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WILLIAM MORRIS

by MONTAGUE WEEKLEY

Great Lives

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CHRONOLOGY

- Birth at Walthamstow, March 24, 1834.
Move to Woodford Hall, 1840.
Enters Marlborough College, 1848.
Goes up to Exeter College, Oxford, 1853.
First number of *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*
published, 1856.
Articled to G. E. Street, 1856.
The Oxford Union Paintings, 1857.
The Defence of Guenevere, 1858.
Marriage to Jane Burden, April 26, 1859.
Red House, Upton, 1860.
Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co., 1861.
26 Queen Square, Bloomsbury, 1865.
The Life and Death of Jason, 1867.
The Earthly Paradise, 1868-1870.
Kelmscott Manor and first journey to Iceland,
1871.
Love is Enough, 1873.
Dissolution of partnership, 1875.
Studies dyeing at Leek, 1875-1877.
Sigurd the Volsung, 1876.
The Society for the Protection of Ancient Build-
ings and the Eastern Question Association,
1877-1878.
Merton Abbey, 1881.

studying closely his subject's parents, brothers, and sisters, can hope for little enlightenment from William Morris's kin. Perhaps physical heredity is the one important clue - the Sheltons were a tough and long-lived stock, but the Morrises seem to have been a good deal less sturdy. Mrs. Morris herself lived to the age of eighty-nine. In spite of his broad frame and the intense energy with which he pursued an extraordinarily varied career, Morris's stalwart appearance was never quite a true index to his constitution. As a young child he was delicate, and this helps to explain his quickness in learning to read and a great devotion to books while he was still a very small boy. At the age of four he was enjoying the Waverley novels.

In 1840 the Morrises went to live at Woodford Hall, an ample Georgian mansion with a large park and a hundred acres of farm attached to the estate. It was very much a squire's house, standing close to Woodford church and having a private gate that opened into the churchyard. Epping Forest stretched immediately beyond the park fences.

Amid such surroundings Morris enjoyed a blissful childhood, riding in the forest on a Shetland pony and exploring its thickets with his brothers. Delight in trees and wild flowers was fostered by this great tract of woodland, then unspoilt,

while plenty of vigorous open-air life built up his health.

Woodford has since become one of the less happy extensions of London, but at the period of Morris's boyhood the country must have been very charming. The hornbeams and beeches of the forest took firm root in his memory, and were afterwards transplanted to the landscape of many of his poems and prose romances. In the future England of *News from Nowhere*, Morris tells his hosts that he

" was born and bred on the edge of Epping Forest ; Walthamstow and Woodford to wit.

" * A pretty place, too,' broke in Dick ; ' a very jolly place, now that the trees have had time to grow again since the great clearing of houses in 1955.'

" Quoth the irrepressible weaver : ' Dear neighbour, since you knew the Forest some time ago, could you tell me what truth there is in the rumour that in the nineteenth century the trees were all pollards ? '

" This was catching me on my archaeological natural-history side, and I fell into the trap without any thought of where and when I was ; so I began on it, while one of the girls, the handsome one, who had been scattering little twigs of lavender and other sweet-smelling herbs about the floor, came near to listen, and stood

behind me with her hand on my shoulder, in which she held some of the plant that I used to call balm : its strong sweet smell brought back to my mind my very early days in the kitchen-garden of Woodford, and the large blue plums which grew on the wall beyond the sweet-herb patch, - a connection of memories which all boys will see at once.

" I started off: ' When I was a boy, and for long after, except for a piece about Queen Elizabeth's Lodge, and for the part about High Beech, the Forest was almost wholly made up of pollard hornbeams mixed with holly thickets. But when the Corporation of London took it over about twenty-five years ago, the topping and lopping, which was a part of the old commoners' rights, came to an end, and the trees were let to grow.' "

It would not be easy to conceive of a boyhood environment better calculated to nourish the two main impulses of Morris's life - he was a romantic, and he also strove to create contentment, not only for himself, but for others. How many of the world's legends and fairy-tales have had a forest setting, which, like sea or mountain, yields mystery and adventure. At Woodford he had a toy suit of armour, and, thus accoutred, rode his pony in the forest, a miniature knight errant. It was a curiously apt plaything for the

future author of *The Defence of Guenevere*, his first volume of poems, which is packed with allusions to knightly trappings, weapons, and heraldry.

Both by instinct and upbringing he was a countryman, for whom thorough contentment necessarily implied a country home. He abhorred "the Great Wen" as heartily as Cobbett, who used this savage epithet to express his hatred of London; Morris admired *Rural Rides* and shared some of Cobbett's strongest prejudices. In London he was always inclined to be restive, and only reconciled himself to living there because he was happily absorbed in various activities that could not be pursued away from it. As he grew older there was something quite poignant about his love for natural beauty, particularly as he had a strangely insistent fear of death. It seemed as though he clung desperately to these constant manifestations of life when he wrote: "How I love the earth and the seasons and weather and all things that deal with them. . . ."

The estate and the country round Woodford afforded other kinds of outdoor amusement - fishing in the little river Roding and in the Lea, or shooting rabbits and birds. Neither then nor at school and at Oxford did he show any liking for ordinary games, but he remained a keen fisherman, and afterwards this sport became his chief open-air relaxation.

The household at Woodford Hall was not so very different from that of a prosperous family in much earlier times. Old traditions were respected, and there is even a faintly "Paston-*esque*" flavour attached to its character, as described by Mr. Mackail. They brewed their own ale, made butter and baked bread ; Twelfth Night was an important celebration and the Masque of St. George was duly performed.

Indoors, he went on consuming books with avidity - Lane's *Arabian Nights*, *The Old English Baron*, and, besides the Waverley novels, he was fond of Captain Marry at. Then, as in after life, Morris was an unusually swift reader and had a capacious memory. Learning to write came a good deal later ; he spelt badly as a boy, and as he grew older his spelling became defiantly reckless. Orthography was something of which he was impatient, possibly because in his eyes its discipline had a comparatively modern taint.

The books at Woodford Hall included a copy of *Gerard's Herbal*[^] and Morris pored over the wood-engravings of plants with the eye of a naturalist, but even at that time he probably appreciated their beauty. Years later the volume proved, not only a source of inspiration for wallpapers and textiles, but a compendium of useful notes on vegetable dyes.

At the age of nine he went to a dame school

in Walthamstow, riding over on his pony, but it was not long before the Misses Arundale, who kept it, moved to other premises very near Woodford Hall. There he continued as a pupil until the death of his father in 1847. Three years before he died, Mr. Morris made a fantastically lucky investment in a Devon copper-mining concern ; the pound shares, of which he held 272, were at one period actually being bought for £800 each. When Morris was a young married man, the value of this investment fell very heavily, and its decline had a considerable bearing on his later career.

A nomination for the new public school, Marlborough College, had been bought for his son while Mr. Morris was still alive, and he entered in 1848, remaining until 1851. During Morris's day the school, which had only been opened in 1843, did not seem destined to attain the reputation which it now enjoys. Discipline was altogether lax ; the headmaster was hopelessly incompetent ; there were no organised games, and boys below the fifth form were herded for class-teaching into one large schoolroom ; the extent of personal freedom allowed to the Marlburian of that period must have been something almost unknown in the annals of famous public schools. The life was, in fact, perfectly adapted to **the** nature of an unusual boy, able by reason of his

physical strength to defend his oddities from any risk of bullying. A schoolfellow remembered him as "good-natured and kind, but with a fearful temper." This latter tendency, already noticeable, gave birth to many anecdotes and legends in after years, for his temper was always liable to squalls and could be positively cyclonic.

Although he never became attached to the school, certain interests of his own were followed up during the time there. On whole holidays in the summer he would go off to Savernake Forest, quite often by himself, or walk over the Wiltshire Downs, investigating barrows, Roman villas, and other remains in the neighbourhood. The school library contained a good number of books on archaeology and architecture. Aided by his excellent memory, Morris left with a knowledge of English Gothic that would have done credit to an ecclesiastical antiquary. His reading was accompanied by visits to churches, and already he showed a keen observation of architectural details and the ability to describe buildings from memory; his gifts in this respect seem always to have been extraordinary. Otherwise he had the normal schoolboy crazes for things like birds' eggs and silkworms.

The religion of the family at home was essentially evangelical, and it is curious that he should have been sent to Marlborough, a High Church

school. The romantic ingredients of Anglo-Catholicism naturally appealed to Morris's taste ; he left the school with holy orders as his intended profession, a choice partly influenced by his favourite sister Emma, who married a High Church parson. At Christmas 1851 he came home to read for Oxford with a private tutor, F. B. Guy, afterwards Canon of St. Albans and headmaster of the Forest School, Walthamstow. Guy was then an assistant master at the Forest School, and also coached a few private pupils at his own house. He was a High Churchman, whose wide range of tastes included pictures and architecture ; from him Morris seems to have learnt happily, and came to read Greek and Latin with very fair fluency.

Soon after she was widowed, Mrs. Morris had moved to a third home in the same corner of Essex. Water House, Walthamstow, where they lived until 1856, was a smaller Georgian house, not altogether unlike Woodford Hall, with moated grounds in place of Woodford Hall's spacious park and farmland. It was situated very close to Morris's birthplace on Clay Hill and took its name from the wide moat beyond the lawn, which harboured pike and perch, so that he could get fishing at his door, as well as bathing with **his** brothers, boating, or skating when opportunity offered. Surrounded by the moat lay a **small**

island, covered with aspens, hollies, hawthorns, and chestnuts, an obvious delight for summer holidays.

The choice of Exeter as a college at Oxford was due to a connection with Marlborough, where several Exeter men were on the staff. In June 1852 he travelled up to Oxford and passed the College entrance examination. By an odd chance, there sat next to him a candidate fated to become his closest friend for life. Burne-Jones remembered how his neighbour in the hall of Exeter finished the Horace paper early, folded it, and wrote on it, " William Morris."

CHAPTER II

Oxford - Burne-Jones — the Brotherhood - influences - the
Oxford and Cambridge Magazine.

MORRIS and Burne-Jones did not come up to Exeter as undergraduates until January 1853, their residence being delayed for a term owing to the overcrowded state of the college. Oxford was then standing on the threshold of big changes, but its outward aspect had altered little since the time when Samuel Johnson became a commoner of Pembroke.

The railway had arrived, after a bitter war with the university, but the other approaches would not have seemed unrecognisably different to the eyes of earlier generations. Morris, however much he was disillusioned with dons and most undergraduates, carried away a memory of its beauty that was later expressed in some of his writings. An extract from *A Dream of John Ball*, which appeared in 1888, deserves comparison with Matthew Arnold's famous rhapsody on "the last enchantments of the Middle Age." " ' Hast thou seen Oxford, scholar ? ' A vision of grey-roofed houses and a long winding street and the sound of many bells came over me at that word as I nodded ' Yes,' to him, my mouth full of salt pork and

rye-bread." In the lecture on " Art under Plutocracy," which he delivered thirty years later at University College, with Ruskin in the chair, Morris asked his audience :

" How does it fare therefore with our external surroundings in these days ? What kind of an account shall we be able to give to those who come after us of our dealings with the earth, which our forefathers handed down to us still beautiful, in spite of all the thousands of years of strife and carelessness and selfishness ?

" Surely this is no light question to ask ourselves ; nor am I afraid that you will think it a mere rhetorical flourish if I say that it is a question that may well seem a solemn one when it is asked here in Oxford, amidst sights and memories which we older men at least regard with nothing short of love."

Morris had been much alone during his school-days and, throughout life, his nature, unusually self-sufficing and remote, tended to keep him rather isolated from intimate friendship. Now for the first time he was able to make contact with someone of his own age, sharing his romantic fervour and finding, as time went on, more and more common grounds of interest. Edward Burne-Jones had come up from King Edward VI School, Birmingham, with the same purpose as Morris - of taking Orders. He, too, was a devout

Anglo-Catholic, whose admiration for Newman had even survived his hero's desertion to Rome. Morris and he were not the first or last young men who have mistaken an imaginative responsiveness to High Church ritual for a priestly vocation.

They got to know each other almost at once, and in the course of a few weeks were constantly together, voicing their disappointment with Oxford, which seemed to them to be a listless place and quite cold to their enthusiasms. Solemnly dismayed, they wondered how this indifference could be associated with what had not long since been the battlefield of the Tractarians. In later life, Burne-Jones described the beginning of his friendship with Morris, how they went for "angry walks" and "sat together in the evenings reading." He has also recorded the personal impression which Morris made *on* him then, both in ways and physical appearance: "He talked with vehemence and sometimes with violence. I never knew him languid or tired. He was slight in figure in those days; his hair was dark brown and very thick, his nose straight, his eyes hazel-coloured, his mouth exceedingly delicate and beautiful." Morris's tutor at Exeter epitomised him in his note-book as "a rather rough and unpolished youth, who exhibited no special literary tastes or capacity, but had no difficulty in mastering the usual subjects of examination."

A photograph taken when he was twenty-three, seated by a table and almost full-face, wearing the vast bow tie of prevailing fashion, and dressed in quite formal style, shows a finely shaped head, a firm, well-modelled mouth, and eyes whose set expression conveys a strong hint of forcefulness. At Oxford he was given the nickname of " Topsy," after the character in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, owing to his conspicuously thick mop of hair, and later he was always " Topsy " or " Top " to his intimates.

Burne-Jones was the only surviving child of a struggling picture-frame maker and gilder of Birmingham, who had been left a widower when his son was born. The full disparity between their means was not known to Burne-Jones, until he came, during one vacation, to stay at Walthamstow, where he was rather taken aback by the splendour of Morris's home. Without the friend whom fate had projected into the very same college, Morris might have been even more lonely than at Marlborough, for some of the undergraduates then at Exeter seem to have been earnest reading men, while the others were hearty oarsmen or riotous hunting men. It is doubtful whether, with his instinct for solitude and self-absorption, he would have enjoyed Oxford at all, had not Burne-Jones and the latter's small group of Birmingham friends at Pembroke gathered him into their circle. He and Burne-Jones confined

themselves to it until they went down. In the company of Burne-Jones and the Birmingham colony at Pembroke, Morris could give vent to the enthusiasms seething within him ; they talked, read aloud, and argued with the unflagging gusto of gifted undergraduates drawn into a congenial set.

Some account of these other men helps to an understanding of Morris's growth at Oxford, and even concerns his work later, for Charles Joseph Faulkner, a mathematical scholar of Pembroke, was a partner in the firm of craftsmen-decorators which Morris afterwards founded in London.

Faulkner had not been at King Edward VI School with the other members of the group, but came from the Proprietary School, Birmingham, and only got to know them after he went up to Pembroke. Glimpses of him, caught here and there in Mr. Mackail's biography of Morris and Lady Burne-Jones's *Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones*, are most attractive. A fine mathematician, and of a staunch and direct character, he was eventually elected to a fellowship at University College. Without having a real instinct for any of the crafts, he seems to have been capable with his hands, and ready to do odd jobs in the firm's workshops when he could spare the time. During the early period of the business he acted as accountant. Faulkner was devoted to Morris until the time of his death, which occurred four years

earlier than Morris's, and he not only took a share in the work of the firm, but followed Morris into the Socialist League.

Richard Watson Dixon (1833-1900) was the only one of the group besides Morris and Burne-Jones to make anything like a name for himself in after-life. A Birmingham schoolfellow of Burne-Jones, he came up to Pembroke in 1851, and got to know Faulkner and, more intimately, Fulford, yet another member of the circle. Dixon is now almost forgotten, but his poetry has found a place in *The Oxford Book of Victorian Verse*, and he also had some reputation as an ecclesiastical historian. He was made an honorary canon of Carlisle as well as an honorary fellow of Pembroke : to Mr. Mackai's biography of Morris he contributed recollections of "The Brotherhood" at Oxford, which give a vivid impression of Morris and his friends during this time.

William Fulford, for whom Burne-Jones had a great admiration when they were at King Edward VI School together, might have appeared superficially to be the brightest figure of them all. A most energetic person and a brilliant and overwhelming conversationalist, he was destined to be one of those people whose fascinating talk is never reinforced by achievement ; he was an ardent Tennysonian, steeped in Shakespeare and Keats, and also devoted to music. Lady Burne-Jones

knew him, while as a girl she was living in Birmingham, and pictured him as " a small man, well and strongly made, and very careful about his dress ; not handsome, but when he was happy delightful expressions would come over his face ; his laugh was very taking when it came." Afterwards he took Orders and never rose from obscurity.

