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ROSSETTI, THE PAINTER-POET

by

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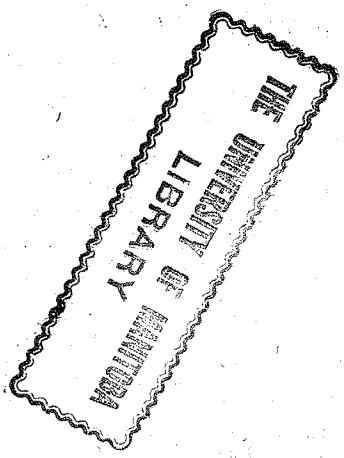

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ROSSETTI - THE PAINTER-POET.

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Introduction- Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelites.

In the case of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, as in how few others, to adequately consider his writings one has to consider in what degree his mind worked consentaneously or diversely in two several arts, the art of poetry and the art of painting. But it is impossible to comprehend even in a slight degree his work in painting, and consequently in poetry also, without a knowledge of the work of the Pre-Raphaelite movement.

Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.

According to various points of view this organization was either the conscious expression of a great artistic revival deliberately planned by a body of zealots based upon a structure of lofty principles, or merely an irresponsible outburst on the part of a few impulsive youths linked together for one brief moment by a mutual combination of enthusiasm and high spirits. The truth, as usual, lies somewhere between.

It was an impulse in which expression, whether embodied in design, color, or verse, sought to free itself from traditional trammels and to make its appeal to the public by the light which shines from the lamp of simple truth and sincerity. In its impulse to be absolutely sincere this new artistic impulse went to the extreme of naivete and in its recourse to the forms and moods of primitive and unsophisticated art, even earned for itself, and probably deserved, the

charge of affectation. For example, in"The Blessed Damozel"

"We two will lie i' the shadow of
That living mystic tree
Within whose secret growth the Dove
Is sometimes felt to be,
While every leaf that His plumes touch
Saith His Name audibly."

These echoes of religious mysticism, of old-time balladry, of the drama in its rude beginnings carry us far back in thought to a period when art had not grown conscious of itself, back,in short, to times and ideals of mediaeval Europe. Sympathy with mediaeval mind and temper is the prevailing note of all this work.

As the term "Pre-Raphaelitism" came to be applied to more and more men and to a greater and greater variety of artistic productions it became even more hopelessly vague in its meaning than it had been at first, but it had evidently come to stay in the jargon of literary criticism. While the movement was like a grain of mustard seed from which a great tree sprung, the name chosen was a marvel of infelicity for the idol of the English art circles of this time was Raphael.

Pre-Raphaelitism.

"Raphael in his prime was an artist of most independent and daring course as to conventions. But he adopted his principle from the store of wisdom gained from long years

of toil, experiment, renunciation of used-up thought, and repeated efforts of artists, his immediate predecessors and contemporaries. The prodigality of his productiveness and his training of many assistants compelled him to lay down rules and manners of work; and his followers, even before they were left alone, accentuated his poses into postures. They caricatured the turns of his heads and the lines of his limbs so that figures were drawn in patterns; they twisted companies of men into pyramids and placed them like pieces on the chessboard of the foreground. The master himself at the last was not exempt from furnishing examples of such conventionalities."

The system of apprenticeship under which was produced all the great art of past ages had died out in the early days of the nineteenth century, perhaps as an inevitable sequence of the establishing of art academies. Serious penalties followed the change. The constant paternal training of the master training the inventive faculties of a particular student ceased to exist, and the latter could no longer see the original work of the master in all its stages, any more than the master could follow the student in his daily ambitious efforts.

Hunt says that after some hours spent in a modern gallery he felt pride welling up in him at the sensibility and skill

"Pre-Raphaelitism"- Holman Hunt Chap. V p.135.

of many British artists of each season. But he increasingly felt that there could be no full satisfaction in merely carrying on his elder's ambitions which had become weakened in their dire struggle for existence in those straitened days by need of compromise with the prejudices of social taste. Artists had to work mainly on a sort of charitable sufferance from the rich who were not always more than fashionably refined.

Constable prophesied that British art would disappear about 1852. He interpreted that this was fulfilled in the death of Turner, but young artists felt that if the open road led to an impassable waste they had to make a new way.

Hunt and Millais, working all one night to finish pictures, were discussing Raphael's cartoons. They did so fearlessly, but Hunt says, "Even when most daring we never forgot their charms to be honored. We advanced judgment on the"Transfiguration". We condemned it for its grandiose disregard of the simplicity of truth, the pompous posturing of the apostles and the unspiritual attitudinising of the Saviour. In our final estimation this picture was a signal step in the decadence of Italian art. When we had advanced this opinion tothe other students, they as a reductio ad absurdam said, "Then you are Pre-Raphaelite." Referring to this as we worked side by side, Millais and I laughingly

agreed that this must be accepted."

Hunt, who was at this time working on his picture "Rienzi", put in practice the principle of the rejection of conventional dogma and pursued that of direct application to nature for each feature however humble a part of the foreground it might be. He says, " I justified the doing of this as the only sure means of eradicating the stereotyped tricks of decadent schools and of conventions not recommended by experienced personal judgment."

At this time Rossetti and Hunt were on terms of intimacy, and when Rossetti had seen the painting "Rienzi" his enthusiasm for the principles upon which Millais and Hunt were working grew with greater familiarity. Rossetti talked much with Woolner, explaining to him their resolution to turn more decidedly to Nature as the one means of purifying modern art. Woolner declared it to be the only system that could reform sculpture.

Hunt thus tells the story of the formation of the brotherhood.: "The companionship of Rossetti and myself soon brought about a meeting with Millais at whose house one night we found a book of engravings of the frescoes in the Campo Santo at Pisa. It was probably the finding of this book at this special time which caused the establishing of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Millais, Rossetti and I were all seeking for some sure ground, some starting point for our art which would be secure however humble. As we searched them this book of engravings we found in them, or thought we found, that freedom from corruption, pride, and disease for which we sought. Here there was at least no trace of decline, no conventionality, no arrogance. Whatever

(Pre-Raphaelitism - Holman Hunt. P. 101.)

the imperfection, the whole spirit of the art was simple and sincere. Think what a revelation it was to find such work at such a moment and to receive it with the triple enthusiasm of three spirits. Neither then, nor afterwards did we affirm that there was not much healthy or good art after the time of Raphael; but it appeared to us that afterwards art was so tainted with the canker of corruption that it was only in the earlier work we could find with certainty absolute health. Up to a certain point the tree was healthy. Above it disease began. Side by side with life there appeared death."

"Pre-Raphaelitism" was adopted after some discussion as a distinctive prefix, and as we bound ourselves together, the word "Brotherhood" was suggested by Rossetti as preferable to "clique" or "association". It was in a little spirit of fun that we thus agreed that Raphael, the Prince of Painters, was the inspiring influence of the art of the day, for we saw that the practice of contemporary painters was as different from that of the master whose example they quoted as established interest or indifference had ever made the conduct of disciples. It was instinctive prudence, however, that suggested to us that we should use the letters P. R. B. unexplained on our pictures as the one mark of our union."

The name "Pre-Raphaelitism" expresses admiration for the early Italian, and notably the early Florentine religious painters like Giotto, Ghiberti, Bellini, and Fra Angelica. "In the work of these men they found a sweetness, depth, and sincerity of devotional feeling, a self-forgetfulness and humble adherence to truth which were absent from the sophisticated of Raphael and his successors. Even the imperfect command of

technique in these primitives had a charm. The stiffness and awkwardness of their figure painting, their defects of drawing, perspective and light and shade were like the lispings of childhood or the artlessness of an old ballad."

Holman Hunt, though apparently not his associates, had read with eager approval the first volume of Ruskin's "Modern Painters" in which the young artists of England are advised to go to nature in all singleness of heart, rejecting nothing, selecting nothing. Pre-Raphaelitism was a practical, as "Modern Painters" was a theoritical protest against the academic traditions. Ruskin says, "We begin by telling the youth of fifteen or sixteen that nature is full of faults and that he is to improve her; but that Raphael is perfection and the more he copies Raphael the better; that after much copying of Raphael he is to try to do what he can himself in a Raphaelisque but yet original manner."

The Pre-Raphaelite movement is a revolt against conventionality. "The rest of the world," Ruskin says, "were painting cattle pieces, and sea pieces, and fruit pieces, and family pieces, the eternal brown cows in ditches and white sails in squalls, and sliced lemons in quarters and foolish faces in simpers."

The disadvantage of a painter like Raphael with the inimitable perfection of technique and tranquil sublimity of conception was that he had influenced too deeply the art

History of English Romanticism in the Nineteenth Century- A. H. Beers, Chap. VII P 282.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti - H. C. Marillier.

of his successors and tended to destroy originality of design.

"Yet life is not long enough in art for anyone who starts from the beginning to arrive beyond the wide outposts. Wise students accept the mastership of the great of earlier ages. True judgment directed us to choose an educational outflow from a channel where the stream had no trace of the pollution of egoism and was innocent of pandering to corrupt thoughts and passions. We drew from this source and strove to add strength to its further meanderings by the inflow of new streams from nature and scientific knowledge. Our work was condemned for its daring innovation. At the time of our boyish combination we had no thought that such pretensions would ever be made; we were too strongly engrossed with the desire to supply a defect in modern training to think of personal penalties."

The painters, W. H. Hunt and J. E. Millais, who were mainly responsible for the idea of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, were joined by five others. Of these, Rossetti was best fitted to express the aims of the coterie by his possession of the double gift of painting and poetry and by the power of a singularly masterful personality. Thomas Woolner, sculptor and poet, Wm. Rossetti, Frederick George Stephens and James Collison were the remaining four. To these might added the names of several sympathisers, who though in close connection with the Brotherhood, were not of it. Among elder men Ford Madox Brown became one of its most powerful exponents in the realm of art. William Bell Scott and Coventry Patmore gave it their help, and it found an ardent champion in Ruskin who used his persuasive eloquence to define Pre-Raphaelitism and vindicate it against

the charges of mere imitation and relapse into mediaevalism.

One leading idea with the youthful group was return to Nature, but this, strictly speaking, was ridiculous. The two are in antithesis. Ruskin in "Modern Painters" had exhorted artists to walk with Nature, "rejecting nothing, selecting nothing, scorning nothing." But afterwards, when they had exhibited work which professed to bear out such principles, he warned them that so long as they painted from nature "however carefully selected and grouped, that pictures could never have the character of the highest kind of composition." But for all that the idea had value and bore fruit.

The following is the Pre-Raphaelite Code as drawn up by William Rossetti:

(1) To have genuine ideas to express.

(2) To study nature attentively so as to know how to express them.

(3) To sympathize with what is direct and serious and heartfelt in previous art to the exclusion of what is conventional and self-parading and learned by rote.

(4) To produce thoroughly good pictures and statues.

The Pre-Raphaelite theory was strictly realistic. They were not to copy from the antique, but from nature. For landscape background they were to take their easels out of doors. In figure painting they were to work, if possible from a living model and not from a lay figure. A model once selected, it was to be painted as it was in each particular and without

(Introd. to J. Ruskin's Pre-Raphaelitism - Lawrence Benyon)

imaginative deviation. "Every Pre-Raphaelite background," wrote Ruskin, "is painted to the last touch in the open air from the thing itself. Every Pre-Raphaelite figure, however studied in expression is a true portrait of some living person. Every minute accessory is painted in the same manner."

In this fashion the earliest works were executed. In Rossetti's "Girlhood of Mary Virgin" exhibited 1849, the figure of St. Anne is a portrait of the artist's mother, the Virgin of his sister, Charlotte, and Joseph of a man of all work employed in the family. But this severity of realism was not long maintained. It was a discipline, not a final method. Even in Rossetti's second painting, "Ecce Ancilla Domini" the faces of the Virgin and the angel Gabriel are blendings of several models. Yet in its freedom from convention, its austere simplicity, and endeavour to see the fact as it happened, the piece is in the purest Pre-Raphaelite spirit.

Ruskin insisted that while composition was necessarily a work of the imagination, the figures and accessories of a picture should be copies from life. In the early days of the Brotherhood there was an ostentious conscientiousness in observing this rule. We hear a great deal in Rossetti's correspondence about the brick wall at Chiswick which he copied into his picture "Found" and about his anxious search for a white calf for the countryman's cart in the same composition. But all the Pre-Raphaelites painted from the lay figure as well as from the living model, and Rossetti, in particular,

(Architecture and Painting - Ruskin Lecture IV)

relied quite as much on memory and imagination as upon the object before him. William Bell Scott thinks that his most charming works were the small water colours on Arthurian subjects "done entirely without Nature and a good deal in the spirit of illuminated manuscripts with very indifferent drawing and perspective nowhere."

In the public mind Pre-Raphaelitism was associated with two main attributes: First, minute peculiarity of method in painting; Second, poetic or romantic temperament, but in the history of the school the two characteristics became separated, one group of artists being dominated by one set, another by another, so that such diverse works as John Brett's "Acoste"and Burne-Jones "Mirror of Venus" have both been regarded as Pre-Raphaelite.

Ruskin asserted in letters to"The Times", afterwards reprinted in pamphlet form under the title "Pre-Raphaelitism", that while mediaeval art was religious and truthful, modern art was profance and insincere. In mediaeval art thought was the first thing, execution the second; in modern art execution was the first thing and thought the second. And again in mediaeval art truth is first, beauty,second; in modern art beauty is first and truth second. He goes on to deny that Pre-Raphaelitism was unimaginative, though he allowed they had a disgust for popular forms of grace and prettiness. He pointed out a danger in the fact that their principles confined them to foreground work and called for laborious finish on a fine scale. He denied that the draw-

ing of the Pre-Raphaelites was bad, or their perspective false, or that they imitated the errors of the early Florentine painters whom they greatly excelled in technical accomplishment.

In Ruskin's "Lectures on Architecture and Painting" we find a further stage of development of the writer's mind for he finds in Pre-Raphaelitism - now that he insists more on the temper in which that work is done than on the method of it - an affinity with the spirit of mediaeval artists who built and carved great cathedrals. He begins to express the dissatisfaction with the ideals of the Renaissance and all its heritage, the believe that with the Middle Ages had been lost something of precious worth for art and life. The movement as continued through Rossetti into the work of Burne-Jones and William Morris has been fruitful and far-reaching beyond any other such movement inducing a change on the whole outlook of life and humanity as well as on art by a rediscovery and resumption of ideals which the Renaissance had broken off and overshadowed. Art should be, he says, a living and spontaneous growth, flowering in the daily life of men and beautifying all we make and use."

Rossetti's first picture painted in accordance with Pre-Raphaelite principles was "The Girlhood of Virgin Mary" a little flat and grey and rather thin in painting but exquisite in its charm of pure and quiet suggestion and marvellous as the work of a boy, without the usual training

and usual self-control.

The symbolism indicates the mystical mind at work beneath the young man's careless, defiant, blustering exterior. The keynotes of the picture are simplicity and sacred mysticism.

The scene shown is a room in the Virgin's home with an open carved balcony at which her father, St. Joachim, is tending a symbolically fruitful vine. On the right of the picture, shown against the green of the curtain, are the figures of the Virgin and her mother seated at an embroidery frame. The young girl, a most untypical Madonna, in simple gray dress, with pale green at the wrists, pauses with a needle in her hand and gazes with a rapt ascetic look at the room before her where, as if visible to her eyes, a child angel is tending a tall white lily. Beneath the pot in which the lily grows are six large books in heavy bindings, bearing the names of the six cardinal virtues. These, and a white dove perching on the trellis, are amongst the peaceful symbols of the picture, whilst the tragedy also is foreshadowed in a figure of the cross intertwined by the young vine tendrils, and in some strips of palm and seven thorned briar laid across the floor.

The girl, the bird, the room, the flower, the embroidery are painted with the utmost reality, direct from nature in accordance with Pre-Raphaelite principles. Hunt says it is the most wonderful picture that any youth under twenty years of age ever did in the world.

Coincidently with the picture of Mary's Girlhood

Rossetti began and finished an oil painting of his father which was his earliest work of this kind. He also drew an exquisite outline design of a lute-player and his lady from Coleridge's "Genevive". Other pen and ink drawings of 1848 include "Gretchen in the Chapel" with Mephistopheles whispering in her ear, and "The Sun May Shine and We be Cold", a sketch of a girl with clasped hands crouching in the embrasure of a window, apparently a prisoner.

These, and much of Rossetti's work of the next two years comes within the scope of Pre-Raphaelite influence. As an example may be cited the notable pen and ink drawing called "Il Saluto di Beatrice." The cream of Rossetti's Pre-Raphaelite work, however, is "Ecce Ancilla Domini" a sequel in sentiment to his picture of the previous year. Its appearance was the signal for a storm of abuse and raillery which descended with impartial violence also upon the pictures of the other Pre-Raphaelites exhibited at the academy, and which pursued them relentlessly until time and success finally established their position.

We are not so conventional now that a new style in art or a new idea could shock us. The tendency, in fact, is towards the other extreme. It is consequently difficult for anyone of this generation to see what it was in the quiet shrinking girl-like figure of Rossetti's Virgin which could infuriate and outrage the so-called critical opinions of the mid-Victorian age. The white effect of the little Virgin crouching on her bed confronted by the tall, white-robed angel and his lily is daringly broken by the deep

blue of the bed curtains, the girl's reddish hair and the red screen in the foreground. The lovely eyes of the Virgin, "dawn-tinted eyes, filled with ache, dream and expectation" are the dominant charm of the simple subject.

This picture was criticised by the Athenaium as "an unintelligent imitation of the mere technicalities of old art- golden glories- fanciful scribblings on the frames and other infantine absurdities." As a result, Rossetti abandoned his idea of three Virgins' pictures, deciding that the class of pictures "which had his material preference was not for the market."

In the darkest hour of criticism against Pre-Raphaelitism a Saviour appeared. Ruskin, who before the outcry hardly knew of the existence of the school had his attention drawn to it by Coventry Patmore, and with characteristic fearlessness and energy he plunged into the fray. In a series of letters to "The Times" he defended the artists at all points from the accusation that they could not draw, the alleged conspiracy against Raphaelitism and from the charge that they knew not the laws of perspective. "Strong instincts," Ruskin says, "are apt to make men strong and rude, self-confidence to give much of what they do and say the appearance of impertinence. Suppose this stubbornness and self-trust in a youth labouring in an art in which the execution part is confessedly to be learnt from masters, and we shall hardly wonder that much of his work has a certain awkwardness and stiffness in it. There is little cause for surprise that pictures painted in a temper

of resistance by exceedingly young men of stubborn instincts and positive self-trust should not be calculated at first glance to win from older works. But that youths of eighteen and twenty should have conceived for themselves a totally independent and sincere method of study, and enthusiastically persevered in it against every kind of dissuasion and opposition is strange enough."

In his warmth of defence Ruskin had not only combatted the statement of faults, but had revelled in laying down an elaborate set of principles. Thus it came about that the original ideas out of which the Brotherhood had grown, ideas of a broad and possibly nebulous character, became transmuted into hard and fast rules of conduct and of practice which the Brotherhood more or less had to accept, partly, perhaps, out of gratitude to their benefactor, partly because they agreed with them in theory, and partly because they may not have seen how far they led.

As an example of Rossetti's poems written in strict adherence to the truth of detail demanded by Pre-Raphaelite creed may be taken the poem "My Sister's Sleep." The subject, however, that of the peaceful death of a girl at midnight on Christmas Eve amid a quiet, broken only by common sounds and the striking of the church clock, while the scene outside is bathed in cold moonlight, is invested with the mysticism and romance which were an inalienable part of Rossetti's thought.

It is quite characteristic of the Pre-Raphaelite school

to introduce into a simple story of life and death a verse such as:-

"Our mother rose from where she sat
Her needles as she laid them down,
Met lightly, and her silken gown
Settled, no other noise than that."

The curiously mystical and uncanny description of the heavens, as seen through the window, is like the background to a picture:-

"Without, there was a cold moon up,
Of winter radiance sheer and thin;
The hollow halo it was in
Was like an icy crystal cup."

"Through the small room, with subtle sound
Of flame, by vents the fireshine drove
And reddened. In its dim alcove
The mirror shed a clearness round."

In the "Bride's Prelude" the sense of the sultry noon-day heat and stillness is perfectly rendered, and the bride's tiring chamber is described with the suggestiveness of a Pre-Raphaelite picture. It is

"Like the inner altar-niche
Whose dimness worship has made rich."

Symbolism is common to all Pre-Raphaelite art. In Rossetti's "Girlhood of Mary Virgin," Joseph is training a vine along a piece of trellis in the shape of the cross; Mary is copying in embroidery a three-flowered white lily plant growing in a flower pot which stands upon a pile of

books, lettered with the names of the cardinal virtues. In "Beata Beatrix" the white poppy brought by the dove is a symbol at once of chastity and death. The shadow upon the sun-dial marks the hour of Beatrice's beatification. Again in "Dante's Dream" poppies strew the floor, emblems of sleep and death, and expiring lamp symbolises the extinction of life, and a white cloud borne away by angels is Beatrice's departing soul. Love stands by the couch in flame-colored robes, fastened at the shoulder with a scallop shell which is the badge of pilgrimage." (English Romanticism in the Nineteenth Century - Beers Chap. VII.)

