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The mediaevalism of William Morris

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THE MEDIAEVALISM OF WILLIAM MORRIS

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Inez V. Parks
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INTRODUCTION

The mediaevalism of William Morris is most significantly modern. The author of twenty-four volumes impregnated with the life and thought of the Middle Ages, the founder of the Morris shops in the interest of popular handicraft and decorative art did not turn to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries for his inspiration because he was an "idle dreamer" and a man "born out of his due time." These over-quoted phrases are modest pleasantries, neither truths nor half-truths. It is my aim to show that Morris was decidedly practical in his mediaevalism, that he went back to the Middle Ages to find a sound basis for his theories of art and life because he saw that progress for the future lay in a picking up of the threads of a lost tradition, in a coordination of old and new, in the incorporation of mediaeval ideals perennial in their soundness with the best modern thought.

Morris's attitude toward the Middle Ages is not quixotic; on the contrary, his ideas are quite in line with the trend of scholarly thought for the last two centuries. Study and research have done away with the appellation, The Dark Ages. No longer is that period considered an unaccountable phenomenon accidentally thrust in between the two ages of civilization, the classical and the modern, a period without growth or meaning, beginning about the time of the decay of the Roman Empire and ending suddenly with the Reformation, a period of lawless and chaotic society, its ethics, mere hypo-
crisy; its art, gloomy and barbarous fanaticism; its literature, the formless jargon of savages; its science, the product of man's invention some hundreds of years later. Morris says: "The light which the researches of modern historians, archaeologists, bibliographers, and others have let in on our view of the Middle Ages has dispersed the cloud of ignorance on this subject. The men of those times are no longer puzzles to us; we can understand their aspirations and sympathize with their lives, while at the same time we have no wish to put back the clock, and start from the position which they held." Further, he says, "— in the beginning of the romantic reaction its supporters were, for the most part, mere laudatores temporis acti; at the present time those who take pleasure in studying the life of the Middle Ages are more commonly to be found in the ranks of those who are pledged to the forward movement of modern life."

CHAPTER I

THE INFLUENCES WHICH LED MORRIS TO MEDIAEVALISM

It was not an altogether bright and prosperous England that Morris faced in the nineteenth century; truly an age of heretofore undreamed-of industrial progress, but, notwithstanding, an age so dark in its ugliness and its poverty that mediaeval England lifted to men's gaze after an envelopment of four long centuries loomed clear in contrast. Morris saw in mediaeval England a light for his own age; he saw in that time a healthier state of human living than he found in his own century. Indeed, it was inevitable that Morris should turn to the consideration of the past. Two great impelling forces were driving all men in that direction; first, the dearth of art and the apparent loss in mankind of the instinct for beauty, a condition which was generating in the minds of the most serious an impulse to hearken back to old traditions for a sounder footing; and second, a general rising dissatisfaction with the economic situation, which was finding expression in social life and in literature.

These are the primary causes of the revival of mediaevalism that was spreading over England in so many phases in Morris's young manhood. It took one form in the Tractarian movement, another in the literature of romance, another in the Pre-Raphaelite movement, another in Socialism, and another in the prose of Carlyle and Ruskin. Brought
early in touch with the environment of the mediaeval in ar-
chitecture and instilled when a boy with the romances of 
Scott and of Tennyson, Morris developed a love for the Mid-
dle Ages which was very much deepened during his Oxford days 
by his coming in contact with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood 
and by his study of Ruskin and Carlyle.

To the youth reared on the edge of Epping Forest in 
"a sunny nook of unspoilt England" where commercialized in-
dustry had not yet removed all of the quaint old Essex 
churches and the delightful manor houses of the fifteenth 
and sixteenth centuries there was given opportunity for an 
early acquaintance with mediaeval art. To a boy of out-door 
tastes with an innate love of the beautiful, Woodford was an 
ideal home. It was here that Morris's parents came in 1840 
when he was only six years of age. And very early the boy 
came to know all of the ancient buildings in the vicinity of 
Woodford. The father himself a lover of mediaeval architec-
ture took the boy two years later on a visit to Canterbury 
and to the Minster in Thanet. There was left on the mind of 
William Morris an ineffaceable impression of the glory of 
Gothic. Years later he was able to describe these cathe-
drals minutely never having seen them since.

In 1848 Morris entered school at Marlborough, one of 
the most beautiful and romantic places in all England. It 
was here we are told that Morris acquired his passionate 
love of the earth, and a foundation for his study of art. 
Here was a good library and Morris was a voracious reader.
He left Marlborough as he himself says a good archaeologist, and knowing most of what there was to be known about English Gothic. In his nineteenth year he came to Oxford, a city at that time decidedly mediaeval in appearance. It had retained much of its earlier loveliness, and the vision of its gray-roofed houses and long winding street and many bells was an abiding influence and pleasure in the life of William Morris. At this time Morris was a great lover of romance and an advanced student of architecture. He had already become acquainted with Scott and Tennyson and had read two volumes of Modern Painters. In the scholarly atmosphere of this beautiful old city Morris's natural inclination toward the mediaeval was greatly increased.

Here in the first year of his college life Morris met Burne-Jones, the man who became his most intimate friend and co-worker through life. Their tastes in some respects were remarkably similar. Together they read many works on ecclesiastical archaeology and delved into masses of mediaeval chronicles. The painted manuscripts which they found in the Bodleian gave them most interesting and valuable information on mediaeval design and coloring. One of these, we are told by Mackail, an excellent Apocalypse of the thirteenth century, proved exceedingly delightful to Morris. The two friends not only thus read and studied together, but they also busied themselves with decorative design and painting, taking subjects for the most part mediaeval in nature.

At this time, however, Morris's interest in the ro-
mance of the Middle Ages was not less than his interest in its art. The spirit of Oxford was keenly romantic. The atmosphere of the whole literary world was decidedly mediaeval. Poetry was very popular. The work of Keats and of Tennyson in its richness of hue and glamour of romance was instinct with mediaeval life. Here Morris revelled in intense delight, even as he had revelled in the tales of Scott in his early youth. A wonderful enthusiasm for Tennyson then prevailed at Oxford. All reading men were Tennysonians, and everywhere poetry was the topic of discussion. Morris writes that people then had the feeling that after Tennyson no further development in poetry was possible. Thus it came that Morris's love for the Arthurian lore and other mediaeval romance was greatly deepened. In 1855 he was reading Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* and the tales of the *Mabinogion*. Then he turned to the *Gesta Romanorum* and finally to Froissart and Langland and Chaucer. With the wider, sweeter view of one he corrected the harsher, more mystical view of another. And so his passion for the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries grew.

Morris's vacations while at Oxford were spent in a most profitable way for a lover of mediaeval art and life. His first long vacation, in 1853, was spent in England, for the most part, in going about visiting old-time abbeys and priories and cathedrals. The next year he made his first journey abroad, traveling in Belgium and in northern France. This trip was of profound interest to Morris. It introduced
him to the painting of Van Eyck and Memling. In Paris the Musee Cluny and the galleries of the Louvre enriched his knowledge of mediaeval art in its noblest forms. The mediaeval city of Rouen he found particularly delightful. Writing about it years afterward he said, "No words can tell you how its mingled beauty, history, and romance took hold of me; I can only say that looking back on my past life, I find it was the greatest pleasure I ever had."* On this trip Morris had the opportunity of seeing the ancient churches of Amiens, Beauvais, and Chartres. Later he wrote that he thought these churches of Northern France "the grandest, the most beautiful, the kindest, and the most loving of all the buildings that the earth has ever borne."

Stronger and stronger grew Morris's determination to become an architect. In 1855 he began a brief period of work under George Edmund Street, an architect of the diocese at Oxford. He could have had no better master; Mr. Street's enthusiasm for the Middle Ages was not less than Morris's. He was at the time most zealously engaged in the preservation and restoration of the old Gothic.

The mediaeval art made all the greater impression upon Morris because of the striking contrast it presented to the then prevailing Victorian type. To a lover of true art the dwellings of men in the nineteenth century had grown inexpressibly base and ugly. The exteriors were generally lacking in harmonious beauty; the interiors combined meretricious flashiness with dingy heaviness. There was ponder-

*Morris, "The Aims of Art."
ous mahogany, dull carpets, drab walls, and preposterous gilt ornaments, all combining to produce a depressing atmosphere of massive ugliness. There seemed to be an utter loss in mankind of the instinct for beauty. This was seen not only in domestic architecture and decoration, but in every line of art. Victorian England had no great painters, and what is more to be deplored, no popular art, — nothing like the beautiful products of a handicraft people, and nothing to compare with a Gothic cathedral. London and the other great commercial cities of England were to Morris "masses of sordidness --- embroidered with patches of pompous and vulgar hideousness." Commercialized industry was everywhere working havoc, not only in debasing the quality of the work of men's hands, but even in disfiguring the natural beauty of the earth.

It was just this feeling that England had become insensible to the truly beautiful and that the only expression of genuine art lay in the remains of the days of the Middle Ages that was the moving force in the Pre-Raphaelite movement. This movement, a strong mediaeval reaction, at first exclusively in the field of painting, was destined to have a most marked influence on the life of William Morris.

In 1848 a group of seven young men, five of whom were painters, had banded themselves together in the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood for the purpose of inaugurating a new movement in art. They had as their leaders Holman Hunt, John Everett Millais, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Their aim
was to restore to modern painting something of that individuality and sincerity which characterized the work of the painters before Raphael, e.g. Giotto, Bellini, and Fra Angelico, painters in the last days of the Middle Ages. The Pre-Raphaelites would say, "Go back to nature! Be true to what you yourself feel!" They protested against the mechanical, superficial art of their own day; they pleaded for the imaginative life and a return to the frank naturalism and the romantic sentiment of mediaeval art.

It was in the year 1855 that the work of the Pre-Raphaelite school became known to Morris and his friend, Burne-Jones. A copy of "The Germ", the publication of the Brotherhood, fell into their hands. A little later they were introduced to Rossetti and an immediate friendship sprang up between them. In the same year they first saw some pictures of the Pre-Raphaelite artists, the work of Madox Brown, Hunt, Millais, and Rossetti. There was at once incited in William Morris a keen admiration for the Pre-Raphaelite school; he became an ardent pupil of Rossetti, and painting was for a time his chief interest. In 1857 Morris and Burne-Jones assisted the Brotherhood in painting the Arthurian frescoes on the walls of the Oxford Union Debating hall, an episode of significance in that it served to bring Morris into still greater intimacy with the Pre-Raphaelites.

The ideas of these artists were carried over from the field of painting to that of poetry. Rossetti's work in both fields well illustrates the principles of the school. The
adherents of this movement desired to bring ordinary life into harmony with the intensity it demanded from art. Figure drawing rather than landscape was the rule. The school showed a decided indifference to perspective and an intense love of detail. Their art reveals a thinness and transparency of design and a superfluity of sensuous beauty. The Pre-Raphaelites were remarkable in their genius for color. They loved rich hues and beautiful forms and graceful attitudes. The Pre-Raphaelite woman was tall, and slender, and long of neck, with a great rope of golden hair; she was clad in soft draperies. This was the woman of their painting as well as of their poetry. Quite often the subject of a picture was taken as the theme of a poem and vice versa. On the whole, Pre-Raphaelite art was largely symbolical; it showed considerable spiritual mysticism, and a decided tendency toward the mediaeval, both in nature of subject and in manner of treatment. It is interesting to note that the Pre-Raphaelite movement had been foreshadowed in literature by the aestheticism, by the romantic and pictorial qualities in the poetry of Coleridge, Blake, and Shelley; in Tennyson's Vivien, for instance, and in the Endymion of Keats, his Eve of St. Agnes, and La Belle Dame sans Merci.

