

**GEORGE
CHAPMAN,
A CRITICAL ESSAY**

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George Chapman, a critical essay by Algernon Charles Swinburne

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Lussy D'Amboise. pg. 83.

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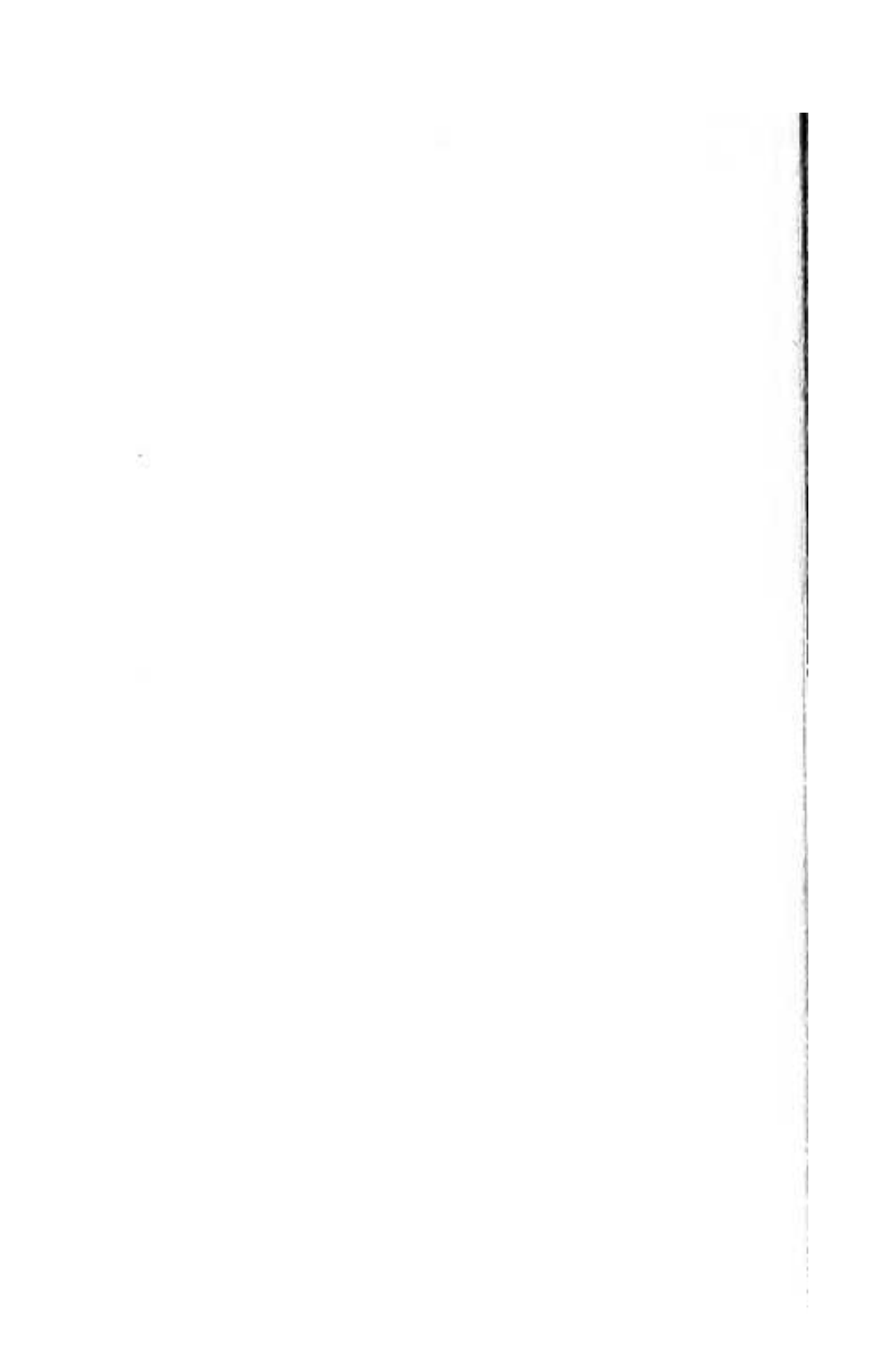
A CRITICAL ESSAY.

BY

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE.

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1875.



GEORGE CHAPMAN.

THE fame which from his own day to ours has never wholly failed to attend the memory of George Chapman has yet been hitherto of a looser and vaguer kind than floats about the memory of most other poets. In the great revival of studious enthusiasm for the works of the many famous men who won themselves a name during the seventy-five memorable years of his laborious life, the mass of his original work has been left too long unnoticed and unhonoured. Our "Homer-Lucan," as he was happily termed by Daniel in that admirable *Defence of Rhyme* which remains to this day one of the

most perfect examples of sound and temperate sense, of pure style and just judgment, to be found in the literature of criticism, has received it may be not much less than his due meed of praise for those Homeric labours by which his name is still chiefly known; but what the great translator could accomplish when fighting for his own hand few students of English poetry have been careful to inquire or competent to appreciate.

And yet there are not many among his various and unequal writings which we can open without some sense of great qualities in the workman whose work lies before us. There are few poets from whose remains a more copious and noble anthology of detached beauties might be selected. He has a singular force and depth of moral thought, a constant energy and intensity of expression, an occasional delicacy and perfection of fanciful or reflective beauty, which should have ensured him a place in the front rank at least of gnomic poets. It is true that his "wisdom entangles itself in over-niceness;" that his philosophy is apt to lose its way among brakes of digression and jungles of paradox; that

his subtle and sleepless ingenuity can never resist the lure of any quaint or perverse illustration which may start across its path from some obscure corner at the unluckiest and unlikeliest time; that the rough and barren byways of incongruous allusion, of unseasonable reflection or preposterous and grotesque symbolism, are more tempting to his feet than the highway of art, and the brushwood or the morass of metaphysics seems often preferable in his eyes to the pastures or the gardens of poetry. But from first to last the grave and frequent blemishes of his genius bear manifestly more likeness to the deformities of a giant than to the malformations of a dwarf, to the overstrained muscles of an athlete than to the withered limbs of a weakling.

He was born between Spenser and Shakespeare, before the first dawn of English tragedy with the morning star of Marlowe. Five years later that great poet began a life more brief, more glorious and more fruitful in proportion to its brevity than that of any among his followers except Beaumont and Shelley: each of these leaving at the close of some thirty years of life a fresh crown of immor-