

**SWINBURNE AS I KNEW HIM,
WITH SOME UNPUBLISHED
LETTERS FROM THE POET TO HIS
COUSIN, THE HON. LADY
HENNIKER HEATON**

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Swinburne as I knew him, with some unpublished letters from the poet to his cousin, the Hon. Lady Henniker Heaton by Coulson Kernahan

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COULSON KERNAHAN

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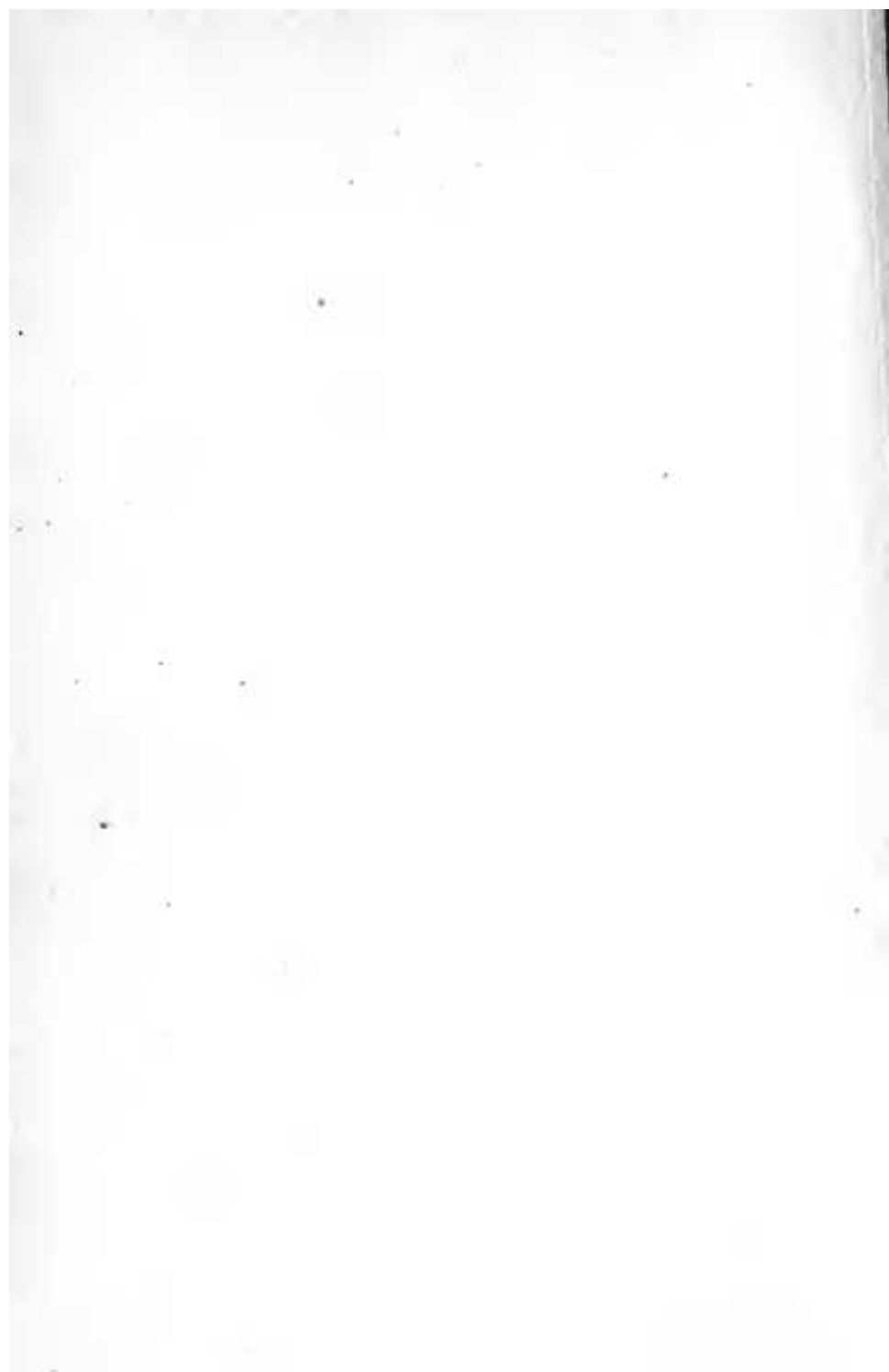
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TO
MAURICE BARING

