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William Michael Rossetti
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Some Reminiscences

William Michael Rossetti (1829–1919) made himself the diarist, chronicler and champion of one of the most creative Victorian families. This two-volume memoir of 1906 provides an unparalleled glimpse into the dynamics of the Rossettis, covering his own childhood and that of his siblings, the genesis of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, and friendships with such outstanding figures as Morris, Burne-Jones, Swinburne and the Brownings. In fact, many of the members of the Victorian art and literary world make an appearance at some point in these volumes. But what is so engaging about the work is the way in which William Michael treats these personalities straightforwardly and unpretentiously. Especially fascinating are the observations that deal with intimate family details, his thoughts about brother Dante Gabriel and his attitude to sister Christina as her work developed. Though what he says is not always completely candid, his remarks remain uniquely informed, subtle and telling.

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VOLUME 1

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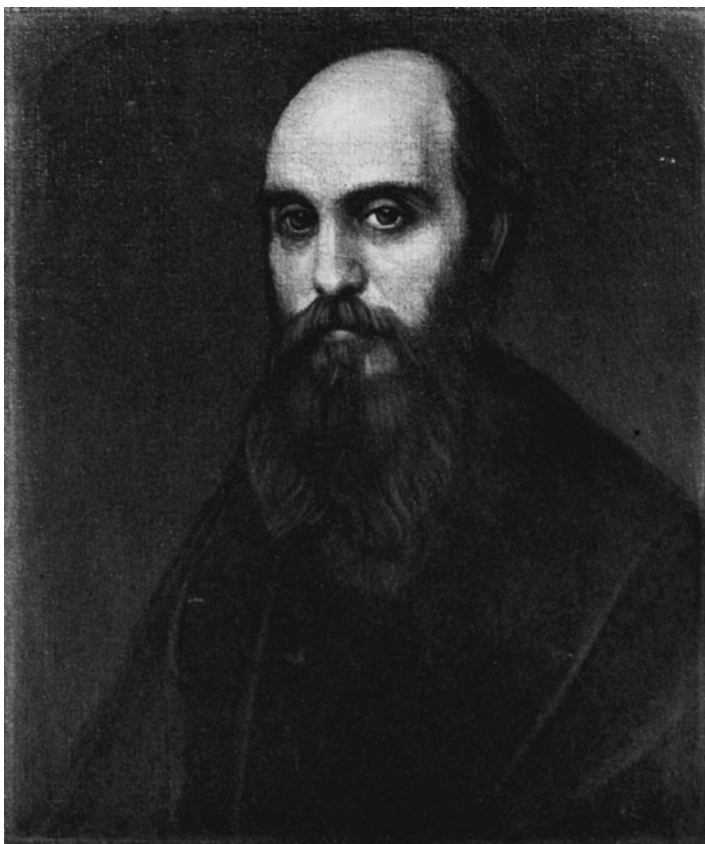
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*William Michael Rossetti.
From an Oil-painting by Alphonse Legros, 1861.*

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SOME
REMINISCENCES
OF
WILLIAM MICHAEL
ROSSETTI

Pensando il breve viver mio nel quale
Stamane era un fanciullo ed or son vecchio
PETRARCA

VOL I

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DEDICATED TO
MY WELL-LOVED DAUGHTER-IN-LAW
DORA BRANDRETH ROSSETTI
MY INFANT GRANDCHILDREN
GEOFFREY WILLIAM ROSSETTI
AND
IMOGENE LUCY CRISTINA MARIA ANGELI
AND THE NOW FEW SURVIVORS AMONG
MY OLD FRIENDS

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PREFACE

I FIND little to state here by way of preface ; but may say that, as I have passed through life with few if any apparent enemies, so also I hope that I have given occasion for not much heart-burning.

Two things would have ill beseeemed me in this work, and I trust I have avoided them both. The first is the offence of appearing as a self-praiser ; the second is the still graver misdemeanour of being ill-natured, or of decrying the men and women of whom I speak. What I thought praiseworthy in them I have praised ; to what I thought blameworthy I have felt it to be my right part to award only a thin modicum of blame, or mostly none. Some readers may opine that, although I speak of several important personages from my own knowledge of them, I say little about them that is of much moment ; neither should I dissent from this allegation. But it does not follow that I know nothing beyond that which I write. In some cases I do know a good deal more ; but to cast a slur here or violate a confidence there would make me contemptible to myself.

