

## PRE-RAPHAELITISM IN ART AND POETRY<sup>1</sup>

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Pre-Raphaelitism is no longer so importantly regarded as it was twenty or thirty years ago. As a form of Art it is reckoned out of date; we find other forms more interesting – more significant of what we are now after. But as a fact – a portent – coming where it did, it is as important as ever.

One might compare the past and present value of Luther and Lutheranism. Lutheranism has not any crucial importance to-day – nor has Luther. As a theologian he has become negligible; but as an historic figure – a revolutionary – he remains tremendously important.

And so, in a narrower, more insular degree, as affecting our own history in art and literature, so it is with Pre-Raphaelitism. It is very English; and it makes a very definite stage in the development of English Art.

The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood has a fixed date from which it started; but the Pre-Raphaelite movement belonged to something older than itself by more than half a century; and when it found its name in the year 1848, it was merely the pictorial expression of influences which had already made their mark in literature, and would perhaps have made their mark in painting much earlier had not all the tradition and training of the Royal Academy been against them.

Pre-Raphaelitism was ostensibly a revolt against the approved canons of Early Victorian art; and its name arose from the desire of a group of young painters of genius (Rossetti, Millais, Holman Hunt, and others) to adopt some watchword or battle-cry expressive of the combative energy of their conviction that things in the art world of their day were all wrong. So they chose, quite naturally, a word which had to do with that branch of art which more particularly concerned them – the art of painting.

But though it thus acquired a name for purposes of publicity, the thing itself had been in full cry for over forty years. A similar spirit had, at that earlier date, stirred literature to much the same effect, and had found expression in the poems of Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley, and, above all, Keats – in the whole of that part of the Romantic movement, in fact (or of what has been well-called “The