As poets the Pre-Raphaelites derive from Keats in exclusive devotion to beauty, to art for art's sake, in their simple absorption in the passion of love, and in their attracti on towards the more esoteric side of mediaeval life rather than towards its broad public and military aspects.

One characteristic of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was its remarkable literary strength. Of the seven original members two, William Rossetti and Stephens, were writers by preference. Gabriel Rossetti was a poet before he could be called a painter, and a poet of the first order. Woolner also was a poet, and in this capacity alone belonged to the order. Even without the need of a propaganda such a body was almost bound to produce a school of literary thought allied in sentiment with its artistic ideas and aims. Hence came about the "Germ" which was ostensibly formed to be the

organ of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and to spread its opinions.

It was a forlorn little magazine and only a few hundred copies of each of the four numbers were printed, but it marked the beginning of the most distinctive development that has been made in English poetry during the last thirty years. "So that never was periodical better named," says Mr. Gosse, "than the "Germ"; the seed which put forth two cotyledons and then called itself "Art and Poetry" and put forth two more little leaves and then seemed to die." Among the names of the contributors were those of Thomas Woolner, Ford Madox Brown, William Bell Scott, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti. One illustration went with each number and the first of the four was signed William Holman Hunt. Christina Rossetti, writing under the pseudonym of Ellen Alleyn, contributed a number of poems, and there were three pieces by Coventry Patmore. The names did not mean much in 1850, but the world was to hear a great deal of them during the next quarter of a century."

The new movement inaugurated by Wordsworth forms an almost exact parallel to that of Pre-Raphaelitism in painting. The homeliness and baldness of Wordsworth's early poems, the strained stiffness and angularity of Pre-Raphaelite early

(The Greater English Poets of the Nineteenth Century - D.G.Rossetti - Payne, P.267.)

pictures originated in a like principle of revolt from accustomed canons of the day. In either case they were but symptoms in exaggeration of a desire for absolute sincerity of imagination.

Sincerity, speaking in the broadest sense, was the aim and achievement of the school. According to Hunt, the method of the Brotherhood was simply the inevitable result of going to nature and of representing the earth as it was in the beauty of actual sunlight. In the pursuit of this endeavour they brought new beauties into the world of painting, refreshed the sight of man by intense and vivid observation. But their way was only one way, and not the only way of seeing nature.

The really potent and vitalising factor in the movement was their imaginative power, a power sustained with ardor and intensity through all the effort of high finish which they carried into every corner of their pictures.

The value of Pre-Raphaelite method lay, not as is claimed for it, in superior exactness of representation, but in imaginative uses. In Rossetti's large pen drawing of "Hamlet and Ophelia" every inch of background and accessories is filled with detail, and here it is not observed but imagined detail.

M. de la Sizeranne proposes as distinguishing characteristics of Pre-Raphaelitism's art, originality of gesture and vividness of colouring, but it should be remarked that originality of gesture in Pre-Raphaelite figures was only one manifestation of the romantic desire for individuality and

concreteness as against the generalising academicism of the eighteenth century."

William Sharp in speaking of that splendid outburst of Romanticism says, "At last a time came when a thrill of expectation, of new desire, of hope, passed through the higher lives of the nation, and what foll wed thereafter were the Oxford movement in the Church of England, the Pre-Raphaelite movement in art, and the far-reaching Gothic revival. Different as these movements were in their primary aims, they were in reality closely interwoven one being the outcome of the other" The study of mediaeval art which was fraught with such important results was the outcome of the widespread ecclesiastical revival, which in its turn was the outcome of the Tractarian movement in Oxford.

Hugh Walker gives the same idea in his Introduction to "The Age of Tennyson" (Page 10) when he says, "Kindred in spirit to the Tractarian movement was the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Both movements were in essence protests on behalf of imaginative and esthetic in human nature against the exclusive nourishment of the intellectual element, and they proved their kinship by each in its own way seeking to bring about a revival of mediaevalism. They fought a battle on behalf of aspects of the truth threatened with neglect."

Hence the chief contribution of Pre-Raphaelitism to the world was not veracity in workmanship, consciousness of detail, the morality of motive demanded by them, but a deep vein of imaginative romance inherited or derived from great dreamers

(English Romanticism in 19th. Century-Beers- Chap.VII.)

of Mediaeval Italy and a lovely sense of colour blooming with exotic brilliancy in the foggy atmosphere of London.

"Poetry also has narrowed to a careful observance of traditions, to a sacrifice of essence to form and to an apparently cynical contempt for whatever in the world breathes the spirit of romance and mystery. The secret of the new Renascence of wonder consisted in going back from the temper of imitation, prosaic acceptance, pseudo-classicism, and domestic materialism to the temper of wonder, reverence and awe."

Pre-Raphaelitism standing for sincere methods and personal ideals stirred the English art world to its depth, "by making it doubt where before it had worshipped, by making it inquire where before it had accepted, by making it for an interval at least look with its own eyes at problems of design and color."

Its members broke away into another world, a new world of beauty and art. They, and especially Rossetti, were in their early career mystics by nature. Doubts did not trouble them at all. They either believed or disbelieved. Historical criticism and science bored them to extinction. "Let us get away from this vain disquiet to quiet, from material to spiritual, from this ugly world to a beautiful one, from theological

(Encyclopaedia Brittanica - Theo. Watts.)

(Influence of Pre-Raphaelitism - Cary - P. 43.)

squabbles to religious symbols, from convention to truth in art, from imitation of dead forms of art to Nature itself. Let us leave a world, noisy, torn, and confused, with physical and mental ugliness for a realm of pure faith, or if we cannot, or do not care to believe, for that pure image of beauty rising from the sea of Time."

(Four Victorian Poets -Stopford Brooke - P.151.)

SOURCES AND INFLUENCES.

Influence of German and French minstrelsy.

Rossetti's note is essentially an individual one and what influences of others can be traced in his work are slight and transient.

By the time Rossetti was fifteen he had taught himself enough German to translate Burger's "Lenore." His translation has perished as has also his version, some hundred lines in length of the "Nibelungenlied." But a translation which he made about the same time of the old Scandinavian poet Hartmann Von Aue's "Der Arme Heinrich" is preserved. Rossetti did not keep up his German and in later years had not much liking for Scandinavian or Teutonic literature.

Like all neo-romanticists he was strongly attracted by Francois Villon, that strange Parisian poet, thief and murderer of the fifteenth century. He made three translations from Villon the best known of which is the famous "Ballad of Dead Ladies," remarkable for the manner in which he caught the spirit of the original and for the happy rendering of the last line:-

"Tell me now in what hidden way is
Lady Flora, the lovely Roman?
Where's Hipparchia and where is Thais
Neither of them the fairer woman?
Where is Echo beheld of no man,
Only heard on river and mere,-
She whose beauty was more than human
But where are the snows of yester-year?"

As a translator he was unsurpassed and was very fine in his rendering of Old French, of which both he and Swinburne made enthusiastic studies.

Besides the "Ballad of Dead Ladies" there are two other specimens of Old French minstrelsy and two songs from Victor Hugo's "Burgraves" among his miscellaneous translations. Rossetti at one time thought of doing for the early poetry of France what he had done for that of Italy, but he never found the leisure for it.

Influence of the Classics.

The only Classical poet that Rossetti took to in any degree was Homer, and his "Odyssey" considerably more than the "Iliad." This was perhaps only natural as the "Odyssey" is the most romantic of epics. William Sharp says, "No work more opposite than Rossetti's to the Greek spirit can hardly be imagined. The former, the Greek, looked to lightness, clearness, form in his painting, sculpture and architecture; to intellectual conciseness and definiteness in poetry; the latter, Rossetti, looked mainly to diffused color, graduated to almost indefinite shades in his art, finding the harmonies thereof more akin than severity of outline and clearness of form, while in his poetry the Gothic love of the supernatural, the Gothic delight in sensuous images, the Gothic instinct of indefiniteness and elaboration carried to an extreme prevailed. He would take more enjoyment in a weird or dramatic Scottish ballad than in a Pindaric or Horacian ode."

Nevertheless Rossetti drew from the Classics the inspiration for some of his grandest and most characteristic works in both painting and poetry. His design for the picture of "Pandora" Swinburne says is "amongst the mightiest in its godlike terror and imperial trouble of beauty." The figure in the picture is clad in a long robe of Venetian red and is holding the fateful casket, from which issues a red smoke, curling all around her and forming behind into clustering shapes, like flame-winged curses. The accompanying sonnet is written in an exalted strain and begins:-

"What of the end, Pandora? Was it thine,
The deed that set these fiery pinions free?
.....

"What of the end? These beat their wings at will,
The ill-born things, the good things turned to ill,-
Powers of the impassioned hours prohibited.
Aye, clench the casket now! Whither they go
Thou mayest not dare to think: nor canst thou know
If Hope still pent there be alive or dead."

Other writers, notably H. C. Marillier, consider that both in invention and depth of feeling Pandora is inferior to its great companion classical picture, Proserpine. In this painting the Queen of the Lower Regions is seen standing in a corridor in the hall of Hades illuminated with a bluish light due to one stray moonbeam from on high. The picture and the sonnets written on the same subject are infested with an air of brooding melancholy. Thus:-

PROSERPINA.

"Afar away the light that brings cold cheer
Unto this wall,-one instant and no more
Admitted at my distant palace-door.
Afar the flowers of Enna from this drear
Dire fruit, which, tasted once, must thrall me here.
Afar those skies from this Tartarean grey
That chills me: and afar, how afar away,
The nights that shall be from the days that were."

Still another fine classical composition is that of "Cassandra." The subject is a scene on the walls of Troy just before Hector's last battle. Cassandra has warned him in vain by her prophecies, and is now rending her clothes in despair because he will not be detained longer. Two spirited sonnets have been written for this drawing, one beginning:-

"Rend, rend, thine hair, Cassandra: he will go
Yea rend thy garments, wring thine hands, cry
From Troy still towered to the unreddened sky."

Other of Rossetti's works, the inspiration for which was derived from the old Greek mythology, and on which time does not allow us to dwell, are the fine painting of "Helen of Troy", the much criticised water color, "Venus Verticordia", (the rock upon which his friendship for Ruskin split), the poem, "Aspecta Medusa" written for a drawing of the same name, and the fine spirited ballad "Troy Town."

(Poems of Dante Gabriel Rossetti - Edited by W.M. Rossetti)

Influence of Dante.

Rossetti was a Latin who made it his special task to interpret to modern Protestant England whatever struck him as most spiritually intense and characteristic in the Latin Catholic Middle Age. The only Italian poet he earnestly loved was Dante. He did not greatly care for Petrarch, Boccaccio, and Tasso, although in boyhood he had taken delight in Ariosto. However, he painted one picture whose title "Bocca Baciata" is taken from some lines in a sonnet by Boccaccio, "The mouth that hath been kissed loses not its freshness; still it renews itself even as does the moon."

Italy was a chief element in all Rossetti's works. Here of course we must consider the influential element of heredity, the artist being on his father's side wholly Italian, and on his mother's half Italian and half English. As an Anglo-Italian he had a double nature, like an enchanter who understood the speech of birds. His first published work was a volume on the"Early Italian Poets"more familiar under the later title, "Dante and His Circle." It includes a translation of "La Vita Nuova," sometimes called the most beautiful book in all literature. Dante is made the central figure of a group of poets who shine, partly by their own, and partly by a reflected light. Sonnets and lyrics are given from more than forty writers, and the whole volume is edited with patient learning and religious care. The volume discloses a genius for poetry of a very high order. It shows his extraordinary mastery of difficult metrical forms. In his own verse Rossetti used few

forms but they are among the most expressive and exacting. His task was to find in the rather hard and unyielding English "equivalents for amorous phrases and redundant rhymes of the most plastic and musical of tongues."

Rossetti himself said. "The life-blood of rhythmical translation is this commandment that a good poem shall not be turned into a bad one. The only true motive for putting poetry into a fresh language must be to endow a fresh nation with one more possession of beauty."

All the Rossetti family were by habit familiar with the sonorous metres of the "Inferno" and "Paradiso." Consequently when Gabriel was a child the name of Dante conjured up no very stimulating thoughts. But at the age of fifteen, when he began to read upon his own lines the Italian writer became to him "a new poet, young and passionately human, tumultuously in love and master of a lovely language." From this time on, Dante was more to him than a poet among other poets. He was rather a religion and an unfailing source of spiritual inspiration. His influence on Rossetti is shown in many tributes, both direct and indirect, but in none perhaps more beautifully than in the lines inscribed to his father's memory in the sonnet "Dante's Tenebrae"

"And didst thou know indeed, when at the font
Together with thy name thou gav'st me his,
That also on thy son must Beatrice
Decline her eyes according to her wont,
Accepting me to be of those that haunt
(The Rossettis - E.L. Cary P. 19.)

The vale of magical dark mysteries
Where to the hills her poet's foot-track lies
And wisdom's living fountain to his chaunt
Trembles in music? This is that steep land
Where he that holds his journey stands at gaze
Tow'rd sunset, when the clouds like a new height
Seem piled to climb. These things I understand:
For here, where day still soothes my lifted face,
On thy bowed head, my father, fell the night."

His chief personal tribute is found in the long noble poem "Dante at Verona." Dante's remarkable words are woven with happy craft into the text and fitted to the metrical scheme without any essential alteration. The poem is a vivid chrtonicle of the years spent by Dante at the court of La Scala, but it also brings out the effective contrast between the outer life shaped by environment and the spiritual life fed by its own springs. Lovell says, "Looked at outwardly, the life of Dante seems an utter and disastrous failure. What its inner satisfaction must have been we with the "Paradiso" open before us can form some faint conception." Rossetti puts the thought in this way:-

"Follow his feet's appointed way,
But little light we find that clears
The darkness of the exiled years.
Follow his spirit's journey: nay,
What fires are blent, what winds are blown
On parts his feet may tread alone?"
(Poems - "Dante at Verona" Verse 3, P. I.)

The poem is full and rich with Rossetti's sympathy for Dante and yet it has less the movement of impassioned thought than almost any other in the book. It is reflective in tone, the poetry of deep contemplation. But in parts, especially the noble verses which paraphrase the famous letter to a Florentine friend when

"In Florence a decree was passed
Whereby all banished folk might win
Free pardon, so a fine were paid
And act of public penance made"

Rossetti gives us in lines surcharged with ardent feeling and rising to a height of passionate denunciation of wrong, one of the noblest utterances ever fount in any literature.

"That he was one the Heavens forbid
To traffic in God's justice sold
By market-weight of earthly gold,
Or to bow down over the lid
Of steaming censers, and so be
Made clean of manhood's obloquy.

"That since no gate led, by God's will,
To Florence, but the one whereat
The priests and money-changers sat,
He still would wander; for that still,
Even through the body's prison bars,
His soul possessed the sun and stars."

(Poems - "Dante at Verona" P. 11)
(Poems - "Dante at Verona" P. 12)

Rossetti was but a young man when he first came under the spell of Dante. When he had finished the translation of "La Vita Nuova," the keynote of which is that the passion of love is at once the guiding light and business of life, the enchantment cast upon him by the great Florentine was strengthened, and from then till the end of his days, Dante remained to him an unfailing source of inspiration for his work both in painting and poetry.

His own poem "On the Vita Nuova of Dante" shows that his admiration for the poet amounted almost to worship.

"At length within this book I found pourtrayed
Newborn that Paradisal Love of his,
And simple like a child; with whose clear aid
I understood. To such a child as this,
Christ, charging well His chosen ones, forbade
Offence: "for lo! of such my kingdom is."

This "Vita Nuova" furnished Rossetti with many subjects for paintings. From it he took the incident of "Dante drawing an Angel on the Anniversary of Beatrice's Death." The same book was the source of a small water-color representing "Beatrice at the Wedding Feast Denying her Salutation to Dante." The poet with a friend grasping his arm as if to restrain him, stands watching a procession of figures clad in blue and green and adorned with roses in their hair.

Perhaps the most important picture painted to illustrate "La Vita Nuova" was the "Beata Beatrix," a painting unique

(Poems - "On the Vita Nuova of Dante" - P. 252)

among the pictures of the world. Rossetti desired to make it a living memorial of his wife and "the haunting melancholy of the scene is a faithful reflection of the spirit in which he set himself to commemorate his dead wife's features." Into the picture he has put the very best of his imagination, feeling, colour, beauty and perfect harmony."

The picture usually associated in the minds of the public with "Beata Beatrix" is "Dante's Dream," Rossetti's most important work in the opinion of many people and considerably his largest. The subject is the vision related by Dante as having come to him of Beatrice lying in death and the angels bearing upward her soul in the form of "an exceedingly white cloud." The following poem contains the incident illustrated by the picture:-

"Then Love spoke thus: 'Now shall all be made clear:
Come and behold our lady where she lies.'
These idle phantasies
Then carried me to see my lady dead:
And standing at her head
Her ladies put a white veil over her;
And with her was such very humbleness
That she appeared to say, 'I am at peace.' "

"Love is clad in the colour of flame, with a pilgrim's scallop upon his shoulder, and birds of a consonant scarlet

(D.G. ROSSETTI - H.C. Marillier - P. 85)
(D.G.ROSSETTI - H.C. Marillier - P.115.)

hue are flying in and out of the open stairways typifying that the house is filled with the spirit of love." The picture is full of symbol and bears witness to possible strength of passion that is so spiritual as to be without taint of sense.

The "Lady of the Window," also known as the "Lady of Pity," is she who in Dante's "Vita Nuova" is described as looking down upon the poet one day when he was overcome with grief, "So that the very sum of pity appeared gathered in her."

Besides the pictures mentioned which were intended to illustrate various passages in "The New Life," incidents from the life and works of Dante have been the subject for a series of other characteristic paintings of the artist-poet. When Rossetti was a boy, a picture of Dante painted by Giotto was discovered on removing the plaster from the wall of the Borgello. One of the discoverers sent a copy to Rossetti's father and it made a powerful impression upon the youthful poet. Later, in 1850, he made it the foundation for a picture intended to give expression to a stanza in Canto XI of the "Purgatorio" on the waxing and waning of fame. In Rossetti's painting, Giotto is painting the face of Dante who is seated with a pomegranate in his hand, gazing with a rapt expression to where Beatrice is passing in a Church procession. "Behind Giotto stands his master, Cimabue

(D.G. Rossetti - H. C. Marillier - P. 115.)
(D.G. Rossetti - H. C. Marillier - P. 139.)

watching the work which is to eclipse his; and behind Dante leans his rival, Cavalcanti, holding in his hand a book of Guinicelli, symbolizing thereby the three generations of poets."

Still other subjects taken from Dante's works are "The Boat of Love," "Matilda Cathering Flowers," "The Vision of Rachel and Leah," and "Francesca da Rimini" in three compartments; In one is represented the lover's kiss, in another, their two souls floating clasped together in Hell through a rain of pale sulphur flames and between the compartments are the figures of Dante and Virgil. Rossetti has given us many versions of this latter subject as he also has of the "Salutation of Beatrice." One of the oddest variations of this is the "Dante's Amor," representing"Dante meeting Beatrice in Florence, and again in Paradise, with (to go between them) a quaint figure of Love poised between the sun (a head of Christ) above, and the moon (a head of Beatrice) below."

But Italy and Dante did not only furnish to Rossetti themes for his works of art. He was so permeated with their spirit that their influence is best recognized, not in furnishing subjects for certain definite paintings and pieces of poetry, but in forming the characteristic style which pervades all Rossetti's creations.

Rossetti is like Dante in that he knows no region of the spirit which is not sensuous also. Love is power which defies distance. Desire penetrates even into the world of death.

(D. G. Rossetti - H. C. Marillier P. 28.)

(D. G. Rossetti - H. C. Marillier P. 58.)

"There will I ask of Christ the Lord
Thus much for him and me:-
Only to live as once on earth
With Love, - only to be,
As then awhile, for ever now
Together, I and he." (The Blessed Damozel-P.236)

Rossetti has been accused of sensualism in his love poetry, but all his tendency is toward a noble chastity. It was really Italian and not English love poetry he wrote, and it was so vitally different from the English way of feeling and speaking of love that it was like listening to a foreign tongue.

The Italian genius loves order and strict arrangement of thought. Its imagination is not fettered but it moves of its own will under self-chosen laws. It is always controlled for the sake of a full and clear expression of a subject. This is sternly characteristic of Rossetti's poetry, especially of the sonnets in "The House of Life." In his painting he sought to follow the old Italian models in "their honest striving after Nature, sincerity of style, decorative simplicity, and pious selection of worthy subjects."

All the works of Dante are characterized by a stern severity, and in Rossetti's poetry he was always serious, even grim. "There was another side to Rossetti, a wild mocking, Bohemian side, full of grim sarcastic humor, but this did not intrude into either painting or poetry. The solemnities

(D.G. Rossetti - H. C. Marillier P. 13.)

of our earthly life and of its passions more than its gaiety or pleasure, were his daily guests." He resembles Dante also in the vividness of his personifications. Not Death only and Sleep and the winged spirit of Love, but certain particular aspects of them are living creatures. Like Dante, his imagery is always peculiarly definite, at times almost grotesque.

