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Emilie Barrington
Frontmatter
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G.F. Watts

G. F. Watts was one of the major artistic figures of the nineteenth century. In this work published in 1905, only a year after Watts' death, Emilie Barrington (1841–1933) reflects on the close friendship she and her husband had with the renowned artist. 'What is, is – and one should not desire to make it seem other', Watts once said, and Barrington's aim in writing her volume of reminiscences was to accurately record her knowledge of Watts' life. She describes her first impressions of Watts, when she first met him in Dante Gabriel Rossetti's studio. Chapters also cover Watts' aims as an artist, his relationships and his genius. This fascinating book is highly illustrated throughout, including Watts' sketches, symbolical paintings and portraits. The reader will gain an intriguing insight into the life and work of this complex character, widely considered to be the greatest painter of the Victorian age. For more information on this author, see http://orlando.cambridge.org/public/svPeople?person_id=barrem

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Reminiscences

EMILIE BARRINGTON



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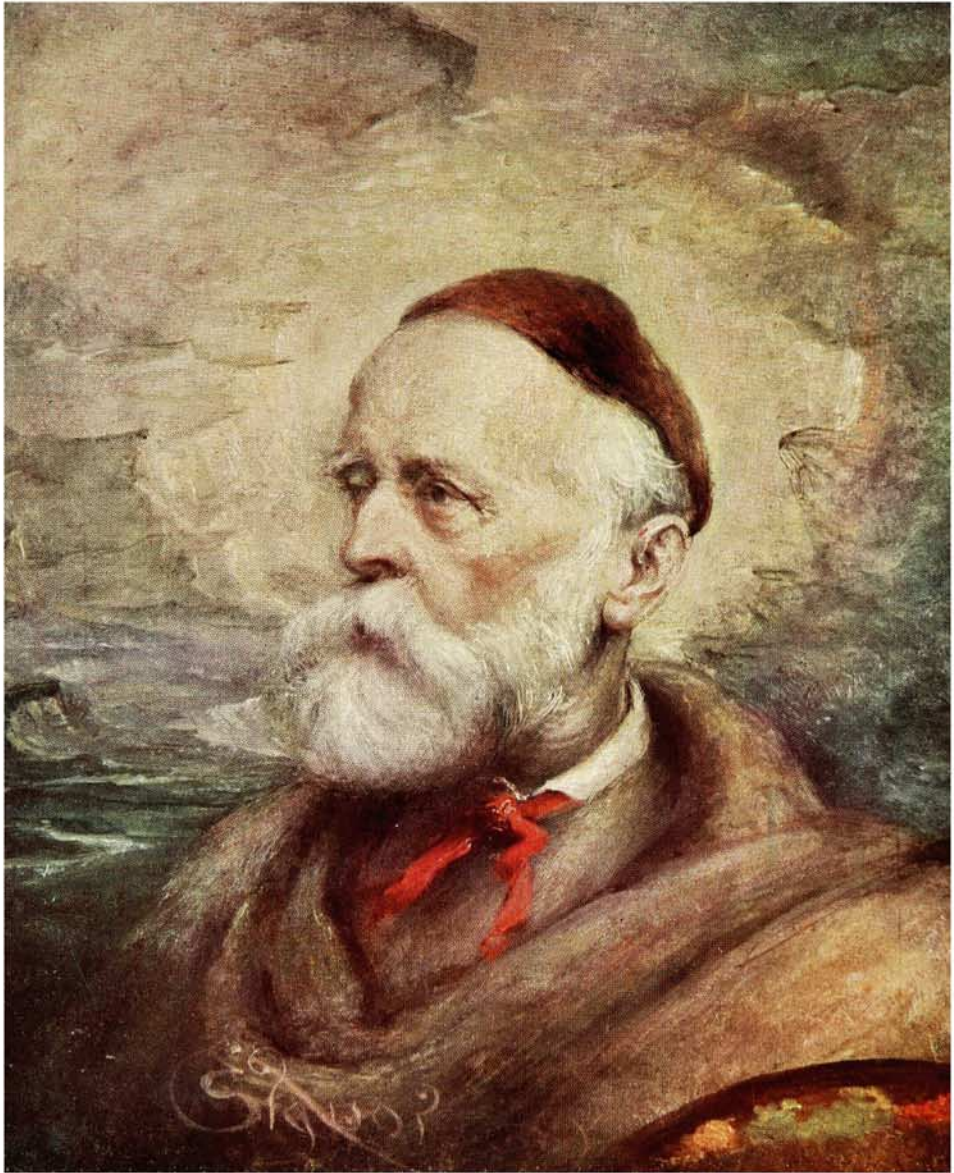
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REMINISCENCES OF
G. F. WATTS

*“ To this life things of sense
 Make their pretence ;
In th’ other angels have a right by birth ;
 Man ties them both, alone,
 And makes them one ;
With th’ one hand touching heav’n ; with th’ other, earth.*

*“ In soul, he mounts and flies ;
 In flesh he dies.
He wears a stuff, whose thread is coarse and round,
 But trimm’d with curious lace ;
 And should take place
After the trimming, not the stuff and ground.”
 —“ Man’s Medley,” GEORGE HERBERT.*

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G. F. WATTS

From Painting by Cecil Schott, 1887

G. F. WATTS

REMINISCENCES

BY MRS. RUSSELL BARRINGTON

AUTHOR OF "THE REALITY OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE,"
"LENA'S PICTURE," "HELEN'S ORDEAL,"
"A RETROSPECT," ETC.

