

NOTES AND REVIEWS

ROSSETTI'S POEMS (1870): A NOTE ON THE
"FIRST TRIAL BOOK"

Of all bibliographical thickets, few are thornier than that growing out of the pre-publication history of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's 1870 Poems. In 1905 William Michael Rossetti identified two sheets of unbound proof for his brother's first volume of original poetry as items 14 and 16 in his Bibliography of the Works of D. G. Rossetti. The first, he says, was printed in 1869, the second in 1870, the latter adding those poems exhumed from Elizabeth Siddal Rossetti's grave, along with some newly composed material, to the contents of the former. In the Ashley Library Catalogue, T. J. Wise identified these as two variant issues of what he unfortunately labelled a "trial book" with "some stray sets of proof of 1870," while devising an ingenious explanation for those proof which did not fit his theory.¹ Writing in The Colophon (New Series III [1938]), Janet Camp Troxell praised Wise's ingenuity, but, using material in the Fitzwilliam Museum and her own extraordinary private collection, showed that what Wise had considered "stray" proof printed piecemeal, actually constituted six separate sets of proof, each complete in itself, and all leading up to the first edition of 25 April 1870. When Mrs. Troxell's collection passed to Princeton University Library, the then Curator of Manuscripts, Robert Fraser, divided what she had described as six sets of proof into sixteen discrete stages while admitting, in some despair, that "the proofs are so numerous and complicated one wonders if they ever can be completely sorted out and understood."² The publication of Rossetti's correspondence with Jane Morris revealed that yet another set had been printed prior to any of those extant, bringing the total to seventeen,³ and I am now about to suggest an eighteenth.

My suggestion is that what has come to be called the "First Trial Book" represents not one but two separate issues, both pulled between the third and the thirtieth of October, 1869. The suggestion is based on the examination of five copies:

- 1) Wise's copy, acquired from Swinburne and now in the British Library with the shelfmark "Ashley 1393";
- 2) Jane Morris's copy, which C. Fairfax Murray gave to the Fitzwilliam Museum, where it bears Murray's designation "Second Proof";