WILLIAM MORRIS AND THE REVOLUTION OF TASTE

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WILLIAM MORRIS AND THE REVOLUTION OF TASTE

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PREFACE

It is not the purpose of this study to tell the whole story of a career or a life. It is not the biography of a man, nor the history of a people. But rather it is an account of the tastes of a people as they were changed, guided, and directed by one man: William Morris, artist, craftsman, and Socialist.

A study of the Victorian era reveals that the tastes of the people, from the highest aristocrat to the poorest laborer, underwent a change. It was a revolution affected to a great extent by the advent of machinery, but also by the work of Morris and his Company, who were the spiritual antitheses of industrialization. It has been the purpose of this study to discover the importance of Morris' work in the light of this revolution.

I am chiefly indebted to the author of Morris' official biography, J. W. Mackail, whose work was used repeatedly to verify fact and to establish background for the more important work of the paper. Also, of great use were the works of Walter Crane, Aymer Vallance, and Lewis Day.

As a source of bibliographical material, the work of Ehrsam, Deily, and Smith was indispensable.

I gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Dr. Ben Euwema, who aided in the preparation and final presentation of the thesis.

J. S. W.

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INTRODUCTION

"Versatile Mr. Morris," he is called; Master Craftsman and supercraftsman. His name was a household word in America at the turn of the century; his life an example of all that is great and good in work and the struggle for happiness. Intricately woven into the pattern of his art is a social philosophy derived from Ruskin, the great artist-reformer. In this paper an attempt has been made to set aside Mr. Morris, the Socialist and soap-box orator, to see more intimately Morris, the artist and designer, the man who changed the tastes of his own countrymen as well as those of his neighbors across the several seas.

In order to appreciate fully Morris' part in the Revolution of Taste, it is necessary, first, to see his life in prospective. The first part of this paper is, therefore, biographical. Second, we shall examine his literary works. Not all of them can be discussed for there are twenty-two volumes, and only a small part deal with our subject here. Third, we shall discover exactly what practical work was done by Morris and Co., Morris individually, and by the Societies and Schools which he helped to establish. It will also be necessary to establish the fact that a change in taste did occur, and that will be done by tracing the history of taste through the Victorian era. Finally, it will be possible to establish William Morris as the leader of the movement which brought to the English homes of the time new ideas of art, architecture, design, color, and decoration. It was indeed a revolution!

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Part I

BIOGRAPHY

Someone has said that William Morris was the perfect Victorian. He was the perfect embodiment of all the awareness that a lifetime passed in the Victorian age might be expected to bring to a perfectly unspoiled and receptive man. Morris was purebred Victorian bourgeois, and he escaped the new insidious bourgeois culture (1). Morris attempted to escape much of what England offered during his lifetime, and in the escape lies the root of the movement which shall be called here the "Revolution of Taste."

William Morris was born at Walthamston on March 24, 1834. He was the son of a prosperous business man whose fortune furnished capital for the business of Morris and Company some years later in the century.

As a child Morris liked to roam through the woods of Epping Forest near his home, and often referred in his writings to the beauty of this untrammeled bit of nature. His feeling for Gothic architecture and art, like thatof the naturalist for things of nature, was evidenced early in his life and he never lost it. In fact, this deep interest which went far beyond that of the mere archeologist, the antiquarian, and the romaticist, was embodied in every part of his work. He could see and live beyond the confines of his own age. In the middle ages men were happy in their work and their work was beautiful; the beauty of the great churches that he saw in

[1] Harold J. Massingham, The Great Victorians, p. 291.

childhood, of Oxford in his youth, and of Westminster in his later years.

But to project his life into the past while living amidst the ravages of England in the throes of industrialism was not an easy task. The life of William Morris, Craftsman and Socialist, is the story of a never-ending struggle to bring art (beauty) to his fellowmen.

At thirteen Morris was enrolled at Marlborough School where the newness of the institution and its lax discipline fostered the growing spirit of a lad who had to be busy. He roamed the forest, entertained his fellows with story-telling, and kept his hands busy as well. He went from there to Exeter College, Oxford, where he intended to take Orders.

Oxford offered little in the form of friendship and inspiration until Burne-Jones made himself known to Morris. Attracted to each other through a common interest in the Church, the friendship broadened, and the real bond became that of poetry, artistic and literary aspiration. Through the Pembroke friends of Burne-Jones, Morris got the society he needed. He continued to educate himself and drew about him a notable group of young men, who were later brought together as the Hogarth Club and the Brotherhood.

Morris found in Ruskin's Stones of Venice, published during the year, the written expression of a feeling not unlike his own for Gothic art. The vacation period brought an opportunity for an extended tour of France with visits to its famous churches and its art galleries. In the same year Morris inherited a yearly income of 900 pounds, and it was not long before he and Burne-Jones gave up their plans to found a monastery and to take Orders. Massingham says,

"When you really knew something about Gothic, and were capable of imagining most of what you did not know, the real adventure was to build a cathederal not to preach in one (2)." His school fellows had discovered the poet in him, and his prose romances were regularly contributed to the Oxford and Cambridge Magazine during this time. Morris was fond of Oxford, with its medievalism and his life there in the Brotherhood was a happy one.

In January 1856 before graduation, he began his apprenticeship under Street, then a well -known architect of the Gothic revival, with offices on Beaumont Street. In the office, also, was Philip Webb, who was to build the famous "Red House." Morris was beginning now in his spare time to practice more than one handicraft - clay-modelling, carving in wood and stone, and illuminating (3). A meeting with Rossetti served to strengthen his interest in art, and long weekends were spent in the company of Burne-Jones and the more famous artist at Chelsea during these months. It was Rossetti's indomitable determination that all men should be painters which finally brought Morris to leave Street's and to go to London to paint.

So Morris and Burne-Jones were now more closely than ever allied with what Rossetti believed to be the new birth of art, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. The strong influence of the poet-painter upon Morris can be seen in these words of his to Burne-Jones: "I have got beyond that: I want to imitate Gabriel as much as I can (4)."

New rooms were taken at Red Lion Square, and here it was that the firm of Morris and Co. had its informal incention. This took the form of drawings for furniture, decorative objects, and household

[2] Ibid., p. 294.
[3] J. W. Mackail, The Life of William Morris.
[4] Ibid., p. 111

articles which a near-by carpenter executed. Mackail says, "Thus the rooms in Red Lion Square were gradually provided with 'intensely medieval furniture,' tables and chairs like incubi and succubi (5)." Here on the panels of the settle and of the chairs were executed the "Love between Sun and Moon," the "Meeting of Dante and Beatrice in Florence," and subjects from Morris' own poems. Already evidence of his unusual ability in pattern-designing was showing itself.

Morris applied himself diligently to drawing and painting. The offer to paint the walls of the Union at Exeter College, which came to Rossetti, gave the young painters their first real job. Morris set to work with his usual energy. The subject is what we might expect: scenes from the Morte d' Arthur. Of Morris' little success as a painter not much need be said. Burne-Jones was the artist. Morris had much difficulty pleasing Rossetti, although perhaps his fine craftsmanship more than compensated lack of skill in figure drawing.

During the months which followed, back in London Morris was feeling his way in other arts and handicrafts: clay-modeling, drawing and coloring designs for stained-glass windows. Here, too, was aroused his interest in the decayed art of embroidery, and, as was typical of all his work in the crafts, he was not satisfied until the craft had been revived in every particular: a frame was made from an old pattern and the worsteds were specially dyed for his work. "The Defence of Guenevere," his first great poem, came out of these years, also.

At this time Morris made the acquaintance of Miss Jane

[5] Ibid., p. 113.

Burden, who in 1859 became Mrs. William Morris. It was for her, that she might as a bride be surrounded by objects of beauty in contrast to the ugly ones common to the time, that Morris built the Red House and set about designing its furnishings.

It has already been mentioned that Philip Webb, prominent architect and friend of Morris, was selected to build the house. Morris had had enough of "square boxes" with lids on top; this was to be of red brick, and Mackail says, "It's planning was as original as its material." To this home with its beautiful oak staircase, its simplicity and grandeur of gardens, Morris took his wife in the summer of 1860. The story of Morris and Co. will be told later; but it must be said here that, because Morris could find no furniture or decorative pieces to suit his taste, the entire furnishings and interior decoration became the work of his friends and himself for months to come.

The Red House became a center of great activity. Here Morris pursued the arts and crafts with a new found energy and interest. He became an inspiration and driving force. Men of note gathered about him, followed his direction, and contributed their bit to the decoration of the Morris home. "The direction in which the Company turned its energies were to be determined, primarily, by the things which he wanted to make or to have made for his own private use, and then by the requirements, towards the purposes of their own professional work, of the rest of his associates (6)." Among those who became actively engaged in the Company were Burne-Jones, Maddox Brown, who was in great measure responsible for its organization, Webb, and Fulkner. Each was an artist in his own right and way. Morris was the driving force and the financial support of the firm. Here was the nucleus of Morris'

[6] Ibid., p. 145.

great missionary effort to bring beauty into the every-day life of all the people. From the offices at 8 Red Lion Square were dispensed the articles which in their way helped to bring about the Revolution of Taste.

As for the Red House, by February 1862 Burne-Jones writes, "Top thrives though bandy, and is slowly making Red House the beautifullest place on earth (7)." Into this gay, youthful, and spirited household were born the Morris' two children. There were always guests, especially upon special occasions, such as Jane Alice's christening. The Marshalls, the Browns, and Swinburne were there; Rossetti, Faulkner, Webb, and Arthur Hughes were frequent callers. It is not difficult to visualise the gaiety and the companionship of this group, discussing their favorite subjects and actually working upon some piece of fine furniture, a panel, or a piece of glass.

The period of enjoyment at the Red House was short-lived. Burne-Jones' dream of a joint home with the Morrises was abandoned. Illness and lack of funds forced both families to move to London and there attempt to reestablish the projects which had gotten underway.

The dwelling at Queen Square became in the autumn of 1865, not only the home of the Morris family, but the headquarters and work shops of Morris and Co. as well. Morris was continuously on the go and had it not been for his industry, the company might not have survived. The whole of production, and except in glass and furniture, practically the whole of the design was now in Morris' hands (8). However, he had been relieved of its management by Mr. George Warring-

7 Ibid., p. 159.
8 Ibid., p. 175.

ton Taylor to whom much of its organization and prosperity were now due.

The popularity of the firm's work was rapidly spreading, and, with increased business, Morris found he had more leisure. This he devoted to poetry, and principally to The Earthly Paradise. "The Life and Death of Jason," a part of the longer poem first published separately, was greeted quite favorably by the critics, despite its medievalism. The public failed to see it as other than another classical production.

By the spring of 1868 upon the completion of seventeen or so of the proposed twenty-four tales, the manner of publication became a problem. Burne-Jones was solicited to design wood-cuts, and he did as many as a hundred. Morris himself executed many of them and through diligent application soon did quite well. Here were anticipated the great and magnificent works of Morris' Kelmscott Press which he produced a quarter of a century later.