"What is, is,—and one should not desire to make it seem to be other"
G. F. WATTS

LONDON
GEORGE ALLEN, 156, CHARING CROSS ROAD
1905

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INSCRIBED
WITH GRATEFUL AFFECTION
TO THE MEMORY
OF
JANIE SENIOR

P R E F A C E

IN attempting to record these reminiscences of our great artist at so early a date after his death it is obviously impossible even to allude to many things connected with his memory. Characteristic and interesting though they be, this is also no moment to publish the numerous letters he wrote and which I have preserved. They were written after Watts' powers, artistic and intellectual, had reached their maturity, and forming as they do an analysis of his character and nature, a record of his life of thought and work as also of his general views on art, they might at some future date prove of value in helping to elucidate the nature, not only of the artist, but of the man. It was about the time when this correspondence began, and during the subsequent twelve years of his life, that Watts painted the works into which he consciously put most of himself—his aims and his ideas—and these will probably be those pictures by which his fame will be sustained and most lastingly secured, though there are some canvasses, which evince, I think, more distinctly his instinctive individual genius.

Put into the form more or less of letters, this correspondence might be considered in the light of a series of short essays. Watts found ordinary letter-writing most irksome, but when he discovered that he possessed a facility for jotting down his thoughts and ideas with his pen

he appears to have taken great interest in so doing. At one time he was in the habit of scribbling down a thought that might strike him at the moment on any scrap of paper that might be at hand, on every kind of subject. As these generally referred to conversations he had had with my husband and myself, he would often give these jottings to me by way of continuing the argument. I find I have fortunately preserved many of these jottings with his letters. On every scrap of paper is an idea, valuable as a criticism on art, morals, or manners. The first letter I possess is dated April 7, 1876—the last, April 2, 1904. Besides the more important letters, there are many notes which are only personally interesting as recalling little daily events that were characteristic of the life Watts was leading at the time they were written. In re-reading these letters the thought came—will there ever be an exhaustive Life written of the man who penned them? There is ever the same difficulty as regards biographies. When interest is keenest, it is then precisely the moment when it is hardly wise or seemly to challenge criticism by endeavouring to write a complete estimate of a notable individuality. When, in the future, certain difficulties no longer exist, even greater arise. Those who could have given a true and subtle atmosphere and vividness to the picture, editing the letters with a full knowledge of the circumstances and feelings which incited the writing of them—these will also have passed behind the veil. And not only does time rob the world of the right biographer, but also of the interested reader. No time seems exactly the best moment when a full biography should be written. Unless the history of great public events or discussions, having a literary or political value and interest, are connected with the personal life of an individual, there remains no vivid desire to know the *vraie*

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vérité, which a true record could give, of the character and motives of the dead, when the generation who was influenced by the power and charm of the personality has also passed away. It is only natural this should be so. Besides the fact that the stream of life quickly passes on to other pastures in which the vitality of the present absorbs the energies of those who stamp their own age with most vitality, a completely truthful portrait, we all know, cannot be written solely through facts being transmitted second-hand. The side lights, the unacknowledged, sometimes even unconscious influences, the delicate shading and correct inferences which all help to make the picture a true, just, and merciful record of the life of a notable human being—a record which adds to the world's treasures by adding to men's knowledge of men—can only be supplied by one who was in the life when it was being lived. Facts that every man in the street thinks he knows, falsify, as often as they elucidate, the estimate of a character. “The lie which is half a truth is ever the worst of lies,” and facts, from which perverted deductions are invented, can lead to conceptions which are completely false.

Many think that the canvasses of great painters are their best biographies. In the case of Watts, though his art is extraordinarily consistent as regards certain qualities and intentions, his pictures are extraordinarily unequal as regards others. Moreover, as one who, besides his universally acknowledged greatness as an artist is viewed by one section of the public as a thinker and a moralist, Watts' position in the interest of his generation differs distinctly from that of most painters. That many of the qualities in his Celtic nature and genius could inspire a very special affection and interest, many friends can testify. An attempt to write an impartial criticism of one who was possessed of such an

PREFACE

unusual power of sympathy and of so much personal charm would at any time be difficult ; at this moment it would seem impossible. My object in writing the following pages is to record accurately those things which have reference to my husband's and my own personal friendship with Watts during many years of his life—to give to the future a page of contemporary history, which, though by no means exhaustive, is correct.

E. I. B.

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