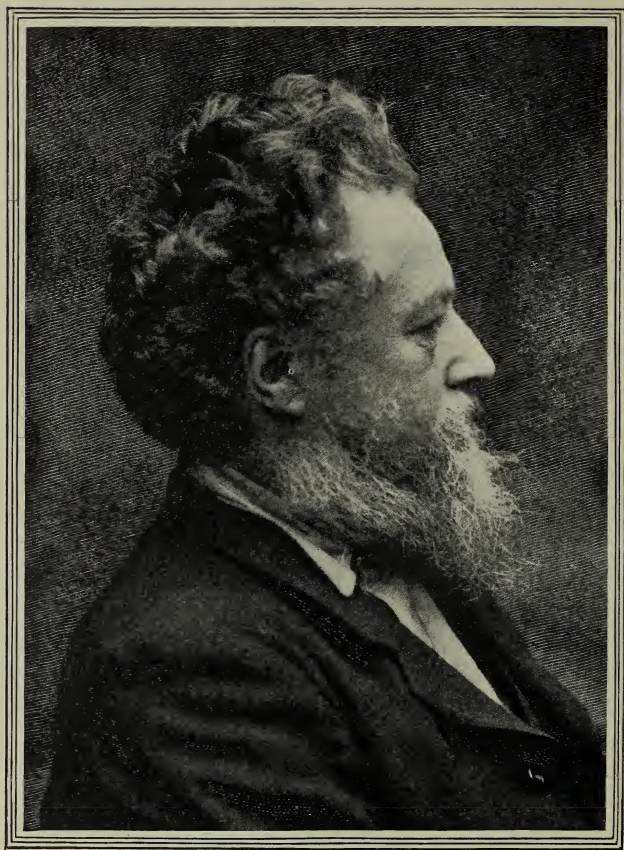


WILLIAM MORRIS AND HIS WORK



PORTRAIT OF WILLIAM MORRIS. FROM A PHOTOGRAPH
BY EMERY WALKER.

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IF it is agreed that art, after all, may be summed up as the expression of character, it follows that the more we realize an artist's personality the clearer understanding we shall get of his work. So remarkable a personality as that of William Morris must have left many distinct, and at the same time different, impressions upon the minds of those who knew him, or enjoyed his friendship in life.

It is difficult to realize that fifteen years have passed away since he left us; but from the dark and blurred background of changing years his character and work define themselves, and his position and influence take their true place, while his memory, like some masterly portrait, remains clear and vivid in our minds—re-presented as it were in the severe but refined draughtsmanship of time.

With so distinct and massive an individuality it was strange to hear him say, as I once did, that of the six different personalities he recognized within himself at different times he often wondered which was the real William Morris! Those who knew him, however, were aware of many different sides, and we know that the "idle dreamer of an

empty day" was also the enthusiastic artist and craftsman, and could become the man of passionate action on occasion, or the shrewd man of business, or the keen politician also, as well as the quiet observer of nature and life. Even the somewhat Johnsonian absoluteness and emphasis of expression which characterized him generally, would occasionally give way to an open-to-conviction manner, when tackled by a sincere and straightforward questioner.

But Morris was above and before all else a poet—a *practical* poet, if one may use such a term—and this explains the whole of his work. Not that personally he at all answered to the popular conventional idea of a poet, rather the reverse, and he was anything but a sentimentalist. He hated both the introspective and the rhetorical school, and he never posed. He loved romance and was steeped in mediaeval lore, but it was a real living world to him, and the glimpses he gives us are those of an actual spectator. It is not archaeology, it is *life*, quite as vivid to him, perhaps more so than that of the present day. He loved nature, he loved beautiful detail, he loved pattern, he loved colour—"red and blue" he used to say in his full-blooded way. *His patterns are decorative poems* in terms of form and colour. *His poems and romances are decorative patterns* in forms of speech and rhyme. His dream world and his ideal world were like one

of his own tapestries—a green field starred with vivid flowers upon which moved the noble and beautiful figures of his romantic imagination, as distinct in type and colour as heraldic charges. Textile design interested him profoundly and occupied him greatly, and one may trace its influence, I think, throughout his work—even in his Kelmscott Press borders. One might almost say that he had a textile imagination, his poems and romances seem to be woven in the loom of his mind, and to enfold the reader like a magic web.

But though he cast his conceptions in the forms and dress of a past age, he took his inspiration straight from nature and life. His poems are full of English landscapes, and through the woods of his romances one might come upon a reach of the silvery Thames at any moment. The river he loved winds through the whole of his delightful Socialistic Utopia in “News from Nowhere.”

As a craftsman and an artist working with assistants and in the course of his business he was brought face to face with the modern conditions of labour and manufacture, and was forced to think about the political economy of art. Accepting the economic teaching of John Ruskin, he went much further and gave his allegiance to the banner of Socialism, under which, however, he founded his own school and had his own following, and conducted his own newspaper. From the dream

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world of romance, and from the sequestered garden of design, he plunged into the thick of the fight for human freedom, in which, he held, was involved the very existence of art.

Ever and anon he returned to his sanctuary—his workshop—to fashion some new thing of beauty, in verse or craftsmanship, in which we see the results of his labour in so many directions.