Burne-Jones now found it necessary to leave Kensington, but he returned every Sunday, circumstances permitting, to discuss the work of the Company and to talk over new schemes.

The next great period in Morris' life is that in which time and energy and thought were devoted to the Icelandic Sagas. The friendship of Mr. Ellis had meant a great deal to Morris during the uncertainties of book publication, and the two men now became close associates.

In 1871 after much effort to escape the dirt and smoke of factory-fed London, Morris discovered Kelmscott. It was located in one of the sleepiest and loneliest sections of southern England. It far exceeded Morris' expectations. His loving description of the

house and its surroundings are a memorable part of *News from Nowhere*. A description of the tapestry room will suffice here to illustrate how perfectly in tune with Morris' nature it really was.

> The tapestry room is over the big pannelled parlour. The walls of it are hung with tapestry of about 1600, representing the story of Samson: they were never great works of art, and now when the bright colours are faded out, and nothing is left but the indigo blues, the greys and the warm yellow browns, they look better, I think, than they were meant to look: at any rate they make the walls a very pleasant background for the living people who haunt the room; and, in spite of the designer, they give an air of romance to the room which nothing else would quite do.
>
> Another charm which the room has, that through its south window you not only catch a glimpse of the Thames clover meadows and the pretty little elm-crowned hill over in Berkshire, but if you sit in the proper place, you can see not only the barn aforesaid with its beautiful sharp gable, the grey stone sheds, and the dove-cot, but also the flank of the earlier house and its little gables and grey scaled roofs, and this is a beautiful outlook indeed (9).

It is little wonder that here, where love of nature and reverence for the medieval might have full sway, that beautiful work was accomplished.

The greater part of 1871 Morris spent in Iceland, returning to Kelmscott in late September. Upon his return he went to work again at illuminating, which had occupied much of his time for over a year. As in all the other handiwork which Morris tried, he was not content with mastering just one operation. All the related activities were fields for exploitation. In this case, it meant acquiring medieval manuscripts for study.

Kelmscott, at first shared with Rossetti, was retained as the Morris country home, but the house at Queen Square was fast becoming overrun by the business. Toward the end of 1872 the family

9 *Ibid.*, pp. 230-1.

moved out that there might be space for more workrooms, a showroom, and a little dye shop.

In 1873 Morris made his first trip to Italy. It gave him little satisfaction and only served to strengthen his distaste for all Renaissance art. Another trip to Iceland in July of the same year was more gratifying.

Now began the long-drawn out procedure of dissolving the firm which had become increasingly successful since its establishment in 1861. Rossetti was mentally, as well as physically, ill. Many of the partners were dissatisfied with existing conditions, and not all were of the same mind concerning the disposal of the company's assets. Much unpleasantness finally resulted in Morris' retaining sole management under the shortened name, Morris and Co. Webb and Burne-Jones still contributed furniture and glass designs as before.

The years 1875-1876 Morris devoted almost wholly to the lost art of dyeing. In order to carry out his work in tapestry and cloth prints to his satisfaction, he found necessity and desire for the deep bright colors of the Middle Ages. The new commercial dyes were outrages upon the sacred system of color. In 1875 he threatened to give up all part of the work which depended on textiles unless the company could set up its own dye works(10). At first there were but few pots, but Morris was absorbed in carpet-looms, silk looms, and up to his neck in designs for papers, chintzes, and carpets.

Little by little Morris' interest in the crafts and the sharp contrast between his work and that of the factories brought

[10] Ibid., p. 712.

him into public life. He had written and published an essay on the "Art of Dyeing," and now he became the founder of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings. There was afoot in England and on the continent a move to "restore" the ancient buildings and monuments which still existed, but were in a state of decay. To Morris restoration meant destruction and his Society was not altogether ineffective in preventing wholesale mutilation of these historic monuments. They certainly could not be restored by covering the original beauty with the false art of commercial products and designs.

At about the same time Morris was also admitted to membership in the Eastern Question Association. His interest here lay in a genuine hatred for commercialism, which he declared was rapidly leading England into an unjust war.

Mackail says of these years: "Morris' absorption in wider interests during this period was accompanied by a fresh development of energy in his own professional work. The dyeing and calico printing industry, still mainly carried on at Leek, was now established as an important branch of the business, and the designing of patterns for chintzes and figured silks was part of his daily work. Weaving both in silk and wool had also taken its place alongside of dyeing in his own workshops (11)."

On December 7, 1877, Morris gave his first public lecture, which he said was somewhat of a success (12). It was later published under the title, "Lesser Arts."

The next craft upon which he focused his attention was that

11 Ibid., p. 351.
12 Ibid, p. 360.

of high-warp weaving. He had long cherished a dream of sometime reviving this work and it now looked as though it might be realized.

However, Mrs. Morris and the girls had spent the winter in Italy, and he had made arrangements to meet them there. He, also, had to find a new home to be occupied upon their return. This he located in Hammersmith and named it Kelmscott House after the Manor on the Thames. One of the first things to be done was the establishment of a tapestry room. Here was another "Red House" waiting for his now skilled hands to make it livable and beautiful. Upon his return from Italy, his time was filled with a thousand odd things, but his chief concern was setting up a Jacquard tapestry loom in his own bedroom. Here he spent many uninterrupted hours executing his own designs in fine tapestries.

The work went on at the same energetic pace and, though Morris became somewhat discouraged and no little confused in his mind concerning his position in the now thoroughly industrialized world, the years 1880-1881 brought forth his best lecture on art and social reform. It also became necessary to change the location of the Company again.

Merton Abbey now was the center for the different works in which this "poetic upholsterer" was engaged. Mackail lists these as follows:

1. Painted glass windows.
2. Arras tapestry woven in the high warp loom.
3. Carpets.
4. Embroidery.
5. Tiles.

6. Furniture.
7. General house decoration.
8. Printed cotton goods.
9. Paper-hangings.
10. Figured woven stuffs.
11. Velvets and cloths.
12. Upholstery (13).

This is a somewhat formidable list when one considers that Morris himself directed all the work and had a very great part in each activity. Morris was not content with designing only; he believed there was a not-to-be-broken link between design and execution which always determined the quality of the work done.

Here, however, it became increasingly necessary that he delegate more and more of the work to his trained assistants. These men were skilled artists who worked under Morris' careful guidance. He was ever at hand to encourage and criticize and no work left the shop without his final approval.

When the great Craftsman had mastered one art completely, he went on to another, but he never left the former one entirely. His great achievement was in the printing of books which he began late in life and carried to a triumphant conclusion.

It continues to amaze all who know the story of this man that into one short life could be crowded so much of real workmanship and fineness. The great Icelandic Sagas were an ordinary life's work, but to Morris they were but a small part of what he could give to a world fast losing sight of true happiness and pleasure in a vain clamber for wealth. Of the ultimate effect of Morris' great work more must be said later.

[17] Ibid., Vol. II, p. 37.

In 1884 Morris formally associated himself with the Socialist party, and it is through his "soap-box" speeches to the poor slaves of modern industrialism that we receive a clearer view of the man and his social-artistic views.

The success of the Merton Abbey works was sorely threatened when it seemed that the water power might be completely shut off. At the same time Morris was distracted and unnerved by a recurrence of his daughter's illness which, it seemed, might at any time prove fatal. To concentrate upon the business at hand was a difficult task; it looked as though a life's work was facing ruin.

Things soon took a turn for the better, and on the 13th of January in that year, Morris was made an Honorary Fellow of his college at Oxford. This was a distinction usually reserved for old members who had attained the highest official rank in their profession. It was a coveted honor, for, though Morris was well known, this was the first official recognition he had received. His works of art travelled far and were recognized for their excellence and fine craftsmanship. He was a recognized poet, and in short, not far from famous.

The next years were crowded with Socialist activities: Sunday afternoon speeches, demonstrations, and even riots at Trafalgar Square and in London Parks. He was never reluctant to tell willing listeners of his views concerning the conditions of the poor, machine-slavery, and of the need for a great change which even now was beginning to take form in the minds of some men. That he had money never lessened his interest in those who had none. Rather, it allowed him greater opportunity to aid those whom he considered worthy: the laborers who were chained by commercialism to ugly machines. Had he not been financially independent, the work which he did in both the arts and

crafts would have been impossible.

Morris' last great literary pieces, the prose romances and some poetry, are the work of a seasoned artist.

Slowly Time was creeping up on the Master Craftsman. He was thinking of death now for the first time, not to fear it, but to wonder. He saw that the time had come when it was best to finish up the old things. He was still absorbed in the work of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings and attended one of its meetings for the last time in January, 1896.

He made a final trip to Iceland but was unhappy, longing to return to the quiet and rest of Kelmscott. He reached London on the 18th of August and there spent his last days. He did not see his beloved gardens and meadows again. But being William Morris even these days could not be idle ones. He dictated the last lines of "The Sundering Flood" on the 8th of September, and less than a month later ended a life which had been filled with more work than those of ten men combined.

Of his passing Mackail writes: "He might seem, now the entanglement of life was snapped, to have resumed his place among the lucid ranks that, still sojourning yet still moving onward, enter their appointed rest and their native country unannounced, as lords that are certainly expected, and yet there is a silent joy at their arrival (14)."

[14] Ibid., p. 350.

Part II

LITERARY WORK

The Revolution of Taste with which we are concerned here was affected by William Morris through several channels in varying degrees. The most obvious, of course, was through the actual production, sale, and distribution of products which did not conform to the pattern of the day. Through lectures on art and industry which became intricately involved with his social philosophy, and through such writings as News from Nowhere and Dream of John Ball, no small influence was wielded. In this section no attempt will be made to deal with the practical activities, for the Arts and Crafts Movement deserves special attention.

The discussion of the literary work, that is, Morris' theories of art, must of necessity involve some account of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood of which Morris was a part, and of John Ruskin, who Morris says was his master.

For publication the lectures have been divided into two groups, as such they will be discussed here: Hopes and Fears for Art and Lectures on Art and Industry. In addition to these, various shorter essays will be mentioned.

To point out the difficulty with which Morris' character may be analyzed in relation to his work, look for a moment at the following statements. "Morris was above and before all else a poet, a practical poet - and this explains his whole work (15)." "He lived two lives, and he was a craftsman before he was a poet (16)."

15 Walter Crane, William Morris to Whistler, p. 4.
16 "Mr. Morris and His Wallpapers," Literary World, Vol. XXVII, p. 346.

Vallance says, "He was a poet, an artist, and had the poet's and the artist's point of view. Yes, but in his eyes art was indissolubly bound up with Socialism and derived from that very connection a higher purpose than he had ever imagined for it before (17)."

When John Ruskin in Modern Painters failed to give even the smallest place to the traditionally great, he embarked upon a career of art criticism and social reform that eventually engulfed all England. Chambers in The History of Taste says this book "served up to the public the tastiest morsel in its memory (18)."

