus ingenii multis
et industria singulari,
cujus animus
infirmo licet in corpore
literarum et historiæ studio ardebat.
Bristolii natus V. Oct. MDCCCXL.
Requievit in Christo XIX Ap. MDCCCXCIII.

Ave carissime
nemo te magis in corde amicos fovebat
nec in simplices et indoctos benevolentior erat.

Lead thou me, God, Law, Reason, Motion, Life!
All names for Thee alike are vain and hollow:
Lead me, for I will follow without strife,
Or if I strive, still must I blindly follow.

Chapter VIII

CONCLUSION

THE life, work, and philosophical position of Symonds illustrate one another as in few recorded cases. Seldom has intellect so clearly reflected character, and character material facts. I think it would be possible to trace the man's peculiar quality, style, method, influence, and choice of themes in an unbroken chain to sheer physiological necessity. Neurotic from birth, suppressed and misdirected in education, turned by early environment and by natural affinity into certain intellectual and spiritual channels, pressed into speculation by dogmatic surroundings and æsthetic study, his naturally febrile constitution shattered by over-stimulation, by wanting vitality denied robust creation, by disease made a wanderer, by disease and wandering together aroused to an unending, fretful activity—the inner his-

tory of Symonds could be detailed and charted scientifically. A little imagination will serve as well to call up the human character of a development which is uncommonly fitted for psychological study.

One cannot read extensively in Symonds without discovering two facts: first, that the matter of ever-uppermost concern with him is religion, the emotional relation which man bears to the whole scheme of things; and, secondly, that his way of conceiving this relation repeats itself constantly in similar statements and in references to a clearly defined circle of historic thought. With hardly an exception his critical volumes close on a common note, which forms the kernel of his poems and speculations. I cannot say how often he refers to Goethe's Proëmium to *Gott und Welt* and the prayer of Cleanthes, to Marcus Aurelius and Giordano Bruno, and above all, Whitman. This circle of recurring references expressed the emotional and vital elements in a point of view which found its purely intellectual basis in the evolution philosophy. A natural affinity thus predisposed him to estab-

lish his theory of criticism upon the wider philosophical basis empirically provided by the nineteenth century. A natural affinity, I say, because I wish to show plainly that his acceptance of evolution was not merely intellectual and that his writings were really the outgrowth of his character and his fundamental emotions towards life.

From that laborious, dutiful father of his he inherited a stoical habit of mind, at variance indeed with his early tendencies, which yet in mature life became practically dominant. But in the son stoicism—the sentiment of work and duty—was wholly separated from its dogmatic and theoretical applications in the father. For Symonds was a conscious sceptic long before he was a conscious stoic. His scepticism seems early to have been secretly fostered by just the dogmatic nature of his father's stoicism. His youth was like the insurrection of a Greek province against the Roman Empire. Æsthetic study, dialectics, neurotic activity destroyed for him the logical texture of Christianity and, combined with the scepticism of Jowett which questioned

life without questioning God, destroyed in him the sentiment of faith: for losing faith in life he could not, as Jowett paradoxically did, retain belief in God.

By the time he left college, then, his position was reasonably clear. With a substratum of stoicism, of which he was not yet aware, his mind was packed with miscellaneous knowledge of European culture and had a strong bias toward Greek thought. But the centre of his heart was not occupied. There was a void, a vacuum, and of this the man was desperately aware. Just here he differs from really small men, just in this fact lies whatever power of personality and achievement finally marked him out. His heart would not let him rest. His mind was unable to occupy him calmly, to allow him to exercise a soulless literary gift. He was paralyzed by the want of a central animating principle. And with all his natural talent, his facility in words, his abundant learning, he could produce nothing. It took him longer than most men to find himself, because his niche in the universe was more essential to him than his

niche in the world. During all the years in which he was storing up knowledge he was a man passionately in search of religion. Naturally, then, he found this religion, and as naturally it had to be one consonant with his peculiar physical condition and the stock of his brain. In these respects he was a member of the post-Darwinian group at Oxford, who felt so keenly the vacuum which remained when the dogmatic elements of the old faith had been swept away. This point enables us to understand the English influence of Whitman and that vague but powerful cult first called by Henry Sidgwick the "cosmic enthusiasm."