He certainly seemed to have possessed a larger and fuller measure of vitality and energy than most men—perhaps such extra vitality is the distinction of genius—but the very strenuousness of his nature probably shortened the duration of his life. There were never any half-measures with him, but everything he took up, he went into seriously, nay, passionately, with the whole force of his being. His power of concentration (the secret of great workers) was enormous, and was spent from time to time in a multitude of ways, but whether in the eager search for decorative beauty, his care for the preservation of ancient buildings, in the delight of ancient saga, story, or romance, or in the battle for the welfare of mankind, like one of his own chieftains and heroes, he always made his presence felt, and as the practical pioneer and the master-craftsman in the revival of English design and handicraft his memory will always be held in honour.

His death marked an epoch both in art and in social and economic thought. The press notices

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and appreciations that have appeared from time to time for the most part have dwelt upon his work as a poet and an artist and craftsman, and have but lightly passed over his connection with Socialism and advanced thought.

But, even apart from prejudice, a hundred will note the beauty and splendour of the flower to one who will notice the leaf and the stem, or the roots and the soil from which the tree springs.

Yet the greatness of a man must be measured by the number of spheres in which he is distinguished—the width of his range and appeal to his fellows.

In the different branches of his work William Morris commanded the admiration, or, what is equally a tribute to his force, excited the opposition—of as many different sections of specialists.

As a poet he appealed to poets by reason of many distinct qualities. He united pre-Raphaelite vividness (as in "The Haystack in the Floods"), with a dream-like, wistful sweetness and charm of flowing narrative, woven in a kind of rich mediæval tapestry of verse, and steeped with the very essence of legendary romance as in "The Earthly Paradise"; or with the heroic spirit of earlier time, as in "Sigurd the Volsung," while all these qualities are combined in his later prose romances.

His architectural and archaeological knowledge again was complete enough for the architect and the antiquary.

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His classical and historical lore won him the respect of scholars.

His equipment as a designer and craftsman, based upon his architectural knowledge and training enabled him to exercise an extraordinary influence over all the arts of design, and gave him his place as leader of our latter-day English revival of handicraft—a position perhaps in which he is widest known.

In all these capacities the strength and beauty of William Morris's work has been freely acknowledged by his brother craftsmen, as well as by a very large public.

There was, however, still another direction in which his vigour and personal weight were thrown with all the ardour of an exceptionally ardent nature, wherein the importance and significance of his work is as yet but partially apprehended—I mean his work in the cause of Socialism, in which he might severally be regarded as an economist, a public lecturer, a propagandist, a controversialist.

No doubt many even of the most emphatic admirers of William Morris's work as an artist, a poet, and a decorator have been unable to follow him in this direction, while others have deplored, or even denounced, his self-sacrificing enthusiasm. There seems to have been insuperable difficulty to some minds in realizing that the man who wrote "The Earthly Paradise" should have lent

a hand to try to bring it about, when once the new hope had dawned upon him.

There is no greater mistake than to think of William Morris as a sentimentalist, who, having built himself a dream-house of art and poetry, sighs over the turmoil of the world, and calls himself a Socialist because factory chimneys obtrude themselves upon his view.

It seems to have escaped those who have inclined to such an opinion that a man, in Emerson's phrase, "can only obey his own polarity." His life must gravitate necessarily towards its centre. The accident that he should have reached economics and politics through poetry and art, so far from disqualifying a man to be heard, only establishes his claim to bring a cultivated mind and imaginative force to bear upon the hard facts of nature and science.

The practice of his art, his position as an employer of labour, his intensely practical knowledge of certain handicrafts, all these things brought him face to face with the great Labour question; and the fact that he was an artist and a poet, a man of imagination and feeling as well as intellect, gave him exceptional advantages in solving it—at least theoretically. His practical nature and sincerity moved him to join hands with men who offered a practical programme, or at least who opened up possibilities of action towards bringing about a new social system.

His own personal view of a society based upon an entire change of economic system is most attractively and picturesquely described in "News from Nowhere, some Chapters of a Utopian Romance." He called it *Utopian*, but, in his view, and granting the conditions, it was a perfectly practical Utopia. He even gave an account (through the mouth of a survivor of the old order) of the probable course of events which might lead up to such a change. The book was written as a sort of counterblast to Edward Bellamy's "Looking Backward," which on its appearance was very widely read on both sides of the water, and there seemed at the time some danger of the picture there given of a socialized state being accepted as the only possible one. It may be partly answerable for an impression in some quarters that a Socialist system must necessarily be mechanical. But the society described in "Looking Backward" is, after all, only a little more developed along the present lines of American social life—a sublimation of the universal supply of average citizen wants by mechanical means, with the main-spring of the machine altered from individual profit to collective interest. This book, most ingeniously thought out as it was, did its work, no doubt, and appealed with remarkable force to minds of a certain construction and bias, and it is only just to Bellamy to say that he claimed no finality for it.

But "News from Nowhere" may be considered—apart from the underlying principle, common to both, of the collective welfare as the determining constructive factor of the social system—as its complete antithesis.

According to Bellamy, it is apparently the *city* life that is the only one likely to be worth anything, and it is to the organization of production and distribution of things contributing to the supposed necessities and comforts of inhabitants of cities that the reader's thoughts are directed.

With Morris the country life is obviously the most important, the ideal life. Groups of houses, not too large to be neighbourly, each with a common guest-hall, with large proportions of gardens and woodland, take the place of crowded towns. Thus London, as we know it, disappears.

What is this but building upon the ascertained scientific facts of our day, that the inhabitants of large cities tend to deteriorate in physique, and would die out were it not for the constant infusion of new blood from the country districts?

Work is still a hard necessity in "Looking Backward," a thing to be got rid of as soon as possible, so citizens, after serving the community as clerks, waiters, or what not, until the age of forty-five, are exempt.