Ruskin's aesthetics makes a clear distinction between content and form, or as he says, thought and language. Thought is everything; language is valuable only as far as it is the adequate expression of thought. In Unity of Art he says, "Fine art is that in which the hand, the head, and the heart work together....Fine arts must always have emotion ruling their mechanism (19)." In other words, Ruskin believed that the subject matter and its moral aspect determined the essential quality of any picture.

The chapter in Ruskin's book, The Stones of Venice, entitled "The Nature of Gothic," became Morris' gospel. Here for the first time he found one who thoroughly agreed with him concerning the decadence of the Renaissance, and who looked, as he, to Nature, for all lessons. Heretofore, the artist's taste had been to improve upon Nature and to secure, at any and every cost, perfection. Form and not content was the basis of the art Ruskin and then Morris, in his turn, attacked so vehemently. Ruskin believed and preached that

17 Aymer Vallance, William Morris, His Art, His Writings, His Public Life, p. 364.
18 Frank P. Chambers, The History of Taste, p. 231.
19 John Ruskin, "Unity of Art" in Two Paths, pp. 54-5.

Nature's worst is better than the artist's best, so the noblest subject for any art is Nature.

Ruskin and his followers were openly and bitterly attacked by the critics and traditional artists. Their work was declared to be deficient in drawing and completely devoid of grace. However, Ruskin's form of art became extremely popular; his painting of a landscape occasioned artists all over England to do likewise. These men were interested primarily in the effect the picture produced, upon the idea, not the form.

The Pre-Raphaelites saw in history the essence of reality and truth. In all things ancient there were lessons to be learned, but they were not things to be merely copied. The architecture of the Middle Ages was reversed by these artists as the epitome of all that was beautiful and true and glorious in art. Ruskin saw it as "an art for the people, ... for their houses and homes....an art for the world; and above all, not an art of form or tradition only, but an art of vital practice and perpetual renewal, an art which had life and growth (20)." This art strongly contradicted the modern practice of division of labor, for Ruskin believed that man and his materials cannot be separated. There is no degradation in manual labor; the man who works with his hands is as thoroughly a gentleman as he who designs. Furthermore, the workman ought often to be thinking and the thinker often to be working. The beautiful Gothic churches were made by men who were happy in their work. It was not perfect, because only God's work can reach perfection and satisfaction, but in

[20] Ibid., p. 43.

its very roughness and imperfection there is strength, naturalness, and humility.

Ruskin could not leave his view of art there, for beautiful things could not be produced in an environment devoid of beauty and leisure. Here Ruskin becomes a social reformer, as well as an art critic, and the crusade is taken up by Morris as he puts into word and action all that the Gothic School embodied and all the hatred for industrialism which Ruskin also felt so keenly.

Before Stones of Venice was published in 1853, Burne-Jones and Morris had done a great deal of reading together and were familiar with Ruskin's other work. Now he became their hero and prophet. In the following discussion of the lectures and the essays on art, this fact can only become increasingly evident. And that these ideas had some effect upon the minds of the people who heard and read them cannot be doubted. By the very nature of these attacks upon the accepted standards of the day, they were destined to arouse opposition, at least, if not immediate adherence.

The lecture on the Lesser Arts was delivered in 1877. Morris' aim was to point out the purpose of decoration. He would not divorce the lesser arts from sculpture and painting, for therein the whole of Art suffers, but ornamentation has a distinct office to perform. This, he says, is "to give people pleasure in the things they must perforce use;....to give people pleasure in the things they must perforce make (21)." Without these pleasures our rest would be vacant and uninteresting, our labour mere endurance, mere wearing away of body and mind (22). He says the Stones of Venice expresses his idea

[21] William Morris, "The Lesser Arts," Collected Works, Vol. XXII, p. 4.
[22] Ibid., p. 5.

of the pleasure of work. Ruskin says, "Nothing can be beautiful unless it expresses man's delight in God's work (23)."

In this lecture Morris traced the history of the arts as he saw it. At one time (the lesser arts) were good and fruitful, that is, in Medieval times, but they grew into decay. The artist left the handicrafts and they were without hope of elevation. He, the artist, was without hope of intelligence, industry, or sympathy, and both have suffered, the artist no less than the workman. But Morris had hope that out of the decay something new might yet come. And this new art would have the interest of the people behind it, and with it would come the birth of wiser, simpler, freer ways of life. The only hope for such a change lay in the artist himself. Everything that he does must be done well. He must study Nature and ancient art; he must copy nothing; especially he must avoid the "feeble work around us (24)."

Though only a handful of artists heard, perhaps more read, his next attack on the world about him, in which he berated a civilization with its hideous streets, its brick and mortar, black smoke, and only the ghost of the great church at Westminster to remind one of a past greatness. The slavery of commercialism took away all pleasure of work; the factory system so widely separated the designer and the workman that neither made any real contribution to the final product.

Morris again and again in his writings attacked the sham and pretense of his age. Art must be truthful to be beautiful. The per-

23 Op. cit., p. 48.
24 Morris, op. cit., p. 16.

fection of machine-made goods was not real. The goods themselves were cheap, and a barrier of luxury and show shut out the good and true art for which people must be willing to pay a fair price.

"Simplicity of life, begetting simplicity of taste, that is, a love for sweet and lofty things, is of all matters most necessary for the birth of the new and better art we crave; simplicity everywhere, in the palace as well as in the cottage (25)."

In summary Morris said:

> That art will make our streets as beautiful as the woods, as elevated as the mountain sides; it will be a pleasure and a rest, and not a weight upon the spirits to come from the open country into a town; everyman's house will be fair and decent, soothing to his mind and helpful to his work: all the works of man that we live amongst and handle will be in harmony with nature, will be reasonable and beautiful: yet all will be simple and inspiring, not childish nor enervating; for as nothing of beauty and splendor that man's mind and hand may compass shall be wanting from our public buildings, so in no private dwelling will there be any signs of waste, pomp or insolence, and every man will have his share of the best (26)."

In "Art of the People," Morris has taken up Ruskin's cry for an art which should come not from a handful of men living in luxury, but from all. Art at the time was in a state of neglect. He says that the leaders of modern thought for the most part hate and despise the arts, and as the leaders are, so must the people be. Something was wrong, but it was not with art in the abstract; that is always good. The mass of people Morris believed had been untouched by the art of the Pre-Raphaelite. The revival of sound principles of architecture which had brought some improve-

25 Ibid., p. 24.
26 Ibid., p. 27.

ment in public buildings had no effect on private dwellings. "Architecture has deteriorated until houses have become a by-word of contempt for their ugliness and inconvenience. Complaints of the dishonesty in the daily arts of life are in all men's mouths (27)." Morris says this is all the natural and inevitable result of the world in the hurry of the war of the counting house, and the war of the battlefield. Man has forgotten that pleasure in daily work which nature cries out for as its due. Time and again he says it must be "an art made by the people for the people, as a happiness to the maker and the user (28)." There must be honesty and simplicity in life, and it is impossible to separate art from morality, politics, and religion. One wonders how this new idea struck the people of England, whose homes were cluttered with ornate furniture and knick-nacks, and whose minds were still somewhat steeped in mid-Victorian smugness. There is ample evidence that some of the thoughts took root and finally bore fruit. This will come into a later discussion.

Morris was greatly absorbed in what he calls the "beauty of life," in fact, beauty of any sort was almost an obsession with him. He says the change in attitude which is now taking place was first represented by Blake and Coleridge, the early writers of the Romantic period. Morris believed that Keats was the last great English poet, and in company with Burne-Jones spent a great deal of time reading from his works. Scott's interest in medievalism and his love of Gothic architecture attracted them, also, and they soon recognized in him a true master. Among these men there was a feeling for the

27 "The Art of the People," Collected Works, Vol. XXII, p. 38.
28 Ibid., pp. 31-47.

romance of external nature joined with a desire to know something real of the lives of those who had gone before them. The Pre-Raphaelite group took up the crusade, and Morris says, "Art has been revolutionized by (them); never in the whole history of art did any set of men come nearer to making something out of nothing (29)."

In this same lecture, Morris appeals to the people to do something about the smoke, the dirty papers, and the posters which deface the beauty of their city. Nothing can be done to improve the lives of the people until they have some share in art. "Have nothing in your house that you do not know to be useful or believe to be beautiful; all art starts from simplicity, and the higher art rises the greater the simplicity (30)."

In a later discussion of Morris' activities and work in the crafts, it will be found that he put into practice the theories he so well expresses in "Making the Best of It." He wonders what can be done to make those strange dwellings - the basest, the ugliest, and the most inconvenient that men have ever built for themselves - livable and endurable. He sees the only hope in free men with fit work to do amid beautiful surroundings (31). This was the ultimate and lasting solution; something could be done by changing the interior and the garden, relieving each room of some of its useless and ornate draperies and furnishings. At the Red House, at Kelmscott, and at Hammersmith there was nothing that failed to bring

29 "Beauty of Life," Collected Works, Vol. XXII, p. 59.
30 Ibid., pp. 76-7.
31 "Making the Best of It," Collected Works, Vol. XXII, p. 82.

unity and dignity and correctness to its surroundings.

"I don't advise you to paint your houses blood-red and chocolate with white facings as seems to be getting the fashion in some parts of London, nor to use that hot brownish red - "cockroach color" - that seems to popular (32)." He goes on to explain that the windows in most houses are too large and too low; they are so heavily draped no light could possibly enter the room. The floors are covered to their dustiest and crookedest corners with carpet, good, bad or indifferent, and fireplaces are ornamented way out of existence as objects of use. Walls are covered with smooth hot-pressed paper, and everything is made to look like something it is not (33).

Morris' solution was, of course, to simplify all things, and if it were not possible to do away with some of the atrocities, at least, cover them with something which would make them less conspicious in their hideousness.

In redecorating the house, Morris says much care must be taken in chosing correct color and design. His suggestions follow. "Woodwork if it is of oak should be left as it comes from the plane. It should always be a tone darker than the walls and painted over if it is not a good noble wood...Yellows and red are difficult colors to use and should be avoided. There is little pleasure in red unless it is deep and full...Pink, though it is beautiful in combination, is not easy to use as a flat tint. Purple should be avoided.

32 Ibid.,.p. 91.
33 Ibid., p. 92-4.

and light greens should be used very carefully. Blue is the safest to use, but all colors should be used in moderation according to the material...Some soberness of tone is absolutely necessary if you would not weary people till they cry out against all decoration...The design should be as bright as possible, as full of color as the nature of the work will allow it to be...There must be order and meaning in design, and it must be original...Your convention must be your own, - make it your own by thoroughly understanding both the nature and the art you are dealing with (34)."

In another lecture, "Some Hints on Pattern Design," he gives the following criteria for the selection of decoration.

> You may be sure that any decoration is futile and has fallen into at least the first step of degradation, when it does not remind you of something beyond itself, of something of which it is but a visible symbol. It must be:
> (1) something possible for you to get,
> (2) something that is beautiful,
> (3) something which will not drive us either to unrest or into callousness,
> (4) something which reminds us of life beyond itself, and,
> (5) something which can be done by a great many people without too much difficulty and pleasure (35).

