

PRE-RAPHAELITISM AND THE *OXFORD AND CAMBRIDGE MAGAZINE*

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BETWEEN two yellow covers in the periodicals section of the Rutgers University Library is a rare complete file of all twelve issues of the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*,¹ a Pre-Raphaelite periodical which appeared monthly between January and December of 1856, under the editorial guidance of William Morris and William Fulford. The high ideals, youthful exuberance, and social commitment of the magazine's founders are difficult to discern now behind the loose cover, yellowing pages, and somewhat faded illustrations, but the fact is that a little over a century ago the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* sounded a vigorous note of protest against the values of life in the Victorian age. Inspired by Morris's enthusiastic leadership, the contributors to this periodical attacked the present and revered the past, shunned the materialistic chaos of the here and now and advocated a return to the spiritual and ethical unity they thought they saw in an age gone by. In so doing, Morris's group participated in what was perhaps the major leitmotif of the Victorian period—the self-conscious critical appraisal of the present in terms of the past. The *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* coupled the aesthetic revolt of William Holman Hunt, John Everett Millais, and Dante Rossetti with the social dissatisfaction of Carlyle and Ruskin to become a periodical which despite its short existence, changed the direction of Pre-Raphaelite thinking and played an influential role in shaping social ideas and attitudes in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Early in 1855 William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones, both students at Exeter College, Oxford, became acquainted with Pre-Raphaelite art through an exhibition of Rossetti, Hunt, Millais, and Madox Brown at the Clarendon Press. This led them to investigate

¹ Among public libraries and universities, the *British Union Catalogue of Periodicals* (III, 484) lists only 7 holders throughout the United Kingdom, and the *Union List of Serials* 3rd. ed. (p. 3224) cites 19 holders in the United States.

the beliefs of this group further, and Morris's biographer records that it was at about this time that they came across a copy of *The Germ* and that their reading of "The Blessed Damozel" and "Hand and Soul" increased their interest in Rossetti and his school.² *The Germ* had been defunct since 1850 when it had ceased publication with its fourth issue, but so strong was their appreciation of this Pre-Raphaelite journal that it is reasonable to assume that the conception of the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* dates from this reading, for it was at this time that Morris and his youthful group saw the possibility of publishing a periodical very similar in tone and spirit to Rossetti's in order to gain an audience for the new ideas which were already taking shape in their minds.

Interest in Pre-Raphaelitism continued through the summer of 1855 when Morris, Burne-Jones, and Fulford, who was to edit eleven of the twelve issues of the magazine, visited the Beaux Arts department of the Paris Exposition. They were overjoyed to find there Holman Hunt's "Light of the World," three paintings by Millais, and one by Charles Allston Collins. Upon their return to England the trio resumed their discussion of the art, society, and poetry of their day, but now more and more their thoughts turned toward an outlet for their ideas. These three found four others who felt as they did, Richard Watson Dixon (1833-1900), destined to become the Canon of Carlisle, a poet in his own right, and an associate of Gerard Manley Hopkins, Coventry Patmore, and Robert Bridges; Wilfred Heeley (1833-1876), later a Civil Servant in India; Vernon Lushington (1832-1912), who entered law after graduation from Cambridge and became Deputy Judge Advocate General; and Cormell Price (1835-1902), later Headmaster in several English Public Schools. These seven young men then formed what they chose to call a "Brotherhood," just as the "first generation" Pre-Raphaelites had done before them. This Brotherhood met to prepare a prospectus of aims and purposes, and after much deliberation decided that "There shall be no showing off, no quips, no sneers, no lampooning in our magazine." They further agreed that the contents of the periodical were to be mainly "Tales, Poetry, Friendly

² J. W. Mackail, *Life of William Morris* (London, 1899), I, 71. Mackail states that "The Blessed Damozel" was "read and re-read" by the group.