Cormell Price, for shortness called " Crom," did not come up to Brasenose from Birmingham until Morris and Burne-Jones had been some time at Exeter. He was Burne-Jones's closest school friend, and later became Headmaster of the United Services College, Westward Ho, where Mr. Rudyard Kipling, Lady Burne-Jones's nephew, was one of his pupils. His charm seems to have captivated everybody, and it is clear that he was the most popular member of the group.

It must not be forgotten that, during their first year at Oxford, both Morris and Burne-Jones were still a good deal immersed in theology, ecclesiastical history, and other subjects linked to the career that each still contemplated. Burne-Jones, especially, who had more leaning than Morris towards abstract thought, kept closely in touch with Church polemics.

As far as his actual work for a degree was concerned, Morris's biting comments on lectures, where translations were furnished from " the

approved crib version," show how he despised the teaching provided at that time by his college for "pass men." The lecturer asks : "' Mr.—, will you just translate that passage ? ' (Another crib version is given.) ' *Precisely* so, *precisely* so ; quite right, quite right, Mr.—.' And so we gradually limp through a page or two which none of the men has bestowed ten minutes upon, and leave the room for another exhibition of crib-repetition." Such was his impression of classical teaching at Exeter, where he later became an honorary fellow. With nothing more formidable in prospect than the pass degree examination, he could devote the best part of his energy to pursuing those interests which gradually absorbed him through life. Out of this Oxford period and its constant atmosphere of discussion, its literary excitements, discoveries in art, and journeys abroad, the ultimate Morris emerged with his main aspirations fairly well defined.

" I remember," Dixon wrote long afterwards, " Faulkner remarking to me, ' How Morris seems to know things, doesn't he ? ' And then it struck me that it was so. I observed how decisive he was : how accurate, without any effort or formality : what an extraordinary power of observation lay at the base of many of his casual or incidental remarks, and how many things he knew that were quite out of our way ; as, e.g., architecture.

One of the first things he ever said to me was to ask me to go with him to look at Merton Tower."

At this time Tennyson was supreme among living poets, and Fulford, who had a gift for poetry reading and a good voice, read *In Memoriam* to his friends. Morris himself was much influenced by Tennyson ; a certain echo, especially from *The Ballad of Onana*. *The Lady of Shalott*, and *The Sisters*, can be detected in his first book. But, although Tennyson was enthroned by the circle with so much reverence, its other idol, Ruskin, was to affect Morris's views more profoundly than any writer, living or dead. Morris had read *Modern Painters* before he came up to Oxford ; *The Stones of Venice* was published in 1853, during his first year at Exeter, and the noble chapter on " The Nature of Gothic " coloured his whole outlook on life ; to him it became a gospel of final truth and wisdom. Had he ever been asked to contribute to one of those symposia, beloved of newspaper and magazine editors, on " Books That Have Influenced Me," he could have had no hesitation in supplying an answer. Ruskin's digressions, in that brilliant analysis, on the lessons to be drawn from the psychology of mediaeval craftsmanship penetrated to the root of Morris's impulses. His later Socialism was but the logical outcome of a passionate belief in the lightness of Ruskin's conclusions. In later life he had no

religious faith, but his deepest convictions had already been uttered for him :

" It is verily this degradation of the operative into a machine, which, more than any other evil of the times, is leading the mass of the nations everywhere into vain, incoherent, destructive struggling for a freedom of which they cannot explain the nature to themselves."

" It is not that men are ill fed, but that they have no pleasure in the work by which they make their bread, and therefore look to wealth as the only means of pleasure."

" It would be well if all of us were good handicraftsmen in some kind, and the dishonour of manual labour done away with altogether."

Such passages from " The Nature of Gothic " are worth quoting and remembering as part of the creed governing Morris's later activities ; there can be few great men whose lives betray a dominating influence so unmistakable.

In the autumn term of 1853, Morris and Burne-Jones found rooms in college, having hitherto been crowded out, except for sleeping accommodation. Much time was now spent in reading all kinds of books, and each was able to introduce the other to some fresh corner of romance. Burne-Jones knew Thorpe's *Northern Mythology*, and by

this Morris was first attracted to Scandinavian epic, afterwards the source of his highest inspiration as a poet. They revelled in mediaeval chronicles and became devoted lovers of Chaucer, but it was not until the autumn of 1855 that Burne-Jones found Southey's reprint of the *Morte d'Arthur* in a Birmingham bookshop. He could not afford to buy it, but Morris, who was staying in Birmingham, "got it at once and we feasted on it long."

Art enthusiasms expanded with visits to the illuminated manuscripts in the Bodleian Library and to Merton chapel, partly thirteenth century, and famous for its early stained glass. The chapel roof had recently been painted by Hungerford Pollen, a fellow of the college, who, as designer and critic, became an important figure in the official art world of South Kensington. As yet neither of the friends was familiar with the work of the Italian or Flemish primitives, a later and rapturous discovery, and it is characteristic of each that, when they did get to know them, Morris was chiefly delighted by the Flemings and Burne-Jones by the Italians.

During the first part of their time at Oxford, religious doubts very nearly steered them Rome-wards ; after this crisis, Romanticism set them on a course leading to new ideals.

As an undergraduate, Morris spent holidays in
CM

France, where the cathedrals - Chartres, Amiens, and Beauvais - enthralled him with admiration for early French Gothic ; throughout life they stood first in his praise as the peerless achievements of art. From the splendour of the French cathedrals he turned to delight in that landscape of contentment, the placid charm of the northern French countryside, with its regiments of poplars and friendly, hedgless fields. A journey to Belgium gave him the opportunity of seeing works by Memling and Van Eyck. These painters remained unrivalled in his estimation.

There is a revealing letter from Burne-Jones to his father, written early in 1854, telling him of a winter visit to some well-known ruins near Oxford :

" I have just come in from my terminal pilgrimage to Godstowe ruins and the burial-place of Fair Rosamond. The day has gone down magnificently ; all by the river's side I came back in a delirium of joy, the land was so enchanted with bright colours, blue and purple in the sky, shot over with a dust of golden shower, and in the water, a mirror'd counterpart, ruffled by a light west wind - and in my mind pictures of the old days, the abbey, and **long** processions of the faithful, banners of the cross, copes and croziers, gay Knights and Ladies by the river bank, hawking-parties and

all the pageantry of the Golden Age - it made me feel so wild and mad I had to throw stones into the water to break the dream. I never remember having such an unutterable ecstasy, it was quite painful with intensity, as if my forehead would burst. I get frightened of indulging now in dreams, so vivid that they seem recollections rather than imaginations, but they seldom last more than half-an-hour ; and the sound of earthly bells in the distance, and presently the wreathing of steam upon the trees where the railway runs, called me back to the years I cannot convince myself of living in."

Small wonder that Burne-Jones, with his highly nervous constitution and health always unstable, should, during this year, have suffered from headaches, caused, as he assumed, " by over excitement." Such dreams of mediaeval pageantry and romance show how strong was the imaginative ferment within them, for the mood of this letter applies almost equally to Morris.

Burne-Jones had taken to sketching trees and flowers in Baglcy Wood and making landscape studies in the country round Oxford, while Morris was in the habit of drawing bits of architecture or floral pattern on any paper that happened to lie under his hand. He was also taking brass rubbings. To Price, during one Easter vacation, he writes that he

" went ' a-brassing ' near the Thames on the Essex side ; I got two remarkable brasses and three or four others that were not remarkable : one was a Flemish brass of a Knight, date 1370, very small ; another a brass (very small, with the legend gone) of a priest in his shroud ; I think there are only two other shrouded brasses in England."

An enthusiasm for the work of living painters was stirred by the publication of Ruskin's Edinburgh lectures, where the two friends first read about the Prc-Raphaclitcs. Millais's " Return of the Dove to the Ark " was presently on show at Wyatt's shop in the High ; later they saw other paintings by Millais, Rossetti, and Holman Hunt, at the Academy or in private collections. Lady Burne-Jones tells how she first met Morris, in 1855 : " At the Royal Academy, where Wilfred Heeley had taken me, we saw him standing before Millais's picture of ' The Rescue,' examining it closely : as he turned to go away, Heeley said, ' That's Morris,' and introduced us to each other ; but he looked as if he scarcely saw me. He was very handsome of an unusual type - the statues of mediaeval Kings often remind me of him - and at that time he wore no moustache, so that the drawing of his mouth, which was his most expressive feature, could be clearly seen. His eyes always seemed to me to take in rather than to

give out. His hair waved and curled triumphantly."

Combe, manager of the Clarendon Press at Oxford, was a collector of Pre-Raphaelite pictures, and at his house they found, among other things, a water-colour by Rossetti of Dante drawing the head of Beatrice and disturbed by people of importance. "We had," wrote Burne-Jones, "already fallen in with a copy of the *Germ*, containing Rossetti's poem of *The Blessed Damozel*, and at once he seemed to us the chief figure in the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood."

When he was almost twenty-two, Morris began, quite suddenly, to write those early poems which were read to the group of friends amazed and entranced by their strange beauty. Dixon recollected how "one night, Crom Price and I went to Exeter, and found him with Burne-Jones. As soon as we entered the room, Burne-Jones exclaimed wildly, 'He's a big poet.' 'Who is?' asked we. 'Why, Topsy' - the name which he had given him." He read them the first poem that he had ever written, *The Willow and the Red Cliff*, and to their expressions of admiration made the now famous retort: "Well, if this is poetry, it is very easy to write." Most unfortunately, the manuscript of *The Willow and the Red Cliff* did not survive; it was probably destroyed, along with several others, at the time

when Morris was choosing from among his early poems those to be printed in *The Defence of Guenevere*.

The idea of " The Brotherhood " was a project that developed gradually among the knot of friends at Oxford ; it seems to have originated with Burne-Jones, who referred to himself as " a monk," and about whom there always hung a strong flavour of monasticism. It was inspired to some extent by the revived enthusiasm for religious communities that followed in the wake of the Oxford Movement and has since been a prominent feature of Anglo-Catholicism. Morris was for a time won over to this misty scheme, and, although it was never realised, the conception helped to prepare his mind for those propagandist associations which consumed so much of his later life. From Oxford he graduated, not only as a Bachelor of Arts, but as a crusader.

As early as the spring of 1853, Burne-Jones tells Price, then still at school, in a letter :

" I have set my heart on our founding a Brotherhood. Learn Sir Galahad by heart. He is to be the patron of our Order. I have enlisted *one* in the project here, heart and soul. You shall have a copy of the canons some day.

" {Signed)

" GENERAL OF THE ORDER OF SIR GALAHAD."

The recruit is, of course, Morris, while the injunction to " learn Sir Galahad by heart " obviously refers to Tennyson's poem. This letter was, in the same year, followed by another to the same correspondent, and signed

" ✠ EDOUARD

" Cardinal de Birmingham

" O.J."

The second letter was fantastically couched in language suggesting that of a pastoral letter, not later in date than the seventeenth century, but full of references to current theological matters. The contrast between them shows the alternating winds, now ecclesiastical and now romantic, that filled the sails at this time.

When he came of age, Morris inherited a personal income of £900 a year, and such means, riches to an undergraduate, he seriously thought of using as an endowment for " The Brotherhood." It is difficult to believe that the settlement would ever have been founded ; one remembers the " pantisocracy " of Sou they and Coleridge, that wild plan of an American Utopia, which these romantic predecessors conceived, but never attempted. Moreover, Faulkner and one or two of the other Birmingham men had first-hand impressions of the sordid misery in and around a big industrial city. Their notions of

practical reform seem to have lain in the direction taken by Frederick Denison Maurice and Kingsley - Christian Socialism, the Working Men's College - or were probably influenced by Carlyle's *Past and Present*.

During the summer term of 1855, the endless discussions of the group were finally concentrated on an ambition that materialised in the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*. Dixon first infected Morris with the idea, and, since they planned a monthly magazine to be fed by contributions from both universities. Heelcy, another Birmingham schoolfellow, now at Trinity, Cambridge, was asked for his support. The Cambridge side was little represented in the magazine, and it was run entirely from Oxford, being financed at a heavy loss by Morris. The periodical was being launched when Florence Nightingale was engaged in her grim struggle with the horrors of Scutari ; during those months, Morris was absorbed in writing poems inspired by an intensely romantic medievalism, or composing a magazine article in praise of Amiens Cathedral.

By the end of the year preparations were complete and the first number came out on the 1st of January, 1856. Morris, having provided the money, seems to have acted as editor, but he very soon transferred this responsibility to Fulford, who accepted an honorarium of £100 a

year. " Topsy " was then, as ever, the last man for such a job, for he was always a careless corrector of proofs, and without the necessary arts of cajolery and patient vigilance.

Sales of later numbers declined heavily, and, after twelve issues, the publishers, Messrs. Bell & Daldy, had a great stock of unsold copies left on their hands, while the enterprise cost Morris several hundred pounds. Only four numbers of the Pre-Raphaelite *Germ* were published, and the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* died when it was a year old. Both, of course, are memorable in the second great period of English Romanticism (the first stretches over Gray, Chatterton, Coleridge, and Keats) that begins with Tennyson and ends in 1909 with the death of Swinburne.

Rossetti contributed three of his most important poems to the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* : *The Burden of Nineveh*, *The Blessed Damozel*, and *The Staff and Scrip*. *The Blessed Damozel* was subjected by its author to a long process of revision, which recalls Gray's interminable work on the *Elegy*, and the version printed in the issue for November differed from that which had been published in the *Germ*.

The poems and prose tales by Morris are among the best things he ever wrote ; in the opinion of some critics he never surpassed in either medium the work of this period. His tales have much

of the intense, sharp beauty of the poems, and both were born of a mood that scarcely re-appeared at all after the publication of *The Defence of Guenevere*. Some of the titles given to the poems were changed when they came to be included in the latter volume. *Pray but One Prayer for Ale*, which is perhaps the best of Morris's lyrics, became *Summer Dawn*. It has been curiously ignored by most critics, although it appears in *The Oxford Book of English Verse*. *The Chapel in Lyoncss* is a fine thing in the group of Arthurian poems later added to his first book, but the splendid *Riding Together* was omitted. The last verse, especially -

*We rode back together
In the winter weather
From the broad mead under the hill ;
No cloud did darken
The night ; we did hearken
How the hound bay'd from the hill,*

has a richer inspiration than some poems which found their way into *The Defence*. Reviewing Browning's *Men and Women*, for the March number, Morris made one of his two solitary attempts at literary criticism. Always afterwards he had a vigorous contempt for critics and disdained their interest in his own works.

During the long vacation of 1855, Morris,

together with Burne-Jones and Fulford, had set off on a walking tour in France, beginning at Abbeville. From this town they moved on to •Amiens, where, according to Fulford, " Jones was speechless with admiration " when he saw the Cathedral, while " Morris surveyed it with calm joy." Journeying on foot, an economy for the sake of Burne-Jones and Fulford, was interrupted at this point by Morris's lameness, which drew a characteristic torrent of fury from him, " filling the streets with imprecations on all bootmakers." He made a valiant attempt to advance further in French carpet slippers, but ten miles of walking with this equipment crippled him hopelessly. They stayed only three days in Paris, going to the Louvre and the Opera, but the restorations of Notre-Dame were in progress, and Morris, who had already told the others of this evil, led them to Chartres as soon as he could. From there they came to Havre by way of Rouen and Caudbec. Before Morris and Burne-Jones left France for England, doubts, which had so long weighed on both minds, were replaced by a decision - taken as they walked, one August night, on the quay of Havre. There and then it was settled that the former should become an architect and the latter a painter.

Some months later, Morris wrote to his mother from Oxford, confessing his change of purpose,

and explaining his reasons for abandoning the idea of Holy Orders. It was the first of several shocks that she was destined to receive, for she died in 1894, only two years earlier than her son. Burne-Jones must have grasped his resolution with anxieties that Morris could not be expected to share ; he chose what was, in any case, the more hazardous path, and followed it without turning aside. " That," he wrote in after years, " was the most memorable night of my life."