Of all the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood with whom Morris came in contact, Rossetti was by far the most influential. The poet-artist in Rossetti could supplement the artist-poet in Morris. Both were intensely interested in the life, the art, and the romance of the Middle Ages; both drew
from that source their inspiration. They particularly enjoyed treating Arthurian scenes. "Arthur's Tomb" was drawn to illustrate Morris's poem, "The Blue Closet," and "The Tune of Seven Towers" was written to accompany Rossetti's pictures. The enthusiasm of Rossetti stimulated Morris. "Rossetti loved the Middle Ages for their mysticism; Morris, for their human elements. Rossetti's art was characterized by elaboration and subtlety; Morris's, by simplicity and directness."* The effect of their intimacy on Morris was to add pictorial richness to his romantic, but subdued mediaevalism and to enhance the vividness of his work both in form and color whether he was designing a piece of tapestry or writing a poem.

Although the natural environment of Morris and the artistic traditions of the nineteenth century were strong and constant influences inclining him to the mediaeval, another influence, the force of which can scarcely be overestimated, lay in the momentous humanitarian movements that were stirring all England. It was from this source that Morris drew the basic principles for the superstructure of mediaevalism which his tastes so delighted in erecting.

The economic situation of nineteenth-century England was ominous. The Victorian age, if it stood for anything, stood for a tacit agreement between the aristocracy and the middle class to keep in their control the country's wealth and power by subordinating the unskilled labor. This was rational, conservative England, and the time was that of great

* A. C. Rickett, *William Morris*. 
steam frigates and Cartwright looms. The result was inevitable. England's working people never saw a darker period. The factories had displaced the handicrafts; the old domestic system was gone. The new inventions and the new methods, however beneficial they have proved in the end, worked at that time great loss to whole classes of laborers. England was the first country to experience this industrial change and she was slow in adapting herself to the new conditions. The small freeholder had nearly disappeared. The rapid growth of cities created problems which at first received no attention. There were no adequate factory regulations. Parliament was the selfish organ of a small oligarchy of landlords. The courts for a long time treated labor unions as conspiracies. Accordingly, the laboring classes were kept in unorganized hordes almost wholly at the mercy of employers who, for their part, were engaged in a new mad race for wealth.

Naturally, reaction followed. The whole Victorian era was an age of conflict and adjustment socially and intellectually. The oppressive industrialism and the rationalistic philosophy gradually wrought a deeper and more vigorous expression of class feeling until all men knew that there was a new power to be reckoned with, and a no inconsiderable power, for it came from the under-strata of society and had drawn to its support some of the finest minds in all England. The fosterers of Chartism and the promoters of organizations for the working men paved the way for the reform labors of Carlyle and Ruskin and Morris, the humanitarians who preached
England a new gospel. Thus it came that the latter half of the century saw the cold, heartless Victorian compromise tempered by liberalism.

The literature of the age mirrored and even prefigured these mighty movements in England's economic life. Dickens dared to rise against the mandates of the so called Age of Reason and make his works an appeal, deep and far-reaching, for social correctives. The same spirit of social reform was upon Mrs. Gaskell, the writer of a tale of Manchester life, and upon Disraeli, who made open war on political radicalism and utilitarian philosophy. Charles Kingsley, a man that Carlyle called remarkable for the exuberance of his zeal, in his "Yeast" and "Alton Locke" preached for the uplift of the working class. Wilkie Collins and Charles Reade, both identified with the great reform policies of the day, were for thirty years zealous apostles of humanitarianism. Finally, above all others in the sincerity and soundness of their theories of reform rose two men, Thomas Carlyle and John Ruskin.

Carlyle with his characteristic vehemence spared no effort to impress upon England the seriousness of her situation. In his passion for justice he told her that she would answer her Sphinx riddle or perish. Then to bring his ideals of government to the people of England in more concrete fashion, he drew forth from the mist of seven centuries a bit of true history, the history of a social group in the twelfth century, a group that like a nation on a small scale had its
governing body and its governed, - a tale of life in a mon­­­astery, "The Story of the Ancient Monk." Like his followers, Ruskin and Morris, Carlyle saw in the Middle Ages a gleam of light for nineteenth-century England. Carlyle was the teacher of Ruskin. In his "Fora Clavigera" Ruskin said that there was only Thomas Carlyle in all England to guide him. However, the lessons Ruskin learned he adapted in his own fashion. He presented a new and truly scientific doctrine of social econ­­­omy, a doctrine that considered life in its integrity. His was a theory that shifted emphasis from the material product to the human agent. Many of his ideas have borne fruit. Many of the schemes we pride ourselves on today as representing the latest efforts of modern humanized industrialism were o­­­riginated by Ruskin. He earnestly tried to grasp and to ex­­­press as a comprehensive whole the needs of human society and the true lines of social reform.

The teachings of Carlyle and Ruskin became the light of their generation. It was such words as theirs that deep­­­ened men's social consciousness and caused them to roll back the curtain of time and review England's mediaeval life to ascertain the condition of her early craftsmen in hope that thus might be revealed the solution of the Sphinx riddle. To these two men is due in no small part the revival of mediae­­­valism that was spreading over England in so many phases in the nineteenth century.

To Morris "Past and Present" stood alongside "Modern Painters" and "The Stones of Venice" as inspired and absolute
truth. "The Stones of Venice," in particular that grand illuminating chapter "On the Nature of Gothic," gave Morris a new gospel and a fixed creed. It showed him the gulf which lay between the nineteenth century and the Middle Ages. It brought to him a full realization of the intimate connection of art and life. He then understood the disappearance of the great old Gothic and the decadence of nineteenth-century art. Even as the art of the Middle Ages was the outcome of the life of that time, so was the deteriorated Victorian type the inevitable outcome of the oppressive Victorian industrialism. Ruskin had revealed to the world the true secret of a popular art. "The Stones of Venice" held up before the eyes of men a higher ideal than that of commercialism. In his later life Morris wrote, "To some of us when we first read it (in those Oxford days), now many years ago, it seemed to point out a new road on which the world should travel."* It set fire to Morris's enthusiasm; it kindled the beliefs of his whole life. At first, it appealed to him chiefly from the artist's stand-point; later, it was to be the basis of his sociology.

Early environed with the mediaeval in architecture, stirred in his youth with the romance of Scott and Tennyson and Keats, quickened by the keen and eager enthusiasm of Rossetti, and thus brought to manhood with a remarkable knowledge of the Middle Ages and an intense love for its art, and then abruptly awakened to the needs of his own social England by two apostles of the mediaeval, the one in his zeal

* Mackail's Life of William Morris.
for social reform bringing to light the spirituality of the Middle Ages, the other, in his passion for a popular art revealing the secrets of Gothic, Morris arose in his inspiration with a worthy message for his troubled age. He told his generation to "look to the past, not with idle regret, but with humility, hope and courage, not in striving to bring the dead to life again, but to enrich the present and the future."
CHAPTER II

THE MEANING OF MEDIAEVALISM TO MORRIS

I

A Popular Art

We may say that mediaevalism had a two-fold meaning for William Morris; in the first place, it meant a popular art; in the second, a vigorous humanity. The mediaeval age that Morris portrayed was for the most part that of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, although he frequently suggested features of the twelfth.

It was the twelfth century that stood especially for feudalism, and its characteristic art symbol, the castle. It was at the close of this century that Richard of the Lion Heart built that acme of castle achievement, that ideal Château Gaillard. This was the century of chroniclers, of William of Malmesbury, Geoffrey of Monmouth, Florence of Worcester, and Simeon of Durham. This was the century of the great crusades and the singing of chansons de geste. The thirteenth century carried on the life of the twelfth and developed some distinctive features of its own. If the castle was the symbol of the twelfth, the cathedral was most certainly the symbol of the thirteenth. Europe was putting on "the white robe of churches." This century saw the organization of the orders of the Friars. The age was also marked by
the development of scholasticism and the rise of universities, of Oxford and Cambridge. These were the days of Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas, Robert Grosseteste, and Roger Bacon. The literature of the age saw a transition from the chronicle and the chanson to the romance and the lyric. In England the vernacular was slowly supersed ing French. This was the age of Layamon andOrm. The thirteenth century saw a new social order, democracy, growing side by side with feudalism and gradually undermining it. This was the century of the Magna Charta and Parliamentary representation. This was the age of the remarkable rise of the middle class, of the development of towns, of the organization of the merchant and craft gilds which came to the height of their power in the next century. The fourteenth century was the age of Froissart, of Langland, of Chaucer, and through them a period ordinarily better known than the preceding centuries. Morris sees in this century the handicrafts at their best. He sees the growing cosmopolitan spirit of England, the spread of democracy, and the decay of feudalism. Morris does not deal with all of the characteristic features of these mediaeval centuries in his works, but he does lay stress on the popular art of that time and on the vigor of humanity, and through these avenues of approach he gives a fairly comprehensive picture.

Morris believed that art was the natural direction of a people's energies when material wants were satisfied and labor was free. Referring to the condition of the worker in
the fourteenth century, Morris said, "That time was in a sense brilliant and progressive, and the life of the worker in it was better than it ever had been, and might compare with advantage with what it became in after periods and with what it is now." The feudal laborers were independent workmen producing almost entirely for the consumption of themselves and their neighbors. They were, indeed, forced to pay their feudal obligation, but this generally was not such an intolerable burden that it made the procuring of a livelihood difficult. In these days the common necessaries were at every man's hand; the upper classes themselves demanded no more than a rude plenty. There was no commerce as we know it; capitalist manufacture was unknown. The only market was close at hand. Men worked directly for their neighbors, understanding their wants; and no one came between them; huckstering was then illegal.

The crafts were drawn together into gilds which afforded the workmen a certain kind of protection and encouragement and guidance. No pressure of speed was put on a man's work; he was allowed to carry it through leisurely and thoughtfully. The laborer set to work at his own time, in his own house; he usually made his tool, instrument, or simple machine himself. The ornament that was to be on his finished product he himself determined; his mind and his hand designed it and carried it out. True, tradition, that is, the minds and thoughts of workmen gone before him as expressed in the custom of his craft did, indeed, guide and

* Morris's "Feudal England."
help him, but otherwise he was free.

Accordingly, he made his work as delightful to himself as he could. "It was his pleasure and not his pain," Morris said, "that made all things beautiful that were made." A man's whole intelligence was developed according to his capacity; he had full freedom, hand and soul. "All men were more or less artists; that is to say, the instinct for beauty, which is inborn in every complete man, had such force that the whole body of craftsmen habitually and without conscious effort made beautiful things."

