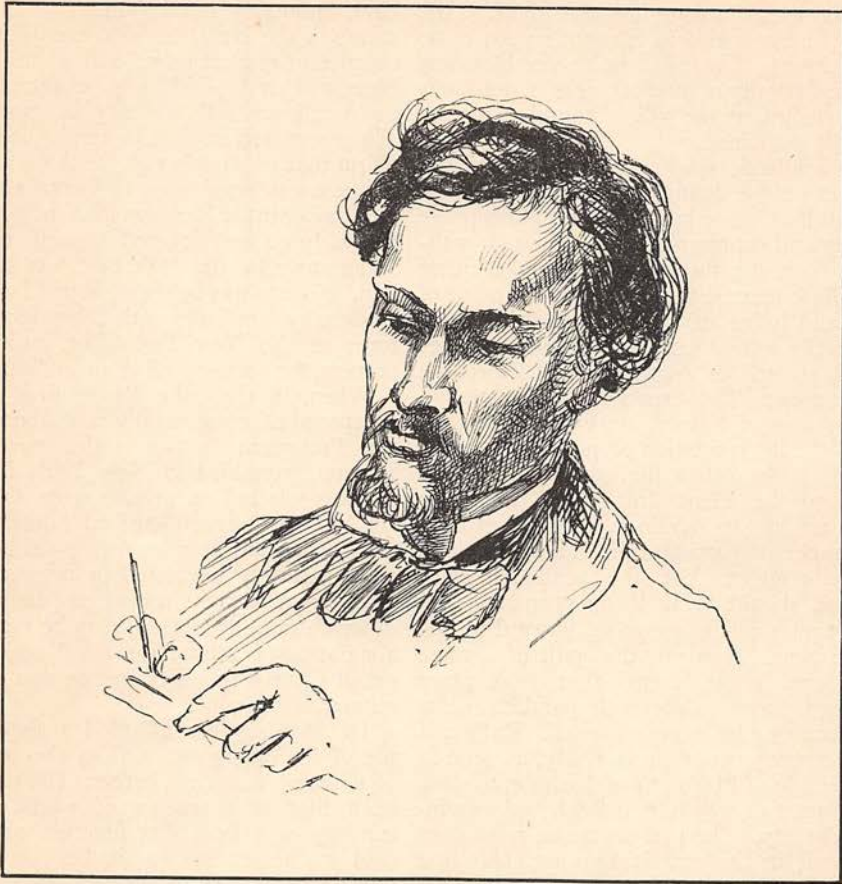


DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI.



DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI. (FROM A PHOTOGRAPH OF A PEN-DRAWING, TAKEN IN 1853.)

THOSE whose privilege it was to meet the late Mr. Gabriel Rossetti at once in the plenitude of his powers and in the freshness of their own impressions, will not expect to be moved again through life by so magnetic a presence. In his dealings with those much younger than himself, his tact and influence were unequalled; he received a shy but ardent youth with such a noble courtesy, with so much sympathy yet with no condescension, with so grand an air and yet so warm a welcome, that his new acquaintance was enslaved at the first sentence. This seems to me to have been in a certain sense the key-note of the man. He was essentially a point of fire; not a peripatetic in any sense, not a person of wide circumference, but a nucleus of pure imagination, that never stirred

or shifted, but scintillated in all directions. The function of Gabriel Rossetti, or at least his most obvious function, was to sit in isolation, and to have vaguely glimmering spirits presented to him for complete illumination. He was the most prompt in suggestion, the most regal in giving, the most sympathetic in response, of the men I have known or seen; and this without a single touch of the prophetic manner, the air of such professional seers as Coleridge or Carlyle. What he had to give was not mystical or abstract; it was purely concrete. His mind was full of practical artistic schemes, only a few of which were suited to his own practice in painting or poetry; the rest were at the service of whoever would come in a friendly spirit and take them. I find among

his letters to me, which I have just been reading once again, a paper of delightful suggestions about the cover of a book of verse; the next youth who waited upon him would perhaps be a painter, and would find that the great genius and master did not disdain the discussion of picture-frames. This was but the under-current of his influence; as we shall see more and more every year as the central decades of this century became history, its main stream directed the two great arts of painting and poetry into new channels, and set a score of diverse talents in motion.