During the autumn term of 1855, Morris was reading hard for his degree, and he arranged to serve his articles with Street, then practising as an architect in Oxford. He passed the final schools, and wound up his life as an undergraduate in eager anticipation of starting work in Street's office at the beginning of the coming year. William Allingham's *Day and Night Songs* was published at this time, with an illustration to *The Maids of Elfen-Mere* by Rossetti, who was furious at the way in which it had been engraved on wood by Dalziel. Morris and Burne-Jones were, however, immensely taken with the illustration, and the former was at once inspired to make drawings and engrave them on wood-blocks himself. This itch to do, personally, something that he had seen was always a strong characteristic ; a lecture, for instance, by Emery Walker, on early type-faces,

excited in him an urge to print, and the Kelmscott Press was thus conceived.

At the end of this term, Burne-Jones actually met the great Rossetti in London, approaching him with every symptom of tense hero-worship. An introduction by Vernon Lushington, who was a Cambridge contributor to the magazine, was followed by an invitation from Rossetti to come and see him in his studio. " He received me very courteously and asked much about Morris, one or two of whose poems he knew already, and I think that was our principal subject of talk, for he seemed much interested about him. . . . I stayed long and watched him at work, not knowing till many a day afterwards that this was a thing he greatly hated - and when for shame I could stay no longer I went away, having carefully concealed from him the desire I had to be a painter."

After hesitating for some time as to whether or not he would take a degree, Burne-Jones finally gave up all thought of it and settled down in Chelsea, unable to concentrate on anything except painting. Morris went into Street's office in January 1856, lodging in St. Giles's ; he now grew long hair, henceforward never used a razor, and, fortified by these significant changes, set out to make professional acquaintance with " The Nature of Gothic."

CHAPTER III

Architecture — London - **Rossetti** - *The Defence of Guenevere* — marriage — **Red House** — **Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Company** - **Queen Square**.

GEORGE EDMUND STREET (1824-1881) was a scholarly influence during the later phase of the Gothic revival, while, as an enthusiastic patron of the Pre-Raphaelites, he had a further passport to Morris's approval. The final period of the revival is important for those developments in domestic architecture and decoration which were largely inspired by three of his pupils - Morris, Philip Webb, and Norman Shaw. Street, after working as one of Sir Gilbert Scott's assistants, practised in Oxfordshire, and had been established for some four years in Beaumont Street, Oxford, when Morris came to serve articles with him. The chief triumph of Street's career was the commission for the Law Courts in the Strand, a prize won from Scott himself.

Webb was a pupil at the time of Morris's arrival, and their meeting led to a lifelong association, which embraced the work of the firm, the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, and, finally, Socialism. He built notable town and country houses, among them Clouds, near

Salisbury, the home of the Wyndham family, and Rounton Grange, Northumberland, for Sir Hugh Bell, the ironmaster and father of the famous Gertrude Bell. A genuine craftsman-builder, Webb declined commissions for work that he could not supervise personally, and this attitude seems to have been typical of his character.

Occupied in Beaumont Street during the day, Morris went round to spend evenings in term time with those members of "The Brotherhood" still at Oxford. Much of his leisure was given to writing more poetry or prose tales, and he now began to try his hand at illuminating, carving in wood, and clay-modelling. He ran up to London for most week-ends, seeing a great deal of Burne-Jones in his Chelsea lodgings, where the latter was now hard at work, his ambition strengthened by hopeful praise from Rossetti : at this time, when Burne-Jones had already surrendered to Rossetti's fascination, Morris began to succumb to it as well.

There is about the most arresting figure in the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, the London-born child of an Italian political fugitive, much **that** suggests the character of some Renaissance grandee - prodigally sensual, magnificently generous, **with** an assertive **will and a** keen eye **to a** bargain. As **English** poet-artist **he stands** second to Blake, whom he admired intensely ; his

genius was an orchid flowering within the hot-house of a purely literary imagination, and never warmed by the sun of life. When he first became intimate with Morris and Burne-Jones, he was being helped by Ruskin, who proved a generous, but interfering, patron. Rossetti had a conviction that the high-water-mark of English romantic poetry had been passed with the death of Keats, while, on the other hand, romantic painting was a new world open to conquest. "If any man," he declared, "has poetry in him, he should paint, for it has all been said and written, and they have scarcely begun to paint it." His views were expounded with all the persuasive power of a brilliant advocate, aided by what Lady Burne-Jones described as "the peculiar charm of his voice, with its sonorous roll and beautiful cadences." In his eyes men were either potential painters or potential buyers of pictures - he saw Morris as one who might combine both virtues - and his immense generosity towards younger artists was one of the most attractive elements in his nature. He could, however, be formidably sarcastic as well as humorous and "slangy."

In the autumn of 1856, Street transferred his office to London, a move that gave Morris and Burne-Jones the opportunity of sharing rooms in Bloomsbury. And now, too close to the magnetism of Rossetti's personality, Morris's apprenticeship

with Street broke down at the end of the year. For a time he did try to keep on working in Street's office during the day, drawing at a life school in the evenings, but obviously this effort of divided allegiance could not be sustained.

A second change of plan, following so soon on the first, necessarily troubled Morris a good deal, and during the two years that he devoted to painting he was inclined to be sullen and overwrought. His mother could not be expected to look on this development with anything but dismay, for to her it must have appeared as the final stage leading to depraved company and moral ruin. He and Burne-Jones now found other quarters, better suited to their work and the latter's means, at 17 Red Lion Square, rooms that Rossetti had rented with Walter Deverell some years previously. There they were faithfully served by a maid whom they called "Red Lion Mary" - a delightful creature, such as Dickens would have loved to portray. She was full of intelligence, resource, and humour, and one can well imagine that she needed all these qualities in keeping house for them, carrying sundry messages, making models' draperies, or in the many other responsibilities that were thrust on her capable shoulders. She found Morris's temper trying enough, but she once charmingly

declared that, " though he was so short-tempered, I seemed so necessary to him at all times and felt myself his man Friday."

Morris had already bought Arthur Hughes's " April Love " from the Academy of 1856, which was acquired by the Tate Gallery in 1909, and a landscape by Madox Brown. He now worked at painting with all the concentrated energy that lay in him, but, even so, he found at this time a new interest that became his chief occupation in life. The rooms in Red Lion Square had been taken unfurnished, and Morris was seized with the idea of designing furniture and getting it made to his specifications by a local joiner. Tables and chairs, resembling, as Rossetti expressed it, " incubi " and " succubi," found their way into the premises, and, with much more difficulty, a strange settle-cupboard of vast proportions. In the volume of caricatures, *Rossetti and His Circle*, the genius of Mr. Max Beerbohm has given us " Topsy and Ned Jones Settled on the Settle in Red Lion Square." Everything was fantastically ponderous and mediaeval, but there were surfaces spread invitingly to the brush, so that Rossetti, irresistibly attracted by such opportunities, set to work at once on designs for the panels.

In die summer of 1857, Rossetti's eager eyes were drawn to some tempting and more important

surfaces in the new hall of the Oxford Union Society, which is now the main reading-room of the Society's library. He successfully enlisted the architect's support for a scheme of ten mural paintings, and came back to collect a team of painters who would undertake the work with him. The record of this ill-starred venture is one of technical ignorance and rash ardour that culminated in a humiliating fiasco. Rossetti and his assistants began work on walls that were unprepared for any kind of mural decoration - new brickwork covered with a coat of whitewash. Within six months, such of the paintings as were ever finished already appeared to be in a hopelessly perishing state, and they rapidly became obliterated. In 1919, an undergraduate who went up into the book-lined gallery surmounting the reading-room could just discern, in the dim light, faint outlines and wan patches that had once been bright colours.

Besides Rossetti, Burne-Jones, and Morris, the others involved were Hungerford Pollen, who has already been mentioned in the previous chapter, Arthur Hughes, Val Prinsep, and Spencer Stanhope. If they had worked on a surface prepared for tempera, and had been competently instructed, the results might have been extraordinarily interesting. As far as one can judge from a reproduction, after a copy made by T. H. Dunn, of

Rossetti's design, illustrating Launcelot's vision of the Holy Grail, the original must have been a fine and very characteristic work. Before it was finished, Elizabeth Siddons's alarming illness sent him hurrying back to London, and he never returned to complete the painting. Here again, one must not forget Mr. Max Beerbohm and the caricature accompanied by the following invention:

"The sole remark likely to have been made by Benjamin Jowett about the Mural Paintings at the Oxford Union :

" ' And what were they going to do with the Grail when they found it, Mr. Rossetti ? ' "

All the subjects were taken from the *Morte d'Arthur*, that fount of inspiration on which the Victorian Romantics made such heavy demands. Morris himself chose the melancholy tale of " How Sir Palomydes loved La Belle Iseult with exceeding great love out of measure, and how she loved him not again, but rather Sir Tristram." The subject may well have reflected his mood at the time.

Val Prinsep's account of his first evening in Oxford is a fascinating " conversation piece " in which Rossetti, Morris, and Burne-Jones are grouped together. Prinsep had been invited by the leader of the enterprise to dine in the rooms where he was staying with his two disciples :

" There I found Rossetti in a plum-coloured frock-coat, and a short square man with spectacles and a vast mop of dark hair. I was cordially received. ' Top,⁵ cried Rossetti, ' let me introduce Val Prinsep.' ' Glad, I'm sure,' answered the man in spectacles, nodding his head, and then he resumed his reading of a large quarto. This was William Morris. Soon after, the door opened, and before it was half opened, in glided Burne-Jones. ' Ned,' said Rossetti, who had been absently humming to himself, ' I think you know Prinsep.' The shy figure darted forward, the shy face lit up, and I was received with the kindly effusion which was natural to him.

" When dinner was over, Rossetti, humming to himself as was his wont, rose from the table and proceeded to curl himself up on the sofa. ' Top,' he said, ' read us one of your grinds.' ' No, Gabriel,' answered Morris, ' you have heard them all.' ' Never mind,' said Rossetti, ' here's Prinsep who has never heard them, and besides, they are devilish good.' ' Very well, old chap,' growled Morris, and having got his book he began to read in a sing-song chant some of the poems afterwards published in his first volume. All the time he was jiggling about nervously with his watch-chain. I was then a very young man and my experience of life was therefore limited, but the effect produced

on my mind was so strong that to this day, forty years after, I can still recall the scene : Rossetti on the sofa with large melancholy eyes fixed on Morris, the poet at the table reading and ever fidgeting with his watch-chain, and Burne-Jones working at a pen-and-ink drawing.

*' Gold on her head, and gold on her feet,
And gold where the hems of her kirtle meet,
And a golden girdle round my sweet ;
Ah ! qu'elle est belle, La Marguerite**

still seems to haunt me, and this other stanza :

*' Swerve to the left, son Roger, he said,
When you catch his eyes through the helmet slit,
Swerve to the left, then out at his head,
And the Lord God give you joy of it ! '*

I confess I returned to the Mitre with my brain in a whirl."

Morris is splendidly alive in this portrait - the chanted verse of a post-dated mediaeval bard, the physical restlessness, the growl - all these traits were noted by different observers at later periods of his life.

Morris remained in Oxford for some months after he had finished the work that he undertook at the Union, seeing a good deal of Price and Faulkner, who were still up, the latter now a Fellow of University College. He met Swinburne,

then a Balliol undergraduate and a warm admirer of his poetry ; this acquaintanceship afterwards grew more intimate.

In the autumn of 1857, Morris first saw, at the theatre, Jane Burden, the Oxford girl whom he married, and the sitter whose beauty has been immortalised by Rossetti in several paintings and drawings. The term "stunner," for a beautiful woman, belonged to the slang currency exchanged by Rossetti and his friends. Morris's wife was the queen of "stunners," tall, stately, and with lovely head and features ; although she lacked Elizabeth Siddons's marvellous colouring, her sheer perfection was something beyond the rivalry of Rossetti's own "stunner." She seems to have been sedately efficient as wife and mother, taciturn, an accomplished needlewoman, and otherwise fades into the background of her husband's overwhelming personality. One looks in vain for tangible evidence regarding the effect of his marriage on Morris's life.

In 1858, *The Defence of Guenevere and other Poems* was published, of which about two hundred and fifty copies were either sold or given away ; the book was just ignored, a better fate than the critical sabotage directed against Keats, or Tennyson's volume of 1833. It received almost as little attention as Fitzgerald's version of *The Rubid'ijyd*, **while** a later reprint only attracted notice because

and slate roofs. Its immediate surroundings have been invaded by match-box villas and bungalows, contrasting sharply with Webb's solid structure, but the garden, shut in by a high, wall and amply screened with trees, still preserves an air of complete seclusion.

I was fortunate enough to see it on a mellow September afternoon, " the right time of the year," when the apple trees were heavy with red clusters gleaming in the sun. The architecture suggests a small monastic building that might have sheltered " The Brotherhood " ; the severe Gothic porches, and the well-house in the south-east angle, enhance this effect. A steep, red-tiled, conical roof surmounts the massive oak timbering and brick-work of the well-house, whose scale is beautifully adjusted in relation to the main structure. Facing almost north, a defiant gesture in the face of orthodoxy, the light inside the house is rather cold, and this characteristic adds further to the pervading impression of cloistered peace. The brick-work is unusually strong, and the thickness of the walls must be conspicuous to the most casual observer. The staircase, of restrained Gothic design, reveals the same insistence on sound material, and one can well imagine the relish with which Morris and Webb conferred over such details. Mr. Kenneth Clark's assertion that " all our houses

are solidier for the Gothic Revival " is at least thoroughly true of Webb's work.

Fervid schemes for decorating the interior, especially the drawing-room, were never fully realised, although the ceilings of the first-floor landing, and of some of the rooms, still retain their original painted and dotted plaster ornament. The drawing-room preserves three of a set of wall-paintings — there were to be seven - that Burne-Jones completed. They are now protected by glass, and one of this series, illustrating the story of Sire Degrevaunt, represents William and Jane Morris as the knight and his bride seated at their wedding banquet ; the painter could hardly have found more inspiring models. The famous settle from Red Lion Square stands at the far end of the same long room, and is crowned by a railed platform providing a minstrels' gallery.

Morris was wrenched away from the home which he had confidently expected to enjoy for life after no more than five years of great happiness. He had a plan for setting up a joint establishment there with Burne-Jones, and erecting workshops close at hand to accommodate the firm's craftsmen. But a run of ill-luck upset all his hopes ; the income derived from the marvellous copper-mine, mentioned in the first chapter, dropped heavily ; he had a bad attack of rheumatic fever ; the Burne-Joneses were also struggling with illness

and money worries. Morris, with a family of two girls, was then forced to concentrate hard on the task of building up a young business ; time and energy consumed by a daily journey at that period between Upton and London seriously hindered his work. Red House was sold, with some of its contents, in the late autumn of 1865. He could never bring himself to see the place again.

During those years at Upton many friends came down to stay, and there were lively gatherings, sometimes riotous fun. Lady Burne-Jones's memories, and those of other visitors, yield glimpses that people the house with joyful ghosts. One looks down the cellar stairs " to see Morris coming up from the cellar before dinner, beaming with joy, with his hands full of bottles of wine and others tucked under his arms." Faulkner, " in the middle of a scrimmage that had surged up the steps into the 'Minstrels' Gallery' . . . suddenly leapt clear over the parapet into the middle of the floor with an astounding noise. . . ."

The firm of Morris, Marshall & Faulkner, decorators, was started in 1861, and die original members, besides Morris and Faulkner, were Ford Madox Brown, Rossetti, Burne-Jones, and Arthur Hughes, among painters, Webb and Peter Marshall, district surveyor at Tottenham.

Arthur Hughes withdrew very soon after the

firm came into existence. The enterprise was rich in genius, extremely poor as regards capital, and could not claim to possess a single experienced business man to direct its policy. Ten years later, Rossetti, writing to Theodore Watts-Dunton, confessed that " we had no idea whatever of commercial success, but it succeeded in our own despite." There is evidence suggesting that the notion first came from Madox Brown, Rossetti's master, a sturdily independent artist, and in many ways the greatest painter working in England during the second half of the nineteenth century. Morris was enthusiastically prepared, by his own private experiments as designer and decorator, to support a scheme of this kind with money and energy. It was agreed that each member contributing designs for the different products of the firm should receive payment for his work before the division of any trading profit that might be made by the business. Up to 1874, £140 represented the total of paid-up capital, and the concern depended during critical periods on loans from Morris and his mother.