Critiques, and Social Articles,"³ the same four categories into which *The Germ* had been divided. Many years later Dixon, one of the most articulate members of the Brotherhood, outlined the objectives of the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* as he remembered them in a letter to T. Hall Caine:

Of this undertaking the central notion was, I think, to advocate moral earnestness and purpose in literature, art, and society. It was founded much on Ruskin's teaching: it sprang out of immaturity and ignorance: but perhaps it was not without value as a protest against some things. The Pre-Raphaelite movement was then in vigour, and the magazine came to be considered as the organ of those who accepted the ideas which were brought into art at that time, and as in a manner, the successor of *The Germ*, a small periodical which had been published previously by the first beginners of the movement.⁴

In all there were 15 contributors to the magazine, 14 men and 1 woman,⁵ all of whom submitted their articles to the editor without pay. They were all in one way or another connected with the two universities, and after 1856 most of them went their separate ways. Except for the members of the Brotherhood who did maintain mutual contact throughout most of their lives, the contributors associated very little with one another. The bonds of friendship were strong among the founders of the magazine, but the others were only peripherally associated with the venture, and the part they played in its development was a small one.

A survey of the contents of the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* shows that of the 69 contributions to its pages, there are 16 short stories (eight by Morris); 17 poems (five by Morris); 19 essays on literature, two on art, six on society and politics, two on history, one on religion, one on philosophy, and five on miscellaneous topics.

³ Cornell Price, *Diary* (unpubl.), as quoted in Georgiana Burne-Jones, *Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones* (London, 1904), I, 104.

⁴ T. H. Caine, *Recollections of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (Boston, 1898), p. 36.

⁵ In addition to the 7 members of the Brotherhood, contributors included Lewis Campbell (1830-1908), who spent most of his life as a Professor of Greek at St. Andrews; Robert Calder Campbell (1798-1857), a miscellaneous writer and sometime soldier; Bernard Cracroft (1828-1888), a stock broker at Austenfriar's in London; Charles Joseph Faulkner (1834-1892), later a Dean at University College, Oxford; Godfrey Lushington (1832-1907), who became Under Secretary of State in the Home Office in 1876; Dante Rossetti (1828-1882), the leader of the Pre-Raphaelites; William Aldis Wright (1831-1914), later Vice Master of Trinity College, Cambridge and editor of *The Letters of Edward FitzGerald*; and Georgiana Macdonald (1840-1920), who later married Edward Burne-Jones.

Thus, it is apparent that although there was an honest effort to cover many subjects, the prevailing interest of the Brotherhood was literary in nature. The eight prose romances and five poems comprise the largest part of Morris's contributions to the magazine and represent his earliest efforts in these genres. His settings are for the most part of indeterminate date but are feudal in tone and Norse or Anglo-Saxon in flavor. Knightly combat, trance-like states, fair ladies, and chivalric ethics are the grist for Morris's literary mill in these early pieces, and although in general they show his youth and inexperience, some like "The Story of the Unknown Church" and "The Hollow Land" exhibit a real ability to superimpose dreams upon reality, fact on fancy, to set the tangible world of actuality against an evanescent background of somnolent beauty and drowsy landscapes—a literary characteristic that was to remain with Morris throughout his life.

The most frequently discussed authors were Shakespeare, Ruskin, Tennyson, and Browning, and in the case of two issues medallions of Tennyson (January) and Carlyle (May) made by the Pre-Raphaelite sculptor Thomas Woolner were offered for sale with the magazine. Discussions of literature frequently led the contributors into analyses of social problems, and although the magazine was politically non-partisan, definite and sometimes outspoken attitudes were expressed on a variety of social topics such as over-population, women's rights, the Crimean War, the Mammonism of the Age, and the effects of the factory system. A major shortcoming of the social criticism in the periodical is that although the young collegians saw a good deal in their environment that disgusted and repelled them, at no time were they able to offer any specific measures for reform.

