

I mean by a picture [he wrote to Mr. Comyns-Carr] a beautiful, romantic dream of something that never was, never will be—in a light that never shone—in a land no one can define or remember, only desire—the forms divinely beautiful—and then I wake up with the waking of Brynhild.

The true mission of the artist, he always declared, was to rescue beauty from the forgetfulness to which it seemed doomed in a selfish and material age, and which in his eyes was the one redeeming power in a sad, bad world. To point a moral or teach a lesson, he argued, was beyond the province of art. All that it can do is to create an atmosphere, lift us out of the dust and mire into a higher and serener air. Of course, he said, we must be prepared to find our life a failure, and to realise, when the sands are running out and the end comes into sight, that the Himalayas are still in front of us. But if we can only raise the tone of art by a hair's breadth, and make a single soul better and happier, that in itself is worth living for, and is more than any of us has a right to expect.

A true Celt in temperament, Burne-Jones was often a prey to the deep melancholy which belongs to all romantic natures, and this very consciousness made him clutch at everything which could cheer and brighten the passing hour. No one entered more fully into the fun of a practical joke, while the delightful caricatures which he drew for his children's amusement reveal a sense of humour which few of his admirers suspected. Like all imaginative artists, he was a hard worker, and the endless designs and studies which he has left show how hard he toiled to attain that perfection after which he yearned. Each picture, he often said, should have a definite, harmonious, and conscious beauty, and each little portion should be so beautiful in colour and surface that if only a few inches of the canvas were preserved it would still be recognised as a work of art. Rossetti often laughed at him for what he called his perpetual discontent, and told him that he must be the vainest of men, since his own pictures were never good enough for him. This sense of dissatisfaction with his own work and passionate striving