

THOMAS E. PLINT - A PATRON OF  
PRE-RAPHAELITE PAINTERS

When Thomas E. Plint died in 1861 he was in severe financial difficulties and it was inevitable that his collection of Pre-Raphaelite paintings should be dispersed. A consequence of the dispersal was that Plint, although an important influence on a number of painters - in particular on Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Ford Madox Brown and Edward Burne-Jones - became an obscure figure in art history. This is unfortunate, for he deserves to be remembered along with the better known Pre-Raphaelite collectors, James Leathart, the Newcastle lead merchant and Thomas Combe, the Oxford publisher.

His father<sup>1</sup> was Thomas Plint, a woollen cloth manufacturer and one of that circle of Leeds Free Traders and reformers which included Edward Baines and Samuel Smiles.<sup>2</sup> The senior Thomas Plint, a radical reformer whose "sympathies were decidedly with the multitude"<sup>3</sup> spoke at nationally organised Free Trade gatherings, wrote for the Leeds Mercury and the Eclétic Review, produced a book on crime statistics<sup>4</sup> and took an executive part in a great number of social reform societies; the son, by contrast, seems to have lived quietly and made a great deal of money on the stock market. "Few names", said Taylor in Biographia Leodiensis, "are better known on the London and provincial stock exchanges . . . (his) transactions were very large".<sup>5</sup> The size of his fortune when he was at the height of success as a speculator is difficult to assess but following the sale of his pictures in 1862 both the Art Journal and Athenaeum<sup>6</sup> reckoned that his picture collection alone had cost him somewhere in the region of £25,000.

It is difficult to know more than this, as details of his private life are difficult to trace. In the Leeds trade directories we can follow changes of home address and deduce improved social status. Poll Books tell us that he was a liberal who voted for Mills and Baines in 1857<sup>7</sup> and plumped for Baines in 1859<sup>8</sup>, the Registry of Deeds that he was not a land speculator<sup>9</sup> and the Census Enumerator's Returns give elementary family details<sup>10</sup> but it is difficult to find more.

Two interests apart from making money seem to have dominated his life, evangelical Christianity and collecting paintings. We know, for instance, that he was a member of East Parade Chapel, Superintendent of its Sunday School and a local preacher. The preface of his book Hymns and Sacred Poetry - this was brought out posthumously - says that it "was intended for gratuitous circulation and for use at the religious services he was in the habit of conducting"<sup>11</sup> and this seems to confirm that his religious enthusiasm was deeply felt. His was a passionate