The first issue was published with lofty hopes and noble aspirations mingled with fear of failure in January, 1856, at a shilling per copy. The publisher, Bell & Daldy of Fleet Street, made an initial printing of 750 copies and met a request from Morris for 250 later in the month. There is no way of telling exactly how many copies of the magazine were actually sold,⁶ but the number of copies pub-

⁶ Correspondence with G. Bell & Sons, Ltd., York House, Portugal Street, London, the descendant of the firm of Bell & Daldy, reveals that "their records do not go back to 1856," and they are therefore unfortunately unable to furnish the detailed publication information which would be of interest in determining the popularity of the magazine.

lished steadily declined until the final issue in December, 1856;⁷ there was no change in format, philosophy, intentions, or types of contributions at any stage of the life of the journal. Morris began as the first editor, but never really interested in the administrative aspects of the project, transferred his duties to William Fulford before the appearance of the second issue. Morris paid Fulford £100 for performing his editorial duties during the year the magazine continued to operate. With Morris's hand on the editorial helm, the Brotherhood sought popular acceptance by appeal to a wide audience in the first issue of the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*; thus controversial issues and doctrinaire attitudes were avoided. The issue contained the first parts of two literary essays (on Sidney and Tennyson), three short stories, three reviews (of Longfellow's *Song of Hiawatha*, Thackeray's *The Newcomes*, and Kingsley's *Sermons for the Times*), and a poem by Morris. The quality of this initial effort is not high by modern standards; indeed it is quite low. The literary essays are little more than panegyrics couched in turgid prose upon the works of favorite authors and punctuated by frequent quotation from the master; the short stories embody most of the faults of Victorian fiction at its worst. The swooning heroine, the pangs of unrequited love, the vision in a dream, expiration from a broken heart, the icy and aloof heroine—they all appear in abundance in the fiction of the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*.

It remained for subsequent issues to make it clear that the magazine was going to be something other than an outlet for the immature critical and creative attempts of a group of Victorian undergraduates. The first vague hint that the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* would have to be taken seriously came with the February issue, in which Morris wrote "The Churches of North France," an essay concerned mainly with the cathedral at Amiens. In this essay Morris described the cathedral not so much as a structure of architectural beauty to be admired by the nineteenth century but as a product of a *zeitgeist* which no longer existed, of artisans with pride in their craft and a spiritual elevation to be revered. Speaking of the workers who built the French medieval cathedrals, he wrote, "And think-

⁷ Mackail, I, 89. Mackail states further that "at the end of the year there was a large stock of unsold copies on the publisher's shelves."

ing of their [the cathedrals'] past away builders, can I see through them very faintly, dimly, some little of the medieval times, else dead and gone from me forever . . . do I not love them with just cause who certainly love me, thinking of me sometimes between the strokes of their chisels; and for this love of all men that they had, and moreover for the great love of God . . . and for this work of theirs, the upraising of the great cathedral front with its beating heart of the thoughts of men . . . I think they will not lose their reward." It was a short step from this adulation of the medieval artisan to a comparison of him with his Victorian counterpart. In his maturity Morris decried mass production, assembly line techniques, the subjugation of man to machine, and the depersonalization of the worker, and it is clear that his mature thought was to a large extent shaped by such early attitudes as that expressed in "The Churches of North France."

Another significant aspect of the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* consistent with Pre-Raphaelite attitudes was its defense of Browning and Ruskin at a time when it was not fashionable to admire their ideas. Browning had been defended against the charge of obscurity by William Michael Rossetti in his review of "Christmas Eve and Easter Day" in the May, 1850, issue of *The Germ*, but even six years later in 1856, the battle had not been won. When Browning's *Men and Women* was severely attacked by the critics, Morris took up the cudgel in his defense and wrote one of the two favorable reviews to appear in contemporary journals.⁸ In his review Morris placed a large share of the blame for not understanding Browning on the Victorian reader and pointed to the indolence and apathy of the age as the cause of poor communication between poet and audience. Morris asserted that Browning's obscurity resulted in large measure from a "depth of thought and greatness of subject on the poet's part, and on his readers' part, from their shallower brain and more bounded knowledge; nay often I fear from mere ignorance and idleness."

⁸ The other favorable review appeared in *British Quarterly Review*, XXIII (January, 1856), 151-180. Considering that *Men and Women* was unfavorably reviewed by such influential journals as the *Athenaeum*, *Blackwood's*, *Westminster Review*, and *Fraser's*, Morris's appraisal of Browning's poems shows a critical astuteness and perception that he is seldom given credit for.