Describing the art of that time Morris says, "It strove little to impress people either by pomp or ingenuity; not unseldom it fell into commonplace: rarely it rose into majesty; yet was it never oppressive, never a slave's nightmare nor an insolent boast; and at its best it had an inventiveness, an individuality that grander styles have never over-passed: its best too, and that was in its very heart, was given as freely to the yeoman's house, and the humble village church as to the lord's palace or to the mighty cathedral: never coarse, though often rude enough, sweet, natural, and unaffected, an art of peasants rather than of merchant-princes or courtiers."

The architectural treasures of the present are mostly some little gray houses where every-day people in the long ago lived, and little gray churches in which they worshipped. There are only a few great minsters and only a few palaces of

* Morris, "Art Under Plutocracy."
* Morris, "The Lesser Arts."
kings and lords. You ask, "Who fashioned them and orna-
mented them?" Perhaps the monk, the plowman's brother, the
village carpenter, smith, or mason -- any common workman.
And the remarkable thing is that there is no distinction be-
tween the quality of labor bestowed on the peasant's cottage
and that on the Gothic cathedral. Morris says, "The throne
of the great Plantagenet --- was no more daintily carved than
the seat of the village massa-john, or the chest of the yoe-
man's wife."*

Morris pictures for us a laborer's cottage built of
the Cotswold limestone. We are told that everything about
it is solid and well wrought; the whole is skilfully planned
and well proportioned. Roof and walls that once were creamy
white are now a lovely warm gray; a little sharp and deli-
cate carving appears about the arched doorway. The humble
dwelling is beautiful -- a work of art -- a piece of the na-
ture about it.

Within these cottages of mediaeval England the handi-
crafts were in evidence, the carving of the woodwork, and the
furniture, the tapestry, and the pottery. Though everything
was designed strictly for use, nothing lacked beauty. Every
article from the wooden bowl and elegantly carved knife-han-
dle on the board to the ornamented armor and weapons bore the
impress of loving effort. In these days every article, how-
ever ordinary its use might be, was ornamented, and the orna-
ment was always fitting and original. Every article bore the

* Morris, "The Art of the People."
stamp of its maker's personality and testified to his freedom of life, to his joy in his work.

Referring to the art of pottery, Morris says, "England could no more do without a native art of pottery in the Middle Ages than any other simple people. Owing to the fact that the work was rough and served the commonest domestic purposes, it had little chance of preservation, but the little that is left shows us that our Gothic forefathers delighted in the potter's wheel and in the capabilities of clay for quaint and pleasant form. Indeed, this rough craft lived on as a village art till almost the days of our grandfathers, turning out worthy work enough done in a very unconscious and simple fashion on the old and true principles of art."

Some of the most notable products of the Middle Ages were the magnificent tapestries, the natural result of the pleasure and skill that were exercised in the art of weaving in every village and homestead. In the words of Morris, "What a noble art it was once! To turn our chamber walls into the green woods of the leafy month of June, populous of bird and beast; or a summer garden with man and maid playing around a fountain, or a solemn procession of the mythical warriors and heroes of old; that was surely worth the trouble of doing, and the money that had to be paid for it; that was no languid acquiescence in an upholsterer's fashion."

* Morris, "The Lesser Arts of Life."
* Ibid.
As to the master art of the Middle Ages, the building of the great cathedrals, here is a work that in the eyes of Morris was innimitable. To him it was as inconceivable for a nineteenth century workman to reconstruct a Gothic cathedral as it would have been for a fourteenth century workman to rebuild a Greek temple; it was as impossible to renew an old cathedral by an imitation of fourteenth century art as to renew an ancient manuscript by making a nineteenth century copy. It looks significant to Morris that would-be restorers of these old buildings have left their names on every piece of their worthless and really destructive additions, while the genuine art stands without a name to indicate its creator. Indeed, a name is impossible for this is the work of a people.

This is Morris's picture of St. Peters. "It rises before you a mass of gray stone traceried and carved and moulded into a great triple portico beset with pinnacles and spires, so orderly in its intricacy, so elegant amid its hugeness, that even without any thought of its history or meaning it fills your whole soul with satisfaction."* Morris has similarly described his feelings on entering the cathedral of Amiens. "It was so free and vast and noble, I did not feel in the least awe-struck by its size and grandeur --- there was a certain kind of satisfaction in looking on the geometrical tracery of the windows, on the sweeping

* Morris, "Arts and Industry in the Fourteenth Century."
of the huge arches."* Morris exulted in the beauty of the magnificent choir-stalls and in the figure subjects sculptured upon them. In all, here was a creation of art that was to be the admiration of all men to come, that testified to the innate vigor of a people, that bespoke joy in labor, that revealed to future generations the thought and the soul, the hopes and fears and feelings that moved in the mediaeval man.

* Morris, "Lecture on Amiens Cathedral."
Mediaeval feudalism did not appeal to Morris as a wholesome state of society. To him that system held the seeds of its own destruction. By nature a system of open war between king and potentates and barons over conflicting claims, it was destined to decay in the development of manufactures and trade which followed the rise of the great middle class and the spread of democracy. Under all this social transition and in spite of the weaknesses of the organization that bound society together, there was in mediaeval England a remarkable vigor of life.

There was physical vigor. The servants of the manor after rendering their feudal obligations were free — free to earn their own living as they pleased. They lived a rural life where no distresses of the slums entered. And there was sufficient virility in these underlings to build castles and cathedrals and to entertain ideas of democracy. And there was sufficient vitality in the over-lords, in spite of their inter-class struggles, to flower forth in a glorious knighthood with its tournaments and its chivalry. There was that same sturdiness that in the twelfth century had impelled men forth on crusades for the sake of an ideal. Or we may look at the darker side of the picture. We may speak of knights and barons and let our imagination call up a set of
men, fierce, active, relentless, covetous, for the most part, living a life of wild-beast isolation, and as prompt as wild beasts to seize and to slay. Chesterton calls them "thieves and thugs and smiters;" such they may have been, but we admit the virility of the type. Virile, too, was the word for the communes and the gilds. The burghers were as fierce as the barons. In these days the "cross-bow twanged defiance to the glitter of the lance."

To realize better the vigor of that people, imagine if you can the face of mediaeval England. These were the days of many chases and great woods. There were long stretches of common tillage and common pasture quite unenclosed. The high-roads were little more than green lanes with a narrow beaten track in the middle. Amidst the well kept fields, the woods, and the green hill-sides arose flower-beset cottages of thatched gray stone and cob. Here and there were high church spires marking small, but beautiful churches, abbeys, priories, and stately cathedrals. Castles crowned the hills; moated, generously built manor-houses appeared now in the edge of the wood, now in a sheltered valley; hermitages stood by the dangerous fords. Here and there were villages consisting of a group of cottages scattered around a wide green.

Even London in these days Morris tells us was "small and white and clean," beautiful from one end to the other with its streets of low white-washed houses, and its big Gothic church standing in the middle of it. In the words of Mor-
These mediaeval towns were very small, smaller than our imagination of them pictures them to us; while on the other hand, the country villages were in many cases much larger than they are now. My familiarity with Oxford makes it easy to me to see a mediaeval town of the more important kind; a place of some extent within its ancient walls, but the houses much broken by gardens, and open spaces within the walls, and without them, a small estate it may be called, the communal property of the freemen. On the whole, the towns of the Middle Ages, in this country at least were a part of the country-sides where they stood. This rural life of mediaeval England bore a close connection to the vigor and virility of her people, a relation Morris never failed to impress upon his nineteenth-century listeners.

Not only did the Middle Ages mean to him a humanity enjoying an existence of physical well-being in pleasant, rural England, but it meant to him a people living a vigorous and wholesome industrial life. The serf, whose lot at the worst was preferable to that of the factory slave in Victorian times, by the very conditions of his labor was able to better himself as an individual, and began in time to acquire rights amid the clashings of king and barons and burghers. The serfs, gradually getting freed and becoming, some of them the town population, the first journey-men, or "free laborers" so called, some of them the copy-holders of agricultural land, fell in line with the spirit of the gilds which were slowly making their appearance. Population had thickened in certain
places where the protection of the feudal lord, baron, bishop, or abbot made a market possible. Here a trading class, which was called a gild, had its origin. These merchant gilds established for the benefit of trade and commerce became an important element in society; they developed into the corporations of the towns, and under them sprang up other combinations, the craft gilds, that brought to workmen the spirit of fraternity, gave them a live interest in the quality of their work, and assured them a certain social position. The laborers worked independently, but had the benefit of an inspiring and protecting organization. The thirteenth and fourteenth centuries saw the transition of mediæval workmen from serfs bound to a manor to yeomen and artisans sharing the collective status of their gilds, a change productive of a marked industrial development, a development that meant the perfection of handicrafts and the gift to the world of Gothic cathedrals.

The people of mediæval England were vigorous intellectually. Out of the crusades had come a cosmopolitan spirit. The students of the time took all learning for their sphere. The Middle Ages saw the rise of universities, of Paris, of Oxford, of Cambridge, and the development of scholasticism. Morris would have his readers cast away the exploded theory of the invincible and wilful ignorance of those days. He says, "The people of that time were eagerly desirous for knowledge, and their teachers were mostly single-hearted and intelligent men, of a diligence and labori-
ousness almost past belief." He refers to the book on
"The Properties of Things" by Bartholomew Anglicus as one
of the huge encyclopedias written in the early Middle Ages
for the instruction of those who wished to learn. "The
reputation of it and its fellows," Morris says, "shows how
much the science of the day was appreciated by the public
at large, how many there were who wished to learn."*

At the same time there was a strong religious ideal­
ism, a devout worship of Our Lady, a sincere zeal and an ea­
gcr passion for the discovery of truth. A new force was
moving the sturdy, serious Anglo-Saxons and their brilliant,
versatile Norman conquerors and undermining the paganism
that was still a part of their mediaeval being. There was
in England a fallow field for a new religious growth, and a
new growth did come. There was a new impulse from Rome.
The latter part of the twelfth century saw the organization
of the Dominican and Franciscan friars, and the first quar­
ter of the next century saw their enthusiastic reception in
England. The same century that saw the development of scho­
lasticism, its symbol, the university, saw the rebirth of
Christianity heralded by the cathedral. The greatest of the
theologians were the most renowned scholastics. In their
hands Faith sought the support of Reason. It was the gran­
diose ambition of the age to arrange all knowledge according

* Ibid.
to law and order, and to harmonize the ancient Aristotelian-
ism with the doctrines of Christianity.

The latter half of the twelfth century saw the found­
ing of Oxford, and the early thirteenth saw the establishment
of the Dominican and Franciscan orders at the university with
the result that Oxford became the home of the greatest stu­
dents and theologians of mediaeval England; of Thomas Aquinas,
the organizer of theological doctrine; of Robert Grosseteste,
the foremost student of the day, the reviver of neglected
languages; of Roger Bacon, the man of science a century in
advance of his time, in popular repute, a necromancer. The
influence of such men was gradually permeating society and
raising the intellectual level. There was, to be sure, ig­
norance and superstition among the lower class, but as a
whole the people of that day showed an admirable open-mind­
edness and eagerness for truth.

The literature of the time is especially illuminating
in regard to this feature of mediaeval England. The transi­
tion in popular taste from the chanson of the twelfth cen­
tury to the romance of the thirteenth indicated the growth
of a reading public in the lower strata of society.