As a final thought Morris repeats what he has often said before, "There is no cheap art, a true artist deserves whatever is due as his share of art (36)."

The series of lectures on art and industry contain many of the same theories as those already discussed. Morris has been attacked by many critics both of his day and of this for being an

[34] Ibid., condensed from pp. 97-107.
[35] "Some Hints on Pattern Designing," Collected Works, Vol. XXII, p. 179.
[36] "Making the Best of It," Collected Works, Vol. XXII, p. 115.

ostrich: living in an age of machinery and refusing to recognize it as significant fact, for dwelling on the past, and for preaching socialism and art for the poor, when he had plenty of money and was well established in a business of his own. But Morris practiced what he preached, and I do not believe that limiting the activities of machinery was denouncing it. Morris could see its evils more clearly than its virtues.

The workman's Utopia of News from Nowhere is a true poet's dream, but it was not beyond comprehension nor possible fulfillment as Morris visualized it. It is truly an idealized world, but Morris arrived at it by logical thinking, and those thoughts were the ones he incorporated into his lectures and practiced in his own workshops.

All the lectures are directed toward improvement in the decorative arts, especially as they were applied to the interior of homes. Some mention has already been made of the advice given in "Some Hints on Pattern Designs," but this is one of the most important lectures and it will be well to pursue it somewhat further. The philosopher warns the people that beautifying their homes cannot be accomplished without sacrifice, and adds that no sacrifice for beauty is too great. His admonitions to them follow:

(1) Refuse altogether to use machine-made work, unless human suffering would accompany its execution, otherwise.
(2) Understand the value of intelligent work; and take the rough rather then the unintelligent work of machines or slaves though it be delicate.
(3) Have high standards in wares, do not accept makeshift, but rather go without.
(4) Have no ornament merely for fashion's sake.
(5) Do not live in an ugly and squalid place like London just for mere excitement, but because duty demands it.

(6) Treat the natural beauty of earth as a holy thing.
(7) Treat with utmost care what is left us of architecture from the times of art (37).

Much of Morris's other work dealing with art and the crafts is technical and cannot be discussed here at length. Closely allied to his theory of art and craftsmanship is the social philosophy which he expounded from the city square as well as the hall platform. He loved the England of old as he saw it in her great Gothic buildings, as he felt the love of the craftsman for his work, and as he observed nature untouched by commercialism at his country homes. He wanted for all men the same love and zest for life and its beauty; and he tried to raise them from their Victorian lethargy to claim their rightful heritage.

His literary work has charm - whether one agrees with it in principle or not. Morris had an appeal which packed the lecture house whenever he was to speak, although many who came were not interested in his socialism nor his theories of art.

We certainly cannot judge Morris' literary ability by the essays and lectures discussed here, but it is well to note that his art is considered when criticism is made. The Cambridge History of English Literature says, "His vividly imagined detail flashes out again and again in phrases of picturesque color. He writes of medieval life with a contemporary insight and accuracy seldom acquired by scholars and antiquarians (38)." Further on in his same article

37 In Collected Works, Vol. XXII, p. 204.
38 Sir A. W. Ward and A. R. Waller, eds., Cambridge History of English Literature, Vol. XIII, p. 134

"His realism was more thorough than the realism which became more and more a mere incident in Rossetti's verse and departed from his painting. More than Rossetti, too, he was awake to the sense of struggle in life, which is the animating power of the highest form of narrative. In the "Life and Death of Jason," he appeared as a master of romantic narrative. Chaucer was his master; his treatment was medieval. He lacks the constant touches of humor which link Chaucer with the modern world, but his sense of the pathos of life is deeper than Chaucer's (39)."

News from Nowhere is full of lovely descriptive passages. I say lovely, because only one deeply in love with the world about him, and utterly conscious of its absorbing beauty could have written the lines of this story. And how neatly through the narrative are woven the steps to man's emancipation from the cruel ugliness to which he is chained.

The book reads like a fairy tale and has many of the same qualities. It is difficult to remember as one reads along that this is the answer to Bellamey's Looking Backward, and, in the main, was intended to clarify Morris' socialistic and economic philosophy.

Dream of John Ball is less appealing, but like the other has a definite lesson. One must call these moral tales, I suppose, because it is remembered that art, according to Morris, has a moral quality, as well as a religious and political one. The King's Lesson is much shorter, but none the less realistic. I have called them "moral tales," but they are not didactic. Morris wanted the world to

[39] Ibid, pp. 136-7.

be happy: his gospel was one with appeal, and if Sparling is correct in his judgment, he did not fail altogether in his effort to reach the people.

> He will be recognised for what he was, one of the great men, and not far from the greatest, of his time, some of us think of all time. He has not only bequeathed us an enormous heritage of material and spiritual beauty, but has conditioned our thinking in matters of art to a degree comparable only to the conditioning of our thoughts in matters of science by Darwin (40).

He understood - no one better - the interdependence of ideas, art, and affairs, and devoted that wisdom to making useful things beautiful (41).

The creation of beauty was not a source of pride, but a symptom of happiness; a proof that a certain external pressure was removed and that a man was free to exercise his own choice and his own fancy.

For his work and the work he encouraged and hoped for, he demanded the exact opposite of prevailing industrial conditions. Work must not be just good enough to sell: it must be original and honest. It must be work done with enjoyment, to bring pleasure, also, to its user. It must be carried on in beautiful and pleasant surroundings, if it is to have those qualities, and it must be properly rewarded. Morris' agitation for a people's art and his talk of beauty led directly to the Arts and Crafts Movement, and indirectly to a movement which culminated in fanatical aestheticism.

40 H. Halliday Sparling, The Kelmscott Press and William Morris, p. 2.
41 Will Ransom, Private Presses and Their Books, p. 44.

Part III

NON-LITERARY WORK

It cannot be denied that by reason of his literary work alone Morris would have had a place in the history of his time. Add to this the lifetime of activity which he devoted to the decorative arts and handicrafts, and it is not surprising that his influence spread even as far as the Continent and America. There seems to be some disagreement as to the extent and depth of this influence upon the tastes of the people, but it will be more appropriate to judge after we consider the work which was done.

Morris had shown some interest in the crafts as a child, and seemed always to be busy with his hands. His interest in Nature began when as a child he roamed the forest near his home. As early, also, he sensed something almost sacred, at least, human, in Gothic architecture. He said he could not remember the time when he was unable to read. Morte d'Arthur had been like a primer to him, as had some of Scott's works. At Oxford all of these leanings were developed. As a member of the set, he read with the others, Chaucer, Tennyson, Ruskin, and the Medieval Chronicles. He became interested in the Oxford Movement, but abandoned the Church to take up Architecture.

In 1855 when he entered Street's office, he was convinced that here was the opportunity for which he had been waiting. He found, however, that the practical aspects of the work were greatly disappointing, and he left in 1856. Sometime before this he had met Rossetti and had joined the small group of artists who clustered about him, driven always by his indomitable determination to make all men painters. As has already

been said, Morris fell under the spell and immediately set about painting the walls of the Oxford Union. In 1858 the Hogarth Club was founded with such men as Ruskin, Burne-Jones, Ford Madox Brown, and Philip Webb among its members. However bad the Pre-Raphaelite paintings were, they were now welcomed at exhibitions, and some outside interest was shown in the work at the Union.

Morris completed his assignment early, and began work on the ceiling. The others worked more slowly, and perhaps with more real talent for figure painting than Morris displayed. The work was never satisfactorly completed and from lack of care soon disintegrated to such an extent that very little is extant.

Upon leaving Street's office, Morris and Burne-Jones had taken up quarters in Rossetti's old studio at 17 Red Lion Square. Here Morris began designing furniture to suit his taste: massive, rude, and comfortless. A neighboring carpenter made most of it for him, but the art work, decoration and designing, was all done by Morris and his friends. Rossetti contributed his bit by painting two chair backs with scenes from Morris' poems, "Gwendolen in the Tower," and the "Arming of a Knight." Burne-Jones decorated the now famous wardrobe with scenes from the "Prioress' Tale." Rossetti suggested that owls might be kept in the large box over one of the chairs! What an innovation this must have been. "The seemingly insignificant fact that these rooms were unfurnished prepared the way for a revolution in household decoration and household arts. For out of this small circumstance grew Morris' later work as a manufacturer and decorator (42)."

[42] Mrs. Anna A. Phelan, The Social Philosophy of William Morris, p. 14.

During the period of painting under Rossetti's guidance Morris met Miss Jane Burden, who became Mrs. Morris in 1859, and for whom the famed Red House was built. Mackail says, "While his whole work as a decorative manufacturer may not be untruly said to have sprung out of this building and the furnishing of this house, it would be almost equally true to say that the house, first in idea and then in fact, sprung out of his devoting himself to the practice of decorative art and requiring, as one might say, a canvas to work upon (43)."

To say the least, the house and its furnishings were strikingly different, and, because they were, they did not go unnoticed.

Morris abandoned completely the usual "square box with a lid" type that he was to talk of in his lectures. The house was planned in an L-shape and had a high pitched roof of red tile. He abhorred the gray slate roofs so common in all England, especially on the houses of the poor. One of his less important lectures is devoted to a discussion of the most suitable roofing materials. To describe the house in detail would be a work in itself, so many intricacies did it possess. One of the most striking things about it was the well house, and another the red brick from which it took its name. The external portion was plain almost to severity and depended for effect upon its solidity and fine proportion. Inside, the most remarkable feature was the large drawing room with the fine decorative work which occupied Morris and his friends for several years. Few things were found on the market which would fit - Persian rugs and blue china for vases - all else was designed and much of it made by Morris and his

[43] Op. cit., Vol. I, p. 143.

friends. Chairs, tile for the fireplace, candlesticks, and even the wine jug had to be reinvented to escape the flat ugliness of the store article.

The plastered walls and ceilings were treated with simple designs in tempera. The hall and living rooms had a richer more elaborate scheme of decoration, but all was simplicity as compared to the usual Victorian ornateness. Art, with its orderliness, dignity, and grace, replaced the haphazard stuffiness of the usual decoration.

The gardens were as well planned. They, too, observed Morris' dictum that decoration must be useful, and above all else it must fit. The gardens "belonged." The orchard trees were untouched when the house was built and their extending branches often dropped fruit through the open windows. If people must live amid beautiful things, as Morris believed, in order to be happy and to make beautiful objects, here was a veritable storehouse of potential art. Here Morris gathered about him a group of fellow craftsmen and artists, and it was not long before the old desire for some practical union took root again.

In 1861 Madox Brown and Rossetti were instrumental in founding a company which for some years was to be known as Morris, Marshall, Faulkner, and Co., Decorators. These men, already known because of their gatherings at the Red House, now set out in earnest upon "their practical protest against prevailing modes and methods of domestic decoration and furniture, which had fallen since the great exhibition of 1851 chiefly under the influence of the Second Empire taste in upholstery, which was the antithesis of the new England movement (44)."

[44] W. Crane, op. cit., p. 17.

