

WILLIAM MORRIS AND HIS CIRCLE

A LECTURE DELIVERED IN THE EXAMINATION
SCHOOLS, OXFORD, AT THE SUMMER MEETING
OF THE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION DELEGACY, ON
AUGUST 6, 1907

BY

J. W. MACKAIL

M.A., LL.D., FORMERLY FELLOW OF BALLIOL COLLEGE
PROFESSOR OF POETRY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

OXFORD
AT THE CLARENDON PRESS
MCMVII

V.
CB

HENRY FROWDE, M.A.
PUBLISHER TO THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD
LONDON, EDINBURGH
NEW YORK AND TORONTO

WILLIAM MORRIS AND HIS CIRCLE

LET us try to cast back our eyes over a space of between fifty and sixty years, and to form some picture in our minds of the City and the University of Oxford as they were then.

Towards the end of the seventeenth century Oxford had fallen asleep. That sleep lasted for more than one hundred years. A great peace and stagnation was hardly stirred, and never effectually broken, by movements originating within or communicated from without. The epoch of founding colleges had ceased ; but for the one belated and solitary foundation of Worcester in the first year of the Hanoverian dynasty, the roll of the colleges remained closed for a century and a half ; and the University itself had remained closed likewise against progress, extension, or revolution. The Methodist movement originated and received its name in Oxford early in the century of quiescence ; but it soon passed out and away into a wider, obscurer world. An epoch of building enriched Oxford with some noble examples of Georgian architecture and then died down. Oxford produced in each generation a few eminent scholars or men of letters ; it kept up a certain tradition of learning, and a solid mass of Conservatism, both in the good and in the bad sense of the word. But it ceased to be a vital or a motive force in the national life. It fostered Johnson, who all his life retained a great loyalty and affection towards it. It received Gibbon, who all his life never lost an opportunity of expressing his opinion of it with that august sarcasm of which he was an accomplished master. It expelled Shelley. It closed its doors rigidly against Nonconformity, and admitted new studies grudgingly and reluctantly. Early in the nineteenth century it began to stir in its sleep ; and about a generation later,

after the industrial revolution and the first Reform Act had created modern England, it awoke, or seemed to awake, to produce that Anglo-Catholic counter-revolution which was one of the most potent forces of the century, and which is habitually, and rightly, called by the name of the Oxford Movement.

The Oxford Movement does not belong to my subject, except that it was out of the soil prepared by it that the new movement which Morris and his circle produced, or which produced them, arose, partly in sympathy, partly in reaction. That movement itself, like the whole Romantic movement of which it was the spiritual and theological side, was partly reactionary and partly progressive. It went back to the Middle Ages and beyond them. It sought to undo all that had been done in the age of enlightenment. But it was also, like the Young England movement which accompanied it in secular affairs, a serious attempt to rebuild an ordered structure of life. Both movements failed, because they did not take account of facts. But both had a vital principle within them, which produced very remarkable results, often at a distance of time and in unexpected quarters.

By the middle of last century in Oxford the first fervour of the Anglo-Catholic revival had passed away. It had reached its climax about 1840, and its decline began after the shock of Newman's secession in 1845. Once Oxford had become alive, it was open to new influences from without. It had come out of its fortress of Conservatism, and left the gate open behind it. A formidable Liberal reaction began. In 1844, after a long and bitter opposition by the University, the railway came to Oxford; and with the railway, one might say, came the modern world, with all its unsettling, all its confusion, all that change and instability and destruction which are the price that has to be paid for life—which are life itself. In 1850 a University Commission was appointed by the Government, and Oxford was

bidden to put its house in order. Its house has never been in order since. When it is, if that should ever unfortunately happen, it will be a sign that a new period of quiescence and stagnation has begun.

