

JOHN BRETT IN SICILY

Gillian Kemp

When the Pre-Raphaelite artist John Brett died in 1902, the President of the Royal Astronomical Society, Henry Hall Turner, acknowledged both Brett's artistic and astronomical achievements. He described Brett as 'an artist of eminence' who came strongly under the influence of the Pre-Raphaelite movement. He also recognised that Brett had been 'a devoted astronomer throughout his life' and expressed the view that Brett's trained eye was a most effective astronomical weapon, and his actual observations are deserving of every respect . . .¹

In this obituary, Turner takes account of the importance of Brett's visual expertise in his contributions to astronomy. Turner also notes the significance of the Pre-Raphaelite movement in Brett's paintings. However, Brett used Pre-Raphaelite principles to interpret his environment in more than just his artistic work. Brett's 'trained eye' assisted him in recording scientific information; there is evidence to show that Brett used Pre-Raphaelite principles in order to interpret his astronomical observations as part of the 1870 Solar Eclipse Expedition to Sicily.

Brett was, first and foremost, an artist. He had already received several commissions and had taught drawing to young ladies even before he was admitted to the Royal Academy Schools at the age of twenty-two.² As a young boy, he had also been interested in astronomy, constructing his own telescopes from second-hand parts.³ However, in order to seriously study the heavens and participate in astronomical discussions, a nineteenth century astronomer had to have both time and money; instruments were expensive, and making and recording detailed observations took many hours.⁴ Brett's financial success as an artist gave him the opportunity to enjoy astronomy as an avocation and allowed him to pursue two subjects that at first appear to be unrelated.

Although it would seem that painting and astronomy in Brett's time had little in common, the progress of learning about the heavens relied strongly on accurate drawings used in conjunction with a variety of instruments. In the early nineteenth century, the astronomer William Herschel had recognised that 'seeing is in some respect an art which must be learnt.'⁵ Brett had acquired the skill of careful observation by way of his artistic training, and his interest in

recording nature in realistic detail, as propounded by the Pre-Raphaelites, gave him an advantage when it came to recording celestial phenomena.

Brett began his artistic career as a figure painter, and he also created landscape pictures. He was familiar with the writings of John Ruskin, and, through his friendship with Coventry Patmore and his wife Emily, he became acquainted with members of the Pre-Raphaelite movement. Emily's family regularly entertained artists at their home, and Brett was frequently invited to share their hospitality, along with William Holman Hunt, John Everett Millais and Dante Gabriel Rossetti.⁶ Once the Patmores were married, these artists, including Brett, were welcomed at the Patmores' home, and it was during these occasions that Brett became attracted to the close study of nature practised by his Pre-Raphaelite acquaintances.⁷

Brett did not fully appreciate what the Pre-Raphaelites were trying to achieve until he met John William Inchbold in Switzerland in 1856.⁸ It was then that he became interested in the realistic portrayal of the world around him. His resultant works after 1856 extend the Pre-Raphaelite principle of close attention to nature into the realms of the developing sciences of the time, with which he also had a fascination. *The Glacier of Rosenloui* (1856), for example, together with *The Val d'Aosta* (1858) display Brett's clear and detailed knowledge of geology. His coastal scenes, such as *Massa, Bay of Naples* (1864), and many of his later works reveal an awareness of meteorology. These attempts to capture the beauty of his surroundings in such scientific detail gave an additional dimension to Brett's astronomical observations. By focusing on the minutiae, whether around him on earth or in the skies above, he learned to transcribe exactly what he saw.

It is perhaps not surprising that Ruskin, with his own keen interest in science, paid attention to Brett's endeavours. With the power of Ruskin's reputation and encouragement, Brett's desire to combine his scientific interests with his love of nature was given credence in artistic circles. His paintings, such as *The Glacier of Rosenloui*, demonstrate the use of intense colour favoured by the Pre-Raphaelites, his growing preference for accurately recorded panoramic views of landscapes, and his love of scientific detail. These qualities strengthened the link between Brett's art and science.