The flat patterns which the Company turned out acknowledged the wall and expressed the proportions of the room, instead of trying to hide both under bunches of sketchy roses and vertical stripes. Slender black wood or light brass curtain rods and curtains to match the coverings, or carry out the color of the room, displaced the heavy mahogany and ormolu "battering rams" with their fringed and festooned upholstery (45). Simple paints did away with graining and marbling. These new ideas were being illustrated in the Red House, and now the purpose of the Company was to put them into commercial practice.

The first contract received by the Company was forthe decoration of two new churches, St. Martin's at Scarborough and St. Michael's, Brighton. In the latter the chancel-roof was painted by Morris, Webb, and Faulkner, and the windows were executed from designs by Burne-Jones. The Firm's success in stained glass work was great enough to bring the criticism from competitors that they had really only retouched Medieval work, that modern artists could not produce such beautiful pieces.

The Company's first circular advertised for work in glass, wall-papers, embroidery, and jewellery. Rossetti contributed a few designs for both glass and tiles, and Marshall had made some designs for furniture and chair decoration. He also made cartoons for glass, but otherwise took very little part. Morris furnished the capital and from the very beginning was the central figure. His energy and ability directed all the work.

The first real establishment was at 8 Red Lion Square where the first floors served as an office and show room. The third floor

[45] W. Crane, "William Morris." Scribners, Vol. XXII, p. 90.

and part of the basement were workshops. A small kiln for tiles and pottery was built in the other section of the basement, and about a dozen boys and men were hired to help. The foreman was Mr. George Camfield, who continued with the Company at Merton Abbey and stayed on after Morris' death. Weekly meetings were held to discuss plans and carry on necessary business. The work of church decoration went on, and Morris never stopped perfecting what was already started and looking for new processes to conquer. William Rossetti says of him, "Mr. Morris came much the foremost, not only by being constantly on the spot, to work, direct, and to transact, but also by his abnormal and varied aptitude at all kinds of practical processes (46)."

> The second exhibition of arts held in 1862 was an incentive to produce. By this time, though the designing of the work carried out by the Firm was done by themselves, many other artists, including Albert Moore, William de Morgan, and Simeon Solomon, were making occasional contributions. Faulkner's two sisters joined him in painting tiles and pottery. Mrs. Morris and her sister, Miss Burden, with several women working under them, executed embroidery on cloth and silk. Mrs. Burne-Jones, besides embroidering, painted figured tiles. Mrs. Campfield, the foreman's wife, helped to execute altar-cloths. The works became a small whirlpool of industry that sucked in every one who came near them. Morris' own manual labor at every kind of work which the firm undertook was unremitting. The payments for work credited to him in that year were more than to all the other six partners put together; and in later years the disproportion increased still further.
>
> At the Exhibition the firm had two stalls, one of stained glass, the other, entered in the catalogue as 'decorated furniture, tapestries, etc.," representing the beginnings of decorative work in many directions. The so-called tapestries were, of course, embroideries; it was not till many years later that Morris took up the art of weaving. The work shown at the exhibition, though from the jury it received only a colourless and vague approbation, attracted much attention, both

[46] Vallance, op. cit., p. 57.

> favorable and adverse. That it really made some impression on the public is shown by the fact that nearly a hundred and fifty pounds' worth of goods were sold from the stalls (47).

Orders for glass work were taken, and Mr. J. P. Seddon commissioned the Company to decorate a cabinet made from his own design. Following this, Morris was accepted as a leader in decorative art and officially assumed control of the Co.

By this time the Company's advertisement included mural decoration, carving generally, as applied to architecture, stained glass, metal work, and furniture. Morris had also begun work on designs for wall papers. "Rose-trellis," "Daisy," and "Pomegranate" are among the most famous which were brought out at this time. Vallance says, "The 'Daisy' is a marvel of supreme cleverness; and withal one of which the popularity declines not one whit as time goes by. After 30 years it is still in demand (48)."

In 1867 Taylor became manager of the Co., and Morris found he had more leisure, which to him meant time to do more things. The Co., well established now, received a contract to decorate the Green Dining Room at South Kensington Museum. Most of the figure work on the paneling was done by Burne-Jones, but Morris contributed the background sprays and plants.

The work of the Firm continued. In 1870 the Earl of Carlisle built his house at Palace Green from the designs of Mr. Webb, and Morris and Co. were the decorators. Other contracts were secured, and, though the work was expensive, it became increasingly popular.

People were certainly conscious of Morris's views concerning

47 Mackail, op. cit., pp. 154-5.
48 Op. cit., p. 57.

their ugly homes. He was a popular lecturer and an imposing person. His great hatred for the machine age and all its sordid ramifications became more intense as work at the Company's establishment went on. His dream of making every house a beautiful home could not be realized for there were too many poor slaves chained to the cheapness and horribleness of uniformity and false perfectionism.

The years from 1871 - 1874 may well be called the period of illuminations. The architecture of the Middle Ages appealed to Morris, but that was only the beginning of his interest. The medieval manuscripts attracted him perhaps even more. He studied photographic copies of them and imitated their style in his own designs. Fourteen or 15 years before, he had tried his hand at illuminating but quickly recognized the inferiority of his work. Rossetti said of this, "It is quite unrivaled by anything modern that I know (49)!"

Morris never really copied anything; the designs are his own: fine, compact, floral designs in delicate colors. They are pure decoration, more for the purpose of filling space than to set off the text. It is graceful, flowing ornament intended to quiet restlessness and to 'fill the eye,' in other words, to be beautiful and to bring pleasure to maker as well as user.

Among the other things which were occupying Morris' time during these years was dyeing. In attempting to make carpets, tapestries, and cloth prints, it had been readily seen that the current chemical dyes were unsatisfactory. Morris detested the insipid colors. He was determined to have his own dye works or to stop work in carpets and

[49] Gerald Crow, William Morris, Designer, p. 71.

textiles altogether.

The firm was dissolved amid much hard feeling and legal folderol in 1875. From that time on Morris' work was his own. The official name was Morris and Co., and he was sole owner and operator. He directed everything. The great indigo dye vats were his special care, for, as he was often heard to say, "The require special attention; a little too much or too little spoils the whole thing. The experienced indigo-dyer is said to know when the fermentation has reached its proper point by an acute sense of smell, where no more scientific tests are found to answer. If the proper moment is not seized, the vat becomes useless. The setting of the blue vat is a ticklish job, and requires, I should say, more experience than any dyeing process (50)."

Morris could often be seen moving about amid the vats, adding, mixing, testing, always tousled and spattered, his own blue shirt flying, arms and hands covered with the precious colors, he was making. "I'm dyeing! I'm dyeing!" was the usual answer to a summons from any visitor.

The new colors were bright and fullbodied, and they did not fade out into the muddy-dirty tints observed in the ordinary home, on walls, in carpets, and in dress. "As soon as he was able to set up his own dyehouse (which he did at Merton Abbey) he turned at once to the frank full hues of the permanent dye-stuffs - indigo blue, madder red, weld yellow, etc. - and with these he produced the beautiful Hammersmith carpets and the Merton tapestries and chintzes (51)." The perfection of these dyes made work in all textiles more interesting and satisfying. A period of great activity in this field followed,

50 Mackail, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 317.
51 Ibid, p. 312.

which crowded out illumination and wallpaper designing.

Morris had gone back to the Middle Ages for a dye formula and now he was to reestablish hand weaving on the high loom, a process completely extinct in England and rapidly disappearing on the continent.

In March 1877, a Lyons silk manufacturer came to England and set up a Jacquard Loom for Morris at Ormand Yard. With his usual diligence and skill he worked long hours executing his own designs in silk and wool.

Work in the shops was devoted almost entirely now to printing on cloth: velveteen, cotton, and linen. Morris' chintzes became famous almost instantly. Between 70 and 80 wall paper designs and 40 chintzes were invented and carried out by Morris, alone: and, if the sum total of his designs for paper, chintz, woven stuffs, silk damasks, velvet, carpets, and tapestries were given, it would be a little short of 600, besides countless designs for embroidery. His printed cotton goods were more used than any of the others, and Morris lamented that they were used for every purpose except the one for which they were designed (52).

Morris next became interested in Arras tapestry and Persian Rugs. His task was to reestablish these processes in England. The first was accomplished in his own shop, but his influence was not great enough to bring a revival in England, though there was a great demand for his work. He could not interest other craftsmen in the process.

Lewis Foreman Day, one of the younger followers of Morris,

52 C. R. Clifford, Period Furniture, p. 222.

says that the Morris tapestries held their own with the French at the Paris Exhibition of 1900. In color and overall design they are exquisite (53). Hunter also agrees that the Merton Abbey compositions are superior to those of Gobelin. The best, he says, are the Holy Grail set at Stanmore Hall, Middlesex (54).

The new building into which the Co. had been moved in 1877 had a large show room and much more space for work shops. Tapestry had replaced Morris' interest in dyeing by 1878, and about this time he visited Persia to learn the secret art of rug making. Upon his return he attempted to revive the method in England, but he was not successful.

It became necessary in 1881 to again seek new lodgings for the work of the Company. A fine establishment at Merton Abbey on the Wandle was secured. It was an ideal location and much of Morris' finest work was done here. In the same year a commission was given to the Company to decorate the Throne Room and Reception Rooms of St. James' Palace. "There was now almost no kind of furnishing or decoration with which the Firm was unable to grace either those intimate and restful, very English small rooms, or the splendid houses of their wealthy patrons (55)."

Morris at this time was still a regular visitor and advisor at the South Kensington Museum and the Royal School of Art Needlework. He had been acting somewhat as a judge and critic at the former institution since 1876. On October 17, 1881, he delivered one of his best

53 Lewis Foreman Day, "William Morris and His Decorative Art," Living Age, Vol. CCXXXVIII, p. 105.
54 George Hunter, Decorative Textiles, p. 273.
55 Crow, op. cit., p. 78.

lectures at the School of Science and Art, which was connected with the Wedgewood Institute at Burslem. In 1882, he was asked to testify before the Royal Commission on Technical Instruction, and his contribution was to the belief that everyone should have some training in art, and that it might be begun very well by studying nature, beautiful buildings, and life itself. This must have fallen on receptive ears, for in 1890 a Code was adopted by the Government making drawing compulsory for elementary boys.

The next large contract which the Firm received was for the decoration of the entire house at Palace Green. Morris did the work throughout. The dining room was extremely well done with great care and elaboratness. This met with such great approval that cheap imitations and machine-made copies of Morris' work in chintzes and decorative articles appeared throughout the country. In his desire to make art available to all the people, Morris had failed to protect himself. He often gave his designs and ideas to persons who seemed interested, and sent them freely to the schools of art and carafts for exhibition. Everyone was clamouring for his articles. The money-minded commercialists were not long in taking advantage of their popularity.

Other houses decorated by Morris were the Old Swan House at Chelsea, Stanmore Hall, and Stanmore, the county residence of W. K. D'Arcy. The letter had beautiful hand-painted ceilings with delicate forms and dainty colors "like embroidery on old white silk (56)."

Morris' less important activities included the stage settings for two plays in which he may have had a small part as an actor, also.