Changes do not come all at once ; and in those early days of its new period, Oxford still remained very largely a mediaeval town. Its limits did not, except for the spacious suburb of St. Giles's, extend much beyond the ring of the ancient city-walls. Within these limits it was much as it is now, seemingly a dense crowd of buildings as one passed through the streets, but revealing from a high outlook, or to the birds who passed over it, that the buildings were a network full of lawns and gardens. 'There was little brick in the city', one writes of it in those years ; 'it was either grey with stone, or yellow with the wash of the pebble-cast in the poorer streets, where there were still many old houses with wood carving, and a little sculpture here and there'. The suburbs that now stretch for miles to the North and East, and are rapidly enclosing the older city on all sides except where the meadows are flooded every winter and too wet for building, did not exist. As you approached it then from any side, you saw its towers rise among masses of trees straight out of a space of meadows and orchards. North Oxford and Cowley, each now a considerable town by itself, were unbroken country. There were no Parks, no Museum, hardly any new college buildings. Balliol had a low grey front along Broad Street. The part of High Street now occupied by Brasenose was a line of small beautiful fifteenth-century houses. The church of St. Martin at Carfax was there, and old Magdalen Bridge, and the City Gaol on Gloucester Green. It was a city of dreams before dawn.

To this Oxford William Morris came up as a commoner of Exeter in January, 1853. He was then nearly nineteen. It is the age at which, just in the uncertain time between boyhood and manhood, young people are often most im-

pressionable, and least impressive to others. So it was with Morris, whom his college tutor set down in the notebook he kept of his pupils as rather rough and ungainly, and showing no special literary tastes or capacity. It was not long before keener and more sympathetic eyes saw in him the stuff of a great poet and artist.

His origins were in no way remarkable, nor had his boyhood, except for one or two circumstances which I will mention, differed much from that of hundreds of others. He was the third child and eldest son of a wealthy bill-broker, who carried on his business in London, but lived on the skirts of Epping Forest, first at Walthamstow and then at Woodford. Both of these were then country places; and the beautiful Essex country, and the Forest in particular—a fragment of *primaeval* England which had remained almost unchanged from prehistoric times—exercised on the boy an influence which lasted all his life, and may be traced distinctly throughout his writings, both prose and verse. From his Essex home he went to school at Marlborough, in the strongly contrasted but equally lovely country of the Wiltshire Downs, a land saturated with history and romance. The love of the Middle Ages was born in him; but it was strongly enforced by these surroundings. At school he was rather a solitary boy, not fond of games, a voracious reader, known among his few friends as a dreamer and story-teller. Meanwhile the Anglo-Catholic movement had penetrated to his family; and when he came to Oxford, it was with the intention of entering the Church.

Within a week of his arrival, he had formed the great controlling friendship of his life. From among wholly different surroundings, but with the same tastes, the same enthusiasms, the same ideals, a kindred but equally rare genius, Edward Burne-Jones entered Exeter along with him, from King Edward's School at Birmingham. They ran together like two drops of

mercury; and for more than forty years, until the Separator of Companions and the Terminator of Delights ended it, there was never a day's intermission in their comradeship. Each felt his own strength doubled in the other's support and sympathy. When the separation came, the survivor pined visibly, and was, I think, never happy again.

Here at Oxford they were the centre of a little group of undergraduates, known among themselves first as 'the set' and afterwards as 'the brotherhood', who were almost unknown to the rest of Oxford, but lived among themselves at a great tension and a white-heat of enthusiasm. They are all dead now but one. Not all of them attained eminence. Some drifted away in the course of a few years. But the memory of the Brotherhood is imperishable, and the story of their association is as enthralling as a romance. By one and another of themselves and those who knew them it has been told very fully. There is not, indeed, much to tell as a matter of history or striking incident; what gives the story its charm and its power is the intensity of the life they lived among quite common circumstances, quickened by community and vibrating with genius, or with what is next best, sympathy with genius. To some of them—to Morris himself particularly—their first experience of Oxford had been a disappointment and disillusion. They had come to it as to some miraculous place, where all their dreams were to be realized. They found it languid, indifferent, swathed in conventions, or interested, if at all, about other things. Now, like Miranda in *The Tempest*, they could cry out:—

O wonder!

How many goodly creatures are there here!
How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world,
That has such people in't!

It was new to them; their life had really begun.

Most of the set came from Birmingham, or got into

touch with it through Birmingham connexions. Fulford, Dixon, Price, and Macdonald were schoolfellows of Burne-Jones: Faulkner was also a Birmingham boy, though not at King Edward's School. Heeley, another schoolfellow, had gone to Cambridge, but kept closely in touch with his friends at Oxford: through him they came to know Vernon Lushington of Trinity, with momentous results so far as Morris and Burne-Jones were concerned; for it was through him again that they came to know Rossetti. But this was a little later; and it was the beginning of the end of the Oxford Brotherhood as such.