Like many Victorian gentlemen, Brett went abroad for the winter; in 1863 and 1864, he visited the south of Italy. There he painted coastal scenes near Capri and Sorrento, the pictures displaying his attention to cloud formations

and the details of the geological strata in the mountains.⁹ Despite the warm and pleasant Mediterranean winter climate in Sicily, travel was difficult. The roads were poor, and the hilly landscape made transportation difficult. Further hazards were instituted by some of the local inhabitants. New landowners had destroyed some of the forests, thereby removing natural protection from flood waters and the fierce winter wind, known as the sirocco. In Naples, the new Italian government's lack of interest added to Sicily's isolation and encouraged the growth of the Mafia, an organisation that had evolved to protect the large estates of absentee landlords.¹⁰

In this environment, where roaming bands of brigands had become a feature of the countryside, Brett and the other members of the Solar Eclipse Expedition established their observatory at Augusta in December, 1870. Other observation posts were established at Catania and on the slopes of Mount Etna. Separate expedition groups were stationed in Spain and Gibraltar, all with the purpose of studying the impending eclipse of the sun.

Worries about how long the sun would last were of real concern to the Victorians, and the spectacle of a solar eclipse was an awesome event. In the mid nineteenth century, the discoveries of sun spots and the effect of solar disturbances upon terrestrial phenomena had engendered great interest.¹¹ However, scientists did not begin to show interest in the phenomena visible during an eclipse until 1842, when Francis Baily described the appearance of very bright points of light visible around the edge of the moon.¹² Baily's publication of the occurrence, which later became known as 'Baily's Beads',¹³ stimulated further investigations of total solar eclipses; the aim of the expedition to Sicily in 1870 was to expand the knowledge relating to the sun's corona.

In the account of W.G. Adams, who was in charge of the Augusta party, Brett is recorded as an observer 'with a reflector for sketching the corona'.¹⁴ In a letter dated November 1870 to Joseph Norman Lockyer, a fellow astronomer and expedition member, Brett responds to a request for some questions 'which might be useful to regulate the efforts of men who propose to make drawings'.¹⁵ Brett sets these out in a separate letter (of similar date, but with an unspecified addressee) as ten detailed points headed 'Some particulars to be especially noticed by those observers who make drawings of the Corona'.¹⁶ This correspondence clearly indicates that Brett's opinion on what should be drawn in relation to the corona was actively sought by his scientific peers.

These instructions would have been written for the draughtsmen who took

part in the expedition. These men were not only artists in their own right, but a number of them were also Fellows of the Royal Astronomical Society (Brett himself was not to become a Fellow until 1871). The draughtsmen, who worked at desks or easels beside their telescopes, would have had to draw very quickly once the eclipse began. When he defined exactly what should be recorded during the eclipse, Brett, in his earlier years a protégé of Ruskin, may well have been influenced by an address Ruskin gave to students in which he said that

*'nothing ought to be tolerated, but simple bona fide imitation of nature . . . Their [artists'] duty is neither to choose, nor compose, nor imagine, nor experimentalize; but to be humble and earnest in following the steps of nature, and tracing the finger of God.'*¹⁷

As it was impossible to make a complete drawing during the eclipse, the draughtsmen created quick sketches with only the important features duly noted, to be finished afterwards. In a 1994 article in the *Journal for the History of Astronomy*,¹⁸ Alex Soojung-Kim Pang argues that solar eclipses in the 1860s and '70s were so impressive that it would not have been difficult to recall what had been observed. However, observations from memory can be deceptive. Did John Brett record what he actually saw?

In his letter to Lockyer, Brett writes, almost as an aside, that he was thinking of making his own scale drawings of the corona. Not only was he familiar enough with mathematics and scale to describe the power and field of the various astronomical instruments he used, but as an artist he also used trigonometry to calculate the optimal size of his canvases.¹⁹ Precision was important to Brett, and in many of his sketches of landscapes he conscientiously records the exact time at which he made the drawing; no doubt this habit percolated into his recordings of astronomical phenomena.