With Morris, work gives the zest to life, and all labour has its own touch of art—even the dustman can indulge in it in the form of rich em-

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broidery upon his coat. The bogey of labour is thus routed by its own pleasurable exercise, with ample leisure, and delight in external beauty in both art and nature.

As regards the woman's question, it never, in his Utopia, appears to be asked. He evidently himself thought that with the disappearance of the commercial competitive struggle for existence and what he termed "artificial famine" caused by monopoly of the means of existence, the claim of women to compete with men in the scramble for a living would not exist. There would be no necessity for either men or women to sell themselves, since in a truly co-operative commonwealth each one would find some congenial sphere of work.

In fact, as Morris once said, "settle the economic question and you settle all other questions. It is the Aaron's rod which swallows up the rest."

I gather that while he thought both men and women should be economically free, and therefore socially and politically free, and free to choose their occupation, he by no means wished to ignore or obliterate sex distinctions, and all those subtle and fine feelings which arise from it, which really form the warp and weft of the courtesies and relationships of life.

Now, whatever criticisms might be offered, or whatever objections might be raised, such a con-

ception of a possible social order, such a view of life upon a new economic basis as is painted in this delightful book, is surely, before all things, remarkably wholesome, human, and sane, and pleasurable. If wholesome, human, sane, and pleasurable lives are not possible to the greater part of humanity under existing institutions, so much the worse for those institutions. Humanity has generally proved itself better than its institutions, and man is chiefly distinguished above other animals by his power to modify his conditions. Life, at least, means growth and change, and human evolution shows us a gradual progression—a gradual triumph of higher organization and intelligence over lower, checked by the inexorable action of natural laws, which demand reparation for breaches of moral and social law, and continually probe the foundations of society. Man has become what he is through his capacity for co-operative social action. The particular forms of social organization are the crystallization of this capacity. They are but shells to be cast away when they retard growth or progress, and it is then that the living organism, collective or individual, seeks out or slowly forms a new home.

As to the construction and colour of such a new house for reorganized society and regenerated life, William Morris has left us in no doubt as to his own ideas and ideals. It may seem strange that a man who might be said to have been steeped in

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mediaeval lore,¹ and whose delight seemed to be in a beautifully imagined world of romance peopled with heroic figures, should yet be able to turn from that dream world with a clear and penetrating gaze upon the movements of his own time, and to have thrown himself with all the strength of his nature into the seething social and industrial battle of modern England. That the "idle singer of an empty day" should voice the claims and hopes of Labour, stand up for the rights of free speech in Trafalgar Square, and speak from a wagon in Hyde Park, may have surprised those who only knew him upon one side, but to those who fully apprehended the reality, ardour, and sincerity of his nature, such action was but its logical outcome and complement, and assuredly it redounds to the honour of the artist, the scholar, and the poet whose loss we still feel, that he was also a man.

Few men seemed to drink so full a measure of life as William Morris, and, indeed, he frankly admitted in his last days that he *had* enjoyed his life. I have heard him say that he only knew what it was to be alive. He could not conceive of death, and the thought of it did not trouble him.

I first met William Morris in 1870, at a dinner

¹ At the same time, it must be remembered, his knowledge of mediaeval life, the craft guilds, and the condition of the labourer in England in the fifteenth century, helped him in his economic studies and his Socialist propaganda.

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at the house of the late Earl of Carlisle, a man of keen artistic sympathies and considerable artistic ability, notably in water-colour landscapes.



William Morris
speaking from
a wagon in Hyde
Park, May 1 1894

He was an enthusiast for the work of Morris and Burne-Jones, and had just built his house at Palace Green from the designs of Mr. Philip Webb, and Morris and Company had decorated it. Morris, I remember, had just returned from a

visit to Iceland, and could hardly talk of anything else. It seemed to have laid so strong a hold upon his imagination; and no doubt its literary fruits were the translations of the Icelandic sagas he produced with Professor Magnússon, and also the heroic poem of "Sigurd the Volsung." He never, indeed, seemed to lose the impressions of that Icelandic visit, and was ever ready to talk of his experiences there—the primitive life of the people, the long pony rides, the strange, stony deserts, the remote mountains, the geysers and the suggestions of volcanic force everywhere, and the romance-haunted coasts.

I well remember, too, the impression produced by the first volume of "The Earthly Paradise," which had appeared, I think, shortly before the time of which I speak: the rich and fluent verse, with its simple, direct, Old World diction; the distinct vision, the romantic charm, the sense of external beauty everywhere, with a touch of wistfulness. The voice was the voice of a poet, but the eye was the eye of an artist and a craftsman.

It was not so long before that the fame began to spread of the little brotherhood of artists who gathered together at the Red House, Bexley Heath, built by Mr. Philip Webb, it was said, in an orchard without cutting down a single tree. Dante Gabriel Rossetti was the centre of the group, the leading spirit, and he had absorbed the spirit of the pre-Raphaelite movement and cen-

tralized it both in painting and verse. But others co-operated at first, such as his master, Ford Madox Brown, and Mr. Arthur Hughes, until the committee of artists narrowed down, and became a firm, establishing workshops in one of the old-fashioned houses on the east side of Queen Square, Bloomsbury, a retired place, closed by a garden to through traffic at the northern end. Here Messrs. Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Co. (which included a very notable man, Mr. Philip Webb, the architect) began their practical protest against prevailing modes and methods of domestic decoration and furniture, which had fallen since the great exhibition of 1851 chiefly under the influence of the Second Empire taste in upholstery, which was the antithesis of the new English movement. This latter represented in the main a revival of the mediaeval spirit (not the letter) in design; a return to simplicity, to sincerity; to good materials and sound workmanship; to rich and suggestive surface decoration, and simple constructive forms.