Meanwhile, the Brotherhood was a little whirlpool of high plans and young enthusiasms. Living in daily intimacy, and drawn together by a common ardour which fused in it very separate views of life and desires and opinions, they found their outlook endlessly enlarging. In Morris particularly—for I must not forget that it is he of whom mainly I am speaking—two years wrought a silent, swift, and profound change. Anglo-Catholicism fell off him like an outworn garment, like the husk from an expanding bud. Itself it had arisen as one stream of the great flood of Romanticism. It had carried the vital force of the Romantic movement into the pure thin air of those abstractions which, when vitally grasped, become the only realities. Now, in Morris as in others of his contemporaries, it was merging and expanding into a new Romanticism, which connected once more the world of imagination with the world of visible and sensible things, and with the world of ideas which are more real than these. His ideal when he came to Oxford had been, in spite of all his passionate love of Nature and of human history, ascetic and all but monastic. The Brotherhood broke up the monastic element in that ideal; its ascetic element—except for an almost severe purity, a great cleanness of life and speech—melted away in the wider, larger,

opener air now let in upon him. It was as though windows were flung open and the daylight poured in, the large secular daylight in which the world was seen crowded with life, filled with beauty, saturated with history. His favourite reading had been in Christian antiquities and Anglo-Catholic theology. The whole of history and literature now broke open before him; and through it all, as its central spirit and vital essence, ran the golden thread of art.

In three modern writers beyond all he found the clue and impulse to this enlargement and emancipation. These were Carlyle, Ruskin, and, to a less degree than the two others, Browning. Of Carlyle and Ruskin he spoke all the rest of his life as his masters—a word that he did not use freely, and hardly of any one else but of them. In Browning he found a subtler and less acknowledged affinity, that of the poet with the poet. As artists, Keats and Tennyson—the early and miraculous Tennyson—meant more to him; but in Browning he found an influence even more stimulating, a keenness of delight in life, a directness and vividness in realizing and grasping life, such as he was now finding in himself. In Carlyle he found the heroic northern temper; in Ruskin the passion for beauty and the indignation against wrong, and above all, the illumination, and one might almost say the rediscovery, of the great art of the Middle Ages. It was at this point, when they had been between two and three years at Oxford, that Morris and Burne-Jones, when on a long vacation tour in Northern France, took jointly what was for them—and for many others besides them—the momentous resolution to renounce their earlier purpose of entering the Church, and to become artists. For both this decision meant, not to decline from their earlier ideals, but to enlarge and ennoble them. ‘I will by no means,’ wrote Morris to his mother in announcing his resolution, ‘give up things I have thought of for the bettering of the world in so far

as lies in me.' Here, as always, he spoke the truth simply and straightforwardly.

A few months later, a new and very powerful influence came upon the scene, that of D. G. Rossetti. A single design of his, published as an illustration to a volume of poems by William Allingham, had been like a spark upon powder to Morris and Burne-Jones. The latter had been introduced to him in London by Vernon Lushington in the Christmas vacation of 1855-6—you see how the Brotherhood is beginning to stretch out filaments from Oxford and connect itself with the larger world—and at his advice left Oxford at the following Easter without taking a degree, and began his life-long work as a painter under his guidance and encouragement. Morris had already taken his degree, and articulated himself to the architect Street, the great exponent of revived early Gothic. He soon came to know Rossetti too, for the little band of brothers shared all their possessions. When he moved to London with Street later in that year, he came into Rossetti's daily intimacy. For once, and perhaps for the only time in his life, he had come into contact with a personality even more potent and imperious than his own. For a while he was quite subjugated. He left Street's office in order to become a painter, because Rossetti said that everybody ought to be a painter, except the people who could not paint, and whose business it therefore was to buy the pictures that the others painted. He never resumed the professional study of architecture, although architecture remained to him always in the full sense what the word means—the mistress-art which includes and consummates all the other arts: for the sake of which, or as elements in which, most of these other arts exist.

