

Some Pre-Raphaelite Reminiscences

BY FORD MADOX HUEFFER

IN a previous paper, published in a recent number of this Magazine, I dealt more or less completely with the inner circle of the Pre-Raphaelite Movement and its development. The following pages will be found to treat more fully rather of their connections and dependents. Turning at random to Madox Brown's diary, I find:

"November 7th.—Dined with William Rossetti and afterward to Browning's, where there was a woman with a large nose. Hope I may never meet her again. Browning's conversational powers very great. He told some good stories, one about the bygone days of Drury Lane—about the advice of a very experienced stage-carpenter of fifty years' standing at the theatre, given to a young man who wished for an engagement there but had not, it was objected, voice enough—the advice was to get a pot of XXXX (ale) and put it on the stage beside him, and having the boards all to himself, he was first to drink and then to holloa with all his might, then to drink again, and so on—which the aspirant literally did—remaining, of course, a muff as he had begun. However, I spoil that one! Browning said that one evening he was at Carlyle's. That sage teacher, after abusing Mozart, Beethoven, and modern music generally, let Mrs. Carlyle play to show Browning what was the right sort of music, which was some Scotch tune on an old piano with such bass as pleased Providence—or rather, said Browning, as did *not* please Providence. An Italian sinner, who belonged to the highest degree of criminality which requires some very exalted dignitary of the Church before absolution can be obtained for atrocities too heinous for the powers of the ordinary priest, Browning likened to a spider who, having fallen into a bottle of ink, gets out and crawls and sprawls and blots right over the whole of God's table of laws.

"November 8th.—Painted at William Rossetti from eight till twelve. Gabriel came in. William wishing to go early, Gabriel proposed that he should wait five minutes and they would go together, when William, being got to sleep on the sofa, Gabriel commenced telling me how he intended to get married at once to Guggums (Miss Siddall) and off to Algeria! and so poor William's five minutes lasted till half past two A.M.

"... I went to a meeting of the sub-committee about the testimonial of Ruskin's, he having noticed my absence from the previous one with regret. Ruskin was playful and childish, and the tea table overcharged with cakes and sweets as for a juvenile party. Then about an hour later cake and wine was again produced, of which Ruskin again partook largely, reaching out with his thin paw and swiftly absorbing three or four large lumps of cake in succession. At home he looks young and rompish. At the meeting at Hunt's he looked old and ungainly, but his power and eloquence as a speaker were Homeric. But I said at the time that but for his speaking he was in appearance like a cross between a fiend and a tallow-chandler. . . . At night to the Working Man's College with Gabriel, and then a public meeting to hear Professor Maurice spouting and Ruskin jawing. Ruskin was as eloquent as ever, and as widely popular with the men. He flattered Rossetti in his presence hugely, and spoke of Munroe in conjunction with Baron Marochetti as the two noble sculptors whom all the aristocracy patronized—and never one word about Woolner, whose bust he had just before gone into ecstasies about and whom he had invited to dinner. This at a moment when Woolner's pupils of the college were all present. Rossetti says Ruskin is a sneak, and loves him. Rossetti, because he is one too; and Hunt he half likes because he is half a sneak, but he hates Woolner

because he is manly and straightforward, and me because I am ditto. He adored Millais because Millais was the prince of sneaks, but Millais was too much so, for he sneaked away his wife, and so he is obliged to hate him for too much of his favorite quality. Rossetti, in fact, was in such a rage about Ruskin and Woolner that he bullied Munroe all the way home, wishing to take every cab he encountered.

"January 27th.—To Jones's (Sir Edward Burne-Jones) yesterday evening with an outfit that Emma had purchased at his request for a poor miserable girl of seventeen he had met in the streets at 2 A.M. The coldest night this winter—scarcely any clothes and starving after five weeks of London life. Jones gave her money and told her to call next morning, which she did, telling her story, and that she had parents willing to receive her back again in the country. Jones got me to ask Emma to buy her this outfit, and has sent her home this morning. Jones brought Miss Macdonald, and I didn't ask any questions. (Miss Macdonald is now Lady Burne-Jones.) This little girl seems to threaten to turn out another genius. She is coming here to paint to-morrow. Her designs in pen and ink show real intellect. Jones is going to cut Topsy (William Morris). He says his overbearing temper is becoming quite insupportable as well as his conceit. At Manchester, to give one recording line to it, all that I remember is that an old English picture with Richard II. in it was the only beautiful work of the old masters, and Hunt and Millais's the only fine among the new. Hunt, in fact, made the exhibition. The music was jolly, and the waiters tried very hard to cheat."