The first premises were at 8 Red Lion Square, **and** the managership was entrusted to Morris, who was paid £150 a year, while Faulkner, as book-keeper and business manager, was later employed at the same salary.

A circular was issued by " Morris, Marshall,

Faulkner & Company, Fine Art Workmen in Painting, Carving, Furniture, and the Metals " ; behind this boldly worded manifesto, Mr. Mackail discerns " the slashing hand and imperious accent of Rossetti, now as always contemptuous of all difficulties and not over-scrupulous in accuracy of statement." The circular goes on to say : " Having among their number men of varied qualifications, they will be able to undertake any species of decoration, mural or otherwise, from pictures, properly so called, down to the consideration of the smallest work susceptible of art beauty." The reference to mural decoration appeared to be somewhat rash, but presumably the Oxford Union fiasco was now cheerfully ignored.

Stained glass was, from the beginning, an important part of their work, and the foreman, George Campfield, had had some experience of this craft before he was employed by Morris. The firm showed stained glass, decorated furniture, and embroidery at the International Exhibition of 1862 ; medals were awarded to them by the jury, whose report on one section of their exhibits runs as follows : " Messrs. Morris & Company have exhibited several pieces of furniture, tapestries, &c, in the style of the Middle Ages. The general forms of the furniture, the arrangement of the tapestry, and the character

of the details are satisfactory to the archaeologist from the exactness of the imitation, at the same time that the general effect is excellent." "Tapestry," it should be added, here refers to embroidery.

Among the furniture exhibited on this occasion is a quaintly charming wall cabinet, the joint work of Webb and Morris, designed by the former, and painted by Morris with a series of panels illustrating the life of St. George. The cabinet, exhibited in the Victoria and Albert Museum, is rather attractive for its colour and tone, a deep glow of black, red, brown, and gold, although the figures betray his weakness as a draughtsman.

Commissions for church decoration were secured from Street and another architect, G. F. Bodley (1827-1907), Gilbert Scott's first pupil, who built St. Martin's, Scarborough, and St. Michael's, Brighton ; both churches have glass and painted decoration by the firm.

Rossetti and Madox Brown produced a certain number of designs for stained glass, and their names were an obvious asset during the early days of the business, but even then, and still more later, Morris, Burne-Jones, and Webb were the partners **who** carried the enterprise to success. **Before the firm** came into existence, **Burne-Jones had already made designs for stained glass commissioned by Messrs. Powell, the famous**

Whitefriars Glasshouse. He drew an amazing number of glass cartoons for Morris & Company, labour in itself sufficient in quantity to fill the life of an industrious designer.

Webb was one of those architects who enjoy designing furniture and smaller pieces of domestic art. Before the firm was born, he designed agreeable table glasses for the personal use of Morris and Burne-Jones, also certain very weighty copper candlesticks. His furniture designs for the business - some of them are unhappy - were at first carried out by a joiner in the neighbourhood of Red Lion Square. A gift for drawing animals and birds was valuable later when such forms were introduced into textile patterns.

Morris himself became, not only the firm's most prolific artist, but its dynamo ; without his driving force and wonderful aptitude for practical work the venture must have failed. Yet for all his natural skill of hand, his zeal and quickness in picking up the technique of several different crafts, there is no getting away from the fact that he had served no real apprenticeship to any of the arts. To some extent, he remained an amateur throughout life. It is not so much a question of actual teaching, as one of continuous and intensive practice. He began late, and, despite his huge industry, suffered always from too many distracting interests. A most fertile inventor of

floral pattern, he was unable to express his fancy with the sensitive and nimble hand of a fine draughtsman. The highest aptitude may, in any case, have been lacking, but he never gave himself a fair chance of discovering whether he possessed it.

Printed cottons and wallpapers, the least expensive and the most charming of the firm's products, were necessarily those which had the widest influence on taste. The design of such things, together with woven fabrics and carpets, was Morris's own particular province. Messrs. Jeffrey & Company, of Islington, undertook the work of cutting blocks and printing the papers; the quality of both paper and printing was remarkable. In the small staff room of Vittoria Street School of Art at Birmingham, I saw a Morris paper that had been on the walls for thirty years, and had once actually been washed. Compared with ordinary types of wallpaper, it looked as though it had been hanging for about six months. Always Morris was a tremendous stickler for fine and durable materials. The " Daisy " paper, the first to be printed, remained the most popular, but many people who have had an opportunity of looking through the complete range of patterns may agree that the " Willow Boughs " design is the most successful. The latter paper, seen on the hall and staircase walls of a small country house,

appeared to be so emphatically "right," that it was impossible at the time to conceive of anything more happily suited to the setting. Except for birds and beasts, nearly all Morris's designs for papers and textiles are based on plant form.

Textiles belong to a later period in the firm's history ; among other early work, besides furniture, wallpapers and stained glass, were tiles, bought undecorated from Holland and painted by Morris, Faulkner, and the latter⁵'s two sisters, Kate and Lucy. Burne-Jones made some attractive figure designs for tiles, including fairy-tale subjects like Cinderella and the Sleeping Beauty. Jane Morris and Mrs. Burne-Jones worked at embroideries, principally altar-cloths and hangings for church decoration. During the preceding decade there had been an art-and-industry movement, officially sponsored and further stimulated by the Great Exhibition of 1851. Alfred Stevens (1817-1875) and his followers, Godfrey Sykes, Reuben Townroe, and others, worked in the opposite camp ; their style of decoration was inspired by Italian Renaissance ornament. Owen Jones (1809-1874), architect, was an industrious student of pattern, author of *A Grammar of Ornament*. He supervised the works for the Great Exhibition, and designed wallpapers, carpets, and furniture. Morris came to wield an important influence on behalf of the Gothic school, and,

although he professed a strong hatred for Renaissance architecture, some of his work was derived from sources closely related to Italian Renaissance patterns. To him, Wren was a detestable fellow and St. Paul's a loathsome building ; it is odd that a poet and designer should allow himself to become so blinded by prejudice as to feel no admiration for Wren's genius, the supreme blending of romantic vision and classic proportion.

In November 1865, Morris moved from Red House to No. 26 Queen Square, Bloomsbury, since demolished along with several other houses in order to provide a site for the National Hospital. The upper part of the premises was occupied by the family, while the ground floor and outbuildings became the firm's showroom and workshops until such time as an expansion of the business compelled the Morrises to find a more comfortable home.

Under Morris's leadership the firm was driven by a vigorous current of proselytism, directed against factory-produced ugliness. War was declared on the domestic interior of Podsnap, debased Victorian rococo, Berlin woolwork, bead mats, and horse-hair upholstery. The Oxford freshman, " slight in figure," had now become a burly man of very powerful physique, strenuously launched on his first crusade.

CHAPTER IV

The Earthly Paradise and Jason - Kelmscott - Iceland - illuminating — dissolution of partnership — dyes and textiles — translations - Sigurd the Volsung.

BETWEEN 1865 and 1867, the firm obtained a valuable recruit and an important commission. Warrington Taylor succeeded Faulkner as business manager, and for the first time in its existence the concern had a genuine, full-time, commercial man to supervise the accounts and the costing. Faulkner, having worked for a short period in the offices of a London firm of civil engineers, returned to Oxford in 1864 ; he had never been able to give more than spasmodic attention to **the** business of Morris & Company. The new arrangement was a common-sense move and had been too long delayed.

Taylor was something of a Sydney Carton, excellent in managing other people's affairs and disastrously improvident with regard to his own ; he had already lost two fortunes when he gladly accepted a salary of £120 from his new employers. An Etonian, schoolfellow of Swinburne, and afterwards in the Army, he was, when he joined **the** firm, working as a check-taker at the Opera House. He had ability and cultivated tastes, a love of

music, and the necessary admiration for the Pre-Raphaelites ; unfortunately, consumption carried him off when he was only thirty-four years of age. Some letters from Taylor to Rossetti were included in *The Rossetti Papers, 1862-1870*, edited by William Michael Rossetti. They throw much light on the problems confronting the business manager - he had obviously stepped into no sinecure - and on the financial position of the company. The following extracts from his correspondence in 1867 are worth quoting :

" Morris and I never get hot with one another, save on the subject of price. He is always for a low price ; seeing the amount of work we do, it is absurd."

" I know well the tendency at Queen Square to make life comfortable ; anything rather than face death or a fact ; hence the prosperous appearance of everything. Morris won't have any of the sours of life - can't get him to face them at all."

Other letters complain repeatedly of the wretched profits made from stained-glass work owing to bad costing.

In 1867, Morris & Company were commissioned to decorate one of the rooms in the restaurant of the South Kensington (now Victoria

and Albert) Museum ; the contract was a great event in the firm's history, official recognition from the most impressive quarter.

The green dining-room is the most interesting work carried out by the firm, especially significant because of the contrast afforded by the adjoining room, which was decorated by Godfrey Sykes and his collaborators. Here one finds the Renaissance party check by jowl with the adherents of Gothic ; yet a third room has decorations from designs by Sir Edward Poynter, P.R.A. (1836-1919), so that the museum restaurant is a microcosm of educated Victorian taste, in which the contrasted styles are well illustrated. The Morris room is an amazingly romantic achievement, difficult to describe. A high skirting of oak on the walls is surmounted by a frieze of green plaster decoration, with berries and foliage modelled in relief; the skirting is divided into panels, painted with floral and figure subjects, some of which are partly obliterated. Otherwise the work is in very good condition - Webb was largely responsible for its supervision — and only the ceiling had to be redecorated afterwards, because of damage from gas lighting. Burne-Jones designed the stained-glass windows with their quaint roundels. A piquant feature was introduced in the cornice, the " egg-and-dart " moulding of which is, of course, a characteristic Renaissance enrichment ; this may possibly

have been a later addition, but appearance rather suggests that it was part of the original scheme.

Morris, now relieved by Taylor of much work that he disliked, and living on the firm's premises, found time to write a series of narrative poems, which had been taking shape in his mind during the years at Red House. He planned to tell a cycle of stories taken from Greek, Norse, and mediaeval sources, woven into a coherent pattern with the aid of a device suggested by that which Chaucer had used for the *Canterbury Tales*. Not only did Morris borrow this scheme from his favourite poet, but the group of narrators whom he invented were made to live in Chaucer's own time. The Argument at the beginning of the Prologue to *The Earthly Paradise* runs thus : " Certain gentlemen and mariners of Norway, having considered all that they had heard of the Earthly Paradise, set sail to find it, and after many troubles and the lapse of many years came old men to some Western land, of which they had never before heard : there they died, when they had dwelt there certain years, much honoured of the strange people." The voyagers include Laurence, a Swabian ; Nicholas, a Breton ; and a Scandinavian, Rolf, who had spent his younger days in Constantinople. They are handsomely entertained by the Elders of that city in " some **Western land** " (Chaucer's London) to whom they

tell the stories which are narrated at intervals during a year.

The Prologue embodies a bitter irony ; the Earthly Paradise was reputed to be a land of eternal youth, and the wanderers have been aged prematurely by grisly hardships suffered during their long search -

*Their brows seem furrowed deep with more than years ;
For sorrow dulls their heavy sunken eyes,
Bent are they less with time than miseries.*

Utterly worn and disillusioned, the voyagers' mood colours that of the stories, which are mainly tales of death and unrelenting fate.

The Earthly Paradise, with its vast length, offers a further challenge to the endurance of the reader who can claim to have emerged triumphant from every stanza of the *Faerie Queene*. Morris is not at all a quotable poet, but the introductory verses, " An Apology," repeat his one familiar line -

The idle singer of an empty day.

The Life and Death of Jason, in seventeen books, was published before the three volumes of *The Earthly Paradise*. The poem had originally been designed as a tale to be included in the cycle. It grew, however, to a length out of scale with *The Earthly Paradise* stories, appeared separately

in 1867 and met with immediate success. Morris relates the Argonauts⁵ adventures in rhymed heroic couplets. His narrative could not be more direct. Both *Jason* and *The Earthly Paradise* have fine descriptive passages, some of which reveal the craftsman and the poet enjoying together the detail of cunningly wrought weapons, wonderful gold vessels, and splendid silks. The interest of the stories atones for a lack of metrical vitality in their telling, but, as sheer poetry, the interspersed lyrics are the outstanding beauties. Who, having read *Jason*, can forget the nymph's song to Hylas, with its lovely opening verse ?

*I know a little garden-close
Set thick with lily and red rose,
Where I would wander if I might
From dewy dawn to dewy night,
And have one with me wandering.*

The Earthly Paradise was gratefully seized by the heavy hand of German scholarship ; Dr. Julius Riegel, in *Die Quellen von William Morris's Dichtung, "The Earthly Paradise"* taught Morris much about the sources of his tales that he had not previously known.

The narrative phase of Morris's poetry, unrecognisably remote from the intensity of *The Defence*, has for most tastes too much tranquillity and too little emotion. Swinburne, in spite of his

admiration for Morris, commented delightfully on this failing in a letter :

" His Muse is like Homer's Trojan Women-; she drags her robes as she walks. I really think any muse (when she is neither resting nor flying) ought to tighten her girdle, tuck up her skirts, and step out."

The Earthly Paradise was published between 1868 and 1870, and meanwhile Morris's imagination was fired by Scandinavian legend to such purpose as made his muse take strong wings in *Sigurd, the Volsung*. In 1868 he began to read Icelandic three times a week with Eirikr Magnusson, gradually working his way through the great sagas. Thirty-six years old, and in the prime of his power, he was then finishing *The Earthly Paradise*, busy with the expanding work of the firm and further engrossed in this new study.

It was about this time that Walter Crane saw him from a friend's window in Queen Square :

" We caught sight of a sturdy figure clad in snuff-brown, striding along in a determined manner, with an oak stick in his hand and a soft felt hat on. He turned his head as he passed, hearing us talking, and glanced up, and we met quick, penetrating eyes set in a handsome face, and a fair beard, with gTave and abstracted

look, and probably a little fagged after a day's toil at the works."

In the spring of 1871, Morris discovered Kelmscott Manor, not far from Lechlade, close to the Thames, and lying south of the Cotswolds. He had noticed a house-agent's advertisement describing the place, and was so attracted by what he read that he travelled down to see it ; he came back enthusiastically determined to rent the house, which Rossetti agreed to share. They settled in during the summer, and Kelmscott was Morris's country retreat for the remainder of his life. When the family first occupied this Tudor house, built of grey limestone, it provided a blissful escape from Queen Square and healed the wound inflicted by the loss of Red House. Kelmscott survived all the changes which he depicted in *News from Nowhere* ; Morris's Utopian dream in this book ended with a journey up the Thames by boat, returning to a house more beautiful than any that could be built in his imagination. The last chapter but one, entitled "An Old House Amongst New Folk," begins with a memorable description :

" I had a mind to say that I did not know the way thither, and that the river-side dwellers should lead ; but almost without my will my feet moved on along the road they knew. The raised way led us into a little field bounded by

a backwater of the river on one side ; on the right hand we could see a cluster of small houses and barns, new and old, and before us a grey stone barn and a wall partly overgrown with ivy, over which a few grey gables showed. The village road ended in the shallow of the aforesaid backwater. We crossed the road and again, almost without my will my hand raised the latch of a door in the wall, and we stood presently on a stone path which led up to the old house to which fate in the shape of Dick had so strangely brought me in this new world of men. My companion gave a sigh of pleased surprise and enjoyment ; nor did I wonder, for the garden between the wall and the house was redolent of the June flowers, and the roses were rolling over one another with that delicious superabundance of small well-tended gardens which at first sight takes away all thought from the beholder save that of beauty. The black-birds were singing their loudest, the doves were cooing on the roof-ridge, the rooks in the high elm-trees beyond were garrulous among the young leaves, and the swifts wheeled whining about the gables. And the house itself was a fit guardian for all the beauty of this heart of summer."

Since the tragedy of his wife's death, Rossetti **had** been overwhelmed by a dark tide of misery.

