

FOUR UNPUBLISHED LETTERS BY  
CHRISTINA ROSSETTI

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In a letter of 9 February 1893, after thanking Edmund McClure for an “agreeable visit and for the noble parcel which ensued,” Christina Rossetti tells her SPCK editor that she has begun reading one of the books he sent her, *Links and Clues* by Lady Victoria Welby-Gregory.<sup>1</sup> Rossetti seems to recognize the name of the author and wonders if Lady Welby was a person for “whom I (helped by my dear Mother) once did a small job of Italian translation several years ago” (*Letters* 4:313-14). A few days later, Rossetti returns the borrowed book to McClure with the following evaluation:

All that is devout and aspiring in it I revere, but I own it seems to me to stray away from the Inspired Text: I do not so much mean by contradiction, as by absolutely unauthorized statement or suggestion. Indeed, to my limited apprehension it seems to approach perilously near to *contradiction* in one or more of its utterances. (*Letters* 4:315)

Rossetti’s discomfort with Welby’s book reflected the reaction of other orthodox readers to the traits of free-thinking that mark *Links and Clues*. Interestingly, these brief references in a letter of 1893 suggest that Rossetti did not recall that she and Lady Welby had exchanged letters with each other just over a decade earlier in the period between July and the autumn of 1881. Of course, during those same months of 1881 Rossetti was primarily concerned with the publication of *A Pageant and other Poems* (in August 1881) and then *Called to Be Saints* (initially titled *Young Plants and Polished Corners*) in October. The rapidly declining health of her brother, Dante Gabriel Rossetti (who suffered a stroke and partial paralysis on 11 December and died in April 1882), was also preoccupying her attention.<sup>2</sup>

The four letters that Christina Rossetti wrote to Lady Welby in 1881 are found in the Lady Victoria Alexandrina Maria Louisa Welby fonds (F0443) at York University in Toronto, a large archive of 42 boxes containing Welby’s