The simple, black-framed, old English Buckinghamshire elbow-chair, with its rush-bottomed seat, was substituted for the wavy-backed and curly-legged stuffed chair of the period, with its French polish and concealed, and often very unreliable, construction. Bordered Eastern rugs, and fringed Axminster carpets, on plain or stained boards, or India matting, took the place of the stuffy planned carpet; rich, or simple, flat patterns acknowledged

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the wall, and expressed the proportions of the room, instead of trying to hide both under bunches of sketchy roses and vertical stripes; while, instead of the big plate-glass mirror, with ormolu



DESIGN FOR WALL-PAPER. "THE DAISY."

frame, which had long reigned over the cold white marble mantel-piece, small bevelled glasses were inserted in the panelling of the high wood mantel-shelf, or hung over it in convex circular form. Slender black wood or light brass curtain rods,

and curtains to match the coverings, or carry out the colour of the room, displaced the heavy mahogany and ormolu battering-rams, with their fringed and festooned upholstery, which had hither-



DESIGN FOR WALL-PAPER. "ROSE TRELLIS."

to overshadowed the window of the so-called comfortable classes. Plain white or green paint for interior wood-work drove graining and marbling to the public-house; blue and white Nankin, Delft, or Grès de Flandres routed Dresden and

Sèvres from the cabinet; plain oaken boards and trestles were preferred before the heavy mahogany telescopic British dining-table of the mid-nineteenth century; and the deep, high-backed, canopied settle with loose cushions ousted the castored and padded couch from the fireside.

Such were the principal ways, as to outward form, in which the new artistic movement made itself felt in domestic decoration. Beginning with the houses of a comparatively limited circle, mostly artists, the taste rapidly spread, and in a few years Morrisian patterns and furniture became the vogue. Cheap imitation on all sides set in, and commercial and fantastic persons, perceiving the set of the current, floated themselves upon it, tricked themselves out like jackdaws with peacocks' feathers, and called it "the aesthetic movement." The usual excesses were indulged in by excitable persons, and the inner meaning of the movement was temporarily lost sight of under a cloud of travesty and ridicule, until, like a shuttlecock, the idea had been sufficiently played with and tossed about by society and the big public, it was thrown aside, like a child's toy, for some new catch-word. These things were, however, but the ripples or falling leaves upon the surface of the stream, and had but little to do with its sources or its depth, though they might serve as indications of the strength of the current.

The art of Morris and those associated with

him was really but the outward and visible sign of a great movement of protest and reaction against the commercial and conventional conceptions and standards of life and art which had obtained so strong a hold in the industrial nineteenth century.

Essentially Gothic and romantic and free in spirit as opposed to the authoritative and classical, its leader was emphatically and even passionately Gothic in his conception of art and ideals of life.

The inspiration of his poetry was no less mediæval than the spirit of his designs, and it was united with a strong love of nature and an ardent love of beauty.

One knows but little of William Morris's progenitors. His name suggests Welsh origin, though his birthplace was Walthamstow. Born 24th March 1834, one of a well-to-do family, it was a fortunate circumstance that he was never cramped by poverty in the development of his aims. Escaping the ecclesiastical influence of Oxford and a Church career, his prophets being rather John Ruskin and Thomas Carlyle, he approached the study and practice of art from the architectural side under one of our principal English Gothic revivalists, George Edmund Street, although he at one time entertained the idea of becoming a painter, and the very interesting picture of "Guinevere" which was shown at one of the Arts and Crafts Exhibitions makes one regret he did not do more

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in this way. Few men had a better understanding of the nature of Gothic architecture, and a wider knowledge of the historic buildings of his own country, than William Morris, and there can be



WOOLLEN HANGING. "THE PEACOCK."

no doubt that this grasp of the true root and stem of the art was of enormous advantage when he came to turn his attention to the various subsidiary arts and handicrafts comprehended under decorative design. The thoroughness of his methods of

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work and workmanlike practicality were no less remarkable than his amazing energy and capacity for work.

In one of his earlier papers he said that it



DESIGN FOR SILK HANGING.

appeared to be the object with most people to get rid of, or out of, the necessity of work, but for his part he only wanted to find time for more work, or (as it might be put) to live in order to work, rather than to work in order to live.

While as a decorative designer he was, of course, interested in *all* methods, materials, and artistic expression, he concentrated himself generally upon one particular kind at a time, as in the course of his study and practice he mastered the difficulties and technical conditions of each.

At one time it was dyeing, upon which he held strong views as to the superiority, permanency, and beauty of vegetable dyes over the mineral and aniline dyes, so much used in ordinary commerce, and his practice in this craft, and the charm of his tints, did much to check the taste for the vivid but fugitive colours of coal-tar.

His way was to tackle the thing with his own hands, and so he worked at the vat, like the practical man that he was in these matters. An old friend tells the story of his calling at the works one day and, on inquiring for the master, hearing a strong, cheery voice call out from some inner den, "I'm dyeing, I'm dyeing, I'm dyeing!" and the well-known robust figure of the craftsman presently appeared in his blue shirt-sleeves, his hands stained blue from the vat where he had been at work.