"The sun was gone now; the curled moon
Was like a little feather
Fluttering far down the gulf." (The Blessed Damozel-P.234)

"It lies in Heaven, across the flood
Of ether, as a bridge.
Beneath, the tides of day and night
With flame and darkness ridge
The void, as low as when this earth
Spins like a fretful midge." (The Blessed Damozel-P 233)

"And the souls mounting up to God
Went by her like thin flames." (The Blessed Damozel-P.233/

Influence of Edgar Allen Poe.

In considering the different fountains for the inspiration of Rossetti's work Ernest Rhys says of him, "In nature mainly Italian by blood, a born poet, and an artist of unusually concrete imaginative faculty, the ages and countries seemed to meet, Mediaeval Italy, Old France, Provence, Chaucer's and Shakespere's England and some unsuspected traits of Victorian Britain were brought to a narrow circuit in his studio at Blackfriars."

(Lyric Poetry - Ernest Rhys P. 346.)

Rossetti was a great but not a wide reader, reading entirely for pleasure and with an eye for everything unusual, grotesque, or which bore the impression of a strong individuality. He was more detached from the world of his own time than probably any other modern man, true only to the ideal which was the projection of his own soul. Being so sensitive and intense in his imaginative faculty we would not expect him to fall under the influence of a multitude of antagonistic teachers. He would respond only to those with whom his own nature had some spiritual kinship.

When he was but eighteen, he came under the spell of Edgar Allen Poe and the result was the paintings "Ulalume" and "The Raven" and indirectly that wonderful poem "The Blessed Damozel." That it was suggested by "The Raven" we know from Rossetti himself. "I saw that Poe had done the utmost it was possible to do with the grief of the lover on earth, and I determined to reverse the conditions and give utterance to the yearning of the loved one in Heaven."

It was essentially a painter's poem written at a period when the mystical and earthly tendencies of Rossetti's mind were nearest together. The result is that the whole poem is a strange combination of daring and reverence, of sensuous warmth and spiritual remoteness. Many years later he attempted to realize on canvas the same unique conception-

"The blessed damozel leaned out
From the golden bar of heaven;
Her eyes were deeper than the depth
Of waters stilled at even

"She had three lilies in her hand,

And the stars in her hair were seven." (Blessed Damozel)

Influence of the Bible.

The Bible and Shakespeare may now be added to his sources of inspiration. For his first subject, painted under the influence of the Pre-Raphaelite creed, "The Girlhood of Mary Virgin," appealed to his intensely mystical and symbol-loving mind. Two years afterwards came the "Ecce Ancilla Domini," a sequel in sentiment to the previous picture. The suggestion for these, as for "Mary in the House of John" was the noble poem "Ave." :-

"Work and play,

Things common to the course of day,

Awed thee with meanings unfulfill'd;

And all through girlhood, something still'd

Thy senses like the birth of light,

When thou hast trimmed thy lamp at night

Or washed thy garments in the stream;

To whose white bed had come the dream

That He was thine and thou wast His

Who feeds among the field-lilies." (Poem "Ave" P. 245)

In this poem as in all the Virgin pictures Rossetti has treated the domestic life of the Holy Family with a reverent freedom from conventionality.

In "Mary in the House of John" the scene is at late twilight, "the red glow of the sky casting a purple light over the clustered dwellings of Nazareth, with the deep-blue hills beyond.

Mary is standing before the tall window, the framework of which resembles a cross, filling a hanging lamp from a long red jar of oil."

The most important remaining works painted from the New Testament are "The Nativity," "The Annunciation," and the dramatic picture and sonnet, elsewhere described, "Mary Magdaline" at the Door of Simon the Pharisee" Rossetti has also written verses for the painting of "Mary's Girlhood" and "The Passover in the Holy Family.

The two principal works inspired by the Old Testament stories are "Ruth and Boaz" and "The Seed of David." This latter was painted in three compartments for the Cathedral at Llandaff and shows in the centre"the infant Christ on his mother's knee being adored by a shepherd and a king, and on either side a single figure of David, first as a shepherd-boy slinging the stone at Goliath, and secondly as a king harping to the glory of God."

Of the sonnets written for his pictures Stopford Brooke says, "I do not think they are successful. I do not believe in the representing through a second art vehicle of that which has been previously represented in another. Where the attempt is deliberately made to make a picture into a poem, or a poem into a picture it is not so freshly shaped as it ought to be" While this is probably true, nevertheless, literature would be sorry to lose a verse such as this:-

(D. G. Rossetti - H.C. Marillier P. 66.)
(D. G. Rossetti - H.C. Marillier P. 49.)

"Birth-bare, not death-bare yet, the young stems stand
This Lady's temple-columns: o'er head
Love wings his shaft. What mystery here is read
Of homage or of hope? But how command
Dead Springs to answer? And how question here
These murmurs of that wind-withered New-Year?"
(Poem "Spring" P. 352.)

And besides in the poems where Rossetti uses the powers of the painter to enhance his poetic work, he has done that which is unique in English poetry. There has been no other poet in English who was also a painter of genius and who really could use the painter's gifts to adorn therewith the poet's work.

Influence of Shakespeare.

Rossetti's noblest tribute to Shakespeare is found in his verses "On the Site of a Mulberry-Tree":-

" "The world's enfranchised son,
"Who found the trees of Life and Knowledge one" (P.285)

but other offerings to the master-poet are found in a series of paintings based on his works. One of these, a somewhat harrowing conception, is of Lady Macbeth depicted on her death-bed, sitting up, and with disordered mind rubbing at the fancied bloodspots on her guilty hand. Rossetti's first illustration of Shakespeare was a scene from "Much Ado About Nothing," representing the happy lovers, Benedick and Beatrice, receiving the congratulations of those who had plotted their match. The greatest paintings, however, inspired by Shakespeare are the different pictures of Hamlet and Ophelia. They are remarkable for their intellectual conception of the character of Hamlet.

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"At the time when there lingered the hideous conception of nodding plumes and trunk hose, Rossetti has represented the prince gracefully and gravely attired, with hair tossed back and a handsome serious face."

Miscellaneous Sources.

Continuing Rossetti's literary pedigree, after Shakespeare would come Scott and Byron. These in due course gave way to the Border Ballads, Mrs. Browning, and Dante. After his boyish period followed Tennyson and Browning, but before we consider their influence it might be well to take up a few miscellaneous poems and paintings inspired from kindred sources.

One of Rossetti's earliest literary works was "St. Agnes of the Intercession," the fantastic history of an English painter who was convinced that his soul had lived in this world prior to his birth. His belief was confirmed when he found in a Florentine gallery two portraits resembling in minutest detail his betrothed and himself. This legendary idea was later made the subject of a weird and ghostly painting called "How They Met Themselves." This depicts a pair of lovers wandering at twilight in a wood and suddenly confronted with their own doubles. To illustrate his tale, "St. Agnes of the Intercession," Rossetti painted "Bonifazio's Mistress." At the end of the story, the lady to whom the hero is affianced suddenly falls back and dies as he is painting her, thereby fulfilling a sort of destiny enjoined by the like tragedy in a previous state

of existence.

Mr. J. Stedman says, "poetry furnishes themes to the painter, and of late, painting, through the study of elemental processes has enriched the field of poetry to which Rossetti's contribution is the latest if not the greatest, and has the charm of something rare that is brought to us from another land." Two good examples in which Rossetti has visualized for us the thoughts of other poets are the drawing entitled "Hesterna Rosa" and the great painting "Found." The former is based on the plaintive song of Elena in Sir Henry Taylor's "Philip Van Artevelde"

"Quoth tongue of neither maid nor wife
To heart of neither maid nor wife,
'Lead we not here a jolly life
Betwixt the shine and shade?"

"Quoth heart of neither maid nor wife
To tongue of neither maid nor wife,
'Thou wag'st, but I am sore with strife,
And feel like flowers that fade."

The scene represents two gamblers throwing dice, and their mistresses, one of whom in a fit of shame is covering her face. "She is the yesterday's rose."

The latter "Found," a countryman recognizing in a fallen woman of the streets his own lost sweetheart, was founded on a ballad by William Bell Scott called "Rosabell" These pictures are allied in sentiment with Rossetti's great poem

(Victorian Poets - J. Stedman P.358.)
(D.G. Rossetti - H.C. Marillier P. 29.)

"Jenny" elsewhere described.

Rossetti got little from Milton and Dryden or even from Chaucer and Spenser. Wordsworth he valued hardly at all, but when we come to consider Tennyson as a source of romantic inspiration we find this subject inextricably bound up with "The Morte D'Arthur" of Sir Thomas Malory. This cycle of old celtic legends had been for many years practically a sealed book in England and its popularity to-day is largely due to the interest revived in it by Rossetti, and later by the famous group of Oxford friends, including William Morris, and Edward Burne-Jones. Tennyson became infected from the same source and produced the first set of "Idylls of the King." The mysticism, the romance, the mediaevalism in MALORY appealed strongly to Rossetti, and a very large proportion of his work was influenced thereby. The subject, however, will be discussed at greater length under the topic "Mediaevalism," so it will suffice here to mention a few paintings whose fount of inspiration was the old Celtic legend of "Morte d"Arthur."

In 1854 Rossetti painted a strange, sad, little water-color, "King Arthur's Tomb," representing Lancelot bidding a last farewell to Guinevere. It is said by some that this painting was suggested by Morris' poem of the same name.

The next important scene inspired by Malory was "The Chapel Before the Lists." In a lighted chapel a lady is helping to arm a kneeling knight in red, her long white headdress as she stoops to kiss him, falling like a mantel

down her blue dress. She is holding his long two-handed sword. Upon the pointed shield of the knight is the figure of a maiden in distress. The whole composition is surcharged with the same atmosphere of chivalry as permeates that wonderful poem "The Staff and Scrip":-

"She sent him a sharp sword, whose belt
About his body there
As sweet as her own arms he felt.
He kissed its blade, all bare,
Instead of her.

"She sent him a green banner wrought
With one white lily stem,
To bind his lance with when he fought.
He writ upon the same
And kissed her name.

"She sent him a white shield, whereon
She bade that he should trace
His will. He bent fair hues that shone,
He kissed her face." (P. 77-78.)

Rossetti has painted St. George more than once in different stages of his great adventure. The earliest design is entitled "The Wedding of St. George." He is resting, clad in armour, while the princess kneels and leans her head upon his breast, cutting off a long dark lock of her hair which she has bound upon the crest of his helmet. In the background is a hedge of flowers and attendant angels playing upon bells. (D.G.Rossetti

Influence of Tennyson.

Rossetti is most closely connected with Tennyson in the matter of the famous "Moxon Designs." We find them mentioned in a letter from Rossetti to Allingham, "I have not even begun designing yet, but fancy I shall try "The Vision of Sin" and "The Palace of Art",- those where one can allegorize on 'one's own hook' without killing for oneself and everyone a distinct idea of the poet's."

Rossetti's interpretation of the last sentence may be sought for in the wonderful illustration to "The Palace of Art" on which he lavished all the wealth of his rich mediaeval fancy and feeling for beauty without trespassing to any extent upon the central idea of the poem. It was intended to represent the verse describing how

"In a clear-walled city on the sea

"Near gilded organ-pipes, her hair

"Wound with white roses, slept St. Cecily;

"An angel looked at her."

The second illustration for the same poem showing how "Mystic Uther's deeply wounded son" was tended in the Vale of Avalon by weeping queens, Tennyson liked best of any in the book. The three remaining designs, intended to illustrate "The Lady of Shalott" "Sir Galahad at the Secret Shrine" and "Mariana in the South" reveal an exquisite workmanship and elaborate finish.

(D. G. Rossetti - H.C. Marillier P. 50)

Influence of Wm. Bell Scott and Watts-Dunton.

About the same time William Bell Scott decorated the circular staircase of Penkill Castle with a series of scenes from the "Kinges Quair," the writing of which was once attributed to James I of Scotland. This suggested to Rossetti the writing of his powerful ballad "The King's Tragedy."

Two other artistic works of merit based on the writings of a popular author of the day, Mr. Watts-Dunton, remain to be mentioned here, "The Spirit of the Rainbow" and "Forced Music" The latter is a half-length figure playing upon a sort of lute, and from the expression the idea is conveyed that the girl is a captive slave. It is based upon a little romance written by Watts-Dunton. The second illustrates the following lines of a sonnet by the same author:-

"The spirit of the Rainbow wouldst thou wed?
I arose, I found her - found a rain-drenched girl
Whose eyes of azure and limbs of rose and pearl
Coloured the rain above her golden head."

It pictures a full-length nude figure standing in the centre of a gauzy veil symbolizing the Rainbow.

Influence of Browning.

After Tennyson followed Browning who for a time affected Rossetti almost exclusively. Two of his earliest water-colors were inspired by Browning's works. He first attempted a large canvas illustrating the Page's song in "Pippa Passes" Soon finding this impossible he dropped it. The composition

(D. G. Rossetti - H. C. Marillier - P. 135.)

however, remains in a little painting called "Hist, Said Kate the Queen."

Rossetti was passionately fond of "Sordello" and "Paracelsus", poems for which the world at that time had shown but little appreciation, and had been known to recite fifty pages of "Sordello" to a circle of admiring friends. Therefore it is interesting to find that his second Browning composition is a pen and ink drawing from "Sordello" entitled "Taurello's First Sight of Fortune." The picture that has been before mentioned as marking the opening of Rossetti's second period-the breaking away from the mystical in painting to take up the study of human passion-was another subject taken from Browning called "The Laboratory." It is intended to illustrate the lines in Browning's poem of that name:-

"In this devil's smithy
"Where is the poison to poison her, prithee?"

The painting is intensely dramatic, brilliant and striking in color.

But it is not in the isolated studies and illustrations of Browning's works that we can trace his real influence on Rossetti, but in certain qualities such as realism, passion, and the dramatic perception of character and incident which pervade some of Rossetti's most characteristic work and are the result of his love for and study of that master.

An almost unique piece of genre work on the part of Rossetti and in which can be traced Browning's influence is a painting "Dr. Johnson and the Would-be Methodist at the

Mitre." Dr. Maxwell told the story of how two young women from Staffordshire had come up to the town to consult Johnson about Methodism in which they were much interested. "Come," said he "You pretty fools, dine with Maxwell and me at the Mitre and we will talk over that subject," which they did, and after dinner he took one of them on his knee and fondled her for half an hour together." In his painting, Rossetti instead of Maxwell has introduced the features of Boswell. His Johnson is quite a study in portraiture, and Rossetti has entered into the humorous and somewhat spicy subject in a very realistic and Browningesque manner.

What Knight considers to be Rossetti's most charming poem, "A Last Confession," also seems due to the inspiration of Browning. It is a psychological study, keener than Rossetti often effects of passionate masculine vengeance. The dramatic monologue, the touches of realism, the consummate art shown in the recurrent waves of interruption all vividly recall Browning, as does also the introduction:-

"Our Lombard country-girls along the coast
Wear daggers in their garters: for they know
That they might hate another girl to death
Or meet a German lover. Such a knife
I bought her, with a hilt of horn and pearl."

(Poem "Last Confession" P. 18)

(D. G. Rossetti - H. C. Marillier P. 70)

But the wonderful picture of the girl in this poem would only have been possible for a painter to give us:-

"She had a mouth
Made to bring death to life,- the underlip
Sucked in, as if it strove to kiss itself.
Her face was pearly pale, as when one stoops
Over wan water; and the dark crisped hair
And the hair's shadow made it paler still:-
Deep-serried locks, the dimness of the cloud
Where the moon's gaze is set in eddying gloom.
Her body bore her neck as the tree's stem
Bears the top branch; and as the branch sustains
The flower of the year's pride, her high neck bore
That face made wonderful with night and day."

(Poem "A Last Confession" P. 24)

Influence of Coleridge.

In his later years Rossetti loved Coleridge above all modern poets, and his greatest tribute to that author is found in his sonnet dedicated to him:-

"Yet ah! Like desert pools that show the stars
Once in long leagues,-even such the scarce-snatched hours
Which deepening pain left to his lordliest powers:-
Heaven lost through spider-trammelled prison-bars.
Six years, from sixty saved! Yet kindling skies
Own them, a beacon to our centuries."

(Poem "Samuel Taylor Coleridge" P.338.)

Coleridge was also the fount of inspiration for several of Rossetti's artistic works, notably "Genevieve" and "The

Sea Spell." Rossetti's first idea in painting this subject was to illustrate the lines from Coleridge:-

"A damsel with a dulcimer
In a vision once I saw." (Poem "Kubla Khan".)

It represented a siren crowned with roses holding a harp of strange unearthly form. Later a beautiful glimpse of blue waves was painted in where trees had formerly been. Then Rossetti wrote the poem "The Sea Spell" to accompany the picture:-

"Her lute hangs shadowed in the apple-tree,
While flashing fingers weave the sweet-strung spell
Between its chords." (Poem "A Sea Spell" P. 361)

Influence of Shelley and Keats.

Rossetti had also a profound admiration for Shelley and Keats, but as was perhaps natural, was more influenced by Keats than Shelley. Above all the profuseness of detail and the sensuous element in the poetry of Keats, the chosen poet of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, attracted Rossetti, the born colorist, beyond anything in the English Poetry of that generation. Shelley was a visionary and often abstract. Keats was an artist and always concrete. Shelley had a philosophy of life, or thought he had. Keats had none, neither had Rossetti.

There is, however, only one of Rossetti's paintings whose source can be directly traced to Keats. This is a painting entitled "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" which bore upon its frame two verses from Keats beginning:-

"I met a lady in the wood

"Most beautiful, a fairy's child." (Quoted by H.C.Marillier)

Rossetti's sonnets upon five English poets confirm the account already given of his preferences and add the names of Blake and Chatterton who seem to have been among his later favorites. The noble sonnet written in honour of the latter has a wonderfully wholesome tonic quality:-

"With Shakepeare's manhood at a boy's wild heart,-
Through Hamlet's doubt to Shakespeare near allied,
And kin to Milton through his Satan's pride,-
At Death's sole door he stooped, and craved a dart."

(Poem "Thomas Chatterton" P.337)

Conclusion

But though we have been discussing the different writers who to a small extent influenced Rossetti or proved a source of inspiration to him in his artistic work still the only conclusion at which we can arrive is that Rossetti is intensely original. His poetry was indeed new, entirely different to that of Tennyson, Clough, Arnold or Browning. The subjects, the methods, the aims of his art are all different and the inspiration is drawn from different sources. "It was in fact a new poetical world. It was also an interlude since it had no children of any importance."

Rossetti carried his horror of plagiarism to extreme limits. On one occasion he considered omitting three important sonnets from "The House of Life" because the idea of a single line, "They die not, never having lived" was identical with the idea expressed in Browning's

"In a Gondola." He said, "The point is just what is wanted and it is not possible to alter what Browning writes."

Rossetti was incapable of imitation." He made new paths for poetry as he did for painting and along the new paths he planted trees and flowers unknown before."

(The Rossettis : E. L. Cary P. 136)

PERIODS OF WORK.

Broadly speaking Rossetti's work shows two perfectly distinct manners. In his earlier period when the beauty of the world opened before him he had both in his poetry and his pictures, a sweet and exquisite naivete of phrase and conception. As years went on this natural freshness was dimmed by sad experience, as a result of mental and physical suffering. The growing strength of the craftsman came to his aid. He discarded the earlier simple, direct manner, and began to spin gorgeous word-textures, and strange tapestries of language and color. To illustrate this change, set a delicate poem such as "The Portrait" against a sonnet out of "The House of Life" with its reverberating roll of sound, or an early water-color like "Bonifazio's Mistress" against a picture of some ideal female head like the "Astarte Syriaca" with its dark jewellery of colour.

The two sides of Rossetti's life endeavour were entirely harmonious. They were the complementary expressions of a genius who saw things as a whole with a glance that pierced to the very soul of beauty in things visible. They were the offspring of a thoroughly harmonized mind, and therefore it is not surprising that when Rossetti's work in painting showed two entirely different sets of characteristics, that his work in poetry should reveal the same.

In the early poems when the Pre-Raphaelite influence was strong there is a deliberate simplicity of style and a prominance of homely detail which he afterwards entirely

disregarded. In "My Sister's Sleep" is revealed a close power of observation of small accessory effects:-

"Her little work table was spread
With work to finish. For the glare
Made by her candle, she had care
To work some distance from the bed."

(Poem "My Sister's Sleep" P. 229)

Occasionally this early simplicity rises into stateliness which is yet very different from the gorgeous dignity of his later work.

"To whose white bed had come the dream
That He was thine and thou wast His
Who feeds among the field-lilies." (Poem "Ave" P. 245)

Pieces like"The Blessed Damozel" "The Bride's Prelude" and "Rose Mary" are art poems, condensed, pictorial, and laden with ornament. Every attitude of every figure is a pose and landscapes and interiors are painted with minute Pre-Raphaelite finish:-

"The blessed damozel leaned out
From the golden bar of Heaven;
Her eyes were deeper than the depth
Of waters stilled at even;
She had three lilies in her hand,
And the stars in her hair were seven."