But, as far as anything can be seen plainly about Rossetti at present, to me the fact of his immovability, his self-support, his curious reserve, seems to be the most interesting. He held in all things to the essential and not to the accidental; he preferred the dry grain of musk to a diluted flood of perfume. An Italian by birth and deeply moved by all things Italian, he never visited Italy; a lover of ritual and a sympathizer with all the mysteries of the Roman creed, he never joined the Catholic Church; a poet whose form and substance alike influenced almost all the men of his generation, he was more than forty years of age before he gave his verse to the public; a painter who considered the attitude of the past with more ardor and faith than almost any artist of his time, he never chose to visit the churches or galleries of Europe. It has been said, among the many absurd things which his death has provoked, that he shrank from publicity from timidity, or spurned it from ill-temper. One brilliant journalist has described him as sulking like Hector in his tent. It used to be Achilles who sulked when I was at school; but it certainly never was Gabriel Rossetti. Those who only knew him after his constitution had passed under the yoke of the drug which killed him, cannot judge of his natural reserve from that artificial and morbid reserve which embittered the last years of his life. The former was not connected with any objection to new faces or dislike of cordial society, but with the indomitable characteristic of the man, which made him give out the treasures of the spirit, and never need to receive them. So far from disliking society, it is my impression that he craved it as a necessity, although he chose to select its constituents and narrow its range.

He was born in 1828. The story of his parentage is well known, and has been told in full detail since his death. He was born in London and christened Gabriel Charles Rossetti; it was not, I am told, until he was of age to appreciate the value of the name,

that he took upon himself the cognomen which his father had borne, the Dante by which the world, though not his friends, have known him. Living with his father in Charlotte street, with two sisters and a brother no less ardently trained in letters than himself, he seems to have been turned to poetry, as he was afterward sustained in it, by the interior flame. The household has been described to me by one who saw it in 1847: the father, titular professor of Italian literature, but with no professional duties, seated the live-long day, with a shade over his eyes, writing devotional or patriotic poetry in his native tongue; the girls reading Dante aloud with their rich maiden voices; Gabriel buried here in his writing, or darting round the corner of the street to the studio where he painted. From this seclusion he wrote to the friend who has kindly helped me in preparing these notes, and whose memories of the poet extend over a longer period than those of any survivor not related to him.

Mr. W. B. Scott, now so well known in more arts than one, had then but just published his first book, his mystical and transcendental poem of "The Year of the World." This seems to have fallen under Rossetti's notice, for on the 25th of November, 1847, he wrote to the author, a perfect stranger to himself, a letter of warm sympathy and acknowledgment. Mr. Scott was living in Newcastle, and instead of meeting, the young poets at first made acquaintance with each other by correspondence. Rossetti soon mentioned, of course, his own schemes and ambitions, and he sent, as a sample of his powers, his poems of "The Blessed Damozel," and "The Sister's Sleep," which he had written about eighteen months before.

Mr. Scott tells me that his first feeling on receiving these poems, written in English by an Italian boy of eighteen, was one of amazement. I cannot wonder at it. If the "Blessed Damozel," when it was published a quarter of a century later, seemed a masterpiece to those who had, in the meanwhile, read so much that was vaguely inspired by it, what must it have been in 1846? Certain pieces in Mr. Tennyson's "Poems" of 1842, and a few fragments of Mr. Browning's "Bells and Pomegranates," were the only English poems which can be supposed to have given it birth, even indirectly. In its interpretation of mystical thoughts by concrete images, in its mediæval fervor and consistence of fancy, in its peculiar metrical facility, it was distinctly new—original as few poems except those by the acknowledged masters of the craft can ever be.

"The sun was gone now; the curled moon
 Was like a little feather
 Fluttering far down the gulf; and now
 She spoke through the clear weather.
 Her voice was like the voice the stars
 Had when they sang together."