The defense of Ruskin provides an even better example of allegiance to the Pre-Raphaelite cause because it concerns the concept of the very nature of artistic expression itself. In 1855 and 1856 John Ruskin was involved in a controversy over the function and practices of art with Lady Elizabeth [Rigby] Eastlake, wife of Charles Eastlake, R.A., whom Ruskin had criticized in his *Academy Notes* of 1855, and when Lady Eastlake attacked Ruskin in her review of *Modern Painters* for the *Quarterly Review*, Edward Burne-Jones resolved to answer it in the June issue of the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* by pointing out that her view of art had overlooked its moral and spiritual elements, debasing it to a level of purely material and sensuous consideration: "Yet this is dismally certain that on the whole this is what the reviewer degrades the art of painting to—something which amuses men, at best refreshes them when they are tired; think of a man spending his life in this kind." The entire concept of purely utilitarian art was totally repugnant to the Brotherhood, and of course, in Ruskin they saw an advocate of the divine in art, an attitude to which they subscribed wholeheartedly. Burne-Jones, after refusing to admit the truth of any part of the *Quarterly's* attack on *Modern Painters*, lamented the fact that a figure of such a petty nature as the reviewer would dare attack John Ruskin, "a Luther of the Arts. Thenceforward, let no one wanting to be listened to, or even respected, write twaddle upon art, for we will not have it."

Another of Ruskin's views which Burne-Jones admired and one which he felt was lacking in Lady Eastlake's review was a concept of the essential *unity* of all the arts. It is certainly no accident that the members of the Pre-Raphaelite movement, unlike most other literary figures, were as much at home in the fields of painting, sculpture, printing, and woodcarving as they were in literature; and the common denominator among the diverse individuals who comprised this movement was not the *form* in which their artistic productions were expressed, for this varied greatly, but the *function* which they sought to voice, that art was essentially the evocation of an emotional stimulus through the medium of direct narrative. Both the Pre-Raphaelites and Ruskin made this alliance of art and literature, and this was another legacy of *The Germ* to Morris's group. Although most of the contributors to the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* left the

field of art and letters, the few who remained gave evidence of having learned their lessons well. In his entire life Morris never really wrote any poetry that was not narrative in nature, and Burne-Jones's paintings are, to a very large degree, pictorial stories. In this defense of Ruskin against Lady Eastlake's attack, Burne-Jones was motivated by an attitude which was to remain with him and his fellows for the remainder of their lives.

Pre-Raphaelite fever continued to burn in the August issue of the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, which was especially noteworthy for two reasons: first, because it contained the only article in the life of the magazine to discuss *specific* Pre-Raphaelite paintings; and secondly, because it marked the appearance of the poetry of Dante Rossetti in Morris's journal. Written by Vernon Lushington, the article entitled "Two Pictures" attempted to show the world that "the Academy does not contain *all* the good pictures that have been painted this year or last," and by analyzing Rossetti's "Dante's Dream" and Madox Brown's "The Last of England," Lushington sought to gain a wider audience for paintings which, whether they be of the past or present, "quicken our faith in God and man." He especially decried the current practice of the Royal Academy of specializing in portrait and landscape paintings and clamored for more paintings which revealed the fusion of spiritual sense with material form. Rossetti himself had noted this resurgence of the Pre-Raphaelite spirit in the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* and had been first attracted to the new periodical by a complimentary reference to him which he had seen in the January issue. Edward Burne-Jones, in the course of reviewing Thackeray's *The Newcomes*, referred to Rossetti's ability to tell a story in his paintings and asked the question, "Why is the author of 'The Blessed Damozel' and the story of Chiaro so seldom on the lips of men? If only we could hear him oftener, live in the light of his power a little longer."⁹ Rossetti

⁹ Chiaro dell'Erma was the hero of Rossetti's tale "Hand and Soul," which appeared in the January, 1850, number of *The Germ*. Referring to Burne-Jones's compliment, Rossetti wrote a friend, "That notice in the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* was the most gratifying thing by far that ever happened to me—being unmistakably genuine. . . . It turns out to be by a certain youthful Jones . . . one of the nicest young fellows in Dreamland. For there most of the writers in that miraculous piece of literature seem to be." (*Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti to William Allingham, 1854-1870*, ed. G. B. Hill [New York, 1897], p. 173f.