[56] Vallance, op. cit., p. 96.

Needle work had been a part of the Company's business since its inception. In fact, women had been employed as early as 1859 to make pieces for the Red House. From 1873 to 1883, this work was under the direction of Morris' daughter, May. Morris and Co. was especially prominent in the revival of ecclesiastic embroidery, and many beautiful examples of their work can still be seen at the Bishop of Rochester's House of Deaconesses at Clapham. Morris, also, did ornamenting for the publications of the Socialist League, and it must not be forgotten that his own literary works were often illuminated and illustrated by himself or by the wood-carving of Burne-Jones.

The final and crowning achievement in the field of crafts was undertaken by Morris late in life, and has perhaps brought him as much single fame as any other one thing. This was the revival of hand printing. The printing of the Kelscott Chaucer by William Morris was a monumental work, and though it may have been far out of the reach of the majority, its beauty and influence have touched many.

Morris was dissatisfied with the printing of his day which he felt lacked everything but legibility. He set up his own hand press, designed three different types, and, of course, planned his own illustrations and page makeup. Critics say that the pages are beautiful but not readable; that the books are fine for museum pieces. Perhaps in a world crowded with ugliness and cheapness as Morris believed England to be, and obviously it was, the need was for something of this very nature. Peoples souls were being crushed beneath the burdens of machinery; even such a work of art might bring some pleasure and a measure of relief.

> It almost seems that Morris was trying to find for the printed page an equivalent of illumination, and match the sunshine of the manuscripts with the splendour of a night of stars. He awakened a general interest in the production of volumes beautiful in every feature including an appropriate type and an insistence upon well-proportioned margins....The debt of the very large subsequent number of private presses to his impetus, if not to his typographical example, is incontestable (57).

The paper in common use did not suit Morris, either, so with the help of Emery Walker he set about making some which was more to his liking. Only good white linen rags were used. No process was beyond his reach if there was a need for its product. If England had no teacher of the craft, he journeyed to the Netherlands, to Persia, or to France to learn it from an artist there.

More than any other man of his day he lived for the purpose of hallowing labor by art, and he devoted to it an energy and a variety of gifts without equal since thedays of the Italian Renaissance (58).

Morris' interest in Gothic architecture and his belief in the value of the past lead to the founding of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings. He was becoming increasingly alarmed at the popularity of the movement to "restore" the ancient buildings in England and on the continent. He spoke to many of his friends and gained their interest and support. In 1877 the Society was organized, and from that time on he devoted a great deal of time and energy to its activities. He was Honorary Secretary and a member of the society until his death. The society owed more to him than to anyone else both for its origin and its success. "Should all else be

57 Crow, op. cit. p. 96.
58 Holbrook Jackson, The Eighteen Nineties, p. 246.

ever did be reprobated or forgotten, he could yet confidently rest his title to be held in grateful remembrance of posterity for this signal service alone; and it is hardly possible to lay too much stress on this department of Mr. Morris' work, or to overrate the importance he himself attached to it (59)."

His attention was first directed to the urgency of the matter by his study of Ruskin, who had taught that there were valuable lessons to be learned from the past, that they could be learned by careful study of its art and architecture, and that every monument belonged partly to its builders and partly to posterity. The "restoration" which was going on was really destruction and fraud. "The first step, "Ruskin says, "is to dash the old work to pieces; the second is usually to put up the cheapest and basest imitation which can escape detection. It is a lie from beginning to end. We have no right to touch them (60)."

Morris criticized the control of church buildings which was in the hands of clergy who had the power to destroy, or tear down these monuments belonging to all the people. Commissions were formed under the auspices of the Society which attempted to arouse interest in the matter in England as well as in France, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands. When officials failed to heed communications from the Society concerning the "restoration" of some buildings, it became necessary to resort to an appeal in the London papers. Many times Morris was the one who wrote out the protests and made the most urgent

59 Vallance, op. cit., p. 267.
60 Quoted in Ibid., p. 270.

appeals for protection.

In November, 1979, news reached England that St. Mark's in Venice was about to undergo restoration. Morris sensed the urgency of the situation and its seriousness. He seized upon it as an opportunity to appeal to Englanders and to those responsible as well. The agitation stirred up in England had a decided effect in Italy. The news of the movement afoot in England caused considerable shame and annoyance to the Italian authorities. Probably William Morris' protests halted ultimate destruction, although the matter was brought up again some time later.

In order to defray the expenses of the Society, the more important lectures of its members were published in a collected volume in 1882. Among them were several by Morris, others by Richmond, Poole, Poynter, and Michlethwaite.

At the June 4 meeting, 1885, the Society discussed the proposed "restoring" of Westminster Abbey. Communications to those responsible were written under Morris' direction. He visited York to protest the destruction which was going on there, and lectured consistently through 1889 and 1890. He protested that present-day architecture was mere superintendence of buildings: there was no feeling for its arts or its materials.

Certainly Morris' name was not unknown. Upon the occasion of his arrest for Socialist disturbances, he said, "I am an artist and literary man, pretty well known, I think throughout Europe." His friend and associate in the Society, Walter Crane, says, "The importance of the work which Morris did with his society - the work which that

society carries on - can hardly be overestimated (61)."

Stimulated by Morris' interest in the crafts and the Prince Consort's support, the Arts and Crafts Movement received new impetus and life as the years went on. The group of artists who had gathered at the Red House, visited Kelmscott and Hammersmith had grown considerably. The government had shown interest in the ideas of art which these men were fostering, although the Royal Academy had as its principle aim the encouragement of painting and its exhibitions did not include any craft work. In 1884 the Art Worker's Guild was founded for the purpose of strenghening the position of the craftsman. Ruskin was one of the first, it will be recalled, to speak out in defense of the workman, who, he believed, deserved as much credit for fine work as the designer.

The organization grew and increased rapidly, finally incorporating "The Fifteen," which was a band of artists holding monthly meetings under the direction of Lews Day. The object of the Guild was to encourage work in the crafts by practical exposition of different art methods, social gatherings, conversations, papers and small exhibitions, at which each artist would be given proper credit for his work. Morris became a Master of the Society in 1892, and afterwards ranked as a Past Master. From this beginning similar smaller organizations and schools sprang up all over England. Morris visited some of them often to deliver lectures, give encouragement, and to loan his designs.

Because the Royal Academy failed to recognize craft work as artistic accomplishment, Morris and his fellow artists felt the need

61 Op. cit., p. 98.

for some means of getting their work before the public. The South Kensington Museum had been founded for this purpose and Morris was delighted when the public was allowed to view the art work there more than a few hours a week.

Out of this need grew the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society. Morris, though not the originator was a co-founder. Walter Crane says of the Society, "It's aim is to assert the claims of the decorative designer and the craftsman to the position of artist, and to give everyone responsible in any way for the artistic character of a work full individual credit (62)."

Morris was one of those who guaranteed financial aid for the exhibitions. The first one held in the autumn of 1888 was a land mark in the progress of the decorative arts in England. Designs, as well as the work itself, were displayed. Woodcarving and furniture, embroidery, tapestry, and other textiles, glass and pottery, wall papers, leather and metal work, jewellery, book decoration, printing and binding, each had a place, and there was not one that William Morris, Master Craftsman, had not tried and done well!

An interest in the crafts was created which spread to the continent and to America. Societies of various kinds were founded for the main purpose of stimulating activity in the crafts. The Society in London met oncea year with exhibitions at the New Gallery in 1889, 1890, 1893, and 1896. Morris was elected president in January, 1981, a position he held until his death. His interest and guidance were the inspiration and mainstay of the Society throughout his association with it.

62 Quoted in Vallance, op. cit., p. 300.

Two other important art gatherings had their initial meetings in 1888. The first was a Society for the Advancement of Art in Association with Industry, and the other, the Art Congress in Edinburgh, which was followed by other meetings at both Edinburgh and Birmingham.

In the field of printing, Morris made a valuable contribution to the Bibliographic Society in his paper, "The Ideal Book," presented November 21, 1892. He was also a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London to which he was formally admitted on November 22, 1894 and to which he contributed valuable and important items from his own library for its exhibition in 1896.

Among the more important schools of art which were founded as a result of Morris' work are, the Birmingham School of Art, Royal College of Art at South Kensington, London County Council Schools of Arts and Crafts, and many others. Local societies called Home or Cottage societies were founded in almost every village. Of course, all were not producing great work; in fact, some probably harmed the cause of art more than they helped it, but the people were beginning to show an interest, and in that Morris rejoiced. He was beginning to see results from his long struggle against disinterest and neglect: His dream of an art for the people, a pleasure to the user and the maker, had not been in vain; the first steps to fulfillment had already been taken.

Of Morris' death Vallance says, "It seemed impossible to imagine how one could do without him to whom one always looked for guidance, as supreme authority in everything relating to the decorative arts. ... We had come to regard him, living, as the permanent possession of the

world of art (63)." The Graphic said, "His whole life was a vivid, and in many respects a successful protest against the squalor of modern industrialism. To him, more than to any other man, we owe our emancipation from the hideous vulgarity of mid-Victorian house decoration and upholstry. Others preached but William Morris was able to supplement precept by practice and visibly demonstrate the superiority of his method (64)."

63 Ibid., p. 442.
64 Ibid., p. 444.

Part IV

THE REVOLUTION OF TASTE

The Revolution of Taste with which we are concerned took place in England as a direct result of the work, the teachings, and writings of William Morris. It had been well started in the field of art by the publication of Ruskin's Modern Painters in 1834, but it was not until 1861, when the firm Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Co. was founded, that there was real evidence that something practical would be done in the other fields. The latter phase reached its height during the 80's, and its peak with the Exhibition of 1888.

For our purpose here it will be necessary to trace the history of taste in England through the Victorian period and to point out as we proceed the extent to which William Morris and his associates influenced the changes which occurred.

To definitely establish the point at which Morris' influence began to affect taste will be entirely impossible, because as early as 1853-9 there was some interest in his work which may have bourne real fruit sometime later. As soon as the Red House was built it began to attract attention, and, though the first spectators were merely curiosity-seekers, an ever widening circle gathered in its rooms to discuss the new art. At first this included only painting in the Pre-Raphaelite tradition, but later through Morris' enthusiasm it encompassed all the arts, architecture as well as the various crafts.

The 18th century had not yet seen the downfall of aristocracy and its civilization aimed at a life that should be beautiful and dignified with comparatively little regard for comfort. A man of breed-

ing was expected to be a man of taste and to impose his cultured ideas not only on his surroundings but on the very landscape. The beautiful china and furniture of that time were produced to meet the requirements of people with wealth and leisure enough to insist on living exquisitely. But the industrial revolution changed that completely. The 19th century found the middle class in the ascendancy, the face of England dotted with factories belching forth great clouds of black smoke, and cities, once fair, crowded with the slaves of commerce.