Such were the daily preoccupations of this small circle as recorded—with a spelling whose barbarity I have not attempted to reproduce—in Madox Brown's diary. If the bickerings seem unreasonably ferocious, let it be remembered that in spite of them the unions were very close. Rossetti, who called Ruskin and himself sneaks, put up with Ruskin's eccentricities, and Ruskin put up with Rossetti's incredible and trying peculiarities for many years, and Burne-Jones, who was going to cut Topsy for good,



CARLYLE

retained for him to the end of their lives a friendship which is among the most touching of modern times. And the secret of it is, no doubt, to be found in the spirit of the last passage that I have quoted. These men might say that So-and-so was a sneak, or that some one else was the prince of sneaks, but they said also that So-and-so "made" an exhibition with his pictures, and that the other man's were the finest of modern works. It was the strong personalities that

made them bicker constantly, but it was the strong personalities that gave them their devotion to their art, and it was the devotion to their art that held them all together. It is for this reason that these painters and these poets, with singular merits and demerits as singular, made upon the English-speaking world a mark such as perhaps no body of men has made upon intellectual Anglo-Saxondom since the days of Shakespeare. For it is one of the saddening things in Anglo-Saxon life that any sort of union for an æsthetic or for an intellectual purpose seems to be almost an impossibility. Anglo-Saxon writers, as a rule, sit about, each on his little hill, surrounded each by his satel-

lites, moodily jealous of the fame of each of his rivals, incapable of realizing that the strength of several men together is very much stronger than the combined strengths of the same number of men acting apart. It was the union of these men in matters of art that gave them their driving force against a world which very much did not want them. They pushed their way among buyers; they pushed their way into exhibitions, and it was an absolutely certain thing that as soon as one of them had got a foothold he never rested until he had helped in as many of his friends as the walls would hold. With just the same frenzy as, in private and among themselves, these men proclaimed each other sneaks, muffs, and even thieves—with exactly the same frenzy to the great picture-buyers did they declare each other to be great and incomparable geniuses. And, as may be observed by the foregoing quotations, for any one of them to leave the other of them out of his praises was to commit the unpardonable sin. So, bickering like swashbucklers or like schoolboys about wine, women, and song, they pushed onward to prosperity and to fame.

In those days there was in England a class of rich merchants which retained still the medieval idea that to patronize the arts had about it a sort of super-virtue. Such patronage had for them something glamorous, something luxurious, something splendid. They were mostly in the north and in the Midlands. Thus there was Peter Millar, of Liverpool; George Rac, of Birkenhead; Leathart of Gateshead, and Plint of Birmingham. And while the artists strove among themselves, so did these patrons, each with his own eccentricities, contend for their works. They had about them, as a rule, something almost as bluff as the artists, and they had also almost as keen a belief that the fine arts could save a man's soul. Here is a little portrait of one of these buyers—Mr. Peter Millar, a ship-owner of Liverpool, who supported out of his own pocket several artists of merit sufficient to let them starve, and whose name should have its little niche among the monuments devoted to good Samaritans and to merchant princes:

"I may notice that Mr. Millar's hospitality is somewhat peculiar in its kind. His dinner, which is at six, is of one joint and vegetable *without* pudding. Bottled beer for only drink—I never saw any wine. His wife dines at another table with his daughters. After dinner he instantly hurries you off to tea, and then back again to smoke. He calls it a meat tea, and boasts that few people who have ever dined with him have come back again. All day long I was going here and there with him, dodging back to his office to smoke, and then off again after something fresh. The chief things I saw were chain tables forged and Hilton's *Crucifixion*, which is jolly fine. . . . This Millar is a jolly kind old man with streaming white hair, fine features, and a beautiful keen eye, like Mulready and something like John Cross, too. A rich brogue, a pipe of Cavendish, and a smart rejoinder, with a pleasant word for every man, woman, or child he meets in the streets, are characteristic of him. His house is full of pictures even to the kitchen, which is covered with them. Many he has at all his friends' houses in Liverpool, and his house in Bute is filled with his inferior ones. Many splendid Linnells, fine Constables, and good Turners, and works by a Frenchman, Delafant, are among the most marked of his collection, plus a host of good pictures by Liverpool artists, Davis, Tonge, and Windus chiefly."