At this time he was a pitiable wreck, drug-sodden, and afflicted with persecution mania. It was thought that Kelmscott might help him to recovery, but the joint tenancy was never a success and ended three years later. Morris had the gift of sound sleep and used to rise very early - habits essential to one who got through such a bewildering amount of work. At Kelmscott, where his vitality was always refreshed by open-air enjoyment and perpetual delight in the place and its surroundings, he would eagerly start at dawn for a day's fishing. Rossetti sank into a chloral sleep about three or four in the morning, rising some time after noon ; he had never cared for the country, the state of his mind made him a wretched figure in the cheerful household, and he eventually moved back to London. Morris was by that time much relieved at his departure.

During the summer of 1871, the poet of contentment had only just begun to taste Kelmscott's happiness, when the other Morris, fascinated by terror and weird, set out on his first journey to Iceland. After an interval of two years, he made a second voyage to the island with Faulkner. Preparations for this holiday, far more of an adventure in those days than it would be now, filled Morris with boyish excitement ; he practised riding, made experiments in camp cookery, and determined to keep a journal of the expedition.

The other members of the party were Magnusson, Faulkner, and a new friend, W. H. Evans, who was keen to get shooting and fishing in the island. Early in July they left Granton, near Leith, in a Danish mail-boat, which anchored at Reykjavik on the 14th of that month. Here arrangements had been made in advance for mounts, pack-horses, a guide, and money ; three days later the tour of the island began. To Morris, who looked on the grim landscape with eyes kindled by the heroic and terrible drama of the sagas, it was something much more than an adventurous holiday. The journal devoted to this intense pilgrimage is almost more revealing than anything that he ever wrote about himself:

"Just think, though, what a mournful place this is — Iceland, I mean — setting aside the pleasure of one's animal life there, the fresh air, the riding and rough life, and feeling of adventure ; - how every place and name marks the death of its short-lived eagerness and glory But Lord ! what littleness and helplessness has taken the place of the old passion and violence that had place here once - and all is unforgotten ; so that one has no power to pass it by unnoticed ; yet that must be something of a reward for the old life of the land, and I don't think their life now is more unworthy than ymost people's elsewhere, and they are happy

enough by seeming - yet it is an awful place : set aside the hope that the unseen sea gives you here [at Herdholt], and the strange threatening change of the blue spiky mountains beyond the firth, and the rest seems emptiness and nothing else : a piece of turf under your feet, and the sky overhead, that's all : whatever solace your life is to have here, must come out of yourself or these old stories, not over hopeful themselves."

The poet who had recently left the snug, domestic scene of Kelmscott looked out from another part of the island on " a great sea of terrible inky mountains tossing about."

At the beginning of September he returned home, with an Icelandic pony as a present for his two daughters at Kelmscott.

Morris had shown a recurring interest in the art of illumination since his earliest attempts at Oxford, and it now became, for some time, a favourite occupation. Owen Jones illuminated *The Song of Solomon*, a work reproduced by chromolithography, but the thing is stilted and smacks too much of the Gothic revivalist's drawing-board. Otherwise illumination flourished chiefly as a polite accomplishment taught to Victorian young ladies.

Morris obtained vellum for his manuscripts from **Rome, where** the technique of its preparation

had survived, owing to the Vatican's special needs. A transcript of Fitzgerald's *Rubd'iydt*, perhaps the loveliest of his illuminations, was given to Lady Burne-Jones, who later presented the volume to the British Museum ; it is exhibited in the Department of Manuscripts among masterpieces that Morris knew and loved. The book is very small, 6 inches by 4½ inches ; the figures, some of them drawn by Burne-Jones, were coloured by Fairfax Murray, but Morris was responsible for its general design and the charming borders, as well as for the writing. His gilding was inexpert and has now cracked rather badly in places, yet the whole achievement is possibly finer than anything else that he accomplished as a craftsman. There is nothing archaic about the illuminated ornament or the handwriting ; both have a lively delicacy. The manuscript is altogether exquisite, and this quality, together with elegance, is not conspicuous in his other designs. The genius of Mr. Edward Johnston and Mr. Graily Hewitt's rare accomplishment have since been devoted to a further revival of the art which Morris practised with originality, skill, and intuitive taste. In the process his everyday handwriting was raised from a commonplace level to one of beauty and distinction.

Morris's range of activity was too wide at all times, and more especially during the 'seventies,

to allow of neat compression into a short biography. The remainder of this chapter will attempt to deal mainly with his work as craftsman and poet in a period when he was already becoming absorbed in politics.

In 1874, the affairs of the firm caused much trouble and led to a great deal of bitterness. Morris, now getting towards middle age, was largely dependent on the business for his livelihood, and was concerned to provide for his family. The firm had grown without any change in its financial constitution, always vague, and obviously dangerous, for the liability of the seven partners was unlimited. The problem of a just settlement was complicated by many factors, not all matters of strict law, since the enterprise owed its success primarily to Morris's work and money. According to law, every partner was entitled to an equal share in the value of the business, because each was supposed to have contributed £20 towards the original capital of £140. Burne-Jones, Webb, and Faulkner surrendered their claims, while Rossetti, Madox Brown, and Marshall contested the issue on legal grounds. After prolonged accounting and negotiations, a settlement was reached; the partnership was dissolved, and Morris became sole proprietor and manager. The rights and wrongs of this dispute cannot be investigated here. Morris was incensed by the behaviour of

the three partners who had done least for the business. Several years later he made it up with Madox Brown, but Rossetti was never forgiven. *The Defence of Guenevere* had been dedicated " to my friend, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, painter " ; the tribute was symptomatic of an association that grew from mutual enthusiasms. His early hero-worship did not endure, their friendship had long become badly frayed, and this quarrel finally severed relations that were never based on instinctive attraction.

During 1875, Morris became keenly interested in dyeing and weaving - work that afterwards grew to be the chief activity of the firm. In early days he had difficulty in procuring good fabrics for embroidery, and he was now ambitious to master various textile processes. Since 1858, industrial dyeing had been revolutionised by the introduction of the aniline dyes, made chiefly from coal-tar, an invention which he denounced heartily. His own first experiments as a dyer were made in the scullery coppers at Queen Square for the purpose of colouring embroidery silks. But his real training in the art was obtained at Leek, in Staffordshire, where he learnt it from the greatest English expert of that time, Sir Thomas Wardle (1831-1909). Wardle, a dyer, who started a silk-and-cotton-printing business in 1882, was a man of varied gifts - author, musician,

and famous for his researches into the silk industry, especially in India. He had knowledge of the ticklish process of indigo dyeing, and was interested in vegetable dyes, the technique of which he made into an important industry. Both Morris and Sir Arthur Liberty owed much to his advice.

Morris enjoyed working at the vats at Leek, but even his disregard for personal elegance was subdued by indigo -

". . . I must say I should like not to look such a beast, and not to feel as if I wanted pegs to keep my fingers one from the other."

In an essay on dyeing, published later, he wrote of various materials that he had himself used : poplar and osier twigs for yellow ; kermes as yielding a more permanent and beautiful red than cochineal ; and brown, extracted from the roots of the walnut-tree. By practical work as a dyer he was prepared to embark on the production of printed fabrics, woven stuffs of silk or wool, carpets, and, finally, high-warp tapestries.

He imported a French silk-weaver from Lyons, and a Jacquard loom was erected in Ormond Yard, close to Queen Square. The whole premises at No. 26 were now occupied by workshops, into which the showrooms were absorbed after the firm had opened a shop in Oxford Street. The family

had already been squeezed out of their quarters in Queen Square at the end of 1872. They moved to Horrington House, at Chiswick, then a quiet and rather countrified region. The house disappeared long ago. A dense and lethal stream of motor traffic now rushes past the corner where it stood, opposite Chiswick Lane.

In connection with the firm's activities he visited clients up and down the country to advise on furnishing and decorations, and a few years later Morris & Company were commissioned to execute the hangings and mural decoration of the throne and reception rooms in St. James's Palace. There is a true story of a lady who summoned him to her house, where Morris, expecting a business consultation, found that she needed his advice about her own poker-work.

His reputation as a designer and an authority on the crafts stood very high by this time, and was officially recognised when he became an examiner for the Science and Art Department, and was often consulted with regard to acquisitions for the South Kensington Museum.

Morris's study of Icelandic literature during the 'seventies bore fruit in the series of translations which he made in collaboration with Magnusson. They include a version of the *Volsunga Saga*, published in 1870, and *Three Northern Love Stories*. His translation of the *Eyrbyggja Saga* was an illuminated

manuscript on paper, and is now exhibited in the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, famous for its collection of Pre-Raphaelite pictures, drawings and designs. From translations of Norse legend he turned to *The Mneids of Virgil, done into English verse*, a rendering in the same mood of mediaeval narrative poetry with which he had approached *The Earthly Paradise* tales. It appeared in 1875, and twelve years later he published a verse translation of the *Odyssey*, flatteringly reviewed by that brilliant classical scholar, Oscar Wilde. Neither of these translations has taken rank with the famous versions, Dryden's or Conington's Virgil, Chapman's Homer, or the modern translation of the *Odyssey* by Andrew Lang and Samuel Butcher. But his *JENEIDS* showed sympathy with some aspects of Virgil's genius to which other translators have been less sensitive.

In *The Defence of Guenevere*, Morris had used a dramatic form for *Sir Peter Harpdorfs End*, one of the poems inspired by Froissart, and for the fantasy of *Rapunzel*. The first, especially, was successful to an extent that encouraged a later experiment with dramatic poetry, and in 1873 he published *Love is Enough ; or the Freeing of Pharamond. A Morality*. The story is a Celtic legend, which he took from *The Mabinogion*, telling of the hero king Pharamond, wise ruler and brave soldier,

who becomes a listless dreamer, distraught by visions of an ideal love. He leaves his kingdom, and sets forth with one faithful companion, Oliver, wandering over land and sea until he finds in a lowly maid the fulfilment of his dreams. Pharamond returns, after surviving many perils, to find his throne usurped and the loyalty of his subjects dead, yet he is content to lose kingship and all worldly comforts for love. The morality is performed before an emperor and empress at their marriage festivities, while the rustic lovers, Giles and Joan, watch the emperor and empress as well as the play itself; their role resembles that of a Greek chorus. In this elaborate framework, Morris set beautiful lyrics, and proved again his skill in handling a variety of metres. *Love is Enough* must be less known than any of the other long poems, although the recurring song :

*Love is enough : though the world be a-waning.
And the woods have no voice but the voice of complain-
ing . . .*

is remembered separately through anthologies.

Morris's poetry always appears stronger in vision and metrical skill than in purely verbal resources, for which he sometimes seems, even, to depend on echoes. Compare the lines already quoted from *Love is Enough* with the following from Tennyson's *Lady of Shalott* :

*In the stormy east-wind straining,
The pale yellow woods were waning,
The broad stream in his banks complaining . . .*

Here are two other examples picked out at random :

*And in his hand he bare a mighty bow
{The Life and Death of Jason, Book I., 149}.*

*And in his hand he haer a tnyghty bowe
(Chaucer, Canterbury Talcs, Prologue, 108).*

*I know a little garden close
Set thick with lily and red rose . . .
{The Life and Death of Jason, Book IV., 577}.*

*But I know where a garden grows,
Fairer than aught in the world beside,
All made up of the lily and rose . . .
(Tennyson, Maud, Part IL, V. viii).*

Sigurd the Volsung, and the Fall of the Nibelungs, which appeared in 1876, was his last ambitious work in poetry. He himself regarded it as his masterpiece, and a majority of serious critics would probably agree with Morris's own estimate. During the nineteenth century two men of genius were inspired by this theme. Morris's epic has suffered undeserved neglect, while Wagner's *Der Ring der Nibelungen* triumphed. Morris utterly despised Wagner's florid brilliance :

" The most rococo and degraded of all forms of art - the idea of a sandy-haired German tenor tweedledeeing over the unspeakable woes of Sigurd, which even the simplest words are not typical enough to express ! "

There are two versions of the story of Sigurd or Siegfried, Norse and German. The twelfth-century *Völsunga Saga*, set down in prose by an unknown Icelandic writer, was, in Morris's eyes, a Nordic story " which should be to all our race what the Tale of Troy was to the Greeks." But readers who had welcomed the easy-flowing narrative of *Jason* were indifferent to *Sigurd's* splendours ; the world of Northern epic was too remote from their consciousness ; they preferred the Argonauts' exploits, grown to be almost as familiar as Old Testament stories. He composed *Sigurd* at a time when he was hard at work on *Æneas* and was full of anxiety owing to the complete breakdown of his elder daughter's health. In every way the poem marks the zenith of his extraordinary powers.

Morris used an anapaestic couplet with six beats to the line, and varied the length of his stanzas in order to avoid monotony. This tune yields a splendid rhythm, and for great stretches the epic moves forward with the swing and strength of a boat driven by mighty oarsmen.

Sigurd is a superb and unique achievement in modern literature ; I can think of only one work belonging to the nineteenth century, and that a prose epic, in any way comparable with it.

Gunnar is put to die at the bottom of a pit inhabited by venomous serpents. He charms, with song and the music of his harp,

*All save the Grey and Ancient, that holds his crest aloft,
Light-wavering as the flame-tongue when the evening
wind is soft . . .*

*He fell to the earth as he spake, and life left Gunnar the
King,*

*For his heart was chilled for ever by the sleepless
serpents sting,*

*The grey Worm, Great and Ancient - and day in the
East began,*

*And the moon was low in the heavens, and the light
clouds over him ran.*

I am reminded of the final scene in *Moby Dick*, when the white whale sinks Captain Ahab's vessel and the sky-hawk swoops down to peck at the flag as her mast-head disappears beneath the waters.

CHAPTER V

" Anti-Scrape " — The Eastern Question Association — Hammer-smith — weaving — Merton Abbey — Socialism.

THE proem to *The Earthly Paradise*, with its refrain,

The idle singer of an empty day

had asked :

*Dreamer of dreams, born out of my due time,
Why should I strive to set the crooked straight ?*

An answer came from the crusading impulse, deeply rooted in Morris's nature, which now drew him, step by step, into active politics. Up to this time he had simply voted as a Liberal and had taken no part in public work. The nearest approach to anything of the kind had been a period of service with a volunteer corps, which he joined during 1859-1860, when an enthusiastic movement for national defence was provoked by an outburst of anti-British sentiment in France. After *Sigurd* appeared, he progressed towards militant Socialism by way of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings and the Eastern Question Association.

Since Oxford days, injudicious restoration had aroused Morris's wrath, and his dismay over the

maltreatment of Notre-Dame has already been recorded. Street undertook a good deal of restoration work., a circumstance that may have influenced Morris's decision to turn so suddenly from architecture to painting. In 1877, Gilbert Scott's restoring zeal threatened Tewkesbury Abbey, and Morris sent a strongly worded letter of protest to the editor of the *Athenaum*, recommending that a defensive organisation should be established : " What I wish for, therefore, is that an association should be set on foot to keep a watch on old monuments, to protest against all ' restoration ' that means more than keeping out wind and weather, and, by all means, literary and other, to awaken a feeling that our ancient buildings are not mere ecclesiastical toys, but sacred monuments of the nation's growth and hope."

The Society was promptly brought into being with Morris as secretary. William de Morgan, the potter, but more famous as the author of *Joseph Vance*, persuaded Carlyle to join, and at the first public meeting the secretary had to read a letter from the platform expressing Carlyle's approval of the organisation's aims and his devout admiration for Wren's City churches. " Anti-Scrape," a name coined by Morris, usurped for unofficial purposes the full title of the Society. Webb's membership was effective in dealing with **technical** problems. He invented a method of

strengthening walls by extracting the loose core, afterwards filling the cavity with new and carefully selected material. "Anti-Scrape" hampered Morris & Company's stained-glass business, for commissions were often declined because of risks to which the mullions and tracery in old churches might be exposed by the insertion of new windows. The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings is still pursuing its work, made easier by a public opinion largely created by the Society's earlier propaganda. This beginning of Morris's public activities may, at first sight, appear to have little connection with his later Socialism, but, since he inevitably approached social problems from the standpoint of art, the development of his thought was entirely logical. He began by attempting to defend ancient buildings and craftsmanship, and he then tried to inspire men with a conception of life in which great art might flourish again. There is, however, something characteristic of Morris in the fact that, as a reformer, he started with buildings and turned from them to human beings.

