

good deal in under the roof), about 300 years old I was told, it stands fairly and squarely across the road from the Common. Now one of a brewery chain, it has a well-kept and prosperous look.

Our haste to get here did us no good, for it was only 4.30 in the afternoon, when English pubs are closed. We had to wait another hour. I know it's civilised and all that, but we felt impatient. However, as surely and slowly as 9.0 a.m. comes in New Zealand came 5.30 here, and we went in through the door labelled saloon bar. The civilised aspect of it was apparent now. No nonsense about parking your wife somewhere else—we both could go into this pleasant bar, where meals and snacks were served as well as drinks. (But you are quite welcome to go in and sit down and read the paper if you wish just to do that.) This kind of thing has been objected to for New Zealand on the grounds that it would encourage drinking. No, it makes it very easy for anyone not to have a drink and yet keep company with someone who does. Why, even Swinburne was trusted to go in here. But to continue.

"Do you know anything of Swinburne's connection with this pub?" I asked the boy.

"No, sir. I'll enquire, sir."

He turned to the older man. "The gentleman wants to know about Swinburne's connection with this pub."

"Is this the place?" I asked.

"Yes, this is the place all right, but we don't know much about it now. We have a picture of him somewhere." He walked over to a corner. "Oh, that's what it is. I'd never bothered about it much."

It was a Johnny Walker advertisement, with a drawing of the well-known figure of Johnny Walker talking to the shade of Swinburne.

"Perhaps the Major knows something about it," said the barman.

But the Major, who was sitting with a companion at the end of the bar, had already taken up the subject.

"Old Percy Lester, who used to keep the stables at Roehampton, told me that Swinburne used to come in here, drink one glass of beer, and go away without paying for it. He used to walk over here, you know. All the way from Putney. But he used to go away without paying for his beer."

"I think it had been paid for," I said. "The idea was to keep him from drinking too much."

"Oh, was that it?" said the Major.

"Yet I bet he wrote his best poetry when he was half cut," said the barman.

"I must read some of his poetry some time," said the Major.

"Is it any good?" asked his companion. "I've never heard of him."

"Oh, jolly good stuff," said the Major. "So they tell me, at any rate."

I tried to keep to my point. Had Swinburne had only the one glass of beer? Had he never gone upstairs for anything extra? Nobody really knew, but they did not think so. But Mr Kay would be down shortly. He lived at the pub and he was over 80. He might know.

"I wasn't there at that time," said Mr Kay. "But I can tell you that he came in and sat down in a little bar over in that corner. No, he didn't have anything else. Sometimes he had a roll and a bit of cheese. I'll take you and show you his chair if you like."

I was duly taken out to the kitchen and allowed to sit in an old Windsor chair.

Still, I felt disappointed as I came back into the bar. But something interesting was being said.

"Yes," said a barmaid, who had just arrived on the scene, to the Major. "We would hear a sound like a hand being slid across the back door, and then the latch would rattle and the lock would turn. And one morning there was a glass on the counter that hadn't been there the night before. Another night we locked every door inside and out, and in the morning the door into the bar was open and the key in it."

"Sounds to me like old Kemble on a binge," said the Major.

Could this morsel be for me? This wasn't about Swinburne? I asked.

"Swinburne's ghost," she said. "That's what we always say."

"What do you think of it?" I asked the barman.

"I've heard them talk about it, but I don't believe these tales."

"Tales," said the barmaid. "This is no tale."

Well, I had an ending for my inquiry. Perhaps the story I was chasing was a bit muddled. Perhaps this was when Swinburne had his bottle of Burgundy.

People began to come in; it was no use following the matter up any further.

I was very pleased to be shown a memorial copy of *The Bookman*, published in June, 1909, not long after Swinburne's death, which Mrs Anderson said "went with the house" when they took *The Pines* in 1952. There were many tributes to Swinburne, and two extracts, one from George Saintsbury and the other from George Bernard Shaw are very interesting:

Professor Saintsbury: But Mr Swinburne's poetry had another attraction less genuinely poetical, not more popular, but very seductive to some tastes. He was notoriously one of the most scholarly poets of a literature which can boast of Milton and Gray, of Coleridge and Landor. . . . The whole of his work was saturated, so to speak, with its own ancestry. It was never obtrusively learned: but it