These extracts from Madox Brown's diary belong to a period somewhat earlier than that of which I wrote in the preceding paper. They show the Movement getting ready, as it were, to move faster, but moving already, and they reveal the principal figures very much as they were. And gradually these principal actors attracted to themselves each a host of satellites, of parasites, of dependents, of disciples. Some of these achieved fame and died; some of them sponged all their lives and died in the King's Bench Prison; some achieved fame and disgrace; some, like Mr. William de Morgan, still live and have honorable renown; some, like Meredith and like Whistler, became early detached from the great swarm, to shine solitary planets in the sky. But there are very few of the older or of the lately deceased men of prominence in the

arts who were not in one way or other connected with this Old Circle. Thus Swinburne, young, golden, golden-tongued, and splendid, was the constant companion of Rossetti and his wife, the almost legendary Miss Siddall, and later a very frequent inmate of the house in Fitzroy Square. And, indeed, the bonds between this poet and this painter were closer than any such statements can imply. Meredith's connection with the Movement was, as to its facts, somewhat more mysterious, but is none the less

readily comprehensible. What has been called the famous "Ham and Egg story" seems to put Mr. Meredith in the somewhat ridiculous position of being unable to face the spectacle of ham and eggs upon Rossetti's breakfast table. This was very unlike Mr. Meredith, who, delicate and austere poet as he was, had as a novelist a proper appreciation of the virtues of such things as beef and ale. But the position of Mr. Mere-

dith in the household at Cheyne Walk—a large mansion that in Tudor days had been the Dower House of the queens of England, and in which at one time D. G. Rossetti, William Rossetti, Swinburne, and Meredith attempted a not very successful communal household—the position of Mr. Meredith in this settlement remains a little mysterious. The Ham and Egg story made it appear that Mr. Meredith did not stop for more than one minute in the establishment, but fled at the sight of the substantial foods upon the table. In a letter to the *English Review* of last year Mr. Meredith, however, denied the Ham and Egg story, pointing out that his version of the affair would be that, during a stay of an indefinite period at Cheyne Walk, he had observed with alarm

quantities of meat and neglecting altogether to take exercise. Mr. Edward Clodd, however, informed me the other day that Meredith had assured him that he had never lived with Rossetti at all. I have, however, in my possession letters which by their date prove that Mr. Meredith lived at least one month in the household at Cheyne Walk. Madox Brown's own version of the episode—and he was so constantly at Cheyne Walk that his story, if picturesque, has in it the possibility of truth—Madox Brown's story was as follows:

The Pre-Raphaelite painters and writers were attracted earlier than any other men by the merits and charms of Mr. Meredith's poems. From this connection sprang an acquaintanceship between Rossetti and Meredith, and the acquaintanceship led to the suggestion by Rossetti that Meredith should make a fourth in the household. This suggestion Meredith accepted. The arrangement was that each of the four



CHRISTINA ROSSETTI

men should contribute his share of the rent and of household bills, but Mr. Meredith was at that time in circumstances of an extreme poverty, and, while paying his rent, he was unable or unwilling to join in the household expenses. Thus he never appeared at table. This may have been because he disliked the food, but the Pre-Raphaelites imagined that he was starving himself for the sake of pride. They attempted, therefore, by sending up small breakfast dishes to his room and by similar attentions to provide him with some measure of comfort. It is possible that these dishes disgusted him, but it is still more possible that they disturbed his pride, which was considerable. According to Madox Brown, the end came one day when the benevolent poets substituted for

the cracked boots which he put outside his door to be cleaned a new pair of exactly the same size and make. He put on the boots, went out, and having forwarded a check for the quarter's rent, never returned again.

