

**THE BLESSED  
DAMOZEL: AND  
OTHER POEMS**

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The Blessed Damozel: And Other Poems by Dante Gabriel Rossetti & Hannaford Bennett

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**DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI & HANNAFORD BENNETT**

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OTHER POEMS**



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# The Blessed Damozel

And other Poems

By

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

With Biographical Introduction

by

Hannaford Bennett



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## Biographical Introduction

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DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI, or, to give him his baptismal name, Gabriel Charles Dante Rossetti, was born in London. But his parentage was almost entirely Italian. His father, Gabriele Rossetti, was an Italian refugee, exiled from his native country for his connection with the Liberal movement at Naples. He settled in London about 1824, and married Frances Polidori, who was half Italian and half English. Gabriele Rossetti obtained an appointment as Professor of Italian at King's College; he devoted his leisure to the study of the *Divine Comedy*, and is remembered by two or three unique volumes of comment on his great countryman.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti was born on the 12th of May 1828, at 38 Charlotte Street, Portland Place. He was sent first to a private school in Foley Street, but his education was received



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principally at King's College. From an early age he evinced a natural inclination towards painting, and on leaving school in 1843 joined Cary's Art Academy in Bloomsbury, among whose pupils was John Everett Millais: subsequently he studied at the Royal Academy, though he never proceeded beyond its antique section. About this time Rossetti saw and greatly admired the paintings of Ford Maddox Brown. Tired of Academy technicalities, and hoping to find a royal road to painting, he wrote asking to be admitted to Maddox Brown's studio as a pupil. Maddox Brown took him without fee, but much to his disappointment set him to work on "pickle-pots" and "still life." Rossetti left after a few months to share a studio with Holman Hunt. In 1849 his first picture, "The Girlhood of Mary Virgin," was exhibited at the Free Exhibition in a gallery at Hyde Park Corner, and purchased by the Marchioness of Bath for £80. It is a picture of high merit, and an admirable example of his early art. He seldom exhibited again, but just before his

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death "Dante's Dream," regarded by Sir Noel Paton as among the half-dozen supreme pictures of the world, was exhibited at Bristol.

Rossetti had displayed a youthful bent for writing as well as painting, and at about twelve years of age had written a poem, *Sir Hugh the Heron*, which was privately printed by his grandfather. A copy still survives in the British Museum. He sent poems to Leigh Hunt with a request for advice. Leigh Hunt dissuaded him from adopting poetry as a profession as "too pitiable to be chosen in cool blood." But side by side with his art studies he had cultivated his poetical faculty. While he was still under age he composed *The Blessed Damozel*, and *My Sister's Sleep*. In 1848 Rossetti, with Millais, Holman Hunt, and the sculptor Thomas Woolner as the leading spirits, formed the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, the object being, according to Ruskin, "to paint nature as it is around them with the help of modern science." In the pages of the short-lived periodical, the *Germ*, four numbers of which appeared in 1850,

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the qualities and limitations of the Pre-Raphaelite school were well set forth. Rossetti himself contributed *The Blessed Damsel* and the beautiful prose poem *Hand and Soul*.

In 1856 Rossetti wrote a little, including *The Burden of Nineveh*, for the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, which was the practical outcome of the *Germ*. The contents of the present volume indeed are taken from these two publications. In the spring of 1860, after a long engagement, he married Elizabeth Eleanor Siddal, the daughter of a Sheffield cutler, a gifted and beautiful woman, who was the model for many of his best known pictures. It was during his short married life that he published his first volume, which consisted of translations, called *The Early Italian Poets*, and now known as *Dante and His Circle*. In 1862, two years after his marriage, Mrs Rossetti took an overdose of laudanum and died. Overwhelmed with grief at her loss, her husband buried in her coffin the MSS. of a volume of poetry which had for the most part been