(Poem "The Blessed Damozel" P. 232)

Many think that Rossetti's poetic excellence is best brought out in the ballad. Lang says, "Ballads are a voice from secret places, from silent peoples and old times long

dead and as such they stir us in a strangely intimate fashion to which artistic verse can never attain." No one has reproduced so accurately the temper and spirit of the old ballads as Rossetti. He errs in the introduction of complexities when the keynote should be simplicity. In "John of Tours" the form and the temper of the old ballad is perfect, but in "Rose Mary" we have the temper only because here is found elaborate structure and ingenuity of fancy.

Rossetti used to study the old ballads and romances not only for the pleasure of the reading but also to enrich his vocabulary. He told his brother he hoped to "pitch on stunning words for poetry" and states that he has found "several romances tremendously fine."

His use of words is an interesting study. In the early poems there is a strong fancy for archaic words such as "gallor" "cote-hardie" and a tendency to use monosyllabic and Anglo-Saxon words. But in "The House of Life" there is a great variety of double words, perhaps traceable to Keats, expressions such as,- "dawn's first hill-fire," "angel-greeted door," "wing-winnowed," and great resonant classical words such as,- "multiform circumfluence," "firmamental blue," Rossetti was a master of both kinds of writing but perhaps he was at his best when neither archaic nor elaborate.

Rossetti's work in art also falls into two periods which may be exemplified by his two different types of female figures. His earlier women have a sweet, untroubled, natural beauty, to the development of which would seem to have gone

a freedom from care, unruffled by anxiety and unshadowed by passion. "They have been fed on the roses and lain in the lilies of life." (Tennyson's "Maud" Pt. I)

"Fiammetta" is the very type of lustrous youth. The picture represents the lady beloved by Boccaccio to whom he addressed many sonnets which Rossetti translated. The one accompanying the picture begins,"Round her red garland and her golden hair I saw a fire about Fiammetta's head." She is clad in a dull red robe and has hair of reddish brown, but the most striking feature of her beautiful face is the bright blue eyes that form a color contrast with the pink-white masses of blossom surrounding the whole picture.

The beauty of the second type of female figure arouses intangible and remote emotions; for example, "Pandora". who is the spirit of terror incarnate and "La Bella Mana" whose picture is characterized by a certain heavy sensuousness.

"Mary Virgin" and "Ecce Ancilla" are typical of the artist's work in oils in the first period. These and some of the water-colors are the only truly Pre-Raphaelite pictures that he produced. His later works are by no means painted from Nature but are romantic works of a more ideal kind in which, however, traces are still to be found,in the attention to details and accessories, of the artist's enthusiasm for sincerity. In the beginning Rossetti had chosen the range of the semi-religious, semi-mystical, as his field of work, but after the failure of "Ecce Ancilla" he abandoned it

and undertook subjects from romance, from Browning, Dante, Keats and Malory.

More characteristic of this first phase of Rossetti's art are his numerous water-colors, "The Passover in the Holy Family," "Paolo and Francesca," "The Blue Closet," "The Tune of Seven Towers," "Lucretia Borgia" and many others, each of which is replete with color and imaginative charm. Mr. James Smethan thus describes one of the most typical, the "Wedding of St. George," "One of the grandest things, like a golden dim dream. Love, credulous all gold, gold armour, a sense of secret enclosure in palace chambers far apart, quaint rooms in quaint palaces where angels creep in through sliding panel doors and stand behind rows of flowers, drumming on golden bells."

Mr. Sydney Colvin sums up the artist's achievement of this period. "The characteristics are vividness and ingenuity of dramatic presentment, the idea so predominating over the matter that actions are allowed to appear as strained and compositions as naif as they please, provided only the emotional and intellectual points are driven home. These are the qualities whereby Rossetti's work is obviously and spontaneously allied to that of the Middle Ages; others are his enjoyment of the quaint mixture of costumes with furniture and the weight of symbolical meaning which he makes every detail and accessory bear. Many little pictures of this time flash and glow like jewels on the fragments of some gorgeous painted window."

(Sydney Colvin Quoted by Bate)

A transitional phrase between the sensitive, spiritual types of the first period and the impassioned sensuous figures which dominate the second is found in a series of homely humorous or genre paintings. The first of these was "The Laboratory," a water-colour romance painted under the influence of Browning. A court lady of the ancient regieme visits an old poison-monger to obtain from him a fatal potion for her rival in love. The picture bears the legend:-

"In this devil's smithy

Where is the poison to poison her, prithee?"

The next important painting of this series was "Hesterna Rosa," a gambling scene of men and their mistresses, one of whom in a fit of shame is covering her face. An innocent little child near by is touching a lute, and Rossetti has completed the other aspect of the scene by putting in an ape scratching itself. Then followed "Borgia" and "How They Met Themselves," both tragedies illustrating the force and originality of Rossetti's genius. The latter depicts a pair of lovers wandering at twilight in a wood and suddenly confronted with their own doubles. "Dr. Johnson and the Would-be Methodist at the Mitre" is an almost unique piece of genre work on the part of Rossetti who has entered into the humour and surroundings of the scene. Another triumph of realism and typical of this transitional phase is"Found" a vigorous and intensely pathetic painting corresponding to "Jenny" in his poetry.

But Rossetti saw that he must make narrower the stream of his effort if he would have it flow deeper, so he abandoned the complex subject designs and confined himself to simple

three-quarter length pictures. He ceased to tell a story but used a single female figure and its accessories as symbols of an abstract idea or theme, or a personification of some intellectual conception, or else he simply painted beauty for beauty's sake, a lovely form bedecked with all the rich ornaments of his vivid fancy, revelled in a lovely face full of sensuous charm. "In these pictures Rossetti's genius shows itself ripe, but not over-ripe, and the characteristics of a certain type of feminine beauty are obviously dominant in his work, though not as in later days overemphasised." His color throughout is masterly while later it is apt to be jarring, and his genius always poetical seemed to turn to the morbid in its manifestations.

COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OF HIS POETRY AND PAINTING.

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It is a true instinct which declines to discuss Rossetti's poetry apart from his painting. With him the artist is inalienably associated with the poet and more than any other modern he has brought these two arts of expression into harmony. His poems were often suggested by his pictures, and his pictures were an expression of the same ideas which dominated his poetry. The artistic force of his temperament drove him to the worship of beauty, the poetic and religious forces to the adoration of mystery. In much of his art and poetry the same kindred ideas find expression, the same half-sad, half-resigned view of life, the same glimpses of hope, the same fore-shadowings of gloom; for example, the vague unrest in "Autumn Idleness":-

"While I still lead my shadows o'er the grass
Nor know for longing that what I should do."

He said himself, that the feeling pervading his pictures was such as poetry ought to suggest.

Rossetti's choice in the two arts in which he was eminent was determined by his conviction that painting was the art of the future and poetry that of the past. He was accustomed to maintain that Keats was and would remain the last great English poet. "If any man has any poetry in him," he said to Burne-Jones,"he should paint, for it has all been said and written and they have scarcely begun to paint it."

(Quoted in "Literature of the Victorian Age" Hugh Walker Part II, Sec. 3, P. 491.)

But although poetry and art are linked and interwoven in Rossetti and were mutually helpful and explanatory still the view is superficial and there is only an element of truth in the statement of W. D. Howell's, "It will always be a question whether Rossetti had not better have painted his poems and written his pictures there is so much that is purely sensuous in the former, and so much that is intellectual in the latter." But in writing, Rossetti's most characteristic work "The House of Life"[1] is in no sense pictorial poetry, and in his paintings the half-length designs of mystical women have no special literary quality.

Just here it might interesting to mention Rossetti's own statement of his methods in the two arts. "I paint by a set of unwritten but clearly defined rules which I could teach to a man as you could teach arithmetic. In painting after all there is in the less important details something of the craft of a superior carpenter and the part of a picture that is not mechanical is often trivial enough."[2]

This comment, making allowance for his tendency to bluff, shows him in complete possession of his instrument for the limited uses to which he usually put it. Through deficiency in early training, he found draughtsmanship difficult, but he could, when occasion exacted the effort, draw with accuracy and vigor. Rossetti went on to say, "In poetry it is different. I lie on the couch, the racked and tortured medium, never

[1] (The Pre-Raphaelites in the Age of Tennyson-Chap. XI P. 240) - Hugh Walker.

[2] (D.G. Rossetti spoken to Hall Caine, quoted in his "Recollections.)

permitted an instant's surcease of agony until the thing on hand is finished." Yet facility in verse making had been a long cultivated gift with Rossetti. In their home at Charlotte Street, he, William and his sister Christina were accustomed to "Bouts rimes" or verses written to rhymes previously supplied.

Only a very very small portion of his work is autobiographical. From it we get only a partial suggestion of himself. There is no trace of the exuberant animal spirits, the decision of manner, the fearless positive utterance or the quickness of intellectual perception. But like most artists of great emotional force he was disinclined to sentimentalize over his work and cheerfully referred to "Ecce Ancilla Domini" as "The Blessed White Eyesore" or "That Blessed White Daub." But we do get from his works in both mediums qualities,less in evidence to the casual eye, in his personality; the romantic temper which sees even in common events the essential and underlying mystery; the passion for beauty in the human face, in the color and texture of flowers, stuffs and ornaments; the overpowering sense of the beauty and holiness of human affections; and the conviction that personal happiness is only achieved through these affections.

Mysticism and Mediaevalism.

The first most noticeable characteristic that is common to both Rossetti's poems and pictures is "mysticism." "The goal before the young man's eyes was to reach through art the forgotten world of old romance, that world of wonder and

mystery and spiritual beauty which the old masters knew and could have painted had not lack of science combined with slavery to monkish traditions crippled their strength." Rossetti was steeped in the "beautifully devotional feeling" which Hunt speaks of. He was so full of the frank childlike wonder and awe that he might have worked with the old masters.

Mr. Watts-Dunton says, "The ever-present apprehension of the spiritual world and of the struggle of the soul with earthly conditions, constitutes the romantic spirit with which Rossetti's work is filled." The idea of the forces of Nature assailing man through his sense of beauty was the idea at the core of the old Romanticism, and has never been more forcefully or more originally expressed than in such pictures as "Lilith" "Hesterna Rosa" or the "Sea Spell." Again the basis of the romantic temper is the supernatural, and the finest portions of many of Rossetti's poems, such as "The King's Tragedy" "Sister Helen" and "Rose Mary" are those which deal with this aspect. These poems perhaps do not rise to the height of such masterpieces as "Kubla Khan", "The Demon Lover," "Christabel," but with Rossetti the purely romantic temper was a more permanent and more natural temper than with any other nineteenth century poet.

The "Bride's Prelude" is the one of Rossetti's poems which is perhaps more heavily saturated in a mediaevalism of spirit than any other. The spell of romance which comes with that atmosphere of the Middle Ages is never broken but preserved in the minutest, most matter of fact details, such as the bowl of water that stood amidst the flowers, and in which

the sister, Amelotte, "slid a cup"and offered it to Aloyse to drink.

The same mediaeval spirit with no lapse into modernism is seen in the painting "Fra Pace." The picture represents a kneeling monk, busy illuminating at a desk. He has worked so long and with such preoccupation that the cat has coiled itself up asleep upon his trailing robe. A youthful acolyte is tickling it with a straw in order to beguile the tedium of the long silence.

But even in the works which treat subjects belonging to a remote past there is sometimes a modern touch which brings floating into the antique tale a breath from the life of the Nineteenth Century. These wafts of modernism often give body to his mystic story and a strange clearness to the past of which he writes. In the dramatic story of "The Last Confessio we have a mystical turn to the narrative when he relates his dream of the garden of God. It is a mediaeval conception of heaven where saints and martyrs and angels dance in the flower meadows in a golden air, but all this is touched, not only wit the rude peasant nature of the dreamer, but with modern though and especially with a modern turn of words:-

"Then all the blessed maidens who were there
Stood up together, as it were a voice
That called them; and they threw their tresses back,
And smote their palms, and all laughed up at once,
For the strong heavenly joy they had in them
To hear God bless the world." (Poem "A Last Confession"
Page 21-22.)

This laughter of maidens was of modern not mediaeval foundation. Dante would have been much too serious for that. "Beatrice never laughs but smiles, and her smile illumines heaven."

Symbolism

Another Mediaeval characteristic of Rossetti's art was his unwearied symbolism. In his work both in painting and poetry he continually introduced illustrations and images which carry with them a hundred suggestive meanings. In both his painting and his poem "The Blessed Damozel" he has pictured the immortal maiden holding three lilies in her hand, typifying purity, and bearing seven stars in her hair, symbolizing aspiration.

Rossetti always began with a simple design and then he added detail upon detail, and every one weighty with meaning. This is one reason why his Pre-Raphaelite paintings and verse odd and weird as they may be, are full of exhaltation and power. "Rossetti discerned the spirit of beauty wandering within the confines of a region whose landscape was only visible to the poet's finer insight."

Realism.

It may perhaps seem strange to consider the quality of realism in the works of Rossetti, the born mystic, but a stern realism, a determined clinging to actualities is combined with the mystic religion and magical supernaturalism of his art.

("Four Victorian Poets" - Stopford Brooke P. 185)

("Victorian Poets" - E. C. Stedman P. 358)

He took pleasure in facts only, but being an artist he chose the facts he represented for the sake of their beauty. While he painted on canvas or described in words his details with truth to nature,he did not cling fast to simplicity, but drenched his work with mystic symbols. The atmosphere he had the genius to add to his poetry and painting was not that of Nature, but was above and beyond, drawn from the strange excursions of his imagination into the unexplored regions of his own soul.

A splendid example of Rossetti's realistic treatment of a piece is found in "The Blessed Damozel." It is mystic throughout and yet clings to actualities. The golden bar of the rampart of God's House, over which the immortal maiden in her longing for her earthly lover leans down towards the tides of day and night, the shrine of God Himself, the living mystic tree of the Spirit, the groves where the Lady Mary walks with her five handmaidens, are all described with close reference to place and appearance. The boldness of imagination which likens the moon in space to a "curled feather" comes dangerously near grotesqueness, so material is the image employed to define an object of transcendental vision. On the other hand the comparison of the revolving earth to a "fretful midge" is a masterpiece of daring; that of the souls "like thin flames" mounting up to God, is absolutely unforced, and the phrase in which the Blessed Damozel sees,-

"Time like a pulse shake fierce
Through all the worlds," (Poem "The Blessed Damozel"P 23

is a triumphant attempt to figure forth the indescribable.

In the later stanzas which figure forth the joys of Paradise details are particularized with clearness of sense and fulness of melody. A last touch of strong realism ends the poem:-

"And then she cast her arms along
The golden barriers
And laid her face between her hands
And wept, (I heard her tears.) ("The Blessed Damozel" P236)

In "Jenny" on the other hand, we have stern realism. Nothing is shirked, no false veil is thrown over the truth, and yet the pity of it, the sense of sorrow for the fates of man is supreme. No violent diatribes are cast forth against the society that shuts this woman out, but we see her and know her for what she is, a woman like unto other women, desecrated but akin. In this poem "Rossetti seems to reserve his whole personal feeling for the impeachment of lust."

"Like a toad within a stone
Seated while time crumbles on;
Which sits there since the world was curs'd
For Man's transgression at the first;
Which, living through all centuries,
Not once has seen the sun arise;
Whose life, to its cold circle charmed,
The earth's whole summers have not warmed;
Which always-whitherso the stone
Be flung - sits there, deaf, blind, alone;-
Aye, and shall not be driven out
Till that which shuts him round about
Break at the very Master's stroke,
(Recollections of Rossetti - Hall Caine P. 24)

"And the dust thereof vanish like smoke,
And the seed of man vanish as dust:-
Even so within this world is Lust." (Poem "Jenny" P. 91)

Rossetti's paintings "Hesterna Rosa" and "Found" are similar in conception and realistic treatment to "Jenny" We find like touches in, for example, Rossetti's dramatic group called "Borgia." The famous Lucretia is seen seated with a lute in her hands, to the music of which two innocent little children are dancing. Over her shoulders lean, on the one side, the bloated Pope Alexander VI, on the other, her brother, Caesar, beating time with a knife against a wine glass on the table and blowing the rose petals from her hair. Rossetti has completed the other aspect of the scene by putting in an ape scratching himself.

All Rossetti's poems contain strong touches of realism but especially do we find them in the ballads. Thus in "The White Ship":-

"At last the morning rose on the sea
Like an angel's wing that beat towards me." (P.145)

The realism in Rossetti has been compared to that of Browning but it is so interpenetrated with mystic elements that it is altogether severed from that of the great master. It approaches however, most nearly to that of Browning in a poem such as "The Last Confession," in lines like these:-

"I heard the blood between her fingers hiss;
So that I sat up in my bed and screamed
Once and again; and once to once, she laughed.
Look that you turn not now, - she's at your back:

"Gather your robe up, Father, and keep close,
Or she'll sit down on it and send you mad."

(Poem "A Last Confession" P. 31)

or the dramatic description of the murder:-

" 'Take it,' I said to her the second time,
" 'Take it and keep it.' And then came a fire
" That burnt my hand; and then the fire was blood,
" And sea and sky were blood and fire, and all
" The day was one red blindness; till it seemed,
" Within the whirling brain's eclipse, that she
" Or I or all things bled or burnt to death.
" And then I found her laid against my feet
" And knew that I had stabbed her, and saw still
" Her look in falling. For she took the knife
" Deep in her heart, even as I bade her then,
" And fell; and her stiff bodice scooped the sand
" Into her bosom.
And she keeps it, see,
" Do you not see she keeps is? - there, beneath
" Wet fingers and wet tresses, in her heart.
" For look you when she stirs her hand, it shows
" The little hilt of horn and pearl, - even such
" A dagger as our women of the coast
" Twist in their garters."

(Poem "A Last Confession" P 33-34)

In "The Bride's Prelude" an unfinished poem upon a singularly painful theme, realistic description is used with a completeness

which excludes all mysticism. The contrast between the glare of the hot summer day without, and the half darkness of the room in which, while the bride and her sister await the wedding Aloyse falters out her secret to the horror-stricken Amelotte, is felt and pictured with vivid intensity and stands out in relief from the surface of a somewhat prolix story of whose weakness Rossetti himself became conscious as he proceeded. His imagination needed a stimulus from the supernatural for complete success in narrative, and this use of the supernatural is another great common characteristic of both his poems and paintings.

Supernatural.

Rossetti's mind was quickened by ballad poetry with its tales of witchcraft, love philtres and such accessories of tragedy. The directness and simplicity of the ballad were not within the range of his genius of which the love of ornament was an essential quality, but yet he achieved great success and vigor in "The White Ship" and "King's Tragedy."

Although the supernatural plays no direct part in the story of "The White Ship" the fate which presides over the action is clearly expressed by the thrice repeated stanza, at the beginning, middle, and end of the poem, with its double refrain, a comment upon the insincerity of earthly power:-

"By none but me can the tale be told,
The Butcher of Rouen, poor Berold.
(Lands are swayed by a King on a throne.)
'Twas a royal train put forth to sea,

"Yet the tale can be told by none but me.

(The sea hath no King but God alone.)

(Poem "The White Ship" P.137)

The "King's Tragedy" on the other hand is full of sinister foreboding and incident heralding the fatal climax. Twice by the Scottish sea and in the Charter-house at Perth the spae wife warns the King of her recurring vision of the shroud which at first covers his feet only, but gradually envelops his whole phantom form until,-

"When I meet thee again, O King,
That of death hath such sore drouth,-
Except thou turn again to this shore,-
The winding-sheet shall have moved once more
And covered thine eyes and mouth."

(Poem "The King's Tragedy" P 154)

There is nothing melodramatic in the whole poem but "the wind blows cold out of the inner shrine of fear."

"'Twas a wild-wind eve in February,
And against the casement-pane
The branches smote like summoning hands,
And muttered the driving rain." (P. 156)

"But Death even then took aim as he sang
With an arrow deadly bright;
And the grinning skull lurked grimly aloof,
And the wings were spread far over the roof
More dark than the winter night." (P. 160)

As the tragedy nears its consummation the moon-lit shield of Scotland in the window-pane is blackened by an obscuring cloud:-

"And the rain had ceased, and the moonbeams lit
The window high in the wall,-
Bright beams that on the plank that I knew
Through the painted pane did fall,
And gleamed with the splendour of Scotland's crown
And shield armorial.

"But then a great wind swept up the skies
And the climbing moon fell back;
And the royal blazon fell from the floor,
And nought remained on its track;
And high in the darkened window-pane
The shield and the crown were black."