The very fact of the eager absorption of French tales
of romance as "Aucassin and Nicolette," and "Floris and
Blancheflur," as well as the growth of the supposedly native
English, as "King Horn," and "Havelok the Dane," and the
taking form under the hands of Geoffrey of Monmouth and of
Layamon of the great mass of the legendary Matter of Britain in all its variety and commanding breadth reveal a decided vigor of intellect in mediaeval England. Add to this field of legendary romance the religious and didactic literature of the age, such literature as has come down to us in "The Poema Morale," "The Ormulum," "The Debate of the Body and the Soul," and "The Cursor Mundi" together with the lyrics of the age, the carmina vagorum, and hymns like the "Dies Irae," and finally include the literature of science, e.g. the "Opus Maius" of Roger Bacon, and the legal classic of Ranulph de Glanville and we have some idea of the comprehensive scope of mind in the people of the Middle Ages. Only by such a realization can one in the slightest degree account for the deus major of the fourteenth century, for Geoffrey Chaucer.

Morris loved the mediaeval literature, but not especially for its romantic elements as did Scott, nor primarily for its pictorial richness as did Rossetti, although this aspect appealed to him as an artist, but, at bottom, because of the vigorous humanity that lay beneath its pages, a humanity, by the way, with some very admirable ideals.

One striking feature of mediaeval literature is its general anonymity. Of the many who wrote, the names of but few are recorded. This is not simply accident. In those days the importance attached to an author's personality was far less than now. It was the substance that attracted atten-
tion. The author wrote for no self-exaltation. His product was impersonal; it was cosmopolitan; it was a part of the republic of letters. The same spirit that resulted in the anonymity of the Gothic cathedral resulted in the anonymity of literature, a spirit that appealed to Morris as indicative of the health of the age.

Naturally, the writers of this period were orthodox; they clung to the traditions of the past. Anselm in the early Middle Ages tells us frankly that he is using the venerable Bede in support of his argument. He had no egotistical desire to be considered an originator of new views. But nevertheless, he shows a remarkable freedom of thought, a spirit as inspiring as the mountain air. Layamon, who would tell the noble deeds of England, claims to be the compiler of three books. "He took the English book that St. Bede made; another he took in Latin that St. Albin made; the third book he took and laid there in the midst that a French clerk made, who was named Wace. Layamon laid before him these books and turned the leaves; lovingly he beheld them, pen he took with fingers, and wrote on book-skin, and the true words set together, and the three books pressed into one."* Here was a spirit that pleased Morris. It was that of a simple-hearted man, a sincere lover of books, an honest scholar, a seeker after truth, a man who wrote for the increase of learning.

* Layamon's "Morte d'Arthur" (Everyman edition).
There is in the popular literature of the Middle Ages an element of rugged simplicity. Layamon describes battles with the same earnestness dignified by the same simplicity of expression that is to be found in "The Battle of Maldon" and in "The Battle of Brunanburh." There is simplicity in the characterization, a feature that marks all the mediaeval literature from the chansons de geste to the fourteenth-century Miracle and Morality. A good illustration is found in the "Song of Roland." Roland, the hero, is brave; Oliver is wise; and both are good men of their hands. Here is an appeal to primal emotions. The exaltation of courage and wisdom, scorn of treachery and cowardice, appreciation of loyalty, and emphasis on chivalric love were the elements that drew a response from the popular mind. These were the emotions that pervaded the songs of the troubadours and the wandering minstrels and caught the sympathy of men whether sung in the castle or in the yeoman's cottage.

In addition, mediaeval literature abounded in all the picturesque features that belonged to the days of crusades and chivalry. The out-door Viking quality that pervaded the early literature was mingled with the relation of thrilling adventures of knights in battle, of the rescue of fair ladies, of struggles with desperate wild beasts, giants, and evil enchanters, and with the introduction of faery and magic. Such romantic creations were the work of a vigorously imaginative people. They may seem childishly naive, but they are indicative of a certain bodily strength. Only a
people happily environed, a people physically and mentally strong and filled with boundless enthusiasm, are likely to give such free rein to fancy. It was this vigorous human-ity that Morris saw back of the glamor of thirteenth cen-
tury romance.

Morris saw in mediaeval literature no unity. It was truly representative of a life that had the most strik-ing contrasts, courtly elegance and peasant rudeness, wis-dom and superstition, glorification of Christianity and res-ignation to Weird, romance and reality, gaiety and gloom, feudalism and democracy.

Morris has commented upon the marked contrasts in the literature of the fourteenth century. "Chaucer," he says, "the gentleman, the court poet, with his Italianizing meters and his formal recognition of the classical stories --- builds a superstructure of the quaintest and most unadul-terated mediaevalism, as gay and bright as the architecture which his eyes beheld and his pen pictured for us, so clear, defined, and elegant it is; a sunny world even amidst its violence and passing troubles --- in its eager life of adven-ture and love amidst the sunlit blossoming meadows, and green woods, and white-begilded manor-houses --- Look at all the picture, note all and live in all, and be as merry as you may, never forgetting that you are alive and that it is good to live." Alongside of this Morris sees the ballad poetry wholly untouched by courtly elegance or classic pedantry; rude in art, never coarse, and thoroughly sincere, a poetry
instinct with indignation against wrong, a protest of poor against rich. Especially is this true of the songs of the Foresters and the "Piers Plowman" of William Langland. "It is no bad corrective to Chaucer," Morris declares. And it seems indeed true that Morris strikes a mean between these two so opposite moods of mediaeval thought. And he can do so because he himself has seen the Middle Ages from so many points of view that he can harmonize the seeming inconsistencies. Whether he sees the age from the view of the poor or from that of the rich, from the view of the scholar or from that of the unlettered, he sees a virile people with a sturdy optimism - their motto, Langland's *Diasc*, *Doce*, *Dilige*; their vision, that of *Dowel*, *Dobet*, *Dobeat*. 
CHAPTER III
MORRIS'S ADAPTATION AND APPLICATION OF MEDIAEVALISM

I
In his Arts and Crafts

Morris's work in the field of arts and crafts, while it was in one sense completely modern and even in advance of his age, was based on a return to and development of methods which, for the most part, had gone quite out of use. To go back to the fourteenth century, not with the intention of staying there, but of advancing from it on what he conceived to be the true highroad out of which the arts had long wandered, was his constant aim. With him craftmanship, based on firm and secure mediaeval principles, took on a striking freshness not out of harmony with the traditions of the past, and yet imbued with the best the nineteenth century could offer.

Naturally certain mediaevalisms found their way into the building and the decoration of his much loved home, the Red House, and into his workshops in Queen Square and at Merton Abbey. Morris did not servilely imitate fourteenth century art, but because he had a gift of good taste and a sense for the truly beautiful and harmonious as well as a love for the ancient art, the work of his hands did take on frequently a resemblance to the products of the Middle Ages,
and inevitably so, for the principles of his creations were in keeping with the natural lines along which the medieval workman labored.

It is said that the Red House bore a decidedly Gothic aspect. It possessed the long sloping roof, the pointed arches over the doorways, the deep simple porches, the large hall that were characteristic of the old English houses centuries before. The garden close by was as individual and old-fashioned as the house. Not a plant, we may be sure, was cultivated that was not native to the English soil.

Passing to the interior of this dwelling at Upton, one saw at the windows small leaded panes of glass. To the mind of Morris the large windows that commonly prevailed were neither useful nor beautiful. They let in a flood of light in a haphazard and ill-considered way and necessarily the indwellers were forced to obscure them with curtains, blinds, and upholstery. The mere fact that small windows were distinctly mediaeval was never brought forward as an argument for their superiority.

As to furniture and decoration, Morris would have nothing that he did not know to be useful or think to be beautiful. He would have massive chairs firmly made, a table that would "keep steady when you work upon it," a good floor, a bench "that you can sit or lie upon," a cupboard with drawers, and a bookcase "with a great many books in it," and unless the cupboard or the bookcase were very beautiful
with carving or painting, he would have pictures and engravings upon the walls, or else the walls must be ornamented "with some beautiful or restful pattern." And finally, there would be a fireplace, in an English home, the chief object in the room. In the Red House, we are told, the walls were hung with rich hangings, embroidered fabrics worked by Mrs. Morris and her friends, or with beautiful tapestries, or with panels painted by Burne-Jones. The furniture, which was large and heavy and decidedly mediaeval in appearance, offered great spaces for decoration, and Rossetti as well as Morris and Burne-Jones painted upon it subjects from Chaucer and Dante and the Arthurian legend. The result naturally was a marked effect of artistic splendor; and yet withal there was in Red House so much of a practical simplicity that it was easy to see that its master was a lover of a rough, simple age and a sturdy art.

The decoration and furnishing of the Red House called attention most forcibly to the commercial and conventional conceptions of art which had obtained so strong a hold on Victorian England. To obtain anything really artistic or beautiful Morris was compelled to design it himself and have the design executed under his direction. Such need was the germinating force of the Morris Firm and the Morris Workshops.

In 1861 the little band of eight artists, Morris, Burne-Jones, Rossetti, Madox Brown, Webb the architect, Arthur Hughes, Marshall, and Faulkner, became the firm, "Mor-
ris, Marshall, Faulkner & Company, Fine Art Workmen in Painting, Carving, Furniture, and the Metals." Their object was to open a shop in Red Lion Square and sell what their united talent produced, to give good taste in household furniture and decoration at a moderate price. They attempted mural decoration, stained glass, wood carving, metal work, embroidered tapestries, woven hangings, besides the designing and making of all the common articles of furniture. In their practical protest against the prevailing mode and methods of domestic art and decoration they 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."* As the success of the work grew the workshops were moved from Red Lion Square to Queen Square, Bloomsbury, London, and finally to Merton Abbey, a little out from London on the Thames. Other lines of work were added, the making of carpets and tiles and wall-papers and printed cotton goods.

Morris and Webb, for the most part, designed the furniture; "intensely mediaeval furniture" Rossetti calls it. From the cheap pretentiousness of Victorian stucco and veneer Morris turned to the thirteenth century, for there if anywhere could be found models showing logical principles of construction and genuine workmanship. The simple, black-

framed old English chair with its rush-bottomed seat was substituted for the wavy-backed and curly-legged stuffed chair of the Victorian period, with its French polish and concealed and often very unreliable construction. His co-workers catching from him the infection of the mediaeval attitude, or being already in sympathy with it, the work of the firm took on from the beginning an emphatically Gothic aspect.

It is said that the painted glass windows, the work of Rossetti, that were entered at the National Exhibition of 1862, "gave an impression of color, dazzling and magnificent, velvety and harmonious, resembling the Flemish stained glass windows decorating the Gothic cathedrals."* In the early days of the company the designs were supplied almost entirely by Rossetti and Madox Brown, but later, the figure drawing was done altogether by Burne-Jones, and the floral and subsidiary design by Morris. The result of their cooperation was many fine windows scattered over England, particularly at Oxford, Cambridge, and Birmingham. Morris aimed only at beauty and fitness; he did not try imitatively to make his work mediaeval, and he did not pretend that it could be suitable to a mediaeval building.