At another time it was weaving that absorbed him, and the study of dyeing naturally led him to textiles, and, indeed, was probably undertaken with the view of reviving their manufacture in new forms, and from rugs and carpets he conceived the idea of reviving Arras tapestry. I re-

member the man who claimed to have taught Morris to work on the high-warp loom. His name was Wentworth Buller. He was an enthusiast for Persian art, and he had travelled in that country and found out the secret of the weaving of the fine Persian carpets, discovering, I believe, that they were made of goats' hair. He made some attempt



COTTON PRINT. "EVENLODE."

to revive this method in England, but from one cause or another was not successful. William Morris, when he had learned the craft of tapestry weaving himself, set about teaching others, and trained two youths, one of whom (Mr. Dearle) is now chief at the Merton Abbey Works, who became exceedingly skilful at the work, executing the large and elaborate design of Sir Edward

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Burne-Jones (*The Adoration of the Magi*), which was first worked for the chapel of his own and Morris's college (Exeter College) at Oxford.

In this tapestry, as was his wont, Morris enriched the design with a foreground of flowers, through which the Magi approach with their gifts the group of the Virgin and Child, with St. Joseph.

In fact, the designs of William Morris are so associated with and so often form part of the work of others or only appear in some conditioned material form, that little or no idea of his individual work, or of his wide influence, could be gathered from any existing autograph work of his. That he was a facile designer of floral ornament his numerous beautiful wall-papers and textile hangings prove, but he always considered that the finished and final form of a particular design, complete in the material for which it was intended, was the only one to be looked at, and always objected to showing preliminary sketches and working drawings. He was a keen judge and examiner of work, and fastidious, and as he did not mind taking trouble himself he expected it from those who worked for him. His artistic influence was really due to the way he supervised work under his control, carried out by many different craftsmen under his eye, and not so much by his own actual handiwork.

In any estimate of William Morris's power and influence as an artist, this should always be borne

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in mind. He always described himself as an artist working with assistants, which is distinct from the manufacturer who simply directs a business from the business point of view. Nothing went out of the works at Queen Square, or, later,



KELMSCOTT HOUSE. MEETING ROOM OF THE HAMMERSMITH
SOCIALIST SOCIETY.

at Merton Abbey, without his sanction from the artistic point of view.

The wave of taste which he had done so much to create certainly brought prosperity to the firm, and larger premises had to be taken; so Morris and Company emerged from the seclusion of Queen Square and opened a large shop in Oxford

Street, and set up extensive works at Merton Abbey—a most charming and picturesque group of workshops, surrounded by trees and kitchen gardens, on the banks of the river Wandle in Surrey, not far from Wimbledon. The tapestry and carpet looms which were first set up at Kelmscott House, on the Upper Mall at Hammersmith,¹ were moved to Merton, where also the dyeing and painted glass-work were carried on.

This latter art had long been an important part of the work of the firm. In early days designs were supplied by Ford Madox Brown and D. G. Rossetti, but later they were entirely from the hands of Morris's closest friend, Edward Burne-Jones; that is to say, the figure-work. Floral and subsidiary design were frequently added by William Morris, as was also the leading of the cartoons. The results of their co-operation in this way have been the many fine windows scattered over the land, chiefly at Oxford and Cambridge, where the Christ Church window and those at Jesus College may be named, while the churches of Birmingham

¹ Here Morris lived when in London and his press was set up close by at Sussex House, opposite to which is the Doves Bindery of Mr. Cobden-Sanderson. Much of Morris's time was spent at Kelmscott, near Lechlade, Gloucestershire, a delightful old manor-house close to the Thames stream. This house was formerly held by D. G. Rossetti conjointly with Morris. At Hammersmith the room outside the house, after the carpet looms went to Merton, was used as the meeting room of the Hammersmith Socialist Society.

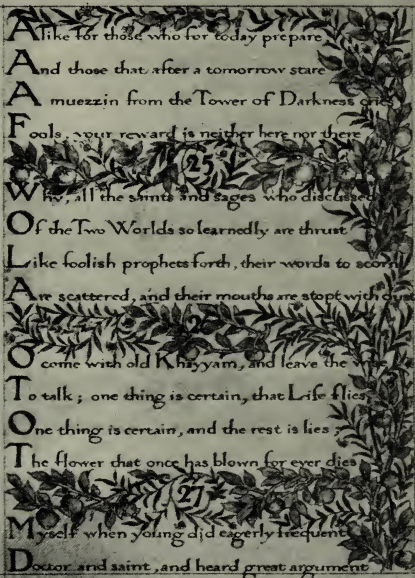
have been enriched by many splendid examples, more particularly at St. Philip's. Their glass has also found place in the United States, in Richardson's famous church at Boston, and at the late Miss Catherine Wolfe's house, Vinland, Newport.

An exquisite autograph work of William Morris's is the copy of "The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyám," which he wrote out and illuminated with his own hand, though even to this work Burne-Jones contributed a miniature, and Mr. Fairfax Murray worked out other designs in some of the borders. This beautiful work was exhibited at the first Arts and Crafts Exhibition in 1888. It is in the possession of Lady Burne-Jones, and by her special permission I am enabled to give some reproductions of four of the pages here.

It is so beautiful that one wonders the artist was not induced to do more work of the kind; but there is only known to be one or two other manuscripts partially completed by him. Certainly his love for mediaeval illuminated MSS. was intense and his knowledge great, and his collection of choice and rare works of this kind probably unique. The same might be said of his collection of early printed books, which was wonderfully rich with wood-cuts of the best time and from the most notable presses of Germany, Flanders, Italy, and France.