This was a strange accent in 1846. Miss Barrett and Mr. Tennyson were then the most accepted poets. Mr. Browning spoke fluently and persistently, but only to a very little circle; Mr. Horne's "Orion" and Mr. Bailey's "Festus" were the recent outcomes of Keats and Goethe; the Spasmodic School, to be presently born of much unwise study of "Festus," was still unknown; Mr. Clough, Mr. Matthew Arnold, and Mr. Patmore were quite unapparent, taking form and voice in solitude; and here was a new singer, utterly unlike them all, pouring out his first notes with the precision and independence of the new-fledged thrush in the woodland chorus.

In painting the process was somewhat different. In this art, no less than in poetry, Rossetti understood at once what it was that he wished to do himself, and what he desired to see others doing; but the difficulties of technique were in his way. He had begun to write in childhood, but he had taken up design late in his youth, and he had undergone no discipline in it. At the present day, when every student has to pass a somewhat stringent examination in design, Rossetti, at eighteen could not have entered the schools of the Royal Academy. He did so, however, yet without ever advancing to the Life School. The soul of art, at this early period, interested him far more than the body, especially such a substance as he found under the presidency of Sir Martin Shee and the keepership of George Jones. Let us not forget, meanwhile, that it is easy to sneer at the incompetence of mannered old artists, and yet hard to over-estimate the value of discipline in a school, however conventional. Rossetti was too impatient to learn to draw, and this he lived to regret. His immediate associates, the young men whom he began to lead and impress, were better draughtsmen than he. His first oil picture, I believe, was a portrait of his father, now in possession of the family. But, as far as can be now made out, he did not begin to paint seriously till about January, 1848, when he persuaded another Royal Academy student, W. Holman Hunt, to take a large room close to the paternal house in Charlotte street, and make it their studio. Here Mr. Scott visited them in the early spring of that year; he describes to me the large pictures they were struggling upon, Hunt on his "Oath of Rienzi," and Rossetti

on his "Girlhood of Mary Virgin." The latter was evidently at present but poorly equipped; the painting was timid and boyish, pale in tone, and with no hint or promise of that radiant color which afterward became Rossetti's main characteristic. But the feeling was identical with that in his far more accomplished early poems. The very pulse and throb of mediæval adoration pervaded the whole conception of the picture, and Mr. Scott's first impression was that, in this marvellous poet and possible painter, the new Tractarian movement had found its exponent in art. Yet this surely was no such feeble or sentimental echo as had inspired the declared Tractarian poets of eight or nine years earlier; there was nothing here that recalled such a book as the "Cherwell Water Lily" of Father Faber. This contained the genuine fleshly mysticism, bodily presentment of a spiritual idea, and intimate knowledge of mediæval sentiment without which the new religious fervor had no intellectual basis. This strong instinct for the forms of the Catholic religion, combined with no attendance on the rites of that church, fostered by no study of ecclesiastical literature or association with teachers or proselytes, but original to himself and self-supported, was at that time without doubt the feature in Rossetti's intellectual character which demands our closest attention. Nor do I believe that this passion for the physical presentation of a mystical idea was ever entirely supplanted by those other views of life and art which came to occupy his maturer mind. In his latest poems—in "Rose Mary," for instance—I see this first impulse returning upon him with more than its early fascination. In his youth, however, the mysticism was very naïve and straightforward. It was fostered by one of the very few excursions which Rossetti ever took—a tour in Belgium in October, 1849. I am told that he and the painter-friend who accompanied him were so purely devoted to the mediæval aspect of all they saw, that, in walking through the galleries, they turned away their heads in approaching modern pictures, and carefully closed their eyes while they were passing Rubens's "Descent from the Cross." In Belgium, or as the result of his tour there, Rossetti wrote several curious poems, which were so harsh and forced that he omitted them from his collection when he first published his "Poems," in 1870. One of these, which was indeed printed anonymously in the pages of the "Germ," but is quite unknown, may be given here as a curiosity. It is a "preraphaelite" poem by design. It attempts, with crude exactness, to give all those aspects of the scene

which had, up to that time, evaded the notice of poets.

"PAX VOBIS.

"Tis of the Father Hilary.
He strove, but could not pray: so took
The darkened stair, where his feet shook
A sad, blind echo. He kept up
Slowly. 'Twas a chill sway of air
That autumn noon within the stair,
Sick, dizzy, like a turning cup.
His brain perplexed him void and thin:
He shut his eyes and felt it spin;
The obscure deafness shut him in.
He said: 'The air is calm outside.'