Tapestry weaving was a favorite art with Morris, and one which he carried to an extraordinary degree of perfection. He and Burne-Jones combining their designs to produce results, came nearer to the old Arras effect than to the

* E. L. Cary, William Morris.
work of modern weavers. After some years Morris succeeded in obtaining a loom like those on which the beautiful fabrics of mediaeval times were woven. The methods he proposed to revive had died out in Cromwell's time, but from an old French book he finally picked out the details of the ancient craft. In connection with his textile work he early felt the imperative need for better colors than the market offered. He was forced to turn his back on chemical dyes and to go to Pliny to learn former methods; he studied from French books of the Middle Ages the secrets of the old vegetable dyes. Finally, he set up his own vats and becks and by making his own dyes he succeeded in producing colors that were a delight to the eye, full, soft, and brilliant colors that greatly enriched his silks and wools.

In his designs, whether he was working at wall-paper or tapestry, or doing illumination, printing, or drawing of book-covers, Morris was inclined to a romantic freedom of spirit and to an over-luxuriance of detail. It is said that in common with most designers who derive their ideals from mediaeval sources, he was less impressed by the tranquillity gained from delicately ordered open spaces, and the simple dignity brought about by the rhythmical play of mass in perfect proportion than by the charm of elaborately detailed and highly vitalized imagery. With his fine sense of color and his remarkably keen feeling for pattern he created designs that covered the background richly and intricately, yet he never allowed his work to sink into petty picturesque-
ness or vagueness. In his earliest wall-papers the designs were comparatively simple and direct, often more quaint than beautiful as in the well-known Daisy pattern. Later they became much more intricate as in the Pimpernel and Acanthus designs. His tapestries were always exuberant in color and variety of line. The same is true of his illuminations. Rossetti declared that nothing better in that work had been done since the Middle Ages. In his printing and book-making Morris effected some truly remarkable achievements. As early as 1866 he had planned a folio edition of his *Earthly Paradise* that was to be printed after a more or less mediaeval fashion; but not till some twenty years later did he set up his Kelmscott Press and begin collecting ancient books for the purpose of studying their type and form. We are told that after a careful study of the beautiful types of Peter Schoeffer of Mainz, of Gunther Zainer of Augsburg, and of Anthony Koburger of Nuremberg, Morris designed for himself the Troy type, so called from Caxton's "Historyes of Troye," the first book that Morris printed in this style, a very pleasing type, somewhat Gothic in character. Later he designed his Chaucer type, which was a little more antique in appearance. Taking a model from a fifteenth-century book, Morris had paper made according to his order, of unbleached linen, thin and tough and pleasing not only to the eye but to the hand. His designs for the borders of his pages and for the covers were in spite of his mediaeval tendencies decidedly modern; at least, the principles of his designs
proved popular and are today recognized as sound. His orna-
ment was most painstakingly done and was always handsome and
often even exquisite. Morris was, above all, original; he
thought out for himself the methods and motives of the an-
cient arts by which he was so consciously and intentionally
guided.

It is true that Morris's aim was not so much to re-
store the arts of the past as to put modern art on a firm
basis. If he was unduly dominated by the mere conventions
of the mediaeval, it was because he recognized in that art
the expression of a life that was strong and fine and aspir-
ing. He saw in Gothic the realistic and practical side of
the mediaeval mind; and he saw as we do today that Gothic is
so truly England's art that if ever applied art again be-
comes the chief pleasure and pre-occupation of her people,
the form of that art must be and can be only a development
from the Gothic. That art and not Japanese or Persian,
Greek or Roman, was capable of providing England of the nine-
teenth century with material and ideas suitable to her orig-
inally fertile imagination and her northern temperament. The
principles of art that Morris brought before his deluded age
were gathered from the days when the work of every man's
hands was beautiful, when there was no distinction between
artist and artisan, when every household article bore the im-
press of loving effort and joy in labor, when labor was not
preparation for living, but life.

In the first place, Morris preached that art should
be democratized as in the days of the Middle Ages. Again and again he declared, "I do not want art for a few any more than education for a few or freedom for a few." Through art the individual comes to know the universe, to feel the satisfying joy of a self-directed existence, and to find in work its own reward. Morris said, "By art I understand the pleasure of life," a definition that at once universalizes and individualizes. Tolstoy has said, "Art is a human activity consisting in this, that one man consciously, by means of certain external signs, hands on to others feelings he has lived through, and that other people are infected by these feelings, and also experience them." It follows that the question of art is largely social, and that a popular art is the highest attainment of society.

As one of his first maxims, Morris maintained that labor must be free and intelligent, else a popular art cannot exist. To his mind, nothing made by man's hand can be indifferent; it must be either beautiful and elevating, or ugly and debasing. In the Middle Ages everything made had a due and befitting form, and however ordinary its use, it was always elaborately ornamented, and the ornament was always both beautiful and inventive. This decoration grew spontaneously out of the method of work; the craftsman, as he fashioned the thing under his hand, added artistic touches so naturally and so entirely without conscious effort that one can scarcely distinguish the utilitarian part of his work from the ornamental. The origin of this art was
the necessity that the workman felt for satisfying his individual craving for the beautiful. And though the beauty produced by this desire was a great gift to the world, yet the workman's satisfaction and delight was a matter of more importance, for it stamped all labor with the impress of pleasure. "Now," Morris says, "if you wish to have ornament, you must pay especially for it, and the workman is compelled to produce ornament as he is to produce other wares --- The beauty which was once a solace to his labor, has now become an extra burden."* And so it is when the workman is not free to carry out his own designs, when the cry of the age is the greatest production at the least cost.

Another fundamental proposition of Morris's theory, and one that he held in common with Ruskin, was that all good work is handwork. To his mind, machinery had its proper place, yet in the production of a work of art it was inferior even to the halting efforts of a man who put his soul into his work. This point of view was generally visible in the reaction against early Victorian furniture, - in the demand for antiques, for mediaeval designs in cabinet making, metal work, ornate book bindings, imitation of ancient printing and illustrations - all signs of a change of thought in which there was a manifest inclination to link production with the producer's intelligence. Morris deplored the factory system with its deadening division of labor on the

* Morris, Useful Work and Useless Toil.
ground that it, like machinery, took out of man's reach the
delight of individual creation. He pointed out the superior
wisdom of the mediaeval system that called forth the whole
power of the workman and did not submit his hand and his soul
to the necessities of competition. It was those days when
men in their simplicity considered that commerce was made for
man that produced the popular art of the Middle Ages.

Another of Morris's leading ideas drawn from mediae­
val art was that real beauty lay in the perfect harmony of
material and design. And he recognized that it was practi­
cally impossible to get this unity unless the craftsman and
the designer were one. The designer must thoroughly under­
stand the conditions of production and allow them to deter­
mine the character of his design. And he can hardly do so
unless he is in close and constant touch with the craftsman.
Present industrial conditions seeking trade rather than art
tend to separate the two functions more and more and to work
injury to both classes of laborers. Artists tend to become
effeminate when they do not practise the handling of rough
materials and workmen become debased when they cease to ex­
ercise their faculties in design. Morris ever maintained
that in the Middle Ages the word artisan always meant artist.
Men in those days were not unwilling to exercise their fac­
culties on the humblest undertaking with no other aim than to
make a common thing pleasant to look upon and agreeable to
use.

Finally, Morris taught that great architecture is es-
sentially a cooperative art. True, the planning and the general scheme of design may be the work of one man, but the realization calls for a host of skilled artisans, stone masons, carvers, carpenters, tilers, etc., an army of laborers working harmoniously together. And yet to make the building really expressive, really a work of art, something more is needed than skilled workmen and cooperative labor. Therein lies the difference between ancient and modern architecture. Artists and craftsmen of past great periods worked in such harmony on a Gothic cathedral that the whole never lost its character or its individuality though the different parts of the work were full of invention and variety. And the laborers could work in harmony because they were pervaded by a unity of sentiment, by the common inspiration of a great ideal. Like Ruskin, Morris believed that "great art is nothing less than the type of strong and noble life;" he believed that most of the men about him were exhausting their energies and deadening their faculties in the conduct of trivial and inessential things. In the records of the mediaeval spirit in art he found the temper which was at once a warning and a corrective to this wastage. Morris had faith that men would return to a renewed simplicity of life, to a vision of larger issues.

The whole drift of Morris's teaching was towards sincerity and Gothic freedom in the arts, - a strong protest against academic convention and classical coldness. Through his extraordinary knowledge of the arts of design and his in-
tense enthusiasm for beauty and truth, Morris became leader of our latter day English revival of handicraft.

The first practical steps taken by the zealous adherents of the new movement was the fitting up of a typical Morris tea room at the Victoria and Albert Museum. The quiet influence of this superb collection has probably had a most far-reaching effect on designers and craftsmen, an effect ostensibly exceeding the results of the more direct efforts of the Art Department to reach them through its school system.

About 1880 a few workers in decorative design gathered together in response to a desire for fellowship and interchange of ideas on the various branches of their craft. The society thus formed after a few years of quiet existence grew into a larger organization including designers, architects, and craftsmen called The Art Workers' Guild, which met once a month and had practically the same objects, interchange of ideas and demonstrations in the many lines of craft work. The society made a rapid and continuous progress and came to include not only the leading designers in decoration, but the foremost painters, architects, woodcarvers, sculptors, and engravers, besides representatives of various other crafts. Later, a Junior Art Workers' Guild was established in connection with it, and finally, local Arts and Crafts societies sprang up all over England, among them, two societies of designers in London, and The Northern Art Workers' Guild at Manchester. The Royal Academy, to be sure,
was concerned almost exclusively with painting, architecture, sculpture, and engraving, and was neglectful of all other lines of art. Organizations looking to the encouragement of arts and crafts multiplied rapidly, and whatever their effect in spreading a knowledge and love of the decorative arts, at least, a sign of an awakening interest and of a general impulse toward ornamental expression. It would be impossible to enumerate all the organizations of this nature outside of the big trade combinations and decorating firms.

There was "The Century Guild" with its careful attention to the printer's art, - its leader for fine taste in type and book ornaments, Herbert P. Horne. There was "The Home Arts and Industries Association" which started village classes in various crafts all over England. There were "The School of Art Woodcarving" in Pelham Place, and "The Royal School of Art Needlework" at Albert Hall. Later, "The London County Council" came into existence and founded its schools of art and craft throughout London, - schools which have produced some admirable work.

In 1866 some artists discontented with the limited field touched by The Royal Academy proposed the establishment of a truly National Exhibition of all the arts which might include not only painting, sculpture, and architecture, but all arts of design in general. The result was the founding of The Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, its members, for the most part, of The Art Workers' Guild. Its first exhibition, in 1888, is said to have shown the best contemporary work in England up to that time in designs, furniture,
tapestry, pottery, tiles, glass and metal work, jewelry, printed books, binding and illumination. In the same year an Art Congress was arranged at Liverpool for the advancement of art in industry. It was clearly evident that a great intellectual revolution was taking place.

"The perception of the essentially social character of the arts that minister to daily life, and the dependence of design and handicraft upon effective and sympathetic cooperation among groups of workers have drawn craftsmen together and have led in some sort to a revival of guilds. Some like the Art Workers' Guild are for discussion and demonstration in the various artistic handicrafts, and for mutual information and help. The influence of such guilds in the revival of many beautiful crafts on sound lines, and, above all, in imbuing artists of different crafts with a sense of the unity of art can hardly be over estimated. Other guilds, groups of workers, and industrial associations have been formed in many parts of the country influenced by the teaching of John Ruskin and William Morris. Others, again, are hardly more than commercial, but all endeavor to meet the increasing public interest in handwork."* This movement is clearly traced to the workshop of William Morris, who when he founded with his colleagues the firm of Morris and Company represented the advanced school in English art.

