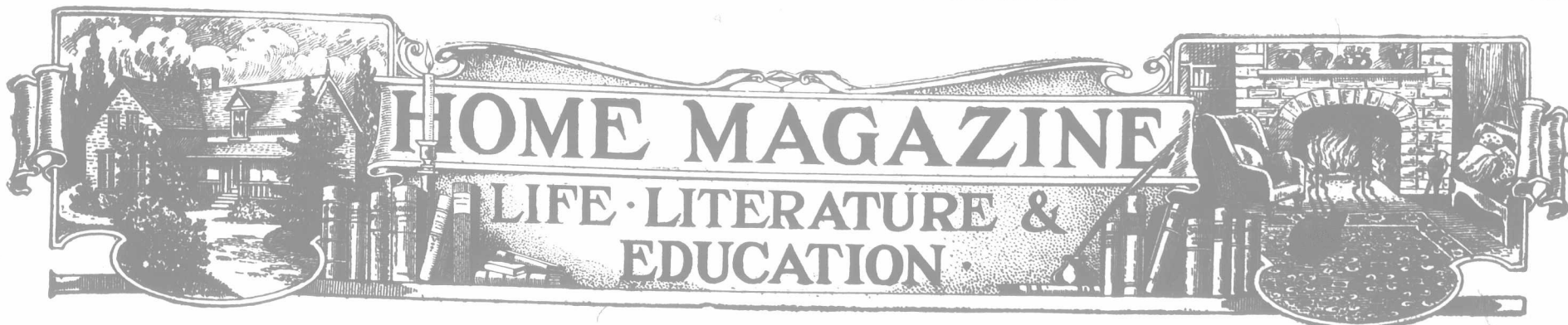
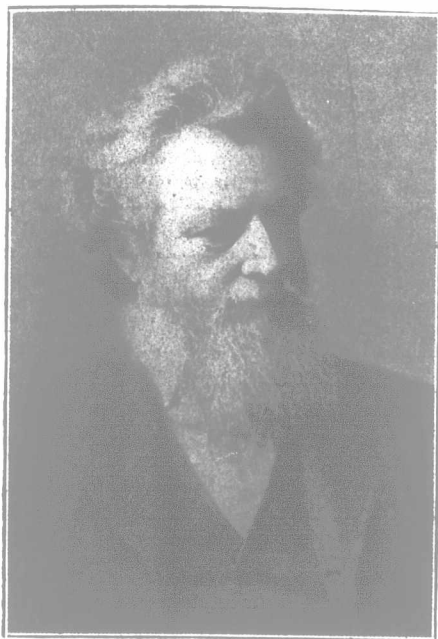




Little Trips Among the Eminent Writers.



William Morris.

Perhaps no name is more familiar to the furniture-dealer or the furniture-buyer than that of William Morris, chiefly because of the supposition that he was the inventor of the well-known "Morris" chair. As a matter of fact, Morris had nothing to do with this chair, which has been given his name, merely because it was said to be designed in recognition of his principle that everything we use should be "useful and beautiful, strong and true." Even had he designed the chair, the thread must surely have been a slender one upon which to hang the fame of a man whose influence has already affected many of the homes of two continents, and is likely, in time, in its ever-growing progress, to creep across every threshold where civilization reigns. Although he received his inspiration from the teachings of Ruskin, William Morris was practically the father of a school of good taste, which has ever since sought to promote honesty and beauty in commonplace things. His life was devoted, in short, to the founding of true art in the home, yet he was also an apostle of a message deeper, if less immediately evident—an apostle who was to show by actual work the value of much that Ruskin had had time to advance only in beautiful theory.

William Morris was the third of nine children, and was born at Walthamstow, Essex, England, on March 24th, 1834. He appears to have shown remarkable mental ability even from babyhood, for we are told that at four years of age he was already "deep in the Waverley novels." In his case, also, was the truth of the adage, "The child is father of the man," very strikingly exemplified. Even in the early years of his life, while still but a very small boy, he was much given to rambling about among the many old churches of Essex, dreaming over the old Norman masonry of which parts of many of them are composed, and learning to love the Medieval ages, to which, all his life, he looked back as the golden era of England. From these ages, at a later day, he took many of the ideas which he utilized in modern design.