(Poem "The King's Tragedy" P 169)

In "Rose Mary" the marvellous element becomes the subject of direct narrative. Some say this poem is the author's highest poetic accomplishment. The ballad uses with unrivalled effect a mystical eastern conception of a magic crystal in which to the eyes of pure maidenhood action at a distance is plainly revealed. The poem is full of the subtlest supernatural imagery of black magic and evil spirits in precious stones. For example:-

"With shuddering light 'twas stirred and strewn
Like the cloud-nest of the wading moon:
Freaked it was as the bubble's ball,

"Rainbow-hued through a misty pall
Light the middle light of a water-fall." ("Rose Mary" P 104)

The poem moves with a shadowy movement like that of the fire spirits who, circling in a mazy rhythm end the first and second parts of the poem with songs of melancholy triumph, and cast out of their strong-hold close the third part with a hymn of anguish:-

"Woe! woe! what shelter have we
Whose pangs begin
With God's grace to sin
For whose spent powers the immortal hours are sterile,
Gyre-circling spirits of fire,
We, cast forth from the Beryl?" ("Rose Mary" P.136)

In "Rose Mary", in his later masterpieces of painting, and in the short poem "The Card Dealer," Rossetti's interest in the mystical side of his composition leads to some obscurity of detail and meaning. This is the very antithesis of his early Pre-Raphaelite manner, but still in the following verses from "The Card Dealer" what a strange weird spell of the supernatural is cast over the reader:-

"A land without any order,-
Day even as night, (one saith,)-
Where who lieth down ariseth not
Nor the sleeper awaketh;
A land of darkness as darkness itself
And of the shadow of death."

"What be her cards, you ask? Even these:-
The heart, that doth but crave

"More, having fed; the diamond,
Skilled to make base seem brave;
The club, for smiting in the dark;
The spade, to dig a grave.

"And do you ask what game she plays?
With me 'tis lost or won;
With thee it is playing still; with him
It is not well begun;
But 'tis a game she plays with all
Beneath the sway o' the sun.

"Thou seest the card that falls,- she knows
The card that followeth:
Her game in thy tongue is called Life,
As ebbs thy daily breath:
When she shall speak, thou'lt learn her tongue
And know she calls it Death."

(Poem "The Card Dealer" P. 249)

In"Sister Helen" we have the supernatural, plus the added element of demonology. There is no prelude. We are plunged at once into the thick of dramatic action. A woman in a lonely hill castle is melting the waxen image of her false lover. His father, brother, and wedded wife come and pray for mercy, but with madness born of poisoned love she persists in her task to its dreadful end. Her little brother watches the terrible drama with the unshrinking interest of childhood, and his innocent questions heighten by contrast the relentless irony of Helen's

answers. Over the whole poem broods a deadly fear which culminates in the final stanza in a breathless horror:-

"Ah! what white thing at the door has crossed,
(Sister Helen?)
Ah! what is this that sighs in the frost?'
'A soul that's lost as mine is lost,
Little brother! '
(O Mary, Mother, Mary)
Lost, lost, all lost, between Hell and Heaven.) "
(Poem "Sister Helen" P. 74)

Joseph Knight says that as a tale of calm and inexorable vengeance on the part of a wronged woman this ballad is unapproached in all literature.

One of Rossetti's favorite supernatural topics was that of Lilith, the witch-wife of Adam. He has written a wild weird poem upon the subject, and has also twice painted the picture of the beautiful, cruel, sensuous woman.

"It was Lilith the wife of Adam:
(Sing Eden Bower!)
Not a drop of her blood was human,
But she was made like a soft, sweet woman."

"In the ear of the snake said Lilith:-
(Sing Eden Bower!)
To thee I come when the rest is over;
A snake wast I when thou wast my lover" (Poem "Eden Bower"P 308

Rossetti's poetry is a poetry of atmosphere and this weird atmosphere is surcharged with terror and superstition, for example in "Love's Nocturn" :-

"Reft of her, my dreams are all
Clammy trance that fears the sky:
Changing footpaths shift and fall;
From polluted coverts nigh,
Miserable phantoms sigh;
Quakes the pall,
And the funeral goes by."

(Poem "Love's Nocturn" P. 289)

But one of the grimmest and weirdest of all Rossetti's design was the picture entitled "How They Met Themselves." This legend of Doppelganger was one of a class of mysterious horrors which greatly appealed to Rossetti's imagination and fascinated him from boyhood. Few but he, however, would have dared to draw it, and fewer still could have succeeded with it. The design was of two lovers meeting their wraiths in a wood and receiving a ghostly presentment of death in a light, half-gold, half-fire.

Passion and Dramatic Force.

Rossetti is at his best in describing moments of passion, hours in which a fate reaches a climax, or intense passages of psychological struggle. These are the realms in which the white hot power of his imagination achieved its greatest success. This is one of the reasons why we find that on the whole Rossetti was not good at lengthy narrative. He projected many long stories but realized very few. As a painter, of course, he could not paint a long picture, for a picture treats only of a moment. But nevertheless, with his Southern intensity of passion he is at his best when concentrating into an hour's emotion all the tragedy of years.

This characteristic is common to both his poems and pictures, but it is nowhere seen to better advantage than in "Rose Mary". Here we appreciate his gift of flashing images upon the mind by one single expression. For example:-

"Closely locked, they clung without speech,
And the mirrored souls shook each to each,
As the cloud-moon and the water-moon
Shake face to face when the dim stars swoon
In stormy bowers of the night's mid-moon." ("Rose Mary" 115)

"Deep the flood and heavy the shock
When sea meets sea in the riven rock:
But calm is the pulse that shakes the sea
To the prisoned tide of doom set free
In the breaking heart of Rose Mary." ("Rose Mary" P. 117)

"And now in Rose Mary's lifted eye
'Twas shadow alone that made reply
To the set face of the soul's dark sky." ("Rose Mary" P.127)

Every flash of thought helps to heighten the emotion. There is nothing more dramatic in English narrative poetry than the verses:-

"She rose upright with a long low moan,
And stared in the dead man's face new-known.
Had it lived indeed? She scarce could tell:
'Twas a cloud where fiends had come to dwell,-
A mask that hung on the gate of Hell."

"She lifted the lock of gleaming hair
And smote the lips and left it there.
'Here's gold that Hell shall take for thy toll!
Full well hath thy treason found its goal,
O thou dead body and damned soul!" (RoseMary Page 123)

and no more forceful description anywhere than that of the corpse of Rose Mary's false lover:-

"The fight for life found record yet
In the clenched lips and the teeth hard-set;
The wrath from the bent brow was not gone,
And stark in the eyes the hate still shone
Of that they had last looked upon.

"The blazoned coat was rent on his breast
Where the golden field was goodliest;
But the shivered sword, close-gripped, could tell
That the blood shed round him where he fell
Was not all his in the distant dell." ("Rose Mary" P. 120)

In the "Staff and Scrip" we are suddenly brought face to face in a few single words with an entensity of tragic feeling that leaves the mind brethless with the stress of passion. Thus:-

"'Uncover ye his face,' she said.
O changed in little space!'
She cried, 'O pale that was so red!
O God, O God of Grace!
Cover his face." ("Staff and Scrip" P. 80)

and likewise the tense gripping situations of "Sister Helen." The innocent little brother standing in the clear moonlight high up on a windy balcony hears the sounds of horses' hoofs and men's

voices who arrive to entreat pity from the pitiless.

"The wind is loud, but I hear him cry,
Sister Helen,
That Keith of Ewern's like to die.'
'And he and thou, and thou and I,
Little brother.'
(O, Mary Mary Mother,
And they and we, between Hell and Heaven!) (P. 68.)

But her terrible love has turned to a terrible hate and so:-

"But he says, till you take back your ban,
Sister Helen,
His soul would pass, yet never can.'
'Nay then, shall I slay a living man,
Little Brother?'
(O Mother, Mary, Mother,
A living soul between Hell and Heaven!) "

"But he calls for ever on your name,
Sister Helen,
And says that he melts before a flame.'
'My heart for his pleasure fared the same,
Little Brother.'
(O Mother, Mary, Mother,
Fire at the heart, between Hell and Heaven!)"

Her relentless and triumphant vengeance reaches its height when her hated and successful rival appears to pray for mercy:-

"Her clasped hands stretch from her bending head,
Sister Helen;
With the loud wind's wail her sobs are wed.'

"What wedding-strains hath her bridal bed,
Little Brother?'
(O Mother, Mary Mother,
What strain but death's, between Hell and Heaven!)" (P. 72)

The element of suspense is sustained to the thrilling finish when the white form of the man's lost soul enters at the door which opens on the calm, starwhite, visionary night, and the poem ends with a wail of despair:-

"Ah! what white thing at the door has cross'd,
Sister Helen?
Ah! what is this that sighs in the frost?'
'A soul that's lost as mine is lost,
Little Brother!.
(O Mother, Mary, Mother,
Lost, lost all lost between Hell and Heaven!)
(Poem "Sister Helen" P. 74)

Even "The Bride's Prelude" a poem whose greatest charm lies in its powerful and subtle psychical analysis, there are passages that are highly dramatic. For instance the lines in which she fears to curse the wicked men who have taken her child, lest from evil lips the curse should prove a blessing:-

"At length I feared to curse them, lest
From evil lips the curse
Should be a blessing; and would sit
Rocking myself and stifling it
With babbled jargon of no wit.

"But this was not at first: the days

"And weeks made frenzied months
Before this came. My curses piled
Then with each hour unreconcil'd
Still wait for those who took my child."

(Poem "The Bride's Prelude" P. 62)

Again "The White Ship" is a strong dramatic story of the death at sea of Henry I only son.

"And under the winter stars' still throng
From brown throats, white throats, merry and strong,
The knights and the ladies raised a song.

"A song, - nay, a shriek that rent the sky,
That leaped o'er the deep! - the grievous cry
Of three hundred living that now must die.

"An instant shriek that sprang to the shock
As the ship's keel felt the sunken rock."

(Poem "The White Ship" P.140)

The character of the prince, intolerant, tyrannical, luxurious, voluptuous, is concisely indicated, and its one remaining trait of heroism is finely conceived and rendered:-

"He was a prince of lust and pride;
He showed no grace till the hour he died.

"When he should be king, he oft would vow
He'd yoke the peasant to his own plough.
O'er him the ships score their furrows now.

"God only knows where his soul did wake,
But I saw him die for his sister's sake."

(Poem "The Wh

Rossetti's poetry is filled with tense, gripping, dramatic situations. We could multiply incident upon incident from "The Last Confession," "Hand and Soul" and the passionate sonnets of the "House of Life" until there would be a danger of the topic becoming wearisome, but a couple of examples from "The King's Tragedy" must suffice. The tramp of the armed men bent on the murder of their King is heard approaching, how swiftly, nearer and ever nearer, the chamber door:-

"Then back I fly to the rest; and hard
We strove with sinews knit
To force the table against the door;
But we might not compass it.
.....
"And now the rush was heard on the stair,
And 'God, what help?' was out cry.
And was I frenzied or was I bold?
I looked at each stanchion-hold,
And no bar but my arm had I!
"Like iron felt my arm, as through
The staple I made it pass:-
Alack! it was flesh and bone - no more!
'Twas Catherine Douglas sprang to the door,
But I fell Back, Kate Burlass."

(Poem "The King's Tragedy" P. 166)

But when the dreadful deed had been committed, the queen "would not bury her slaughtered lord, Till his slayers all were dead" and what an intensity of hate and passionate love

is crowded into the closing stanzas of the poem:-

"And now of their dooms dread tidings came,
And of torments fierce and dire;
And naught she spake, - she had ceased to speak,-
But her eyes were a soul on fire.

"But when I told her the bitter end
Of the stern and just award,
She leaned o'er the bier, and thrice three times
She kissed the lips of her lord.

"And then she said,-'My King, they are dead!'
And she knelt on the chapel-floor,
And whispered low with a strange proud smile,-
'James, James, they suffered more!"

(Poem "The King's Tragedy" P. 174)

In all Rossetti's poems and pictures, the poorest and the best, is displayed that power which Blake calls "vision." The power which he says, "is surrounded by the daughters of inspiration, the power of seeing imaginary objects and dramatic actions and flashing them upon the imagination of others"x

Rossetti's conception of his subject matter was always so intense, and in expression so readily rose to passion, that he is always dramatic in pictures as well as in poems. One of his most spirited and forceful drawings is called "A Fight for a Woman." xx It represents two men in doublets and hose engaging in a conflict for a woman cowering near the scene, a wood at dusk.

x (Article in "Encyclopaedia Brittanica")

xx D. G. Rossetti — W. C. Marillier page 96

Another water-colour of Rossetti's which produces upon the mind a profound impression of actuality is the tragedy of the "Merciless Lady."[x] It is staged in a field of the brightest, sunniest green, all Nature rejoicing about. In the centre is a man gazing with rapt admiration at the blond-headed damsel on his left who is singing to a lute. She is a vapid, reckless-looking maid not to be compared with the dark beauty on his right who with gloomy frown is trying to win back her lover.

The painting of "Paolo and Francesca"[xx] is also surcharged with passion and dramatic force. In the pitture Paulo in red and Francesca in green are seated before a window having the gryphon arms of Malatesta upon it. The lovers have stopped in the midst of their reading to give the fatal kiss that sealed their doom.

One of the most dramatic of all Rossetti's compositions is that of "Mary Magdalene at the Door of Simon the Pharisee." Mary has left the procession of revellers and moved by a sudden impulse is ascending the steps of the house where she sees Christ. Her lover has followed her and is trying to turn her back. The accompanying sunnet is a complete dramatic poem approaching the work of Tennyson in its purity and richness of tone.

"Why wilt thou cast the roses from thine hair?
Nay, be thou all a rose,-wreath, lips and cheek.
Nay, not this house,-that banquet-house we seek;
See how they kiss and enter; come thou there.
This delicate day of love we two will share

x. D G Rossetti by C H Marillier Page 94
xx D G. Rossetti by C H Marillier P. 97

"Till at our ear love's whispering night shall speak.
What sweet one,-hold'st thou still the foolish freak?
Nay, when I kiss thy feet they'll leave the stair.

"Oh loose me! Seest thou not my Bridegroom's face
That draws me to Him? For His feet my kiss,
My hair, my tears He craves to-day:- and oh!
What words can tell what other day and place
Shall see me clasp those blood-stained feet of His?
He needs me, calls me, loves me: let me go!"

(Poem "Mary Magdalene" P. 356)

Sensuousness.

In Rossetti's poetry no mood was ever too evanescent, too strained or too sacred to be embodied in symbols, the materialism of which has given rise to severe criticism. The warmth the glow, the white fire of his love poetry, the concentration of his whole being for the time of writing to the exclusion of all else was characteristic of Italy and especially of Dante who laid all realm of feeling, spirit and intellect at the feet of his love. But from the artistic point of view, the sensuousness is sometimes so great as to blur the intellectual outlines. This is best seen in the sonnets. He lavished on them wealth of colour, fulness of melody, and treasures of research. He reserved for them the most noble, graceful, picturesque and significant words and polished and recast them until they are not surpassed and hardly equalled in the language. But if we ask ourselves if the idea of the sonnet stands out with due clearness the answer for the majority of readers would be in the negative.

As a sonnitur and as a poet working in pigments Rossetti deals in meanings, but he sometimes darkens, if he does not altogether bury the meaning under a wealth of sonorous words and mystic symbolism. The fault of over-elaboration chargeable to all Pre-Raphaelites is visible here. For instance in the sonnet entitled "Winged Hours":-

"Each hour until we meet is as a bird
That wings from far his gradual way along
The rustling covert of my soul,-his song
Still loudlier trilled through leaves more deeply stirr'd:
But at the hour of meeting, a clear word
Is every note he sings, in Love's own tongue;
Yet, Love, thou know'st the sweet strain suffers wrong,
Full oft through our contending joys unheard.

"What of that hour at last, when for her sake
No wing may fly to me nor song may flow;
When, wandering round my life unleaved, I know
The bloodied feathers scattered in the brake,
And think how she, far from me, with like eyes
Sees through the untuneful bough the wingless skies?"

(Poem "Winged Hours" P. 189)

But even when, as here, Rossetti amplifies and teases his metaphors to the verge of obscurity he constantly introduced such exquisite single fancies that they reconcile the mind and bewitch the imagination.

Also in the "Astarte Syriaca" the Syrian Venus gazes majestically from the canvas. Her eyes are vague and dreamy, mysterious as her rites. Her swarthy form, larger than life

size stands out impressively against a blood-red sunset sky and behind her the moon rises for her worship. To right and left, with heads uplifted and strained in adoration, are two attendant spirits bearing each a fiery torch.

It was one of Rossetti's glories to paint luxuriously luxurious women surrounded by every form of luxury. His colors, before they began to have like his forms, an exaggeration, were as if charmed into their own places. By his fiery imagination, his restless energy, he created a world, curious, and astonishing at first sight, but strange, morbid, and subtly beautiful. As he became the slave, and no longer the master of his dreams, his pictures became no longer symbolic but idols. It has been charged against the "Astarte Syriaca" described above, that in this picture"Venus has lost all the freshness of the waves from which she was born and has become hardened into a mysterious image for idol-worship."

We must remember, however, that with Rossetti every feature had its suggestive value. The mouth really represented the serious part of the face no less certainly than the eyes represented the spiritual part. If in certain heads the sensuous fulness of the lips became scarcely Caucasian, this was as a necessary correction to eyes which became on their part over-mystical in their spirituality.

Another reason for the alleged obscurity of some of Rossetti's work is its condensation. He once said to Hall

(North American Review : July 1916 "A Note on Rossetti"
- Arthur Symons.)

Caine, "Probably the man does not live who could write what I have written more briefly than I have done." Emphasis and condensation were dominant characteristics of the major part of his work, although sometimes as in "Dante at Verona" the mood is long drawn out, generally he is frugal of words. "He passes them through the first assay of criticism that he may gain the pure gold of a perfect phrase and extract the utmost expression of which language is capable. There is no slovenly work in Rossetti. His very laboriousness impresses us as a fault at times. In his aim at pregnancy he becomes obscure, in his love of melody he becomes mannered."

The fire of his imagination was as a flame that consumed whatever was not essential. Consequently his productiveness was restrained by his fastidious habits of revision. He always kept hsi verse yp to his own standard. "If I have any distinction as a sonnet writer, it is that I never admit a sonnet that is not fully on a level with every other." While Rossetti respects the limitations of the sonnet with the respect of a true artist yet he deliberately crowds within those limits every figure of speech that he can call up from his full mind.

Consequently, while the wealth of imagery in his sonnets is striking, it is to many obstructive. Watts-Dunton compares their language to "a lovely gauze behind which the thought is seen iridescent and alive like a fish in a net, and sometimes

("Recollections of D. G. Rossetti - Hall Caine P. 22)

("Makers of English Poetry" - Dawson Chap.XXXII-P.350)

the fish is rather small and unimportant to be detained by a net of such elaborate construction."

Swinburne, who had perhaps an exaggerated admiration for the work of Rossetti in his "Essays and Studies" gives the following criticism, which it may not be out of place to quote here, of the work of the master. "Much of Mr. Rossetti'S work is so intense in aim, so delicate and deep in significance, so exuberant in offshoot and undergrowth of sentiment and thought, that even the sweet lucidity and steady current of his style may not suffice to save it from the charge of darkness and difficulty. He is too great a master of speech to incur the blame of hard or tortuous expression and his thought is too sound and pure to be otherwise dark than as a deep well spring at noon may be when the sun is strongest and the water highest. Colour and sound are the servants of his thought, and his thought is servant of his will. The subject matter of his work is always great and fit,- nothing trivial, nothing illicit, nothing unworthy the workmanship of a master hand. There is no misuse or waste of good work on stuff too light or too hard to take the impression of his noble style. Among English speaking poets of his age, I know of none who can reasonably be said to have given proof of the highest qualities than Rossetti, if the qualities we rate highest in poetry be imagination, passion, thought, harmony, and variety of singing power."

("Essays and Studies" - Swinburne)

A few poems dealing with love and other passions are concerned with moaral and spiritual problems of life. Of these are the sonnets in the second part of "The House of Life," the poems "Card Dealer," "Cloud Confines," and "Soothsay." Here love between sexes can hardly be said to exist. They knit themselves with a singular force around the life of man, his death, his pain and his pleasure. They are weighty with thought, very subtle yet very clear, but their thinking does not run along known philosophical lines. "These poems ask with reiterated force,'Why are things as they are? What shall we do, things being as they are?' "Soothsay" is marked by a masculine concentration of thought and wording and intricate evolutions made beautiful at every step by the play of passionate imagination." Clearness and definiteness of thought, as well as beauty of expression, is found in such poems as "Berth Bond", and "The One Hope." In "Winter" and "The Last Three from Trafalgar" we find a tonic characteristic which is at once great and thoroughly wholesome. The blood is fired when we read of Chatterton:-

"With Shakespeare's manhood and and a boy's wild heart"
of of the three greybeards destined soon to greet
"The impassioned soul which on its radiant way
Soared through the fiery cloud of Trafalgar." (P. 342)

Nevertheless, a few of Rossetti's poems, for example "Troy Town" are not free from the taint of fleshliness.

("Four Victorian Poets" - Stopford Brooke P. 155)

Poetry not only may be, but ought to be sensuous, as well as simple and impassioned, but the cloying effect which Rossetti's verse produces on some readers is mainly due to what is in itself a good thing. This excess renders it not wholly inexcusable to translate sensuous into sensual. Some of the poems characteristic of him are overwrought and luscious. "The Bride's Prelude" "The Stream's Secret," and a few of the sonnets in "The House of Life" are chargeable with this fault. The effect aimed at is always obtained. For instance, the sense of the sultry noon-day heat and stillness is perfectly rendered in "Bride's Prelude" and the bride's tiring chamber is described with the rich suggestiveness of a Pre-Raphaelite picture. It is

"Like the inner altar-niche
"Whose dimness worship has made rich.