"He leaned unto the gallery
Where the chime keeps the night and day:
It hurt his brain—he could not pray.
He had his face upon the stone:
Deep 'twixt the narrow shafts, his eye
Passed all the roofs unto the sky
Whose grayness the wind swept along.
Close by his feet he saw it shake
With wind in pools that the rains make;
The ripple set his eyes to ache.
He said: 'Calm hath its peace outside.'

"He stood within the mystery
Girding God's blessed Eucharist:
The organ and the chaunt had ceased;
A few words paused against his ear,
Said from the altar; drawn round him,
The silence was at rest and dim.
He could not pray. The bell shook clear
And ceased. All was great awe,—the breath
Of God is near, that warranteth
Wholly the inner things of Faith.
He said: 'There is the world outside.'"

The effort here is too marked. I remember once hearing Rossetti say that he did not mind what people called him, if only they would not call him "quaint." But the fact was that, if quaintness be defined as the inability to conceal the labor of an art, there is no doubt that both his poems and his designs occasionally deserved this epithet. He was so excessively sincere an artist, so determined not to permit anything like trickiness of effect or meaningless smoothness to conceal the direct statement of an idea, that his lack of initial discipline sometimes made itself felt in a curious angular hardness. The poem which I have quoted above, and which seems to me as invaluable to the poetical student as it must be perplexing to the mere lover of poetry, is an excellent instance in point.

And now it would be necessary, if I were attempting a complete study of Gabriel Rossetti's intellectual career, to diverge into a description of what has so much exercised popular curiosity, the preraaphaelite movement of 1848. But there is no reason why, in a few notes on character, I should repeat from hearsay what one of the seven brothers, Mr. William Michael Rossetti, has reported from authoritative memory. It is admitted, by him

and by all who have understood the movement, that Gabriel Rossetti was the founder, and in the Shaksperian sense "begetter," of all that was done by this earnest band of young artists. One of them, Mr. Millais, was already distinguished; two others, Mr. Holman Hunt and Mr. Woolner, had at that time more training and technical power than he; but he was, nevertheless, the brain and soul of the enterprise. What these young men proposed was excellently propounded in the sonnet by "W. M. R.," which they prefixed to their little literary venture, the "Germ," in 1850. Plainly to think even a little thought, to express it in natural words which are native to the speaker, to paint even an insignificant object as it is, and not as the old masters or the new masters have said it should be painted, to persevere in looking at truth and at nature without the smallest prejudice for tradition, this was the whole mystery and cabal of the P. R. B. They called themselves "preraaphaelite" because they found in the wings of Lippi's angels, and the columbines of Perugino's gardens that loving and exact study of minute things which gave to them a sense of sincerity, and which they missed in the breadth and ease of later work. They had no ambition to "splash as no one splashed before since great Cالداسي Polidore"; but they did wish to draw a flower or a cloud so that it should be a portrait of that cloud or flower. In this ambition it would be curious to know, and I do not think that I have ever heard it stated, how far they were influenced by Mr. Ruskin and his "Modern Painters." I should not expect to find Rossetti influenced by any outside force in this any more than in other instances, but at all events Mr. Ruskin eagerly accepted the brotherhood as practical exponents of the theories he had pronounced. None of them, I think, knew him personally when he wrote the famous letter to the "Times," in 1851, defending Mr. Millais and Mr. Holman Hunt from the abuse of ignorant critics, who, he said, had failed to perceive the very principles on which these "two young men" were proceeding. Somebody wrote to him to explain that there were "three young men," and Mr. Ruskin wrote a note to Gabriel Rossetti, desiring to see his work, and thus the acquaintance of these two remarkable men commenced.

Meanwhile, although the more vigorous members of the brotherhood had shown no special sympathy for Rossetti's religious mysticism, a feebler artist, himself one of the original seven, had taken it up with embarrassing effusion. This was the late James Collinson, whose principal picture, "St. Elizabeth of Hungary," finished in 1851, produced a sort

of crisis in Rossetti's career. This painting out-mystified the mystic himself; it was simply maudlin and hysterical, though drawn with some feeling for grace, and in a very earnest spirit. Rossetti, with his strong good sense, recognized that it would be impossible ever to reach the public with art of this unmanly character, and from this time forth he began to abandon the practice of directly sacred art. Meanwhile, as is proved by two sonnets which Mr. W. B. Scott kindly permits me to print, one of them for the first time, the poet continued to dwell on that field of thought from which, as a painter, he had now shut himself out. The earlier of these sonnets, which were written in 1852, and sent to Mr. Scott at Newcastle, was published for the first time, with various alterations, in 1881:

"THE CHURCH PORCHES."