In 1848 he went to Marlborough College, but was by no means an

ideal student, choosing to spend what seemed far too much of his time "idly" in the forests of Savernake and Epping. Possibly even to himself these seemed idle days, and yet here, perhaps, he learned much of the forms of tree, and vine, and flower which came so readily to his fingertips in later life.

On leaving Marlborough College, he went up to Oxford, with the intention of taking holy orders, but was from the first disgusted with the morals and methods of the great University, then, perhaps, in urgent need of reform. While there, however, he fell in with that coterie of young artists and literary men with whom (notably Burne-Jones) he formed such strong personal friendships, and who were destined to exert so great an influence over his life. He was described at this time as being handsome, erratic, passionate, with a tremendous capacity for the sort of work which suited him, and a strong distaste for that which did not. All his life, indeed, he held it as a settled tenet that people should only work at "what they had a turn for."

After spending some time at the University, he and Burne-Jones decided to leave it. Burne-Jones entered on his career as a painter, Morris to throw up his intention of taking holy orders, and become an architect. With characteristic impulsiveness, the latter at once communicated his resolution to his family, who, by no means democratic in sympathy, received his intimation with an outcry of indignation. "I do not hope to be great at all in anything," he had written, "but think I may look forward to reasonable happiness in my work." He had, moreover, referred to this work as a useful "trade"—insult upon injury!

The result of the storm was that Morris decided to finish his course at Oxford. Before leaving it he became instrumental in founding the Oxford and Cambridge Magazine, to which he contributed much both in prose and verse—wield, medieval romances for the most part, a series of pictures like mystic and gorgeous embroidery, filled with the glint of "red" and "gold," and containing but little philosophy. Morris was at no time, indeed, a philosopher. In the ordinary sense of the term. He was erratic, impulsive, versatile, positive. Things came to him by a sort of instinct, rather than by the slower process of balancing and reasoning. He was never greatly given to probing either his own mind or the minds of others; it was enough for him to enjoy life, to be generous, to think nothing at all of himself and much of the welfare of others; to exult in the beauties of literature and of art, especially of that art of which he became practically the creator.

During this last period at the University, he and Burne-Jones made several trips to the Continent, where they gloried in studying the grand old cathedrals and great specimens of art in Belgium and France. The longest of these trips was essayed, we are told, on foot, for the purpose of minimizing expenses, Morris, with a fine delicacy, embracing poverty because his friend was poor. At Amiens, however, he went lame, and, after gaily attempting to continue the journey in carpet-slippers, was compelled to urge that the way to Chartres be completed in the ordinary manner, but furiously contending that Paris should be skirted, "so as

not to see the streets of it." On this trip the young students became deeply immersed in the study of Ruskin, and Morris, in particular, became steeped in the ideas of art as the expression of man's pleasure in his toil, and of beauty as "the natural and necessary accompaniment of productive labor," which exercised so strong an influence over his life.

Shortly after their return, Burne-Jones fell under the influence of Rossetti, then in London, and soon afterwards he and Morris took rooms at 17 Red Lion Square, giving up all of their time to studying painting under the illustrious Italian. Of their life here, Burne-Jones wrote: "Topsy and I live together in the quaintest rooms in all London, hung with brasses of old knights and drawing of Albert Durer." The furniture was, for the most part, made to the order of Morris, and was heavy and massive, with broad spaces, upon which he, Rossetti and Burne-Jones painted scenes from Chaucer, Dante, and the Arthurian legends. . . . In London, Burne-Jones had found his work, but Morris not yet.