The taste of the upper class plunged downward. The bourgeoise had no traditions of culture and were too absorbed in competition for a means of life to have much time for the refining graces. There was instant and prolonged clamour for machine-made products. Homes were cluttered with hundreds of ugly, worthless trinkets. Walls were plastered with hideous commercial paper. Nothing in the house gave it any semblance of unity. Lucy Crane says, "The things grow cheaper year by year, and that can be the only reason why people buy them; else if they thought about the matter, or even cared for the things themselves, how could they bear, as Mr. Morris says, 'to pay a price for a piece of goods that will help to trouble one man, to ruin another, and to starve a third? (65)' " We cannot stop now to discuss the social philosophy of this Master and his pupil, though it is evident that it is closely allied to the attack which they made upon the art of their day.

It was only natural that when cheap and specious household goods were turned out of the new factories people jumped to stocking

65 Lucy Crane, Art and the Formation of Taste, p. 41.

their houses. Useless tawdry bits of glass, china and metal work, vases that wouldn't hold anything, candlesticks that wouldn't carry candles, and lamps that wouldn't burn, cluttered the interiors of the "square boxes" of the middle and lower classes. What hope was there for real art, beauty, and pleasure in such an environment?

Styles for these atrocities were executed by imitation of anything and everything within sight or memory. No one had any particular knowledge of what Gothic furniture was like, but there was much talk of the Gothic mode, so it was logical to make it apply. The result was that chairs came to look like rose windows and footstools like tabernacles (66). The Gothic revival which had its beginning with Horace Walpole a century earlier was still giving to the people examples of its shallowness, its pretense, and sham.

Toward the middle of the century machine-made products were coming more and more to supersede craftsmanship, and Victorians seemed to be fast losing both the desire and the capacity to surround themselves with beautiful things. Everything pretended to be something that it was not. How Morris hated this falseness which showed itself in every nook and cranny of the average middle class home, and more publicly in the movement to restore ancient churches! The houses themselves were "interminable rows of brick and slate boxes made to contain 'robots' instead of men (67)."

With the departure of taste in architecture and furniture went that of color and design. Burdette describes a typical living room in the following passage.

66 Wingfield-Stratford, Those Earnest Victorians, p. 224.
67 Ibid., p. 227.

> The ornate overmantel, bristling with mirrors and vases standing upon obtrusive shelves, was a conspicious altar in honor of ugliness. ... Every object ministered to a mind diseased, to an artificial corruption of taste that is without parallel. In the center of the mantelpiece was an ormolu clock (ugly) ticking beneath a glass cover, and flanked on either side by a pair of hideous bronze horses. Against the ornate brass of the fender, twisted into fantastic coils, was a white hearth rug, and beyond, a floriated carpet that mimicked the contorted paper on the walls. Enormous dahlias in bright colors peered between the framed engravings of Dore; and the floor was studded with occasional tables and crowded whatnots, sprinkled with gilt albums and framed photographs. Bright cushions reposed in the chairs, which seemed to overflow into white lace antimacassars. Everything looked as if it was meant to be seen not used, and the windows were draped so heavily with double curtains that the blanket of stale air was the only neutral presence in the room. ... It was all dullness and hypocrisy. ... Those which followed were the exact opposite in every particular (68).

Before we leave this mid-Victorian disgrace, it must be remembered that the same struggle for show and elaborateness was carried into all phases of middle-class life. Women's dresses lost all sense of proportion and unity when great insertions and enlargements were added to them. The preposterousness of the situation was clearly evident but not willingly acknowledged. Utility had certainly passed out of existence when a young lady was forced by the protrusion of her gown to remain standing in a perfectly upright position though she desired ever so much to sit.

Some one has said that the Victorians "set colors at each other's throats, or left them screaming at each other like lions in a zoo. The most hideous discords were received with joy. The blues and bottle greens of the dandies darkened into oblivion and a reign of universal dinginess set in (69)." The whole period was thrown off balance and the worst tastes of human nature were aroused and stimulated.

68 Osbert, Burdett, The Beardsley Period, p. 196.
69 Wingfield, Stratford, op. cit., p. 225.

"The hard, ungradated, glaring, metallic brilliancy of the magentas, the mauves, the emerald greens, and the unmitigated blues had names! Violine, roesine, fuchsine, saferine, emeraldine, azuline, are a few; and such sickly purplish hue overspread magenta after it had seen the sun a few times, and into what a greenish pallor mauve stuffs feebly relapsed after a little wear (70)!" It is little wonder that Morris with his fondness for and ability to use color set out to reform; and it is not surprising that he started with his own home. Of his work in dyeing much has already been said.

In the discussion of the lectures it will be recalled, we pointed out that Morris appealed to the people to do away with the wall papers which were so inharmonious, to use paint very carefully, and to do whatever was in their power to alleviate the drabness and ugliness with which they had surrounded themselves. With the Company's production of an increased number of articles for household decoration, demand for wallpapers, textiles, and decorative pieces increased. Though not much of consequence was accomplished during its early years, it was evident by the80's that a movement toward the revival of the arts and crafts was well underway and the increased receipts of the Company are positive proof.

The age of "square-boxes" passed and that of the villa advanced. Accompanying the change in architecture was the change in all artistic taste. The 1890's with their decadance and fin de siecle spirit brought with them the climax of art for art's sake, and the beginning of what is later called L'Art Nouveau.

Morris' Philosophy of beauty which had been inherited from

70 L. Crane, op. cit., pp. 95-6.

Ruskin, and which had also been adopted by the Pre-Raphaelite painters and poets, and which was the very basis of the Aesthetic movement established as early as 1875, dwindled into the doctrine of Art for Art's sake. Beauty became an obsession and was gradually identified with the fantastic and strange. Oscar Wilde and the Aesthetes broke with Ruskin completely, and the Socialism which to Morris was a cause worthy of even his life, if necessary, was a yellow flower in Wilde's lapel. Beardsley followed the Pre-Raphaelites, and "accompanied in art the final overthrow of the complacency that had blinded Victorian eyes to the spirit-atrophy beneath the riches that it was accumulating. He showed the soul corrupting beneath the mask of commercial civilization (71)." William Morris when he was dying, is said to have enjoyed a visit from Wilde more than from anyone else, though Morris was the reality of so much that Wilde profaned. The Yellow Book was the surprising realization of the seed sown by the Germ in 1851.

> The age of shoddy stood across the path of quality, and many who were set upon the high trail of excellence by the Arts and Crafts Movement ended as devotees of fumed oak furniture, and what began as a great movement was in danger of ending as an empty fashion with the word 'artistic' for 'shibboleth' (72).

The final outcome of the Morris Movement was the somewhat modern but, nevertheless, closely related art, called "Functionalism." This is characterized by emphasis upon utility and individualism, although both are carried to extremes which Morris had not anticipated nor advocated. Morris believed that in order to be good decoration must be useful, and that every artist was limited in the exercise of his individuality by the nature of his materials. Functionalism in

71 Burdette, op. cit., p. 143.
72 Jackson, op. cit., p. 252.

its new form overthrew the latter idea entirely. Therefore, it is somewhat difficult to decide just how far Morris' influence extended into the period of modern art. Some critics cannot reconcile modernity and medievalism, and, consequently, have little regard for the Movement as a whole. In the following pages an attempt will be made to estimate Morris' influence and to define the limits of the Revolution. It was perforce a revolution in thought accompanied in varying degrees by a change in taste, that is, in action.

Part V

CONCLUSION

I do not know who are the better critics, contemporaries, who may be too close to judge wisely, or men of a century later, who may be too far removed from the scene to have a complete picture. The first, in the case of Morris, were nearly all people associated with him or followers in his line of thought and work: Walter Crane, who founded the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, his daughter Lucy, who took up the cause and lectured on the place of art in life, Lewis Foreman Day, whose little group of artists became a part of the Art Worker's Guild, and the biographers, Aymer Vallance and H. Halliday Sparling. There are countless others who knew Morris and saw the work that he did. Their judgment of him is, at least, consistent in its praise.

Of the others are the people who felt that William Morris' contributions to art were great enough to deserve comment and investigation in later years, especially at his centenary.

Certainly a significant statement is that of Walter Crane written in 1897, the year following Morris' death.

> Beginning with the houses of a comparatively limited circle, mostly artists, the taste rapidly spread, and in a few years Morrison patterns and furniture became the vogue. Cheap imitation on all sides set in, commercial and fantastic persons, perceiving the set of the current, floated themselves upon it, tricked themselves out like Jackdaws and peacock's feathers and called it 'the aesthetic movement.' These were the usual excesses indulged in by excitable persons, and the inner meaning of the movement was temporarily lost sight of under a cloud of travisty and ridicule - until it was finally thrown aside for some new catch-word.

> These things were, however, but ripples or falling leaves upon the surface of the stream, and had but little to do with its sources or its depth, though they might serve as indications of the strength of the current (73).

Of Morris' work, he says, "Few men had a better understanding of the nature of Gothic architecture and a wider knowledge of the historic buildings of his own country, and there can be no doubt that this grasp of the root and stem of the art was an enormous advantage when he came to turn his attention to the various subsidiary arts and handicrafts comprehended under decorative designs. The thoroughness of his methods of work and workmanlike practicality were no less remarkable than his amazing energy and capacity for work (74)."

Vallance, who wrote several books and articles about William Morris and his work, said of him, "It is thus impossible to overestimate the influence of William Morris in the improvement of household taste. When he began his crusade against ugliness and bad work, the art of house decoration was at its lowest ebb, and there was little produced which was not positively repulsive both in execution and design. But thanks to Morris, the remedy for so deplorable a state of things is with us. In the establishment of the decorative firm which bears his name, he provides the public with both an illustration of his teaching and also a practical means of putting it into effect in one's own surroundings. How great a multitude of houses he has thus directly or indirectly beautified none can tell - it is indeed incalculable (75)." He routed imitative and nosegay kinds of patterns, leaded and stained glass. He filled places of blank despair; "the white marble mantelpiece turned livid before rich tapestries and

73 Op. cit., p. 90-1.
74 Ibid., p. 91.
75 Op. cit., p. 144.

deeptomed wall papers was dismantled and sent to the church yard (76)." There was a return to the older and sounder ideas in domestic decoration and Mr. Harry Quilter says, "He has changed the look of half the houses of London and substituted art for ugliness all over the kingdom (77)."

Day in Living Age, 1903, outlines the work William Morris accomplished in his time and points out that he was the child of the Gothic revival, but that his stamp upon Victorian ornament effaced the fainter impression of the elder generation at whose enthusiasm his own had taken fire. The Pre-Raphalite group also had its effect upon art and life, for to them art and life were interchangeable terms, and though Morris belonged to the group, his influence lay in a somewhat different and sounder direction than that which broke off into the art for art's sake and the Oscar Wilde brand. Day also credits Morris with the reintroduction into modern ornament of natural forms which Owen Jones and the reformers before him had been at pains to surpress; but Morris treated natural form in relation to the thing he was designing (78)."

Of the decadance of the 90's Lucy Crane writes, "Those genuinely interested in the present revival of taste will not be affected by ridicule - it is sure to disappear in time and no harm if it be driven away by satire and derision; but the sounder part that is founded on true principles and just reasons will certainly last and serve as a good fouhdation for a wider and better diffused knowledge of art than has yet been seen in our day (79)."