The introduction of telescopes with attached cameras, such as the photoheliograph devised by Warren de la Rue in 1858, meant that the stages of the total solar eclipse could be actually recorded and new hypotheses formulated from the data.²⁰ Although photographic telescopes were employed during Brett's expedition in 1870, their capabilities were limited. Copies of the photographs taken could be made, but the developing process was still in its infancy, and subtleties of detail and shadow could not be accurately reproduced.²¹ Furthermore, the cameras used on the expedition could not deal

with the extreme contrast in illumination produced by the sun's corona during the eclipse. Since it was not possible to mass produce the photographic results it remained very important for the solar phenomena to be drawn.²²

The transportation of all of the instruments for the Solar Eclipse Expedition to Sicily, including cameras, developing equipment and telescopes was the responsibility of John Brett. Despite a shipwreck on the Italian coast, Brett and the equipment eventually arrived safely in Catania. There, with other members of the party, he practised with the instruments and tested them before travelling on to Augusta where the observatory had been established.²³ His pencil sketch of the observatory depicts the 'rough shed of the English observers' and a series of tents of varying shapes and sizes which were occupied by English sappers and members of the expedition.²⁴ The drawings of each tent are quite detailed, with the guy ropes clearly delineated. The observatory itself appears to be a wooden barn-like structure with a large portion of its roof missing. There are a few pencilled clouds in the sky, but there is absolutely no foreground detail in the picture. This had the effect of drawing immediate attention to the shapes and positioning of the tents, the drawings of which commences halfway up the page.

The clouds in the sketch only hint at the signs of bad weather, but visibility of the eclipse itself was hampered by such rapid cloud movement that some observers experienced more of the eclipse phenomena than others. Brett notes in his commentary that this should be 'duly taken into account when the value of the observations come to be considered'.²⁵ His anxiety about the success of the English contribution to the Sicilian expedition because of the weather is illustrated in a letter, dated 13 January 1871 to Arthur Cowper Ranyard, a keen astronomer and mathematician who was also in charge of the expedition funds. In the letter, Brett asks 'whether our people in Spain succeed so far as to make our observations useless?'²⁶ However, from this letter, it is clear that in spite of the frustration with the weather conditions, Brett considered his own contribution worthwhile and was concerned that his own drawings should be engraved. 'About my drawings; who will engrave them, if anybody? Le Keux could do it perfectly.' He also expressed his willingness to submit a report of his observations to the Royal Astronomical Society.

Initially, Brett was uncertain as to the astronomical value of his observations. This was due not solely to the weather, but because what he actually saw was not what he had expected. Although in his report to the Royal

Astronomical Society members, Brett describes in quite vivid detail what he saw; he writes, 'I must confess I was extremely vexed not to see anything like the corona I expected; I should never have called this a corona at all.'²⁷ The end of the recording appears to have come as an anti-climax. He goes on to say in his report that 'the appearance on the whole was far more like terrestrial conflagration than I expected' and in a footnote to his report he adds, 'Especially the combustion of wood in a baker's oven when nearly exhausted'.

Fortunately, Brett's observations of the corona were corroborated by Charles Burton, an eminent mathematician and astronomer. Brett writes 'I begged Mr. Burton, my next neighbour in the observatory, to bring his experienced eye to bear upon it, which he did.'²⁸ Burton was known for his 'very keen eyesight',²⁹ and his opinion was considered worthy of note; not only is he mentioned in John Brett's reports of the eclipse, but also in a report by Ranyard. It is therefore reasonable to suggest that Brett's observations were accurately recorded.

Brett's disappointment at the overall effect of the eclipse certainly did not stop him from proposing reasons for the terrestrial nature of the streamers he had observed. H. H. Turner's obituary of Brett reminds readers that Brett's conclusions relating to this phenomenon were inaccurate, but Turner nevertheless pays tribute to Brett's artistic skill, noting that '... Mr Brett, no doubt, recorded very faithfully what he saw . . .' although 'when he unfortunately proceeded to draw deductions he is more open to criticism'. Turner admits that whilst Brett's strong opinions were sometimes met with scepticism, it was often found that 'Mr. Brett's keen sight had not misled him'. These comments demonstrate that overall Brett was generally accepted by the astronomical community.

Brett's expedition report also draws attention to his view of the scientific apparatus he employed. He considered his equipment to be beautiful objects in their own right and uses terms such as 'small but beautiful' and 'exquisite' to describe the different types of telescope he used.³⁰ To Brett, the beauty of these instruments was an important feature, as worthy of being recorded in his report as the beauty of the first contact of the solar eclipse itself.