At this time, he was also engaged in strenuous work as treasurer, speaker, and writer for the Eastern Question Association, founded in 1876. The Russo-Turkish War, with its hideous prelude of Bulgarian atrocities, divided English opinion. On the one hand there was the old enmity to

Russia, surviving from the Crimean War ; on the other, indignation at Turkish barbarity and sympathy with its victims. Gladstone and the Eastern Question Association denounced the Turk, while Disraeli's policy in the Near East aimed at consolidating Turkey's strength as a check to Russia. In England, there was a body of noisy and truculent opinion which favoured armed intervention on the side of the Turks and chanted the Tyrtæan refrain :

" *We dorit want to fight,
But, by Jingo,¹ if we do,
We've got the ships, we've got the men,
We've got the money too*"

When Russia finally came to the aid of Turkey's oppressed Balkan subjects, the country was on the verge of succumbing to another Crimean mania. Gladstone, then in opposition, made some of his greatest speeches against the war party gathering under Disraeli's Government ; Carlyle's pen attacked " the unspeakable Turk." The war ended in 1878, and Disraeli returned from the Congress of Berlin, bringing " peace with honour." While this chapter of European history was being enacted, Morris vigorously condemned the Jingoës who threatened to plunge England into

¹ From this song, with which the Great Macdermott thrilled music-hall audiences, dates the political sense of "Jingo.**

a shameful war. Especially significant was his manifesto addressed "to the working-men of England." There he already inveighed against those who "would thwart your just aspirations,* would silence you, would deliver you bound hand and foot for ever to irresponsible capital . . . if you long to lessen these inequalities, which have been our stumbling-block since the beginning of the world, then cast aside sloth and cry out against an Unjust War, and urge us of the middle classes to do no less."⁵³ The crisis inspired the first of his political songs, *Wake, London Lads!* which was sung at a meeting in Exeter Hall.

In the midst of such distractions, he was yet busily occupied with the firm's expanding activities and designs for chintzes and silks. Most of the dyeing and cotton printing was done at Leek, but further experiments were carried out in the Queen Square vats. He now began seriously to consider the weaving of high-warp tapestries, an idea which he had been discussing with Thomas Wardle. In the spring, however, of 1878, a bad attack of rheumatic gout made him an invalid for many weeks ; afterwards he did not fully regain his huge vitality, taxed so heavily during the previous few years. This tendency to rheumatism became a recurring weakness in his constitution.

He returned from a holiday in Italy to occupy

the house on Hammersmith Mall where he lived for the rest of his life. It is a solid, comfortable, square dwelling, built in the brownish brick typical of many Georgian houses in the London area, with a severely plain facade. The rooms are large and lofty, whereas Horrington House seems to have been inconveniently small. A stone tablet in the wall has an inscription, informing the passer-by that "WILLIAM MORRIS POET CRAFTSMAN SOCIALIST LIVED HERE 1878-1896." The incised letters are worthy of a craftsman's memory. From the upper windows there are wide views across the Thames towards Richmond's trees, or up the river, where the broad tower of Chiswick's parish church stands in the bend beyond Chiswick Eyot.

The house, which had been called The Retreat, was renamed Kelmscott House, and Morris delighted to remind himself of the Thames running from his Oxfordshire Kelmscott to Hammersmith. Naturally he was full of schemes for its decoration. The long drawing-room on the first floor was later hung with a woollen fabric from his own looms. Tapestry-weaving now became an absorbing enthusiasm. In his bedroom a loom was installed, at which he would often be working at day-break during the spring and summer months. The craft had to be learnt "from a very little eighteenth-century book, one

of the series of *Arts et Metiers*, published by the Government." He chose, of course, the finer high-warp method of weaving. This kind of tapestry is made on an upright loom with the warp threads held vertically, while the weaver sits at the back of his loom. In order to watch the progress of his work he must peer through the warp threads into a mirror suspended in front of them. Morris made and presented to the Victoria and Albert Museum a model which illustrates the process admirably. The great Flemish and French tapestries of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries were woven on the high-warp loom, and it was their late Gothic design that inspired the tapestries produced by the firm. In the essay on "Textiles" which he contributed to the collection of studies published later by members of the Arts and Crafts Society, Morris wrote that "the style of even the best period of the Renaissance is wholly unfit for tapestry : accordingly we find that tapestry retained its Gothic character longer than any other of the pictorial arts." As one would expect, he abominated seventeenth and eighteenth-century Gobelins tapestries.

Admiration for Near-Eastern art, especially Persian carpets, attracted him to yet another kind of weaving, and led to a further development in Morris & Company's textile business. He was disgusted with the degeneration of Eastern

carpet-weaving and dyeing, which had resulted from commercial exploitation of the Western market. In his view it had reached a stage when " we people of the West must make our own hand-made carpets, if we are to have any worth the labour and money such things cost. . . ." Morris had already made carpet designs which were woven for the firm by ordinary manufacturers, but the experience was unhappy, and he now taught himself the weaving of carpets as he had learnt that of tapestries. The firm's " Hammersmith " rugs and carpets were made in the stables beside Kelmscott House until the works at Merton Abbey were established. " Hammer-smith " carpets bore a local trade mark, a device consisting of a hammer, the letter M, and a symbol for the river, woven into their borders.

In 1881, Morris & Company's works were moved from Queen Square and Hammersmith to a seven-acre site at Merton Abbey, near Wimbledon, already provided with large wooden sheds which had been used by a print factory. There Morris obtained really spacious workshops, and was able to bring together nearly all the firm's manufactures. Work on a larger scale became possible ; he could more easily supervise a wide range of craftsmanship.

Merton Abbey was then quite rural, surrounded by fields and trees, with the River Wandle (at

once the most important and attractive feature of the place) murmuring its way past the sheds. Chintzes were washed in its clear waters, which had also been found suitable for dyeing. The setting was idyllic, the fulfilment of a Ruskinian dream, clean, delightful, and the very reverse of those defilements that provoked the famous jeremiad in *The Crown of Wild Olive*, From so many view-points Morris appears as the fighting-arm of Ruskinism.

Morris's printed cottons, the "Wandle chintzes," are among the best things that he accomplished in design. The different patterns were mostly called after their flower motives, or were given names of rivers. Here is a selection : Evcnlode, Eyebright, Kennet, Wandle, Wey, Cray, Trent. They have much character, and the fresh charm that belongs to happy work. An excellent cotton was used, and their splendid blues are eloquent of a fine indigo vat.

Large and thick pile carpets, designed by Morris, were produced on the big loom which was set up at Merton Abbey. These are much influenced by Persian models, although his patterns and weaves are less intricate. He taught tapestry-weaving to boy apprentices, who were found particularly apt at this nimble-fingered craft. Burne-Jones made cartoons for tapestry in addition to those for stained glass. The famous series

illustrating the legend of the Holy Grail was woven for Mr. W. K. D'Arcy, an Australian mining magnate. In 1920 these tapestries were auctioned at Sotheby's, and bought by the Duke of Westminster for 3,400 guineas. The Burne-Jones and Morris tapestry of the Adoration of the Kings came from the Merton Abbey looms in 1890. It hangs in Exeter College Chapel, and, like Holman Hunt's "Light of the World" at Keble, the tapestry is one of the important things that are shown to Oxford visitors. Morris tapestries do, admittedly, represent a notable achievement. But archaic revivals are foredoomed to relative failure, and this one invites a too obvious and fatal comparison with late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century masterpieces.

The works at Merton Abbey are still active, an impressive monument to the capacity and industry of the man who created them, first learning and then teaching his acquired skill with tireless enthusiasm. In "Making the Best of It," the fourth of a series of lectures printed under the title, *Hopes and Fears for Art*, he declared that the increasing tendency to division of labour, "has so stood in the way of my getting the help from others which my art forces me to crave, that I have been compelled to learn many crafts, and belike, according to the proverb, forbidden to

master any." If Morris attempted too much, he proved himself by this excess to be greater as a man than as an artist. That brilliant critic, T. Earle Welby, pronounced a charmingly phrased and sympathetic verdict:

" The pedantry of applying specialised aesthetic measuring instruments to what he did in so many departments is rebuked by the personality of so great, simple, hasty and universal a creature. To judge him by what he did in any one matter is like judging a man's life by what he does on Mondays."

Merton Abbey thrrove, although the industry was not carried on with any stern eye to competitive efficiency. Morris was well served by his manager, George Wardle, brother-in-law, but not otherwise related, to Thomas Wardle of Leek. The owner of the business himself was the last person on earth to sack old or incompetent workmen, or to wage incessant war on dishonesty and waste. His employees were paid at a rate slightly above the average, there was a scheme of profit-sharing which had been started at Queen Square, and they worked in most pleasant surroundings. George Wardle's retrospective comment deserves to be quoted :

" Of the work at Merton, there seems nothing to say, except that it was altogether delightful."

Morris, the Socialist, is necessarily interesting as an employer.

On the 13th of January 1883, Exeter College made him an honorary fellow, and four days later he joined the Democratic Federation. At that time Socialism was, of course, obscure and disreputable. Only during the last few years has the movement been dignified by the support of bishops, peers, judges, and leaders of the Bar. Alfred Russel Wallace added Socialist theories, especially "Land Nationalisation," to his various "isms," but he and Morris were the only very eminent Victorians to take an active part in propaganda. Morris cared nothing for conventional respectability and had never tried to become a rich man, but now he sacrificed to the movement, health, time, and money. For years he had been buying fine books, and some of his greatest treasures were sold to help the Federation's work. Bruce Glasier, in *William Morris and the Early Days of the Socialist Movement*, disagrees with the view that Morris's untimely death was due to the stress and strain of his labours for Socialism. Street-preaching, however, can scarcely have been good for the rheumatic weakness to which he was subject. Glasier's memoir gives us "Comrade Morris" as viewed by a political associate, a devout tribute and a vivid portrait. He records an amusing episode that

occurred on an occasion when he was staying with the Morrises at Hammersmith. His host took him up to his room at bedtime and lingered talking, although it was already late. Glasier had been to see an exhibition of Burne-Jones's paintings at the New Gallery, and Morris asked him what he thought of them. Painting was not in Glasier's line, and his reply :

" It seemed to me as if the artist was trying to imitate some very early style of art rather than nature itself - "

caused an explosion.

" Then the heavens burst open and lightning and thunder fell upon me. Hardly had I completed my sentence than Morris was on his feet, storming words upon me that shook the room. His eyes flamed as with actual fire, his shaggy mane rose like a burning crest, his whiskers and moustache bristled out like pine-needles. . . . Eventually there was a tap at the bedroom door, and it was opened slightly from the outside, and a voice expostulated : * Really, the whole house is awakened. What is the matter ? Do speak more quietly and let us get to sleep.' The interruption acted as an exorcism. Morris quietened down as suddenly as he had flared up.

One knows so little of Jane Morris that the scene has an added interest because of her appearance in it.

Apart from Ruskin's influence, Morris's Socialism grew from the soil of his own experience. "Your manufactures," said Ruskin, "become base because no well-educated person sets hand to them." Morris, the Oxford graduate, poet and antiquary, the craftsman, with an extraordinary range of practical knowledge, came to the conclusion that Socialism was the only means of escape from the baseness of industrial civilisation. He had the ordinary Marxian views on the injustices produced by the capitalist system, but his objections to mechanical and competitive industrialism went further. Morris's case against machine-made art is finally unanswerable. Nobody can pretend that modern design and industry movements are anything more than a compromise. He was convinced that art could never be created or enjoyed by the masses in the existing state of society ; that pleasure in work and self-expression could only be realised in a co-operative community. Morris was now close on fifty years of age, and his mind had long been progressing towards this conversion.

His brooding on problems of art and life had coincided with a period of bad trade, strikes, and unemployment, which set in during the later

'seventies. Henry Mayers Hyndman (1842-1921), who started the Democratic Federation in 1881, was the real founder of British Socialism. The Federation was a Marxian body, although Hyndman himself had quarrelled with Marx and Engels, because in his book, *England for All*, he had failed to acknowledge sufficiently his indebtedness to *Das Kapital*. Like Morris, he was the son of well-to-do parents, a (Trinity) Cambridge man, widely travelled, and, at the time when the Federation was founded, he had some reputation as a Radical journalist. In character, he was domineering, arrogant, and unable to endure criticism. He was immensely energetic, and moved among Socialists a spruce man of the world, immaculate in frock coat and tall hat. The Democratic Federation became, in 1884, the Social Democratic Federation, and, among its members, besides Morris and Hyndman, were John Burns, Tom Mann, George Lansbury, and Harry Quelch.

Within a few months of joining the Federation, Morris was put on the executive, and was helping to meet the constant shortage of funds from his own purse. For *Justice*, the Federation's weekly paper, he wrote a number of articles and a series of "Chants for Socialists." Often lecturing in London and the provinces, he seems actually to have believed at one time that fundamental

changes in the organisation of society might be carried through immediately. He was only gradually and rather bitterly disillusioned. The membership of the Federation increased slowly and was never large, but it included, apart from the famous Labour leaders already mentioned, Ernest Belfort Bax, with whom Morris wrote *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome* ; Walter Crane, who drew the cartoon for " The Goose Girl," the first tapestry woven at Merton ; Dr. Edward Aveling and his wife Eleanor, daughter of Karl Marx.

During the summer of 1884, quarrels arose in the Federation, and by the close of the year there was a definite split. Morris, Crane, Bax, the Avelings, and Andreas Scheu, an Austrian furniture designer, left the Federation and formed the Socialist League. The new organisation absorbed much of Morris's time, money, and energy. He became treasurer, edited its paper, *The Commonwealth*, and spoke at outdoor meetings. The League, however, had a dismal career, disturbed, like the Federation, by squabbles, and ultimately wrecked by anarchists. Morris's connection with it is mainly important because of his writings and certain dramatic events in which he played a part.

On the 21st of September 1885, Morris was in the Thames Police Court to listen to charges made against eight Socialist colleagues. These arose out of a disturbance which had followed an open-air

meeting in Limehouse. One of the accused was sentenced by the magistrate to imprisonment, and the others were fined. There was an angry demonstration in Court, hisses and cries of "Shame!" in which Morris joined. A scuffle followed, he was arrested, and charged with disorderly behaviour and striking a policeman. It was then that, in replying from the dock to the magistrate's question, "What are you?" he made the historic retort: "I am an artist and a literary man, pretty well known, I think, throughout Europe." Morris was discharged, but his opponents did not allow him to forget the self-assertive outburst into which he had been goaded. The whole affair, however, provoked a good deal of sympathy with the Socialists. Certain Radical newspapers protested against the police action and the sentences as an outrageous threat to freedom of speech.

In 1886, a meeting of the unemployed in Trafalgar Square developed into a riot in the West End. Shops were looted, club windows were broken, and Morris & Company's shop-front was protected by shutters a few moments before part of the mob made its way into Oxford Street. During the same year, Morris tried to bring about a reconciliation with the Federation's leaders, but found Hyndman obdurate.

On the 15th of October 1887, he appeared,

as the Archbishop of Canterbury, in his own Socialist playlet, *The Tables Turned; or, Nupkins Awakened*, which was performed at the League's headquarters in Farringdon Road. Mr. Bernard Shaw, who was in the audience, declared that there had been "no other such successful first night within living memory." The performance was given in aid of *The Commonweal's* chronically distressed finances.

The riot of the previous year was followed by a more serious disturbance in Trafalgar Square on "Bloody Sunday," the 13th of November 1887. A mass meeting was announced to protest against the Government's Irish policy, and Socialist contingents, carrying banners, marched up from different parts of London. The meeting had been forbidden by proclamation, and the police were ordered to head off these separate processions before they reached Trafalgar Square. General Sir Charles Warren, Commissioner of Police, made preparations calculated to result in another Peterloo Massacre. (Warren resigned a few months later, after "Jack the Ripper's" double murder during the night of the 30th of September 1888.) At one stage there was a real danger of street fighting. A strong police muster was supported by Life Guards and a battalion of Foot Guards with fixed bayonets and twenty rounds of ammunition.

" I remember," wrote Walter Crane, " in the gloom of that November evening the glitter of the bayonets, and the red line in front of the National Gallery, and also the magistrate riding up Parliament Street in the midst of a company of Life Guards, having been hastily fetched to read the Riot Act."

