

**DAYS WITH THE
VICTORIAN POETS;
ROSSETTI, MORRIS, MRS.
BROWNING**

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Days with the Victorian poets; Rossetti, Morris, Mrs. Browning by Various

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VARIOUS

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A Day
with
Rossetti.

BEATA BEATRIX.

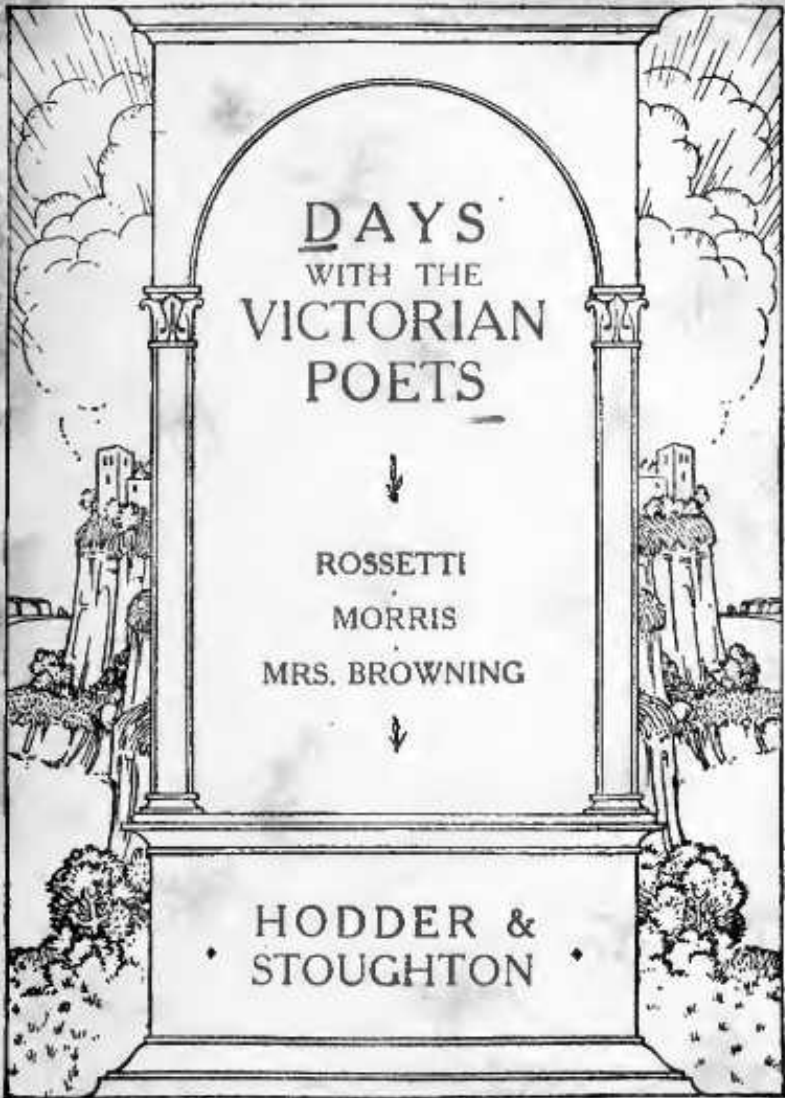
TATE GALLERY

From a painting by Rossetti.

Because mine eyes can never have their fill
Of looking at my lady's lovely face,
I will so fix my gaze
That I may become bless'd, beholding her.

*(Dante Alighieri,
Translated by D. G. Rossetti).*





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DAYS
WITH THE
VICTORIAN
POETS



ROSSETTI
MORRIS
MRS. BROWNING



HODDER &
STOUGHTON

A DAY WITH ROSSETTI.



HOT July day of 1871. The Chelsea streets refracted the scorching sunlight, with that peculiar sultriness common to low-lying districts: the river flowed with a metallic glitter, and no cool breath was wafted from its long sleek ripples, to temper or invigorate the sweltering air. The leaves of the London plane-trees, dulled with dust, endured the heat with a perceptible effort: for it was now between ten and eleven a.m., and the sun stood high in heaven. But in that solid, roomy, old-fashioned dwelling, No. 16, Cheyne Walk, with its "look of equal nobility and shabbiness," (known as Tudor House from the tradition that it had been a nursery-house for Henry VIII's children), there was no suggestion of the solstice. Its beautiful lime-trees, yellow with honeyed blossom, threw depths of shade across the grassy garden: its windows were dark with

A DAY WITH ROSSETTI.

midsummer foliage. It was as deeply secluded as the heart of a wood from the torrid splendour of the heat : and not unreminiscent of some strange and tropic wood, in the number and variety of its out-door inhabitants. A gorgeous peacock trailed his tail along the path : a deer's antlers jutted between the lower boughs of the trees. An armadillo here, and a kangaroo there : a wombat, a wallaby, a chameleon. Owls of every sort and size, parrakeets, jackdaws, and a raven disported themselves in this Paradise of the grotesque : and as for rabbits, hedgehogs, dormice, squirrels, and other ordinary British animals,—only to mention a few,—they were so numerous as to defy description. Never did a more heterogenous collection of *fauna* exist,—outside the Zoological Gardens—than the extraordinary *ménage* which inhabited the spacious garden grounds of 16, Cheyne Walk.

Meanwhile the master of these furred and feathered folk was languidly rising and dressing. The whole aspect of his apartment was dark, almost forbidding. Thick, dark velvet curtains covered the windows : heavy hangings were round the bed and on the walls. An enormous mantelpiece of carved dark oak took up nearly

A DAY WITH ROSSETTI.

one side of the room from floor to ceiling : old black picture-panels enhanced the general effect. One would hardly have believed in the blaze of sunshine without, or in the magnificent colour-sense of the man who deliberately surrounded himself with such a funereal weight of shadow.

Yet Rossetti, at this period of his life, was at his best of health, of prosperity, and with what went with him for happiness : he was free to follow his bent in all respects, to indulge any whim, whether within or without the house. If caprice kept him up at night untill three o'clock and later : if insomnia, or indolence, prevented him rising till towards noon, as now : if he chose to fill the house with rare china, and the garden with rampant animals, there was none to say him nay. Autocratic by nature and habit, he was at present autocratic by dint of circumstance : and in every respect his own master, and a law unto himself.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti was now a man of forty-three, — rather short, distinctly stout, good-looking in a sense, but not impressively so. His large grey eyes, his dark brown hair, his dark auburn beard and moustache conveyed but little intimation of his Italian origin : still less