I shall return to this point later. What I wish you to fix your minds on now is the way in which, during these two or three years of swift and splendid development, Morris's whole outlook on life had become not only

secularized, but socialized. He had passed outside of formal creeds, outside of the cloistered atmosphere in which he had once dreamed of spending his days. He had found the world. But in doing so he had also found the secret of the world—fraternity. He had found out the great truth that solitary life is sterile life; that art is not, or ought not to be, an abstract and lonely thing, but the joint energy of minds and hands working in common sympathy. This social ideal reached him first in the shape of a little group of friends; then of a larger association of artists and craftsmen; until finally it took full shape in the famous phrase of his mature years, art by the people and for the people, a joy to the maker and the user; and in the ideal towards the embodiment of which, in imagination and in fact, his later life was devoted, of a fully socialized commonwealth.

Do not misunderstand this to mean that he either sustained or desired any merging or blurring of personality. It was one of his most fixed and most fertile doctrines that only in a life thus socialized could personality have natural growth and unhindered scope. In the world as it now is, individual genius is everywhere checked, cramped, and thwarted just for want of a common social atmosphere. Himself Morris was, like all great artists, like all men of genius, often and much alone, alone with himself and his dreams. His best friends said of him that he seemed to need no one. He was often far away by himself, in the thirteenth century, or in some imaginary world of the distant past or the distant future, a land East of the Sun or an island among untracked seas. But this lonely self-centred dreamer was at the same time a man of action who naturally and easily gathered others around him, who had an immediate practical effect on all with whom he came into contact, and whose visible and tangible output in production was enormous.

People are apt to think of the sphere of imagination

and the sphere of action as separate. Morris taught, because by experience he knew, that just so far as they were separated, both were spoiled. It was only amid a life of action and production that imagination could work properly; it was only through the life of imagination that real action could be carried on, or real art produced. For indeed the very word of art meant to him a combination, a fusion, of the highest imagination with the most common employment. 'If a chap can't compose an epic poem while he's weaving tapestry,' he once said in one of his vivid phrases, 'he had better shut up; he'll never do any good at all.' And conversely, the man who was weaving tapestry or doing any other manual and so-called mechanical labour was not doing any good at all, was being degraded into a mere machine, if he was not doing it with imagination, with pleasure, with a sense of social sympathy. All work so done was art: and art meant the joy of life.

Now we may return with a clearer understanding to Morris and his circle in the years which immediately followed Oxford, and in which the associations with Oxford still remained strong. The whole story of these three or four years is fascinating to a degree that can hardly be exaggerated. It was a time of which Burne-Jones wrote, many years afterwards, that it was blue summer and always morning, and the air sweet and full of bells. I must omit here much over which I would willingly linger; the planning and production of the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, to which Morris contributed, among other work, his earliest prose romances and some of the most beautiful of his earliest poems; the jolly life of hard work and much laughter that he and Burne-Jones lived together in Red Lion Square, Bloomsbury, with the old Oxford friends and the new London ones drifting in and out; and the whole story from first to last of Red House—the house that Philip Webb built for him when he married, and which was

designed, decorated and furnished with a skill and beauty that were in those days of mid-Victorian ugliness nothing less than a revelation: 'the beautifullest place on earth' it was called in a transport of admiration by one of the artists who worked on it. All this and much else I must omit, and just touch briefly on three episodes in the crowded story of those years. These three are—the paintings at the Oxford Union in 1857; the volume of poems published by Morris in 1858; and the formation of the firm of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Co., Fine Art Workmen, in 1861.

The paintings round the walls of the Oxford Union have long since perished. The way of using tempera-painting for mural decoration was not then understood, and almost every possible mistake was made in the execution of the work. But in its idea, if not in its execution, it is a landmark in the history of decorative art in England. The project was struck out between Rossetti and his friend Woodward, the architect who was building the University Museum, and also a debating-hall (it is now the library) for the Union Society. Rossetti undertook to provide men who, together with himself, should design and execute a belt of ten large panels round the upper walls, and the decoration of the open timber and plaster roof. Morris and Burne-Jones were the first two whom he impressed into the service. To them were added three others who belonged to the larger and less defined London circle of artists into which the Oxford Brotherhood was merging—Arthur Hughes, Spencer Stanhope, and Val Prinsep; and a fourth, Hungerford Pollen, Fellow of Merton, an accomplished antiquarian and skilled designer belonging to an older Oxford generation: you may see his work on the roof and walls of Merton College Chapel. But the other members of the Brotherhood who were still in Oxford, Faulkner and Dixon and Price, were all pressed in to help, with complete inex-

perience, but an ability that was created by the belief in it. Perhaps the most important outcome of the work was that during it Morris discovered his own powers as a decorative designer. A worker of almost incredible persistency and swiftness, he had finished his wall-panel before some of the others had much more than begun, and then set himself to the decoration of the roof. The design which he drew for it in a single day, and which is still to be seen there, though repainted some twenty years later, placed him at once among the masters in that art. It became thenceforth his specific art, applied in many forms to many materials. When he had occasion to describe himself by a single word, he called himself a designer.