The contingent which Morris had joined was dispersed by the police at Shaftesbury Avenue, but round the Square itself other Socialist leaders resisted this suppression of free speech and access to the time-honoured place for open-air meetings. Annie Besant is said to have thrown herself against the police ranks in a desperate effort to reach the middle of the empty Square. Hyndman, John Burns, and that picturesque champion of liberty, R. B. Cunninghame Graham, broke through the cordon and were arrested. All three were tried at the Old Bailey, Asquith appearing for the defence ; Hyndman was acquitted, while the other two received sentences of imprisonment. Some miracle nearly always occurs in England to prevent such happenings from ending in serious loss of life. " Bloody Sunday," for all its mounted police charges and broken heads, was responsible for only one death. A young man named Alfred Linnell, who had been badly injured, died a few days later in hospital. His funeral was **attended** by a large concourse of Socialists. A procession

with bands and banners followed the hearse through the City, and Morris wrote *A Death Song*, set to music by Malcolm Lawson ; it was printed, with a cover which Crane designed, and sold for a penny in aid of Linnell's orphans.

The Socialist League became anarchist-ridden in 1889, when Morris was ousted from the editorship of *The Commonweal*. Realising the League's hopeless prospects, he began to lose interest in its affairs. With anarchism, Morris never had any patience, and the crazy fanatics who now controlled the League were, in his opinion, the most dangerous enemies of Socialism. He withdrew from membership in 1890. Two years later the League and its organ were finally extinguished. D. J. Nicoll, then controlling *The Commonweal*, was tried, and sentenced to eighteen months' imprisonment for causing a wildly anarchist incitement to be published in the paper. Henceforward, Morris confined himself to the Hammersmith Socialist Society, originally the League's Hammersmith branch. It met in the large stable-room adjoining Kelmscott House, where the weaving of rugs and carpets had first begun.

Hopes and Fears for Art, published in 1882, contains the best general summary of his ideals. In the third lecture, on "The Beauty of Life," there is a memorable aphorism : "If you want a golden rule that will fit everybody, *this is it*."

Have nothing in your houses that you do not know to be useful or believe to be beautiful." The five lectures constitute an effective criticism of commercial ugliness and shoddy.

For *The Commonweal* he wrote much ordinary journalism, articles and political comments, but he also contributed poetry and prose that rank with his best work. The unfinished series of poems, *The Pilgrims of Hope*, included *Mother and Son* and *The Half of Life Gone*, afterwards reprinted in *Poems by the Way*. *A Dream of John Ball* appeared serially, and was later followed by *News from Nowhere*. Southey took the Peasants' Revolt as the subject of a drama, *Wat Tyler*, in which John Ball preaches his sermon on Blackheath. It was surreptitiously published, for Southey, like Morris, imbued this theme with revolutionary fervour. *The Defence of Guenevere* had revealed that extraordinary power in Morris, the intensity with which his vision could be stimulated by dreams of the Middle Ages. *The Haystack in the Floods* is the most remarkable of his short poems, a mediaeval murder, seen **with** ghastly vividness. In *A Dream of John Ball*, Morris showed that he could translate a different mood of mediaeval inspiration into prose. The nineteenth-century Socialist witnesses a skirmish between insurgents and knights. Morris's description of the fighting is alive **with a matter-of-fact**

realism which can bear comparison with Defoe's narrative genius.

News from Nowhere is inevitably his happiest work. Here the idealist of 1890 wakes up to find himself in an England, changed after two hundred years into a land fit for Morris to live in. The book was a reply to Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward, 2000-1887*, a highly mechanised American Utopia. The Bellamy system of life, pursued to its logical conclusion, ends in the satire of Mr. Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, with its robots and their mechanical psychology. Morris's dream is surely the most vivid and enviable among famous Utopias. Cheerfulness will keep breaking through his sociology, and there is very little bother about law and government. He was much amused by certain people who took *News from Nowhere* quite seriously as a statement of political belief. The fantasy, however, embodies a good deal of enlightened thought, expressed, for example, in the attitude of the inhabitants of "Nowhere" to marriage and divorce; above all in its emphasis of a truth by which Morris supplements the famous premise at the beginning of Aristotle's *Politics* - "Man is a political animal," and, said Morris, an industrious one. Ellen, in *News from Nowhere*, is a delightful girl. A reader told Morris that he had fallen in love with her, and the author confessed that he had done so himself.

The passive Socialism of his last years was centred in the Hammersmith Socialist Society, of which Emery Walker (1851-1933) became secretary. Speakers at its meetings included Prince Kropotkin, Mr. Bernard Shaw, the Webbs, Graham Wallas, Annie Besant, Lord Olivier, and Mr. Ramsay MacDonald.

Morris's approach to Socialism was vital and yet remote from the immediate problems and practical hopes of his age. A future generation may find in his pleading the essence of a new faith. He would not ally himself with the school of Socialism which has made such progress as has hitherto been achieved. Compromise was foreign to his character, and Morris had little faith in **the** socialisation of the capitalist system or "the inevitability of gradualness" policy developed by the Fabian Society and the earlier I.L.P. These two bodies, more than any other Socialist organisations, are responsible for the growth and present strength of Labour as one of the two effective political parties. "To the vast majority of mankind," wrote Matthew **Arnold**, "how **little of a feast for their senses can life possibly be !**" It is a harsh fact against which **Morris vainly** pitted his hope and strength. **His plea for art and happy work was still-born in a world afflicted with sickening poverty, sweated labour conditions, and slums. Yet the dreamer could put this**

economic prophecy into the mouth of John Ball :

" therefore, hearken, for I tell thee that times of plenty shall in those days be the times of famine, and all shall pray for the prices of wares to rise, so that the forestallers² and regraters¹ may thrive, and that some of their well-doing may overflow on to those on whom they live."

¹ Mediaeval profiteers.

CHAPTER VI

The Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society - prose romances - the Kilmiscott Press — *Poems by the Way* - death — the man - achievement ideas and influence.

AFTER George Wardle retired from the management, the two sub-managers, F. and R. Smith, were taken into partnership and the firm became increasingly prosperous. Morris himself was less busy with its affairs, but he still made designs and kept an eye on the work at Merton Abbey. Study of Near-Eastern and Indian art influenced the character of several designs which belong to Morris's later period. J. H. Dearie, who had joined the firm as a boy apprentice, developed into a very capable weaver and tapestry-designer. A verdure tapestry, woven for the Hon. Percy Wyndham, was largely Dearie's work. It may eventually be regarded as the finest of Merton Abbey tapestries. About 1890, Morris was engaged in "Anti-Scrape" controversy, fighting a drastic scheme to restore the interior of Westminster Abbey. He was also lecturing to various institutions and societies.

Meanwhile the revival of handicrafts, inspired by his example, had led, in 1884, to the foundation of the Art Workers' Guild. Four years later

the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society was established. By this time there was a group of educated craftsmen, who were enthusiasts and eager to spread the artist-workman gospel. Some, like Crane, Cobden-Sanderson, and Emery Walker, were fellow Socialists. Cobden-Sanderson, who had been at Cambridge, gave up his practice at the Bar, became a binder, and afterwards Emery Walker's partner in the Doves' Press. W. A. S. Benson, an Oxford man, turned from architecture to metal-work and the making of furniture. In the 'sixties and 'seventies Morris's choice of occupation had seemed altogether eccentric ; here were his followers.

The Society's first exhibition was held at the New Gallery, Regent Street, which is now a cinema. One of its chief aims was to secure fair recognition for decorative art by exhibiting works " under the name of the designer and responsible executant. (If a joint work, the names of the various workers to be given.)" The quotation is from the circular which Walter Crane drafted.

Depressed by the Socialist League's failure, Morris was not in a sanguine mood about anything, and disinclined to be hopeful with regard to this scheme, although he loyally supported it. He failed to see that a good deal of public interest might be aroused. The Society's Exhibitions of

1888, 1889, 1890, 1893, and 1896 were well attended. Various members contributed lectures and papers dealing with the crafts, and the latter were collected and published in 1893, with an introduction by Morris, who succeeded Crane as President.

During the last ten years of his life, Morris's romantic impulse found fresh and unique expression in a series of prose romances. *A Tale of the House of the Wolfings and all the Kindreds of the Mark. Written in prose and in verse*, appeared in 1888. It was the first of these stories, set in a world of primitive Nordic peoples, relating adventurous quests and tales of magic. Their prose abounds in quaint archaisms, and occasionally the style becomes ludicrous, but, on the whole, he contrived a medium adapted to the atmosphere created by his fancy. There is little trace of serious affectation. Like Doughty, he used an archaic diction with intuitive ease, and Morris, it should be noted, admired *Arabia Deserta*. After the *House of the Wolfings* came *The Roots of the Mountains* (1890) ; *The Story of the Glittering Plain* (1891) ; *The Wood Beyond the World* (1894) ; and *The Well at the World's End* (1896). *The Water of the Wondrous Isles* appeared posthumously ; the concluding lines of *The Sundering Flood* were dictated to his secretary less than a month before Morris died.

Mr. Yeats's "happiest of the poets" is more

conspicuous in the prose romances than in his other writings, except *News from Nowhere*. They were conceived in a mood of youth, spring, love, high hope, and happy endings. Arcadian delights are described in *The Wood Beyond the World*, which is really a fairy story.

" Thou shalt see,' she said ; and led him therewith into the said thicket and through it, and lo ! a fair little grassy place, full of flowers, betwixt the bushes and the bight of the stream ; and on the little sandy ere, just off the green-sward, was a fire of sticks, and beside it two trouts lying, fat and red-flecked.

" * Here is the breakfast,' said she ; ' when it was time to wash the night off me e'en now, I went down the strand here into the rippling shallow, and saw the bank below it, where the water draws together yonder, and deepens, that it seemed like to hold fish ; and, whereas I looked to meet thee presently, I groped the bank for them, going softly ; and lo, thou ! Help me now, that we cook them.'

" So they roasted them on the red embers, and fell to and ate well, both of them, and drank of the water of the stream out of each other's hollow hands ; and that feast seemed glorious to them, such gladness went with it."

In *The Story of the Glittering Plain*, Morris draws on his memories of Iceland for this landscape :

" A wilderness of black sand and stones and ice-borne rocks, with here and there a little grass growing in the hollows, and here and there a dreary mire where the white-tufted rushes shook in the wind, and here and there stretches of moss blended with the red-blossomed sengreen ; and elsewhere nought but the wind-bitten creeping willow clinging to the black sand, with a white bleached stick and a leaf or two, and again a stick and a leaf. In the offing looking landward were great mountains, some very great and snow-capped, some bare to the tops ; and all that was far away, save the snow, was deep-blue in the sunny morning."

There is a strong hint of Morris's influence in Maurice Hewlett's romance, *The Forest Lovers*.

During 1893 and 1894, Morris made pleasing translations from French prose romances of the thirteenth century, among others *Le Conte du Roi Flore et de la Belle Jehanne* and *Le Conte de l'Empereur Constant*. In this period he also produced, in collaboration with A. J. Wyatt, an unsuccessful verse rendering of the Anglo-Saxon epic, *Beowulf*.

He had suffered, in 1891, from another bad attack of gout, complicated by severe kidney disease, and after this his vast enthusiasm for work contended with his failing strength. The Kelmscott Press must be considered all the more remarkable in that Morris was really a dying man **when**

he designed some of the borders and initials for its books.

In the closing years of his life he turned from the disappointments of active Socialism to books, and was happily absorbed in reading, translating, writing, printing, and collecting. Before he began to print, Morris had bought fine books without becoming a serious bibliophile. Many of these were, as has already been mentioned, sold to help Socialist funds. Now study of illuminated manuscripts and incunabula, with a view to actual book production, infected him with a rabid collector's enthusiasm. He paid as much as £1,000 and 3 £900 for mediaeval manuscripts which he added to his library. The sale of the collection after his death realised £11,000, and a large proportion of its treasures went to the famous Pierpont Morgan Library in New York.

A spate of private presses has followed Morris's enterprise, but at the time when the Kelmscott Press was established there had been nothing in England at all comparable with it. Horace Walpole's dilettantism extended to a private press at Strawberry Hill. The Daniel Press, 1845-1919, was a hobby of C. H. O. Daniel, who became Provost of Worcester College, Oxford, and transferred his private press from Frome to Oxford. Neither of these predecessors had been creative in the full sense of designing new type

and ornaments. Caslon founts seem to have been used by the Strawberry Hill Press, while Daniel revived the use of seventeenth-century Fell types, which were originally obtained from Holland for the Oxford University Press by the Dr. Fell immortalised in the famous rhyme. There is an important date in the dreary history of English trade printing during the nineteenth century. In 1844 the Chiswick Press reintroduced Caslon's old-face fount for an edition of Lady Willoughby's *Diary*. The younger Charles Whittingham was head of this firm, and was responsible for some excellent books produced with the publisher, William Pickering. Whittingham printed the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, with its quaint Gothic title page, *The Defence of Guenevere*, and *Jason*. In 1866, Morris projected a fine edition of *The Earthly Paradise*. Burne-Jones drew illustrations which Morris engraved on wood. The Chiswick Press set up specimen pages, but the scheme finally came to nothing, while a similar plan for a special edition of *Love is Enough* was also abandoned. Between 1871 and 1888, his life had been too crowded with other activities to allow time for further experiments in book designing. Morris's interest was reawakened by association with Emery Walker, his neighbour at Hammer-smith and an authority on typography. *The House of the Wolfings*, which appeared in December of

1888, was printed by the Chiswick Press in its Basel type. This fount was designed by Whittingharn, being modelled on that of Johann Froben, the famous sixteenth-century Basel printer.

At the first Arts and Crafts Exhibition, Walker gave a lecture on printing, illustrated by lantern slides of early types. This was on the 15th of November 1888, and it seems to have excited in Morris a fixed determination to design types and to set up a press of his own. Walker declined Morris's invitation to become a partner in the enterprise, but he was constantly asked for advice, and became, for all practical purposes, a consulting director. Photographic enlargements were made from the roman types of two fifteenth-century Venetian printers, Jacobus Rubeus and the incomparable Nicolas Jenson. Mr. Stanley Morrison says of Jenson's roman fount :

" No praise seems too high for it, William Morris has copied it, so also Emery Walker, Cobden-Sanderson and Bruce Rogers.⁰

Morris studied these enlargements long and carefully before he began to design his own letters on the same magnified scale. Each letter that he drew was then photographed to the actual size required for the fount. Punches were cut and impressions, smoked proofs, made from them.

" My father," wrote Miss May Morris, " used to go about with matchboxes containing these ' smokes ' of the type in his pockets, and sometimes as he sat and talked with us, he would draw one out, and thoughtfully eye the small scraps of paper inside. And some of the letters seemed to be diabolically inspired, and would not fall into line for a while, and then there were great consultations till the evil spirit was subdued."

Gradually the fount was completed.

During 1890, Morris investigated inks and papers, his old problem of seeking out fine and durable materials. The ink which he ultimately selected came from Jaenecke of Hanover. Joseph Batchelor, of Little Chart, Kent, satisfied Morris's exacting standard of quality with a hand-made paper, wholly of linen. A fifteenth-century Bolognese paper was taken as a model. Of course, Morris, as Mr. Mackail has recorded,

" must take off his coat and try to make a sheet of paper with his own hands. At the second attempt he succeeded in doing very creditably what it is supposed takes a man several months to master."

The press was the second of Morris's undertakings to be established at Hammersmith, but, unlike carpet-weaving, it had no connection with

the firm. In January 1891, premises were taken at No. 16 Upper Mall, within a stone's throw of Kclmscott House. W. H. Bowden, a retired master-printer, had been engaged as compositor and pressman ; he was soon joined by his son. The hand-presses used were of the kind known as Albion. Morris's romance, *The Story of the Glittering Plain*^ was issued in May, and sold by Reeves and Turner, publishers of *The House of the Wolfings*. After 1892, Morris began to publish Kclmscott Press books himself: " I shall get more money ; and the public will have to pay less."

His roman type, called " Golden," was followed by " Troy " and " Chaucer " - names derived from the books for which they were used. The Kclmscott Press issued a series of Caxton reprints, which included *The Golden Legend*^ and *The Rccuyell of the Historyes of Troye*. The latter was the first book printed in the English language. "Troy," designed in 1891, was a Gothic fount inspired by the letters of very early German printers like Schoeffer of Mainz, Koberger of Nuremberg, and Zainer of Augsburg. "Chaucer" was a smaller size of " Troy."

