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The Indian Mutiny and Christina Rossetti's First Appearance in *Once a Week*

Although she had written poetry from the age of eleven and had two poems printed in the *Athenaeum* before her 18th birthday, Christina Rossetti had virtually nothing else accepted for publication on a commercial, non-solicited basis for over a decade. Recent research has revealed the hitherto overlooked publication of one of her poems in the illustrated magazine *Once a Week* in the summer of 1859, two and a half years before a slightly different version of the same poem appeared in her first collection *Goblin Market and Other Poems* (1862).¹ As so often befalls lesser known writers, her name was misprinted, authorship being credited to "Caroline G. Rossetti," which may help explain why it has so far gone unremarked.¹ The poem was based on an incident reported to have taken place during the uprising known as the Indian Mutiny in 1857.

Shortly after Rossetti completed the composition of *Goblin Market*, the poem that was to make her name, in April 1859, a new weekly magazine was launched, with the title *Once a Week: an Illustrated Miscellany of Literature, Art, Science and Popular Information*. Edited by Samuel Lucas, its first issue at the beginning of July contained a poem by Tom Taylor on French losses at the battle of Magenta, in which the French army had been victorious the month before. The poem was accompanied by an illustration by John Everett Millais showing a grieving woman holding a newspaper; outside the window Death pushes a hearse marked "Magenta."²

It would appear that Rossetti immediately thought of the magazine as a possible outlet for her own work, for within a week her brother William approached Millais, on the strength of their kinship in the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood ten years earlier. Millais replied generously in a letter dated 13 July 1859, offering to forward to Lucas anything William wished to send: "Some poem of your Sister's I am sure would

be gladly received, and I could illustrate it," Millais wrote, explaining that he had no influence on editorial policy but adding "if you will send any short poem immediately, I would make a design for it and give it them, or if you would prefer it I would send the poem to them beforehand. . . I feel certain they would be glad to get some of your sister's poems." "In consequence of this friendly letter," William noted, "my sister offered to *Once a Week* a poem "Maude Clare." It was inserted, with an illustration by Millais—I can but think one of his worst wood-block designs." (W.M. Rossetti, 231-3.)

In fact, "Maude Clare" was not the only poem Christina offered, for on 13 August *Once a Week* contained a short, four-stanza poem, "The Round Tower at Jhansi - June 8, 1857," over the name Caroline G. Rossetti:

A hundred, a thousand to one; even so;
Not a hope in the world remained;
The swarming howling wretches below
Gained, and gained, and gained.

S—— look'd at his pale young wife: -
"Is the time come?" "The time *is* come".
Young, strong, and so full of life;
The agony struck them dumb.

"Will it hurt much?" "No, mine own:
I wish I could bear the pang for both".
"I wish I could bear the pang alone:
Courage dear! I am not loth".

Kiss and kiss: "It is not pain
Thus to kiss and die.
One kiss more". "And yet one again".
"Goodbye". "Goodbye".