But he was already not only an artist in form and colour, but a poet. Poetry had come to him, with equal suddenness and with as surprising quality, a couple of years earlier. The volume published in the spring of 1858, under the title of *The Defence of Guenevere and other Poems*, contained what he thought most worth preserving of the poems he had been writing since 1855. The rest of them he then destroyed: 'it was a dreadful mistake,' one of the Brotherhood said to me long afterwards; and there are few lovers of poetry who would not be inclined to agree. On the inner circle of his friends those early poems made a profound and indelible impression. 'Here,' said Burne-Jones forty years later, speaking of his own rooms in the old buildings of Exeter, destroyed in order to make way for the dull modern frontage in Broad Street which began the disastrous era of rebuilding in the Oxford colleges, 'Here, one morning, just after breakfast, he brought me in the first poem he ever made.' 'We sat down,' says Dixon, speaking of the evening of that same day, 'and heard Morris read his first poem, the first that he had ever written in his life. As he read it, I felt that it was something the like of which had never been heard

before.' This was the sort of impression made by those early poems at the time; this is the impression they make still. They are a new voice in poetry; a voice not yet mature or under full control, but strangely and piercingly sweet. The faculty of ordered design, the architectural quality, which is characteristic of Morris's later and maturer poetry, is as yet absent. Mr. Swinburne, in a just and noble appreciation of the volume, notes this. 'Upon no piece of work in the world,' he says, 'was the impress of native character ever more distinct. There is scarcely connexion, and scarcely composition. There is a perceptible want of tact and practice. But where among other and older poets of his time and country is one comparable for perception and experience of tragic truth, of subtle and noble, terrible and piteous things? where a touch of passion at once so broad and so sure?'

Of the faculty of design, in its technical sense, Morris had once for all showed himself a master in his work at the Oxford Union. Design in its larger sense, the organization of industry, the organization of production, the organization of life itself as a productive and harmonized energy, was the task to which he now addressed himself: it remained, in one form or another, his occupation throughout his life, with a perpetually widening range of application, a perpetual deepening of the foundations towards the bed-rock of ultimate principles. The immediate occasion of his taking up this business in earnest was Red House, the home he began to make for himself after his marriage in 1859. It became more and more evident as the work went on that, in order to make even a single house what it ought to be, the whole of the industries concerned with the building, decoration, and furnishing of houses must be reorganized, must have fresh life put into them. And the house, with all that it involved, was to Morris the symbol and embodiment of civilized human life. Thus, in instinctive

and yet reasoned adaptation to the conditions of actual life, the monastery of his earlier dreams rose into being as a workshop, and the Brotherhood became transformed into a firm registered under the Companies Acts.

The scheme of the firm took shape in the winter of 1860-61. Its formation was the visible sign that the old Brotherhood was dissolved. The outer fringe of that company had already passed out into circles and interests of their own. Fulford and Dixon had taken Orders; Macdonald had gone to America, out of touch; Price had accepted an appointment in Russia which took him away from England for several years. Of the seven, three only were left to join in the new association: Morris himself, Burne-Jones, and Faulkner. The names of the other four who constituted the new association are significant of the change or development that had been going on since the group of undergraduates passed out into the wider world. They were as follows: Rossetti, as a matter of course; Madox Brown, an older man than the others, and connecting them on the one hand—like Rossetti himself—with the earlier Pre-Raphaelites, and on the other hand with the art of design as actually applied to windows and wall-paintings in churches or public buildings; Marshall, a surveyor and engineer, introduced as a friend of Brown's, and from the first somewhat of an outsider in the firm, in which he soon ceased to take any practical interest; and Webb, senior clerk in Street's office when Morris joined it, and an architect who, together with Street's other great pupil, Norman Shaw, has revolutionized domestic architecture in England. Arthur Hughes was also to have been a member, but on the ground that he lived far away in the country and could not take any active part in the business, withdrew his name before the Company was registered.