This brings us to William Morris's next and, as it proved, last development in art—the revival

OMAR KHAYYAM



Alike for those who for today prepare
 And those that after a tomorrow stare
 A muezzin from the Tower of Darkness cries
 Fools, your reward is neither here nor there
 Why, all the saints and sages who discussed
 Of the Two Worlds so learnedly are thrust
 Like foolish prophets forth, their words to scorn
 Are scattered, and their mouths are stopt with dust
 O come with old Khayyam, and leave the vain
 To talk; one thing is certain, that Life flies
 One thing is certain, and the rest is lies
 The flower that once has blown for ever dies
 Myself when young did eagerly frequent
 Doctor and saint, and heard great argument

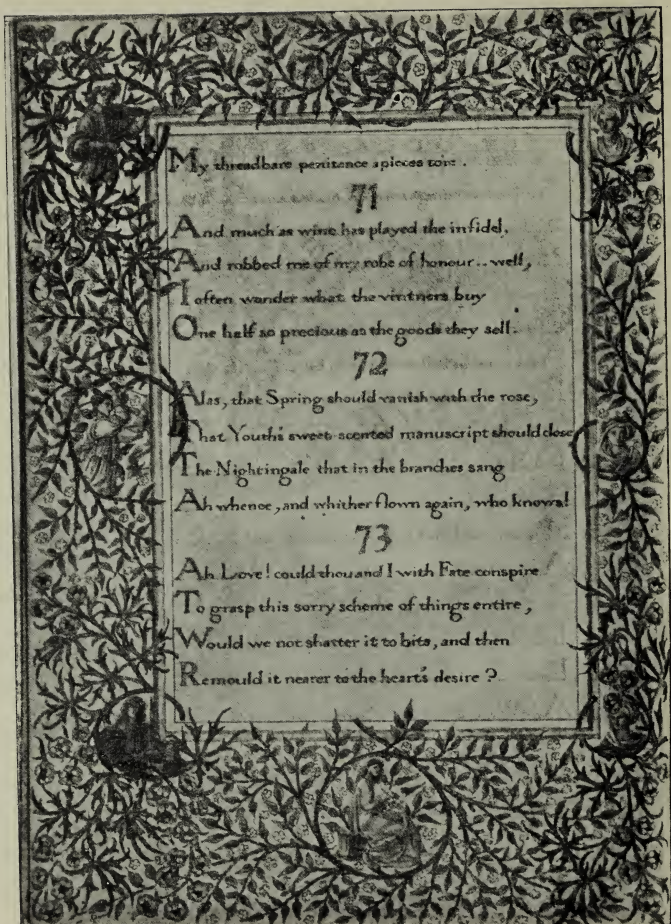
FROM MORRIS'S MS. OF OMAR KHAYYAM.

OMAR KHAYYÁM

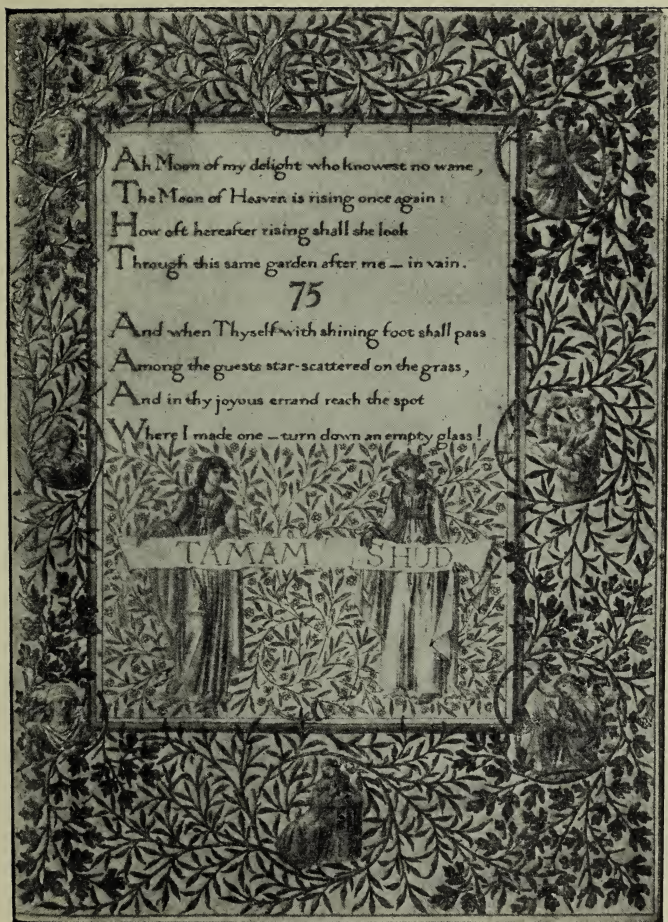
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About it and about, and evermore
 Came out by the same door as in I went
 With them the seed of Wisdom did I sow
 And with my own hand laboured it to grow
 And this was all the harvest that I reaped
 I came like water, and like wind I go
 Into this Universe, and why not knowing
 Nor whence, like water willy nilly flowing
 And out of it as wind along the waste
 I know not whither, willy nilly blowing
 What without asking hither hurried went
 And without asking whither hurried bent
 Another, and another cup to drown
 The memory of this impertinence!

FROM MORRIS'S MS. OF OMAR KHAYYÁM.



FROM MORRIS'S MS. OF OMAR KHAYYÁM.



FROM MORRIS'S MS. OF OMAR KHAYYÁM.

of the craft of the printer, and its pursuit as an art.