We must grasp the idea of a natural mystic, deprived of dogmatic outlet, an eclectic of culture, a man physically weak, intellectually sophisticated, over-educated, strangely susceptible to beauty, strength, powerful influences. Such a man finds his first foothold in Goethe, because Goethe is almost the only character which, as it were, includes a man of such wide range, and provides a generous margin, points out a path of cohesion. For Symonds, Goethe

was an elaboration, a modern instance of the spirit which had drawn him into Greek studies—the spirit of scientific pantheism. In Greek thought he found, first of all, a moral attitude. In their sense of a cosmic order, an all-embracing law, their sense of harmony with nature and of divinity in nature, he discovered the ground-plan of a modern creed which required only to be confirmed by experiment and animated by emotion. He found that in their submission to law they had surmounted the enervating elements of fatalism by resolutely facing and absorbing the sad things of life, including them in selected types of predominant beauty and strength. The logical apex of Greek ethics he found in Marcus Aurelius: its obedience to the common reason of the universe, its social virtue, its faith in the rightness of things we cannot see. This attitude, except for its lack of compelling force, its inadequacy to men who have been indulged with a more celestial dream, seemed to him consonant with modern science, as Christian theology could not be. For Christian theology made man an exile from nature,

dependent for salvation upon a being external to the universe and controlling it from without. The crucial utterances of Christian theology—such, for example, as St. Paul's "For if Christ be not risen indeed, then are we of all men most miserable," or Thomas à Kempis' "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain," are contradictory to the idea of a divinity immanent in nature of which man's consciousness forms a part.

This moral attitude Symonds found expressed in three utterances, to all of which he constantly recurs. The first, which he called his motto, is the maxim of Goethe, "To live resolvedly in the Whole, the Good, the Beautiful." The second is the prayer of Cleanthes the Stoic, which in his own version was written over Symonds' grave:

> Lead thou me, God, Law, Reason, Motion, Life!
> All names for Thee alike are vain and hollow:
> Lead me, for I will follow without strife,
> Or if I strive, still must I blindly follow.

The third is Goethe's Proëmium to *Gott und Welt,* Faust's confession of faith; translated thus by Symonds:

To Him who from eternity, self-stirred,
Himself hath made by His creative word;
To Him who, seek to name Him as we will,
Unknown within Himself abideth still:
To Him supreme who maketh faith to be,
Trust, hope, love, power, and endless energy.

Strain ear and eye till sight and sound be dim,
Thou'lt find but faint similitudes of Him;
Yea, and thy spirit in her flight of flame
Still tries to gauge the symbol and the name:
Charmed and compelled, thou climb'st from height to
height
And round thy path the world shines wondrous bright;
Time, space, and size and distance cease to be,
And every step is fresh infinity.

What were the God who sat outside to see
The spheres beneath His finger circling free?
God dwells within, and moves the world and moulds;
Himself and nature in one form enfolds:
Thus all that lives in Him and breathes and is,
Shall ne'er His presence, ne'er His spirit miss.

The soul of man, too, is an universe;
Whence follows it that race with race concurs
In naming all it knows of good and true,
God—yea, its own God—and with honor due
Surrenders to His sway both earth and heaven,
Fears Him, and loves, where place for love is given.

Characteristically this translation was written on the glacier at Heiligenblut, June 27, 1870. I shall have occasion presently to connect it with his feeling about the Alps.

This philosophical position, I have said, formed for him the ground-plan of a modern creed which required only to be confirmed by experiment and animated by emotion. The first of these requisites he found in the evolution theory, the second in Whitman.

Symonds' use of the word evolution has been severely criticised on the ground that he too laxly identifies it with growth. Whatever truth may be in the charge I think is due to two causes—first, that he approaches the problem rather imaginatively than in the spirit of exact science, and secondly that his data are historical and æsthetic rather than biological or geological. In short, the aspect of evolution he has always in mind is the evolution of the human spirit, which is not yet so accurately determinable as the primary physical aspects of life. In his application of evolution to criticism, in his effort to show that science and religion are complementary, he was a pio-

neer and he had, so to speak, the pioneer's axe to grind; so that what he wrote on these themes must be taken, in his own spirit, as personal suggestions and speculations. Intellectually the evolution theory proved to him what the Greeks and Marcus Aurelius had divined, how truly man is part of nature and how "nature everywhere, and in all her parts, must contain what corresponds to our spiritual essence."

There is, however, a long step to take from the philosophy of nature to the religion of nature—the step from what may be called the cosmic sense to what has been called the cosmic enthusiasm. The prayer of Cleanthes is a statement of submission:

> Lead me, for I will follow without strife,
> Or if I strive, still must I blindly follow.