The firm thus constituted, of which Morris was from the first the leading member, and gradually came into the position of the sole manager, was the visible symbol

and the moving force of a silent revolution in the domestic arts, and in the conditions of life under which those arts are practised. Its object, briefly stated, was to reinstate decoration, down to all its details, as one of the fine arts, and conversely, to reinstate art itself as a function of common life and a vital element in the whole organism of society. Its actual products came in the course of its growth to include, besides the church-decoration with which it started as a principal element of its business, painted windows and mural decoration, furniture in wood, metal, and glass, painted tiles, cloth and paper wall-hangings, embroideries, jewellery, printed cottons (what are generally known as 'Morris chintzes'), woven and knotted carpets, silk damasks, and the famous high-warp tapestries of which there is a noble example here in the chapel of Morris's own college. In all these the hand and brain of Morris himself were the guiding forces. There was hardly one of the productive arts that he did not touch ; and there was none he touched into which he did not put fresh life, which he did not bring in some way or another into new vital connexion with its finest traditions ; which he did not reinstate as an art combining imagination with craftsmanship—an art to be a joy to the maker and the user.

At this point we must break off. There is not time now to trace, even in outline, the course of Morris's life and all the subsequent developments taken by him as a poet and prose writer, as a craftsman and designer, as a producer and manufacturer. There is not time to speak of the particular industries which at one time or another he took up and mastered in order to know their processes and recover their secrets—in particular, those of weaving, dyeing, and printing, each of which in turn marks a definite period in his life. His activity was incessant and ever varying ; throughout it had the unity given by a central idea and a central purpose. That idea and purpose was the reconstitution of art as a

function of human life, and the revitalization of human life through art. And all the while he led his own inner life, apart and alone in a world of his own—a life of brooding thought and romantic imagination, in which the whole framework of things and the whole history of the race lay before his eyes as though in some magic crystal. ‘It seems to me,’ he wrote once, ‘that no hour of the day passes that the whole world does not show itself to me.’ The strength of this inner life made him self-absorbed, and sometimes unsympathizing. For strength, for stimulus, for guidance in work you would go to him: hardly for consolation in trouble, or for comfort in perplexity. But his rare words of comfort ring true in their austerity. ‘I entreat you to think,’ he wrote once to his dearest friend, ‘that life is not empty nor made for nothing, and that the parts of it fit one into another in some way.’ The words sound a little cold, a little abstract. But he would not go beyond what he felt to be the truth; and it is in some such words as these, if we ponder them well, that we shall find the ultimate basis, and the final expression, of the beliefs which enable us to live.

This lonely self-absorption was the other side of what may be called in a single word Morris’s Socialism. You will have noticed that wherever he was, he was at the centre of a group of people to whom he communicated his own enthusiasms, and that co-operation in a common spirit lay with him at the heart of production. More than that: it lay at the heart of life; and without it, life was, in the proper sense of the word, hell. ‘He that waketh in hell,’ he makes John Ball say, ‘and feeleth his heart fail him, shall have memory of the merry days of earth, and how that when his heart failed him there, he cried on his fellow, and how that his fellow heard him and came. This shall he think on in hell, and cry on his fellow to help him, and shall find that therein is no help because there is no fellowship, but every man

for himself.' And as life without fellowship is hell, life with fellowship is nothing less than heaven: and a fully socialized commonwealth, that far-off dream or mystical vision that men feel after in the darkness, in ignorance, in perplexity, but not in despair, is the dream or vision of a kingdom of God on earth.

The *Earthly Paradise* is the name which Morris gave to the central body of his poetry. The framework of the poems is a search for an earthly paradise in some definite place, which was sought for and not found, because it did not exist. The whole body of the poems is an earthly paradise of the poet's art and invention, into which the reader of them may step aside for a while out of the actual world, for rest and enjoyment; a shadowy island built amid the beating of the sea, he calls it, like the imaginary island for which the Wanderers sought in vain. But the finding and winning of an earthly paradise which should be this actual world itself was the goal towards which, more and more clearly as life went on, he set his eyes, and towards which he sets the eyes of those who will follow and understand his teaching. In the paradise of the theologians, as in their other dogmas, he had ceased to believe; not so much that he rejected them as that they dropped away from him. That was a paradise which lay apart from this world, which remedied—if it did remedy—the wrong and misery of this world by abolishing this world itself. He desired, as he knew, no other world than this, 'the earth,' in his own words, 'that I love and worship.' Fellowship upon this earth, as this earth was meant to be and might be, was all he desired and all he could conceive of heaven. The arts re-created and knit together into one vital organic art filling the whole field of life; the people re-created and knit together into one vital organic commonwealth; the coming of mankind into its predestined inheritance; life not empty nor made for nothing, and the parts of it fitting one into another:

