

W. M. ROSSETTI'S REVIEWS OF JAMES COLLINSON

In Pre-Raphaelite Papers, published by the Tate Gallery on the occasion of its 1984 Pre-Raphaelite exhibition, Ronald Parkinson attempted a fresh look at the obscure and hapless P.R.B., James Collinson.¹ Parkinson's "paper," though it provides several new details about Collinson's life and paintings (the former based on a neglected article by Sydney Race in a provincial newspaper, the Nottingham Guardian), does nothing to improve the impression of his jaded personality and the mediocre nature of all but a few of his works which we derive from Thomas Bodkin's Apollo article of 1940² and the scattered references to him in books by and about the Pre-Raphaelites. A source that might have been used to modify somewhat the largely negative remarks of the original Pre-Raphaelites cited by both Parkinson and Bodkin is William Michael Rossetti's press notices of Collinson in the period 1850-1858. Although Bodkin is right in his assertion that when William Michael mentions Collinson in his later writings he does so with "ill-disguised dislike," his earlier comments in the Critic and the Spectator are only occasionally dismissive. In all there are eight reviews,³ as follows:

Critic, 1 August 1850, p. 381, Royal Academy: "Mr. Collinson has reason to complain of the hangers. His former works⁴ entitled him to consideration; and his Answering the Emigrant's Letter (No. 448) of this year shows -- what, however, nothing short of an opera glass will reveal -- an advance in executive skill, some portions being painted with extraordinary delicacy. Besides this, the subject is of so unostentatious a description, as evidently to require to be fully seen in all the detail of its rendering in order to be at all appreciated. A contemporary observes that there are no means of determining that the letter is being written to an emigrant; but a microscopic investigation would have satisfied him that the principal figure holds a map of the district: and from this the inference is obvious. Many nice gradations of incident and character have been here condemned to oblivion."

Spectator, 19 April 1851, p. 377, National Institution. The review of Collinson is preceded by a generally favourable review of W. H. Deverell's The Banishment of Hamlet, which concludes by noting several defects.⁵ The Collinson review opens with a linking sentence: "In these points -- and indeed in all that regards general completeness of arrangement -- Mr. Deverell might derive a profitable lesson from Mr. Collinson's Incident in the Life of St. Elizabeth of Hungary (177). This incident belongs to high mass on the feast of the Assumption; when it is told of St. Eliza-