DEAR M. B.,

It is to the poet of whom I here write that I owe, if indirectly, my friendship with you, whose *Dramatic Poems* I hold to be greater and more beautiful than those of any living poet. That he had read and admired work of yours, I have cause to know, and that he has no truer admirer than you, I am equally aware. May I then link his name with yours, in the dedication of this little volume?

C. K.



BY WAY OF PREFACE

THE WHY AND THE WHEREFORE OF THE
CONTENTS OF THIS BOOK, TO WHICH IS
ADDED A SWINBURNE "STORY"

SOON after I had finished the writing of this small volume, two friends, whom it is my wife's and my own happiness often to welcome to our home—Sir John and the Hon. Lady Henniker Heaton—were here; and as the latter is a cousin of Swinburne's, I told our visitors that I had written a second instalment of recollections. They had already seen my previous reminiscences of the great poet, and expressed themselves as interested to see these.

They were then so good as to say that I might have the use of the letters here for the first time printed. That I was grateful

so to be privileged, and remain grateful, I need hardly record, for one letter at least has singular charm and is very characteristic of the writer.

Half a dozen words from a great man are of infinitely more interest and importance than what a little man may, in very many words, say of him. That is why I adopt the unusual course of printing at the beginning of this book, instead of at the end, in an Appendix, the four letters in question.

When I penned my recollections of Swinburne (for *In Good Company*) I did so with some reserve. Very little, either of his early life or of his later days with that "hero of friendship" Watts-Dunton, was known to the outside world, and I did not feel free to set down all that was within my knowledge.

Now that Mr. Gosse's masterly and brilliant *Life* as well as *Swinburne's Letters* have been published, and the facts are widely known—have, indeed, been the occasion of

some controversy—the reserve of which I have spoken seems to me no longer necessary. On the contrary, a wise frankness strikes one as the better course. May I also say that though I have written frankly of Watts-Dunton, as well as of Swinburne, and have not sought to paint him as other than he was, and so not without human failings, my affection for him, and the honour in which I bear him, have only deepened with the passing of the years? In the whole history of literary friendships, there is no chapter more beautiful than Watts-Dunton's whole-hearted and great-hearted devotion to what he believed to be the best interests of his friends Swinburne and Rossetti.

I conclude with a new and true "story" concerning Swinburne.

Two elderly maiden ladies, with whom "birth" counted for everything, and "brains," even genius, scarcely at all, chanced to see the exquisitely beautiful miniatures which Lady Henniker Heaton (*née* the Hon.
b

Sermonda Burrell) was so kind as to allow to be reproduced in *The Letters of Swinburne*, which Dr. Arthur Compton-Rickett and the late Mr. Thomas Hake so ably edited.

"Who is this Mr. Swinburne, of whom we hear so much?" the elder lady asked. "We know, of course, that he is a poet, but who are his people?"

"Oh, he's the son of Admiral Charles Swinburne, who came of an old Northumberland family, and of Lady Jane Ashburnham, of Battle Place, Sussex," was the reply. "That," pointing to the miniature of Issabella Burrell, Countess of Beverley, and ancestress of the present Duke of Northumberland, "was his great-grandmother. Those," indicating the miniatures of Frances Julia Burrell, Duchess of Northumberland, and Elizabeth Burrell, Duchess of Hamilton and Marchioness of Exeter, "were his great-grand-aunts."

"Is that really so!" exclaimed the elder