But supposing this story to be a mere delusion of Madox Brown's—though I can well believe it to be true enough—there is no reason why something of the sort should not have happened, and why Meredith should not equally truthfully represent that Rossetti's methods of housekeeping were trying to his refined sensibilities. For in person and in habits Mr. Meredith, with his mordant humor, his clean, quick intelligence, and his impatience of anything approaching the slovenly, was exactly the man to suffer the keenest anguish in any household that was conducted by the poet-artist. It is true that at that time Rossetti was not sole ruler of the house, but he was certainly the dominant spirit, and his was a temper in matters of the world easy-going, disorderly, and large in the extreme. You have to consider the Cheyne Walk house as a largish, rather gloomy Queen Anne mansion with portions of a still older architecture. The furnishings were in no sense æsthetic. It is true there were rather garish sofas designed for and executed by Morris & Company, but most of the things had been picked up by Rossetti without any particular regard for coherence of æsthetic scheme. Gilded sunfishes hung from the ceilings along with drop lustres of the most excruciating Victorian type and gilded lamps from the palace of George IV. at Brighton. There were all sorts of chinoiseries, cabinets, screens, blue china, and peacocks' feathers. The dust-bins were full of priceless plates, off which Rossetti dined, and which the servants broke in the kitchen. Rossetti, in fact, surrounded himself with anything that he could find that was quaint and bizarre, whether of the dead or the live world. So that the image of his house, dominated as it was by his wonderful personality, was that of a singular warren of oddities, and, speaking impressionistically, we may say that, supposing an earthquake had shaken the house down, or, still more, supposing that some gigantic hand could have taken it up and shaken its contents

out as from a box, there would have issued out a most extraordinary collection—raccoons, armadillos, wombats, a Zebu bull, peacocks, models, mistresses, and an army of queer male and female “bad hats,” who might be as engagingly criminal as they liked so long as they were engaging, so long as they were quaint, so long as they were interesting. They cadged on Rossetti, they stole from him, they blackmailed him, they succeeded, indeed, in driving him mad, but I think they all worshipped him. He had, in fact, a most extraordinary gift of inspiring enthusiasm, this Italianate man, who had all an Italian's powers of extracting money from clients, who worried people to death with his eccentricities, who drove them crazy with his jealousies, who charmed them into ecstasies with his tongue and with his eyes. “Why is he not some great king,” wrote one Pre-Raphaelite poet who was stopping with him, to another, “that we might lay down our lives for him?” And, curiously enough, one of the watchers at Whistler's bedside during that painter's last hours has informed me that, something to the discredit of Rossetti having been said in conversation, Whistler opened his eyes and said: “You must not say anything against Rossetti. Rossetti was a king.”

This may have been said partly to tease his listeners, whose styles of painting were anything rather than Rossettian, but Whistler certainly received nothing but kindness at the hands of the Pre-Raphaelite group. Looking through some old papers the other day, I came upon a circular that Madox Brown had had printed, drawing the attention of all his old patrons to the merits of Whistler's etchings, and begging them in the most urgent terms to make purchases because Whistler was in indigent circumstances.

Upon one occasion Madox Brown, going to a tea-party at the Whistlers' in Chelsea, was met in the hall by Mrs. Whistler, who begged him to go to the poulterer's and purchase a pound of butter. The bread was cut, but there was nothing to put upon it. There was no money in the house, the poulterer had cut off his credit, and, Mrs. Whistler said, she dared not send her husband, for he would certainly punch the tradesman's head.

So that not nearly all the men whom this circle encouraged, helped, taught, or filled with the contagion of enthusiasm were by any means ignoble. Indeed, every one of them had some quality or other. Thus there was a painter, whom we shall call P, whose indigence was remarkable, but whose talents are now considerably recognized. This painter had a chance of a commission to make illustrations for a guide-book dealing with Wales. The commission, however, depended upon the drawings meeting with approval, and Mr. P, being without the necessary means of paying for his travels, applied to Madox Brown for a loan. Madox Brown produced the money, and then, remembering that he had intended to take a holiday himself, decided to accompany his friend. They arrived upon a given morning, toward two o'clock, in some Welsh watering-place.

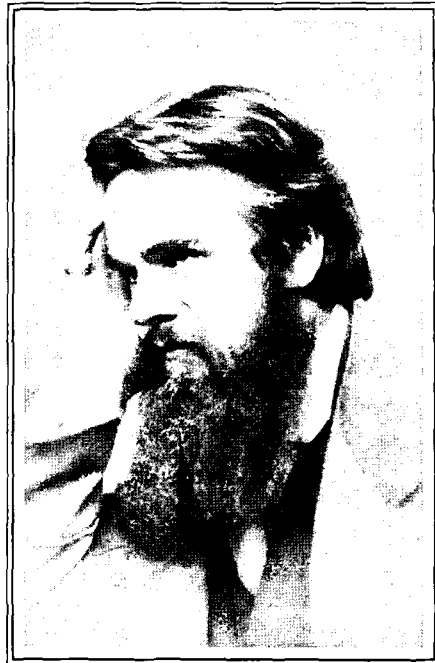
having walked through the day and a greater part of the night with their knapsacks on their backs. They were unable to rouse anybody at the inn, there was not a soul in the streets; there was nothing but a long esplanade, with houses whose windows gave on to the ground.