The widespread influence of the movement inaugurated by Morris is seen in our own country in such industrial organizations as The Roycrofters of East Aurora, New York.

* Walter Crane, William Morris to Whistler.
Their shop is justly praised for the genuine art it produces. Here the best of material is combined with the most careful workmanship. The aim is for beauty of form and for originality and harmony of design, not cheap production, but the creation of a piece of art, beautiful and satisfying. Another ideal workshop is the Rookwood Pottery at Cincinnati. At first it was a private industrial experiment undertaken by Mrs. Maria Longworth Storer. In three decades it has reached a position of public importance and far-reaching influence. Its one controlling motive is the making of a perfect product; the constant aim is to adjust design sympathetically to shape and material. No printing patterns are permitted; no copying or imitation is allowed. It is such industries as these where cooperation and good-fellowship is the watchword, where frequently the designer and the craftsman are one, where handwork is prized above the suavity and perfection of the machine, that are showing America the true meaning of art.

And it is directly to William Morris that the present tendencies in art are traceable. It is his thought that is guiding our craftsmen in their endeavor after an art that is real, that is humanistic, that is inspiring, that brings to man truth in place of convention, that lifts the worker to a new plane of self-directed existence, an art not the work of a moment and as transient, but the result of generations of culture, and an art that men of succeeding ages can call beautiful.
II

In his Literary Works

In some partie it may be take
And for to laugh and for to pley,
And for to look in other way.
It may be wisdom to the wise
So that some dele for good appriæ
And eke some dele for lust and game,
I have it made for thilke same.

- Confessio Amantis.

The spirit of Morris is that of Gower. He hopes to amuse and he hopes also to give his readers a worth while message. His books to some people will be "idle dreams of an empty day;" others may find in them a deeper meaning. Morris is to a certain extent a mediaevalist; he writes tales of the long ago and envelopes them in a hazy atmosphere of legend and romance. But he is also a man decidedly modern; he stresses in his mediaevalism those things that have a special significance for nineteenth-century England. To emphasize the one phase of Morris at the expense of the other is manifestly unfair.

In studying the mediaevalism of Morris's literary work it seems profitable to proceed chronologically. His works fall into three periods, with certain marked characteristics of each, and with a distinct correspondence to the contemporary lines of art on which he was engaged.

The very earliest of his works were the stories of

Best known, however, among the works of this early period is "The Defense of Guenevere and Other Poems" which appeared in 1858. These thirty poems are rich in Pre-Raphaelite suggestions, not only in titles, but also in subject matter and in treatment of theme; they show abundant evidence of Morris's romantic leaning and his great love of art. In "The Defense of Guenevere," "King Arthur's Tomb," and "Sir Galahad" Morris went to the Morte d'Arthur for his themes, and in "Sir Peter Harpdon's End," for instance, to the Chronicles of Froissart. Morris did not hesitate to make modifications as his fancy directed. He did not attempt a long series of adventures after the manner of Tennyson or even after the manner of Malory and Froissart, but he seized upon some significant moment in the narrative and treated it in a frankly original way, imbuing his tale with much distinctly romantic mystery, passion, and vividness. His "Sir Peter Harpdon's End," "Rapunzel," and "The Haystack in the Floods" are thoroughly romantic conceptions, combinations of the chivalric, the tragic, and the fantastic. Some
of the shorter poems as "Praise of My Lady," "The Blue Closet," "Golden Wings," and "Two Red Roses Across the Moon" abound in the glowing color of Pre-Raphaelitism and even to some extent in its frequent vagueness.

Morris’s description is distinctly Pre-Raphaelite. Physical characteristics play an important part:

There was a lady lived in a hall,  
Large in the eyes and slim and tall.  
- Two Red Roses Across the Moon.

We hear of long hands with "tenderly shadowed fingers," warm arms, long fair arms, lips that cleave to the fingers they kiss, broad fair eyelids, and long white necks, and abundant waves of flowing hair.

Throughout all the poems color, full, rich, soft, unbridled, runs riot. We are told that Guenevere "scarce could pray at all, for Launcelot’s red-golden hair would play, instead of sunlight, on the painted wall." In their green gardens walk ladies clad half in scarlet, half in white. Christ appears to Galahad "with raiment half blood-red, half white as snow." In many of the poems the glitter of gold is rendered with almost childish abandon. For instance:-

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.  
- The Eve of Crecy.

No poems except those of Rossetti have better suggested romantic art in its curiousness of figure and brilliance of hue. They make one think of stained glass windows and illuminated manuscripts and gorgeous wall paintings.
And sometimes there seems to be a certain affectation that strikes the reader as the fantastic work of the Esthete. For instance, note the following from "The Defence of Guenevere:"

See my breast rise,
Like waves of purple sea, as here I stand;
And how my arms are moved in wonderful wise,
Yea also at my full heart's strong command,
See through my long throat how the words go up
In ripples to my mouth; how in my hand
The shadow lies like wine within a cup
Of marvellously colour'd gold.

Sometimes the reader meets a kind of mysterious symbolism as in these lines from "Rapunzel" spoken by the witch:—

Is there any who will dare
To climb up the yellow stair,
Glorious Rapunzel's golden hair?

and sometimes one meets the mediaeval fantasy that dwelt on goblins and witches and fairies:—

I have seen no one in the woods except
The witch and her; have heard no human tones,
But when the witches' revelry has crept
Between the very jointing of my bones.

- Rapunzel.

Emotion is a strong feature of these early poems. We listen to the passionate words of Guenevere, overcome by sorrow, shame, and love, and we are not only aware of an effort on the part of the writer after psychological effects in the expression of overwrought feeling, but we see the double aspect in which her love for Launcelot seemed to present itself to the mediaeval mind, the view adopted by chivalry, and the view sanctioned by the church.
Listen, suppose your time were come to die,
And you were quite alone and very weak

Suppose a hush should come, then some one speak:

"One of these cloths is heaven, and one is hell,
Now choose one cloth for ever, which they be,
I will not tell you, you must somehow tell."

And one of these strange choosing cloths was blue,
Wavy and long, and one cut short and red;
No man could tell the better of the two.

After a shivering half-hour you said,
"God help! heaven's colour, the blue;" and he
said, "hell."
Perhaps you then would roll upon your bed,

And cry to all good men that loved you well,
"Ah Christ! if only I had known, known, known;"
Launcelot went away, then I could tell.

In "Sir Peter Harpdon's End" and in "The Haystack in the
Floods" there is such a strongly human element in the char­
acterizing of Sir Peter and of Robert and Jehane that their
torture moves the reader with genuine emotion:

With a start
Up Godmar rose, thrust them apart;
From Robert's throat he loosed the bands
Of silk and mail; with empty hands
Held out, she stood and gazed, and saw,
The long bright blade without a flaw
Glide out from Godmar's sheath, his hand
In Robert's hair; she saw him bend
Back Robert's head; she saw him send
The thin steel down; the blow told well,

"Then Godmar turn'd again and said:
"So, Jehane, the first fitte is read!
Take note, my lady, that your way
Lies backward to the Chatelet!"
She shook her head and gazed awhile
At her cold hands with a rueful smile,
As though this thing had made her mad.

- The Haystack in the Floods.

Such lines give a poetical sense of a barbaric age that is
strongly and sharply real.
In the works of this early period the world is one of almost pure romance presented in thoroughly Pre-Raphaelite fashion. Here we find those tales that are the richest in color and the most turbulent in passion, poetry that at times is strikingly vivid and forceful, and, again, descends into vagueness and becomes simply a wave of glowing rippling melody. It is here that we find the young poet-artist putting into words the Pre-Raphaelite colors that are staining his canvas and the young romantic-realist setting into phrases the mediaeval fantasies that are haunting his brain.

After an interval of almost ten years the second period of Morris's literary work begins, a period which extends over the writing of "The Life and Death of Jason," published in 1367, "The Earthly Paradise," in 1368, his saga and classic translations, and his tale of "Sigurd the Volsung," in 1377. Up to the beginning of this period, H. Buxton Forman declares, Morris might almost be said to be frankly mediaeval in his way of looking at things, but in this period occurs his spiritual birth into his own century. In the works of this decade he betrays profound concern in the destinies of the race, - a desire to "set the crooked straight;" he shows a feeling for national myth, epic action, and the tragic conditions of man's existence, - higher qualities all derived from knowledge of life. At the same time, Morris gives up the mixed lyrical and dramatic method that he used in his early work and now writes in the form of long continuous narratives, both romantic and epic in nature and ob-
viously the work of a maturer mind.

In "The Life and Death of Jason" Morris has taken a classic theme and given it a mediaeval treatment, a story supposed from the outset to be the dream of a mediaeval poet. Alfred Noyes has spoken most truly, it seems, when he declared that Morris wrote the poem more for the sake of drawing near to his beloved Middle Ages than for its Greek elements.

In "The Earthly Paradise" are twenty-four tales, half classic, half Germanic or Norse or Icelandic in origin. An interesting scheme of arrangement, after the manner of Chaucer and Boccaccio, has been provided. A little band of Greeks living on a nameless island in a distant sea in the fourteenth century are visited by wanderers of Northern blood who have been driven from their homes by pestilence. The Greeks and the wanderers entertain each other with tales, alternately classic and northern, yet all glowing with the romanticism of the Middle Ages and radiating the mediaeval spirit.

The Gesta Romanorum has furnished the subjects for several of these tales. According to Aymer Vallance, "The Proud King," "The Writing on the Image," and "The Man Born to be King" have this source. The last named poem has been declared by Herr Julius Riegel to have its source in the legendary history of Emperor Henry III. Vallance also tells us that "The Ring Given to Venus" and "The Writing on the Image" have been recounted by William of Malmesbury. Sir
John Maundeville's "Voiage and Travaile" has furnished Morris with the themes of "The Lady of the Land" and "The Watching of the Falcon." "The Lovers of Gudrun," it has been found, comes from the Laxdaela Saga of Iceland. The stories of "Ogier the Dane" and "The Fostering of Aslaug" are both northern; the latter is said to be from a saga of Ragnar Lodbrok, a sequel to the Volsunga Saga. "The Land East of the Sun and West of the Moon" has been found to have a Scandinavian origin, and "The Man Who Never Laughed Again," an Oriental source through an Arabian translation by Jonothan Scott. "The Hill of Venus" is from the well-known German romance of Tannhauser. The rest of the tales are from classic literature.