"Within the window's heaped recess
The light was counterchanged
In blent reflexes manifold
From Perfume-caskets of wrought gold
And gems the bride's hair could not hold.

All thrust together: and with these
A slim-curved lute, which now,
At Amelotte's sudden passing there
Was swept in some wise unaware,
And shook to music the close air."

(Poem "Bride's Prelude" P. 35)

The air is heavy with scent and heat but it is not wholesome to breathe it long.

The charge of fleshliness has also been made against several pictures of Rossetti's voluptuously beautiful women. The two most notable of these paintings are "The Lady Lilith," the incarnation of Body's Beauty and "The Venus Verticordia" The latter represents a tall, massively built woman, no spiritual goddess of beauty, undraped and standing in a bower of clustering honeysuckle which hides her to the waist. In her left hand she holds the apple, the prize of her beauty, in her right a dart, upon which is poised for an instant, a delicate sulphur butterfly. Others are hovering around like moths at a candle. As a nudity the picture would not now be considered remarkable, but at the date it was painted Rossetti evidently feared, and had reason to fear, hostile criticism on this account. In writing to Mr. Rae he said, "I really do not think the large picture chargeable with anything like Ettyism, which I detest, but drapery of any kind I could not introduce without quite killing my own idea."

Colour.

All of Rossetti's works in both the mediums of art and literature is characterized not only by passion, dramatic force, mysticism, symbolism, and sensuousness, but by a complete mastery of colour. His great idea was to make his canvasses rich garden plots of living and glowing hues. He cared little for light and shade, and was blind to atmosphere effects. He

("D. G. Rossetti" - C. H. Marillier P. 91)

("D. G. Rossetti - C. H. Marillier P. 92)

developed a strong vigorous water-colour technique peculiar to himself, and this medium was made to yield intense and vigorous colour. "He hated the varnishy look of modern work and his own art pictures had so much the manner of frescoes in their lustreless depths that they were sometimes mistaken for water-colours, while on the other hand, his water-colours had often so much depth and brilliancy as to be mistaken for oil."

After his wife's death and his own breakdown in health, he gave up his water-colour work, and the full and varied compositions of his earlier period, and passed on to the large single figure subjects rich and fervid in colour. Romantic and religious symbols largely gave place to magnificence of decoration, and sensitive and refined forms to full and massive ones.

Both in his poetry and painting he began his work with a clearly defined idea, and then instead of pruning he added embellishment to embellishment until the composition became sumptuous with lavish and always significant decoration. He seldom painted even a single figure that was not surrounded by flowers or decorative accessories and in some of his pictures, for example, as in "Joan of Arc" and "Lilith," the beauty of the lilies, roses, jugs and vases, or of the superb draperies, far surpasses the beauty of the flesh painting.

The picture that heralded this Venetian manner was the "Beloved." As regards colour, brilliance, finish, and the charm of the four lovely faces, it occupies a place in the

("Recollections of D. G. Rossetti"- Hall Caine Ch. II P. 50)

world's highest art. Mr. Frederick G. Stephens in a criticism of this picture says, " Excepting one or two later works of the master where sentiment of a more exalted sort, as in "Proserpine" inspired the designs, "The Beloved" appears to me to be the finest production of his genius. It indicates the consummation of Rossetti's powers in the highest order of modern art and is in perfect harmony with that poetical inspiration which is found in every one of his more ambitious pictures."

Rossetti's enthusiasm for colour in his paintings grew and ripened almost to decay. In the pictures of his later period the colour is apt to be hot and jarring and his genius, always poetical, seemed to turn to the morbid in its manifestations. But no English painter has ever been a greater master of the human face, and these later works, especially, acquire a splendid solemnity, a spiritual beauty or significance peculiar to themselves. Harry Quilter says of his painting that at its best it possesses three qualities rarely found in combination, being at once passionate, poetical and refined. "It defies the spectator to associate it with ideas of manufacture for such as it is, the work has evidently grown from the author's character like a flower from the earth and bears scarcely a trace of another's influence. As poems in colour the world has seen nothing finer since the days of Titian."

In both his poetry and his painting Rossetti's style is rich to gorgeousness. His poems nearly always suggest sumptuous pictures and his descriptions in all his writings

(Quoted in Appendix to Memoirs of D.G.Rossetti by Wm. Rossetti)

(Quoted in Appendix to Memoirs of D.G.Rossetti by Wm. Rossetti)

are those of a painter. In a letter to a friend he speaks about the flowers in his garden and says, "The arrow-head rush puts forth eventually a most lovely staff of blossoms just like a little sceptre. The white lily in the garden has grown to be a perfect decorative cluster."

In "Rose Mary" the colouring and imagery are opulent and in passages oriental:-

"With shuddering light 'twas stirred and strewn
Like the cloud-nest of the wading moon:
Freaked it was as the bubble's ball,
Rainbow-hued through a misty pall
Like the middle light of the waterfall.

Shadows dwelt in its teeming girth
Of the known and unknown things of earth;
The cloud above and the wave around,-
The central fire at the sphere's heart bound,
Like doomsday prisoned underground."

(Poem "Rose Mary" P. 104)

and in the "Card Dealer"

"Her fingers let them softly through,
Smooth polished silent things;
And each one as it falls reflects
In swift light-shadowings,
Blood-red and purple, green and blue,
The great eyes of her rings." ("Card Dealer" P. 248)

and

"In a soft-complexioned sky,
Fleeting rose and kindling grey,
Have you seen Aurora fly
At the break of day?
So my maiden, so my plighted may
Blushing cheek and gleaming eye
Lifts to look my way." (Plighted Promise" P.294)

Rossetti was extremely fond of painting harmonies in colour as well as creating them in verse. One notable example of this was "The Blue Bower" representing in a gorgeous setting of blue and green harmonies a woman playing upon a dulcimer. Blue lilies at her back, blue cornflowers by her side, blue turquoises in her hair and deep blue eyes are all notes in the colour scheme. The lady herself is clad in a fur-lined robe of green, such green as the sea alone knows and shares with a chosen few of the world's great colourists.

A very similar composition is "The Blue Closet," representing two queens, one clad in red with green sleeves, the other in crimson with gray, and playing upon opposite sides of a carved and inlaid dulcimer. Above their heads the wall is tiled with blue, and so likewise is the floor, suggesting the title of the picture.

Still along the same lines of 'women and music' are the paintings "The Tune of Seven Towers" "La Ghirlandata" and one of his most popular compositions, "The Veronica Veronese."

("D. G. Rossetti" - C.H.Marillier P. 94)

("D. G. Rossetti" - C.H.Marillier P. 53)

The lady is robed in a rich gown of Rossetti's favorite green with yellow daffodils in a glass beside her. A canary is perched on a cage above her head and she sits at a writing cabinet on which is a sheet with the musical notes she has been writing down; and listening with dreamy blue eyes to the bird's song while she lets her thumb wander over the strings of a violin suspended on the wall before her.

Rossetti's poetry has never been more happily characterized than when Mr. Stedman called it "stained-glass poetry". His figures seem to have stepped down from some Fifteenth Century altar-piece bringing their aureoles and golden backgrounds with them. He was an Italian with Southern sensuousness of temperament, intensity of passion, and love of art, and when he began to write, these qualities manifested themselves in a poetry beautiful but exotic. Melody and imagination there always is, and a charm that is at once weird and powerful, but throughout all his work we are always conscious of a piercing sadness, a gloomy force, and a feverish intensity and strain.

Rossetti's is the poetry of atmosphere. As the reader stands off mentally and thinks of his verse he is less likely to to recall a suggestive epithet or a felicitous passage than to find that a change has come over himself. Word, idea, image and emotion are inextricably one and the manner can hardly be separated from the matter. "The slow melody, the brooding calm, the colors pale and fervid, sometimes glowing with

("D. G. Rossetti" - C. H. Marillier P. 118)

prismatic lights, again cool and sequestered and interpenetrating both music and colour and plaintive human passion whose intensity continually reveals incommunicable depths and beauties of the spirit, all this has worked a spell."
Having read and having breathed that newer, finer air of Rossetti's "poetry of atmosphere" one is never quite the same again. The secret of his power is not in his mastery of color, symbol, detail, in his sumptuous metaphors or wonderful imagery, but in the haunting pathos of the poems, in the terrible earnestness of a passion that begins and ends with the claims of the soul.

Melody.

Mr. Stedman in one of our most excellent criticisms of of Rossetti's work has said,"Throughout his poetry we discuss a finesse, a regard for detail, a knowledge of colour and sound. He knows exactly what effect he desires and produces it by a firm stroke of colour, a beam of light, a single musical tone." Rossetti had in him no passion for music as music, but he gives one an actual sense of it in, for example a stanza of "The Bride's Prelude" or in the fixed eyes of one of his portraits of women. It has been said that "The Stream's Secret" has in it more music than in any other slow lyric in the English language. Its rhythm has in it something of the water's flow and its cadences are more dreamlike and caressing than in any other poem of Rossetti's.

("Poet Lore" - Nancy K. Foster Vol. 21 1910)

("Victorian Poets" E. C. Stedman P. 360)

"Dark as thy blinded wave
When brimming midnight flows the glen,-
Bright as the laughter of thy runnels when
The dawn yields all the light they crave;
Even so these hours to wound and that to save
Are sisters in Love's ken.

"Oh sweet her bending grace
Then when I kneel beside her feet;
And sweet her eyes o'erhanging heaven; and sweet
The gathering folds of her embrace;
And her fall'n hair at last shed round my face
When breaths and tears shall meet."

(Poem "The Stream's Secret" P.97)

The whole poem possesses a slow broken harmony, intermingled, however, with a certain warmth of color that incurred censure.

"Beneath her sheltering hair,
In the warm silence near her breast,
Our kisses and our sobs shall sink to rest;
As in some still trance made aware
That day and night have wrought to fulness there
And Love has built our nest."

(Poem "The Stream's Secret" P. 97)

Rossetti's poems are always melodious and the words employed are always lovely and picturesque. Thus in "Love's Nocturn:-

"Where in groves the gracile Spring
Trembles, with mute orison
Confidently strengthening,
Water's voice and wind's as one
Shed an echo in the sun.
Soft as Spring,
Master, bid it sing and moan." (Love's Nocturn" P. 290)

The combination is most poetical and Rossetti is credited with the introduction into the English language of the word "gracile." The whole poem is full of the happiest epithet, but sometimes the phrases while melodious are more beautiful than interpretive:-

"Vaporous, unaccountable,
Dreamworld lies forlorn of light,
Hollow like a breathing shell." ("Love's Nocturn" P. 290)

As we would expect from our painter-poet we find in the melodious passages the sensuous appreciation and the technical knowledge of the artist:-

"The shadows where the cheeks are thin
And pure wide curve from cheek to chin."

and again:-

"The sunrise blooms and withers on the hill
Like any hill flower."

Rossetti the melodist is at his best in the glorious sonority of the polysyllabic lines of "The House of Life." "THE House of Life" is really "The House of Love;" it touches many passions and depicts life in its changing aspects of aspiration and foreboding, joy, grief, remorse, despair,

and final resignation. Hall Caine thinks that in the English language, excepting Shakespeare's, there exists no single body of sonnets characterized by such sustained excellence of vision and presentment. There seems no story in this sequence of sonnets yet they hold in them all the action and passion of a spiritual history. Two sonnets only need be mentioned as indicative of the range of thought and feeling covered, and both are typical of the tenderness, the illumination, the emotional ecstasy and the wonderful melody revealed in the remainder of the series. The first:-

"The Song-Throe."

"By thine own teers thy song must tears beget,
O Singer! Magic mirror thou hast none
Except thy manifest heart; and save thine own
Anguish or ardour, else no amulet.
Cisterned in Pride, verse is the feathery jet
Of soulless air-flung fountains; nay, more dry
Than the Dead Sea for throats that thirst and sigh,
That song o'er which no singer's lids grew wet.

"The Song-god - He the Sun-god - is no slave
Of thine: Thy Hunter he, who for thy soul
Fledges his shaft: to no august control
Of thy skilled hand his quivered store he gave:
But if thy lips' loud cry leap to his smart,
The inspir'd recoil shall pierce thy brother's heart."

(Sonnet LXI P. 207)

and the second:-

"The One Hope"

"When vain desire at last and vain regret
Go hand in hand to death, and all is vain,
What shall assuage the unforgotten pain
And teach the unforgetful to forget?
Shall Peace be still a sunk stream long unmet,-
Or may the soul at once in a green plain
Stoop through the spray of some sweet life-fountain
And cull the dew-drenched flowering amulet?

"Ah! when the wan soul in that golden air
Between the scriptured petals softly blown
Peers breathless for the gift of grace unknown,-
Ah! let none other alien spell soe'er
But only the one Hope's one name be there,-
Not less nor more, but even that word alone."

(Sonnet CI Page 227.)

with which Rossetti closed his greatest work and which because it exhibits all the qualities of his noble art may form a fitting conclusion to this division of our subject.

Nature.

"It is no idle fancy of Keats that "To be first in Beauty is to be first in might." The office of the artist should be looked upon as a priest's service in the temple of Nature where ampler graces are revealed to those who have eyes to see." "Nature to so many has remained closed and silent and to so few has yielded up her intimate secret of beauty. But to win even a little is a priceless gain and a piece of art that in any way reveals the hidden significance of Nature's loveliness

has gifted the world with a new and lasting delight."

But Rossetti cannot be calle' a devotee of Nature. In fact his criticism of Wordsworth suggests his own attitude. "He thought Wordsworth too much the high-priest of Nature to be her lover, too much concerned to transfigure his Pantho-Christian philosophy regarding Nature to drop to his knees in simple love of her and thank God that she was beautiful."

In considering Rossetti's treatment of Nature several facts must be borne in mind. First that in early life, except for occasional visits to the country and Boulogne, he knew nothing of the country pure and simple. Thus he was thrown back into himself. He has many delicate and informing touches in his poetry, but the landscape in both his pictures and poems is rather of the pictorial than the natural order. He describes ideal places, gardens seen in dreams with the tender light of evening over lawns and thick grown trees. Then above all else, Rossetti was an artist and the lovely little sceneries scattered up and down his poems give glimpses of fascinating landscapes, not indeed of broad open air effects, but rather those of a painter concentrated upon the picturesque effect of one or two splendid objects at a time. For example, phrases like "the hollow hemmed with mist," "the ruined weir," and lines such as the following:-

"Deer dappled white and dun, grazing
From hillock eaves and holds it is
As if being foresters of old the sun
Had marked them with the shade of forest leaves."

attest by their very freshness and simplicity to a pictorial or descriptive power in dealing with the inanimate world.

Thus in the writings of Rossetti Nature has been passed through the medium of another art before it comes into his poetry. "It is a doubly distilled nature. It is nature as we have it in 'Roman de la Rose' or the background of the old Florentine painters, flowery plesances and orchard closes, gardens with trellis and singing conduits where ladies are playing in the palm play."

Canon R. W. Dixon in a criticism of Rossetti's work offers some interesting side-lights on his views of nature. He says, "The main features of his character were fearlessness, kindliness condensation and concentration and a decision that sometimes made him seem somewhat arbitrary. He was wonderfully self-reliant. These moral qualities guiding an artistic temperament as exquisite as was ever bestowed upon man made him what he was, the greatest inventor of abstract beauty that this, perhaps the world, had ever seen. They would also account for some peculiarities that must be admitted in some of his works, want of nature, for instance. I heard him once remark that it was "astonishing how much the least bit of nature helped if one put it in," which seemed like an acknowledgement that he might have gone more to Nature."

Various other writers have made it out that Rossetti cared nothing for the beauties of Nature and was indifferent to scenery. His brother, William Rossetti, thinks this is a great exaggeration. He says, "Italians are not as a rule so fond of 'gush' over hills and trees, so Wordsworthian in co-ordinating phenomena and emotion as some English people have become. The Italians are open rather to the total impression of a scene, whether it is cheerful, gloomy sublime, or what not.

In this relation I consider my brother to have been much more Italian than English. To the beauties of Nature he was not insensitive but he was incurious and valued them more as being so much fuel to the fire of his soul than as being objects of separate regard and analysis. For him the human being was always the Lord of Creation, the recipient, and transformer, and transmitter of the natural influences. That he cared very little for descriptive poetry is very true and just on that account that it exhibits and restores objects instead of turning them into the medium of exchange between the material world and the soul. Still he saw for himself several things in Nature, both in mass and in detail, and his work in painting and poetry testifies no less."

Rossetti was essentially an indoor poet. With him landscape was strictly accessory. But in much of his work we find skiful pictorial touches.

"Where the long cloud, the long waves' counterpart
Sheds double darkness up the labouring hill."

With sure instinct he laid his finger on the one salient feature; but he is best in describing the broader effects of Nature and in pictures of celestial phenomena. He was thoroughly alive to the dreamy charm of a scene but was not at heart a lover of the homely beauty of the earth. To him the smallest touch of human beauty had more significance than the noblest natural prospect.

His whole life was devoted to the expression of a haunting and almost torturing consciousness of beauty. But to Rossetti the beauty of the human face was the sublimest form of loveli-

ness that spirit can conceive. Earth and earthly things only touched him as sweet accessories to this central beauty.

Rossetti felt deeply the beauty and terror of Nature, but he felt as a poet the beautiful and tender landscape of the soul, in its questioning, its expression and its passions, above all in the passion of love a hundredfold more deeply. Nature is never described for her own sake but for love of her alone.

In the hundred and one sonnets of the "House of Life" there is scarcely one in which Nature is the main subject and there are very few where the natural description extends over half a sonnet. The most accurate description of Nature is that of the birds, especially the starlings coming home at evening in "Sunset Wings," but it is only made to image the hours of Hope in flight towards farewell.

In "Spring" we have a full picture of spring in pastoral country. This shows how well Rossetti could have written on scenery had he chosen:-

"Chill are the gusts to which the pastures cower,
And chill the current where the young reeds stand
As green and close as the young wheat on land:
Yet here the cuckoo and the cuckoo-flower
Plight to the heart Spring's perfect imminent hour
Whose breath shall soothe you like your dear one's hand."

(Sonnet "Spring" P. 323)

"From the Cliffs" or "Sea Limits" appeared as a result of a trip to Paris and Belgium with Holman Hunt. This poem has a rare Wordsworthian outlook upon Nature, a blending of imagination with the tranquil contemplation of natural objects.

Usually whatever observation of nature is supplied is of her remote suggestion and latent significance. In the sonnets as well as in the pictures Rossetti is of those who haunt the "vale of magical dark mysteries;" all things are charged with symbolism. Rossetti was so deeply impressed with the symbolism of all things in Nature that he incurred the charge of coarse realism.

As said before, he uses Nature as the great painters of Italy, never as subject but as part of the scenery. Sunlight in all its ways and moonlight he seems to have loved and perhaps it is because of the impossibility of realising moonlight in painting that he is so fond of its description in poetry.

One of his poems entitled "A Match with the Moon" is his most reckless indulgence in a fanciful description of Nature. He dogs the flying moon with similes and finds her now "like a wisp...in ponds"; now "caught in tree-tops like a kite" and anon "in a globe of film all liquorish" swimming "full-faced like a silly silver fish," until when the road turns she gets behind him and sends his "Wizened shadow" craning round at him. In spite of the pleasant farewell when she kisses him good-night, the effect is weird, elfish, and uncanny.

Nearly all Rossetti's poems are the expression of some poignant passion; his tragedies are the tragedies of broken or blighted love. His view of Nature is as a background either of similarity or contrast to the emotions which are being enacted in the foreground.

We see comparatively little out-of-doors in Rossetti's painting. In 1859 he painted a little landscape scene called "Bower Meadow" but later was so dissatisfied with it that he added four figures, two playing instruments and two dancing. In "Water Willow" the pale face and dusky hair of Mrs. Morris is seen against a Nature background showing an old manor house and the winding river with its green sloping banks. He struggled with the background in "Found" almost thirty years and finally Burne-Jones washed in the sky.

But in his poetry if not in his painting we come across descriptions as accurate as those of Tennyson or Wordsworth and filled with such a suggestiveness as Coleridge might have given them. For example in the exquisite poems "Cloud Confines," "Sunset Wings" and "Even So".

Finally we might quote Stopford Brooke's opinion of Rossetti's Nature poetry. "He is not one of the greatest poets. Their work is of the sunlight of the fresh air, of the wide landscapes, of human nature. His work is of the perfumed air, of a precious but confined landscape. It is of the particular, not the universal.....But then within this enclosed garden of poetry the flowers, the paths, the waters, the buildings, are of an exquisiteness, a finish, a colour, a beauty which are rare, specialized and of a seclusive charm."

("Four Victorian Poets" - Stopford Brooke)

PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE.