I.

"SISTER, first shake we off the dust we have
 Upon our feet, lest it defile the stones
 Inscriptured, covering their sacred bones
 Who lie i' the aisles which keep the names they gave,
 Their trust abiding round them in the grave;—
 Whom painters paint with silent orisons,
 And to whom sculptors pray in stone and bronze;
 Their voices echo still like a spent wave.
 Without here, the church-bells are but a tune,
 And on the gothic church-door this hot noon
 Lays all its heavy sunshine here without:
 But having entered in, we shall find there
 Silence, and lighted tapers, and deep prayer,
 And faces of crowned angels all about.

II.

"Sister, arise: we have no more to sing,
 Or say. The priest abideth as is meet
 To minister. Rise up out of thy seat,
 Though peradventure 'tis an irksome thing
 To cross again the threshold of a king,
 Where his doors stand against the evil street,
 And let each step increase upon our feet
 The dust we shook from them at entering,
 Must we of very sooth go hence; the air,
 Whose heat outside makes mist that can be seen,
 Is very clear and cool where we have been.
 The priest abideth ministering. Lo!
 As he for service, why not we for prayer?
 It is so bidden. Sister, let us go."

For some little time after abandoning the directly sacred field in painting, Rossetti seems to have passed through a disconsolate and dubious period. I am told that he worked for many months over a large picture called "Kate the Queen," from some well-known words by Mr. Browning. He made no progress with this, seemed dissatisfied with his own media, felt the weight of his lack of training, and passed, in short, through one of those downcast moods, which Shakspeare has so marvelously described in "Tired

with all these," and which are incident sooner or later to every man of genius. While his touch in poetry grew constantly more sure and masterly, his power as a draughtsman threatened to leave him altogether. He was to have drawn one of the frontispieces in the "Germ," but, although he toiled with a design, he could not make it "come right." At last a happy accident put him on the true track, and revealed his proper genius to himself. He began to make small drawings of poetical subjects in water-colors,—most of those which I have seen are not more than twenty inches by twelve,—over which he labored, and into which he poured his exquisite sense of color, inspired without doubt by the glass of mediæval church windows. He traveled so very little, that I do not know whether he ever saw the treasuries of radiant jewel-work which fret the gloom of Chartres or of Bourges; but if he never saw them, he divined them, and these are the only pieces of color which in the least degree suggest the drawings of this, Rossetti's second period. As far as one can gather, his method was, first, to become interpenetrated with the sentiment of some ballad or passage of emotional poetry, then, to meditate on the scene till he saw it clearly before him; then,—and this seems to have always been the difficult and tedious part,—to draw in the design, and then with triumphant ease to fill in the outlines with radiant color. He had an almost insuperable difficulty in keeping his composition within the confines of the paper upon which he worked, and at last was content to have a purely accidental limit to the design, no matter what limbs of the *dramatis personæ* were sheered away by the frame. It would not be the act of a true friend to Rossetti's memory to pretend that these drawings, of which for the next ten or fifteen years he continued to produce a great number, were without faults of a nature which any coxcomb could perceive, or without eccentricities which an untrained eye might easily mistake for faults; but this does not in the least militate against the fact that in two great departments of the painter's faculty, in imaginative sentiment and in wealth of color, they have never been surpassed. They have rarely, indeed, been equaled in the history of painting. A Rossetti drawing of this class hung with specimens of other art, ancient or modern, simply destroys them. I do not mean that it is better or worse than they are, but that it kills them as the electric light puts out a glow-worm. No other man's color will bear these points of ruby-crimson, these expanses of deep turquoise-blue, these flagrant scarlets and thunderous purples. He

paints the sleeve of a trumpeter; it is such an orange as the eye can scarce endure to look at. He paints the tiles of a chimney-corner; they are as green as the peacock's eyes in the sunshine.