76 Ibid., p. 145.
77 Quoted in Vallance, op. cit., p. 144.
78 Op. cit., p. 103
79 Op. cit., p. 63.

Some idea of Morris' importance to the Society of Arts and Crafts may be gotten from the lecture, "Of Art and Life," delivered by T. J. Cobden-Sanderson the day news reached the Exhibition that Morris was dead. "We must work, incessant work, with Beauty as our everlasting aim - this is the William Morris, this the memory of him, this the light shining upon the darkness of the future which we all ought to cherish and abide by forever (80)."

The later critics say similar things concerning his work. Durant wrote in 1908, "Morris stands out as the man who infused new life and soul into handicraft (81)." Faraday agrees that it was Morris who rescued art and the accompanying crafts from a sadly diminished state and raised them to a position of respect and promise. "Even if his name is seldom on our lips, or his books in our hands, his influence moves amongst us, even today, in innumerable ways. Morris' influence on the ressurection of a tradition of fine printing permanently remains. This is true of the rest of his work, also (82)."

The work of William Morris and his confreres was important and far-reaching. The Morris Movement employed the services of men who have distinguished places in the history of art. "Nobody nowadays can dispute the massive reality of his contribution to the beauty of life, or cavil at the claim that his influence upon taste and thought has been both widespread and permanent. The change has been largely imperceptible, but it has been lasting in its effect. There is hardly

80 T. J. Cobden-Sanderson, "Of Art and Life," Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society Lectures, p. 5.

81 W. S. Durant, "Influences of William Morris," Westminster Review, Vol. CLXIV, p. 547.

82 Benton I. Evans, "William Morris, His Influence and Reputation," Contemporary Review, Vol. CLXV, p. 316.

a single object in daily and habitual use among us which has not in some way received the impress of the movement inaugurated by him (83)."

The greatest controversy over Morris' greatness seems to have arisen, not in England where there seemed to be little question about the revolution affected by him, but in America, and it continues among Americans even to this day.

William Bradley and William Bently disagree very widely as to Morris' influence. Bradley says his designs in furniture, tapestry, wall paper, etc. did not noticeable stir either his fellow artists or his students but they were stimulating (84). He questions even the influence of Morris' revival of printing and its value outside of producing museum pieces. Bentley is caustic in his reply. "If Morris' products did not stir artists and students then 'the nineties' must have surpassed even our own times in spiritual apathy, a fact which many of us have long suspected (85)." He agrees with Albert M. Bender, a San Francisco patron of the arts, who said, "Morris as a designer marked the end of the Victorian era of walnut and horsehair, and many living rooms of San Francisco were the better for the change. Even the artistic and anatomical deficiencies of themost widely adopted of his innovations, the Morris chair, failed to dampen the enthusiasm of his hosts of local admirers. His service in the field of printing was enormous, and we here in California have never quite felt that way about William Morris (86)."

83 Sparling, op. cit., pp. 115-6.
84 William Bradley, "William Morris, Review of His Influence," Publishers Weekly, Vol. CXXV, p. 1373.
85 William Bentley, "Morris' Influence, Reply to W. Bradley," Publishers Weekly, Vol. CXXV, p. 1783.
86 Robert Miller, "Salute to a Press," Christian Science Monitor (July 6, 1940), p. 12.

These, I realize are not directly connected with the history of English taste, but if we set the boundaries of Morris influence and the change it brought about, we are forced to include the United States, Germany (especially, in the field of printing), France. (in L'Art Nouveau), and someone has said even the entire world.

To be sure, all critics do not agree with the opinion thus far expressed here. Let us examine the other side and then draw our conclusions.

Ladd, in his very comprehensive and scholarly book, Victorian Morality of Art, has given this estimate of the Morris Movement:

> Social theories brought forth the Arts and Crafts Societies, offspring of Victorian despair and a misapplied Platonism, doomed from their birth to an unsocial life among sensitive though maladjusted men and neurotic spinsters. For the "Arts and Crafts" are in themselves leisure class products of an industrial age. The art impulse in industry, in any genuine sense, had to come by the attraction of man to the machine.
>
> Ruskin's alienation of the machine led Morris to a reactionary medievalism which was abortive. Individual and mass was already the inevitable term of industrial thought (87).

Jackson isn't quite so vicious in his criticism, for he believes Morris contributed a great deal of good to the movement, but he does say that the "outward effect was not so great as it might have been, for conditions under which Morris and his group worked were so far removed from conditions of the average economic and industrial life of the time, as to appear impractical for general adoption.....The members did pioneer work, stepped back into the past toward fine standards and sound tradition of workmanship,

87 Henry Andrews Ladd, The Victorian Morality of Art, pp. 313-4.

therefore, their work, excellent though it is, looks and is archaic. The best craftsmanship of the 1890's was outmoded at its birth (88)."

Crow says his more general and permanent influence was actually hindered by his own success, in that (1) competitors could not follow his lead because he was the head of the commercial company, and, (2) his impact upon his age engendered the craze for Art Nouveau, which became so debased and ridiculous as largely to discredit its innocent progenitor. His influence upon contemporary design was actually small, but the impulse of his example animates all that is best in modern craftsmanship, wherever men execute their own designs (89).

Wingfield-Stratford, eminent historian, has evaluated the Morris movement in this way: "The forlorn hope of William Morris to revive the arts and crafts of an idealized Gothic in the midst of a machine age is among the most heroic episodes in the war of divine spirit in man for liberation. ... Heaviness might endure for a night, but shoddy cometh in the morning (90)."

Certainly this was one thing Morris failed to consider, because he abhorred it and therefore ignored it: the real strength of industrialism.

In 1893 another exhibition was sponsored by the Arts and Crafts Society of London, and Beamans, who reviewed the work there felt that there was little of real value on display. A few items, among which Mr. Morris' were most prominent, attracted some attention. "If it (the work) can honestly be called representative, then

88 Op. cit., pp. 251-4.
89 Op. cit., p. 115.
90 Victorian Sunset, p. 100.

indeed must the Arts and Crafts of England have fallen to a lower level than ever before (91)." The one exception was a rug of Morris' design which "is so restless and dazzling in pattern and color alike that it is an offence rather than a pleasure to the eye (92)." He attacks not only the arrangement but the selection as well, declaring that, as was to be expected, prejudice had ruled the selection and few things were included which did not come from Mr. Morris' Company (93).

Laver in his birography of James Whistler says that Morris and his friends, with their love of beauty, had only succeeded in cluttering the houses of their patrons with more bric-a-brac, medieval instead of mid-Victorian, but none the less inappropriate and distasteful. With the Pennels he asks the question, "When would they learn the lesson of Japanese simplicity and appropriateness that Whistler would teach them? He had tried to introduce them to Japanese art, and all they had done was to mass it in heaps on the top of their already crowded cabinets and sideboards (94)."

The most stirring attack which the Pennels make upon Morris is one that is often made. He preached that all things useful should be beautiful, that art sprang from the people and should return to the people, but in practice he made it impossible for the people to own or often even to see the work which he maintained was theirs by right. To decorate a house as he wished it to be decorated needed a millionaire patron. "And when it was finished it would resemble a

91
92 "Arts and Crafts in London," Nation, Vol. LXII, p. 283.
93 Ibid, p. 284.
94 Ibid., p.285.
James Laver, Whistler, p. 173.

14th century castle, beautiful, but 19th century people would be so discordant within it that a costume, a language and a life would have to be invented for them. While Morris was busy preaching art for the people, he would run up a bill for $5,000 in decorating a room, making it so precious that the owner hardly dared to go into it. ... With his death his personal powers ceased. His work left its mark, but only that wallpapers and cretonnes might become more gorgeous and elaborate in color, as they became cheaper in other people's hands. More rugs are used than before his day. More people sit upon what are called Morris chairs, though with the design of the best Morris had nothing to do (95)."

If we should forget that these latter critics are, perhaps, prejudiced admirers of Whistler and his art, we might conclude that every person who sees any good in the change from mid-Victorian taste to that of the following decades is entirely wrong. That we cannot do in the light of the study we have made.

William Morris was a philosopher, a socialist, a romanticist, and a medievalist, but he was not an impostor, nor an imitator of outworn ideals nor objects of art. He loved England as he knew she must have been during the age of her great and beautiful buildings. And for her people to conceive and construct such beauty, he believed that they must have been happy in their work. They were unhampered by machinery, working intimately with their materials and executing the designs out of their hearts and souls. Was it not logical that if pleasant objects had once been produced by the union of head, heart, and hand, they might also be again? And, was it too much to

95 Joseph and Elizabeth Pennel, "Whistler as Decorator," Century, Vol. LXXXIII, pp. 502 and 504.

suppose that these things might be accepted by a people who by mid-century were not only slaves to machines and filth and dirt, but lived in the most ugly and unpleasant surroundings conceivable?

Morris, who had Ruskin to guide him in an early understanding of nature and of Gothic, set out to revolutionize society by reviving one by one the almost extinct arts and crafts. If he had not been a true artist, his work,no doubt would have fallen much farther short of its real goal than it did; but he was no ordinary craftsman. We have the painting on the walls at Oxford Union, the fine tapestry, silks, chintzes and wools at the Victoria-Albert Museum, and the Kelmscott Chaucer, not the least of his great works, to attest his greatness.

It is not hard for me to believe that once a people were awakened to their folly, they would not be long in discarding their "fine horsehair furniture and their draperies," their wooden doors that looked like bronze or marble, and the dozens of knicknacks that crowded the dozens of ornate and carved what-nots and tables. Morris' pieces did replace these atrocities, and his ideas of interior decoration did not always fall on barren ground. The editor of Craftsman in the first edition said that the name of Morris was a household word in America. Could it be much less in the country of his birth where the results of his vigorous and active life could still be seen and used and admired?

I am inclinded to agree with Jackson in his estimate of the Arts and Crafts Movement.

> Whatever their theories, their activities produced a notable effect upon taste in all matters relating to architecture and the decorative and useful arts, and permeated more particularly the taste of the middle classes in Great Britain, spreading from them to Europe and America. To a great extent propaganda was carried on by example rather than by precept, and this was made possible by the existence of so many craftsmen of ability and repute (96).

That William Morris was the greatest craftsman of them all is unquestionable, and, though his influence upon taste may not have been ultimately good in every case, he affected a revolution of no small consequence. Vallance says, "For there needed not the past ten years to spread his fame so much more extensively, but that, had he so chosen, he might have claimed justly, even in 1885, to be known in the four continents. There is no quarter of the globe but contains either stained glass, carpets, tapestries, or other works of art from the firm of Morris and Company. It is, therefore, a supreme achievement of William Morris to have brought art, through the medium of the handicrafts, within reach of thousands; his distinction, by decorating the less pretending, but not less necessary articles of household furnishing, to have done more than any man in the present century to beautify the plain, everyday home-life of the people (97)."

96 Op. cit., p. 250.
97 Op. cit., p. 1 and 15.

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