I recall the time when the project was first discussed. It was in the autumn of 1889. It was the year of an Art Congress at Edinburgh, following the initial one at Liverpool the preceding year, held under the auspices of the National Association for the Advancement of Art. Some of us afterwards went over to Glasgow to lecture; and a small group, of which Morris was one, found themselves at the Central Station Hotel together. It was here that William Morris spoke of his new scheme, his mind being evidently centred upon it. Mr. Emery Walker (who has supplied me with the photographs which illustrate this article) was there, and he became his constant and faithful helper in all the technicalities of the printer's craft; Mr. Cobden-Sanderson also was of the party; he may be said to have introduced a new epoch in book-binding, and his name was often associated with Morris as binder of some of his books.

Morris took up the craft of printing with characteristic thoroughness. He began at the beginning and went into the paper question, informing himself as to the best materials and methods, and learning to make a sheet of paper himself. The Kelmscott Press paper is made by hand, of fine white linen rags only, and is not touched with chemicals. It has the toughness and something

of the quality of fine Whatman or O.W. drawing-paper.

When he set to work to design his types he obtained enlarged photographs of some of the finest specimens of both Gothic and Roman type from the books of the early printers, chiefly of Bale and Venice. He studied and compared these, and as the result of his analysis designed two or three different kinds of type for his press, beginning with the "Golden" type, which might be described as Roman type under Gothic influence, and developing the more frankly Gothic forms known as the "Troy" and the "Chaucer" types. He also used Roman capitals founded upon the best forms of the early Italian printers.

Morris was wont to say that he considered the glory of the Roman alphabet was in its capitals, but the glory of the Gothic alphabet was in its lower-case letters.

He was asked why he did not use types after the style of the lettering in some of his title-pages, but he said this would not be reasonable, as the lettering of the titles was specially designed to fit into the given spaces, and could not be used as movable type.

The initial letters are Gothic in feeling, and form agreeably bold quantities in black and white in relation to the close and rich matter of the type, which is still further relieved occasionally by floral sprays in bold open line upon the inner margins,

while when woodcut pictures are used they were led up to by rich borderings.

The margins of the title and opening chapter which faced it are occupied by richly designed broad borders of floral arabesques upon black grounds, the lettering of the title forming an essential part of the ornamental effect, and often placed upon a mat or net of lighter, more open arabesque, in contrast to the heavy quantities of the solid border.

The Kelmscott Chaucer is the monumental work of Morris's Press, and the border designs, made specially for this volume, surpass in richness and sumptuousness all his others, and fitly frame the woodcuts after the designs of Sir Edward Burne-Jones.

The arabesque borders and initial letters of the Kelmscott books were all drawn by Morris himself, the engraving on wood was mostly done by Mr. W. H. Hooper—almost the only first-rate facsimile engraver on wood left—and a good artist and craftsman besides. Mr. Arthur Leverett engraved the designs to the "The Glittering Plain," which were my contribution to the Kelmscott Press, but I believe Mr. Hooper did all the other work, while Mr. Fairfax Murray and Mr. Cateson Smith drafted the Burne-Jones designs upon the wood.

It was not, perhaps, generally known, at least before the appearance of Miss May Morris's fine

edition of her father's works, published by Messrs. Longman, that many years before the Kelmscott Press was thought of an illustrated edition of "The Earthly Paradise" was in contemplation, and not only were many designs made by Burne-Jones, but a set of them was actually engraved by Morris himself upon wood for the "Cupid and Psyche," though they were never issued to the public.

I have spoken of the movement in art represented by William Morris and his colleagues as really part of a great movement of protest—a crusade against the purely commercial, industrial, and material tendencies of the day.

This protest culminated with William Morris when he espoused the cause of Socialism.

Now some have tried to minimize the Socialism of William Morris, but it was, in the circumstances of his time, the logical and natural outcome of his ideas and opinions, and is in direct relation with his artistic theories and practice.

For a thorough understanding of the conditions of modern manufacture and industrial production, of the ordinary influences which govern the producers of marketable commodities, of wares offered in the name of art, of the condition of worker, and the pressure of competition, he was in a particularly advantageous position.

So far from being a sentimentalist who was content melodiously and pensively to regret that

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things were not otherwise, he was driven by contact with the life around him to his economic conclusions. As he said himself, it was art led him to Socialism, not economics, though he confirmed his convictions by economic study.

As an artist, no doubt at first he saw the uglification of the world going on, and the vast industrial and commercial machine grinding the joy and the leisure out of human life as regarded the great mass of humanity. But as an employer he was brought into direct relation with the worker as well as the market and the public, and he became fully convinced that the modern system of production for profit and the world-market, however inevitable as a stage in economic and social evolution, was not only most detrimental to a healthy and spontaneous development of art and to conditions of labour, but that it would be bound, ultimately, by the natural working of economic laws, to devour itself.

Never cramped by poverty in his experiments and in his endeavours to realize his ideals, singularly favoured by fortune in all his undertakings, he could have had no personal reasons on these scores for protesting against the economic and social tendencies and characteristics of his own time. He hated what is called modern civilization and all its works from the first, with a whole heart, and made no secret of it. For all that, he was a shrewd and keen man in his dealings with the world. If he set

its fashions and habits at defiance, and persisted in producing his work to please himself, it was not his fault that his countrymen eagerly sought them and paid lavishly for their possession. A common reproach hurled at Morris has been that he produced costly works for the rich while he professed Socialism. This kind of thing, however, it may be remarked, is not said by those friendly to Socialism, or anxious for the consistency of its advocates—quite the contrary. Such objectors appear to ignore, or to be ignorant of, the fact that according to the quality of the production must be its cost; and that the cheapness of the cheapest things of modern manufacture is generally at the cost of the cheapening of human labour and life, which is a costly kind of cheapness after all.