One might expect a report to the learned men of the Royal Astronomical Society to be somewhat restrained in its construction, but Brett writes a vivid account in which he uses his observations of colour, weather conditions and astronomical experience to create a visual record for the reader. It is like a

painting in words and was perhaps influenced by the style of Ruskin employed in his discussions on Turner's art in *Modern Painters*, with which Brett was familiar.

The descriptions of colour, with the variance of hues, are important features throughout Brett's report. The use of bright colours was a recognised component of Pre-Raphaelite paintings, and Brett, as an artist in the Pre-Raphaelite mould, vividly articulates the variety of colours he saw. He describes, for example, the 'tinge of redness towards the Sun's limb', which had been drawn to his attention by Mr Burton as 'of the colour of iron rust'. 'The whole limb' Brett recalls, 'was literally crowded with prominences, varying in colour from white and yellow to pink and nearly crimson.'

His writing not only describes the colourful details of the eclipse, but also generates a mood of wonderment. During the eclipse in Augusta, the sense of awe felt by the observers is recorded in the 'silence within the observatory' which contrasts with the 'increasing roar and howling of the populace without . . .'.³¹ These comments are pertinent because in his *Academy Notes* for 1859, Ruskin wrote of Brett's painting *Val D'Aosta*, 'I never saw the mirror so held up to Nature; but it is Mirror's work, not Man's'. Whilst he agreed that Brett had executed a realistic portrayal of the valley, Ruskin felt that Brett had failed to imbue it with any element of emotion; a factor he considered to be fundamental when depicting nature in art.³² Yet, it can be determined from Brett's account of the eclipse, albeit some ten years later, that he was not unresponsive to the emotional appeal of nature. He is aware that the edge of the moon was 'beautifully defined on the Sun's disk . . .' and he tells how, in the heavens, he 'beheld a beautiful sight' whilst once again he uses adjectives such as 'delicate' and 'exquisitely' to describe his observations of the corona.³³

Nevertheless, the effect of the eclipse on the terrestrial surroundings does not appear to have been as exciting nor as novel as he had anticipated. Before the period of totality, Brett went outside and looked at the landscape, apparently expecting something special to be occurring, but he noted nothing particularly remarkable. However, there is a note at the foot of a page of his report in which he makes an interesting comment:

'I believe that the wonderful character of the terrestrial appearance recorded during eclipses is to a great extent the measure of the observer's ignorance of ordinary cloud phenomena. Such appearances (to judge from my own

experience) would hardly strike a landscape-painter as very abnormal; but the truth is, that very few persons besides artists have ever paid enough attention to clouds and their effects upon landscape scenery to enable them to answer the most elementary questions respecting them'.³⁴

In this footnote, he quite clearly refers to his experience as a landscape painter. He considers that his knowledge of cloud formations distinguishes him from the ordinary observer, and this comment appears to suggest that because of his awareness and appreciation of the natural world, his observations are more accurate than those of other members of the party. This may indeed be so. After all, he was used to studying terrestrial scenery in great detail, having followed the Pre-Raphaelite principle of closely studying nature by working out of doors as exemplified by Hunt and Millais. His early contact with Inchbold in Switzerland had convinced him of the importance of recording the landscape as scientifically as possible, which allied with his interest in meteorology. Therefore it is not surprising that he felt his experience brought an added dimension to his observations.

What seems a little surprising is that later in the report, he admits to exaggerating his drawing of the phenomena in order to 'show its character, for the refinement of drawing necessary to represent accurately so delicate an image is forbidden by the coarseness of the materials employed'. It is a strange comment, and at first reading, Brett appears to be rejecting the Pre-Raphaelite tenet of honestly representing nature to which he has subscribed hitherto; but the fact that he makes a point of commenting on his drawing method is significant. By admitting to this 'deceit', he confirms his awareness that in this particular environment the tight boundaries imposed by this particular Pre-Raphaelite principle had to be loosened a little for two reasons.