But the classic as well as the northern receive the same mediaeval treatment. "One reads of Greek warriors wearing hauberks and bearing pennons; one meets with chapmen or a woman carrying a maund: the folk dwell in bowers and sleep upon tester-beds; they stroll in pleasures, enter precincts, and pass through posterns. In a word, the associations of the days of chivalry impart an indescribable charm."* One common criticism of the Greek stories in the collection is that the atmosphere is not Greek, but mediaeval. It is certainly possible that this was precisely the effect for which Morris was striving. The stories as a whole are decidedly romantic in atmosphere. The characters and the adventures

* Aymer Vallance, William Morris.
are quite in keeping with mediaeval conceptions. There are kings and lords and knights and fair maidens; there are mighty warriors who struggle against ugly dwarfs and evil enchanters. Gods and goddesses intervene in the affairs of men, work transformations, and deal weal or woe according to the meted fate. However, the careful reader will note that there is a gradual subordination of romance to epic. Stories of the type of "The Man Born to be King" give way to stories of the type of "The Lovers of Gudrun."

As to the tale of "Sigurd the Volsung," here was what Morris considered the wonderful Northern epic comparable to the tale of Troy. Although Morris is faithful to a marked degree to the rugged strength and fierce passion of the original by keeping close to its Saxon vigor of phrase, yet he does impart to his version many features of mediaeval romance. He adds considerable to the length, sometimes with loss of the force of the original, it is true; he frequently softens its rudeness by bringing the characters to us after a more refined conception, and he introduces more color and ornamental detail.

The following extract shows that Morris occasionally exhibits some of the romantic tendencies that marked his earliest work, vivid coloring, and a suggestion of the balled; yet underneath runs in strong epic fashion the exaltation of the Volsung race.

Then praised he the day of the Volsungs amid the yellow light,
And he set forth his hand to the labour and put
forth his kingly might;
He dragged forth gold to the moon, on the desert's face he laid
The innermost earth's adornment, and rings for the nameless made;

He toiled and loaded Greyfell, and the cloudy war-steed shone,
And the gear of Sigurd rattled in the flood of moon-light wan;
There he toiled and loaded Greyfell, and the Volsung armour rang
'Mid the yellow bed of the Serpent - but without the eagle sang:

Bind the red rings, O Sigurd! for thy tale is well begun,
And the world shall be good and gladdened by the Gold lit up by the sun.

It is true that the works of this second period show less of the Pre-Raphaelite vividness of color and superfluity of ornament, and less passionate emotion. There is less vagueness and more smoothness. At the same time, there is often a corresponding loss in freedom of movement and in intensity of feeling. But there are some compensating gains. There is a better sustained vigor of expression, a broader conception of man's relation to his race, and an undertone of inquiring sadness roused by the contemplation of the tragic problems of life.

Morris frequently shows a distinctly mediaeval sense of fatalism. Fate is the key word of "Jason" and of "The Earthly Paradise," and of "Sigurd the Volsung." Sigurd and his heroes are guided ever by the Norns. Morris says: "And what the dawn has fated on the hour of noon shall fall," and again:-

Yea, a man shall he be
A wonder for his glorious chivalry,
First in all wisdom, of a prudent mind,
Yet none the less him too his fate shall find.

Try as he can King Acrisius can not escape his doom; all
the gods cry out protest against his attempts to change his fate.

Throughout these epic narratives runs a strong element of sadness — a meditation on the evanescence of life and
the certainty of death, so common a theme with the writers of the Middle Ages that coming as spontaneously as it does
from the pen of Morris it considerably intensifies the medi­
aevalism of his work. "Morris dwelt constantly on the theme
of Death, the lapse of time, the approach of age. To the
 carriers of the Golden Fleece the sirens sing, 'Come to the
land where none grow old.' The mariners of 'The Earthly
Paradise' sail to the west for a paradise of rest and immor­
tality where age cannot enter or death destroy. Death ac­
companies the young men and maidens, even though they sing
the carols of the morn. Death whispers in the wind that
showers down the blossoms in the orchard. On the very dawn
of May, the merry month when the Lord of Love goes by, the
poet holds his breath and shudders at the sight of Eld and
Death. He cannot make death a little thing."* He writes in
the spirit of a man that recognizes life's tragic conditions.
The Wanderers fail to find The Acre of the Undying and in an
affecting passage they express their half shame at having
undertaken the quest and their regret that it has been in

* O. S. Triggs, The Changing Order. 
vain. Verse after verse in the stanzas addressed to the various months show the unimpassioned grief, the plaintive longing with which Morris regarded the fleeting and unsatisfying aspects of this beautiful, but transitory world.

It is interesting to observe that the literature of this second period reflects Morris's growing enthusiasm for the arts and crafts. Pre-Raphaelite color, although no longer splashed quite so recklessly as in the earlier poems, is united with detailed description of man's handicraft. Morris writes of sculptured gates and painted palaces and marble halls and pictured ceilings and ivory thrones, of golden vessels, and costly woven webs. In "The Wanderers" our attention is called to a hall in a palace,

A mighty way across from wall to wall,
Where carven pillars held a gold roof up,
And silver walls, fine as an Indian cup
With figures monstrous as a dream were wrought.
And underfoot the floor beyond all thought
Was wonderful, for like the tumbling sea
Beset with monsters did it seem to be;
But in the midst a pool of ruddy gold
Caught in its waves a glittering fountain cold,
And through the bright shower of its silver spray
Dimly we saw the high-raised dais, gay
With wondrous hangings, for high up and small
The windows were within the dreamlike hall.

All the literature of this second period shows as distinctly Morris's contact with the Icelandic and his interest in the crafts as does the work of his first period his interest in painting and his admiration for the Pre-Raphaelites. It is true that the strictly mediaeval elements of romance might be said to remain practically unchanged in
the proportion in which they dominate his work, for if in the first period the glitter of the Middle Ages stands pre-eminent, in the second, there is more of the sturdiness that marks its adventurous life.

The third period of Morris's literary work shows a combination of the characteristics of the earlier periods, and yet a most interesting deviation. There is all the pure romance of his first productions and much of the feeling for race that is so conspicuous in the second cycle, and besides, the reader is always very much aware that Morris is holding up before him a severe comment on nineteenth-century life. Morris is so un-modern as to ignore all the subtleties of man's psychic existence. All that concerns him is physical vigor, high idealism, the love of man for woman, response to the beauty of nature, and the enthusiasm of man for popular art. In fact, what makes Morris's work significant is that he sets his figures against a background from which all the inessentials of life have been removed. It was at this time that Morris was most earnestly thinking along socialistic lines. His works show his theory that real happiness for man lay in evolution to a simpler state of society.

The works of this last period, which extends from 1888 to 1896, include his semi-historical "Dream of John Ball," and his seven prose romances, the first two, "The House of the Wolfings" and "The Roots of the Mountains," being fairly sturdy with the Northern spirit, but the other

As might be imagined from the titles, these tales present a romantic vision of human life on the borders of Fairyland. Only in "The Dream of John Ball" has Morris attempted to hold his narrative to a fairly close portrayal of mediaeval life, yet in all these romances there is a recognizable similarity to mediaeval literature. The mediaeval features seem worthy of note.

Morris's heroes are invariably tall, straight-limbed, strongly built, closely knit, men of Havelok the Dane type. This description of Face-of-God in "The Roots of the Mountains" seems fairly representative. "He was tall and strong, very fair of fashion both of limbs and face, white-skinned, but for the sun's tanning, and ruddy cheecked --- his hair yellow and curling, cut somewhat close, but for its length so plenteous, that none could fail to note it." The typical heroine like the Maid in "The Wood Beyond the World" is fair of face as a flower, grey-eyed, brown-haired, with lips full and red, slim and gentle of body - a veritable Nicolette. If Morris's characters are not admirable, they are thoroughly despicable, again a feature of mediaeval romance. We
read of aged carlines, fierce of mood and skilled in witch-lors, and of dark and evil-featured people, ill-shapen and rude of nature. Here in the narratives of Morris we find the simplicity of characterization that is so marked a quality of mediaeval literature — a few vigorous strokes and no subtleties or elaborate detail.

Simple, single-threaded narratives bring before the reader's gaze long strings of adventure, sometimes thrilling, sometimes more or less commonplace. They tell of battles and journeys and escapes and rescues and the working of magic spells. Another mediaeval feature is the rapid movement of the narrative; a few lines suffice to describe quite an important experience on the part of the hero; the events of a day are often compressed into a few words. An even more mediaeval likeness is seen in the scanty trouble taken by the author to provide any kind of motivation or semblance of realism. The creation of realism is not the author's aim. It is interesting to compare Morris's description of his hero, Thiodolf, in battle, with a description of the hero in a similar situation in the tale of Sir Guy of Warwick, to take two passages fairly at random. Morris says of Thiodolf in "The House of the Wolfings:"

"To right and left flashed Throng-plough, while Thiodolf himself scarce seemed to guide it; men fell before him at once, and close at his heels poured the Wolfing kindred into the gap, and in a minute of time was he amidst of the throng and face to face with the gold-dight captain. "What with the sweep of Throng-plough and the Wolfing onrush, there was a space about him for a great stroke; he gave a sides-long stroke to his right and hewed down a tall
Burgundian, and then up sprang the white blade, but ere its edge fell he turned his wrist, and drove the point through that captain's throat just above the ending of his hauberk, so that he fell dead amidst of his folk."

The same spirit is to be seen in the mediaeval story in which we are told that,

"Sir Guy rushes on the Soudan, cuts off his head, stoops to pick up the trophy with his left hand, and slays six Saracens with his right, and leaps upon his horse."

Morris represents in a very realistic way the element of superstition that figured so largely in the literature and in the life of mediaeval people. Thiodolf in "The House of the Wolfings" is given a magic hauberk that has the power of preserving the wearer's life. A boat in "The Water of the Wondrous Isles" is guided by a magic spell. The bead necklace in "The Well at the World's End" has some subtle influence in getting the wearer to his longed-for destination. The water of this Well has the wonderful magic of conferring upon him who drinks everlasting youth. Many of Morris's characters are represented as being of fairy origin; they are learned in leech-craft and prophecy and gifted with powers of sorcery. Some can work transformations. The Maid revives flowers at her touch. The priest of Swevenheim casts a spell over Ralph and Ursula and they become invisible. The interesting fact to note is Morris's strictly romantic, strictly mediaeval treatment of this element of magic. There is never the least apology for it, never the least suggestion of its unreality. The reader finds in Morris all the magic elements that were bound up so intimately
with the French tales and the Arthurian legends, and not only a part of the literature of that day, but even to be seen now and then in the popular mind.