The world is seldom ready to receive any new thing. These drawings of Rossetti's were scarcely noticed even by those who are habitually on the watch for fresh developments in art. But when the painter next emerges into something like publicity we find him attended by a brilliant company of younger men, all more or less influenced by his teaching and attracted by his gifts. The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood had been a very ephemeral institution; in three years, or four at the most, it had ceased to exist; but its principles and the energy of its founder had left their mark on the whole world of art. In 1849 Rossetti had exhibited his picture, "The Girlhood of Mary Virgin," at the Portland Gallery, an exhibition in rivalry of the Royal Academy, which existed but a very short time. As far as I can discover he did not exhibit again in London until 1856, when he and his friends opened a collection of their pictures at 4 Russell Place, Fitzroy Square. We would rather have seen that little gallery than see most of the show-exhibitions of Europe. In it the fine art of the Anglo-Saxon race was seen dawning again after its long and dark night. Rossetti himself was the principal exhibitor, but his two earliest colleagues, now famous painters, Mr. Millais and Mr. Holman Hunt, also contributed. And here were all the new talents whom Rossetti had attracted around him during the last seven years: Mr. Madox Brown, with his fine genius for history; Mr. J. D. Watson, with his strong mediæval affinities; Mr. Boyce, with his delicate portraiture of rustic scenes; Mr. Brett, the finest of our students of the sea; Mr. W. B. Scott himself; besides one or two others, Mr. Charles Collins, Mr. Campbell, Mr. Halliday, Mr. Martineau, whom death or adverse fortune removed before they had quite fulfilled their promise. Gabriel Rossetti contributed to this interesting and historic exhibition five or six of those marvelous drawings of which mention has just been made. "Dante's Dream," the famous vision of the 9th of June, 1290, with its counterpart, "The Anniversary of the Dream" in 1291, were the most prominent of these. A "Mary Magdalene" was perhaps the most moving and exciting. This extremely original design showed the Magdalene pursued by her lovers, but turning away from them all to seek Jesus in the house of Simon the Pharisee. The architecture in this drawing was almost childish; the wall of Simon's house is not three

inches thick, and there is not room for a grown-up person on the stairs that lead to it; but the tender imagination of the whole, the sweet persuasiveness of Christ, who looks out of a window, the passion of the awakened sinner, who tears the roses out of her hair, the curious novelty of treatment in the heads and draperies, all these combine to make it one of those works the moral force and directness of which appeal to the heart at once. Perhaps the most brilliant piece of color at the Russell Place Gallery may have been Rossetti's "Blue Closet," a picture which either illustrated, or as I should rather suppose suggested, Mr. Morris's wonderful poem published two years later.

The same year that displayed him to the public already surrounded by a brilliant phalanx of painter-friends, discovered him also, to the judicious, as a center of poetic light and heat. The circumstances connected with Rossetti's visit to Oxford a little earlier than this are too recent, are fresh in the memories of too many living persons of distinction, to be discussed with propriety by one who was not present. But certain facts are public, and may be mentioned. The Oxford Union still shows around the interior of its cupola strange, shadowy frescoes, melting into nothingness, which are the work of six men of whom Rossetti was the leader. These youths had enjoyed no practical training in that particularly artificial branch of art, mural painting, and yet it seems strange that Rossetti himself, at least, should not have understood that a vehicle, such as yolk of egg mixed with vinegar, was absolutely necessary to tempera, or that it was proper, in fresco-painting, to prepare the walls, and paint in the fresh wet mortar. They used no vehicle, they fixed their colors in no coat of plaster, but they threw their ineffectual dry paint on the naked brick. The result has been that their interesting boyish efforts are now decayed beyond any chance of restoration. It is impossible, however, to ascend the gallery of the Oxford Union and examine the ghostly frescoes that are fading there, without great interest and even emotion. Of the young men who painted there under Gabriel Rossetti's eye, all have become greatly distinguished. Mr. Edward Burne-Jones, Mr. William Morris, and Mr. Spencer Stanhope were undergraduates at Oxford. Mr. Valentine Prinsep and Mr. Arthur Hughes, I believe, were Royal Academy students who were invited down by Rossetti. Their work was naïve and queer to the last degree. It is perhaps not fair to say which one of them found so much difficulty in painting the legs of his figures that he drew an impenetrable covert

of sunflowers right across his picture, and only showed the faces of his heroes and heroines between the golden disks.