First, the details of the solar corona were difficult to transcribe onto paper. Brett was limited by the tools available, and neither photoheliographs nor pencils could compete with the human eye in capturing the complex amount of detail in the solar corona. Secondly, there was the pressure of producing a large volume of work during the short time of the eclipse. There was only one chance to record the phenomena, and speed, accuracy, and a good memory were essential. Exaggerating particular details was a means of remembering them. His own comment on his drawing during the eclipse was that 'though

necessarily done afterwards, [it] gives a very fair general representation of what I saw'.³⁵ Brett was sure that his method was the best way to react in the circumstances and was satisfied that his artistic skills enabled him to reproduce the details he had drawn so swiftly.

Some years after the expedition, Brett remarked that sketching was used only as a reminder of a scene.³⁶ He stressed the importance of memory in capturing the detail of a landscape, and his remarkable ability to do this apparently impressed the writer Beatrix Potter.³⁷ His later sketching activities, even his oil sketches, are known from his records to have been produced in quite quick succession and any deficiencies in their execution he blamed on the speed required to complete them because of poor weather.³⁸ In spite of the tension surrounding the event, Brett was used to working at speed even at the time of the solar eclipse, and he was confident in his capabilities to produce accurate work.

The fast pace at which Brett executed his sketches and even some of his paintings is in contrast to Millais and Hunt who spent many hours working on their landscapes, a section at a time.³⁹ Whilst it was the practice of the Pre-Raphaelites to work out of doors, unlike Brett, neither Hunt nor Millais was interested in weather patterns, but preferred to concentrate more on the plants and vegetation around them.⁴⁰ Brett's interest in meteorology led him to include the specific cloud formations taking place at the time of his work and to replicate it just as accurately as other aspects of the natural world.

During his time in Sicily, Brett not only made some sketches of the landscape but also sketched architectural details on buildings which are reminiscent of Ruskin's own interest in such features. However, it is perhaps not surprising bearing in mind his fascination with geology that Mount Etna, which was then emitting puffs of smoke, particularly caught his attention. His sketches include little notes on the colour of the smoke and the position of the vents on the volcano. In an article for *Nature* which was subsequently published in February 1871, he admits to having watched the mountains 'at all hours of the day for a week past, in the hopes of getting a correct outline of it for pictorial purposes'.⁴¹ The dates in Brett's sketchbooks indicate that he drew his sketches of Etna before the December eclipse and again in January.

One of the results of his fascination with Mount Etna was his painting *Etna from the Heights of Taormina* (1870-71),⁴² which he undertook during his time in Sicily. It was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1871 and described by the

reviewer in the *Art Journal* of 1871 as being in the style 'once known as pre-Raphaelite'.⁴³ It portrays a panoramic coastal scene with Mount Etna covered in snow in the distance. The viewer looks down towards the sea, its variation in depths defined by the use of dark and light colours, and then across to the barren terrain of the distant, snow covered Etna. Here Brett's enduring interest in geological features is demonstrated in the detail of the gullies and valleys of the mountains which are clearly visible. A few trees in the foreground break up the desolation. The technical skill which originally attracted Ruskin to Brett's work is still obvious in the execution of this picture.

This painting also exemplifies some of the skills Brett utilised during the eclipse expedition. His concern in recording precise detail is particularly visible in the meticulous attention he has given to the architectural features of the buildings to the right of the picture, even though they are not the main focus of the painting and are very small. The varying tonal qualities he so vividly described in his expedition reports, are visually demonstrated in the ways he has produced the effects of light and shadow in this landscape. This picture also exhibits his ability to produce a wide panoramic view that is visually acceptable in proportion and scale. His mathematical prowess and visual acuity must have been particularly useful in producing accurate and speedy representations of his astronomical observations. However, the variety and detail of the content in this painting suggest that its execution was a far more leisurely undertaking than the speed at which he had been expected to operate during the eclipse.

By the mid 1860s Brett favoured wide panoramic views and coastal scenes, and for some while he had been moving away from the detailed foregrounds prominent in the Pre-Raphaelite art which had influenced his earlier work. Yet the Pre-Raphaelite principle of realistically capturing the natural world in paint was one which Brett continued to support. Visual accuracy was a significant feature of his work, both as an artist and as an astronomical observer. Although as an artist he was used to reproducing and interpreting his environment in media such as pencil, oils, and watercolours, there are strong indications that the speed at which he had had to operate during the eclipse caused difficulties in drawing the corona with total Pre-Raphaelite fidelity. It is therefore to Brett's credit and a sign of how important he considered the need for precision in his observations that he enlisted the opinion of a fellow observer and did not rely totally on his own professional eye. Brett's interests in geology and meteorology were influential in helping him to interpret his observations, as

illustrated by his display of pride in knowing the significance of the cloud formations during the eclipse which he carefully recorded in his report to the Royal Astronomical Society.