this was his ideal, this the foundation of his belief. Meanwhile he carried on his work patiently from day to day, and exhorted others by word and example to carry on theirs, 'not living like fools and fine gentlemen, and not beaten by the muddle, but like good fellows trying by some dim candle-light to set our workshop ready against to-morrow's daylight.'

So, too, with his poetry. It was partly a relaxation, the solace and amusement in the intervals of the day's work for himself and for those who were to read it; it was partly the application of art to language as to other fabrics. He meant it to decorate the life of the house with stories and music and bright images, just as the house itself was to be decorated with things serviceable, shapely, beautifully designed and coloured. Of poetical inspiration, and of the moral import of poetry as something different from the moral import of all the productive arts, he thought little. But language was the most subtle, the most flexible and expressive, of all the fabrics upon which art could exercise itself; and to that extent the sphere of poetry was larger, and its dignity greater, than those of the other arts with which it was bound up in one fellowship.

His place among the poets is secure. His rank among the poets it still rests with ages more remote than this from his own to determine—if indeed it be proper to speak of ranks in the fellowship of the undying, where all are in a sense equal, with the equality of brotherhood. But if you wish to form a judgement, three things are to be borne in mind: first, that Morris is an artist in whom the whole is always greater than the parts, and the parts kept carefully subordinate to the whole; secondly, that as a story-teller—and story-telling is a very rare and high art—he is perhaps excelled by no one in English poetry except Chaucer; thirdly, and this is the most important of the three, that there is in his poetry, as there is in all his work, a soundness and

sweetness to which one returns again and again with a fresh sense of quiet satisfaction. This quality may outlast other qualities in the work of other poets which seemed for a time more brilliant and more attractive. But perhaps the worst use to which we can put the poets is to put them in competition with one another.

The lesson which Morris impressed most deeply on those who knew him was not, however, to be found in his poetry, nor even in the express teaching of those later years in which he was a missionary of Socialism. It was the lesson of a life lived simply, courageously, and straightforwardly, a life without false shame, guided by an almost childlike dutifulness. His final message to us rests upon two words—Courage and Hope. All his life he had been trying to do what, as time went on, he saw more and more clearly was, in the actual conditions of things, impossible. But that was only a reason the more for altering the actual conditions of things, not for losing hope or faltering in courage. The circle to which in this lecture I have attempted to introduce you was one of specially gifted men; Morris's own work in art was great and splendid. This is how he speaks of both, in one of the latest, the most fully considered, and the most deeply significant of his writings.

‘I do not believe,’ he says, ‘in the possibility of keeping art alive by the action, however energetic, of a few groups of specially gifted men and their small circle of admirers amidst a general public incapable of understanding and enjoying their work. All worthy art must be in the future, as in the past, the outcome of the aspirations of the people towards the beauty and the true pleasure of life. This is the art which I look forward to, not as a vague dream, but as a certainty, founded on the general well-being of the people. It is true that the blossom of it I shall not see; yet we are even now seeing the seed of it beginning to germinate. No one can tell now what form that art will take; but

it is certain that it will not depend on the whim of a few persons, but on the will of all.'

In some such spirit it was that Carlyle had uttered what is really his last great message, the concluding words of his famous address to the students of the University of Edinburgh: *wir heissen euch hoffen*: 'we bid you hope.'

Let me sum up what I have been attempting to say of William Morris in a few more of his own words. 'It is for him that is lonely or in prison to dream of fellowship, but for him that is of a fellowship to do and not to dream. He who doeth well in fellowship, and because of fellowship, shall not fail, though he seem to fail to-day, but in days hereafter shall he and his work yet be alive.' Hope sustained by courage, courage sustained by hope; this is the deep-based fellowship which endures and overcomes.

OXFORD
PRINTED AT THE CLARENDON PRESS
BY HORACE HART, M.A.
PRINTER TO THE UNIVERSITY