Indeed that is what man does whether he will or no; therein he still remains in bondage to fate, because he does not yet with hearty confidence affirm, "In Thy will is our peace." Powerless as man's will is before cosmic law,

he may still believe that his happiness lies in opposition to cosmic law. His acquiescence is not yet enthusiastic. And as Symonds wrote in his *Greek Poets*: "The real way of achieving a triumph over chance and of defying fate is to turn to good account all fair and wholesome things beneath the sun, and to maintain for an ideal the beauty, strength and splendor of the body, mind and will of man." The way to hold one's own in the swift-flowing stream is to swim with it, using the current for one's own progress. Under these conditions the possibility of a new religion is indicated in the following passage: "Through criticism, science sprang into being; and science, so far as it touches the idea of deity, brought once more into overwhelming prominence the Greek conception of God as Law. On the other hand, the claims of humanity upon our duty and devotion grew in importance, so that the spirit and teaching of Christ, the suffering, the self-sacrificing, the merciful, and at the same time the just, survived the decay of his divinity. In other words, the two factors of primitive Christianity are again

disengaged, and again demand incorporation in a religion which shall combine the conception of obedience to supreme Law and of devotion to Humanity, both of which have been spiritualized, sublimed, and rendered positive by the action of thought and experience. What religion has to do, if it remains theistic, is to create an enthusiasm in which the cosmic emotion shall coalesce with the sense of social duty." [*The Philosophy of Evolution.*]

Here then the fire was laid, ready to be lighted. Whitman touched the match. I have already told how in 1865 Symonds discovered Whitman. Years afterward he wrote: "*Leaves of Grass,* which I first read at the age of twenty-five, influenced me more perhaps than any other book has done, except the Bible; more than Plato, more than Goethe. It is impossible for me to speak critically of what has so deeply entered into the fibre and marrow of my being." In Whitman all these smouldering theories, these gently, passively emotional thoughts sprang up as a flame warming and lighting all the implications of the cosmic idea: the universe, the individual,

sex, friendship, democracy. Whitman's passionate belief in life, stout subordination of the world's experience to the forthright soul, superb emotional grasp of the principle of development, glory in health, disregard of cerebration, innocence of the sinister power of creeds, customs, human laws to swamp the cosmic energy in man—all this, on a dozen scores, was calculated to electrify a man like Symonds. He accepted the whole of Whitman as he had never accepted the whole of anything before. And with Whitman he came to accept the whole of life.

Was there something a little hectic about all this? The sheer physical health which underlay Whitman's exultation was just what Symonds did not possess. The question arises, can the cosmic enthusiasm, which is really the joy of living, exist healthily in those who are not healthy? And if the joy of living is to be identified with religion, can any but healthy people be truly religious? It is open to serious question whether any man can love the universe whose digestion is faulty. The question is perhaps insoluble, yet in it lies the na-

ture of Symonds' inherent sincerity, taking that word in its absolute sense. From his acceptance of Whitman sprang the animated point of view which controlled his later life and underlay his writings. That alone is an earnest of sincerity! and yet I accept it with misgivings, because he never eradicated his even more fundamental scepticism, he never ceased interrogating the sphinx even in the midst of his adoration. Or perhaps I should say the cosmic law remained for him a sphinx, the projection of his own sphinxliness (I think Plato would forgive this word)—instead of the more obvious, blunt, vital force Whitman felt it to be: which means merely that both men created the cosmos in their own image. I mention it because it qualifies our notion of this discipleship. It enables us to see that for Symonds the cosmic enthusiasm could really be only a working-plan, a literary and intellectual synthesis and a social platform, while the quintessence of the man remained as volatile, as evanescent, as unremoved and unexpressed as ever. The real Symonds—the "Opalstein" of Stevenson—could never flash

itself into the rough colors of critical prose and common life. Behind the calm sweep of a more and more fruitful actuality, the mystery of life, dim, inscrutable, hidden away, seemed continually surging to the surface, questioning, warning, perplexing, troubling, like a soul seeking a body and always baffled. But for us, who can be students only of the *fait accompli,* the working-plan is there and must suffice.