remembered this passage when Burne-Jones called on him in June of 1856, to show him some designs he had done and to ask his opinion of their merit. It was as a direct result of this meeting that Rossetti became acquainted with Morris, Lushington, and Dixon. This meeting was an especially significant one, for not only did it bring Morris's Brotherhood into contact with the leading Pre-Raphaelite of the day but it also introduced them to some of the other major literary figures of the nineteenth century as well.¹⁰

Rossetti's three contributions to the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, "The Burden of Nineveh" (August), "The Blessed Damozel" (November), and "The Staff and the Scrip" (December), are undoubtedly the highest poetic achievement of the periodical. None, however, was written specifically for Morris's journal, and all underwent various degrees of revision in subsequent publications. "The Burden of Nineveh," the only poem in which Rossetti made direct reference to the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, was originally intended for a projected journal called *The Pen*; "The Blessed Damozel," a poem which went through four separate versions, was first printed in *The Germ*; and "The Staff and the Scrip," which draws upon medieval legend for its narrative, was begun as early as 1849. But even while Rossetti's poetry was enhancing the reputation of the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, Rossetti himself was leading the interests of its founders along lines which were to bring about the discontinuance of the magazine. He was using all his powers to exhort Morris and Burne-Jones to turn their attention to the field of art, and he sought to enlist their help in painting the ceiling of the Oxford Union with murals. Burne-Jones' journal records the venture:

Rossetti and Morris . . . were full of a scheme, and I was to put everything aside and help it. . . . There were bays above the gallery that ran around the room hungry to be filled with pictures—Gabriel equally hungry to fill them, and the pictures were to be from the Morte D'Arthur, so willed our master.¹¹

¹⁰ See for example Rossetti's letter to Robert Browning introducing Burne-Jones to him in A. A. Adrian, "The Browning-Rossetti Friendship," *PMLA*, LXXIII (December, 1958), 543f.

¹¹ G. Burne-Jones, *Memorials*, I, 158. A first hand account of this venture written by one who knew and worked with the principals can be found in V. C. Prinsep, "The Oxford Circle: Rossetti, Burne-Jones, and William Morris," *Magazine of Art*, XXVIII (February, 1904), 167-172.

So overjoyed were the members of the Brotherhood to work with Rossetti that his personality seems to have dominated their thought and action at this time. This shift of interest coupled with the gradual dissolution of the group which had conceived of the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* made the Brotherhood decide to discontinue publication at the end of the year. This decision came as early as August, however, for in that month Burne-Jones wrote, "The Mag is going to smash—let it go. The world is not converted and never will be. It has had stupid things in it lately. I shall not write for it again, no more will Topsy [Morris]—we cannot do more than one thing at a time, and our hours are too valuable to spend so."¹²

In December, 1856, the twelfth and final issue of the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* appeared. The deficit for the entire year was several hundred pounds, all of which Morris had to pay out of an inheritance. Lured by Rossetti's magnetic personality, Morris and Burne-Jones threw themselves wholeheartedly into painting. Writing to Allingham, Rossetti announced the demise of the last of the Pre-Raphaelite journals: "You will see no more of the Oxford and Cambridge. It was too like the spirit of *The Germ*. Down! Down! and has vanished into the witches' cauldron. Morris and Burne-Jones are both wonders of their kind."¹³ By the spring of 1857, the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* was all but forgotten by the disbanded Brotherhood, but the periodical did not disappear before it had made its mark on Victorian intellectual history in several ways. First, by championing the cause of Ruskin, Carlyle, Rossetti, and Browning, the magazine gained for them an audience they would otherwise not have had and thus materially contributed to the development of their reputations. Secondly, the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* provided a workshop for the early efforts of Morris and gave him an opportunity to form the ideas, values, and attitudes which were to determine the course of his mature life; and finally, and most important, the magazine added a new dimension to Pre-Raphaelite thinking by fusing social unrest with aesthetic revolt, thus laying the groundwork for such subsequent Victorian movements as Anti-Scrape, the Guild of St. George, and the Socialist League.

¹² *Memorials*, I, 108.

¹³ Rossetti, *Letters to Allingham*, p. 192.