When we commence a discussion of Rossetti's philosophy of life, concerning his views on religion we must first of all remember that he was not a prophet but an artist; yet one who by the very intensity of his artistic vision and by some inborn bent towards symbolism and mysticism stands on the side of those who see in material things a spiritual significance and utter words of universal meaning from the fulness of his own heart.

Rossetti although he was brought up in a religious atmosphere and retained a deep reverence for Christian tradition regarded religion primarily from an aesthetic point of view. He was a mystic but his mysticism did not take the form of spiritual exaltation to which the beauty of earth is subordinate, but it was a perception of the indefinable unearthly quality which adds an attraction to earthly beauty supplying as it does a glimpse of things distant and unattainable.

Rossetti saw the beauty of mediaeval religion but it was purely as an artist. Its sensuousness appealed to him. It was the ally of art but he did not surrender his intellect to it. The zeal, the warmth, the mystic personality of Roman Catholicism are illustrated again and again in his poems and pictures, for instance, both in the picture "Mary Magdalene" and its accompanying sonnet.

"Oh loose me! Seest thou not my Bridegroom's face
That draws me to him? For His feet my kiss,
My hair, my tears He craves to-day:- and oh!
What words can tell what other day and place
Shall see me clasp those blood-stained feet of His?
He needs me, calls me, loves me: let me go!"

("Sonnet "Mary Magdalene" P. 356)

Some have said that with Rossetti his art was his religion. This supports Locky's argument that "religious ideas die like the sun. Their last rays having little heat are expended in creating beauty."

Touching religion Rossetti was neither prophet nor priest nor saint, nor assailant. He was simply not in the least concerned with religious struggles or searchings of heart. Without being a Catholic, his attitude in such matters is not unlike the unquestioning acquiesence of Catholicism. He returns in spirit, as shown in both his paintings and his poems, to the childlike devoutness of the early Italian painters, seeking for his artistic work an inspiration like theirs though unfettered by asceticism and guided by better scientific knowledge.

"Give honour unto Luke Evangelist;
For he it was (the aged legends say)
Who first taught art to fold her hands and pray.
Scarcely at once she dared to rend the mist
Of devious symbols: but soon having wist
How sky-breadth and field-silence and this day
Are symbols also in some deeper way,
She looked through these to God and was God's priest."

(Sonnet "Old and New Art" P. 214)

Religious doubt he never seems to have felt but the temper of religious wonder, the old childlike Monkish attitude of mind of awe and faith in the presence of the unseen is never absent. In the poem entitled "World's Worth" Father Hilary climbs "The steep-coiled stair" of the church up among the bells. He hears the mass below but finds his world in God alone. Here the religious mediaeval atmosphere is fully realized:-

"He stood within the mystery
Girding God's blessed Eucharist:
The organ and the chaunt had ceased.
The last words paused against his ear
Said from the altar: drawn round him
The gathering rest was dumb and dim.
And now the sacring-bell rang clear
And ceased; and all was awe,-the breath
Of God in man that warranteth
The inmost utmost things of faith
He said: "O God, my world in Thee!"

(Sonnet "World's Worth" P. 251)

"Rossetti's religious message was one of tempered hopefulness, a call to seize upon that which the present moment offers, to live simply and sincerely, to welcome those moods of awe and reverence in which the soul feels lifted up, and to realize the utmost possibilities of a spiritual development which holds its even course between sensuous enjoyment and the rapt contemplation of the eternal verities."

("Greater English Poets of the Nineteenth Century"
- C. Payne P. 284-315)

Rossetti felt the wonder and the vastness of the universe too deeply to admit that its mystery was fathomed by any of the creeds, yet he could enter into the spirit of the most naive embodiments of religious emotion and find tender and wistful music for their expression.

In the poem entitled "The Choice" we have a clear statement of his views. The epicurean ideal is compared with that of the ascetic, but neither of these has power to satisfy the well-balanced mind.

"Eat thou and drink; to-morrow thou shalt die.
Surely the earth, that's wise being very old
Needs not our help." ("The Choice" P. 212)

This the poet rejects as being too material a mandate for the conduct of life.

"Watch thou and fear; to-morrow thou shalt die.
Or art thou sure thou shalt have time for death?.....
Cover thy countenance, and watch, and fear."

This attitude also seems inadequate and the refuge of the poet is given in:-

"Think thou and act; to-morrow thou shalt die.....
Then reach on with thy thought till it be drown'd.
Miles and miles distant though the last line be,
And though thy soul sail leagues and leagues beyond,-
Still, leagues beyond those leagues, there is more sea."
(Sonnet "The Choice" P. 212)

Rossetti is above all else a mystic. Stopford Brooke defines mysticism as "the temper of mind and feeling which considers the apparent world and all its ways as not real except

to our constitution and the invisible world of the spirit and of life as the real world." This was Rossetti's position as a poet and an artist and this is why Rossetti will never be read extensively until the spiritual view of the universe has conquered the materialistic.

In both Rossetti's painting and his poetry we find a mystic asceticism which is hard to illustrate because it pervades the whole work but is not defined by it. It may, however, be noticed that the prose romance "Hand and Soul" is steeped through and through with this sentiment. This mystic asceticism restrains appetite and sense enjoyment in order to be able to contemplate more quietly, and to realise more fully, spiritual ideas and the spiritual world.

In "Soothsay" Rossetti exhorts thus:-

"To God at best, to Chance at worst,
Give thanks for good things, last as first.
But windstrown blossom is that good
Whose apple is not gratitude.
Even if no prayer uplift thy face,
Let the sweet right to render grace
As thy soul's cherished child be nurs'd."

(Poem "Soothsay" P. 336)

In this poem we have an illustration of reflective force, of the dry reason always at work behind imaginative creations and at the same time a clear statement of Rossetti's attitude towards the fundamental questions of life.

"Crave thou no dower of earthly things
Unworthy Hope's imaginings.
To have brought true birth of Song to be
And to have won hearts to Poesy,
Or anywhere in the sun or rain
To have loved and been beloved again,
Is loftiest reach of Hope's bright wings."....

"Let thy soul strive that still the same
Be early friendship's sacred flame."....

"In the life-drama's stern cue-call,
A friend's a part well-prized by all."

and further:-

Whate'er by other's need is claimed
More than by thine,-to him unblamed
Resign it."

Finally:-

"Unto the man of yearning thought
And aspiration, to do nought
Is in itself almost an act,-
Being chasm-fire and cataract
Of the soul's utter depths unseal'd.
Yet woe to thee if once thou yield
Unto the act of doing nought." ("Soothsay" P. 334)

In this poem we have an ideal of strenuous spiritual activity not unworthy to be placed beside the noblest utterances of Tennyson or Arnold. "Not to be concerned with much questioning but to find in the boundless possibilities of the visible universe

matter for the highest aspiration and deepest awe.

Even Wordsworth's great Ode rings no clearer call to duty than the noble "Lost Days."

"The lost days of my life until to-day,
What were they? ....
I do not see them here; but after death
God knows I know the faces I shall see,
Each one a murdered self, with low last breath."

(Sonnet "Lost Days" P. 220)

Rossetti has been accused of being without convictions but does the charge need any further refutation than the verses in his noble poem "Dante at Verona," in which Rossetti records Dante's treatment of the amnesty proffered upon terms that were felt to be an intolerable insult. It means merely that the poet's convictions are too broadly based to square with the narrow prejudices of those who made the statement. They are the convictions resting upon the fundamental rock of righteousness, rather than upon the shifting sands of some ethical system.

In taking up the study of Rossetti's views and convictions the prose romance "Hand and Soul" is important, because no document is more vital to the understanding of the principles on which Rossetti worked, and the lofty conception of art thus formulated. The poem is autobiographical and shows that Rossetti was on intimate terms with conscience. It is the chronicle of the psychological life of a supposed painter of the Thirteenth Century, Chiaro del Erma, of his desire for fame and subsequent contempt for what he found to be so

easily gained, of his rather ignoble revival at the prospect of being surpassed by a more faithful worker, of his conversion to subjects of moral greatness at which men cared little to look, of his ultimate model appearing to him in the shape of his own soul embodied in the person of a beautiful woman who chides him while she comforts and whose portrait he paints with jealous truth that his soul may stand before him always.

We have several statements in Rossetti's work on the subject of immortality. In the poem "Untimely Lost" suggested by the death of Madox Brown's boy, Oliver, denied fulfilment of a life of exceptional promise, we have an expression of complete agnosticism.

"A mist has risen: we see the youth no more:
Does he sed on and strive on? And may we
Late-tottering world-worn hence, find his to be
The young strong hand which helps us up that shore?
Or, echoing the No More with Nevermore,
Must Night be ours and His? We hope: and he?"

(Sonnet "Untimely Lost" P. 323)

The same attitude is revealed in the uncompleted picture entitled "The Question." The triform monster, emblem of the mystery of life and death, gazing blindly into space, whilst at Her feet climb wearily three figures, typifying youth, manhood and old age, all bent on drawing from her sealed lips and unscrutable eyes the answer to the great question. The youth falls back dead, just as he had reached the goal still grasping in his limp and powerless hand a down-turned spear. Manhood presses resulutely behind thrusting aside the obstacles that bar his path, determined to have his answer, whilst old

age toils painfully upward anxious before too late to solve the everlasting mystery.

But in the different Dante pictures and poems, especially "Dante's Dream" we have expressed a confident belief in immortality wherein the utmost limits of blessedness, not of this world, may be compassed.

The deep melancholy traceable in so many of his poems and pictures is inseparable from Rossetti's later view of life. The mystery of death and separation cutting in across the message of beauty could not be shut out. He himself said, "Though the heart aches to contemplate it, it is there."

Rossetti was careless of dogma but was responsive to the art values of religion. His "Death Parting" for instance which begins:-

"Leaves and rain and the days of the year,
(Water-willow and Wellaway.)
All these fall, and my soul gives ear,
And she is hence who once was here.
(With a wind blown night and day.)

("A Death Parting" p. 322)

not only illustrates the old poignancy of the sorrow of parting but testifies to the half-mystical device of symbolising this feeling by a refrain whose meaning, if it have any, is only that of a rhythmic sigh.

In his day Rossetti ignoring science and caring nothing for the contending faiths of the present slipped into the realm of the past. Morris followed him and separated himself even more determinedly than did Rossetti from the present. He never touched for years a single political, religious,

scientific, or social interest of his own time. Rossetti did. Not frequent but occasional pieces inspired by current events reveal the direction of his sympathies.

At the time of the Revolution of 1848 Rossetti was twenty years of age. He hailed the revolutionary outburst as a new sunrise of freedom in verse that suggests what Byron or Shelley might have written.

"God said, 'Let there be light' and there was light
Then heard we songs as though the earth did sing
And the earth's angel cried upon the wing."

He heard the cry of Italy and "The Last Confession," a modern poem is thrilled throughout with Italian hatred of Austria.

"When still from his shut palace, sitting clean
Above the splash of blood, old Metternich
(May his soul die, and never-dying worms
Feast on its pain forever!) used to thin
His yearb doomed hundreds daintily....."

In the poems on "The Palace de la Bastile" and on "The Staircase of Notre Dame" he feels the emancipation of Paris and the world.

The funeral of the Duke of Wellington evoked a striking ode from Rossetti and the sonnet on the death of Alexander II expressed deep indignation at the dastardly act of an assassin made to seem so peculiarly atrocious by memory of what the Czar had done for the emancipation of the people.

"From him did forty million serfs, endow'd
Each with six feet of death-due soil, receive
Rich freeborn lifelong land, whereon to sheave

"Their country's harvest." (Czar Alexander II - P. 342)

But his political ethics reach their highest expression in "On Refusal of Aid Between Nations." In this noble utterance not the individual himself but the nations of the world are brought to the bar of a righteous tribunal and condemned for their selfish absorption in their own affairs.

"Not that the earth is changing, Oh, my God.....
Not therefore are we certain that the rod
Weighs in thine hand so many nations bow.....
But because man is parcelled out in men
To-day; because for any wrongful blow
No man not stricken asks, 'I would be told
Why thou dost thus." (On Refusal of Aid Between Nations" Page 252)

"Here is the very accent of Milton, the very majesty of his stern exhaltation of the immutable moral law."

Rossetti maintained in "St. Agnes of the Intercession" "that all work to be truly worthy should be wrought out of the age itself as well as out of the soul of the producer which must needs be the soul of the age." He did not carry this out fully in his work but the modern element is again plain in the "Burden of Nineveh" which welds together in his thought London and Nineveh, the religion, the future, and the fates of both. Of this poem written at twenty-three, Payne says, "For imaginative power, combined with a sweep of historical vision that is both retrospective and prophetic, this poem occupies a pale by itself." It is a marvellous reflective composition inspired by a chance sight of an Assyrian bull-god

brought to the British museum. The poet's thought turning from the strange extinct civilization from whose ruins this winged beast had been disinterred reflects upon some remote future in which this ancient god again buried beneath accumulations of centuries shall be unearthed and again set men to speculate upon the faith to which it bears witness.

"Or it may chance indeed that when
Man's age is hoary among men,-
His centuries threescore and ten,-
His furthest childhood shall seem then
More clear than later times may be:
Who, finding in this desert place
This form, shall hold us for some race
That walked not in Christ's lowly ways,
But bowed its pride and vowed its praise
Unto the God of Nineveh."

("The Burden of Nineveh" P. 271)

In fact we see that much of Rossetti's art shows how possible it is "without making conscious compromise with puritan principle of doing good with which Keats at one time became enamoured to be unconsciously making for moral ends. Every thought in "Dante at Verona" and "Last Confession" seems mixed and colored by a personal moral instinct that was safe and right."

This unmoralizing tendency of Rossetti's is shown in

("Recollections of D.G. Rossetti" - Hall Caine P. 103)

"Jenny," the one poem in which he subjects a present day problem to realistic treatment. The poem is one in Mr. Forman's words, "that almost all criticism or discussion must represent, not on account of any ineffable workmanship, but simply because of the utter cleanliness and manliness with which the matter in hand has been treated. The moral which it suggests but does not obtrude is made to take the strongest possible hold upon us.

"Just as another woman sleeps
Enough to throw one's thoughts in heaps
Of doubt and horror, what to say
Or think,- this awful secret sway,
The potter's power over the clay!
Of the same lump (it has been said)
For honour and dishonour made
Two sister vessels. Here is one."

and for grim concentration of thought, for vivid presentation of the appalling problem of evil, nothing could surpass the single simple line which is the poet's sole comment upon the above passage:-

"It makes a goblin of the sun."

Among Rossetti's paintings the one entitled "Found" is an analogue of "Jenny." It is a vigorous and intensely pathetic piece of pictorial moralizing. The accompanying sonnet teaches powerfully the same truth as "Jenny":-

"Dark breaks the dawn. But o'er the deadly blight
Of love deflowered and sorrow of none avail,
Which makes this man gasp and this woman quail
Can day from darkness ever again take flight?"

Yet notwithstanding all the given instances of Rossetti's interest in modern life and problems, the bulk of his work rejects the present and lives in the past. It was as if Rossetti and his followers cried, "Let us escape into a lovelier earth, a purer air, a simpler and more natural life." We can trace in the middle of the Nineteenth Century the beginnings of such a cry in Arnold's endeavour to find his subjects in Greek, Norse and Mediaeval story and in his reiterated longing for beauty and calm apart from the noise of warring thoughts and low desires. Arnold never quite escaped from the trouble but Rossetti did.

Rossetti's Worship of Beauty.

Broadly speaking Rossetti was not in touch with the wide movement of life. He was absorbed in a single pursuit and enthralled by a single ideal. Within comparatively narrow limits he has given us a complete picture of the vision which was reflected in the depths of his soul. He was absolutely indifferent to the structure of the society in which he lived and contentedly ignorant of the greatest thoughts if they did not appeal directly to the imagination. He never asked whether a thing was true or not. To him the important question was, "Is it beautiful?" He had no cause to serve, no doctrine to inculcate. "That which is beautiful is right; that which is not beautiful ought not to be."

Spiritually he was a devotee of beauty, and supreme beauty he rightly found and fashioned in the ideal faces he painted so well. But the distinction of Rossetti's work lies in the fact that he conceived and embodied not beauty alone, but that there is an element of strangeness in his beauty which Mr. Walter Pater rightly discerned as the inmost spirit of romantic art. The Renaissance of Wonder culminates in Rossetti's poetry as it culminates in his painting. The poet who should go beyond Rossetti would pass out of the realm of poetry into pure mysticism, as certain of his sonnets show.

Mabie says in his "Essays in Literary Interpretation" (p.91) that "Rossetti was pre-eminently an artist, one who saw the ultimate things of life, not along the lines of intellectual striving and inquiry, not in the moral disclosures of action,

but in those ravishing perfections of form and being which seem to be finalities because the imagination, baffled by their very completeness, cannot pass beyond." He is an artist after the fashion of some mystical painters whose vision included that interior beauty which is the soul of visible things."

Rossetti, however, did not seem to look upon himself as an interpreter or prophet of beauty to others, and one of the mysteries of his strange life is in the fact that he possessed such a curious power over the lives and minds of others without apparently having any desire to exert such an influence.

To most modern poets life presents itself under a vast variety of aspects, but to Rossetti there is but a single face and all things are revealed therein. Nothing, however, sensuous or spiritual which contains life is foreign to the beauty of the universe. It pervades all things and yet is not contained by them:-

"Hers are the eyes which over and beneath
The sky and sea bend on thee: which can draw
By sea or sky or woman to one law
The allotted bondman of her palm and wreath."

Beauty to Rossetti "led up from the throb of passion from eyes and lips wholly of earth through all visible things to that great white rose on which the vision of Dante rested in Paradise."

This beauty is not an end in itself. It is not the sense of desirous possession that is stirred by it but rather there is a deep-seated thirst for the mystery, whatever it may be, that hides beneath and beyond it. It is the beauty that brings

with it awe, reverence, and honour, and a sense of kinship with immortal and everlasting things. All outward loveliness seemed to Rossetti to hide a secret, to be the voice of some remote spirit speaking to the soul. The soul in pursuit of this secret must be alive to any hint that comes to it from the beauty of outward form. It became most clear to him, not through the myriad aspects of nature, but in a woman's face which reveals the soul. Because of this mystery of beauty, life never ceased to be perplexing to Rossetti. It made his life one long eager pursuit and gave his, whether painting or poetry, the sense of something just beyond his grasp.

This mystical attitude of Rossetti's, the attempting to realise the eminence of the eternal in the temporal and to do this through a symbol., is best shown in the sonnet-sequence "The House of Life." His symbol was a woman, her body and soul as a revelation of God. Each sonnet of the series is a "Moment's Monument" and their sum is the impelling force of the poet's inner life.

Love is to him a mystical passion and beauty the symbolic expression of hidden spiritual meanings. To understand all that love meant to Rossetti one must steep his mind in the mystical thought of Dante. "It meant the consummation and fulfilment of all that life promised and prophesied. It meant the final state of being in which knowledge and expression and action find their eternal fruition."

Rossetti's philosophy of life is found in "Love Enthroned."

(Essays in Literary Interpretation"- Mabie P. 96)

Love is shown to be the supreme secret, lord of all the powers of heart and mind and soul. This love is inextricably intertwined with beauty. Though it may exist independently, beauty is the actual visible expression of the secret.

"Under the arch of Life, where love and death,
Terror and mystery, guard her shrine, I saw
Beauty enthroned." (Sonnet "Soul's Beauty" P. 215)

In the light of this secret all things are to be interpreted and then as from a window the soul may look upon the unknown land. This love is not a sudden thing. It is as old as the earth and as deep as the far-off purpose of God.

"O born with me somewhere that men forget,
And though in years of sight and sound unmet
Known for my soul's birth-partner well enough."
(Sonnet "The Birth-Bond" P. 184)

In these deep and tender lines entitled "Sudden Light" Rossetti again tells us that before time was, love was:-

"You have been mine before,-
How long ago I may not know:-
But just when at the swallow's soar
Your neck turned so
Some veil did fall,- I knew it all of yore."

Had this been thus before?
And shall not thus time's eddying flight
Still with our lives our love restore
In death's despite,
And day and night yield one delight once more."
(Poem "Sudden Light" P. 295)

The truth is known in a moment and perceived by both hearts as he tells us in "Love's Sweetness." But the largeness of the message of love for humanity is that it may triumph completely over all things voluptuous and seductive and lift the soul to undreamed heights of nobleness and sacrifice.

Love is the interpreter and mediator between God and man. Only through loving do we come to full knowledge, only in loving do we taste eternal life. To know is not the consummation but to love.

"Not I myself know all my love for thee
How could I reach so far who cannot weigh
To-morrow's dower by gage of yesterday?
Shall birth and death, and all dark names that be
As doors and windows bared to some loud sea,
Lash deaf mine ears and blind my face with spray;
And shall my sense pierce love,-the last relay
And ultimate outpost of eternity?" ("The Dark Glass" P. 193)

After time ends love shall be or else The Blessed Damozel leans in vain from the golden bar of heaven.

The peculiar interest of these sonnets lies in the struggle of the dual nature of man and in the final conquest on behalf of the spirit. The key is found in "Heart's Hope"

"Lady, I fain would tell how evermore
Thy soul I know not from thy body, nor
Thee from myself, neither our love from God."