Evidence that John Brett was keen to be recognised as an astronomer has been demonstrated by his eagerness to write reports and reviews on the expedition and to have his drawings engraved. Since he was asked to provide questions for consideration during the eclipse, Brett's opinion was valued by his scientific peers, even though his interpretation of his observations sometimes drew criticism from his colleagues. Brett's contribution as an amateur astronomer was formally recognised when he was made a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society in 1871. In his obituary, the President of the R.A.S. recorded that Brett's astronomical efforts, especially during his sojourn in Sicily, proved to be of great interest. He was also acknowledged as an excellent artist who, in his landscape paintings, endeavoured to adhere to Pre-Raphaelite principles.⁴⁴ John Brett's artistic talent, his skill in the use of scientific instruments, and his knowledge of the natural environment enabled him to make a worthwhile contribution to astronomy through the medium of art.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

- ¹ H. H. Turner, 'John Brett' Obituary in *The Report of the Council to the Eighty-second Annual General Meeting*, Volume LXII. 4 February 1902 pp. 238-240.
- ² Christopher Newall, *John Brett—The Pre-Raphaelite Years in John Brett: a Pre-Raphaelite on the Shores of Wales* (National Museums & Galleries of Wales, 2001) p. 15.
- ³ H. H. Turner, 'John Brett' Obituary.
- ⁴ Allan Chapman, *The Victorian Amateur Astronomer, Independent Astronomical Research in Britain 1820-1920* (Praxis Publishing Ltd., 1998) p. 33.

- ⁵ Simon Schaffer, On Astronomical Drawings, in Caroline A. Jones and Peter Galison (eds), *Picturing Science, Producing Art* (Routledge, 1998) p. 442.
- ⁶ Ian Anstruther, *Coventry Patmore's Angel: A Study of Coventry Patmore, his wife Emily and 'The Angel in the House'*, (Haggerstone Press, 1992) p. 48.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 61.
- ⁸ Allen Staley, *The Pre-Raphaelite Landscape* (Yale University Press, 2001) p. 169.
- ⁹ Christopher Newall, *John Brett—The Pre-Raphaelite Years* p. 21.
- ¹⁰ Anton Blok, *The Mafia of a Sicilian Village 1860-1960* (Polity Press, 1974) preface.
- ¹¹ A. Pannekoek, *A History of Astronomy* (George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1961) p. 404.
- ¹² Lucien Rudaux and G. De Vaucouleurs, *Larousse Encyclopedia of Astronomy* (Paul Hamlyn, London 1966) p. 166.
- ¹³ J. B. Zirker, *Total Eclipses of the Sun* (Princeton University Press, 1995) p. 18.
- ¹⁴ 'Report of Professor W.G. Adams, on Observations of the Eclipse of December 22nd, 1870, made at Augusta, in Sicily' in *Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society from November 1870 to June 1871*, Volume XXXI, pp. 155-163.
- ¹⁵ Letter from John Brett to J. N. Lockyer dated November 1870 (Royal Astronomical Society archive).
- ¹⁶ Letter from John Brett—no addressee—dated November 1870 (Royal Astronomical Society archive).
- ¹⁷ George P. Landow, *John Ruskin: Chapter One: Ruskin the word-painter* (Oxford University Press, 1985, sourced from The Victorian Web: <http://65.107.211.206/ruskin/pm/1.html>).
- ¹⁸ Alex Soojung-Kim Pang 'Victorian Observing Practices, Printing Technology and Representations of the Solar Corona (1): The 1806s and 1870s', *Journal for the History of Astronomy*, Volume 25, 1994, pp. 249-274.
- ¹⁹ Ann Sumner, Introduction in *John Brett: a Pre-Raphaelite on the Shores of Wales* (National Museums & Galleries of Wales, 2001) p. 12.
- ²⁰ A. Pannekoek, *A History of Astronomy* p. 405.
- ²¹ Alex Soojung-Kim Pang 'Victorian Observing Practices' p. 256.
- ²² *Ibid.*