For some matters I have a moderately fair memory—I might mention dates in particular. But there are two kinds of things for which my memory is decidedly bad

—the faces of people I meet, and the words of conversations. When a conversation is over, I am not long in forgetting even its definite purport, and more especially I recollect scarcely at all the precise words that had been used. Naturally therefore, when I come to write reminiscences, I can say little of the talks which I had, even with men of mark, and I could very seldom give a *résumé* of their actual phrases. To invent diction which would convey the same sense in a certain way is what I do not feel at liberty to do. The result is that these pages of mine are most rarely enlivened with a few words of remembered talk : which is a pity, but under the circumstances it cannot be helped.

The writing of this book was begun in August 1901, and was substantially completed in March 1903. Since the latter date several things have happened, entitled, on their own showing, to figure in my reminiscences. They are glanced at here and there ; but, so far as may be, I have left my text unaltered.

My life having been an eminently unadventurous and uneventful one, and perhaps of little import to anybody save myself and my immediate surroundings, I do not exactly propose to write my life, and I even take little or no notice here of some of the matters which most closely affected myself. But I have some reminiscences of personages and incidents not unknown to fame, and these I partly set down.

It may be as well here to say that I have already written and published various things in which my personal reminiscences, more especially as affecting other members of the family, are concerned. I shall have to

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recur to some of the same matters, but shall, so far as manageable, avoid repeating the same identical details. The writings in question are as follows :—

1. 1884. Notes on Works by Dante Gabriel Rossetti—Four articles in *The Art Journal*.
2. 1886. The Collected Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti—Editorial matter. Amplified in the illustrated edition of his Poems, 1904.
3. 1888. The Portraits of Dante Gabriel Rossetti—Articles in *The Magazine of Art*.
4. 1889. Dante Gabriel Rossetti as Designer and Writer.
5. 1895. Dante Gabriel Rossetti : his Family Letters, with a Memoir by myself.
6. 1896. New Poems by Christina Rossetti—Editorial matter.
7. 1898. The Blessed Damozel, by Dante Gabriel Rossetti—Introduction.
8. 1898–1901. Prefatory Notes to The Poems of Dante Gabriel Rossetti—Siddal Edition.
9. 1899. Ruskin, Rossetti, Præraphaelitism—Editorial matter.
10. 1900. Præraphaelite Diaries and Letters—Edited and partly written by me.
11. 1900. Lenore, by Bürger, translated by Dante Gabriel Rossetti—Editorial matter.
12. 1901. The Germ, Facsimile Reprint—Introduction by me.
13. 1901. Gabriele Rossetti, a Versified Autobiography—Translated and supplemented by me.
14. 1902–3. Bibliography of the works of Dante

Gabriel Rossetti—Articles in *The Bibliographer* (New York), since republished and amplified as a pamphlet.

15. 1903. Dante Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal—Article in *The Burlington Magazine*.

16. 1903. Rossetti Papers, 1862 to 1870.

17. 1904. The complete Poetical Works of Christina Rossetti, also a selection of them in the *Golden Treasury* series—Editorial matter.

There are also some minor writings, not here specified, bearing on the same range of subject.

It will thus be perceived that, even if I were now to write no more, I have contributed in some substantial measure to public information concerning relatives and associates more interesting than myself. But for several years past the reminiscent or autobiographic mood has been in the ascendant (I think it was Sir Henry Taylor who gave it the first re-impulse), and I may perhaps be excused for joining the goodly company—goodly in numbers and often in quality—of persons who will not keep their private transactions to themselves. “Interviewing” is one of the manias of the day—to my thinking, a noxious one. The reminiscent are persons who, whether interviewed or not by others, interview themselves. To me this seems, if an evil, at all events a minor one.

W. M. R.

LONDON. *January* 1906.

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