

which abides in the gratified passion for gathering together fine things, I made a collection of drawings, paintings, and other objects that, brought together in a focus, proved eloquent enough to convince the public that the great English Art was deserving of the exalted place I had foreshadowed. I felt privileged in my endeavour; I was proud of its accomplishment. And I fearlessly contend that my

pride was single-minded, unsordid, and honest. My efforts as a collector were crowned with distinguished success. My collection is known and appreciated by the best judges and connoisseurs all over the world. With the aid of this collection of mine, and by the exercise of voice and pen, my life-long object has been gained. The English school is now in the van!"

## A CHAPTER FROM A PAINTER'S REMINISCENCE.

### THE OXFORD CIRCLE: ROSSETTI, BURNE-JONES, AND WILLIAM MORRIS.

By VAL C. PRINSEP, R.A.

As age grows on a man he becomes unconsciously retrospective. So many bright scenes in which he has played a part have left their impression in the retina of his mind that he may surely be pardoned if he is apt to stray into the past. Yet with that past the younger generation have but little sympathy, and the old man with his anecdotes is voted that most intolerable of God's creatures, a bore.

Conscious of the thinness of the ice over which I would travel, and of the slight difference that there is between a welcome *raconteur* and a wearisome anecdotist, here am I about to plunge into personal reminiscences about well-known men long since lost to us, and times which may well be called antediluvian. I have, however, a vivid memory, and though I may blunder sometimes in dates, I am sure my facts will be correct, and let the critic point out where I err if he can.

My object is to make these men appear before the world as I saw them, and let them talk and act as they did when I knew them. And as I loved them all three, I loved the peculiarities and eccentricities which served to make up their most striking personalities, without which no one could realise their individuality.

It must be recollected that at the time I became one of the clique over which Dante Gabriel Rossetti presided, Burne-Jones was twenty-three or twenty-four, William Morris younger, and I myself not twenty! Rossetti himself was over thirty. We were all young and full of life, we loved our little jokes which we "cracked" in ways not usual, but as befitted young fellows who saw nature in the Thornton Romances and humour in the Coventry mysteries!

It was in either '58 or '59 that Rossetti asked permission to bring a young friend to our house, who, he declared, was the greatest genius of modern times. I had already made Rossetti's acquaintance and been duly impressed by the wonderful charm he exercised on the young; I was therefore very excited by the idea of meeting so great a genius. Rossetti at that time was a plump little man who generally wore a plum-coloured frock coat. He was bald for his age, and his beard was cut *à la* Shakespeare: indeed, there was a strong likeness to the great bard, save that the eyes were the eyes of an Italian, grave and dark with the *bistre* tinge round them which some great lady—I think Carlyle's Lady Ashburton—said "looked as if they had been put in with dirty fingers." His mouth was large, and his lips had what the novelist would call a sensuous appearance. His voice was singularly sweet and caressing, and he talked in a kind of melodious chant. The young genius was Burne-Jones, then—and for years, until his fame made it necessary to assert his second name—known to us as Ned Jones. He was a thin, pale-faced man, with high cheek bones and round, very blue, gentle-looking eyes. His hair, straight and without curl, was apt to stray over his forehead. At that time he was very shy, and, until you came to know him, you might wonder that one said to be so talented should be so silent. When he did speak it was in an earnest, impressive manner. It was on this occasion that Rossetti fairly took my breath away by proposing that I should do one of the decorative panels in the Union at Oxford. "But," I stammered, "I can't paint or draw."

"That makes no difference—there's one of my friends going to join us who has never painted anything, but you'll see he'll do a stunning thing."