(Sonnet "Heart's Hope" P. 179)

The greatest poets from Dante to Browning have deified the body of the loved one because it contains the soul, but

for Rossetti it is the soul. This lesson is embodied in the impassioned spiritual verse of "Lovesight":-

"The spirits of mine eyes
Before thy face, their altar, solemnize
The worship of that Love through thee made known." (P.178)

In the ninth sonnet, "Passion and Worship," the flesh gives way and passion becomes transfigured into worship.

"Then said my lady: 'Thou art Passion of Love,
And this Love's Worship: both he plights to me." (P. 181)

A true note of worship runs as a motif through the series. The vocabulary is religious, the images are taken from the sanctuary. The beloved's breath is incense, her face a shrine. It is between the scriptured petals that the lover peers for the gift of grace, and finally her eyes flash forth the prophecy of his spirit's highest ideals.

The true message of all Rossetti's poetry was his unalterable belief that

"To have loved and been beloved again
Is the loftiest reach of Hope's bright wing."

He was one who in the words of Merimee "se passionment pour la passion," one of Love's lovers.

Reading "The House of Life" we find that the poet has known love as love can be, not as an enjoyment only or a triumph, but as a worship and a regeneration. "Love far above all passionate winds of welcome and farewell," "Love whose hours elect in choral consonancy" bear with them nothing that is vain or vulgar, common or unclean.

Rossetti was haunted by a special type of womanly beauty which he dwells upon again and again with a warmth of

description foreign to English reserve. But Frederick Myers sounds a just note of criticism when he says that the "view is superficial which represents Rossetti as a dangerous sensualist." The distinction between sensuous and sensual between the legitimate and illegitimate use of love as a poetic motive is perfectly illustrated by the sonnet-sequence and is repeated again in the dactylic measures of the "Song of the Bower," the union of the body and the soul in which the impulses of the one are the outward symbol of the emotions of the other. But it is a distinction which some of Rossetti's critics have failed to understand.

It might be well to mention here the strong coarse onslaught of Mr. Buchanan in his article entitled "The Fleshly School of Poetry." It was an article grossly unjust and intolerably vehement, gaining power to wound because it was a supposed attack in defence of public morality. The whole spirit of Rossetti's poems is misrepresented. There certainly breaks out in places a certain voluptuousness of phrase and image, but the fault is rather one of taste, and it must be kept in mind that Rossetti was more Italian than English, and never looked at things from the English point of view. Later Mr. Buchanan owned that his first judgment was a misconception arising from hasty reading and dedicated his roamnce "God and the Man" to Rossetti with the words:-

"Pure as thy purpose, blameless as thy song,
Sweet as thy spirit may this offering be,
Forget the bitter blame that did the wrong
And take the gift from me!"

Rossetti's Treatment of Women.

Taken in connection with Rossetti's philosophy, if such it may be called, his glorification of love, there is no more interesting study than that of his treatment of women. He approaches her with constant chivalry, with an almost religious reverence and yet with a frank and sensuous admiration for her mere physical charms. The union of sensuousness and spirituality which is the most remarkable feature of Rossetti's work whether poetry or painting, is clearly portrayed in the type of beauty of his maturer pieces. The full curves of lips and throat are contrasted with the languid pose and the tragic eyes with their mystic brooding intensity.

Rossetti's art remains a tribute to the eternal feminine, to ideal womanhood. No one can read "The House of Life" without recognizing the old appeal of the man to the woman to succour and guide his soul. The boy who at the age of fourteen drank in the soul passion of Dante never betrayed his master. The history of Dante's passion for Beatrice as told in "La Vita Nuova" in which the figure of the girl is gradually transfigured and idealized by death into the type of heavenly love, made an enduring impression upon Rossetti's imagination. It became associated most intimately with his own love and loss. We see it in a picture like "Beata Beatrix" or a poem like "The Portrait."

"O Lord of all compassionate control,
O Love! let this my lady's picture glow
Under my hand to praise her name, and show

"Even of her inner self the perfect whole:
That he who seeks her beauty's furthest goal
Beyond the light that the sweet glances throw
And refluent wave of the sweet smile, may know
The very sky and sea-line of her soul." (P. 181)

Into the "Beata Beatrix" Rossetti has put the very best of himself. Not a flaw, not an ugly touch mars the repose of that upturned face in a trance, the purest of all the images that have made his wife immortal. Rossetti himself describes the picture thus:- "It illustrates the 'Vita Nuova" embodying symbolically the death of Beatrice as treated in that work. The figures of Dante and Love passing through the street gaze ominously on one another, conscious of the event; while the bird, a messenger of death, drops the poppy between the hands of Beatrice. She, through her shut lids, is conscious of a new world, as expressed in the last words of "Vita Nuova" "That blessed Beatrice who now gazes continually on His Countenance."

"Upon the modern woman the poet throws again the old responsibility of being man's spiritual guide. Rossetti's woman stands for no transitional type, no new woman. She belongs to the original scheme of things. She is created, not for her own use but for man's; for the service of others. No woman can mistake Rossetti's recognition of her moral pre-eminence, nor his insistance that her function is to reveal God to man. With this exhaltation comes her power, her mystery, her inviolateness. Rossetti's lady is wrapped in the scantity of a Madonna, the inscrutableness of the Sphinx; her individuality

is an inseparable quality as little artificial and acquired as the perfume in the violet."

In his sonnet entitled "True Woman" he thus describes his ideal:-

"To be a sweetness more desired than Spring;
A bodily beauty more acceptable
Than the wild-rose tree's arch that crowns the fell;
To be an essance more environing
Than wine's drained juice; a music ravishing
More than the passionate pulse of Philomel;-
To be all this 'neath one soft bosom's swell
That is the flower of life:- how strange a thing."

(Sonnet "True Woman" P. 204)

Free from sensualism and mystical as this passion of love is in Rossetti, it never becomes a mere abstraction as in Dante, or a purely psychological power as in some of Browning's love poems. It is the love of the man for the woman whether she be on earth or in heaven. It is always full of yearning and personal need. The Blessed Damozel is homesick for her lover even in Paradise.

"I wish that he were come to me
For he will come,' she said.
Have I not prayed in Heaven,on earth?
Lord, lord, has he not prayed?
Are not two prayers a perfect strength?
And shall I feel afraid?" ("The Blessed Damozel" P. 234)

It has been said of Rossetti that he always depicted one woman, but this has more than once been shown to be erroneous. At the same time he has admittedly invested many of the faces he painted with the characteristics of a type of beauty that was all his own. He originated a new ideal of loveliness, a type that appeals at once to the beholders' sensuous joy in beauty and his intellectual apprehension of a soul behind a mask. "Lovely faces he painted overshadowed by a cloud of dusky hair," "sweet curved lips for a conqueror's kiss," all the body's beauty that his artist's mind conceived of he strove to depict, and by and through this beauty all the loveliness of soul that his poet's heart could dream of."

Perhaps no quality is lacking in our woman of to-day than repose. But one characteristic Rossetti never fails to emphasize is calmness. "Rossetti's still women." Nervous restlessness is unknown to these peaceful spirits. Here are no violent gestures, no strident voices. No more exquisite description of a woman's voice has ever been given than in the following:-

"Whose voice attuned above
All modulations of the deep-bowered dove
Is like a hand laid softly on the soul
Whose hand is like a sweet voice to control
Those worn tired brows it has the keeping of."

(Sonnet "Mid-Rapture" P. 189)

In one of the sonnets in "The House of Life" Rossetti lets us into the secret of his art.

("The English Pre-Raphaelite Painters" - Percy Bate P. 50)

"By thine own tears thy song must tears beget
O Singer. Magic mirror thou hast none
Except thy manifest heart."

Through experience alone is an artist equipped for his task. Love is Rossetti's theme, the joy of possession, the grief at the loss of love and we may truly say that all his poems had been lived out in his own life. The most touching event in his whole career of swift and flame-like emotions is the sudden impulse which led him, as his wife's coffin was being closed, to bury in her beautiful hair of gold the drafts of all his early poems. Infinite regret and infinite hope thereafter tinctures all his art.

"Is there a home where heavy earth
Melts to bright air that breathes no pain
Where water leaves no thirst again?"
And springing fire is Love's new birth?
If faith long bound to one true goal
May there at length its hope beget,
My soul that hour shall draw your soul
Forever nearer yet." ("Insomnia" P. 328)

The influence of his wife dominated the thirty years of his artistic life and art. Her expression suggested a morbid languor and dreaminess in curious contrast with her richness of colour and form. Hence we see how she fitted into Rossetti's Dantesque dreams with her definite yet visionary beauty. It was her stately purity and gracious sensuousness that first attracted Rossetti. After a long engagement they

were married and twelve months later she died. From that hour the glory and vivacity of life were gone for her husband. He became practically a recluse, a brooding and uncomforted man whose days were passed in the shadow of the dead. One of the most beautiful of the sonnets of Christina Rossetti is a tribute to Elizabeth Siddall entitled:-

"In an Artist's Studio."

"One face looks out from all his canvases,
One self-same figure sits or walks or leans:
We found her hidden just behind those screens,
That mirror gave back all her loveliness.
A queen in opal or in ruby dress
A nameless girl in freshest summer-greens,
A saint, an angel, every canvas means
The one same meaning, neither more nor less.
He feeds upon her face by day and night
And she with true kind eyes looks back on him
Fair as the moon and joyful as the light
Not wan with waiting, nor with sorrow dim,
Not as she is, but was when hope shone bright
Not as she is, but as she fills his dream."

Rossetti's world was dominated by the eternal feminine, and his heroines nearly always wear some nimbus of sorrow, or fate or death. But the primary prompting and the ultimate outcome even in such widely diversified works as "Jenny" and "The Blessed Damozel" in poetry and "Sibylla Palmifera" and "Found" in painting are the same ardent longing after ideal purity in womanhood.

In a few of his works Rossetti ventures outside of his natural range, for example in "Sister Helen." Cruelty was a quality foreign to his women and one which he was not prone to depict in his art, yet a more relentless and vindictive passion barbaric in its bitterness can hardly be imagined than that which is concentrated in the answers of the sorceress. Lucretia Borgia, the subject of two paintings by Rossetti, was neither more fateful nor more relentless than Sister Helen. Slight as are the changes in the burden of the ballad they are weighty in significance and the answers of the heroine with their grave acquiescence in the Soul's death which she knows is the price of her deeds have an indescribable dramatic force. Rose Mary unlike Helen is the undesigning instrument of evil powers and her blind deed is a means by which her own and lover's sin and his treachery are revealed. Unlike Sister Helen who loses her soul as the price of revenge, Rose Mary loses her life while her soul gains rest.

Another subject removed from Rossetti's usual bent was the painting "Joan of Arc." It is a vigorous, bold and inspiring picture, but it brought out the martial and not the mystical side of the maid. The face is boyish in feature and fierce and strong in expression. Dark hair thrown back from her forehead falls over a fine muscular throat. Her hands clench the sword with an eloquent gesture as she kneels kissing the sword of deliverance, with resolution, not revery in her look.

The characteristic of the blending of human devotion with pious mysticism is shown also in the "Staff and Scrip." The poem breathes the very spirit of chivalry. When the action is finished the poet transports the lovers to Heaven.

"The lists are set in Heaven to-day
The bright pavilions shine
Fair hangs thy shield and none gainsay
The trumpet's sound in sign
That she is thine."

This poem is only one of the many which shows that Rossetti lived his intellectual life in a mystical richly-colored world of romantic knights and sad-eyed ladies. Rossetti was the fountain head of the revival in England of the pictorial art on the romantic side. He was drawn by a sympathetic feeling for the buried past when lives were many-hued and passion strong.

"Like flame within the naked hand
His body bore his burning heart." ("Dante at Verona" P.1)

"He had the same tendency as Dante to embody all the passions and experiences of the human heart in forms of many-coloured personification and symbol."

This is well illustrated by a painting such as "Astarte Syriaca" a picture of a tall, mysterious figure, with gray brooding eyes, the very type of mournful memories, clad in a robe of deep sea-green. In one hand she carries a lighted bronze lamp, in the other a curious winged chalice. Yellow pansies and a faded sunset sky carry out the symbolism of the picture.

"Thou fill'st from the winged chalice of the soul
Thy lamp, O memory, fire-winged to its goal." (P. 362)

Dr. Hake says, "I thought that no one ever could paint a woman's eyes like Rossetti. There was a softness, a delicacy, a life, a soul in them never seen elsewhere but in living beings, and that how rarely." (Appendix to Memoirs of Rossetti : Wm. Rossetti)
(D.G.Rossetti

"The sweetness of love, the glamour of the mysterious unknown, the brooding aspect of passion, the clear placid joy of living, all are to be found in the limpid depths of his women's eyes, such wonderful eyes as no other artist has ever painted, from the clear-grey unshadowed ones that swim in the head of "The Beloved" to the dusky orbs that burn in the face of "Astarte."

Frederick G. Stephens thinks that "The Beloved" is in English art what Spenser's gorgeous and passionate "Epithalamium" is in English verse. The subject is the Bride of the Canticles advancing to meet her lover. As the song says, "She shall be brought unto the King in raiment of needlework; the virgins that are to be her fellows shall bear her company." As she nears the bridegroom the maiden draws aside her veil of pearly tissue, revealing a face, which for pure majestic loveliness is unsurpassed on canvas. The sitter was one of Rossetti's ordinary models, nor does she resemble even remotely that type of dark and brooding beauty which is so frequent in Rossetti's later subjects.

In "Lady Lilith" we have the same frank attempt as in "The Beloved" to realize the utmost charm of radiant loveliness in colour and line. His problem was to paint a fair witch-like woman magnificently beautiful but with sinister intimations of cruelty and craft in her expression. Lileth is a modernized conception of that wife whom Adam had before Eve, in the Talmudic legend. She is the incarnation of the world and the flesh, with all sorts of latent suggestions of the third element. A beautiful woman,

("The English Pre-Raphaelite Painters" : Percy Bate P. 50)

splendidly and voluptuously formed, is leaning back on a couch, combing her long fair hair. The languid eyes, the peculiar curve of the lids, the drooping lines of the richly moulded mouth, all carry out the impression of sombre interest.

The witch-wife of Adam appealed to Rossetti by her magical associations no less than by her physical loveliness. He has given us five portraits of that beautiful, fateful, sensual face. She is the heroine of the poem "Eden Bower," a powerful study of snake-like seduction, witchery and burning implacable hatred.

"Not a drop of her blood was human
But she was made like a soft sweet woman."

The pictures show Rossetti's power to see the soul at its most elusive moments as revealed in the human face. "Body's Beauty" he afterwards called the picture of Lady Lilith, contrasting it with his conception of "Soul's Beauty," the "Sibylla Palmifera." At the same time he described the two in a pair of sonnets which were embodied in "The House of Life." The "Queen of Beauty" Rossetti designed the "Palmifera" giving it this title as he said, " to mark the leading place which I intend her to hold among my beauties"

The sonnet describes the picture partly. A Sibyl bearing a branch of palm and seated on a throne beneath a stone canopy overlooking a temple court. Above her is carved on one side a blind Cupid, wreathed with roses; on the other a skull, crowned with red poppies. A burning censer, a flaming lamp, and two butterflies hovering near are all accessories in the picture.

Rossetti tried to help out his pictures with his sonnets but still strove to impose upon his pictures themselves the burden of the message. Watts-Dunton says, "The corporal part of man seemed

more and more to be but a symbol of the spiritual and more and more did he try to render it so." Rossetti penetrated the envelope of the flesh and found the personality shielded by it. He used the expressive features, the eyes and the mouth, as symbols of the soul and body.

In the painting "Pandora," Pandora herself wears a look of distant brooding melancholy. On one side of the casket is a spirit form with the words "Nescitur Ignescitur" and on the frame below the picture is the sonnet beginning:-

"What of the end, Pandora? Was it thine
The deed that set these fiery pinions free?"

Mr. Swinburne in his "Essays and Studies" praises the sonnet as the most perfect and exalted of all those done by Rossetti for his pictures as the design itself is "among the mightiest in its god-like terror and imperial trouble of beauty."

In its air of brooding melancholy this picture has much in common with the painting of "Proserpina." The queen of the lower regions is eating her heart out for thoughts of that girl life in the meads of Sicily. She holds pensively in her hand the pomegranate of which she ate one fatal seed which binds her to her destiny. The empire of sorrow has become part of her lif and has left its mark in the eyes that seem to be as dark wells into which all the pain of the world has streamed.

In closing this little talk of Rossetti's treatment of women and love, I cannot do better than quote a sonnet written on "The House of Life" by Walter Ives:-

"Take these dear sonnets sweet and call them mine
For they are mine to-day as once they were
Rossetti's, born of his high love for her
Whose golden locks crowned her his queen divine
Not less to me the darker glint of thine
Thy glance, thy cheek, thy mouth such passion stir
As made him master and interpreter
For all true hearts that bow before Love's shrine
And since the master said he knew not all
The love his heart held, O how vain for me
'Tis all so little I may understand
The echo only of great love's call
Lifts me so high that now I stand by thee
And in thine eyes behold Love's Promised Land."

(Lippincotts Monthly Magazine : Vol. 68, Yr. 1901)

INFLUENCE OF ROSSETTI

Rossetti's position in the last half of the Nineteenth Century is something like Coleridge's in the first half. Unlike Coleridge he was the leader of a school, the master of a definite group of artists and poets. Like Coleridge his was a seminal mind, a mind rich in original suggestions which inspired and influenced younger men to carry out its ideas, often with a fluency of utterance and a technical dexterity both in art and literature which the master himself did not possess. Holman Hunt, Millais, and Burne-Jones among painters; Morris and Swinburne among poets were disciples of Rossetti who in some ways outdid him in execution. Perhaps, though on the whole it is his spirit rather than his manner that has been sought after; and we may be glad that this is so, for manner even in his own hands tended to become mannerism, and in the hands of imitators would infallibly have done so.

Rossetti was the Nineteenth Century spirit of art embodied. He was not either the best painter, or the best poet of his time but he was the man in whom the artistic spirit was least mingled or diluted with other things. That which was not artistic, or that which did not admit of presentation from an artistic point of view did not exist for him. He observed "that two things seemed to have utterly departed from England and its art, the temper of religious wonder and the power of perfect fidelity and reverence in following Nature."

All these he attempted to restore and hence we may say that

("Makers of English Poetry" : Dawson Ch. XXXII P. 348)

one function of Rossetti was to develop in poetry the sense of beauty, mystery and awe. Rossetti's work is best described by the word 'Glamour.' This glamour lays a restraint on us that cannot be shaken off, and is the real secret of Rossetti's influence.

But because the man, Rossetti, showed such an ungrudging unselfish delight in the work of others, and never hesitated to bestow thoroughly appreciative yet distinguishing praise, he had the power of inspiring boundless enthusiasm and making proselytes. Consequently his own tastes in various matters influenced public opinion to a considerable extent. The popularity of the Celtic legends is due to the interest revived in them by Rossetti. His discovery of Fitzgerald's translation of "Omar" in a bookseller's box started the world-wide appreciation of those wonderful quatrains.

By his early preaching of Browning he increased the circle of that poet's admirers. He cultivated the modern taste for Blue China, Japanese Art and sumptuous bookbinding. He modified for some years the British taste in fashions of dress and female beauty, promoting the possessors (or the imitators) of auburn golden hair, those who wore the hair low down on the forehead and the owners of strong set profiles and rich lips. "No Roman noses need apply." He invented the three-quarters' length picture, painted from a type of female beauty which is akin to none other and which for wealth of sublime and mysterious suggestion, unaided by complex and dramatic design was unique in the art of the world. He may not have modified in any direct way the great stream of English poetry

but he powerfully revived one current, that of woman-worship.

To sum up the major influence of Rossetti we may say that his office was:-

(1) To revive and express both in painting and poetry the religious spirit of the early Florentine schools.

(2) To give a more intimate interpretation of Dante to the English public, especially of Dante's life and personality and of his minor poetry like the "Vita Nuova" which had not yet been translated.

(3) To open the closed doors of the past and lead us into fresh fields of romance.

(4) To furnish poets with a new set of artistic impulses and motives.

(5) He exercised a wide influence on the forms of poetry in giving back to us forgotten rhythmic movements and in setting an example of careful workmanship. Besides, like Tennyson, enriching our modern English by a revival of obsolete yet effective Norman and Saxon words, Rossetti added to its flexibility by novel inversions and accented endings.

(6) To afford new illustrations of mediaeval life and thought, partly be treating legendary matter in the popular ballad form, and partly by treating romantic matter of his own invention with the rich colour and sensuous imagery which belonged to his particular art.

Rossetti seems to sweep his fingers over the harp-strings of innumerable hearts, calling out the music that is in them. Without the influence of this artist-poet during the last thirty

years the world would have been Prussianized.

We cannot do better than to conclude by quoting Ruskin's estimate of his work. "I believe that Rossetti's name should be placed first on the list of men within my own range of knowledge who have raised and changed the spirit of romantic art; raised in absolute attainment, changed in direction of temper."

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