Morris's long working association with Burnc-Jones culminated in the Kclmscott Press, for which the latter drew a great number of illustrations. W. H. Hooper, an experienced craftsman,

came out of retirement to help the press. He had been an engraver of Leech, Tenniel, Keene, Millais, and others, for the *Illustrated London News* and for *Punch*. He engraved blocks for many of the initials and borders designed by Morris, as well as those for several of Burne-Jones's drawings.

Except for the Chaucer, the bindings were simply in vellum and halfHolland. The coloured silk ties attached to the vellum covers were specially woven and dyed.

Fifty-three books came from the press, and among them were most of Morris's own writings. Otherwise the list naturally reflects his literary admirations and interests - Ruskin's *The Nature of Gothic* ; More's *Utopia* ; Keats ; *Sire Degrevaunt*, and Chaucer. *The Nature of Gothic* was issued, with a preface by Morris which is not unworthy of that marvellous chapter from *The Stones of Venice*. *Sire Degrevaunt* is a Norman-French romance, translated into English about 1440, and published by the Camden Society in 1858. This story has already been mentioned as the subject of Burne-Jones's panels for the drawing-room at Red House. The Chaucer was much the most ambitious achievement of the Kelmscott Press, a folio, printed in black and red, with eighty-seven woodcut illustrations from designs by Burne-Jones. The edition consisted of 425 copies on paper at £20 and 13 on vellum at 120 guineas.

Morris intended to design four different bindings for this book, but he only lived to finish one for blind tooling on white pigskin with silver clasps, which was executed at Cobden-Sanderson's Doves' bindery, a few doors from the press. It is a most handsome piece of work.

The Kelmscott Press has been severely criticised in recent years. Morris's page is considered to be too black, his decoration overwhelmingly exuberant, and neither the roman nor the Gothic fount is regarded with approval. If one admits that the taste of our day is hopelessly prejudiced on the subject of repeating floral pattern, it is still rather true that Morris treated the printed page too much as though it were something between an illuminated manuscript and a textile. "Golden" type is not likely to be revived, while "Troy," which Morris himself preferred, was not a triumphant experiment. Both founts lack the highest quality of type design, which seems almost to be a prerogative of the engraver's art. For instance, Jenson, a Frenchman, was master of the Mint at Tours, and Caslon had been an engraver of gun-barrels. Morris set out to design a legible Gothic type, and, to some extent, he succeeded, but the rational use of such founts is strictly limited. The German Klingspor foundry has produced an excellent "black letter." A specimen is illustrated in a volume of

sacred music, where the effect is wholly appropriate. In spite of its general magnificence, the Kclmscott Chaucer is spoilt by its type. Morris's ornamental initial letters are not equal to his borders, many of which are fluent and vigorous.

In nothing that he undertook did Morris exercise an influence so profound as that which sprang from his work as a printer. In the twentieth century, printing, more than any of the industrial arts, has yielded to taste and to intelligent design. The Kclmscott Press books are so outstandingly important because Morris fully understood that type, illustrations, and ornament should be designed in sympathy with one another.

" Morris," says Mr. D. B. Updike, " taught a lesson in the unity of effect in books for which the modern printer is deeply in his debt - a unity now influencing volumes very far removed from those rather precious productions in which it was first exemplified."

He rightly insisted that the unit in book design consists of the double page, and that the proportion of margins must be considered in relation to it.

He was obsessed with hatred of modern-face types. To-day there is much tolerance in regard to the use of old or modern faces, a belief that appropriateness can be the only reasonable

criterion. The researches carried out by present-day typographers mainly follow Morris's historical method. The great collections of early books have been closely studied with a view to discovering the finest examples of type-design. Such investigations create waves of enthusiasm for Garamond, Blado italic, and many different founts.

The second book to be issued by the Kelmscott Press was a collection of his own verse, published in 1891 under the title *of Poems by the Way*. The volume contains a few very early poems, and others written at various periods of his life. Here, Morris brought together a medley which ranges over his mind's gamut - poems inspired by Socialism, Norse legend, and mediaeval romance. A few of his shorter translations were included. The nymph's song to Hylas, from *Jason*, was reprinted with the title *A Garden by the Sea*. There are also verses associated with painting and tapestry, the four stanzas for Burnc-Jones's *Briar Rose* series, and the thirteen couplets for *Tapestry Trees*. Among the latter is this flawless gem :

VINE : / *draw the blood from out the earth ;*
I store the sun for winter mirth.

The couplet for ORANGE-TREE :

Amidst the greenness of my night,
My odorous lamps hang round and bright,

echoes Marvel's lines from *Bermudas* :

*He hangs in shades the orange bright
Like golden lamps in a green night.*

Mother and Son, *The Half of Life Gone*, and *The Message of the March Wind*, formed part of an unfinished narrative sequence, *The Pilgrims of Hope*, which had first appeared in *The Commonwealth* during 1885. These three poems are finer than anything in the book except *A Garden by the Sea*, and it is significant that they came from his last vein of inspiration. He is the one important poet of Socialism. *Poems by the Way* must, however, be considered a relatively disappointing book, for *The Defence of Guenevere* is altogether more impressive than this final volume. *Sigurd* stands apart, but otherwise Morris's first book promised greater things than *Jason*, *The Earthly Paradise*, *Love is Enough*, and *The Pilgrims of Hope*.

In the spring of 1896 his strength began to ebb fast. A stay at Folkestone during June brought no improvement, and in July he was advised to take a sea voyage to Norway, but he was miserable away from his books and the absorbing interest of the Kelmscott Press. When he returned to England, in the second half of August, he became desperately ill. Throughout the following month he grew steadily weaker and

died at Hammersmith on the 3rd of October, in his sixty-third year.

He was buried in the churchyard at Kelmscott on the 6th of October : " The only funeral I have ever seen," wrote W. R. Lethaby, " that did not make me ashamed to have to be buried." The unpolished oak coffin with wrought-iron handles was borne on a farm-cart such as Morris described in *The Half of Life Gone* -

*The forks shine white in the sun
Round the yellow red-wheeled wain.
Where the mountain of hay grows fast.*

When life had gone, this was the simple hearse on which his body was carried to the grave.

In later years, Morris's appearance was splendidly venerable. With his magnificent head, thick white hair and beard, and massive physique, he looked the great man that he was. Mr. Sydney Cockerell possesses a photograph of the Kelmscott Press staff in which Morris is seated like a white-maned lion among ordinary men. He had long ago dispensed with a neck-tie. He habitually wore a dark blue serge suit and a lighter blue shirt and collar. His gait was rolling and, apparently, nautical. A fireman once stopped him in Kensington High Street to ask : " Beg pardon, sir, but were you ever captain of the *Sea Swallow* ? " G. F. Watts's portrait in the

National Portrait Gallery reveals Morris's in-expressive eyes that saw everything without seeming to look.

Strong contrasts in the personalities of " Topsy " and Burne-Jones were emphasised by physical differences. The former had enormous vitality, which he spent with persistent recklessness, whereas Burne-Jones was always a delicate man. " Topsy " was bold and vehement ; his friend humble, laborious, and quietly persevering. " Topsy " lacked most kinds of humour - those he had were either grim or exuberant — and he could appreciate neither wit nor irony. The sense of fun, which Burne-Jones so rigidly excluded from his work as a painter, appeared in delightful little drawings of himself and his friends. They are rather suggestive of Edward Lear. He was full of subtle humour and happy wit : " O Tempera ! O Morris ! " The pun was more than worthy of the Oxford Union, and it was an unconsciously apt comment on those disastrous mural paintings. Burne-Jones's charming and talented wife seems better than anyone else to have understood Morris. To her quick sympathy he confided his hopes and disappointments.

Morris remained a fidget throughout life. As a schoolboy he used to employ his restless hands in netting. One end of the net was attached to

a desk in the big schoolroom at Marlborough and he would work away at it for hours. He was never able to sit still for any length of time. He "had aristocratic instincts, and his temper was not only explosive but masterful. Yet he could "blow up" his own workmen or address a working-class audience without a trace of condescension. There was no vanity in him, and he had the most complete simplicity of mind, together with a distrust of obviously clever people. Morris was actually shy and rather uninterested in particular human beings or shades of personality. Self-absorbed and pre-occupied, he could, unintentionally, be most rude. From the disappointments and insults that he endured as an active Socialist he emerged with a more certain temper. Even so, he must always have been terrifying. A lady, who is by no means timid, declares that as a girl of seventeen or eighteen she was thoroughly frightened of him, although her father and Morris were very close friends.

Morris got through an incredible amount of work because he was quick, immensely strong, and enjoyed work far more than anything in life. Like other bewildering workers he seemed to be strangely unhurried. Great stretches of toil were interspersed with fishing expeditions, days in the country, and the enthusiastic ordering of gardens.

At Red House, Kelmscott, and Merton he made delightful gardens and revealed much knowledge of flowers and trees. He never belonged to a club, he would not wear dress clothes, and he* ignored all the formal contacts of social life. The time and energy which other men consume in this way were given to work. When he was quite a young man he seemed to know by instinct what would appeal to him and what would bore him.

It is easy to understand the hero-worship which Morris inspired. Remote and self-sufficing, appearing to move through life in a strenuous dream, he yet exercised over men and women the fascination that radiates from dynamic energy and courage.

" Morris will be here to-morrow," wrote Burne-Jones, " strong, self-contained, master of himself and therefore of the world. Solitude cannot hurt him nor dismay him. Such strength as his I see nowhere."

A shrewd man of wide experience, who worked with Morris in the 'nineties, corroborated this impression. He told me that, nowadays, for strength such as Morris's one would have to turn from the arts to " somebody like Mussolini."

His hatred of industrial civilisation made him a Socialist, but he was none the less a responsible citizen, and despised the fribbling licence for

which Bohemianism is supposed to provide sufficient justification. He was as earnest as Carlyle, Ruskin, Emerson, or any of the fervid "prophets of the nineteenth century. He was born to such comfortable circumstances that he never had to practise serious thrift or self-denial. If Morris's energy and ability kept the business alive during the early years, it is equally true that his careless finance nearly killed it. Mr. Sydney Cockerell possesses some letters from Warrington Taylor to Philip Webb which show that Taylor had a hard struggle to keep the firm's accounts on a safe footing. There seems no reason to doubt that, but for Taylor's efforts, the business would not have survived to enjoy the prosperity and achievements of Merton Abbey. Save for this rather inevitable failing, Morris was dependable, scrupulously fair in all his dealings, and a thoroughly honest burgess, with the best traditions of the class from which he sprang. One may picture him as the leading craftsman of Ghent in the fourteenth century, a staunch guildsman, and a formidable supporter of Van Artevelde's burgher democracy.

Morris's literary tastes were certainly not catholic. Apart from enthusiasm for the classical stories, sagas, and mediaeval romance, he had few admirations. Writers like Tolstoy and Ibsen, with their analysis of character and psychology,

made no appeal to him. As a Romantic he admired Coleridge, Keats, Tennyson, and some of Browning, but he did not enjoy Stevenson or Meredith. Morris could appreciate exuberant" humour, and delighted in three of its masters - Dickens, Surtees, and Mark Twain. His own writings, however, echoed none of this mirth.

His genius was not exciting, but substantial and extraordinarily versatile. George Saintsbury wrote of Morris's poetry in 1895 :

" It has always seemed to me that not merely the general, but even the critical public, ranks him far below his proper station as a poet."

The ordinary reader, especially, must be frightened of his voluminousness. Morris's reputation seems to need a selection from the shorter poems with an introduction by a sufficiently gifted and sympathetic critic. Such a book, together with *Sigurd*, might help to secure the fuller recognition which is due to his stature.

The quantity and range of Morris's output in literature and art were prodigious. There is no critical study of his whole achievement in which its importance is judiciously assessed. At his best he could join fine quality to amazing variety. The man who wrote *The Defence of Guenevere* in his early twenties, the outstanding lyrics and short

poems scattered through the volumes of narrative verse and *Love is Enough*, who could write *News from Nowhere* and *A Dream of John Ball*, who designed, and largely executed, the illuminated manuscript of *The Rubd'iydt*, who created some excellent textiles, printed fabrics, and wallpapers, was among the most remarkable men of his own or any age. Morris was obviously one of the best educated men that ever lived. Without definite scholarship, he read Greek, Latin, Icelandic, and certain kinds of Romance literature. His knowledge and practical work in many arts implied an understanding of different scientific principles and mechanical devices. He was something of a naturalist, a skilful gardener, and had a wide antiquarian knowledge. Dryden's satire applies to Morris in all seriousness :

*A man so various, that he seemed to be
Not one, but all mankind's epitome.*

He may not have been a very great designer and craftsman, but he brought to the domestic arts, during the nineteenth century, an architectural instinct and genuine culture. The fact that the firm's wares could only be appreciated and bought by people of education and means strengthened his Socialist conviction. In *Hopes and Fears for Art*, Morris borrows Lincoln's famous words and adapts them to his own gospel of

democracy : " Art made by the people and for the people, a joy to the maker and the user."

His influence on taste and thought was far-reaching, and flowed into many channels. In her delightful book, *Pot-Pourri from a Surrey Garden*, Mrs. C. W. Earle wrote :

" The first time I went to Mr. Morris's old shop in Queen Square, quite as a girl, it was indeed a revelation. It had the effect of a sudden opening of a window in a dark room. All was revealed - the beauty of simplicity, the usefulness of form, the fascination of design, and the charm of delicate colour."

Morris was heartily masculine, and almost elaborately unaffected in his attitude to art and poetry, as matter-of-fact in referring to his work as though he were talking about plumbing. Yet his simplicity and Burne-Jones's earnest Romanticism were mainly responsible for the birth of that fatuously self-conscious child, the aesthetic movement, which became the butt of Gilbert's satire in *Patience*. Wilde used to attend meetings of the Artworkers' Guild. A volume of his essays and lectures includes " Art and the Handicraftsman," " Lecture to Art Students," and " House Decoration."

The arts and crafts movement was altogether disappointing in its direct results. Whatever anyone may think of Socialism as a vehicle for popular art, Morris has been proved right in his belief that economic and social conditions absolutely dominate the issue. A few individual and independent craftsmen - Ernest Gimson, Christopher Whall, Edward Johnston, Bernard Leach, Michael Cardew, and others - are swallows far too rare to make a Morris summer. But a quite recent tendency in general education, the teaching of handicrafts in elementary and secondary schools, is a tribute to Morris's ideas, and must have some tangible effect on the whole population. Before this, his influence had principally been confined to schools of art.

Morris had a powerful and logical mind, although his opinions were inflamed by crusading enthusiasm. In collected volumes of his lectures, *Hopes and Fears for Art*, and *Architecture, Industry and Wealth*, he expresses convictions that were largely inspired by Ruskin. The lectures deserve to be read more widely, for Morris reveals in them the depth of his instincts and a solid grasp of values. For many people Ruskin's eloquence is marred by its Messianic tone. They may prefer the direct style of Morris. Through the very nature of his strong impulses, Morris reverted in spirit to an age when things were superlatively

well fashioned and the workman enjoyed his labour :

" Time was when everyone that made anything, made a work of art besides a useful piece of goods ; and it gave them pleasure to do it. Whatever I doubt, I have no doubt of that."

His hatred of the Renaissance sprang from a kind of religion, rather than from purely aesthetic prejudices. He saw the Renaissance as the beginning of progressive changes which were to extinguish the craftsman. To Morris an early Gothic cathedral was more than a noble work of art. It was a vast symphony composed by simple workmen, who were guided by a master-builder to express their own fancy with highly trained skill. The conception lay at the root of Morris's ideals and his firm belief in the potentialities of the ordinary man, to whom he delivered a message more inspiring than that of other Socialist prophets.

An extract from the lecture on " Art and Socialism " shows that Morris was not blinded by prejudice in regard to mechanical inventions.

" Those almost miraculous machines, which if orderly forethought had dealt with them might even now be speedily extinguishing all irksome and unintelligent labour, leaving us

free to raise the standard of skill of hand and energy of mind in our workmen, and to produce afresh that loveliness and order which only the hand of man guided by his own soul can produce ; what have they done for us now ? "

Morris asked this question fifty years ago. It has since become more grimly pertinent.

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