

ROSSETTI'S SCHOOLDAYS

King's College, London, was founded by Royal Charter on 14 August, 1829, its Junior Department, the School, sharing its foundation. Basically, the College was the answer of the Church of England to the non-sectarian University College -- always referred to as "the Godless foundation." King's, except for the grant of a derelict piece of Crown land, at peppercorn rent, lying at the east end of Somerset House, was dependent upon public contributions for the erection and equipping of its buildings and upon the fees of students to cover its running costs. For the first fifty years of its existence, there is not the smallest doubt that it was the School that kept the whole establishment financially afloat. For example, the Financial Committee's estimates for the year 1838-9 calculated the profit from the School at £2520, while all the other departments in the College collectively yielded no more than £650. The School that Rossetti entered, together with his brother William Michael, at the start of the autumn term 1837, though technically the "Junior Department", was very much the senior department in numbers and material importance. Rossetti's father, Gabriele, had been appointed Professor of Italian Literature when College and School opened their gates for the first time in October 1831. This enabled him by a privilege, later to be rescinded as one of the many economies forced upon the College authorities, to educate one of his sons free of charge at the School. Initially Gabriele had been granted a "Nomination" from Sir Robert Harry Inglis Bt. M.P., one of the most influential members of the first College Council, and a leading spirit in the whole concept. For each share of £100 purchased, or for each donation of £100, the donor was allowed to nominate two pupils to the School, or one pupil each to School and College. This meant a reduction of three guineas from the annual School fees of eighteen guineas. There is a pleasant irony in Inglis's nomination of Gabriel Charles Dante, for the former was among the most obdurate reactionaries contesting the Reform Bill, whose first rejection by the Lords coincided with the opening ceremony of the College, and was responsible for the unexpectedly meagre turn-out of many Noble Lords who had sponsored the foundation.

Dante's nomination was duly transferred to his brother, his own education being free until he left the School at the end of the summer term 1841, after which his brother enjoyed the privilege until he left the School at the end of the spring term 1845.

In many ways King's College School was a pioneer in early 19th century education. Except for a handful of famous establishments