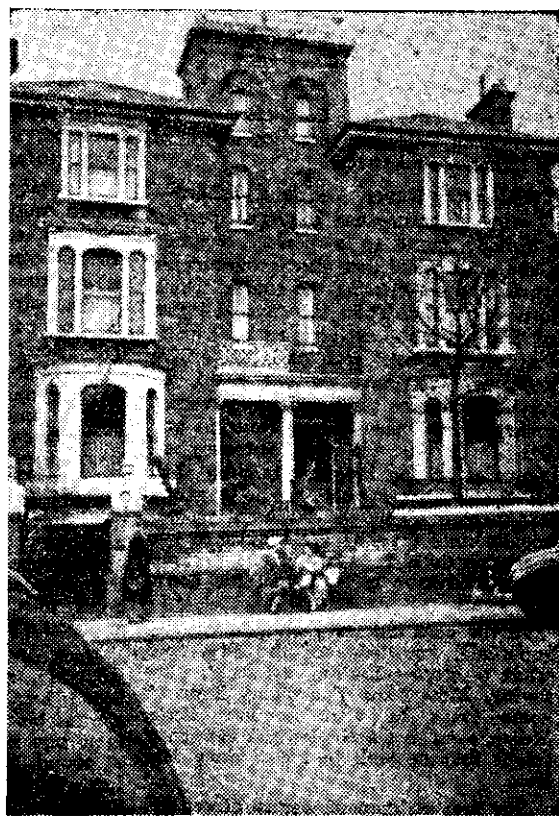
had a quality which is vaguely troublesome to those who had no learning. It smelt not of the lamp but of "honey and the sea," like its own laurustinus. Yet the honey was the honey of Hybla; and the sea had washed the shores, and had caught and returned the melodies, of England and of France, of Provence and of Italy.

Shaw: He was an odd phenomenon, this supporter of Dublin Castle, who was a republican and regicide when Russia was in question; always distinguished and powerful at second hand, always commonplace and futile at first hand; great on paper, insignificant on Putney Hill. I never got anything from him except the musical pleasure of reading his verse; and I could not go on very long with that, any more than I could make my dinner off raspberry jam. But the pleasure was very great whilst it lasted. R.I.P.

I am glad Shaw admits that Swinburne was great on paper, which seems to me to be the all-important place for a writer to be great, whatever kind of figure he cuts on Putney Hill. If the criticism had been made of Sir Edmund Hillary it would, of course, be a totally different matter.

Swinburne and the Burgundy

THE story of Swinburne and the Burgundy was told by Richard Le Gallienne in his book *The Romantic '90s*. "The last time I saw Swinburne he did not see me," he wrote, "and perhaps it is telling tales out of school to recall the occasion. Still, as I consider the reminiscence far from derogatory to him, and believe, too, that the reader will regard it with me as presenting him in a brotherly human aspect, I will hazard it. Swinburne, like some other poets of the time, Tennyson and Meredith, for instance, was a great walker. Putney lies at the foot of Wimbledon Common, and it was Swinburne's custom to walk every morning from his house to the top of the Common and back. It chanced that one morning I had been out early bicycling, and I had stepped into a shop at the top end of the Common to buy a newspaper. Whom should I come against, leaving as I was entering, but Swinburne. He did not see me, and I had no thought of disturbing his morning meditations. But when I came out of the shop I saw him ahead of me on his way home. It was then I noticed his fantastic manner of walking and heard those profane carters laughing at the great man of whom they knew nothing. As I watched him dancing oddly on his way, a profane idea struck me also. I remembered that there was at the head of the Common, a short distance away, an old inn called the Rose and Crown; I have referred to that bottle of Bass which was all that the protective Watts-Dunton, ever thoughtful of his well-being, considered good for him. Swinburne, needless to say, was no ordinary drunkard, but for him, as for so many other poets, strong drink was a mocker, and for him, with his orgiastic temperament, it was more potent and dangerous



THE PINES TODAY

No. 2, where Swinburne lived, is on the right

than for less sensitive men. Thus, as I remembered the Rose and Crown, I could not help wondering if, now that he was out of the clutches of his friend, he might not be inclined to a little human truancy. So I hung behind till the inn came in sight. 'Will he pass it?' I smiled to myself, or 'Will he go in?' I was not left in doubt, for, as a billiard ball glides into the pocket, the author of *Atalanta in Calydon* suddenly disappeared. There was no one but me and the carters to see. I smiled to think of Watts-Dunton at the bottom of the hill, and, after waiting a few moments, I myself entered the inn. It was one of those old inns in which the taproom is partitioned off into various cosy sections. I glanced into one and another of them, but there was no sign of my illustrious friend. Perhaps I had been mistaken, after all. Then, leaning on the bar, I ordered my own 'morning,' as Pepys would say, from the gay young barmaid, and presently brought our conversation round to the gentleman who had entered before me, remarking that I was acquainted with him, and wondered what had become of him. 'Oh,' she replied, 'the gentleman' never drank at the bar, but every morning, at the same hour, he dropped in and, repairing to a private room, punctually consumed a bottle of Burgundy, alone with his thoughts. Needless to say, he did not fall in my estimation on that account. On the contrary, it but made him the more comradely human, and I rejoiced, too, that, in spite of his friendly gaoler, the poet did contrive thus to warm his veins with that generous ichor. I waited around on the grass outside for perhaps three-quarters of an hour, and then suddenly again there was the divine 'Algy' once more on his homeward way, apparently none the worse for his truant libation."



THE PINES AS IT WAS

From a card made by the present occupants from an old drawing