

Another day at the Exhibition

And then how tempting a theme is that of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, whose doings and endeavours are here, on the whole, more fully set forth than in any previous exhibition! and yet very inadequately. For whilst most of the leaders of the schism are here, the prime heresiarch Rossetti is absent; and of the others nothing like a connected, or illustrative view of their course is given.

The Pre-Raphaelite pictures fitly round off the show, for as, at the first general glance over the gallery, the thing that most strikes the visitor is the variety and individuality of our artists, so, in a more detailed survey, he becomes gradually impressed as he follows the pictures in something like chronological sequence with the sudden changes that occur in the choice of subjects and the manner of looking at and representing life and external nature; the constantly increasing prominence given to the subordinate features; the apotheosis of ugliness, quaintness, and the grotesque, and the intense dwelling on details.

London Society Volume I 1862 (August p. 192)

A letter from Rossetti. He is coming to see us before long. He has some fine things at the Hogarth Club, to which he gave me a ticket. There is a man there, Edward Jones, whose work you would like amazingly. There is a tall cabinet, seven feet high, designed and painted by him from Chaucer, the legend of the little boy whom the Jews murdered, but who would go on singing, 'Alma redemptoris, evermore' till some saint, or somebody, put a grain of wheat on his tongue. It might have been done by Giotto, only Giotto could not have done it near so well. Rossetti has Dante and Beatrice in Paradise, a glorious thing. The sky is gilt, the name is put on scrolls (Hortus Eden) in the sky, and the names are written near the heads. The background is a rich rose-hedge, with birds of Paradise pecking roses, and nestling, and singing birds singing lustily. There is a floor of tall buttercups, hyacinths, and lilies, among which the five figures are treading ankle deep. Coloured calm, 'above all pain, all passion, and all pride', reigns in the atmosphere. There they walk in knowledge, love, and beauty evermore.

Letter of James Smetham 24 March 1860

I went to Ford Madox Brown's the other evening, and though I took a small dose, yet B's beautiful geniality and ingrained kindness, and that of his family; Arthur Hughes's face and retiring gentle power, . . . E. B. Jones's 'wide blue eyes as in a picture', Morris's rum and indescribable deportment (not at all like Turveydrop's)—all these things not simply pass; they *bite*.

Letter of James Smetham to Frederic Shields 1871