

The True Pre-Raphaelite [W.H.H.]

The Editorial Statement of Francis Golfing in the first issue of *The Pre-Raphaelite Review* (Vol. 1, No. 1, November 1977, p. 1) asserted that 'part of the aim of this journal [is] to show how men and women so diverse in vision, intention and method [as were the Pre-Raphaelites] were able, for a time, to set aside their idiosyncrasies and engage in a joint endeavor. . . ."

It is hardly surprising that the editor soon abandoned this aim in both the *Review* and its successor, *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, since the idiosyncrasies of individual Pre-Raphaelites are precisely what holds such great interest for modern readers and viewers. Furthermore, so important an historian of the Brotherhood as William Holman Hunt has maintained unequivocally in his *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood* that there was never a "joint endeavor" at all. Hunt writes:

*It is stultifying in writing a history of Pre-Raphaelitism to be compelled to avow that our impulsively formed Brotherhood was a tragic failure almost from the beginning, and that we became the victims of our allies. . . .*¹

It is common knowledge that the Brotherhood, formed in 1848, lasted only a few years before the seven Brothers went their separate ways. After the death of Dante Gabriel Rossetti in 1882, controversy arose as to the real founding father of the movement, and F. G. Stephens and William Michael Rossetti, two of the Brethren, in fostering the idea that Dante Gabriel Rossetti was the head, roused Hunt to attack in the book quoted above.

Hunt makes it clear that he considers both of these critics to be among the "allies" referred to, who had betrayed the ideals of Pre-Raphaelitism through their inability to comprehend them. The other "allies" were, by implication, all of the remaining Brothers—Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Thomas Woolner, James Collinson—except John Everett Millais and himself, the "victims." And even

Millais, we are shown, needed Hunt's steady influence to be kept up to the Pre-Raphaelite mark.

If we read Hunt's argument carefully, then, we are brought to the conclusion that, in his opinion, no one but himself had really lived up to these ideals, that he was in fact the only true Pre-Raphaelite.

This was not his position in the three-part article he published in *The Contemporary Review* in 1886.² Here he had allowed equal initiative to Millais, Rossetti and himself in founding the P.R.B., while scarcely mentioning that there were other Brothers. "Millais, Rossetti, and myself," he wrote, "were all seeking for some sure ground. . . ." and, "Think what a revelation it was to find such work [as the Campo Santo engravings which provided the young artists with a model for their own work] at such a moment, and to recognize it with the triple enthusiasm of our three spirits. . . ."

The other four members he dismissed quite casually:

Another aspect of our Brotherhood must not be passed over, though it lasted but a short time and becoming meaningless was abandoned with good reason. It is the social one. . . .

The members who valued only the social aspect are not named, nor is there any further attempt to analyse their motives. In *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood* they could not be dismissed so easily, and Hunt no longer claims that the movement arose from the "triple enthusiasm" of himself, Millais and Rossetti.

By the time he came to write his book, of the original seven Brothers only William Michael Rossetti and Stephens were alive beside himself. The two critics had considerable clout. William Michael had been secretary of the short-lived Brotherhood and editor of the P.R. magazine, *The Germ*, as well as official biographer of his famous brother and art critic for *The Spectator*; Stephens