"Well, I'm going to have a sleep," P said. "But that is impossible." Madox Brown answered. "Not at all," P rejoined, with a happy confidence, and pulling his knapsack round his body, he produced his palette-knife. With this in his hand, to the horror of Madox Brown he approached the drawing-room window of one of the lodging-houses. He slipped the knife through the crack, pushed back the catch, opened the win-

dow, and got in, followed eventually by his more timid companion. Having locked the door from the inside to prevent intrusion, they lay down upon the sofa and on chairs, and proceeded to sleep till the morning, when they got out of the window once more, closed it, and went on their way.

I have always wondered what the housemaid thought in the morning when she came down and found the drawing-room door locked from the inside!

On the next night they appeared to be in an almost similar danger of bedlessness. They arrived at a small village which contained only one inn, and that was filled with a large concourse of Welsh-speaking people. The landlord, speaking rather broken English, told them that they could not have a room or a bed. There was a room with two beds in it,



Copyright by Elliott & Fry

HOLMAN HUNT

but they could not have it. This enraged Mr. P beyond description. He vowed that not only would he have the law on the landlord, but he would immediately break his head; and, Mr. P being a redoubtable boxer, his threat was no mean one. So that, having consulted with his Welsh friends, the host made signs to them that they could have the room in an hour, which he indicated by pointing at the clock. In an hour, accordingly, they were ushered into a room which contained a large and comfortable double bed. Mr. P undressed and retired. Madox Brown similarly undressed, and was about to step into bed, when he placed his bare foot upon something of an exceedingly ghastly coldness.

He gave a cry, which roused Mr. P. Mr. P sprang from the bed, and bending down, caught hold of a man's hand. He proceeded to drag out the man, who displayed a throat cut from ear to ear. "Oh, is that all?" Mr. P said, and having shoved the corpse under the bed, he retired upon it and slept tranquilly above the suicide. Madox Brown passed the night in the coffee-room.

Upon this walking tour Mr. P picked up a gipsy girl, who afterward served as a model to many famous Academicians. He carried her off with him to London, where he installed her in his studio. There was nothing singular about this, but what amazed Mr. P's friends was the fact that Mr. P, the most bellicose of mortals, from that moment did not issue outside his house. The obvious reason for this was a gipsy of huge proportion and forbidding manner who had taken up his quarters at a public house at the corner of the street.

P's friends gibed him for his want of courage, but P continued sedulously and taciturnly to paint. At last he volunteered the information that he could not afford to damage his hands before he had finished his Academy picture. The picture finished, he sallied forth at once, knocked all the teeth down the gipsy's throat, and incidentally broke both his knuckles. The gipsy girl was credited with the retort that was once famous in London. When P, who had been given a box at the opera, proposed to take her with him she refused obdurately to accompany him, and for a long time would give no reason. Being pressed, she finally blurted out, "Ye don't put a toad in your waistcoat pocket," in which saying she underrated the charm of one who, for a long time, was a popular and beloved hostess in London, for she married one of P's wealthiest patrons, while poor P remained under a necessity of borrowing small loans to the end of his life.

In a Garden

BY GEORGE HERBERT GIRTY

I SAW her in a garden dight in May,
 With every manner flower in bright perfection.
 She picked the fairest without stint or stay.
 Though every new one forced an old rejection.
 Fast fading in the sun's too ardent glances,
 To passing foot and fiery noon resigned,
 She takes no pity of their cruel chances,—
 Beauty to beauty ever was unkind.
 Though they would of themselves so soon have wasted
 Cut them not short, O lady of my heart!
 Spill not the cup that thy own lips have tasted,
 Thou too art mortal, then play not in death's part.
 As these to thee, so thou to death must pay—
 And at that thought I turned me sad away.