The "Oxford and Cambridge Magazine," which also dates from the year 1856, is a still more notable expression of budding genius than the dome of the Oxford Union. It was edited by Mr. Godfrey Lushington, all its articles were anonymous, and it contrived to exist through twelve consecutive monthly numbers. A complete set is now rare, and the periodical itself is much less known than befits such a receptacle of pure literature. It contains three or four of Rossetti's finest poems; a great many of those extraordinary pieces, steeped in mediæval coloring, which Mr. William Morris was to collect in 1858 into his bewitching volume called "The Defense of Guenevere"; several delightful prose stories of life in the Middle Ages, also by Mr. Morris, which, like certain prose romances by Mr. Burne-Jones, have never been publicly claimed or reprinted by their author; and not a little else that was as new as it was notable. A little later Mr. William Morris's first book was dedicated "To my Friend Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Painter," and in 1860 Mr. Swinburne followed with a like inscription of his first-fruits, his tragic drama of "The Queen-Mother." Thus in the course of a little more than ten years Rossetti had become the center and sun of a galaxy of talent in poetry and painting, more brilliant perhaps than any which has ever acknowledged the beneficent sway of any one Englishman of genius.

But all this while the world outside knew nothing of the matter. One by one the younger men stepped forward on the public stage and secured the plaudits of the discerning, and ascended the slow incline of general reputation. But Rossetti remained obstinately reclusive, far preferring to be the priest and confessor of genius to acting himself a public part. To this determination several outward things engaged him still further. He married quite early in life; and his wife, who was herself an artist of rare, if somewhat wild and untrained talent, bore him a son who died at birth, and then shortly after died herself. During his brief married months Rossetti had collected the MSS. of his poems, and thought to publish them; but when he lost his wife, in a paroxysm of grief he placed the sheets of his poems in her coffin, and would hear no more a suggestion of publication. In 1861 he presented the world with a very learned and beautiful anthology of early Italian poetry, and proposed as early as that year to print his original poems. It was his scheme to name the little volume "Dante in Verona,

and other Poems"; but it came to nothing. About 1867 the scheme of publication again took possession of him. I have been told that a sudden sentiment of middle age, the fact that he found himself in his fortieth year, led him to conquer his scruples, and finally arrange his pieces. But he was singularly fastidious; the arrangement would never please him; the cover must be cut in brass, the paper at the sides must bear a special design. These niceties were rarer twelve years ago than they are now, and the printers fatigued him with their persistent obstinacy. It was not till early in 1870 that the "Poems" in stately form first appeared, and were hailed with a shout of admiration which was practically universal.

It was about Christmas in that same year, 1870, that he who writes these lines was first presented to Gabriel Rossetti. The impression on my mental eye is as fresh as if it had been made yesterday, instead of twelve years ago. He was a man of average height, commonly loosely clad in black, so as to give one something of the notion of an abbé; the head very full, and domed like that of Shakspeare, as it was then usual to say,—to my thinking more like that of Chaucer,—in any case a head surcharged with imagination and power, strongly Italian in color and cast. The eyes were exceedingly deep-set, in cavernous sockets; they were large, and black, and full of a restless brilliance, a piercing quality which consoled the shy novice by not being stationary. Lastly, a voice of bell-like tone and sonority, a voice capable of expressing without effort every shade of emotion from rage and terror to the most sublime tenderness. I have never heard a voice so fitted for poetical effect, so purely imaginative, and yet, in its absence of rhetoric, so clear and various, as that of Gabriel Rossetti. I retain one special memory of his reading in his own studio the unfinished MS. of "Rose Mary" in 1873, which surpassed in this direction any pleasure which it has been my lot to enjoy; and on various occasions I have listened to his reading of sonnets, his own and those of others, with a sense that his intonation revealed a beauty in the form of that species of verse which it had never been seen to possess before. I have already spoken of his wonderful courtliness to a new acquaintance, his bewitching air of sympathy; on a closer intimacy this stately manner would break up into wild fits of mirth, and any sketch of Rossetti would be incomplete that did not describe his loud and infectious laughter. He lived very much apart from the every-day life of mankind, not ostentatiously, but from a genuine lack of interest in passing events. An old friend tells

