

THE LATE WM. MORRIS, POET AND MANUFACTURER.

The late Wm. Morris, whose poems have been so much talked of since his death, was the source of much that is best in English textile designs of to-day.

He approached the subject entirely from the artist's standpoint, and carried out his designs without any regard to their commercial utility, or the cost of production. The result was a great advance in the public appreciation of the artistic in design, and an immediate response by the manufacturers for the new demand for beautiful fabrics for household purposes. The general public could not afford Morris' fabrics at first; but they insisted on Morris' ideas in color and treatment.

The following sketch of Wm. Morris' factory, at Merton Abbey, and its output, are from special correspondence in *The Textile Mercury*, Manchester, Eng.:

"Attracted by the interesting personality of the man, and interested in him for reasons of a more practical character, the proprietors of *The Textile Mercury* dispatched me recently to Surrey in order to interview Morris for the purpose of ascertaining the exact nature of the work he was carrying on. I found Mr. Morris, as others have done before and since, the most approachable of men. He wore the familiar blue shirt, with collar attached, which has caused him to be more than once taken for Jack Tar on a holiday, and the resemblance was heightened by the pipe he was smoking, and the offer of a 'fill-up' from his pouch, made almost as soon as I entered the old-fashioned room, in which a half-completed carpet design was the principal object of attraction. When I had finished with Mr. Morris, who kindly gave up the whole afternoon to my service, I wrote for *The Textile Mercury* an account of what I saw. It was published some time ago, but has gained rather than lost interest in the interval. This will explain the reproduction below of some of the impressions formed on that occasion.

"Surrey, where Morris conducted his textile work, has been called the cradle of English calico printing, 2,000 men being employed in 1726 within the boundaries of Merton Abbey alone. The block printing industry in cotton and silk still languished on the banks of the Wandle when I was there in 1890, and it was at Merton Abbey that Mr. Morris wove furniture stuffs, silks, carpets, and tapestry, besides carrying on the business of a block printer and glass stainer. Hard by the Abbey is Merton Place, which was given by Nelson to Lady Hamilton after her husband's death. The monks whose solemn faces were once to be seen in every nook of the abbey, are gone, and only a feeble remnant of the workers who thronged the village in the old days of block printing is left. But the Surrey meadows are as green as ever, and the neatly-trimmed hedge-rows, so characteristic of our English landscape, overshadow winding lanes which lead to scenes of quiet rural life—scenes which, as Mr. Morris himself puts it, bid us

Forget six counties overhung with smoke.

Forget the snorting steam and piston stroke.

Forget the spreading of the hideous town;

Think rather of the pack-horse on the down."

"Down the quiet Merton High street, to the right, is the quaint front of Mr. Morris' factory, which, was originally, to judge from the look of the place, a farm house. Here the 'Dreamer of dreams, born out of his due time,' produced the beautiful art fabrics which are now world-famed. The old house is a veritable museum of reactionary art, of which Mr. Morris is the exponent. Here the poet-artist produced designs which possess the all-important merit of originality, and in which the same idea is not harped upon for ever and for ever. I found the author of 'The Earthly Paradise' quite willing to converse with me in my character as a native of Lancashire, eager for facts bearing upon the art of design, as applied to the staple products of the County of Cotton. Mr. Morris possessed a frank and open countenance—one which banished all sense of restraint, and made the visitor feel that there was no reason to fear the presence of that ceremonial stiffness which, to the stranger, is so irksome. Dressed in a suit of dark blue serge, with an open collared shirt of lighter blue, Mr. Morris presented a decidedly nautical appearance, an illusion which was further heightened by his peculiar sea roll and engaging manner. It is interesting to learn that while admitting to the French their superiority as masters of style, Mr. Morris thought that in appreciation of beauty, in love for beautiful lines and colors, they cannot be regarded as superior to the English. People from Lyons and Arles have called upon Mr. Morris in his capacity as an upholsterer, with patterns of stuffs which amaze one on account of the amount of cleverness shown in the working up of unpromising material. Referring to the custom of some of our calico printers of buying designs from Paris which are afterwards shuffled and pieced into a variety of patterns, the same authority deprecates the existence of a class of mere artists like some of the designers in the French capital, who learn about as much of the technical portion of the work as is necessary from the weaver in a perfunctory and dull sort of fashion. 'I think,' said Mr. Morris upon one occasion, 'that the man who actually goes through the work of counting the threads and settling how the thing is to be woven through and through, should do the greater part of the drawing.' This is interesting, but nothing Mr. Morris ever said struck me more forcibly, or appeared so incontrovertible as his statement that an education all round of the workmen, from the lowest to the highest, is wanted in technical matters as in others, and that this should be obtainable in the several centres of industry without its being necessary for a man to go to London to have to learn his work. In this connection, a reference to the specimens of textiles buried in South Kensington, amidst a population to whom weaving and all that appertains to it is a matter of profound indifference, is appropriate. There are scores of valuable objects there stored away in chests which really ought to be here in the North.

"Mr. Morris' factory is an irregular collection of detached buildings on both sides of the Wandle. Here the various processes of dyeing, weaving and printing