That the cosmic enthusiasm did not indeed altogether absorb or satisfy him is proved by certain notes and miscellaneous papers he published on the question of God. He was plainly not contented with the impersonality of Cosmic Law. He described himself as an agnostic leaning toward theism, which may be taken as a precise way of shadowing forth his need of a devotional object. Of the definition of deity he says: "What must of necessity remain at present blank and abstract in our idea of God may possibly again be filled up and rendered concrete when the human mind is prepared for a new synthesis of faith and science." [*Notes on Theism.*]

To me it seems that the words agnostic and Whitman can hardly be uttered in the same breath: for the whole hopeless tangle of cold metaphysical processes involved in words like agnostic withers away before one luminous, heartfelt glimpse into the infinite. But this again illustrates the dualism of Symonds—his incapacity to accept a soul-stirring intuition without submitting it immediately to analysis. It illustrates the lifelong struggle in him of the poet and the critic. A man who could write, near the close of his life, "If there is a God, we shall not cry in vain. If there is none, the struggle of life shall not last through all eternity. Self, agonized and tortured as it is, must now repose on this alternative"—a man who could write this could not have possessed essentially the spirit of the cosmic enthusiasm. He could not have been so troubled with definitions, he could not have wavered so in faith.

So far as he possessed it he found it imaged in the Alps. His feeling for the Alps once more illustrates the physical basis of religious emotion—it was the longing of stifled lungs

for oxygen, literally as well as figuratively. So far back as 1858 we find him speaking of grand scenery as an elevating influence which depreciates one's estimate of self. Visiting Switzerland for the first time at twenty-one, he fills his mind with haunting pictures and memorable sounds—the murmurous air of waterfalls and winds, wild flowers that call to him more and more compellingly through days and years of illness and heated study in England. "I love Switzerland as a second home," he writes already in 1866, "hoping to return to it, certain that I am happier, purer in mind, healthier in body there than anywhere else in the world." A year later in London, in the roaring, dazzling summer streets, he dreams of sunrise over the snow-fields, the church bells ringing in the valleys, the dew upon the flowers; and without forgetting their pitiless indifference to man he says, "I love the mountains as I love the majesty of justice. I adore God through them, and feel near to Him among them." At Mürren in 1863 he first read Goethe's *Proëmium;* on the Pasteuze Glacier seven years later he translated it. In

1869 he describes the Alps as his "only unexploded illusion." Gradually the Alpine sentiment becomes central in him. He connects it with all his major impressions—with Prometheus on Caucasus, with Beethoven and Handel, Cleanthes and Plato, Bruno and Whitman, Michael Angelo and Goethe—just those men, observe, who became the subjects of his criticism. In 1867 he writes: "The only thing I know which will restore my physical tone and give me health is living in the Alps. The only prospect of obtaining spiritual tone and health seems to be the discovery of some immaterial altitudes, some mountains and temples of God. As I am prostrated and rendered vacant by scepticism, the Alps are my religion. I can rest there and feel, if not God, at least greatness—greatness prior, and posterior to man in time, beyond his thoughts, not of his creation, independent, palpable, immovable, proved."

Here, then, is indicated the relation between his physical condition, his religious attitude, and his controlling motive in criticism. The Alps which could give him health could give

him also, and for the same reason, faith. And they gave him that sense of "greatness," the importance of which in his own work is indicated by a passage in one of his Greek studies: "No one should delude us into thinking that true culture does not come from the impassioned study of everything, however eccentric and at variance with our own mode of life, that is truly great." There we have the logical basis for his literary, as well as his religious, enthusiasm for Whitman. In the Alps he not only found, as Obermann had found, an outlet for his mystical pantheism, but he found, what Tyndall admitted as a possibility, the laboratory for placing some such pantheism on a scientific basis. He found moreover practical democracy among the peasants, he found his ideal of the human body, which drew him to Michael Angelo; and he came to feel that "elevating influence which depreciates one's estimate of self"—which troubled him at eighteen—as a blissful relief. Years of introspection had given him too much of himself, and he was glad enough to be "sweetly shipwrecked on that sea."

It is not surprising, then, that Symonds came to look in literature for everything that has tonic value. Health, moral and intellectual, and all that nourishes a high normality in man, was the object of his quest in art, history and literature: not sensations that console the pessimist, nor distinction that implies a dead level to throw it into relief, nor the restoration of past ages lovelier than ours in specific points at the cost of true democracy. His vision was wide and sane: power and clairvoyance might have made it prophetic. For the underlying principle of his critical theory—that life is deeper than thought—is only in our day, after centuries of philosophical delusion, becoming recognized once more. It was a principle far more "modern" than that of a greater than Symonds, Matthew Arnold. *Prose of the centre* was Arnold's criterion, meaning prose of the social centre. But the criterion of Symonds, held with however much defect of power, was a more fundamental centre than that of taste: one in which even taste, even the social centre, becomes provincial and which admits Rabelais, Burns, Thoreau, Whit-