Just as delightfully accurate is Morris's representation of the mystical spirit in the religious life of the Middle Ages. It is true that the world was being rapidly Christianized, but even in these centuries the traditions of paganism were not so old that they failed to find some slight acceptance in the minds of common men. People in those days stood, you might say, on the borderland, with half-dead pagan ideas on the one hand, and half-alive Christian conceptions on the other. An especially happy illustration of Morris's thorough understanding of this habit of medieval thought occurs in the tale of "The Ring Given to Venus." In the person of Dan Palumbus are blended the two conflicting forces; he is both a necromancer and a Christian priest. In helping the hero of the tale to recover his ring from Venus, Palumbus causes to come before his eyes a long pageant of dead gods to try his obedience. Palumbus considers that in thus aiding the young man he is doing a good deed in God's cause. The Priest of Swevenheim portrayed throughout "The Well at the World's End" as a man of high Christian ideals, possesses the same power over the black arts. In these old time tales there is not only belief in magic, but there is belief in Weird. Very frequently this influence in the guiding of the affairs of men is suggested
Another romantic feature is seen in Morris's treatment of chivalric love and the ideals of knighthood. Morris deals with the love element in the thoroughly wholesome way that is the fashion in the earlier mediaeval romances, e.g. the tales of "Havelok the Dane," and "King Horn." He never drifts into sentimentalism. In regard to this feature of Morris's work, A.C. Rickett says, "There is a frank animalism, an outspoken earthiness, which is wholly beautiful, because of its frankness and simplicity. --- There are few things more beautifully told in modern romance than the love story of Birdalone in 'The Water of the Wondrous Isles,' and the tale of Walter and the Maid in 'The Wood Beyond the World.' The beauty lies in the simplicity and freshness with which it is told."*

The heroes of Morris are, for the most part, the conventional knightly type, brave and courageous in battle, feared of their foes, loyal to their friends, capable of supreme self-sacrifice, lovers of "trouthe and honour, freedom and curteiaye." Osberne saves his land from marauding foes; Thiodolf is a mighty man of valor and gives his life in the defence of his fellowmen. Everywhere Morris stresses the ideals of valor and fellowship. He portrays a sturdy manhood. His heroes have the courage and the physical vigor that sent men in the twelfth century on crusades. They go in search of the Well of Everlasting Youth and the Acre of

*
the Undying.

Morris's heroes, to be sure, are strong exponents of democracy. Whether the sons of kings or of men of the middle class, they are represented as being sincerely devoted to the interests of their people. Brotherhood is the note of the Morris world. "The Dream of John Ball" is vehement in its spirit of defence of the common man against over-lordship oppression. The mediaeval ideas of democracy that are so clearly evident in "Havelok the Dane" and in "Piers Plowman" are particularly abundant in "The Man Born to be King," in "The Roots of the Mountains," and in the Utopian "News from Nowhere." There is a distinct tendency to exalt the stability and worth of the lower class and to rebuke over-haughty demeanor on the part of kings.

The features of the mediaeval home life that Morris draws are particularly interesting and significant. Although there is much idealization, there is considerable fidelity to the spirit of the time; especially is this true of "The Dream of John Ball." Morris constantly stresses the simplicity of that life, the general pleasure in art, and man's love for nature, - the essentials of life that he wished to impress upon nineteenth-century England.

In "The Roots of the Mountains" Morris draws a picture of simple, peaceful life, beautiful and eloquent and particularly appropriate at the present time:

"Sweet friend," says the hero to his bride, "what
thou sayest is better than well; for time shall be, if we come alive out of this pass of battle and bitter strife, when I shall lead thee into Burgdale to dwell there. And thou wittest of our people that there is little strife and grudging amongst them, and that they are merry, and fair to look on, both men and women; and no man there lacketh what the earth may give us, and it is a saying amongst us that there may a man have that which he desireth save the sun and the moon in his hands to play with; and of this gladness, which is made up of many little matters, what story may be told? Yet amongst it I shall live and thou with me; and ill indeed it were if it wearied thee and thou wert ever longing for some day of victorious strife, and to behold me coming back from battle high-raised on the shields of men and crowned with bay; if thine ears must ever be tickled with the talk of men and their songs concerning my warrior deeds. For thus it shall not be. When I drive the herds it shall be at the neighbors' bidding where so they will; not necks of men shall I smite, but the stalks of the tall wheat, and the boles of the timber-trees which the wood reeve hath marked for felling; the stilts of the plow rather than the hilt of the sword shall harden my hands; my shafts shall be for the deer, and my spears for the wood-boar, till war and sorrow fall upon us, and I fight for the ceasing of war and trouble. And though I be called a chief and of the blood of chiefs, yet shall I not be masterful to the good men of the Dale, but rather to my hound; for my chieftainship shall be that I shall be well beloved and trusted and that no man shall grudge against me. Canst thou learn to love such a life, which to me seemeth lovely?"

Amid the musical charm is hidden a deep thought. The Morris doctrine here expressed is that happiness lies in normal self-activity, in the doing of a multitude of homely tasks to satisfy our needs and those of our fellows.

Morris is constantly dwelling on the beautiful work of men's hands. In his dream of fourteenth-century England the houses we are told "were almost all built of oak framework filled with cob or plaster well white-washed --- There was much curious and inventive carving about most of them; and though some were old and much worn, there was the same look of deftness and trimness and even beauty." Within were
to be seen quaintly carved sideboards with bright pewter pots and dishes and wooden and earthen bowls, all bearing a pleasing look of home manufacture. There were stout oak tables and carved oak chairs. The walls were festively adorned. Everywhere was evidence of the popular art of the fourteenth century.

Not only buildings and furniture show this lavish ornament, but garments and all the countless accessories. Osberne's knife in "The Sundering Flood" is described to the reader as a "goodly weapon, carven with quaintnesses about the helf, the blade inlaid with runes done in gold, and the sheath of silver." We read of elaborately and handsomely embroidered smocks and girdles. We are told that Birdalone in "The Water of the Wondrous Isles" embroidered her gown with roses and lilies, and with "a tall tree springing up from midstmost the hem of the skirt, and a hart on either side thereof, face to face of each other." And the smock she had sewn daintily at the hems and the bosom with fair knots and buds. All of Morris's tales seem to be overflowing with lovingly detailed description of handwork.

Thus Morris carries into his "pleasure work of books" the "bread-and-butter work" of which he seemed equally fond. At the same time he not only portrays an important feature of mediaeval life, but he preaches his chief doctrine of art, that beauty is the inevitable result of human labor when man is as happily environed as nature intended.

Morris strikes a strong, mediaeval note in the re-
markably fresh, spacious, outdoor, open-air quality that pervades both his poetry and his prose. Morris lives in the land of Gower where "the world neweth every day," only Morris likes to talk of "the green growing acres with increase begun." His descriptions are particularly vivid, delightful, and invigorating. We read of fair lands with mountains and rocky nesses and cliffs and hills and falling streams, of grassy swellings and knolls and purple heaths, of meandering paths through thick groves of willow and pine woods, and all nature looks fresh and lovely. On every page we are keenly alive to the beauty of the out-of-doors whether we are traveling with Ralph and Ursula to the Well at the World's End, or are on our way with Jason and his companions in search of the Golden Fleece.

This passage from "The Water of the Wondrous Isles" pictures a profusion of loved detail:

Now they rode fair and softly by thicket and copse and glade of the woodland, following up the stream aforesaid for the most part, till at last the trees failed them suddenly, and they came forth on to a wide green plain, all unbuilded, so far as their eyes could see, and beyond it the ridges of the hills and blue mountains rising high beyond them.

When Birdalone's eyes beheld this new thing, of a sudden all care left her, and she dropped her rein, and smote her palms together, and cried out: "Oh! but thou art beautiful; O earth, thou art beautiful!" Then she sat gazing on it, while the grey-head turned and smiled on her, well pleased of her pleasure.

Here is especially well illustrated the response of Morris's characters to nature. He pictures them with all his own intense love for the earth. The passage quoted
shows a love of the earth as truly mediaeval in its vigor and spontaneity as that to be found in that well known lyric of the thirteenth century, "Sumer is ioumen in." Here is the same passion for nature that moved the author of "The Pearl" in the lines:

    I know not what might be the place,
    But I looked where tall cliffs cleave the skies,
    Toward a forest I turned my face,
    Where ranks of radiant rocks arise.
    A man might scarce believe his eyes,
    Such gleaming glory was from them sent.

Such an elemental emotion grows only in a people that lives close to the life-giving soil. Wherever it appears it is a sure indication of vitality and freedom.

But how give people eyes and soul for art and beauty? Morris would say, by eliminating the inessentials of life, its burdensome luxuries, and by guarding the fairness of the earth and sky. He would have a city as refreshing as the woods, as exalting as the mountain sides. To him the spirit of art is delight in the life of the world and love of the surface of the earth. He would have every man's house fair and beautiful and soothing to his mind and helpful to his work, and his work the chief pleasure of his existence.

Morris's idea is that of Ruskin: "There is no wealth but life, and that country is the richest which nourishes the greatest number of noble and happy human beings." Morris looked for a gradual substitution of a new order of so-
To him modern society was based on a state of perpetual struggle, competition, or the pursuing of one's own advantage at the cost of someone else's loss. Morris writes: "It is now a desperate competition between the great nations of civilization for the world market, and tomorrow it may be a desperate war for that end. --- That is how we live now with foreign nations, prepared to ruin them without war if possible, with it if necessary."* However, Morris says: "I have a sort of faith that men will get wiser, as well as more learned; that many of the intricacies of life, on which we now pride ourselves more than enough, partly because they are new, partly because they have come with the gain of better things, will be cast aside as having played their part, and being useful no longer. I hope that we shall have leisure from war — war commercial, as well as war of the bullet and the bayonet; leisure from the knowledge that darkens counsel; leisure above all from the greed of money, and the craving for that overwhelming distinction that money now brings. --- Then having leisure from all these things, amidst renewed simplicity of life we shall have leisure to think about our work, that faithful daily companion, which no man any longer will venture to call the Curse of labor; for surely then we shall be happy in it, each in his place, no one bidden to be any man's servant, every man scorning to be any man's master; men will then assuredly be happy in

* Morris, "How We Live and How We Might Live."
their work, and that happiness will assuredly bring forth decorative, noble, popular art."

Morris through the by-way of art came to the same conclusion reached by many men moved by the deepest thought tendencies of the modern age, by Kipling when in L'Envoi he struck the note of "the joy of the working," by Whitman, when he talked about "the primal sanities," by Yeats in his "Lake Isle of Innisfree," by Henry George in his "Progress and Poverty," by Kropotkin in his "Farm, Field, and Factory," by Tolstoy in "The Slavery of our Times." In "The Roots of the Mountains" Morris has given a beautiful expression of his thought of what society ought to be:

"Thus then lived this folk in much plenty and ease of life, though not delicately nor desiring things out of measure. They wrought with their hands and wearied themselves; and they rested from their toil and feasted and were merry: tomorrow was not a burden to them, nor yesterday a thing which they would fain forget: life shamed them not, nor did death make them afraid."

Here we strike the keynote of Morris's philosophy, the modernity of his mediaevalism. It is not his use of archaic words, his choice of mediaeval themes, his mediaeval manner of narrative, or even his representation of mediaeval life that make his works timely and inspiring. It is, rather, his description of a life that is well lived, of a people that drink their vitality from the earth, that delight in nature and in the brotherhood of man, that find the keenest joy in the work of their hands, a people that exist

* Morris, "The Lesser Arts."
simply and happily without the useless barriers that the modern age in its blindness has attempted to erect.

It is true that Morris never hints at a solution. Weak and disappointing his Utopian romances may seem to some practical readers seeking a tangible guide on the problems of this modern age. Not a flesh and blood character is to be found in his prose romances, or even in the poetry on which his fame must chiefly rest, not a character that exhibits any of the complexities that attend men of the present. Morris has his own particular mission, his own peculiar service to render mankind. Not like a man of lesser vision, convention bound, does he show us a remedy for any one politic ill, but he goes to the basis of the social organization and strikes out all the trivialities and artificialities of life and leaves for man of the present age a picture of an ideal society attaining the real objects of existence. Morris is a man truly modern, for he stands with the leaders of present thought at the gateway of the future, a seer of the larger issues.
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