me that during the French Revolution he burst into Rossetti's studio with the incredible news, "Louis Philippe has landed in England!" "Has he?" said Rossetti calmly, "What has he come for?" That certain political events, in which he saw a great symbolic significance, could move him deeply, is easily proved by such sonnets as the noble "On the Refusal of Aid between Nations," and "Czar Alexander II." But such glances out of window into the living street were rare, and formed no characteristic part of his scheme of life.

As a poet in these great years he possessed rare gifts of passionate utterance, and harmony of vision and expression. Mr. Swinburne has characterized these qualities in words which leave no later commentator the chance of distinguishing himself. But it would be totally unjust, even in so cursory and personal a sketch as this, to allow the impression to go undisputed that Rossetti preferred the external form to the inward substance of poetry. This charge was brought against him, as it has always been brought against earnest students of poetic art. I will rather quote a few words from a letter of Rossetti to me, written in 1873, when he was composing his own *magnum opus* of "Rose Mary." I have always felt them to be very salutary, none the less because it is obvious that the writer did not at all times contrive, or perhaps desire, to make them true in his own work:

"It seems to me that all poetry, to be really enduring, is bound to be as *amusing* (however trivial the word may sound) as any other class of literature; and I do not think that enough amusement to keep it alive can ever be got out of incidents not amounting to events, or out of traveling experiences of an ordinary kind, however agreeably, observantly, or even thoughtfully treated. I would eschew in writing all themes that are not so trenchantly individualized as to leave no margin for discursiveness."

During the last eight years of his life, Rossetti's whole being was clouded by the terrible curse of an excitable temperament—sleeplessness. To overcome this enemy, which interfered with his powers of work and concentration of thought, he accepted the treacherous aid of the new drug, chloral, which was then vaunted as perfectly harmless in its effect upon the health. The doses of chloral became more and more necessary to him, and I am told that at last they became so frequent and excessive that no case has been recorded in the annals of medicine in which one patient has taken so much, or even half so much chloral as Rossetti took. Under this

unwholesome drug his constitution, originally a magnificent one, slipped unconsciously into decay, the more stealthily that the poison seemed to have no effect whatever on the powers of the victim's intellect. He painted until physical force failed him; he wrote brilliantly to the very last, and two sonnets dictated by him on his death-bed are described to me as being entirely worthy of his mature powers. There is something almost melancholy in such a proof of the superior vitality of the brain. If the mind had shared the weakness of the body, the insidious enemy might perhaps have been routed in time to secure the elastic rebound of both. But when the chloral was stoutly met at last, it was too late.

So at the age of fifty-four we have lost a man whom we should have retained, in the nature of things, for twenty years longer in the plenitude of his powers, but for a mistake in hygiene—a medical experiment. His work of inspiring the young, of projecting his fiery originality along the veins of others, was perhaps over; it is doubtful whether this can ever be continued with advantage through more than two generations. The prophet is apt at last to become a tyrant, and from this ill apotheosis Rossetti was spared. But there was no reason why he should not, for at least a score of years, have produced noble pictures and have written gorgeous poems, emphasizing a personal success which he would have extended, though he hardly could have raised it. Yet he was always a melancholy man; of late years he had become almost a solitary man. Like Charles of Austria, he had disbanded his body-guard, and had retired to the cloister. Perhaps a longer life would not have brought much enjoyment with it. But these are idle speculations, and we have rather to call to our remembrance the fact that one of the brightest and most distinguished of our race, a man whose very existence was a protest against narrowness of aim and feebleness of purpose, one of the great torch-bearers in the procession of English art, has been called from us in the prime of life, before the full significance of his genius had been properly felt. He was the contemporary of some mighty names older than his, yet there scarcely was to be found among them all a spirit more thoroughly original; and surely, when the paltry conflicts of passing taste are laid to rest forever, it will be found that this man has written his signature indelibly on one of the principal pages of the register of our intellectual history.