man and a hundred others who have no other centre at all than native humanity. "Life is deeper than thought"—a contemporary platitude which with Symonds was notable for two reasons. In the first place it was with him a true discovery of experience, and that always elevates a platitude. Secondly, it stands almost unique in an age of culture and in a man who contributed so much to culture in its popular aspects. "I am nothing if not cultivated," wrote Symonds once, "or, at least, the world only expects culture from me. But in my heart of hearts I do not believe in culture, except as an adjunct to life. . . . Passion, nerve and sinew, eating and drinking, even money-getting—come, in my reckoning, before culture." In his day perhaps only a man deprived of life and submerged in literature could have proclaimed that. Robust minds like Arnold or Browning could not feel so keenly the tonic element in thought. Life in its own abundance was tonic enough. To them it was a commonplace from the outset that life is deeper than thought—they could not feel it as a revelation. It was from ex-

cess of vitality that they were able, without losing their personal equilibrium, to emphasize the purely intellectual. In everything written by these men health and strength were implicit, and for this reason they were seldom explicit. Browning could afford to occupy himself with intricate psychological cases, and Arnold with writers of exquisite prose; but Symonds required vital forces like Michael Angelo and Whitman.

Symonds again was one of the first of English men of letters to grasp what may be called the optimism of science. To Tennyson, Ruskin, Carlyle, Arnold, Clough, science appeared in one way or another as an enemy, a negative agent, a cause of melancholy, pessimism, or resignation, subverting God, revelation, personal immortality. To them it brought with it an overwhelming sense of loss. Arnold and Clough consoled themselves with duty and work, Carlyle and Ruskin passionately recalled the past, Tennyson credulously snatched at the hope that it might after all be theology in another form, Browning proclaimed a totally unreasonable optimism. The

positive aspects of science meanwhile remained hidden, unpopularized, uncompromisingly "scientific." Such an aspect as that of eugenics, for example, has only in the last few years, and chiefly through Continental influences, begun to take its place in our literature. Science, not as a destroyer, but as a builder, Symonds divined, and his training enabled him to link that modern view with the thought of the past. He would have gladly recognized the truth that doubt and faith are attitudes toward life itself, not toward figments of the brain, that states of mind like scepticism and pessimism are to be explained rather by experiments in circulation and digestion than by abstract metaphysical questions of immortality and God. And he would have recognized that this, instead of debasing our view of the human soul, glorifies our view of the human body.

These, I say, are aspects of science that Symonds divined, largely because the problem of his own life and consequently the nature of his experience was, unlike that of his greater contemporaries, more physical than in-

tellectual. There was only a defect of power in the man to make it memorable, in the sense in which the teachings of Carlyle, or Ruskin, or Arnold are memorable.

A defect of power; and also a defect of coherence. The writings of Symonds do not stand together as do those of Arnold or Ruskin. There has never been a collected edition of his works, and the idea of such a thing is inconceivable. With all their community of tone and subject, their marked evolution of style, their consistently delivered message, they lack that highest unifying bond of personality. Some of them are isolated popular handbooks, others are esoteric and for the few, others again are merely mediocre and have been forgotten. Individually they appeal to many different types of mind. Taken together they do not supply any composite human demand, nor are they powerful enough to create any such demand. They are indeed rather the product of energy than of power.

The conclusions of Symonds reduce themselves, upon analysis, to sanity and commonsense: and it appears certain that nothing is

more perilous to long life in literature than sanity and common sense when they are not founded upon clairvoyance. Only the supreme geniuses—Goethe and Tolstoy—have been able to carry off the palm with platitude. That is because they not only see and experience the truth in platitude, but feel it, with a dynamic and world-shaking passion. Symonds, in specific traits the equal of Arnold, or Ruskin, or Carlyle, falls short of their finality partly at least because more than any of them he saw life steadily and saw it whole. He saw life neither through the spectacles of the Zeit-geist nor of the Hero. To him England was not accurately divided into Barbarians, Philistines, and Populace, nor was the world wholly a world of Plausibilities. And he was obviously more sensible in his hard-won faith in human evolution than that nobler prophet who strove so tragically to restore the Middle Ages. But common sense unhappily is the virtue of equilibrium: and equilibrium is a state of the mind which has no counterpart in life or in men who, in the profound sense, in the *normal* sense, grasp life—that is to say, the prophets.