- 23 Report of Professor W. G. Adams, on Observations of the Eclipse of December 22nd, 1870, made at Augusta in Sicily, in *Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society from November 1870 to June 1871*, Volume XXXI, p. 155.
- 24 Sketch by John Brett, 'Observatory and Camp Augusta 22 December 1870, 8 am, (National Maritime Museum Picture Library, Greenwich).
- 25 John Brett, 'Italian Report', *Nature* p. 309.
- 26 Letter from John Brett to Arthur Ranyard dated 13 January 1871 (Royal Astronomical Society archive).
- 27 Extract from a Report of the Eclipse Expedition of 1870, at Augusta, Sicily by John Brett Esq. In *Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society from November 1870 to June 1871*, Volume XXXI, p. 166.
- 28 *Ibid.* p. 263.
- 29 On the Zodiacal Light. By A. C. Ranyard Esq. In *Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society from November 1870 to June 1871*, Volume XXXI, p.171.
- 30 Extract from a Report of the Eclipse Expedition of 1870, at August, Sicily By John Brett Esq., p. 163.
- 31 *Ibid.* p. 164.
- 32 Allen Staley, *The Pre-Raphaelite Landscape* pp. 177-178.
- 33 Extract from a Report of the Eclipse Expedition of 1870 p. 165.
- 34 *Ibid.* p. 164.
- 35 *Ibid.* p. 166.
- 36 David Cordingly, John Brett in Wales, in *John Brett: A Pre-Raphaelite on the Shores of Wales* p. 34.
- 37 *Ibid.*
- 38 Kate Lowry, A Technical Note on Brett's Paintings, in *John Brett: A Pre-Raphaelite on the Shores of Wales*, p. 38.
- 39 Allen Staley, *The Pre-Raphaelite Landscape* p. 28.
- 40 *Ibid.* p. 26.
- 41 John Brett, Mount Etna, in *Nature* 2 February 1871, Volume 3 p. 266.
- 42 Allen Staley, *The Pre-Raphaelite Landscape*, plate 146, p. 185.
- 43 *Art Journal*, 1871, p. 177.
- 44 H. H. Turner, 'John Brett' Obituary.

BOOK REVIEWS

Charles Fairfax Murray: The Unknown Pre-Raphaelite

by David B. Elliott, with a Foreword by John Christian. Lewes: The Book Guild Ltd., 2000. xiv, 266 pages, 12 illustrations, appendix, endnotes, chronology, select bibliography, index. Special offer to members: £10.

It should be said at once that this is the first "life" of Fairfax Murray and that it is written by his grandson. Unlike some filial biographers, Mr. Elliott seems not to have had any privileged access to private papers — though family knowledge is in the background — so he has had to rely on his own very diligent research in public archives and printed sources. The result is an admirably objective account of an unusual and, in some respects, a fascinating life.

Issue might be taken with the sub-title because, although Murray knew the Pre-Raphaelite circle very well during the first part of his life, the overall impression left by this biography is that he was, above all things, a notable collector and public benefactor. This leads to a point which rather worried the present reviewer: the question of exactly how, and by what stages, someone who, initially, was working very hard to "make ends meet", became a rich man. That he became wealthy by business in the art world is clear; but the mechanics, and the progressive degrees of wealth, elude us — either through filial discretion or lack of surviving materials.

Murray made his money, built up his collections and made his reputation as a connoisseur and dealer by slogging hard work; the disciplined application of a discerning eye and a retentive memory; and by the kind of ruthless marshalling of his time and energy which very few people can, or even wish to, achieve. It might almost be said that he wore himself out by constant travelling; and nothing in his restless life is more extraordinary than his return to England from Italy — in the midst of the Great War and after a serious stroke — to put his affairs in order under English, rather than Italian, law. This episode demonstrates both his will-power and determination, and also his conscientious feeling that his two separate families — one in Florence and the other in London — should be properly provided for after his death. (He died in January 1919, in his seventieth year.) Murray spent most of his life in male company, moving about and working, yet he had twelve children and maintained two comfortable households where he was essentially a visitor rather than a resident. His grandson says that he loved his children but he was seldom with