Of the enthusiasm and impulsiveness of the young artists at this time, the following incident is an example: On making an excursion to Oxford, Rossetti and Morris were shown a new Debating Room which had been built as an annex to one of the University buildings. Immediately they were fired with an inspiration to donate a decoration for the room, and, without considering the practicability of the scheme, devised a plan for illuminating a blank space around the gallery with scenes from *Morte d'Arthur*. Several other young artists became interested in the scheme, and soon all were engaged in the work, which progressed gaily, but, alas, upon a surface which had been smeared with a lime-wash. As a result, the water-colors faded within a very few weeks to an indistinguishable blur.

Morris' stay in Oxford was not, however, to be void of importance to him, for it was during this time that he met Jane Burden, who afterwards became his wife, and whose "tragic, mystic, passionate, calm, beautiful face" became a favorite model for both Rossetti and Burne-Jones. She and Morris were married in 1859, and went to live in the beautiful "Red House," with which their name was for several years associated. It was built of red brick, was distinctively Gothic, with narrow, small-paned windows, "which made you think that you were at least indoors on a cold day," and was surrounded by a quaint old garden filled with trees and flowers. The furniture was all designed by Morris—strong, yet light and beautiful chairs, "which could be moved," and massive tables, "that will keep steady when you work on them." The walls were covered with paper and tapestries, also made to order: on some of them were painted scenes from the life of Sire Degravant, while up the stairway ran a series representing incidents in the War of Troy.

Shortly after Morris' marriage, the firm of "Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co."—destined to be later the firm of "William Morris"—was originated. It was proposed, almost as a joke, at one of the evening meetings which these erratic and talented young men were wont to hold for conversation and enjoyment, but presently took actual form in a "shop," at which it was proposed not only to "give

real good taste," but at the price, "as far as possible, of ordinary furniture." The firm consisted of those mentioned, and, of course, Rossetti and Burne-Jones; Morris, having more money and time than the rest, was appointed manager.

The experiment soon proved, however, that to Morris, at least, it was by no means to present the face of a joke. With his passion for beauty and sincerity, he saw more clearly than the others—who were more interested in purely pictorial art—the ugliness in the homes and lives of the people, and recognized in this "shop" an opportunity for warfare against it. He had found his work. He would create in the people a taste for the beautiful, and then strive to satisfy that taste by actually manufacturing those things which must appeal to it. Incidentally, in connection with this ideal, became embodied the great underlying principle of which he was to become, later, the apostle.

Mural decorations, carving, stained glass, metal work, furniture, embroidery, stamped leather, tiles, carpets, wall-papers and tapestries, were all to be designed at this "shop," which, almost from the beginning, proved a financial success, and speedily developed into an extensive manufacturing establishment. Its popularity was, in fact, assured from the great exhibition of 1862, at which several examples of work were shown, "at the cost," as Faulkner wrote, "of more swearing and tribulation to Topsy than three exhibitions will be worth," but with the result that medals were won by the Morris Company in almost every department.

The designs for everything produced were made by the members of the company, and were exclusive of their kind, created to suit the rooms in which the articles were to be used. Everything was constructed for real beauty and durability, not merely with a superficial quality which might attract "sales." Morris, however, was the only one of the firm who took actual part in the handiwork of the establishment. His tremendous vitality would not permit him to be idle, and when not busy at drawing or painting designs, it was his habit to plunge into any work whose interest was at that moment paramount in his mind. He made himself, in fact, master of every craft (save designing for stained glass, which he left chiefly to Rossetti and Burne-Jones) undertaken in the establishment. Interest in the work, indeed, became an obsession with him, and he was often to be found at the looms exultantly bringing out a new pattern, at five o'clock in the morning. It is told of him, also, that he was quite in the habit of presenting himself at any hour at the houses of his friends, with hair awry, and wearing his workman's blouse steeped in indigo, but with a face full of the most cheerful self-forgetfulness in the world.

Out of this enjoyment in his work there grew his message, *THAT PLEASURE IN ONE'S WORK IS THE TRUE SECRET OF HUMAN HAPPINESS*. This creed he preached by example, by pamphlet, and by lecture, at every opportunity, for the rest of his life. Men should take pride in their work, and make it the best of its kind; they should only labor at that in which they can find enjoyment. Hand-work should not be confined to certain classes, but every artist should be a workman,