If anyone cares for good work, a good price must be paid. Under existing conditions possession of such work is only possible to those who can pay the price, but this seems to work out rather as part of an indictment against the present system of production, which Socialists wish to alter.

If a wealthy man were to divest himself of his property and distribute it, he would not bring Socialism any nearer, and his self-sacrifice would hardly benefit the poor at large (except, perhaps, a few individuals), but under the working of the present system his wealth would ultimately enrich the rich—would gravitate to those who *had*, and not to

those who *had not*. The object of Socialism is to win justice, not charity.

A true commonwealth can only be established by a change of feeling, and by the will of the people, deliberately, in the common interest, declaring for common and collective possession of the means of life and of wealth, as against individual property and monopoly. Since the wealth of a country is only produced by common and collective effort, and even the most individual of individualists is dependent for every necessary, comfort, or luxury of life upon the labour of untold crowds of workers, there is no inherent unreasonableness in such a view, or in the advocacy of such a system, which might be proved to be as beneficial, in the higher sense, for the rich as for the poor, as of course it would abolish both. It is quite possible to cling to the contrary opinion, but it should be fully understood that Socialism does not mean "dividing up," and that a man is not necessarily not a Socialist who does not sell all that he has to give to the poor. "A poor widow is gathering nettles to stew for her dinner. A perfumed seigneur lounging in the *œil de bœuf* hath an alchemy whereby he can extract from her everythird nettle and call it rent." Thuswrote Carlyle. Men like William Morris would make such alchemy impracticable; but no man can change a social (or unsocial) system by himself, however willing; nor can anyone, however gifted or far-

seeing, get beyond the conditions of his time, or afford to ignore them in the daily conduct of life, although at the same time his life and expressed opinions may all the while count as factors in the evolution by which a new form of society comes about.

Thus much seems due to the memory of a man like William Morris, who was frequently taunted with not doing, as a Socialist, things that, as a Socialist, he did not at all believe in; things, for which, too, one knows perfectly well, his censors, if he had done them, would have been the first to denounce him for a fool.

At all events, it is certain that William Morris spent some of the best years of his life, he gave his time, his voice, his thought, his pen, and much money to put Socialism before his countrymen. This can never be gainsaid. Those who have been accustomed to regard him from this point of view as a dangerous revolutionary might be referred to the writings of John Ball, and Sir Thomas More, his predecessors in England's history, who upheld the claims of labour and simple life, against waste, want, and luxury. Indeed, it might be contended that it was a conservative clinging to the really solid foundations of a happy human life which made Morris a Socialist as much as artistic conviction and study of modern economics. The enormous light which has been recently thrown by historic research upon mediaeval life and condi-

tions of labour, upon the craft guilds, and the position of the craftsman in the Middle Ages—light to which Morris himself in no small degree contributed—must also be counted as a factor in the formation of his opinions.

But whether accounted conservative or revolutionary in social economics and political opinion, there can be no doubt of William Morris's conservatism in another field, important enough in its bearings upon modern life, national and historic sentiment, and education—I mean the protection of Ancient Buildings. He was one of the founders of the society having that object, and remained to the last one of the most energetic members of the committee, and in such important work his architectural knowledge was of course of the greatest value. At a time when, owing to the action of a multitude of causes, the historic buildings of the past are in constant danger, not only from the ravages of time, weather, and neglect, but also, and even to a greater extent, from the zeal of the “restorer,” the importance of the work which Morris did with his society—the work which that society carries on—can hardly be overestimated.

The pressure of commercial competition and the struggle for life in our cities—the mere necessity for more room for traffic—the dead weight of vested interest, the market value of a site, the claims of convenience, fashion, ecclesiastical or otherwise, or

sometimes sheer utilitarianism, entirely oblivious of the social value of historic associations of architectural beauty—all are apt to be arrayed at one time or another, or even, perhaps, all combined, against the preservation of an ancient building if it happens to stand in their way.

The variety, too, of the cases in which the difference of the artistic conditions which govern the art and craft of building in the past and in the present is another element which often prevents the defenders and destroyers from meeting on the same plane. It is the old tragic conflict between old and new, but enormously complicated, and with the forces of destruction and innovation tremendously increased.

William Morris was a singularly sane and what is called a "level-headed" man. He had the vehemence, on occasion, of a strong nature and powerful physique. He cared greatly for his convictions. Art and life were real to him, and his love of beauty was a passion. His artistic and poetic vision was clear and intense—all the more so, perhaps, for being exclusive on some points. The directness of his nature, as of his speech, might have seemed singularly unmodern to some who prefer to wrap their meaning with many envelopes. He might occasionally have seemed brusque, and even rough; but so does the north wind when it encounters obstacles. Men are judged by the touchstones of personal sympathy

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or antipathy; but whether attracted or repelled in such a presence, no one could come away without an impression that he had met a man of strong character and personal force, whether he realized any individual preconception of the poet, the artist, and the craftsman, or not.

He was certainly all these, yet those who only knew him through his works would have but a partial and incomplete idea of his many-sided nature, his practicality, personal force, sense of humour,¹ and all those side-lights which personal acquaintance throws upon the character of a man like William Morris.

¹ It is noteworthy that one who excluded humour from his own work, whether literary, or artistic, had a keen appreciation of it in the work of others. Few who only knew Morris through his poems, romances, and designs would imagine that among his most favourite books were "Huckleberry Finn,"² by Mark Twain, and "Uncle Remus." I have often heard him recall passages of the first-named book with immense enjoyment of the fun. He was, besides, always an admirer of Dickens.